

Grace to You :: *Unleashing God's Truth, One Verse at a Time*

Who Can Study the Bible?

Scripture: Selected Scriptures

Code: 1381

Today we're going to do something kind of special, I think. Some of the fellows on the staff and the elders suggested that we needed to do just one Sunday on the subject of how to study the Bible. Because we have so many new people coming to Grace Church and so many folks who really are kind of hungry for the Word and maybe don't know how to get into it. And apparently there was offered in the last couple of weeks a new class on how to study the Bible and it filled up so very fast that everybody got shut out of it, and it indicated a great need, and so it was suggested that maybe me could do that today.

And interestingly enough, I didn't know that this is what they were thinking and I proposed that I would like to do that, and everybody just kind of blinked, and so I want to share with you this morning and then tonight how to study the Bible.

I just have two points: Who and how. And this morning I want to talk about who, and tonight I want to talk about how. This morning I want to talk about who can study the Bible and tonight how to study it. Because if you're not the right who the how won't matter, basically. You may have all the methodology for studying the Bible. You may know all of the techniques, and you may have all of the insights, but if your life isn't right you're not going to perceive what God wants you to see. And so we have to begin with the who and then the how, and that's what we want to do today.

And I'm excited about tonight because it's probably going to be the most practical evening we've ever spent here on how to study the Bible. And as a church that's committed to studying the Bible I think you'll want to be a part of what we're going to say tonight, and I think God will really use it. Everywhere we've shared these truths God has blessed them in the lives of the people who make application. And they'll be some very practical things. How do you open up a text? How do you understand the verses? How do you make sense out of a difficult passage? What are the good resources? And so forth. And we'll be getting into that tonight.

But for this morning we want to kind of introduce the thing and talk a little bit about the who of Bible study, who can understand the Bible. It always amazes me that they use the Bible in school as a literature book and people study it to find out its literary insights and qualities. And then there are the cults, who take the Bible and try to systematize it into grandiose religious concoctions, and invariably whether you're using it as a piece of literature or whether you're using it as an agency to develop a false religious system, you come up with error. Because there are some factors that are not there,

some ingredients that are absolutely necessary. And that's basically what we want to speak of this morning.

Some of you may have read of a certain Danish religious philosopher who lived in the 19th century by the name of Soren Kierkegaard. Kierkegaard has said many things in terms of Christianity and religion that we would not necessarily accept but on the other hand, every once in a while he says some pretty profound things, too. And one of them, I thought, was this statement that I'd like to read to you. Listen to it.

"Too often in their church life people adopt an attitude of the theater. Imagining the preacher is an actor and they his critics, praising and blaming the performances. Actually, the people are the actors on the stage of life, the preacher is merely the prompter reminding the people of their lost lines."

I think he perceives a real problem. It's very easy for you or for anyone to come to church and treat it like a theater and sit and watch it happen, and then to either praise or criticize what went on. But he's right. The fact is you are really the actors living on the stage of life and I'm here to prompt you about what you ought to do. If all that happens is you come and evaluate the sermon, then you've missed the point. But if you come and learn from what I do what you should do in approaching the Word of God, then you've gotten it.

A lady said to me at one of the conferences, she came up to me and she said, "Do you know what your preaching does to me?" And I said, "I have no idea." She said, "It makes me want to study the Bible." She said it very matter-of-factly. And I said, "Well, I think that's the best compliment I ever got. It makes you want to study the Bible."

I really feel that that's the whole point. I'm not here to entertain you. I'm not here to put on a show which is to be evaluated. I'm here to stimulate you to do something on your own, and that is to learn the Word of God and learn to live it. And if you don't get that message, you've missed the whole point. Mine has become an exercise in futility.

The ministry in the pulpit is to stimulate the people in the pew. And the reason I study and teach is to stimulate you to study and teach. And the sad part of it is there are so many Christians who don't really do that, they just don't get into it and they don't teach it to somebody else.

And there's always distractions, you know. I think about Paul writing to Timothy and he said to him, "Timothy, the things you have heard from me among many witnesses, the same commit to faithful men who shall be able to teach others also." In other words, "Timothy, what I told you I told you to tell somebody else." Because you see, Timothy at Second Timothy in his life, at that juncture in his life when Paul wrote that book, is beginning to falter. He's even having anxiety, you know. And Paul had written to him earlier about taking some wine for his stomach's sake and he was beginning to be

fearful about his youth. People were kind of hassling him about it, and so Paul says, "Don't let anybody despise your youth." And he says, "Flee youthful lusts."

