

CONCERNING THE WAY

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LESSON 6: BIBLIOLOGY – PART 4



Introduction

God has revealed Himself in various ways: in creation, in history, in miracles, visions given directly to the prophets. But primarily, God has revealed Himself in the person of Christ, the Living Word, and in the Bible, the Written Word. But what we learn about the person and work of Jesus Christ, we learn from the Bible in both the Old and New Testaments. The majority of that which we can know about God comes from the Bible. If men do not hold the Bible in high esteem as the inspired and inerrant Word of God and fail to handle it properly (interpretation and application), then they will turn to other sources as their authority (human reason alone, science, tradition, the church, mysticism, experiences) for what they believe and practice. If men do not hold to the Scripture as the *complete, sufficient, clear, authoritative, and adequate rule of faith*, they will reject the Bible's truth either completely or partly and in the process miss its message of salvation and deliverance from sin, which it offers them in the person of Jesus Christ.

Our view, approach, and attitude toward the Bible is foundational. If our view of the Bible is inadequate we will naturally handle the Bible that way. If I do not think it is God-breathed, I won't think it is profitable and vital. If I think it might contain errors, or that only some of it is inspired, say the thoughts, not the words, then I will probably approach it much like a cafeteria line, choosing only what I like, what sounds good to me. What do I believe and not believe? If it is wrong in some places, then how can I be sure what it says about Jesus is true? On the other hand, if I believe it is God's infallible and inerrant Word, as the evidence supports, then I should accept it all and study it carefully. Unfortunately, many today who call themselves evangelicals will theoretically, at least, claim allegiance to the Bible as the all-sufficient and authoritative rule of faith, but in practice, many are raising other sources on a level with or even above the Scripture as their authority for what they believe and practice.

In this our last study on Bibliology, we will look at attitudes about the Bible, method of interpretation, and finally discuss the best ways to study it for ourselves.

- *Dusty Rhodes*

A true mystic in the biblical sense believes that the Bible is our final authority and seeks to always judge personal experience by the Bible. He does not allow experience to either take precedence over the Bible nor does he judge the Bible or what is biblical by his experience.

Attitudes Toward the Bible

In the study of bibliology it is important to be aware of the various attitudes people either have or with which they approach the Scriptures. We will divide these attitudes toward the Bible into six different categories.

Rationalism	<p>The theory that the exercise of reason, rather than the acceptance of authority, or spiritual revelation, provides the only valid basis for action or belief and that reason is the prime source of knowledge and of spiritual truth. In its extreme form it denies divine revelation and represents the belief of atheists and agnostics. Moderate rationalism may admit divine revelation but tends to accept only those parts of divine revelation that personal reason approves. Under this approach the Bible is not viewed as authoritative, but the moderated rationalist seeks to eliminate or honor various Scriptures as he may choose. This is often the attitude of modern liberals. The issue in rationalism is that the <i>mind</i> is supreme and becomes the final authority. <i>(Lewis Sperry Chafer - Systematic Theology)</i></p>
Mysticism	<p>There is a false mysticism and a true mysticism. False mysticism says that divine revelation is not limited to the Bible, but that God continues to give new truth beyond the Bible. False mysticism makes human <i>experience</i> supreme; one’s personal experiences become the final authority rather than the Bible. If it fits with one’s experience, then it is accepted as valid; but if it does not fit one’s experience, it is rejected as invalid. For this kind of mystic, the Bible is not complete or final. Those holding to some form of false mysticism believe spiritual truth is being added beyond the Scriptures. This type of false mysticism is seen in the ideas of pantheism, theosophy, modern-day spiritism, Seventh-day Adventism, new thought, Christian Science, Swedenborgianism, Mormonism, Quakerism, and Jehovah’s Witnesses.</p> <p>In addition, it can be seen in the beliefs of some forms of the modern-day charismatic movement. Some non-cessationists believe all the gifts mentioned in the New Testament are operative today. Some believe that God is still speaking through present day prophets, and some even go a step further and claim that the revelation coming to and from these prophets is equal in authority with the Bible. This is a growing movement within some circles of the evangelical church. What these teachers and their disciples fail to appreciate is that, in the Bible, God’s activity of speaking apart from the Scriptures occurred at a time when those documents were still being written. Interestingly, during that long history of Scripture writing, God’s people did live by a “Scripture plus” principle of authority, and, in keeping with that principle, God employed various means to speak His extrascriptural words to them. But today the church is faced with a new situation; now, with centuries of Christian orthodoxy, we confess that the writing of Scripture is finished, and that the canon is actually closed.</p> <p>True mysticism stems from the indwelling and teaching ministry of the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit illuminates the minds of believers to enable them to grasp and apply the truth of the Scripture. As Hebrews 12:25 affirms, God is speaking today, but He does so through the illuminating ministry of the Holy Spirit to the truths of the completed canon of Scripture. This is the work of illumination, leading, and conviction, but this must be distinguished from the Spirit’s work of revelation.</p> <p>By contrast, true mysticism is the proper approach of systematic theologians who believe the Bible. It involves the fact that all believers are indwelt by the Holy Spirit and therefore are able to be enlightened directly by the Spirit in their understanding of divine revelation. Such revelation does not exceed what the Scriptures reveal; it consists in making known divine truth recorded in Scripture. Guidance is always in keeping with the Scriptures themselves (John 16:13; 1 Cor. 2:9-10). <i>(Lewis Sperry Chafer- Systematic Theology)</i></p> <p>A true mystic in the biblical sense believes that the Bible is our final authority and seeks to always judge personal experience by the Bible. He does not allow experience to either take precedence over the Bible nor does he judge the Bible or what is biblical by his experience.</p>

