

Bible Rules For Bible Study

by Elder Vernon Johnson, Denton, Texas

A study of the scriptures is a most noble undertaking. It was said of the Bereans in Acts 17:11, "These were more noble than those in Thessalonica, in that they received the word with all readiness of mind, and searched the scriptures daily, whether those things were so." As we begin a study of the scriptures it is important that we know that there are rules or principles the scriptures give us to study by. By using these rules or principles we will come to increase our knowledge of the truth and be able to correct any errors in our own knowledge base as well as discuss and reason biblically any differences of understanding we may encounter with our fellow Christian travelers.

The bible sets forth the following rules and principles to study by:

1. II Tim. 3:16, "All scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness: That the man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works." This passage teaches us several lessons:

A. All good works are taught in the scriptures.

B. The scriptures are a thorough furnisher unto all "good works." We need not go outside the scripture to be thoroughly furnished in our instruction about any or all good works. In contrast, those things that are taught as good works, but not found in the scriptures are, in fact, "not" good works to be observed by us.

C. The purpose of the scripture is to mature (perfect) the man of God (those born of God).

D. All verses and passages of scripture, both in the old and new testament will fit into one or more of the four listed categories - doctrine, reproof, correction, instruction in righteousness. Paul's own writings and the order they are given unto us in the bible illustrate this lesson: Romans is primarily a book of doctrine, I & II Corinthians are primarily books of reproof, Galatians is primarily a book of correction, and Ephesians through Philemon are primarily books dealing with instruction in righteousness.

E. Last, but not least, the bible is inspired of God.

2. John 5:39, the Lord said, "Search the scriptures; for in them ye think ye have eternal life: and they are they which testify of me." This verse teaches us:

A. The old and new testament scriptures are a continual testimony of Jesus.

B. We are to search the scriptures for that testimony of Jesus.

3. II Tim. 2:15, "Study to shew thyself approved unto God, a workman that needeth not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth." This scripture teaches us:

A. Our study is not to approve us before others, but to be approved unto God. As workmen in the kingdom of God, we are to study that we might not be ashamed because of unskillful use of the scriptures.

B. We must rightly divide the word of truth. That doesn't say that we are to divide truth from error. For there is no error in God's word. We are to make the proper application of God's word. A text, out of context, is a pretext. Our application of the text must fit the context in which it is written. Furthermore, many subjects have multiple applications. As an example, the subject of justification can be greatly confusing until you realize the bible teaches three courtrooms. For instance, the bible teaches in the courtroom of glory we are justified by grace through the shed blood of Jesus. In the courtroom of our minds, we are justified by our faith in the blood of Jesus, and in the courtroom of public opinion we are justified by our works. Until we rightly "divide" the subject of justification we will be in a state of confusion on this or any other subject.

4. II Pet. 1:20, "Knowing this first, that no prophecy of the scripture is of any private interpretation." Too often people want to put their private interpretations on the scripture. This is often done by going outside the scripture to interpret things in the scripture. If someone goes outside the scripture to interpret the scripture then he has a "private" interpretation. Regardless of the claims of some that they have a special revelation from God, the bible clearly teaches us that their claims are false.

5. I Cor. 2:13, "Which things also we speak, not in words which man's wisdom teaches, but which the Holy Ghost teacheth, comparing spiritual things with spiritual." This informs us that the Holy Ghost teaches us the understanding of His word by comparing scripture (spiritual things) with scripture. In other words, the scripture, by the unlocking of the Holy Spirit is its own interpreter.

6. John 10:35, "...and the scripture cannot be broken." Scriptures do not contradict (break) themselves. There cannot

be a situation where the scripture teaches one thing and then, elsewhere, teaches something which contradicts the previous scripture. The problem is in our understanding of what is being taught. We should seek to reconcile those scripture which appear to contradict themselves. Often this is done by changing our mind about what the scripture teach. The previous rule of interpreting scripture by using other scripture also applies here.

7. Isa. 28:9, 10, "Whom shall he teach knowledge? And whom shall he make to understand doctrine? Them that are weaned from the milk, and drawn from the breasts. For precept must be upon precept, precept upon precept, line upon line; here a little and there a little." Studying and learning the scriptures is compared to the natural growth process. When we learn the basic precepts, then we build upon those basic precepts. Some precepts cannot be adequately learned until a good foundation has been laid. Furthermore, as in life, we learn "here a little, there a little." Learning is a lifetime process and our study of the scriptures should be for the rest of our lives. Almost any bible subject is taught throughout the bible (here a little, there a little). Indirectly, this warns us against forming hard concrete opinions based on a single verse of scripture.

8. Rom. 9:17, "For the scripture saith unto Pharaoh..." Here Paul equates what God said to what the scripture said. Some have said, "I pay more attention to the red writing because that is what Jesus said." All scripture is the word of God. The black writing is just as much the word of God as the red writing.

If you have any questions or comments about the things I have written, or if you have a subject matter you would like to see addressed in this forum please let me know and I will do my best to address them. (Elder Vernon Johnson).