



Bible Study Meetings

Introduction

One of the problems that seems to be popping up in the broad church in recent times is the lack of Bible study. There are a few reasons for this, including but not limited to these:

- Adoption of false gospels in the church
- False teachers promoting “Progressive Christianity”
- The proliferation of philosophies in the church
- Studying men’s teachings rather than the word of God
- Believing that it’s too hard to understand the Bible without a Bible school qualification
- Being led by men rather than the Holy Spirit

All of these, and there are doubtless many other reasons, have led to a degree of Bible illiteracy among the broad church. In fact, from surveys and speaking to people who have left or are considering leaving the church, one of the main reasons is the lack of Bible based teaching and false doctrine.

In the house church then it is important to buck these trends so that the members of the church do study the Bible.

Why study the Bible?

If we are to stand with Christ, then we need to know what He wants us to do.

The Bible is the word of God and it has been given to us for teaching, spiritual growth, encouragement, advice, examples, and much more. It is the word of God that will provide us with the answers in every situation.

Even Jesus used the word of God to give us an example of how to fight the devil and wage war in the Spirit. If you read the first section of Matthew chapter 4, where Christ was led out into the wilderness for forty days to be tempted, you will find how Jesus defeated Satan at every turn.

In every temptation, Jesus defeated Satan with and by the word of God. Every time He was tempted, Jesus responded by saying, “*It is written...*” and then quoted the relevant scripture to shut Satan down.

We have to be able to do the same.

Furthermore, when it comes to the armour of God described in Ephesians chapter 6 we see these words.

“And take the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God.” (Ephesians 6:17)

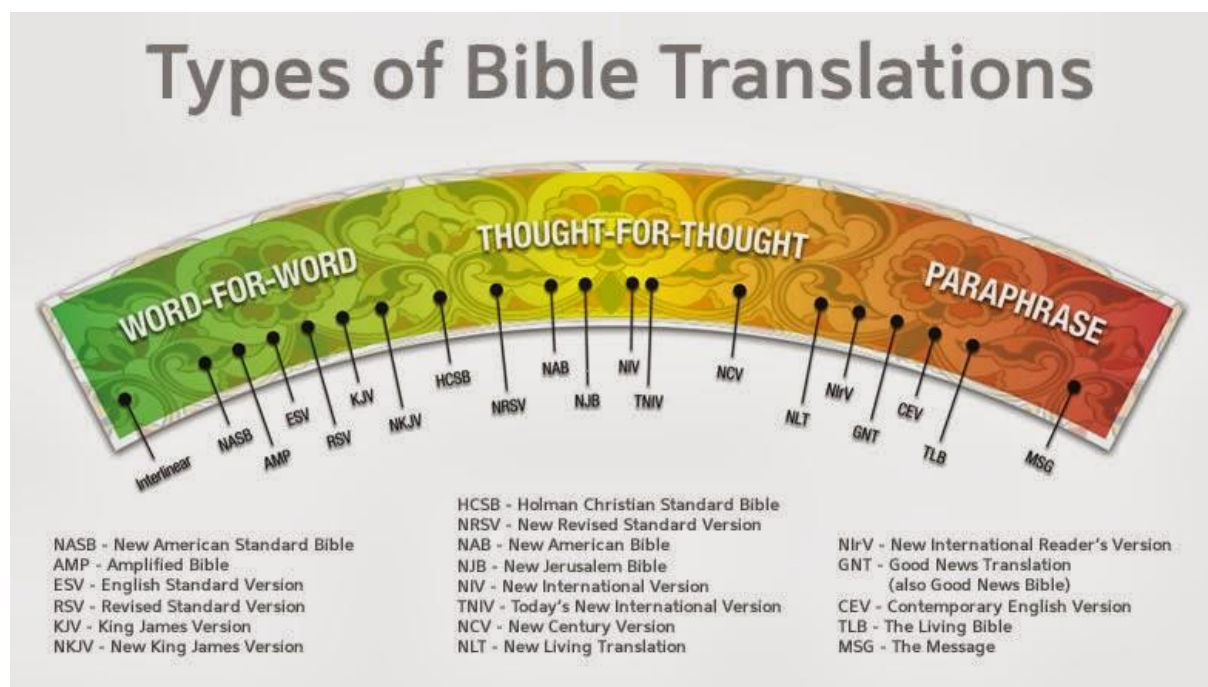
It is the word of God that is the sword that the Holy Spirit wields on our behalf whenever we are under attack from the devil. But the Holy Spirit cannot wield a weapon unless and until He is armed with it.

