

## How to Study the Bible—an Adequate Person

### Scripture reading:

Hymn: 812

- John 6:63 It is the Spirit who gives life; the flesh profits nothing; the words which I have spoken to you are spirit and are life.
- I Cor. 2:13 Which things also we speak, not in words taught by human wisdom but in words taught by the Spirit, interpreting spiritual things with spiritual words.
- Heb. 5:14 But solid food is for the full-grown, who because of practice have their faculties exercised for discriminating between both good and evil.

### I. In order to study the Bible properly, one has to meet two basic requirements

- A. Objective requirement—the “methods” of studying the Bible has to be right.
- B. Subjective requirement—the “person” studying the Bible must be right.

### II. To be a “right” person before God, there are three prerequisites:

- A. The need to be spiritual
  1. Only a person who is regenerated, having a regenerated spirit can read the word of God
  2. God has given the spiritual matters to the spiritual man—1 Cor. 2:1-15, 3:1-4.
    - a. Soulless man— is an unregenerated man; he does not have a regenerated spirit and does not have the proper organ to understand God’s word. Such a person cannot understand the Bible.
    - b. Fleshly man— such a man has God’s life and His Spirit within him. But he walks not according to this spirit but according to the flesh. He has a very limited understanding of the Bible.
    - c. Spiritual man— such a person has the Spirit of God. He operates under the power of the living Spirit and walks according to the principle of the Spirit. The amount of revelation he receives is unlimited. God’s Word says that spiritual things can only be discerned by spiritual men.
- B. Consecration
  1. The heart being open—2 Cor. 3:18
  2. The Eye being single—Matt.6:22-24
  3. The need for continual obedience—John 7:17
- C. Being experienced in practice—Heb. 5:14
  1. Not being subjective.
  2. Not being careless.
  3. Not being curious.

**Reference Book:** *The Collected Work of Watchman Nee*, Vol. 54, Chapter 1.

**Excerpts from the Ministry:****The Preparation of the Person**

In order to study the Bible properly, one has to meet two basic requirements. The first requirement is that the person must be right; he must pass through proper training. The second requirement is that he has to have the right methods. During the past few centuries, in particular since the rise of Protestantism, many books have been published on the study of the Bible. Many of them are very good, but almost all are short in one matter—they only pay attention to methods of studying the Bible; they do not pay enough attention to the person who is studying the Bible. They give the impression that anyone who uses these methods will achieve good results.

Many have tried these methods but have not found any profit to their study. Those who have written books on the study of the Scripture have studied the Scripture well, but those who try to imitate them by approaching the Bible with the same methods do not necessarily fare as well. This is because the imitators have forgotten who they are. The study of the Bible is not only a matter of methods but a matter of the person. Some study the Bible well because they—the persons—have learned the proper lessons from God. When they find the right methods to assist in their study, they reap rich results. It is wrong to pass on methods without considering the kind of person one has to be. Even when some have the right methods, they can never study the Bible well because they are wrong in their very person.

**The Study of the Bible Is Not Merely a Matter of Right Methods  
But a Matter of Right Persons**

This is a very important point. The study of the Bible is not merely a matter of right methods but a matter of right persons. A person must be right before he can adopt the right method to study the Bible. Methods are important because without good methods, one cannot study the Bible well. But the person must also be properly calibrated before he can study the Bible well. Some people have a misguided concept that very few people can study the Bible. Others have a mistaken notion that anyone can study the Bible. Both are wrong. It is wrong to think that very few people can study the Bible, and it is equally wrong to think that everyone can study the Bible only one kind of person can study the Bible, and we have to be that kind of person before we can study the Bible well. We have to see that the person is first; the methods second. If the person is wrong, nothing will work even if one has all the right methods. If the person is right, the right methods can be put to good use. Some people pay much attention to good methods. Even though we also pay proper attention to good methods, we should never make methods our first priority. The methods do not come first; the person does. First, we have to be right in our person, and then we can speak about the best methods of Bible study.

**To Be a “Right” Person before God, There Are Three Prerequisites**

The Need to be Spiritual

Only one who has a regenerated spirit can read the word of God

The Bible is not only a book with words or letters printed on pages of paper. The very nature of the Bible is spirit. For this reason, everyone who reads this book must approach it with his spirit; it must be read with the spirit. The spirit that we are referring to is the spirit of every regenerated person. We call this spirit the “regenerated spirit”. Not everyone has this spirit. Therefore, not everyone can read the Bible well. Only those who have this spirit can read the Bible well; those who do not have this spirit cannot read it well. This spirit is needed to worship God. This same spirit is needed to read the Bible well.

