

HOW TO STUDY THE BIBLE FOR GREATEST PROFIT

by

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CHAPTER THREE

TOPICAL STUDY

A second method of Bible study is the Topical Method.

This consists in searching through the Bible to find out what its teaching is on various topics. It is perhaps the most fascinating method of Bible study. It yields the largest immediate results, though not the largest ultimate results. It has advantages. The only way to master any topic, is to go through the Bible, and find what it has to teach on that topic. Almost any great subject will take a remarkable hold upon the heart of a Christian man, if he will take time to go through the Bible, from Genesis to Revelation, and note what it has to say on that topic. He will have a more full and more correct understanding of that topic than he ever had before.

It is said of Mr. Moody, that many years ago he took up the study of "**Grace**" in this way. Day after day he went through the Bible, studying what it had to say about "grace." As the Bible doctrine unfolded before his mind his heart began to burn, until at last, full of the subject and on fire with the subject, he ran out on to the street, and, taking hold of the first man he met, he said:

"Do you know grace?"

"Grace who?" was the reply.

"**The grace of God that bringeth salvation.**" Then he just poured out his soul on that subject.

If any child of GOD will study "**Grace**," or "**Love**," or "**Faith**," or "**Prayer**," or any other great Bible doctrine, in that way, his soul too will become full of it. JESUS evidently studied the Old

Testament scriptures in this way, for we read that "**beginning at Moses and all the prophets, He expounded unto them in all the scriptures the things concerning Himself**" (Luke 24:27).

This method of study made the hearts of the two who walked with Him to burn within them. (Luke 24:32). Paul seems to have followed his Master in this method of study and teaching. (Acts 17:2, 3). But the method has its dangers. Its very fascination is a danger. Many are drawn by the fascination of this method of study to give up all other methods of study, and this is a great misfortune. A well-rounded, thorough-going knowledge of the Bible is not possible by this method of study.

No one method of study will answer, if one desires to be a well-rounded and well-balanced Bible student. But the greatest danger lies in this, that every man is almost certain to have some line of topics in which he is especially interested, and if he studies his Bible topically, unless he is warned, he is more than likely to go over certain topics again and again, and be very strong in this line of truth, but other topics of equal importance he neglects, and thus becomes a one-sided man. We never know one truth correctly until we know it in its proper relations to other truths.

I know of people, for example, who are interested in the great doctrine of the Lord's Second Coming, and pretty much all their Bible studies are on that line. Now this is a precious doctrine, but there are other doctrines in the Bible which a man needs to know, and it is folly to study this doctrine alone. I know others whose whole interest and study seems to center in the subject of "Divine Healing." It is related of one man that he confided to a friend that he had devoted his time for years to the study of the number "seven" in the Bible. This last is doubtless an extreme case, but it illustrates the danger in Topical Study. It is certain that we will never master the whole range of Bible truth if we pursue the Topical Method alone.

A few rules concerning topical study will probably be helpful to most of the readers of this book.

I. Be systematic

Do not follow your fancy in the choice of topics. Do not take up any topic that happens to suggest itself. Make a list of all the subjects that you can think of that are touched upon in the Bible. Make it as comprehensive and complete as possible. Then take these topics up one by one in logical order. The following list of subjects is given as a suggestion. Each one can add to the list for himself and subdivide the general subjects into proper sub-divisions.

LIST OF TOPICS

GOD.

GOD as a Spirit.

The Unity of GOD.

The Eternity of GOD.

The Omnipresence of GOD.

The Personality of GOD.

The Omnipotence of GOD.

The Omniscience of GOD.

The Holiness of GOD.
The Love of GOD.
The Righteousness of GOD.
The Mercy or Loving Kindness of GOD.
The Faithfulness of GOD.
The Grace of GOD.

