Tools for Biblical Interpretation

A Seminar by
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Purpose

Tools for Biblical Interpretation is designed for the purpose of assisting the Christian to be better equipped to study God’s Word by equipping the Christian with an understanding of the various and many resources available. This purpose is accomplished by providing the Christian with an overview of the resources available with a brief explanation as to the resource’s purpose and benefit to individual study.

A brief look at the original languages of both the Old and New Testament is designed to create the understanding in the Christian regarding the source for the English translations and their many differences. In conjunction with such an understanding, Tools for Biblical Interpretation seeks to reveal the benefit to using the language resources available through digital media and printed media in the Christian’s personal study. The goal of establishing this benefit is to motivate the Christian to utilize the language resources in his personal study so far as he is able. An accurate understanding of the Christian’s current language skills is paramount to maintain in order that he keep himself within the bounds of his own limitations.

Ultimately, Tools for Biblical Interpretation is to better equip the Christian to rightly divide the Word of God.

Bible Study is a Command

For the individual who has placed their dependence upon Jesus of Nazareth to be the messiah Bible study is a command. In Paul’s second epistle to Timothy he records the Holy Spirit’s command:

“Be diligent to present yourself approved to God as a workman who does not need to be ashamed, accurately handling the word of truth.”

The Christian’s ability to present himself to God as a “workman who does not need to be ashamed” hinges upon his success at accurately handling the word of truth. This identifies that the Christian is able to understand God’s Word, and not only understand it, but understand it accurately.

If such is the case, then why are there so many different beliefs and denominations in the church? There are many reasons for the varied beliefs and varying denominations in today’s church.

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Reasons for varied beliefs and varying denominations in today’s church (the short list):

1. Studying God’s Word with pre-conceived ideas.
2. Studying God’s Word with an agenda.
4. Studying God’s Word to fit within a theological framework.
5. Studying God’s Word to fit within a philosophical framework.
7. Studying God’s Word from human viewpoint.

There are many other reasons why varied beliefs and varying denominations exist in today’s church, but most often the difference in beliefs and thus denominations is the result of one or more of these seven reasons on the short list.

In 2 Timothy 2:15 Paul commands Timothy to be diligent in his presentation of himself to God the Father through accuracy in understanding God’s Word. Notice that Paul doesn’t tell Timothy, “Make sure you repeat what I teach!” Paul doesn’t even tell Timothy to interpret God’s Word. No, Paul commands Timothy to present himself to God through “accurately handling the word of truth.”

The Koine Greek word used by Paul is ὀρθοτομοῦντα (or-tho-to-moun-tah) which means “to cut and divide something rightly.” The grammar of ὀρθοτομοῦντα identifies that he must cut and divide the word of truth rightly before he can present himself to God as an approved workman.

In today’s society the Christian attempts to interpret the word of truth. Yet there is a difference in interpreting God’s Word and rightly dividing it. When the Christian rightly divides the word of truth he separates out its different teachings into their proper categories. When the Christian rightly divides the word of truth he skillfully understands the boundaries between different doctrines. When the Christian rightly divides the word it is because he has understood what it says and he does not need to interpret its meaning, instead merely understanding the definitions of the words it contains.

Interpretation takes one statement and creates a semi-equivalent statement in another language or form. Understanding God’s Word means the Christian works to identify what the original statement says through defining terms and applying the rules of grammar within the scope of the statement’s original language. When this is done properly the result is not an interpretation, but rather it is an understanding.

The command to Timothy to present himself to God as an approved workman who does not need to be ashamed is contingent upon his success at understanding God’s word accurately.
Any time God’s Word is interpreted it creates a parallel meaning that can be similar but is not the same and, as a result, God’s Word is distorted.

The purpose of Tools for Biblical Interpretation is to focus on equipping the student of Scripture with an understanding of the resources available and how they are designed to be utilized in accurately understanding and dividing the teachings, and thus teaching, of God’s Word.

**Vulnerability to Inaccurately Understanding God’s Word**

In the short list above, seven reasons for various beliefs and varying denominations have been identified that reveal the vulnerability to accurately understanding God’s Word. If the Christian is to accurately understand God’s Word then he must be aware of the vulnerabilities and protect himself against falling victim to one or more of them.

The greatest vulnerability is found in the Christian himself. As a Christian he is a sinner saved by grace. Yet the Christian remains a human. Within the human are a plethora of attitudes, ideas, mentalities, and views which all are a part of his natural thought process. Summarily, the natural thought process of the human is self-first. Whether it is satisfying his senses, giving internal or external attention to his ego, or pursuing physical and tangible objects, humanity is self-focused, and self-pursuing. Humans do what humans want and in a naturally unhindered state a human will pursue only that which he wants. Therein lays the greatest vulnerability to the Christian as he also has a natural human tendency to make God’s Word say that which he wants it say. This is identified as personal bias.

Personal bias is the first vulnerability the Christian must remove from his study of God’s Word. Any time the Christian pursues a study on a verse in order to prove his preconceived belief or to disprove the belief of another individual he is operating from personal bias. Often times the Christian does not enter into study of God’s Word under the premise mentioned above, but the vulnerability can present itself at any moment in the Christian’s study of God’s Word.

The greatest approach to combatting personal bias in Scripture is for the Christian to adopt the policy of desiring accuracy over being correct. In that sense the Christian is more likely to accept what is revealed in Scripture as opposed to attempting to prove his own correctness.

Personal bias also plays into the Christian’s vulnerability toward not accurately understanding God’s Word in the area of attempting to harmonize his own personal experience with God’s Word. It is not uncommon for Christians to experience something which they identify as a spiritual experience or as being “of God.” Sometimes those experiences are not in harmony with the teaching of God’s Word. The experiences of men do not reveal the Word of God. God reveals His Word, not man’s experience. Should man’s experience be incongruous with God’s
Word, the Christian should accept God’s Word as truth concerning the matter rather than their own personal experience.

