

HOW TO STUDY THE BIBLE,

BY DWIGHT L. MOODY

THE Bible is a storehouse of whose contents no one can afford to be ignorant. It repays reading and study whether it be approached merely because of its literary value, or its ethical teachings, or its practical bearing on everyday life, as, for instance, in the Book of Proverbs. While such reading may bring a measure of blessing, however, in accordance with the Scripture—"Blessed is he that readeth, and they that hear the words of this prophecy" (Rev. 1:3),—I believe that God reveals His deeper truths to the eye of faith. Those who come to the Bible in a devotional spirit, seeking to know more of God and His will regarding us, are the most blessed.

Hence it is necessary, at the very beginning, that the reader shall be a partaker of that new life which alone can digest heavenly food. The natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness unto him; neither can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned (1 Cor. 2: 14). But they that are after the Spirit, who have been born of the Spirit, do mind the things of the Spirit, and the Spirit-breathed Word is sweeter to them than honey and the honeycomb.

I believe further that the reader must have faith in the Bible, and a love for it, before he will receive much good from it. As Pascal said: "Human knowledge must be understood to be loved, but divine knowledge must be loved to be understood." Those who are full of doubts will never be much blessed. The Book comes to us as a whole with the same authority, and no man has a right to cut out any portion. Did you ever notice that the things that men cavil about most are the very things that Christ set His seal to? The story of Noah and the flood; of Lot's wife; of the brazen serpent; of Jonah and the whale—Christ taught them all, and if I give them up, I must give up all Christ's teaching. What we want is a faith that believes in the Bible from cover to cover.

SUGGESTIONS AS TO BIBLE STUDY

1. Read the Bible as intelligently as you would read anything else.

If I receive a letter from my wife eight pages long, and read the fourth page to-day, the last page to-morrow, then turn back to the first page, it will be unintelligible to me. To grasp it intelligently I must begin at the beginning and read through it in order.

Now the Bible is not only a book in itself, with one distinct purpose running through it from Genesis to Revelation, but it is also a collection

of sixty-six books, each complete in itself. Therefore it is only fair and reasonable, if you want to understand it, that you should read them through.

2. Do not read too fast or too much. Butterflies cover more ground, but bees gather more honey. Imitate the bees.

Studying goes deeper than mere reading. There are surface nuggets to be gathered, but the best of the gold is underneath; and it takes time and labor to secure it. Skimming over large areas of truth is not so profitable as the careful turning of every passage.

3. Have some definite object in view.

If a friend should see me searching about a room and should say: "Moody, what are you looking for? have you lost something?" and I should reply: "No, I haven't lost any thing; I'm not looking for anything in particular," he would think me very foolish. But if I tell him I am looking for something, I may expect him to help me find it.

Numbers of people take the Bible without any definite desire to receive anything out of it. We should hunt it thoroughly for its great truths, and not read at random.

In private devotions or for family prayers, select passages as carefully as for public services. All the medicines in a druggist's shop may be helpful, but they have different properties that make them suitable for different cases. In the Bible there is a word for every condition and circumstance of life. Every case is met; but passages should be selected according to the needs of that case. For instance, in time of trouble, read Ps. 91. For consolation in bereavement, turn to John 14 or 1 Cor. 15. For devotional reading, turn to the Psalms or epistles.

4. Learn to feed yourself. The great trouble with most church members is that they don't know how to do this. They have to be fed with an ecclesiastical spoon. If they happen to have a minister who feeds his flock, they get on pretty well; but otherwise their souls are not fed at all, and become lean and starved.

Obtain for use a good Bible, a concordance, and a topical text-book. Any Teacher's Bible embraces the two latter, or they can be obtained separately. They form a complete library, and by their aid the Bible can be studied with profit.

METHODS OF BIBLE STUDY

Every man cannot fight in Saul's armor, and perhaps my methods may not suit you; but if one method does not help and interest you, try another.

1. First, the telescopic method; that is, taking a grand sweep of a book or chapter, and trying to find out the main outline. Thus, there are seven leading men in Genesis: Adam, Enoch, Noah, Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, and Joseph. They stand out like mountain peaks in the course of the history. Study their lives and times, and you will have a fair grasp of the whole book. Similarly, there are ten great sermons in the Book of Acts—five preached by Peter, one by Stephen, and four by Paul. When you know the circumstances under which these were preached, etc., you will have a general idea of the Book of Acts.

