



A Three-Fold Cord

Creation, Redemption & Dominion

2nd Edition, Revised & Expanded

Chapter 3. How to Study the Bible

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1. Introduction

You can't know what the Bible means if you don't know what the Bible says. Like anything else in life, it takes time to learn especially when we are dealing with a completely different way of thinking. Biblical, Kingdom thinking is almost opposite from earth-based and even church-based thinking.

At some point in our walk with God we are going to have to make a choice: Are we going along with what the biblical text says, or are we going after the world or what our traditions say? I made a choice, a long time ago, that I will go after the Text, even if it means walking alone.

But the question is, am I understanding the text correctly? In most cases the answer is yes, but sometimes what looks to be plain needs a deeper examination. That is the purpose of this chapter.

The study of scripture is a lifelong venture. Many times, our search for deeper understanding of the holy book leads to questions beyond the Bible itself. As we encounter references to social conditions, cultural practices, and even other writings mentioned within the scriptures we are called to investigate and expand our knowledge in order to fully appreciate the context, knowledge base, and cultural significance of what is being taught. Thus, to fully understand the Bible, we are necessarily drawn to sources outside the Bible.

These sources add to the historical, social, or theological understanding of Biblical times. As our view becomes more macrocosmic, we see the panoramic setting and further understand the full truth within the scriptures.

To point us to the sources we should be concerned with, we must know which books were popular and important at the time. There are several books mentioned in the Bible which are not included in the Bible. They are not spiritual canon, either because they were not available at the time the canon was originally adopted, or at the time they were not considered "inspired." In cases when inspiration was questioned, one could argue that any book quoted or mentioned by a prophet, or an apostle should be considered as spiritual canon. Unfortunately, this position would prove too simplistic.
(Joseph B. Lumpkin, *The Books of Enoch*, Introduction, 3)

I must confess that in my earlier years I thought that all you had to do was just "read the Bible" and you would get everything you needed to know. By the way, I recommend just "read the Bible," especially the New Testament everywhere. You have to get started. Most preaching just gives you a few verses, like fortune cookie sayings. You NEED to read it for yourself. A literate congregation is a good defense from ministerial error.

But now I know this is a very simplistic view. For instance, if someone says, "All we need is the Bible," you must ask the question, "To do what?" If all you want to do is go to church and live the average Christian life and go to Heaven when you die, then sure, the Bible is all you need. This is similar to the statement, "Jesus is all you need." Again, I ask, "For what; To do what?"

But if you want to change the world, then you will be woefully unprepared. You will run headlong into ideas and practices that subtly and/or blatantly defy your simplistic knowledge, from people that would love to destroy what faith you have (Rom 10:17). There are highly organized systems of intelligent evil raised up against the knowledge of God (2 Cor 10:3-5) that dare you to do something, anything to challenge them. But that is precisely what we are called, even commanded, to do.

2 Timothy 2:15

Be diligent to present yourself approved to God, a worker who does not need to be ashamed, **rightly dividing the word of truth.**

2 Timothy 3:16-17

16 All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for **doctrine**, for **reproof**, for **correction**, for **instruction in righteousness**, 17 that the man of God may be **complete**, **thoroughly equipped** for every good work.

Rightly dividing the word of truth is a lost art because so many have not taken the time to read the Scriptures for themselves. Some people think they can just "claim" what they think are "promises from God" and stuff will magically happen. After 40 years, I have discovered, the hard way, it's not like that. But, in Christ, all God's promises are YES and AMEN! Learning takes time. Scripture is profitable for doctrine (to teach you what's true), for reproof (show what's wrong), for correction (show what's right), for instruction in righteousness (living God's way). Are you complete; are you equipped? If not, start by committing to read the New Testament 15 minutes every day, starting with the Gospel of John.

Biblical understanding must stand on its own two feet without regard to any other system of thought. ... The Bible has its own worldview, the Bible has its own way of understanding the relationships of things in the world, to the human mind, to God. The Bible has its own way of gaining knowledge.

(John Frame, *Apologetics* 315, 7:00 and *Apologetics to the Glory of God*)

Biblical Studies, Theological Studies and Systematic Theology

Biblical Studies deals with the study of individual books of the Bible, chapters, verses and even words. It is the study of names, places, events presented in the Bible. This would be like examining the individual pieces of a jigsaw puzzle.

Theological Studies are concerned with the study of ideas and doctrines, like the nature of God, the trinity, how God could become a man, church government. Like examining larger sections of the jigsaw puzzle.

Systematic Theology is concerned with how biblical understanding and theology comport with one another, how they fit together into an integrated and coherent whole. It is like the picture on the cover of a jigsaw puzzle box, the big picture. There is (and should be) general agreement between all correctly understood biblical teachings.

By the way, this should extend out into every area of the world as well. Science, philosophy, and other disciplines should have a coherent wholeness to them. There should be natural harmony among all the areas of human knowledge and experience. Sometimes finding that agreement is difficult. Some ideas just don't seem to fit, and maybe for good reason. This is because the system needs adjusted or the idea is wrong, like the flat earth or millions of years just don't fit at all, even though some try very hard to make them fit.

This area is probably the most lacking today where consistency seems to have taken a back seat to other post-modern considerations. We are living in a time when it is possible to hold a basket full of conflicting beliefs with no discomfort. Truth is not like that.

There are ideas that we cannot know completely, like the trinity or creation. But what we do know can be known with certainty. Only God has comprehensive knowledge of all things. If you are one of those people that has to "know everything" about something before you will accept it, you will be forever unbelieving, as well as frustrated. God has seen to it that we have sufficient knowledge (sufficient in His view, not yours) to walk in certainty and fulfill all we are called to do (Eph 2:10). We will have Eternity to figure out all the rest!

2Pet. 3:14-16

Therefore, beloved, since you look for these things, be diligent to be found by Him in peace, spotless and blameless, and regard the patience of our Lord is salvation; just as also our beloved brother Paul, according to the wisdom given him, wrote to you, as also in all his letters, speaking in them of these things, in which are some things hard to understand, which the untaught and unstable distort, as they do also the rest of the Scriptures, to their own destruction.

It shall greatly help you to understand Scripture, if you mark not only what is spoken or written, but of whom, and to whom, with what words, at what time, where, to what interest, with what circumstances, considering what goes before and what follows (John Wycliffe, 1324–1384).

This was the kind of thinking that changed the world!

2. Hermeneutics – The Art and Science of Interpretation

A. A Word on Interpretation.

Translation has the idea of moving from one language to another. Interpretation is more connected to meaning or perception. On occasion, they are used interchangeably. Many times, someone will say, "Well, that's just your interpretation." It is equivalent to saying, "Well, that's just your opinion." I have observed that they say this when they don't like what I said. When you point out that some verses contradict a pet doctrine, some organizations will imply the verses were not correctly translated. I always ask for the correct translation. So far, none has been provided. The Jehovah's Witnesses published their own translation, New World Translation, to head off such objections. Some Messianic Jews will not read Paul's writings saying he has been wrongly translated, because he contradicts some pet doctrines. By the way, everybody has pet doctrines. The question is, "Can any doctrine stand the scrutiny of the Word of

Truth?” As people of truth, we are ever in pursuit of aligning our thoughts with His thoughts (Isa 55:7-11, Rom 12:1-2, 1Cor 2:16, 2 Cor 10:5, Php 2:5).

There is a long-standing discussion concerning translation, and it is this: Is it better to translate using a word-for-word method, a phrase-by-phrase method, or conceptually. Conceptually is the most controversial and used more in paraphrased Bibles. For example, “white as snow” might be conceptually translated as “white as coconut meat” in places where snow is unknown. The controversy arises when the concepts are more complex and subject to theological bias. Is it sky or heaven (Mt 24:30), land or region or world (Mt 24:14, Lk 2:1), age or world (Mt 24:3)? Big differences. The reality is that all three methods, in varying degrees, are used in every translation. I want to focus the reader’s attention on the word “understanding.” As best we can we want to understand what can be known from God, and the world around us.

Proverbs 4:7

Wisdom is the principal thing; therefore, get wisdom. And in all your getting, get understanding.