It is noted that the Holy Spirit often times reveals spiritual truth and spiritual reality amidst the Christian’s personal experience, but it should be also noted that it is not the experience, but the Holy Spirit which reveals God’s Word. That which is revealed by the Holy Spirit in those times is the result of prior teaching concerning God’s Word, and is not a new momentous revelation according to Scripture.

The area of personal bias can be often times more subtle than attempting to prove one’s one beliefs or harmonize an experience with the Word. There are many times when the Christian operates from personal bias with a more passive stance in his approach, unaware of his own bias. Such is not always or necessarily the case, but the Christian should be aware of his own desires and thought processes for the purpose of keeping them from influencing the reality of what God’s Word says.

There is, to be certain, much more to be identified concerning personal bias and the natural vulnerability of the Christian attempting to accurately understand God’s Word.

**Poor Scholarship**

While personal bias is a great hindrance to the student of Scripture so is poor scholarship. Poor scholarship identifies that the student has failed to thoroughly or adequately examine the information available to him concerning his passage of study. The more difficult a passage is to accurately understand the greater the demand for depth of scholarship.

Often times the Christian will grab the first commentary or resource available, give it a cursory reading, and then come to a conclusion on his studied passage of Scripture without adequately exploring or understanding that which was read. This sort of laziness should never be applied to Scripture and is the result of the Christian not esteeming Scripture with the respect demanded in accordance with it being the very word of God. When the Christian respects Scripture as being the very word which was revealed to humanity by God then he is willing to do whatever work necessary to accurately understand it.

A lack of scholarship in studying God’s Word is from a direct lack of respect to esteem it as the very word of God. Whenever Scripture is studied it should be with fear and trembling in the understanding that the sovereign and eternal God of the Universe is the One from whom the text came and not merely a human mind. Maintaining a proper thought process concerning the respect for God’s Word as the very word of God is the best policy to combat poor scholarship.
Finally, it is not for man to decide or interpret what God has said. It is God’s job, and He has done it in extreme detail and clarity when one does the work necessary to understand that which He has revealed. One must always remember when studying Scripture to not take lightly the meaning of the words on the page nor their source. Maintaining an accurate level of respect concerning what God Himself has revealed is the best policy to prevent the apathy and laziness of poor scholarship.

**Approach to Scripture**

The Christian’s approach toward Scripture is of critical importance as some approaches yield a more consistent message than others. Much like a worldview, it is the Christian’s approach to studying Scripture which is the lens through which they understand what the word of God reveals. One lens will produce a different view of Scripture than another.

Hermeneutically, there are two basic approaches to understanding Scripture. The approach of the Christian toward studying Scripture is either allegorical in nature or literal in nature. Within these two approaches there are multiple variations and varying degrees of depth, but on the whole, all understandings of Scripture result from either a literal approach or an allegorical approach toward Scripture.

It is important in personal study of Scripture to establish a systematic approach to understanding Scripture. However, not just any approach will produce an accurate understanding of God’s Word. One approach specifically produces a closer accuracy than another and so it is important for the Christian to carefully select which approach to Scripture to utilize in rightfully dividing the word of truth.

An allegorical approach is one which approaches Scripture as being an abstract concept rather than a specific message. From the allegorical approach to Scripture the Christian has the freedom to surmise and define the ultimate concept as he wishes. This approach identifies that Scripture gives a basic idea of reality and man is left to define it as he senses it in any given moment. An allegorical approach to Scripture places the reader in the center of the abstract concept and emphasizes his senses and imagination as the two basic tools towards defining what Scripture means. The allegorical approach to Scripture takes Scripture as an abstract, generic message which must be imaginatively understood by the Christian, thus the Christian defines what is meant based upon his feelings and viewpoint.

A literal approach to Scripture is one which approaches Scripture as being defined specifically rather than abstractly. From the literal approach to Scripture the Christian must submit himself

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2 Hermeneutics is the study concerning the analyses, processes, and protocols of studying Scripture. It is in essence a study on the mechanics of how to study Scripture.
to definitions and descriptions which are provided for him specifically by Scripture. He must accept what Scripture has already defined and described, rather than determine for himself what it means and reveals. This approach to Scripture gives a specific understanding of reality and leaves man to accept what Scripture defines as reality regardless of how man’s senses or desires fluctuate in any given moment. A literal approach to Scripture places Scripture in the center and forces man to submit to its definitions and descriptions through an academic understanding of what Scripture already defines itself as.

The literal approach to Scripture includes the use of anthropopathisms, hyperboles, and metaphors for what they literally represent and not for what they literally define. The literal approach takes Scripture for what it says it is and accepts that which it reveals through an academic process applied to Scripture.

The literal approach is in reality the approach that yields a more accurate understanding of Scripture and should be the approach applied by the Christian in his personal study.

In either approach to Scripture, allegorical or literal, there are three basic safeguards which, if kept in place during study, will provide a natural protection for the Christian. These three basic safeguards become a part of the Christian’s approach as well.

First, the Christian must ascertain what Scripture actually says. Immediately following 70 A.D. this would have been an easy task supposing the Christian could actually acquire a complete set of manuscripts containing all the books within the Bible at once. In that time period the spoken language was Koine Greek which is also the language of the New Testament. The Hebrew of the Old Testament had been well established and maintained by the Jews in spite of the conquests of Alexander the Great and an ability to speak Koine Greek or read biblical Hebrew would certainly prove a valuable tool to the Christian in studying Scripture.

