

How to Study the Bible

Michael J. Davis

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How to Study the Bible
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Table of Contents

Foreword	iv
1. Using the Proper Tools – Especially the Bible	1
2. Where Do I Start?	9
3. How Do I Study? Let Me Count the Ways!	24
4. What About the Externals?	36
5. How Deep Do I Plow?	48
6. Restudying the Studied	58

Foreword

2 Timothy 2:15 – “Study to shew thyself approved unto God, a workman that needeth not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth.”

No verse of scripture relates more responsibility to the soul of man than this verse. Within it, man notices the following requirements:

- Study – the process of gaining knowledge
- Yourself – the only soul for which the individual is directly responsible
- Approved – found acceptable of value and purpose
- Of God – the Supreme Being, Judge and Creator
- Workman – one intent on the craftsmanship of labor
- Unashamed – without embarrassment or ruin
- Rightly dividing – handling rightly

- Word of truth – the only topic of which no lie exists

When obeyed, this single verse reveals the following essentials:

- Knowledge that God is
- That Christ is His only begotten Son
- That the Spirit inspired this word
- That obedience to its commandments saves the soul
- That without it, the soul is eternally lost

Granted, there are many more particulars to the Word of God. Nonetheless, these facts fulfill the proof of our statement: viz. 2 Timothy 2:15 relates more responsibility to the soul than any other verse of scripture! It is not the most important; neither is it the least important. It is the ACTION OF OBEYING THE VERSE wherein one finds its immeasurable merit of responsibility!

Therefore, we rejoice in your expression of interest in this discussion of HOW TO STUDY THE BIBLE. This study will help you develop a greater appreciation for God's Book and an ability to read it, study it and obey it with prayerfully greater enthusiasm. A wise preacher once described this Book of all Books in the following fashion:

“It contains the mind of God, the state of man, and the happiness of Christians. Its doctrines are holy. Its precepts are binding. Its history is true, and its decisions are immutable. It contains light to direct you, food to support you, and comfort to cheer you. It is the traveler’s map, the pilgrim’s staff, the pilot’s compass, the soldier’s sword, and the Christian’s charter. It involves the highest responsibility. It will reward the greatest labor, and will condemn all who trifle with its sacred contents. It is given to you in life. It will go with you through death. It will be opened at the judgment. Read it to be wise. Believe it to be safe. Practice it to be saved.”

His description may be quite accurate, however he did not obtain such a noteworthy estimation of the Book without study of its inspired contents!

Each person studious of this inspired work (2 Timothy 3:16-17) will have his/her own “method” of study. It is not our intention to change workable habits. It is our intent to form habits that work! So many souls believe reading alone is the art of study. It is not! While an element of study, it is not the only element. Notice Paul’s admonition of Ephesians 3:4: “Whereby, when ye read, ye may understand my knowledge in the mystery of Christ.” It is critical to read the scriptures (1 Timothy 4:13 – “Till I come, give attendance to reading, to exhortation, to doctrine.”) Yet we say again, it is not the only critical element of study.

You will need the following items to complete this course of discussion:

- Your Bible
- Paper and pencil for recording notes
- A fervent desire to learn

With these items, the rest of the “tools” for good and profitable Bible study come easily. Remember that God’s Word contains all things that pertain until life and godliness (2 Peter 1:3). Therefore, the way to obtain these items essential for eternity is to learn to practice in great diligence the commandment of 2 Timothy 2:15!

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Chapter 1

Using the Proper Tools – Especially the Bible

Several years ago, I “broke family tradition” when I declined an offer to go to college and become a schoolteacher. Perhaps one of the “reasons” was my changing from “pupil” to “student.” In my family, (where both parents and one grandparent were “professional” teachers), we learned early in life the difference! A student is one who studies while a pupil is one occupying a seat and wasting everyone’s time! Granted, you will not find those stated definitions in any dictionary, but you will find that sentiment.

The same point is true regarding study of God’s word. There is a difference between the STUDENT of the Bible, and the PUPIL. Usually, one notices the chasm between these souls when observing ATTITUDE. The student actually studies the context of the Bible and exhibits a hunger and thirst for its contents. The pupil may attend the appointed hour of Bible study, but seldom expresses any interest other than being counted “faithful” to the assembling.

Examine the following verses:

- Romans 8:1-10
- Philippians 2:1-12
- Romans 10:17
- Hebrews 11:1, 6
- 2 Peter 1:5-11
- 1 Timothy 4:11-16

These and many other verses, when studied, fully convey the necessity of a right attitude regarding study of the scriptures. Let us understand that the first and primary “tool” needed to study the Bible is this “right attitude.” Without it, you waste your time, the time of the teacher and most importantly, the time God grants for us to prepare for eternity (2 Corinthians 6:2). [By the way, did you notice in examining these passages you actually took the first step in “studying”?]

The difference between a SPIRITUAL MIND and a carnal mind is what you want in return for your efforts. If all you want is the praise of men for “knowing your Bible” then you really cannot study it for heaven’s sake (Matthew 6:5-8; John 12:43). If you want the approval of God (2 Timothy 2:15), then not so strangely, men find you eloquent in the knowledge of the scriptures besides (1 Corinthians 2:1-16). Since we walk by faith and not by sight (2 Corinthians 5:7) and since faith comes from hearing the word of God (Romans 10:17), then it behooves us to have a

SPIRITUAL MIND by which to gain the lessons spiritually discerned (1 Corinthians 2:14)!

