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Understanding The Word of God

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We should all be grateful for the providence of God. Material and spiritual blessings which are available to us make life both possible and enjoyable. Intelligent obedience to God's Word brings to one the fullest, richest life to which one is capable. *"I am come that they might have life, and that they might have it more abundantly"* (Jn. 10:10). The abundant life Jesus promised must include **an understanding of the Word of God.**

"Study to show thyself approved unto God, a workman that needeth not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth" (2 Tim. 2:15). These words clearly indicate that there is a right and a wrong method of studying the Bible. The Bible **can** be understood! God is the Author both of man's mind and of the Bible, and He adapted His revelation to the needs of man to whom He gave it.

Factors Which Hinder An Understanding of the Bible

(1) Regarding the Bible as the peculiar property of a few hinders a study of the Scriptures. Men have been led to believe that without the interpretation of councils made up of ecclesiastical superiors, one should not study the Bible, lest he reach wrong conclusions. Uninspired creeds become the actual standard of faith and conduct, rather than the Bible itself. Errors are handed down from generation to generation without being suspected of being untrue. The people of Berea were commended because *"they received the word with all readiness of mind, and searched the scriptures daily, whether those things were so"* (Acts 17:11).

(2) Using the Bible to prove oneself right. The Bible is not a book with which to prove doctrines; **it is the doctrine itself!** The common assertion that "one can prove anything by the Bible" is not true if the Bible is properly interpreted. Of those who do not love the truth Paul wrote: *"And for this cause God shall send them strong delusion, that they should believe a lie That they all might be damned who believed not the truth but had pleasure in unrighteousness"* (2 Thess. 2:11-12). One must search the Scriptures for what they contain rather than assuming some doctrine to be true and approaching the Scriptures merely for approval.

(3) Lack of Confidence. Many people are hindered from understanding the Scriptures because they read the Bible **without intending or expecting to understand it.** We would not discourage regular Bible reading, but would rather encourage it. But there are those who seem to think it is their duty to read the Bible through once a year whether they take the time to understand what they read. Others read irregularly and without any

system in their study. Some read only their favorite passages and become warped in the emphasis they place upon certain matters, but completely overlook other gems of truth.

(4) Improper Motives. Improper motives in Bible study often hinder a correct understanding of the scriptures. Like Balaam who kept going to the Lord until the Lord told him what he wanted to hear (Num. 22). Some may refuse plain teaching of the Bible and continue searching until they find a passage which they can construe to please them. The desire to be a member of a popular denomination may furnish a strong temptation for one to abuse the Scriptures in an attempt to justify that religious body. Or, one may engage in an argument concerning the Scriptures and force a passage to suit his point by removing it from the context and perverting its meaning. By desiring to become a leader of men one may assume a novel position and wrest the Scriptures for attempted proof of his idea.

Factors Which Aid An Understanding Of The Bible

These are not all of the hindrances to a correct understanding of the Bible, but they open the way for self-examination of motives for the study of God's Word. It will also be helpful for us to notice some factors which will **aid us** or prepare us for a correct understanding of the Scriptures.

(1) Faith in the inspiration of the Scriptures aids one to make a patient and thorough investigation. This does not mean that unbelievers cannot learn anything about the Bible, but the condition of the mind may be unfavorable to a complete investigation. To receive a letter from the world's wealthiest or most influential man would not benefit the receiver if he believed that someone else sent it as a practical joke. If he read it at all, it would be out of curiosity, and then it would be laid aside. This is often the case with the unbeliever and the Bible. On the other hand, if one discovered a human document which he really believed contained instructions which would lead to buried treasure he would exercise the most patient and complete care in studying the document. One's attitude toward the Bible may help or hinder his understanding of its contents.

