

BIBLE CORRESPONDENCE FELLOWSHIP

UNDERSTANDING THE BIBLE



LESSON 3

HOW TO STUDY THE BIBLE

Memory Verse ACTS 20:32

According to our memory verse it is “the Word” which is able to build up GOD’S people and to give them the inheritance. Put another way, God uses the Bible to bring spiritual growth, bring power and blessing progressively into our lives.

The Bible changes the lives of God's people for the better. The following account of a true story is adapted from a booklet entitled, How To Study the Bible, written by Richard W. Dehaan and published by Radio Bible Class, Grand Rapids, MI.

There are many reasons why Bible study can be extremely profitable, but I will give only one. The Holy Scriptures have been a life transforming power wherever they have gone. When the gospel is preached and believed, men and women, boys and girls experience a revolutionary change in their lives, and societies are lifted to new levels of morality and humanitarianism. One example is the historical event which became the basis of the well-known story “Mu-

tiny on the Bounty.” That conflict remains an amazing testimonial to what the Bible can do. In 1789 a group of English sailors who had spent six months on a south sea island decided to remain. They mutinied against their captain and set him adrift in an open boat. A punitive expedition from England captured 14 of the mutineers and transferred nine of them to another Island where they formed a new colony.

The Encyclopedia Britannica tells us that these people degenerated so rapidly and became so fierce that life there turned into a hell on earth. Having learned to distill whiskey from a native plant, they soon were involved in quarrels, drunken orgies and violence. Finally, all the men except Alexander

Smith were dead and he was left alone with a group of native women and half-breed children.

Then a wonderful thing happened. Finding a Bible in an old sea chest, Smith read it and believed it. He gathered the women and children around him and taught them the Word of God. Twenty years later, an American ship visited the island and found a Christian community. There was no disease, no crime, no insanity, no illiteracy and no strong drink. The moral standards of its people were so high that no law enforcement agency was necessary. The island seemed a small paradise. What had brought about this astounding transformation? Just reading the Bible, believing it, and putting it into practice.

The Bible will work powerfully in your life, even as it did among the small group on Pitcairn Island. The purpose of this series of studies is to give you an overview of the whole Bible along with some important principles which will help you to understand it. As you grow in understanding, the Bible will "build you up and give you the inheritance among all those who are sanctified."

THE STUDY OF GOD'S WORD WILL BRING GROWTH AND BLESSING !

Before examining some specific principles concerning Bible study, we will look at several references which show that God has promised to work through His Word.

1. For review, please look up (2 Timothy 3:16,17). List the four things for which the Word of God is profitable.

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____
4. _____

(vs. 17) What will be the result for those who study the Word faithfully? _____

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2. (1 Thes. 2:13) Paul commended the people of Thessalonica because they accepted his teaching as the Word of God. According to the last part of this verse, what does the Word of God do?
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3. Please carefully read Joshua 1:1-9 _____ (Check)
4. (Joshua 1:8) The "Book of the Law" referred to the first five books of the Bible which were written by Moses. In Joshua's day this was Israel's Bible. According to verse 8, what did the Lord promise Joshua if he would study and meditate upon this Book? _____
5. Psalm 119 speaks a great deal concerning the Word of God and its effect in our lives. Refer to the following references from Psalm 119 and answer the related questions.
- (Psalm 119:9) What will the Word of God accomplish? _____
-
- (vs. 11) How will the Word of God help us? _____
-
- (Psalm 119:98) What do the commandments of God accomplish? _____
-
- (vs. 100) What is the result of considering God's Word? _____
-
- (vs. 105) How is the Word of God described? _____
-
6. Please carefully read Psalm 1. _____ (Check)
7. (Psalm 1:3) Describe the life of the man who delights in the law of the Lord and meditates upon it. _____
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God has given us His Word, the Bible, to teach us and to guide us. As we study and meditate upon His Word we will grow and experience peace, stability, and the blessing and power of God.

SEVEN IMPORTANT PRINCIPLES OF BIBLE STUDY!

PRINCIPLE #1

Only those who know Jesus Christ as their Savior can fully understand the Bible.

8. (John 3:3) What is necessary if someone is to "see the kingdom of God?" _____
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The word translated "see" means to "perceive with understanding."

The one who is not "born again" cannot have understanding.

9. (1 Corinthians 1:18) How do the unsaved (those who are perishing) regard the gospel message? _____

10. (2 Cor. 4:3,4) In this verse Satan is referred to as the "god of this world." What has he done to the unsaved? _____

11. Please carefully read Matt. 13:1-9, 18-24. _____ (Check)
12. (Matt. 13:19) When someone hears the word of the Kingdom, what does the evil one do? _____

Scripture indicates that Satan works to blind the minds of the unbelieving to the truth of the Word. In addition, the old sinful self is not able to understand the truth of God.