Without adequate scholarship, meaning is almost always lost in translation. Languages possess both specific and ambiguous words, idioms, and metaphors that are culturally understood but often transition from their original meaning into their current meaning until such a time as transition occurs again. The Christian needs to be aware of the meanings of words, idioms, and metaphors, at the time of their use, rather than the time of study. Etymology is the study of words as they have changed over time and can be a great aid to the Christian in understanding what God’s Word says.

For a non-native speaker or reader, the biblical languages of Hebrew and Koine Greek can prove an overwhelming mountain which can intimidate the Christian from climbing up and gazing from in exchange for marveling and wondering at its beauty. Thus the English Christian must produce more work in attempting to understand what the text actually says. This proves a disadvantage, although it is able to be overcome with good scholarship.
The second safeguard to studying Scripture is understanding the context of the passage. Context refers to the setting of a passage of Scripture. In understanding the context of a specific passage the Christian must ask questions such as “Who was this written to?” and “When was this written?” Other questions of a similar nature yield a better understanding of context. When the Christian asks the proper questions concerning context he is able to identify more clearly the dividing lines which Scripture possesses concerning various responsibilities and promises.

For example, Jeremiah 29:11 is often times inaccurately misunderstood to refer to the church age believer.

“For I know the plans I have for you’ declares the LORD, ‘plans for welfare and not for calamity to give you a future and a hope.”

The church age believer who depends upon this promise is doing so erroneously. Context dictates that this passage is given directly to the nation of Israel by God. The “you” of Jeremiah 29:11 is not the church age believer, but rather the chosen nation of Israel. And so it is the nation of Israel to whom God has promised Jeremiah 29:11 for. This is understood by continuing to read chapter 29 following verse 11 where verse after verse establishes a setting for this promise being given to “all you exiles, whom I have sent away from Jerusalem to Babylon.”

Jeremiah 29:11 was a promise given to disobedient Israel who had been exiled by God out of their promised land under warfare and captivity by the Babylonian Kingdom. It was a promise given by God to those exiled as a comfort that their current situation would not remain in its state forever.

Context identifies the recipient of the promise. When the Christian maintains a focus on context he is able to divide accurately what the Word of God is saying.

A Brief Word About Dispensations

Dispensational theology is the belief that God has used different stewards to accomplish different objectives throughout history.

A dispensation is an amount of time known as an “age.” In different ages God has required His stewards (those operating on His behalf in the world) to be responsible for different commands. Adam and Eve were given different commands and responsibilities than the

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Christian alive today. Israel was given different responsibilities through the Mosaic Law than the Church is given through the Law of Liberty.

In various ages God has given different responsibilities to different people. Yet in doing so He has maintained the consistent approach that only through a Messiah can sinful humanity be redeemed and forgiven. In that sense He does not have separate standards for each different age, but merely different responsibilities for His stewards to carry out in harmony with His standards.

Simply put, dispensational theology identifies that God has dispensed different responsibilities to different people in different ages throughout history. Understanding the dispensational context of the passage being studied makes a significant impact on the passage’s application.

The third safeguard which will help protect the Christian from inaccurately understanding God’s Word is harmonization.

In spite of using at least forty individuals over at least two thousand years to record His single revelation to humanity there is not one verse in Scripture which, when accurately understood from the original languages, contradicts another verse. Every verse written regardless of the century in which it was recorded or the person who recorded it reveals a message which harmonizes in every aspect.

Harmonization of Scripture is the process by which a student who has obtained an accurate understanding of a passage compares that passage of Scripture with all other passages of Scripture. This process can be exhausting and seemingly impossible. The Christian can remove a lot of the intimidation by starting first with other passages on the same subject and then comparing the understanding of the passage to the character of God. Where discrepancies arise or seeming contradictions appear the work must be done to find the error in the Christian’s understanding.

The Holy Spirit will not contradict Himself therefore any apparent contradiction is a misunderstanding by the Christian. This misunderstanding must be sorted out until is cleared up by an accurate understanding of the previously misunderstood passage. Usually when contradictions appear it is poor scholarship or bias which prove to be the places wherein the discrepancy exists.

If the Christian will pursue an understanding of what the verse actually says, will maintain the context in which the verse is set, and will harmonize it with the rest of Scripture then he will be greatly safeguarded from an inaccurate understanding of God’s Word and will be able to rightly divide it into its different categories of teaching.
The Operation of the Christian

As a believer the Christian is a spiritual being and not merely a soulish being. That is to say that he has both a human soul and a human spirit. Understanding the differences between the two is important for the Christian in his endeavor to accurately understand God’s Word.

The Christian operates either from the soul or from the human spirit. Prior to his regeneration which follows his dependence upon Christ as the Savior, the individual only had the potential to operate from the human soul. At the moment wherein he placed his dependence upon Jesus of Nazareth as the Messiah the Holy Spirit gave birth to his human spirit and he became a spiritual being. The Christian then has the potential to operate from either the human soul or the human spirit. The soul and spirit are designed to accomplish different responsibilities and they produce different products. Understanding their operation is critical to the Christian’s ability to understand whether or not he is operating in the proper mode for understanding Scripture.

Originally, in the Garden of Eden at the creation of man, God formed Adam with a body, a human soul, and a human spirit. The body was the house for the human soul, the soul was the operator of the body, and the human spirit was the governor over the soul. In that sense, the human spirit governed how the soul operated the body.

The human soul relates to those things which are physical in nature, that is all those things which are non-spiritual and are created (all that is in the universe, the world, the laws of science, animals, plants, other humans, etc...). It is the human soul which relates to and corresponds with human phenomena (that which is humanly observable). In that the human soul requires observation for its information it is primarily sensory based. The body’s senses feed information to the brain where the human soul processes it and sorts through it using the mind.

