

How to Study Your Bible

Dub McClish

[Editor's Note: I've had this article in my files for some time, and its author's name if ever attached, has not survived with my copy of it. It deals with basic and elementary (rather than comprehensive principles of Bible study. It is sad to observe that, as it was when the inspired writer wrote Hebrews 5:12, so it is today: Multitudes are ignorant of "the rudiments of the first principles of the oracles of God." Because of ignorance or neglect of such simple principles as noted below, thousands have become the prey of false teachers over the past few decades. The article appears for the most part as it came to me, although I made a few editorial alterations. Dub McClish]

People often approach Bible study in a rather strange manner. One person said he just began studying wherever his Bible happened to open. With this approach, it is no wonder that people cannot understand the Bible. With this approach, one cannot understand a novel. To understand what God's will for us is, we must begin our study at the beginning of the book.

Have an Open Mind

To understand clearly what God is saying, we must, as much as possible, free our minds from all prejudices and pre-conceived ideas. If we begin our study with our minds already made up, we will never learn the Truth. As we study, we must always have an open mind.

Determine Who Is Speaking and to Whom

Not everything recorded in the Bible is spoken by God. God has seen fit, upon occasions to record what others have said. For example, "Skin for skin, yea, all that a man hath will he give for his life" (Job 2:4) was spoken by Satan. Neither does everything spoken in the Bible apply to me specifically. For example, God's command to "Get thee out of thy country, and from thy kindred, and from thy father's house unto a land that I will shew thee" (Gen. 12:1) applies only to Abram. In every sentence, we must carefully observe who is speaking and to whom it is spoken if we are to have a clear understanding.

Determine in Which Period of Bible History the Words Were Spoken

Not everything recorded in the Bible applies to us specifically because there are three major periods of Bible history – the Patriarchal, the Mosaic, and the Christian ages. The Patriarchal or father-rule period (when God communicated through the "fathers"),

began with Adam, and covers the book of Genesis up to the giving of the Mosaic law on Mount Sinai, as recorded in the book of Exodus. Careful study reveals that the Mosaic law was given only to the descendants of Jacob, Israelites, or Hebrews (later called “Jews”), who had been slaves in Egypt and were led out of bondage by Moses.

The Mosaic law was to be a schoolmaster to bring them to Christ (Gal. 3:24–25). When Christ came and died on the cross, the authority of the Mosaic law ceased (Col. 2:14). After the death of Jesus, the law/will/testament of Jesus went into effect (Mat. 17:5; Heb. 1:1–2; 9:16–17). All who have lived or will live since the cross are accountable to Jesus’ law, the New Testament. The events that took place during the Patriarchal and Mosaic ages are all true, and the record of them is God’s revelation as much as the New Testament is. We must study them to learn more perfectly God’s dealings with men (Rom. 15:4; 1 Cor. 10:1–11), but those laws do not apply to us today. We live under the law of Christ, and if we try to live by any of the commandments given during the Mosaic Age, we displease God and put our souls in jeopardy (Gal. 5:1–4).

Always Observe the Verb Tenses

As with any writing, verb tenses are very meaningful because they tell us whether the action is now, continuing, in the future, or already past. About six months before Jesus’ crucifixion, He said, “upon this rock I will build my church” (Mat. 16:18). The verb tense shows that the church did not exist at that time, but He would build it at some future time. Unless we very carefully observe the verb tenses, we will misunderstand and misapply what God is saying.

Carefully Observe the Use of Pronouns

The use of pronouns often gives us a deeper insight into what God is saying. For example, by carefully observing the pronouns we learn that Luke joined Paul’s company in Troas (Acts 16:6–11) and that he remained in Philippi to work with the newly formed congregation when Paul and Silas departed for Thessalonica (Acts 16:1–17).

Pay attention to “Signal” Words

Watch carefully for such words as *but*, *for*, *wherefore*, and *therefore*. These words are important as they signal a contrast, an explanation, or a conclusion.

Always Observe the Context

We must never be guilty of taking verses out of their context to prove a conclusion we have already reached, some pet theory we might hold, or even to validate some Scriptural fact or principle taught elsewhere. Always read the verses before and after to get the thought and allow verses to stay in the context. For example, many have taken Paull's statement, "Eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of man, the things which God hath prepared for them that love him" (1 Cor. 2:9). To refer to Heaven. Although these statements are true concerning Heaven, applying these words to Heaven represents a gross disregard for the context. By reading the verses before and after, we learn that what Paul is really talking about is the revelation of God's will through inspired men. Always be sure to study statements in their context to learn exactly what God is saying.

[**Note:** I wrote this article for, and it was published in *The Edifier*, weekly bulletin of Pearl Street Church of Christ, Denton, TX, of which I was editor. Date of publication is unknown]

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