<p>Romanism</p>	<p>In Romanism, the Roman Catholic Church is both the channel of divine revelation and the final authority for how the Bible is to be interpreted in faith and practice. Since the Bible is the product of the church, and since the Scriptures are obscure (another teaching of Romanism), only the church can properly interpret the Scriptures. In Romanism, the Bible is viewed as incomplete; there is more truth available, but it can only come through the church. “Furthermore, the traditions of the church are, along with the Bible, a source of divine revelation. Ecumenical councils and popes have from time to time made pronouncements that are considered infallible and therefore binding on church members.” (Charles C. Ryrie, <i>Basic Theology</i>)</p> <p>Particularly objectionable is the concept that the church can supersede Scripture itself. As a part of this approach to divine revelation, tradition must also be examined and should be studied in the light of important Scriptures (Gal. 1:14; 2 Thes. 2:15; 3:6). In His earthly ministry, Christ repeatedly had to contradict the traditions of men in affirming the truth of the Word of God. (Lewis Sperry Chafer- <i>Systematic Theology</i>)</p>
<p>Neoorthodoxy</p>	<p>Karl Barth (1886-1968), often viewed as the father of neoorthodoxy, believed that the basis of authority is the Word, but for Barth, the Word is mainly Christ. The Bible only witnesses to the Word and only becomes authoritative when it speaks to the individual. This means that the Bible’s witness to Christ is fallible. The individual must determine what is the word of God within the Bible and what is not. To clearly grasp what is and what is not, there is the need for some type of divine encounter. In short, neoorthodoxy does not believe that the Bible <i>is</i> the word of God, only that it <i>contains</i> the word of God. This means the individual becomes the final judge as to what in the Bible is the word of God and what is not. Since in neoorthodoxy the encounter is primary, the encounter actually becomes the authority and anyone can have his or her own encounter and come up with totally different conclusions.</p>
<p>Cultism</p>	<p>Many of the cults teach that the Bible <i>along with some other writing</i> is supreme and authoritative. A key characteristic of the cults, however, is that though they make a claim to believe the Bible is God’s word, they either affirm another writing as having equal authority or raise the other writing as more important or authoritative than the Bible itself. The perfect illustration of this is Mormonism and the <i>Book of Mormon</i> which Mormonism views as inspired. Christian Science views Mary Baker Eddy’s book, <i>The Key to the Scriptures</i>, as equally inspired. In the final analysis, the Bible is not the only authority; in matter of fact it is relegated to a lower position of importance.</p>
<p>Conservative Protestantism (the Orthodox Position)</p>	<p>The conservative or orthodox position is that the <i>Bible alone is our final authority for faith and practice</i>. For the conservative believer, the Bible is the infallible word of God. It is inspired in the original autographs and is without error. This means that, while it will record the lies of Satan who deceived Eve in Genesis 3, it records it as a lie. The Bible is true in everything it affirms to be true.</p> <p>Concerning the mind or reason, it must be subservient to the word of God. If the mind is thinking in terms which are contrary to the Scriptures, it is not the mind that judges the Scriptures, but the Scriptures judge the thoughts of the mind. Concerning the experience of Mysticism, the Bible is the final judge of experience, and experience cannot determine the truth of Scripture. Concerning Romanism, it is not the church that determines the meaning of the Bible but, rather, the Bible determines the proper place of the Church. Concerning the encounter, a man does not need a unique encounter before he can comprehend what is the word of God in the Scriptures.... Concerning the issue of the cults, the answer of Orthodoxy is that the Bible, and the <i>Bible alone, is</i> supreme, and the 66 books of the Scriptures are all that has been inspired by God in written form. Any other writing is the writing of a false prophet or false prophetess. We who hold to the supremacy of the Bible believe that knowledge is subject to the Bible, and there is no inner light that adds revelation beyond the Bible. (Dr. Arnold G. Fruchtenbaum, Ariel’s Radio Ministry, The Messianic Bible Study)</p> <p>To be sure, understanding God’s revelation in the Bible involves using the rational processes of a redeemed mind, a commitment of faith in matters not revealed or not understood, a dependence on the teaching ministry of the Holy Spirit, a conscience clear before God, and some insight into the lessons of history.</p>

