

Basic, Inductive, Spirit-led Bible Study

by
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Some believers think that it is almost impossible to understand the Bible or get truth from scripture without a seminary level of training in hermeneutics, and, that it is, therefore, the purpose of pastors, teachers, and Bible “experts” to tell them what to believe.

One easily recognizable problem with that assumption is that these same pastors, teachers, and Bible “experts” all disagree with one another in their own understanding of what to believe.

So what is a believer to do?

Some of those receiving emails from me have expressed concern that my commentaries are too complex for them to follow easily. Some have asked if I might not present the material in the same kind of easy-to-follow format I used in the “Final Instructions” Bible study guide.

I want to respond for their sakes, but, at the same time, I want to warn even those who know me intimately and trust my scriptural point of view, that no one should receive a teaching as “truth” because the one teaching is seen to be an authority in that believer’s life.

All teaching should be tested, not only for conformance to scripture, but for conformance with the revelation of the Spirit of Truth who is the Lord, our true Teacher (Matthew 23:8-11).

Sometimes this testing is easy, but at other times, it takes the Spirit of Truth a much longer time to build up the pyramid base of truth and confirmed knowledge in our souls before we can receive a deeper or more complex truth.

Be patient and determined. He has given us a promise. Those who earnestly seek His truth will find it. (Matthew 7:7)

The Berean Spirit

Paul said that the Bereans were of a more “noble” character than the Thessalonians, because they examined the scriptures diligently to find out if what he was teaching was the truth. The most important quality we can have for receiving the truth of God’s written word is to have a Berean spirit demonstrating the following characteristics:

1. A strong desire to know the absolute, immutable truth of God even if that truth negates what we currently believe or what our denomination teaches.
2. An unwillingness to believe Paul or anyone else without a thorough, unbiased, inductive examination of scripture for ourselves, as well as the confirmation of the Spirit of Truth who was sent to guide us into all truth.

The Berean spirit extends into our attitude when we hear or read something being taught or preached. If we are angered or strongly offended by something being taught or preached, because it differs from what we have already believed, this response is coming from the flesh. It is possible to experience righteous anger prompted by the Spirit, but that response is never associated with personal feelings.

The response of the Holy Spirit to erroneous or deceptive teaching and preaching is to be grief.

If what I am teaching or preaching is challenged I may respond vigorously if the challenge has no merit, but I do not assume that everything I teach or preach is correct. If someone makes a valid challenge to what I believe, teach, or preach, I will re-examine scripture until the issue is settled again in my heart and mind.

Some of the biggest and most important changes in my walk with the Lord have come when someone, directly or indirectly, challenges what I believe. Therefore, I am not likely to give that attitude up.

Definitions:

Hermeneutics is the entire science and methodology for interpreting scripture, but the effectiveness of one's hermeneutics depends on the methodology used.

Exegesis means to draw out. We are to **draw out** the meaning of the text. There is meaning in scripture that is being communicated by the author. We need to draw that out. We should not do Isogesis, which is to pour our meaning into the text. We must not make the text say what we want it to say but we must get at what the original author is communicating.

In Bible study terminology "Exegesis" is synonymous with inductive Bible study methodology. An inductive exegesis starts with an objective examination of the biblical text and then draws conclusions on the basis of objective facts. Inductive Bible study is much more likely to lead to the correct understanding of the

written text and the conclusion intended by the Holy Spirit, and is, therefore, the preferable technique.

Isogesis is synonymous with a deductive Bible study, and it starts with a specific idea or premise. Then it examines biblical text subjectively for support of the pre-existing premise. Deductive Bible study presumes that the truth is already known, and is, therefore, not open to new or different interpretations. I call this the square peg in a round hole method, because many who use this technique alone are attempting to do just that with scripture. (i.e. They have to eliminate some contradictory scripture in order to make the square peg fit in the round hole.)

Heresies are interpretations of the Bible that are contrary to the revelation of God in scriptural text. This most often takes place where authority becomes more important than what scripture says. This authority becomes interested only in perpetuating its own authority, not in what scripture really says.

