

# HOW TO STUDY THE BIBLE FOR GREATEST PROFIT

by

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Old Tappan, New Jersey

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## PART TWO

### FUNDAMENTAL CONDITIONS OF PROFITABLE BIBLE STUDY

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#### CHAPTER EIGHT

##### THE FUNDAMENTAL CONDITIONS OF THE MOST PROFITABLE BIBLE STUDY

We have considered seven profitable methods of Bible study. There is something, however, in Bible study more important than the best methods, that is, The Fundamental Conditions of Profitable Study.

The one who meets these conditions will get more out of the Bible, while pursuing the poorest method, than the one who does not meet them will, while pursuing the best method. Many a one who is eagerly asking, "What method shall I pursue in my Bible study?" needs something that goes far deeper than a new and better method.

1. *The first of the fundamental conditions of the most profitable Bible study is the student must be born again.*

The Bible is a spiritual book, it "**comparing spiritual things with spiritual**" (I Corinthians 2:13), and only a spiritual man can understand its deepest and most characteristic and most precious teachings. "**The natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God: for they are foolishness unto him: neither can he know *them*, because they are spiritually discerned**" (I Corinthians 2:14). Spiritual discernment can be obtained in but one way, by being

born again. "**Except a man be born again he cannot see the kingdom of God.**" (John 3:3).

No mere knowledge of the human languages in which the Bible was written, however extensive and accurate it may be, will qualify one to understand and appreciate the Bible. One must understand the divine language in which it was written as well, the language of the Holy Spirit. A person who understands the language of the Holy Spirit, but who does not understand a word of Greek or Hebrew or Aramiac, will get more out of the Bible, than one, who knows all about Greek and Hebrew and cognate languages, but is not born again, and, consequently, does not understand the language of the Holy Spirit.

It is a well demonstrated fact that many plain men and women who are entirely innocent of any knowledge of the languages in which the Bible was written, have a knowledge of the real contents of the Bible, its actual teaching, in its depth and fulness and beauty, that surpasses that of many learned professors in theological faculties.

One of the greatest follies of the day, is to set unregenerate men to teaching the Bible, because of their rare knowledge of the human forms of speech in which the book was written. It would be as reasonable to set a man to teach art because he had an accurate technical knowledge of paints. It requires aesthetic sense to make a man a competent teacher of art. It requires spiritual sense to make a man a competent teacher of the Bible. The man who had aesthetic discernment, but little or no technical knowledge of paint, would be a far more competent critic of works of art, than a man, who had a great technical knowledge of paint, but no aesthetic discernment; and so the man who has no technical knowledge of Greek and Hebrew, but who has spiritual discernment, is a far more competent critic of the Bible than the one who has a rare technical knowledge of Greek and Hebrew, but no spiritual discernment.

It is exceedingly unfortunate that, in some quarters, more emphasis is laid upon a knowledge of Greek and Hebrew, in training for the ministry, than is laid upon spiritual life and its consequent spiritual discernment. Unregenerate men should not be forbidden to study the Bible; for the Word of GOD is the instrument the Holy Spirit uses in the New Birth (I Peter 1:23; James 1:18): but it should be distinctly understood, that, while there are teachings in the Bible that the natural man can understand, and beauties which he can see, its most distinctive and characteristic teachings are beyond his grasp, and its highest beauties belong to a world in which he has no vision.

The first fundamental condition of the most profitable Bible study, is, then, "**Ye must be born again.**" You cannot study the Bible to the greatest profit if you have not been born again. Its best treasures are sealed to you.

*2. The second condition of the most profitable study is a love for the Bible.*

A man who eats with an appetite, will get far more good out of his meal than a man who eats from a sense of duty.

It is well when a student of the Bible can say with Job, "**I have esteemed the words of his mouth more than my necessary food,**" (Job, 23:12), or with Jeremiah, "**Thy words were found, and I did eat them; and thy word was unto me the joy and rejoicing of mine heart:**

**for I am called by thy name, O LORD God of hosts" (Jeremiah 15:16).**

Many come to the table GOD has spread in His word with no appetite for spiritual food, and go mincing here and there and grumbling about everything. Spiritual indigestion lies at the bottom of much modern criticism of the Bible. But how can one get a love for the Bible? First of all by being born again. Where there is life there is likely to be appetite. A dead man never hungers. This brings us back to the first condition. But going beyond this, the more there is of vitality the more there is of hunger. Abounding life means abounding hunger for the Word. Study of the Word stimulates love for the Word.

The author can well remember the time when he had more appetite for books about the Bible than he had for the Bible itself, but with increasing study there has come increasing love for the Book. Bearing in mind who the author of the Book is, what its purpose is, what its power is, what the riches of its contents are, will go far toward stimulating a love and appetite for the Book.

