

Soul Care | *Spiritual Basics for Hungry People*

Week 3 – Bible Study

Corporate Prayer

The Morning Prayer: from *The Valley of Vision*



¹⁶ All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness,¹⁷ so that the man of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work.
– 2 Timothy 3:16-17 (NIV)

REVELATION AND SCRIPTURE

(References are to Chapter One of the Westminster Confession of Faith)

[1] General vs. Special Revelation

- **General Revelation:** What we can know about God from observing his creation or how he governs his creation, namely, that he exists, that he is powerful, that he has a moral code which we innately understand because it reflects his will. General revelation tells all people equally that they “had better think about God.”
- **Special Revelation:** What we know about God because of his particular, specific self-revelation in Jesus Christ (Jn 1:1), his decrees (Gen 1:3, Ps 33:6), his words of personal address (Gen 2:16-17; Matt 3:17), his use of humans to speak his words (e.g. the prophets, Dt 18:18-20) and his written word, the Bible (Ex 31:18; I Cor 14:37). Special revelation tells those who encounter it “what they should be thinking about God.” **SPECIAL REVELATION IS PROGRESSIVE!!**
- **Romans 1:18-20** tells us that all people are without excuse before God, because he has made himself sufficiently known to us through his creation. We see his face in front of us, which must cause us to ask more about him; if we do not, we are guilty.
- However, we still needed special revelation before the fall (God telling us who he was and who we were created to be), and after the fall *general revelation only serves to condemn us before God*. One cannot adequately understand who God is without his self-revelation. Special revelation *acts as the “glasses”* that allow us to see general revelation in focus and clearly.

[2] The Authority of the Bible

- Scripture is God-breathed, it is his “expired” word to us (Cf. II Tim 3:15-17). Cf. Calvin p. 41 Just as the universe is a result of God’s spoken word.
- Scripture is authoritative because of its Author, *understand the character of the Author and know the authority of Scripture*.
- Not simply a ‘human reflection’ on religious experience.
- We affirm the Inerrancy of Scripture: *The Bible is fully truthful in all that it affirms, it is free from mistake and exempt from error*.
- Some dangers of denying inerrancy of Scripture:
 - To deny inerrancy implies that God is untruthful in some small matters, here we face a moral contradiction in God’s character
 - To deny inerrancy is to cast doubt on God’s reliability and trustworthiness, in both small and large matters, that he is capable to speak falsehood is a dangerous proposition

- To deny inerrancy is to raise our human minds, logic, critique, etc. places our mind as a higher standard than God's word
- To deny inerrancy is to question the truth of biblical doctrines, such as salvation, justification, sanctification, perseverance of the saints, eternal hope, etc.

[3] The Sufficiency of the Bible

- **Sufficiency of Scripture:** Scripture contained all the words of God he intended his people to have at each stage of redemptive history, and that it now contains everything we need God to tell us for salvation, for trusting him perfectly, and for obeying him perfectly. Grudem, p. 127.
- This means that: **1) we should search Scripture** to discover what God would have us think or do; **2) we are to add nothing to Scripture** and should not consider any other writings of equal value to Scripture; **3) God does not require** us to believe anything about him or his salvation of us that is **not found in Scripture**; **4) no modern revelations** from God are to be placed **on the same level of authority as Scripture**; we are not to add prohibitions to the Christian life which Scripture does not place on us (explicit or implicit); we should emphasize what Scripture emphasizes and be content to remain silent where Scripture is silent.

But to deviate from the truth for the sake of some prospect of hope of our own can never be wise, however slight the deviation may be. It is not our judgment of the situation which can show us what is wise, but only the truth of the Word of God. Here alone lies the promise of God's faithfulness and help. It will always be true that the wisest course for the disciple is always to abide solely by the Word of God in all simplicity.

