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How to Study the Bible (Part 2)



Individual Topics - Steve Gregg

In this discourse, Steve Gregg outlines important steps to studying the Bible. He emphasizes the significance of becoming familiar with the text and understanding it in its unique human language, which involves careful observation and questioning. He also highlights the importance of studying unfamiliar words and considering the context of a passage when interpreting it. Additionally, he stresses the need for humility and prayer in approaching biblical study, and the importance of applying the word of God in our lives for spiritual growth.

Transcript

Alright, I've given you a printed handout, which is the final handout in this series on the authority of scripture. The title on the handout is Three-Step Bible Study Procedure. Now, the three steps are introduced early on here, but there are many sub-points, especially under the three-step.

And I'm going to go through the third step that we'll be looking at tonight. And so, I'd like to get into this. Last time we talked about the kinds of tools that are available to help us in our study of the scripture.

The study of the Bible is important for Christians, because it is only by the study of the scripture that we really gain a responsible grasp of the whole teaching of scripture. There are people who don't ever properly study. I mean, you cannot call what they do at the scripture study.

They might read it occasionally to calm their nerves, or they might have morning devotions where they take a passage without any reference to context and get some kind of sense from God about what God might have to say to them from that passage. There are other valid uses for scripture besides study. However, nothing will replace study as a means of really giving you understanding of the whole counsel of God.

The Bible is a big book. You have, of course, in your lifetime, opportunity to read through it many times through, if you would. And that is the first step of really studying the Bible, is to familiarize yourself with it by much reading.

And much of what I have to say about studying the scripture will really come instinctively to, I would hope, many of you, just by virtue of learning how to think reasonably about the text. We have to remember that the Bible, although it is a unique book, and although it is inspired by God, it is still read and studied in many ways the same way any book is. God spoke in human language.

He spoke in ways that He expected us to be able to understand, just like any author would do so. And yet, there are things difficult to understand for us in the Bible. And that is because spiritual truths and moral truths are sometimes complex.

As C.S. Lewis said, that theology is at least as complicated a subject as physics, and for the same reason. Physics studies the laws of the natural world, and theology studies the laws of the spiritual realm. And the spiritual realm is just as real and every bit as involved, and I might say as complex, or at least as many-faceted, as is the physical world.

So, to learn theology well, I think the best we can do is to read frequently the scriptures and study them responsibly. A lot of people simply have never studied the scripture responsibly, perhaps because there are some people who are in churches where the scriptures never are taught. I grew up in a church where little pieces of the scripture formed the basis of sermons on Sunday mornings, but there was no systematic way in which these followed one another in a year, for example.

And whatever sermon topic came to the pastor's mind would determine what passage of scripture would be presented and discussed. But it wasn't until I was... I actually went to a church when I was 16 that taught the scripture through every two years, verse by verse. And that really revolutionized my whole understanding of the scriptures, just to see the relationship of everything in the Bible to everything else.

And I think that's what... I could have gotten that just by reading it through again and again, but until I was in a church that taught it through in that way, I didn't have the discipline just to read through the Bible, and read through the Bible, and read through the Bible. But I know it made a huge difference in my understanding of scripture to know where things fit together. Before that, I knew the story of David and Goliath, and of Samson and Delilah, and of Paul being lowered out a window in a basket, and of Jesus, you know, walking on the water, and of Balaam's ass speaking to him, and the children of Israel crossing the Red Sea.

But until I went through the whole Bible, you know, straight through, I couldn't have told you exactly what these stories had in relation to each other, where they stood to each other chronologically, or how any of them impacted any of the others. But when I read through the whole Bible, and read through it, and became acquainted with it, and this was initially under the leadership of a pastor who taught through it verse by verse, from beginning to end, every two years, it really much fell together. And, you know, familiarity

with the whole Bible is the foundation.

That's not the goal. The goal is not that you become familiar with the whole Bible. That's the beginning.

That's the foundation for advancing on the goal. The goal is to understand the specific things that are difficult to understand in the Bible. But only when you have a familiarity with the whole Bible can you really, with ease, sort out the individual issues that confront you in specific passages.

Because when you do know the whole Bible, at least, I'm not saying understand the whole Bible, nobody understands the whole Bible. I don't think. I know I don't.

But just familiarity with it helps you a great deal when you consider any one part. Because then you recognize how that part speaks to an issue that is in several other parts of the Bible that you're already familiar with. And it certainly gives you a broader perspective.

There are three steps that I think anyone following common sense would recognize as steps that need to be a part of any responsible biblical study. This is what some people call inductive Bible study. Now, different people use the term inductive Bible study for different procedures.

Actually, inductive Bible study simply means that you're trying to read from the text what's really there and understand it responsibly, rather than trying to just go to the Scripture to prove some point that you already have decided to believe. But that inductive study is the attempt to draw from the Scriptures what it actually teaches and to, if possible, not impose on the Scripture certain meanings of your own prejudice. Now, inductive Bible study has had many advocates in recent years.

In Youth with a Mission, there's a nine-month school called the School of Biblical Studies where they have one method of inductive Bible study that involves the students making all kinds of charts and everything. And I've taught in these schools around the world. And the students seem to think that inductive Bible study means making these charts, because they never heard of inductive Bible study before they came to these schools.

And these schools are all about making these charts, outlining the books, and so forth. And it needs to be understood that if you've encountered inductive Bible study in some form or another, maybe K. Arthur's inductive Bible study from Preset Ministries or some other, you have probably encountered one way in which inductive Bible study is done. But there are some things that are common to all inductive Bible study.

And that is these three steps. All inductive Bible study will advocate following these three steps. And they come in the logical order that we will consider them.

First is observation. Secondly is interpretation. And third is application of the text.

When you read a passage of Scripture, the observation of what it actually says is important, followed by interpretation, which is where you seek to understand the meaning of the passage. Not just seeing what words are used, but what the meaning of those words are, or the meaning of those phrases, what the ideas are that are being communicated in the passage. And then thirdly is application.

And that's where you actually take the truth of the passage and say, okay, how do I do this? What am I supposed to do differently now that I know this? What responsibility is laid upon me, knowing what I now see in the Scripture? How do I apply this to my everyday decisions in living? And any responsible biblical study will involve all three of these things. Observation means you notice what it really says. Now, I have observed many texts.

I could tell you exactly what they say. But where I fail is on the area of interpretation. I still don't know what they mean.

Take Paul's statement in 1 Corinthians 15 about those who are baptized for the dead. Paul says, what shall they do who are baptized for the dead, if the dead rise not at all? Why then are they baptized for the dead? I can quote the verse. I can tell you, I know what every word in that verse is.

I have observed it very closely. Interpretation is another problem. I don't know what it means.

I don't know if anyone really knows what it means. I know of many good theories. A couple of them seem better than others.

But if I am ever going to apply it to my life and say, OK, now I need to know what I need to be baptized for the dead, I'd have to interpret it. Fortunately, I don't think we are supposed to be baptized for the dead. The Mormons teach that you should be.

And they base it on that one Scripture, I guess. But the interpretation sometimes is the hurdle. We can't really do what the Bible says unless we know what it's saying to do.

And observing what the words are and what the sentences say is not the same thing as being able to interpret. When you interpret something, you assign meaning to it. Every time you read any printed word, you are interpreting.

But you may not be interpreting correctly. When my wife and I have conversations, we have different methods of communicating. She expresses herself differently than I do.

And because of that, even though I hear the words she says and she hears the words I say, sometimes we don't understand what the other is really getting at or what the other

is trying to say. And we end up not really changing much. I'm trying to figure out what she wants me to do.

She's trying to figure out what I want her to do. And we talk. We think we've communicated.

And then sometimes we don't change. We don't ever apply what was said. And partly, the breakdown was at the area of interpretation.

I heard her words. I thought she meant something. She meant something else.

And therefore, I didn't apply in a way that was satisfactory. You see, it's the interpretation of the thing. Assigning the meaning and recognizing, okay, the words say this, but what is the idea? And what is it trying to communicate? That's interpretation.

And then, of course, the application is the final step. If you don't apply it to your life, you just become a Pharisee. You just become somebody who knows a lot.

There's a lot of head knowledge, but hasn't really ever done it. Jesus said that the scribes and the Pharisees sit in Moses' seat. He said, therefore, whatsoever they command you to do, that observe and do.

But do not do according to their deeds, because they say and they do not do. They have learned. They've studied the scriptures.

And in many cases, the theology of the Pharisees was quite adequate. In some of the controversial issues where the Pharisees differed from the Sadducees, where there were ongoing debates, Jesus was on the side of the Pharisees. They were right.

They had the information right. But the application fell down. They knew what the Bible was saying on some issues, but they didn't do what they knew.

And so, that's where application comes in. I want to talk about each of these three things a little bit. There's some sub points there.