The human spirit relates to those things which are spiritual in nature. That is to say that the human spirit relates to spiritual things (God, angels, spiritual truth, etc...). It is the human spirit which relates to and corresponds with spiritual phenomena (that which is spiritually observable). In that the human spirit requires spiritual consciousness to discern spiritual information (which by nature is not perceived through the body’s senses) it is primarily faith based. It receives spiritual information through and in its spirit from another spiritual being, primarily God.

The human body is the shell wherein the human soul and human spirit are contained. In order for the body to be alive it must have a living human soul. The human soul is the operator of the body dictating to the body what to do and where to go through systems such as volition (choice), mentality (the attitude of the mind), emotion (responders to circumstance),
personality (that which makes the individual unique), conscience (the moral storage device of the soul), and consciousness (self-awareness).

Without the soul, the body is not a living being, but merely a physiological structure comprised of many mechanical systems. The body can function without a human soul, but it requires something to keep its momentum such as a life support apparatus or a human host which accomplishes the same task. There is a difference between a functioning body and a living body.

The human soul is comprised of a structure capable of containing the breath of life (called the “soul format’’). In order for the soul to be a living soul it must have the breath of life within its soul format. The human spirit is the same, it is comprised of a structure to contain spiritual life (called “spirit format’’) and life within that structure (again provided through the breath of life). Take the breath out of the soul or the spirit and all that is left is the capacity for soul life or spiritual life, but not a living soul or a living spirit. This is what occurred at the fall of man in the Garden of Eden.

As a result of the fall the human spirit died instantly. God removed the breath of life from the spirit format and the living human spirit became a non-living spirit, possessing the capacity for spiritual life, but not possessing the necessary breath to be a living, operating spirit. This creates a problem for humanity as without a human spirit they are incapable of producing spiritual works. Since their works are not spiritual works, they are soulish works having been accomplished by the soul of man. Soulish works do not measure up to the blueprints of God’s design. They are counterfeit works, looking similar on the outside, but of a lesser quality having been produced from a lesser factory, the human soul. Because of this no human in their sinful state has the potential to produce righteous works.

As a fallen being the individual is not capable of relating to spiritual phenomena, since he is soulish.\(^5\) As a redeemed individual, the Christian is able to operate from either the human soul (carnally) or the human spirit (spiritually). It is only in spiritual operation that the Christian is able to understand the things of God.

Paul writes in Romans 8:5:

“For those who are according to the flesh set their minds on the things of the flesh, but those who are according to the spirit, the things of the spirit.”

And also in Romans 8:12-14:

\(^5\) Soulish is what the New Testament refers to as “carnal” or “fleshly.” It is an identification that the human is operating from his soul instead of his spirit.
“So then, brethren, we are under obligation, not to the flesh, to live according to the flesh—for if you are living according to the flesh, you must die; but if by the spirit you are putting to death the deeds of the body, you will live. For all who are being led by the Spirit of God, these are the sons of God.”

It is of utmost importance therefore in Bible study for the Christian to wisely understand whether he is operating from the human soul as a carnal individual, or from the human spirit as a spiritual individual. John writes in 1 John chapter 1 that believers do not have fellowship with God while they are carnal, but that through the confession of sin the believer is able to be restored to fellowship with God, and therefore operate from the human spirit.

1 John 1:5-10:

“This is the message we have heard from Him and announce to you, that God is Light, and in Him there is no darkness at all. If we say that we have fellowship with Him and yet walk in the darkness, we lie and do not practice the truth; but if we walk in the Light as He Himself is in the Light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus His Son cleanses us from all sin. If we say that we have no sin, we are deceiving ourselves and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, He is faithful and righteous to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness. If we say that we have not sinned, we make Him a liar and His word is not in us.”

If the Christian is going to be able to understand the spiritual messages of God’s Word then he must do so from the sphere of fellowship with God by operating according to the human spirit. In doing so the Christian allows the Holy Spirit to teach his human spirit the spiritual truths and messages of Scripture. Outside of fellowship with God the Holy Spirit is limited to exhorting and convicting the Christian to confess his sins for the purpose of operating spiritually again in the sphere of fellowship with God.

An understanding, awareness, and positive motivation then of the Christian is necessary in order for him to accurately recognize whether he is operating from the soul or the spirit when he enters into Bible study. Soulish Bible study is spiritually futile because it only produces a human understanding of words which are spiritual in meaning. The spiritual truths contained in God’s Word must be understood from the human spirit having been taught by the Holy Spirit.

With these vulnerabilities and safeguards in mind the Christian is able to conscientiously pursue a systematic study of God’s Word. He does so with fear and trepidation allowing the Holy Spirit to teach him the spiritual truths and in so doing he has the potential to present himself as an approved workman who does not need to be ashamed based upon his proper division of Scripture.
Biblical Approach to Scripture

Most churches have a document which summarizes their beliefs concerning God, the Bible, man, and Jesus. These are called doctrinal statements. For centuries doctrinal statements have been established as a cornerstone for the organization of believers in a local congregation. Doctrinal statements provide a summary of the beliefs possessed by that local congregation. The idea behind doctrinal statements is a clear line wherein unity is found based upon each member of the local congregation being in agreement with the document. They are born out of a desire and necessity to clarify the local congregation’s beliefs so as to have stability within the ministry of that local church body.

Here is an example of a fairly thorough doctrinal statement concerning Scripture:

“We believe the Bible, consisting of the Old (39) and New (27) Testament books to be the verbally inspired Word of God. While there may be several applications of Scripture, there is but one true interpretation. That interpretation is found by using the literal, grammatical, historical method of study, guided by the Holy Spirit. We further believe the Scriptures are absolutely inerrant in the original writings, infallible, and God-breathed (II Timothy 3:16-17; II Peter 1:20-21; Matthew 5:18; John 16:12-13).”

