

# PRINCIPLES OF BIBLE STUDY

**1) PRAY FOR GUIDANCE.** Before beginning to seriously STUDY the Bible, you must realize that your Creator is the Divine author of it! In Bible study, as with anything else, there is a RIGHT and a WRONG WAY to proceed. FIRST, you must ask God in PRAYER to open your mind to His Word in the study that you intend to make.

David was a man after God's own heart – he studied that portion of God's Word, which was available to him in his day. He prayed: “Teach me, O Lord, the way of thy statutes; and I shall keep it unto the end. GIVE ME understanding, and I shall keep thy law; yea, I shall observe it with my whole heart. MAKE ME TO GO in the path of thy commandments; for therein do I delight. INCLINE MY HEART unto thy testimonies, and not to covetousness . . . ESTABLISH THY WORD unto thy servant, who is devoted to thy fear . . . Behold, I have longed after thy precepts: QUICKEN ME in thy righteousness” (Ps. 119:33-40).

Without seeking God's Kingdom and His righteousness first (Matt. 6:33) – Bible study of itself would be futile, just as you can worship God in vain (Mark 7:7). Therefore, accept as fact that you do not know OF YOURSELF how to understand the Plan of God – that's why you must ASK Him to make it plain! As you get down on your knees and sincerely ask God to guide you in a study of His Word, He will open your mind to understand things that the most intelligent minds of mankind have not been able to understand. HEART-FELT PRAYER for God's guidance in our personal Bible study will ensure success!

**2) ATTITUDE MUST BE FOR SELF-CORRECTION.** God's Word is written directly to each of us as an individual – it is personal, direct. Therefore, your attitude should be the same as Jeremiah's. Turn to Jeremiah 10:23-24. “O Lord, I know that the way of man is NOT IN HIMSELF: It is NOT INMAN that walketh to direct his steps. O Lord, CORRECT ME, but with JUDGMENT; not in thine anger, lest thou bring me to nothing.” Really mean it because YOU WANT CORRECTION FROM YOUR CREATOR!

Another scripture will further aid you in understanding what your approach should be: “Thus saith the Lord, The heaven is my throne, and the earth is my footstool: where is the house that ye build unto me? And where is the place of my rest? For all those things hath mine hand made, and all those things have been, saith the Lord: but TO THIS MAN WILL I LOOK, even to him that is poor and of a contrite spirit, and TREMBLETH AT MY WORD . . . Hear the word of the Lord, YE THAT TREMBLE AT HIS WORD” (Is. 66:1-2, 5). This Bible that you are studying is the very MIND AND THOUGHTS OF YOUR CREATOR-GOD! It is not to be argued about. Therefore, APPLY TO YOURSELF AND YOURSELF ONLY that scripture which refers to YOU!

**3) PROVE ALL THINGS.** 1 Thessalonians 5:21. This means to PUT TO THE TEST. See Luke 14:19, where a man was going to “prove” or TEST his team of oxen. This is what God means in 1 Thessalonians 5:21 – to DO WHAT HE SAYS TO DO. See Malachi 3:10, where God directs that we put Him to the test by tithing to see if He pours out His blessings on us for obeying Him. This is POSITIVE GOING FORWARD, a finding out of what God DOES say, not a search for ERROR or DISproof.

**4) REALIZE THAT THE BIBLE NEVER CONTRADICTS ITSELF.** God says “For I am the Lord, I CHANGE NOT; therefore ye sons of Jacob are not consumed” (Mal. 3:6). Hebrews

13:8 adds, “Jesus Christ THE SAME yesterday, today, and forever.” The very source of truth is God’s Word (John 17:17). Unless your approach is from this point of view, you will never gain any understanding of the Bible. Every case of apparent contradiction in the Bible is cleared up by careful study of the Bible passage in question with other principles given in the Bible. An example of this is Proverbs 26:4, 5. This says, “ANSWER NOT a fool ACCORDING to his folly.” But the very next verse reads, “ANSWER a fool ACCORDING to his folly.” Actually, these verses are not contradictory but COMPLEMENTARY. The use of either verse depends on the SET OF CIRCUMSTANCES.