No matter how the Bible is translated or perceived, what we are after is the author’s understanding **when** they penned their pages. Except for Luke, all of the authors of the New Testament were Jews. They were not writing to us, but their writings were preserved for us. They were writing to communicate a message to the audience of their day. What we are after is the context of the author and his original audience, in the time of the author, not our modern spin. This is historical context. What did the author know and understand about a text? What did the first readers know and understand about the text?

I am not talking about the modern notion of context, which says to read a few verses before and a few verses after the verse in question. By the way, this is a good idea. But they are still being interpreted according to a modern context, not historical context. For most places in scripture it doesn’t really matter, but sometimes it matters a lot. As you will see in the next two chapters. As an example, a prophet describes an arrow and bow (Ezek 38:4, 39:9). A modern prophecy expert says, “Oh, that is a rocket and rocket launcher.” By what authority is any such arbitrary claim made?

It is a simple fact that literate Jews of the first century had a knowledge base much greater than most Christians ever access today. They wrote knowing the readers of their day would understand their references to the other publications of the time. There is a context of history and literature that is often unknown and sometimes misunderstandings are propagated to the people based on incomplete information. Fortunately, we can have access to those publications in our time and can bring clarity to some of those strange passages and even stranger man-made interpretations.

2 Timothy 2:15

Be diligent to present yourself approved to God, a worker who does not need to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth.

If you wrote something that was important to you and it was discovered 1000 years from now, would you want the discoverers to understand your message, or is it okay for them to make up some interpretation according to the dictates of their own mind or culture? This should be true when reading any author. Those who say we cannot know what an author intended are revealing a personal bias that I dealt with in chapter 2, “Apologetics.” They are hinting they are biased or worse, just plain lazy. There is a reason “truth” is described as “treasure.”

To be sure biblical prophetic writings may leave the author with limited understanding, nevertheless the Chief Author intends for there to be an understanding relevant to prophetic fulfillment. We have an advantage in that we have the prophet’s writings plus history. We can see how their future history

compares to our past history. This is one of the ways we come to “interpret” symbolism, language style and use of terminology. This reinforces the “Bible as its own best interpreter” method of Bible study. Good interpretation leads to an understanding which equals the Author’s Understanding, true doctrine (teaching), and quality theology.

Luke 2:14

Peace on earth, good will toward men. KJV
 Peace on earth toward men good will. Geneva
 Peace among those with whom he is pleased ESV

Notice the different emphasis between these three translations. Which is correct?

Knowing God helps. Knowing a little Greek is good also. This illustrates differences in the translations. There is no “best” translation; there are only better and worse. It is good to use a few different translations. Most verses in this book are from the New King James Version.

A language tool called an interlinear is helpful for those starting out. A Greek interlinear (see picture) has the Greek Bible and a word-for-word translation into English. This allows us to see a comparison between the two languages. The numbers are for a Strong’s dictionary. The Greek language doesn’t flow the same as English, so it will seem strange when you first start reading it. By the way, you can learn to read Greek in a week, but it will take a couple of years to learn to translate what you read. There is a certain satisfaction that comes when you begin to recognize Greek words and know what they mean. I think learning Greek is superior to Hebrew because it is the language “of the New Covenant in My blood.” It is Christianity set above and apart from all other beliefs and practices that is the answer to all the world’s problems because of the Lamb upon the throne. His name is Jesus, the name above all names, the name at which every knee shall bow (Php 2:10, Act 4:12)! Greek is the language God chose to communicate that truth, that Gospel to the entire world, not Hebrew. The primary Old Testament of the first century church was the Septuagint, the Greek Old Testament, not Hebrew. Often when the Old Testament is quoted in the New, it is right out of the Septuagint. It would be good to start with Greek. Here is a free link to begin.



<http://learngreekfree.com/>

Two words related to interpretation are, and I will repeat often.

1. Eisegesis – Reading into text ideas that aren’t there. Ideas foreign to the Scripture drive the interpretation and even translation. “Eis” means into.
2. Exegesis – Reading from text ideas embedded within the text. Scripture itself drives the interpretation. You see the word “exit” meaning out of. Scripture is its own best interpreter.

Unscientifically, I would say eisegesis is the number one fallacy of biblical interpretation. A close second is a superficial study of some topic. The real failure is in not being thorough in the study of the topic, and third is what I call “Pickers and Choosers.” People “pick and choose” verses to justify their pet theories. The problem happens when someone comes up with a theory, then search the Scripture to find justification for that theory. When the theory is not clearly supported, they may begin to “see” verses that can be adjusted, twisted, massaged, or read into, in order to prop up a failing theory.

Two very long-lasting theories were the flat-earth and geo-centrism, the idea that the sun orbits the earth. For over 1000 years, both of these theories were settled fact, until they were shown to be wrong. Advocates had their Scriptures to justify the position which they strengthened until they collapsed, like loading bricks into a kid's Radio Flyer wagon until the wheels fall off. Some tried to drag the thing anyway. It happens that when a bad theology falls apart critics say, "See, that proves the Bible is wrong!" No, the eisegetical interpretation proved wrong, not the Bible. Same for the flat-earth theory. By the way, where did these theories come from in the first place? Simply put, the pagans. They were absorbed into Church thinking, became theology, then dogma. Unfortunately, this pattern was and is repeated regularly. How do you think the "traditions of man that make ineffective the word of God," (Mk 7:13) get started? One of the biggest in the Church today is the belief in millions of years. Some get very dogmatic in defending their belief in millions of years and make a variety of justifications. By the way, what is the eisegetical presupposition for millions of years? The claim that science is a higher interpretive authority than the Bible itself. See ch 4, "Origins."

The single largest reason young people give for leaving the faith, 60-80% within two years after high school graduation, is unanswered or poorly answered questions. The age of the earth is the single largest poorly answered question. Apparently, young people can read the Scripture better than the adults can twist it. (*Already Gone* by Ken Ham). A red-flag warning should always go up when someone says passages don't mean what they plainly say. It doesn't automatically mean they are wrong but be more careful and attentive.

The Bible is the ultimate written authority on earth. As such, it is the Christian's presuppositional, self-referential starting point. The only higher authority is God Himself, and He cannot contradict His Word. Over time we develop an understanding of biblical teachings for which we would not, indeed should not, compromise. We would "take a bullet" rather than deny them. Then there are others that are just interesting, and a diverse range in between. We should not allow division to occur over interesting doctrines. There aren't that many doctrines for which I would die, but in the beginning, I knew I could "bet my life" on God's Word. Others have different sets.

The Bible is 66 books, 39 Old Testament (OT) and 27 New Testament (NT). No more, no less. There were 40 authors from all walks of life written over 1,400 years and comport or agree with remarkable harmony. With a couple of exceptions, the OT was written by prophets, and the NT was written by apostles.

Most Bibles divide between Malachi, the last book of the OT and Matthew, the first book of the NT. But technically the dividing line between the OT and the NT is the cross. So, the NT starts on resurrection day and is found in Matt 27-28, Mark 15-16, Luke 23-24 and John 20-21. Just remember, technically, only the last two chapters of each of the Gospels is in the NT. Before that Jesus taught as a Jewish rabbi to the Jews, as under the Mosaic law (Gal 4:4), to those under the Mosaic law. The death, burial and resurrection of Jesus the Christ changed everything! It inaugurated the "new covenant in My blood."

Some may ask, "How do we know there should be exactly 66 books of the Bible?" Many have written on why these particular books, so I will leave you in their capable hands. One great book is *Evidence That Demands a Verdict* by Josh McDowell, "Bible" section. More in the bibliography.

If you will indulge me in some mental candy, I think there are two hints. By the way, I like the expression "I wouldn't take a bullet for this." But it is interesting.

1. Observe that the book of Isaiah was providentially divided into 66 chapters. In the Bible there are 39 OT books and 27 NT books, so what is Isaiah chapter 40 about? The ministry of John the Baptist was the beginning of shift from the OT to the NT.

