

Principles of Effective Bible Study

James Smyda

Recorded November 25, 2017

Brethren, as we all know the objective of Christianity, the whole purpose that we're having this walk of a Christian life, is to ultimately, hopefully be born into the Kingdom of God as one of God's children born into His family. To do that one of the things we have to do is to strive our entire life to be molded in God's image, to become as much like Him as possible; to look at things; to act and behave in the way that He does. To do that one of the things that we have to be very knowledgeable about is how He thinks. How does He behave? How does He look at situations? We need to be knowledgeable about learning about Him and building a relationship with Him. One of the things that we need to make a regular priority out of is studying His word. We don't sit down and talk face to face as a friend does to another. He talks to us through His word, the Bible, and we talk to Him in prayer. To have an effective communications system there we have to again make a priority in our lives of regularly studying His word so that we get to know Him, to understand how He thinks and stay in touch with Him.

Unfortunately, sometimes in our Christian life our communication, our connection with God can go the way that relationships can go with married couples. What I mean by that is when a young couple when they were in love and looking forward to getting married oftentimes it's a high priority in their lives to communicate with each other regularly, to spend lots of time with one another. They'll even plan their lives making a priority of having time to spend with one another, wanting to talk all of the time, getting to know everything they can about the other individual and learning everything about them. Again, it's a very important priority in their lives. Unfortunately, what happens sometimes is that they get married, move in together and start planning a life together. Over the years this tends to wane. In other words, other things in their life begin to suck up their time, whether it's their job or their hobbies or other family or friends or interests in their life. That same priority that they put in their relationship with their spouse begins to lose its priority in their life. They can go for periods of time where they get so busy with other things, they hardly communicate with one another. What can happen sometimes over the years is they literally can get to the point where they hardly ever spend any time sitting down and getting to know and talk to one another; building that relationship with each other. Then what can happen is they get older and the children grow up and they move away from home and start their own lives. The husband and wife can look at each other and realize they don't even know each other anymore. They have gone so long not working with that relationship that it has really fallen apart.

The same thing can happen with our relationship with God. Oftentimes if you think back to the time that you were first coming into the church and understanding the truth, you were probably in a situation like a lot of people where the truth was exciting to you. You wanted to study the Bible. You couldn't get enough of it. You read everything you could get your hands on. You were trying to learn as much as you could as fast as you

could. You were probably making a big priority of it in your life in terms of how you planned your time and planned your days and such. The same thing can happen over time with us as church members. We get baptized. We start regularly attending church and being a part of it. Over the years we tend to start taking it for granted, just like that married couple that I mentioned. Then we can even fall to the point where literally we take our Bible to church with us, sit down and have it open, follow through it as we're paying attention to a sermon and when services are over we can close the Bible and put it aside. When we get home, we put it on the bookshelf and it stays there until the following Sabbath when you pick it up to take it to services. Unfortunately, church members can fall into that kind of habit, because you might think I've studied the truth for decades. I know what's in that book. I have other fun things to do. Then it becomes not a priority in our lives anymore to study and stay in connection with God. If we allow ourselves to do that what happens over time to our relationship with God is the same thing that happens to the married couple that I was talking about. We literally get to the point where we don't really know Him anymore. We've just taken Him for granted for so long that that relationship has deteriorated.

What can ultimately happen in that situation is the situation that Jesus Christ described in His lifetime when He was telling others about the judgment day. There would be people that He would say to them I never knew you. Again, this is similar to the married couple that years after they've been married look at one another and realize that they don't really know each other anymore. We can allow that to happen to our relationship with God if we don't make a priority out of regularly studying His word, becoming very familiar with that and continuing to learn and grow as Christians.

One of the things that we need to make a priority in our lives as Christians is regularly studying God's word and continuing to grow in our relationship with Him. Due to that the main thing we're going to focus on in this sermon is the subject of Bible study and not just the priority of studying God's word, but looking at effective principles of studying God's word. You can spend lots of time reading God's word and not necessarily understanding, interpreting it correctly and coming to the right conclusions. The title for this sermon is "Principles of Effective Bible Study". We're not just going to look at the need for putting a priority on studying God's word, but look at a number of principles that we need to be utilizing so that we accurately understand God's word and come to the right conclusion as we're studying. To start off let's turn to 2 Peter 3:14-18. We're going to briefly cover first of all a priority that we need to make in studying God's word. We are going to see two major things that we need to balance here.

2 Peter 3:14. *Therefore, beloved, looking forward to these things, be diligent to be found by Him in peace, without spot and blameless;
15) and consider [account] that the longsuffering of our Lord is salvation — as also our beloved brother Paul, according to the wisdom given to him, has written to you,*

16) as also in all his epistles, speaking in them of these things, in which are some things hard to understand, which untaught and unstable people twist to their own destruction, as they do also the rest of the Scriptures.

17) You therefore, beloved, since you know this beforehand, beware lest you also fall from your own steadfastness, being led away with the error of the wicked; (NKJV)

You can see that one of the priorities here is that we need to make sure that we're holding strong to the foundational truths, that we're staying in connection with God, that we're not falling away and stumbling off into the world and that we hang onto the foundation that we have. It's not just as simple as just hanging on to what we've always known. It's an issue of also learning to grow.

18) but grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. To Him be the glory both now and forever. Amen. (NKJV)

You can see it's a situation where we always need to be growing and learning more about God and developing a stronger relationship with Him, also hanging on strongly to the foundation that we've had, not abandoning that but not looking at a situation of, well I know everything, because I've been in the church for decades and I already know what that book says. No, it's a living word that we need to be continuing to study and to grow in our relationship with Him. The only way that we can do that is continuing to regularly study this word.

How do we balance this priority; hanging onto the foundational truths that we have but also continuing to grow, to learn more. The key to this is the concept the Bible refers to is rightly dividing the word of truth. Turn to 2 Timothy 2:14-19.

