

Study and Education

What can I learn from study?

- Many of the big questions of life have answers
 - They are answered in scripture
 - I'm not just talking about spiritual questions
 - Although those are certainly answered in scripture
 - But also questions we think of as scientific and historical
 - Questions like "Where did we come from?"
- In fact, if we cannot trust the Bible's science or history, how could we then trust it with questions of life and death?
- Let's just spend a moment on that question "Where did we come from?"
 - That which men often call science today has no answer
 - I don't mean they haven't come up with a theory, I mean they don't have an answer
 - Scientists were not there to observe anything at the beginning
 - Whatever observations can be made now can test certain theories about what may have happened
 - But only an eyewitness account can tell us for sure
 - The wonderful news is that God was there
 - And He has provided a written account of what He did
 - Whatever evidence we have today should be seen in light of what He said
 - And He gave us many profound details
- Chief among them, He created the heavens and the earth and all that is in them
 - He created everything out of nothing by speaking
 - And He did so in six literal days, resting on a seventh day
 - We also know, based on the detailed records kept in the Old Testament that we live on a young earth
 - And, after being declared "very good," that earth was cursed after Adam's sin
 - And that death is the result of sin
- Not only does Genesis answer the question of where we came from
 - In doing so, it answers several other big questions in life about meaning and death and suffering
 - It also refutes many popular, well-accepted, worldly theories that lead men away from God

- The Bible is trustworthy
- And so whatever men say, whatever they assert based on their own study
- Must be seen through the lens of scripture
- All evidence on questions of origin and history must be filtered through its text
- We don't make judgements about the Bible based on what the world tells us
- We make judgements about what the world tells us based on the Bible

- I wonder if some of us may struggle with this level of trust that is needed in God's word?
- Do some of us believe that what we see and hear and observe based on our own intelligence will persuade us more?
- Should something beyond these written words persuade us instead?

- The Bible gives us example of those who think "something else," whatever it may be, would be more persuasive
- I think of one man who was rich
- In the torments of hell he had concern for his five brothers
- Experiencing the reality of hell convinced him these brothers should be told how to avoid hell
- That's where we pick up the story in Luke 16...

27 Then he said, I pray thee therefore, father, that thou wouldest send him to my father's house:

28 For I have five brethren; that he may testify unto them, lest they also come into this place of torment.

29 Abraham saith unto him, They have Moses and the prophets; let them hear them.

30 And he said, Nay, father Abraham: but if one went unto them from the dead, they will repent.

31 And he said unto him, If they hear not Moses and the prophets, neither will they be persuaded, though one rose from the dead.

- The words of Moses and the prophets did not seem enough to persuade according to this man
- "Something more" was needed
- If someone could have been proven to have raised from the dead
- This would have provided just that little bit of extra assurance
- The experience of seeing a risen person would have convinced, according to this logic
- But Abraham says no
- If they will not believe the message God purposefully and providentially sent
- Then not even someone raised from the dead will do it

- John 20 has another account that may help...

24 But Thomas, one of the twelve, called Didymus, was not with them when Jesus came.

25 The other disciples therefore said unto him, We have seen the Lord. But he said unto them, Except I shall see in his hands the print of the nails, and put my finger into the print of the nails, and thrust my hand into his side, I will not believe.

26 And after eight days again his disciples were within, and Thomas with them: then came Jesus, the doors being shut, and stood in the midst, and said, Peace be unto you.

27 Then saith he to Thomas, Reach hither thy finger, and behold my hands; and reach hither thy hand, and thrust it into my side: and be not faithless, but believing.

28 And Thomas answered and said unto him, My Lord and my God.

29 Jesus saith unto him, Thomas, because thou hast seen me, thou hast believed: blessed are they that have not seen, and yet have believed.

- All who believe after Jesus ascended do so based on the word of God
- We have not this experience to persuade us
- Our belief is based on the written word
- We trust it fully

- It is the book that educates the believer beyond any of man's wisdom
- Beyond any collective understanding of culture
- Because it is truth - all of it

- There are some wonderful details about what it can teach in Psalm 119:97-106
- That is where we will spend the bulk of our time tonight...

Psalm 119:97-98

97 O how love I thy law! it is my meditation all the day.

98 Thou through thy commandments hast made me wiser than mine enemies: for they are ever with me.

- For a person in the midst of trouble (in this case surrounded by enemies), the word of God is critical
- It offers wisdom beyond any the ungodly can find
- And while they may have power or might or numbers or experience
- We have the instruction of almighty God

- This is why the person in a scenario like this can declare with confidence "I love thy law!"
- It provides a platform, at least for survival, and often for victory

- That makes it worth meditating up all the day
- It is used for reflection by the reader
- It is an object of study
- During not just a portion of the day, but all day
- If enemies are ever-near
- The follower of God must be ever-ready
- Prepared in mind and heart to act in accordance with God's will
- This wisdom is far beyond the wisdom of men
- That is, the wisdom of any enemy that may face us, from Satan to tyrant kings or any other group of oppressors
- His intelligence is above theirs
- And has been passed directly to us
- What else does this kind of reflection on the word provide?