That is why we do Bible study; to learn the word of God and to arm the Holy Spirit with the sword of the Spirit so that the right words are available when we need them to defend or attack the devil.

What Bible to use

I am not going to tell you what Bible you should use. What I will tell you is what “type” of Bible should be used for Bible study.

Bible translations fall along a spectrum as the diagram below shows.



You will see from this that all the different English translations fall somewhere along the spectrum from “Word for Word” translations to “Thought for Thought” and “Paraphrase” interpretations.

Now, if you are doing Bible study you should ONLY use one of the “Word for Word” translations, because the aim of the translators was to try to convey the exact word-for-word meaning of the original Greek, Hebrew, and Aramaic texts, into English. They don’t always get it right, and some are better than others.

Also, the older translations, like the King James Version (KJV) suffer from the fact that word usage changes over the years. What the words meant when the KJV translation was originally produce around four hundred years ago, they do not necessarily mean today.

As for the Bibles in the middle and to the right on the chart above, I would not recommend using them for Bible study. The whole concept of “Thought for Thought” and a “Paraphrase” Bible is at odds with the need for accuracy in a translation.

Consider this scripture for just a moment and then consider what these different Bibles claim.

For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways, says the Lord. For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways and my thoughts than your thoughts. (Isaiah 55:8-9)

So, if God says the thoughts of man are not like His thoughts, how can any man presume to interpret what God is saying as a thought for thought Bible? And even worse, the paraphrase Bibles basically take the “idea” of what is being said, and then paraphrase it into more acceptable English. These Bibles are often called “Idea for Idea” and they are even further away from the original texts than the “Thought for Thought.”

These other Bibles are much easier to read, but they may not be accurate and reflect what God was actually saying.

So, for simple reading, you can use the other two types of Bibles, (personally I don’t), but for Bible study, stick to one of the “Word for Word” Bibles which are as close to a direct translation of the original texts.

One final word on what Bible you should use for Bible study, and in particular in a group study. Everyone should use the same translation to avoid confusion.

It becomes very difficult to follow along in a Bible study if one person has the King James, another has the Amplified, someone else is using the ESV and someone else is using the NIV or some other translation.

The scripture tells us that:

“For God is not a God of confusion but of peace.” (1 Corinthians 14:33)

The devil is the author of confusion and he will try to confuse your Bible studies. Don't give him the chance. It can be hard enough to learn as it is without trying to decipher between different translations. It is better to choose one that will be used in the Bible study and everyone uses the same one.

This is not hard to do, especially in this day and age as there are plenty of Bible apps that can be downloaded for free with many Bible versions loaded, including an interlinear Greek and Hebrew Bible too.

Other Necessary Bible Study Resources

There are a few other things that are extremely useful, if not essential.

I have already mentioned a few things that are valuable to being able to study the Bible fully. I will reiterate them here:

- A range of “Word for Word” translations
- A Greek interlinear Bible
- A Greek to English lexicon
- A Concordance for the translation you are using (or if you know the scriptures you are trying to find, you can look them up in the search feature on a Bible app).

And a range of pens, pencils, notepads, highlighters and whatever other stationery might be useful

What types of study are best?

Subject Studies

There are two main methods that can be effective for studying the Bible.

The first is to select a subject and then study everything on that subject. Subject studies are good for getting a detailed understanding of specific topics.

Often, however, churches use books written by men and follow their interpretations of the scriptures.

However, as I have already said, it is better to allow the Lord through the Holy Spirit to teach you rather than the words of men. As the scripture says:

It is written in the prophets, 'And they shall all be taught by God.' (John 6:45a)

And again;

*10 This is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, says the Lord: I will put my laws into their minds, and write them on their hearts, and I will be their God, and they shall be my people.
11 And they shall not teach every one his fellow or every one his brother, saying, 'Know the Lord,' for all shall know me, from the least of them to the greatest. (Hebrews 8:10-11)*

It is important that we let God lead us in learning the words of God. As these scriptures say, when we let Him, God will teach all of His people.

But if we follow the words of men, then how are we letting God, through the Holy Spirit lead and teach us?

So, subject studies are a good way to develop depth of understanding on specific topics. But there is one glaring fault with subject studies. They do not cover all of the Bible. You may do many Bible studies, but never cover and examine EVERY word in the scriptures. This is why I recommend the next process for Bible study.

[Scripture by scripture](#)

The best way to ensure that EVERY word and every shade of meaning in the scriptures is covered is to read and study EVERY word.

I would also add that in your Bible study, stick to the New Testament because that is where you will find Christ (we are Christians after all!), and also it is where the teachings of the New Covenant and the Gospel of salvation will be found.