Illumination

THE NEED FOR ILLUMINATION

Though the Bible can inspire us and bring us into an understanding of God, man needs a special enablement from God to really understand His plan and purposes. “*For who among men knows the things of a man except the man's spirit within him? So too, no one knows the things of God except the Spirit of God.*” (1 Cor. 2:11).

Adam's fall into sin and his spiritual death rendered man incapable of comprehending the truth of Scripture. “*The unbeliever does not receive the things of the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him. And he cannot understand them, because they are spiritually discerned.*” (1 Cor. 2:14). This means a special work of God is needed to make the Scripture understandable to both the unbeliever and to the believer. As seen in the way Jesus opened the eyes of the two disciples on the road to Emmaus, the work of illumination is necessary to enable us to comprehend the Word of God (Luke 24:44-45).

DEFINITION OF ILLUMINATION

Illumination can be defined as “the special ministry of the Holy Spirit whereby He enlightens men so they can comprehend the written Word of God.” *Illumination* begins with the pre-salvation work of the Spirit to bring demonstrable proof of the claims of the gospel that people might trust in Christ (cf. John 1:9; 16:8-11; 2 Tim. 1:10; Heb. 6:4). Generally, *illumination* is used in reference to the ministry of the Holy Spirit in enabling believers to understand the Scripture (Eph. 1:18; 3:9).

As the Spirit of truth, the Holy Spirit is the believer's means of spiritual illumination. Four New Testament passages focus on this ministry of the Spirit; these are John 16:12-15; 1 Corinthians 2:9-3:3; Ephesians 3:16-19; and 1 John 2:20 and 27. The essence of these passages is as follows:

(1) As the Spirit of truth and God's special anointing, He is our Teacher. This is not a privilege for a select few, but is available to all believers since He indwells all believers. The teaching ministry of the Spirit is thus guaranteed to all believers.

(2) Since indwelling is limited to believers, unbelievers can only experience the illuminating ministry of the Spirit in the matter of convicting and convincing them of the truth of the gospel message (John 16:8-11). This does not mean they cannot achieve a high level of understanding of the Bible, but its truth remains foolishness and they do not welcome it.

(3) As the extent of the Spirit's illumination, it encompasses the whole council of the Bible, Genesis to Revelation and salvation to things to come.

(4) Several things can hamper the Spirit's ministry of illumination. Carnality (1 Cor. 2:1-3), indifference (cf. Heb. 5:1f with 1 Pet. 2:2), tradition and preconceived ideas (Mark 7:7-13), ignorance (Mark 12:24; Luke 24:25-32; “foolish” in vs. 25 is the Greek, *anohtos*, “not understanding”), and poor methods of Bible study or interpretation (cf. Paul's exhortation in 2 Tim. 3:15).

(5) The purpose of the Spirit's ministry is not to focus on Himself, but to disclose to us the glories and sufficiency of Christ and, as a result, to glorify Him (Eph. 3:16f; John 16:12-15).

(6) The Spirit uses those whom He has gifted with the gift of teaching in His ministry of illuminating others (Rom. 12:7; 1 John 2:27). 1 John 2:27 does not mean we do not need teachers. Otherwise, why would the Spirit give this gift? In the context, John was speaking of discerning truth from error.