On the matter of observation, when you read a passage of the scripture, you need to be observant. Sherlock Holmes used to complain that others than himself would see, but they did not observe. He would see and observe, he said.

When you'd gone up a flight of stairs, he expected you to know how many stairs you had climbed. And, of course, no one pays any attention to that. But he knew, of course.

He observed. He not only saw the stairs, he observed how many there were. And, of course, he's a fictional character.

But it really is true that you can see things all the time and not notice them, not observe

them. And this is true when you're reading as well. How well I know this just from reading anything I read.

I typically have to reread the same sentence several times, partly because someone's talking to me in the same room or something. I'm trying to half read and half listen. But the fact is, I will read it and I will have seen it.

I will have seen and read every word, but nothing is registered. I've observed nothing. And when people read the Bible, you know, there's certain things, verses of the Bible we've heard from childhood, phrases that are so familiar that we've never thought about what they actually are saying.

I mean, every Christian who's grown up in the church has heard the expression, believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and thou shalt be saved. But many Christians have never wondered what it means to believe or what it means to be saved. We assume that we know they're familiar words.

They're used, believe and saved are very typical in our Christianese words that are passed around and used readily. And yet to say, well, what does the word saved actually mean? What is being said there? And when the scripture says, whosoever shall call upon the name of the Lord shall be saved. I've heard that verse since my childhood and I could quote it from childhood.

But what does it mean to call on the name of the Lord? Well, I'm not saying this is a hard question to answer. I'm just saying sometimes it's hard to get people to even ask the question, much less to seek the answer. There are many people who've been evangelical, born again Christians for years and years, been in the church.

But if you said, how can you tell someone how to get saved? They wouldn't know. They know many verses, but they don't know what they mean. They can quote verses like they can quote, you know, the times tables, the multiplication tables.

They've got to memorize. But if someone says, OK, what does that really mean? How do I do that? When someone says you must be born again? I mean, Christians will say that to unbelievers frequently enough when they're witnessing and if the unbeliever says, OK, how do I do that? What does it mean to be born again? Christians, when they use the word, they assume they know what it means. But when they try to explain it, it's clear that they didn't really they didn't really think about it for a long time.

It's possible to hear such cliches so many times that you assume you know what they say. And my experience in studying the scriptures, and I would dare say probably yours, too, if you've been a Christian very long, has included many times that I'd be reading over a passage that I'd read 10, 20, 30 times before and suddenly I noticed it. You know, have you ever had that experience where suddenly you notice something is there and

you've read it, you've seen it dozens of times, it may be, but you just all of a sudden your your mind notices it.

You observe for the first time that that is there, that this phrase is used. It's a strange phrase. I wonder why he uses that phrase.

Never wondered before because I was raised just hearing the sound of the words so much that it never caught in my mind as peculiar. But you need to read material carefully and you need to identify the key words and information that answers the questions of who, what, when, where, why, and how. Now, this is the way to begin to observe what's in a passage even before you begin to interpret it.

When you see a scripture that addresses a certain group of people, to ask yourself, okay, who is being addressed here? Where are they? Sometimes that matters. Why are they being addressed? Is there some background occasion for this? When did this apply to? How are these instructions to be followed? These are just questions that most thinking people ask without even realizing they're asking them. But I've noticed that a lot of people apparently are not thinking people.

They see, but they don't observe and it never occurs to them to ask those questions. Now, see, I don't think I'm exceptional. I think most people who want to learn, when they hear a statement, they ask these questions kind of instinctively.

You know, who is this talking? Who is it that they're talking to? But there are people who just never pay that close attention to even think about that. There are a lot of people who will quote something like, God will restore the years that the locust has eaten, brother, in your life. And that is a scripture.

It's in Joel, but what does it mean? Who is it addressed to? What is meant by locusts? You know what's meant by locusts in the book of Joel? Locusts. It's not symbolic of anything. In Joel, the book was written when there was a locust plague happening.

What does it mean, restore the years? Does that mean he's going to turn the clock back and we'll look at the calendar or watch and it'll have a different year that's several years back? How does this work? What is the meaning of these words? Does this apply to me? Is this something that applies to any situation I'm in? I have to ask the questions, who, what, when, where, why, how, and about things. And if I don't ask these questions instinctively, I have to make myself ask them so that I can answer them. And until I answer them, I don't really know what has been said.

I haven't really observed what is written down there. The next step is to interpret, but I can't even begin to interpret until I have observed what's there and the basic stuff that can be observed by an inquiring mind that asks these kind of questions. You need to identify the key thought of a passage.

Now, you don't have to do all of this, but it's helpful to divide a passage, a lengthy passage, into paragraphs because a paragraph is a thought unit. Actually, a word and a sentence are thought units also, but a paragraph is your basic thought unit in most literature. A paragraph is a group of sentences that are all on the same basic thought.

You change paragraphs when you change your basic thought. And so, if you can identify where the paragraphs change, now a lot of modern Bibles are printed in paragraph form for you, whereas the older King James version doesn't do that. It's just every verse is individual, but in modern translations, a lot of times they set it off in paragraphs for you.

But I don't even trust those. I like to make, I like to observe myself where the paragraphs change. I don't even trust the people who printed the Bible to tell me where the chapters change, much less the paragraphs.

Yeah, I mean, you need to realize that when Paul wrote or when Luke wrote or when Isaiah wrote, they didn't probably indent their paragraphs. That's an English convention, not Greek and Hebrew. And they certainly didn't put verse numbers and chapter numbers.

So, their thoughts in the original manuscripts just look like a flow of words. And the scholars who study them and translate them try to decide where the paragraph changes go and so forth. Sometimes they mistake.

And it's important to know whether a thing belongs to one paragraph or to another at times. There may be a time where a verse would make perfectly good sense if it's applied to the previous paragraph, but it makes maybe perfectly good sense, but a different sense if it's applied to the following paragraph. Is this the first sentence of the next thought or is this the last sentence of the previous thought? If you identify the paragraph changes in your thinking, you will have a structure that's easier to interpret the individual parts within.

To make an outline of the passage is something I think is a good thing to do. Not everyone is good at this. Not everyone needs to do this.

As you can tell from the handouts I give you, I like to outline stuff with, you know, this is a main point, here's a sub point, here's a sub point under that one. That's how I think that most literature, most communication can be outlined like that. If it can't be, it's just random rambling.

I mean, people who have organized thoughts, you can figure out how they've organized them. And once you have done so, you've got a head start on understanding what it is they say and what one sentence has to do with the subject matter of another sentence. And a lot of times you will not understand properly a sentence in the Bible unless you understand what the previous sentence was about.

Because a lot of times in communication, one sentence doesn't stand alone without context. You have to have context. And so if you know the context of the paragraph it's in, it helps.

If you've outlined the passage, it helps. That's another way to observe more carefully what is actually said, even if you haven't figured out what it means. I would suggest that as you read the Bible carefully and as you're just seeking to observe what's there, that you make note, a note for yourself of the things that you are ignorant about.

The things that you say, I wonder what that means or what he's alluding to. Or if I wonder if there's some other explanation of this concept somewhere else. You don't know the answer yet, but it's things you wish you knew the answer to.

There are a lot of things you will learn by noting what your questions are. I'm not saying that you make this list and then immediately hope to find the answers. But when you identify what your own questions are about a passage, then when the information comes your way to answer those questions, you'll remember you had a question about that.

You know, I hear lots of things during the day. I listen to Christian radio. I read Christian books.

I hear preaching. I've talked to Christians and they say profound things I'd like to remember. A lot of times, sometimes I don't remember everything I hear.

But the things I do remember are the things that when I hear them, I say, oh yeah, that answers that question I had about something or another. I find that in learning, and I believe this is important for people who are educators to pay attention to also, that students will learn and retain things that they were already curious about. They're much less likely to retain and learn things that they hadn't any curiosity about when you decided to tell it to them.

Jesus in his teaching did a great percentage of his teaching on the occasion of someone asking him a question. If you go through the Gospels, you'll see that Jesus was frequently asked questions, and much of his teaching was what we call occasional teaching. That is, he was answering somebody's question.

And there are times when they didn't ask a question, but he would ask them a question to get them thinking and get them curious before he gave them the answer. That's when Peter came in after being asked, does your master pay the temple tax? Peter said, sure he does. He didn't really know the answer.

He just gave the answer he thought was obligatory. So, he came into the house and Jesus says, Jesus prevented him and said, Peter, of whom do the kings of this world exact tribute? Of their own sons or foreigners? Now, by asking this question, it got Peter thinking. I wonder, you know, first I probably wondered, where's this going? And

secondly, yeah, that's a good question.

I mean, and how does this relate to what I'm, to this temple tax situation? And then, of course, Jesus gave him, Jesus actually let Peter give the answer, and Jesus confirmed the answer and built on it. But, or when Jesus said, who do you say that I am? And who do men say that I am? By asking questions, it piques the curiosity and gets someone thinking about it. If someone asks the question themselves, it expresses a curiosity that they have.