Let’s look at Luke 20:1-8, where Jesus was challenged on the source of His authority to do what He did. Clearly, these Pharisees were not interested in learning anything but were there to ARGUE foolishly with Jesus! So Jesus dealt with them accordingly, as you can read in verses 3-8. Christ answered their question with a QUESTION! Christ avoided strife by NOT ANSWERING THEM ACCORDING TO THEIR FOLLY. But what about answering a fool according to his folly, as it says in Proverbs 26:5? Look at 2 Corinthians 11, where Paul is addressing the FALSE APOSTLES who claimed they were the true apostles of Christ. The congregation was being led astray – Paul had to smash the contentions head on. Paul stated, “Are they ministers of Christ? (I SPEAK AS A FOOL) I am more; in labours MORE ABUNDANT, in stripes above measure, in prisons more frequent, in deaths oft. Of the Jews five times received I forty stripes save one . . . in fastings often, in cold and nakedness” (vv. 23-27). Paul showed the people HE was their true minister – he ANSWERED and DEBUNKED the claims of these self-serving men by answering them ACCORDING TO THEIR FOLLY!

**5) READ THE BIBLE EXACTLY AS IT IS WRITTEN.** Many who claim to be representatives of God, the INTERPRETERS of His Word, actually TWIST that Word to their own destruction and the destruction of their hearers. So, always remember to ask yourself – and ANSWER, the question: “What DOES the BIBLE say?” John 3:6 is a good example of this: “That which is born of the flesh IS flesh; and that which is born of the Spirit IS spirit.” This is a very clear statement that flesh is flesh and Spirit is spirit – but that is not what PEOPLE SAY the Bible says! Sometimes you may have to refer to a reference work or a note in the MARGIN of your Bible to understand a scripture that seems to contradict what you know to be the truth.

**6) CHECK THE CONTEXT CAREFULLY.** Context means, con – WITH, text – TEXT. To check the context you simply read the texts, which come with the text in question; that is, the texts that come BEFORE and AFTER the text in question. Let’s see Luke 17:20-21 as an example. “The kingdom of God cometh not with observation: Neither shall they say, Lo here! Or, lo there! For, behold, THE KINGDOM OF GOD IS WITHIN YOU.” Here, it is only the King James and New King James TRANSLATIONS, which say this – not necessarily God’s exact Word. So, by reading the texts BEFORE this (vs. 20), we learn that Jesus was speaking to the Pharisees – and we KNOW that Christ wasn’t saying that the Kingdom of God is inside of Pharisees! Therefore, the context helps one understand that there must be a MISTRANSLATION in this particular verse. And sure enough, the margin of your Bible reveals that the word “within” should be translated “among” – meaning that Jesus was referring to Himself as a Representative of God’s Kingdom who was at that time “among” the Pharisees!

To understand any scripture thoroughly, in its context, you need to ask and answer for yourself the following questions: WHAT? WHEN? WHERE? WHY? WHO? HOW? Many people misunderstand Mark 7:19 – thinking that in this passage unclean meats were cleansed by Christ – simply because they do not read the context. In this case, the context is the ENTIRE CHAPTER. By doing this, one finds that the subject is whether or not to wash one’s hands

ceremonially before eating – it has nothing to do with whether the food you eat is clean or unclean according to the laws of Leviticus 11 and Deuteronomy 14.

**7) GET ALL THE SCRIPTURES.** No one scripture can OF ITSELF, taken out of context, be used to establish the Truth. “Knowing this first, that no prophecy of the scripture is of any PRIVATE interpretation” (2 Peter 1:20). God has put His Word together in a very unusual manner, so that men could study it in detail over a lifetime and YET never be able to come to a knowledge of the truth (2 Tim. 3:7). You must take the whole Bible in its entire context, getting ALL OF THE SCRIPTURES on any one subject BEFORE you can understand that particular subject from God’s point of view. See Isaiah 28:9-10, 13. In addition, without God’s Holy Spirit, which is the very mind of God, one cannot truly understand God’s Word. The Holy Spirit is given ONLY to those who OBEY God – Acts 5:32.