2 Timothy 2:14. *Remind them of these things, charging them before the Lord not to strive about words to no profit, to the ruin of the hearers.*

15) Be diligent to present yourself approved to God, a worker who does not need to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth.

16) But shun profane and idle babblings, for they will increase to more ungodliness.

17) And their message will spread like cancer. Hymenaeus and Philetus are of this sort,

18) who have strayed concerning the truth, saying that the resurrection is already past; and they overthrow the faith of some.

19) Nevertheless the solid foundation of God stands, having this seal: "The Lord knows those who are His," and, "Let everyone who names the name of Christ depart from iniquity." (NKJV)

You can see again this priority of hanging on to the strong foundational truth that we have, but we need to continue to grow. How do we do that? Again, the principle is rightly dividing the word of truth. How do we make sure that we are doing that

correctly? That's what we're going to focus on today, learning basic principles that we need to be utilizing to effectively analyze the Bible to come to the right Biblical conclusions.

Probably the most foundational concept that we need to look at in that regard is a concept that Mr. Armstrong used to sum up by saying the phrase "the Bible is like a jigsaw puzzle." In other words, you have all of these different pieces and you have to learn how to assemble the pieces together. Look at the principle in Isaiah 28:9-13.

Isaiah 28:9. *"Whom will he teach knowledge? And whom will he make to understand the message? Those just weaned from milk? Those just drawn from the breasts?*

10) For precept must be upon precept, precept upon precept, line upon line, line upon line, here a little, there a little."

Basically, the concept is that in studying the Bible we have to look at subjects and realize that not all of the truth is contained in one chapter. We have to take various scriptures that cover a similar topic and put them together and consider all of them when we're considering a particular point or subject that we are studying into to come to the right conclusions. We can't just look at part of the scriptures on a particular subject, but take all of it into consideration. Understanding this principle is pivotal to understanding how to interpret the Bible and how to study it. As we're going to see in this particular chapter, this same principle, which is the key to properly understanding the Bible and coming to the right conclusions, can also be a stumbling block for those who don't understand it correctly.

11) For with stammering lips and another tongue he will speak to this people,

12) To whom He said, "This is the rest with which you may cause the weary to rest," and, "This is the refreshing"; yet they would not hear.

13) But the word of the Lord was to them, "precept upon precept, precept upon precept, line upon line, line upon line, here a little, there a little," That they might go and fall backward, and be broken and snared and caught. (NKJV)

This same principle that is the key for us in understanding how to properly understand the Bible and realizing that we have to put the pieces together from various parts of the Bible on a particular subject to come to the right conclusion is also a stumbling block for those who don't understand this or don't utilize this correctly. They can study the Bible for hours and come to the wrong conclusions; put pieces together but not correctly and misunderstand what it's trying to say.

Before we go any further I would like illustrate that the Bible not only teaches this principle, but it literally demonstrates this principle. If you have been in the church since the days of the Worldwide Church of God and remember how things went there the last few years and all of the doctrinal changes that were taking place, one of the things that they did is basically try to just throw out the whole concept that I just explained, saying

that's not what these scriptures were talking about. It's not about an issue of taking the various scriptures on a subject and putting them together. They basically tried to downplay and disregard this entire concept. What I would like to do before we go any further is not only show you that this particular principle is taught correctly in the Bible, but show you a very good example where the Bible demonstrates this very idea. Probably one of the best examples of this is found in Hebrews 1:1-13. We will see here where the author of Hebrews literally very clearly demonstrates this very concept in how he writes this chapter. There are a number of quotes from the Old Testament utilized throughout this chapter, put together to present a consistent chain of thought in teaching some lessons about Jesus Christ. We are going to go back and forth to other parts of the Bible to demonstrate how all of these quotes are put together.

Hebrews 1:1. *God, who at various times and in various ways spoke in time past to the fathers by the prophets,
2) has in these last days spoken to us by His Son ... (NKJV)*

That makes it clear to us that the God referred to in verse 1 is God the Father, because we're now talking about Jesus Christ as His Son. As we go through the next couple of verses, the focus is going to completely switch to Jesus Christ, because the rest of the chapter is mainly teaching us lessons about Christ and His role.

*2b) ... whom He has appointed heir of all things, through whom also He made the worlds;
3) who being the brightness of His glory and the express image of His person, and upholding all things by the word of His power, when He had by Himself purged our sins, sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high,
4) having become so much better than the angels, as He has by inheritance obtained a more excellent name than they. (NKJV)*

As we go through the rest of this chapter one of the things that we're going to notice is that there are at least six different quotes that are pulled directly from various parts of the Old Testament that are then put together, one right after the other, to teach a consistent thought about Jesus Christ and His role. You can see that it's going to be literally demonstrating the very concept that we just read about in Isaiah 28.

5) For to which of the angels did He ever say: "You are My Son, Today I have begotten You"? (NKJV)

Turn to Psalms 2:7 and notice what we just read is a direct quote from this verse.

Psalms 2:7. *"I will declare the decree: The LORD has said to Me, 'You are My Son, today I have begotten You.'" (NKJV)*

We have a word for word quote here of a sentence that was pulled out of here and is now used in Hebrews 1. Turn back to Hebrews 1:5b.

Hebrews 1:5b. And again: "I will be to Him a Father, and He shall be to Me a Son"? (NKJV)

Turn to 2 Samuel 7:14 and we'll see that this is a quote as well.

2 Samuel 7:14. I will be his Father, and he shall be My son. If he commits iniquity, I will chasten him with the rod of men and with the blows of the sons of men. (NKJV)

He only quoted the first part of that verse, because in the context here it's referring to Solomon being the son of King David. Only the first part of the verse is quoted in Hebrews, because it's referring to Jesus Christ as a descendant of David. My point is that part of this verse is taken and quoted in Hebrews. Turn back to Hebrews 1:6-7.