The Lord said, “It is the Spirit who gives life; the flesh profits nothing; the word which I have spoken to you are spirit and are life” (John 6:63) Here we see two realms. One is the realm of spirit; the other is the realm of flesh. In the realm of spirit, everything is unprofitable. One must read the Bible with his spirit and in the realm of spirit. No matter how educated, logical, and analytical a man is, he cannot understand the Bible if he does not have this spirit.

God is Spirit. We know God today because we have a spirit. ...Unbelievers want to find out about God through analysis, synthesis, and reasoning. But even when the analysis, synthesis, and reasoning are all well founded, they will still not believe in God, because God can never be analyzed or synthesized. Job said, “Can you find out the depths of God?” (Job 11:7). No one can find out God by research. There is only one way to find out God – by the regenerated spirit. Those who touch God with this spirit will know Him right away. There is no other way except this way. In order to study the Bible, a man must have a regenerated spirit, in the same way that he must have a regenerated spirit to touch God. (*The Collected Works of Watchman Nee*, Vol. 54, pp.7-11.)

First Corinthians 2 and 3 show us three kinds of men—  
the soulish man, the fleshy man, and the spiritual man

As a rule, after a man becomes a Christian, he should know the things of the Spirit. But why is it that so many brothers and sisters do not know them? The reason is that though they have a regenerated spirit, they are not necessarily spiritual men. Paul’s emphasis in 1 Corinthians 2 and 3 is not merely the spirit but spiritual. John’s emphasis is the spirit, but Paul’s emphasis is on being spiritual. A man must not only have the spirit but must be spiritual according to this spirit.

One must have the spirit; without the spirit one can do nothing. But to have the spirit alone without living under the principle of this spirit, that is without living in this spirit and walking according to this spirit to be a spiritual man, is useless.... The fundamental way to the understanding of the Bible is through the spirit. This is the reason Paul showed us in 1 Corinthians 2 that the issue is not having or not having the spirit, but of being spiritual or not being spiritual. Spiritual things are discerned only by spiritual men. (*The Collected Works of Watchman Nee*, Vol. 54, pp. 14-16.)

First, there is the soulish man. Such a man merely possesses all the faculties of the soul. We can call him the psychological man. A soulish man is an unregenerated man; he does not have a regenerated spirit and does not have the proper organ to understand God’s word. Such a person cannot understand the Bible.

Second, there is the fleshy man. Such a man has God’s life and His Spirit within him. But he walks not according to this spirit but according to the flesh. He has a regenerated spirit, but he does not use his spirit or subject himself to the rule of his spirit. He has a spirit, but he does not come under the control of the spirit or allow the

spirit to take over everything. The Bible calls this kind of person fleshy. He has a very limited understanding of the Bible. He can only take milk, not solid food. Milk is something that is first digested by the mother. It refers to indirect revelations, revelations that do not come to a person directly. A man who drinks milk cannot receive any direct revelation from God. He receives revelation from other spiritual men, who transfer such revelation to him.

Third, there is the spiritual man. Such a person has the Spirit of God. He operates under the power of the living Spirit and walks according to the principle of the Spirit. The amount of revelation he receives is unlimited. God's Word says that spiritual things can only be discerned by spiritual men. In order to study the Bible, we have to remember these basic requirements: We must be spiritual and we must walk according to the spirit. (*The Collected Works of Watchman Nee*, Vol. 54, pp. 16-17.)

### Consecration

Previously, we have said that only spiritual men can understand the Bible. Now we have to add one more thing; only consecrated ones can understand the Bible. If a man is not consecrated, he can never read the Bible well. As soon he opens the Bible, he will come across places that he has held back in consecration, and darkness will be with him. ...In order to understand the Bible, we need an absolute consecration. Without consecration, our heart will not go to God. One special characteristic of consecration is that it brings our heart to God. ...May the Lord show us this basic principle. If we want to read the Bible, understand its teachings, and receive its revelations, we have to hear one responsibility before the Lord: we have to consecrate ourselves absolutely to Him. (*The Collected Works of Watchman Nee*, Vol. 54, pp. 20-22.)

