

Studying the Bible

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Few people know how to really study the Bible. And this is not always because they do not know how to study at all, for very often those who are good students otherwise, are poor students of the Bible, even though they want to understand it. In Proverbs 2.1-5 we are told how to study the Bible so as to understand it. Let us read the passage: —

“My son, if thou wilt receive My words, and hide My commandments with thee; so that thou incline thine ear unto wisdom, and apply thine heart to understanding; yea, if thou criest after knowledge, and liftest up thy voice for understanding; if thou seekest her as silver, and searchest for her as for hid treasures; then shalt thou understand the fear of the Lord, and find the knowledge of God.”

When a man is convinced that there is rich silver or gold ore in a certain place, what does he do? He goes right there and digs *in that very place*. But how do people generally do with the Bible? Why as soon as they light upon a portion where there is special treasure, —and that means a place where there is special difficulty, —they immediately go off to some other place to dig. If they went to some other part of the Bible it would not be so bad, for there is treasure everywhere in the Bible, and whoever finds it in one place will be better able to find it in another; but they generally go to a library and begin to dig among the commentators, or they ask their pastor or some friend what he thinks it means. It is as though a man should find indications of gold in a certain place, and should straightway go off a hundred miles and begin digging. People are not so foolish as that in temporal matters.

Another point: When a man is digging for silver or gold, he carefully examines every portion of the soil where he is digging. Whoever has seen men washing out gold knows that every particle of the soil is carefully examined. No matter what the style of mining, everything is in some way closely scrutinized.

Here then we have the simple directions for studying the Bible. First go to the Bible itself, and to the particular passage which you wish to understand, and then give the most careful and patient attention to every sentence and every word. Let your mind dwell upon every word and every clause, noting its relation to what precedes and what follows, until you know for a certainty just *what it says*. Do not sit down to commit the passage to memory so that you can repeat it parrot-like. That is not study. But question the text, asking a question and letting the words of the text give the answer, until you cannot possibly think of it without thinking the very words.

Many people who read the Bible a great deal do not know what it says, because they read it carelessly, and do not let the Bible itself form their ideas. No one can hope to understand any portion of the Bible when he does not know for a certainty just what it says. This is self-evident, for it applies to everything.

When the student knows what the text says, then what? Here is the instruction, "Consider what I say; for the Lord shall give thee understanding in all things." 2 Timothy 2.7, R.V. How will He give us the understanding? By our considering what He says. That is, while we are diligently considering the text, the understanding of the text will come from the text itself. From what other place should we expect it to come? "For the Lord giveth wisdom; out of His mouth cometh knowledge and understanding." Proverbs 2.6. The meaning of what the Lord says is in just the very words that He says.

How long must one consider the words before he can understand it? That depends upon several things. We must be prepared to consider them for ten years, if need be, without getting impatient. We must have such confidence that wisdom and knowledge do come from the very words of the Lord that we shall be assured that they are really there, and that they are nowhere else. But much depends on the spirit in which we approach the study. The Spirit of God is the source whence the Bible comes; the Spirit is the life and power and wisdom of the word. When we come with hearts submissive to the Spirit, we shall not have to wait so long as we otherwise would.

Remember that the righteousness of God is revealed to faith, and not to intellect. That does not put any discount upon intellect, but it simply exalts faith. God has given man talents of intellect, and expects him to use them, but not without faith. A very feeble intellect with faith will understand the Bible far more readily and more perfectly, than a giant intellect without faith.

At the same time that one particular passage is being thus *studied*, do not neglect the reading and studying of other parts of the Bible. The Bible is a unit; one Spirit and one truth are in it all; and every part is thus directly connected with every other part. If the particular passage under special consideration is in the middle of a chapter, the student will find it necessary to extend his careful study back to the beginning of the chapter, and even to the beginning of the book; for no book in the Bible, unless it is Proverbs and Psalms, is made up of detached thoughts. A line of thought runs through each, and every text should be considered in its full connection. Then when it is used in the study of any special subject, it will not be misapplied.

When the mind thus gets accustomed to dwelling upon the Scriptures, it is wonderful how light will come. Almost anything may serve to cause the light to shine forth from the word. While reading some other portion of the Bible, while listening to a discourse, in conversation even upon some other subject, —in short, in a thousand different ways, — the mind may be directed to the text that has been studied, and the light will shine forth. No one can tell in what way the Spirit will work, and what means it will use to lead the soul into the truth; only let it be remembered that in any case it is the Spirit that guides, and that the knowledge gained comes from the word itself, and not from any other source.

"For the Lord giveth wisdom; out of His mouth cometh knowledge and understanding."