

Bible Study Approaches

Bible study begins in an attitude of prayer, whether expressed in words or quietly reflected in the heart. The expression of the psalmist is exactly what our hearts should say:

Open my eyes, that I may behold

wondrous things out of thy law (Ps. 119:18).

Or, as the apostle prays for the Ephesian Christians,

...that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give you a spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of him, having the eyes of your hearts enlightened, that you may know...(Eph. 1:17,18).

And the result should be:

My meditation of him shall be sweet: I will be glad in the Lord (Ps. 104:34 KJV).

We really are wholly dependent on God for the illumination of his Word to our minds and hearts. Methodology and techniques, though necessary, are fruitless unless we are truly taught of God.

With that desire, then, we can listen, search, compare, meditate, reach conclusions, and be ready to obey the truth we have discovered. When we have done this, we can expect God to give opportunity to share what we have learned with others, for he doesn't want us to keep a good thing to ourselves. Approaching our study with this attitude we can then use various means to enhance our understanding of the Bible.

There is one basic method of Bible study, but several different approaches utilizing that method. The method is the well-known OBSERVE, INTERPRET, and APPLY SO well taught in Oletta Wald's *Joy of Discovery*, which is heartily recommended for your study (see bibliography in the appendix for details). It goes like this:

Observation --what it says

Interpretation --what it means

Application- -what it means to me personally, that is, what I must do about it

Three different approaches to Bible study are the panoramic, the telescopic, and the microscopic.

- The panoramic view seeks to encompass the overall sweep and scope of the Bible or a passage of scripture. It's as if one were scanning the whole landscape from one horizon to the other from a high vantage point. If you have ever stood on a site near Glacier Point in Yosemite National Park where the whole sweep of mountains, valleys, rivers, and falls is stretched out before you as though on a gigantic canvas, you have a mental picture of this approach to Bible study. It has unique value to give us the sense of the Bible's cohesive unity through a wide variety of expression, observable only through the panoramic look at scripture.
- The telescopic view is quite different. As a telescope limits the field of vision and focuses attention on one place at a time, so we can view the Bible. This is pictorial of topical study, with its focus upon a specific truth, theme, or word. In this approach we scan across the panorama of God's Word, focusing our attention on a particular area of truth, and then relate it to the whole picture.

- The microscopic view is still another approach. Just as a microscope brings into view things ordinarily hidden to the human eye, so the carefully analytical and detailed study of the Bible reveals the hidden treasures of God's Word. And just as discovering hidden treasure brings excitement and delight, so it is when we examine the Bible this way. This type of study involves vocabulary and language study, includes the investigation of biblical history and culture, and demands an intensive, methodical approach to scripture. The results are eminently worthwhile, for we find God revealing to us the underlying pattern and purpose of his Word through our diligent use of this approach. Casual curiosity will never discover this hidden wealth.

Follow with me as we work through an illustration of each of these three modes of study, will you?

The Panoramic View

If we were to read the whole Bible, seeking to discover its central theme, we would see something like this:

The First Look--The Old Testament

The Old Testament, we can easily see, is centered around the Hebrew people, for as early as the eleventh chapter of Genesis, the book of beginnings, we are introduced to Abram, the first Hebrew, and the father of the nation Israel. God chose to work through this people and to make their history a living illustration of his own desire to relate to all of us on a basis of loving reality. The New Testament confirms this idea with these words, referring to Israel:

Now these things happened to them as an example, and they were written for our instruction, upon whom the ends of the ages have come (1 Cor. 10:11 NASV, italics mine).

And

...whatever was written in former times was written for our instruction, that through perseverance and the encouragement of the Scriptures we might have hope (Rom. 15:4 NASV, italics mine).

So we see the Old Testament, with all its varied forms of expression, as essentially God's picture book, showing through the nation Israel God's yearning heart longing to relate in love to a people who refused to trust him. Does this ring a bell with you regarding your own personal life? It should, for all of us are pictured here.

To illustrate the correlation: Abraham and Sarah tried to help God out, since in their view he was unable to keep his promise to give them a son (read Genesis 16 & 17, Galatians 4: 29-31). This is a picture of the flesh in us, with its inherent pride of achievement. The result, in their case, was a boy named Ishmael, the progenitor of the Arab peoples. It is most interesting to observe that the historic, and current, enmity between Arabs and Jews is a consequence of Abraham and Sarah's fleshly actions. Thus we see a pointed illustration of the consequences of the flesh--whether in them or in us.

The Second Look--The Gospels

In all the Old Testament history of Israel we see a thread of prophecy: Someone is coming! He will bring in better times. The Jews were looking for one called "the Messiah." So when we read the four Gospels, we see the focus on one person, Jesus, called the Christ (or Messiah). The gospel writers witness, *Here He Is!*

Not recognizing their Messiah, though given ample evidence, the Jews had him killed. In their mistaken religious zeal, they thought they were doing God a favor--to rid the world of this blasphemer. In doing so, they unconsciously fulfilled God's purpose, for Christ came to die for men's sins. But God raised him from the dead. Ever since, he has become the author of eternal life and salvation to any who want him to be their Lord, Jew or Gentile.

