

WORK OF THE WORD

Understanding the Bible is a lot like taking a hike to a high place. First, you scope the terrain. That's your observation of the content of a passage, noting, what does the text actually say? Second, you read the trail-markers. That's the interpretation of a passage in context, asking what does the text mean? Third, you go on the trek. That's making application, so that you conform to the truth of the passage. You do this by asking, how will this work in my life? Finally you reach the top. That's transformation, as you ask, how does Christ change me, as I continue in this process of living out the truth of Scripture?

1- TIMELESS TRUTHS - In observation, you study the words of human authors, breathed out by God to write the Bible. In interpretation, you discern the original Author's intent, what God said to His original audience. Then you can make application, as you believe all the Bible teaches, obey all that it requires, and trust all that it promises. This leads to transformation of your life. These steps are the "work of the Word" as you step out in faith to put God's truth to work in your life situation.

Psalm 19 says, "*the law of the Lord is perfect, reviving the soul; the testimony of the Lord is sure, making wise the simple; the precepts of the Lord are right, rejoicing the heart; the commandment of the Lord is pure, enlightening the eyes; the fear of the Lord is clean, enduring forever; the rules of the Lord are true and righteous altogether. More to be desired are they than gold; in keeping them there is great reward.*"

Because God's Word contains timeless truths. His revealed principles are true for all people in all times and in all places. Scripture was written not *to* me but *for* me, to be lived out by the church in the world. The content of God's Word, in the context of history, is that to which I must conform. God is truth, objective and unchanging. The words of the Creator directly relate to my life situation here and now.

2- ONLY ONE MEANING - When reading the Bible, most people confuse steps two and three. They jumble interpretation with application. They think the text "means" how it applies to their lives. As we've stressed in recent columns, there can be only one true interpretation of any text, and that is what the original Author intended for it to mean. Your task is to discern His meaning for His original audience

Only then can you make application of His timeless truths across the time-bridge into your own life today. God's words are a reflection of Himself and His character. His words are without error, and what He has written down for us in the Bible is the complete revelation of His will for His people. You can live out the truths and principles of Scripture in your own life, by understanding the meaning of the text, and relating its significance for today's life situations. That's knowing and experiencing how the eternal message matters to you today. And it involves repenting from and renouncing the lies you formerly believed.

You replace the lies of the world, the flesh, and the devil, with God's truth. Through the renewing of your mind, by being conformed to the image of Christ, as revealed by the Holy Spirit in the Bible. God's written Word (His propositions of truth) and His living Word (the person of Jesus Christ) form the record of the absolute and eternal truth that God wants us to know, the measure to which all things compare: "the ultimate authority by which every realm of human knowledge and endeavor should be judged. Therefore, it is to be believed in all that it teaches, obeyed in all that it requires, and trusted in all that it promises."

3- MANY APPLICATIONS - There can be only one true interpretation for any passage, what the original Author intended for His original audience; but there are many appropriate applications of that one true interpretation. That's why understanding the Bible is the "work of the Word." It takes study. Application is the temporal relevance of timeless eternal truths. Application involves how it works for you, in your life situation today. Transporting God's timeless truths across the time-bridge to you, today, here, now.

1 Corinthians 10:11 says, "*these things happened to them as an example, but they were written down for our instruction.*" Romans 15:4 agrees "*whatever was written in former days was written for our instruction, that through endurance and encouragement of the Scriptures we might have hope.*" The Bible speaks to your needs this very minute, because God spoke to real people long ago to reveal His timeless truths. Your human nature is the same as theirs, and so what God said then applies to you now. And when you walk in His ways according to His Word, by His power within, your life will certainly change for the better.

Problem is, we're impatient as we read Scripture. Most people don't even read their Bible every day. And when they do, they're in the midst of a challenge or struggle and they need God to speak to them "now" with direction or blessing or comfort or strength. They end up "leapfrogging" as to how and why God wrote it, as though the Bible exists only for your immediate convenience and comfort. They speedread the observation part, muddling interpretation with application. But there's no substitute for reading the Bible every day. Make it part of your daily life experience, to inform your attitudes and actions. God's timeless truths in mind to apply to everyday life situations, in God's providence for you. Read your Bible! □