

# BIBLIOLOGY 31 – HOW TO STUDY THE BIBLE PART 8

## INTRODUCTION

Colossians 3:15-16 - Let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, to which indeed you were called in one body; and be thankful. Let the word of Christ richly dwell within you, with all wisdom teaching and admonishing one another with psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing with thankfulness in your hearts to God.

The Bible is the authoritative Word of God in all aspects of our lives. It is the single source for our worldview and principles of life. We believe that the original autographs are perfect in form and function, and that we have an accurate representation of these originals in the Greek and Hebrew Bibles. While translations are valuable, the question remains: how do we study?

## REVIEW

We continue to affirm the biblically mandated method for studying the Bible: the Literal, Grammatical, Historical (LGH) approach. This method respects the text's natural reading flow, follows linguistic rules, and preserves the historical setting while being mindful of the culture. It ensures that the author's intended meaning and the audience's understanding are maintained.

We also maintain essential attitudes in Bible study:

- Prayer
- Respect for the Word of God
- Desire to learn, not prove
- Understand our limitations
- Reduction of presupposition

We seek to answer three questions from every study, though not every passage will answer all three:

1. What does this passage teach me about God, Jesus, and/or the Holy Spirit?
2. Is there a universal principle that I can understand from this passage?
3. Does this challenge my theology? Do I need to change my mind?

## LGH IN THE EPISTLES

The Epistles (letters) of the New Testament were written by apostles (primarily Paul, Peter, John, James, and Jude) to specific churches or individuals, addressing theological truths, ethical conduct, and practical concerns within the early believing communities. Unlike narratives or poetry, Epistles are didactic, designed to instruct, correct, and encourage.

The LGH method is crucial for understanding Epistles, as it prevents misinterpretation of their often direct, yet context-dependent teachings. We treat these letters as actual correspondence, respecting their Greek grammatical structure, and anchoring them in the historical and cultural context of the first-century recipients.

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As with all genres in the Bible, there is a range of difficulties:

- Easy
  - Galatians-Philemon
  - 2 Peter
  - 2-3 John
  - Jude
- Moderate
  - 2 Corinthians
  - 1 Peter
- Difficult
  - Romans, 1 Corinthians
  - Hebrews
  - James
  - 1 John

In these Epistles, there are no narratives; there is a review of some events in history from the author, but not a third-person narrative. When Paul discusses his history, it brings the discussion to the doctrinal issue at hand, or there is doctrine presented through the historical review.

## Basic Rules

The entire book must be reviewed before analysis

Simple passages explain the difficult.

Instructions are connected to doctrine.

The main point is greater than the subpoints – never emphasize passages in reverse.

Pronouns are tricky; if needed, replace them with the antecedent.

How to study a passage in an epistle –

Break up the passage into main sentences and phrases/clauses.

Have them answer questions

Analyze each clause with the main sentence as the anchor.

Identify main verbs (to the best of our ability)

Identify other key terms

Ask questions – no question is off limits

Answer questions to the best of our ability

Ask the questions you do not know to a trusted teacher.

Rewrite the sentence, phrase, or paragraph in your own words. Have your conclusions analyzed by your trusted teacher.

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## Literal

Approach the text as a real letter written to real people about real situations. Avoid allegorizing or spiritualizing passages that are meant to be taken plainly. For example, when Paul gives instructions on church order, these are literal instructions, not metaphors for something else.

- Read the Entire Letter: Read the entire Epistle in one or two sittings to grasp the overarching argument and flow of thought. Imagine you are the original recipient, reading the letter for the first time.
- Identify the Main Purpose: What is the primary reason the author wrote this letter? Is it to correct a heresy, encourage a struggling church, teach a specific doctrine, or address practical issues?
  - Example 1: Romans 11:25-29 – Who is Israel?
  - Example 2: 1 Peter 5:12-13 – Where is Peter writing from?

## Grammatical

Pay close attention to the Greek grammatical structure (as rendered in your translation). Identify key terms, verb tenses, conjunctions, and logical connectors that show cause-and-effect or contrast.

- Trace the Argument: Epistles often follow a logical progression of thought.
- Analyze Key Terms: Look for repeated words or phrases. What is their meaning in the immediate context?
- Pronouns and Antecedents: clearly identify who "we," "you," and "they" refer to to understand the audience and participants in the discussion.
  - Example: Ephesians 2:8-9
    - Grammatical Analysis:
      - "For by grace you have been saved through faith": "have been saved" indicates a completed action with ongoing results, emphasizing salvation as a past event
      - "and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God; not of works": The grammar explicitly denies human agency or merit in salvation, highlighting it as a "gift." The repeated negative "not of yourselves" and "not as a result of works" underscore this.
      - "It is" is in italics – this is not in the text – For by grace you have been saved by grace through faith and that not of yourselves – the gift of God
      - Salvation is a free gift received through faith, entirely by God's grace, and is not earned by works.

## Historical (and Cultural)

Understand the specific historical and cultural context of the author, the recipients, and the circumstances surrounding the writing of the letter.

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- Author: Who wrote the letter? What was their background, their relationship with the recipients, and their theological emphasis?
- Recipients: Who were they? A specific church (e.g., Corinth, Rome), an individual (e.g., Timothy, Philemon)? What were their issues, strengths, weaknesses, or specific questions they had?
- Date and Location: When and from where was the letter written?
- Purpose for Writing: Why was this specific letter sent to this specific audience at this specific time? Was there a crisis, a false teaching, a need for encouragement, or a specific question that prompted the letter? (e.g., divisions in Corinth, Judaizers in Galatia, comfort for Thessalonians regarding the Lord's return).
  - 1 Peter 1:1 – scattered - diaspora
    - 1 Peter, like James, is written to Diaspora Jews. How does this impact our handling of the text?
    - 1 Peter 2:9-12 – Who is the chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation?
    - Historical/Cultural Understanding: Peter is reminding the Diaspora believing Jews that they have a calling and a purpose to be a light to the Gentiles for the witness of Jesus Christ. Are we that?
    - What is the universal principle? To live with good behavior among unbelievers so that our verbal and behavioral witnesses are aligned.

### Practice:

Ephesians 1:3-6 – What is the main sentence? What is the main point?

Blessed be the God – What does this mean?

Why should we bless God?

1. Father of our Lord Jesus Christ
2. He has blessed us with every spiritual blessing
3. He chose us
  - a. Before the foundation of the world
  - b. THAT we would be holy and blameless
4. He predestined us
  - a. TO adoption as sons
  - b. Through Jesus Christ
  - c. According to the kind intention of His will
  - d. To the Praise of His glory of His grace
    - i. Which He freely bestowed on us in the beloved