

The Importance of Careful Bible Study

Scripture: 2 Timothy 2:15

Code: B120917

While we understand that sanctification is the work of the Holy Spirit in the lives of God's people through His Word, it's not an entirely passive process for believers. Spiritual maturity doesn't come through osmosis—it takes careful discipline and hard work, even in the basics like how we study Scripture.

Last week we established the vital role of God's Word in our spiritual growth, and the pattern by which it transforms our lives. But that process hinges on how we approach the Bible and seek to understand it. Your spiritual growth can be stalled or even derailed by uninformed faith and bad hermeneutics.

You've probably seen firsthand the willy-nilly way some people approach Scripture. Looking for "a word from the Lord," some play a game of Bible roulette, flipping at random through their Bibles, looking for something that seems applicable to whatever trial or need they're facing. When they find something that vaguely applies to their situation, they treat it as a special revelation from the Lord just for them.

But hunting and pecking through Scripture won't produce mature believers. In fact, it's far more likely to hinder your spiritual growth than to build up your faith and understanding.

You might have heard the story of a man who was wrestling with a major decision and decided to close his eyes, open his Bible, put his finger down, and get guidance from whatever verse his finger happened to light on. His first try brought him to Matthew 27:5: "[Judas] went and hanged himself" (KJV). Since that verse wasn't really much help, he made a second attempt. This time his finger landed on Luke 10:37 and Jesus' words there: "Go, and do thou likewise" (KJV). Not ready to give up yet, he tried one more time. His finger came to rest on Jesus' words in John 13:27: "That thou doest, do quickly" (KJV).

That story, while exaggerated, makes an important point: looking for meaning in Scripture beyond its historical, grammatical, and logical context is unwise and even potentially dangerous. It's possible to substantiate almost any unbiblical idea or false teaching with Scripture if you're willing to twist and distort its original meaning. That is precisely how most of the cults use Scripture to buttress their false doctrines.

The task of hermeneutics is to discover the meaning of the text in its proper setting, to draw meaning from Scripture rather than reading one's presuppositions into it.

The importance of careful biblical interpretation can hardly be overstated. Misinterpreting the Bible is ultimately no better than disbelieving it. What good does it do to agree that the Bible is God's final and complete revelation and then misinterpret it? The result is still the same: one misses God's truth. Interpreting Scripture to make it say what it never intended to say is a sure road to division, error,

heresy, and apostasy.

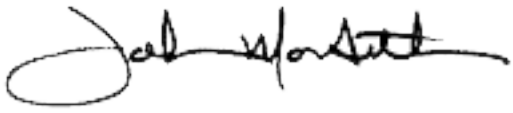
Yet look around at how casually contemporary evangelicalism approaches Bible interpretation! Scripture is routinely stretched, contorted, and twisted to the point of unrecognizability. And rather than do the hard work of careful exegesis and study, people are encouraged to eschew wise counsel and mature guidance, and instead seek some mystical, intuitive interpretation.

Perhaps you have been in one of those “Bible studies” where everyone goes around the room and shares an opinion about the verse in question. “Well to me, this verse means such and such.” In the end what you have is usually not a proper, biblical understanding but a pooling of everyone’s ignorance, along with several potential interpretations of the verse, all of which may be wrong.

The truth is, it doesn’t matter what a verse means to me, to you, or to anyone else. All that matters is what the verse *means*! Every verse of Scripture has intrinsic meaning apart from any of us. And it has that true meaning whether or not we have ever considered it.

The task of Bible study is to discern that true meaning of Scripture, to understand what *God* is saying in the text. Sometimes the meaning is quickly evident; other times it requires a closer look at the context. I admit I have encountered some passages I simply cannot fully understand. But the fact remains: every jot and tittle of Scripture carries only the intended meaning of the author, and the task of the interpreter is to discern what that is.

Tomorrow we’ll look at some key mistakes to avoid when it comes to proper biblical interpretation.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "John H. H. H.", is positioned above a solid blue horizontal line.

(Adapted from [Charismatic Chaos](#).)

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