

Teaching Sound Doctrine

How to Get The Most Out Of Your Bible Study 2

As we talked about last week, a good deal of the Bible study that is going on across the country is lacking and needs to be addressed if we sincerely and personally desire spiritual growth not only for ourselves, but also for our brethren with whom we worship on a regular basis. In last week's class I suggested that we need to forgo the current practice of exclusively studying by either continuous verse-by-verse studies or work books that are not challenging enough to most participants, I suggested we begin with a broader, survey-type study of each book. I also suggested that only after this should we then gradually narrow the study down to the point where it is more appropriate to study a verse at a time. [The inverted pyramid.] I also stated that it is necessary to enter into the study in the appropriate manner, first making a thorough observation of the text, then making a proper interpretation, and finally, making personal application.

Productive and effective Bible study must also be begun with the right attitude and with proper preparation if we are to gain further and deeper knowledge of the text. To illustrate this, just try reading a book late at night when you are tired and ready to go to bed, or at a time when you are pressed for time. Try reading a book you do not think is worth reading, or one you think it is too difficult to understand. How much knowledge will you gain from those times? How much will you comprehend? And how would you enter into the time allotted to read or study such a book? Most likely, you would gain very little and you would not enjoy the time spent reading such a book.

It is no different when we read and study our Bibles! If we begin the study with the attitude that it is not worth our time, or if we start with the misconception that it is too difficult to understand, it is almost certain that we will gain very little — if anything — out of the time spent in studying. If we read it or attempt to study it when we are tired or when we do not have sufficient time to do a effective study, we will likely not get much out of it.

A look at Attitude.

One of the most important factors in productive Bible study is our own attitude even before we enter the study. As I have stated already, if you begin with the mind set that it is not worth your time or with the belief it is too difficult, you will likely not gain much, if anything, from the study. But imagine what you will gain if you enter in believing it is worth your time and it is not too difficult! I imagine you have met people who enjoy studying their Bibles, but never stopped

to realize it. Those people who actually enjoy studying God's word show it by their comments in the Bible classes and by their vocal demonstration of how much they love God and His word. You will not even have to ask them if they enjoy studying God's word because it is clearly evident by their attitude — and their knowledge.

The psalmist's attitude has given us a great illustration of one who truly loved reading the word of his Lord. This is the man who wrote an acrostic psalm that spelled out his love for God's word 'from A to Z' — eight times for each letter of the Hebrew alphabet (Psalm 119)! Within that psalm, he said, “Oh, how I love Your law! It is my meditation all the day!” (v. 97) Was he exaggerating, or was this how he really felt? I believe the psalm speaks for itself, but he later says, “My eyes are awake through the night watches, that I may meditate on Your word.” (v. 148) His love for God's word actually kept him up at night so he could meditate on it!

The Ethiopian eunuch demonstrated the difference an attitude may make in Bible study, too. When we meet this man (Acts 8:26-40), he was in his chariot, reading from Isaiah (v. 28). When Philip came to him, he was asked, “Do you understand what you are reading?” (v. 30) The eunuch did not get flustered and try to make it appear he did understand what he was reading and did not make some superficial comments about what he thought the proper interpretation was, but simply said, “How can I, unless someone guides me?” (v. 31) He actually asked Philip to come sit with him! His attitude, though, was evident long before this point because he had already traveled an extremely long distance just to come to Jerusalem to worship God properly. What does this say about this man's attitude? It says he was receptive to God's word before he picked it up. And when he had an opportunity to understand it better, he did not hesitate. The result was his own salvation!

And, of course, there are the Bereans. When Paul had to hastily leave Thessalonica because of the persecution there, he went to nearby Berea, where he went into the synagogue of the Jews (Acts 17:10). When Paul preached God's word to the people there, they “received the word with all readiness, and searched the Scriptures daily to find out whether these things were so.” (v. 11) They were not as some in Thessalonica, who really did not care to hear what Paul had to say (v. 5), but their hearts were prepared to hear God's word, and were prepared to verify it by a thorough search of God's word. That, friends and brethren, is the attitude we must have before we enter into the study. Are you ready to study? Your attitude will make all the difference in the world.

I am often asked when I get into an extended discussion about Bible study is: How can I learn to love Bible study even more than what I now do? The only answer I have been able to come up with is an easy one. The solution is...a love for God Himself. But how can I learn to love God more? The answer is...study

His word more often. It is a continuous circle of studying to know more about God, loving Him more deeply because we know Him more intimately, studying His word to know even more about Him, and loving Him more because we study more. If you can ever 'get in the circle' of loving God and studying His word, you have it made! The hard part is finding a starting point. Wherever you may feel like you are lacking, I suggest you start with seeking the answer for that first. But it really doesn't matter where your starting point is, it is most important that you start.

Making Time. Another one of the problems many have in their Bible study is nothing more than a lack of time devoted to the effort. Many people simply do not set aside enough time in their weekly schedule to give their full attention to an effective Bible study. More than a few of us remember those days when, as kids, we forgot to even look at our Bible class workbook until late Saturday evening or even Sunday morning on the way to the building. Unfortunately, there are many who are still doing that as adults! Many "forget" to study for the Sunday morning Bible study class until late Saturday night, and others who do not remember it until Sunday morning. I have seen my share of adults who are "filling in the blanks" and "studying" their Bibles even as the class is in progress. Those who "study" in this way are doing themselves no favor and are not getting the most out of their Bible study, to say the least. We need to do better than this!

If we really want to learn more of God's word and if we really want to grow spiritually, then we need to make the study of God's word a higher priority in our lives. Most of us do not have to be told, as adults, to get up on Monday morning to get ready for work; we know the importance [hopefully] of getting to work on time and giving our best for the required work day. An honest worker does not shirk his or her duties, and realizes rest and recreation comes after the work is done. "First things first," as we say.

But do we do that when it comes to our study of God's word? Do we recognize the full meaning of the words of our Lord Jesus Christ when He said, "seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness" (Matt. 6:33)? Are we honestly seeking the kingdom of God and His righteousness when it comes to the time we devote to studying God's word, where the righteousness of God is revealed (Rom. 1:16, 17)?

Attitude and time will play an important role in the quality of your Bible study, without question, so let us work on these things for our own good. More next week.