

Students of Scripture, part 3

(Assorted)

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Introduction

Charles Spurgeon once said,

“Perhaps there is no book more neglected in these days than the Bible. I do verily believe there are more moldy Bibles in this world than there are of any sort of neglected books. We have (useless) books in abundance; we have innumerable books which never see any circulation, but we have no book that is so much bought, and then so speedily laid aside, and so little used, as the Bible.”

He said that in a sermon in 1856, and if biblical literacy was faltering then, it is flat on its face today.

People buy Bibles at an astounding rate, but they have no interest in opening and reading them.

Yet to hold the Bible is to hold the very words of the God of creation.

God has spoken and His words are available to man.

WE don't have to look to heaven for a word from God.

God have given His word from heaven in Scripture, yet people are so uninterested in it.

There are whole segments of supposedly Christian churches looking for chill bumps and audible voices from heaven when God has already spoken in Scripture.

There are Christians begging God to say something to them, yet their Bible remain closed.

To close your Bible is to clog your ears to what God has to say.

To sit your Bible on a shelf and ask God to tell you something is the same as sitting your phone on the shelf and trying to call someone.

If you want to hear God speak audibly to you, then pick up your Bible and read it out loud.

God is speaking in His word, and He is speaking clearly to His people.

Tonight, we come to a 3rd installment of how to study the Bible.

We are calling this STUDENTS OF SCRIPTURE, and this is what we desire to be as believers.

It is what God desires us to be as members of the flock at Pine Grove Baptist Church.

As I said early on in this series, the goal of this topic is to work myself out of a job.

Though the church will always need pastors and teachers, the pastor's role is to enable the flock to feed itself.

As we live in the green pastures of God's Word, we all need to know how to enjoy the green grass.

And my desire is to have us all equipped to know how to rightly divide the word of truth.

In fact, take your Bibles and turn to 2 Timothy 2:15.

Paul is offering instruction to Timothy on the importance of Biblical ministry..

And note what he says in verse 15..

15 Be diligent to present yourself approved to God as a workman who does not need to be ashamed, accurately handling the word of truth.

The phrase accurately handling could also be translated rightly dividing the word of truth.

It is likely that Paul was using the language of a tent maker here.

Tents would cut according to patterns, and to cut a pattern wrongly would lead to the whole tent being unfit for use.

As we approach Scripture, the command in our lives is to cut every verse rightly so that all of Scripture fits together properly.

In fact, Paul says that we are to be diligent to cut every word of God rightly.

The Greek word for diligent is *spoudazo*, and it means an earnestness.

A dedication.

A desire.

In other words, God commands his people to be dedicated to interpreting His word accurately.

And note what the rewards are for someone who is diligent to rightly divide the word of God.

He is unashamed and approved by God.

Church, we must not take Bible study and interpretation lightly.

WE must not give any ground to people who just make the Bible say what they want it to say.

We must not be people who say that a right interpretation of Scripture doesn't matter.

WE must workmen who give it our all to get the Bible accurately interpreted.

And that is not just an assignment for the preacher.

That is a command to every believer.

So how do we do it?

Well, we started becoming students of the word by considering our view of the Bible.

Is the Bible a collection of unrelated stories and events or is it a collection of related truths?

And we talked about how the Bible has one author and one storyline, and it should be taught with that in mind.

Therefore, expository preaching, which consists of an explanation of God's word in its immediate context and within the overall context of Scripture, helps us approach the Bible from a student's perspective.

We are not people who just let our Bibles fall open to any old verse and read.

Instead, we read the Bible understanding the context of what we are reading and the overall message of Scripture as well.

And then last week, we began to get practical as we seek to be students of Scripture by talking about the Bible itself.

We talked about the need to keep the Bible handy in our lives.

We talked about the value of using the same Bible to help us get familiar and stay familiar with books and chapters and verses.

We talked about the need to read more of the Bible each day and not less.

But to take notes as we read of things that we don't understand.

And the final thing we talked about were types and translations of Bibles.

Do we want a formal equivalence or a dynamic equivalence?

Do we want a study Bible or not?

And I suggested a formal equivalence which is a word for word translation.

And I suggested a study Bible to help us bridge the time gaps of cultures and geography and language and history.

Tonight, we have a right view of the Bible and we have the right kind of Bible, but now how do we go about reading it?

What are some tools that will help us as we read?

We want to be able to understand most of what we read, so where do begin and what should we do as we read and study the Bible?

Let's begin with a basic but very helpful principle of reading the Bible..

We will call this the literal principle..

III. Bible Study Tools

#1 – The Literal Principle **Read the Bible Literally**

Seems easy enough, but so many people don't do it.

You should read the Bible and understand it like you do any piece of literature.

For instance, if you pick up the paper and it reads "Rockets are Being Fired into Israel", what do you think?

