

## Studying the Bible – An Introduction

*Our purpose in studying the Bible is to nurture a disciplined pursuit of the heart of God, a heart being perfected in love toward God and people as we are transformed into the likeness of Jesus Christ. The result of Bible study equips believers as empowered by the Holy Spirit to intimately know God through His Scriptures and as a result to more faithfully serve God within the Gospel-design of a Christ-centered identity.*

**Theology:** Christian theology is the study of God as He is revealed in the Divine revelation of the Bible. No theology will ever fully explain God and His ways because God is infinitely and eternally higher than we are. Therefore, any attempt to describe Him will fall short (Romans 11:33-36). – Sometimes believers have a negative view of “theology” thinking it is divisive and is what pharisaical and pompous believers focus on. Yes, believers must be guarded against the pride that can come with knowledge. Knowledge can *puff up*, but our focus should be knowledge grounded in love which will *build up*. Theology simply means the *study of God*.

*Biblical theology and systematic theology are two different manners of arranging the teaching of the scriptures.*

**Biblical Theology:** Biblical theology seeks to understand the progressive unfolding of God's special revelation throughout history, Biblical theology is thus historical and chronological in its design. Another narrower application of Biblical theology would be the study of the unfolding of revelation during a specific time period; or the study of the development of themes in a particular Biblical author. In brief, Biblical theology is the study of God through verse by verse study in one book of the Bible at a time.

**Systematic Theology:** Systematic theology seeks to present the entire scriptural teaching on certain specific truths, or doctrines, one at a time. As such, systematic theology is laid out, not chronologically, nor with a consideration of the progressive development of doctrines, but thematically, taking into account from the outset the complete form which revelation as a whole has finally assumed. Hence, systematic theologies progress from the doctrine of the Godhead (i.e. theology proper), Christology, pneumatology, angelology, soteriology, etc., treating each theme exhaustively. Systematic theology is the study of the themes of Scripture where we benefit from looking through the entire Bible about a given topic. Both systematic theology and Biblical theology are beneficial for Bible study.

**Exegesis:** Exposition, explanation; *especially* : an explanation or critical interpretation of a text. Scholarly interpretation of religious texts, using linguistic, historical, and other methods. In Judaism and Christianity, it has been used extensively in the study of the Bible. Textual criticism tries to establish the accuracy of biblical texts. Philological criticism deals with grammar, vocabulary, and style in pursuit of faithful translation. Literary criticism classifies texts according to style and attempts to establish authorship, date, and audience. Tradition criticism seeks the sources of biblical materials and traces their development. Redaction criticism examines the way pieces of the tradition have been assembled into a literary composition by editors. Form criticism studies the way narratives are shaped by the cultures that produce them. Historical criticism looks at a text's historical context. To study the Bible exegetically, is to let the Bible speak for itself, in its context. It is a form of Bible study where we seek to put aside our preconceived ideas about a given text and let the truth of Scripture speak within its intended purpose and meaning.

**Eisegesis:** The interpretation of a text of the Bible by reading into it one's own ideas. The process of interpreting a text or portion of text in such a way that it introduces one's own presuppositions, agendas, or biases into and onto the text. This is commonly referred to as *reading into* the text. The act is often used to "prove" a pre-held point of concern to the reader and to provide him or her with confirmation bias in accordance with his or her pre-held agenda. We want to avoid looking for proof texts to support an opinion that we may have on a given subject.

**Biblical hermeneutics:** Hermeneutics is the study of the principles and methods of interpreting the text of the Bible. 2 Timothy 2:15-14 encourages believers to be involved in the hermeneutical process: *“Be diligent to present yourself approved to God, a worker who does not need to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth. But shun profane and idle babblings, for they will increase to more ungodliness.”* (NKJV) The purpose of Biblical hermeneutics is to help us to know how to properly interpret, understand and apply the Bible.

1.) The most important principle of Biblical hermeneutics is that the Bible should be interpreted literally as much as possible. We are to understand the Bible in its normal or plain meaning, unless the passage is obviously intended to be symbolic or if figures of speech are employed. The Bible says what it means and means what it says. Biblical hermeneutics keeps us faithful to the intended meaning of Scripture and away from allegorizing Bible verses that should be understood literally.

2.) A second crucial principle of biblical hermeneutics is that passages must be interpreted historically, grammatically, and contextually. Interpreting a passage historically means we must seek to understand the culture, background, and situation that prompted the text. Interpreting a passage contextually involves considering the context of a verse or passage when trying to determine the meaning. The context includes the verses immediately preceding and following, the chapter, the book, and, most broadly, the entire Bible. The Bible is not for a private interpretation that contradicts orthodoxy and the historical understanding of a text by the church in general (1 Peter 1:20).

3.) A third principle of biblical hermeneutics is that Scripture is always the best interpreter of Scripture. For this reason, we always compare Scripture with Scripture when trying to determine the meaning of a passage.

## A Biblical Theological Method

The Royal Bible Study Series on how to study the Bible with Pastor Miles McPherson:

<https://www.sdrock.com/messages/theroyal/>

(There are 26 messages in this series)

Different authors use these variant outlines for study:

- 1) Read – Reflect – Respond
- 2) Pre-Observation – Observation – Interpretation – Application
- 3) Observation – Analysis – Interpretation – Application – Prayer

Here is an example of a step-by-step approach to Biblical theology in studying a text of Scripture in its context:

**Survey/Pre-Observation:** Make observations after reading the text carefully 2-3 times. Write down questions, notice text divisions, etc. Do not begin to interpret the passage yet.