And if you identify what your questions are about a passage when you read it, maybe write them down, if you're good at remembering things, just remember what the questions were, then later on, it might be years later. In my experience, it's sometimes years later. I'll hear some preacher, I'll see some bit of data, I'll read a passage I'd forgotten about, and it will answer the question that I had in my mind for years on a subject.

But that's because I'm inquisitive. When I'm reading the Bible, I'm trying to understand, and there's many things I don't understand, but I don't just kind of block it out. I think, okay, there's something I don't understand.

That's something I want to understand. I'm going to keep a question open about that, and I'm going to be, you know, when I hear the answer, I'll remember it because it's going to feel like I've got this square hole here waiting for something to fill it. And people can throw, you know, triangular and round and oblong blocks at me all they want.

Those are going to bounce right off my head. I'm not going to remember. They're going to go like water off a duck's back.

When that square peg comes, it's going to fit right there because that hole is the question I had. And when I get the answer, I'm going to say, ah, and it's going to become part of my mental furniture. It's going to be something I'll retain, and it'll, you know, I'll gain the ability to understand and retain it because I had a question about it.

And I would suggest that it would do you good as you read the Bible to jot down when questions come to your mind and say, I wonder what that means. I wonder why he said that. Why did Jesus say, if anyone of you lacks a sword, let him sell his cloak and buy one.

And then when the disciples said, Lord, here are two swords, he said, that's enough. It doesn't make sense. There were 11 of them.

Jesus said, every one of you needs a sword, enough so that if you don't have one, you should sell your cloak and buy one. They said, here's two. That shouldn't be enough.

But Jesus said, it's enough. What did he mean by that? You want to know the answer? I

don't know what he meant. That's still an open question with me.

And you know how long that question has been open with me? That question has been open with me for 30 years. I remember back when I first began the ministry, when I was a teenager, I started out in the ministry. Well, the first assignment I had in ministry after I graduated from high school was to work for a Christian coffee house ministry in Southern California during the Jesus movement to answer Bible questions for new converts.

And, you know, I'd have sessions, you know, a group of people, and I'd say, okay, you can ask your Bible questions, but there's two things you can't ask me about because I don't have a clue what the answer is. One is, what did Jesus mean when he said, buy a sword? And they said, it's enough when they said there's two swords. And the other was about the unjust steward.

Well, in the meantime, I've gotten some insight, I think, about the unjust steward. The sword one still perplexes me. It's been an open question for a long time.

And you know what? Every time I see a new commenter in the gospel of Luke, I turn to Luke 22 and look up that passage to see if this guy understands that. So far, in my opinion, no one has yet, but I'm still looking. But the thing is, you read something, you say, I don't understand it.

That's perplexing. What did he mean by that? Why did he say that? And the answer is not necessarily evident. Either make a mental note of that or write it down so that when you someday encounter the answer, you will have gained a piece to the puzzle of that Bible book you're studying.

I mean, it can be extremely exciting to have a question that's been eating at you for years to finally, suddenly be satisfied. Oh, that's right. That's clear.

It's clear now. And so, you know, an ignorance list, writing down what you're ignorant of, what you want to know, what questions you have unanswered about the passage is not a bad idea. Now, those are thoughts I have about how to read observantly.

Observe what is there, but observe what's not stated and what you are curious about. This will become in some ways the way that your agenda of learning will be defined as you study the scripture for the rest of your life by seeing the questions. You know, I, my style of teaching has, when I teach verse by verse through a book of Bible, I just noticed this because of people commenting on it, that my style of teaching is to more than, more than not, I teach to the questions that I believe people have about the passage.

That is, I'll read the passage and instead of saying everything I can conceive to say about the passage, I'll ask myself, what questions do these people have about the passage? And then I'll endeavor to answer those questions. And I've many, many times

when people have gone through books of the Bible I was teaching, they've said to me after a study, they've said, you know, at a certain point when you're teaching, this question arose in my mind and I was about to ask it, but then you answered it. And then another question arose in my mind, I was about to ask it and you answered that too.

And, you know, I say that's, that's by design because I know that if you teach to the curiosity of the people, it'll be more meaningful to them, the questions they have, it'll be retained and they'll understand much better. You can do that for yourself though. You can, you can keep track of what your questions are.

The reason I can do that is because I remember the questions I had. When I was a young Christian reading the Bible for the first time, I remember what things just struck me as odd. I remember what things were opaque to me, what things just, you know, seemed contradictory to me.

And it made me, it pestered me, you know, it annoyed my mind and it ate at me until I found answers. And now when I teach the same passages, I remember what my questions were and I have found by experience that almost all Christians have, typically have the same questions about those passages. And the reason is because we're all from the same culture, we're all living in the same century and we're all, we all find the Bible equally foreign in its culture and hard for us to understand in certain things.

Certain things always rub us the wrong way. I mean, Americans, you can count on it. When they read God telling Joshua to go and wipe out the Canaanites, the men, women and children, count on it.

Every American sensitivity is going to revolt at that. Say, why did he say kill those children? Now, I dare say that that's just part of the culture we live in and our sensitivities as Americans and so forth. I bet if we lived in any ancient country, the idea of exterminating whole populations would have struck us as strange.

But we are culturally removed from the Bible and likely the questions one person has are going to be the questions everyone in the same culture has. Rub you wrong. But when you are identifying what your questions are, then you're prepared to go into the discovery of the answers.

You might not discover them immediately in the same passage. You might even not discover them in the same year that you ask the questions, but you will be prepared to recognize the answer only after you've identified the question. So when you've observed what is there and what is not there.

I do need to say something else about this before I go into the subject of interpretation. A very good example that comes to my mind about what is there and what is not there and people observing it. Most of us, if we were asked to prove from Scripture that Satan

is a fallen angel and to turn to the Scriptures to prove this point, most of us, if we're fairly scripturally literate, would turn to Isaiah 14 and Ezekiel 28.

In Isaiah 14, verse 12 and following, we read about. Well, let's see what we read about there. Let's see if we can observe what this says.

Isaiah 14. This will be a lab in reading and observing, beginning with verse 12 of Isaiah 14. It says, How art thou fallen from heaven, O Lucifer, son of the morning? How art thou cut down to the ground which did weaken the nations? For thou has said in thine heart, I will ascend into heaven.

I will exalt my throne above the stars of God. I will. This print is so small I can't even see it.

I'm going partially from memory here. I will sit at the also on the mount of this. What does it say here? This print is so small.

I don't have a bigger print Bible around here I could take a look at. Thank you. I didn't expect to read such a lengthy passage here tonight.

Thanks, Chris. What translation we got here? New King James. That'll do.

That's good. OK, let me get back there again. Where's your chapter? Here we are.

OK, he says, I will ascend into heaven. I will exalt my throne above the stars of God. I will also sit on the mount of the congregation on the farthest sides of the north.

I will ascend above the heights of the clouds. I will be like the most high. Yet you should be brought down to shale to the lowest depths of the pit.

Those who see you will gaze at you and consider you saying, is this the man who made earth to tremble and who shook kingdoms, who made the world as a wilderness and destroyed its cities, who did not open the house of his prisoners? Now, what did we just read about? Did we read about Satan? The question is, yeah, is Satan in this passage? Well, there is a mention of Lucifer. In fact, it's the only mention of Lucifer in the Bible. It's the only place in the whole Bible where Lucifer appears.

In fact, you'll only find the name Lucifer in the King James and the New King James. In modern translations, it just translates the word Lucifer because the word Lucifer means morning star or star of the dawn. And a lot of translations just say, how are they falling from heaven? Oh, morning star.

Don't even use the word Lucifer because there's some doubt as to whether it's even a proper name. But I would say this. There's nowhere in the Bible that tells us that Lucifer is Satan.

He may be, but it doesn't say so in the passage. And it doesn't say so anywhere else in Scripture either. If it is so, we must get that information elsewhere than from Scripture because the Scripture does not tell us whether or not Lucifer is Satan.

It is a tradition from Tertullian's time on that he is Satan. But as far as whether that's in the passage or not, many Christians will read that and they will say, I've just read about Satan. But have they really observed what's in the passage? Is there a reference to Satan anywhere here? Actually, if you read earlier in the passage, in verse four, you'd see that it says that you will take up this proverb against the king of Babylon and say how the oppressor has ceased, the golden city ceased and goes on.

And in verse 12, it continues to, as it would appear, the same person. So if you would observe what's there rather than just see it and click it into the category, you've been taught to click it into, you might say, well, wait a minute, is this really talking about Satan? The reason I bring this up is because I remember very well when I observed this for the first time, because I was raised always just assuming this is a passage about Satan. And then I was asked to teach a series on demonology for a group that wanted me to teach on it.