You think exactly what it says, Rockets are being fired into Jerusalem.

You don't think, what does this headline mean?

You know what it means by what it says.

The same is true of the Scriptures.

The Bible should be read literally.

When it says that Jesus died on a cross, we know that means that Jesus died on a cross.

We don't look for hidden meaning.

Listen to what Daniel Webster said,

“I believe that the Bible is to be understood and received in the plain and obvious meaning of its passages; for I cannot persuade myself that a book intended for the instruction and conversion of the whole world should cover its true meaning in any such mystery and doubt that none but critics and philosophers can discover it.”

In other words, why would a loving God desiring that all come to repentance and faith in him....

Author a book that is full of hidden meaning?

Listen to how John MacArthur puts it,..

“When the plain sense of Scripture makes common sense, seek no other sense.”

That why it discourages me to no end to see people and preachers try to find hidden meanings in the Bible.

My civics teacher always taught us the KISS principle for life..

Keep It Simple Stupid

And the Bible is not a book that you need a special code to unlock.

God has revealed His truth for all time to all people in common easy to understand language.

When the plain sense makes sense, seek no other sense of the words.

Now, are there difficult to understand passages and symbols and figurative language in the Bible?

Yes, but they are meant to tell us literal truth.

For instance, if the headline read, “Rockets Rain Down on Israel.”

Does that mean a cloud passed over Israel and rockets rained out of the sky?

No, we read that and know that it is a figure of speech.

Yet, we still get the literal truth...Rockets were Fired into Israel.

We are going to talk about this more, but you need to be very careful of people who don't interpret the Bible literally.

The shelves of Christian book stores are full of books seeking to sell you the secrets of Bible interpretation, but the greatest secret of Bible interpretation is that there are no secrets.

Instead, read the Bible literally and take the literal meaning unless the context suggests otherwise.

That leads to a second helpful tool in reading the Bible.

We will call this the context principle.

#2 – The Context Principle

Read the Bible in its context.

After last week's explanation of Bible translations, someone came up and told me a funny story.

He said he met a lady who only believed in the King James Version...

“She said that if the King James Bible was good enough for Jesus, it was good enough for her.”

That's a lady who has little knowledge of history.

The King James wasn't around in the days of Jesus, it was first printed in 1611.

She was mistaken about the historical context of the King James Bible.

Context is simply what surrounds a bible verse.

And this is so important in Bible study and arriving at a proper meaning of a verse.

Let me start with an example that most of us know.

If you came to church and only two other people showed up, you would still have church...

And what verse what come to most people's minds?

“For where two or three have gathered in my name, I am there in their midst.” Mathew 18:20

Let me break the news to you gently...

That verse has nothing to do with prayer meetings.

What happens with this verse and so many others is that it is ripped from the Bible....

And given a meaning that God never intended.

Is it a bad meaning?

No, but that doesn't matter .

It is an inaccurate meaning.

And that matters much.

How do you arrive at a proper meaning of this verse?

You look at the surrounding context.

Jesus has been talking about church discipline in the previous verses, beginning in Matthew 18:15.

This is the process of removing a brother in sin from the church.

Though the goal is always to call this person back to repentance and restore him...

The underlying principle is to protect the purity of the church.

And Jesus ends this section by saying that those who gather to exercise church discipline...

Should be comforted to know that HE will be there with them as they seek to protect the holiness of His church.

So, where two or three have gathered in my name to go through with church discipline, rest assured that I will be there with you."

But if you rip that verse away from the other verses, you can make it mean anything you want.

If you allow that verse to mean anything you wish, it is possible for 2 or 3 Christians to gather and sin and claim that Jesus is there with them.

That is not how we handle God's word with care.

We honor the context of the Scriptures.

But that is not the only context that we honor, we honor the context of history and culture.

Again, this is so important.

When you read the Bible, you need to consider the people to whom a book was originally written.

You need to consider the time period in which it was written.

And you need to consider the culture of the time in which it was written.

Those considerations are so important when trying to arrive at a proper meaning of a text.

For instance, people read verses about obeying governments, praying for leaders and submitting to authorities...

And they will make statements like...

Well, the Bible was written at a different time.

Governments of that day are not like the ones we see today.

But they speak before they study the historical context of a letter...

For instance, the government of Paul's day was openly hostile to Christians.

The killing of Christians like we are seeing in countries was an everyday occurrence under Nero, who was emperor in Peter's day.

They killed Christians in the market.

Yet, Paul wrote in Romans 13..

13 Every ^aperson is to be in subjection to the governing authorities. For there is no authority except ^bfrom God, and those which exist are established by God. ² Therefore ^cwhoever resists authority has opposed the ordinance of God; and they who have opposed will receive condemnation upon themselves

And Peter, living under a corrupt government wrote this in 1 Peter 2..