Hebrews 1:6. But when He again brings the firstborn into the world, He says: "Let all the angels of God worship Him."
7) And of the angels He says: "Who makes His angels spirits and His ministers a flame of fire." (NKJV)

Turn to Psalms 104:4.

Psalms 104:4. Who makes His angels spirits, His ministers a flame of fire. (NKJV)

You have another word for word quote that was pulled out of Psalms and used here in Hebrews. Turn back to Hebrews 1:8-9.

Hebrews 1:8. But to the Son He says: "Your throne, O God, is forever and ever; A scepter of righteousness is the scepter of Your kingdom."
9) You have loved righteousness and hated lawlessness; therefore God, Your God, has anointed You with the oil of gladness more than Your companions." (NKJV)

Turn to Psalms 45:6-7.

Psalms 45:6. Your throne, O God, is forever and ever; a scepter of righteousness is the scepter of Your kingdom.
7) You love righteousness and hate wickedness; therefore God, Your God, has anointed You with the oil of gladness more than Your companions. (NKJV)

Turn back to Hebrews 1:10-12.

Hebrews 1:10. And: "You, Lord, in the beginning laid the foundation of the earth, And the heavens are the work of Your hands.

11) *They will perish, but You remain; and they will all grow old like a garment;*
12) *Like a cloak You will fold them up, and they will be changed. But You are the same, and Your years will not fail.*" (NKJV)

Turn to Psalms 102:25-27.

Psalms 102:25. *Of old You laid the foundation of the earth, and the heavens are the work of Your hands.*

26) *They will perish, but You will endure; yes, they will all grow old like a garment; like a cloak You will change them, and they will be changed.*

27) *But You are the same, and Your years will have no end.* (NKJV)

This is another quote that was put forward in Hebrews. Turn back to Hebrews 1:13.

Hebrews 1:13. *But to which of the angels has He ever said: "Sit at My right hand, till I make Your enemies Your footstool"?* (NKJV)

Turn to Psalms 110:1 to see another quote that's used.

Psalms 110:1. *The LORD said to my Lord, "Sit at My right hand, till I make Your enemies Your footstool."* (NKJV)

You can see here that throughout the entire chapter of Hebrews 1, the majority of it is scriptures pulled from the Old Testament. It's just like we read in Isaiah, here a little, there a little. It's pulling one verse out of this chapter, one verse out of that chapter and putting them together. It's presenting them as a consistent chain of thought teaching lessons about the role of Jesus Christ. The point it's illustrating here is this is how in many cases we have to study the Bible. On particular topics there will be a verse over here that address a particular part of the subject, a verse over there that covers that part of the subject and you have to put them together to look at all of the different facts and all of the scriptures that are relevant to it to come to an appropriate conclusion on a subject. That's a very important point of Bible study, because we can't just read one particular chapter or one particular verse on a subject and then come to a dogmatic conclusion about everything associated with that subject. We have to consider all of the scriptures that approach a particular subject.

Just like we started off in Isaiah 28 and saw that this particular subject is the key to properly understanding the Bible, it can also be a stumbling block. In other words, for those who don't utilize this properly they can read through the Bible and put things together, but come up with all of the wrong conclusions. I am sure you've seen many people in your lifetime that are well versed in the Bible. They've read through it. They can quote a lot of it off of the top of their head, but the conclusions they come to don't match the truth at all. That's one of the things that we can fall into as well. Being in God's church and having His holy spirit, if we are not properly utilizing Biblical principles in how we study His word, we can fall into that same thing. Understanding this concept

that we have to look at all of the scriptures in different areas, if we approach it not utilizing the principles we're going to look at shortly, we can pull things together but come up with conclusions that are completely wrong and wind up being out in left field with the conclusions that we come up with.

Today we are going to look at a number of principles, that if we practice them can really help us in our study of the Bible to not get tripped up and come to wrong conclusions in how we go about analyzing the Bible and utilizing this principle.

Let's now look at some different concepts that we need to be utilizing in studying God's word.

The first one we're going to look at is keeping the big picture in mind. Sometimes we can be looking at a particular subject and get lost in the minutia, the finer details of a particular argument, for or against a particular idea when sometimes the best thing we can do is take a step back and look at this subject in the context of the overall picture of the Bible, the overall picture of God's plan. Sometimes that can really help guide us in the right direction. If we look at the big picture, there are some obvious issues or questions that will jump out at us that tell us how to interpret something and guide us in how we look at a subject. Let's look at a couple of examples that illustrate this point. Turn first of all to John 7:37-39.

John 7:37. *On the last day, that great day of the feast, Jesus stood and cried out, saying, "If anyone thirsts, let him come to Me and drink.*

38) He who believes in Me, as the Scripture has said, out of his heart will flow rivers of living water."

39) But this He spoke concerning the Spirit, whom those believing in Him would receive; for the Holy Spirit was not yet given, because Jesus was not yet glorified. (NKJV)

I'm sure most of you know this is a scripture we most often read on the Last Great Day, on the day the Bible in the Old Testament refers to in Leviticus 23 as the eighth day. The title the Last Great Day we pull directly from this scripture. I'll tell you before we go any further that I personally believe that's the accurate way to interpret these scriptures. The reason I'm bringing this up is in recent years, probably the last decade or two one of the common ideas I've seen promoted by some church of God organizations is taking this particular set of scriptures that we just read and applying them not to what we typically have called the Last Great Day, the eighth day that's a separate festival after the seven days of the Feast of Tabernacles, but applying this particular set of scriptures to the seventh day of the Feast of Tabernacles and not what we typically call the Last Great Day, which Leviticus 23 calls the eighth day. Just to illustrate this particular point not long after the Feast this year I was talking with a good friend of mine that I've known for many years who attends another church of God organization. He was telling me about a conversation he had at the Feast site he was at this year. He was over at an individual's house one evening and there were a number of church members there

fellowshipping. A couple of the individuals he was talking to brought up this idea. As my friend was telling me about it, you could tell that he was excited about this idea. He thought this was some new truth he'd come to understand.

