

Preparing To Study The Bible, Part 2

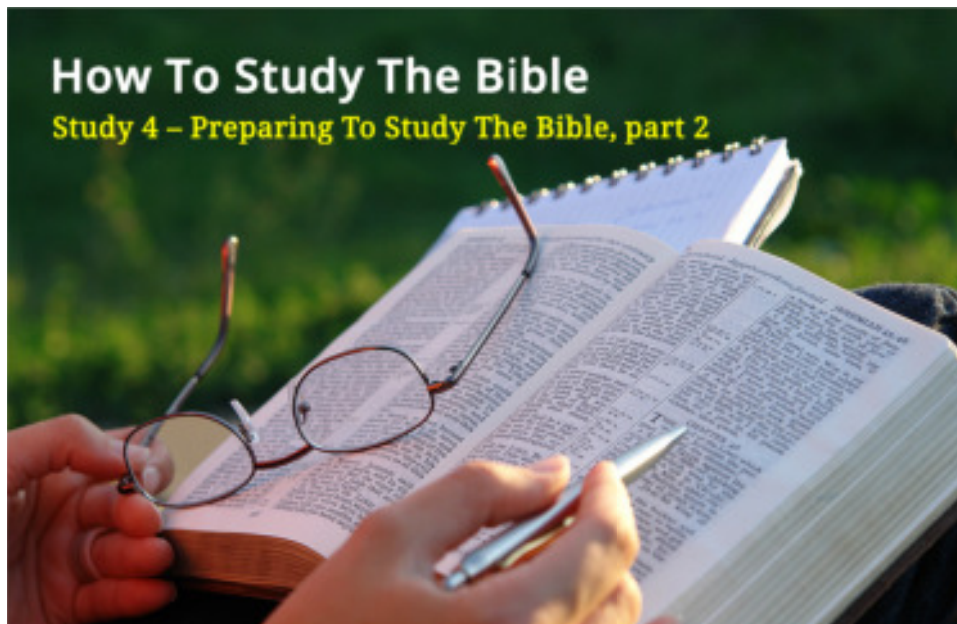
We have already discovered in our first two studies two reasons why we should study the Bible. In the third study, we started thinking about preparing to study the Bible. In that study we discussed two of five steps that are necessary in Bible study. The first step is that we must be a believer in Jesus Christ in order to understand the truths taught in the Bible. The second step if we want to know The Truth is that we must have an intense desire to know truth.

Third Step — Diligently Work Hard. In this study we will discuss the third step in preparing to study the Bible. The third step is that we must diligently work hard to interpret the Bible accurately.

I want to start with an illustration that explains the results of one type of Bible study. Have you heard about the “seeker-sensitive” approach to doing church? If not, a “seeker-sensitive church” is one in which sin, salvation, sanctification, and

Scripture are deemphasized. The emphasis of the ministry is on felt needs. The goal in a seeker-sensitive church is to please or attract people in order to build the size of the congregation. This movement became extremely popular in the 1980s and continued into the 2000s.

In a recent book, Costi Hinn and Anthony Wood wrote about the church that started this movement. Here is a statement from their book,



In 2007, a high-profile megachurch pastor had what he described as the “wake up call of his life” when he realized parts of his church were built on the power of strategy instead of the Scriptures. For 30 years his seeker-sensitive methods turned his church into a massive enterprise. Tens of thousands attended his uplifting sermons. People-centered programs kept everyone happily engaged in church life. As the numbers increased, it seemed that they were changing the world. However, when the church conducted a research survey to test the spiritual growth and member satisfaction rates,

they found large portions of their congregation were biblically illiterate. The pastor and his leaders quickly realized that they had spent 30 years of their lives and millions of dollars going in the wrong direction.

After publicly repenting, they expressed their need to establish the next 30 years of ministry on the foundation of Scripture.¹

The pastor of this church announced,

1. Hinn and Wood. *Defining Deception*. Southern California Seminary Press. 2018. p. 117.

We should have . . . taught people, how to read their Bible . . . how to do the spiritual practices much more aggressively on their own.²

This is only a portion of his announcement. But I think we understand. They discovered that serious Bible study is essential to spiritual growth. Also, believers must do Bible study on their own during the week. We can be thankful for pastors who faithfully teach the Bible, that we have our evening Bible studies, and for leadership teams that are committed to helping all of us learn how to study the Bible.

I wanted to start this study by talking about the “seeker-sensitive” movement because it illustrates what happens when believers do not diligently work hard to interpret the Bible. That approach to ministry did not produce mature believers. Without personal, serious Bible study, baby Christians remain baby Christians.