JESUS CHRIST

The Divinity of Christ
The Subordination of JESUS CHRIST to the Father
The Human Nature of JESUS CHRIST
The Character of JESUS CHRIST.
His Holiness.
His Love to GOD.
His Love to Man.
His Love for Souls.
His Compassion.
His Prayerfulness.
His Meekness and Humility.
The Death of JESUS CHRIST.
The Purpose of CHRIST's Death;
Why did CHRIST die?
For Whom did CHRIST Die?
The Results of CHRIST's Death.
The Resurrection of JESUS CHRIST.
The Fact of the Resurrection.
The Results of the Resurrection.
The Importance of the Resurrection.
The Manner of the Resurrection.
The Ascension and Exaltation of JESUS CHRIST.
The Return or Coming Again of JESUS CHRIST.
The Fact of His Coming Again.
The Manner of His Coming Again.
The Purpose of His Coming Again.
The Results of His Coming Again.
The Time of His Coming Again.
The Reign of JESUS CHRIST.

THE HOLY SPIRIT.

Personality of the Holy Spirit.
Deity of the Holy Spirit.
Distinction of the Holy Spirit from GOD the Father, and the Son, JESUS CHRIST.
The Subordination of the Holy Spirit to the Father and to the Son.
Names of the Holy Spirit.
The work of the Holy Spirit:

In the Universe.
In Man in General.
In the Believer.
In the Prophet and Apostle.
In JESUS CHRIST.

MAN.

His Original Condition.
His Fall.
The Present Standing before GOD and Present Condition of Man outside of the Redemption that is in JESUS CHRIST.
The Future Destiny of those who Reject the Redemption that is in JESUS CHRIST.
Justification.
The New Birth.
Adoption.
The Believer's Assurance of Salvation.
The Flesh.
Sanctification.
Cleansing.
Consecration.
Faith.
Repentance.
Prayer.
Thanksgiving.
Praise.
Worship.
Love to GOD.
Love to JESUS CHRIST.
Love to Man.
The Future Destiny of Believers.

ANGELS.

Their Nature and Position.
Their Number.
Their Abode.
Their Character.
Their Work.
Their Destiny.

SATAN OR THE DEVIL.

His Existence.
His Nature and Position.
His Abode.
His Work.

Our Duty Regarding Him.
His Destiny.

DEMONS.

Their Existence.
Their Nature.
Their Work.
Their Destiny.

For a student who has the perseverance to carry it through, it might be recommended, to begin with the first topic on a list like this, and go right through it to the end, searching for everything the Bible has to say on these topics. This the author of this book has done, and, thereby, gained a fuller knowledge of truth along these lines, and an immeasurably more vital grasp of the truth, than he ever obtained by somewhat extended studies in systematic Theology. Many, however, will stagger at the seeming immensity of the undertaking. To such it is recommended to begin by selecting those topics that seem more important. But sooner or later settle down to a thorough study of what the Bible has to teach about GOD and Man. The "Abstract of Subjects, Doctrinal and Practical," in the back of "*The Bible Text Cyclopaedia*" is very suggestive.

II. Be thorough

Whenever you are studying any topic, do not be content with examining some of the passages in the Bible that bear upon the subject, but find, as far as possible, every passage in the Bible that bears on this subject. As long as there is a single passage in the Bible on any subject that you have not considered, you have not yet gotten a thoroughly true knowledge of that subject.

How can we find all the passages in the Bible that bear on any subject?

1st. *By the use of the Concordance.*

Look up every passage that has the word in it. Then look up every passage that has synonymous words in it. If, for example, you are studying the subject of prayer, look up every passage that has the word "pray" and its derivatives in it, and also every passage that has such words as "cry," "call," "ask," "supplication," "intercession," etc., in it.

2nd. *By the use of a Bible text book.*

A text book arranges the passages of Scripture, not by the words used, but by the subjects treated, and there is many a verse, for example on prayer, that does not have the word "prayer" or any synonymous word in it. Incomparably the best Bible text book is Inglis' "*The Bible Text Cyclopaedia*."

3rd. *Passages not discovered by the use of either concordance or text book will come to light as we study by books, or as we read the Bible through in course, and so our treatment of topics will be ever broadening.*

III. Be exact.

Get the exact meaning of each passage considered. Study each passage in its connection, and find its meaning in the way suggested in the chapter on "Study of Individual Books." Topical study is frequently carried on in a very slipshod fashion. Passages, torn from their connection, are strung or huddled together because of some superficial connection with one another, and without much regard to their real sense and teaching, and this is called "topical study." This has brought the whole method of topical study into disrepute. But it is possible to be as exact and scholarly in topical study as in any other method, and when we are the results will be instructive and gratifying, and not misleading. But the results are sure to be misleading and unsatisfactory if the work is done in a careless, inexact way.

