

Bible reading and Study (10)

The difference between devotional reading/meditation and study.

Bible reading is not as intensive as Bible study. Bible study provides the objective framework in which Bible reading is able to successfully function.

Devotional reading is not as intensive as study. Devotional reading should be an everyday habit for every believer. However, “the disadvantage of confining Bible study to devotional reading is that it offers an unbalanced diet—too much milk, too little meat. It needs to be supplemented by other forms” (John White, *The Fight*, 47). “Devotional reading is not the only kind one should do. One must also read for learning and understanding. In short, one must also learn *to study* the Bible, which in turn must inform one’s devotional reading” (Fee and Stuart, *How to Read the Bible*, 26). “While diligent, prayerful, honest study of the Bible is essential to one’s becoming and remaining a good student of the Bible, the mere *reading* of the Bible is not sufficient to guarantee that one will understand...what the Bible teaches.... After learning what the Bible *says*, one must learn what the Bible *means*. This can be learned only by correctly *reasoning* about what the Bible says” (Warren, *When is an Example Binding?* 20). Even though study is extremely demanding, it is not simply the reserve for experts, and it is incredibly useful and interesting. Everyone can and should learn to *study* the Bible.

Reading methods:

1. Read the whole Bible (or New Testament) from beginning to end.
2. Read a whole book in one sitting.
3. Use some sort of regular reading program
4. Follow a devotional guide

Daily Bible reading should become a **habit**.

Bible Study (Helps determine what you will teach) (Some of this material adapted from *God’s Holy Fire* and “Delving for Treasure” in *Fanning the Flame*)

Reading theologically:

1. Examine literary context: Book as a whole.
2. Examine the immediate context: Context, context, context! What comes directly before and after.
3. Examine the narrative itself: Notice details, themes, repetition, transition words. Why does the author include this? Why does he leave out that?
4. Ask two basic questions:
 - What does this say about God?
 - What does this say about God’s people?

Interpreting Historical precedent:

1. Pray
2. Focus on the Theological core (what is the theology behind a given practice?).
3. Ask “who?” and “why?” questions first, and then ask “what?” and “how?”
4. Consider canonical context.
5. Consider historical context (difference between prototype and archetype).
 - Prototype is simply the *first* way something was done. Archetype is the way it was always *intended* to be done.
6. Consider the level at which a text is authoritative:
 - a. rule
 - b. principle,
 - c. paradigm/pattern
 - d. understanding of God or humanity
7. Consider role of culture (see below)

Simple Bible Study Method

1. Read through a chosen book of the Bible in one sitting. Write notes from the reading.
2. Answer the questions: Who wrote, when, to whom, why etc. (After reading look in a Bible dictionary or commentary for help).
3. Read the book again and write a simple outline of the book.
4. Read the book again, paragraph by paragraph. What is the main thought or point of each paragraph? What is the function of each paragraph in the context of the whole book? What do I still not understand?
5. Compare other translations.
6. Examine a commentary for help. **WARNING.** Commentaries simply contain human opinions. They may be correct, or they may be incorrect.
7. Now, answer the question: How does this Biblical message apply here and now?

General principles for Biblical Interpretation

1. Ask, "What is God's purpose or what is his will?" (We discern a person's will according to what he says and what he does.)
2. A text cannot mean something that it never meant either for its author or for its original readers. What is the purpose of a given text?
3. It is important to recognize not only what the Bible *explicitly says* but also what it *implies* by its explicit statements.
4. We need to know what the presuppositions of a given text are. We should not expect to find commands of actions that were assumed, nor should we be surprised by the absence of prohibitions of items that were not practiced.
5. Some commands are limited to a specific time or culture while others are intended to have eternal force.
6. Even commands that are limited to a specific situation may contain eternal principles.
7. Some practices are *intended* to be eternal precedents while others are simply "incidental matters of the biblical record." A helpful key is to determine whether the practice is in agreement with other texts.
8. Ethics must often be sought in overarching principles of Scripture.
9. What is not recorded in the New Testament as a practice of the early church in regard to membership, organization, and worship, clearly is not *necessary* for the practice of the modern church

Helpful questions for determining whether a practice or command is supra-cultural

1. Does the author give a theological basis for his practice or command?
2. Does the practice or command occur only in one situation, or does it occur repeatedly—even across cultural boundaries?
3. Does a given practice imply an underlying command?
4. To what degree is our situation similar to the situation of the original readers?
5. Is a given practice something that the Bible clearly indicates is secondary?
6. How does a given practice or command fit with the overall message of the Bible?
7. Does the New Testament contain a consistent witness to a given practice, or does it indicate differences?
8. What possibilities were available to the author and his original readers?
9. Does the New Testament teaching go against the cultural norms of its day?
10. To what extent is it *possible* to obey the command or follow the practice?
11. Would obeying the command or following the practice today nullify the original intent?
12. Do I reject the biblical practice for theological reasons or because of my own personal feelings or tastes?