Acts 17:11 – Eagerly Study the Bible Daily. Next, I want us to look at several passages in Scripture that discuss Bible study and the results of Bible study. I have given you an illustration. Now I want us to discover what Scripture teaches us. The first verse we will look at is Acts 17:11. We have discussed this passage several times already. But as the apostle Peter said in 2 Peter 1:12-15, it is good that we are reminded “of these things.” Acts 17:11 is about the people in the ancient city of Berea. The apostle Paul had just come from the city of Thessalonica and had arrived in Berea. Acts 17:11 describes the response of the people in Berea to Paul’s teaching. It says,

Now these were more noble-minded than those in Thessalonica, for they received the word with great eagerness, examining the Scriptures daily to see whether these things were so. Acts 17:11 (NASB)

This is a wonderful verse. The verse reminds us that God loved the fact that the Bereans were “examining the Scriptures daily.” Notice three things they were doing. First, they were studying the Bible. Second, they were doing this daily. Third, they were receiving what they heard with eagerness. That is, they were hungry to learn what the Scriptures taught. Now

you may wonder what I like best about this passage. I love God’s approval of these Bereans. The Holy Spirit said they were “more noble minded.” I want God’s approval. It is similar to the desire that Paul shared in 2 Timothy 4:7. He said,

I have fought the good fight, I have finished the course, I have kept the faith; in the future there is laid up for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will award to me on that day. 2 Timothy 4:7 (NASB)

Paul knew that God would reward him for his faithfulness. Imagine standing before God and being told that you were noble-minded because you studied the Bible and then be given a reward for faithfulness.

1 Timothy 5:17 – Work Hard at Preaching and Teaching. The next verse is 1 Timothy 5:17. It is about the elders of the church. In this passage the Holy Spirit urges the congregation to give special honor to certain elders. As you read the verse ask, “Who is to receive special honor?” Now I am not looking for a name. I am looking for what the person does. Here is the verse,

The elders who rule well are to be considered worthy of double honor, especially those who work hard at preaching and teaching. 1 Timothy 5:17 (NASB)

Who is to be given special honor? Those elders who work hard at preaching and teaching. The Holy Spirit singled out the elders who work hard in the Word of God.

Now notice in Acts 17:11 that the Holy Spirit honored those who seriously studied the Bible. Then in 1 Timothy 5:17, the Holy Spirit gave special honor to the elders who seriously studied the Bible. So, what is the message? God greatly approves of serious Bible study.

2 Timothy 2:15 – Accurately Handling the Word of Truth. The third verse about Bible study is 2 Timothy 2:15. It says,

Be diligent to present yourself approved to God as a workman who does not need to be ashamed, accurately

2. Ibid.

handling the word of truth. 2 Timothy 2:15 (NASB)

The Greek word for “diligent” has the sense of giving “intense effort combined with great motivation.” This is also a command in the Greek. That means God wants every believer to give great effort to Bible study. The idea of laboring in the Word is reinforced by the command to be a workman. The idea is reinforced again when we are urged to accurately handle the Word of Truth. That requires great effort.

The message is that God approves when we seriously study the Bible. God wants us to work hard at Bible study as we seek to accurately understand and interpret its meaning.

What does that suggest? The meaning of a passage of Scripture may not be what we think it is when we casually read it.

Hebrews 5:11-14 - Solid Food is for the Mature.

Hebrews 5:11-14 introduces us to two types of believers. It describes baby believers and mature believers. Here is verse 11.

Concerning him we have much to say, and it is hard to explain, since you have become dull of hearing. Hebrews 5:11 (NASB)

If we look at verse 10, it reveals that the author was discussing Melchizedek. So, when the writer of Hebrews said that it was going to be “hard to explain,” he was referring to teaching about Melchizedek. This helps us understand the author knew in advance that it was going to be difficult to discuss

Melchizedek. Then he tells us why. He says they were dull of hearing. The Greek word for “dull” is *nothros*. It is used only two times in the New Testament. The other time it is used is in Hebrews 6:12. There the Greek word is translated as “sluggish.” That is, they were slow to learn, with the implication of laziness. They lacked motivation.

Then the Holy Spirit said,

For though by this time you ought to be teachers, you have need again for someone to teach you the elementary principles of the oracles of God, and you have

come to need milk and not solid food. Hebrews 5:12 (NASB)

Here we learn that the Holy Spirit said they should have known enough to teach the Bible to other people. Now He did not mean that they should have the spiritual gift of teaching. If He

did, that would mean every believer should have that spiritual gift. He meant that these people should have been able to explain the Word to others by this time. Notice the word “again.” He reveals that something had happened to them. They needed someone to re-teach them the elementary principles of Scripture. Why? The reason is that they had been on a diet of milk and not solid food.