The Third Look--The Acts of the Apostles

A first century historian, Luke, recounts the history of God's new society, the church, in the Book of Acts. The unfolding action includes (1) the coming of the Holy Spirit to join all believers in Christ into one body, the church; (2) the early victories, problems, and persecution of Christians; (3) the ministry of the apostle Peter blending into that of the apostle Paul; and (4) concludes with Paul "*proclaiming the kingdom of God, and teaching concerning the Lord Jesus with all openness, unhindered*" (Acts 28:31 NASV). The action of this book is still going on. Its final chapters are, perhaps, being written in the life of the church today.

The Fourth Look--The Epistles

Even while he was engaged in his earthly ministry, the Lord Jesus laid the groundwork for this new society (see John 13 through 17). Thus, the men he called to begin the action he also prompted to write letters of instruction on how the new regime was to operate. So we have the New Testament letters.

The Fifth Look--The Revelation

The final book gives us the Unveiling of Jesus Christ, personally entering again into human history to set things right, to consummate man's day and to usher in eternity.

The whole of the biblical revelation, we observe, is centered around one person--Jesus Christ. So to summarize our panoramic view we can headline each section of scripture, as it relates to him, like this:

Jesus, the Messiah

- The Anticipation of His Coming--The Old Testament
- The Realization of His Coming--The Gospels
- The Presentation of His Message--The Acts of the Apostles
- The Explanation of His Purposes--The New Testament Epistles
- The Consummation of His Plan--The Revelation

Here we have a simple example of the panoramic approach to Bible study. I suggest that you take a book of the Bible, perhaps one of the Gospels or the Book of Acts, and write your own synopsis of its contents, with a simple outline to summarize.

A real adventure is to make a New Testament survey, using this approach with every New Testament book. You'll never be the same if you do. My friend and colleague, Ray Stedman, has a tremendous grasp of the full scope of the biblical revelation. The following outline has resulted from his study. I think you'll find it highly instructive. But don't take his outline as final; work out your own from your personal grasp of the text of Scripture.

The Panorama of Scripture

THE GOAL--YOU--Complete in Christ.

Ephesians 4:11-13 and 2 Timothy 3:16,17

I. THE FUNCTION OF THE OLD TESTAMENT

Peculiar Purpose: Preparation, Anticipation:
to produce hunger,
to increase thirst.

An inescapable imperative to the understanding of truths of the New Testament.

A. FIVE BOOKS OF MOSES--(PENTATEUCH)

The Pattern of God's working.

GENESIS--Awakening Sense of Need (HUMANITY)

EXODUS--New Relationship (REDEMPTION)

LEVITICUS--New Resource (ACCESS)

NUMBERS--Human Failure (FLESH)

DEUTERONOMY--A New Law (RESTORATION)

B. HISTORICAL BOOKS

The Perils of the Pathway.

JOSHUA--Peril of premature contentment.

Example of Grace--Joshua

JUDGES, RUTH--Peril of consecrated ignorance.

Example of Grace--Ruth

1 SAMUEL--Peril of legalistic conformity and divided allegiance.

Example of Grace--David and Jonathan

2 SAMUEL, 1 CHRONICLES--Peril of a forgotten calling.

Example of Grace--David's repentance.

1 KINGS, 2 CHRONICLES--Peril of material magnificence and religious deceit.

Example of Grace--Elijah

2 KINGS, 2 CHRONICLES--Peril of moral abandonment and the hardened heart.

Example of Grace--Hezekiah and Josiah

EZRA, NEHEMIAH, ESTHER--Peril of the discouraged heart.

Example of Grace--The personal life of each.

C. POETICAL BOOKS

The Protests of the Human Heart

JOB--(Cry of the Spirit) FAITH

PSALMS--(Cry of the Soul) HOPE

Voice of Emotions:
Yearning of Hope--Messianic

Burning of Anger--Imprecatory
Sighing of Sorrow--Penitential
Glorying of Grace--Victorious

PROVERBS--(Cry of the Soul) HOPE

Expression of Mind

ECCLESIASTES--(Cry of the Soul) HOPE

Conclusion of the Will

SONG OF SOLOMON--(Cry of the Body) LOVE

D. PROPHETIC BOOKS

The Promises of God. God offering Himself.

ISAIAH--Cleansing of God
JEREMIAH--Judgment of God
EZEKIEL--Presence of God
DANIEL--Mind of God
HOSEA--Persistence of God
JOEL--Ultimate Meaning
AMOS--Perfection
OBADIAH--Spiritual Victory
JONAH--Patience
MICAHA--Pardon
NAHUM--Destruction
HABAKKUK--Ultimate Answers
ZEPHANIAH--Jealousy of God
HAGGAI--Integrity of God
ZECHARIAH--Encouragement
MALACHI--Responsibility of God

II THE FUNCTION OF THE NEW TESTAMENT

Peculiar Purpose: Realization, Fulfillment: to unveil Christ.

A. GOSPELS AND ACTS--The Presentation of Christ.
MATTHEW--Christ as King, proclaiming His Law.
MARK--Christ as Servant, ministering to a sick society.
LUKE--Christ as Man, praying--Man's lost secret.
JOHN--Christ as God, giving life--God's work.
ACTS--The Body of Christ--the unfinished book.

B. THE EPISTLES

The Explanation of Christ. Fall into three groups, each group begun by a fundamental epistle (Romans, Ephesians, Hebrews.)

