

Why and How Should We Study the Bible?—Part 2

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Today we're going to continue with part two of how and why we should study the Bible. I gave part one a while back and frankly was amazed at the response. I didn't think the subject of how to study the Bible would elicit much response—it's kind of a mundane topic—but brethren came out of the woodwork to say things like, I've been in the church for decades and nobody taught me how to study, or, I've never heard a sermon on how to study, which was surprising.

I got to thinking about it, and I believe in part this happened over the decades (from the '50s, '60s, '70s onward), when a negative attitude crept into church culture—the culture of the Worldwide Church of God—in which over time the brethren came to be regarded as “dumb sheep”, so that an Ambassador College graduate and a minister had to explain what the Bible said. The brethren who contacted me have felt this way, sometimes for decades. They admitted that for years their personal Bible study consisted of reading a church booklet on a certain topic, or listening to a recording of a sermon and thumbing through the Bible as the speaker gave the scriptures, but they didn't go into the Bible and study it for themselves, apart from all of that. Many people just never did that. That continues to this day, frankly.

Some brethren said, I don't feel like I'm smart enough to study the Bible on my own, or, I don't have the training to study the Bible on my own. The response to that is, would God have a plan of salvation that is so complicated that the people He calls couldn't understand it? Is that logical? Of course not—we know we are the weak of the world, yes, but God's plan of salvation is structured so that we as the weak of the world can understand it, if we'll just spend the time, look into the Bible on our own, and study the Bible for what we can personally glean from it. God expects us to prove things for ourselves. It was said years ago, dust off your Bible and prove it for yourselves, but we got away from that and the brethren have been left in a hungry state, so to speak. Let's go to 2 Timothy 2:15; we covered that last time but this sets the frame for what we're going to talk about today. It's the commandment, really, to study. This doesn't say when you study or if you study, it says:

2 Timothy 2:15 *Study to shew thyself approved* [Who are we studying to show ourselves approved to? It says] *unto God, a workman* [meaning you have to put in effort and time] *that needeth not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth.* (KJV)

So we see that study is not something that's optional, if we feel like it; it's not something where it's okay if we occasionally find time to do it. Remember Christ said—describing the outline for the model prayer—*when* you pray; He didn't say if you pray, and this says

the same thing. We won't turn there but in 2 Timothy 3:16, the next chapter over, we talked about the fact that all scripture is God-breathed. It comes from God and we need to respect it as something that comes directly from God.

Last time, just as a reminder, we covered various study helps. I talked about the numerous translations of the Bible and how they are beneficial because they can sometimes give us a sense of a verse, if we look at various translations. We have to remember that translations are made by men and men have biases, particularly the trinity, and we just have to keep that in mind. We also talked about the fact that in most Bibles, there are two columns on a page with a center column between them, and in the center column there are marginal references that refer to related scriptures. Maybe in the New Testament the author is quoting from the Old Testament, so the translators cite the scriptures that they feel are relevant. But remember these are choices of men. However, scriptural references can be helpful. In that same margin there are alternative translations of words or alternative meanings of words, and sometimes those can be helpful also.

Then there are study Bibles that add helpful information to traditional translations like the New King James or the King James. A study Bible has maps, cross references, commentaries that you wouldn't find in a normal Bible. It's much thicker, it's heavier, and sometimes the editors give backgrounds on the various books—when each was written, who wrote it, what the setting was—and sometimes those can be helpful. But the big reference is Strong's Exhaustive Concordance. People that I know who have been in the church for decades have never had their hands on one or have never used one, or if they have a computer, don't realize you can get that on your computer. In a Strong's Exhaustive Concordance (I should have brought one; it's probably about *that* thick, at least mine is, about *that* high, *that* wide; it's a heavy book, with a lot in it), in the first part of the book is an alphabetical list of all the words used in the Bible—think about that. James Strong first published that in 1890 and this was long before computers, so can you imagine going through every word in the Bible and cataloguing each one? It just blows the mind.

In the first part of the concordance, there is a list of every word and then below that, a topic, such as faith, and every time faith appears in the Bible, there is a list of every scripture that uses the word faith. Then each word is assigned a Strong's number, so if you take faith and you go through the New Testament where faith is listed, every time it's used, every verse has the same number, and you can say, this same word is used every time. Quite often you find there are different words that are translated faith, and that tells you maybe there's something more here, maybe there's something I need to look at more closely. So the first part of the book is an alphabetical list of words in the Bible, then a list of every verse, and then a phrase where that verse is used. The second part is actually two parts; there's a Hebrew dictionary and a Greek dictionary where the word's number is shown—it's all in numerical sequence—as well as its definition or definitions. The translator may pick one definition but there may be other definitions that are worth considering. You can see that Strong's opens up the Bible in a way that maybe we hadn't considered before, by giving alternate translations, or

showing how many times a word appears, so you can see various applications of that word and so forth. It opens up the study a great deal. The end pages of some Bibles contain a small concordance. Some Bibles have them, some don't. Study Bibles generally do but these are small concordances, not exhaustive like Strong's, and these generally just hit the high spots.