*3. The third condition is a willingness to do hard work.*

Solomon has given a graphic picture of the Bible student who gets the most profit out of his study, "**My son, if thou wilt receive my words, and hide my commandments with thee; So that thou incline thine ear unto wisdom, and apply thine heart to understanding; Yea, if thou criest after knowledge, and liftest up thy voice for understanding; If thou seekest her as silver, and searchest for her as for hid treasures; THEN shalt thou understand the fear of the LORD, and find the knowledge of God"** (Proverbs 2:1-5).

Now, seeking for silver and searching for hid treasures, means hard work, and the one who wishes to get not only the silver but the gold as well out of the Bible, and find its "**hid treasures,**" must make up his mind to dig.

It is not glancing at the word, or reading the word, but studying the word, meditating upon the word, pondering the word, that brings the richest yields. The reason why many get so little out of their Bible reading is simply because they are not willing to think. Intellectual laziness lies at the bottom of a large per cent, of fruitless Bible reading.

People are constantly crying for new methods of Bible study, but what many of them wish is simply some method of Bible study by which they can get all the good out of the Bible without work. If some one could tell lazy Christians some method of Bible study whereby they could put the sleepiest ten minutes of the day, just before they go to bed, into Bible study, and get the profit out of it that GOD intends His children shall get out of the study of His Word, that would be just what they desire. But it can't be done.

Men must be willing to work and work hard, if they wish to dig out the treasures of infinite wisdom and knowledge and blessing which He has stored up in His Word.

A business friend once asked me in a hurried call to tell him "in a word" how to study his Bible.

I replied, "Think."

- the Psalmist pronounces that man "**blessed**" who "**meditates in the law of the Lord, day and night**" (Psalm 1:2).
- the Lord commanded Joshua to "**meditate therein day and night,**" and assured him that as a result of this meditation "**then thou shalt make thy way prosperous, and then thou shalt have good success**" (Joshua 1:8).
- of Mary, the mother of JESUS, we read, "**Mary kept all these things, and pondered them in her heart**" (Luke 2:19).

In this way alone can one study the Bible to the greatest profit. One pound of beef well chewed and digested and assimilated, will give more strength than tons of beef merely glanced at; and one verse of scripture chewed and digested and assimilated, will give more strength than whole chapters simply skimmed. Weigh every word you read in the Bible. Look at it. Turn it over and over. The most familiar passages get a new meaning in this way. Spend fifteen minutes on each word in Psalm 23:1, or Philippians 4:19, and see if it is not so.

*4. The fourth condition is a will wholly surrendered to GOD.*

JESUS said, "**If any man will do his will, he shall know of the doctrine**" (John 7:17). A surrendered will gives that clearness of spiritual vision which is necessary to understand GOD's book. Many of the difficulties and obscurities of the Bible rise wholly from the fact that the will of the student is not surrendered to the will of the author of the book. It is remarkable how clear and simple and beautiful passages, that once puzzled us, become when we are brought to that place where we say to GOD, "I surrender my will unconditionally to Thine. I have no will but Thine. Teach me Thy will."

A surrendered will will do more to make the Bible an open book than a university education. It is simply impossible to get the largest profit out of your Bible study until you do surrender your will to GOD. You must be very definite about this. There are many who say, " Oh, yes, my will, I think, is surrendered to GOD," and yet it is not. They have never gone alone with GOD and said intelligently and definitely to him, "O GOD, I here and now give myself up to Thee, for Thee to command me, and lead me, and shape me, and send me, and do with me, absolutely as Thou wilt." Such an act is a wonderful key to unlock the treasure house of GOD's Word. The Bible becomes a new book when a man does that. Doing that wrought a complete transformation in the author's theology and life and ministry.

*5. The fifth condition is very closely related to the fourth. The student of the Bible who would get the greatest profit out of his studies must be obedient to its teachings as soon as he sees them.*

It was good advice James gave to early Christians, and to us, "**Be ye doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving your own selves.**"

There are a good many, who consider themselves Bible students, who are deceiving themselves in this way to-day. They see what the Bible teaches, but they do not do it, and they soon lose their power to see it. Truth obeyed leads to more truth. Truth disobeyed destroys the capacity for discovering truth. There must be not only a general surrender of the will, but specific practical obedience to each new word of GOD discovered. There is no place where the law, "**unto every**

**one that hath shall be given, and he shall have abundance; but from him that hath not shall be taken away even that which he hath,"** is more joyously certain on the one hand and more sternly inexorable on the other, than in the matter of using or refusing the truth revealed in the Bible. Use, and you get more; refuse, and you lose all.

Do not study the Bible for the mere gratification of intellectual curiosity, but to find out how to live and to please GOD.

- whatever duty you find commanded in the Bible, do it at once.
- whatever good you see in any Bible character, imitate it immediately.
- whatever mistake you note in the actions of Bible men and women, scrutinize your own life to see if you are making the same mistake, and if you find you are, correct it forthwith.

