

YOU BELIEVE WHAT???

WEEK 6: HOW DO WE PUT IT ALL INTO PRACTICE?

INTRODUCTION TO THE SERIES

- The overall goal of this series is for us to find out *why we believe what we believe*.
- We should never believe a doctrine because a church teaches it, a person teaches it or because we think that it makes sense to believe it. We must be able to search the Scriptures for ourselves.
- Right now, the perspicuity of Scripture is under heavy attack. It is not coming from the usual suspects, liberal theologians, progressive Christians or social gospel warriors.
- What is being said is that the individual believer cannot understand what the Bible is *actually* saying without some sort of help.
- **What is the help that people need?** It's the creeds, confessions and teachings from men long ago.
- "Did you know that many of the reformers taught churchgoers the catechism for years prior to giving them unbridled access to the scripture?"¹
 - The attack is coming from men who are conservative, evangelical believers.
- It's becoming increasingly common for some theologians to **mock individual Bible study**. Picking up the word of God, reading it for yourself, and heeding what the Lord has said can be couched in language that makes the process sound like a fool's errand. **These theologians will claim that without the help of historical secondary sources, it's nigh impossible for an individual to understand the biblical text in accordance with historic Christian orthodoxy.**²

Schedule for Classes:

- 07/23: Creation Trip Presentation
- 07/30: Introduction and the Purpose of the class. Part I.
- 08/06: Introduction and the Purpose of the class. Part II.
- 08/13: Why should the Bible be our firm foundation? Part I (History of Perspicuity)
- 08/20: Why should the Bible be our firm foundation? Part II (Perspicuity and Personal Illumination)
- **08/27: How to put it all into practice?**

The overall goal is to take some vital doctrines and learn how to exegete the text and defend the faith.

¹ <https://twitter.com/MattMBarrett/status/1516401230234456064> This quote is from Matthew Barrett, professor of Christian Theology at Midwestern Baptist Theological Seminary and author of multiple publications. He is a leading evangelical scholar who is seeking to bring Protestants back to their Roman Catholic faith.

² <https://www.jeremyhoward.net/2022/07/biblicism-confessions-womanhood.html>

MORE ABOUT WHAT DIVINE ILLUMINATION IS NOT³

- The Spirit’s ministry of illumination is not revelation.
 - Revelation refers to the Spirit’s act of revealing that which was previously hidden from human understanding. Since God’s will for us in the church age is now perfectly revealed in the Scriptures (e.g., Eph 3:3-7; 2 Tim 3:16-17; 2 Pet 1:2-3; Rev 22:18-19), there is no on-going revelation of new, divine knowledge. The Spirit’s work in revelation has been completed. So, unless the Christian is going to quote Scripture verbatim, he must put away the inaccurate and deceptive language reflected in the popular refrain, “God revealed to me today” Such statements are often clever attempts to canonize one’s own opinions about God and his own self-importance.
- The Spirit’s ministry of illumination is not inspiration.
 - Inspiration pertains to the manner by which the Holy Spirit superintended the biblical writers in their recording of divine revelation (e.g., 2 Pet 1:19-20). It pertains to the Spirit’s role of ensuring that the original words recorded in human language—even to the level of “the smallest letter or stroke” (Matt 5:18)—were exactly those intended by God. Only the biblical writers experienced inspiration in this theological sense.
- The Spirit’s ministry of illumination does not occur apart from the Bible.
 - The Spirit’s ministry of illumination is inseparable from his ministry of sanctification, and according to the prayer of Jesus, sanctification does not occur apart from God’s word (“Sanctify them in the truth; Your word is truth”—John 17:17). In other words, the Spirit works with the word and through the word, but never apart from the word.
- The Spirit’s ministry of illumination does not ensure inerrant interpretation.
 - As Peter indicates in 2 Peter 3:14-16, the correct understanding of a biblical text is not always easy to achieve. There are “things hard to understand” (v. 16), especially for those of us who are far removed from the original recipients of Scripture’s writings. Just as spiritual perfection is unattainable in this life (see Paul’s admission in Phil 3:12-14), so is absolute understanding of God’s word. Illumination is needed precisely because of this. It does not impart perfect knowledge, but it does empower us in the pursuit of constant improvement (2 Pet 3:18). In fact, recipients of this special ministry still remain under the need for reproof and correction (2 Tim 3:16-17).
- The Spirit’s ministry of illumination is not limited to certain members of the church.
 - The Bible was withheld from ordinary church members for many centuries of church history because of the conviction that the “code” of the Bible was too obscure and that the Holy Spirit only “decoded” it for the pope. The Reformers delivered a fatal blow against this premise, asserting that