Often, people think the Bible is contradicting itself when in fact, it is SUPPLEMENTING itself. A good example of this is found in Matthew 27:37, as compared to Luke 23:38. These two passages APPEAR to contradict one another as to what was written on the sign affixed to the stake upon which Jesus Christ was crucified. By comparing these two scriptures with Mark 15:26 and also John 19:19, we learn that it was Pilate who did the writing and that the writing was done in THREE languages. Thus, these FOUR passages supply us with a complete record of what was written originally – no one scripture contradicts the other but each serves to complement the information of the other three!

**8) LET THE BIBLE INTERPRET THE BIBLE.** Turn to the Book of Revelation, the last book of the Bible. In most editions of the Bible, this book is entitled “The Revelation of St. John the Divine.” However, when we read the first words of the book itself, we learn that this is “the revelation of Jesus Christ” (Rev. 1:1). So we see that man’s interpretation of the Bible directly CONTRADICTS the Bible’s own interpretation! Romans 3:4 is a good, clear principle to live by in regard to this EIGHTH rule of Bible study – “. . . let God be true, but every man a liar.” All you have to do is be patient and search the Word of God and you will come up with God’s clear answers to the muddled questions of humankind.

**9) DON’T PUT VAGUE SCRIPTURES FIRST.** Perhaps a better general statement of this would be: NEVER ESTABLISH A DOCTRINE BY A VAGUE OR DIFFICULT TO BE UNDERSTOOD SCRIPTURE. An example of this is the vision, which Peter had regarding unclean beasts lowered to him on a sheet – which many people assume means that God “cleansed” all unclean meats (Acts 10:15). However, all one needs to do is read on TWO MORE VERSES and it is plainly stated that Peter himself doubted what the vision meant. Then, further reading on to verse 28 reveals that Peter finally came to understand that the vision meant, “that I should not call ANYMAN COMMOM OR UNCLEAN.”

**10) USE SEVERAL TRANSLATIONS.** Even though the original Word of God was inspired in the Hebrew or the Greek languages, God has allowed it to be translated into almost every language spoken by mankind. The King James Version was written 400 years ago. In the time since, the English language has undergone many changes. Sometimes those texts which are vague or unclear in the King James can be cleared up easily by simply reading a MORE MODERN TRANSLATION, such as the Moffatt, the Revised Standard Version or even the New King James.

One thing to note about the King James Version is the use of italics. *This sentence is written in italics.* Words that look like this in your King James Version are NOT in the original languages but have been supplied by the translators to help clear up the meaning of the sentence. However,

since the translators were subject to error, they did not always supply the words correctly. Therefore, some of these words in *italics* are incorrect and hinder, rather than help, your understanding. However, NOTALL of the words supplied by the translators are in italics. For example, 1 John 5:7 – referring to three who bear witness in heaven – is a completely erroneous reference inserted by a monk-copyist in the Middle Ages. The fact is that this verse appears only in the King James and New King James Versions, and in NO OTHER translations of the Bible. Often, many Bible difficulties are cleared by merely reading another translation and comparing it to the King James. Remember to also look up any words that you find difficult to understand in a DICTIONARY or in Strong's Concordance so you can see what the original meaning of the word in the original is. For example, the word "conversation" which appears in 1 Peter 3, today means talking between two people; however, during the time of King James "conversation" meant THE ENTIRE CONDUCT of a person, and that is the meaning in the Bible usage of this word.