This doctrinal statement identifies both the beliefs and approach to studying Scripture. Many churches have similar statements, varying in degree, mode, and depth but in each statement the purpose of stating that congregation’s beliefs is to clarify how that congregation views Scripture.

The Biblical Approach According to Isaiah 28:10

The prophet Isaiah identifies the approach of God in teaching Scripture in Isaiah 28. The prophet identifies how the spiritual leadership of Israel was to teach God’s Word to the Israelites.

The priests of Israel had become intoxicated with the wine of religion. Through their repetitious external behavior they became callous to the intent and teaching of the rituals and ceremonies of the Law. Verses 7 and 8 identify,

“And these also reel with wine and stagger from strong drink:
The priest and the prophet reel with strong drink;
They are confused by wine, they stagger from strong drink;
They reel while having visions,
They totter when rendering judgment.
For all the tables are full of filthy vomit, without a single clean place.”
The spiritual leaders of Israel, the priests, have failed to teach the nation God’s Word. Instead they fell victim to the snares of religiosity. Having no substance behind their external rituals and behaviors because of lack of knowledge they became vulnerable to false doctrines and sinful practices. Their vulnerability carried them so far that the priests became literal drunkards. Their drunken state was the logical consequence of a failure to teach God’s Word and depend upon the doctrines it teaches.

It is not within the repetitious behavior of religious rituals that doctrine is taught to the human, but rather through repetitious study of God’s Word. The repetitious aspect is to be so consistent that it builds reflexive behavior in the individual to study on a consistent basis. Repetition of religious rituals is not the proper approach to teaching doctrine or studying Scripture, but rather repetitious teaching of information from a specific approach. In response, as seen in verses 10-13, Isaiah records God’s instruction to the degenerate priests identifying to them the proper approach to teaching His Word.

“For He says, “Order on order, order on order, Line on line, line on line, A little here, a little there.”’ Indeed, He will speak to this people Through stammering lips and a foreign tongue, He who said to them, “Here is rest, give rest to the weary.” And, “Here is repose,” but they would not listen. So the word of the LORD to them will be, “Order on order, order on order, Line on line, line on line, A little here, a little there,” That they may go and stumble backward, be broken, snared and taken captive.”

Verse 12 identifies that this approach to teaching God’s Word is the location wherein their “repose” exists. God says to the priests, “‘Here is repose,’ but they would not listen.”

The Hebrew word for repose identifies a place where one can rest in relief from their endless labor. The priests labor in vain through their meaningless religious behaviors when they could be harvesting the precious gems of spiritual truth through the commanded approach to learning biblical truth and implementing it into their lives through faith. Many churches in today’s American church make the same mistake and carry out humanly pleasant religious acts which have no value in God’s kingdom, having been founded in human viewpoint rather than divine thought as revealed in Scripture.
In verse 10 of Isaiah 28, Isaiah records what God says is to be their approach to studying and teaching His Word. It is to be,

“Order on order, order on order,
Line on line, line on line,
A little here, a little there.”

The Hebrew word for the New American Standard’s English word “order” is צַז (tsaw) and it means “instructive command.” It refers to the instructions given by a superior to carry out a specific task in a specific way. As the inferior individual receives his instruction from his superior he learns the process of how to do what he is being commanded to do.

The phrase tsaw lae tsae (“instructive command on instructive command”) identifies that there are multiple areas in which instruction is given. There is instruction for one area and then instruction for another area. The closest English word that carries the idea of tsaw is “doctrine.”

Merriam-Webster defines “doctrine” as:

1. **Archaic**: Teaching, instruction
2. a: Something that is taught.
   b. A principle or position in the body of principles in a branch of knowledge or system of belief.
   c. A principle of law established through past decisions (precedent).
   d. A statement of fundamental government policy especially in international relations.
   e. A military principle or set of strategies.

Doctrine is that teaching which gives the processes and protocols concerning the carrying out of a command. It is an instruction in how to do what is being commanded. A good father commands his children to follow God and instructs them in how to do so. Without the instruction the children are left to guess at what to do in order to accomplish the given command.

The Hebrew word tsaw is the equivalent of the English word “doctrine.” When used in the phrase of Isaiah 28:10 it identifies a systematic development of doctrine, one doctrine upon the other. There are different categories of doctrine which build upon other categories of doctrine. Basic doctrines are the foundation and framework for more advanced doctrines. Without the proper foundation and framework a house cannot stand and neither can Bible doctrine.
Tsaw lae tsae, tsaw lae tsaw identifies that categories of doctrine are learned one doctrine upon the next. The Christian’s ability to learn doctrine, understand doctrine, and implement doctrine through faith depends upon his understanding concerning the doctrines taught previously to the doctrine being taught currently.

It is “category of doctrine upon category of doctrine” which identifies the systematic teaching process by which the priests are to study and teach Israel. Through categorical studies of doctrine, one category of doctrine upon the other, Israel will find their repose from the meaningless rituals of the religion they created out of the Law.

The second line of the instruction on how to teach and study is קָו (qaw lae qae). The Hebrew word קָו (qaw) is literally, “measuring line.” It identifies a standard that is established and is distinguishable. This is a reference in Isaiah 28:10 to the sentence structure of a language. It is therefore, sentence upon sentence that the priests are to study and teach.

It is by sentences that languages are marked out for measurement. When one sentence adds to another you have two sentences, add those two sentences to a third and you have three sentences. Add five sentences together and you have a simple paragraph. Add eight sentences together and you have an advanced paragraph.