So I said, well, of course, the logical place to start is the origin of Satan. So I turned to all the regular places, Isaiah 14, Ezekiel 28, and the regular suspects. And although I'd read these passages many times before and quoted them as proof texts and so forth, I looked at it and I said, wait a minute, where does it even mention Satan here? I see Lucifer here, but where in the Bible am I ever told that Lucifer is a name for Satan? The passage itself would suggest that Lucifer is a title being addressed to the King of Babylon.

That's the only person who's addressed plainly in the passage. And even this person who is addressed as Lucifer, it says very specifically in verse 16, those who see you will gaze at you and consider you saying, is this the man who made the earth to tremble? Not is this the angel or the demon or is this the man? And so I began to observe it for the first time a little differently. I thought, oh, where is Satan in this passage? There's a man being addressed to the King of Babylon.

Now, I will say this, the first thing that came to my mind is, well, it's probably a double entendre, probably addressed to the earthly King of Babylon, but really through the Holy Spirit addressed to the power behind the throne, which is really Satan. But in saying that, I realized I was not drawing from the passage anything it said. I was imposing on the passage something that I've always been taught that it meant.

And it really disturbed me because I thought, well, this is one of my key passages to prove that Satan is a fallen angel. And I went to the other one and we won't go there tonight, but Ezekiel 28. And it's classic passage to prove that Satan is a fallen angel.

And yet Satan is not mentioned in it. The passage itself says it's addressed to the King of

Tyre. And again, I could say, well, maybe it's addressing the power behind the throne and it's really talking to Satan.

Well, maybe it is, but it doesn't say whether it is or not. The thing is to observe before you interpret. Some people have already interpreted before they've ever paid attention to what's actually there.

It's all been done for us. Somebody else has interpreted for us and we've picked up their interpretation and never looked at the passage to see what is and what isn't said in the passage. And this is an example of a passage I've read dozens of times before I ever observed what it said and what it didn't say.

And I have to say today that I am not convinced at all that this passage mentions the devil or tells me anything about the devil. Maybe it does. But if it does, I have to impose something on the passage that isn't there.

Maybe it's there. Maybe it's hidden. But by definition, observation doesn't show you what's hidden.

It shows you what is observable. And what's observable here is that there is a king of Babylon being addressed, who is a man, and he is addressed as Morning Star. By the way, a lot of Christians say, well, isn't Jesus also called the Morning Star? What's the deal there? And of course, what we need to understand is the term Morning Star in the ancient world was simply a term of respect to a regal person, just like the term king of kings is applied to Jesus.

So is it applied to Nebuchadnezzar? Daniel says in Daniel chapter two, O king Nebuchadnezzar, you are a king of kings. So is Jesus the king of kings. It's a term of exalted position.

And, you know, the king of Babylon is called the king of kings. He's also called the Morning Star in this passage. Jesus, because he's an even more exalted person, is also called in Revelation, the king of kings and the Morning Star.

But the point is, there's no there's no clear reference to someone other than the king of Babylon. And observation is what is lacking in many cases when Christians will read a passage like this. And I cite myself as the chief offender for many years in this respect.

Now, let's talk about interpretation once we've observed what is there and what isn't there. How do we interpret a passage? Well, first of all, it would help to identify the genre of the passage. Now, this is something that most of us don't do when we go and pick up a novel or a textbook written by some modern author.

We don't well, we might do it kind of instinctively, but we recognize that American Western writers typically all write in narrative prose or or if it's, you know, something like

a science textbook. It's also prose, but it's straightforward. It's literal.

That's that's the way we Westerners have learned to write and to think and to and to assume others are writing. When you study, you know, literature from some other country, even some other modern country, you will discover, especially if they're Asians or Africans or some culture very different than our own. They often don't assume the same things we assume about how you express yourself.

And if you talk about ancient cultures like the ancient Hebrews or the ancient Greeks, you'll often find even more so that they have different idioms and different figures of speech than we're accustomed to and different genres of literature. There's a great, huge portion of the Old Testament that is written in poetry. There are whole books in the Old Testament that are written in poetry, Psalms and Proverbs being among them.

Job is another one that's almost entirely poetry, except for the first two chapters in the last ten verses. It's all poetry, Hebrew poetry. But not only that, not only the books we call the poetry books, but the books of the prophets.

The vast majority of the material the prophets is written in a genre called poetry. And this is very important to note, because the prophets are typically very difficult for Christians to interpret. I think that most Christians would agree that the Old Testament prophets, if they've ever bothered to try to read them, present some of the greatest challenges in interpretation.

What in the world is this guy talking about? And one of the things to observe in reading any passage of scripture, and the written in poetry or not. Now, the reason for this is that poetry, well, even in English poetry, when you're reading poetry, you know you're not reading prose. People can talk about, you know, my little horse must think it queer to stop without a farmhouse near, but we know that he's not being literal because horses don't really reason, probably.

He probably just wants to get home. But you can read poetry about clouds that talk about how they bind the sun with a golden girdle. And I mean, just things that aren't really literally true.

These are figures of speech. It's poetic language. And there's a lot of that in the prophets, as in the Psalms and in Job.

If you don't know you're reading poetry, you might impose some candidate of interpretation on a passage that you would apply to narrative prose. When in fact, you need to take into consideration, you've got poetry happening here. And therefore, the the conventions of poetic expression need to be taken account of.

There is historical narrative. And I think in scripture, that's typically pretty straightforward, literal, although you will find figures of speech, even in historical

narrative. I mean, everyone uses we have figures of speech when we talk.

We just don't know their figures of speech because we because we're so familiar with them. But when we read the scriptures, we will find figures of speech that we don't use. And if we don't recognize them as figures of speech, we might not know what to do with them to recognize it possible when someone's using a metaphor.

I received a call today from a Roman Catholic calling me on my program. And I had earlier said on the program to an earlier caller that I believe that when we take the bread and the wine, it symbolizes the body and blood of Christ. And in typical Roman Catholic argumentative fashion, this Catholic called up and I mean, Protestants argue to Catholics don't argue more than Protestants, maybe less so.

But a typical argument of the Roman Catholics is this, that he said, if you look in the Greek itself, Jesus did not say this bread symbolizes my body and this cup symbolized my body. He said, this is my body and this is my blood. OK.

And he said, therefore, it is. That's what it says. Well, that's a good observation.

And I didn't need him to help me make that. I had noticed that years ago that it does. I observed that it says this is my body.

This is my blood. But now to interpret what is the meaning there is such a thing as a metaphor, you know, and another thing that is similar called a simile. Similes are similar to metaphors.

But the difference between a metaphor and a simile is that a simile says such and such is like such and such. A metaphor is just a such and such is such and such. But it's not literally so.

When it says Benjamin is a ravenous wolf in the prophecy of Jacob. Well, Benjamin, the tribe of Benjamin, was not literally a wolf. Apparently had something like a wolf about him that made him use that metaphor.

But to say Benjamin is a ravenous wolf is or Judah is a lion's wealth. That is a metaphor because Judah is not really a lion's wealth and Benjamin is not really a ravenous wolf. Now, a simile would be where you say Benjamin is like a ravenous wolf or Judah is like a lion's.

Well, it has the same meaning as the metaphor, but just a different form of expression. When Jesus said, this is my body, this is my blood. Was he using a metaphor when I pull out a road map and try to give you instructions to my house and I show you a little line of ink on a piece of paper and say, now that is Highway 13 right there.

Well, that line of ink on that paper is not Highway 13. Highway 13 is made of pavement.

It's much larger than that.

What I mean, and everyone knows what I mean, is that this line on this paper represents Highway 13. And it's not literal. And when Jesus said, this is my body and this is my blood, it's not very likely that some of his blood suddenly escaped his veins and jumped into that cup while he was there in the room.

He hadn't even shed a drop of it yet. How did it get into the cup? Did a chunk of his flesh somehow remove itself from his arm? And they saw a big hole appear there as bread became the body of Jesus. I don't mean to be irreverent, but I mean, it's not really reasonable to think that that's what he was saying.

And it's much more reasonable to believe that he was talking metaphorically or representatively. This represents. He was using a figure of speech.

We use them too. And if you don't recognize figures of speech, it can make a big difference. You can, on the one hand, think you're eating bread and wine, or on the other hand, you can think you're eating human flesh and human blood, depending on the recognition of a figure of speech or the failure to recognize a figure of speech.

Now, in addition to poetry and historical narrative, it's good to recognize whether the genre of the passage is that of, you know, making a promise or giving a command or whether it's a local correction. You know, especially, especially the epistles of Paul are what we call occasional documents. They are written for the churches that he needed to address.

And a lot of times the things he says are about the local situations. The difference between those who do and those who don't believe that women need to wear head coverings these days is a difference in deciding whether Paul's passage in 1 Corinthians 11 was a local correction about a local custom or whether he's talking about a universal issue. That may never be settled completely by all Christians coming to an agreement on it, but the fact is that's the difference.

