
The Different Approaches to Studying Scripture

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Here are Some Definitions on the various ways we can read and know God's Word, the Bible. Some of these methods of Bible Study are very Biblical, beneficial and good and while others are harmful and lead to false teaching.

We, at *Into Thy Word*, are geared toward challenging you to learn how to better understand and study the Bible! We seek to teach people to use logic, induction, reasoning, and good inductive and deductive principles by examining the particulars, facts, and essence of a text first before making any conclusions. Thus, we can lead a mature, meaningful, fruitful, character driven life for Christ's glory!

Methods to Understanding Scripture

First is the *Deductive Approach*: This is the common way of reading the Bible. The reader acts as a detective, which is good at first, as we all need to deduct what the Bible says. This form usually starts with a premise such as a topic or idea and then pulls out the relative ideas. This method can be done with a good heart seeking to start with a subject and then looking for the corresponding Scriptures that are relevant to it. This can be a good tool for topical studies; however, it can also be dangerous, leading to false conclusions because the context is usually abandoned. This deductive method tends to skip the key process that helps organize, in a logical manner, what the text says. Thus, one skips and misses a lot and does not get out of the Bible reading what should be discovered. The danger is that when ideas are pulled out of context, the results are theology, interpretation, and application that may not exist.

Second is the *Opinion Approach*: This form is the practice of "eisegesis" (see below) that uses the personality of the reader as the template for gathering information from the text. All that is read and studied is compared to his or her experience and education. The reader has the tendency to go to the text with firm, preconceived ideas from what is presumed, what was previously learned, and not caring or too lazy to check out the facts. The pitfall is that even if you are a seminary graduate and an experienced pastor, you can miss a lot and get things wrong.

In the above approaches, the reader plows into the Bible without knowing how to do it. It would be much like someone using a cookbook without an understanding of how to cook or what the measurements and ingredients mean so, the meal will be less desirable than what may have been intended. The Bible reader becomes confused, overwhelmed, and frustrated. Of course, there is always a benefit to just reading the Bible. Our point is, we can do it much better and gain more for our lives as His child.

Third is the *Inductive Method*: The Inductive approach looks at the whole text in its context and pulls out facts, interprets them, and then applies them. There are no pitfalls with this method as long as the *exegete* is honest to the text.

Analyses Types

Exegetical analysis simply means a serious or *critical* examination of a text of Scripture for the purpose of explanation (clarification) or interpretation. Thus, we become the *redactor* of the Bible, as in breaking down its parts, examining and researching them, and then putting them together for our illumination and benefit. *Critical* means “serious,” and *redactor* means “to draw from.” For the authentic Christian, it provides either a framework of God’s principles, or it can be a shredder for its critics—as in those who oppose Christ and His principles.

Exegesis or the *Deductive Approach* to Bible study basically means “to lead out” or “draw out,” extracting objectively, in a systematic study, what a text is actually saying to its original intended readers in their language, culture, and setting before we can discover what it means. In practice with the Bible, it is finding the true meaning of the passages of Scripture from word meanings and context. It is a tool and a discipline which enables us to get more out of what we read, so we can see a text in its background and then gain a better grasp of it by knowing the intended meaning, rather than just what we want it to mean. As a tool, it is an examiner and a detective that interviews a passage in a comprehensive, extensive, and serious manner. This enables a better understanding of the Bible that helps draw out more of the meaning for our personal understanding and spiritual growth. In this way, we can better internalize a passage for our personal conviction and explain it better to others, too. In other words, *I want to know Him and His Word, what He is saying to me.*

A good Christian leader approaches this with reverence. A liberal who is callous to God approaches this purely as academic and thus will just tear it down for tear-down purposes only, and not put it back together for His glory. The same mechanic can tear down a car and strip it for parts so it is of no use, or he or she can tear it down to restore it, make it better, and use it. We, of course, do not make the Bible better; rather, we make ourselves better by understanding Him better.

Inductive simply means to use logical induction and reasoning by examining the particulars, facts, and essence of a Bible text first before making any conclusions. Thus, it means to draw out from the Bible with reverence, humility, and without preconceived ideas, agendas, or theological systems.

