

2003 Topical Studies Introduction and No 1.

Why we study

As we embark on our series of topical studies we need to consider why we do such things. We are not studying and meeting and discussing just out of habit, or because it is a congenial thing to do—our equivalent of a pagan’s visit to the pub. We study the Bible because its main topic, God, the Lord Jesus and his people, though vast and not completely knowable, can benefit us by giving us a better knowledge of God. A proper knowledge of God leads to a better life, if we choose to live that way. It gives us security in a world that is full of hardship and temptation. It makes us effective witnesses and light-bearers. It is a *lifetime* quest.

In our judgment, to broaden our grasp of reality at this stage we need to undertake three studies: “God of All the Ages”, “The Gospel for Today” and “The People of God.” You may have other topics too.

- **If we understand God better we will be able more confidently to trust him. “And without faith it is impossible to please God, because anyone who comes to him must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who earnestly seek him” (Hebrews 11:6). The path of following Christ is always uphill and needs faith for us to climb it. Judy and I are concerned that we all exercise more faith as we make our daily decisions and consider what we will do with our life.**

- **If we have a better understanding of the gospel we will be better able to present it to the wide spectrum of non-believers that surround us. We are concerned that we get beyond a simplistic approach that takes no account of where the person is coming from—“All have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God.” True, but is that what people need to hear first? How does that go down with a New Age hippie, or a rationalist or a post-modern graduate?**

- **We, the Tuesday Group, have become a community of like-minded people, and it is a remarkable and wonderful phenomenon! All over town, all over the world, people gather in various styles of communities—from the most formal to the least structured—and all claim that what they have is the right way. The cults say theirs is the only way. Some do this and some do that in the name of fellowship and worship, and somewhere the Bible loses its influence in favour of tradition. So we need to understand what the Bible has to say about the people of God, their worship and relationships and how we present ourselves to the unbelieving world. Some of this has been covered in our Corinthians studies, but not all of it.**

All this is not just an intellectual exercise, or a course that you might undertake at Bible College. These are issues that we need to address because the advance of the gospel in your neck of the woods is up to you. The apostles worked out how to do it, so why can't we?

But before we set out, we should revise the principles that are a part of the study of the word of God.

How we study

We have been studying the Bible for some years now and are familiar with the principles of analysing the texts: What does it say? What does it mean? and What should I do about it? Topical studies need a little different approach because someone has already done preliminary work, with certain presuppositions. We need to recognize these presuppositions, and we also need to recognize our own. We all have biases. These may arise from a theological heritage and may subtly control what we look for and how we look for it in our Bible study. This, in turn, affects what we can or cannot discover. Becoming aware of our unconscious presuppositions is not easy, and it is a process that will go on throughout the whole of life.

Here are a few questions to help you review the way you approach and understand the word of God, and they comprise the first of the topical studies.

How one approaches and understands the word of God

[The studies are designed in workshop style, with everyone contributing and doing the research on the job. We need a note-taker who will type up a report of the collective wisdom at the end of the topic, perhaps more frequently. The answer to the first question may be done privately, and shared only if you feel like it.]

1. What biases (or presuppositions) might you be bringing to the Scriptures that could colour your understanding or interpretation? No agendas here, just think it out and put it into words.

2. Luke 24:25-49 describes Jesus' handling of the Scriptures with two groups of people. What do you observe about his attitude to the Scriptures and how he treated them?

3. How does the condition of the heart affect our grasp of God's truth?

Matthew 13:11-15

Hebrews 3:7-15

4. What do you think Scripture means by "the heart"?

5. How does our mind influence our grasp and use of God's truth?

Acts 17:1-4

2 Corinthians 3:14-17

2 Peter 3:1-2

6. How does the Bible integrate "heart" and "mind"?

Mark 12:30

Ephesians 4:17-24

1 Peter 3:15-16

Summary:

7. How does the Holy Spirit help us understand God's word?

John 16:13:14

1 Corinthians 2:7-16

1 John 2:27

8. What do the Scriptures say about mastering God's word?

Proverbs 2:1-6

2 Timothy 2:15

1 Peter 1:10-12

Summary:

9. What else affects or contributes to our understanding of God's truth?

Psalm 25:4-5

Psalm 119:33:34

1 Corinthians 12:7-11

Ephesians 1:15-23

1 Timothy 4:11-14

Hebrews 5:12-14

Summary:

10. In summary, what do you consider to be the essential elements to help us understand God's word?

11. Again in summary form, list the significant truths the Holy Spirit has drawn to you attention through this study.

12. For each truth compose an "If . . . then" statement.
