

METHODS OF BIBLE STUDY

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CHAPTER THIRTEEN

THE STUDENT'S TWO BIBLES

Two Bibles are essential to all Bible study. One is not sufficient, and without two we are liable to lose a great deal of blessing.

THE BIBLE FOR KNOWLEDGE

By this is meant Bible study in general, and the processes and methods of Bible knowledge and information. We ought to have one Bible specially, if not exclusively, devoted to intellectual study.

Knowledge must be gained - gained first by personal study.

There are two methods of Bible study that should be prosecuted, if at all possible, side by side. One is the steady progress right through the Bible from Genesis to Revelation, taking GOD's Word as we have received it. For this purpose it is distinctly useful to belong to some organization which follows this method.

The oldest, and parent of the rest, is the *Bible and Prayer Union* (Mrs. Richardson, Benet's, Stepney, London, E.). This takes one chapter a day, from Genesis to Revelation, and reads the Bible through in about three years and a quarter.

Or there is the *Christian Progress Scripture Reading and Prayer Union* (Miss Boys, 34 and 35, Paternoster House, Paternoster Row, E. C.). Members read daily one chapter of the Old Testament, and a short evening portion of the New Testament, while associates read the New Testament only.

Again, there is the plan adopted by the "*College by Post*," which affords help and guidance to students. Full particulars can be obtained from the admirable book already noticed in an earlier chapter, *Clews to Holy Writ*.

Side by side with this regular general reading through the Bible, there should be, if possible, special study of some book or period, but particularly of the New Testament. If anyone will take the *Calendar of the English Prayer Book*, the reading of the Second Lesson each day will cover the New Testament in one year, with the exception of a few chapters in the Revelation.

Or we might give three or six months to one book and do our best to master it. In any case there should be system and method, and perseverance therein. In this study of the Bible it is essential that we should be definite in our work, and that we do not merely read, but think.

For example, when we have our chapter or section before us it is well for us to ask ourselves, What is my purpose in this study? What is it that I am going to do? Then we might go on to ask ourselves some or all of these questions:

1. Do I understand the meaning of the words and phrases of the passage? (Never hesitate to confess the need of a dictionary). In Exodus 2. "**to wit**," "**ark**," "**flags**" are instances.
2. What persons and places are mentioned? Do these occur elsewhere in Scripture? (This means history and geography).
3. Are there any allusions to Eastern manners and customs needing elucidation? (The Bible is such an Oriental book that many passages can only be properly understood in the light of Eastern life).
4. What marginal references to other passages need attention? (Scripture wonderfully interprets Scripture).
5. Is there any special doctrinal teaching on GOD, CHRIST, the Spirit, sin, grace, holiness, eternity? (See the chapter on doctrinal study).
6. When reading in the New Testament, consider whether there is anything about the Old Testament? Or if in the Old Testament, am I reminded by it of anything in the New Testament?
7. Is there anything typical or prophetic in it? We gain knowledge, too, from Bible classes and from books on the Bible.

Contact with other minds cannot fail to increase our store of knowledge. But we are now concerned first and foremost with our own personal study, and with our own study of the Bible as distinct from books on the Bible.

Many more helps might have been suggested, but we have been anxious to urge the student to go direct to the Word first, and to be occupied with that mainly and primarily. We must thoroughly grasp its contents, discover its meaning, and receive its message as far as possible by immediate contact with its pages.

Knowledge must be gathered. How may we best store the results of our study?

First, by means of a Bible with margins or interleaved pages. There is a cheap Bible with a very wide margin (Cambridge Press) admirably adapted for notes, and it is published in some at least of the separate books. Into this should be put all our "finds" and the other results of study.

In this connection may be mentioned Bible-marking. Mrs. Menzies' *How to Mark your Bible*, and Mr. Wells' *The Bible Marksman*, will prove suggestive. We would only urge great care about underlining and "railways," lest the Bible text become overloaded with such marks and its clearness almost obliterated.

For thorough and minute Bible-marking one Bible should be devoted solely to the plan adopted.

There will, however, be many a note or extract that cannot well be put in the margin of a Bible. For these we need a note-book, which we can arrange and index in such a way as to be easily available. The Note-Books published by Eason, Mid-Abbey Street, Dublin, are useful for this purpose, though almost any book will suffice. It is best to index by subject and by text, and put the number of the page of the note-book opposite the text in the margin of the Bible. Reference at any time thus becomes easy. In some such ways we may gather and garner the results of our study.