Thus, inductive Bible Study enhances the *exegesis* process by enabling us to read the Bible for all its impact, value, and significance. In practice, we first examine the ideas and words of the text; this then leads us to the meanings and interpretations, and then we are led to the conclusions and applications. As we are interviewing a passage, we are also allowing His Word to interview and then intervene in us. Additionally, we are to do this with a sense of worship, prayer, respect, and humility—without our

preconceptions or agendas, thus, seeking what God is actually saying before we seek what a passage means. Then, we can apply it to our lives in a more effective and effectual manner. In other words, *I want to know Christ and His Word better, to be convicted and impacted so I can line my life up to His.*

The Inductive approach looks at the whole text, in its context, and pulls out facts, interprets them, and then applies them. The only pitfall with this method is if we do not investigate word meanings or *genres*, we may miss crucial items or get things wrong. However, the Inductive approach is still the best as long as the *exegete* is honest to the text and comparisons to other passages.

Combining the Inductive and Exegetical (the *Into Thy word* method) is simply using the best of both approaches to enhance our ability to study, know, and practice His Word. The idea of *exegetical* analysis is addition and complementing, to add what is missing from most Inductive approaches so to synergize our leaning and teaching.

Besides asking key inductive questions, we can also act as a detective; we can look for the word meanings, cultural considerations, and use tools such as concordances, Bible Dictionaries, and Lexicons to bring out deeper, more insightful meanings. Then, we match up the passage with what we are studying and other Scriptures that are relevant to it. This can be a good tool for expository, exegetical, and topical studies.

Hermeneutics simply means the application of reason in how to interpret the actual, intended meaning of a passage. Then, the principles of *exegesis* are put into practice, using the science and art of understanding to interpret the Bible for Christ's glory and not ours. In this way, we gain not just what it said then, but what the passage means for us today. Thus, we come to His Word, seek what it actually means, and then transcribe His timeless principles for today.

Criticism simply means "analysis," as in to investigate something, such as a passage, in order to form an opinion and then use it for *didactic* (educational) purposes. It can be positive and helpful or it can be negative and arrogant, like any criticism. There are three major categories of Criticism: first, there is *Higher Criticism* which is considered "scholarly;" it investigates the origins, aspects, authorship, languages, date, compositions, and literary structure and meanings, which is good to do with the right motives and intent. This is what pastors, commentary writers, and Bible expositors do. The second is *Lower Criticism*. This is mainly the study of manuscript evidences to determine wording, grammar, and structure; this is what the Bible translators do. By the way only ½% of the New Testament is in any serious dispute—mostly over grammar and spelling, and none affects any doctrine or meaning! The third type of Criticism is called *Form Criticism*. This is analyzing the literary forms, which is very good; however, another aspect of this form of critique is what liberal scholars use to look for the origins of legend and myth in the Scriptures. Most of this is reading into it the commentator's ideas and theories, unsubstantiated by fact or sound reason. This is the bad version that many confuse for all the views of Criticism.

The approach of Criticism helps form our understandings and opinions so we can be good learners and educators of the Bible. This is why reverence and humbleness are crucial; otherwise, liberalism and discord will abound.

Eisegesis or Isogesis simply means “to lead in” or “reading into the Scriptures” as in to introduce into the text one’s own presuppositions, ideas, and thoughts while ignoring what is actually there in order to satisfy one’s own agendas and opinions. In practice, this is using our personal interpretation, agenda, or presupposition, inserting or expressing our own ideas and bias, seeking what we want it to mean rather than the actual, intended meaning of the passage. This ignores the language, context, and culture, leading us to incorrect conclusions, inconsistent understandings, and also leads to heresies and false teachings. This method enables us to read into a text what is not there and draw out what God is not saying. *Isogesis* causes us to think this way: In other words, *don’t confuse me with the facts; I have already made up my mind, I want to think my way and or lead my life my way, not His Way.*

We never ever want to do *eisegesis* to God’s most precious Word; that would be heinous at best and blasphemous at worst! The improper use of *exegetical* methodologies will skew our understanding of God and His precepts, leading us to an improper life and false teachings. One should always seek the meaning from the actual, original languages (and/or use multiple Bible translations and compare to other passages; do some research), and context, and also what it meant to the intended audience; then, compare it to other passages to find the authentic meaning. This is proper *exegesis*. Never seek a meaning from modern vernaculars, theological agendas, or hearsays—because you will skew the intent that God has for us—that is, reading into the text what God is not saying to us!

Check out Acts 17:11; 2 Corinthians 4:2; and 2 Timothy 2:15, and see how God wants us to study His Word!

However, no matter how good the tools we use are, we have to be aware that they can be limiting and even dangerous (can lead to liberalism through higher criticism that is devoid of Christ and Fruit). It can also lead to false conclusions if the human authors got it wrong or had biases. This *deductive exegetical* method helps you with a process so you can organize what the text says in a logical manner and then outline it and use it for teaching and sermons.