James compares the Bible to a looking glass. (James 1:23, 24). The chief good of a looking glass, is to show you if there is anything out of fix about you, and, if you find there is, you can set it right. Use the Bible in that way. Obeying the truth you already see, will solve the enigmas in the verses you do not as yet understand. Disobeying the truth you see, darkens the whole world of truth.

This is the secret of much of the scepticism and error of the day. Men saw the truth, but did not do it, now it is gone.

I knew a bright and promising young minister. He made rapid advancement in the truth. He took very advanced ground upon one point especially, and the storm came. One day he said to his wife, "It is very nice to believe this, but we need not speak so much about it." They began, or he, at least, to hide their testimony. The wife died and he drifted. The Bible became to him a sealed book. Faith reeled. He publicly renounced his faith in some of the fundamental truths of the Bible. He seemed to lose his grip even on the doctrine of immortality. What was the cause of it all? Truth not lived and stood for, flees. That man is much admired and applauded by some to-day, but daylight has given place to darkness in his soul.

*6. The sixth condition is a child-like mind.*

GOD reveals His deepest truths to babes. No age needs more than our own to lay to heart the words of JESUS, "**I thank thee, O Father, Lord of Heaven and earth, because Thou hast hid these things from the wise and prudent, and has revealed them unto babes**" (Matthew 11:25).

Wherein must we be babes if GOD is to reveal His truth unto us, and we are to understand His Word?

A child is not full of its own wisdom.

- it recognizes its ignorance and is ready to be taught.
- it does not oppose its own notions and ideas to those of its teachers.
- it is in that spirit we should come to the Bible, if we are to get the most profit out of our study.

Do not come to the Bible full of your own ideas, and seeking from it a confirmation of them. Come rather to find out what are GOD's ideas as He has revealed them there. Come not to find a confirmation of your own opinion, but to be taught what GOD may be pleased to teach. If a man comes to the Bible just to find his notions taught there, he will find them; but if he comes, recognizing his own ignorance, just as a little child, to be taught, he will find something infinitely better than his own notions, even the mind of GOD.

We see why it is that many persons cannot see things which are plainly taught in the Bible. The doctrine taught is not their notion, of which they are so full that there is no room left for that which the Bible actually teaches.

We have an illustration of this in the apostles themselves at one stage in their training. In Mark 9:31 we read **"he taught his disciples, and said unto them, The Son of man is delivered into the hands of men, and they shall kill Him; and after that he is killed, he shall rise the third day."** Now, that is as plain and definite as language can make it, but it was utterly contrary to the notions of the apostles as to what was to happen to the CHRIST. So we read in the next verse **"they understood not that saying."**

Is not that wonderful? But is it any more wonderful than our own inability to comprehend plain statements in the Bible when they run counter to our preconceived notions? What trouble many Christians find with portions of the Sermon on the Mount, that would be plain enough, if we just came to CHRIST like a child to be taught what to believe and do, rather than coming as full grown men, who already know it all, and who must find some interpretations of CHRIST's words that will fit into our mature and infallible philosophy.

Many a man is so full of an unbiblical theology he has been taught, that it takes him a lifetime to get rid of it, and understand the clear teaching of the Bible.

"Oh, what can this verse mean?" many a bewildered man cries. Why, it means what it plainly says; but what you are after is not the meaning GOD has manifestly put into it, but the meaning you can by some ingenious trick of exegesis twist out of it, and make it fit into your scheme.

Don't come to the Bible to find out what you can make it mean, but to find out what GOD intended it to mean. Men often miss the real truth of a verse by saying, " But that can be interpreted this way." Oh, yes, so it can, but is that the way GOD intended it to be interpreted? We all need to pray often, if we would get the most profit out of our Bible study, " Oh, GOD, make me a little child. Empty me of my own notions. Teach me thine own mind. Make me ready like a little child to receive all that thou hast to say, no matter how contrary it is to what I have thought hitherto."

How the Bible opens up to one who approaches it in that way!

How it closes up to the wise fool, who thinks he knows everything, and imagines he can give points to Peter and Paul, and even to JESUS CHRIST and to GOD Himself! Some one has well said the best method of Bible study is "the baby method."

I was once talking with a ministerial friend about what seemed to be the clear teaching of a

certain passage.

"Yes," he replied, "but that doesn't agree with my philosophy."

Alas! But this man was sincere, yet he did not have the child-like spirit, which is an essential condition of the most profitable Bible study. But there are many who approach the Bible in the same way. It is a great point gained in Bible study when we are brought to realize that an infinite GOD knows more than we, that indeed our highest wisdom is less than the knowledge of the most ignorant babe compared with His, and when we come to Him as babes, just to be taught by Him, and not to argue with Him. But we so easily and so constantly forget this, that every time we open our Bibles we would do well to get down humbly before GOD and say, " Father, I am but a child, teach me."

This leads to the seventh condition.

*7. The seventh condition of studying the Bible to the greatest profit is, that we study it as the word of GOD.*

~ end of chapter 8 ~

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