

Does God Approve of How You Handle His Word?

Why do some Christians seem to be more knowledgeable about the Bible than others? While some may have more mental capacity or resources than others, God considers every Christian a steward of the abilities and resources that He has entrusted into their care. *“Everyone to whom much is given, from him much will be required; and to whom much has been committed, of him they will ask the more”* (Luke 12:48).

While some Christians have less capacity to acquire Bible knowledge than others, this is usually not the factor that hinders most Christians from learning their Bible. For most, the problem is **a lack of diligence** about the matter. Rather than focus on the relatively few people with diminished mental capacity, I will turn my attention to the millions of Christians who are fully able to acquire truth from the God who invites and commands us to seek for it. Assuming you are one of these people, let me now get personal with you. If you have not done so yet, you need to embrace the fact that God holds you personally responsible for the acquisition of truth and He expects you to be diligent about it.

*“Be diligent to present yourself approved by God, **an unashamed workman who accurately interprets the Word of truth**”* (2 Timothy 2:15).

If English is your first language, He holds you more accountable than most other people in the world because more tools are available to English-speaking people to help them accurately study the Bible. Even if you are not currently proficient at studying the Bible, you can still make it your goal to become “an unashamed workman who accurately interprets the Word of truth.”

What does God expect from you? What goals should you set for yourself in this matter in order to become an unashamed workman who accurately interprets the Word of truth? Again, let me remind you that you have no choice in this matter because God has commanded you to acquire the skills necessary to accurately interpret the Word of truth. He expects you to be diligent about this. You can't shrug it off. God expects you to acquire the skills that will enable YOU to accurately interpret the Word of truth.¹

To obey God's command, what are some things you can and should do? First and foremost, you should read your Bible daily. If you read the Bible through cover to cover every year, you will acquire much of what you need to properly interpret the Bible for yourself.² As you read the Bible through each year, your increased general Bible knowledge will help you by giving you valuable overall knowledge of the Bible. Armed with this foundational knowledge, you will be equipped to accurately interpret some of the more difficult passages. You will also be in a better position to detect and discern erroneous interpretations that are so widespread these days.

Another valuable technique is to study one Bible book at a time by reading it through daily and noting observations that God gives you on a piece of paper. By writing them down, you will be forced to articulate your thoughts in an organized way. This will also help you convey these thoughts to other people at a future time.

¹ If a Christian shrugs off God's desire that he be diligent in this matter, it suggests that he does not properly revere God. Rather, it suggests that he despises God. (To despise God is to take God and His Word lightly.)

² If you read just three chapters each day, you will read through the entire Bible in one year.

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Another important practice is the use of the Bible itself to help you interpret passages that might be difficult to understand. A good **reference Bible**³ will help immensely. When you come across a difficult passage, look to see if there are reference notes in the margin for that verse that will direct you to other passages in the Bible. The best interpreter of any Bible passage is the Bible itself. Whenever possible, you should consult other passages in the Bible that shed light on the passage you are currently trying to interpret.

A similar method is the use of “word studies.” If you are trying to understand a passage, it usually helps to gain a better understanding of key words in that passage. You can look up the key word in a **concordance**.⁴ An exhaustive English concordance (such as “Strong’s”) will indicate all the passages in the Bible that use that key word. Then, you can look up those other passages and often glean a very helpful understanding about the key word that is in the passage you are currently trying to interpret.

The techniques mentioned above are the most important methods a Christian can utilize in his quest to become an unashamed workman who accurately interprets the Word of truth in accordance with God’s desire. Some tools that will help you use these techniques include an English dictionary, a Bible dictionary, a Bible program ap running on a smart phone or computer. If you do not know how to use any of these tools, ask your pastor or another knowledgeable Christian to show you.

In order to become an unashamed workman who accurately interprets the Word of truth, these approaches must be used in faith and not mere academic exercises that natural men use in the pursuit of knowledge. Whatever is not done in faith is sin. (See Romans 14:26.) We can have confidence that God will lead us into truth because He has promised to do so for all who seek it by faith. He sent His Spirit into the world to guide and teach us.⁵ If we study our Bibles using mere academic means (like natural men), we are doing so from a position of unbelief. Such an approach is sinful, especially in light of God’s promise to personally teach all who seek His truth by faith.