Ryrie adds an important note about illumination and revelation.

The experience of illumination is not by “direct revelation.” The canon is closed. The Spirit illumines the meaning of that closed canon, and He does so through study and meditation. Study employs all the proper tools for ascertaining the meaning of the text. Meditation thinks about the true facts of the text, putting them together into a harmonious whole and applying them to one's own life. The end result of the illumination ministry of the Spirit is to glorify Christ in the life, or to promote healthy doctrine—teaching that brings spiritual health and wholeness to the believer's life. Illumination is not concerned merely with understanding facts but with using those facts to promote Christlikeness.

Historically, Protestant evangelicalism has affirmed that the Bible is the canon of Scripture, that it is our supreme authority in matters of faith and practice, and that the canon is now closed, but that God is still speaking today and that He does so by means of the illuminating work of the Holy Spirit through this completed canon.

But a new proposition is being promoted today which states that God also speaks to His people today *apart* from the Bible. Most within the evangelical community would also add that, though He speaks *apart* from the Bible, He never *contradicts* what is in the Scriptures. But doesn't this new position threaten the sufficiency and finality of the Scripture? Many conservative scholars believe that it does.

Interpretation

The illuminating work of the Spirit goes hand-in-hand with the interpretation of Scripture. Although illumination is assured for believers, it does not always guarantee accurate interpretation. And if the interpretation is wrong, so will be the understanding of the passage in question. Many people approach the Bible with a false mysticism. Their attitude is, "The Holy Spirit will show what this means." But then they proceed to butcher the text and come up with some off-the-wall idea that completely misses what the Spirit is saying based on solid principles of Bible study or exegesis. The word that comes to mind here is *abuse*.

Ours is a day of abuse; sexual abuse, emotional abuse, verbal abuse. But what about *biblical* abuse? By that I mean being deceived by the improper use of Scripture. Who of us has not witnessed someone twisting Scripture, forcing it to mean something it does not mean? Those who don't know better start believing it with all their heart, only to discover later on that both the interpretation and the application were fallacious ... perhaps dangerous to their spiritual health and growth. (Charles R. Swindoll, *Growing Deep In The Christian Life*)

It is because of this very problem that the Apostle Paul, in a section where he was warning Timothy against false teaching that can lead to the ruin of the hearers, said, "Be diligent to present yourself approved to God as a workman who does not need to be ashamed, *handling accurately the word of truth*". Paul had in mind the important principle that we must correctly handle the Word of God in both its analysis (exegesis) and in its presentation (exposition) since Timothy was faced with the foolish interpretations of false teachers. But the main emphasis is on the study and interpretation of the Word of God. What's involved here? Is this a matter of sincerity or of theology?

Now this has nothing to do with *sincerity*. Many, perhaps most, people who mishandle the Word are very sincere. And it really has little to do with *theology*. Some who have their theology fairly well in place can still mishandle Scripture. It also has nothing to do with *personality*. There are gifted teachers dripping with charisma who can sway an audience and hold them in the palm of their hand, yet be guilty of mishandling Scripture. It certainly has nothing to do with *popularity*. Famous, highly visible personalities in Christian circles who can draw large listening audiences can (and often *do*) mishandle Scripture. So let's put to bed, once for all, the idea that if a person just "loves the Lord," he or she will be preserved from mishandling Scripture. No, even those of us who believe in the inerrancy of Scripture and affirm the importance of sound doctrine can be guilty of biblical abuse. (Swindoll)

Christians need to learn the basics of sound Bible study. Sound Bible study is that which is based on the fundamental principles of interpretation that will protect the student from Scripture abuse and that will provide a check on his or her own wild imagination.

THE PLAIN OR NORMAL METHOD OF INTERPRETATION

The word *literal* is avoided here since it often leads to wrong ideas that must be later corrected. By plain or normal we mean the words of Scripture are to be understood in their normal meaning just as we normally understand words in our normal, everyday communication. When we read the newspaper or a recipe in a cookbook, how do we read those words? We understand them according to their literal or normal meaning. If the recipe says two cups of flour, you don't symbolize that to mean, a great quantity to be chosen at your discretion. If, however, it calls for a pinch of salt, you understand it to be somewhat symbolical of a very small amount.