THE BIBLE FOR POWER

By this we mean the use of the Bible for spiritual life and power.

And here we wish to emphasize in the strongest way the necessity and importance of having a separate Bible for devotional purposes alone, quite apart from the Bible for general study.

Further, we urge the imperative necessity of this devotional Bible being kept entirely free from marks. We need to have a fresh message from GOD every day, and if we open our marked Bible for this we are almost certain to find our thoughts running in the groove of former messages suggested by our marks and notes.

It is only a very strong and detached mind that can overcome this tendency, and hence it is far better to have a Bible with a clear page which allows the mind to be untrammelled in seeking its new message. Then when the new message comes we can register any results in our Bible for notes. We venture to plead earnestly for this. The fruit of it will be abundant. Let this Bible be one with a good print, for it will last a lifetime and become "a little sanctuary."

In this devotional study let us ever beware of reading the Bible with an eye to our work. How great is the temptation to a worker to read with a view to sermons or classes! We must read it for ourselves first of all, and for no one else.

And this devotional study should become the very habit of our life.

Our personal and direct contact with the Word of GOD will be an exact test of our discipleship and character. The Bible is the mirror, in which we see ourselves as we are and as GOD sees us, and it must be evident that if we never use, or rarely use the mirror, we cannot be sure of our real state before GOD.

Christianity is largely a matter of the condition of soul; stress is laid on character, and character is power.

Now character requires solitude for growth; solitude is "the mother-country of the strong"; but solitude without the Bible tends towards morbidity, while with the Bible it is a guarantee of vitality and vigor.

Let us then be sure that amid the hurry and worry of life we "**take time to be holy**" by means of meditation on GOD in His Word. Not even Christian work must rob us of this secret of true service and blessing. The superficiality of many lives warns us "**to give heed to reading, "to meditate on these things,**" that "**our profiting may appear to all,**" and at the same time glorify GOD.

The following suggestions are offered for this devotional study:-

1. Open all such occasions with prayer for the Holy Spirit's light (Psalm 119:18).
2. Ask to be guided to some definite thought for yourself.
3. Dwell prayerfully on this thought thus given:

- Is it a counsel?
- Is it a precept?
- Is it a warning?
- Is it a promise?
- Is it an experience?
- Is it a command?

4. When its meaning is clear, use it as the basis of a prayer for grace to realize it in experience.
5. Yield the whole soul in full surrender to its truth and power.
6. Link it on to truths already known, and thereby strengthen the chain of experience.
7. Trust GOD to reproduce it in your life that day.

It is perhaps scarcely necessary to do more than call attention to the intimate and necessary connection between prayer and all Bible study, whether the study be mainly critical or purely devotional. Bible knowledge is at once a cause and an effect of prayer. We need prayer for spiritual and intellectual enlightenment before and as we study the Word of GOD, while the results of our study will in turn lead to, more prayer and increasing waiting on GOD in fellowship. Thus the two act and react on each other, for prayer in its simplest definition is just our speaking to GOD, and the Bible is GOD speaking to us.

These two combined constitute true fellowship, that intimate friendship which is the very crown and culmination of GOD's revelation in CHRIST in relation to human life (I John 1:3).

We have now come to the end of these chapters on Bible Study.

They have of course only touched the fringe of a vast subject, but perhaps sufficient has been suggested to show the wonderful treasure we possess in the Word of GOD, and how great is the need and value of thorough, earnest, sustained study.

Further help in the way of practical hints may be obtained from *How to Study the Bible for Greatest Profit*, by R. A. Torrey *; *Searching the Bible Mine*, by H. Hankinson (specially suited to educated young people); and an *Introduction to the Devotional Study of Holy Scripture*, by Dean Goulburn. If these and all similar works are used aright, and not allowed to do for us what we ought to do for ourselves, they will fulfil their mission by sending, us to the Bible itself and compelling us to think over and grasp its contents and apply its truth to our daily life.

The end of all Bible study is information and inspiration, and it cannot be too often stated that we shall never realize this unless we give ourselves to the Bible first and foremost, and not to books about the Bible.

For fullness of experience, for reality of character, for clearness of testimony, and for effectiveness of service, there is nothing to compare with definite daily Bible study and meditation. Then shall we "**make our way prosperous, and then shall we have good success.**"

"All scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness: That the man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works" (II Timothy 3:16-17).

* This book is posted on our site - BBB.

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