### Concentration/Analysis:

- Background study-Who is the author? To whom is the author writing? What is the geographical location? What is the situation or circumstance of the author? What is the author's purpose? Bible dictionaries and commentaries can help support this aspect of study.
- Understand the context of the passage. There is the original context and cultural setting of the Bible. It's important to have some understanding of this so we can grapple with passages and apply them meaningfully to our lives today.
- Identify the literary genre (e.g. historical/narrative, poetic, polemic, apocryphal, doctrinal, etc.).
- List the key words, phrases, or verses in this passage. Define some of the key words. Are there repeated words/phrases? Use Bible encyclopedias, dictionaries and word study books.
- Make note of what you do not know or understand in the text. Then use other sources to gain more information.
- Identify major theological themes. Write out a couple of sentences/questions for each theme discerned. What do you learn about the nature of God and our responsibility to God.
- Identify and reflect about what you see as the central theological theme.
- Outline the text within the broader outline of the book.
- Review the context of the passage of Scripture, what precedes and follows. Reflect upon the *Sitz im Leben* (historical context of the writer and the audience of the time). Bible dictionaries will again help in knowing the historical context.
- Compare and contrast this passage with other Biblical cross-reference texts. Identify similarities and differences. Use cross-reference tools, concordances, etc. Record insights

### Interpretation:

- Theology-What do you learn about God and other theological themes. How does this inform and influence your world view? Avoid reading into the text your own biases.
- What are the implications of this text for Christian ethics, spiritual life and contemporary worldview?
- Summarize some of your findings and questions for further study.
- Let Scripture interpret Scripture whenever possible. For example in John 1:1, we read, "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God." If we keep reading, the rest of the passage helps us interpret this verse as we read, "And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us ..." (John 1:14), showing us that the Word is Christ.

**Application** (Following your textual study, discern the personal and corporate applications):

- Is there an example to follow?
- Is there sin to avoid?

- Are there promises to hold on to?
- Is there a prayer to repeat?
- Is there a challenge to consider?
- Is there an exhortation/encouragement to obey?
- Is there a verse to memorize?
- Is there a virtue to see as your identity?
- Is there an authority to live by and declare?

*“The low view of God, entertained almost universally among Christians is the cause of a hundred lesser evils everywhere among us. A whole new philosophy of the Christian life has resulted from this one basic error in our religious thinking. With our loss of the sense of majesty has come the further loss of religious awe and consciousness of the divine presence... The only way to recoup our spiritual losses is to go back to the cause of them and make such corrections as the truth warrants. The decline of the knowledge of the holy has brought on our troubles. A rediscovery of the majesty of God will go a long way toward curing them... Among the sins to which the human heart is prone, hardly any other is more hateful to God than idolatry, for idolatry is at bottom a libel on His character... The essence of idolatry is the entertainment of thoughts about God that are unworthy of Him.” (The Knowledge of the Holy by A.W. Tozer)*

*“The Church may not rest on its oars and be satisfied with the knowledge of the divine truth to which it has attained and which it has formulated in its confessions. It must seek to dig ever deeper into the mine of Scripture, in order to bring to light its hidden treasures. Through scientific study it must seek an ever-deeper knowledge, an ever better understanding, of the words of Life. It (the Church) owes this to the truth itself as a revelation of God, but also to the training of future ministers.” (Systematic Theology by Berkoff)*

### Online Bible Study Helps

The following links are great resources to study the Bible more in depth, without having to purchase a lot of books. The last resource on this list, *Logos.com*, does have options for purchase.

<https://www.sdrock.com/messages/theroyal/> *The Royal Bible Study Series* on how to study the Bible with Pastor Miles McPherson (26 messages)

<https://thebibleproject.com/> The Bible Project

<https://www.youversion.com/> YouVersion Bible Support

<http://www.bible.org/> Bible search engine.

<http://www.biblegateway.com> Bible resources.

<http://www.crosswalk.com/> Bible search engine.

<http://www.blueletterbible.org/> Bible search engine, commentaries, dictionaries, maps, outlines, charts, timelines, biographies.

<http://www.biblestudytools.net/> Bible search engine, commentaries, dictionaries.

<http://www.bible.christiansunite.com/> Bible search engine, commentaries, dictionaries.

<http://unbound.biola.edu/> Biola University’s Bible search engine, commentaries, Naves, dictionaries, Strong’s, etc.

<http://www.ccel.org/> Classic articles and tools that are in Public Domain.

<http://www.searchgodsword.org/> Bible search engine, commentaries, encyclopedias, dictionaries, lexicons, Power Point maps.

<http://www.askmoses.com/> Great for Old Testament Bible answers.

<http://www.firefighters.org/> Great resource for Bible study cassettes and MP3’s.

<http://www.spurgeon.org/> Basic Bible study resources and Spurgeon reference material.

<http://www.equip.org/> Christian Research Institute. Apologetics, cult info and basic Bible questions and resources.

<http://www.icr.org/> Institute for Creation Research. Creationism, facts, books, etc.

<http://www.elijah.com/lexicon.html> Strong’s Exhaustive Concordance w/ dictionaries

<http://www.2-7series.org/> *Navigators “2:7” Discipleship Foundations Series* – 3 books with 10-11 sessions each

<http://www.blackaby.net/expgod/> *Experiencing God* by Henry Blackaby

<https://www.logos.com/product/136022/basic> Logos Basics can be downloaded for free for Bible study resources.

Should a larger library be desired, [www.logos.com](http://www.logos.com) offers a variety of levels to expand a Bible study library online.