Some common forms of authority that hinder truth are:

- Believing, by assumption, what is taught by a denomination, or what the church (we are familiar with) has historically believed, what the ministry leader is promoting, or what has been accepted due to tradition;
- The authority of one's own natural logic and intellect;
- The authority of one's own experience.

Revelation is how God speaks to man. God is a spirit, and He communicates with us through our unique spirit-soul connection. No one comes to faith in Christ without experiencing revelation, and no one walks by faith without experiencing revelation. Without revelation, scripture is nothing but a belief system, as evidenced by the Pharisees and scribes in the days of the Lord's earthly ministry.

But we are hindered by the belief that "revelation" is a stupendous event that only happens to apostles and prophets.

The Spirit Himself testifies with our spirit that we are children of God,
Romans 8:16 NASB

The word "testify" or, in some translations, "bears witness," is a description of how God "speaks" to us through the still, small voice of the Spirit. But notice that He does not communicate directly with our minds (our souls). Rather, He communicates with us through our unique spirit-soul connection.

But there are many other ways the Lord supernaturally reveals His truth, promises, and commands to us. One of these is our natural conscience now influenced by the Holy Spirit as He either condemns or confirms our thoughts, words, and actions, and I particularly like the Amplified version of Colossians 3:15 in this regard.

*And let the peace (soul harmony which comes) from Christ rule (act as **umpire continually**) in your hearts [**deciding and settling with finality all questions that arise in your minds...***

He also “speaks” to us through the spiritual gifts of others, our own spiritual gifts, spiritual dreams and visions, angelic visitations, certain kinds of circumstances, and, of course, through the illumination of scripture so that we “see” and “know” what we would have been incapable of “seeing” or “knowing” on the basis of intellect alone.

*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, which things we also speak, not in words taught by human wisdom, but in **those** ...(words)... **taught by the Spirit, combining spiritual thoughts with spiritual words. But a natural man does not accept the things of the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him; and he cannot understand them, because they are spiritually appraised.** 1 Corinthians 2:12-14 (NASB) (insert and emphasis are the author’s)*

The object of an inductive exegesis of scripture is to bring the disciple into direct interaction with God through a clear understanding of the scriptural text, which positions the disciple to receive a revelation of His truth, promises, and commands. Obviously, our erroneous intellectual interpretation of the meaning of the text itself hinders this process.

Knowledge is not the sufficient end of any study of the Bible. A Spirit-led Bible study is always conducted with a prayerful attitude of simply seeking His truth for the purpose of personal faith and obedience. The goal is not just to know about God. The goal is to “hear” from God and then incorporate what we have heard by obeying the living word of faith thus imparted to our hearts.

My sheep hear My voice... John 10:27 NASB

The appropriate attitude in Bible study and meditation on the Word is one of a disciple sitting at the feet of the Lord, our Teacher.

But you are not to be called rabbi ... (teacher) ..., for you have one teacher, and you are all brothers. And call no man your father on earth, for you have one Father, who is in heaven. Neither be called instructors, for you have one instructor, the Christ. Matthew 23:8-11 ESV (inserts and emphasis are the author's)

In this we need to be constantly aware that the Lord desires to reveal His living word to us.

Some are too keenly concerned with which interpretation of scripture to use. The Bible in the original languages is the inerrant Word of God given word for word to certain men over a period of time, but no translation, whether literal or not, is perfect.

I prefer a literal translation like the NASB or ESV for my familiar Bible, but I keep a King James Version with Strong's annotations and an Amplified Bible for Bible study. I also use the [Bible Gateway](#) website to read different versions or look up key words, and I use the [Strong's Concordance](#) online to look up the original Hebrew and Greek words and sentence structure to obtain a more accurate understanding of the text.