13 Submit yourselves for the Lord's sake to every human institution, whether to a king as the one in authority, ¹⁴ or to governors as sent ^[p]by him for the punishment of evildoers and the praise of those who do right. ¹⁵ For ^[a]such is the will of God that by doing right you may silence the ignorance of foolish men.

Without the historical context, you won't get the full meaning of those verses.

Or if you don't understand the low view of women in Paul's day...

You will never get all the meaning when he tells husbands to love their wives as Christ loved the church.

Context is so very important in getting at the proper meaning of verse.

We will talk about this more, but we need to get through two more principles before we are done.

This will be brief but important...

#3- The Grammar Principle

Pay Attention to Words and Grammar

There are times in your life where you don't appreciate the Lord's goodness to you until later.

When I was in 8th grade, I had an English teacher that I didn't get along with.

And the problem was me, not her.

Yet, in all my disobedience and dislike of her class, I learned English grammar very well.

Now, at the seminary that I went to...

Everyone must take and pass a test on English grammar before they graduate.

And the purpose of the test is real simple...

The Bible is a collection of words and to properly translate it...

You need to know how grammar works...

Things like subjects, verbs, nouns, pronouns, prepositions, adjectives, adverbs are very important.

And to the Lord's credit and Mrs. Campbell's credit out of 28 guys that entered with me, I and 4 others were the only ones to pass on the first try.

And that is not a reflection on me, God was even at work on me as an 8th grader.

He knew that one day, I'd enter seminary and be handling His Word and he gave me an excellent teacher who I am very grateful for now.

I even saw her a few years back and told her so.

Now, that is not to say that you need to have made an A in English to understand the Bible...

But words and sentences are very important.

For instance, let's read from Matthew 28.....

This is a very familiar passage here...

17 When they saw Him, they worshiped Him; but some were doubtful. 18 And Jesus came up and spoke to them, saying, "All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth. 19 [e]Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, 20 teaching them to observe all that I commanded you; and lo, I am with you [f]always, even to the end of the age."

What is the main action that the church should take from these verses?

Most folks say we need to GO.

Some would say that we would need to do all 4...

Go

Make disciples

Baptize

And teach.

But if you look at the grammar of this sentence closer,
the main action of this passage is on making disciples...

We are to go.

We are to baptize, and we are to teach...

But the focus of the church is to ***make disciples***, and we
know that because the main verb of the sentence is
making disciples.

The main verb is not go or teach or baptize.

The main verb is make disciples.

Therefore, the mission of the church is to make disciples
as we go and teach and baptize.

We can talk about that more the rules of language, but the point is that grammar is very important in rightly divided the word of truth.

Last one....

#4 - The Puzzle Principle **The Bible Always Fits Together Perfectly**

When you arrive at a meaning that contradicts another verse in the Bible...

You have arrived at the wrong meaning.

Now, let me be clear.

The Bible does contain so hard to understand verses.

For instance, turn with me to 1 Cor 15:29...

29 Otherwise, what will those do who are baptized for the dead? If the dead are not raised at all, why then are they baptized for them?

To arrive at the intended meaning of this passage, we must understand what it means to be baptized for the dead....

But here is where we start...

First, we know from other passages....

That there is no salvation in baptism..

And also, that there is no second chance for folks who are dead.

So, we can know for sure that this doesn't mean that you can be baptized for someone who has died.

Now, we may not have arrived at the intended meaning yet...

But we know for sure from the Puzzle Principle that it cannot possible mean that.

God cannot lie.

He cannot contradict himself.

So His words always fit together perfectly.

The reformers called this principle *analogia scriptura*, which means that the Bible fits together and will interpret itself.

In difficult passages, the meaning is found in clear passages.

The Bible cannot teach two opposing truths.

If the Word has breathed out by God (and it has), it will not contradict itself.

The problem is with the interpreter and not with the author.

Now to summarize those 4 principles of your Bible reading and studying.

#1 - Read the Bible literally.

#2 - Understand the context, both near and far.

#3 - Follow the rules of language and grammar.

#4 - Let Scripture interpret Scripture.

Now that you have a few tools of how to rightly divide the word of God, let me offer a few way to wrongly divide the word of God.

We will only get started in these tonight, and finish them next week..

WE will call these..

IV. Bible Study Errors

Error #1 –Avoid Proof Texting

Using isolated texts to prove YOUR point.

You must be careful not to make your point at the expense of a verse's true meaning.

Look at Mark 2:1-5..