³ https://blog.tms.edu/what-is-the-holy-spirits-role-in-bible-study#_ftn4

the Bible was clear enough for all believers to study and understand (the doctrine of the perspicuity of Scripture), and that the Holy Spirit was given equally to all who are born of God (the doctrine of the priesthood of all believers).

- The Spirit's ministry of illumination does not negate the need for disciplined study.
 - As Paul states in 2 Timothy 2:15, "Be diligent to present yourself approved to God as a workman who does not need to be ashamed, accurately handling the word of truth." Certainly, any reader of Scripture can grieve the Spirit through disobedience (Eph 4:30). But for the reader who walks by the Spirit (Gal 5:16), prays diligently (Ps 119:18, 33, 144), and seeks to be a doer of the word (Jas 1:22-25), his diligent efforts to study must never be construed as competition to the Spirit's work.

MORE ABOUT WHAT DIVINE ILLUMINATION IS

- "Illumination is that ministry of the Holy Spirit whereby He develops in the believer a clearer understanding of, a stronger certainty in, a deeper love for, and a greater obedience to the meaning of the text of Scripture."⁴
- What can we learn from these two definitions?
 - Illumination is a ministry of the Holy Spirit.
 - It applies only to those who are regenerate.
 - It occurs only in conjunction with the word of God—whether spoken or read.
 - It improves the believer's cognitive understanding of the objective, unchanging meaning of the text.
 - It testifies within the believer that the text he is reading is indeed the word of God, nurturing a fullness of conviction that this word is ultimately authoritative and necessary for life.
 - It nurtures the believer's appreciation and hunger for the truth communicated by the text.
 - It motivates the believer to apply what he has come to understand, and in turn serves as the means of sanctification—the transformation of the believing reader into the image of Jesus Christ, the Word of God.

What is the purpose?

- "He's provided us with the Word of Truth: truth that illumines our hearts to all wisdom **that we need to change in a way that pleases Him.** He's done this for the ultimate goal of changing us-and all for His glory."⁵
- God has given us the Spirit for many purposes. One which is often neglected is that of divine illumination which leads us into obedience to what we read.
- There is an expectation that those who read and understand are going to obey.

⁴ https://blog.tms.edu/what-is-the-holy-spirits-role-in-bible-study#_ftn4

⁵ Elyse M. Fitzpatrick, *Idols of the Heart*, p. 19.

- Those who have tasted of God’s grace in redemption continue to grow in sanctification through the internalization of His Word. **True believers are marked by a hunger for the Scriptures, delighting in God’s Word with the intensity with which a baby craves milk (cf. Job 23:12; Psalm 119).** In all of this, we are being conformed into the image of Christ—a ministry that the Spirit accomplishes by exposing our hearts to biblical revelation about the Savior (2 Corinthians 3:18). He makes it possible for “the Word of Christ [to] richly dwell within you” (*Colossians 3:16*), a phrase that parallels Paul’s command to “be filled with the Spirit” (Ephesians 5:18), **so that** the fruit of a transformed life is seen in the way we express our love to God and to others (cf. Ephesians 5:19-6:9; Colossians 3:17-4:1).⁶
- **Exodus 24:7** “Then he took the book of the covenant and read it in the hearing of the people; and they said, ‘All that the LORD has spoken we will do, and *we will be obedient!*’”
 - This final phrase *we will be obedient* is the Hebrew word שָׁמַעַתִּי.
 - The word that means “hear or listen,” and is an excellent example of the difference between Hebrew, which stresses physical action and Greek and Western culture that stresses mental activity.
 - Listening, in our culture, is a mental activity, and hearing just means that our ears pick up sounds. But in Hebrew, the word שָׁמַעַתִּי describes hearing and also its effects – taking heed, being obedient, doing what is asked. Any parent who asks their child, “Were you listening?” when they ignore a command to pick up their room, understands **that listening should result in action**. In fact, almost every place we see the word “obey” in the Bible, it is translated from the word שָׁמַעַתִּי.⁷
- If what we read does not cause us to be conformed more into the image of Christ, we should take a moment and make sure that our position right before God.
- **Keep in mind**... “God’s work in us is most of the time maddeningly slow. Although it’s true that all Christians know some change (*even if it’s minuscule*); God’s work – our sanctification – is a process. This process involves learning, growing, falling, changing, **becoming convinced again of the truth**, failing again and developing wholeness over our lifetimes.”⁸
- I wanted to highlight *becoming convinced again of the truth*...when we doubt our salvation, when we fall from grace, when we think that we are no longer in God’s hands...we need to stay in the Word and then become convinced again of the truth.