Isaiah 40:1-5

1 “Comfort, yes, comfort My people!” Says your God. 2 “Speak comfort to Jerusalem, and cry out to her, that her warfare is ended, that her iniquity is pardoned; For she has received from Yahweh’s hand Double for all her sins.” 3 The voice of one crying in the wilderness: “Prepare the way of Yahweh; Make straight in the desert A highway for our God. 4 Every valley shall be exalted, and every mountain and hill brought low; The crooked places shall be made straight and the rough places smooth; 5 The glory of Yahweh shall be revealed, and all flesh shall see it together; For the mouth of Yahweh has spoken.”
(Matt 3:3, Mark 1:2-3, Luke 3:4-5)

2. This one is more concrete. It is about the menorah, the lampstand in the tabernacle of Moses.

Psalms 119:89, 105

89 Forever, O LORD, Your word is settled in heaven.

105 Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path.

Exodus 25:31-40

31 “You shall also make a lampstand of pure gold; the lampstand shall be of hammered work. Its shaft, its branches, its bowls, its ornamental knobs, and flowers shall be of one piece. 32 And six branches shall come out of its sides: three branches of the lampstand out of one side, and three branches of the lampstand out of the other side. 33 Three bowls shall be made like almond blossoms on one branch, with an ornamental knob and a flower, and three bowls made like almond blossoms on the other branch, with an ornamental knob and a flower—and so for the six branches that come out of the lampstand. 34 On the lampstand itself four bowls shall be made like almond blossoms, each with its ornamental knob and flower. 35 And there shall be a knob under the first two branches of the same, a knob under the second two branches of the same, and a knob under the third two branches of the same, according to the six branches that extend from the lampstand. 36 Their knobs and their branches shall be of one piece; all of it shall be one hammered piece of pure gold. 37 You shall make seven lamps for it, and they shall arrange its lamps so that they give light in front of it. 38 And its wick-trimmers and their trays shall be of pure gold. 39 It shall be made of a talent of pure gold, with all these utensils. 40 And see to it that you make them according to the pattern which was shown you on the mountain.

The lampstand was to be made from a single piece of gold beaten into its finished shape, shown to Moses on the mountain. There were seven lamps: a central shaft and six branches, three on each side of the central shaft. The shaft and branches were to be made of sets of almonds, buds, and flowers. The branches each had three sets and the central shaft had four sets. So, each branch had three sets of three parts or nine parts per branch. The central shaft had four sets of three parts or twelve parts. Bringing it all together: six branches with nine parts each is 54 parts, plus twelve parts from the central shaft is a grand total of 66 parts. 66 books of the Bible, no more, no less. “Your word is a lamp unto my feet!” Interesting.

B. Everybody starts somewhere – The Myth of Neutrality

When you open the Bible, you are not coming as a blank slate, even if you have no Bible knowledge. You will read things that will cut across your previously held ideas. How do you handle those moments? My plan is to give you some basic tools to process new, even antithetical information. In the same way you would let a person “express themselves” in conversation, you will let the Bible express itself. Remember, the Bible has its own worldview, it expresses reality in its own way. You will learn how to understand the Bible on its own terms. Often people will reject Scripture because of the implications. They know that if they believe what is plainly written it will set them against their previous beliefs,

family, job, and culture. They cannot accept the opposition that will come (Mat 13:20-21). For example, in many Islamic societies becoming a Christian is a crime, resulting in loss of family, job, even life. Even potential loss of approval or friends is too much for some people. Jesus said to “count the cost” of following the truth. To me, the truth is everything. As we saw before, there is much hostility toward the truth. You will often be brought to the place of having to make a choice: Are you going to believe God or someone else. This was Eve’s choice.

I am regularly surprised at how often the Scripture gets misquoted. Sometimes it appears intentional. Being wrong is one thing. Being correctable is another. There is more about “neutrality” in chapter 2, “Apologetics.” But simply, nobody is neutral, and everyone starts somewhere.

Even in places where the name of Jesus has never been heard, and there are many, the people already have developed belief systems about where the world came from, where they came from, and that there are unseen forces at work. It is the job of the missionary to give the right answers about all these things and ultimately demonstrate the truth of the Gospel. As the Apostle Paul said:

1 Corinthians 2:3-5

3 I was with you in weakness, in fear, and in much trembling. 4 And my speech and my preaching were not with persuasive words of human wisdom, but in **demonstration of the Spirit and of power**, 5 **that your faith should not be in the wisdom of men but in the power of God.**

C. Here are some basic definitions.

Everybody has the following:

1. Presuppositions – Most basic or fundamental beliefs, held religiously, believed by faith in some authority, not verifiable by natural science. Everyone has some, even if not thought out. The Bible is the Christian’s presupposition.
2. Faith – Trust in an authority, and belief that is put into action, confidence, allows us to touch the past and the future. Everyone lives by some faith. It is impossible to live otherwise.
3. Religion – The day-by-day outworking of one’s faith.
4. Theology – A belief system that outlines religion.
5. Philosophy – Who are we, how do we fit in and why? Tries to answer the big questions, serves religion. All religions, including atheism, have an attendant philosophy.
6. Politics – the application of theology onto the social order and governance. The state is the ultimate organized religion. All law is someone’s moral philosophy being imposed on everyone else.
7. Eschatology – The view or expectation of the future that effects how we live in the present.
8. Worldview – A network of presuppositions in the light of which all experience is inter-related and interpreted. Overall frames of reference through which “reality” is viewed and new information is integrated; Worldviews give over-all meaning to life and identity and are mutually exclusive and irreconcilably different. Within worldviews are smaller Continent Views. Continent views are to a worldview as denominations are to a world religion.

D. Four Basic Rules of Reason

These four basic rules, which allow for the growth of human knowledge, are regularly attacked. We are after the truth of what God is trying to tell us in His Word. We may be sifting through centuries of beliefs that actually interfere with seeing the truth. These ground rules provide a starting point and insight into God’s way of thinking. Violation of these rules leads to illogical, irrational, and absurd ideas. The world is full of such nonsense, and some even try to call it faith.

From R. C. Sproul's, *Classical Apologetics*

a) Law of Non-Contradiction

The law of non-contradiction is the most basic building block of logic and, therefore, rational thought. Everything else flows from this. It says that a thing cannot be its opposite in the same way at the same time. $A = \sim A$ ($A = \text{not } A$) is a rational impossibility. "My car is in the garage and my car is not in the garage" is a physical impossibility. This law is at the heart of all truthful, rational thinking.

Its attempted usage in life can be construed as lying, deceit, or fraud in saying that something is so when it is not or something is not so when it is.

Aristotle put it this way:

"To say of what is that it is not, or of what is not that it is, is false, while to say of what is that it is, and of what is not that it is not, is true."

Exodus 20:16

Thou shalt not bear false witness...

b) Law of Causality

The law of causality is an extension of the law of non-contradiction and has been used as an argument for the existence of God going back millennia. God is the First Cause or Prime Mover. Atheist philosopher Bertrand Russell "believed in God" until he read John Stuart Mill who said, "Everything must have a cause. So, God must have a cause." Russell died believing this common but false definition of the law of causality.

The true definition is that "every effect must have a sufficient, antecedent cause." A related definition says that "anything that comes into existence must have a cause." If a new disease manifests or a building collapses, a "cause" is sought to explain the event. Causal thinking is at the heart of all natural science and the scientific method, at least the "observable, testable, repeatable" kind of "how things work" science.

c) Basic Reliability of Sense Perception and Language

It is true that our senses do not have perfect perceptions of reality. That is why we have machines to heighten and extend our senses.

There persists, in this day, an idea that if something is not 100% it should be discarded. If you can be deceived by your senses (like an optical illusion), then your senses can't be trusted to any degree. It is a radical "all or nothing" position. You could imagine the chaos if people actually lived like that. But they can't, at least not for very long. Their purpose is to shred truth, not advance truth and understanding.

It is true that language changes with time. When you read the King James Bible, or Shakespeare, you are reading the English language of 400 years ago. It has changed, but it is still understandable.

d) Analogical Use of Language

As each of the above laws were philosophically broken-down, language became the next victim. They would say that like our senses, language, because it changes, is unreliable. As a means to express human thoughts, it is useless. I always find it amusing to hear someone, that believes this, using language to say that language is meaningless, and then expect you to know what they mean by what they say. This is a particularly diabolical attack. If language can be destroyed in the minds of people, then the Scripture breaks down because the words are meaningless. Which is the point: to destroy the meaningfulness of the Scripture and the Gospel.