This verse is very important. It reveals there are two basic types of Christians. Some are on a diet of milk and some are on a diet of meat. The Holy Spirit is using an illustration from our physical life. Babies need milk. In fact, they scream loudly when they are hungry and do not get their milk. They can



be very unhappy and demanding. Then there are the mature believers in Christ. They have been chewing on the meat of the Word. Milk symbolically refers to more easily understood truths of the Bible. Solid food refers to truths that are more difficult and have much greater spiritual rewards.

The message is that every believer determines their spiritual maturity by their spiritual diet. When we first come to Christ, we need the simpler truths of Scripture. New believers need Bible teaching that is easier to digest. But we do not want to stay there. If we do, we will not grow spiritually. Therefore, believers need to be encouraged to eat meat. Those who do not diligently work hard to learn what the Bible teaches will be spiritual babies. Those who do will become mature believers.

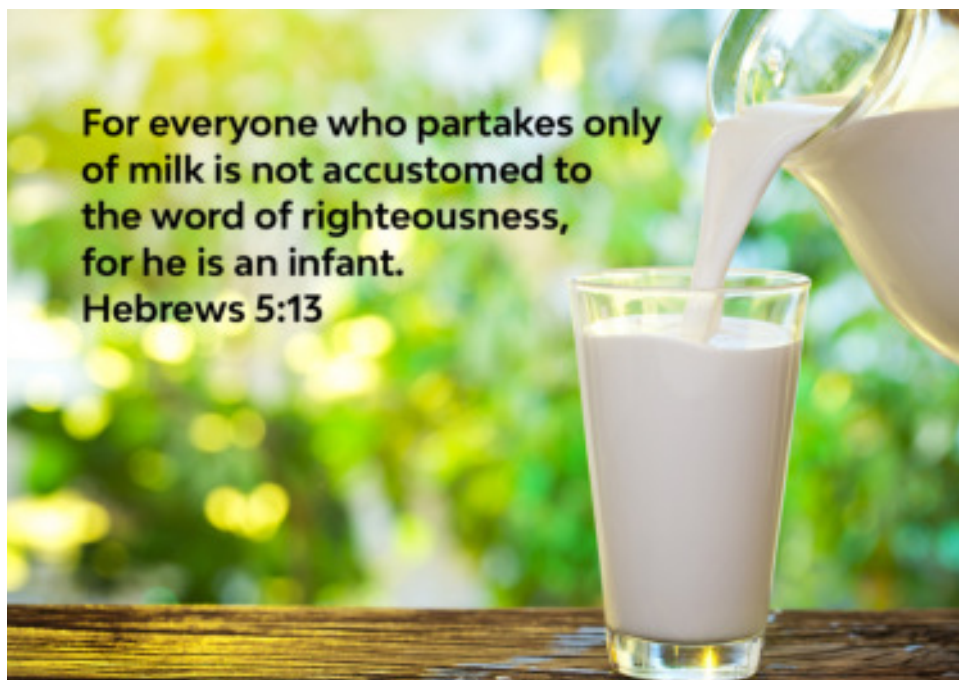
Now let's return to the word "again" in verse 12. This reveals an important truth that may not be immediately obvious. It teaches us that these believers had slipped backward in their spiritual growth. Why? The answer is that they returned to a diet of milk, or perhaps were still on a diet of milk. The message is that a believer is either moving forward or slipping backward in their spiritual growth. There is no such thing as remaining in place. I found a good illustration of this truth one day. It is a photograph of a woman climbing an escalator that was going down. I have tried to climb an escalator that was going down. It is hard work. I also discovered that if I stood still, I slipped back down. That is the meaning of "again." Have you ever gone to a Christian camp or a Christian seminar where you were constantly in the Word of God?

You came home experiencing a euphoria! Then after several days, that euphoria disappeared. Let me suggest that it was because you were not in the Word as much. The message is that as we seriously study the Word of God, we will grow spiritually.

Here are verses 13-14,

For everyone who partakes only of milk is not accustomed to the word of righteousness, for he is an infant. But solid food is for the mature, who because of practice have their senses trained to discern good and evil.

