

SEVEN STEPS TO GREATER BIBLE UNDERSTANDING**THE PLEASANT VIEW PLUMB LINE**

Some claim that the Bible is too old, too long, too boring, or too difficult. Yet amazingly, the United Bible Society distributed 23,200,000 Bibles in 2001 alone—an average of 44 Bibles per minute throughout the year.

It is necessary to do more than just own a copy of the Bible, or engage in some superficial reading. We must learn to understand it and live by it.

Step One—One Theme

The resurrected Christ met some disciples on the road to Emmaus. They were distressed while his identity was hidden from them. It was them the third day, and they had hoped he would redeem Israel. The Lord said to them, “O foolish men, and slow of heart to believe in all that the prophets have spoken” (Luke 24:25; see also vv. 26-27,44-47).

We must familiarize ourselves with the single theme of Scripture—salvation through the suffering of Christ.

Step Two—Two Covenants

Failing to understand the divine purposes of the Old and New Testaments will invariably lead to misunderstanding the Bible. The Old Testament was not given to teach how one becomes a Christian. It is not a guide for Christian worship. A pattern for the church is not given in the Old Testament; that must be read in light of New Testament revelation.

We do study the Old Testament, however, to satisfy life’s basic questions (cf. Genesis 1:1), to perceive that our relationship with God is one of Creator and creature, to understand the nature of sin and its consequences, and to learn the principle that God rewards the obedient and punishes the rebellious.

In the Old Testament, we also see valuable apologetic material in predictive prophecy. As we see God’s design in the Old and New Testaments, we come to understand the Bible better.

Step Three—Three Ages of Time

The point of this step is this: we must familiarize ourselves with the content of the Bible, and we must follow its history from beginning to end. We must actually read the content of Scripture to understand it better. Otherwise, we may pick up facts here and there and fail to have a comprehension of the wonderful unity of Scripture. Its single theme is to be followed through three vast periods of time—the Patriarchal Age, the Mosaic Age, and the Christian Age.

Step Four—Four Gospels

The four gospels, like four witnesses, testify to the person and work of Jesus Christ. Without any appearance of collusion, these independent witnesses provide accounts of the ministry, death, and resurrection of Christ, under the guidance of the Holy Spirit.

Since they contain the foundation for faith (John 20:30-31), the Gospel accounts need to be read and re-read by Christians regularly. Since the one theme of the Bible is the redemptive work of Christ, how valuable it is to rehearse those events that are the focal point of human history.

Step Five—Five Steps to Salvation

Some characterize the idea of “five steps” in the “plan of salvation” as legalism, calling those who preach it “five-steppers.” No matter how many requirements there might be, the truth is that people must hear the gospel (Romans 10:17). Individuals are required to believe the gospel of Christ (John 8:24). All men are commanded by God to repent (Acts 17:30). They must confess their faith in Christ, that he is Lord and that

“...then said the Lord, Behold, I will set a plumb line in the midst of my people Israel...” (Amos 7:8)

NOAH: GOD’S PREACHER OF RIGHTEOUSNESS

Text: _____

I. Noah Preached Righteousness by _____

Notes:

II. Noah Preached Righteousness by _____

Notes:

III. Noah Preached Righteousness by _____

Notes:

COMMON CHRISTIAN COURTESY

Text: _____

I. They _____ For Each Other

Notes:

II. They _____ Each Other

Notes:

III. They _____ With Each Other

Notes:

God raised him from the dead (Romans 10:9-10; cf. 1 Timothy 6:12; Matthew 10:32-33). And the Lord requires penitent believers to be baptized in water for the forgiveness of sins (Mark 16:16; Acts 2:38). According to Ms. Hudson, my first grade teacher, that makes five.

There is no need to be ashamed of what the Lord requires, and anyone who criticizes such demonstrates that he has been influenced by the trends of denominationalism.

Step Six—Six Things God Hates

“Yea, seven!” With this numerical proverb, Solomon indicates that his list is by no means exhaustive (Proverbs 6:16-19). But this is the point. It *does matter* how we live. Even after we become Christians, we must continue to take sin seriously and stop doing anything the Lord hates.

Step Seven—Seven Churches of Asia in Revelation 2 and 3 Teach Valuable Lessons

These congregations were all held to the same doctrinal standard. They all belonged to Christ, and there were no different religious brands. The Lord knew what was going on, and he commended their efforts or condemned their sins.

There is only one way to right wrongs—repent and do right. Seeing our individual and collective responsibilities, we learn that understanding the Bible translates into lives and congregations that are pleasing to the Lord. “Be ye doers of the word, and not hearers only” (James 1:22).