Thomas Aquinas divided up language like this:

- a. Univocal – a single meaning: "The door is locked."
- b. Equivocal – multiple meanings: "That is really cool!"

- c. Analogical – scaled or proportional meaning: good dog, good man, good God

Note that language is being used in this book and your eyes are perceiving the text on the page and you are basically, but maybe not perfectly, understanding what you read. Communication is basically reliable.

E. AICP Test – The Test for Knowledge Claims

More details in chapter 2, “Apologetics.”

1. **Arbitrary** – mere opinion, no particular reason, ignorant or prejudicial conjecture, relativism
“Monks probably wrote the New Testament in the Middle Ages.” A supposedly rational person actually made this assertion. They thought they sounded brilliant, but it was a statement of ignorant, maybe prejudicial conjecture. They didn’t bother to do any research but thought their mere opinion had value. Many today, especially college students, think that just because something is their opinion, it has value. Hmmm, no, it doesn’t. “They are free to speak rubbish; and we are free to point out that it is rubbish” (David Berlinski).
So, which came first...the NT or the monk?
2. **Inconsistency** – lacks comportsment (agreement), compatibility, conceptual coherence, ideas don’t hang together, conflicting ideas.
3. **Consequences** – logical conclusion, implications. There is a sociology to theology.
4. **Preconditions of intelligibility** – Meaningfulness, Resources for meaning and understanding
 $e = mc^2$ requires different resources than $2 + 2 = 4$
Foot and Mouth – Does one’s speech agree with the foundation being stood on?

Again, it is the work of the Holy Spirit to bring genuine enlightenment to the mind. Our job is to show the truth of things, not endless speculations on the possible meanings of some passage. The truth is one. Getting at it may take some effort, but it is a treasure of great value. Don’t settle for fool’s gold or rhinestones!

Matthew 7:28-29

28 And so it was, when Jesus had ended these sayings, that the people were astonished at His teaching, 29 for He taught them as one having authority, and not as the scribes.

Facts (and Bible words and verses) are not self-interpreting, not stand-alone. They must have an environment, a context.

The overall point here is that there are a variety of competing voices trying to get our attention and occupy our thinking. Some are tenacious in their ability to block what your eyes see, and ears hear. These tools will help you filter out the noise and get a clear signal. Neutrality is a myth, and recognizing our biases helps us see with less distraction. We want to know, as much as possible, what was written for our learning. “You can’t stop the signal, Mal.”

3. The Difference Between the Old and New Testaments

The division between the Old and New Testaments runs much deeper than just the division in a book. Why is that division there in the first place?

The simple answer is the cross. It is the death, burial and resurrection of Jesus Christ that separates the Old from the New. Technically The majority of the content of each of the Gospels resides in the Old Testament period. The post-crucifixion period occupies the last two chapters of each of the Gospels. The majority of Jesus’s teaching was as an orthodox Jewish rabbi to Jews, not Gentiles.

There is nothing in the OT that can teach you how to be a Christian, how to follow Christ. There are hints of something better coming (Jer 34:31), but nothing that tells you how to live it.

See Appendix A, *The Law of Bondage*, Michael P. Hays.

Galatians 4:4

But when the fullness of the time had come, God sent forth His Son, born of a woman, born under the law

Matthew 15:24

But [Jesus] answered and said, “I was not sent except to the lost sheep of the house of Israel.”

Romans 1:16

For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ, for it is the power of God to salvation for everyone who believes, for **the Jew first** and also for the Greek.

Romans 2:6-11

6 who will render to each one according to his deeds: 7 eternal life to those who by patient continuance in doing good seek for glory, honor, and immortality; 8 but to those who are self-seeking and do not obey the truth, but obey unrighteousness—indignation and wrath, 9 tribulation and anguish, on every soul of man who does evil, of **the Jew first** and also of the Greek; 10 but glory, honor, and peace to everyone who works what is good, to **the Jew first** and also to the Greek. 11 For there is no partiality with God.

OT	NT	
A. Ends with curse	Ends with Amen.	Mal 4:6, Rev 22:21
B. Under law	Under grace	
C. Servant	Son	
D. Death	Life	
E. Life in the flesh	Life in the Spirit	
F. In stone	In the heart	Dt 4:13-14, Ez 36:26, 2 Cor 3:7

4. General Guidelines:

A. A Practical on Note Taking – Very Basic

500 years ago, the grid of chapters and verses was added to the Bible. This made an effective way to quickly locate any passage in the Scripture. Being man-made it is not a perfect system, but it is a good one. We sometimes scratch our heads as to why various divisions were made. For example, Genesis 2:1-3 really belongs at the end of chapter 1 because it is about the 7th day and should go with the other 6 days. Then verse 4 starts a completely different thought. As noted above in Isaiah, the divisions seem providential. Chapter endings and beginnings can be confusing when it breaks a thought. Our minds want to conclude the thought at the end of the chapter, but it may actually continue into the next chapter. This has some theological implications. Sometimes you will also see the word “Therefore” used at the beginning of a chapter. It is a conclusion from the previous chapter. That means you need to know what the previous chapter says that led to the conclusion.

Romans 5:1

Therefore, having been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ

As you listen or read, you may want to write the references for further study. There are various forms of shorthand that you will see. The key is to make your own such that you can read your own writing. In

this book I am generally spelling out the name of the book of the Bible for whole stand-alone verses and shorthand book names for verse references that don't include the text. Mostly, that is for newer people, so they don't have to guess too much at the reference I am making. Below is an actual example of my shorthand:

Ps 2, 24:1, 1Tm 1:7, 6:5, Rev 1:5

Here is how to decipher the references. After a while, you don't even think about it.

Ps 2 is Psalm chapter 2 (all of it), then Psalm chapter 24, verse 1

1Tm 1:7 is 1 Timothy chapter 1, verse 7. Then 1 Timothy chapter 6, verse 5

Rev 1:5 is Revelation chapter 1, verse 5

Piece of cake!

When you are taking notes (depending on your memory), it is generally more helpful to write the numbers first then the book name: 24:1 becomes Ps 24:1. Ps is for what book? Psalms. If multiple references are coming from the same book there is no need to rewrite the book name.

In writing book names, use two to four characters for the book name. Some are similar, like Judges and Jude, Philipians and Philemon. Remember the whole point is to have a methodology so you can locate a reference later from your notes. This is not complicated.

B. Sources

1. **Biblical** – Of or from the biblical record itself. We could include study tools, like Strong's, Naves, and interlinears, lexicons, and other language tools into this category.

Tiers of understanding:

- a. "It is written..." – The simple reading of the text. What does it actually say? Always start here!
For some people it is very difficult to repeat what, exactly, the passage says without commentary, or modification based on their training. I have found this to be a great obstacle to accurate biblical understanding.
 - b. Conclusions derived from "It is written..." such as theologies, like eschatology, trinity, baptism, and communion.
 - c. Applications derived from the conclusions. Baptizing babies or not, apologetics, weddings, governance.
 - d. "Scriptural" – Ideas that are solidly and clearly based on chapters and verses, directly and in principle. It is easy to claim something is Scriptural with little support, like one verse.
 - e. "Non-Scriptural" – Ideas that have little or no verses or authority. None or one verse theology.
2. **Extra-Biblical** – Writings related to the Bible, like commentaries, the Shepherd of Hermes and Apocrypha. Writings not included in the Bible, like Enoch, Jasher, and Laodicea. Early church fathers like Clement, historians like Eusebius, even frauds like the Gospels of Thomas or Judas and some so-called *The Lost Books of the Bible*. These can inform or enhance biblical understanding but **never** lead it. Any idea must naturally fit existing scripture. Sometimes historical gaps are filled in, like 1Enoch.

A note on Extra-Biblical writings mentioned in the Bible. The biblical writers had a knowledge base much larger than the average Bible reader today and that informed their biblical authorship. These can help broaden your understanding. Books like Enoch, Jasher and Laodicea are mentioned in Scripture (Jude 1:14, 1Pt 3, 2Sm 1:18, Col 4:16, etc).

