

Qualifications for Understanding the Bible

Introduction: Hermeneutics is the science and art of interpreting a given book. Certain principles exist and certain rules apply to the interpretation and understanding of the Bible—these rules define Biblical Hermeneutics. Because the Bible is unlike any other book, and because it is in its essence a spiritual book of revelation from God, particular qualifications are required of the would-be student. These qualifications are indispensable if a person desires to understand God's unique revelation.

In order then that one be able to understand the Bible, he must possess these qualifications:

1. Salvation

The unregenerate man simply cannot (utterly incapable) understand the Bible.

The unsaved man is dead to spiritual truth
(Eph. 2:1).

Satan is engaged in a spiritual warfare of deception and confusion. His aim includes separating men from an understanding of the Word of God. (2 Cor. 4:4; Eph. 6:12).

1Corinthians 2:14 But the natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God: for they are foolishness unto him: neither can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned.

Unregenerate people can read words and discern their meanings. This verse is not teaching that the unsaved view the Bible as mere gobbledegook; it is simply indicating that they are unreceptive of the truths of the Bible and therefore cannot properly fully understand them.

2. Surrender

The believer must surrender himself to obey the Scripture he endeavors to learn. A predisposition for obedience must be an integral part of the one who would hope to understand the Bible.

Not only do the unregenerate not receive the Word of God, but also they do not understand the Word of God (1 Cor. 2:14).

A carnal man is a spiritual (regenerate) man who acts like a natural (unregenerate) man. Certain truths will be incomprehensible to carnal people because they do not have a penchant to obey the Word of God.

Babies have a level of comprehension far below that of an adult; carnal Christians likewise are inhibited in their comprehension of deeper spiritual truths because of their unwillingness to apply that which they already know.

When a man truly desires to find the will of God and to live by it, God will reveal His Word to him in a special way (John 7:17).

3. Sobriety

In order for one to understand the Word of God, he must be serious in his approach to it.

The Bible is holy; it is a revelation of and from God that is set-apart from any other type of revelation, whether it be that of God generally (as Creation and conscience) or that of God historically (as dreams, visions, or prophecies).

A lackluster excavation of the Word of God will not procure for the digger many of the precious gems that lie beneath the surface of its cover (Prov. 2:1-5).

4. Supplication

The Holy Spirit is the author of the Word of God. Literally, the Bible is a God-breathed book (2 Tim. 3:16). Moreover a function of the Holy Spirit in the life of the believer is to reveal the truth of God's Word to him.

The Spirit reveals God (and the things of God) to man through the Word of God (1 Cor. 2:10-13).

Jesus promised that the Holy Spirit would guide the believer into all truth (John 14:26; John 16:13).

We should ask God to reveal His Word to us. After all, the Author of the book is its best Expositor (Psalm 119:18).

5. Studiousness

It stands to reason that the casual reader will reap a casual understanding of any given piece of literature. This axiom rings true even more significantly when one considers the value God places upon His Word.

2Ti 2:15 Study to shew thyself approved unto God, a workman that needeth not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth.

The word “study” connotes both urgency and effort. To be certain, the student must be a workman when it comes to his labor in the Word. Passages of Scripture are not always readily understandable (2 Peter 3:16); they must be carefully examined, prayed over, and researched.

We must labor for one reason: to be approved by God! Crowd approval must never be the goal. The Scripture should enter into the understanding and experience of the student before it is disseminated through him to the hearers (1 Cor. 9:27).

The term rightly dividing literally means, “to make a straight cut.” Anciently it was used to describe a straightly cut farmer’s furrow, or a stonemason’s brick, or a tentmaker’s fabric. In applying this thought to Bible study, the student must seek to apply hermeneutic principles like focus, harmony, and context to aid his understanding of a given text (2 Peter 1:20 and 1 Cor. 2:13).