So, to study this way, start at Matthew chapter 1, verse 1 and work word by word, verse by verse through to the end of Revelation chapter 22, verse 21. This is the only way to be certain you cover every word.

And every word is important, even the little insignificant words that you might skip over. Let me give two examples.

Matthew chapter 1

If you have ever read this chapter I am sure your eyes glazed over reading all those names of who was the father of whom in the genealogy of Jesus.

But as you read it there are some interesting points that come up. Did you realise there are five women mentioned in the chapter, some of whom had a “checkered past?” Just FYI they are:

- Tamar, who was the daughter of Judah and was impregnated by him without his knowing, because he had done her wrong.
- Rahab the harlot, who was the father of Boaz and was not of the lineage of Israel.
- Ruth, who was also not of Jewish lineage and yet married Boaz and was the grandmother of David the King.
- Bathsheba, who is not mentioned by name but is referred to as, “the wife of Uriah,” who David took in adultery. She was the mother of King Solomon.
- And of course Mary who was betrothed to Joseph and fell pregnant by the Holy Spirit.

There is a story in each of these, for each of these were women of faith and so Christ was not ashamed or afraid to have them in His human genealogy.

Also, it is interesting that Bathsheba is not mentioned by name but only as the wife of Uriah. Uriah also was a Hittite and not an Israelite, but he was a man of faith and he fought with and for Israel. When David discovered that he had impregnated Bathsheba, Uriah was called back from the war. David expected Uriah to have sex with his wife when he came home, and then they could say the child was Uriah’s. But Uriah refused on the grounds of his faith and loyalty to his brothers in arms and to the God of Israel.

So, David sent Uriah back to the war and organised for him to be killed so that David could have Bathsheba.

I believe the reason why she is referred to only as the “wife of Uriah” was so that Uriah would be remembered for all time as a man of faith who did what was right in the sight of God, even when his King did not.

But if we just skipped over Matthew chapter 1, all of these insights would be missed, and let’s face it, it doesn’t matter how many different subject studies are done, it is unlikely there are many that look at Matthew 1 to look at these things.

Hebrews 8:9

And another example is the power of what I call “small words.”

Consider this scripture from Hebrews.

8 For he finds fault with them when he says: "The days will come, says the Lord, when I will establish a new covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah; 9 not like the covenant that I made with their fathers on the day when I took them by the hand to lead them out of the land of Egypt; for they did not continue in my covenant, and so I paid no heed to them, says the Lord. 10 This is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, says the Lord: I will put my laws into their minds, and write them on their hearts, and I will be their God, and they shall be my people. (Hebrews 8:8-10)

When I was young and at school, I asked my religious instruction teacher what the difference was between the Old Covenant and the New Covenant. This man was an ordained minister in one of the churches and his answer was that the New Covenant is basically just an extension of the Old Covenant.

Years later I learned how wrong that statement is, and one of the key words that told me so is contained in the section of scripture above.

If you look at the first word in verse 9, it says "...not..." It tells us that the New Covenant is NOT like the Old Covenant. And when you continue reading down to verse 13 it says this:

In speaking of a new covenant he treats the first as obsolete. And what is becoming obsolete and growing old is ready to vanish away. (Hebrews 8:13)

Not only is the New Covenant not like the Old Covenant, and is not just an extension of the Old Covenant, when God spoke of the New Covenant He treats the Old Covenant as being obsolete, growing old and ready to vanish away.

That is a lot different from what that minister told me, and the key to learning this was that one "little word," not.

And it raises the question that if the New Covenant is NOT like the Old Covenant, then what is it like? And that's a whole area of study in itself that has taken years for me to learn and understand...and I am still learning new things about it.

So, it is only by reading and studying ALL the words in the scriptures that we can gain insights. These "little words" might seem insignificant, but they can pack a real punch.

How to study the Bible

Dealing with contradictions

The first thing to say is that the Bible never contradicts itself on doctrines. This is Bible study “Rule Number 1.” Anyone who says it does is without understanding and has a lot to learn. Yes, there may be some historical or memory recollection issues, but the doctrine is NEVER contradictory. The doctrines and teachings of the Bible are perfect because they are the words of God.

And we also thank God constantly for this, that when you received the word of God which you heard from us, you accepted it not as the word of men but as what it really is, the word of God, which is at work in you believers. (1 Thessalonians 2:13)

The second rule for Bible study is that the Bible as a whole is complete and holds together perfectly. It makes sense within and across all of the scriptures. This is so because God is perfect and His word is perfect.

OK. Now that I have that out of the way, what do you do when you find something that appears to be a contradiction. Or what if someone else points out a contradiction?