Hebrews 5:13-14 (NASB)



Now what did verse 13 just tell us? Do not miss this verse! It says that those who are on a diet of milk are not accustomed to "the word of righteousness," that is, the Word of God. But notice the Holy Spirit substitutes "righteousness"

for "God." The Holy Spirit is communicating that baby Christians who are on a diet of milk are not learning how to live a godly life. Verse 14 gives us the reason. It says the mature have their senses trained to discern good from evil. That is, a believer becomes mature by diligently working hard at studying the Word of righteousness. The result is that they know good from evil. That is, diligent, hard work in Bible study and godliness go together.

So, every believer has a choice. Spiritual infants avoid the sold meat, but maturing believers hunger for the meat of the Word and become more righteous. This means the third step in Bible study is to diligently work to interpret the Bible accu-

rately.

Fourth Step — Strive to be Holy. The fourth step in preparing for Bible study is to strive to be personally holy. A very important passage is 1 Corinthians 3:1-3. In the first verse, the apostle Paul says that he could not speak to these believers as if they were spiritual men. Here is verse 1,

And I, brethren, could not speak to you as to spiritual men, but as to men of flesh, as to infants in Christ. 1 Corinthians 3:1 (NASB)

So, what did Paul mean that they were not spiritual? First, we must remember that in 1 Corinthians 1:2, Paul called the people in the church in Corinth “saints.” That is, Paul said they were believers. But here in 1 Corinthians 3:1, he said they were not spiritual. This reveals a Christian may either be spiritual, or may not be spiritual. Then he said they were men of the flesh and called them “infants.” Why? What was wrong with these Christians? He explains in verses 2-3,

I gave you milk to drink, not solid food; for you were not yet able to receive it. Indeed, even now you are not yet able, for you are still fleshly. For since there is jealousy and strife among you, are you not fleshly, and are you not walking like mere men? 1 Corinthians 3:2-3 (NASB)

Paul adds that he could not give these believers solid food or the meat of the Word. Why? He says they were fleshly. What does fleshly mean? Read the rest of verse 3. They were committing sins such as jealousy and strife. They were acting as unbelievers. This means a person can be a believer but not be spiritual. Believers are spiritual when they are striving against sin and confessing their sins.

Paul reveals that if a believer is habitually sinning, they will only be able to understand the more easily understood truths of the Bible – the milk of the Word. The baby Christians cannot understand because sin is a major hindrance. Hebrews 5:11-14 has already taught us that the mature will sin less and less as they understand the deeper truths of Scripture. I should add quickly that some Christians are puffed up

by their knowledge of the Bible. The truth is such Christians are not mature. Maturity is measured by their knowledge of Scripture and their righteous living which includes humility.

Another important verse is John 14:21. As we read this verse, ask yourself, “How does the first part of the verse help us to understand the last part of the verse?”

He who has My commandments and keeps them is the one who loves Me; and he who loves Me will be loved by My Father, and I will love him and will disclose Myself to him. John 14:21 (NASB)

Here Jesus said that those who keep His commandments are those who love Him. Then in the last part of the verse, He adds that He will disclose Himself to them. That is, believers who are confessing their sins, are those to whom Jesus will reveal Himself. Therefore, if we want a greater and deeper understanding of our God, we will sin less.

James 1:21 says,

Therefore, putting aside all filthiness and all that remains of wickedness, in humility receive the word implanted, which is able to save your souls. James 1:21 (NASB)

Notice the connection between sin and receiving the Word as you read it. 1 Peter 1:15-16 reminds us that God wants us to be holy. It says,

But like the Holy One who called you, be holy yourselves also in all your behavior; because it is written, “YOU SHALL BE HOLY, FOR I AM HOLY.” 1 Peter 1:15-16 (NASB)

Fifth Step — To Pray. The fifth step in preparing for Bible study is to pray. Two passages to remember are,

With all prayer and petition pray at all times in the Spirit, and with this in view, be on the alert with all perseverance and petition for all the saints. Ephesians 6:18 (NASB)

Pray without ceasing. 1 Thessalonians 5:17 (NASB)

We should pray constantly is the simple message. I would add that when you sit down to study the Bible, ask the Holy Spirit to help you remember any sin that you need to confess. Ask the Holy Spirit to open your mind to understand the truth, to teach you. He is your real teacher. If the Holy Spirit helps you to remember some sin, confess it and then begin to study.

Conclusion. We have learned that there are a number of rewards for diligent hard work in studying the Bible. The first reward is that believers will understand more of the truth contained in the Bible. The second reward is that believers will have a greater ability to discern good from evil and will then sin less and less. The third reward is that the believer will become a more righteous man or woman of God. The fourth reward is that then God will allow us to learn more about Him.

In our next study, we will begin to dig into the Bible and discover how to study the Bible.