2. Another method is the very opposite of this—the microscopic method, when you take a verse or section and analyze it.

Take, as an example, Gal. 6:7: "Be not deceived; God is not mocked: for whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap." The text naturally divides into three sections. (1) "Be not deceived." Now take a topical text-book and see what the Bible says about deceiving; who deceives us; how we are deceived, etc. (2) "God is not mocked." What is the Bible meaning of "mocking;" do men ever try to mock God; can He be deceived; etc. (3) "Whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap." Note the certainty of the reaping—"shall;" the two kinds of sowing and reaping—sowing to the flesh and a harvest of corruption, or sowing to the Spirit and a harvest of everlasting life; that a man reaps the same kind as he sows, and more than he sows—some thirtyfold, some sixtyfold, some an hundredfold, etc.

3. Study of subjects or topics. It has been well said that we must not read the Bible by the blue light of Presbyterianism, or by the red light of Methodism, or by the violet light of Episcopalianism, but by the light of the Spirit of God. Between conflicting opinions, most Christians are in dense ignorance regarding the most fundamental doctrines of our religion. What they should do is—take the Bible and study for themselves.

For instance, consider the doctrine of the atonement. A great many say that it is folly to claim that men are saved by simply trusting in the atoning blood of Jesus Christ. When you meet that objection, go to the Bible and find out all it says about the blood. We have the first reference in the third chapter of Genesis, where blood must have been shed before Adam and Eve could have been clothed with the skins of beasts. Follow the doctrine through the sacrifices of Abel and Noah and Abraham; the ceremonies and sacrifices of the Mosaic dispensation; the prophecies of Isaiah and Daniel. Pass from the Old Testament to the New, and see how the cleansing power of the blood of Christ is emphasized, until we reach the last chapter of Revelation, where we read about the Lamb of God, by the merits of whose shed blood alone we can hope to enter into that new Jerusalem.

Other fertile subjects are: Fulfilled prophecy; Old Testament types; the meaning of proper names; the promises; prayer; heaven; the attributes of God, Father, Son and Holy Ghost; faith, love, hope, etc.

4. The study of words and expressions. Here

you take a word or expression and follow it through the whole Bible, or through some particular book or section, with the help of a concordance.

For instance, in the second chapter of Habakkuk there are five "woes" against five common sins: 1. "Woe to him that increaseth that which is not his!" 2. "Woe to him that coveteth an evil covetousness to his house!" 3. "Woe to him that buildeth a town with blood, and establisheth a city by iniquity!" 4. "Woe unto him that giveth his neighbor drink!" 5. "Woe unto him that saith to the wood, Awake; to the dumb stone, Arise, it shall teach!"

Again: *Faint not* in prayer. Luke 18:1.

" " in confidence. 2 Cor. 4: 1.

" " in hope. 2 Cor. 4: 16.

" " in well-doing. Gal. 6: 9.

" " at tribulations. Eph. 3: 13.

" " under chastening and rebuke.

Heb. 12: 5.

Study in the same way the seven "blesseds" and the eight "overcomes" of Revelation; the "better things" of Hebrews; the "believings" and the "I am's" of John; "the fear of the Lord" in Proverbs; the seven "walks" of Ephesians; three "sound" things in Titus; the seven "forty days" of Scripture; five "much mores" in the fifth chapter of Romans; "with one accord" in Acts; six "precious" things in Peter's epistles, etc.

5. Another profitable study is Bible characters. Take one man and follow him from the cradle to the grave.

Here let me say that the key to the whole Bible is Jesus Christ. You remember that, on the way to Emmaus with those two disciples, "beginning at Moses and all the prophets, He (Jesus) expounded unto them in all the Scriptures the things concerning Himself." Notice those two "alls." The one theme of the Old Testament, in type and prophecy, is the Messiah; and the New Testament deals with His life on earth, and with the Church, which is His body, and with His coming glory.

Do not expect ever to exhaust the full meaning of Scripture. A supernatural God must have a supernatural book. Finite minds cannot grasp the infinite. That is one reason why men who know the Bible best find it ever new.

Talmage has said that as the smallest dewdrop on the meadow at night has a star sleeping in its bosom, so the most insignificant passage of Scripture has in it a shining truth. Spurgeon said that the flowers of God's garden bloom, not only double, but sevenfold; they are continually pouring forth fresh fragrance. George Muller wrote that he had read the Bible through a hundred times in order, and every time with increasing joy. Whenever he started afresh it seemed like a new book to him. Joseph Parker recently said that he had preached twenty-five volumes of sermons upon the Bible, and that when he had written the very last word, his feeling was that he had not begun it yet!

I thank God there is in it a height I have never been able to reach, a depth I have never been able to fathom, a length and a breadth I know nothing about. It makes the book all the more fascinating and proves it divine.