First Group--You in Christ

ROMANS--Panorama of Salvation (Key verse) 8:29-30

(3 tenses--Justification, Sanctification, Glorification)

1 CORINTHIANS--Fellowship with Christ (Key 1:9)

Carnality--lack of fellowship

Spirituality--experience of fellowship

2 CORINTHIANS--Triumph in Christ (Key 2:14)

Despite pressures--victory

GALATIANS--Freedom in Christ (Key 5:1)

A red-hot "needle"

Second Group--Christ in You

EPHESIANS--The Nature of the Body (Key 2:19-20)

PHILIPPIANS--The Problems of the Body (Key 2:5)

COLOSSIANS--The Power of the Body (Key 3:3)

THESSALONIANS--The Hope of the Body (Key I Th. 5:23-24)

TIMOTHY--The Ministry of the Body (Key I Ti. 4:6)

TITUS--The Work of the Body Key (2: 11-12)

PHILEMON--The Unity of the Body

Third Group--Faith (the operative word)

HEBREWS--What Faith Is (Key 11:1_

JAMES--What Faith Does (Key 2:26)

PETER--Why Faith Suffers (Key I Peter 1:6,7)

JOHN--How Faith Works (Key I John 3:23)

JUDE--What Faith Faces (Key v. 3)

C. REVELATION--The Consummation of Christ Key 11:15

In the foregoing considerations, we have been concerned mainly with *observation*. Now let's *interpret and apply* this information. I conclude that *the centrality of the one person in the whole Bible makes Jesus Christ the most important person there is*, in God's eyes. In application, I ask myself, what is he to me? Is he the most important person in my life? Do I really let him be Lord in my life in the practical level of making choices, determining life style and life direction? These questions get pretty close to home, if he is as important as God says he is. No wonder the Father said of him, "*This is my beloved Son, hear him!*"

The Telescopic View

To acquire a sound doctrinal base for Christian life we can be greatly helped by topical studies. One way to engage in such a study is this:

Procedure for Topical Study

1. Select an interesting and important topic, such as "The Wrath of God."
2. Without looking at your Bible or concordance, list the verses or Scripture portions on the subject that you know, with references if possible. In other words, set down all that you know about the subject.
3. Take your concordance, subject index, topical or reference Bible, and count the references to this subject.
4. Look up each reference and list the ones that set forth a basic principle or key thought.
5. State these principles, that is, identify them by some pertinent phrase.
6. Track down the answers to any apparent contradictions so that you have an answer satisfying to you and one you can explain to others.
7. Write out the additional facts or facets of this subject that you learned in your study.
8. Note subjects that caught your interest, for future study.
9. Ask the Lord for an opportunity to share the truth learned.

Following this procedure on the subject, "The Wrath of God," I found my mind immediately recalled two verses, 1) "For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who suppress the truth in unrighteousness" (Rom. 1:18 NASV) and 2) "For God has not destined us for wrath, but for obtaining salvation through Jesus Christ our Lord" (1 Thess. 5:9 NASV) .

Not bad for a starter, I thought, until I went from there to Strong's *Exhaustive Concordance* and found some 208 references to *wrath*. I got less than one per cent. Keeping in mind that Strong's Concordance lists the references in the King James version, I sorted out those which referred to *God's* wrath and found there were 140. Of these, 105 were in the Old Testament and 35 in the New Testament. It's not hard to see why people see the God of the Old Testament as a God of wrath, while the God of the New Testament appears to be a God of love. But he's the same God! He has not changed; he has always been a God of love *and* wrath, for if he didn't love us he would not get angry about that which hurts us. But here I am moving into the interpretation realm, perhaps prematurely, so let's get back to our observations.

Scanning through the Old Testament references on the subject, I make the general observation that God's wrath was turned on his people because of their strong-willed disobedience and idolatry, but was always redemptive, not punitive, in nature. Isaiah characterizes God's wrath *toward his own* in these words:

For a brief moment I forsook you, but with great compassion I will gather you. In overflowing wrath for a moment I hid my face from you, but with everlasting love I will have compassion on you, says the Lord, your Redeemer (Isa. 54:7, 8).

and he adds:

For the mountains may depart and the hills be removed, but my steadfast love shall not depart from you ...(Isa. 54:10).

But regarding Ammon, the entrenched enemy of God and his people, he says:

A sword, a sword is drawn for the slaughter...to be laid to the necks of the unhallowed wicked, whose day has come, the time of their final punishment...you shall be no more

remembered; for I the Lord have spoken (Ezek. 21:28, 29, 32).

No such statements are issued against God's own people, only against those who refuse him and steadfastly oppose his will. The prophet Habakkuk knew this about his God, for he said to the Lord, "...in wrath remember mercy" (Hab. 3:2).

Moving to the New Testament data, we see the picture rounding out: mercy is always there for those who will turn back to God in the obedience of faith.

He who believes in the Son has eternal life; he who does not obey the Son shall not see life, but the wrath of God rests on him (John 3:36)

Do you not know that God's kindness is meant to lead you to repentance? But by your hard and impenitent heart you are storing up wrath for yourself on the day of wrath when God's righteous judgment shall be revealed (Rom. 2:4, 5).

So we observe that there are two possibilities: either we are storing up wrath through our unbelief and disobedience, or we are enjoying life in Christ through our faith in him and obedience to his Word.

As we pursue our investigation to the end of the story, we find in the Book of Revelation the final expression of God's wrath. There are those in that day who would prefer to be buried by an avalanche rather than to repent. They say to the mountains and rocks, "Fall on us and hide us from the face of him who is seated on the throne, and from the wrath of the Lamb..." (Rev. 6:16). The wrath of a lamb? Who ever heard of a fearsome lamb? This paradox of terms says a lot: "the Lamb of God" who has taken away men's sins is descriptive of the redemptive nature of our God; but having refused him in this character, he becomes an awesome one whose wrath is to be feared.