Using the American standard, there are twelve inches are necessary for a foot. If sentences represent the inch mark on a tape measure, then paragraphs represent the foot mark. You can’t have feet without inches. And you can’t have inches without the four quarter inches that comprise the inches.

The literal metaphor of a measuring line compares the sentences of language to the measurement marks of a measuring line. In America the tape measure is the standard for measuring short length. It is comprised of small delineations which represent portions of an inch, with twelve inches to the foot.

What qaw identifies then is that sentences are comprised of words, including grammar and syntax, which when compiled properly creates a complete sentence. When a sentence is added to multiple sentences a paragraph is created.

And so in studying and teaching Israel, the priests were instructed to teach sentence by sentence. This required the teaching of each word that comprised the sentence as well as the grammar and syntactical relationship of that word to the other words in its sentence. Once the sentence was taught, the next sentence could be taught. Teach enough sentences together and the priests would be teaching a paragraph. Continuing this process day in and day out produces paragraphs upon paragraphs wherein the student acquires significant knowledge of multiple sentences of biblical truth.
The process then for studying and teaching Israel was to be “Categories of doctrine upon categories of doctrine, categories of doctrine upon categories of doctrine, sentence upon sentence, sentence upon sentence...”

As the Priest studied and taught in one place one time and another place another time the result of the priest’s study and instruction would be the gleaning of a little bit of doctrine here and a little bit of doctrine there. The priest would acquire doctrine in multiple categories by studying from a word by word and thus sentence by sentence approach to Scripture. In doing so, the priest would pick up portions of doctrines that would then be categorized in their proper categories of doctrine adding a little bit more instruction concerning each category addressed by the study. One sentence would yield information in a few areas of doctrine; another would yield information in different areas of doctrine. The result of their word by word, sentence upon sentence study was the production of a little bit of doctrine being categorically understood at that time of study and another little bit of doctrine being understood at another time of study.

This is the protocol by which Israel would find repose (rest from futile labor) from their meaningless external rituals of religion that did not have the instruction of God undergirding them.

And so the proper biblical approach to study of God’s Word and teaching according to Isaiah 28:10 is:

“Category of doctrine upon category of doctrine, category of doctrine upon category of doctrine, sentence upon sentence, sentence upon sentence, a little doctrine here, a little doctrine there.”

When this is applied to Bible study, the Christian is able to systematically understand the academic teaching of God’s Word, acquiring little bits of doctrine in one study and a little more in another study.

The depth of study is dependent upon the Christian’s volition (ability to choose). When looking into categories of doctrine the Christian should look first to the sentences (verses) which comprise biblical truth. The depth of the investigation applied to the sentence will dictate the depth of biblical truth which comes from the sentence.

Jesus Himself identified the necessity to understand every word of Scripture accurately in His statement in Matthew 4:4 in response to Lucifer’s temptation:
“But He answered and said, ‘It is written, “Man shall not live on bread alone, but on every word that proceeds out of the mouth of God.”’”

It is every individual word which is the linguistic focus of Jesus’ statement. God’s words make up His instruction in one area of teaching or another. Understanding His words yields an understanding of His Word and the doctrines it contains in sentences spread out throughout the pages of its writings.

The necessity arises then for the Christian to study God’s Word from a word by word, sentence upon sentence approach in order to understand the systematic doctrines of God’s instruction. Many resources are available in order for the Christian to carry out his study. Scholarship demands that those resources are utilized effectively by utilizing them within the boundaries and limitations of the scope for which they were designed. Therefore an overview of the resources available and the scope of their use is paramount to the believer who is attempting to accurately divide God’s Word into its proper teachings.

A Brief Word on the Presentation of Studies

It is important to note that while the study approach to Scripture which yields the greatest accuracy in its nature is the word by word sentence upon sentence literal approach, that there are many different ways in which the information learned through study may be communicated. The aforementioned approach yields the greatest accuracy of doctrine, but that doctrine can be expressed in different levels of depth to students of the Bible by a teacher.

There are four main types of presentations through which the sentence by sentence literal approach to Scripture can communicate information. These are listed from most basic to most in-depth based upon their typical usage:

1. Devotional-Attempts to provide a thought to think about as derived from the study.
2. Topical-Attempts to provide an overview of information concerning a specific topic of the study.
3. Expositional-Attempts to provide truths from a passage by exposing the ultimate meaning of the passage and its relationship to passages which speak on the same topic.
4. Exegetical-Attempts to provide exact definitions and grammatical construction insight of each word in the text of the original language.

Regardless of the manner of presentation, the Christian should utilize an exegetical approach to personal study and teaching of the Word of God. Different forums require different depths and levels of presentation, yet study should be on the word by word sentence upon sentence (exegetical) level so that the material presented is the closest to its purest form regardless of the depth of the presentation level.
Bible study is about accuracy to truth and each presentation level should focus to present truth and solely truth as revealed in the Bible within the boundaries of its own characteristics.

**Resources Available to Assist in Bible Study**

There are many resources and types of resources available to the Bible student. They range in depth of information as well as function. The following is a list of various categories of resources available to the Bible Student:

- Concordances
- Dictionaries
- Grammars
- Commentaries
- Word Studies
- Biblical Encyclopedias
- Reference Bibles
- Study Bibles
- Interlinears

Through the expansion of technology an enormous amount of these resources are available through computer programs, mobile device apps, and websites such as:

- Logos Bible Software (also known as Faithlife Bible Software)
- Biblesoft
- E-Sword (a free resource)
- PC Bible
- www.biblia.com
- www.biblos.com
- www.biblestudytools.com
- www.biblehub.com

There is no excuse from which the Christian can justify an inaccurate understanding of God’s Word. This is emphatically true when the Christian remembers that the Holy Spirit who wrote the Bible indwells him as a result of his dependency upon Christ. He is the best resource, but it should also be remembered by the Christian that there are many spirits in operation in the cosmos. John writes in 1 John 4:1:

> “Beloved, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits whether they are from God, for many false prophets have gone out into the world.”
In all Bible study the Christian must test and prove that which is the Holy Spirit as opposed to another spirit, a spirit of false teaching. Here again the Bible implies heavily that the Christian is able to accurately understand the truth of Scripture.