Those who believe that there is no need for women to wear head coverings do so because they believe that Paul is addressing a local situation. And those who believe that women should believe that Paul is addressing a universal situation. Now, later in the same chapter, when Paul talks about the abuse of the Lord's table in 1 Corinthians 11, and he finds that some people are going away drunk and others are going away hungry because people at their apparently buffet style meal, the people front in line are taking more than their share because they can't control their appetites.

Paul says, well, eat your meals at home before you come to church. Okay, well, that's in the Bible. We need to eat our meals at home before we come to church.

Well, what if church is too early? What if I oversleep? What if I don't have time to have

breakfast before I go to church? Am I in violation of the scripture if I come to church without eating a meal first? Well, not necessarily. It depends. Is he not addressing a local problem in the church? They can't control their appetites, so eat at home so you don't come and make a fool of yourself here and a reproach to Christ when you come take communion with the saints.

We have to recognize that some things that are commanded have local or cultural application. One of the most frequently commanded things in scripture is greet one another with a holy kiss, and it's been a long time since I greeted most people I see with a holy kiss or any other kind of kiss, but I typically hug or shake hands depending on the situation and the degree of intimacy I have with a person or their gender, but the fact is we are commanded to greet one another with a holy kiss, but is this a local thing? Is it something applicable to the culture of the time, or is it something that we should do because it's a universal command of God? Recognizing those kinds of things are part of what it takes to interpret the meaning and eventually to apply to our own behavior. Identify figures of speech.

I already mentioned that. Hyperboles, anthropomorphism, apocalyptic imagery. I actually mentioned metaphors and similes.

What in the world is hyperbole, anthropomorphism, and apocalyptic imagery? Well, hyperbole is exaggeration. It is exaggeration for the sake of emphasis of a point. It is not exaggeration for the point of fooling someone.

When the fisherman talks about the fish that got away, it had to be this big, and really it might have only been this big. His exaggeration has become proverbial that fishermen lie. I mean, Christian fishermen ought not, but fishermen lie about the size of the fish that got away, but not really.

They just resort to hyperbole. Well, maybe they are lying at times. You see, exaggeration can be a means of lying, but it doesn't have to be.

When someone's debating some point and they say, you know, yeah, I've, you know, I studied Greek for years, you know, and really what it means is they looked up a few words in the lexicon a few years ago. That's probably an exaggeration that is calculated to, you know, misinform about one's credentials to speak to the subject of Greek nuances, but at the same time, when a mother says to her child, I've told you a million times to brush your teeth before you go to bed. Well, that's a hyperbole because nobody's ever told anyone anything a million times and nor does she intend for her children to take that literally.

It's not important for her or her child to know exactly how many times she said it. The point is to exaggerate for the sake of making the point, and that's a hyperbole. There's a lot of that in the Bible.

There's a lot of hyperbole in the Bible. One of the biggest problems is knowing when it's a hyperbole and when it's not because when Jesus talks about plucking out your eye or cutting off your hand, some people don't think that's a hyperbole, and I've known people who actually have cut off parts of their body that they saw as troublesome because of struggles they were having with sin, and they were taking Jesus literally, but in my opinion, missing the point. It's a rather tragic mistake to make.

Misinterpretation can be costly. We're not just talking about abstractions here. We're talking about the way you live your life, and sometimes mutilating oneself can be the result of misinterpretation.

A hyperbole has got to be recognized as a hyperbole. How do you know if something's a hyperbole? Well, Jesus said, give to everyone that asks you. How do I know if that's literal or hyperbole? What if my kids ask me for all my money, or they ask that they can buy everything in the toy store? I mean, Jesus said, give to everyone who asks you.

I mean, there's a lot of people who have asked me for things that it doesn't seem to me would be very good to give them, whether it's my children or whether it's the wino on the street or whoever. How do I know? Am I supposed to give to literally everyone who asks me, or is that a hyperbole? Well, how can I know? Well, it helps to compare Scripture with Scripture. For example, I mean, the Bible does say to those who don't work should not eat.

And so, that would be at least one case of an exception to what otherwise sounds like an absolute universal command. And if there's one exception, there might be others. It may not be so universal.

It may be that it's a hyperbole. Maybe he's saying, I should freely give of what I have readily to persons in need. And he says it by saying, give to everyone who asks you.

Is that a hyperbole? It seems like it is because there are some exceptions, I believe. Others might not agree about that. When Jesus said, if someone strikes you on one cheek, turn the other cheek.

Or when someone compels you to go, well, now go two with him. Is that something I literally must do? What if the guy doesn't want me to go two with him? I insist I'm under your orders here. I'm going to go two.

But I'm stopping here. No, I'm taking your stuff for another mile. You have to come after it.

You know, I mean, what's he saying? He's saying that I need to be prepared to go above and beyond my comfort level and convenience level to serve somebody else and to rather absorb injury than inflict it. I mean, there's a lot of principles here that are being stated in very absolutist kind of terms as if there's no exceptions to them. But often

there are exceptions to them.

They may be hyperbole. But we don't just decide there's exceptions because we want to decide there's exceptions. We have to judge that by the teaching of the rest of scripture on similar topics.

But you need to identify when you're looking at a hyperbole or an anthropomorphism. Anthropomorphism comes from two Greek words, anthropos, which means man, and morpho, which means form. And anthropomorphism is a figure of speech where something that is not a man is spoken of as if it was a man.

It's presented in the form of a man. When Isaiah talks about how the trees of the field will clap their hands. Well, trees don't have hands.

They can't clap their hands. It's that's anthropomorphic. It's speaking about trees as if they were people, though they're not.

God is sometimes spoken of anthropomorphically. God's hands are spoken of, his eyes and so forth. Now, it's debatable whether God actually has literal hands and eyes and so forth.

Most Christians in dialogue with Mormons try to prove that God doesn't have those things because he's a spirit. But we don't know the spirit doesn't have hands or eyes or whatever. I mean, we don't know if that's anthropomorphic.

But there are times when God is presented, for example, in encounters with people like Abraham, where God acts like he's a mere man. He says to Abraham, I'm on my way down to Sodom. I've heard the place is really bad.

I'm going down to check it out. And if it's as bad as I've heard, I'll know. You're like, what? God doesn't know what's going on in Sodom? He's talking to a man as if he was a man.

It's just a manner of expression. It's strange to our ears to hear God talk like that. When Abraham's ready to plunge the knife into his son Isaac, God says, don't do it for now I know that you fear me.

You know? Well, didn't God know before that Abraham feared him? Was the fear of God, you know, opaque in Abraham that God didn't know that that was there? Or when Cain killed Abel, he says, Cain, where's your brother? Or when Adam and Eve were hiding in the bushes. Adam, where are you? I mean, God asking questions if he didn't know something. These are times when God actually, in those particular cases, actually probably appeared in a human-like form.

But not only appeared visibly like human, but spoke as if he was a mere man. Spoke as if

he had limitations of man. This is strange to our ears, but it's called anthropomorphic language.

And occasionally that's useful to know because there are people who have concluded, there are people whose theology is that God doesn't know what we're going to do before you do it. Because he said to Abraham, now I know that you fear me. Didn't know before that, apparently.

They don't recognize anthropomorphic language. Figures of speech are useful to know. Apocalyptic imagery is especially useful to know when you're reading a book like Ezekiel or Zechariah or the book of Revelation or in some parts of Daniel.

Apocalyptic refers to a whole genre of literature that the Jews produced a lot of. And we call those books apocalypses or apocalyptic-style literature. Some of the prophets, the ones I mentioned, Ezekiel and Zechariah particularly, but also some of the other minor prophets and a bit of Daniel, is written in apocalyptic style.

So is the book of Revelation. In the years between the close of the Old Testament and the beginning of the New Testament, those in what's called the intertestamental period, the Jews produced dozens of non-inspired books using this actual style, the apocalyptic style. This style of literature basically was comparable to science fiction in our day.

Some scholars have actually compared it to political cartoons in our modern society. I mean, where animals represent concepts. I mean, in a political cartoon, an elephant represents a Republican and a donkey represents a Democrat.

And a bear represents Russia and an eagle represents America in our political cartoons. Well, scholars who've studied Jewish apocalyptic say, you know, the closest thing we have in our world of literature to Jewish apocalyptic style is the political cartoon. But actually, to me, it's a lot more like science fiction.

But the point is that it is a style of writing that was very common and popular among the Jews. And some of the features were that they described things symbolically rather than in literal terms. Very commonly in apocalyptic literature, there were dragons, monsters, wild beasts.

An angel would take the author around and explain things to him and so forth, a little bit like Dante's Inferno or something. It was a style that the Jews loved and there was a lot of it in their literature. And some of it's in the Bible.

