

Bible Study

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There is a definite difference between our reading the Bible and studying it. And some professing Christians do not even read the Bible regularly, let alone study it.

Objections

There are some people who are plainly not interested in reading their Bibles.

Many if not most "professing Christians" are not interested in reading or studying their Bibles. Some of their objections are to the antiquated King James language, which we addressed briefly in the article, *Why Hebrew and Greek?*

1. They see no use to it. To them the Bible is old stuff, too old to have any relevance in modern-day living. "Who cares about somebody fighting Philistines and Amorites with slings, spears, and swords?" they ask. "Who cares nowadays about sheep-herders 2000 BC or traveling through the Mediterranean world on a donkeymobile? How does a list of the idol-worshipping kings of Israel relate to satisfying my boss at work, or making my next sale, or finishing a complex monthly report? What's on TV tonight? A special on the History channel about shepherders in the Mediterranean world 2000 BC? Now there's a good way to spend an evening."

Such people have no claim to Christianity. They think they have been "saved," or had an "experience," but they are woefully deceived. They are living proof of the text, "But the natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God: for they are foolishness unto him: neither can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned (1 Corinthians 2.14)."

If there was ever anything "of the Spirit of God," it is the Bible, which the Holy Spirit inspired: For the prophecy came not old time by the will of man: but holy men of God spake, moved by the Holy Spirit.

"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 (2 Timothy 3.16f)."

"As newborn babes, desire the sincere milk of the word, that ye may grow thereby: If so be ye have tasted that the Lord is gracious (1 Peter 2.20)." Newborn babies want milk and cry for it. Peter raises the question: have you tasted that the Lord is gracious? If you have not, that fact will show itself in your lack of desire for the milk of the word. Could it be that your lack of desire for spiritual baby-food is an indication you are not a newborn baby in the biblically spiritual sense—that you are not born again, born from above?

2. Then there are the ones who have tried Bible reading and have failed. "I tried to read my Bible through a few times, but it has never worked. Genesis and Exodus were okay, but I got bogged down in Leviticus—you know, all those sacrifices and everything—and I sort of gave up. Once I did read the Bible all the way through, but I didn't remember much of it. I don't see much relation to my everyday living in what I remember reading."

Or, "I have a terrible temper. I read and read my Bible but don't find anything about how to control it. I am no better about it now than I was 20 or 30 years ago."

Or, "Where does the Bible say anything about when your marriage is falling apart? My wife (or My husband) has another "love interest" outside our marriage." Or, "My rebellious teenagers are getting into liquor, drugs, sex, and even worse trouble. Where does The Bible tell me how to handle those kinds of problems?"

First, may we say negatively, the Bible is not a Dale Carnegie *How to Win Friends and Influence People* book or a daily Ann Landers or Dear Abby newspaper column to consult every day (although the books of Psalms and Proverbs are wonderfully inspired manuals on human relations).

Second, positively, the Bible is the magnificent, God-inspired record our Creator God has given to us of Himself, exactly what He intends for us to know about Himself—His holy and righteous character; His absolute sovereignty and power over all creation, His eternal purpose, telling His people exactly why He created the universe, including angels and demons, saints and reprobates, what is the purpose for all things that exist, what our past, present, and future is, and a host of countless other details you didn't know you want to know.

The Bible is a bottomless well, an infinite fountain, overflowing with the wisdom of and instruction from our Creator God. And depraved, rebellious sinners with dead hearts and deader heads get bored and sleepy reading a couple verses of it. Others think they have really accomplished something if they have read a chapter a day for a while.

Before Moses began writing his five Old Testament books, which we call "the Pentateuch" and the Israelites call the Torah, around 1500 BC, there was no need for the Scriptures. If there had been, God would have provided them. Back then, true religion was propagated through the family. The father/husband was to be, in effect, the prophet, priest, and king of his individual little family unit. As prophet, he was to instruct his wife and children in the proper worship of God. As priest, he offered sacrifices and prayers to the Lord in behalf of his wife and children, as Job did (see Job 1.5). As king of his family he was to righteously rule his wife and children in the fear of God.

Later, the Lord God Almighty provided the Scriptures as a cohesive document that He Himself has verbally inspired, word for word, letter by letter, through which and by which He would teach His people about Himself,

about themselves, their relationship to Him, and "...all things that pertain unto life and godliness (2 Peter 1.3)." The Lord has never diminished the role of the father/husband as to his family. Rather, the man now has a written record of the mind of his Sovereign Creator that he is to transmit to the next and succeeding generation(s) as the Lord enables him.

I Have No Responsibility.

It's Accountability I Worry About

I avoid saying it is the man's *responsibility* to teach his family (or to do anything else) for two reasons:

(1) the word *responsibility* implies that man has the ability to respond, which no sinful, fallen man has. He has no ability whatsoever to respond to God, or to do, or to be, or even to desire to be, think, or desire to do anything other than what the Lord gives and enables him to do. Other than that, if our Sovereign God sees fit to leave us to our own natural inclinations, we will be found only "in the lusts of our flesh, fulfilling the desires of the flesh and of the mind (Ephesians 2.3)."

The Lord Jesus Christ said about Himself, "Verily, verily, I say unto you, **The Son can do nothing of himself**, but what he seeth the Father do (John 5.19)," and, "The words that I speak unto you **I speak not of myself: but the Father that dwelleth in me, HE doeth the works** (John 14.10)." Since Christ was and is the eternal God manifest in the flesh, and He emphatically denied any ability to do any thing apart from God the Father working IN Him, what foolishness it is then for any depraved, sin-laden, puny offspring of Adam to think he has the "ability to respond" to any of the spiritual, holy commands and precepts of the Lord?