JUSTIFICATION FOR THE PLAIN, NORMAL METHOD OF INTERPRETATION

(1) The very purpose and nature of language supports this method. This is how we communicate in everyday life. God gave us language for the purpose of communicating with each other and with Him. Ryrie writes:

Two ramifications flow from this idea. First, if God originated language for the purpose of communication, and if God is all-wise, then we may believe that He saw to it that the means (language) was sufficient to sustain the purpose (communication). Second, it follows that God would Himself use and expect man to use language in its normal sense. The Scriptures do not call for some special use of language, implying that they communicate on some "deeper" or special level unknown to other avenues of communication.

(2) The need of control and objectivity. Only the plain method of interpretation provides a check on the minds of men. The allegorical or spiritualizing method of interpretation leads to all kinds of abuse with one person seeing one kind of hidden meaning and another person seeing something entirely different. When interpreters disregard the normal meaning of words and

look for supposedly hidden meanings, the true meaning of the Bible is lost; the Bible is abused; imagination and speculation go wild as the interpreter arbitrarily assigns this meaning and then that meaning to the text without any solid historical or grammatical foundation for his interpretation.

(3) The example of the Bible itself. A precedence for interpreting the Bible in this manner can be seen in the way Old Testament prophecies like Psalm 22, Isaiah 7:14; 53:1-12; Micah 5:2 have all been fulfilled literally or according to their plain meaning. To this someone might argue, “Aren’t some prophecies of the Old Testament fulfilled in a spiritual or typical sense in the New Testament?” To this question Ryrie says:

Of the approximately twenty-four prophecies to which the New Testament gives a typical fulfillment, only seven are cited as examples of a nonliteral hermeneutic (and, of course, not all agree that these seven prove this). The seven are Matthew 2:15, 18, 23; 11:10; Acts 2:17-21; Romans 9:24-26; and Galatians 4:21-31. Remember, however, that we are not just comparing seven out of a total of twenty-four, but seven out of a total of hundreds, for almost all Old Testament prophecies are clearly fulfilled literally in the New Testament. This is a strong support for the literal hermeneutics.

PRINCIPLES OF THE PLAIN, NORMAL METHOD OF INTERPRETATION

- 1) **We must interpret the Bible grammatically.** Grammatical interpretation is the process that studies the text of Scripture to determine four important things: (a) the meaning of words (lexicology), (b) the form of words (morphology), (c) the function of words (parts of speech), and (d) the relationship of words (syntax). This means it is necessary to study the tenses of verbs, nouns and pronouns, prepositions, conjunctions, and the ways these words are structured.

If we neglect the meanings of words and how they are used, we have no way of knowing whose interpretations are correct. The assertion, “You can make the Bible mean anything you want it to mean,” is true only if grammatical interpretation is ignored. The hallmark of the Reformation was a return to the historical, grammatical interpretation of Scripture. This was in direct opposition to the approach to the Bible that had been in vogue for hundreds of years—the view that ignored the normal meaning of words in their grammatical sense and let words and sentences mean whatever the readers wanted them to mean. (Roy B. Zuck, *Basic Bible Interpretation*)

- 2) **We must study the Bible historically.** “The historical context is important as a framework from which to interpret the Scriptures. Every book of Scripture was written in a historical context that should be understood in order to help interpret the book accurately.” (Paul Enns, *The Moody Handbook of Theology*)
- 3) **We must study the Bible contextually.** Every passage and all the words and sentences in that passage have a context. Take the passage out of the context, and you will miss its meaning and you may abuse the passage. “Words and sentences do not stand in isolation; therefore, the context must be studied in order to see the relation that each verse sustains to that which precedes and to that which follows. Involved are the immediate context and the theme and scope of the whole book.” (Charles C. Ryrie)
- 4) **We must interpret according to the analogy of Scripture.** This means, while always keeping in mind the context, we also need to allow Scripture to interpret Scripture. If an interpretation of a passage contradicts other plain passages of the Bible, then something is wrong with the interpretation. Also, it’s important to understand:

The dual authorship of the Bible makes it necessary not only to know the human author’s meaning but also God’s. God’s meaning may not be fully revealed in the original human author’s writing but is revealed when Scripture is compared with Scripture. We must allow for a *sensus plenior* which allows for a fuller (though directly related) meaning in the mind of the divine Author of Scripture. We cannot say that the human authors of Scripture always understood the full implications of their own words. When we compare Scripture with Scripture, we can discover the fuller intention of the divine Author. (Charles C. Ryrie)

- 5) **We need to recognize the progressive nature of God’s revelation.** God did not reveal Himself or His plan all at once. The promise of salvation is revealed in seed form in Genesis 3:15, but it is expanded and developed throughout the Old Testament until we come to its fulfillment in the person of Jesus Christ and its full explanation in the New Testament.