And Timothy was fighting his youth, he was fighting his physical problem. He was basically a timid person and so Paul says, "God has not given us a spirit of timidity." He was being persecuted. He was also being attacked by some high-powered religious errorists who had invaded the Ephesian church and were propagating some genealogies and some sort of high-powered philosophy that he really couldn't handle. And so he was beginning to falter, and fold up, and quit, and bail out. And Paul says to him, "Look, fella, you can't stop. Too much is invested in you. Everything I committed to you I committed to you to give to somebody else." That's the whole point.

Last Sunday you had opportunity to hear my father, who made a great commitment in my life, gave me many things to pass on. His father gave him things to pass on, and what I have I have to pass on, and when I pass it on to you, you have to take it and develop it, and learn it, and pass it on to somebody else. You see, this is a relay race. We're all involved.

Now, in recent weeks, we finished our study of Ephesians, and we talked about the sword of the Spirit and how important it is that we know the Word of God to fight the enemy. We must study it for ourselves and study it to pass it on to others so they, too, can know the victory that the Word of God brings.

And you remember in that message on the sword of the Spirit that I said the Bible is a source of truth, joy, power, guidance, growth, comfort, perfection, and victory, a tremendous reservoir of truth. And at that time, I really wanted to go into the material on how to study the Bible but we didn't have time, so I'm going to do it now. Because I don't want to just exhort you without instructing you. I don't want to just say, "Study the Bible," and not tell you how or what the conditions are. I want you to be able to get into it and really be productive.

A young man wrote me this week and he's attending a large, very charismatic school in America. And he wrote me a most interesting letter. He said, "I transferred here out of a liberal college. I went to a college where they didn't believe in the Bible and they denied the great doctrines." And he said, "I noticed there was tremendous carnality, and they worshiped their intellect." And then he said, "Let me be very honest with you. Where I am now there is the same carnality and they worship their emotions." He said, "Where can I go where they worship God through His Word?" What a great thought.

There's nothing wrong with the intellect as long as it's subjected to the Word of God. There's nothing wrong with emotion as long as is brought into authority of the Word of God. But the center of everything is the Bible, God's Word. And as believers, this is where we have to be. And if we are going to be committed as a church to the Word of God, then it's got to be true in your life also. That

commitment has to be there.

Now to begin with, if we're going to study the Bible, we've got to be committed to the fact that it needs to be studied, right? I mean, that seems to me to be basic. Look with me for a minute, and let me just kind of set that for you in your thinking. Look at Hosea chapter 4. Hosea is facing a reality in Israel. And the reality is this. God's people have abandoned God. And consequently, they have fallen into all kinds of sin. They have become a harlot wife, an adulterous nation, violating the vow to God. And what is the basic problem? How did this happen? And why did it happen?

Indicated in 4:1 and following, listen to what he writes. "Hear the Word of the Lord, ye children of Israel." We can stop right there. Hosea 4:1. "Hear the Word of the Lord." He puts his finger right on the problem. When a nation ceases to hear the Word of the Lord, confusion and chaos takes place. "For the Lord hath a controversy with the inhabitants of the land, because *there is* no truth, nor mercy, nor knowledge of God in the land."

In other words, they had removed the foundation. And when the foundation was gone, what was left is in verse 2. "Swearing, lying, killing, stealing, adultery, and blood touching blood." Blood flowing everywhere. In other words, you get the national chaos of verse 2 when you give up the foundation of the Word of God in verse 1. I'll tell you something, people. In America people are concerned. They're concerned about our country. They're concerned about a rising crime problem. They're concerned about a disintegration of the family. They're concerned about chaos in government. They're concerned about economic stress and chaos there. All of these concerns people have in their hearts.

And I'll tell you the truth about it. There is no resolution to any of these problems. You can change the cabinet every week if you want. You can do that all the time. You can just shovel people in and out of there all week long, and month long, and year long, and you're never going to eliminate the moral problems in a nation like ours unless there is a reaffirmation of the standard of the absolute qualification of the Word of God to set the pace for this country.

Same thing in Israel. Destroy a biblical base and all you're going to get is chaos. And because they wouldn't hear the Word of the Lord, everything bad began to happen. And "the land mourned - " in verse 3 " - and everyone that dwelleth in the land languisheth, with the beast of the field, the fowls of the heaven, yea, the fish of the sea shall also be taken away." Everything goes wrong, everything. And it all comes down to verse 6. "My people are destroyed - " why? " - for lack of knowledge, because they reject knowledge."

