



today. We must also remember that Christ lived as a faithful Jew, which explains why He observed the Sabbath Day.

In order to understand a particular doctrine, all related passages must be considered. No one verse teaches the entire truth about any subject. Thus, one must thoroughly study the Bible to determine God's complete teaching on a topic. For example, Romans 10:13 states, "*For whoever calls on the name of the Lord shall be saved.*" Reading this passage in isolation, we might conclude that all one must do is verbalize God's name and he can be saved. However, we must also note other passages such as Acts 2:21, 38 and 22:16.

There are also several external aids that can help one to understand the Bible. Numerous **translations of Scripture** can be compared (e.g., KJV, NKJV, ASV or NASV), which might help the understanding of a passage. What seems unclear in one translation might be clearer in another.

Another helpful tool is an **exhaustive concordance** [Strong's Exhaustive Concordance and Young's Analytical Concordance] which lists all the occurrences of a certain word in the Bible, enabling one to quickly do a topical study of specific words, people, or places. This also allows one to swiftly find a particular passage.

A **topical Bible** lists verses that relate to a general topic, such as "grace," "love," etc., enabling one to study all aspects of a topic. **Bible dictionaries** or **encyclopedias** can be valuable in defining biblical words, studying particular places or people, or giving some background information on a passage.

Commentaries — comments on a particular passage, written by a scholar who has done extensive study — are helpful, but one must remember that those are uninspired thoughts, and some viewpoints may be in error. Furthermore, these should never take the place of one's own study.

Bible study should be a lifelong process, and one should always endeavor to grow in strength and knowledge of God's will (2 Peter 1:5-8).

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How to Study God's Word

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Knowledge of God's will is essential for anyone to be pleasing to God. While we should pray for wisdom (James 1:5), we cannot understand God's Word without study and meditation. Paul commended the Berean Christians in Acts 17:11 because they searched the Scriptures daily to see if what they were being taught was consistent with God's revealed Word. He further encouraged Timothy in 2 Timothy 2:15, "*Be diligent to present yourself approved to God, a worker who does not need to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth.*" Simply quoting Scripture is not handling the Word of God properly. After all, even Satan quoted Scripture (Matthew 4:6), but he misapplied it. What are some basic principles involved in properly understanding the Bible?

First, one must have the proper attitude.

In John 7:17 Jesus said, "*If anyone wills to do His will, he shall know concerning the doctrine, whether it is from God or whether I speak on My own authority.*" Thus, a *desire* to both know and do God's will is essential to properly understand God's Word. This is illustrated in John 8 where Jesus said that some unbelieving Phari-

sees were not able to understand His teaching because their prejudiced minds and hard hearts blinded them (8:43-44).

Second, one must understand the two major divisions of the Bible: the Old Testament and the New Testament. A failure to understand this distinction has led to many false doctrines throughout the history of the church. God made a covenant with the people of Israel on Mount Sinai. It is known as the Old Testament and contains God's dealings with the people of Israel, leading up to the coming of Christ. When Christ died on the cross, this first covenant was abolished and a new covenant was instituted, called the New Testament (Ephesians 2:15; Hebrews 9:15-17). This new covenant is far superior because it brings forgiveness of sins, which the Old Covenant could never do (Hebrews 10:4). Therefore, the Old Testament no longer serves as our *authority* in matters of faith and practice, even though it continues to serve a useful purpose for our learning (Romans 15:4).

In order to understand a passage, one must also study the Bible in its context. The context would include several things such as the historical setting, the literary context, and the immediate context, which is a study of the

verses immediately preceding or following the passage. One must also consider its type of literature. For example, Psalms is basically a book of poetry. Poetry is written in figurative and picturesque language. In Psalm 148:3 the psalmist calls upon the sun, moon, and stars to praise the Lord, figurative language. Because the Bible contains several different types of literature, it should be interpreted accordingly.

When studying a certain passage, one should ask several questions. Who is speaking, to whom is he speaking, and what is the situation involved? Jesus once told a rich ruler to go and sell all he had and give to the poor (Luke 18:22). One might conclude that everyone who would follow Jesus must do this. However, when we consider that these words were spoken to a man who loved riches more than God, we can conclude that we do not literally have to sell everything, but simply that we must love God more than anything, including riches.

One must consider under what dispensation a passage was written? The Sabbath Day was a command given specifically to the Jews on Mount Sinai, but the law of which it was a part was nailed to the cross (Colossians 2:14). Therefore, it is no longer binding on Christians