What about study Bibles? Study Bibles can be helpful, but beware of falling into the trap of accepting the interpretation offered by the authors of your particular study Bible. All study Bibles have some interpretational bias. The author would advise believers to avoid the Scofield and Ryrie Study Bibles, in particular, because of an erroneous dispensational bias, but most study Bibles, Bible dictionaries, and Bible commentaries can be helpful, if the disciple does not automatically assume that the authors of those Bible study aids are entirely accurate and correct. Listen to those who teach the word, whether individually or through some written commentary like a study Bible, but be like the noble Bereans who studied the scriptures for themselves to confirm what Paul was telling them.

The Spirit of Truth will ultimately confirm His word to those who seek His confirmation and revelation, but those who depend entirely on "experts" to interpret the Bible for them are sometimes drawn into inaccurate deductive conclusions and are thus hindered in both their understanding and their "hearing".

Keep in mind that the early Christians did not have the complete canon of scripture that we have today, and, yet, they had a richer faith life than most of us have today with, not only the complete canon of scripture, but an unbelievable amount of Bible study aids available to us. Likewise, there are numerous remote third world believers who have only a new testament or certain books of the new testament translated with varying degrees of accuracy into their native languages, and, yet, many of these third world believers also have a richer faith life than many western believers.

Always, always remember that the object of Bible study is to position yourself to “hear” or “receive” by revelation, the truth, promises, and commands of the Lord so that you can respond in obedience to the living word thus imparted to your heart, which is faith.

It is better, therefore, to know little but “hear” clearly than to know much but “hear” little.

Text in context. I am always surprised that people who have no trouble at all understanding text in context (the specific meaning of words and sentences as they relate to what is being conveyed) while reading a magazine article, and get all glassy-eyed while reading scripture. Every word included in scripture, and everything left out, was deliberate. Even the genealogies given in the Old Testament were provided for a specific purpose.

One of the most delightful things I have discovered is that the names of people and places recorded in scripture have specific meaning and application. I don't know how God caused it to happen, but He did cause it to happen for our benefit and understanding. And, because I know this, I like to use a Bible Dictionary, hard copy or online, to look up the meaning of the names of people and places.

Context Considerations: Who is writing or speaking? To whom is he writing or speaking? What are the circumstances? What is the overall circumstance that this particular passage is related to? What is the relationship of this particular text with the context of the entire Bible?

Text Considerations: **Key Words:** Begin with an understanding of what the text is actually saying. If there are any key words that you do not have a deep, Spirit-given understanding of, like “grace”, “faith”, “sanctification”, etc. look into the meaning of those specific words. These words with deep meaning for us can become religious words that no longer stir our spirits if we do not continually

examine them afresh. Key word studies will add more to your overall understanding of the text than anything else you can do.

A good exercise to do is a mini-study of common words and phrases that we hear or see so frequently that they no longer stir a deep revelatory understanding in us. Try doing a mini-study on the following. Then develop your own paraphrase of what each one means.

1. grace
2. faith
3. glory
4. sanctification

I will give you an example of the paraphrase I have developed for a common phrase, “by grace through faith,” that without a personal, expanded paraphrased understanding can become almost meaningless to us through common usage.

My paraphrase of “by grace through faith”: “By the empowerment of God released through my obedient response to the living word of God in my heart.”

Now the common phrase, “by grace through faith, ” triggers a more personal image of God’s power working in me and through me as I respond to His promises and commands “spoken” to me by various means.

Paraphrasing is also a way for you to distill what you think you have received and understood in a more familiar and personal form. If the passage is still confusing to you it will be evident in your attempt to paraphrase the passage. Likewise, your paraphrase may reveal a greater insight and understanding than you even thought you had.

As you are paraphrasing, you will ultimately discover that the Spirit quietly reveals the truth to you through the process of paraphrasing.

As a teacher I use paraphrasing continually. Paraphrasing is literally one of my most important tools for both understanding and for leading others to understand.

Questions, questions, questions: We naturally think that the illuminating role of the Holy Spirit is for the purpose of providing answers and applications only, but the most important role of the Holy Spirit’s illumination is to cause us to ask the right questions of the text. The text itself openly suggests many questions, but

some of the most important and most profound questions will come from the prompting of the Holy Spirit.