Now when a people reject the law of God, the knowledge of God, they open the floodgates to chaos. Now as it's true in a nation in the case of Israel, it's true in the life of an individual. If you do not have as the base of your life, as the orientation of your behavior, as the solid foundation upon which you live, the Word of God, there is no base. There is none. In Proverbs chapter 1 the writer says wisdom

cries in the streets. “How long, you simple ones, will you continue in your simplicity?” How long will you go on being naive and foolish? How long will you reject the Word of God? And it says they turn a deaf ear, and they will not hear. Wisdom is available, people.

And so just as a general thing, I’m trying to get you to see how important it is to study the Word of God. This is the foundation of everything. Here is a judge who writes me and says, “What does the Bible say about what is right in a law court?” A doctor, “What does the Bible say about what is right in terms of how we discipline our children?” I’ve received letters from doctors, “What does the Bible say about abortion? What does the Bible say about euthanasia? What does the Bible say about how certain people are to be treated in certain psychological and psychiatric situations?”

And so, beloved, what I’m saying to you is, you see, you can’t live your life the way it ought to be lived unless you have the knowledge of God’s Word. And so it’s imperative that we be students of His Word.

In the New Testament this becomes literally a replete issue. In Romans 12:2 it says, “And be not conformed to this world: but be ye transformed.” Now how do you get above the system that engulfs you? How do you rise above the corruption we live in? How do you ascend beyond the mentality of the day? It says, “Be ye transformed - ” but how? “ - by the renewing of your - ” what? “ - your mind, that you may know what *is that* good and acceptable, and perfect, will of God.”

In other words, it is first of all to know and then it is to live. If you rush off headlong trying to live life without the knowledge of God’s truth you’re going to find you’re going to hit right into the system full blast. In order to rise above it you must know the Word of God.

In Ephesians 4:23, the Apostle Paul says, “Be renewed in the spirit of your mind.” In Philippians 1:9 he says, “That you may abound more and more in knowledge and discernment.” In Philippians 4:8 he names a lot of things and then he says, “If *there’s* any virtue, any praise, think on these things.” In Colossians chapter 1, “Increasing by the knowledge of God,” he says.

In 2 Peter 3:18, “Grow in grace and *in* the knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.” Second Timothy 3:16. “The Word of God is given to perfect you that You may know what God’s will and God’s choice is for your living.”

Knowledge. In Proverbs 24:13 there’s a beautiful statement about knowledge. “My son, eat thou honey, because *it is* good; and the honeycomb, *which is* sweet to thy taste: So *shall* the knowledge of wisdom *be* unto thy soul.” And all through Proverbs, 31 chapters, is the injunction to learn God’s truth and to live it, to know, seek wisdom, seek wisdom, seek wisdom, again and again. And by the way, every Hebrew boy as he grew up was taught the book of Proverbs that he might know God’s standards for life. And so we must know.

May I add something? The knowledge of which Scripture speaks is not separated from obedience. It knows nothing of the theory. It knows nothing of the concept. It knows nothing of simply the intellectualism of the Greek *sophia*. The Hebrew thought of wisdom was always behavior. In fact, to the Hebrew, if you didn't live it you didn't really know it. To the Greek wisdom, *sophos*, was intellectualizing, was theory, was conceptual. But to the Hebrew, wisdom was life. It was living. It was behaving in a manner in accord with the law of God.

Wisdom wasn't just conceiving. Wisdom was walking. And so where the Bible draws us to knowledge, and where it draws us to knowing, and where it draws us to wisdom, and to understanding, and to enlightenment, and to perception, it is always with a view to behavior. You never really know until you live it.

"Blessed are they who hear the Word of God and keep it," Jesus said. "If you love Me, keep My commandments." "For this is the love of God that we keep His commandments." And in Deuteronomy 5:29 the Bible says, "O that there was such an heart in them, that they would fear Me, and keep all My commandments always, that it might be well with them, and their children forever!"

The Lord told Joshua that he was required to study and reflect on the Word of God. And so in Joshua 1:8 it says, "This book of the law shall not depart out of thy mouth; but thou shall meditate therein day and night, that thou mayest observe to do according to all that is written therein: for then thou shalt make thy way prosperous, and then thou shalt have good success." In other words, Joshua, you must be committed to the law of God. You know the chaos that existed in Israel when the law was lost, and finally when it was found and they stood up to read it what a revival broke out as they found again the standard for life.