And that's helpful to know, because if the Bible says that in Revelation, that a beast rose out of the sea with seven heads and ten horns and had a mouth of a lion and feet of a bear and a body like a leopard, we need to know, is this a real animal that's going to come out of one of the world's oceans someday and all the world's going to worship this animal? Or do we recognize, no, that's apocalyptic imagery. That animal represents

something. The seven heads represent something.

The ten horns represent something. We need to be very cautious about interpreting the book of Revelation as Western thinkers unfamiliar with Jewish apocalyptic style, because we think of people right literally. There's a whole series of books out called the Left Behind series that are about the tribulation based on a fairly literal approach to the book of Revelation.

Out of the bottomless pit, there come these locusts with faces of men and hair like women and breastplates of bronze and tails like scorpions. And they afflict people for five months and so forth. And you've got these horses then coming with flamethrower mouths and serpent tails that bite people and kill people.

And is this literal or is this something else? Well, if you take it literally, you're probably unfamiliar with apocalyptic literature. And you're probably going to become inconsistent even in the way you take the book of Revelation, because nobody, for example, I know has ever thought that Jesus Christ is a lamb with seven eyes and seven horns. And when we see Jesus, we don't expect to see a lamb with seven eyes and seven horns, although he's described that way in Revelation 5, 6. But seven eyes and seven horns are apocalyptic imagery for omnipotence and omniscience.

But this gets difficult. And fortunately, not many books of the Bible are written in this style. But if you study apocalyptic style, there's many samples of it in the Jewish world.

You are much more equipped to recognize it and to not mistake it for something else when you encounter it. And Zechariah is the Old Testament book that is almost completely, probably the closest to the book of Revelation in its images. And yet many Christians have developed from passages in Zechariah ideas that come from the failure to recognize the apocalyptic imagery in it.

If you've heard that when Jesus comes back, he's going to set his foot on the Mount of Olives and the Mount of Olives is going to split in two. I imagine most of you have heard that before. Where's that in the Bible? It's in Zechariah 14.

But I would suggest that taking that literally is not what the author intended, not what the Holy Spirit intended when he wrote that. That's an apocalyptic language. And I have an idea of what it meant because I can compare it with other passages in Ezekiel that talk similarly, not the exact same thing, but similar imagery.

And when you compare the imagery of one apocalyptic passage to another, it will help you to not make the mistake of taking something literally that isn't intended that way. You need to look up to interpret properly. You need to look up unfamiliar words in the passage.

If you can, you can use lexicons and cross-referencing tools. Unfamiliar words. There are

words in the Bible that most of us don't really use in modern speech.

The word propitiation, for example. How many times in a given day do you use the word propitiation? Or even, I mean, some words are a little more common, but still not very common in secular speech. Words like atonement or, you know, I mean, just theological words.

You know, sanctification, predestination, those kinds of words. You know, if those are words that you don't use very often and you only encounter them in the Bible, then looking up those words, maybe find out what the Greek word means, see, get the concordance, see how many times this word is used in the Bible and what connections it's used. This is extremely important in understanding words that are, whose meaning is under dispute.

The word predestination, for example. I'm often asked by people, do you believe in predestination? I say, of course. How can anyone not believe in predestination? The Bible uses the word predestination.

Next question, what does predestination mean? Well, that's another story, you see, because there are some who believe that predestination means that God, without any, you know, consideration of conditions in the part of man, just predestined certain people to get saved and certain other people not to get saved. Other people have a different view of what predestination means than that. And to have a different understanding of what the word means will make a different doctrine, really.

I mean, everyone who is a Christian believes in predestination. The question is, what does it mean? Well, that's a word that only occurs in one of its cognates or another four times in the Bible, twice in Romans 8 and twice in Ephesians 1. So, you don't have to go all over the Bible to find all the references to it. And you can look in the context and say, well, here's, there's different understandings that people have, which of them fits these contexts.

But in a word that occurs more often than that, where you might have to look up 20 passages or 30 to understand how the word is used, it's worth doing so. I mentioned last week my objection to the translation new self and old self that's in some of the modern translations where Paul actually said the old man and the new man. Why is that? Why do I object to that? Why don't I like people taking Paul's use of the word old man and translate it old self? Because I don't believe that the word man, as Paul used it, meant self.

And I believe he meant something entirely different. But the only way I figured that out is by looking up all the places in the Bible where Paul mentioned the new man and the old man. There's not very many.

Romans 6, 6, he says, knowing this first that our old man was crucified with him, that the body of sin might be destroyed. Okay. Then you've got two passages in Ephesians.

One is in Ephesians 2, 14 or 15, where he said that God broke down the middle wall of partition between the Jew and the Gentile, and he made of the two one new man. So making peace. Then later in Ephesians 4, he said that we need to put off the old man and put on the new man with his deeds.

And we read a list of deeds that belong to the old man and the list that belonged to the new man. Then in Colossians, you have a passage, Colossians 3 also says something similar, but he says, we have put on the new man and we have put off the old man. And again, list some of the deeds of each.

Now, when you look at the context of that, you can, you know, you can discover the meaning of the word by looking at the other places where it's found. That's what I'm saying to do. Do a word study.

What does the old man mean? Well, you can do your own study and find out. But I'll tell you what I thought, what I think. I think the old man is mankind in Adam.

And the new man is the new mankind, the new humanity. The word Anthropos, man, can also be translated humanity. Just like if you saw a book in English that's title was The History of Man.

You know that the word man there means mankind. And that's the same with Anthropos. Anthropos can mean man, individual man or mankind.

So, there's an old humanity and a new humanity. The old humanity is in Adam. The new humanity is in Christ.

And that's the only interpretation that makes sense when Paul says that God took the Jew and the Gentile and made of the two in himself one new man. The new man is that which God created out of the Jew and the Gentile believers, which is a new humanity in Christ, the church. And it's not a new self.

Nowhere in the Bible does the Bible think of the new man is in me or the old man is in me. It's always the opposite. I am in the new man.

I was in the old man, but I put it off. The imagery is taking off clothing. Clothing is external to you.

You shed your involvement in the old man and you put on involvement in a new humanity. It's different than an old self and a new self. It has to do with a people, not a particle of my self.

Anyway, the point is that if you don't look up the passages where it's used, then the

words don't mean what they're supposed to mean to your mind. And so look up unfamiliar words and phrases in the passages. Cross-referencing is very important.

And finally, on the matter of interpretation, how does the thought of the passage fit in and interact with the context of the immediate discussion, that of the book in which it is found and that of the whole Bible? Now, those are three contexts. Every passage has at least three contexts. I could add a fourth, but every sentence in the Bible has an immediate context.

There's a sentence before it and a sentence after it. And those sentences before and after it often will be necessary to give you information of what that sentence is talking about. And there's also a larger context.

Every verse in the Bible occurs in a book of the Bible. And sometimes that book of the Bible will use the same concept. I think I've shared with you before the way that the book of Isaiah uses the word healing and sickness.

People see that Isaiah 53.5 says, by his stripes we are healed. And without thinking or without studying the book of Isaiah very well, or the New Testament apparently, some people have concluded that that means that when Jesus received a flogging before he was crucified, that he atoned for our sicknesses so that we can be healed on the same basis that we can be forgiven. Because by his stripes we're healed.

But it would help to look at the context, both the immediate context of that verse and the context of the whole book of Isaiah. Because Isaiah talks about healing and sickness throughout the book, but he never means organic sickness. He never talks about what we think of as individual healing.

He's always talking about the nation personified anthropomorphically as a sick man, is sick because it's been beaten on by God. It's under the judgment of God and nothing can reconcile it to God except the healer who comes to, by his stripes, heal that broken relationship. Now I don't remember, did I talk about that particular example in this before I did, didn't I? There's that example.

It has an immediate context and it has the context in the book. And you often won't understand what a thing is saying if you don't recognize that the author has been talking about this subject all the way through the whole book. One of the things that, to understand what it means to judge.

Are we supposed to judge or are we supposed to not judge? Jesus said, judge not that you be not judged. But when you go to a book like 1 Corinthians, you'll find that there's, it's quite a nuanced subject, this business of judging. Paul says in chapter 4, I don't even judge myself.

But on the other hand, he says later on, if we would judge ourselves, we would not be

judged. And as you go through the book of 1 Corinthians, you say, I'm going to see how Paul uses this word judge throughout the book. It might give me some idea of what in the world he means by judging.

And you'll find really early on in chapter 2, he says, the spiritual man judges all things. OK, and later on, he'll say, I speak to you as under spiritual man, judge what I say. He'll say, let the prophets speak two or three and let the others judge.

He'll say, judge in yourself. Is it proper for a woman to pray a prophesy with her head uncovered? He, judge, judge, judge. He's always saying, judge things.