Another big Bible help we've talked about is the Interlinear Bible. It's a word-by-word translation of the Bible into English, but then depending on the interlinear, either right above or right below each English word, is the Hebrew or Greek word. You can follow along and sometimes we find that one Hebrew word or one Greek word is translated into two or three English words. Okay, that's sometimes nice to know. Then sometimes we find out, lo and behold, the English translators left a word out. Let's go to John 1:1 and see that—we've covered that before but I think it's helpful to all of us to go back and see how critical an Interlinear translation might be in understanding God's word.

John 1:1 *In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. (KJV)*

We see here, in the beginning was the Word and the Word was with God, but if you look at an Interlinear, you see that there's a Greek word that doesn't appear in the English. That's the word "the". We see it changes the whole meaning of the scripture: In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with the God, and the Word was God. We have to remember that the English translations were made by trinitarians, and if they include the phrase, the God, that makes proving trinitarianism a little harder because trinitarians and binitarians mush everything up. If you say, the God, that means there is a God that is the God, and that is hard for trinitarians to explain. So an Interlinear Bible in some situations can be very helpful and very good.

Then we have Bible dictionaries. You can have just a dictionary of Hebrew and Greek words but in general there are dozens of Bible dictionaries, meaning broad dictionaries that function like an encyclopedia. You can have a subject; let's say you want to find out about the Temple, and in a general Bible dictionary you look up the word Temple and there can be a description of the Temple itself; there might be a floor plan of the Temple; there could be drawings of what the people think the Temple looked like and all the accoutrements in the Temple, and something about the Levitical priesthood and so on. A Bible dictionary or encyclopedia is helpful in giving background for us in our study.

Then we have Bible commentaries—any number of Bible commentaries. Young's Bible Commentary, Jamieson, Fausset and Brown's Commentary, and the list goes on and on. These are written by very knowledgeable men but men with biases because we all have our biases. They were written by men who believe in the trinity, something we need to keep in mind. A commentary can be helpful sometimes but you can't establish doctrine from a commentary—can't do that. The Bible has to establish doctrine, not what somebody says about the Bible.

Then we talked about a Bible atlas. An atlas is just a book of maps. Generally what an atlas does is show the area of the Middle East over time. In other words, what the Middle East looked like at the time of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob and the nations around them. Then going through a timeline, you would have a map of what the Middle East looked like when Israel was there, to see how the various tribes were allocated various lands. Then of course, the time of Christ, and then there are maps of Paul's journeys that can all be helpful. I like geography and I like maps, and it's fun just to look and see where people went. You find out what it means when an author writes, he went down from Jerusalem, because Jerusalem is way up high so that's a literal statement—went down to the coast or down to Jericho. In a very short period of time you have a drop in elevation so viewing a relief map adds to our understanding.

Finally we talked about a topical index. A topical index means just what it says—there are topics and then underneath those topics are listed all the pertinent scriptures. Mark Mickelson has devoted decades of his life to building a topical index. His latest version is out and it's free, and if you want one, contact Mark or Michelle or Vivian Blank, and they'll get you one free, no postage or expense to you. It's very helpful if you want to look up a subject and see the scriptures—there's no commentary—just scriptures that have to do with that subject. It can jumpstart somebody's Bible study—we talked about that as well.

All of the above are available on a computer and sometimes it makes it easier because you aren't lugging books around, or don't have a desk piled with books, but some people like the feel of a book; I like to turn a page and I can't read a book on a computer. I just can't do it—I like the feel of the book in my lap and to be able to turn it page by page. If you also like hard copies of all of this, you might want to look at CBD (Christian Book Distributors); they have a toll-free number, they have a website, they give very good prices, have very good shipping. I've dealt with them for years and they give very good service. Their catalogue is comprehensive. There's a lot of stuff there we would never touch but you can look through it and get to the important stuff.

The last time (I'm summarizing part one) I asked the question, how much time should I spend in Bible study? Back in the old days we were told, as an absolute minimum, half an hour a day. So the only question I would ask is, how much do I study relative to other things I do? Do I watch soap operas for three hours a day and study for five minutes? What does that say to God? We all have to go through and evaluate that question. Where we put our mind and what we put into our mind tells God where our focus is. If our focus is on soap operas versus God's word, that sends God a message. We need to be careful about the message we send to God. Proper study of course takes time—we all know that. We can't rush through study. God wants to see if we will devote the time and the energy to Him, studying His word, what came out of His mouth. Attitude makes all the difference. Sometimes people have checklists. Did I pray today—check—did I study today—check—did I take out the garbage today—check—and it's just one of many on a checklist. That's not the way God wants it. He wants us to focus on contact with Him. Do I really look forward to study? Is it the highlight of my day? Do I appreciate the precious time that I spend with God, learning about His word, allowing

Him to teach me or is it just another chore that has to get done? God watches our attitude. So this kind of summarizes part one. Now what we want to get to is why and how to study the Bible.