And you remember the words of Isaiah. "For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are My ways higher than your ways, and My thoughts than your thoughts. For as the rain cometh down, and snow from heaven, and returneth not thither, but watereth the earth, and maketh it bring forth and bud, that it may give seed to the sower, and bread to the eater: So shall My word be that goes forth out of My mouth: it shall not return unto Me void, but it shall accomplish that which I please, and it shall prosper in the thing whereto I sent it." God says, as the rain and the snow comes down and waters the earth, so My word will come down and give growth to your life.

I love the Psalms, the hymnbook of the Old Testament. And David, of course, was a man with a worshiping heart. And in Psalm 138:2, worshiped God with these words. "I will worship toward Thy holy temple, and praise Thy name for Thy loving kindness and for Thy truth." Why for Thy truth? "For Thou hast magnified Thy word above all Thy name." In other words, David says, "God, I will worship You on the basis of Your truth."

We've talked about that in the past. You can't even worship God, no matter how meaningful that might be in your own mind, you can't truly worship God unless you worship Him according to truth. Here were the people up on Mount Gerizim trying to worship God in John 4, and Jesus says, "You must worship the Lord in spirit, yes, but in truth." You can't devise your own means.

Like Saul, you can't offer the Lord a whole lot of animals that you stole against His commandment and then say, "Well, I'm serving the Lord." And the prophet said to him, "You may be thinking you're serving God. He said no to those animals. You will never put a son on the throne." And cursed his line. God doesn't want self-styled worship. He wants it according to His Word.

In Psalm 119, one of the most majestic poems in all of holy writ, nearly everyone of the 176 verses teaches us the necessity of obedience to the Word of God. In verses 1 and 2 the whole Psalm begins, "Blessed *are* the undefiled, who walk in the law of the Lord. Blessed *are* those who keep His testimonies, *and* seek Him with their whole heart." And you know what it says in verse 11. "Thy word have I hid in my heart, that I might not sin against Thee."

And so we find the Scripture calls us to obey the Word. Now, beloved, the standard is up there, you see. I've just given you scripture, after scripture, after scripture. The importance of the Word. Can I ask you to make a covenant in your heart? I don't want to impose it on you, I just want you to do it because it's right. You say, "Well, you know, this Bible study is hard work." Yes, but these things are written unto you that your joy may be - what? - full. You want full joy in your life? That's why God wrote this. Would you make a covenant? And I'll give you a covenant so you don't have to think up your own. This is a covenant made by Josiah the king, and God really blessed him for it.

In 2 Chronicles 34:31. "And the king stood in his place, and made a covenant before the Lord." Bless his heart. This young man Josiah is like a beam of light in the midst of the darkness of the ancient past of Israel, a godly man. He made a covenant before the Lord. Now listen to it. "To walk after the Lord, to keep His commandments, and His testimonies, and His statutes, with all his heart, and with all his soul, and to perform the words of the covenant which are written in this book." Josiah said, "God, as long as I live, this day I vow to learn and to live Your Word." That's why he made a difference. That's why he was different than everybody before him and after him. Are you willing to make that covenant? This is God's Word. Study it as God has commanded you.

Now, specifically who - for this morning - can study the Bible? I've just given a general injunction. I've just said everybody study the Bible. Now who can study it and get something out of it? You say, "Well, you've got to go to seminary." Do you? What are the requirements? Well, you've got to have a lot of books to do it. Well, I'm too new. I don't know. Well, I've tried to figure it out, but, boy, all those words are so tough. I don't understand it. Well, my wife's good at it, but I'm lousy.

Who can understand it? Lots of people purport to understand it. They come and knock on your door and tell you they'll explain it to you. Who can understand the Bible? What are the requirements? What are the bottom line basic requirements? All right, here we go, I'm going to give you five and then a final sixth.

Number one. Who is able to understand the Bible? Only believers. Only believers. First of all, you have to be a Christian, a true Christian, a believer, born again, regenerated. You say, "Well, you mean if you're not a Christian you can't understand the Bible?" That's right. Let me show you that.

First Corinthians 2:14. I want to work up to it a little bit, so let me start in verse 10. This is a tremendous, tremendous insight. "But God - " now watch this " - hath revealed *them* unto us by His Spirit." Now "them" refers to God's truths, God's principles, or God's revelation, or God's Word. Who receives it? "God hath revealed *it* unto us by His Spirit." Now I want you to notice the little phrase "unto us," those two words in verse 10.