They wrote about things that were common knowledge to first century readers but are completely foreign to readers today. For instance, who were the "spirits in prison" referred to in 1Pt 3:19-20, 2Pt 2:4 and why were they there? Jude actually quotes 1 Enoch in 1:6, 14. There are many references to ideas found nowhere else in the Scripture, such as the eternal fire was prepared for the devil and his angels (Mt 25:41). Paul quotes some in Acts 17. Some of these inform a proper biblical eschatology and outworking of the Gospel, (i.e., redemption). A good author on this subject is Michael Heiser. The book *Reversing Hermon* by Michael Heiser has an Appendix 4, which lists more than 150

allusions (60 from 1 Enoch alone), from over 20 writings available in the first century, that are found in the New Testament.

Use caution! There is always a subtle lure to knowledge in the shadows, to know something everyone else has missed. If you don't know Scripture, why are you messing with questionable writings anyway?

Some try to say teachings have been removed like reincarnation or Jesus had a wife. Impossible!

Why? Because no one ever had complete control over the abundance of copies that exist. I would ask the person saying this to produce even one manuscript to prove their point. No one ever has, because such manuscripts don't exist!

3. **Non-Biblical** – Non-Christian writings like Roman and other historical records and documents. Historians, like Tacitus and Josephus. This includes studies into other religions. Also, there are some smart, insightful people whose observations about the world are valuable. Even sceptics can be of value in getting us to look more closely at what we think by pointing out flaws, or what they think are flaws. It has been said that heresy help to expose weak theology. Again, these can inform or support biblical understanding, but never lead it.

C. The Book of History (Whose-Story?)

When it comes to the ultimate context we are talking about history. The Bible is not a book of doctrines or rules or morals or even religion. It is a book of history and the overarching Narrative of history. It is the history of the Creator and His interactions with individuals, families, and nations. It is the history of God's interactions with those that love Him, those that hate Him, and those that love other things more. From Genesis to Revelation, the focus is on people and their activities. People, the ultimate expression of God's love, are why the universe exists! The Old Testament revolves around one family line (Deut 32:9), Israel. The New Testament revolves around a new family line, Christ's. But in Christ, we are all brothers and sisters of the King (Gal 3:28-29). Note the continuity. God has no grandchildren. There are only two branches of the family, two races in the earth: the dead and the living. Dead in Adam, alive in Christ. Jesus said, "I have come that you might have life" (Jn 10:10). That means you didn't have it before. All human beings start out as part of God's estranged family (Gen 11, Dt 32:8, 2Cor 5:19-20). The "chosen people" are universalized to all peoples, nations and languages (Isa 66:18-20, Act 10:35, Rev 5:9-10, 7:9), and the "promised land" is globalized to the whole earth (Ps 24:1, Isa 6:3)

Any interpretation must fit the continuity of the historical big picture. It is easy to get lost in the woods of words. Many get preoccupied with meanings of words and doctrine at the expense of the Narrative. Like a forest ranger absorbed in examining a bug on the bark of a tree and not noticing the entire forest is on fire! The words are important; doctrine is important. But of more importance is their proper place within the Narrative of history. The form was created to serve God and man, not the other way around. The Bible is not the starting point, God is, always the ultimate Presupposition. Nevertheless, the Bible is meant to be understood by common people. It was this understanding that led to the radical idea that the Bible should be translated into the common languages of the people. Yes, the professionals, translators and theologians can make things more complicated but are necessary for fuller understanding. There are some people whose calling and passion is to dig around in ancient languages to show how amazing the Scriptures really are. It takes time to learn how to put the pieces together. Most basically, the intent of the Chief Author is you be able to understand His book. After all, it is the standard by which all other standards are measured. As you grow you will be able to discern increasingly subtle meanings. Remember, when some says, "The Bible is all we need." The response should be, "To do what?" Like the system of checks and balances in the American government a biblically literate congregation is a necessary check on the ministry (1Tm 5:17-20).

2 Timothy 3:16-17

16 All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness, 17 that the man of God may be complete, thoroughly equipped for every good work.

2 Peter 1:20-21

20 Knowing this first, that no prophecy of Scripture is of any private interpretation, 21 for prophecy never came by the will of man, but holy men of God spoke as they were moved by the Holy Spirit.

1 Corinthians 10:11

Now all these things happened to them as examples, and they were written for our admonition, upon whom the ends of the ages have come.

Luke 24:25-27

25 Then He said to them, “O foolish ones, and slow of heart to believe in all that the prophets have spoken! 26 Ought not the Christ to have suffered these things and to enter into His glory?” 27 And beginning at Moses and all the Prophets, He expounded to them in all the Scriptures the things concerning Himself.

Remember what I wrote above about Scripture being self-referential, self-interpreting.

D. Recognize context, audience, purpose, and use of time and space.

Combining all the discussion concerning context above, with some examples:

- a. The first thing, for any passage, is to note the context. Are there layers of context?
 - i. Temporal context: When was it written?
 - ii. Historical context: How does it fit into the Divine narrative?
 - iii. Cultural context: Jewish, Roman, Greek, all the above.
 - iv. Audience context: To whom was it written? Who is the listening audience?
Mat 23:36, 24:3
 - v. Conditional context: Why was it written?
- b. Is there any indication of a location? The temple, a mountainside, a city
Mat 24:1
- c. Are there any time or timing indicators? Sequence of events?
1 Cor 11:23, 1 Thes 4:13-18

E. The Bible is its own best interpreter.

- a. You cannot know what the Bible means if you do not know what the Bible says.
- b. Allow the Bible to be the guide; always come back here.
- c. Read it as though you were visiting the author and he just handed you the first copy, even if you have read it a dozen times. This keeps your eyes and mind fresh.
- d. Better translations will give clues as to certain modifications made by the translators.

Notice the parentheses in the verse below. These often started out as notes in the margins of ancient manuscripts but were later added to the body of the text, sometimes for clarity. See also Jn 5:4.

Genesis 18:10

And He said, “I will certainly return to you according to the time of life, and behold, Sarah your wife shall have a son.” (Sarah was listening in the tent door which was behind him.)

Similarly, italicized words (*a child*) are not part of the original text but added for clarification. This is more subjective in that such clarifications are the opinions of the translator and may be subject to translational bias. It doesn't mean it is wrong, but pay closer attention.

Genesis 18:13

And Yahweh said to Abraham, “Why did Sarah laugh, saying, ‘Shall I surely bear *a child*, since I am old?’

- e. “The Bible is its own best interpreter” should be the foundational principle of all Biblical studies. But there are times, very few times, when we have to look outside of Scripture for clarity and understanding. For example: the origin of demons, gaps in the historical narrative. It is the failure to understand these instances that have led to some bad theology. Please understand, these effect no major Christian doctrine, but have been used by critics to weaken or destroy the faith of poorly prepared Believers. I want you prepared to “...having done all, stand,” (Eph 6:13). It is still the truth that sets people free, not twisted theology. We are not allowed to interpret scripture as though it fell out of the sky in modern times. It was not written to us but preserved for us. There are more than one hundred references to material outside of Scripture. So, it is sometimes difficult to understand what the author knew, and was thinking, when he wrote some of the more obscure passages. By the way, if a passage looks strange, it is probably one of those. The author expected that his audience would understand completely because they shared the same worldview. They also shared the same dictionary. Words today often mean something different, but that knowledge is available. Book writing, and reading, was more common than you might expect. The people of the first century were not ‘moderns’ like us, neither were they ignorant illiterates. The first apostles are often portrayed as ignorant fisherman. This is simply not true. Any one not having the elite education of the Pharisees were considered “unlearned and ignorant,” (Acts 4:13). But the people had a reasonable, general education and knew about stuff which is foreign to us, as demonstrated in their writings. So, the big question we want to know is, what did the first century readers (mostly Jews) know and understand about the scriptures? Some of those difficulties will be covered in the next section.

F. A valuable skill to develop

When you read, or listen, practice “hearing” what the author is trying to say. If Scripture can mean whatever you want it to mean, then it means nothing at all. There may be more than one of the ideas below in operation at the same time.