In part two of this sermon series, we're going to talk today about fundamental principles of Bible study—things we need to keep in mind as we study the Bible to avoid getting off track. Once we start getting off track, remember we have an adversary who wants to work on our minds in an effort to keep us off track or take us off track in the first place. So the first fundamental point is:

1. The Old Testament came first and it is the foundation of the New Testament.

The problem is many modern Christian sects totally ignore the Old Testament. They say the Old Testament has this mean, vengeful, hateful God and the New Testament has this loving Jesus Christ, so therefore we're going to ignore the Old Testament and we're going to focus on the New Testament with this loving Jesus Christ. They make a fundamental error when they ignore the Old Testament, because the Old Testament forms the foundation, has the building blocks, that enable us to understand the New Testament. We can't fully understand the New Testament without understanding the Old. We need to keep that in mind. It's an important concept.

For example, if you're studying in the New Testament and Christ or one of the apostles is quoting something from the Old Testament, you can quickly go to your center margin and it's probably listed where that quote came from. So stop your study, put a marker there, go back to the Old Testament, and see the original quote and the context of the original quote, so it gives you a background of what Christ or the apostles were saying. Let me give you two examples. Let's talk about the Sabbath—let's go to Mark 2:27. Christ is talking to the Pharisees; they had all of these rules and regulations and made the Sabbath a burden, and Christ was getting on them for doing that.

Mark 2:27 *And he [Christ] said to them [the Pharisees], "The Sabbath was made for man, and not man for the Sabbath.*

28) Therefore the Son of Man is also Lord of the Sabbath." (NKJV)

If you have Strong's Exhaustive Concordance and you go back and look up the word Sabbath, you can find (or go to the margin if it's listed there) the number of times in the verses that the Sabbath appeared in the Old Testament. The first one listed is in Exodus 16:23, so let's go back and look there. Christ is telling us that the Sabbath was made for man—for the benefit of mankind. Maybe there is something to learn from the Old Testament.

Exodus 16:23 *Then he [referring to Moses] said to them [referring to Israel], "This is what the LORD has said: "Tomorrow is a Sabbath rest ... (NKJV)*

So we see, just in the beginning of verse 23, two facts: The Sabbath is made for rest, and the time—the Sabbath itself—is holy. Very important.

23 continued) ... *to the LORD. Bake what you will bake today* [meaning the preparation day], *and boil what you will boil* [on the preparation day]; *and lay up for yourselves all that remains, to be kept until morning.*'” (NKJV)

Here in this one verse, we see not only that the Sabbath is holy and it's a time of rest, but we are introduced to the concept of a preparation day in which all the cooking and all the cleaning and all the preparation is done the day before the Sabbath. We see the Old Testament adds clarification and understanding to the New Testament. If we didn't go back and look at that, we could miss some of the meanings of the Sabbath.

Now let's look at another example: how we treat others. Going back and taking something in the New and looking into the Old. Let's go to Matthew 5:38—you'll want to place a marker here because we're going to read and then go to another scripture and then come right back. In Christ's first recorded sermon, notice what He says.

Matthew 5:38 *Ye have heard that it hath been said, An eye for an eye, and a tooth for a tooth:* (KJV)

We could stop there and ask, where was that said? If you go to the margin, you can find out, or you can look it up in a concordance and see it's in Leviticus 24:17—I'll read it out of the New King James. This was what Christ was referring to when He said, you've heard an eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth. Sure enough, they had heard.

Leviticus 24:17 [Moses says] *“Whoever kills any man shall surely be put to death.* (KJV)

That's certainly an eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth.

19) *If a man causes disfigurement of his neighbor, as he has done, so shall it be done to him—*

20) *fracture for fracture, eye for eye, tooth for tooth; as he has caused disfigurement of a man, so shall it be done to him.* (KJV)

People who read that start wringing their hands and say, how can this be, how can this happen? Even some of the commentators sadly call this the principle of retaliation. That's absolutely not true. Remember Israel was largely a carnal society. Only a few in Israel were granted God's Holy Spirit so the nation itself was devoid of God's Spirit, so therefore this isn't about retaliation. What it graphically demonstrates is the principle of reaping what you sow. We won't turn there but in Galatians 6:7, Paul says God is not deceived, and He cannot be mocked. Whatever a man sows, that shall he also reap. This is just what a carnal society needs. If somebody starts a fight and breaks someone's arm, then in that little village, they would gather the people together and the man who committed the assault would have to stand in the center while somebody broke his arm. All the kids are watching, teenagers are watching, young adults are watching and once you see that—or see somebody's eye put out or see somebody

stoned to death, do you think maybe it might be a deterrent for other people to continue in that way of life? Of course it would be. Reaping what we sow is just what a carnal society needs. We don't have that today—people can sit on death row for thirty years, so there's no immediate punishment. Let's go back to Matthew 5:39; Christ said, you've heard of old, an eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth.