Dietrich Bonhoeffer, quoted in *Eugene Petersen, Long Obedience*, p. 36

[4] The Clarity of the Bible

- **The clarity (or perspicuity) of Scripture:** The Bible is written in such a way that its teachings are able to be understood by all who read it seeking God's help and being willing to follow it. Grudem p., 108.
- Practically this means that Scripture (through God's aid of the Holy Spirit) makes clear his redemptive purposes.
- The clarity of Scripture presupposes that we—the reader, the student—will encounter Scripture according to its own rules of language, genre, culture etc. (i.e. we still need good teachers and translations.), we will do good exegesis to understand the text's meaning

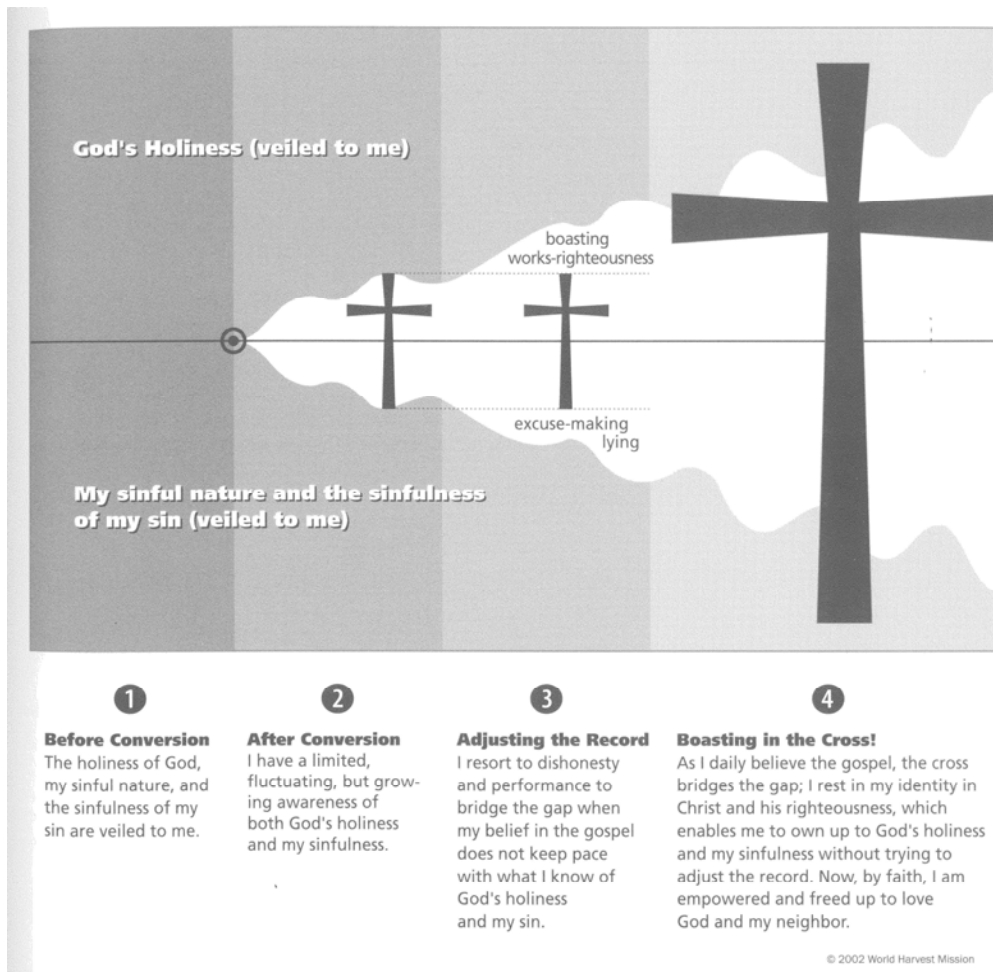
[5] Reasons for being persuaded that the Bible is True and Inspired

- **Lesser Reasons:** spiritual subject matter, its effect in people's lives, its style, its claims for itself to be true, its unity, outside support of its claims (archeology, history etc.)
- **Main Reason:** The witness of the Holy Spirit within us tells us that it is true. Scripture has a "self-authenticating nature" which means that when we encounter it, "we are not like unhappy creatures whose minds are enslaved by superstition, but we can feel a divine energy living and breathing in it which encourages us and inspires us to obey it willingly and with understanding, but with more life and power than could be exerted by human will and wisdom." Calvin p., 44

THE STUDY OF SCRIPTURE

Having understood the doctrine of Scripture as laid out in God's own Word, and clarified/summarized in the Westminster Confession of Faith, it requires of us that we study and know it. Not that we just know what it says, but that we put these truths into practice in our daily living.

The cross chart below is a visual way to see how scripture reveals our sin and God's holiness. We need scripture, through the accompaniment of the Holy Spirit to teach us, reveal to us, convict us, and remind us of the promises of God. The more we are engaged with scripture (reading, memorizing, applying, being formed by it) the more is revealed about God and us. In scripture we see the narrative of fallen disobedient people being loved by a holy God. As our understanding of our sin and God's holiness increases, the necessity of the cross and its beauty increases.