It is unfortunate that so many Christians read and study the Bible as if the Holy Spirit is not interested in helping them do so. Throughout the Bible, we read the command to “wait upon the Lord.” This command applies to everything we need. We pray and the wait with expectation that He will answer. So, if we need strength to go through a trial by faith, we pray and continue to pray until God brings deliverance as He

³ A reference Bible is the same as other Bibles except that it includes “reference notes” in the margins. Typically, a letter (a,b, c, etc) is usually placed somewhere in the verse you are reading. When you see a letter like this, then go to the margin and look for the verse reference for the verse you are reading. Then, look for the appropriate letter (a, b, c) next to that verse reference number. Next to that letter will be one or more other Bible verse references that you can look up that might shed light on the verse you are currently trying to interpret.

⁴ Smart phones, computers and tablets can perform the function of a concordance very efficiently. Open up a Bible program such as Bible Gateway or Blue Letter Bible and search on the key word in the search window. The ap will then display every verse in which that word appears in the English Bible you have opened. Read the verses that are presented to gain more understanding about that word or subject. Then bring your knowledge to bear on the passage your are currently trying to interpret.

⁵ "Eye has not seen, nor ear heard, Nor have entered into the heart of man The things which God has prepared for those who love Him." ¹⁰ But God has revealed *them* to us through His Spirit. For the Spirit searches all things, yes, the deep things of God.

¹¹ “What man knows the things of a man except the spirit of the man which is in him? Even so no one knows the things of God except the Spirit of God. Now we have received, not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit who is from God, that we might know the things that have been freely given to us by God. ¹³ These things we also speak, not in words which man's wisdom teaches but which the Holy Spirit teaches, comparing spiritual things with spiritual. ¹⁴ But the natural man does not receive the things of the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him; nor can he know *them*, because they are spiritually discerned. (1 Corinthians 2:9-14).

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sees fit. The same principle holds true for our approach to the Bible. Because God has promised to answer those who seek, we pray before we read or study our Bible. If God does not give us the insight immediately, we don't run to others and ask them what the passage means. No, we continue to meditate and pray expecting that light will eventually come in a very personal way from the Holy Spirit.

This brings us to the subject of commentaries. Generally speaking, reading a commentary⁶ will not help you acquire proper interpretation skills. You will be leaning on others to interpret it for you and never develop the skills God intends you to acquire. While commentaries have their uses, most of them cannot help us in our efforts to become an unashamed workman who accurately interprets the Word of truth. When faced with a passage that seems difficult to interpret, many Christians stop waiting upon the Lord and immediately look to see what various men have said about the passage, and they often do so without even trying to employ the methods described above. If they revered God properly and desired to see His glory unleashed in their lives, they would continue to pray and ask God to help them employ the means available that would allow them to become an unashamed workman who accurately interprets the Word of truth. Instead, they settle for second-hand insight which may not even be accurate. If this is their normal approach, they are approaching the Bible as if they are natural men who study the Bible in an autonomous way.

Since the Holy Spirit has been provided to help you, make up your mind now to begin depending less and less on other human beings to interpret the Bible for you. Even if you feel inadequate right now, God will help you over time to become an unashamed workman who accurately interprets the Word of truth. And as you progress, you will experience along the way many personal encounters with the God who delights to make Himself known personally to all who diligently seek Him.

Thomas Bear, March 20, 2020

Οὐαὶ μοὶ ἔστιν ἂν μὴ εὐαγγελίζωμαι (Προς Κορινθίους Α 9:16)

⁶ Certain types of commentaries may actually help you in your efforts to become an unashamed workman who accurately handles the Word of truth. The type of commentaries that can help are those that contain critical notes about the Greek text itself or books that merely give background information about the history or setting of the book. But even these commentaries and books may contain inaccurate information. The burden is on you to fulfill your responsibility to become an unashamed workman who accurately interprets the Word of truth.