

Chapter 2

AUTHORITY OF GOD'S WORD 2 *HOW TO USE AND UNDERSTAND THE BIBLE*

Introduction: The Bible is God's Word, but if we do not use it, it will not help us. Not using or reading the Bible is in a way like getting a telegram and being afraid to open it because it might contain bad news (it could also be good news). Or it is like getting a letter from someone special and then being so excited about getting it that we forget to open it and read it but rather just carry it around with us.

- I. There is no other book like the Bible. It is unique and incomparable because it is the revelation of God to man. The Bible is "God-breathed" or inspired. It tells us of God's plans and purposes for the ages of time and eternity. Most importantly it centers on the person of Jesus Christ, the Savior of mankind. (Romans 3:2; 2 Timothy 3:16; Hebrews 1:1-2)
- II. The word Bible comes from the Greek word "*Biblia*" which means "books." The term "scripture or holy scriptures" was also used, which simply means "writings." These were terms used by New Testament writers in referring to what we now know as the Old Testament. Peter also referred to Paul's epistles as 'Scriptures' in 2 Peter 3:16. Parts of the Bible were also referred to by the terms "the Law of Moses", "the Law and the Prophets", and "the Psalms". The terms Old Testament and New Testament can also mean Old Covenant and New Covenant. (Matthew 5:17; Matthew 11:13; Matthew 21:42; Luke 24:32,44; John 5:39; John 10:34; John 12:34; John 15:25; Acts 13:15; Acts 18:24; 1 Corinthians 14:21; 2 Timothy 3:15)
- III. Understanding the Bible is like a two-way street. We must know God to understand His Word, the Bible, but we must also more and more understand His Word to know Him better. The Holy Spirit will use and work through what we know and have learned of the Bible to give us direction, encouragement and as necessary correction. If we open ourselves to the truths that are in the Bible it will help us to better see our assumptions (cultural and theological) and our biases in the light of God's Word.
 - A. The work of the Holy Spirit for us in understanding the Bible is to illuminate (enlighten, to make clear, to explain). There has been a process of the Holy Spirit through the ages to bring to Bible to us now.

- ❖ **Revelation** of God's ways to his chosen people.
- ❖ **Inspiration** of the spirit to those used to write it down for us.
- ❖ **Illumination** of the meaning of that which has been recorded to us by the Holy Spirit.

We have been promised illumination by the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit is the teacher and we need Him in our lives to guarantee illumination. His teaching includes "all truth"...even an understanding of prophecy. The Holy Spirit will glorify Christ, not Himself. Carnality in the believer can hinder and even nullify this ministry of the Holy Spirit. (John 16:12-15; 1 Corinthians 2:9-3:2)

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- B. It is important to begin to understand the Bible for ourselves. We can do this through reading it for ourselves, through study, through fellowship with the Lord and with other believers, and through teachers that share truths from the Bible.
1. In beginning to understand the Bible for ourselves we need to be aware of some basic principles of interpretation. There are some questions we can ask ourselves as we read and study the Bible: What does it say? What does it mean? What must I do?
 - a. To help with these basic questions we will need to understand word meanings. The use of dictionaries; both Bible and regular will be very helpful. Using a modern translation can also be very helpful.
 - b. If we understand something of the time and place, figures of speech, and what was common at that time, it can help us to understand better was being said. How would it be expressed today? Some examples: James was speaking to the Jewish people, Paul's Epistles answered questions, Acts is a history lesson of the early church, and Romans is a theological book.
 - c. It is important that the thoughts we see and read in the Bible are kept in context; otherwise there is a risk of making a verse stand on its own to say what we want it to say. What is context? It is keeping a verse in the section of verses in which it is written. A text out of its context is a pretext.
 2. There is also a progression of revelation in the reading and understanding of the Bible. First of all there is the division of the Old Testament and the New Testament. The word revelation simply means "unveiling." 1 Corinthians 10:6 and 11 tell us that the things that happened before are recorded as examples for us. For instance there were prophecies that have been fulfilled; God moved from using a man to using a nation; He moved from only showing His acts to showing His ways; and finally He said He would turn our hearts of stone to hearts of flesh. (1 Corinthians 10:6, 11; Psalm 103:7; Ezekiel 11:19; Ezekiel 36:26)
 3. It is also important to recognize different sections of the Bible when interpreting it. The most basic is the difference between the Old and New Testaments. But there are also different kinds of writings; historical, poetic, prophetic that must be recognized as different if they are to be interpreted correctly. Other landmarks in the Bible that affect proper interpretation are things like the great covenant made with Abraham and the one with David, the mystery of the church as the Body of Christ, and the difference between law and grace.
- IV. What will the study of the Bible do for me personally in getting to know my God better as well as growing as His child?
- A. The Word of God, the Bible, will uncover sin and mistakes in my life that I have been unaware of or perhaps have even ignored. (Hebrews 4:12; 2 Timothy 3:16; James 1:23-