To be able to interpret plainly and consistently, it is imperative to recognize that revelation was given progressively. This means that in the process of revealing His message to man, God may add or even change in one era what He had given in another. Obviously the New Testament adds much that was not revealed in the Old. What God revealed as obligatory at one time may be rescinded at another (as the prohibition of eating pork, once binding on God’s people, now rescinded, 1 Tim. 4:3). To fail to recognize this progressiveness in revelation will raise unresolvable contradictions between passages if taken literally. Notice the following pairs of passages which will contradict if understood plainly unless one recognizes changes due to the progress of revelation: Matthew 10:5-7 and 28:18-20, Luke 9:3 and 22:36, Genesis 17:10 and Galatians 5:2; Exodus 20:8 and Acts 20:7. Notice too the crucial changes indicated in John 1:17; 16:24; 2 Corinthians 3:7-11. Those who will not consistently apply this principle of progressive revelation in interpretation are forced to resort to figurative interpretation or sometimes simply to ignore the evidence.

HOW TO STUDY THE BIBLE

READ REGULARLY!

How often do we feed on God's Word (see I Peter 2:2; Matthew 4:4; Job 23:12)? Maybe you think you do not have time to read the Bible every day. A man once made this excuse to the great evangelist, D.L. Moody. He answered, "My friend, if you are too busy to read the Bible every day you are busier than Almighty God ever intended any human being should be, and you had better let some things go, and take time to read the Bible."

It is good to set aside a special time during the day for your reading. Many Christians find the morning to be the best time because they can start the day by hearing from God. Others read in the evenings or during some quiet time during the day (some mothers might wait until after the children have gone to school in the morning). You need to choose a time that will work best for you.

READ SLOWLY!

What really counts is not how much of God's Word you go through but how much of God's Word goes through you! It is much better to read and understand one verse, than to read three chapters and not remember anything that you read in those chapters! A little read with understanding is better than a lot that is read in a hurry. According to I Corinthians 14:19, Paul would probably want us to read five words with our understanding, rather than read ten thousand words so fast that we do not get anything out of it! You can get more from the Lord in five minutes spent unhurried than in thirty-five minutes with your eye on the clock!

READ SYSTEMATICALLY!

Many people do not know where to start reading in the Bible, so they sometimes use the "lucky dip" method. They say, "Lord, show me where you want me to read" and randomly open their Bible and start reading wherever the Bible happens to open. Sometimes the Lord will bless this method, but in general it is not the best way to read His Word.

When we read a short story, we generally start at the beginning and read through until we get to the end. This is how the writer wrote it, and this is the best way to read it. We usually read letters in the same way. The same should be true with the books of the Bible. The best way to read is to start at the beginning of a book and continue until you get to the end. When Paul wrote the books of Romans, he did not write chapter 13 first and then chapter 8. He began with chapter 1 and then wrote chapter 2. If he wrote it this way, shouldn't we read it this way?

READ CAREFULLY!

Pay close attention to every word. Do not overlook any details. Be a good detective and see what you can discover! Sometimes we miss what God has for us because we fail to see what is right before our eyes! Also, be careful not to let your mind start to daydream (to check this you can always ask yourself: What did I just read?).

*"The studious perusal of the Sacred Volume will make better citizens, better fathers, and better husbands."
--- Thomas Jefferson*

READ INQUISITIVELY!

As you read the Bible, always be asking questions such as these: Who is the author or speaker? To whom is the passage written or who is the speaker addressing? What are the main ideas? Who do the pronouns ("he" "she" "they" "it" "you" etc.) refer to? Some other key questions that will help to bring out the meaning of the passage as are follows:

- Is there any command to obey?
- Is there any promise to believe?
- Is there a good example to follow?
- Is there any sin to avoid?
- Do I learn anything about God?
- Do I learn anything about man?
- Is there anything I can thank God for?

Questions such as these will help make the passage real to you.

READ LOVINGLY!