Now, that might not seem too important in the English, but in the Greek it is, because in the Greek it comes at the beginning of the sentence "unto us," and it is in an emphatic form. And what Paul is saying is this, that the revelation of God's truth is unto us and the "us" refers to believers. Watch. In contrast to the ones he has been referring to. Because all the way from 1:18 clear down 2:9 he is talking about how ignorant the philosophers of the world are regarding the truth of God.

They cannot know it. Why? Because of verse 9. "Eye hath not seen - " in other words, they can't see it empirically. They can't find it out by discovery. Secondly, "Neither has it entered into their heart." They can't find it by their own feeling, or their own emotion, or their own musings, or their own spiritual experience. It is not available externally. It is not available internally, no matter how erudite the philosopher may be. Why? Because God has revealed it unto us, not to them. That's the implication. It isn't available.

There are those in the world who speak human wisdom, "the princes of this age," he says in verse 6, but none of the princes know the truth, verse 8 says. None of them know it. It's not available to them. Why? Because in their humanness they can't know it. Verse 11. "For what man knows the things of a man, except the spirit of man which is in him? Even so the things of God knoweth no man, but the Spirit of God."

If a man does not have the indwelling Spirit, he can't know anything about God. Now he may think he knows some things, may try to figure some things out, but he can't really truly know, not in the sense of knowing and living out that truth in life. But verse 12 says, "Now we have received, not the spirit of the world." The spirit of the world is just the idea that human reason - it's a paraphrase for human reason. We don't depend on human reason, but the Spirit of God. And because of Him we "know the

things that are freely given to us by God.” And then verse 14 sums it up. “The natural man - ” now mark this, understandeth not or “ - receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God: they are foolishness unto him: neither can he - ” what? “ - know *them*, for they are spiritually discerned.”

If you're not a believer, you cannot really perceive with understanding and result the truth of the Word of God. It is the same in the analogy of verse 11. A man cannot know anything about himself unless he knows it in his spirit. In other words, his body can't know. Illustration. A dead body doesn't know anything because it has no spirit. A man without the Spirit of God is like a physically dead body. He can't know anything, either. That's what spiritual death is, the absence of the knowledge of God because of the absence of the Spirit of God.

And so, without knowing Christ you can't know the Bible. And that's what's so sad about the cults and all, they come along and figure out these elaborate concoctions of supposed theology, and because they don't even know God to begin with because they deny Jesus Christ, they are hopelessly muddled and the confusion just is added upon confusion. The truth is only available to those who know and love the Lord Jesus Christ.

Martin Luther said, “Man is like a pillar of salt. He's like Lot's wife. He's like a log or a stone. He's like a lifeless statue which uses neither eyes nor mouth, neither sense nor heart, until that man is converted and regenerated by the Holy Spirit. And until that happens, man will never know God's truth.” And so I just encourage you that the bottom line on knowing the Bible is that you know God, through Jesus Christ.

Now you say, “I thought you were going to tell us how to study the Bible. This is just preaching.” Listen. I'm going to tell you that tonight, but I want you to know what I said earlier, if you don't, if you don't understand the requirements, the method doesn't mean anything. This is basic. The believing heart will understand.

You know, this is brought home by the words of our Lord as profoundly as anywhere in the Bible. In John 8:44, He says to the Pharisees, He says, “You are of *your* father the devil.” And then He makes an incredible statement to them. He says, “The devil speaks lies.” And then He says in verse 45 - this is something - “Because I tell *you* the truth, you believe Me not.” Amazing.

In other words, the reason you don't believe Me is because I'm telling you the truth and that is something you can't perceive. Now that is the state of an unregenerate man. That is the condition of an unbeliever. You tell them the truth, and they don't receive it because it is the truth and they can't perceive it.

There's a second principle. In order to study the Bible you must be diligent - not only born again but diligent, diligent. And this is a great thought, to be diligent. You can't study the Scripture in a

haphazard way. There's got to be a commitment to it.

Let me show you what I mean. In Acts chapter 17, Acts chapter 17, you remember the apostle Paul was moving around in his ministry to the Gentiles. He had been in Thessalonica, proceeding from there south to Berea. It says in Acts 17:10, "And the brethren immediately sent away Paul and Silas by night unto Berea: who coming *there* went into the synagogue of the Jews. These were more noble than those in Thessalonica, in that they received the Word with all readiness of mind." Now this is great. Boy, here are some open minds. This is a group that's in that little gap in the middle. They want to know. And their minds are open. And they're ready to receive it. "And they searched the Scriptures daily, whether those things were so. Therefore many of them believed."

