

# Studying the Bible Logically

Multiply--part 9, pages 123-138

July 21, 2013

## **DAY 1: Use Your Brain.**

*2 Timothy 2:15 Do your best to present yourself to God as one approved, a workman who does not need to be ashamed and who correctly handles the word of truth.*

1. Paul gives Timothy three important instructions regarding his approach to the bible. Underline each of the three.

2. Paul starts out with, "*Do your best...*" as you study the bible. What would "doing your best" mean for you as you study the bible?

3. Paul's second piece of advice is to approach the bible as a "workman" who does not need to be "ashamed."

a. How does the image of "workman" affect your approach to the bible? What would be the opposite of this? A lazy, slovenly, haphazard approach?

b. When is a workman "ashamed" of his work?

c. Paul's last piece of advice is to "*correctly handle*" the bible. Have you ever handled something poorly? (A job, a do-it-yourself project, a relationship, an activity, an event) If you had it do over are there things you would do to *correctly handle* it? How does this apply to correctly handling God's word?

4. One of the easiest errors we make in studying the bible is to misunderstand what it is saying. Below is a list of reasons why that happens. Place a check next to ones you've done:

Our assumptions about the bible were faulty

Blindly following others' views

Sinful desire to do our own thing

Un-teachability; pride

Not doing enough personal study

Reading "into" the bible what you want it to say

5. How should you alter your approach to studying the bible?

## DAY 2: Consider the Context

1. It is easy to "proof text" any book, including the bible. Proof texting is divorcing a text (verse) from its context. Every word has a context in its verse. You can tell the meaning of a word partly due to how that word is used in the verse, or in a passage of verses.

*2 Timothy 2:15 Do your best to present yourself to God as one approved, a workman who does not need to be ashamed and who correctly handles the word of truth.*

2. Let's use yesterday's verse as an example. When Paul tells Timothy to correctly "handle" the word of truth, what does he mean?

\_\_\_ The correct way to hold (handle) your bible?

\_\_\_ Take charge of the bible (as in handling a project or responsibility)

\_\_\_ Study the bible appropriately and accurately

3. I hope you checked the last example. The word "handle" has several meanings in English. A fair reading of the *context* of the entire verse points us to the quality of our study of the bible.

## Interpretation and Application

4. Another easy way to misunderstand the bible is not understanding the difference between interpretation and application. We read a verse and immediately wonder, "What does it mean to *me*?"

\*\*\*\* When trying to understand the bible, try this three-step process:

- a. What does the writer *say*?
- b. What does the writer *mean*?
- c. How can I put this into practice?

5. Let's take an example:

*Matt. 22:39 "...and you shall love your neighbor as yourself."*

- a. What does Jesus say? \_\_\_\_\_
- b. What does Jesus mean? \_\_\_\_\_
- c. What is one way you could apply this verse? \_\_\_\_\_

Here's how I'd answer these questions

- a. What does Jesus say? We are to love the people around us.
- b. What does Jesus mean? We are to love the people around us in the same way we already "love" ourselves. He is not talking about, "Do I *love* (like; high self-esteem) myself?" He assumes we already "love" ourselves in the way that we are committed to getting our needs met.
- c. I will buy my next door neighbors a half gallon of ice cream for their kids.

6. How can you sharpen up your bible study skills?

### DAY 3: Look for the Plain Meaning

1. Sometimes we misunderstand the bible because we look for a "deeper" meaning when the "plain" meaning is right in front of us.

*Ephesians 4:2-3 Be completely humble and gentle; be patient, bearing with one another in love. Make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace.*

- What does Paul say? \_\_\_\_\_
- What does Paul mean? \_\_\_\_\_
- How could you apply this? \_\_\_\_\_

2. Some people read a verse like, "Be *completely* humble and gentle," and wonder if Christians are just supposed to "roll over and play dead" when it comes to difficult relationships. The plain meaning of 4:2 has to do with our inner attitude. The plain reading of 4:3 has to do with our actions. The meaning of both 4:2 *and* 4:3 *together* is where the gold is found!

### Take the Bible Literally

3. I am occasionally asked if I take the bible *literally*. Usually the attitude behind the question is something like, "Only UN-educated people would do *that!*"

4. In one sense we are to read the bible like you'd read any book. For example, match the types of literature in the left column with how you'd interpret that literature in the right column. You can use answers in the right column more than once.

___ History	a. Metaphors
___ Poetry	b. Imagery
___ Songs	c. Comparisons
___ Prophetic	d. Dates, places, events
___ Apocalyptic	e. Allegory
___ Personal letters	f. Figurative language
___ Biography	g. Illustrations, stories
___ Teaching	h. Parables
___ Diary	i. Personal notes

5. The point is simply this. If we are reading the book of John, we are reading both history and biography. Your general approach is to read John like you'd read a history book and biography. When there are times when Jesus uses a metaphor, you interpret that usage as a metaphor, as in, "I am the door." (Jesus is *not* wood swinging on hinges). He used a metaphor.