The final word on God's wrath is this:

...he will tread the wine press of the fury of the wrath of God the Almighty. On his robe and on his thigh he has a name inscribed, King of kings and Lord of lords (Rev. 19:15, 16).

The Lamb is Lord over all, and those who oppose his gracious reign have only his wrath left to face. Yet even after this word of impending judgment, there comes the gracious invitation, "...let him who is thirsty come, let him who desires take the water of life without price" (Rev. 22:17). Even in this awesome time of the final expression of his wrath, God remembers mercy. What a great and gracious God!

Note that we have mingled observation and interpretation in running through the verses on God's wrath. We do this almost unconsciously, as we absorb the content of the scripture and think through its meaning. Now let's try to identify some principles regarding this subject. Here are some that occurred to me:

1. *God's wrath is not directed at people* so much as it is against their conduct in opposition to his will and way.
2. *People only experience God's wrath when they refuse to obey God's Word.*
3. *In relation to God's wrath, there are two classes of people, (a) those who are related to God as his people by faith, to whom God's wrath becomes corrective and redemptive, and (b) those who refuse to relate to God in love, and thus inherit the folly of their own stubborn, willful opposition to God, in the experience of his wrath. This, for them, means utter destruction, for one cannot defy the living God in his sovereign authority (see 2 Thess. I :7-10).*
4. According to Romans 1:18 the wrath of God *is now being revealed* in the present mess the world is in. Three times in this chapter we read "God gave them up" (Rom. 1:24, 26, and 28). In essence God says, "Since you don't want my way I'll give you over to your own way

that you may learn to value my way." This is the present expression of God's wrath. *But there is a future expression of his wrath* from which there is no recovery. Meanwhile, he is long-suffering toward us, that his goodness may lead us to repentance.

5. *God's heart is always redemptive*, but salvation refused leaves only God's righteous wrath against sin to be visited on the sinner.

6. *God's wrath is to be avoided at all costs*. The price of disobedience is too high.

Thank God "he has delivered us from the dominion of darkness and transferred us to the kingdom of his beloved Son, in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins" (Col. 1:13,14).

7. There is no need for anyone to feel the weight of God's wrath. He sent a Savior. "For God sent the Son into the world, not to condemn the world, but that the world might be saved through him. He who believes in him is not condemned; he who does not believe is condemned already, because he has not believed in the name of the only Son of God" (John 3:17, 18).

So I conclude that God is not a petulant, vindictive, or punitive deity just waiting to catch us in some failure, but rather he is a loving, kind, heavenly Father committed to achieving nothing but the best for his children--even if they must have a spanking. He is, on the other hand, utterly righteous, and will not change the way things are in his sovereign order just because we don't want to conform to his plan.

"God is love" (1 John 4:8). But he is also "a consuming fire" (Heb. 12:29). Such a one is to be loved and obeyed--not to be taken lightly or presumed upon.

In working through this topical study, I have carefully followed the procedure outlined at the beginning. You can identify the steps if you think it through. The only point I did not address is to note subjects that caught my interest. To consider this item, all the way through my study I kept thinking I must now study the other side of the picture, the grace of God. With this additional study, I will hopefully achieve a balanced view of two vital topics centering around the character of God. Such study can bring nothing but profit.

The Microscopic View

Now we come to what, in my opinion, is the most productive approach to Bible study, the detailed, analytical look. Once again, some steps on how to proceed in this investigative adventure may be useful.

Let's start with a simple approach to the study of a single verse of scripture, or a short passage.

Discovering God's Truth

1. Seeing the Setting (reconnaissance)
2. Pulling into Focus (observation)
3. Getting on Target (meditation)
4. Hitting the Bullseye (interpretation)
5. Getting the Point (application)
6. Putting It Back Together (outlining)

I suggest you take six blank sheets of paper and write in headings with spaces in between as we have done on the following tables.

DISCOVERING GOD'S TRUTH

Step I

Seeing the Setting (Reconnaissance)

- a. From the Local Scene:
- b. From the Broader View: other scripture, history, the whole Bible.

DISCOVERING GOD'S TRUTH

Step II

Putting it in Focus (Observation)

Observe what it says, one word at a time.

DISCOVERING GOD'S TRUTH

Step III

Getting on Target (Meditation)

Decide what it means, weighing possible alternatives:

DISCOVERING GOD'S TRUTH

Step IV

Hitting the Bullseye (Interpretation)

Draw Conclusions:

- a. In statement of principles
- b. What's the big idea?

DISCOVERING GOD'S TRUTH

Step V

Getting the Point (Application)

Determine "How it Affects me," and "What must I do about it?"

DISCOVERING GOD'S TRUTH

Step VI

Putting it Back Together (Outlining)

Well ...you did pretty well at taking it apart, now see if you can put it together again! Schematic Summary (sometimes called an outline)

Final Exam: Will it hold together?

Now choose a single verse of scripture and fill out the blank spaces concerning your chosen text. I've done it with a most interesting verse, Isaiah 53:11. On the next seven pages (8490) you can see what I have done as a sample, then do likewise with your own subject. Here's the text I have chosen to analyze:

He shall see the fruit of the travail of his soul and be satisfied; by his knowledge shall the righteous one, my servant, make many to be accounted righteous; and he shall bear their iniquities (Isa. 53 :11).