They were more noble than the rest because they were diligent in their study. I believe they were true Old Testament saints. I believe they knew God under the terms of the Old Testament, and now their hearts were cracked wide open when the gospel came in their openness to receive, and they searched diligently. By the way, the term for "search" is a judicial term meaning an "investigation." They really got into it and investigated to see if it was true. Beloved, you can't study the Bible in a haphazard manner.

In 2 Timothy 2:15 it says, "Be diligent," and it uses a tremendously strong word. "Be diligent to show yourself approved unto God, a workman that needeth not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth." Listen. You need to be diligent in your Bible study. Why? So that you can rightly divide it. Because if you don't, you'll have something to be ashamed about and you will not be approved.

Oh, that word "approved" is a great word, *dokimos*, *dokimos*, proven, tested, shown to be of high quality, a high-quality Christian, an approved Christian, who has no flaws for which he will be ashamed, as one who is diligent to study the Word of God, to cut it straight.

The word "rightly dividing" is to literally "cut it straight," and Paul was making tents, and that was the word he used because he used to make tents out of goatskin and he'd cut the hides to fit together. He didn't make one tent out of one goat. There was no super goat. So you had to cut little goats and fit them together, see? And he fit all those pieces together and the diligent part of what Paul is saying is you have to cut straight every portion of the Scripture or the whole doesn't come together. You can't make a dress, ladies, when you sew, unless every part is right.

And in theological terms, we would say you can't be a theologian unless you're an exegete. You can't make sense out of the whole unless you know what to do with the parts. And so you must deal with the Word of God, cutting every portion straight, and then fitting the whole together. And that takes work. As I told you before, G. Campbell Morgan said, "Ninety- five percent of inspiration is perspiration." It's work.

In I Timothy chapter 5 the Bible indicates this as it writes about elders. It says, "Let the elders that rule well be counted worthy of double honor, especially they who work hard in the Word." And it uses *kopia*, which is a Greek verb meaning "to work to the point of sweat and exhaustion." Oh, he says, "Honor those elders who work hard in the Scripture." It's labor. There's got to be a commitment to diligence, hard work, searching the Scriptures.

And so, to begin with, if you're going to be a Bible student, if you're going to learn the Scriptures and make it in your own life a personal commitment, first you have to be born again and to know Jesus Christ so you have the resident Spirit to teach you. Secondly, you must be diligent.

Thirdly, and maybe this should even be the apex of our thoughts, you must have a great desire. Desire. It isn't going to happen by accident. In fact, nothing ever happens by accident. Certainly not becoming a good Bible student. You've got to want it. First Peter 2:2. "As babes desire the pure milk of the word that you may grow thereby." A baby desires one thing: Milk. That's all. That's the only thing a baby desires. It doesn't care about anything else. It doesn't care what color the curtains are, the carpet. It doesn't care whether you're in what room or another. It doesn't care what color the booties are or the nightgown, couldn't care less about anything. You can do anything you want around the house. That baby doesn't care what kind of car you buy. The baby doesn't care anything about what you eat. The baby wants milk. That's it. Give him the milk. Deal with the consequences. That's the whole deal. A baby has single-mindedness and that's what Peter is saying. He's saying like a baby desires milk and only milk and is consumed by milk, so should your hunger be for the Word.

And, you know, people sometimes, you know, ask me why we study the Bible. And I don't know where I got this, but somewhere along the line God has given me a hunger to know His Word. Very often a pastor will say, you know, your church has grown from Bible teaching. I'd like to do that and build a church. But what they really want to do is use Bible teaching as a way to build a church rather than as a fulfillment of their own hunger. And it doesn't work as a gimmick. You've got to have the hunger for the Word.

I love what it says in Proverbs 2. Proverbs 2:4 it says, "Seek for her as for silver." Can you imagine how hard people work to find silver? Find gold? That's the way you ought to seek for the knowledge of God's Word.

I think Job has the most marvelous speech on this in Job 28. He gives this tremendous speech on mining, and then he applies it to the Word. Listen. "Surely there is a vein for the silver, and a place for gold *where* they refine *it*." Now Job's going to talk about how men work for gold and silver. Now, "Iron is taken out of the earth, and bronze *is* smelted *out of* the stone." And he says, "Boy, men will go to all length to do mining." "They'll set an end to darkness, search out all perfection: the stones of darkness, and the shadow of death."