As he was telling me this I stopped and said, let me ask you a question then. Based on what you just told me what exactly would make the seventh day of the Feast the great day of the Feast? That's what this verse starts off with. What would make that seventh day greater than all of the others? It's not even a high day. With the Feast of Tabernacles and the Last Great Day we always have the first day as a high day and the eighth day as a high day. None of the rest of them is a high Sabbath. What argument would you have for why that's the great day of the Feast? My friend stopped and said well I guess I don't know. That's exactly what I was trying to get him to see. If you stop and look at the big picture of the spiritual significance of all of this, outside of all of the details of how that argument is structured, if you apply this to the eighth day there's a very easy argument as to why that's the great day of the Feast. It's the day that pictures the second resurrection. That's when the billions of mankind who have lived all throughout time are brought back up and given their chance at salvation. This is the great harvest. This is the culmination of the plan of God. All of the other holy days that have led up to this in this plan are very significant, but this is the culmination. This is when everyone gets their chance at salvation to be born into the family of God. It's very easy to see why this would be called the great day of the Feast, because of its spiritual significance. If you place this on the seventh day of the Feast, how exactly do you explain that? I brought this up, because every time I see someone who presents this argument, they have to struggle to come up with a rationale for why it's the great day of the Feast and I've never been convinced by any argument that anyone has ever presented. Just like my friend's reaction when I asked this question, I could see he was stumped. He said he hadn't thought about that one.

That's the reason why I used this particular example. If we stop and look at a particular subject and put in the context of the big picture of the Bible, of God's plan, sometimes there's a question or an issue that just screams at you and makes it very clear how something has to be interpreted. This is one of those issues. Again, what would make it the great day of the Feast? It's hard to make an argument for the seventh day of the Feast of Tabernacles. When you place it on the day that pictures the second resurrection, it's a very easy argument to see why that's the great day of the Feast.

Another good example of this is in Leviticus 16. Again, if we sit back and look at the big picture, there are some questions that just scream at you that clarify an issue here. I am going to summarize a lot of this because not long before the Feast I gave a sermon specifically addressing this chapter and the ceremonies described here. Even in that sermon I focused on the interpretation of the Azazel goat. That's the core of the example I want to mention here. In this chapter is described the ceremony that ancient Israel was commanded to do every year on the Day of Atonement. That's something that the high priest could do. It was the only day that he could ever access the most holy place in the temple. The ceremony involved two goats. This chapter directly tells

us that one these two goats is referred to as the Lord's goat. There's another goat involved in this ceremony and it's referred to as the Azazel goat. When you think about these two goats, with the Lord's goat there is really not much of any debate as to what that pictures, not only through church of God circles, but in professing Christianity in general it's widely accepted that the Lord's goat there is a picture of Jesus Christ and His sacrifice atoning for the sins of mankind enabling the relationship with God the Father for salvation. Again, this is very clearly explained in the book of Hebrews. The high priest coming with the blood of the Lord's goat was basically a picture of Jesus Christ coming before the Father's throne bringing His own blood as a sacrifice to be accepted as an atoning sacrifice for all of us.

When you come to what the Azazel goat means, there is a lot more debate about this subject. There are basically two main arguments. The one that the church of God has typically put forward and I personally believe is accurate is that the Azazel goat pictures the binding of Satan during the thousand years of the Millennium that Satan is bound and he basically doesn't have access to affect anybody during this time frame. That's what is being pictured by the Azazel goat being taken off into an uninhabited land. Another common argument that's even being espoused in some church of God circles today is the idea that the Azazel goat is also a picture of Christ. How this argument goes is basically that these two goats together are the complete picture of what Christ's sacrifice accomplished for mankind. Their argument basically is that the Azazel being taken off to an uninhabited land is Christ removing your sins from you as far as the east is from the west. That's kind of the idea behind this.

There's a huge hole in this argument if you stop and look at the big picture. If you study the meaning between Passover and the wave sheaf, and then look at what is being pictured by the Lord's goat in Atonement, you are going to see a great deal of redundancy here. They are basically picturing the same thing. If you think about it, through the holy days by the time you get to Atonement the first fruits have already been resurrected. They've received salvation at that point. They are raised at the blowing of the seventh trumpet, which is the latter part of the fulfillment of the Feast of Trumpets. Their process of salvation is done. If you even look at the meaning of Passover, whose life was saved by putting the blood upon the door? It was the firstborn. That's who died from the plague in Egypt. You'll even see with the symbolism of the wave sheaf, if you go to Leviticus 23 this is very specific to the first fruits. They both picture the same thing, because Christ died once and for all for everyone, but it's a question of when this is applied. It's applied first to the first fruits, but then later this same sacrifice has to be applied to everyone else and that's what Atonement speaks to.

Here is the obvious question. All of this extra symbolism associated with the Azazel goat is completely missing from everything that we see in the symbolism of Passover and the wave sheaf. Think about it. Christ died once and for all for everybody. The rules of salvation are the same for everyone. Everything that Christ's sacrifice would accomplish for all of the rest of mankind it accomplished for the first fruits as well. If this is also a picture of Christ, why is all of this extra symbolism completely missing from

Passover and the wave sheaf? The very fact that none of that is addressed there tells you something else is being pictured here. This isn't the same thing. Again, it's the obvious issue of one being the Lord's goat and the other is something else. It tells you there's some other issue here. What tends to happen oftentimes is people get down in the minutia of the argument and then create their whole argument that this is Christ as well without stepping back a step, looking at the big picture and going --- wait a minute. If that's the case, the same sacrifice that's applied to the first fruits, why is this concept completely absent? Well, that's because it pictures something else. It pictures the binding of Satan.