DISCOVERING GOD'S TRUTH

STEP 1

Seeing the Setting (Reconnaissance) around Isaiah 53:11

a. From the Local Scene:

1. The chapter, back to 52:13 is a remarkable prophetic picture of the atoning work of Christ.
2. The immediate context portrays the value of his death, and resurrection.
3. The book (and passage) is Isaiah's prophecy addressed to Israel. The passage presents Israel's redeemer.

b. From the Broader View: other scripture, history, the whole Bible.

1. Probably the clearest exposition in Old Testament or New Testament of the value of the atoning work of Christ.
2. Prophetic portrait of Christ as the suffering servant of Jehovah, written 700 B.C.
3. Text and early date confirmed by two manuscripts dated second century B.C. found among Dead Sea Scrolls.
4. So extensive is his writing concerning the person and work of Christ that Isaiah has been called the Evangelical Prophet.

DISCOVERING GOD'S TRUTH

STEP 2

Pulling into Focus (Observation)
about Isaiah 53:11

Observe What It Says, one word at a time!

He shall see--He (the Lord Jesus) shall see (after death--RESURRECTION) see--in the sense of perceiving after observation. (Declaration of fact)

The fruit--the result

of His travail--resulting from as a source. travail--more than physical suffering, includes "being made sin" and experiencing the separation from the Father that this entails.

of His soul--relating to His perfect, sinless humanity.

and be satisfied--The consequence of His seeing. Satisfied--feeling that it was all worth the cost, finding no fault with the Father's will.

by His knowledge--i.e., the knowledge of Him.

the righteous one--Christ, the one absolutely right, without fault or flaw.

my servant--Jehovah, speaking of Christ as obedient unto death.

make many--He will do it for many (i.e. all who receive Him)

to be accounted righteous--this is justification. Those who know Him shall be declared blameless of sin through His righteousness. Accounted--it's God's accounting.

and--"for" of KJV is better, as explanatory clause as to how He will make many to be accounted righteous.

He shall bear--Christ shall (the passage is prophetic) bear, i.e. carry, take on Himself as His burden.

their--the "many"

iniquities--wickedness, gross injustice, unrighteousness

DISCOVERING GOD'S TRUTH

STEP 3

Getting on Target (Meditation)
about Isaiah 53:11

Decide What It Means, weighing possible alternatives:

1. There is a question regarding the antecedents of the pronouns: I take it that this is saying that Christ is satisfied with the results of His sacrifice.

I see no strong reason why it could not equally well be that God is satisfied.

2. This is justification by faith in the Old Testament. It means that:

a. Christ shall be satisfied with the results of His sacrifice.

b. Through the knowledge of Christ many shall be accounted righteous because Christ has borne their sins.

DISCOVERING GOD'S TRUTH

STEP 4

Hitting the Bullseye (Interpretation)
on Isaiah 53:11

Draw Conclusions:

a. In statement of Principles.

1. Justification is through the knowledge of Christ as the atoning sacrifice for sins.

2. The Lord Jesus is satisfied with the result of His atoning work on the cross.

3. Christ is alive, enjoying the result of His obedience.

b. What's the Big Idea?

Really two ideas:

1. The satisfaction of Christ with His work.

2. The justification of believers, those who know Him as sin-bearer.

DISCOVERING GOD'S TRUTH

STEP 5

Getting the Point (Application)
of Isaiah 53:11

Determine How it affects me, and What must I do about it?

1. Since Christ is satisfied with His atoning work, certainly I should be.
2. I am accounted righteous through what He has done in my behalf.
3. He bore MY iniquities--hence I don't have to bear them. This means freedom from guilt.
4. ONE sin-bearer is enough!

I must not harbor sins that Christ has dealt with in Himself

DISCOVERING GOD'S TRUTH

STEP 6

Putting It Back Together (Outlining)

Well...you did pretty well at taking it apart, now see if you can put it together again!

Schematic Summary (sometimes called an outline) of Isaiah 53:11

- A. The SAVIOR'S SATISFACTION vs. 11a
- B. The SINNERS' JUSTIFICATION vs. 11b

Final Exam: Will it hold together?

Yes, I think I've got the message.

Taking another passage, this time three verses from the New Testament, here's another sample study on Ephesians 2:8-10.

For by grace you have been saved through faith; and this is not your own doing, it is the gift of God--not because of works, lest any man should boast. For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them (Eph. 2:8-10).

My study of these verses follows.

DISCOVERING GOD'S TRUTH

STEP 1

Seeing the Setting (Reconnaissance)
about Ephesians 2:8-10

a. From the Local Scene:

In a chapter describing
What we were vs. what we are in Christ.

In a book--which is a letter written by Paul to the Christians at Ephesus (& everywhere) telling God's purposes in placing us together in Christ as members of His body, the Church.

b. From the Broader View: other Scripture, history, the whole Bible.

Historical background--Acts 19

Doctrinal correlation--see Acts 4:12, 15:8-11, 13: 38, 39

Romans 4:4, 5, 16-21, 10.34, 11:6, 5:8 Titus 3:3-8

Bible Orientation--Presents the Church as Christ's body, companion to Colossians, which presents Christ as Head over the body.

This passage highlights the work of God in taking poor material and making it fit for His use and habitation.