He says, "They'll burrow into the earth like a bunch of moles, into pitch-black darkness. They'll get themselves surrounded by very dangerous situations. They'll do anything to find the stuff."

"The flood breaks out from the inhabitant; *even the waters* forgotten by the foot: they are dried up, they are gone away from men." The idea here is of changing the configuration of the earth and mining and digging it all out.

They literally, verse 9, "overturn the mountains by the roots." They dig so deeply, they change the configuration of the earth. They go places, verse 7, "where no bird has ever been," where no animals have ever gone. "Lion's whelps have never tread there - " in verse 8 " - and the fierce lion never passed it by. They cut rivers among the rocks;" and they dam up other places in verse 11. They dig and find precious metal.

Just think about that in our society. We dig and hunt and go to tremendous extremes to buy gold and silver to hang on our fingers, and our arms, and our necks, and our ears, all kinds of stuff like that, and the tremendous expense involved. And we mine, dig for other precious metals, and all the different things and we go to those lengths. And yet with all of the advancement, all the technology, all the luxury, all the gold, silver, metal, everything we've got the one thing we don't have is any wisdom. And that's exactly where Job is going, and he brings it up very clearly in verse 12. "But where shall wisdom be found?"

Man is so good at digging everything else up, where's he going to find wisdom? "And where is the place of understanding?" Where can you mine understanding? "And the depth says, *It is not in me*: and the sea says, *It is not in me*. And you can't buy it for gold, and you can't get it for silver. And it can't be valued with the gold of Ophir, or the precious onyx, or the sapphire. The gold and the crystal can't equal it: and the exchange of it *shall not be for* jewels of fine gold. No mention shall be made of coral, or pearls: for the price *is* higher than even rubies." And he goes on and on. It just isn't available.

In other words, what he is saying is in man's earth, and in man's concourse, and in man's economy wisdom is not found. But the implication of what is being said in Proverbs, that man is a fool who spends such energy to find metal and spends none to find truth. God help us to seek for wisdom in His Word as men seek for precious metal.

Do you have a desire for His Word? Do you have an overwhelming passion for His Word? Job 23:12 – I love this verse - he said, "I have treasured the words of His mouth more than my necessary *food*." If it came down to working for my food or studying His Word, it would be His Word. If it came down to eating or feeding on the Word, it would be His Word. For I treasure that above anything else.

That's the kind of hunger the psalmist must have been referring to when he said, "O how I love Thy law." He said in Psalm 19, "Sweeter to me than honey in the honeycomb is the truth." So there must be a great desire, people.

You say, "Well, I don't have that desire. How do you get that desire?" Well, I think all of these things that I'm going to mention to you come together. And you don't really have them in a vacuum. If you're just born again, that's only the first requirement. If you're born again and diligent, that's just the first two. If you're born again, diligent, and you have a desire, that's just three, and there are even more. I think they all come together and where you're weak in one, it will be strengthened by another.

So, let's go to the fourth. And we'll just go through these last two very, very briefly. Fourth is holiness. I feel in order to study the Word of God there must be holiness. You say, "Well, where do you get that?" Well, let me show you two verses, and that's all, just very briefly. I want you to get it. First Peter 2:1, and I mentioned verse 2, but I want to mention 1 in connection with it. "Wherefore - " listen now " - laying aside all malice." Now the word "malice" is *kakia* in the Greek, it means "evil," general evil. Put away "all evil, all deceit, all hypocrisy, all envy, and all evil speaking." In other words, clean up your act. Holiness, righteousness. Get your life pure and then, "desire the milk of the Word that you may grow."

If the desire isn't there, you better back up to verse 1. You see why I say you have to take them all? You're not going to get a desire in a vacuum. If you're born again, and if you're holy, and righteous - that is, you're dealing with sin in your life, confessing it and living a pure life before God - out of that born again reality, out of the holiness of your life will grow the diligent desire to study. But you can't have one and another in a vacuum.

Now I want you to look at James 1:21, because it says the same thing. Listen to this, it says at the end of verse 21, "Receive with meekness the engrafted word." Receive with humility the Word. That's a great thought. Receive with meekness the Word. But you can't do that unless you go to the first part of the verse. "Wherefore put away all filthiness and overflowing of wickedness, and then receive with meekness the engrafted word." The Word, you see, cannot do its work in a sinful life. For it is not a conceptual thing. It is a living reality. It isn't just thought, it's life.