-Jason Jackson

DANGER OF A LITTLE LEARNING

An astronomer who was on his way to give a lecture discovered that his seatmate on the airplane was a preacher. Early in the conversation he assured the minister that he knew everything about religion he needed to know. The preacher expressed delight and asked where the scientist had studied religion and how much he had read the Bible.

“Oh, no,” the astronomer replied, “I’ve never studied theology, and I don’t read the Bible, but I know the Golden Rule, and I figure that’s enough religion for me.”

“Well, on that basis,” declared the preacher, “I guess I know all about astronomy.”

The scientist scoffed and asked the gentleman what he knew about the cosmos, to which the man of the cloth replied gravely, “Twinkle, twinkle little star; how I wonder what you are.

AT BIRTH AND DEATH

They are two of the most significant times of life. They represent bookends to what could be either a time spent in positive productivity or needless negativity. One always is associated with joy and happiness, the other often is marked by sorrow and anguish. However, it is both in birth and death that there are otherwise great similarities that in understanding greatly benefit us as we pass through life preparing for the end.

For instance, in birth we enter with nothing, and in death we depart with nothing. Paul would word it this way: "For we brought nothing into this world, and it is certain we can carry nothing out" (1 Timothy 6:7). The context in which this remark is made is in the broader point of contentment as an accompaniment to godliness, but contained in that thought is a wonderful realization as to the opportunities and responsibilities that we thus have in life. At birth we enter life penniless, with absolutely no degree of prosperity. Thus anything we accumulate over the years is a testament to hard work, ingenuity, and ultimately God's blessings. But a wealthy man once died, and as two friends observed the funeral procession one asked the other, "I wonder how much he left?" The other responded, "He left it all." Wealthy, middle class, or poor, the same is said of us all. Whatever we accumulated over the span of life, it is all left behind. Thus all that matters is what we did with what we had in the time that we had it. Was that time spent in nothing more than the pursuit of prosperity, every other responsibility to the contrary notwithstanding? Did we shun the pleas and expectations of God while seeking to lay up treasures on earth? Our time is always best spent laying "up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust doth corrupt, and where thieves do not break through nor steal: for where your treasure is, there will your heart be also" (Matthew 6:20-21). And do not be deceived by those who advocate the ability to "straddle the fence" or "have one's cake and eat it too," because "no man can serve two masters: for either he will hate the one, and love the other; or else he will hold to the one, and despise the other, ye cannot serve God and mammon" (Matthew 6:24). At birth we have nothing and at death we leave with nothing. What are you doing with your time and means in between?

Also, at birth you are surrounded by people who contemplate your life (in prospect), but in death you have the same (only in retrospect). At birth the future is bright. Normally, a long life filled with many years lies ahead and its outcome is of your making. Parents and grandparents gleefully imagine what great things you will accomplish in life and how many people you may impact. However, at death children and grandchildren gather and remember. They contemplate the life just lived and must come to one of two conclusions. Either it was a life spent in worthwhile endeavors that brought joy, happiness, and goodwill toward those around you, or it was time wasted in which nothing of substance ever was accomplished. But in even weightier matters is the reality that one's life examined in retrospect calls to memory the realization of righteousness or unrighteousness. Again, the memories at the end all depend on how you spent your time since the beginning. When family and friends gather to remember, will those memories be marked with godly endeavors or ungodly filth? Will the close of life measure to the expectation that marked its beginning or fall disappointingly short?

However, it is these two similarities that bring to mind a reality in birth that should serve as motivation as we approach death. At birth we enter life innocent, free of sin. At death our hope is to depart in the same manner. The Bible abundantly makes the case for the purity of infants. They do not inherit the sins of the past generations, but begin life with a clean slate. At death, our goal is to depart in similar fashion; not because we have fooled ourselves into believing we can live perfectly unblemished lives, but because God has made provision by which those sins we do commit can be cleansed and purged from our record providing us the means to depart life declared innocent. The Hebrews writer revealed the extent to which God forgives sin by writing, "For I will be merciful to their unrighteousness, and their sins and their iniquities will I remember no more" (Hebrews 8:12; 10:17). Such is the innocence that we can obtain in life and that can define us at death as we maintain our purity by faithful living. God is "faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness" (1 John 1:9). The innocence with which we began life can be regained in Christ so that we can die declared innocent once more. Is that the end toward which you are traveling?

"To every thing there is a season, and a time to every purpose under the heaven: a time to be born, and a time to die..." (Ecclesiastes 3:1-2a). Our end to life is just as certain as our entrance. In looking toward the end, will these realizations serve as the motivation we need to live faithfully, or will we aimlessly wander through life. Let us leave so as we entered that our eternity will be blessed in the presence of God!