DISCOVERING GOD'S TRUTH

STEP 2

Pulling into Focus (Observation)
about Ephesians 2:8-10

Observe What It Says, one word at a time!

v. 8 For--explanatory again

by grace--God's undeserved favor, doing for us what we do not deserve and could not do for ourselves.

you have been--present perfect tense, indicates accomplished fact being currently experienced

saved--rescued, made whole, conserved for intended use.

(This statement is a DECLARATION OF FACT)

through faith--channel or medium of application or reception--modifying phrase
*

which God has prepared beforehand--explanatory clause, modifying main statement.

and this--this what? faith or salvation? What is faith?

*is not your own doing--modifying clause explanatory of main proposition it is the Gift of God--DECLARATION OF FACT

v.9 *not because of works--further explanatory phrase, limiting proposition.

*lest any man should boast--added modifying clause further limiting main statement of fact. God does it, no ground to boast.

v.10 For--explanatory again

we are His workmanship--another DECLARATION OF FACT the product of His working.

created--again the work of God, the Creator

in Christ Jesus--the sphere of our life; we are a new creation in Him.

for good works--the end for which He made us anew.

* which God prepared beforehand--explanatory clause, modifying main statement. Not just any good works, but according to God's previous planning.

that we should walk in them--purpose clause. This should be the pattern of our life and conduct, doing what He has planned for us.

* modify main declaration of fact

DISCOVERING GOD'S TRUTH

STEP 3

Getting on Target (Meditation)
about Ephesians 2:8-10

Decide What It Means, weighing possible alternatives: Draw Conclusions:

1. We who are Christians have been saved by God alone, apart from any work or effort on our own part. God has done all that is possible and necessary for salvation.

2. Salvation is received through faith. Faith is taking God at His word, that is, believing what He has said is true and acting upon it. Faith is not the gift, salvation is. God commands men to "believe on the Lord Jesus." Man has the capacity to obey or disobey this command. The Gospel is a valid proposition--addressed to faith, demanding a response from the will of man.

3 Good works are God's intent for man, and the result of saving faith in Christ. These works are not done independently of God, but are the result of and empowered by His working in us (we are His workmanship).

4. God has a plan for us. A specific pattern of good works plotted out for us. Our place is to discover (a step at a time) what He has for us to do, and DO it.

DISCOVERING GOD'S TRUTH

STEP 4

Hitting the Bullseye (Interpretation)
re: Ephesians 2:8-10

Draw Conclusions

a. In statement of PRINCIPLES.

1. Salvation is an accomplished fact and a present reality for those who are Christ's.
2. It is a gift, received by faith.
3. God's unmerited favor toward us is its source.
4. Salvation is not achieved by man's works
5. Salvation does not originate with man.
6. Good works are the consequence of our belonging to God.
7. God has a prearranged plan for our life.

b. What's the BIG IDEA?

THIS IS AN EXPLANATION OF THE TRUTH CONCERNING OUR SALVATION IN CHRIST.

DISCOVERING GOD'S TRUTH

STEP 5

Getting the Point (Application)
of Ephesians 2:8-10

Determine "How it affects me," and "What must I do about it?"

1. I have made, and can make, no contribution toward my personal salvation. All I can do is to take the great gift of grace that God offers in His Son.
2. Any attempts at self-justification or claims of self-righteousness are a contradiction of the truth of this passage. My complete dependence should thus be on Jesus Christ.
3. I must allow God to go on working in me as "His workmanship."
4. I must seek to discover and walk in the specific plan of God for my life.

DISCOVERING GOD'S TRUTH

STEP 6

Putting It Back Together (Outlining)

Well ..you did pretty well at taking it apart, now see if you can put it together again!

Schematic Summary (sometimes called an outline) of Ephesians 2:8-10

Our Salvation

A. A Settled State

1. An accomplished fact 2:8a
2. A present experience

B. A Sovereign Source

1. Completely from God
2. Not from human origin or works 2:8b-9

C. A Prearranged Purpose

1. Arranged by God
2. Performed by us (2:10)

D. A Calculated Condition

Faith. God is not content to be cut out of our lives in any degree. 2:8a

Final Exam: Will it hold together?

Sure think so!

Another Method

There is another plan for employing the microscopic approach to Bible study, probably more usable on a larger segment of scripture than the approach we have just considered. It is this:

Procedure for Analytical Study

1. Choose a portion of Scripture on which you would like to have additional light.

Read it over several times, in different versions if possible.

2. Look for the central thought and write it down.

4. Observe the most frequently used words or phrases to determine the emphasis or thrust.
5. Trace through the argument or progress of thought of the writer and think through the steps used in arriving at a conclusion.
6. Make your own paraphrased translation of the passage in contemporary American language. This will show you just how much you really understand of the passage, and will enable you to transmit the truth you have learned to someone else, in terms easy to understand.

Choose a Passage and Read It

Let's try it on Colossians 3. Having made this choice, I read it through in the Revised Standard Version, the New American Standard, the New English Bible, the New International New Testament, the Amplified New Testament, the Living Bible, the King James Version, and finally a Greek-English interlinear translation.

Central Thought and Divisions

As I did so, the central thought, or theme, I perceived was "God's Design for Godly Living." The paragraph breaks I observed are these, with appropriate titles:

1. New Life in Christ 3: 1, 4
2. Taking Off Our Old Dirty Clothes 3: 5-11
3. Putting On New Garments 3 :12-4:6
 - a. In general conduct 3 :12-17
 - b. In marriage 3 :18, 19
 - c. In child/parent relationships 3: 20,21
 - d. In slave/master relationships 3: 22-4:1
 - e. In regard to prayer 4:2-4
 - 1) In general 4:2
 - 2) In intercession for others 4: 3, 4
 - f. In relation to worldlings 4:5, 6
 - 1) In wisdom, redeeming opportunities 4:5
 - 2) In gracious (not insipid) speech 4:6

Note that I ignored the chapter break, since it does not accord with the thought content.

