

MSB231

MORE Seed and Bread

BRIEF BIBLICAL MESSAGES FROM

THE WORD OF TRUTH MINISTRY

Otis Q. Sellers, Founder - David R. Hettema, Director

PRINCIPLES IN BIBLE STUDY

by M. B. Hammond

The purpose of Bible study is to help the professing Christian become familiar with the things of God. Such study requires both a firm belief in the Lord Jesus Christ as your Savior, and a strong sense of confidence in the Scriptures as the Word of God and not of men. Likewise every student must be fully convinced in his/her own mind about what he wants and what he expects from his study. If Bible study is for personal comfort, or to prove a prior belief, then the student should clearly recognize that he/she will reject the truth when it conflicts with his desire. However, if he approaches this study with the expressed desire for the truth, it will demand a strong discipline of study to familiarize himself with all Scripture. The wealth of Biblical knowledge gained will generate many questions that will need to be answered. These questions should be written down, and frequently reviewed so that study may be focused on learning. As understanding is increased some questions will be solved, while others are added and continued study progresses. Proverbs 25:2 states, It is the glory of God to conceal a thing: but the honor (glory) of kings is to search out a matter. So, too, it is the glory of the believer in Jesus Christ to search the Scriptures for the meaning God conceals therein. God has revealed what He desires, as Micah 6:8 says, He hath shewed thee, O man, what is good; and what doth the Lord require of thee, but to do justly, and to love mercy, and to walk humbly with thy God. That is what the student of Scriptures is doing when he seeks for the truth.

THE LOVE OF THE TRUTH

The first principle of Bible study is always the question, What is true? The truth is that which accords with the facts of Scripture, and it may not always

be pleasant to the student and even may be disagreeable to his cherished opinions. Nevertheless we must accept the statements of Scripture, whether they cause us problems with other believers or force us to believe what others describe as a "heretical" view. The truth may bring an end to our service, our friendships, and even our testimony or our influence. Proverbs 23:33 states it best saying, Buy the truth, and sell it not. This implies that truth is expensive, and to find it you must be ready to pay the price. Do not misguide yourself into the position that you will ever possess the whole truth, but pray the Lord will give you the love of the truth. As Ruth followed Naomi back to her country, we need to become followers of the truth. Ruth said, Whither thou goest, I will go; and where thou lodgest I will lodge; thy people shall be my people, and thy God my God (Ruth 1:16). The support of great and famous names in theological circles cannot be the basis of our beliefs, nor can we reject a truth just because it has not been taught us by people we have respected in Bible study.

GOD'S INSTRUCTION IN SCRIPTURE

God speaks plainly, even distinctly, and in no uncertain manner regarding the purpose He had in transmitting the Scripture to us. We find His thoughts in 2 Timothy 3:16-17 where He has Paul say, 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 (mature) thoroughly furnished (fully equipped) unto all good works. This says that all Scripture is God-breathed, thus the very words men wrote were inspired by God. The word "doctrine" means "teaching" and the man of God must ask, "Have I been taught by the Word of God?" The word "reproof" means "exposure," and Scripture will expose, even lay bare the thoughts, motives and beliefs in a man's mind. The seeker for truth will find his beliefs corrected by the Holy Spirit if he continues studying the Bible with faith in his Lord. The word "instruction" really means "discipline," and the student will find that diligent pursuit of Scripture will provide discipline in righteousness, such that he will give himself over completely to the belief, comprehension and practice of the truth. The idea that truth is a brittle and fragile thing is blatantly false. Paul said of this barrier, For we can do nothing against the truth, but for the truth (2 Cor. 13:8). It is the knowledge of the truth that makes Christ's words so powerful to the believers, Then said Jesus unto the Jews which believed on Him, 'If ye continue in My word, then ye are My disciples indeed; And ye shall know the truth, and the truth will make you free' (John 8:31-32).

