

HOW TO STUDY THE BIBLE, LECTURE 3: VIEW OF AND ATTITUDE TOWARD THE BIBLE

I. VIEW OF THE BIBLE

“And we also thank God continually because, when you received the word of God, which you heard from us, you accepted it not as a human word, but as it actually is, the word of God, which is indeed at work in you who believe.” (1Th 2:13)

Introduction: One’s view of the Bible affects their value system, life direction and daily life, and especially bible study. Generally, there are two views of the Bible: merely human words, or the word of God.

A. Merely human words

Historical criticism or higher criticism is a branch of literary criticism that investigates the origins of ancient text in order to understand “the world behind the text.” *(In a very real sense, the word of God is expressed in human words. “The Word became flesh....” These human words are inspired by the Holy Spirit and are in essence the words of God. In contrast, the expression “merely human words” indicate the view that the Scriptures originated with man, not with God. For example, enlightenment thinkers saw some elements of Scripture as mythological and did not consider them to be taken as historical fact or literally. Among such passages are Genesis 1-11, and many miracles.)*

If one sees the Scripture as merely human words, it is easy to dismiss them as just another person’s opinion. Then there is no reason to take them more seriously than our own ideas or to obey them. For example, God has given us moral guidance based on God’s justice in the Ten Commandments. This guides us to know God’s heart and love and justice, and to discern right from wrong. This eventually leads us to salvation. But if we ignore God’s word, or treat it as just another human idea, we forfeit the blessing he wants to give us. We cannot experience the power of the word of God to transform us or save us (like the Sadducees [Mt 22:29]). We cannot find the direction and guidance that God intends for us to have. Hebrews 2:1-3a says, “We must pay the most careful attention, therefore, to what we have heard, so that we do not drift away. For since the message spoken through angels was binding, and every violation and disobedience received its just punishment, how shall we escape if we ignore so great a salvation?” Many people ignore the word of God because of their relativistic view. As a result, they do not know the meaning of life and live in their own way without knowing the consequences for the future. They may say, “Let us eat and drink, for tomorrow we die,” not knowing that after death comes God’s judgment.

B. God’s word as inspired, inerrant, sufficient

In contrast, if we see the Scriptures as the living words of God, they work in us to change us and to save us from our sins and eternal condemnation (Heb 4:12). We become children of God with

a living hope in the kingdom of God. The words of God transform our lives, like the Thessalonian believers, who turned from idols to serve the living and true God (1Th 1:9). Metaphorically speaking, to ignore the word of God is like ignoring an important letter, assuming that it is not really addressed to me. However, if we know that the letter contains the words of a beloved one, or a letter from a government official, or an important warning, we will not ignore it, but take it seriously.

1. Inspiration: The Bible is God-breathed: the very words of Scripture originated in God.

- 2 Timothy 3:16 “All Scripture is God-breathed...”
- 2 Peter 1:21 “For prophecy never had its origin in the human will, but prophets, though human, spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit.”
- The words of Scripture came to us from the innermost essence of God himself. Jesus described the words of Scripture as words from God himself (Mt 19:4-5; Mk 12:36).
- Hebrews 1:1-2a, “In the past God spoke to our ancestors through the prophets at many times and in various ways, but in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son....”

2. Inerrancy: The Bible is error-free. The word “infallibility” comes from a Latin word that meant “unable to deceive” or “not liable to err.” Scripture tells the truth and never deceives us.¹

- Roman 3:4 “God never lies.”
- Titus 1:2 “God ... does not lie.”
- Hebrews 6:17-18 “Because God wanted to make the unchanging nature of his purpose very clear to the heirs of what was promised, he confirmed it with an oath. God did this so that, by two unchangeable things in which **it is impossible for God to lie**, we who have fled to take hold of the hope set before us may be greatly encouraged.” (Two unchangeable things: God’s promise and God’s oath. God’s promise is trustworthy. He confirmed it with an oath in order to make it doubly sure. Both God’s promise and God’s oath are unchangeable because their source is God, who cannot lie.)
- If God can’t lie, his written revelation can’t lie either. Our trust in the truthfulness of Scripture is rooted in our belief in the trustworthy character of God.
- Inerrancy: Scripture in its entirety is inerrant, being free from all falsehood, fraud, or deceit. Error-prone human beings put the Scripture together, but

¹ Timothy Paul Jones, *How We Got the Bible* (Torrance, Rose Publishing, 2015) pp. 13-14.

God was at work among these inspired authors and editors, preventing them from introducing any errors into his written revelation.

- Inerrancy does not require Scripture to be scientifically precise, and inerrancy certainly doesn't rule out figurative language or numeric estimates in the Bible.
- God revealed his message through human authors who recorded truthful testimony in different genres and styles of writing. To whatever extent precision was necessary to express God's truth, Scripture tells the truth with precision.

3. Sufficiency: The Bible is Enough

- Scripture is sufficient in two senses: First, Scripture provides enough knowledge for us to find God's truth and to live in fellowship with him. Second, Scripture has been copied with enough accuracy to preserve God's truth.
 - 2 Timothy 3:16-17 "All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, 17 so that the servant of God[a] may be thoroughly equipped for every good work."
- ❖ Jesus' view of the Scripture: Mt 5:18; Mk 13:31; Lk 4:1-13, 24:44; Jn 5:24, 17:17

The Scriptures are the Word of God, not man's opinions, human philosophy, somebody's ideas, not the polling of the best thoughts from the best thinkers. Scripture is God's word.