(2) None of the words *responsibility*, *respond*, or *response* occur in the Bible. If we are responsible to God, wouldn't He have said so somewhere in His word?

The Bible does not use these words, *responsible* or *responsibility* because the God who dictated the Bible to holy men of old did not use those words. Nor did the Lord use the word account-able or account-ability; but He did use the word account: "But I say unto you, That every idle word that men shall speak, they shall give account thereof in the day of judgment (Matthew 12.36)." "So then every one of us shall give account of himself to God (Romans 14.12)." Peter speaks of "you who shall give account to him that is ready to judge the quick and the dead (1 Peter 4.4f)."

The Sincere but Wrong Method
of Interpretation
(Sometimes Right for the Wrong Reason)

With you it may start with reading an unfamiliar word in the KJV: John 3.8, "The wind bloweth where it listeth." What's "listeth"? A friend regularly misread this as "the wind bloweth **where it's listed**" - his "interpretation" of this was: God predestinated wherever the wind blows, and He has a list of everywhere the wind blows or will blow (he did not elaborate further on this point). I am sure this much is true: The Lord controls all winds and exactly when, where, how, and why they blow or do not blow, Or whether they blow or do not blow at all. **This is all true according to the Bible** (see Exodus 10.13-19,14.21, 15.10; Numbers 11.31; Psalm 18.10,107.24-29,135.7, 148.8; Amos 4.13; Nahum 1.3; Matthew 8.24-27), **but that is NOT what this text is saying.**

Anyone can plainly see the Bible does not say "the wind bloweth **where it is listed**"; it says the wind bloweth **where it listeth**," or where it **lists**; not wherever God listed for it to blow (like Arizona, Chicago, or in Wind Cave, South Dakota). So you look up "list" in Webster's Dictionary and find there are at least NINE English definitions for **list**. The very first definition is the one we seek: Old (KJV) English "list" is, believe it or not, a form of the word "lust," in the sense of to please, to suit, to wish, or to

choose. All Christ was saying here about the wind is that the wind blows wherever it pleases. The wind blows wherever it suits it to blow. The wind blows wherever it wishes. The wind blows where it chooses to blow.

(Anyone having a problem with the wind wishing or choosing wherever it suits it to blow, please take it up with the One who is speaking in John 3.8.)

The Not So-Smart Method **of Interpretation**

Some do not know the difference between "spiritualizing" a text and "making it figurative." Some think it is the same thing. It is so easy to "spiritualize" a text one knows nothing about, especially when he does not know what "spiritualizing" or "making a spiritual application" means.

This method takes at least two forms:

A. **One man I knew** used his *Webster's Collegiate Dictionary* as the only Bible commentary he ever needed. One day he read Hebrews 7.26: "For such an high priest **became** us, who is holy, harmless, undefiled, separate from sinners, and made higher than the heavens." He got his dictionary, looked up **became**, and read: "*past of BECOME.*"

So he looked up **become** and found the first meaning of become is "**1.** To happen." Being a good absolute predestinarian who did not believe anything just "happens," my studious friend rejected that definition and went to the next ("**2.** To come to be; as, a caterpillar *becomes* a butterfly"). Here he found the "interpretation" of Hebrews 7.26 that satisfied him. He later told me this is what the text means: "When Elder Blank or you go into the stand, that's not Elder Blank or you up there any more! It's Jesus Christ. He **becomes** you, and now it's not you preaching any more; it's Jesus Christ up there in the stand preaching!"

There are countless people who believe such an approach is sound Bible study, and they cannot see the fallacy of such nonsense.

B. One may read an interpretation into a text that supports his personal feelings and desires. The story was told about a young adults' Sunday School class in which the teacher asked Betty what her *interpretation* was of "Let the dead bury their dead" in Matthew 8.22.

Betty said, "Ummm ... I think it means I should break up with Willie?"

"That's wonderful! Marvelous!" said the teacher. "Bob, what's your *interpretation* of 'Let the dead bury their dead'?"

Bob, who for a long time has had a deep and abiding interest in getting better acquainted with Betty, said, "Uh, I think Betty's right. I also think it means she should break up with Willie!"

It is for reasons like these that I fairly well despise the words "interpretation" and "interpret"—not the words themselves, but these words *as they are generally misunderstood and misused in this way today!*

Interpretation is not subjective; it is not what you *think or feel a text means to you*. That **may** (or **may not**) be an *application*. **A correct interpretation is translating the words of the original text in a way that conveys as exactly as possible what the writer originally said and meant.**

Summary

The people in the Bible, whether in the Old or the New Testament, faced the fact of international language differences and difficulties. Shall we, by God's grace and His Spirit's leadership, do anything less? They provided translations in the Bible text itself where necessary in the multicultural world in which they lived. Must we in this lazy, self-indulgent, fat and flabby age, not rise to the challenge presented by a few obsolete or hard-to-understand old English words here and there?

"And now, brethren, I commend you to God, and to the word of his grace, which is able to build you up, and to give you an inheritance among all them which are sanctified (Acts 20.32)."

Those who hunger for the truth of God's inspired word will gladly search it with whatever tools they have, and they will grow in grace and in the knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. To him be glory both now and for ever. Amen (2 Peter 3.18).

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