Matthew 5:39 *But I say unto you, That ye resist not evil: but whosoever shall smite thee on thy right cheek, turn to him the other also.* (KJV)

In other words, don't you hit him on the cheek because he hit you on the cheek, thereby returning evil for evil. We see that Christ eliminates that Old Testament statute for those who would be part of the New Covenant, for those who would have the help of God's Holy Spirit, because God's Spirit is what helps you turn the other cheek. It's hard when somebody slaps you. It's hard when somebody slanders you, to keep your mouth shut, turn the other cheek, and walk away, which is what Christ did. The apostles repeated that admonition; let's go to 1 Thessalonians 5:15 and see that this wasn't just something that Christ said. The apostles followed suit and continued to preach it.

1 Thessalonians 5:15 *See that none render evil for evil unto any man [the word man is in italics, and was inserted by the translator]; but ever follow that which is good, both among yourselves, and to all men.* (KJV)

That's repeated in Romans 12:17 and 1 Peter 3:9—Paul said it, Peter said it, Christ said it. We see that the Old Testament gives a foundation and a context for what we find in the New Testament. That's point number one.

2. The New Testament often adds a spiritual dimension to the Old Testament.

We can think of numerous examples. The New Testament doesn't do away with the Old Testament, it adds to it and adds to our understanding. One of the focuses of the New Testament, as we all know, is what is in our heart and on our mind. The Old Testament mostly was focused on what people actually did, but even with the Ten Commandments, coveting is something that goes on in the head. Adultery starts in the head. The New Testament really adds to that—let's go to Romans 7:14. The New Testament adds to the Old and points to what is in our hearts and in our minds, to what our intent is.

Romans 7:14 [Paul says] *For we know that the law is spiritual:*

If you look up that word in [Strong's Exhaustive Concordance](#), it's #4152 and it means non-carnal, not human, divinely supernatural, because that law comes from the mind and heart of God.

14 continued) ... *but I am carnal, sold under sin.* (KJV)

Then verse 22.

22) *For I delight in the law of God after the inward man: (KJV)*

The Greek word for *inward* means inside or within. Paul is saying, the Holy Spirit in me helps me delight in God's spiritual law. That's something that was missing before he had God's Holy Spirit.

Then let's go to Romans 12:2, just a few chapters over. The point is, God is concerned with what's in our heart and our mind.

Romans 12:2 *And be not conformed to this world: but be ye transformed [changed, made new] by the renewing of your mind, that ye may prove what is that good, and acceptable, and perfect, will of God. (KJV)*

There has to be a change from the old way, the old man, to the new man, and that's made possible by God's Holy Spirit. God is saying to all of us, I want you to have a mind like I have. Paul said in Philippians, let this mind be in you which is in Jesus Christ, who had the same mind as God the Father. God is concerned, in adding a spiritual dimension, that we come to the place that we think like He thinks and we act like Christ acted when He walked this earth. Let's give an example—go back to Matthew 5 again, this time verse 27. You know this scripture, we've talked about it before; Christ is speaking to those assembled there.

Matthew 5:27 *Ye have heard that it was said by them of old time, Thou shalt not commit adultery: (KJV)*

That's one of the ten commandments, it's been passed down from generation to generation, it's on the scrolls that they read, and in verse 28, He said:

28) *But I say unto you, That whosoever looketh on a woman to lust after her hath committed adultery with her already in his heart. (KJV)*

It goes both ways, men to women. The fact is, Christ is adding a spiritual dimension. He's saying don't think you can get away from sin by not committing the physical act of adultery, because all it has to do is occur in your mind and you've sinned. It's not just the physical act, it's what is in the mind and in the heart. The New Testament adds a spiritual dimension to the Old—that's the second point.

Now to the third:

3. Doctrine must be established with clear scriptures, not fuzzy ones.

This has been violated so many decades in the church. We have to establish doctrine with clear, absolute scriptures and not with ones that are out there and fuzzy, and way off in the twigs or down in the weeds, so to speak. Let's go to Acts 3:13. This scripture is so clear, and as I've said before, I'm still ashamed that I read over this for decades and it never sank in.

Acts 3:13 *The God of Abraham, and of Isaac, and of Jacob, the God of our fathers, hath glorified his Son Jesus [hard to get around that one]; whom ye delivered up, and denied him in the presence of Pilate, when he was determined to let him go. (KJV)*

Wow! Now notice verse 25.

25) *Ye are the children of the prophets, and of the covenant which God [again referring back to verse 13, the Father] made with our fathers, saying unto Abraham [God spoke to Abraham—what a concept], And in thy seed shall all the kindreds of the earth be blessed.*

26) *Unto you first God, having raised up his Son Jesus, sent him to bless you, in turning away every one of you from his iniquities. (KJV)*

How clear can you get? Very clear. Yet, I've read over it for decades. You see, these verses—Acts 3:13, and verses 25 and 26—fit perfectly with Acts 5:30. Let's turn over two chapters to Acts 5:30, where this statement is repeated again.

Acts 5:30 *The God of our fathers raised up Jesus, whom ye slew and hanged on a tree. (KJV)*

It's repeated again for emphasis. There's no confusion here between God and Christ and who is the God of our fathers and who Christ is—no confusion at all. That fits perfectly with Hebrews 1:1; let's go there.