⁶ <https://www.gty.org/library/blog/B160725/how-does-the-spirit-work-through-scripture>

⁷ <https://engediresourcecenter.com/2015/06/30/shema-hear-and-obey/#:~:text=The%20word%20shema%20here%20again,or%20%E2%80%9Clisten%20and%20obey!%E2%80%9D>

⁸ Elyse M. Fitzpatrick, *Idols of the Heart*, p. 17.

- 1 The heavens are telling of the glory of God;
And their expanse is declaring the work of His hands.
- 2 Day to day pours forth speech,
And night to night reveals knowledge.
- 3 There is no speech, nor are there words;
Their voice is not heard.
- 4 Their line has gone out through all the earth,
And their utterances to the end of the world.
In them He has placed a tent for the sun,
- 5 Which is as a bridegroom coming out of his chamber;
It rejoices as a strong man to run his course.
- 6 Its rising is from one end of the heavens,
And its circuit to the other end of them;
And there is nothing hidden from its heat.

7 The law of the LORD is perfect, restoring the soul;
The testimony of the LORD is sure, making wise the simple.

8 The precepts of the LORD are right, rejoicing the heart;
The commandment of the LORD is pure, enlightening the eyes.

9 The fear of the LORD is clean, enduring forever;
The judgments of the LORD are true; they are righteous altogether.

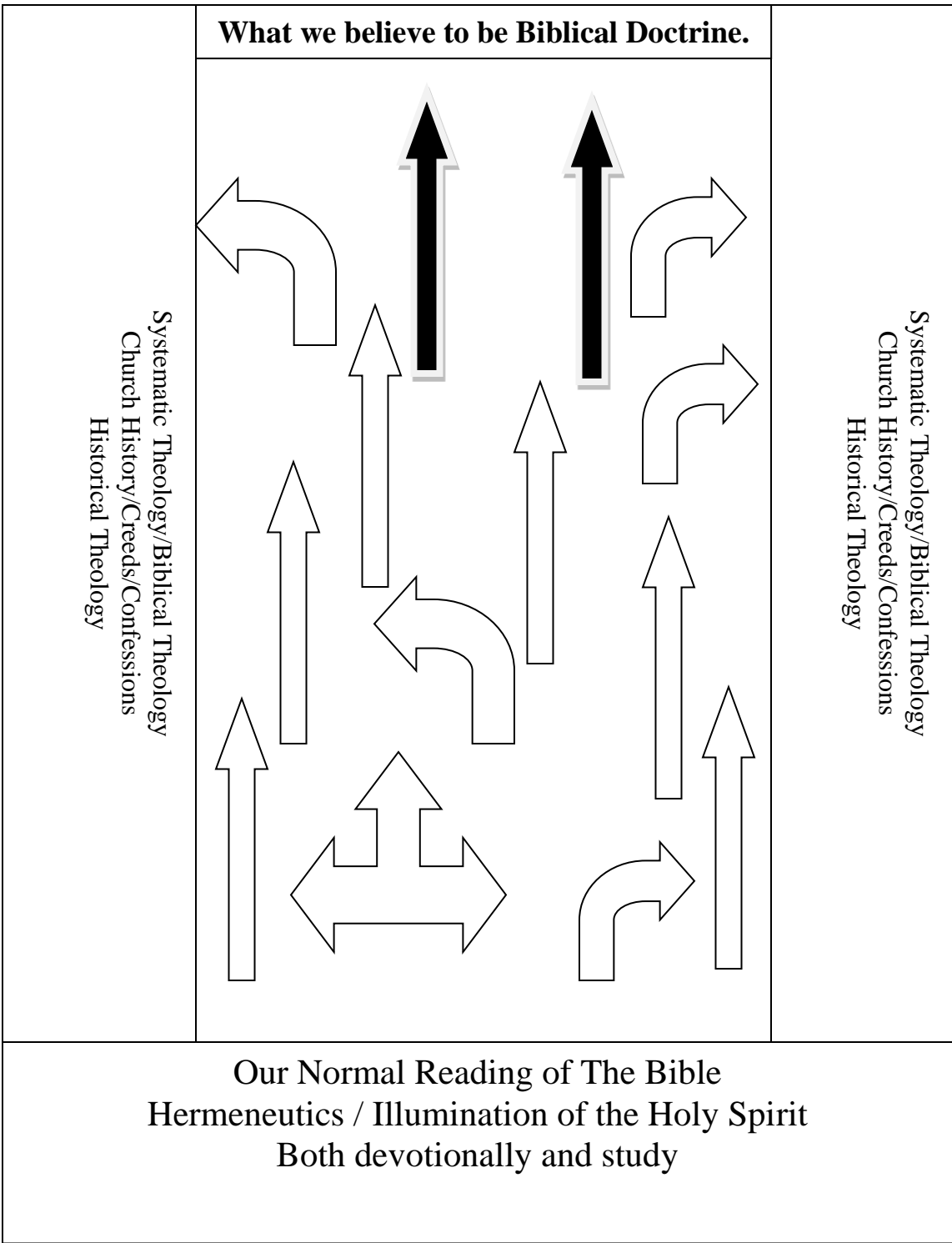
10 They are more desirable than gold, yes, than much fine gold;
Sweeter also than honey and the drippings of the honeycomb.