**Concordances**

A concordance is a study tool which contains an alphabetical list of prominent English words in the Bible and identifies the verses wherein those prominent words are used by list form. Concordances are designed to assist the Christian in locating a verse based upon its use of an English word. Because a concordance is used for finding where English words are used in the Bible they are translation specific. Therefore concordances will only work with the translation for which they are designed to be used. Looking up the word “love” in Strong’s Exhaustive Concordance yields a list of verses (320 of them in the New American Standard version) which contain the English word for love. The search includes both Old Testament passages and New Testament passages.

“Love:

- Genesis 22:2 “...Take now your son, your only son, whom you love, Isaac...”
- Genesis 27:4 “…prepare a savory dish for me such as I love, and it bring it…”
- Rev. 3:19 “Those whom I love, I reprove…”
- Rev. 12:11 “…and they did not love their life…”

Strong’s has developed a diverse market of concordances. Many Strong’s concordances are linked to Hebrew and Greek words and provide the Christian with a simple meaning of the word based on how it has been translated. Something such as the Enhanced Strong’s Lexicon is used to provide a little more of an understanding concerning how the Hebrew and Greek words are translated.

Concordances are great at:

- Finding a verse that can’t be remembered entirely.
- Revealing how many times a word is used in the Bible.
- Locating passages based upon topic or word.

Concordances are not so great at:

- Giving a thorough definition of a word.
- Identifying what a passage says.
- Going into detail about a passage.
Dictionaries

Bible dictionaries provide varied depths and types of information designed to create a better understanding about the meaning of a Bible word.

There are four main tiers of resources categorized as dictionaries listed from most surface level to most in depth:

1. Tier 1 – Provides an English synonym or list of synonyms for the Hebrew or Greek word.
2. Tier 2 – Provides a meaning of the Hebrew or Greek word based upon how it has been translated by a specific translation of Scripture.
3. Tier 3 – Provides a definition of the Hebrew or Greek word by defining the word’s characteristics.
4. Tier 4 – Provides an exhaustive study on the Hebrew or Greek word from which a more complete definition is extracted.

The higher the tier the more in depth the information provided to the Christian. Tier 1 dictionaries provide a similar idea to the Hebrew or Greek word, but fail to define the word itself. Tier 2 dictionaries provide an abstract idea which is based on the Hebrew or Greek Word. Tier 3 dictionaries define the word by describing its characteristics. Tier 4 dictionaries define the word by describing its characteristics, origins, contexts, etymological changes, cultural conceptions, and many other sources.

An example of a Tier 1 dictionary would be *A Concise Greek-English Dictionary of the New Testament* which defines the predominant Koine Greek word translated as “love” in this way:

“ἀγάπη, ἡς n f love (primarily of Christian love); concern, interest; sacred meal shared by the early Church (Jd 12)*6*

No definition is provided but rather synonyms are used to create a loose idea of the word.

An example of a Tier 2 dictionary would be the *Enhanced Strong’s Lexicon* which defines the same word for “love” as:

“26 ἀγάπη [agape /ag-ah-pay/] n f. From 25; TDNT 1:21; TDNTA 5; GK 27; 116 occurrences; AV translates as “love” 86 times, “charity” 27 times, “dear” once,

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“charitably + 2596” once, and “feast of charity” once. 1 brotherly love, affection, good will, love, benevolence. 2 love feasts.\textsuperscript{7}

The \textit{Enhanced Strong’s Lexicon} provides a meaning for the word \textgreek{αγάπη} based upon how it has been translated (the above citation identifies the King James Translation).

An example of a Tier 3 dictionary would be the \textit{Analytical Lexicon of the New Testament} which identifies the root word and provides a description as to its definition then adds a list of variations used in Koine Greek. In the current example:

\begin{quote}
\textgreek{αγάπη, ης, η} love; (1) especially as an attitude of appreciation resulting from a conscious evaluation and choice; used of divine and human love \textit{love, devotion}; (2) plural \textgreek{αἱ αγάπαι} love feasts, fellowship meals, meals in which members of a Christian community eat together in fellowship (JU 12)\textsuperscript{8}
\end{quote}

The word is defined by describing its characteristics. A minimum of a Tier 3 dictionary should be in the home of every Christian. Defining the word by describing its characteristics is the simplest way to understand the meaning of the word and the message it portrays in a verse.

An example of a Tier 4 dictionary would be \textit{The Theological Dictionary of the New Testament (TDNT)} which provides 34 pages of information describing the same word. In those pages the TDNT provides analysis of the word as used in the Old Testament, in pre-biblical Greek, in regards to Judaism, as used by Jesus, in the Apostolic Period, and in the Post-Apostolic Period.

In prioritizing dictionaries for use the Bible student should prioritize firstly, a Tier 3 dictionary, secondly, a Tier 4 dictionary, thirdly, a Tier 2 dictionary, and lastly a Tier 1 dictionary. That is not to say that Tier 1 dictionaries are useless, but rather that they are designed for a quick fix type of definition. The Christian is to understand God’s every word and so he needs at least a Tier 3 dictionary which describes the characteristics of the word. Most Tier 3 dictionaries are simplistic in their definitions and require little extra work from the Bible student to understand. The Christian should keep in mind, however, that the depth of the definition and thus the accuracy in understanding the word being defined is equivalent to the depth of the dictionary used. The Christian should not expect Tier 4 depth of definition from a Tier 1 dictionary. Keeping in mind the limitations and brevity or depth of each different tier is crucial to recognizing the validity and accuracy produced in understanding the word into which the Christian is inquiring.

