



Week 4 - Understanding and Applying Scripture

In 2 Timothy 2:15, the apostle Paul urged Timothy to “be diligent to present yourself approved to God as a workman who does not need to be ashamed, accurately handling the word of truth.” God calls us to study His Word so that we may be accurate in our understanding and living out Christian truths. Diligent students are not put to shame. Kay Arthur tells us:

God wants to bring us into intimacy with Himself. He wants to be a Father to us ... to explain to us who He is and how we can be brought into a close, wonderful relationship with Him ... The Bible tells us everything we need to know about life. That, my friend, is why you need to study it for yourself (How to Study Your Bible, p. 7).

The New Testament honors the Bereans, who “were more noble-minded ... for they received the word with great eagerness, examining the Scriptures daily to see whether these things were so” (Acts 17:11). The Protestant Reformation offered every Christian the right and responsibility to search out the teachings and doctrines of the Bible for themselves.

Bible Study: Key to Sound Theology and Doctrine

Theology is the study of God and how we are to live for Him. We need sound theology, a correct understanding of God, to live wisely as Christians. Warped theologies lead to warped lives that don't reflect the goodness of the God we follow.

Our society has veered further and further from the truth, with subjective imagination replacing clear thinking derived from the eternal truths found in the Word. During an era much like our own, Paul warned his younger associate, Timothy, about problems he would face: “... some will fall away from the faith, paying attention to deceitful spirits and doctrines of demons...” (1 Timothy 4:1).

Jesus warns us, “See to it that no one misleads you” (Matthew 24:4). The source of good doctrines includes God (Titus 2:10), Christ (Hebrews 6:1-2, 1 John 9), and the apostles (Acts 2:42). The Bible also warns us about evil doctrines: those coming from men rather than God (Mark 7:7), doctrines of demons (1 Timothy 4:1), and false doctrines (1 Timothy 6:3). Jude strove to expose the doctrines that false teachers had disseminated:

“Beloved, while I was making every effort to write you about our common salvation, I felt the necessity to write to you appealing that you contend earnestly for the faith which was once for all handed down to the saints. For certain persons have crept in unnoticed, those who were long beforehand marked out for this condemnation, ungodly persons who turn the grace of our God into licentiousness and deny your only Master and Lord, Jesus Christ.” (Jude 3-4)

Unless our doctrines come from God's Word, we will be misled!

Paul exhorts Timothy, “Watch your life and doctrine closely. Persevere in them, because if you do, you will save both yourself and your hearers” (1 Timothy 4:16, NIV). Careful, methodical and consistent Bible study, along with a heart to seek God and live a pure life for Him, lead to good theology and sound doctrine.

The Holy Spirit and Humility: Keys to Unlocking Scripture Truth

“Open my eyes, that I may behold wonderful things from Your law.” (Psalm 119:18)

Unbelieving “experts” can often quote the Bible better than many Christians. As German martyr Dietrich Bonhoeffer said, “Just as you do not analyze the words of someone you love, but accept them as they are said to you, accept the Word of Scripture and ponder it in your heart” (The Way to Freedom).

Critics who reject this approach of faith are missing two key ingredients: the Holy Spirit and humility. Since the Holy Spirit inspired Scripture, then He can interpret Scripture (1 Corinthians 2:9-16). Martin Luther said, “Where the Spirit does not open the Scripture, the Scripture is not understood even though it is read.”

Start any Bible study with prayer, asking the Holy Spirit to help you understand it. The Bible is the Lord’s Word, and, as we learn in the Book of Genesis, “interpretations belong to God” (Genesis 40:8). As we pray, the Author of Scripture will reveal its truth to His children who seek it. “For who among men knows the thoughts of a man except the spirit of the man which is in him? Even so the thoughts of God no one knows except the Spirit of God. Now we have received, not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit who is from God, so that we may know the things freely given to us by God” (1 Corinthians 2:11-12).

We must approach the Bible humbly rather than as critics, since, He gives wisdom and insight to those who ask. Any other spirit displeases God, and dramatically reduces the benefits of Bible study. With the Holy Spirit and humility a student of the Bible reaps sure and plentiful rewards.

Hermeneutics: Correctly Interpreting the Word of God

Paul warned Timothy that a “time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine; but wanting to have their ears tickled, they will accumulate for themselves teachers in accordance to their own desires” (2 Timothy 4:3). Like Timothy’s day, it is still common for people to gather teachers of their own desires who “tickle their ears” with fanciful teachings.

Hermeneutics refers to the methods by which Scripture is interpreted. Sound hermeneutical principles help us to understand the Bible’s teaching, and to accurately discern false teaching, enabling us to know God and also to bring correction where error exists.

Book	False Doctrine Addressed
Romans, Galatians	Salvation by works rather than faith
1 and 2 Corinthians	Divisions, lack of orderly worship

Colossians	False spirituality
Philippians	Divisions, pride
1 and 2 Thessalonians	False understanding of the second coming
1 and 2 Timothy	False qualifications for leaders and teachers
Titus	Licentious or sinful living
2 Peter	False understanding of sin and the endtimes
1 and 2 John	False view of Christ's nature, tolerance of idolatry

One urgent purpose of the New Testament epistles was to correct false doctrines and to teach the truth. A few examples are in the table below. It takes work -- sound hermeneutics -- to reach correct conclusions about what God has to say through His Word.

Review:

1. How does the Holy Spirit help our study of the Bible?
2. Why did God leave us Scripture?