My whole point in this is sometimes instead of just focusing on all of the fine, fine details, we need to take a step back and put it in the big picture of God's plan. If you do that, these questions just kind of scream at you and it becomes obvious how to interpret this.

Let's look at some more principles. We talked about looking at the overall big picture in terms of God's plan. To zero in a little bit closer we also need to not just look at the picture of God's entire plan in general, but also utilize a similar principle when studying a similar subject. Sometimes we can just zero in on a particular scripture or a subject and not take a little broader look at all of the scriptures that can pertain to a particular idea. We can come to a wrong conclusion if we don't take the full context into consideration.

Turn to Revelation 1:6 to see a good example of this. In my lifetime I've seen a number of people stumble on this and, quite frankly, I'm guilty of stumbling on it myself.

Revelation 1:6. *and has made us kings and priests to His God and Father, to Him be glory and dominion forever and ever. Amen. (NKJV)*

I am quoting from the New King James Version. It's referring basically to the resurrected saints being made kings and priests to God the Father. If you are reading from this translation, you'll notice next to the word "kings", there is a little number 1. If you look in the margin, you'll see it suggests an alternate translation can be the word "kingdom". In fact, if you look up in a number of other Bible translations, you'll see it actually renders it as "kingdom of priests" rather than "kings and priests". If you look up the Greek word for this, you can see that it is an acceptable translation to use kings or kingdom. You can also support this idea by looking at some of the scriptures in the Old Testament as well. Let me back up and explain what I'm getting at here.

What happens if oftentimes people look at this scripture and Revelation 5:10 that we're going to look at shortly. They take this idea and say okay, if you can translate this as kingdom of priests, maybe that means the idea of being kings is not a valid concept. They basically throw that idea out and think well, it's just a kingdom of priests. If you look back in Exodus 19, which I am just going to summarize, when God is saying to ancient Israel that He wants to make a covenant with them. They are going to make

this covenant agreement. I'll be your God and you shall be My people. He says to them I want to make a kingdom of priests of you. You also see in the New Testament that He makes comments about the church being a royal priesthood. The idea of being a kingdom of priests is certainly a valid idea, but the core issue here is the question does this throw out the concept of being kings? You'll see that the wording "kings and priests" is only used in two scriptures in the Bible. What very often happens when people are looking at this idea is they just focus on these two scriptures. Turn to Revelation 5:9-10, the other reference that uses this phrase.

Revelation 5:9. *And they sang a new song, saying: "You are worthy to take the scroll, and to open its seals; for You were slain, and have redeemed us to God by Your blood out of every tribe and tongue and people and nation, 10) And have made us kings and priests to our God; and we shall reign on the earth." (NKJV)*

Once again, if you are reading from the New King James Version, you'll notice next to the word "kings" there's a little number 2 there. If you look in the margin, once again you'll see it's suggested that "kingdom" is another possible translation for this. If you look at these two, you can take the idea that maybe this is saying kingdom of priests and maybe the idea of being kings is not a valid concept. You can fall into that and stumble on that if you're just focusing on these two scriptures.

I'm guilty of having done this in the past myself. In fact, let me illustrate how to look at this the way another minister taught me this particular lesson. Many years ago, I went to him with this idea. I was excited about it. I told him well this is actually kingdom of priests and the idea of being kings is basically not a valid idea. He looked back at me and said let me ask you a question. What do you call somebody who wears a crown, sits on a throne and reigns? He just grinned at me and was waiting for a light to come on in my head. What he was getting across to me is these are all qualities that are repeatedly mentioned that the resurrected saints will have and none of those qualities apply to a priest. You never refer to a priest as sitting on a throne, wearing a crown and reigning. Those are all qualities of a king. We're going to see shortly some of the scriptures that mention that, but let's also notice what we just read here in Revelation 5:10. The last part of the sentence was "and we shall reign on the earth." Notice the word reign. That wouldn't fit with just kingdom of priests, if we throw the concept of kings out. There are numerous scriptures that describe wearing a crown, sitting on a throne and reigning. Let's look at a couple of them to make this particular point. Turn to Revelation 20:4.

Revelation 20:4. *And I saw thrones, and they sat on them ... (NKJV)*

We're referring to the resurrected saints and they are sitting on thrones.

4b) ... and judgment was committed to them. Then I saw the souls of those who had been beheaded for their witness to Jesus and for the word of God, who had

not worshiped the beast or his image, and had not received his mark on their foreheads or on their hands. And they lived and reigned with Christ for a thousand years. (NKJV)

Notice that they're sitting on thrones and they're reigning. Let's also notice that they're going to wear crowns. Turn to Revelation 3:11.

Revelation 3:11. *Behold, I am coming quickly! Hold fast what you have, that no one may take your crown. (NKJV)*

Again, there are numerous scriptures that speak to this and we're just scratching the surface on this. My point here is if we consider all of the related scriptures on a particular subject, you can really clarify something. You can stumble on this one, if you just focus on those two scriptures and how they might be translated and don't look at the broader context.

One of the other things that I think can be very important to Bible study is what I like to call following a word or a phrase through the Bible. Sometimes we're studying a particular subject where the Bible uses a particular phrase or title or word and if we only look at it in certain scriptures, we can get an idea in our head as to what it might mean and maybe not consider all of the places where it's utilized. Sometimes to get the full context to understand it we need to follow it through the Bible. Words or phrases can have very consistent meanings and if you follow it through the Bible and read all of the different scriptures on it, you can see that. Other times that's not always the case.

If you use a Bible search program like PC Study Bible or one of numerous other programs that do similar things, you can type in a word or phrase and look at all the different scriptures it's used and read each one and follow it through the Bible. That can really give you a good picture of things.