- a. Try to recognize underlying presuppositions, assumptions, and biases. Both yours and in the readings.
- b. Are opinions being projected in to or drawn out of the Bible? Are they valid?
 - i. Eisegesis – Reading into a text ideas that aren't there. Ideas foreign to Scripture drive the interpretation, like millions of years.
 - ii. Exegesis – Bring out from a text ideas that are embedded within the text. Scripture itself drives the interpretation. “It is written...” You see the word “exit”. Scripture is its own best interpreter.
- c. Are ideas original or derived? “It is written...” or “If this... then that...”

- d. Look for language style:
- i. Historic – This is describing people, places, events,
 - ii. Poetic – Some like Psalms, Song of Solomon, imaginative imagery. Not generally suitable for doctrine or theology.
 - iii. Prophetic – Describing events in the future, generally straightforward.
 - iv. Prophetic Judgmental – Often, there is symbolic language and stylistic imagery.
 - v. Symbolic – One object stands for another object. Also, numbers. Very common in prophetic language. Raging seas, many waters are symbolic of disturbance among the masses of people (Rev 17:15, Luke 21:25). Sun, moon, and stars are governing authorities (Gen 37:9), and when darkened is judgment (Ezek 32:7, Isa 13:10, Micah 3:6). There are whole books dedicated to biblical Symbology and Numerology. Always remember, every symbol in the Bible is defined somewhere in the Bible. Symbols are not arbitrary, subject to random, external definition. To completely understand a symbol, you should examine every verse in the Bible using that symbol, then come to a conclusion. Use this same procedure for studying any topic you want to understand. Then you can truly say, “The Bible says...” with authority.
- e. Proof Texting – This is when someone pulls out a verse or two to prove their point and claim “the Bible says.” There is nothing inherently wrong with this. It is quite common that a single verse is used to illustrate a larger, biblically solid idea. The problem arises when a single verse, usually out of context or hyper-literal (see below) is used to justify a weak or superficial idea and the verse is claimed to prove the point. Flat-earthers have some of these. See “Avoid Single Verse Theology” below.
- f. Literalism
- i. Literal – Literally means “according to the literary style.” Literal is relative to the type of literature being evaluated. Is it historical, poetry, prophecy, prophetic judgmental (apocalyptic), parable, etc.? Each style has its own flavor of literal. Normally literal is set against symbolic.
 - ii. Selectively-literal – “Literalness” is applied in an arbitrary manner, depending on the requirements of the system. There is no consistency as to when, where or why something should be literal rather than symbolic. This is probably the most (mis)used application of literal.
 - iii. Hyper-literal - There are those that say the Book of Revelation is literally true. To be consistent, that means that Jesus has a sword coming out of His mouth and His feet and eyes are on fire. It also means that there are various kinds of multi-headed monsters and stars that fall to earth. Not exactly. When confronted with such inconsistencies, they would then morph into selectively-literalists. This is not just prophetically, but other areas as well.
- Here are some other examples:
- John 2:1-11 – water into wine. Did you know the passage doesn’t explicitly say Jesus made water into wine? So, it must not have been Jesus that made the water into wine. “Jesus would never make wine.” An actual church member told me this. He is very anti-alcohol, and it drives his interpretation of events like the Wedding at Cana. Also, there is no place that explicitly says Jesus drank wine. If wine was so grievous, why would Jesus serve it and instruct His disciples to drink it at the last supper? (Matt 26:27).
Question: What is the logical connection between Jesus and the wine? (Jn 4:46)
 - Matt 19:21 – To the rich young ruler, Jesus said, “If you want to be perfect, go, sell what you have and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; and come, follow Me.” The question here is, “Was Jesus’s remedy only for the rich, young ruler, or was He talking to every potential disciple that would want to follow Him?” There are those, through the centuries, that said it is necessary for every believer that

genuinely wanted to follow Jesus to give up all their stuff. This was the price of discipleship. This is the basis of the Franciscan (St. Francis of Assisi) Order, similar to selling your property and giving the money to the apostles (Acts 4:34).

- Matt 6:19 Jesus says, “Do not lay up for yourselves treasures on earth.” The average American has more treasure than the vast majority of people in Jesus’s day. Does that mean they should get rid of it? What defines treasure? Should these passages be considered **requirements** (How literal?) for following Jesus, or is it voluntary? No opinions allowed. Show from the Scripture and the Rules of Reason and the AICP Test why. A clue: Acts 2:46
 - Daniel 4:10-11 “These were the visions of my head while on my bed: I was looking, and behold, a tree in the midst of the earth, and its height was great. 11 The tree grew and became strong; Its height reached to the heavens, and it could be seen to the ends of all the earth.” This verse is used hyperliterally to ‘prove’ a flat earth. How can you see a single tree from everywhere on the earth? Only if it is flat. What is wrong with this? See also Ecc 1:5 sunrise/sunset.
- g. Figures of Speech – used in all languages.
- i. Simile – The Kingdom is *like*... Matt 13, 18
 - ii. Metaphor – Metals, stone, grain in Dan 2, Matt 21:42-44, Prov 10:11.
 - iii. Allegory – Gal 4:21-26
 - iv. Parable – Matt 13, 18, 21-22, 25, Luke 19
 - v. Superlative – 2Chr 36:23, Col 1:23, Acts 19:27, Dan 4:22
 - vi. Hyperbole – Gen 13:16, 22:17, 26:4, Dt 10:22, Heb 11:12
 - vii. Expression – 2Sm 23:4, Matt 5:45, Isa 11:12, Rev 20:8, sunrise, 4 corners
Expressions can spill over into hyper-literalism and cause problems.
- h. Traditions of men
- i. Matt 12:1-2, 15:6
- i. Spiritualizing the natural, Naturalizing the spiritual
There has been a great effort to naturalize supernatural events, such as the Red Sea crossing, Moses and the burning bush, even Jesus walking on water.
- i. Matt 24:29, Rev 6:13
- j. Humanizing the spiritual
A corollary to spiritualizing the natural, supernatural beings are naturalized or made into human beings. Gen 6:1, Ps 82
- k. Globalizing the local, Localizing the global
- i. “The whole world” (Luke 2:1, Matt 24:14)
- l. Absolutizing, extremizing general things
- i. Mark 16:16, see below
- m. Generalizing the unique: Only Jesus died for the sins of the world, once for all, a single event does not constitute a pattern (2Chr 20).

G. Do you have the whole story?

- a. Avoid “single verse” theology or conclusions. There are some ideas that appear to contradict one another. This is a red-flag warning area, pay attention. Having a verse that is representative of a biblical idea is not the same as building an idea from a single verse, or even a phrase. I will let you discover, from Scripture, what is wrong with these examples. You will encounter many more as you hear various people talk. As a reminder, this is one of the primary reasons there are 3000 denomination and 10,000 cults. Don’t get stuck!
- i. Mark 16:16 – “He who believes and is baptized will be saved” is such an example.
There are those that believe, because of this verse, that a person is NOT saved until

