

# ***Teaching Sound Doctrine***

## ***How To Get The Most Out Of Your Bible Study #3***

I don't know about you, but my memory is not what it used to be. It seems I have to write myself notes a lot more often than what I have in the past and, sometimes, I forget where I put my notes! I am sure a lot of this 'forgetfulness' is due to the fact that I am now older than I once was. I do realize, though, that my note-taking does remind me of important responsibilities that I might otherwise forget or simply leave undone if I do not consider it important enough to write down. Sometimes, if the task or responsibility is unpleasant, I later wish I had forgotten to write down the note!

But note-taking is an important part of effective Bible study, too, and it is this aspect I would like us to consider today. As far back as I can remember, I have been taking notes on Bible classes and sermons, and I have even made an effort to try to copy the illustrations used by preachers in the lesson to help me remember what was said. I have notebooks full of sermon outlines, charts, and overheads and I have often been able to refer back to a lesson I thought I had heard only because I had the notes from that lesson. I've even had occasion to remind preachers of what they said because I had the notes at hand. Those notes help me when my memory fails, but they also help me when I am trying to understand the meaning of a verse in its proper context. If I have outlined the book [or chapter] ahead of time, I may look at that outline and find the verse in its proper context and then consider the writer's intent.

Way back in the Dark Ages, when I was still in school, I had a bad habit of never studying. Never. I paid close attention in class, but when the test time came near, I did not do anything that I wasn't already doing. I read over the class book very briefly, but I was never one to 'cram' for tests. In fact, the school system of which I was a part did not even require that I take the finals unless I had a low grade point average and/or had been absent a certain number of days. I coasted through school and expected that it would be pretty much the same out in the world. Boy — was I in for a surprise!

The best thing I learned after school was that I did not know how to study. Since I never bothered to study up until then, I never took the time to learn how. It wasn't until I had been out of school for a few years that I ran across someone who showed me an effective way to study, and it was something I had actually known all along: take notes in generous portions. Along with this knowledge came some more helpful pointers I have — ever since then — tried to pass onto everyone I meet. If these things are implemented in your own personal Bible

study, you will notice a tremendous change not only in what you learn, but the amount you learn, and even your desire to learn.

Effective Study Requires A Pencil. To ensure you get the most out of your Bible study time, the student must bring the most helpful equipment he or she has at their disposal into the study. Now, some believe this means we load up on the most popular commentaries, or at least commentaries written by "respected brethren." Though these may help down the road they are not necessary. If you truly want to learn what the Bible is saying, you simply need a bible a pencil and paper. Commentaries will only teach you what uninspired men say the Bible says. If you truly want to learn what the Bible says, set aside the commentaries and bring only your eyes, a pencil, and a notebook. I know this sounds simple — and it is — but it will help you more than you could possibly imagine.

As we set to the task of studying, the first thing we must do is look intently into the text to see what is being said. As we do this, we must enter in with our minds free of personal prejudices and preconceptions that will taint the true meaning of the text. Study with the mind set to know only what the Bible says. As you read over the text, be meticulous in your search to know what is said. It is important to see the difference in even the smallest words [such as "in" or "from"] and whether or not the word is singular or plural. Paul alluded to this necessary distinction (Gal. 3:16 Now to Abraham and his seed were the promises made. He saith not, And to seeds, as of many; but as of one, And to thy seed, which is Christ. ) and we are not excluded from being so particular, either. Some may consider this being overly picky, but when we ignore even the little things, we may miss some important lessons, or misunderstand the true meaning of the text.

To heighten your awareness, the best thing to do in this step of your study is to put your pencil to good use. Start noting repeated words or phrases found throughout the text [for example: the word "better" in the book of Hebrews]; they are repeated for a reason! One thing I constantly remind my people is that there were no such things as exclamation points, bold letters, or underlining in the first century. The only means they had to emphasize a point was to repeat it. [Ex. Rom. 12:17-21 where Paul urges the brethren to not repay evil with evil, and Gal. 1:6-9 where Paul condemns the one who brings another gospel.] Repeated words or phrases often illustrate the intent of a book better than anything else, but if we fail to see the writer's repetition, we may miss the meaning entirely. Don't overlook anything.

Another thing to look for is the writer stating the same point, but in various ways. [Ex. Psalm 119, where the psalmist states his love for God's word in an acrostic fashion, from "A to Z."] Look also for contrast and comparison as a means of unfolding the writer's message. [The Proverbs are often contrasts of the wise versus the foolish, or the rich and poor.] Look for a continuous

progression of thought that leads up to a climactic point [such as the book Romans]. Look for any definitions of words or statements made earlier in the context [such as Mark's explanation of certain phrases or terms; 5:41, 15:22]. Jesus often used parables to teach, but he occasionally stopped to give explanations (Matt. 13). If the writer takes time to give us the meaning, we should not ignore the effort! Do not reject anything as possibly significant.

**The Four 'R's' Of Reading.** One of the greatest contributions to more effective Bible study comes at this point in the study. How we read will influence everything that follows [interpretation and application]. To help make our Bible study more effective, let us remember the four 'R's' of reading:

**Read.** I know, this sounds like a given, but don't take anything for granted. If we skim the text, if we read commentaries instead of the text, or if we read only portions of the text, we may miss the true meaning. Remember, the writer was inspired by the Holy Spirit to write these words; not a one is unimportant. Read the text carefully, and then read it again and again and again. I have found my most productive Bible studies came after I had read the text more than 30 times before I got to class. Use your pencil during this period to note what you find.

**Reflect.** Once you've read the text, now it is time to think about what you've discovered. Don't pick verses out of their context, but consider each one in light of where it is found. Think about the writer's intent, the situation in which the events transpired, and even the characters in the text. It is important that you do not rush this portion of the study!

**Record.** Now it is time to write down what you have discovered, but this time in a more orderly manner. I strongly suggest getting a notebook for every book you study and keep your notes in an orderly manner. If you have questions, now is the time to write them down. [Bring your notebook to class; the teacher will love questions!] Write down the things that personally apply to you.

**Respond.** Here is the point when you make application. What you do at this point will be determined by your heart. It is now you should ask yourself, "What does this mean to me?" or, "How does this apply to me?" Recognize where you have failed, obey what has not been followed, and hide His word in your heart (Psa. 119:11).