

"Understanding Your Bible"

We must do more than simply read the Bible, we must understand and obey it. Hello, I'm Phil Sanders, and this is a Bible study "In Search of the Lord's Way." Today we're exploring how we can understand what God means for us to know. Stay tuned.

Welcome to In SEARCH of the Lord's Way! We're here to search the Scriptures for God's will. God gave us the Holy Scriptures so that we might understand what He wanted us to know. God's word includes instructions, warnings, blessings, and promises. We need to understand what He's saying to us. Since the words of Jesus will one day judge us, we need to know what He is saying. Hearing God demands focus on what He says and means as He speaks to us through the written word. Thanks for taking time with us today. We'd love to hear from you and we want to be a part of your life each week.

Now to understand the Bible one needs several things. First, they need a correct translation to have a reliable understanding. Now good Bible students do not rely on just one translation; they study several of the better known, standard translations. Second, one must have an understanding of language. A Bible dictionary that defines words and reveals vital information is a great help. Good interpreters find out the meaning of words, study grammar, and investigate the historical, geographical and cultural circumstances surrounding any text. They also acquaint themselves with various literary forms.

Third, to understand the Bible one needs the common sense to ask what God means by what He says. Properly understanding the Bible is not reading into the word of God what we feel or think but carefully paying attention to what He has said. Properly understanding Scripture is not reading it through the eyes of human traditions or creeds but looking back at what it meant when it was first written. Properly understanding the Bible doesn't pick out a few passages to the neglect of others that are just as relevant. We cannot be presumptuous but must take all that God says into account on any subject. Let's hear what God says!

Now we offer this study on understanding the Bible free! If you'd like a printed copy or the little booklet that we're offering, Know Your Bible, and you live in the United States, mail your request to In Search of the Lord's Way, P.O. Box 371, Edmond, OK 73083 or send an e-mail to searchtv@searchtv.org. Or, you can call our toll-free telephone number. That number is 1-800-321-8633. We also have many free programs and materials on our website, www.searchtv.org. You can also see us on YouTube.

We will now worship in song, we'll read from Psalm 1, and explore how to understand the Bible better.

Our reading today is from the six verses of Psalm 1. Psalm 1 sets the stage for the entire book. And is really worth looking at.

How blessed is the man who does not walk in the counsel of the wicked,
Nor stand in the path of sinners,
Nor sit in the seat of scoffers!
But his delight is in the law of the LORD,
And in His law he meditates day and night.
He will be like a tree firmly planted by streams of water,
Which yields its fruit in its season

And its leaf does not wither;
And in whatever he does, he prospers.
The wicked are not so,
But they are like chaff which the wind drives away.
Therefore the wicked will not stand in the judgment,
Nor sinners in the assembly of the righteous.
For the LORD knows the way of the righteous,
But the way of the wicked will perish

Yes that's a very strong statement about God's will. Let's pray together. Father we're thankful that You through Your grace and mercy have given to us a book by which we may know Your will. And my grow to love You and be able stand firm in this world. Help us Heavenly Father to love You with all our hearts and to do Your will always. In Jesus name we pray, Amen.

We need the heart of Ezra, who was both a Levitical priest and a scribe. Ezra 7:10 says, "For Ezra had set his heart to study the law of the Lord and to practice it, and to teach His statutes and ordinances in Israel." It's not enough to know the Word, we too should practice and teach it. Nehemiah 8 and verse 8 says that Ezra and others "read from the book, from the law of God, translating to give the sense so that they understood the reading." As preachers and teachers we too should help everyone understand what God wishes for them to know.

When Paul and Silas came to preach the gospel in Berea, Acts 17:11 says about the Bereans, "Now these were more noble-minded than those in Thessalonica, for they received the word with great eagerness, examining the Scriptures daily to see whether these things were so." And we too should have such a mindset, to examine the Scriptures for ourselves to see if what we are hearing from those who are teaching us, to what the Bible really says and compare it. Today religious leaders are teaching many half-truths and ideas that lead to misunderstanding. Now just as the Pharisees wrongly adopted an oral law in addition to the written Law of Moses, so there are religious leaders today who have accepted human traditions far different from the teaching of the first century New Testament.

If we're to understand the word of God, we must ask these questions: What did the author intend his original readers to understand? We approach a Scripture to understand what the passage meant as the author wrote it and as the original readers understood it. We don't want our understanding to be cluttered with doctrines and practices that came centuries later and had nothing to do with what the Lord and His apostles taught. Now here are some things we realize as we approach the Bible

First, God has spoken in the Holy Scripture. Our faith rests in the certainty that God has inspired the Biblical text; and, as a consequence, that text partakes of the inerrancy of His very nature. Second, we believe the Scriptures are capable of being clearly understood. While there are some passages hard to understand, as Peter said in 2 Peter 3:16, Scripture is largely intended to be understood. Peter could say to the early Christians in 2 Peter 1:12, "Therefore, I will always be ready to remind you of these things, even though you already know them, and have been established in the truth which is present with you."