The basic plan is that you interview the Bible; use tools and ask it questions to get to know the account, just as an investigator or a reporter or a researcher does. At the same time, remember reverence; the *Whom* you are interviewing is God’s Most Holy Word in His Holy presence!

The Reason for the Exegetical Method

What about being led by the Spirit?

The basics of understanding Bible Study methods, how to learn from and about God's Word is basically simple, do it. But what we do not want to do is do it bad or erroneous. The science and art of *exegesis* or *exegetical* method is not meant to be scary, but rather provide us with the essential tools so we can better know and teach His Word. It is a science because there are rules of logic and word meanings that are rigid, and it is also an art that requires us to learn the skills of His Word so we can apply them to the canvas of our lives. These are the basic procedures a pastor or experienced teacher of the Word learns in Bible School and Seminary so they can prepare sermons, Bible studies, and commentaries. This primer is designed to compliment the inductive process by helping you use outside tools so to better mine more nuggets of precious precepts and not miss important stuff. This primer goes into the "What Does it Mean" section of Inductive Bible Study. Thus, to get as much as you can, follow the inductive process (either the basics or the advanced steps), and when you are done, use this process to add to your work. This is what we do at *Into Thy Word!* Remember, these Bible study methods are not for professional Christians only; they are tools for all disciples of the Lord to use!

Why is the *exegetical* analysis of the Bible important? Because, we need to know what the Bible is saying before we can gain from it. We do not need to take things out of context; we want what we teach to be truth, not untruths, half truths, or get our facts wrong and thus lead the people who are in our care astray. No real, authentic, Christ-infused leader would ever want to lead people astray. No real pastor, called by God, would ever deliberately teach what is false, what he or she does not fully understand, or teach to mislead for personal, misguided agendas. Yet, many do; that is why this subject is so important! Authentic pastors and Christian leaders always desire to lead people deeper in the precepts and applications of Christ-like character and spiritual growth so they will be impacted and be impacting! Knowing and gaining insight about God's Word helps us give glory to Christ and growth to His church; otherwise, we are the annoying noise of 1 Corinthians 13:1!

This is why leaning how to examine Scripture is so important for a pastor or anyone who wants to be a serious Bible student or teacher. We are to engage the Bible so we can be familiar with His precepts for our personal spiritual formation. And, even more importantly, if we are teaching, we must know what the Bible says before we try to share with others what it says. Too many preachers love to embellish and assume, and thus consciously or unconsciously deceive many people. If we decide that digging into the Scriptures is a waste of time or it is not for us, consider this: If we just have a superficial overview of Scripture, we will have superficial understanding and then

superficial results that lead to a superficial church—all because we do not understand and thus do not apply God's most precious precepts into our lives!

Why do so many people say this is not necessary or that it is even dangerous? Mainly, they do not understand it and/or they just see the abuses by some of the liberal commentators who examine and tear down the Bible, but do not put it back together nor understand that it is still God's precious Word! God calls us to seek and understand His Word. He wants us to tear it down so we can see its parts, elements, and teachings, so we can examine it carefully and steadfastly so we can receive His guidelines and principles, and thus get as much as we can. Then, He calls us to do something with what we have learned, apply it to our lives, and, in turn, teach others by example and by words.

What about being led by the Spirit? Some Christians—even pastors—believe that the *exegetical* or inductive method is not yielding to the voice of the Holy Spirit. They see this as a mechanical mode that separates the believer from God. The problem with this view is, the Bible is truth and we have a God of Truth. If we look at His Word and make up our own meanings for the words and precepts and not seek the actual meaning, we are doing the Holy Spirit and God a disservice by ignoring and even rejecting His Truth. This can even be blasphemous and create all kinds of false teaching. The Voice of the Holy Spirit intercedes so we can know the deeper things of God, but He will never contradict Himself or His Word. Thus, if the Holy Spirit says one thing and the Bible says another, one is lying. And, since neither the Word nor the Spirit ever lies, and what we read is clear, then what we think we hear from the Spirit is our own whim and not Him! God is seeking those *who worship Him in spirit and in truth*; thus, we can never divorce one from the other. The role of the Spirit is not to give us new information, but to convict us on the information God has already given (Is. 66:2; John 4:23-24; 14:17; 1 Cor. 2:10; Eph. 3:16-17; 1 Thess. 1: 4-5; 1 John 4:1)!

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