II. ATTITUDE TOWARD THE BIBLE

What attitude do we need when we study the Bible?

1. Learning mind

- Apprenticeship is a kind of job training that involves following and studying a master of the trade on the job instead of in school. Carpenters, masons, doctors, and many other professionals often learn their trade through apprenticeship. The word "apprenticeship" is not common in our times, but the principle still applies.
- In the fields of medicine, sports, music, education and others, without having a proper attitude toward learning, one cannot grow and improve and make progress.

2. Depend on the Holy Spirit: Pray for the Holy Spirit's help.

- John 14:26, “But the Advocate, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, will teach you all things and will remind you of everything I have said to you.”
- John 16:13, “But when he, the Spirit of truth, comes, he will guide you into all the truth. He will not speak on his own; he will speak only what he hears, and he will tell you what is yet to come.”
- Luke 11:13, “If you then, though you are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father in heaven give the Holy Spirit to those who ask him!”

★ God’s wisdom cannot be discovered by human wisdom but by the Holy Spirit.

- 1 Cor 2:7-8, “No, we declare God’s wisdom, a mystery that has been hidden and that God destined for our glory before time began. None of the rulers of this age understood it, for if they had, they would not have crucified the Lord of glory.”
 - ✓ Just as the deaf man cannot hear sweet music, the natural man cannot appreciate the sweet song of salvation.
 - ✓ Martin Luther said, “Man is like Lot’s wife—a pillar of salt. He’s like a log or a stone. He’s like a lifeless statue that uses neither eyes nor mouth, neither senses nor heart, unless he is enlightened, converted and regenerated by the Holy Spirit.”
- 1 Cor 2:10 “...these are the things God has revealed to us by his Spirit. The Spirit searches all things, even the deep things of God.”
- 1 Cor 2:12 “What we have received is not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit who is from God, so that we may understand what God has freely given us.”
- 1 Corinthians 2:14 “The person without the Spirit does not accept the things that come from the Spirit of God but considers them foolishness, and cannot understand them because they are discerned only through the Spirit.”
- 2 Timothy 3:16 “All Scripture is God-breathed...”
- 2 Peter 1:21 “For prophecy never had its origin in the human will, but prophets, though human, spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit.”
- The Holy Spirit is the only one who can prove God’s Word is true and He does this as He works in the heart and mind of the Christian whom He indwells. (John MacArthur, *Why Believe the Bible?* P. 43.)
- It should be *sincere* and *reverent*, with deep respect for God and prayerful dependence on the Holy Spirit, without whom we cannot understand God’s word.
- We need to pray that God may open our minds and hearts. (Psalms 119:18)

3. Try to find “treasures”

- ★ Mt 13:44-46, “The kingdom of heaven is like treasure hidden in a field. When a man found it, he hid it again, and then in his joy went and sold all he had and bought that field. Again, the kingdom of heaven is like a merchant looking for fine pearls. When he found one of great value, he went away and sold everything he had and bought it.”
 - Treasures are hidden secrets, which God reveals to those who have a learning mind
 - Be an explorer of the text
 - Be a miner looking for diamonds
- ★ Who is Jesus? Col 2:2-3, “My goal is that they may be encouraged in heart and united in love, so that they may have the full riches of complete understanding, in order that they may know the mystery of God, namely, Christ, in whom are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge.”
- ★ Encounter God. Deut 4:29, “But if from there you seek the LORD your God, you will find him if you seek him with all your heart and with all your soul.”
- ★ Jesus is the focal point of the Scripture
 - ✓ John 5:39: “You study the Scriptures diligently because you think that in them you have eternal life. These are the very Scriptures that testify about **me**.”
 - ✓ Luke 24:44, “He said to them, “This is what I told you while I was still with you: Everything must be fulfilled that is written about **me** in the Law of Moses, the Prophets and the Psalms.”
 - ✓ Acts 10:43, “All the prophets testify about him that everyone who believes in him receives forgiveness of sins through his name.”
 - ✓ Hebrews 1:1-2a, “In the past God spoke to our ancestors through the prophets at many times and in various ways, but in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son....”

4. Try to learn from the text without prejudice or preconceived ideas (Isa 55:8).

- Try to put aside my past knowledge and experience in studying the passage.
- Do not read commentaries first; just read the Bible itself many times, depending on the Holy Spirit, and observe carefully what the Bible says.
 - Mark 4:3 “Listen!” 4:9 “Whoever has ears to hear, let them hear.”

- Mark 4:24 “Consider carefully what you hear. With the measure you use, it will be measured to you—and even more.”
- Read the passage again and again with a prayerful heart until the morning star rises in your heart (2 Pe 1:19).
- Isaiah 66:2b “These are the ones I look on with favor: those who are humble and contrite in spirit, and who tremble at my word.”

5. Try to study the Bible to apply to my personal life

- Not to teach others but to love and obey Jesus (Mt 23:3; Jn 14:15,23; Ro 2:21)
- To lay a good foundation of our life (Mt 7:24-27)
- To grow spiritually (1Pe 2:2; Heb 5:11-14; Ro 8:29)
- To be equipped for every good work (2Ti 3:16-17)