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- B. The Word of God, the Bible, will cleanse us. (John 15:3; Ephesians 5:25-26; Psalm 119:9; Psalm 19:7-11; 1 John 1:9)
 - C. The Word of God, the Bible can and will impart necessary strength to us. (Matthew 4:4; Deuteronomy 8:3; Psalm 19:10; Psalm 119:103; Job 23:12; Jeremiah 15:16; Ezekiel 2:8, 3:3)
 - D. The Word of God, the Bible, will give direction to our lives. (James 1:22; Matthew 7:24-27)
 - E. The Word of God, the Bible, will help to make our lives fruitful and prosperous. (Psalm 1:1-3; Joshua 1:8-9)
 - F. The Word of God, the Bible, will provide for us victory over sin. (Psalms 119:11; Ephesians 6:17)
 - G. The Word of God, the Bible, will give us the power to pray. (John 6:63, John 15:7; 2 Timothy 3:14-17)
- V. We should **search the scriptures** diligently and reverently. We should **listen** while they are being read, for in them God has magnified His great Name. We should **believe** them and make them our **guide to daily living**. We must **know them**, for in the scriptures God is speaking to man. The scriptures tell us about Jesus. We will be blessed when we obey the Bible. When we obey the Bible, we are proving our love for Jesus. (Psalm 138:2; John 5:39; Luke 11:28; Jeremiah 15:16; John 8:31-32, John 14:23)
- VI. How can we make the best use of the Bible in our own personal lives?
- A. The first step is to develop the habit of Bible reading. Many times a habit is thought to be a bad thing, but a habit can also be good. It is a discipline that we apply in our lives to improve, to grow, to become more proficient. For the "habit" of Bible reading to work for us we need to find something that will work for us; that will fit our schedule and style of living. If it doesn't work for us we won't do it. There are many plans available. Setting aside a specific time and place can also help in establishing the habit of daily Bible reading.
 - B. To make the best use of our daily Bible reading we will need to learn to read with an open mind and heart. It can be easy to carry over into our daily Bible reading our pre-conceived ideas and pet doctrines. It is also easy to let our mind wander while we are reading and not to give thought to the words we are reading and the words that the Holy Spirit wants to use. We need to be open to what God is saying to us personally. Keeping a notebook or journal can be helpful; as well as using a highlighter to mark key thoughts and verses. Learning the names and locations of the Bible books can also be helpful. Memorization of scriptures and then meditating on them is also a good discipline. (Psalm 1:1-2; Psalm 119:15, 48; Joshua 1:8; Psalm 19:14)

QUESTIONS FOR STUDY AND DISCUSSION

Chapter 2 Authority of God's Word 2 - How to use and understand the Bible

1. The teaching (illumination) of God's word by the Holy Spirit is so important in our lives. What are some practical ways the instruction or illumination of the Scripture by the Holy Spirit takes place?
2. We know that the Bible is intended to be more than religious history or a book of rules. How can we actually use the Bible to help us in our day to day living? Discuss some of the practical ways we can and should do this.