**11) DON'T ESTABLISH DOCTRINE WITH "Bible Helps."** Even though Bible helps, such as Clarke's Commentary or Halley's Bible Handbook are good reference works and can be helpful in sorting out some biblical questions, these and other Bible helps should ONLY be used to establish historical or grammatical facts related to the Bible and MUST NOT be used to ESTABLISH DOCTRINE OR TO INTERPRET THE MEANING OF THE BIBLE ITSELF. Even the chain references in the center column of many Bibles may be in error. At Revelation 1:10, some Bibles have references to Acts 20:7 and 1 Corinthians 16:2 – which refer to the FIRSTDAY OF THE WEEK. However, these scriptures do NOT refer to "the Lord's day" mentioned in Revelation 1:10. The "Lord's day" or the "day of the Lord" is explained in the rest of the Book of Revelation. To find out which day Jesus Christ is the Lord of all we have to do is read Mark 2:27-28! "And he said unto them, the Sabbath was made for man, and not man for the Sabbath: therefore THESON OFMAN IS LORD ALSO OF THE SABBATH." Consequently, with Bible helps, remember to use them only for technical facts and NOT for interpretative facts.

**12) MARK YOUR BIBLE.** Many have thought that the Bible should not be marked. But what they fail to realize is that what is HOLY about the Bible is not the paper, ink or leather out of which it is made, but the WORDS OF TRUTH and the SPIRITUAL FACTS! Any tool you can use – such as a pen or colored pencils – to help you remember and apply the spiritual truths in your life, is right with God. He expects you to USE His written Word to worship HIM – not physical paper and ink! Sometimes we may hold back from marking the Bible because we think we will do it later – BUT the best way to mark the Bible is to JUST MARK IT! For instance, when you find out that the word "conversation" in 1 Peter 3 ought to be "conduct," the thing to do is to IMMEDIATELY WRITE DOWN "conduct" in the margin of your Bible, then draw a little line and circle the word "conversation" in the verse. This way you will always remember.

**13) JUST READ IT!** This point may sound trite but is actually among the most important to keep in mind. Simply reading the Bible to get a general idea of what it says is the first step in getting to know God's Word. Some people decide to begin at the beginning, with the Book of Genesis, and just read on through – a little each day – until they have read the entire Bible. That's one way of reading through the Bible, but it can get somewhat drab and mind-numbing when reading such passages as the "begets" listing of genealogies in Genesis, or long lists of numbers in the book of that title. A more interesting way might be to read a portion of the Gospel accounts in the New Testament (Matthew, Mark, Luke and John), along with a portion from the Old Testament, perhaps beginning in Psalms or Proverbs. Whichever method one uses, the important thing is to get started in reading the inspired Word of God – the Book that is responsible for the greatness of the modern English-speaking nations, and many of their leaders.

Abraham Lincoln is known to have said: “I believe the Bible is the best gift God has ever given to man. All the good from the Saviour of the world is communicated to us through this book” (as quoted in *Halley’s Bible Handbook*). Lord Tennyson made this profound statement: “Bible reading is an education in itself” (same source as before). Plainly stated, the place to begin a study of God’s Word is by reading it.

**14) PUT IT INTO PRACTICE IN YOUR DAILY LIFE.** The late Herbert W. Armstrong, founder of Ambassador College and Chief Editor of The PLAIN TRUTH magazine, often stated that “knowledge is of no value, except as it is applied. Contrary to the opinion of some misinformed critics, the Bible is a PRACTICAL book of knowledge. It is literally filled with practical advice and wisdom that will produce positive results when applied! Take, for example, these compact yet wise sayings: “A soft answer turns away wrath [anger] but grievous [harsh] words stir up anger” (Pro. 15:1). Think of how many fights and deaths could have been prevented by applying this simple advice. “He that keepeth his mouth keepeth his life: but he that openeth wide his lips shall have destruction” (Prov. 13:3). “Poverty and shame shall be to him that refuseth instruction: but he that regardeth reproof shall be honoured.” (Prov. 13:18). Who would not rather receive honor instead of shame?

The Bible is literally full of sound, rich advice that will produce positive results and real success! There is no greater source of written information that can transport and transform the reader into the most exciting areas of accomplishment and real satisfaction.

Apply these principles diligently and your Bible study will be both interesting and rewarding!