Definitions of Words

My study of words gave me the following, working from the verse order of the Revised Standard Version:

put to death = believe that we died with Christ to the power of sin (understood in this context).

immorality = fornication, sexual sin.

impurity = moral uncleanness passion = lustful desire
evil desire = a craving for bad things
covetousness = greediness
idolatry = worshipping things that are seen
wrath = anger (in context, God's righteous anger)
anger = (in context, on man's part) slow-burning revengeful attitude
malice = just plain badness
slander = injurious speech
foul talk = obscene language
old nature = old man (as I was in Adam)
new nature = new man (as I am in Christ)
image = a visible representation of a prototype
circumcised = a term equivalent to "the Jews"
uncircumcised = a term equivalent to "the Gentiles"
barbarian = a comparative term: the more crude type of people
Scythian = from their reputation: the very worst sort
compassion = heart concern for the problems of others
kindness = committed to practical help, good heartedness
lowliness = willingness to take the humble place
meekness = power under control
patience = able to take abuse without losing your cool
forbearing = putting up with people the way they are
rule = mediate, arbitrate
admonish = to call to mind, for warning or encouragement
be subject = to rank under, take second place
love = commitment of the will to act in a way that will serve another
be harsh = be bitter, irritate
obey = to hear under authority

provoke = exasperate

eye service = working only when the boss is looking

men-pleasers = seeking human approval

singleness of heart = aiming to please one Lord

fearing (the Lord) = caring first and foremost what the Lord thinks and says

reward = to give as a result of a relationship (in this context)

inheritance = what the Father leaves to his children

mystery = a revealed secret, to those in the know, taught by God

wisely = properly using that which you know

outsiders = those not yet in Christ

gracious = with kindness and good will

seasoned with salt = to give taste and zest to that which could be flat and insipid

I derived these definitions by consulting Vine's Expository Dictionary of New Testament Words, working through the King James Version words to the Revised Standard Version, then adding my own flavor to the definition from my own understanding of the words in American vernacular terms. Yes, it was a lot of work--but worth it, for now I have a much clearer understanding of what this passage is all about.

Most Frequent Usage

Observing the most frequently used words to determine emphasis, I found that the thrust of the passage was centered around "putting off and putting on." Put to death (v. 5), put them all away (v. 8), put o,] (v. 9), put on (v. 10), put on (v. 12), and put on (v. 14) all reflect this idea.

Grammatically, the series of imperatives makes strong impact.

- Set your minds on things above!
- Put to death what is earthly in you!
- Put them all away (those evil things) !
- Put off the old man!
- Put on the new man!
- Put on then as God's chosen ones (all these graces of spirit)!
- And above all put on love!
- Let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts!
- Be thankful!
- Let the word of Christ dwell in you!
- Do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus!
- Wives, be subject to your husbands!
- Husbands, love your wives!
- Children, obey your parents! Fathers, do not provoke your children!
- Slaves, obey your earthly masters!
- Masters, treat your slaves justly and fairly!
- Continue steadfast in prayer!
- Pray for us!

- Conduct yourselves wisely toward outsiders!
- Let your speech be always with grace!

Some impact, when you consider each of these is a demand upon our will--to do it! This makes it even more imperative that we "put on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make no provision for the flesh, to gratify its desires," as we have it in Romans 13:14. He is the one who enables us to do all the rest, as we trust him.

Tracing the Argument

As I trace through the progress of thought of the writer, his argument seems clear. Since we have the risen Christ, and he is our life; and since he has the place of honor and authority; and since we died with him and now our life is hid with him in God; and since we share his glory (all in verses 1-4 of chapter 3), we have no need to live in the old way. We can now, because of all these facts, put off the old life and adopt a new life style consistent with the one who is our life, the Lord Jesus. All the commands and exhortations that follow are based on this premise. The rest of the passage is just telling us what we must put off and what we must put on-- God's new design for living. This is spelled out in generalities, applicable to all Christians, then in specifics relating to the various relationships of life. It concludes with instructions about how we should talk to God and how we should talk to men.

Your Own Paraphrased Translation

There is just one more step in our procedure: to make our own translation in paraphrased form, using our own terms. So here it is--Colossians 3:1 to 4:6, my version:

(3:1) Therefore, since you were raised together with Christ, seek the things above, where Christ is sitting at God's right hand. Stop being preoccupied with earthly things. For you died, and your life is centered in Christ and is being kept with Christ in God; whenever Christ, our life, shall be made evident, then also you will be shown to be with him in the splendor of his character.

(3:5) Therefore, put to death that which belongs to your strictly human, earthly ways: the improper use of sex, moral uncleanness, lustful desires and urges, craving for evil things, and greediness, which is worshipping material things (instead of the living God). Because of these things in which you formerly walked, the righteous anger of God is coming, yes, because of these things in which you once lived.

(3:8) But now put away all these: revengeful anger, ill will, injurious talk about others, and foul, obscene language coming out of your mouth. Stop lying to each other, having put off the old man with his habits, and having put on the new man, who has been renewed in fuller knowledge to conform to the likeness of the one who created this new man. In him there is no place for human differences of status, whether national, religious, cultural, or social; rather Christ is all that matters, and in all his people.