Just to give a particular example, in the last month or two Rick Railston gave a sermon on the Most High God and the Almighty God. Personally, in studying that particular subject one of the things I did was to go into PC Study Bible, type in Most High, pull up every scripture that's associated with that, read them all in the particular context and follow them through the Bible. If you not only do that but utilize the other principles that we've talked about, what you'll see is a consistent picture on that particular phrase. You'll see in the New Testament and the gospels that Jesus Christ is referred to as Son of the Most High God. In Genesis as Melchizedek He is referred to as Priest of the Most High God. Obviously, in both references the Most High has to be the Father. If you look up the Hebrew word for what Most High is in the Old Testament, it's "Elyon" which means the one in the highest position, then you look up associated scriptures. What you're going to see is Christ says My Father is greater than I am. The Father sent Him. The Father appoints Him to the roles He is in. The Father is His head. You see this consistent picture of, you might say, a superior subordinate relationship. Yes, Jesus Christ is an immortal being, no question, but He makes it very clear that the

Father is in a higher position than Him. You can see again this consistent picture that the Most High is the Father. That's a good example of a phrase that has a consistent meaning everywhere.

There are phrases that sometimes have nuances of meaning that if we assume it always means the same thing, we can stumble on it. A good example of that is the phrase "circumcision of the heart". Turn to Romans 2:25-29. I am sure as I mention this phrase; probably what comes most often to everyone's mind is how the New Testament typically uses this particular phrase and the way it's used in the following scripture.

Romans 2:25. *For circumcision is indeed profitable if you keep the law; but if you are a breaker of the law, your circumcision has become uncircumcision.*
26) *Therefore, if an uncircumcised man keeps the righteous requirements of the law, will not his uncircumcision be counted as circumcision?*
27) *And will not the physically uncircumcised, if he fulfills the law, judge you who, even with your written code and circumcision, are a transgressor of the law?*
28) *For he is not a Jew who is one outwardly, nor is circumcision that which is outward in the flesh;*
29) *but he is a Jew who is one inwardly; and circumcision is that of the heart, in the Spirit, not in the letter; whose praise is not from men but from God. (NKJV)*

Notice here we're referring to circumcision of the heart as not just a repentant change of heart, but specifically that which is brought about through the holy spirit in changing our mind and character to become more like God. When you think of circumcision of the heart that is most often what we think of, because that's typically how the New Testament uses that phrase. If we assume that every time we see a similar phrase like this, that it's specifically referring to a change brought about by the holy spirit, we can stumble on this, because we also have to take historical context in verse into consideration when we're interpreting something. Turn to Deuteronomy 10:12-15 and we'll notice this. Let me summarize the context of the first part of the chapter. In the first eleven verses of this chapter Moses is recounting the story of Mount Sinai where he got the Ten Commandments and the tablets and such and establishing the Old Covenant relationship with Israel. Realize that is the context in which he is going to make the statement that we are about to read here. Nowhere in this chapter is he referring to in the future when you guys are all brought up in the second resurrection and salvation if offered to you. He's talking about what they need to do today to be responsive to God and to be obedient to God as their part of the Old Covenant agreement. That's the whole context in which he is saying this. Again, historical context can be very important in interpreting a scripture.

Deuteronomy 10:12. *"And now, Israel, what does the LORD your God require of you, but to fear the LORD your God, to walk in all His ways and to love Him, to serve the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul,*

13) and to keep the commandments of the LORD and His statutes which I command you today for your good" (NKJV)

Notice he's not talking about what they're going to do in the future. This is what you need to do today.

14) "Indeed heaven and the highest heavens belong to the LORD your God, also the earth with all that is in it.

15) The LORD delighted only in your fathers, to love them; and He chose their descendants after them, you above all peoples, as it is this day." (NKJV)

What's the context? It's what they need to do today.

16) Therefore circumcise the foreskin of your heart, and be stiff-necked no longer." (NKJV)

Obviously, he is not saying to them you guys need to be baptized, repent and receive the holy spirit today. That's not even an option for them. Conversion is not being offered as a part of the covenant agreement that they have. This is basically physical letter of the law obedience for physical promises and blessings that they would receive. As we know, they were stiff necked and rebellious and didn't follow along with God's instructions. He is obviously not telling them you guys need to receive the holy spirit and oh, by the way that's not an option for you anyway. That wouldn't make a lot of sense. Realize what I'm getting at is he's using this phrase here yes, as a change of heart to be more obedient to God, but in this context again it doesn't make any sense for him to be saying you need to receive the holy spirit. Turn to Ezekiel 44:4-7. We will look at another example where people oftentimes stumble over this one not considering the historical context and references that are made here. Just to put all of this in its context Ezekiel 40 through 48 is a vision that Ezekiel is receiving of the millennial period. You can see it is a graphic description of what all is being set up during the Millennium and telling Ezekiel what this will look like. Because of that oftentimes we're going to see a phrase that is used of "circumcision of the heart." People think well it's the Millennium, because it's talking about the holy spirit. They missed the historical reference that's being made in the verses that we're about to read.

Ezekiel 44:4. *Also He brought me by way of the north gate to the front of the temple; so I looked, and behold, the glory of the LORD filled the house of the Lord; and I fell on my face.*

5) And the LORD said to me, "Son of man, mark well, see with your eyes and hear with your ears, all that I say to you concerning all the ordinances of the house of the LORD and all its laws. Mark well who may enter the house and all who go out from the sanctuary.

6) "Now say to the rebellious, to the house of Israel, 'Thus says the Lord GOD: "O house of Israel, let Us have no more of all your abominations.