### The heart being open

The Bible is the word of God. It is full of God's light. Yet this light will only enlighten those who are open to Him. Second Corinthians 3:18 says, "But we all with unveiled face, beholding and reflecting like a mirror the glory of the Lord. "The basic qualification for being enlightened by the glory of the Lord is to behold Him with unveiled face. God's light will only enlighten those who are open to Him. If a man is not open to God, he will not receive God's light.... Light operates according to a law. It shines on those who are open to it, and the amount of shining depends on the amount of openness. This is a law.

Every child of God has a Bible in his hand, but the amount of light each receives from this book is different. Some are completely ignorant of what the Bible says. Others receive some light from reading it. Still others are full of light when they read it. The reason for the difference is that the persons reading it are different. God's light is the same, but the persons are different. Any lack of sight that we experience, whether great or small, complete or partial, means that we are in darkness. We should never consider it a small thing to find ourselves having difficulty understanding the Bible. If we have difficulty understanding the Bible, it can only mean one thing: we are living in darkness! It is a very serious thing to read God's Word and not understand or receive any light from it.

Next, we should ask: what is the meaning of being open to God? Openness comes from unconditional and unreserved consecration. Openness to God is not a temporary

attitude; it is a permanent disposition which a man develops before God. It is not an incidental temperament but a continuous practice. Openness to God can only come from unconditional and unreserved consecration. If a man's consecration to God is perfect and absolute, he will have no reservation toward God and will not be closed in any way. (*The Collected Works of Watchman Nee*, Vol. 54, pp.17-19.)

### The eye being single

Many portions of the Bible explicitly speak of light. In Matthew 6:22 the Lord Jesus spoke on the light of the heart, saying, "The lamp of the body is the eye." ... Light is in God's word, whereas the lamp relates to us. In order for God's word to shine in us, we must have a lamp within us. This lamp is our eye. In order for our whole body to be full of light, the Lord specified one condition—our eye must be single.

What does it mean to have a single eye? Although we have two eyes, there is only one focus; they only see one thing at one time. In order for the eyes to see clearly, they must have only one point of focus; they cannot have two foci. If our eye is not single, we cannot perceive the light.

The Lord said, "No one can serve two masters, for either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will hold to one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and mammon" (6:24) Many people do not have light because their eye is not single. The reason their eye is not single is that they are short of consecration before the Lord. What is consecration? It is serving Jehovah alone. A man cannot serve two masters. (*The Collected Works of Watchman Nee*, Vol. 54, pp. 19-20.)

### The need for continual obedience

God grants us revelation of scriptural teachings according to the measure of obedience we render to Him. The more we obey Him, the more light we will receive. If we continue to obey God, we will continue to see. Without consecration, we cannot see. Without a continual obedience, we cannot continue to see. If our consecration is not thorough, the shining will not be great. Therefore, the fundamental issue is consecration. If a man does not understand the meaning of consecration, he cannot understand the Bible. A consecrated person must not only have an initial, fundamental consecration, but he must sustain an obedience before the Lord all the time. Only then will he continually see. The amount of light a man receives depends on the amount of obedience he sustains after his initial consecration. If we are perfect in our obedience we will be perfect in our seeing.

We should pay special attention to the Lord's word in John 7:17: "If anyone resolves to do His will, he will know concerning the teaching, whether it is of God or whether I speak from Myself." If a man resolves to do God's will, he will know. In other words, obedience is the one condition for knowing. A resolution to do God's will is a condition for knowing God's teaching. If a man has no intention to do God's will, yet wants to know God's teaching, he is asking for the impossible. In order to know God's teaching, a man must first resolve to do His will. This resolution relates to one's attitude. God wants us to be obedient first in our attitude. If a man is obedient to God in his attitude, God's teaching will be clear to him. We should not ask what the Bible teaches. Instead, we should ask if we are willing to obey His word. The problem is with our attitude; it has nothing to do with the teaching of the Bible. Whether or not the Bible will be open to us depends on our attitude towards God. We are responsible for our attitude, while God is responsible for His teaching. If our attitude is right, God will

reveal Himself to us and open our eyes immediately. If we supplement this with our obedience, our attitude will be right once again and God will grant us further revelation. First there is a right attitude, and then there is revelation. If we respond to the revelation with obedience, we will have more of the right attitude and will receive more revelation. (*The Collected Works of Watchman Nee*, Vol. 54, pp.23-24.)