Psalm 119:99-100

99 I have more understanding than all my teachers: for thy testimonies are my meditation.

100 I understand more than the ancients, because I keep thy precepts.

- There are no teachers in the world that know more than God
- No teachers that can communicate with more effectiveness than God
- It's not that teachers have nothing good to say
- Of course, if they point us to Him, they have a great deal of good to say
- But nothing beats going directly to the source
- The same is true of teachers from ages gone by
- People who are old or who have already died and left us their writings
- Any number of them may be helpful, but going directly to God and acting in obedience is best
- When verse 99 talks about "understanding" it is referring to insight and prudence
- This is what study can provide
- Verse 100 says "understand" - and that is a different word
- That means to have discernment, to be capable of distinguishing
- When we have insight and can discern, we are capable of living out Godliness

- I would argue that insight and discernment are the keys to any successful walk through life
- And it is no surprise that this text declares we will find both in the "testimonies" of God
- Specifically, in meditating on and obeying them
- But this only comes when we deeply consider, with careful attention
- And that results in other actions...

Psalm 119:101-102

101 I have refrained my feet from every evil way, that I might keep thy word.

102 I have not departed from thy judgments: for thou hast taught me.

- The Bible can keep us from doing things that are wrong
- That is when we know and internalize its truth
- When we understand some not-doing is pleasing to God
- And as this verse indicates, when we are circumspect and avoid the traps of Satan
- We have the opportunity to go on in obedience
- As we are not hindered or weighed down
- Scripture also has the ability to keep us on a right path
- Obedience can be habit-forming
- As God teaches through the Bible and the work of the Holy Spirit
- It can keep us on a straight path, a narrow path
- And that is the one that leads to life eternal
- This is an education beyond any book of man
- Because this is education directly from God - "thou hast taught me"
- This kind of learning and living is a delight...

Psalm 119:103-104

103 How sweet are thy words unto my taste! yea, sweeter than honey to my mouth!

104 Through thy precepts I get understanding: therefore I hate every false way.

- The more we partake of God's word the sweeter it is to us
- While falsehood becomes bitter
- There is no experience greater in the world than being enlightened by scripture

- That which is against scripture, which is against God, is to be hated
- There is no understanding in the false way - The unscriptural way
- But God's precepts help us discern and distinguish
- Through it we know the difference between truth and falsehood

- All this learning and growing is accomplished in us for a reason...

Psalm 119:105-106

105 Thy word is a lamp unto my feet, and a light unto my path.

106 I have sworn, and I will perform it, that I will keep thy righteous judgments.

- We are going to need a light in this world
- Things can get dark quickly
- Not even the path directly ahead of us can often be seen
- But God's word can light that path
- It can show us where to safely and securely step
- So we do not get off-course or fall

- Why would we not then commit ourselves (without reservation) to obedience?
- A victorious life - a joyful life - demands righteousness
- To live successfully, we must live rightly

- Not only will God's word relay the facts of the world - scientifically and historically
- But it will tell us what they mean and why they are important
- And also tell us how to live in light of them

- I want to provide a few tips on how we can know develop a deep understanding of what God tells us
- They will help those just starting out and be a reminder to those who have studied for many years
- These are principles I take into account every day

- When approaching any Bible text...

- 1. Always consider the immediate context

- Read carefully the passages that precede and follow your text
- Discover how that context may alter your thinking about the main text
- Only extract a verse from its context when it's appropriate to do so

2. Always consider the historical context

- You may be able to find more details from that time period
- Or from that city
- Or about the people mentioned
- Or about a cultural practice you don't understand
- Or about the circumstances in the world at that time
- Search for these kinds of details
- They can help you gain perspective

3. Always consider the "entire Bible" context

- Confusing passages can seem like a "one-off"
 - They may give us the wrong idea about what God is really saying
 - If there are seemingly contradictory statements, find out why
 - Never come to final conclusions based on one verse alone
- I think there is a good example from the account of Paul and Silas in Acts 16...

23 And when they had laid many stripes upon them, they cast them into prison, charging the jailor to keep them safely:

24 Who, having received such a charge, thrust them into the inner prison, and made their feet fast in the stocks.

25 And at midnight Paul and Silas prayed, and sang praises unto God: and the prisoners heard them.

26 And suddenly there was a great earthquake, so that the foundations of the prison were shaken: and immediately all the doors were opened, and every one's bands were loosed.

27 And the keeper of the prison awaking out of his sleep, and seeing the prison doors open, he drew out his sword, and would have killed himself, supposing that the prisoners had been fled.

28 But Paul cried with a loud voice, saying, Do thyself no harm: for we are all here.

29 Then he called for a light, and sprang in, and came trembling, and fell down before Paul and Silas,

30 And brought them out, and said, Sirs, what must I do to be saved?

31 And they said, Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved, and thy house.

- If one person believes in Christ, is there entire family automatically saved too?
- Why not?
- Paul and Silas told the keeper of the prison this was possible, right?

- But what do we know about the remainder of the scriptures?

- Reading on may help too...

32 And they spake unto him the word of the Lord, and to all that were in his house.

33 And he took them the same hour of the night, and washed their stripes; and was baptized, he and all his, straightway.

34 And when he had brought them into his house, he set meat before them, and rejoiced, believing in God with all his house.

4. Properly define words and phrases

- Use the tools we have at our disposal for defining the original languages

- There are fine details and nuances within these words that help us

- And we don't want to impose modern definitions that may differ from the original

5. Find out what trustworthy people have said

- Commentaries can help

- Thousands of people may have written on this text

- Find out what the best of them has said

- Ask people you know

6. Consider everything deeply (meditate)

- Read carefully

- Think about what you read

- Give yourself some time to consider it

- Go over it a few more times

7. Pray

- Ask God to provide accuracy

- Ask Him to clear your mind and prepare your heart

- Just a few words to sum this up...

- Read the word carefully

- Get all the information you can

- Ask important questions

- Do your homework
- If it is not work, you are doing it wrong

- The Bible means what it says
- It doesn't mean what it doesn't say
- And it means exactly what it says