IV. Classify and write down your results.

In the study of any large subject one will get together a great mass of matter. Having gotten it, it must now be gotten into shape. As you look it over carefully, you will soon see the facts that belong together. Arrange them together in a logical order.

An illustrative topical study is given below.

What the Bible teaches concerning the Deity of JESUS CHRIST.

JESUS CHRIST: HIS DEITY.

Divine names.

a. Luke, 22:70.

"**The Son of God.**" This name is given to CHRIST forty times. Besides this the synonymous expression "**His son,**" "**My son,**" are of frequent occurrence. That this name as used of CHRIST is a distinctly Divine name appears from John 5:18.

b. John 1:18.

"**The only begotten Son.**" This occurs five times. It is evident that the statement, that "JESUS CHRIST is the Son of GOD only in the same sense that all men are sons of GOD" is not true. Compare Mark 12:6. Here JESUS Himself, having spoken of all the prophets as servants of GOD, speaks of Himself as "one," "**a beloved Son.**"

c. Revelation 1:17.

"**The first and the last.**" Comp. Isaiah 41:4; 44:6. In these latter passages it is "**The LORD,**" "**The LORD of hosts,**" who is "**the first and the last.**"

d. Revelation 22:12, 13, 16.

First, "**the Alpha and Omega.**" Second, "**the beginning and the ending.**" In Revelation 1:8. It is the Lord GOD who is the Alpha and Omega.

e. Acts 3:14.

"**The Holy One.**" In Hosea 11:9, and many other passages, it is GOD who is "**the Holy One.**"

f. Malachi 3:1; Luke 2:11; Acts 9:17; John 20:28; Hebrews 1:11.

"**The Lord.**" This name or title is used of JESUS several hundred times. The word translated "**Lord**" is used in the New Testament in speaking of men nine times, e. g., Acts 16:30, Ephesians 4:1, John 12:21, but not at all in the way in which it used of CHRIST. He is spoken of as "**the Lord**" just as GOD is, cf. Acts 4:26 with 4:33. Note also Matthew 22:43-45, Phil, 2:21, Ephesians 4:5. If any one doubts the attitude of the Apostles of JESUS toward Him as Divine, they would do well to read one after another the passages which speak of Him as Lord.

g. Acts 10:36. "**Lord of all.**"

h. I Corinthians 2:8. "**The Lord of Glory.**" In Psalm 24:8-10, it is "**the Lord of Hosts**" who is the King of Glory.

i. Isaiah 9:6.

(1) "**Wonderful**" (cf. Judges 13:18, *meaning of the word 'secret'*).

(2) "**Mighty God.**"

(3) "**Eternal Father.**"

j. Hebrews 1:8. "**God.**" In John 20:28, Thomas calls JESUS "**my God,**" and is gently rebuked for not believing it before.

k. Matthew 1:23. "**God with us.**"

l. Tit. 2:13, "**Our great God.**"

m. Romans 9:5. "**God blessed forever.**"

Proposition: Sixteen names clearly implying Deity are used of CHRIST in the Bible, some of them over and over again, the total number of passages reaching far into the hundreds.

Divine Attributes.

a. Omnipotence.

(1) Luke 4:39. JESUS has power over disease, it is subject to His word.

(2) Luke;:14-15; 8:54-55; John 5:25. The Son of GOD has power over death, it is subject to His word.

(3) Matt: 8:26-27. JESUS has power over the winds and sea, they are subject to His word.

(4) Matthew 8:16; Luke 4:35, 36, 41. JESUS, the CHRIST, the Son of GOD, has power over demons, they are subject to His word.

(5) Ephesians 1:20-23. CHRIST is far above all principality and power and might, and dominion

and every name that is named, not only in this world, but also in that which is to come. All things are in subjection, under His feet. All the hierarchies of the angelic world are under Him. (6) Hebrews 1:3. The Son of GOD upholds all things by the word of His power.