### Being Experienced in Practice

#### Not being subjective

First, every reader of the Bible should learn to be objective. No subjective person can understand the Bible. A subjective person is not suitable to be a learner. If we speak to an objective person, he will understand after we speak once. But a subjective person will not understand after we speak three times. Many people do not understand what others are saying, not because they are unintelligent, but because they are too subjective. They live entirely in their mind and cannot take in others' words. They are full of thoughts, opinions, and proposals. Others' words cannot find any ground in them. Their mind may be focused on water, while others may be speaking about mountains. They interpret what they hear and take the mountains to mean mountains with water. A subjective person cannot understand men's word accurately, let alone hear God's word! He cannot understand worldly things, let alone spiritual things.

One interesting thing about those who are good at studying the Bible is that they are all quick to listen. Once others say something, they understand exactly what has been spoken. An objective person can listen to others, and he can also understand the Bible. In contrast, some people do not have any idea what others are saying even after listening once or twice. They have too many things in their head. They are full of thoughts, opinions, and proposals. Others can repeat the same thing to them once or twice, but they will still not get it. In order to find out if we are subjective, we only need to ask ourselves if we understand what others are saying. Can we understand what others are saying even if they speak very briefly? Our days on this earth are limited. If we are subjective, the time that is available to us will be greatly reduced. An objective man can get more from reading the Bible one time than a subjective man can from reading it ten times. A subjective man will miss what he reads even after he reads it once, twice, or even nine or ten times. The Bible will slip by him and not leave any impression in him. (*The Collected Works of Watchman Nee*, Vol. 54, pp.26-27.)

#### Not being careless

Second, no one can be careless in reading the Bible. The Bible is a very accurate book. Not a single word of it can be misread or replaced. If a person is somewhat careless, he will miss God's word. A subjective man will miss God's word, and a careless man will also miss God's word. We have to be careful. The more we know God's word, the more careful we will be. A sloppy person has a sloppy reading of the Bible. As soon as we hear a brother speak on the Bible, we know whether he is a sloppy person or a careful person. In reading or memorizing a verse, many people make careless mistakes with crucial words. This is a terrible habit. It is easy for us to become inaccurate in our habit. This leads to an inaccurate understanding of the Bible. In many instances a little carelessness on our part will lead to misunderstanding God's word. (*The Collected Works of Watchman Nee*, Vol. 54, p. 28.)

Before the Lord we have to develop the habit of being accurate. If we are inaccurate, we will sacrifice God's accuracy. If we have a habit of being inaccurate, we will not get anything when we read the Bible. We have to realize how accurate the Bible is. It is so accurate that it has no room for any confusion. We must be trained by the Lord to be accurate. (*The Collected Works of Watchman Nee*, Vol. 54, p. 32.)

#### Not being curious

Third, in trying to be accurate, we must not become curious. God's Word is accurate, but we must never search it with a curious mind. If we search God's Word with a curious mind, we will miss the spiritual worth of the book. The Bible is a spiritual book, and we must exercise our spirit before we can understand this book. If the purpose of achieving accuracy is the satisfaction of our curiosity, not the satisfaction of our spiritual needs, we are on the wrong track. It is unfortunate that many people read the Bible with the goal of digging out strange things. Some people have spent a great deal of time trying to ascertain whether or not the tree of the knowledge of good and evil is a vine tree. This kind of study of the Bible is vain. We must remember that the Bible is a spiritual book. We have to touch life, touch the spirit, and touch the Lord. Once we touch the spiritual things, we will spontaneously recognize the literal accuracy of the Word because all spiritual things are intrinsically accurate. But if our premise is not a pursuit of spiritual things, we will be on the wrong track. This error comes from one's disposition for curiosity. If we do not change our disposition, we cannot expect to read the Bible well. (*The Collected Works of Watchman Nee*, Vol. 54, pp.32-33)

#### Questions:

1. What are the two basic requirements in order to study the Bible properly?
2. What are the three prerequisites in studying the Bible?
3. Why does a person who has a regenerated spirit still need to be spiritual in order to study the Bible?
4. What is the relationship between consecration and the heart being open, the eye being single, and the need for continual obedience, in the matter of studying the Bible?
5. What are the three habits we need to be experienced in practice when we study the Bible?