13. (Romans 8:5-8) Where have the unsaved (those who are "according to the flesh") set their minds? (vs. 5) _____

(vs. 7) How does the mind set on the flesh (the mind of the unsaved) respond to God? _____

14. Finally, refer to 1 Cor. 2:14. Here the unsaved person is referred to as the "natural man." According to this verse, how does the unsaved man view spiritual truth, i.e. the "things of the Spirit of God?" _____

Educated unbelievers can read the Bible and know what it says. They can outline its content and teach others what is in it. But only those who are "born again," alive to God and taught by the Holy Spirit, can know and accept what it means.

PRINCIPLE #2

THE HOLY SPIRIT WHO INDWELLS ALL BELIEVERS IS INSTRUMENTAL IN HELPING US TO UNDERSTAND THE BIBLE.

15. Please carefully read John 14:15-26 _____ (Check)
(Vs. 17) By what name is the Holy Spirit referred to? _____
(John 14:26) What two things would the Holy Spirit do for Christ's disciples? 1. _____
2. _____
16. Please carefully read John 16:13-15. _____ (Check)
(vs. 13a) What would the Holy Spirit do for the disciples? _____

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17. Please carefully read 1 Corinthians 2:6-16. _____ (Check)
18. (vs. 6-9) Paul speaks of truths which had been revealed to him.
(vs. 10) Who had revealed these truths. _____
19. (vs. 12b) Why has God given us the Holy Spirit? _____
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The Holy Spirit's teaching ministry to the twelve Apostles and later to Paul helped them to produce the Bible. Now that the Bible is complete, the Holy Spirit helps us to understand it, "that we might know the things freely given to us by God."

PRINCIPLE #3

THE HOLY SPIRIT BRINGS UNDERSTANDING TO THOSE WHO ARE WILLING TO OBEY!

Perhaps you have had the experience of training others for some task. Possibly you have coached a Little League team or trained new people in a job situation. When you work to teach others an important fact of human nature quickly surfaces. **Some people are willing to be taught!** They pay attention and do as they are instructed. Others, however, pay little attention and do not follow directions. As a teacher or trainer, what kind of person do you prefer to work with? Who will get more of your effort and attention? Naturally it will be the one who responds...who is willing.

There is a similar principle which operates in the spiritual realm. While all Christians are invited to grow through study and spiritual exercise, God grants the greatest understanding to those who are interested and willing to learn and obey.

20. (Matt. 7:6) What are Christ's followers commanded not to do? _____
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The "holy things" and "pearls" of this verse refer to spiritual truths from God. The "dogs" and "swine" are those who have no genuine interest. They ask spiritual questions and then take the answers and "trample them under their feet."

21. (Matt. 7:7,8) These verses might also be applied to Bible study. Summarize these promises in your own words.
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22. (Proverbs 3:5,6) What command is given? _____
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What promise is made if we obey? _____

23. Please carefully read Psalm 25:1-15. _____ (Check)

24. Refer specifically to Psalm 25:12-15. To “fear the Lord” is to hold Him in awe and reverence and to have a healthy fear of disobeying Him. This biblical kind of fear leads us to obey.

(Psalm 25:12-15) List any two of the promises made to the one who fears the Lord. _____

25. Please carefully read John 7:14-17 _____ (Check)

In this section Christ is teaching in the temple. What question did the Jews ask among themselves? _____

(vs. 17) Christ said that a certain condition must be met if the people were to have the understanding which they wanted. What was this condition? _____

“The secret of the Lord is with them that fear him (Ps. 25:14 KJV).”

“If any man is willing to do His will, he shall know of the teaching, whether it is of God or whether I speak from myself”

(John 7:17 NASB)

“The Holy Spirit will teach those who are interested and willing to obey.”

PRINCIPLE #4

**The Lord Jesus Christ and his death on the cross for our sins
is the central truth of the Bible.**

26. (John 1:45) Who had written about Christ according to this verse? _____

27. (John 5:39) The term “scriptures” in this verse refers to the Old Testament. What two things did the Old Testament speak of? 1) _____

2) _____

28. Please carefully read Luke 24:13-27,44,45. _____ (check)

29. (vs. 27) What did Christ explain to these two disciples? _____

30. (vs. 44) Where were things about Christ written? _____

This three-fold designation, "The Law . . . Psalms. . . Prophets," was a common expression which referred to the entire Old Testament. Christ taught that the Old Testament spoke of him both in prophecies and in types. (A type is an Old Testament picture of a New Testament truth.) For example, The Passover lamb of Exodus 12:1-14 is a picture, or type, of Christ, the Lamb of God slain for sinners (1 Corinthians 5:4-8).