- they are baptized. If they accepted Jesus and got killed on their way to be baptized, they would go to hell. They are that strict! I had this actual conversation with protesters outside a Billy Graham crusade. They said he was false because he wasn't telling the new converts they must be baptized to be saved.
- ii. Revelation 3:5 – “And I will not blot out his name from the Book of Life” is another example. These people believe that EVERYONE is in the Book of Life and then do something bad and get blotted out. The opposite is true, Matt 7:13-14, John 3:5, 17-21, Rom 1:18-21
 - iii. Job 1:21 – “Yahweh gives, and Yahweh takes away” This verse is extensively used to blame God for losses in life. Certainly, we should maintain a grateful attitude no matter what happens in life (1Th 5:18). But the first part is hardly ever quoted when someone is advanced or blessed. By the way, much bad theology comes out of Job.
 - iv. Exodus 20:13: “Thou shalt not kill.” I will let you consider the problem of this bad translation which has been used as an argument against capital punishment, and for the promotion of vegetarianism.
- b. Avoid the “all or nothing” syndrome, this includes false perfectionism. This is an extremist, usually judgmental position. I picked up someone to go to church and he said, “The first time I hear that preacher say something wrong, I’m not going back.” A preacher once told me God can’t use a person with faulty theology. Nonsense. Nobody has ever had a fault-free theology, especially growing believers. Everyone comes to Christ loaded with goofy ideas about reality. Some are life-long. Try to employ the “grocery shopping” method. Take what you can use and leave the rest. You can learn something from everybody.
- Only God is perfect, with comprehensive knowledge and understanding. Like God, be merciful and gracious to faulty people, even ministers. You might need the favor returned someday. Another area to avoid is “false perfectionism.” For example, some Muslims will say that any differences in Bible manuscripts are proof that the Bible is not God’s book, because if it were, there would be no differences of any kind. Every difference is an error, so the Bible is full of errors. They have been (erroneously) told the Quran is such a book, and therefore superior to the Bible. They don’t know, or ignore, their own history. Yes, there are many differences, and none effect ANY significant doctrine. Is it 616 or 666 (Rev 13:14)? Both exist and the two earliest manuscripts say 616. So, some would say, that proves the virgin birth was added to the Bible. Raving madness! If someone says something absurd like this, ask that they show you such a “virgin birth-less” manuscript. We can have every confidence that what we have is reliable. I would suggest looking up the debate on the reliability of the New Testament by James White.
- c. Don’t jump to premature conclusions. Take the necessary time to develop a complete picture.
 - d. Has anything been left out? How do you know what you don’t know? There is something immensely satisfying about working through a problem to a proper solution.
 - e. Don’t oversimplify: Avoid the white-flour, white-sugar syndrome. An example would be: “Grace is unmerited favor.” That is true, but a better definition is “Grace is the power of God to accomplish the will of God.” The first has been stripped of its vital nutrients.
 - f. Don’t complicate: Truth is essentially uncomplicated. Its outworking is often not.
 - g. Truth is like a road with a ditch on each side: neglect and excess. Balance is a deception. It is much better to be stable than balanced. Some people go from ditch to ditch to ditch, like shoelaces. Or vertically, spiritual yo-yos, up and down and up and down. This is generally cured with maturity.

H. As you listen to anyone teaching from the Bible (or the news) listen for:

- a. Distortion – Make something other than it really is. All that follows are examples of distortion.

- b. Exaggeration – Make something bigger than it really is, imaginatively adding to the story.
- c. Minimization – Make something smaller than it really is.
- d. Misquoting – Altering a quote, usually to fit a story.
- e. Misrepresentation – Intentional or unintentional. Ignorantly repeating a false claim.
- f. Neglect – Ignore or overlook necessary details.
- g. Selective Details – A story can be adjusted by selecting the facts to include and exclude.

I. What if you discover your favorite preacher/group/denomination is wrong on some issue?

- a. Keep in mind there are 3000 denominations and 10,000 cults. Divergent ideas abound. It is only a matter of time until you find some. One can be sincerely wrong. Being correctable is a virtue.
- b. Pray.
- c. Have patience.
- d. Is the issue important enough to leave over? There are a few pillars of Christianity that are non-negotiable, and most Christian groups have a broad platform of agreement. Besides having these pillars in place, I want to know their vision. What will they be doing 5, 10, 25, 50, 100 years from now? Can we go the distance, together?
- e. If God called you there, then He knew about the problem before you did. Are you part of the solution? Most preachers have heard endless criticisms over their ministry. Be respectful.

Above all, we are to be people of truth in a world full of distortion and compromise. By doing this we honor God and gain the respect of honest people looking for the straight story. They might not like our truth, but they know it's real and can trust us. There is no trust without truth. By the way, in human relationships, love will not last long in an environment lacking truth or trust.

5. Heresies, Apostasy, and Cults

A heresy is a teaching that forces a recalculation of more than a few doctrinal or theological categories in the network of systematic theology. If the heresy is considered true, then other teachings are wrong, or need adjusted to fit the new teaching. It is true that there was a massive shift between the Old and New Testaments, but what I am talking about is more arbitrary with little or no Scriptural foundation. They are generally someone's idea in search of Scriptural justification.

For example: "The Bible allows for millions of years." If this were true, how many other scriptures, or doctrines, must be modified to fit this one particular idea? Does this do damage to systematic theology?

Other examples:

- Jesus is not God.
- Jesus is not human.
- Jesus was only a mortal man used by God.
- Jesus had no real human body but was like a solid apparition.
- Jesus is gone, never to return.
- Unitarian – God is one, a denial of the trinitarian nature of God. Islam, Judaism.
- Universal Salvation – Everyone will be saved in the end.
- Cessationism – Supernatural demonstrations were only for the early Church.
- Hyper-preterism – All Bible prophecy was fulfilled by AD 70.
- Futurism – Most Bible prophecy is still awaiting future fulfilment.
- Evolutionism – All life descends from a common ancestor. Functionally atheistic.

A. What About Cults?

It should be noted that the appearance of one or more of the "marks" below does not mean that a group in question is necessarily a cult. Today there is such a wide variety of errors, or perceived errors, available that it is virtually dependent on the group doing the finger pointing. "Since they are not like us,

they are in obvious error.” The world is drowning in a shoreless and bottomless ocean of conflicting beliefs and there is a strong competition for those beliefs. It is always great when a belief is true, but the Truth often stands alone. Only the truth sets people free. Beliefs have no inherent power of their own, being little different than an opinion.

Broadly speaking there are two main cultic groupings: Christian cults and non-Christian cults. The tipping point has to do with the question: Who is Jesus? Some have the right Jesus but add extra baggage, while others have invented a man-made Jesus substitute, an anti-Christ. Only the real Jesus can deliver real salvation!

As the Kingdom of God is non-coercive, so the appearance of control and manipulation violates this principle. Honest efforts to get people “to do the right thing” can move into spiritual or intellectual bullying, or worse, manipulation. When it becomes a trait of an organization it becomes cultic. In chapter 4, “Origins,” I discuss the origins of the multiplicity of the world’s religions.

Adapted from **Know the Marks of Cults** by Dave Breese

B. Why Do Cults Grow?

1. Spiritual Immaturity

Desire the sincere milk of the word that you may grow (1Pt 2:2, 1Cor 3:1, Heb 5:12-13).

2. Love of Darkness

Cults provide a place for the God haters to feel spiritual. They hated the light and loved darkness (John 3:19-21, Rom 1:21).

3. Intellectual Pride

Pride in any form is bad but intellectual pride is an infection of the mind that has led many to feel that Christianity is "not sophisticated enough" or "too simple" for their brilliant intellects (1Cor 8:1, Matt 7:13-14), simple obedience to God and His Word (1Pt 5:6).

4. Spiritual Subversion

"Beware lest any man spoil you through philosophy and vain deceit, after the tradition of men, after the rudiments of the world, **and not after Christ**" (Col. 2:8).

C. Identifying Marks of a Cult or Cultic Practices

a) Extra-Biblical Revelation

There are those that don’t know much about the Scripture but are very concerned about all the other “lost books of the Bible” or “books that have been left out of the Bible” or the other spiritual writings available. These people are easy prey to those claiming special knowledge or access to God’s hidden knowledge.

b) A False Basis of Salvation

Most often these are “works-based” systems. Salvation is not free but must be earned in some way, and/or works are necessary to maintain one’s salvation. Works-based is the norm for almost all the world’s religions, including atheism.

c) Uncertain Hope

Often related to works-based, these systems say that a person cannot know for sure that they are saved. The cultic benefit is that it pushes these workers to work even harder so that the final balance will tip in their favor, and they will be found acceptable.

d) Presumptuous Messianic Leadership

Only Jesus Christ deserves disciples! These leaders will say that they have special intercessory pull with the Big Guy upstairs. If the workers are faithful in doing whatever the leader says they will be granted extra points.

1 Timothy 2:5

For there is one God, and one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus.

e) Doctrinal Ambiguity

Jesus said, “You have heard it said, ... but I say ...” Jesus was always taking the people back to the bedrock truth, “It is written...,” and away from the traditions that had been created by men. Deceivers do the reverse by implying that what is plainly written actually means what they say it means. Without their expert guidance, you will become deceived.

f) The Claim of "Special Discoveries"

The discovery of “lost writings” is a clue here. This can also include an update from God to reveal new truth or restored lost truth. Over time an entire movement is developed. The Quran, Book of Mormon and The Urantia Book are good examples here. They were brought forth to repair so-called damaged or lost truth. Commonly, it is claimed that the true history of the earth has been intentionally hidden, or that doctrine has been suppressed.

g) Defective Christology

Who is Jesus Christ? There is virtually no greater question. If you get the answer wrong little else matters. This question separates Christian from non-Christian cults. Christian cults have the right Jesus but something else is needed, sometimes called “Jesus Plus.”

