



Systematic Theology

A study of the major doctrines of Scripture

TOPIC 4 – THE DOCTRINE OF MAN

LESSON 89 – DEFINING WORLDVIEWS: CONCLUSION

BIBLICAL DOCTRINE – JOHN MACARTHUR, PGS. 399-451

SYSTEMATIC THEOLOGY – WAYNE GRUDEM, PGS. 439-528

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Consider These Things

- ▶ In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. – John 1:1
- ▶ These questions confront us in everyday life with the reality that not everyone believes the Bible. But if we do believe the Bible then that will affect the way we live – if it does not then we don't really believe the Bible. These are things we need to consider.
- ▶ 1. What do we do when someone says that science disagrees with the Bible?
- ▶ We have to understand that the Bible is inerrant. There are no errors within its pages. Not historically or scientifically. So we must understand that if a report places science at odds with the Holy Scriptures, the science, quite frankly, is wrong. We cannot allow scientific theories to inform our faith. Our faith must inform our view of those theories. If a scientific theory stands against the Scripture then we should reject that faulty bit of “science.”

Consider These Things

- ▶ 2. What about contradictions in the Bible?
- ▶ The truth is, if the Bible is the Word of God and God cannot lie nor make mistakes (Titus 1:2; Hebrews 6:18) then we can say with assurance that there are no contradictions in the Bible. To say that the Bible contains contradictions is to attack the very nature of a Thrice-Holy God and say that He is not who He says He is.
- ▶ 3. What about hard to understand passages?
- ▶ There are things in the Scripture that are hard to understand. Even Peter refers to some of Paul's writing (which he does identify as Scripture) as difficult to grasp (2 Peter 3:16). But just because something is hard to understand does not mean it cannot be understood!

Studying the Bible

- ▶ 4. How do we study the Bible effectively?
- ▶ Step 1: Reading
- ▶ Read a passage of Scripture repeatedly until you understand its theme, meaning the main truth of the passage. Isaiah said, “Whom will he teach knowledge? And whom will he make to understand the message? Those just weaned from milk? Those just drawn from the breasts? For precept must be upon precept, precept upon precept, line upon line, here a little, there a little” (Is. 28:9,10).
- ▶ Read through the Old Testament at least once a year. As you read, note in the margins any truths you particularly want to remember, and write down separately anything you do not immediately understand. Often as you read you will find that many questions are answered by the text itself. The questions to which you cannot find answers become the starting points for more in-depth study using commentaries or other reference tools.

Studying the Bible

- ▶ Step 1: Reading
- ▶ Follow a different plan for reading the New Testament. Read one book at a time repetitiously for a month or more. This will help you to retain what is in the New Testament and not always have to depend on a concordance to find things.
- ▶ Write on index cards the major theme of each chapter. By referring to the cards as you do your daily reading, you will begin to remember the content of each chapter. In fact, you will develop a visual perception of the book in your mind.

Studying the Bible

- ▶ Step 2: Interpreting
- ▶ In Acts 8:30, Philip asked the Ethiopian eunuch, “Do you understand what you are reading?” Or put another way, “What does the Bible mean by what it says?” It is not enough to read the text and jump directly to the application; we must first determine what it means, otherwise the application may be incorrect.
- ▶ As you read Scripture, always keep in mind one simple question: “What does this mean?” To answer that question requires the use of the most basic principle of interpretation, called the analogy of faith, which tells the reader to “interpret the Bible with the Bible.” Letting the Holy Spirit be your teacher (1 John 2:27), search the Scripture He has authored, using cross references, comparative passages, concordances, indexes, and other helps. For those passages that yet remain unclear, consult your pastor or godly men who have written in that particular area.

Studying the Bible

- ▶ Errors to Avoid
- ▶ As you interpret Scripture, several common errors should be avoided.
- ▶ Do not draw any conclusions at the price of proper interpretation. That is, do not make the Bible say what you want it to say, but rather let it say what God intended when He wrote it.
- ▶ Avoid superficial interpretation. You have heard people say, “To me, this passage means,” or “I feel it is saying. . . .” The first step in interpreting the Bible is to recognize the four gaps we have to bridge: language, culture, geography, and history (see below).
- ▶ Do not spiritualize the passage. Interpret and understand the passage in its normal, literal, historical, grammatical sense, just like you would understand any other piece of literature you were reading today.