Proposition. JESUS CHRIST, the Son of GOD, is omnipotent.

b. Omniscience.

(1) John 4:16-19. JESUS knows men's lives, even their secret history.

(2) Mark 2:8; Luke 5:22; John 2:24-25; (Acts 1:24). JESUS knows the secret thoughts of men. He knew all men. He knew what was in man. (cf. II Chronicles 6:30; Jeremiah 17:9, 10. Here we see that GOD "**only knoweth the hearts of the children of men.**")

(3) John 6:64. JESUS knew from the beginning that Judas would betray Him. Not only men's present thoughts but their future choices were known to Him.

(4) John 1:48. JESUS knew what men were doing at a distance.

(5) Luke 22:10, 12; John 13:1; Luke 5:4-6. JESUS knew the future regarding not only GOD's acts, but regarding the minute specific acts of men, and even the fishes of the sea.

NOTE Many, if not all, of these items of knowledge up to this point could possibly, if they stood alone, be accounted for by saying that the Omniscient God revealed these specific things to JESUS.

(6) John 21:17; 16:30; Colossians 2:3. JESUS knew all things, in Him are hid all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge.

Proposition. JESUS CHRIST is omniscient.

NOTE There was, as we shall see when we study the Humanity of CHRIST, a voluntary veiling and abnegation of the exercise of His inherent Divine omniscience. (Mark 11:12-14; Philippians 2:7).

c. Omnipresence.

(1) Matthew 18:20. JESUS CHRIST is present in every place where two or three are gathered together in His name.

(2) Matthew 28:20. JESUS CHRIST is present with every one who goes forth into any part of the world to make disciples, etc.

(3) John 3:13. The Son of man was in heaven while He was here on earth.

(4) John 14:20; II. Corinthians 13:5. JESUS CHRIST is in each believer.

(5) Ephesians 1:23. JESUS CHRIST filleth all in all. Proposition. JESUS CHRIST is omnipresent.

d. Eternity. John 1:1; Micah 5:2; Colossians 1:17; Isaiah 9:6; John 17:5 (John 6:62; John 8:58; I John 1:1, 27); Hebrews 13:8.

Proposition. The Son of GOD was from all eternity.

e. Immutability. Hebrews 13:8; 1:12. JESUS CHRIST is unchangeable. He not only always is, but always is the same.

f. Philippians 2:6. JESUS CHRIST before His incarnation was in the form of GOD.

NOTE: "Morphe" translated "**form**" means "*the form by which a person or thing strikes the vision; the external appearance*" (Thayer, *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament*).

g. Colossians 2:9. In CHRIST dwelleth all the fulness of the Godhead in a bodily way.

Proposition. Five or more distinctively divine attributes are ascribed to JESUS CHRIST, and all the fulness of the Godhead is said to dwell in Him.

3. Divine Offices.

a. Creation. Hebrews 1:10; John 1:3; Colossians 1:16. The Son of GOD, the eternal Word, the Lord, is creator of all created things.

b. Preservation. Hebrews 1:3. The Son of GOD is the preserver of all things.

c. The forgiveness of sin. Mark 2:5-10; Luke 7:48-50. JESUS CHRIST had power on earth to forgive sins.

NOTE He taught that sins were sins AGAINST HIMSELF. Luke 7:40-47, both Simon and the woman as sinners were debtors to Him, but in Psalm 51:4 sin is seen to be against GOD and GOD only.)

d. Raising of the dead. John 6:39-44; 5:28-29. It is JESUS CHRIST who raises the dead.

Question. Did not Elijah and Elisha raise the dead?

No; GOD raised the dead in answer to their prayer, but JESUS CHRIST will raise the dead by His own word. During the days of His humiliation it was by prayer that CHRIST raised the dead. John 11:41.

e. Transformation of bodies. Philippians 3:21, JESUS CHRIST shall fashion anew the body of our humiliation into the likeness of His own glorious body.

f. Judgment. II Timothy 4:1, CHRIST JESUS shall judge the quick and the dead.

NOTE: JESUS Himself emphasized the Divine character of this office. (John 5:22-23).

g. The bestowal of eternal life. John 10:28; 17, 2. JESUS CHRIST is the bestower of eternal life.