Hebrews 1:1 *God, who at sundry times and in divers manners spake in time past unto the fathers by the prophets ... (KJV)*

God spoke to the prophets in times past, and

2) *Hath in these last days spoken unto us by his Son ... (KJV)*

It can't get any more clear than that. God spoke by His Son when Christ walked this earth. Previously, He spoke to all of Ancient Israel through various prophets. So who is the God of our fathers? It's clearly God the Father. The point is that if there is a mountain of clear scriptures over here on this issue (or any issue) and then there are a few fuzzy ones—just a tiny handful of fuzzy scriptures over there—then we'd best go with the mountain of evidence, and spend the time as needed to figure out what the fuzzy scriptures mean. If the mountain of evidence is absolutely clear and irrefutable, shame on us if we don't go with that and instead get hung up in the weeds, trying to prove some preconceived notion. So the third point is, doctrine has to be established with clear scriptures.

The fourth—we've known this for years but it's been violated for years:

4. Always look at the context.

Who wrote the words? What was the author's purpose in writing those words? Who was the intended audience? For example, in the New Testament, it's helpful to know if the words were written to the Jews or the Gentiles. So maybe we ought to study that to see whether the book or section of scripture was written to the Jews or the Gentiles. It makes a big difference. Another question to ask is what is the subject of the surrounding scriptures? If we're concerned about a particular one, what's going on before that scripture and what transpired after that scripture? For example, Terry's sermon on the content of the gospel of John, Was Jesus Christ-Centered? (given on August 11 of last year). He showed the common theme through the book of John, the context of the entire book, and how it frames everything that we read within it, and it's so clear because as you go through John, what was Christ's focus? It was His Father. Christ was focused on the Father, the book is focused on the Father, so if that's the case, maybe we should take that into consideration. Maybe we should think about that.

Let's look at an example of ignoring the context; let's go to Isaiah 65. We read and have read Isaiah 65 at the Feast for decades. We can all go to the Feast and sing the songs and hear Isaiah 65 quoted. Just notice the context as we go through.

Isaiah 65:18 *But be ye glad and rejoice for ever in that which I create: for, behold, I create Jerusalem a rejoicing, and her people a joy.*

19) *And I will rejoice in Jerusalem, and joy in my people [God is speaking here]: and the voice of weeping shall be no more heard in her, nor the voice of crying.* (KJV)

Go to verse 21.

21) *And they shall build houses, and inhabit them; and they shall plant vineyards, and eat the fruit of them.*

22) *They shall not build, and another inhabit; they shall not plant, and another eat: for as the days of a tree are the days of my people, and mine elect shall long enjoy the work of their hands.* (KJV)

We read this during the Feast of Tabernacles. Verse 23.

23) *They shall not labour in vain, nor bring forth for trouble; for they are the seed of the blessed of the LORD, and their offspring with them.*

24) *And it shall come to pass, that before they call, I will answer; and while they are yet speaking, I will hear.* (KJV)

Then the very famous scripture.

25) *The wolf and the lamb shall feed together, and the lion shall eat straw like the bullock: and dust shall be the serpent's meat. They shall not hurt nor destroy in all my holy mountain, saith the LORD.* (KJV)

All of us agree that this is talking about the Millennium. It's a millennial setting. But notice one verse. Let's go back to verse 20; we skipped over that on purpose.

20) There shall be no more thence an infant of days, nor an old man that hath not filled his days: for the child shall die an hundred years old; but the sinner being an hundred years old shall be accursed. (KJV)

The church took verse 20, took it entirely out of context and applied it to the Great White Throne judgment of Revelation 20. Maybe it applies but you can't prove it from the context because the context is entirely millennial, and this occurs right in the middle of it, so we'd best be careful about pulling something out of an area of scripture and then taking it and applying it to something different. You have to be careful about that.

Today, let's look at an example of a context that's been entirely ignored. I mean, almost entirely ignored. Let's go to John 5:37. Christ is speaking, and we'll come back to who He is speaking to in just a minute, but let's just take this scripture. Christ is saying, as Terry pointed out going through John, focus on the Father.

John 5:37 [Christ is saying] *And the Father himself, which hath sent me, hath borne witness of me. Ye have neither heard his voice at any time, nor seen his shape. (KJV)*

People take this statement, you have neither heard His voice at any time nor seen His shape, completely out of context and then they change it. Somebody this past week sent me a link to a sermon given by a minister—not part of the Pacific Church of God—who quoted John 5:37 as saying, no one has ever heard God. Really? So we see here that we have routinely heard—and I can't tell you the number times I have heard it, ministers of God have said to me—that no one has seen God at any time. But the scripture says *you* have not seen God at any time. We see that this has been taken out of context, words have been changed, and then it's applied to something totally different. The question is, who was Jesus talking to when he said "you"? Who was His audience? Let's back up a bit to verse 16—here's the context.

*16) And therefore did the Jews persecute Jesus, and sought to slay him, because he had done these things on the sabbath day.
17) But Jesus answered them ... (KJV)*

He was answering them when He made the comment, the Father has sent Me and *you*—the Jews who were standing right there—have neither heard His voice at any time nor seen His form. If you go through from verse 37 to 47, you're going to find the word *you* is used twenty times. If that doesn't tell us who Christ is referring to and who Christ is aiming His words at, then there isn't much hope of understanding the passage.