Studying the Bible

- ▶ Gaps to Bridge
- ▶ The books of the Bible were written many centuries ago. For us to understand today what God was communicating then, there are several gaps that need to be bridged: the language gap, the cultural gap, the geographical gap, and the historical gap. Proper interpretation, therefore, takes time and disciplined effort.
- ▶ Language. The Bible was originally written in Greek, Hebrew, and Aramaic. Often, understanding the meaning of a word or phrase in the original language can be the key to correctly interpreting a passage of Scripture.
- ▶ Culture. The culture gap can be tricky. Some people try to use cultural differences to explain away the more difficult biblical commands. Realize that Scripture must first be viewed in the context of the culture in which it was written. Without an understanding of first-century Jewish culture, it is difficult to understand the gospel. Acts and the epistles must be read in light of the Greek and Roman cultures.
- ▶ Geography. A third gap that needs to be closed is the geography gap. Biblical geography make the Bible come alive. A good Bible atlas is an invaluable reference tool that can help you comprehend the geography of the Holy Land.
- ▶ History. We must also bridge the history gap. Unlike the scriptures of most other world religions, the Bible contains the records of actual historical persons and events. An understanding of Bible history will help us place the people and events in it in their proper historical perspective. A good Bible dictionary or Bible encyclopedia is useful here, as are basic historical studies.

Studying the Bible

- ▶ Principles to Understand
- ▶ Four principles should guide us as we interpret the Bible: literal, historical, grammatical, and synthesis.
- ▶ The Literal Principle. Scripture should be understood in its literal, normal, and natural sense. While the Bible does contain figures of speech and symbols, they were intended to convey literal truth. In general, however, the Bible speaks in literal terms, and we must allow it to speak for itself.
- ▶ The Historical Principle. This means that we interpret in its historical context. We must ask what the text meant to the people to whom it was first written. In this way we can develop a proper contextual understanding of the original intent of Scripture.

Studying the Bible

- ▶ Four principles should guide us as we interpret the Bible: literal, historical, grammatical, and synthesis.
- ▶ The Grammatical Principle. This requires that we understand the basic grammatical structure of each sentence in the original language. To whom do the pronouns refer? What is the tense of the main verb? You will find that when you ask some simple questions like those, the meaning of the text immediately becomes clearer.
- ▶ The Synthesis Principle. This is what the Reformers called the *analogia scriptura*. It means that the Bible does not contradict itself. If we arrive at an interpretation of a passage that contradicts a truth taught elsewhere in the Scriptures, our interpretation cannot be correct. Scripture must be compared with Scripture to discover its full meaning.

Studying the Bible

- ▶ Step 3: Evaluating
- ▶ You have been reading and asking the question, “What does the Bible say?” Then you have interpreted, asking the question, “What does the Bible mean?” Now it is time to consult others to insure that you have the proper interpretation. Remember, the Bible will never contradict itself.
- ▶ Read Bible introductions, commentaries, and background books which will enrich your thinking through that illumination which God has given to other men and to you through their books. In your evaluation, be a true seeker. Be one who accepts the truth of God’s Word even though it may cause you to change what you always have believed, or cause you to alter your life pattern.

Studying the Bible

- ▶ Step 4: Applying
- ▶ The next question is: “How does God’s truth penetrate and change my own life?” Studying Scripture without allowing it to penetrate to the depths of your soul would be like preparing a banquet without eating it. The bottom-line question to ask is, “How do the divine truths and principles contained in any passage apply to me in terms of my attitude and actions?”
- ▶ Jesus made this promise to those who would carry their personal Bible study through to this point: “If you know these things, blessed are you if you do them” (John 13:17).
- ▶ Having read and interpreted the Bible, you should have a basic understanding of what the Bible says, and what it means by what it says. But studying the Bible does not stop there. The ultimate goal should be to let it speak to you and enable you to grow spiritually. That requires personal application.
- ▶ Bible study is not complete until we ask ourselves, “What does this mean for my life and how can I practically apply it?” We must take the knowledge we have gained from our reading and interpretation and draw out the practical principles that apply to our personal lives.
- ▶ If there is a command to be obeyed, we obey it. If there is a promise to be embraced, we claim it. If there is a warning to be followed, we heed it. This is the ultimate step: we submit to Scripture and let it transform our lives. If you skip this step, you will never enjoy your Bible study and the Bible will never change your life.