7) When you brought in foreigners, uncircumcised in heart and uncircumcised in flesh, to be in My sanctuary to defile it — My house — and when you offered My food, the fat and the blood, then they broke My covenant because of all your abominations.”” (NKJV)

Notice here he's talking about the establishment of this temple in the Millennium and referring to all of the past sins that they did in regards to the temple. They haven't had a chance to do that yet in this temple. He's referring back to Old Testament times and all of the things that they did wrong. We won't take the time to go over all of the history, but when he's talking about people you brought in uncircumcised of heart and in flesh into my temple, there were even times in Old Testament Israel that they had pagan rulers setting up shop in the temple of God that he was very upset about. This is the history that he's referring back to. Obviously, when he's making this reference of "uncircumcised of heart" he's not telling them you guys messed up. You let people who weren't converted and didn't have the holy spirit into the temple. That wouldn't make any sense, because this was at a time when the holy spirit wasn't even being offered to them. He's referring to - - you let rebellious, pagan people that weren't even trying to obey God into the temple. That's unacceptable. I'm not allowing this anymore. When we consider the historical context, we get a more realistic idea of what's being addressed here and then we know how to read verse 9.

9) Thus says the Lord GOD: "No foreigner, uncircumcised in heart or uncircumcised in flesh, shall enter My sanctuary, including any foreigner who is among the children of Israel." (NKJV)

Again, he makes this statement twice, but if we consider the historical reference that he's putting in here, we get a clear idea of how the phrase is being used. It wouldn't make any sense to chastise Israel for allowing someone in without the holy spirit at a time when that's not even an option. He's using the phrase in the same way that Moses is using it in Deuteronomy 10, which is referring to an attitude of trying to be obedient to God and submissive to Him, but not specifically brought about by the holy spirit, because we're talking about a time when that's not even an option to begin with.

Look at another important point. The next thing I'd like to talk about is putting tradition above scripture. I think all of us in the church of God are oftentimes critical of people in professing Christianity that we know keep Easter, Christmas, Sunday and other things. We know the history of these things and what the Bible says. If you ask people why they do this, the answer typically is my family has always done this. All of my friends to this and it's what everybody's doing, so that's what I do too. That's oftentimes the answer that you'll get, when, if you just do a Google search on the history of Christmas, in fifteen to twenty minutes you have a good idea that this is all pagan. We all seem to understand that, although we see these issues with people in the world, we can fall into this idea as well.

To give you an example of this, when I was attending Ambassador College, my sophomore year I was in a class called Fundamentals of Theology. There were various times that we would discuss different Biblical topics. A lot of the students would present a particular idea or debate something with the instructor. Oftentimes they would present an idea and the way they would present it is I've always been taught X or Mr. so and so said this. It wasn't like just a historical reference. It was well, I've always been taught this so therefore it's true or maybe another professor or their minister back home or some individual that they were quoting said something and they are saying that makes it true. My instructor was basically saying don't come in here with that type of argument. That's evidence for nothing. He said come in with an argument from the Bible and we'll discuss that all day long. I'll be more than happy to discuss that with you. I'm not going to entertain an argument of Mr. so and so. That doesn't prove anything. Realize this is exactly what Jesus Christ taught as well. Turn to Mark 7:1-13.

Mark 7:1. *Then the Pharisees and some of the scribes came together to Him, having come from Jerusalem.*

2) *Now when they saw some of His disciples eat bread with defiled, that is, with unwashed hands, they found fault.*

3) *For the Pharisees and all the Jews do not eat unless they wash their hands in a special way, holding the tradition of the elders.*

4) *When they come from the marketplace, they do not eat unless they wash. And there are many other things which they have received and hold, like the washing of cups, pitchers, copper vessels, and couches.*

5) *Then the Pharisees and scribes asked Him, "Why do Your disciples not walk according to the tradition of the elders, but eat bread with unwashed hands?"*

6) *He answered and said to them, "Well did Isaiah prophesy of you hypocrites, as it is written: 'This people honors Me with their lips, but their heart is far from Me.*

7) *And in vain they worship Me, teaching as doctrines the commandments of men.'*

8) *For laying aside the commandment of God, you hold the tradition of men — the washing of pitchers and cups, and many other such things you do."*

9) *He said to them, "All too well you reject the commandment of God, that you may keep your tradition.*

10) *For Moses said, 'Honor your father and your mother'; and, 'He who curses father or mother, let him be put to death.'*

11) *But you say, 'If a man says to his father or mother, "Whatever profit you might have received from me is Corban" — ' (that is, a gift to God),*

12) *then you no longer let him do anything for his father or his mother,*

13) *making the word of God of no effect through your tradition which you have handed down. And many such things you do." (NKJV)*

I will give you a good example of this. A couple of years ago I got a phone call one night from a gentleman that I'd never met before that evening. He introduces himself and basically tells me that he had been listening to some of the sermons from the Pacific Church of God website and generally liked what he was hearing. He said I have

a question for you. Can you convince me that Sunday is the right day for Pentecost and not Monday, because I'm convinced it's not Monday?

I had given a sermon not long before that particular conversation covering this very subject. I said if you would like to see why we come to the conclusion that we do, I gave a sermon on this this covering that whole section of Leviticus 23 and going through various arguments. I sent him a link and said you can listen to this. He said, okay I'll listen to that, but I have a question for you. After I listen to that would you be willing to discuss the subject with me? I said, sure I'd be happy to discuss the topic with you. He said if I can show you that Monday is the right day would you be willing to change? I said let me explain to you a little bit about how I think so you understand how to approach this. I basically told him the story in regards to my instructor and how I look at the subject. My point to him was if you are going to argue the subject, you are going to have to do it from Leviticus 23 and the other scriptures specifically relevant to how you count Pentecost.

The reason I brought that up is because it's been my experience that with people who focus on that particular argument, the core of their argument seems to revolve around well, Mr. Armstrong's original understanding was Monday. The church kept it on Monday for forty years and we just have to trust that that's perfect revelation and that's right. Basically, tradition becomes more important than scripture. I was trying to tell him up front that if you are going to take that approach, you are not going to get very far with me. If you can show me from Leviticus 23 and other scriptures that we misinterpreted it, I'm more than willing to pursue that one.