38) And ye have not his word abiding in you: [because] for whom he hath sent, him ye believe not.

- 39) *Search the scriptures; for in them ye think ye have eternal life: and they are they which testify of me* [meaning the scriptures, but you ignore them, He's saying].
- 40) *And ye will not come to me, that ye might have life.*
- 41) *I receive not honour from men.*
- 42) *But I know you, that ye have not the love of God in you.*
- 43) *I am come in my Father's name, and ye receive me not: if another shall come in his own name, him ye will receive.*
- 44) *How can ye believe, which receive honour one of another, and seek not the honour that cometh from God only?* (KJV)

Who is saying this? Jesus Christ.

- 45) *Do not think that I will accuse you to the Father: there is one that accuseth you, even Moses, in whom ye trust.*
- 46) *For had ye believed Moses, ye would have believed me: for he wrote of me.*
- 47) *But if ye believe not his writings, how shall ye believe my words?* (KJV)

It is so plain, the context of this whole section. Christ was talking to the Jews who were there and who were plotting to kill Him. He was saying to them, you don't have a clue who I am because you don't have a clue who God is. You haven't heard God's voice—meaning all of the record of scripture—you haven't heard His voice out of the scrolls that were in the Temple, you haven't heard God's voice, you haven't even recognized Him—that is what He is trying to get across to them. It's important to notice that Christ is not making a blanket statement that all mankind has never seen God. That is not there; you must read it for what it says and yet people will pull it out of context, twist it, add to it and then make a whole doctrine out of it. Let's look at a scripture by the same author, to add to our understanding. Let's go to John 12:27. Christ is speaking on His last night as a physical human being on this earth. I'm reading out of the King James.

- John 12:27** *Now is my soul troubled; and what shall I say? Father, save me from this hour: but for this cause came I unto this hour.*
- 28) *Father, glorify thy name. Then came there a voice from heaven, saying, [what did this voice say?] I have both glorified it, and will glorify it again.*
- 29) *The people therefore, that stood by, and heard it [this voice], said that it thundered:* (KJV)

Of course, if God was speaking, I imagine it would sound like thunder.

- 29) *others said, An angel spake to him* [ok, some people have said that].
- 30) *Jesus answered and said, This voice came not because of me, but for your sakes.* (KJV)

So here we see, God spoke, people heard. Pretty clear, isn't it? How could I read over this all these years and not put it together—I'm ashamed. How intense has my Bible study been and I look back and sometimes it wasn't as intense as it should have been—

shame on me. We always have to take into account the context to understand God's word. That was the fourth point.

5. You cannot read into scripture something that is not there.

We just covered that, when the word *you* was substituted with all mankind. Reading something into a scripture that was not there. Mark gave a sermon on that subject on the last day of Unleavened Bread: Not adding to, not subtracting from. Let's go to Matthew 3:17—another example. This was after Christ's baptism; Christ walked out of the water from being baptized, being immersed.

Matthew 3:17 *And lo a voice from heaven, saying, This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased. (KJV)*

Pretty clear, *This is My beloved Son*. In my margin, I wrote in there, "voice of an angel". I wrote that probably in the '60s or '70s—we talk about our inspired margins, but it's not very inspired, and it's there, to my condemnation—voice of an angel. This teaching was started back in the late '50s (I won't name names), by an individual who said, in order to explain this, that it was a heraldic angel. A herald is somebody who cries out. He said it was a heraldic angel who was speaking, because church tradition dictated that God could not be heard, so you had to find a way to explain that, and he read into it, a heraldic angel. But what does the scripture plainly say? *My beloved Son in whom I am well pleased*. How could an angel say that? It would be blasphemous for an angel to say, this is my beloved son. God would not condone that. Some ministers say it was an angel speaking on God's behalf. That is not what the verse says, it says I—I, My beloved Son. A voice from heaven: This is My beloved Son. You can't get around it but people do. They try to get around it by reading into a scripture something that is not there. In our Bible study, we have to be very careful about that. Look at the scripture, and be careful not to read something into it based on what our previous understanding has been—we can't do that.

6. Doctrine cannot be established on just one scripture.

Let me give you an example. Let's go to Leviticus 21:5. I have personal knowledge of this one. An entire doctrine has been established by a small group on this scripture.

Leviticus 21:5 *They shall not make baldness upon their head, neither shall they shave off the corner of their beard, nor make any cuttings in their flesh. (KJV)*

I know of a group—a very small group—that has taken this scripture, this one scripture, and established an entire doctrine around it that says all men should wear beards, and all beards should have square corners. And they base it on this one scripture. Okay, what's the context? We just talked about that. Look at verse 1.