The second “tool” is the Bible. I hesitate to say “second” because for obvious reasons, one cannot know of spiritual things without the Bible. However, one cannot accept the Bible as the truth, i.e. God’s Word, without some fashion of a spiritual mind. Nonetheless, the Bible is the text of study and therefore a required element! As suggested in the Foreward of this material, reading alone does not constitute study. Nonetheless, be honest: **YOU CANNOT STUDY THE BIBLE WITHOUT HAVING A BIBLE TO STUDY!**

With so many “translations” of the Bible, several pupils in their growing maturity toward being students need to know which version is best for their study. Asking such a question invariably creates controversy, but we accept the question as a challenge: provided you accept the answer as an equal challenge! Throughout this study, this written material will use the King James Version for its quotations from scripture. There is a simple reason for this use: **IT IS THE VERSION WITH WHICH THIS AUTHOR IS MOST FAMILIAR.** That is not to say it is the “only right translation” for to say so is simply not the truth! Through several years of study, I find the following versions accurate in their translations and list them in order of my personal preference:

- New American Standard Updated
- New King James Version
- New American Standard
- Revised Standard
- Englishman's Translation (Phillips)

While some argue in favor of the following versions for their personal study, I do not favor them for various and sundry reasons (most within the realm of personal opinion). In many verses, the "translation" is inaccurate. More frequently, the use of "paraphrasing" scripture depletes from God's Word and lends support to man's opinion.

- Good News for Modern Man
- Contemporary English Version
- The Living Bible (admitted paraphrase)
- The Everyday Bible
- The Twentieth Century New Testament
- The Oxford Annotated Bible
- New International Version

(This list is not in any order of discomfort to me. I simply find each to have various faults and therefore use none of them in usual Bible Study. I do have them in my library, however, and sometimes find the "comparison study" helpful. I must reiterate again, I do not recommend any of these for the "average" student of the Bible.)

As we discuss these “translations” and “versions” in our class, please understand only the PROVEN ACCURATE will benefit the student (1 Thessalonians 5:21). The process by which one proves their accuracy is indeed part of this discussion. Put simply, scripture cannot contradict itself and remain credible. The most popular of translations (KJV) often finds itself in defense of its wording because of apparent contradictions. The same is true of the NASU. Briefly stated, these contradictions vanish with CAREFUL study of apparently conflicting texts.

Another valued point of this discussion is the fact you grow accustomed to the Bible you most frequently use. The more you study, finding various texts becomes “second nature.” For example, I know that Romans 8 is on the left hand page, inside column. While this is true with my Bible, it may not hold true with yours. The point is familiarity with the book you most often use. To a student of the Bible, the “well used” look of the tattered and torn Bible magnifies its beauty, for it is proof of its studied content.

When and where you study constitutes the next “tools” for proper study. Let us be perfectly clear in this point: ATTENDING A BIBLE STUDY CLASS DOES NOT IN AND OF ITSELF CONSTITUTE A BIBLE STUDY! Those of us who remember a little about “yesteryear” schools remember the classroom was the place for reciting the lessons learned! We had studied them some place and sometime other than

during the “discussion” and/or “recital” time of class work. That’s right, we did HOMEWORK! Granted, many parents and modern day students think modern day teachers assign too much homework and should take some extra time actually teaching in the classroom. While we could make a case for such (pro and con), the point of this discussion is WE HAVE TO HAVE A TIME AND A PLACE TO STUDY and neither are commonly found in the hour’s time of our customary Bible study classes.

We suggest doing as the great men of the Bible did. Daniel, Mordecai, Peter, Paul and others had “times of prayer.” We sing, “take time to be holy” and in exchange, try to “fit it in if anything is left at the end of the day.” I know a man who is an insurance salesman. His day at the office begins around 8:00 A.M. and often lasts well into the evening hours. Both he and his wife are active in civic affairs for their community, and certainly wish to spend time with their children and grandchildren. They both teach Bible classes at their congregation. For him, he considers the best time for quiet, and meditation of the scriptures (1 Timothy 4:15; Psalm 1) is the very early morning. He begins his study at 5:00 A.M.!

The important fact is you need TIME and you need QUIET in order to concentrate. Most people do not read fast, or well. Of those with sixth grade reading skills (and by population in the United States, most citizens read on this level), less than 30% of these

readers retain more than 50% of what they read with only one reading of any text. This statistic proves one factor greater than all others do: MOST WILL HAVE TO READ THE SAME THING TWO OR THREE TIMES IN ORDER TO RETAIN ONLY PART OF THE TEXT!

Finally, as you study, TAKE NOTES! None of us have, “perfect memory recall.” My wife often says, “You might remember scripture, but you can’t remember to bring home a gallon of milk.” Well, if truth be known, I don’t remember scripture that well, either! The point is, taking notes permits our writing down the IMMEDIATE POINTS OF INTEREST OR CONCERN. A word or a phrase triggers another thought. If you fail to write it down, you fail to remember that thought that once intrigued your interest. Scripture references especially pose a problem in our memories. We need to write it down and put some sort of notation with it, which reminds us to “study this further.” Most students find it helpful to carry a notebook and pencil to every class (and every sermon) and then do their REAL STUDY at home! Questions arise with frequency and we need to write them down immediately so we may reference our thoughts to the serious matters. Remember Paul requested of Timothy “the books and the parchments” (2 Timothy 4:13). No one knows what books or what parchments Paul meant ... BUT PAUL AND TIMOTHY KNEW! Undoubtedly, they accompanied his study of God’s Word and the work at

Paul's hands. It certainly lends credence to TAKING NOTES.

Before our next study time in class, do the following exercises:

1. List at least five passages verifying the need to prepare the mind (soul, spiritual thinking) more than the carnal mind for judgment. Try not to repeat the ones listed in this chapter: that would be less than "fair" in doing your "homework."
2. Write a paragraph proving your use of the translation/version you presently use.
3. Establish a time and place each day for your personal study of God's word. Record this time and tell us how well you kept it for the week.
4. You will not need to show us your notes. We each will see how well you take notes as we share class time!

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