Think of a young woman in love with her fiance who is separated from her by many miles. How do you suppose she would read his love letters? As soon as the letter arrives in the mail she would rip it open and quickly read it all the way through with great interest. Then she would read it again, this time very slowly. She would think about every word. She would lovingly meditate upon every phrase and think to herself, "I wonder why he said this?" Even after she finishes reading the letter she would remember much of what was contained in the letter and she would continue thinking about it throughout the day.

We need to read the Bible in that way! And if you think about it, is not the Bible God's love letter to us? (Read I John 4:7-21.)

READ PRAYERFULLY!

Depend upon the Holy Spirit to teach you. Make it a habit to pray before you read. Psalm 119:18 is a good example of such a prayer!). Why is this important? It is the Lord that gives understanding (II Timothy 2:7).

BOOKS WHICH HELP IN STUDYING THE BIBLE

1. BIBLE HANDBOOK

A good Bible Handbook is a simple and concise reference book dealing with the Bible in general. A Bible Handbook will also give a general survey of the 66 books of the Bible, briefly summarizing the contents of each chapter. For example, if you wanted to know the content and teaching of 1 Corinthians chapter 7, a Bible Handbook would give you this information in a few concise paragraphs. **RECOMMENDED:** *Unger's Bible Handbook*.

2. ENGLISH DICTIONARY

This is one of the most important tools that a Bible student has. Make sure you have a good one! One of the

reasons we have difficulty understanding the Bible is that we do not know the English language as well as we should.

3. CONCORDANCE

A Bible Concordance is an alphabetical index of the words found in the Bible, listed in *their context* (the sentence or phrase in which they are found). There are basically 2 ways in which a concordance can be of help to the Bible student:

1) *A concordance helps in locating verses.* This is the best book to have when you do not know where a verse is found in the Bible. For example, there is a verse which says, "the love of money is the root of all evil." By using a concordance, you could find where this verse is located in the Bible (book, chapter and verse). Helpful hint: look up the word that is the least common (such as "root" or "money"). Don't look up common words such as "the" or "all" or "is", because the list will be so large that you will never find the verse unless you search all day! Some small concordances do not even include the very common words which occur so frequently.

2) *A concordance helps in studying a word.* Suppose you wanted to study the word "faith." With a concordance you could simply look up this word and it would immediately give you the places where this word is found in the Bible. You could then turn to each of these places and see what you can learn about faith!

Many Bibles contain a concordance in the back, although these are not complete concordances. A complete concordance is a very large book, and it contains a listing of every word in the Bible (even the common words) and every verse where those words are found. **RECOMMENDED:** *Strong's Exhaustive (Complete) Concordance.*

4. BIBLE TRANSLATIONS

When studying a portion of Scripture, it is sometimes helpful to read the same passage in another version. Here are some examples of how the use of other translations might help to clarify the meaning of the original text:

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| 1) Acts 19:2 (KJV)--"Have ye received the Holy Ghost since ye believed?" (this translation may suggest that a person can believe on Christ and then receive the Spirit at some later time) | Acts 19:2 (NASB)---"Did you receive the Holy Spirit when you believed?" (this translation correctly indicates that a person receives the Holy Spirit the moment he believes) |
| 2) 2 Peter 1:1 (KJV)--"through the righteousness of God and our Saviour Jesus Christ" (this translation may suggest that Peter was talking about two Persons: God the Father and Jesus Christ the Son) | 2 Peter 1:1 (NASB)--"through the righteousness of our God and Saviour Jesus Christ"(this translation correctly shows that Peter was talking about only one Person: the Lord Jesus Christ, who is here said to be GOD!) |
| 3) Revelation 4:6 (KJV)'--"four beasts"(when we think of "a beast" we usually think of a wild, savage animal) | Revelation 4:6 (NASB)--"four living creatures" (a better description of these angelic beings) |

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| 4) 2 Samuel 14:26 (KJV)--"And when he polled his head (for it was at every year's end that he polled it..." | 2 Samuel 14:26 (NASB)--"And when he cut the hair of his head (and it was at the end of every year that he cut it..." |
| 5) Deuteronomy 28:26 (KJV)--"no man shall fray them away" | Deuteronomy 28:26 (NASB)--"there shall be no one to frighten them away" |
| 6) Proverbs 13:24 (KJV)--"He that spareth his rod hateth his son: but he that loveth him chasteneth him betimes" | Proverbs 13:24 (NASB)--"He who spares his rod hates his son, but he who loves him disciplines him diligently" |
| 7) 2 Thessalonians 2:7 (KJV)--"For the mystery of iniquity doth already work: only he who now letteth will let, until he be taken out of the way" | 2 Thessalonians 2:7 (NASB)--"For the mystery of lawlessness is already at work; only he who now restrains will do so until he is taken out of the way" |