1) *And the LORD said unto Moses, Speak unto the priests the sons of Aaron [who is he talking to?—the sons of Aaron], and say unto them, There shall none be defiled for the dead among his people: (KJV)*

Then it goes on down to the scripture that we just quoted. It is addressed to Aaron and his sons. This is not some fundamental teaching that affects every male down through the millennia—it is just not. We see that somebody has taken an obscure scripture and expanded it into a doctrine that God never intended. God doesn't reveal a fundamental teaching on one scripture, hidden away somewhere. God doesn't do it that way. Rather, we find fundamental teachings throughout the Bible from one point to another point to another point, adding to one another. Let's go to Ephesians 3:9 and we're going to see four scriptures that fit perfectly together and add to our understanding. What we're saying is this is in multiple places in the Bible and therefore it has a lot more weight than one obscure scripture. We can't establish doctrine on one scripture. Ephesians 3:9.

Ephesians 3:9 *And to make all men see [or to make all; "men" has been added by the translator] what is the fellowship of the mystery, which from the beginning of the world hath been hid in God, who created all things by Jesus Christ: (KJV)*

A lot of people will twist this but it says, God, who created all things by Jesus Christ. God created all things, which fits perfectly. Let's go back to Hebrews 1:1, we were there earlier. The subject is God the Father. I think we know this scripture by heart now.

Hebrews 1:1 *God, who at sundry times and in divers manners spake in time past unto the fathers by the prophets,
2) Hath in these last days spoken unto us by his Son, whom he [God] hath appointed heir of all things, by whom also he [God] made the worlds; (KJV)*

God made the worlds. These two verses then fit perfectly with 2 Corinthians 4:6—let's go there. Paul is telling us today, by way of the church in Corinth,

2 Corinthians 4:6 *For God, who commanded the light to shine out of darkness, hath shined in our hearts, to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ. (KJV)*

We see God and Christ are referred to in the same verse but we see it was God the Father who commanded the light to shine. God is the Creator, God is involved. He's not off somewhere letting Christ do everything. Then that fits perfectly; we won't turn there for time, you know the verse (Genesis 1:26), where God said let Us make man in Our image. All of those four scriptures fit perfectly together. Let Us make. We see that one adds to another, and to another, in a chain of knowledge, all saying the same thing. We cannot base doctrine on an isolated scripture and pull it out of context, and base doctrine on that. We must have a chain of evidence where the Bible supports and confirms itself. That leads to the seventh point.

7. We have to study with an open mind and not to prove a preconceived idea.

That's called proof texting. You have an idea of the way you think it should be and then you go try to pick out texts, taking them out of context to prove your preconceived ideas. People have done that for decades. Let me give you a ridiculous example—this is a true story but it's ridiculous. An enterprising preacher about 100 years ago believed that women should not put their hair up, they should wear their hair long, and he claimed that the Bible supported that view. He quoted Matthew 24:17, so let's go and see if maybe this fellow was wedging in a scripture to fit his preconceived idea. Christ is speaking, prophesying about the end days.

Matthew 24:17 *Let him which is on the housetop not come down to take any thing out of his house: (KJV)*

What the preacher did was split the word "housetop" into two words and then said, "Top not come down!" This is when women tied their hair up into a bun, into a topknot. So what's the context? This is how ridiculous it gets. Verse 3.

3) And as he sat upon the mount of Olives, the disciples came unto him privately, saying, Tell us, when shall these things be? and what shall be the sign of thy coming, and of the end of the world? (KJV)

Christ is not talking about hairstyles. He's talking about something far more dramatic and important, and that's the end of the world. It's a laughable story but it's true—it actually happened. In contrast, the Bereans were the ones who set the perfect example. Sometimes we just blow past the Bereans and don't think of what they actually went through. Lets go to Acts 17:10. The brethren got together, along with Paul and Silas, and thought it would be a good idea if Paul and Silas went to Berea.

Acts 17:10 *And the brethren immediately sent away Paul and Silas by night unto Berea: who coming thither went into the synagogue of the Jews. (KJV)*

Think about the context: Paul is walking into a synagogue and the Jews there believe that the Messiah is going to come somewhere down the road. That was the common belief of the day. Verse 11, with that in mind.

11) These were more noble than those in Thessalonica, in that they received the word with all readiness of mind, and searched the scriptures daily, whether those things were so. (KJV)

Paul came into that synagogue and preached what was regarded as heresy—the Messiah has already come and you guys have killed Him. I'm sure with some in that synagogue it was not well received, or at least, not in the beginning. The fact is that the Bereans did two things. They received what Paul said with an open mind—let's listen to what this man has to say. Let's consider it with an open mind, not with a preconceived idea, let's consider it. Then the second thing they did is they proved from the scriptures

whether or not what he said was true. Think about this: They didn't have a Bible in their lap. They didn't have an iPad that could connect to an online concordance where they could do a search in a couple of seconds. What they had to do, it says, was search the scriptures daily, which means they had to make a trip from their house to the synagogue, get permission, and probably wait in line so they could unroll the scrolls and read for themselves what this man Paul was saying. That takes effort, that takes work, it takes time. We should follow the Bereans' example. Study with an open mind but prove it out of the scriptures.