THE DISPENSATIONAL PRINCIPLE

The next great principle is set forth in 2 Timothy 2:15 and says, Study to shew thyself approved unto God, a workman that needeth not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth. In fact there are two great principles here. First, in all our labors in the Word we must seek only God's approval. Men may weigh our efforts in their own unjust balances and even speak disapprovingly of them. If you don't seek men's approval, then their approval or disapproval will not have the power or meaning to derail you from your purpose. The second principle is to rightly divide the Word of Truth. The truth has its divisions and it is our duty to discover what they are and honor them. Many things Christ spoke were instructions for the Kingdom of God. That time is still future, although the Acts Period was a fore-taste of its blessings. If we try to "Give to him that asketh thee" (Matt. 5:42), or "Sell that ye have, and give alms" (Luke 12:33), then we cannot provide for our own future. Clearly it is not a message for today, but rather another time. What God meant in 2 Timothy 2:15 is clear from the passage immediately following, which mentions Hymenaeus and Philetus. They did not deny the resurrection, but rather erred in saying it had already taken place (2 Tim. 2:17-18). Every truth of God has its place, and when it is taken out of place, the truth is mangled and becomes error. People are still doing this today by trying to do faith healings, and even saying Christ has come already (the error of the Preterists), or the Kingdom is here now (the error of Jehovah's Witnesses). Truth must be interpreted in the administration (dispensation) where God has placed it.

THE PRINCIPLE OF DIVINE INTERCHANGE

Another "discovered" principle is called "divine interchange," where the words used by the Spirit to provide Greek quotations in the N. T. of Hebrew passages in the OT are controlled by the meaning of the Hebrew words. To go to a Greek Lexicon is faulty thinking because Greek is a language of men and its words have been contaminated in many instances by man's philosophy. Many theologians using only Greek lexicons have missed the truth of God in such words as, "soul" (psuche), "hell" (hades), "church" (ekklesia), and even "generation" (genea). The Hebrew references to these terms give more correct meanings since the Hebrew language is the God-given tongue of His people. These words in Hebrew are: "soul" (nephesh);

"hell" (sheol); "church" (kahal); and "generation" (dor). There are other words too, but these have been badly garbled and need clarification. For the words "soul" and "hell," the parallel passages are Psalm 16:10 and Acts 2:27, which states, "Thou wilt not leave my soul in hell." By divine interchange, the words "soul" and "hell" must have identical translations. Scholarship in the O.T. has shown that the soul is the combination of the body and the breath of life (Genesis 2:7). Likewise the word sheol is rendered by "hell," "grave," and "pit" and means "the state of death" with resurrection in view. The idea that man has a "soul" as a separate part of him and that hades is that place where the "soul" goes after death is pure fanciful Greek philosophy. It is simply man's fantasy not supported by the Word of God. For the word "church" we go to Psalm 22:22, and to Hebrews 2:12 where it is quoted. Since the kahal of Israel was a special assembly of the leaders and priests, it is a group out-called from the total congregation (Heb.-edah). Likewise the ekklesia is a group of people out-called for special service. The word "generation" finds its equivalent in Isaiah 53:8 and Acts 8:33 where it says of Christ, "And who shall declare His generation?" The verb, "to generate" means "to produce" and a "generation" is that which is produced. Christ's generation is the body of truth He produced, and produces still. His disciples/apostles and all believers declared it in the Acts Period, while today, the Word of God declares to us what He said and did.

SOME RULES OF INTERPRETATION

Here are some rules of interpretation that can be helpful to the Bible student.

(Condensed from **The Word Of Truth**, Vol. V, No.3, pg. 68, by Otis Q. Sellers):

1. In reading the Bible visualize yourself in the times, places and circumstances of the sacred writers. Read aloud with expression to make it more real.
2. Form a correct view of the geography and the ancient manners, arts and habits.
3. Establish first the plain literal meaning of Scripture.
4. Beware of mystical, ingenious, and fanciful interpretations.
5. Seek the literal before the spiritual meaning.
6. Make full allowance for figurative and idiomatic diction.
7. Distinguish between plain and figurative language.
8. Never press a metaphor too far and don't build doctrines upon them.

9. Carefully consider the context before you draw a conclusion from any passage.
10. Seek to explain what is difficult by that which is plain and easy. A disputed expression must be examined in other locations where its meaning may be clearer.
11. Get a good working knowledge of Scripture. Understanding cannot precede knowledge. Our duty is to know, and God gives the understanding.
12. Do not rigidly fix the meaning of a word, rather try to find the sense of its use.
13. When reading, cover whole portions of Scripture, consider the parts in relation to each other, form a picture of the whole. Don't form opinions on single passages.
14. Be content to remain in ignorance, rather than plunging into error.
15. Keep in mind the nature of Hebrew poetry when reading the poetical books.
16. God's promises to particular persons may not apply to all people.

END

ISSUE NO. MSB231
Published April 15, 1999