Non-Christian cults don't even start with the true Jesus but some man-made alternative. For example:

- a. Jesus and Michael the Archangel are the same.
- b. Jesus and his brother, Lucifer, were born on the planet Kolob from the same father but different mothers.
- c. Jesus was just a man used by God.
- d. Jesus was a prophet, definitely not the Son of God since God cannot “beget”.

Can you identify which groups to which the above statements belong?

h) Segmented Biblical Attention

Sometimes a group “camps out” on a particular Bible verse, verses or saying. The camp out becomes a settlement, then turns into a stronghold (2Cor 10:3-5). The verse becomes the center of a full-blown theology. As noted above, a “single verse theology” is a big red warning flag.

This is not quite the same as some groups specializing in some area like faith, healing, deliverance, teaching, evangelism, and more. It is not God's plan that all groups be the same. This is the language of the body of Christ in which each part has its own function and not every part does the same thing. Instead of teaching one another, we imagine our group has exclusive truth and denounce all the others. This is shameful!

i) Enslaving Organizational Structure

“You belong to us!” Cults actually bring their followers into psychological and spiritual slavery. One of the primary ways is by connecting salvation to remaining faithful to the group or organization. I once knew a man that would not become a member of our church. He was otherwise faithful. When asked why he said that another organization put a curse on him to keep him from becoming a member anywhere else. Yes, we set him free, in the name of Jesus!

Another is more subtle, in that the organization always has needs that the members are expected to fill. This is an unintentional consequence in small churches. Eventually these members become vital to the functioning of the church. But it is when the leaders cross the line into control and guilt manipulation that a good thing goes bad.

j) Financial Exploitation

A rather obvious revelation is this: “It takes money to do things.” Every organization needs money to conduct its mission. But an organization that requires members to give a substantial amount of one’s income to the organization in order to curry extra favor is cultic. I have known of some churches that required income tax statements, provided yearly by members to make sure they were paying “their fair share.” This is a works-based system using money as its measure.

k) Denunciation of Others

It is one thing to expose false groups, like cults and entirely different to denounce legitimate groups just because they are “not like us.” Every group has faults because they are made up of people. We have to look at the foundation, where are they standing? Are they standing on Christ? Christians need to be trained to deal with cults and heresies. It is also necessary to look for other cultic indicators. Some “ministries” seem to specialize in “exposing” others. This was a fad in the 1980s. They can become dark and twisted over time. It is easy to become more aware of what the devil is doing and lose track of what God is doing. There are many things that are wrong, but the Gospel is about redemptive solutions to the problems, outside and inside the church.

l) Syncretism

We should “become all things to all men,” but the loving concern for spiritual accommodation can be pressed to the point where it compromises the Gospel of Jesus Christ beyond recognition. Absorption of un-biblical ideas for the sake of identification and “getting along” perverts the Gospel. People often compromise truth for the sake of peace. The idea that God used evolution is one such accommodation and millions of years introduces distortion. I heard one “old earth” evangelist say that the biblical record of thousands of years turns intellectuals off, so we want to get them to believe in some God first. This lunacy is covered in chapter 2, “Apologetics.”

In some places, there is an effort to fuse Christianity with Islam. It is common to hear it said that Yahweh and Allah are the same God. This is completely false. Here is one simple difference: Allah cannot beget; Yahweh did. Historically, Christianity has been fused with various occult or shamanistic systems (i.e., Santeria is a fusion of Catholicism and West African witchcraft).

1 Corinthians 9:22

To the weak I became as weak, that I might win the weak. I have become all things to all men, that I might by all means save some.

6. Conclusion

Your life in Christ is discovering who you already are based on what He has already done

It is still the truth that sets people free, not twisted theology. We are not allowed to interpret scripture as though it fell out of the sky in modern times. It was not written to us but preserved for us. There are more than one hundred references to material outside of Scripture. So, it is sometimes difficult to understand what the author knew, and was thinking, when he wrote some of the more obscure passages. By the way, if a passage looks strange, it is probably one of those. The author expected that his audience would understand completely because they shared the same worldview. They also shared the same dictionary. Words today often mean something different, but that knowledge is available. Book writing, and reading, was more common than you might expect. The people of the first century were not 'moderns' like us, neither were they ignorant illiterates. The first apostles are often portrayed as ignorant fisherman. This is simply not true. Any one not having the elite education of the Pharisees were considered "unlearned and ignorant," (Acts 4:13). But the people had a reasonable, general education and knew about stuff which is foreign to us, as demonstrated in their writings. So, the big question we want to know is, what did the first century readers know and understand about the scriptures?

Galatians 2:20

I have been crucified with Christ; it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me; and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself for me.

Romans 12:1-2

1 I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that you present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God, which is your reasonable service. 2 And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what is that good and acceptable and perfect will of God.

Make an appointment or commitment with God to show up every day. Plan on one year. This is not a legalistic thing. Life happens, so an 80% accomplishment rate is marvelous.

30 Minutes a day that will change your life (Rom 12:1-2)

Shadows of the old life will haunt you for some time.

15 minutes reading, or listening to, the New Testament

If you are new to the Bible, or not so new, my advice is this, **for the next year**, start reading the book of John and read all the way to Jude. Then go back to Matthew and read it all again. The point here is to read and develop the habit of putting the words into your mind. A great defect in the Body of Christ is biblical illiteracy. Most seem content with letting someone else tell them what the Bible says. Ignorance, superstition, and deception are inevitable. If you will read consistently this defect can be overcome. Study will come soon enough.

The purpose is to just read, or listen, not study. Study is too focused. Reading will bring into view all those other verses that get skipped over and help you see the bigger picture. After 15 minutes put in a bookmark for next time. But soon, you won't be satisfied with 15 minutes.

15 minutes praying

Talk to Jesus about what you read. Ask questions. Spend one-third of the time being quiet and listening for answers to your questions. Over time, you will learn to hear better. There is nothing more awesome than knowing you heard from God!

Have a notebook handy

This is to write ideas, questions, and impressions. It also helps remove distractions, like remembering to get milk after work or calling someone. Some of these distractions are the Holy Spirit helping you with your day. Write them down and get back to the business at hand.

Look for opportunities to put into practice what you have learned.

The Old Testament is important, but there is nothing there that can teach you what it means to be a Christian, a born-again child of God. The Old Testament is about servants. The New Testament is about family. They are not the same. We are not servants but sons that serve! We are brothers and sisters of the King of kings, the ruler of the kings of the earth. Act like it!

**The faith of the founding fathers
brought forth a new nation, conceived in liberty.
What on earth have you done for Heaven's sake?**

Write me with questions at michael@criticalmass.pro or mphays633@gmail.com.

7. Appendix A

The Law of Bondage

No discussion on the subject of law can be complete without including these Scriptures. Please suspend judgement until these have all been reviewed. This will give you the 'big picture' rather than a bunch of puzzle pieces.

As always ask the Holy Spirit of Truth for guidance to proper conclusions.

Gal	1:6, 11-14 2:4, 16-21	A New Root 2Chr 7:20
*	3:1-2, 5, 10, 12-14, 19-25 4:5, 21-31 5:1, 3-4, 7, 14, 18, 23	Pr 2:22 Is 5:24 14:30 53:2
Rom	2:14 3:19-23, 28 4:6-8, 13-15 5:12-14, 20	Ez 17: Hos 9:16 Mal 4:1
*	6:14-16 7:1-7, 10 8:2-3 9:31-32 10:1-10 13:10	Mt 3:10 21:43 Mk 11:60 Lk 3:9 Rom 11:16
*	1Cor 15:56	* key verses
*	2Cor 3:3, 7, 11, 13	
Heb	7:11-12, 16, 19 8:7, 10, 13 9:All 10:1, 9	
Jam	1:25	
1Tm	1:8-9	
Mat	7:12 11:11-15	
Jer	31:31-34	
Acts	15:7-11, 20, 24, 29 21:25	