(3:12) Therefore, all of you, as God's chosen ones, devoted to his own special purposes and dearly loved by him, put on (as you would a fresh, clean garment) these life qualities: a deep heart-concern for the needs of others, good-heartedness that makes you of down-to-earth usefulness, a genuine willingness (having thought it through) to take the humble place, soft courage which is neither inflated by praise nor resentful of injury, a steadiness under provocation that keeps you from having a short fuse, a patient acceptant attitude which enables you to put up with people the way they are, a forgiving heart (for if anyone has a complaint against another, you must forgive--just as the Lord has forgiven you. Remember?)

(3:14) The overriding principle over all these things is love, the kind that knocks itself out for the loved one and never quits. This is the quality that holds it all together and shows how mature we really are.

And let the peace which Christ wrought be the mediator in your hearts, to which you were surely called in the one body--his body; and be thankful.

(3:16) Let the word of Christ make its home in you richly: teaching, warning and encouraging each other from it, applying the truth wisely--singing in psalms, in hymns and in spiritual songs with thanks in your hearts to God; and whatever you do, in your words and in your work, do everything in the character and authority of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him.

(3:18) You wives, be subject to your husbands (that is, put him first), for this fits the Lord's plan. You husbands, love your wives (with the same kind of love with which God loves you--which means putting her first), and don't be caustic toward them. You children, listen to your parents and heed them, for this pleases the Lord greatly. You fathers, don't exasperate your children, or you will turn them off. You slaves, hear your masters as under their authority in everything; they are your lords in a human sense. Obey them, not just when they are watching, just to please them, but with unmixed motives caring most about what the Lord thinks and says.

(3:23) Whatever you do, do your work from the heart, as to the Lord and not to men, knowing that you will receive from the Lord that which he gives back to you in your inheritance, given because you are his child. You serve the LORD Christ.

(3:25) Surely the one acting unjustly will bring on himself what he did wrong, and there is no partiality in this. You masters extend to your slaves that which is just and fair, knowing that you also have a Lord in heaven.

(4:2) Be persistently engaged in prayer, being alive to its potential, with thanksgiving; also praying together about us, that God may open a door for us to tell the sacred secret, now revealed, about Christ, because of which I am in bonds, that I may make it clear as I ought.

(4:5) Conduct yourselves wisely toward those who are not yet in God's family, using every opportunity with them, your speech always being gracious, having been seasoned with salt and thus not flat and insipid, to know how you ought to answer each one.

Now Interpret

Since we have now done a pretty thorough observation of the text, our next step is to deal with the interpretive problems and arrive at conclusions--then to apply the truth learned. I expect by now you can do this for yourself, using the principles we have suggested earlier. So, to avoid being tedious, I will only touch on some of the interpretive areas as examples, rather than try to interpret the whole passage for you.

The first interpretive decision I faced is in Colossians 3:4. Here I had to decide whether Paul was referring to the future coming of Christ or his present manifestation in the believer. For at least two reasons I chose the latter, (1) because the context is dealing with present conduct, not future conditions, and (2) because the word when in verse 4 is really whenever in the Greek text (I admit I may have an advantage over you if you do not have access to the Greek, but you can get a Greek-English interlinear translation like I have and read it right out of that in English). The point is, I believe, that since Christ is our life, as we walk with him our life will be evidencing the glory of his character. What a delightful prospect! No wonder Paul adds, "Therefore put to death your human, earthly ways..." which characterized your former way of life without Christ.

This correlates with my understanding of the meaning of "...do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus," in verse 17. To act in the name of another is to act out of his authority and consistent with his character and purposes--just as if it were that person acting. We are truly his representatives among men! How important, then, the impression we convey to a watching world.

Verse 25 of Chapter 3, I decided, goes with the instruction to masters in 4:1, not with the preceding section,

which properly ends with the emphatic "You serve the Lord Christ." Here the emphasis is clearly on the word Lord, as having the right to exercise authority over us. But it also uses the rather unusual combination of terms in the Lord Christ, instead of the usual expression, the Lord Jesus. The word Christ means "anointed one," that is "one empowered and able to do a job," so here we have the lordship of Jesus (with its right to demand obedience from us) coupled with his ability to supply all we need to fulfill those demands. This, to me, is an interesting and pointed use of our Lord's names, interpretively very significant.

And Apply...

The applications are many if I take the passage in detail--and you can make your own as the Lord points you to an area of need. But in general, the passage says to us that it really matters what life style we adopt, for we are accountable to the Lord Christ. Since he is our life, what we do and say every day reflects on him, whether favorably or unfavorably. So I need to be consistently putting off the old ways and putting on the Lord Jesus--to show forth that newness of life I have in him. But this is not some legalistic paste-on, rather it is just being myself in Christ and allowing his life to show through in all that I do.

Through this study, I was greatly encouraged to keep responding to Jesus Christ as my Lord. Though it took some time and work on my part, I'm glad I did it. Please note that what I have suggested to you in study procedures I have done myself, so if you think I've made it too tough on you, at least you can't say I'm not fair about it.

This chapter concludes Phase 1, the basics of Bible interpretation. I hope you find it helpful and sufficiently rewarding to move to Phase 2, a study of Figurative Language.

[Phase 1: Chapter 7](#)

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