Studying the Bible

- ▶ Step 5: Correlating
- ▶ This last stage connects the doctrine you have learned in a particular passage or book with divine truths and principles taught elsewhere in the Bible to form the big picture. Always keep in mind that the Bible is one book in 66 parts, and it contains a number of truths and principles, taught over and over again in a variety of ways and circumstances. By correlating and cross-referencing, you will begin to build a sound doctrinal foundation by which to live.
- ▶ And consider also this from Charles Hodge as he explains rules of interpretation when it comes to rightly handling the Word of God: If every man has the right, and is bound to read the Scriptures, and to judge for himself what they teach, he must have certain rules to guide him in the exercise of this privilege and duty. These rules are not arbitrary. They are not imposed by human authority. They have no binding force which does not flow from their own intrinsic truth and propriety. They are few and simple.

Studying the Bible

- ▶ 1. The words of Scripture are to be taken in their plain historical sense. That is, they must be taken in the sense attached to them in the age and by the people to whom they were addressed. This only assumes that the sacred writers were honest, and meant to be understood.
- ▶ 2. If the Scriptures be what they claim to be, the word of God, they are the work of one mind, and that mind divine. From this it follows that Scripture cannot contradict Scripture. God cannot teach in one place anything which is inconsistent with what He teaches in another. Hence Scripture must explain Scripture. If a passage admits of different interpretations, that only can be the true one which agrees with what the Bible teaches elsewhere on the same subject. If the Scriptures teach that the Son is the same in substance and equal in power and glory with the Father, then when the Son says, "The Father is greater than I," the superiority must be understood in a manner consistent with this equality. It must refer either to subordination as to the mode of subsistence and operation, or it must be official. A king's son may say, "My father is greater than I," although personally his father's equal. This rule of interpretation is sometimes called the analogy of Scripture, and sometimes the analogy of faith. There is no material difference in the meaning of the two expressions.

Studying the Bible

- ▶ 3. The Scriptures are to be interpreted under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, which guidance is to be humbly and earnestly sought. The ground of this rule is twofold: First, the Spirit is promised as a guide and teacher. He was to come to lead the people of God into the knowledge of the truth. And secondly, the Scriptures teach, that “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.) The unrenewed mind is naturally blind to spiritual truth. His heart is in opposition to the things of God. Congeniality of mind is necessary to the proper apprehension of divine things. As only those who have a moral nature can discern moral truth, so those only who are spiritually minded can truly receive the things of the Spirit.
- ▶ The fact that all the true people of God in every age and in every part of the Church, in the exercise of their private judgment, in accordance with the simple rules above stated, agree as to the meaning of Scripture in all things necessary either in faith or practice, is a decisive proof of the perspicuity of the Bible, and of the safety of allowing the people the enjoyment of the divine right of private judgment.

Worldviews – Conclusion

- ▶ Hebrews 11:3 By faith we understand that the worlds were framed by the word of God, so that the things which are seen were not made of things which are visible.
- ▶ A worldview is “a set of fundamental assumptions about the most important issues in life.” The question then is whether or not these “fundamental assumptions” are based on the Word of God? How will we inform our minds and our consciences when it comes to the foundational truths about the creation of the world in which we live?
- ▶ As Christians, we should have what is referred to as a Biblical worldview, or a Christian worldview. Sadly though many in the church neglect the Word of God and live in ignorance when it comes to the truth given to us about the foundation of the world. Some have secular worldviews, worldly worldviews and values that reject the truth of God's Word. How can a professed follower of Christ hold to a secular worldview? It's simple really. It happens when we neglect the truth of God's Word and lean on our own understanding (Proverbs 3:5-6) instead of gaining understanding and wisdom from the Word of God.

Worldviews – Conclusion

- ▶ Our goal then has been to see what a Biblical worldview is, where it comes from, and how we apply it in examining the other worldviews that exist all around us. We learned that to have a truly Biblical worldview, to hold to Theism in its fullness, we must go back to the beginning.
- ▶ **In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth (Gen. 1:1).**
- ▶ NEXT WEEK: Topic 5 – The Doctrine of Sin