\textsuperscript{7} James Strong, \textit{Enhanced Strong’s Lexicon} (Bellingham, WA: Logos Bible Software, 2001).


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Tools for Biblical Interpretation
Grammars

Grammars of biblical languages are designed to teach the Christian who does not know Biblical Hebrew or Koine Greek the accidence and rules of syntax of those languages. Accidence refers to the variations of words utilized in different forms (i.e.: Noun form vs. verb form). Syntax refers to the relationship of words to other words and the expectations concerning the structure of those relationships as demanded by the rules governing the language in view.

It is the opinion of the author that every Christian should know Biblical Hebrew and Koine Greek. However, the circumstances of life, finances, family, work, and society often take priority over acquiring such information. While often times these have the potential to be excuses, there are practical issues which hinder the Christian from acquiring knowledge of the original languages. To be certain, the most predominant reality hindering the Christian from understanding the original languages is actual desire (as opposed to wishful desire or perceived desire).

The languages utilized by the Holy Spirit to record the words of God’s revelation to man were divinely ordained. They are some of the most specific languages available in the history of humanity. Koine Greek is at the top of that list with biblical Hebrew close behind it. Knowing these languages is extremely important for the Christian seeking to understand what God’s Word actually says, rather than what it has been translated to mean.

Biblical Hebrew and Koine Greek grammars are available to the Christian to utilize in order to learn the original languages. Starting on page 1 of the basic grammars, the Christian should not expect to have a grasp on the language, but should learn systematically that which he does not yet know concerning Biblical Hebrew and Koine Greek. This is done one chapter at a time.

Commentaries

Commentaries are resources which provide opinions of other Christians on specific books or passages of Scripture. They are opinions in nature and the ability of the Bible student to depend upon commentaries is only insofar as he trusts the one from whom the opinion is derived. Commentaries provide the opinion or teaching of someone who has studied or supposedly studied a passage of Scripture and has recording his views concerning it. The ability of the Christian to trust an opinion expressed through a commentary is dependent upon his ability to trust the approach that the author takes towards studying Scripture. If the approach is the same as the Christian then the resulting opinions should generally follow a similar understanding.

Commentaries are great for learning multiple views on passages of Scripture, but should not be the main material consumed by the Christian studying Scripture. In that analogy commentaries
are the dessert that adds a little bit extra after the meal has been consumed. The meal should be God’s Word, not man’s word.

That is not to say that commentaries do not contain information valuable to the Christian, but rather that the comments expressed in the commentary must be investigated by the Christian in order to ascertain their harmony to biblical truth.

**Word Studies**

There are a number of grammarians and language scholars who have produced books which study the words of the original languages. Kenneth Wuest has produced a three volume set called *Wuest’s Word Studies in the Greek New Testament*. His endeavor was to provide a thorough study of specific words based upon an exegetical approach. Often times this set is coupled with his *Wuest’s Expanded Translation of the New Testament* which attempts to supply the Christian with grammatical insight in a translation of Scripture.

**Biblical Encyclopedias**

There are numerous encyclopedias of biblical times and cultures which provide great historical insight into the various objects and people mentioned in the Bible. A brief search through the *Baker Encyclopedia of the Bible* on Demas reveals:

> “One of Paul’s associates who was with him during one of his imprisonments. Little is known about Demas beyond the brief information given in the NT. Initially he supported Paul’s ministry and was mentioned in the salutations of Paul’s letters to the Colossians (4:14) and to Philemon (v 24). However, in 2 Timothy 4:10 Paul writes that Demas deserted him because of his love for the present world.”

Encyclopedias are very useful in providing insight through information and often times photographs or diagrams on a specific topic.

**Study Bibles and Reference Bibles**

Many Bibles today have both study notes and cross references. Study Bibles typically have wider margins for the Christian’s own note taking, cross references to verses on similar topics, and an editor or theologian’s comments concerning key passages or teachings of Scripture. These can be valuable pew books which the believer takes to the pastor’s sermon that allows him to gain quick insights and information into the passage or topic being preached. Popular examples are the *Ryrie Study Bible* and the *Thompson Chain Reference Bible*.

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Interlinears

An interlinear is a type of Bible which has both an English translation (KJV, NKJV, NASB, ESV, NIV, etc...) and a manuscript copy of the original language with a word by word English parallel directly underneath the words of the original language.

Interlinears are greatly beneficial to every Christian regardless of their knowledge of the original language. With an interlinear the Christian is able to match English words to words from the original languages and identify when two different words from the original language have been translated into the same one English word. This should then flag the attention of the Christian to identify that there is a difference in meaning in the original language than what has been translated by the translator.

Recommended Resources

The author recommends that each Christian own and utilize the following resources as far as they are able financially\(^\text{10}\), in no particular order:


   The Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament (Available in a set or pieced together one volume at a time.).

3. Reference/Study Bible: The Hebrew-Greek Key Word Study Bible NASB (ISBN: 0899577504; Available on Amazon.com in many binding options for $30 plus shipping.). A great all in one resource for everyday study and church pew use.

4. Other dictionaries (Tier 3 or Tier 4):
   The Exegetical Dictionary of the New Testament
   The Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament
   Enhanced Strong’s Lexicon
   Vine’s Complete Expository Dictionary of Old And New Testament Words

\(^{10}\) Amazon.com or cbd.com provide good prices for these resources.