Third, the best way to understand Scripture properly is to seek out what the authors intended the readers to know. To do that, we must have some knowledge of the language the authors used and the historical and cultural circumstances which influenced each book of the Bible. Now the Old Testament was written in Hebrew, though some books contain the Aramaic language. The New Testament was written in the common Greek of the first century. Fourth, God has not revealed some things to us.

We'll never know some things in this life. Deuteronomy 29:29 says that, "The secret things belong to the LORD our God, but the things revealed belong to us and to our sons forever, that we may observe all the words of this law."

A good Bible student will have faith. It does no good to say you believe in God, if you refuse to believe what He teaches. A good Bible student must have a love for the truth. Now believing a lie will not bless you or help you to know God. A good Bible student must be honest. Now some try to rewrite what the Bible teaches in order to make it say something different. Rather than accept what God says they want to make agree with their desires. God has spoken, and we must lovingly accept what He has said, even if it doesn't agree with what we want. A good Bible student studies the Word of God with humility. He realizes that God is all-wise and knows all things. We are merely humans and limited. It's an important day in our lives when we realize that God is God, and we are not. Jesus is Lord, and we are merely servants.

A good Bible student pays attention to learn from God rather than tell God what he thinks. A good Bible student has a willingness to listen and learn. God doesn't approve of an unteachable, arrogant spirit. And we should be willing to dig deep and to meditate on God's Word. God never forgets, and we should never forget, that we must obey God rather than men. Psalm 1 and verse 2 reminds us that the blessed man's "delight is in the law of the LORD, And in His law he meditates day and night." A good Bible student won't allow his doubts or contemporary culture to overrule what God says.

In John 6, some disciples were offended by something Jesus said. And John 6:66 to 69 says, "After this many of his disciples turned back and no longer walked with him. So Jesus said to the twelve, "Do you want to go away as well?" Simon Peter answered him, "Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life, and we have believed, and have come to know, that you are the Holy One of God." Now some today are like those former disciples, they withdraw to their own peril. Only Jesus has the words of eternal life. And if you reject Him, who will you find to die for your sins? No one will or can do what Jesus did for you.

Let me suggest these tips as you study your Bible. First, familiarize yourself with the sixty-six books of the Bible. If you have a study Bible, read the introduction before each book. The Bible is actually a library of books. The Old Testament was written to a different audience than the New Testament. The Old Testament addresses the ancient nation of Israel, while the New Testament is addressed to Christians, both Jews and Gentiles. The books of the Bible are written in different styles of literature: history, narrative, poetry, wisdom, prophetic, exhortation, and apocalyptic. The Bible was written over a period of 1500 years by forty different authors who lived in a variety of places. Now each book has its own historical and cultural setting.

Second, select good Bible study helps. It will help you greatly to acquire a Bible dictionary, a Bible atlas, and a concordance. These tools will help you define people, places and things that you may be unfamiliar with. There are several reference books that define the specific words used in Scripture. We can easily misunderstand a word, if we do not know its meaning, as the Scripture uses it. Good students study words.

Third, read each individual book in its context. Now each book has a historical setting in which it is to be read and understood. Many passages are misunderstood because the reader has never taken time to investigate the background of the Scripture. Some questions he must ask of any passage: Well, who is writing the passage? To whom is the author writing? You see not everything in the Bible is written to every person. When was the passage written? What was the author's intent and purpose in writing? The direct or literal sense of a sentence is the meaning of the author, when no other idea is indicated;

not any figurative, allegorical, or mystical meaning may be present. What circumstances may have prompted the writer to give rise to this lesson? What kind of literature is he using to make his message known? And what are the historical and cultural circumstances that bear on this passage? And, what would this message mean to its original recipients?

Fourth, learn to draw out the meaning of a passage; do not read into the passage anything that was not originally there. There's a difference between reading into a passage something that was never there and drawing out what is there. Those who study the Bible must be careful not to read into it their own personal prejudices or concepts that they think ought to be in the Bible. People are not smarter than God. One must read God's Word with an open mind to learn what He has said and to understand the Bible for what it says for itself. The Bible is always its own best interpreter.

Fifth, let the Bible explain itself. A difficult prophecy in Joel 2 finds its fulfillment in Acts 2. On the day of Pentecost, Peter said, "This is that which was spoken of by the prophet Joel" (Acts 2 and verse 16). In Ephesians 4 and verse 4 Paul says that there is "one body"; this body is defined earlier in Ephesians 1:22 as the church. In Revelation 1 and verse 20 John explains that the seven stars are angels or messengers and the seven golden lampstands are the seven churches. Well there's no further need of wondering what these mean. The Bible is indeed its own best interpreter. A plain, clear passage should always be used to make the dark and abstruse passages clear. A difficult passage never denies or contradicts the plain teaching of the Scripture.