(2) A desire to know and obey the truth is also necessary to a proper understanding One can, of course, learn something about the truth without a desire to know God's will thoroughly or to obey it, but he is not apt to learn much in such a frame of mind; It is difficult for such a person to be impressed by the truth. James wrote, "*but be ye doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving your own selves. For if any be a hearer of the word and not a doer, he is like unto a man beholding his natural face in a glass; for he beholdeth himself and goeth his way and straightway forgetteth what matter of man he was. But whoso looketh into the perfect law of liberty, and continueth therein, he being not a forgetful hearer, but a doer of the word, this man shall be blessed in his deed*" (Jas. 1:22-25). The contrast drawn is between one who hears with a view to learning and obeying and another who hears only to be hearing. Knowledge of the word of God does not come accidentally; it must be desired and sought after.

(3) The removal of all religious prejudices. One must investigate any Bible subject with an open mind, and refrain from reaching a definite conclusion until all the facts have been considered. Prejudice simply pre-judges the case, jumps to conclusions and assumes those conclusions to be right without proper evidence. Prejudice seeks approval or confirmation of an opinion that is already held rather than seeking the truth, whatever it may be. To those who rejected Him, Jesus said: *“Search the Scriptures; for in them ye think ye have eternal life, and they are they which testify of me. And ye will not come to me, that ye might have life. I receive not honor from men. But I know you, that ye have not the love of God in you”* (John 5:39-42). These people had decided against Him before they heard Him; their problem was prejudice. Developing an open mind which is ready to be remolded in the light of added knowledge from the Word of God is wonderful ambition.

(4) Use Common Sense. An unusual rule for profitable Bible study is the exercise of common sense. Common sense is sound judgment, the capacity to weigh matters in their true light. The Hebrew writer rebuked his readers for a failure to *“exercise their senses to discern both good and evil”* (Heb. 5:12-14). For an example, Philip baptizing the eunuch is found in Acts 8:38; *“And he commanded the chariot to stand still: and they went down into the water, both Philip and the eunuch, and he baptized him.”* Controversies have actually raged over who was baptized in the passage, Philip or the eunuch, but surely common sense will conclude that it was the sinner, not the preacher, who was baptized when it is said, *“and he baptized him.”* When we become involved in arguments, we often lay aside both common sense and revealed truth in an effort to sustain a position.

(5) examine the context. It is necessary to get the setting of the passage of Scripture before one can be sure he correctly understands it. Several questions may be raised: Who is speaking in the passage? To whom is he speaking? What is the subject? Under what circumstances did he speak it? When and why was this speaking done? In Job 2:4 we read, *“Skin for skin, yea, all that a man have will he give for his life.”* The point of this statement is that a man will give up anything, even his faith, in order to save his life. When one reads the entire verse, however, he learns that Satan, not God, is the speaker, and the words are not always true. Some may be willing to give up all to live, but others will die rather than give up their faith. To illustrate the problem of determining the context of a passage of Scripture let us consider another example. Gen. 6:14 says; *“Make thee an ark of Gopher wood.”* This is not command to us. God spoke this command to Noah. We must consider the setting of any passage so we can be sure the proper meaning is gained.

(6) Work! A spirit of investigation, mental industry, is necessary in order to obtain a correct understanding of the Scriptures. The Bereans were praised for their spirit of investigation as *“they searched the Scriptures daily”* (Acts 17:11-12). Timothy had a wonderful background of knowledge from his mother and grandmother, Eunice and Lois, and a great teacher in the person of Paul, but he was often exhorted to **study** by Paul’s letters to him (2 Tim. 2:15; 3:10-15; 1 Tim. 4:15-16).

Bible knowledge is not a miraculous gift, nor is it the special prerogative of a privileged few. Jesus said, *“If ye continue in My word, then are ye my disciples indeed. And ye shall know the truth and the truth shall make you free”* (John 8:31-32). By obeying the truth our souls are purified: *“Seeing ye have purified your souls in obeying the truth through the Spirit unto*

unfeigned love of the brethren, see that ye love one another with a pure heart fervent; Being born again, not of corruptible seed, but of incorruptible, by the word of God, which liveth and abideth forever” (I Peter 1:22-23). Since we are born into the family of God by **obedience to the Word of God**, let us spare no effort to correctly understand that Word!