6. How can you sharpen up your bible study skills?

## DAY 4: Study the Grammatical Context

1. Part of what's amazing about the bible is that it is not intended to be understood all at once. There are "layers" of understanding that we will uncover as we progress in our relationship with Jesus. It is similar to the excitement of a young boy (me) reading his first book about the battle of Gettysburg. I could only understand so much. Over the last fifty plus years, I have read a lot about the battle, and my "layers" of understanding have grown.

2. Sometimes we read verses that do not make sense to us. But, we want to understand that verse. How are we to proceed? One bible study skill is to consider the grammar of the verse or passage.

Let's consider an example:

*Psalms 23:1-6 The Lord is my shepherd; I shall not want. <sup>2</sup> He makes me lie down in green pastures. He leads me beside still waters. <sup>3</sup> He restores my soul. He leads me in paths of righteousness for his name's sake. <sup>4</sup> Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil, for you are with me; your rod and your staff, they comfort me. <sup>5</sup> You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies; you anoint my head with oil; my cup overflows. <sup>6</sup> Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life, and I shall dwell in the house of the Lord forever.*

3. In reading this I would focus on different parts of grammar. Let's start with verbs:

- "Makes me" - God *makes me* lie down in green pasture.
- "Leads me" (twice) as opposed to "makes me."
- "Follow me" (23:6) - Goodness and mercy *will follow* David.

Each of these grab my attention. I would ask "Why" or "What" to all of them.

- a. Why does God "make me" lie down in green pastures? Do I not do enough of this on my own?
- b. Why does God "lead me" to still waters and in paths of righteousness? Won't I go myself?
- c. What is the significance of goodness and mercy "following" me? Is there a cause and effect? If I let God be my shepherd, are goodness and mercy *sure* to result?

4. You can do the same exercise for noun, pronouns, and adjectives. Below, are some nouns that stand out to me. Jot down what strikes you about these nouns, in the context of this psalm:

Shepherd- \_\_\_\_\_

Sheep- \_\_\_\_\_

Pastures- \_\_\_\_\_

Waters- \_\_\_\_\_

Soul- \_\_\_\_\_

Enemies- \_\_\_\_\_

5. To become a student of the bible involves *study, effort, and your brain.*

## DAY 5: Study the Historical Context

1. One of the bible study skills needed is to consider the historical context of a passage you are reading. Let's study an example.

*Jeremiah 29:11 For I know the plans I have for you, declares the Lord, plans for wholeness and not for evil, to give you a future and a hope.*

2. This verse is part of God's message to His people. At first glance, what is your take away from this verse? Does this give you hope? What kind of hope? Are brighter days ahead?

3. The historical context takes into account what was going on *at that time*. Read Jer. 29:1-10

*Jeremiah 29:1 These are the words of the letter that Jeremiah the prophet sent from Jerusalem to the surviving elders of the exiles, and to the priests, the prophets, and all the people, whom **Nebuchadnezzar had taken into exile from Jerusalem to Babylon.** <sup>2</sup> This was after King Jeconiah and the queen mother, the eunuchs, the officials of Judah and Jerusalem, the craftsmen, and the metal workers had **departed from Jerusalem.** <sup>3</sup> <sup>4</sup> "Thus says the Lord of hosts, the God of Israel, to all the exiles whom I have sent into exile from Jerusalem to Babylon: <sup>5</sup> Build houses and live in them; plant gardens and eat their produce. <sup>6</sup> Take wives and have sons and daughters; take wives for your sons, and give your daughters in marriage, that they may bear sons and daughters; multiply there, and do not decrease. <sup>7</sup> But seek the welfare of the city where **I have sent you into exile,** and pray to the Lord on its behalf, for in its welfare you will find your welfare. <sup>8</sup> For thus says the Lord of hosts, the God of Israel: Do not let your prophets and your diviners who are among you deceive you, and do not listen to the dreams that they dream, <sup>9</sup> for it is a lie that they are prophesying to you in my name; I did not send them, declares the Lord. <sup>10</sup> "For thus says the Lord: When seventy years are completed for Babylon, I will visit you, and I will fulfill to you my promise and bring you back to this place.*

5. Well meaning Christians, including me, have used 29:11 in hopes of believing that "good times are ahead." From heaven's vantage point, that is true. But in the meantime, God's plans may keep me in wicked Babylon all my life! If my real hope is "good times ahead" meaning, "We'll be back in Jerusalem," we will be sorely disappointed, and angry at God.

## Let Go of Your Baggage

7. The greatest barrier to understanding is that we read the bible for what we want it to say, not for what it actually says.

**What Bible Shall I Read?** I recommend you buy a "study bible." There are two kinds to consider.

a. The Life Application Bible- This bible is for beginners to the bible and will serve you well for the next ten years or so. It has notes on the bottom of each page which explain difficult verses.

b. Thompson Chain Reference Bible- If you want to "dig deeper" into the bible or are a bible study leader, lay leader or pastor-type, this bible will serve you well! It is loaded with all kinds of study aids which are easy to use.