And so to understand the Christian theology of judging, it helps to notice that it's brought up a lot of times in the same book and in various contexts. And you can get a picture of OK, judging is right in this context and judging is wrong when it's this way. I'm going to let you do your own study on that.

But the point is, there's a context for every comment in the Bible. There's the context of the immediate passage of the whole book it's in. And then, of course, the whole Bible, because God inspired the whole Bible.

You'll find that the whole Bible is necessary to really understand certain passages. Now, about application, I'm going to run through this rather rapidly because we're almost out of time. There's a lot of points here, but these can mostly be read rather than explained.

Although the temptation I have is to give examples in each case, I won't. In applying the scripture, once you've gotten a sense of what it really is talking about and what it really means, the question is, how does this apply to my life? And that depends. It depends on what kind of passage we're talking about.

As you can see, looking over these notes, there are several different kinds of passages that I've given you separate consideration of. Some passages in the Bible contain a promise. God makes a promise to his people.

Another kind of passage expresses a duty, not a promise, but a command. Do this. That's not a promise.

That's a command. That expresses duty. Another kind of passage will simply tell you something about what kind of God God is.

It doesn't tell you a duty, doesn't make a promise. It's a disclosure of God's own character. God tells you about himself.

Another kind of passage will be a story about some Bible character. You can get stuff from those if you know how to unpack a passage like that, and you can learn things for your own life from them. Another kind of passage will be a prediction about something, a

prophetic prediction that something will happen.

Now, when you're reading a passage, it helps to know what you're looking at. For example, when you read in Acts chapter 2 that the believers had all things in common, and as many as had possessions, sold them and brought them to the apostles' feet, and they distributed them to the poor. There are people who have decided from that passage that Christians have an obligation to live communally, to have a common purse, to have no disparity at all in lifestyle or standard of living or income or any of that stuff that, you know, it says right there in the book of Acts.

They didn't keep anything for themselves. They just kind of shared everything equally. Well, it's true it does say that, but the question is, is that a command or is that historical narrative? There are many things like that in the scripture.

You'll read that so-and-so did such and such. Rahab lied in order to protect the spies. Is that something we should do? Well, some people say yes, some say no, but the point is the fact that it says that she did it doesn't mean that that's an example for us all.

You know, I mean, some things in the Bible are merely descriptive. Others are prescriptive. A passage like they sold their goods and gave them to the poor is descriptive.

It tells you what they did. It doesn't editorialize. It doesn't say that every Christian ought to do this.

It doesn't say that they should or shouldn't have done this. It doesn't say whether they were making a mistake when they did it or whether it was the thing God wanted them to do. It just tells us what they did.

When Paul is, you know, people in Tyre tells him, don't go to Jerusalem, don't go to Jerusalem. And Paul says, I'm going. And Luke is trying to persuade him not to go, but he says, I'm going anyway.

And so Paul went to Jerusalem. Well, does that tell us that he should have gone to Jerusalem? It only tells us that he did. The question of whether he should have or not is hotly debated to this day.

But the fact is when the Bible just tells us that someone did something that Abraham told his wife to lie and say that she was his sister and she did it. Now, this is sometimes given as a wonderful example of wifely submission. Should she have done it? We're not told whether she should have done it or not.

Some people think she shouldn't have, but the fact that she did and that we're told she did doesn't prove anything about whether wives should in a parallel situation do the same thing. What I'm saying is you have to recognize whether you're talking, looking at

a passage that is, you know, commanding you to do something, promising something to you, just telling the story about somebody, disclosing something about God's character, whether it's a prophetic prediction. A prediction is different than a promise.

In fact, take a scripture like train up a child in the way he should go. And when he is old, he will not depart from it. Is that a promise or is that a prediction? That's a hard call.

I'm not sure I know the answer. It could be just a prediction. It could be a promise.

And in some cases, a prediction is the same thing as a promise, but not necessarily. Anyway, when you are reading promises, there are some helpful ways to apply these kinds of passages. In each kind of passage, I would recommend approaching with certain unique questions suited to that kind of passage.

There are many promises in the Bible. I love if you ever go through the book of Psalms or Proverbs with a highlighter and just decide to highlight every time there's a promise there, you'll have a very colorful set of pages there because there's a lot of promises there in those books and elsewhere, of course. But when you're reading promises in the Bible, it would do well to ask yourself these questions in order to apply it properly.

To whom was the promise originally made? The promise, I will bless thee exceedingly and make thy name great and multiply thy seed as the stars of heaven. That's a promise in the scripture. Can I claim that promise? Not necessarily.

It wasn't made to me. It was made to somebody else. It was made to Abraham.

And when Paul said to the Philippian jailer, believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and thou shalt be saved and thy house. Is that a promise to me? Maybe, maybe not. It wasn't made to me.

It was made to that guy. It turns out his house was saved. I think mine will be too, but it doesn't seem to work for all families.

A lot of families, their whole house isn't saved even though they are. Who is this promise made to? What did the promise mean in the original context? You see, when God made promises to Abraham, the Jews understood that those promises were to them and that they were the seed of Abraham through whom all the nations would be blessed. Paul tells us in Galatians 3, they misunderstood.

The promise was not about them. It was a promise to Abraham about his seed, but the seed, Paul says in Galatians 3, 16 is Christ. And that's not how the Jews understood it.

They understood themselves to be the blessed seed that would bless the nations. Paul says, no, they didn't understand. It was Christ, not seeds, but seed.

And therefore, we need to say, well, is it possible that the intent of the promise was

misunderstood? You see, a lot of the promises made to Israel in the Old Testament have a fulfillment in the church, but in a very different way than Israel thought. In fact, the very promises about what the Messiah would be like were misunderstood to a great extent by the Jews. They, I mean, a lot of the promises about the Messiah setting his people free, they thought it meant from the Romans.

But the angel told Joseph, no, he will save his people from their sins. That's the enemies they'll be set free from. It's a spiritual thing.

What did the promise mean? It's possible that you can misunderstand a promise. Even people who take by his stripes, you are healed. Some people take that as a promise of God.

Well, what does it mean? Or MacArthur did a lengthy sermon on, you know, is any sick among you? Let him call for the elders of the church and let them anoint him with oil in the name of the Lord. In the prayer of faith, he'll save the sick and the Lord shall raise him up. What's that mean? Many people believe that's a promise of instantaneous healing whenever one is prayed for and anointed with oil by the elders.

Is it? Well, there's a lot of interpretations of that, and it'd be very foolish, it seems to me, to assume that one meaning that strikes me at first reading is the meaning, and then assume that's God's promise. Because it might mean something different if I would think about it and say, well, what is it that's really being promised here? And once I decide that, I can claim that promise or live in the light of that promise, but sometimes a promise can be misunderstood. Are there stated or implied conditions attached to the promise? This is very important.

God made certain promises and threats without stating conditions, and yet there were implied conditions. Jonah said in 40 days Nineveh will perish. It didn't.

Why? There were implied conditions. He stated none, but when they repented, God changed the outcome. In fact, in Jeremiah 18, God says it'll always be that way.

In Jeremiah 18, 7 through 10, God said, whenever I say that I will destroy a nation, if that nation repents, I will repent of the evil I said I would do to it. And whenever I say I will build or plant a nation, if that nation turns from my ways and does evil to my side, I will repent of the good that I said I would do. Now, he doesn't always state those conditions whenever he makes his promises or threats, but they're always underlined.

They're always implied. And the reason to reckon, the reason to, I bring this up, is that some people assume that all the promises of God are just unconditional. And sometimes a promise can be forfeited by lack of faith or lack of obedience or some other condition failed to be met.

Can I think of, oh, if, let's see, does this apply to other parties besides the original

recipients, like me, for example? Sometimes there's ways to tell if that's so or not. If so, am I realizing this promise in my experience? If Paul says sin shall not have dominion over you, sin shall not reign in your moral body, that sounds like a promise. Or is it a prediction? But the point is, if it's a promise, am I realizing that? Is that really happening in my life? Is sin reigning in my moral body? Jesus shall save his people from their sins.

Has he saved me from mine? Am I still in bondage or am I really free? If I'm not free, then maybe some conditions on my part are expected to be met that I'm not meeting. What should I be doing differently? Can I, you know, am I realizing this? Anyway, you can see some of these questions. Let me skip down some.

About passages that describe a duty. Similar questions. Is this passage really presenting a duty? Is it prescriptive? Or is it merely descriptive of what someone did without necessarily endorsing it? Okay.

To whom does this duty apply? Is it for me? Biblically, how can I know? In other words, there are duties that are put on some people. The Jews were told not to eat pork. Does that apply to me? Jesus said, go into all the world and preach the gospel.

Does that apply to me? Am I supposed to go into all the world, personally, me? What if I never leave this place? What if I just preach the gospel where I am? Well, who is he making that statement? Who is he giving that commission to? He's giving it to the church corporately, especially the apostles. And there are, of course, others, evangelists and so forth, that God calls. But some people just take a command of God that he gave in a certain situation and just assume it applies to each of us individually.