11 Moreover, by them Your servant is warned;
In keeping them there is great reward.

12 Who can discern *his* errors? Acquit me of hidden *faults*.

13 Also keep back Your servant from presumptuous *sins*;
Let them not rule over me;
Then I will be blameless,
And I shall be acquitted of great transgression.

14 Let the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart
Be acceptable in Your sight,
O LORD, my rock and my Redeemer.



BIBLE STUDY⁹ (A LOT IS DONE IN YOUR BIBLE FOR YOU)

- **Genre.** Establish guidelines for interpreting a passage's style of literature.
- **Textual Criticism.** Establish the original wording.
- **Translation.** Compare translations.
- **Greek Grammar.** Understand how sentences communicate by words, phrases, and clauses.
- **Argument Diagram.** Trace the logical argument by arcing, bracketing, or phrasing.
- **Historical-Cultural Context.** Understand the situation in which the author composed the literature and any historical-cultural details that the author mentions or probably assumes.
- **Literary Context.** Understand the role that a passage plays in its whole book.
- **Word Studies.** Unpack key words, phrases, and concepts.
- **Biblical Theology.** Study how the whole Bible progresses, integrates, and climaxes in Christ.
- **Historical Theology.** Survey and evaluate how significant exegetes and theologians have understood the Bible and theology.
- **Systematic Theology.** Discern how a passage theologically coheres with the whole Bible.
- **Practical Theology.** Apply the text to yourself, the church, and the world.

BIBLE DEVOTION¹⁰

- **Character of God**
 - What do I see about God in this passage?
- **Responsibility**
 - What does God require or expect of me from this text? Are there commands here or something that is modeled that reflects what God has prescribed elsewhere in the Bible?
- **Attitude and Actions**
 - What does this reveal about my own heart's attitudes and actions? In other words, what idols are being stored in my own heart that the Scriptures are revealing to me that I need to bury at the foot of the cross?
- **Meditation**
 - What phrases, words or multiple verses from your reading really stick out to you or make an impact? Write these down, memorize them and think on them throughout the day. If the Holy Spirit has revealed idols or sin in your heart, meditate on how Christ has set you free from that bondage and the truth of Scripture.

⁹ Andrew David Naselli, *How to Understand and Apply the New Testament: Twelve Steps from Exegesis to Theology* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 2017), 3.

¹⁰ <https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/blogs/erik-raymond/a-tool-for-reading-the-bible-devotionally/>