A Few Words about English Bible Translations:

The first thing to remember is that there is no perfect translation. You may see some arguments against some of the popular translations like the NIV, for example, claims that its translators are trying to water down or distort some of the important doctrines of the Bible. This is not true. All of the translations I'll mention here are fine, with all of the doctrines of Christianity intact. This is not to say there aren't some translations to stay away from, because there are! For example, The New World Translation, created by The Jehovah's Witnesses, contains many errors and has obviously been written in a way to fit their doctrines, not to accurately translate the original texts.

I like to break down the array of available translations into three main groups:

- o Word for word - the translation tries to faithfully convert the original language of the text to English as close to word for word as possible. Of course, with the large differences between the languages, this is sometimes difficult.
- o Paraphrase, or Thought for thought - Instead of translating word for word, the translator tries to convey the original thought that was presented by the author, in today's English vernacular. These translations are easier to read, but you are depending more upon the translator's opinions this way. In extreme paraphrases like The Message it can be more like a commentary than a translation.
- o Middle of the Road - these translations are in the middle of the first two, they try to remain as faithful to the original text as possible, while using modern English for ease of reading.

Here is a table of some of the popular translations available now, listed in one of these three categories, with the best ones at the top (in my experience):

Word For Word	Middle of the Road	Paraphrase
New American Standard (NASB)	New English Translation (NET)	New Living Translation (NLT)
New King James (NKJV)	English Standard Version (ESV)	The Living Bible (TLB)
King James (KJV)	Holman Christian Standard (HCSB)	Good News Bible (GNB)
	New International Version (NIV)	The Message (MSG)

It is helpful to have several versions available for study, and compare them. Word for Word

translations are best for serious study, as they are the most accurate translations. If you are new to the Bible, it is fine to start with a paraphrase like the NLT, as they are much easier to read. Just realize that you sometimes will lose the original meaning of the text in those versions. I would never use The Message for study, as it tries so hard to use the “hip” language of today that frequently the original “message” is totally lost.

5. STUDY OR REFERENCE BIBLE

Some editions of the Bible are especially prepared for the serious Bible student. A good study Bible contains the following helpful features: 1) a system of cross-references (for example, if you were studying Ephesians 6:1-2, the cross-reference system might direct you to Colossians 3:20 and Exodus 20:12). 2) an introduction to each book of the Bible (giving the author, date, theme, purpose for writing, etc.) 3) marginal notes throughout the Bible which define words, explain difficult passages, provide necessary background information and whatever else is needed to make the Bible more understandable 4) a partial concordance 5) a set of Bible maps.

6. BIBLE DICTIONARY

A good Bible Dictionary contains a wealth of information for the serious Bible student. Many Christians fail to use a Bible Dictionary as often as they should (and some do not even have one!). If properly used, the Bible Dictionary is one of the most valuable tools available to the student of God’s Word..

10. COMMENTARIES

A commentary is someone’s written comments on an entire book of the Bible, verse by verse and chapter by chapter (actually the Bible Handbook could be considered as a general commentary of the entire Bible). For example, you could obtain a commentary on the book of Philippians which would discuss every verse in all four chapters of this epistle.

CAUTION: A commentary should be the *last* book you study. No human author has a perfect understanding of the Bible, and often a commentary will make a statement or reach a conclusion which may not be correct. If you read the commentary first, you may quickly accept what the author has written without knowing all the facts. It is much better to let GOD be your TEACHER, and not any man. Always go *first* to the Word of God before you look at any other book.

I hope that this series has given you more knowledge than you had before about the Bible, and that you have increased confidence that what we have in the Bible is truly God’s Word.

All right, enough preparation, time to dive into the Word! In the next lesson we’re going to start studying Genesis, and I guarantee you will learn things you have never considered before. If you don’t fully understand and accept what happened in Genesis 1-11, it is impossible to understand the rest of the Bible and God’s plan for mankind.

In Christ,
Dusty Rhodes