Just when it... I mean, Keith Green, who was a friend of mine, I loved him, admired him, still do, even though he's dead now. But he was mistaken, I believe, in what he used to say shortly before he died, that the last command of Christ was to go into all the world and preach the gospel. And if you aren't going, you are disobedient, unless you have a very clear call to stay.

I don't see that taught in the Bible. The Bible doesn't say that everyone went out on the mission field except the few who had a call to stay home. What I find in Scripture is very few went out on the mission field.

The apostles did, but even they didn't go real quickly. Twenty years after the resurrection of Christ, the twelve were still in Jerusalem. He told them to go into all the world.

They didn't even go until after the Jerusalem Council in A.D. 50. Paul himself was, what, fourteen years a Christian before he went out. And he didn't go out until the Holy Spirit spoke to the elders of his church and said, separate to me Barnabas and Saul for the thing I've called them to.

It wasn't considered that automatically you go out just because you're a Christian. You go out when God sends you out. And what did most of the church in Antioch do? Paul and Barnabas get sent out.

Everyone else stayed home. Did they all have special calling to stay home? We're not told they had a special calling to stay home. It sounds more like Paul and Barnabas had a special calling to go out.

The assumption that because a command in the Bible is given to somebody, that it must apply to me without any kind of modification or without any kind of qualification is not a responsible way to do things. What was God's underlying concern in staying this command? In other words, is there a way that I could be keeping this to the letter but not in the spirit of it? I need to know what God was really concerned about here. What character trait would be exhibited in the consistent performance of this duty? Do I need to work in this area of my character? How did Jesus fulfill this duty in his life? Am I violating this duty in any way? If so, what specifically has prevented obedience? Have I just been ignorant, blind, or negligent, or stubborn? What specific resolution should I make to bring my life into conformity with it? Now, I'm not saying you'll memorize all these questions.

Every time you read a scripture that gives a command, you'll ask these. These are the kinds of things you should be wondering when you see, okay, here's a command of God. Am I supposed to do this? How am I supposed to do this? Do I feel convicted that I haven't been doing this? What do I need to decide to do today so that I won't neglect this anymore? These are the kinds of issues that you have to ask yourself.

You don't have to ask them in the exact words here. I'm just trying to lay out some ideas of how you approach these things. There's more.

I won't go over all of them in detail. You can see them for yourself on the back of the page. But at the bottom of the back of the page, I would like to draw attention to just a few other considerations in your biblical study, and that is that biblical study is not strictly an academic exercise where you're on your own.

As a Christian, you have certain promises that God has made about your coming to the understanding of the scriptures, if you're diligent. In 1 John 2.27, John said, but the anointing that you've received, meaning the Holy Spirit of Him, abides in you, and you do not need that anyone teach you. But as the same anointing teaches you concerning all things, you shall abide in Him.

Now, the anointing that's in you, the Holy Spirit will teach you in all things. That's not an unconditional promise. You have to be, you have to be, keep your heart pure.

You've got to be diligent. You've got to do all the things He wants you to do, but in the

process, He will lead you into all truth. Jesus said that to the disciples.

The Holy Spirit, when He comes, He'll lead you into all truth. The Bible is understandable to people who have the Holy Spirit. That doesn't mean everything will be immediately understood, but the things you need to understand will be understood when you need to, if you're a diligent seeker.

You don't have to wonder whether my IQ is going to be adequate to figure out everything I need to know. You don't need someone to teach you more than the teacher that God has given you. Now, you might say, Steve, well, why are you teaching us then? Well, that's a good question.

I listen to teachers and I read teachers, but I don't need them to teach me. They help. They can help, but I never read a commentary saying, okay, what this guy says, I'm going to go with that.

I never listen to a radio program saying, whatever this guy says, I'm going to believe that. I don't need them to tell me what it means, but sometimes they can stimulate my mind. Sometimes they'll have an insight I hadn't thought of.

Sometimes I can learn in one minute listening to a guy say something that took him 10 years for the Holy Spirit to show him. It might take 10 years for the Holy Spirit to show me if I don't listen to him too. I mean, we can, after all, the Holy Spirit does anoint with a gift called teaching.

And when teachers are used of God to teach us something, that is another way in which the Holy Spirit is teaching us. And, uh, but the point is we are not dependent on these teachers. If these teachers are not available, the Holy Spirit who dwells in us can lead us into the truth too.

It may take a little longer without, without teachers, but it can happen. Another scripture. If any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask of God and it will be given to him, but let him ask in faith.

James 1 5. If you're studying the scripture and you just, it's, it's, uh, opaque to you, you just can't understand it all. Ask God to give you wisdom and ask in faith and he'll give you wisdom. Paul said to Timothy in second Timothy 2 7, consider what I say and the Lord give you understanding in all things.

Consider, roll that over in your head, meditate on it, think about it, and the Lord will eventually give you understanding and everything that you need to understand. There are prayers from Psalm 119 that I've given you here that you could pray before you study or while you study. Certainly these prayers suggest that prayer helps in understanding the scripture.

The writer says, blessed are you O Lord, teach me your statutes. Let God be our teacher as we study his statutes and his words. In verse 18 he says, open my eyes that I may see wondrous things from your law.

If God doesn't open your eyes, you may take forever to see things. Some of them you may never see. Ask God to open your eyes.

In verse 33 he says, teach me O Lord, the way of your statutes and I shall keep it to the end. That's important by the way, that if you ask God to teach you, you've got to be committed to keep it, to obey it. God's not going to teach you just to satisfy your curiosity.

It says in Deuteronomy 29, 29, the secret things belong to the Lord, but what he has revealed are for us and for our children that we might learn to do all the words of his law. He reveals things to us so that we will learn to do what he wants us to do. There are secret things he doesn't reveal and he doesn't need to, but those apparently aren't necessary for us to do what he wants to do.

But teach me your statutes and I will do it. I will keep it to the end. Jesus said, if any man is willing to do his will, he will know of the words, whether I speak for myself or not.

In verse 34 it says, give me understanding and I shall keep your law. Indeed, I shall observe it with my whole heart. If you can pray these prayers in association with your biblical study, then I believe they are God ordained prayers in scripture that will be answered.

God, give me understanding. Teach me. Open my eyes that I can see wondrous things from your law.

These are the kinds of prayers we are told and authorized to pray. God has inspired these prayers so that we will recognize our dependency on God in understanding. If we begin to think that our own minds without God's assistance can understand everything properly, we will be mistaken and unfortunately we won't know we're mistaken because we'll think that whatever our minds came up with is the truth and we'll stop looking further.

We need to recognize that God is teaching us progressively. And I was talking to someone in this fellowship the other day. They were telling me how that God's been stretching them because they're in this church fellowshiping with people that they would have never fellowshiped with a few years ago because of the particular doctrinal exclusivity that they had at the time.

And they said that what really mattered to them most for so long was what they called doctrinal purity. And I'm all for doctrinal purity. Nothing I like less in my doctrine than impurity in my doctrine.

But I think all of us ought to aim at having something else and that's doctrinal humility. Because we all want doctrinal purity, but if we assume prematurely that we've got it, we won't be humble enough to be teachable still for more. We need to realize that whenever we hold to a view that responsible Christian people disagree with on the basis of some way they understand the scripture, that we might be right and they could be wrong.

But on the other hand, it may turn out they're right and we're wrong. We do well to be humble in holding opinions where good Christians differ. Now there's some issues that Christians all see it the same because it's clear as a bell.

But on issues that are controversial, on issues that are less clear, a doctrinal humility is called for. And only when that humility exists will God teach us from his word. If we think we already know it all, we're not going to learn anything more.

That's why I'd rather be in fellowship with people who are 50% right but teachable than people who are 90% right but unteachable. If someone's 90% right but unteachable, they're never going to get any more right than that. A person who's 50% right but teachable might become 100% right someday.

That's what I'm looking for in my own attitude and in that of others. So let's pray. Father, I ask you to teach us your ways, teach us your word, open our eyes that we might see when we read the scriptures.

And yet, Father, many of us cannot pray that with a clear conscience because we don't read the scriptures very much. We need to repent of our neglect and we need to study to show ourselves approved unto God as you've wanted us to do. And if the time would come where we don't have Bibles available anymore to read or to study, it will certainly tell on our neglect that we have not learned when we had the opportunity to know and to understand and to apply your word to our lives.

And how terribly it shows in a compromised church when biblical illiteracy is at a high level and where Christians are simply doing every man what's right in his own eyes because they have never really studied to understand or determined to apply what your word says in their lives. I pray that we might break free from any of that tendency in our own lives and move forward as your spirit leads us into truth through the word of God. I pray that we might continue to be teachable and humble so that you can bring us further along in our understanding of you.