8. Always keep in mind the big picture—God's picture.

God's picture is the big picture. We look at life through soda straws. We're like *this* [speaker pantomimes looking at something through a long, narrow tube] and we're looking around through soda straws. God sees the beginning from the end, and we want to see it as God sees it, not as we see it. Too often, the old saying applies, that you can't see the forest for the trees, or we've got our nose down in the dirt plowing through the weeds when we ought to get our head up, and look up towards God and see what He has in mind.

Regarding any doctrine, the important question is—and it's something we all have to consider when a new teaching comes to our attention, or somebody has a new insight into scripture—how does any given teaching directly affect how I live my life today? How does it affect how I live my life on a daily basis, in seeking God's Kingdom? I can think of one example: A deeper understanding of God and Christ—their relationship, their roles, their activity in the record of scripture—affects everything. We sang here. I look at those words now with a new understanding because I know to Whom I am singing. Without a question, it's not a fuzzy thing—could be God, could be Christ, could be this, could be that—no, it's very clear to Whom I am singing and it makes it real to me. When we pray, this understanding makes it real. God is on His throne, Christ at His right hand; Christ said, when you pray you pray to the Father. So it makes things very clear. It affects every prayer we give. It affects our study. When we study, in the Old Testament, in the New Testament, like we've covered today, it becomes very clear who the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob was and who was involved, and who spoke to Moses and who spoke to Abraham. It's very clear and it adds a new dimension. This doctrine, as an example, results in a deeper understanding of God and Christ that affects everything.

Let's look at another example. We won't turn there but in Revelation 10 it talks about the seven thunders. Let's say somebody comes along and knows who the seven thunders are or what they mean. Well, hooray. But the point is, does my understanding of the seven thunders affect in any way the daily living of my life? It's good knowledge, I suppose, and it may shed some light here and there, but how I daily conduct my life ... it doesn't have much of an effect. My point is, we need to keep God's big picture in mind as we study, and we have to ask, what is God trying to tell us and does it affect how I live my life, what I think, how I interpret His word, how does it affect that? If it affects everything, then that's important and I had better pursue it. But if it's down in the weeds

and in the future God will reveal it, and it doesn't affect our daily lives, then maybe we should put it on a shelf and come back to it someday. For now let's keep in mind the very important subjects.

These eight principles should be kept in mind at all times when we study. Let's wrap this up and I would like to start closing with an important point, because going through this study over the last several years, older brethren say to me, what I studied yesterday, I can't remember today; I'm having a hard time holding on and walking through this. The fact is, as we age, our memory is not as sharp as it was when we were in our twenties or thirties. I used to have a near photographic memory. I could look at a specification sheet once and I had it. Today—no, it doesn't work that way. People can remember what happened thirty years ago but they can't remember what happened yesterday. That's just part of getting older.

There are two things that can help. The first one can be described as rumination. Rumination, in the most basic sense, is what a cow does when chewing her cud. Cows have an interim belly and what they do is chew the grass, burp it back up (God designed it, even if the idea makes us cringe a little), and then they chew it again. That's rumination—bringing something back up and chewing it some more so it can be digested better. Rumination for human beings is deep or considered thought on a subject. In other words we come back to it and we chew on it a little bit, we think about it a little more, we look at it from different angles and then move on to something else. Then we come back to it and think about it some more. Over time we do a lot of thinking on the subject. If we apply that to scriptures that we study on a given day—let's say you spend a half hour studying some important scriptures—don't just walk away and forget them. Think about your study, bring it back up, chew on it a little bit more, think about the ramifications of the teaching, think about the context, think about what God had in mind. Rumination—bring the subject back up and keep chewing on it.

The second is repetition. Studies show without doubt that if we repeat what we have learned shortly after learning it, and then a few minutes later, call it to mind after studying it, and then later on that day think about it again—what was that scripture again?—then the next morning when you wake up, think about it again. If you do that, it will stick. You have to keep on it. It will stick. The point is, if we have a purpose to our study, an urgency to our study, meaning this scripture is critical to my understanding (like Hebrews 1:1 or Acts 3:13), if it's critical to our understanding of who God is, we'll remember it. If it's casual—Paul went from this port to that port on a ship—we don't need to remember that because it's not critical to our understanding. If it's not critical we won't remember it but if it's critical and urgent, we have a better chance of remembering it if we ruminate on it and if we use repetition.

In addition, we also have to realize we live in an age of Laodicea—*I have need of nothing*. A number of years ago I heard an evangelist say, I don't study much anymore because I've known these doctrines for years; there's nothing to add, I don't really need to study any longer.

We won't turn there, we know it by heart—John 17:3. This is life eternal that we might know You, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom You have sent. That is a process that takes time, to know God and to know Christ. It doesn't happen all at once. You come to know about Them over time.

The implication then is, if you know God, you're going to do what He says. We're in an age of "I have need of nothing", and we need to fight that because we need everything. We need God, we need Christ, we need His word, we need His Holy Spirit. We will spiritually starve if we don't study.

In prayer we talk to God, and in study God talks to us. We have to remember that. It's a time when God talks directly to us—He can put thoughts in our mind, of course—but in study, God is talking to us. There is a special joy in studying God's word. Let's make it the high point of our day because God is indeed talking to us.