And so what is the Word of God saying to us? Who can study the Bible? Someone who is born again. Someone who is willing to be diligent and search the Scripture. Someone who has a strong and hungering desire for it, a desire that is born out of holiness, righteousness. And fifth, in order to study the Word of God effectively, you must be Spirit controlled, Spirit controlled.

I've been reading a book for the last three weeks written by a secular writer about a well-known religious personality. And as I've been wading through the book and he's been talking, and evaluating, and criticizing, and making tremendous statements about this man and other parts of his

ministry, it's been interesting to me as I've gone through the book, I've had more of an urge, I think, in this book than any other in a long time to want to talk to the author.

If I could just sit down with him and say, "Now what do you mean by this?" Or, "How do you know this is true?" Or, "How do you support this?" Or, "Where is the basis of this statement?" I've just wanted so much to talk with him and I, in thinking about that, I've thought of how wonderful it is to study the Scripture and know that I not only have the page in my hand, but I have the author in my heart. Because the Spirit of God is the teacher.

Look at 1 John 2:20. First John 2:20 says, "But you have an unction from the Holy One, and you know all things." Now just stated itself, that verse doesn't maybe make a lot of sense, but what's going on here is John's talking about false teachers, antichrists. They thought they knew everything and they said, "We know because we have an anointing." That was their little phrase. "We know because we have an anointing. We have a special anointing that elevates us above everybody else."

And John is saying to the Christian, "Hey, you're the one with the unction. You're the one with the anointing. You have an anointing, not some fantasy, mystical anointing. You have an anointing from the Holy One and you know all things." Over in verse 27 he elucidates on the same thought. "But the anointing which you have received of Him abides in you." Whatever this anointing is it lives in us, and who is it? It's the Spirit of God. The Spirit of God living in us, so that we don't need human teachers, because He teaches us.

And what it's saying there is that we don't need teachers teaching human wisdom. Why? We have an anointing, the Spirit of God. And so, beloved, it's obvious, then, that we need to be born again, diligent, have a strong desire, live a holy life, and be Spirit filled, Spirit controlled, because the Spirit is the One who teaches and applies the Word of God.

There's one other thing, and I close. All of this has to come together in an atmosphere of prayer. If you want to put down a sixth, that's it. And yet it isn't a sixth. You could draw a circle around the five and it encompasses all, prayer. I believe that our Bible study must be born out of prayer. So many times I pray the simple prayer, "Lord, as I approach Your Word show me Your truth. Teach me what I must know."

I would never approach the Scripture without seeking God in prayer. And so, says Ephesians 1, Paul says, "I pray for you." What do you pray, Paul? "That the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give unto you the spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of Him: The eyes of your understanding be enlightened; that you may know."

Listen. Paul says, "I'm praying for you." What are you praying for, Paul? That you'll know, that your eyes will be open, that you'll understand, that you'll see the truth. If Paul prayed for us to understand

God's Word, then we are well instructed to pray, as well.

Who can study the Bible? Listen. You've got to be the right who or the how won't matter. Are you born again? Do you have a strong desire in your heart? Are you diligent? Holy? Spirit controlled? Prayerful? If you are, you can open the pages of this book and God will open His truths to your heart. When your life is right, then the method we're going to share with you tonight, and the how-tos will become productive, and possible, and really life changing as you study His Word. Let's pray together.

We honor you, Father, for Your Word. We cherish it. We love it because it speaks to us of You. We do not worship the book, but we exalt the book because it allows us to worship You. May we know that You are revealed here. Apart from this book, all is mystery. So may we love it as the psalmist did. May we find its taste sweet as honey. I pray this morning, Father, for those who might be with us who want so much to know what the standard for life is, who want to know a bottom line for living, who want an absolute authority, and maybe even believe it's the Bible but because they've never come to Jesus Christ they cannot understand it.

I pray today that You would save them, Father, that You would reach out Your arms of love and redeem them. That You'd draw them into the family, plant the Spirit of God in their lives so that He may teach them Your truth.

For Christians who are with us, I pray that You might kindle in their hearts a great desire born out of holiness that leads to diligence as the Spirit of God controls their life. And all bathed in prayer, Father, may they become the students of the Word that You want them to be. God, may we know that this is a book written for every man. We hold in our hands not a symbol of something but the reality itself, Your very words. May our hearts be unsatisfied until they have feasted daily upon Your truth.

Bring us together tonight, Lord, as we consider how we are to study in the practical areas, that we might fill up our understanding and that this day might be a day of real changing in our lives. We give You praise in Christ's name. Amen.

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