Sixth, the Scriptures admonish us not to add or take away from what is revealed. Deuteronomy 12:32 says, "Whatever I command you, you shall be careful to do; you shall not add to nor take away from it." We must learn to stay within the teaching and observe the teaching carefully, completely, lovingly and accurately.

Seventh, the Scriptures do contain a law of inclusion and exclusion. We must "observe all things that Jesus commands (Matthew 28 verses 19 and 20), yet we must realize the difference between general commands and specific ones. When God gives us an instruction in general terms, He allows us to use our common sense to fulfill that command in a variety of ways. For instance when God tells us to "go into all the world," He allows us to travel any way we think best; but when God gets specific, He expects us to do specifically what He commands. While the generic commands allow one to fulfill it in different ways, specific commands demand to be fulfilled specifically. Specific commands exclude substitutes and additions. When God told Noah to build an ark of "gopher wood," this excluded all other kinds of wood.

Eighth, take all that the Scriptures teach on any subject. And all the truth on any one subject is not usually found in one passage. There's a difference between a true statement and the whole truth of a matter. John 5:24 says, "Truly, truly, I say to you, he who hears My word, and believes Him who sent Me, has eternal life, and does not come into judgment, but has passed out of death into life." Now it is true that we are saved by faith, but it is not the whole truth. Faith apart from love, repentance, or baptism will not save.

Ninth, recognize figures of speech. There are many figures of speech in the Bible. Many problems occur because uninformed students interpret a passage literally when they should interpret it figuratively. E.W. Bullinger, in his book *Figures of Speech*, said, "It may truly be said that most of the gigantic errors have their root and source, either in figuratively explaining away passages which should be taken literally, or in taking literally what has been thrown into a peculiar form or Figure of language: thus, not only falling into error, but losing the express teaching, and missing the special emphasis

which the particular Figure was designed to impart to them." Biblical authors didn't use figures of speech to do away with the truth; they used them to emphasize the truth.

Read and study your Bible each day. Read it slowly. Look up words you don't understand. Meditate on its teaching, its promises, and its warnings. Respect and love the truth. Treasure it up in your heart. And let God speak.

Let's pray together. Father we're thankful for Your word and it's power to make a difference in our lives. To help us to grow spiritually and to stay away from the things that are evil. And Father we pray that our love for You and our love for the truth may grow more and more. In Jesus name, Amen.

Apply the message of the Bible to your life. We ought to bring the message of the Bible home by responding to the passage with our hearts and lives. Now here's some questions we can ask that will help us apply the Scriptures to our lives: Does this command something I'm not doing? Does this suggest a change in my behavior? Does this reflect a spirit or an attitude that I'm not manifesting? Does this confirm a belief that I already hold? Does this suggest further study or a change in my beliefs? Have I accepted this promise and trusted God to fulfill it? Have I seen this promise fulfilled in my life? How would it change matters if everyone obeyed this command? What would Jesus do in my place?

Now a person has failed God and himself if he or she has applied the truths of the Scripture to everyone else but neglected to apply God's Word to himself. Romans 2:6 to 8 says "He will render to each one according to his works: to those who by patience in well-doing seek for glory and honor and immortality, he will give eternal life; but for those who are self-seeking and do not obey the truth, but obey unrighteousness, there will be wrath and fury." God is no respecter of persons.

Become a Christian by placing your trust in the Lord Jesus Christ, repenting of your sins out of love for Jesus, confessing Jesus Christ as the Son of God, and being baptized into Christ for the forgiveness of your sins. In baptism God washes away our sins (Acts 22:16), buries and raises us with Christ (Romans 6:4), and causes us to be born again by His grace (Titus 3:5 to 7). Now those who sincerely study God's word realize the necessity of repentance and baptism to salvation (Acts 2 and verse 38).

Well, we hope that today's study about understanding the Bible has helped you see the importance of following God's Word. If you live in the United States and want a free printed copy, we have one for you, and we have the booklet, Know Your Bible, so send your request to In Search of the Lord's Way, P.O. Box 371, Edmond, OK 73083 or send an e-mail to searchtv@searchtv.org. Or, you can call the Search office toll-free at 1-800-321-8633. There's a schedule of our programs and a map of churches in your area at www.searchtv.org. You can watch SEARCH on YouTube anytime! Subscribe to our channel, and be sure to like the programs. Our channel is "SearchTVMinistry". We also offer free Bible Correspondence courses. Now don't worry, we're not asking for money. We're here to help you draw close to God.

We do ask that you show God your love by worshiping at church. You need a church family my friend. If you can attend, don't neglect worshiping at church. There's probably a church of Christ near you. If you're looking for a healthy, Biblical church home, we'll gladly help you find one. God bless you and we love you from all of us at In Search of the Lord's Way.