

Lesson 1 - Introduction

Most Christians would agree with the idea that reading and understanding God's Word is essential to our growth as Christians. Yet, many Christians continue to struggle with either developing a regular habit of studying the Bible or understanding what they read when they do attempt to study the Bible. It might be fair to say that a large portion of Christians experience both ends of that struggle. It is also fair to say that success in one area should lead to success in the other.

Hermeneutics is the study of interpretation. This class will primarily focus on the part of our struggle to understand what the Bible says. Hopefully, it will also help you develop a more regular habit of being in God's Word. By the time we reach the end of the class, we hope that you:

- develop a _____ of Bible study that will enable you to see how individual passages relate to the _____ Bible.
- identify _____ resources to aid in your study of the Bible.
- grow in your _____ of God's Word.
- grow more like _____.

Those last two objectives are really the main goal of this class. The first two are just tools to accomplish that most important mission. Before we get into the details of *HOW* to study the Bible, it is imperative we understand *WHAT* the Bible is.

What does it mean for Scripture to be “inspired”?

The *inspiration* of the Bible is of great importance because from it, ALL Christian doctrines are developed. The final authority in all matters rests upon the Bible. It is the record of God's communication through men, what we would call *revelation*. When it comes to our ability to understand Scripture so that we can properly form doctrine, God himself drives this work. Let's look at how this is accomplished.

What does 2 Timothy 3:16 say about Scripture? _____

How does Job 32:8 say that we are able to understand it? _____

Both verses above refer to the breath of God. The word *theopneustos* in 2 Timothy literally means divinely breathed in. It tells us that God enabled man to correctly record his revealed truth, i.e. inspiration. *Neshāmâ* is the word used in Job to refer to the breath of God. Here, we see that God *illuminates* man so that he can understand that which he has revealed.

How did God accomplish this work of inspiration?

There are four broad views on the method God used to inspire the men who wrote the Bible.

- 1) _____ - men were inspired by some innate ability to create meaningful descriptions of “religious” themes
- 2) _____ - God gave men the words to pen, while overriding their personalities, i.e. they were like robots
- 3) _____ - some portions of the Bible are true and others are false. The stories involving miraculous events - the virgin birth, the resurrection, the creation account - are usually considered false.
- 4) _____ - God superintended the authors work so that the words they used were the ones he wanted. This differs from a *mechanical* view in that God used the life experiences of the authors as preparation for their writings.

This class proceeds from the perspective of plenary inspiration. Now that we have established some of what we believe about God’s Word, let’s look at the various ways in which we can study it.

Different Approaches to Interpreting the Bible

Historically, four major approaches to interpreting the Bible have been employed to understand its meaning.

- 1) _____ interpretation - What are the *ethical* lessons to be learned from this passage?
- 2) _____ - What are the *typological* meanings of the people, places, and events of this passage?
- 3) _____ - What are the *hidden* meanings of the text that will explain the life to come?

- 4) _____ - What is the *plain* meaning conveyed by the grammatical construction and historical context of the passage?

Over the last two centuries, other academic and philosophical approaches have emerged.

- 1) _____ - What is the *origin* of the text?
- 2) _____ - What does the Bible say to *me* personally?
- 3) _____ - What is the author's original *intended* meaning of the text?

Bible Study Methods

Study methods are usually classified as either *deductive* or *inductive*. When it comes to studying the Bible, deductive methods are most often _____ in nature. Someone might want to know what the Bible says about marriage. They look up all the passages referring to marriage and from that collection of verses develop an application or principle. In other words, deductive studies are looking for passages to support a pre-existing interpretation. If those passages reveal a different interpretation, then the person doing the study will have to adjust his or her understanding of the principle.

Inductive studies are _____ centered. Someone doing an inductive Bible study might want to know what a particular passage means. They would read the passage, make observations about the text, interpret the passage based on those observations, then apply it to their own lives. Inductive Bible studies are generally characterized by the *observation-interpretation-application* cycle.

Inductive Bible Study System

In this class, you will learn how to do an inductive Bible study from a historical-grammatical approach. We will proceed with the understanding that God used the life experiences of the chosen writers of the books of the Bible and their life experiences to communicate a specific message. We want to determine *who* the writer is, from *where* and *when* he wrote them, *what* words God chose, *how* he linked them together, and *why*. We will extend the observation-interpretation-application cycle to look at how a specific passage fits into the larger book from which it comes. To use a familiar cliché, you will be able to see the forest AND the trees. You

will gain broader understandings of the themes of a book of the Bible, the meaning of smaller portions of that book, and how the two illuminate one another.

Here are the basic steps of the system you will learn.

Step 1- Read the entire book and make note of repeated ideas, phrases, and words.

Step 2- Outline the book into smaller sections and identify how the sections fit together.

Step 3- Repeat steps 1 and 2 for smaller sections.

As you move through the first three steps, you will compile a list of questions based on the observations you are making during the process.

Step 4- Do a detailed observation of the smallest segment of Scripture you want to interpret.

Step 5- Select one or more of your questions that relate to the segment you are interpreting and consult other resources to help you answer that question.

Step 6- Determine how you can apply that answer to your life.

Homework

This week, read the book of Philippians as many times as you can, preferably in one sitting if you can. Reading it in larger chunks will help see how the whole letter fits together. It may seem daunting at first, but you will soon become more comfortable with the process. The goal for the first one or two times you read it is to become familiar with the book. After you have read it a couple of times, begin making note of any themes, ideas, words, and phrases that are repeated throughout the letter. Keep a notebook or some electronic device of your choosing nearby where you can record your observations.