THE BASICS OF HERMENEUTICS

There are myriad resources we can look to for helps, guidance, or ideas for how to study scripture in order that we understand types of literature in the Bible, the history of each book, the process by which we do *exegesis* – the careful, systematic study of Scripture to discover the original, intended meaning. After we have done solid exegesis, we continue in study to engage in proper *hermeneutics* – the understanding the contemporary relevance of the ancient text, the “here and now” meaning of the text.

1. ***The key attitude for interpreting Scripture: God speaks, we listen.*** Because God is really speaking to us, these are his words, it is essential that we do all that we can to put ourselves into the place where he can most easily speak to us.
2. ***The key concept for interpreting Scripture: Context.*** Scripture tells one, large, overall story and no individual part can be interpreted without reference to the story of redemption. At the most basic level this means that Scripture is its own best interpreter and that we should interpret less clear passages in light of more clear passages.

Biblical Study:

1. Exegesis: *the careful, systematic study of Scripture to discover the original, intended meaning*
 - a. Context –
 - i. Historical Context –
 1. what is the situation of this book, what is going on?
 2. Location, the time period?
 3. Intended recipients?
 4. What is the occasion/purpose of the book?
 - ii. Literary Context –
 1. What is the author saying, what is his train of thought?
 2. What type of literature is this? Poetry, narrative, apocalyptic?
 - b. Content – what do the words mean?
 - i. What is a denarius?
 - ii. A sabbath day's journey?
 - iii. High places?
2. Hermeneutics: *the understanding the contemporary relevance of the ancient text*
 - a. What is the original meaning of the text? *Truth*
 - b. How does the teaching in this text relate to me today? *Context*
 - c. What am I to do in response to the text? *Application*

Helpful Resources (among many):

1. A good, readable translation of the Bible which is most faithful to the ancient text, what is called a “dynamic equivalent” (recommended are ESV, NIV, TNIV, NLT)
Ask yourself: What translation should I be reading?!
2. *The Spirit of the Reformation Study Bible*, Zondervan
3. *NIV Study Bible*, Zondervan
4. *ESV Literary Study Bible*, Crossway
5. *Life Application Study Bible*, Tyndale
6. *How to Read the Bible for All It's Worth*, Fee and Stuart
7. *How to Apply the Bible*, David R. Veerman
8. *What the Bible is All About*, Henrietta C. Mears

Opportunities this Week:

Meeting God in scripture is something that is almost limitless in terms of the way we can do it. The key thing to remember is that the bible is God's word, which he has spoken to you.

Use the lectio divina (next week's class) to supplement your inductive bible study. Make a habit of regularly taking just a single morsel of scripture and savoring every last bit of it, instead of wolfing down your spiritual food so that you can move on.

Use Chuck Miller's 2PROAPT method for reading through scripture. Pray that God will speak to you through his word, Preview by scanning the entire passage, Read carefully, Observe what is being said and who is doing what seeing who each part relates to the larger whole, Apply the passage by asking how this passage will change a relationship that day or change your schedule, Pray again that God will enable you to carry out the application he has just placed on your heart, Tell someone else how God has been speaking to you.

Use a regular method for reading through the bible. NPC has a 2-year program, or you could simply chose to read a psalm every day. The idea is to not let a single day go by without hearing from God.

Purchase an audio copy of the New Testament that is read by a good voice artist and listen to it regularly. You'd be surprised how hearing scripture read opens up your mind with regard to hearing God's voice through the text.

Get a translation that you don't normally use for bible reading. The New Living Translation and The Message are particularly good for this. Then spend time reading several pages at a time, as if you were reading a novel.

Pretend that the portion of scripture you are reading is a love letter that has been sent to you by a secret admirer. Take time to notice the choice of words and the nuances. Maybe even makes notes of them.

Start memorizing a few verses of scripture every week. Write them out on a 3x5 card and the put the card someplace where you will see it throughout the day—tape it to the center of your steering wheel and glance at it when you are at a red light; put it on your mirror so you see it when you get ready each day; put it in your purse or wallet so that when you are stuck waiting in line you can pull it out. You'd be surprised how easily you can remember scripture when you just see it several times per day.

Get a harmony of the gospels (a chart that lists all the events of Christ's life in more or less chronological order listing the passage where each event takes place) and read through Christ's life from beginning to end. As you do, keep track of how Christ is meeting you and your observations about his life (a journal!).