He listened to the sermon and followed up with me. Sure enough he said I've listened to your sermon twice and I'm more convinced than ever that Monday is the right day. We went through an email exchange after that. I couldn't help but notice that after two or three exchanges back and forth that he had never even attempted to argue the subject from Leviticus 23 or the other scriptures associated with the subject. I pointed this out to him. I said I can't help but notice that you haven't even tried to show it to me from the scriptures directly relevant to counting Pentecost. Your entire argument has been around Mr. Armstrong and the church did this for years therefore it's right and we can't alter from that. I said I think we're just going to have to disagree on the subject, because I don't think there's any place else we can go here. We peacefully ended it at that point.

What I want you to see here is scripture quite frankly became irrelevant, because tradition was so important from his perspective that he didn't even attempt to argue it from the scriptures that were directly relevant to the subject. That's what happens if we take tradition or what we're used to hearing and place it above God's word. It's more important to put God's word ahead of everything else, because human beings are fallible. We can be wrong, but God's word is what we should always use as an example. As I pointed out to this gentleman, you realize Mr. Armstrong is the guy who

is famous for saying don't believe me. Believe your Bible. Don't we need to follow that and put the Bible ahead? Again, we had to agree to disagree and move on from that.

One last example is sometimes we get a particular scripture in our head and we have an idea of what that particular scripture is saying but it's not what the words on the page said. Sometimes we're so used to repeating an idea that we don't actually read what's there.

Turn to Matthew 2:1-12 for an example. This is when the wise men come to see Christ after He was born. I'm sure every year around Christmas people talk about the three wise men. You'll see nativity scenes and you'll always have these three guys showing up in a barn setting. Well, you can't find any of that in the Bible. If you try to get them to turn to a scripture to back this up, here's the only place that they can turn.

Matthew 2:1. *Now after Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judea in the days of Herod the king, behold, wise men from the East came to Jerusalem, 2) saying, "Where is He who has been born King of the Jews? For we have seen His star in the East and have come to worship Him." 3) When Herod the king heard this, he was troubled, and all Jerusalem with him. 4) And when he had gathered all the chief priests and scribes of the people together, he inquired of them where the Christ was to be born. 5) So they said to him, "In Bethlehem of Judea, for thus it is written by the prophet: 6) 'But you, Bethlehem, in the land of Judah, are not the least among the rulers of Judah; for out of you shall come a Ruler Who will shepherd My people Israel.'" 7) Then Herod, when he had secretly called the wise men, determined from them what time the star appeared. 8) And he sent them to Bethlehem and said, "Go and search carefully for the young Child, and when you have found Him, bring back word to me, that I may come and worship Him also." 9) When they heard the king, they departed; and behold, the star which they had seen in the East went before them, till it came and stood over where the young Child was. 10) When they saw the star, they rejoiced with exceedingly great joy. 11) And when they had come into the house, they saw the young Child with Mary His mother, and fell down and worshiped Him. And when they had opened their treasures, they presented gifts to Him: gold, frankincense, and myrrh. 12) Then, being divinely warned in a dream that they should not return to Herod, they departed for their own country another way. (NKJV)*

Notice they came to a house, not a barn. It doesn't say anything about there being three wise men. There were three different types of gifts in a house. They're not in a barn. What happens sometimes is we get an idea in our head what a particular verse says and we aren't actually reading the words on the page anymore. We repeat that idea and repeat it and repeat it until we are no longer reading what it actually says.

As I mentioned before another minister was one that taught me lots of lessons and mentored me for many years. One of things that he used to love to do when we would be debating a subject, because we both had type A personalities and we loved to debate subjects and the Bible and such, I would sometimes dogmatically state something. He would scratch his chin and say can you show me where it actually says that in the Bible? He would just grin at me, because he knew I had just made a statement I couldn't back up. Sometimes I'd turn over to a verse and read it. He would say, okay where does it say what you just said? I don't see what you just said here. He would get me to read it and sometimes I'd have to read it and say well you're right. It doesn't actually say that. Sometimes you get an idea in your head and say the Bible says this. He'd say again, can you show that to me? He would just grin because he knew there wasn't a place where you could turn to demonstrate it. He caught me on that numerous times.

Again, that's one of the things we have to be careful of in studying or reading the Bible. Sometimes we get an idea in our head and we're quoting our idea. We're not even reading the words on the page anymore.

Another thing that we need to be aware of is sometimes we build a chain of logic based on that as well. We get an idea in our head of what this particular verse says and it's not actually what the words on the page say. It's just how we've begun to think of looking at it and then we use that as the building block of stacking another concept on top of another concept. We now have a house of cards that's all based upon this idea of a scripture that we've quite frankly misinterpreted or are so used to thinking of in a particular way or saying that means something. When you actually read it in context and study the actual words on the page, it doesn't actually say what we're thinking it does.

These are some of the reasons why it's important that we regularly study God's word, that we don't just easily read over things but actually study and analyze things, that we consider common counter arguments to a particular idea. That causes us to be careful and to look at things from a thorough perspective. What we can do in our relationship with God if we take this book for granted, think well I've been coming to church for years. I've heard all of that. I know what it's about. I have other busy things to do. We can allow our relationship with God to deteriorate and fall apart. It can also stunt us from growing, because God's word is a living word. This book always has more to teach us. We are never going to get to the point in this physical life where we have it all figured out, there is nothing else to learn and there are no further ways to grow.

I always love to put it when we get to the marriage supper, if we're all fortunate enough to be there, and we're sitting around the table, there will be one individual who can honestly make the statement when I walked the earth, I understood it all correctly and I taught it perfectly. His name will be Jesus Christ and that will be it. All of the rest of us are fallible human beings and we all have more to learn. We have to realize that we all

have more to learn. We all have room to grow and we all have imperfect understanding. That's one of the reasons why we need to diligently be studying this word and growing in our relationship with God not just to learn more but to stay directly connected with Him so that we don't ever get to the point where that relationship falls apart and we never get to the point where we see Jesus Christ on judgment day and He says to us I never knew you.