

Rules of Biblical Understanding

How to Study the Word of God

"Thy word is a lamp unto my feet, and a light unto my path." Psalm 119:105

IN ORDER TO STUDY THE BIBLE AND ARRIVE AT AN ACCURATE INTERPRETATION, WE MUST BE WILLING TO ABIDE BY THE FOLLOWING PRINCIPLES:

1. We must believe that the whole Bible is the inspired word of God, and we must be willing to abide by its teachings, even if they go contrary to our own personal ideas and practices.

"All scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness, That the man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works." 2 Timothy 3:16,17.

"Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God." Matthew 4:4.

2. We must be humble and teachable. However great and extensive our knowledge and educational achievements, we must come humbly to the word of God, not seeking to study it from a secular standpoint as a scientific or philosophical work, and with a dependence upon human intellect. Trusting in intellectual pride and humanistic opinion will prevent us from being able to understand the deep spiritual truths of the Bible. God requires us to come humbly and with a teachable attitude, sincerely and prayerfully seeking to understand His word. Jesus said, "I thank Thee, O Father, Lord of heaven and earth, because thou hast hid these things from the wise and prudent, and hast revealed them unto babes." Matthew 11:25

3. We must compare scripture with scripture, letting the Bible explain itself. It is not common to find individuals and groups of people who build a whole theology upon one single statement of the Bible. This can be very dangerous and misleading, depending upon the method of interpretation employed in their Biblical research. The only correct and safe way of securing an understanding of a particular truth is to study everything that the Bible has to say about that specific topic. "Whom shall He teach knowledge? And whom shall He make to understand doctrine?... For precept must be upon precept, precept upon precept; line upon line, line upon line, here a little, and there a little." Isaiah 28:9,10. We must study broadly, permitting the Bible to define its own terms. This will preserve us from the practice of some, in taking an isolated passage and twisting it to fit or "prove" their own ideas. We should always approach the Bible with an open and honest attitude, willing to lay aside any established beliefs and practices, whenever we find them to be without scriptural foundation.

4. We should ask the Holy Spirit to guide us as we study the Bible. Though written by men, the Bible has been supernaturally inspired. We therefore need the Holy Spirit, the author of all scripture, to guide and instruct us as we study. Prayer for divine instruction and enlightenment should always precede a study of God's word.

Without heaven's assistance to render our minds spiritually receptive, it is not possible to properly interpret and appreciate the truths of the Bible, which are often "hidden beneath the surface" and readily missed by the casual, superficial approach. "But God hath revealed them unto us by his Spirit: for the Spirit searcheth all things, yea, the deep things of God. 11 For what man knoweth the things of a man, save the spirit of man which is in him? even so the things of God knoweth no man, but the Spirit of God. 12 Now we have received, not the spirit of the world, but the spirit which is of God; that we might know the things that are freely given to us of God. 13 Which things also we speak, not in the words which man's wisdom teacheth, but which the Holy Ghost teacheth; comparing

spiritual things with spiritual. 14 But the natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God: for they are foolishness unto him: neither can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned.” 1 Corinthians 2:10-14.

5. We must truly want to know the truth before we can know the truth. Our motives for studying the Bible must always be honorable and acceptable to God if we would receive instruction and guidance from the Holy Spirit. If it is our determined purpose to research the Bible in order to find an argument against the truth, God will leave us to our own devices. For example, some people use a few scriptural verses to supposedly prove that God’s law was abolished when Jesus Christ died upon the cross. A proper method of research will clearly demonstrate that such is not the case, and the verses used to substantiate this idea are found to be unsupportive when placed in their proper context. Only those who are willing to love and accept the truth when it is made plain, and do not seek to construct arguments against it, will be preserved from the dangers of self deception. God will not force us to believe anything against our will. However, His word clearly describes what will happen to those who still choose to believe, contrary to what He has plainly said: “Because they received not the love of the truth, that they might be saved. And for this cause God shall send them strong delusion, that they should believe a lie.” 2 Thessalonians 2: 10,11.

6. Bible study must become a priority in life. Jesus likened the kingdom of heaven to “. . . a merchant man, seeking goodly pearls: 46 Who, when he had found one pearl of great price, went and sold all that he had, and bought it.” Matthew 13:45,46. We must earnestly search for truth, recognizing that it is worth more than anything else in life. This quest must be made priority, especially when other things seek to crowd out the time that should be allocated to Bible study. God’s promise to us is that, “And ye shall seek me, and find me, when ye shall search for me with all your heart.” Jeremiah 29:13. Our desire, our relish and our love for the Bible will strengthen and deepen as we discipline ourselves to study it every day.

7. We must live up to all the light we have before God will teach us more. As truth is opened to our understanding, we should determine by God’s grace to walk in its light. God has set before us an upward pathway and it is His will that we should walk in His footsteps. As our Savior therefore leads us further along the pathway of advanced truth, we must determine to follow if we would keep in step with Him and remain His disciple. Also, living according to the truth that we already have qualifies us to receive more light and truth from God. “If ye continue in my word, then are ye my disciples indeed; 32 And ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free.” John 8:31,32.