Your starting point is to go back to Rule Number 1...ALWAYS. There are no contradictions.

But...

Peter made a good point speaking about the letters of Paul when he said this:

15 And count the forbearance of our Lord as salvation. So also our beloved brother Paul wrote to you according to the wisdom given him, 16 speaking of this as he does in all his letters. There are some things in them hard to understand, which the ignorant and unstable twist to their own destruction, as they do the other scriptures. 17 You therefore, beloved, knowing this beforehand, beware lest you be carried away with the error of lawless men and lose your own stability. (2 Peter 3:15-17)

If the ones pointing out the errors are atheists or non-believers, then ignore them. How can they make a valid assertion about things over which they have no understanding? Their actions are just to deceive and pull down believers.

But sometimes you will find things you don't understand. Sometimes there will seem to be a contradiction with another part of the scriptures. When that occurs,

this is the process that I follow and it has almost always helped me to understand.

1. Recognise that you don't know it all, but that the Bible holds together perfectly
2. Pray over the scripture asking the Lord to give you understanding
3. Look at several other translations (Word-for-Word translations only) and see how they have translated the same scripture
4. Use a concordance or a cross reference to check other scriptures about that same topic to see how they fit together
5. Check the original Greek or Hebrew for alternative or shades of meaning in the word that have not come through in the word the translator has selected.
6. If, and only if, you have not had success, then look up what others have said about the scripture to see if it adds any insight.

Point 6 is a last resort because you want to be led by the Holy Spirit to understand the scriptures, not the words of men. I do not recommend using books of Bible expository, because then you may wind up looking to men rather than God for your answer.

After all this, if you still don't have an answer or the necessary insight, "put it on the back burner," recognising that in due course the Lord will open it up to you...and keep praying about it. Remembering always the scripture that says:

7 "Ask, and it will be given you; seek, and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you. 8 For every one who asks receives, and he who seeks finds, and to him who knocks it will be opened. (Matthew 7:7-8)

This is the best way to deal with potential contradictions in scripture, and it works. The translators of the Greek and Hebrew have done a great job delivering good Bibles, but they don't always get it perfectly right. I have found instances where the choice of words in English don't always convey the many and varied shades of meaning in the original texts. For example, consider this scripture:

"For the love of Christ controls us..." (2 Corinthians 5:14)

I was recently looking at this verse and it didn't feel right. The word "controls" sounded too, well...controlling! It seemed like the love of Christ was "forcing" us to walk in a certain way, and that doesn't fit with the broad context of the New Testament.

God gave all men a free will to choose what they do. So, saying that we are being “controlled” didn’t seem right.

Following the process above I looked at the Greek word, which is “sunecho.” In the interlinear Greek Bible it was translated as “compels,” which is better but not by much. However, the Greek word is best translated as “to hold together” or, “to hold fast.”

So, if it read as “The love of Christ holds us together...” it would be more consistent with the rest of the scriptures. Basically then it would mean that the love of Christ prevents us from falling apart or breaking down and so on. It keeps us in God’s grace and walking correctly when we are walking in the love of Christ. This is certainly a better rendering of the original Greek.

Process for Bible Studies

The process for a Bible study is actually quite straightforward.

1. Identify what you are studying
2. Ask for a volunteer to read one paragraph or section of the scriptures
3. Discuss what this means using the approaches mentioned above. If anyone has an insight, bring it forth
4. Everyone’s opinion is valuable because everyone may have a different perspective.
5. Listen and seek to understand what is being read/discussed and how it fits the broad context of the Bible

That’s pretty much it!

And if there appear to be contradictions or people have widely varied opinions, follow the scripture that says:

Know this, my beloved brethren. Let every man be quick to hear, slow to speak, slow to anger (James 1:19)

Be quick to hear – that is, listen carefully and don’t reject anything out of hand without hearing the person out. They may have had a real gem revealed to them.

Be slow to speak – that is, seek to understand. Seek context and how it fits with everything else. Look at it carefully before rejecting or accepting it

Be slow to anger – Hopefully there will be no anger in the Bible study meeting, although I have seen meetings become quite heated sometimes. The point is,

don't be controlled by emotion but consider and discuss in a factual unemotional way so that peace rules the discussion.

Meeting Running Sheet

This is a proposed running sheet for a Bible study. It can be used as is or modified to suit your own house church Bible study approach.

1. Opening Prayer
2. Songs of praise and worship
3. Testimonies of how the Lord has been working in members lives
4. Any important announcements
5. Study period
6. Closing prayer

It need not be any more complicated than this, and you can modify it to suit your own meeting needs.