Proposition. Seven distinctively Divine offices are predicated of JESUS CHRIST.

4. Statements which in the Old Testament are made distinctly of the Lord God taken in the New Testament to refer to JESUS CHRIST.

a. Psalm 102:24-27, comp. Hebrews 1:10-12.

b. Isaiah 40, 3-4, comp. Matthew 3:3, Luke 1:68, 69, 76.

- c. Jeremiah 11:20; 17, 10, comp. Revelation 11:23.
- d. Isaiah 60:19 (Zech. 2:5) comp. Luke 2:32.
- e. Isaiah 6:1; 3:10, comp. John 12:37-41.
- f. Isaiah 8:13-14, comp. I Peter 2:7-8.
- g. Isaiah 8:12-13, comp. I Peter 3:14-15.
- h. Num. 21:6-7, comp. I Corinthians 10, 9.
- i. Psalm 23:1; Isaiah 40:10-11, comp. John 10:11.
- j. Ezekiel 34:11; 12:16, comp. Luke 19:10.
- k. Lord in the Old Testament always refers to GOD except when the context clearly indicates otherwise: Lord in the New Testament always refers to JESUS CHRIST except where the context clearly indicates otherwise.

Proposition. Many statements which in the Old Testament are made distinctly of Jehovah God are taken in the New Testament to refer to JESUS CHRIST, i.e., in New Testament thought and doctrine JESUS CHRIST occupies the place that Jehovah occupies in Old Testament thought and doctrine.

5. The way in which the name of GOD the Father and JESUS CHRIST the Son are coupled together.

- II Corinthians 13:14.
- Matthew 28:19.
- I Thessalonians 3:2.
- I Corinthians 12:4-6.
- Titus 3:4,5, comp. Titus 2:13.
- Romans 1:7. Many instances of this sort (see all the Pauline Epistles).
- James 1:1.
- John 14:23, "we," i. e. , GOD the Father and I.
- II Peter 1:1.
- Colossians 2:2.
- John 17:3.
- John 14:1, comp. Jeremiah 17:5-7.
- Revelation 7:10.
- Revelation 5:13; comp. John 5:23.

Prop. The name of JESUS CHRIST is coupled with that of GOD the Father in numerous passages in a way in which it would be impossible to couple the name of any finite being with that of the Deity.

6. Divine Worship to be given to JESUS CHRIST.

- a. Matthew 28:9; Luke 24:52; Matthew 14:33, comp. Acts 10:25-26; Revelation 22:8-9; Matthew 4:9-10.

JESUS CHRIST accepted without hesitation a worship which good men and angels declined with fear (horror).

Ques. Is not the verb translated worship in these passages used of reverence paid to men in high position?

Yes; but not in this way by worshippers of the Lord, as is seen by the way in which Peter and the angel drew back with horror when such worship was offered to them.

b. I Corinthians 1:2; 2 Corinthians 12:8, 9; Acts 7:59. Prayer is to be made to CHRIST.

c. Psalm 45:11; John 5:23; comp. Revelation 5:8, 9, 12, 13.

It is GOD the Father's will that all men pay the same divine honor to the Son as to Himself.

d. Hebrews 1:6; Phil, 2:10, 11. (Comp. Isaiah 45:21, 23). The Son of GOD, JESUS, is to be worshiped as GOD by angels and men.

Proposition. JESUS CHRIST is a person to be worshiped by angels and men even as GOD the Father is worshiped.

General Proposition. By the use of numerous Divine names, by the ascription of all the distinctively divine attributes, by the predication of several divine offices, by referring statements which in the Old Testament distinctly name the Lord GOD as their subject to JESUS CHRIST in the New Testament, by coupling the name of JESUS CHRIST with that of GOD the Father in a way in which it would be impossible to couple that of any finite being with that of the Deity, and by the clear teaching that JESUS CHRIST should be worshiped even as GOD the Father is worshiped in all these unmistakable ways, GOD in His word distinctly proclaims that JESUS CHRIST is a Divine Being, is GOD. One suggestion remains to be made in regard to topical study.

Get further topics for topical study from your book studies.

~ end of chapter 3~

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