Example: See how many questions you can come up with just by reading Acts 1:8. If you can only think of ten or less questions, you need to spend more time meditating on this passage. If you can eventually think of fifty or more questions to ask of this passage, you are on the right track.

At some point in time you will begin to recognize the difference between the questions piqued by your own intellect and those piqued by the Spirit, and in those moments you will relish with great joy the time of intimacy you are sharing with the Teacher.

It's okay to ask questions that you assume the text will not answer. It's also okay for a question to remain a question. Sometimes it will take the Spirit of Truth some time to build up the base of your knowledge before you are able to receive the answer to your question.

Biblical and theological paradoxes, as well as difficult individual passages, are the Holy Spirit's opportunity to reveal the profound mysteries and truths hidden in the written text from those who attempt to understand it on the basis of intellect alone.

There are numerous places where the Bible seems to contradict itself or where it seems to provide evidence for opposing doctrines and interpretations. This is not accidental, and the solution is not a matter of just applying correct exegesis. It is in the paradoxes and in the passages we have the most difficulty understanding that the Spirit of Truth, who was sent to guide us into all truth, can reveal truth that cannot be received on the basis of intellectual understanding alone. It is also here that the disciple who is determined to know truth, despite what he/she has believed in the past, will be guided by the Spirit, even in the exegesis.

For me the paradoxes, puzzles, and difficult passages have become signposts saying, "The Spirit of Truth abides here. Come in, and let Me turn on the light for you."

I have even been accused from time to time of reading between the lines, but I only read what the Holy Spirit deliberately leaves between the lines. And some of the most profound and meaningful revelations of truth I have received have come from the paradoxes and puzzles that He deliberately placed in scripture.

The correct exegesis when thus received will conform with the entire fabric of scripture. And, as it has happened time after time with me, when a correct exegesis, guided by the Spirit, causes us to remove a piece of the puzzle that we forced into place where it didn't belong, the scripture opens up to us in an amazing way.

An illustration of how this goes would be in the working of a jigsaw puzzle. We first build the framework from the pieces that have one straight edge, with the corner pieces that have two straight edges being the most important as we build this framework. As we build inwards from the framework and we place a piece of the puzzle where it does not actually fit by forcing it into place, what we build on that erroneous union will also be erroneous. But once that piece is removed and the correct piece is in place, progress is achieved again.

The spiritual gift of teaching is not about telling us what to believe, but about facilitating the process. But we must apply ourselves to the process.

Be diligent to present yourself approved to God as a workman who does not need to be ashamed, accurately handling the word of truth. 2 Timothy 2:15 (NASB)

Receive the Word with all readiness of mind, but search the Scriptures daily to prove whether those things be so. Acts 17:11 (KJV)

Nor should we look at it as a chore or as a religious duty. If you are doing it right, Bible study is just a part of your overall relationship with the Lord during which time you diligently position yourself to “hear” and “see” with spiritual ears and spiritual eyes what the Lord, the Teacher, who is the Spirit, wants to reveal to you.

Examine the following promises of this supernatural process:

The one who has My commandments...(as a living word)...and keeps them...(through obedience)...is the one who loves Me; and he who loves Me will be loved by My Father...(will experience the love of the Father)...and I will love him and will disclose myself...(manifest and make Myself real)...to him. John 14:21 NASB (inserts and emphasis are the author's)

And all of us, as with unveiled face...(able to “hear” and to “see” by revelation, because of His Spirit in our spirits)..., [because we] continued to behold [in the Word of God] as in a mirror...(recognizing and identifying with

who we are in Him)...*the glory of the Lord, are constantly being transfigured* ...*(transformed by the renewing of our minds)...into His very own image in ever increasing splendor and from one degree of glory to another; [for this comes] from the Lord [Who is] the Spirit.* 2 Corinthians 3:18 Amplified
(inserts are the author's)

Studying and meditating on these two passages is a good place to start. And if you “see” what I have seen and “hear” what I have heard just in these two passages, you will jump up and shout with joy.

May He always grant you a spirit of wisdom and revelation as you seek His truth, promises, and commands.