

Notes for the Ones Called-Out to Meet

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Bible Study Tools and Methods

by Dan Trygg

“Be diligent to present yourself approved to God as a worker who does not need to be ashamed, accurately handling (lit., ‘cutting-straight’) the word of the truth.” 2 Timothy 2:15

Study Methodology – Overview, Observations and Principles

A. Data Gathering

1. Prayer -- 1 Corinthians 2:12-16; 2 Peter 1:20,21 -- for guidance, discernment.
Note David's heart in this regard -- Psalm 119:18,27,66,73,125,169. True Bible study is a spiritual experience, not just an intellectual pursuit. In order for the Scriptures to be fully profitable, let us ask for the teaching/illuminating ministry of the Holy Spirit (Isaiah 11:2; John 14:26; 16:7-15).
2. Study a passage in its context.
 - a.) Historical Context - What is the historical setting of the book? Time, place, people referred to, issues or events mentioned, culture, etc. How was this verse understood by the first hearers or readers?
 - b.) Textual Context.
 - Immediate - The flow of argument or thoughts presented in the verses before and after the passage in question.
 - Wider Context - How does this passage fit into the general argument or word usage of the entire book, the works of this particular Biblical writer, the entire testament to which the book belongs, or even the Bible as a whole. Generally, the broadest context is the best context.
3. Argument flow - Following are some key words that help identify the relationships of phrases or sentences to each other:

Because, for, thus, since,
for this reason, wherefore,
consequently, therefore

All reflect a logical causality - a cause and effect relationship in the writer's thought. It is the writer's explanation for why his argument is true.

In order that, that, to, towards,
unto, for

All reflect the idea of purpose or direction toward a goal. It is the language of motivations, plans, and visions. It deals with the question of where or to what end.

So that, that, consequently, with
the result that

The idea of result. This is a statement of fact without making any strong claim to causal relationships or any statement as to the purpose involved. It states simply what happened or what will happen.

And, also, even

Conjunctions - words that tie thoughts together.

But, except, unless

Disjunctives - words that separate thoughts from being linked together.

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| As, like | Reveal that a comparison is being made. An illustration or example. |
| Comparative and superlative adjectives | Quantitative or qualitative relationships between concepts or objects, e.g., more, most, words ending with “-er” or “-est”. |
| Prepositional phrases | Note carefully the emphasis of the preposition and how the prepositional phrase relates to other words or phrases in the sentence. Create a visual picture in your mind, if possible. |
| If then | Conditional statement. Important to watch for multiple Conditions or multiple promised results. Many times the "if" or the "then" are not explicitly stated, but are reflected by the contextual flow of thought and are thus to be understood by the reader. |
4. Use of Study Tools.
- a.) Primary tools - Tools to help you interact with the text itself. English dictionary; concordance; topical Bible; cross references; other versions; maps; Bible atlas; Greek and Hebrew helps.
 - b.) Secondary tools - Tools that provide additional information in the form of explanations and interpretations. Be careful not to prejudice your own conclusion! – Commentaries; Bible dictionaries; Bible handbooks; Bible encyclopedias; resource people; other books.

B. Data Analysis and Organization

Conceptualizing a single picture. It is like putting puzzle pieces together. You match up the "shapes" and "colors" of the pieces to enlarge the picture. However, do not force the pieces! The goal is to reconcile all information in order to build a complete concept without:

- (1.) adding to the information plainly discovered; or, (2.) excluding any information discovered.
1. List pertinent information gathered.
 2. Beware of making assumptions or unjustified presuppositions.
 3. Be sure all passages refer to the same subject. You may find passages that *appear* to be about the same thing but are, on closer examination, about different subjects entirely. E.g., the use of the word "law" in the book of Romans.
 4. Remember, sometimes when trying to describe spiritual truths it is impossible to grasp it all in one nice, neat picture. This is because either (1.) we do not have enough information, or (2.) our finite minds are incapable of grasping the infinite.

C. Evaluation - Tests for Truth

Obviously, the major consideration is that our position is true to the Scriptures. Following, however, are some tests that are helpful in evaluating any theological or philosophical position:

1. **Coherence - Does the position hold together as a system?** Any logical contradictions or blatant discrepancies within the position itself betray the existence of error.
2. **Correspondence - A clear one-to-one relationship to reality.** Does not overlook or "explain away" certain phenomena; nor does it focus mainly upon the untestable, the unknowable.
3. **Pragmatic - Does it work?** Does it do what it claims to do? Does it provide a workable explanation for different experiences?