In John 14:26 Christ taught his disciples that the Holy Spirit would come and "... bring to your remembrance all that I said to you (KJV)." This was the basis for the writing of the four gospels: Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John. According to John 16:13, the Holy Spirit would also "... guide you into all the truth." This refers to new revelation yet to be given, much of which became the foundation for many of the epistles (letters). Also in John 16:13, the Holy Spirit would "... disclose to you what is to come." This refers to New Testament prophecies of future events.

31. (John 16:14,15) From whom and about whom would the Holy Spirit be speaking? _____

32 Please carefully read Colossians 1:15-19. _____ (Check)

(vs. 18b) What is the Father's desire concerning Christ? _____

Jesus Christ is the central figure of the Bible

The Old Testament points forward to his coming.

The four gospels tell the story of his coming.

The epistles tell the meaning of his coming.

Revelation tells us that he is coming again.

PRINCIPLE #5

Statements in the Bible must be understood in the context in which they are made .

If you were to receive a letter from a friend and read the words, "I'm desperate and I'm afraid I'm going to do something drastic," you might draw a conclusion and become very alarmed. Suppose you were to look more carefully and read, "I was watching a movie the other night on television and just as the hero said, 'I'm desperate and I'm afraid I'm going to do something drastic,' my doorbell rang and I missed the end of the show." Now you would have a very different impression of what our friend was saying. So it is with the Bible. The Bible is to be read and studied much as any other textbook. That is, we must apply standard rules of grammar and logic and take statements in the context in which they were written. Always ask,

"Who is speaking?"

"To Whom are they speaking?"

"When are they speaking?"

"What are they speaking about?"

33. Practice the principle of context. Refer to Acts 20:16-21 and answer the following questions.

Who is speaking? _____

To whom is he speaking? _____

When is he speaking (vs. 16,17)? _____

What is he speaking about? _____

PRINCIPLE #6

Interpret the Bible literally

Literal interpretation is a basic principle of Bible study. Every passage should be taken to mean exactly what it says unless context or the expression itself indicates otherwise.

Someone else has wisely said, "If the literal sense makes good sense, then leave it alone, or else you'll wind up with nonsense." God has spoken to us through human language. He has said exactly what He wanted to say and we are to understand the Bible at face value.

34. Practice literal interpretation. Look up and carefully read 1 John 5:11-13. List three things which this passage teaches.

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____

35. (Eph. 4:25-32) List 5 things which God expects of those who have believed in Christ?

Vs. 25. _____
Vs. 26. _____
Vs. 27. _____
Vs. 28. _____
Vs. 29. _____

The Bible is to be plainly understood. If symbols or figures of speech are used, the context will make it obvious .

36. (Isaiah 55:12) In the Messianic Kingdom, which is still future, what will the mountains and hills do? _____

_____ The trees? _____

It is obvious that these statements are figures of speech meant to show the glory of that time when the curse will be lifted and all will be in harmony with God. Our first response should be to accept the Bible literally, at face value. If figures of speech or other literary devices are used it will be obvious from the context.

PRINCIPLE #7

Rightly divide the Word of truth.

37. Does God give commands concerning our diet? Look up each of the following passages and tell what it commands concerning man's diet.

(Genesis 1:29) _____

(Geneses 9:3) _____

(Leviticus 11:3-8) _____

(1 Timothy 4:3,4) _____

Why the seeming discrepancies in God's rules for diet? The answer lies in the fact that at different times in history God has dealt with the world in differing ways. To understand this fact and to recognize the basic divisions of scripture is essential to our understanding the Bible. This is rightly dividing or handling accurately the Word of truth (2 Tim. 2:15). In our next lesson we will consider this important principle more fully.

Remember these 7 basic principles for Bible study.

1. Only those who know Jesus Christ as their Savior can fully understand the Bible.
2. The Holy Spirit who indwells all believers is instrumental in helping us understand the Bible.
3. The Holy Spirit brings understanding to those who are willing to obey.
4. The Lord Jesus Christ and His death on the cross for us is the central truth of the Bible.
5. Statements in the Bible must be understood in the context in which they are made.
6. Interpret the Bible literally.
7. Rightly divide the Word of truth. Recognize the important divisions of scripture.

38. Memory Verse. Write out Acts 20:32. _____

Use the space below for any questions or comments:

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