

Personal Bible Study – 3

1. Noting Major Divisions Within a Book

- A. Several NT books are divided into two basic sections: principle and practical application. Romans, for example, presents the underlying principle of the gospel in chs 1-11 and deals with specific applications in chs 12-16. A similar division exists in Galatians (1:1-5:6 and 5:7-6:18), Ephesians (1-3 and 4-6), Colossians (1-2 and 3-4) and Hebrews (1:1-10:18 and 10:19-13:25).
- B. Various divisions of OT books can also be noted: the first 39 chapters of Isaiah primarily deal with conditions in the immediate future concerning the impending destruction of Israel by the Assyrians; chapters 40-66 mainly look beyond the captivity to the blessings to come in the Messiah. Daniel is divided into the historical narrative of chapters 1-6 and the apocalyptic visions of 7-12. Exodus begins with the history of Israel's departure from Egypt (1-19), then turns to details of the Law (20-31), and finally returns to the history of the people as they leave Sinai (32-40).
- C. Being aware of such shifts in subject matter can alleviate many difficulties in Bible study. It is also of great value in tracking down particular passages for which we may be searching.

2. The Flow of a Book

- A. An awareness of specific purpose and theme of a book leads the student to follow the author's train of thought. This is of special importance in studying the epistles.
- B. Consider the book of Romans. Paul's thoughts follow a logical progression as he argues his thesis and anticipates his critics' objections.
 - 1. He begins with the premise that all humanity is alienated from God through sin (Rom 1:1-3:20). Note Paul's use of questions as he advances his argument (2:3-4, 21-23, 26-27; 3:1, 3, 5, 7-9).
 - 2. Next he establishes the principle of justification from sin through genuine faith in God (Rom 3:21-4:25) as opposed to merit. He then reflects upon the wonder of God's provision of such salvation through "one man" – Jesus (Rom 5).
 - 3. Paul continues his treatise by refuting the argument that such a principle of justification removes incentive for living properly (Rom 6:1-7:25), then he rejoices in the power of God available to His people to defeat all their enemies in securing eternal glory (Rom 8).
 - 4. In Romans 9-11 Paul addresses questions concerning the Jewish people in re-

gard to the change of covenants. Have they been mistreated or wronged by God in any way? No, answers Paul. Then, as noted above, Paul turns from the underlying principles of the gospel to their everyday applications (chs 12-16). This, of course, is but a brief sketch and can be developed more fully.

- C. **But note:** *the mistake is often made of comparing a verse with one from another book which may sound similar but in fact has no logical connection. Instead, verses should **first** be understood in light of the book they are found in **and then** carefully compared with other pertinent passages elsewhere.*

3. The Meaning of Words

- A. Words are the basic building blocks of language. Words convey ideas, and spiritual words convey spiritual ideas: “... *which things we also speak, not in words taught by human wisdom, but in those taught by the Spirit, combining spiritual thoughts with spiritual words*” (1 Cor 2:13, NAS).
- B. Divine inspiration involves the very selection of words from contemporary language to express God’s thoughts to men (Hebrew/Aramaic in the OT; Koine Greek in the NT). Those words had a certain meaning in their own cultural setting, and the English words used to translate them have their own meanings as well.
- C. A correct understanding of words is vital for two reasons: a) God’s blessings are communicated to us in words, and b) unscrupulous men will advance their false ideas by corrupting word meanings. Words have meaning, and we neglect or misuse them to our peril.

4. The Translation and Use of Words

- A. The job of the translator is to consider the meaning of words in the original language and choose the most accurate equivalent to express the idea.
1. Those who think King James’ translators were somehow “inspired” to produce the one and only perfect translation of the Scriptures forget that the earth is sprinkled with hundreds of languages and dialects, and the people who speak them all need salvation.
 2. When an adequate word in another language is found to express a Gk. word, the word is **translated**. When there is no completely adequate word, the Gk. word is **transliterated**, or spelled letter for letter into the other language. For example, the English word “baptize” was transliterated from the Gk. word *baptizo*; the English “Abba” is an Aramaic word spelled *abba* in Gk.; the English “apostle” is transliterated from the Gk. *apostolos*.
- B. We must also remember that translators, while experts in the field of language, have their theological biases and prejudices.

1. The KJV translators substituted the word “Easter” for the word “Passover” in Ac 12:4. Instead of choosing an English equivalent of the Gk. *baptizo*, i.e., dip, submerge, plunge, etc., the word was transliterated to avoid condemning their own practice of sprinkling.
 2. The NIV translators have moved from translation to commentary by their use of the phrase “sinful nature” for “flesh” (Eph 2:3; Rom 8:3-5, 8-9, 12-13; etc.).
 3. Consulting different translations of the Bible and definitions in Greek dictionaries, available to non-Greek readers, will help the student perfect word meanings.
- C. Words also mean *different* things; that is, they carry different shades of meaning. The context must often decide which meaning to attribute to a certain word.
1. For example, the word “elder” (Gk. *presbuteros*) can mean someone chronologically older or someone functioning in the role of congregational overseer.
 2. Regarding the term “brother” (Gk. *adelphos*), Vine lists eleven usages ranging from male children of the same parents to people of the same nationality to all believers in Christ.
- D. Further, the same English word is often used to translate a variety of Greek words.
1. A good example of this was the KJV’s inadequate rendering of “hell” for the Gk. words *hades*, *gehenna* and *tartarus*, thus leaving the impression that Christ went to “hell” instead of “hades” (Ac 2:27, 31).
 2. The verb “worship” translates several Greek words: *proskuneo*, *sebomai*, *latreuo* and *eusebeo*, each carrying different shades of meaning.
- E. Conversely, the same Greek word is often translated by a variety of English words in order to capture subtle differences.
1. For example, the basic meaning of the Gk. *ekklesia* is “a gathering of citizens called out from their homes into some public place” (Thayer, pp. 195-196) and is thus translated assembly (Ac 19:32, 39, 41), congregation (Heb 2:12) and church (Mt 16:18; Ac 8:1; etc.).
 2. Likewise the Gk. *charis* is translated by grace (Tit 2:11), favor (Lk 1:30), gift (1 Cor 16:3), thanks (Rom 6:17) and benefit (2 Cor 1:15).

Conclusion: A natural progression of Bible knowledge will eventually lead one to the meaning of words. If we content ourselves with superficial knowledge we will stagnate. If we stretch ourselves to learn to the fullest extent of our resources, our spirits will be constantly renewed and refreshed by our discoveries. Be a student of words, and you will be a student of **the word**.