1 When He had come back to Capernaum several days afterward, it was heard that He was at home. 2 And many were gathered together, so that there was no longer room, not even near the door; and He was speaking the word to them. 3 And they *came, bringing to Him a paralytic, carried by four men. 4 Being unable to [a]get to Him because of the crowd, they removed the roof [b]above Him; and when they had dug an opening, they let down the pallet on which the paralytic was lying. 5 And Jesus seeing their faith *said to the paralytic, “[c]Son, your sins are forgiven.”

Some may look at that verse and say that our job is to carry people to Jesus.

So we need to have a bus ministry.

That is not what that text is saying at all.

It is simply saying that these men were compelled to carry their friend to Jesus.

Nothing more and nothing less.

But be careful not to say something that the Bible doesn't say by cherry picking verses to support something YOU want to say.

Error #2 – Avoid Spiritualizing a Text

Looking for a meaning that isn't there

In 1990, the Colorado football team lost to Notre Dame in the Orange Bowl.

And with it, they lost a shot at the national championship.

A close friend of coach was a pastor.

He said the spirit directed him to ***Isaiah 11:11***.

Which reads..

11 In that day the Lord will extend his hand yet a second time to recover the remnant that remains of his people, from Assyria, from Egypt, from Pathros, from Cush,[a] from Elam, from Shinar, from Hamath, and from the coastlands of the sea.

He said that meant that God was going to extend his hand again to the Colorado football team.

And the next year according to this pastor, the verse was fulfilled when Colorado won a national championship.

Look there are a lot of names in that verse, but the Colorado Buffalos is definitely not there.

Please, avoid spiritualizing the text.

3, and though is closely related, I have to make it a separate error because it is so common in the US and especially in the South.

Avoid nationalizing the text..

Many in the Bible belt and really throughout our nation make the mistake of claiming God's promises to Israel as promises to the United States.

Turn with me to 2 Chronicles chapter 7...

This will be a familiar passage to many of you.

The first 7 chapters of this book are about Solomon building the temple.

Israel at this time was still a united kingdom, and Solomon was their king.

And the temple was built and is ready to be dedicated to the Lord.

In chapter 6, Solomon had prayed to the Lord asking God to forgive the sins of Israel.

And God responds to that prayer beginning in verse 12 of chapter 7....

This is a rather long passage but stay with me as I read...

12 Then the Lord appeared to Solomon at night and said to him, "I have heard your prayer and have chosen this place for Myself as a house of sacrifice. 13 If I shut up the heavens so that there is no rain, or if I command the locust to devour the land, or if I send pestilence among My people, 14 and My people [d]who are called by My name humble themselves and pray and seek My face and turn from their wicked ways, then I will hear from heaven, will forgive their sin and will heal their land. 15 Now My eyes will be open and My ears attentive to the [e]prayer offered in this place. 16 For now I have chosen and consecrated this house that My name may be there forever, and My eyes and My heart will be there perpetually. 17 As for you, if you walk before Me as your father David walked, even to do according to

all that I have commanded you, and will keep My statutes and My ordinances, 18 then I will establish your royal throne as I covenanted with your father David, saying, '[f]You shall not lack a man to be ruler in Israel.'

19 "But if you turn away and forsake My statutes and My commandments which I have set before you, and go and serve other gods and worship them, 20 then I will uproot you from My land which I have given [g]you, and this house which I have consecrated for My name I will cast out of My sight and I will make it a proverb and a byword among all peoples. 21 As for this house, which was exalted, everyone who passes by it will be astonished and say, 'Why has the Lord done thus to this land and to this house?' 22 And they will say, 'Because they forsook the Lord, the God of their fathers who brought them from the land of Egypt, and they adopted other gods and worshiped them and served them; therefore He has brought all this adversity on them.'"

What verse stands out?

Well, certainly verse 14 is a favorite passage of many people...

They pull this passage out of this chapter and claim this promise for modern day America.

This is clearly a promise to Israel in the OT.

America was nowhere in the world at this point in history, and is certainly not in this passage.

God promise was to Israel.

He promised to respond to their prayers if they turned back to him in their sin.

Yet, I see bumper stickers and shirts with American flags and 2 Chronicles 7:14 all the time.

We need to be careful that we don't nationalize verses.

And make them promises to America when they were clearly promises to Israel.

So what truth can we take from 2 Chronicles 7:14?

God is a forgiving God in the face of repentance.

The Lord responds to humility with restoration and mercy.

That is it.

We don't need to look for America in those verse.

It simply isn't there, so don't take a passage written to Israel and say it is written to America or to any other nation for that matter.

Let's stop right there and we will save a few errors for next week.

Conclusion

So, let's quickly summarize tonight.

#1 - Read the Bible literally.

#2 - Pay close attention to context and original audience.

#3 - Apply rules of grammar to the original languages.

#4 - Let Scripture interpret itself.

#5 - Don't pull verses out of context.

#6 - Avoid spiritualizing the text.

#7 - Resist nationalizing the text.