

The Disciplines of Grace

~ Reading Scripture I ~

(1) What are the *Disciplines of Grace*? (aka - the Means of Grace)

Philippians 2:12-13

¹² Therefore, my beloved, as you have always obeyed, so now, not only as in my presence but much more in my absence, **work out your own salvation with fear and trembling**, ¹³ for it is God who works in you, both to will and to work for his good pleasure.

1 Timothy 4:7-8

⁷ **Train yourself for godliness**; ⁸ for while bodily training is of some value, godliness is of value in every way, as it holds promise for the present life and also for the life to come.

(2) Why read Scripture?

Colossians 3:16

Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly, teaching and admonishing one another in all wisdom, singing psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, with thankfulness in your hearts to God.

Deuteronomy 6:6-9

⁶ And these words that I command you today **shall be on your heart**. ⁷ You shall teach them diligently to your children, and shall talk of them when you sit in your house, and when you walk by the way, and when you lie down, and when you rise. ⁸ You shall bind them as a sign on your hand, and they shall be as frontlets between your eyes. ⁹ You shall write them on the doorposts of your house and on your gates.

(3) Introduction to Hermeneutics (The art of interpretation)

The problem of interpretation: case study on homosexuality

Leviticus 20:13

If a man lies with a male as with a woman, both of them have committed an abomination.

(4) How do you do hermeneutics?

Two steps:

Exegesis

Application

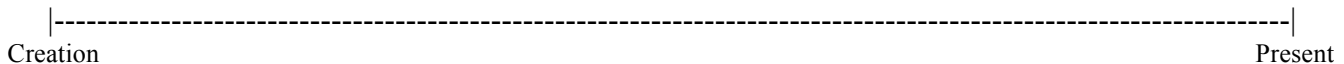
Example passage:

1 Corinthians 10:25-29

²⁵ Eat whatever is sold in the meat market without raising any question on the ground of conscience. ²⁶ For “the earth is the Lord’s, and the fullness thereof.” ²⁷ If one of the unbelievers invites you to dinner and you are disposed to go, eat whatever is set before you without raising any question on the ground of conscience. ²⁸ But if someone says to you, “This has been offered in sacrifice,” then do not eat it, for the sake of the one who informed you, and for the sake of conscience – ²⁹ I do not mean your conscience, but his.

(5) Why is exegesis so hard? Answer: the historical gap.

Bible timeline



So how do we overcome the historical gap?

(6) A final word: the importance of prayer (The Illumination of the Holy Spirit)

1 Corinthians 2:13-14

¹³ And we impart this in words not taught by human wisdom but **taught by the Spirit**, interpreting spiritual truths to those who are spiritual. ¹⁴ The natural person does not accept the things of the Spirit of God, for they are folly to him, and he is not able to understand them because they are spiritually discerned.

(7) Book recommendations

Knowing Scripture, RC Sproul

How to Read the Bible for All Its Worth, by Gordon Fee and Douglas Stuart

ESV Study Bible

Discussion Notes:

(1) Christians often complain that they are not growing. The reason is that they are not using the disciplines of grace God has given us. The Bible never speaks of the Christian life as something you coast through on cruise control. There is a toiling, a striving, a training. This is key to growing in grace.

Phil. 2:12-13. You have to work out your salvation. I thought we are saved by grace not works. Yes, but you are saved to do good works (Eph. 2:10). Salvation is not simply you saying a prayer at retreat and that's it. But it's working out into reality what God has declared in your life.

1 Tim. 4:7-8. Paul is talking about athletics. Growing as a Christian is analogous to training for athletic competition. But for so many of us, we are sitting on the couch, eating potato chips and then we show up fat and out of shape. No wonder we are not growing.

Do we take our Christian lives as seriously and with the sweat and training that we would if we were involved in a sports competition?

(2) People have this attitude that reading the Bible is optional. That what the Bible says is pretty basic and it just repeats itself anyways and everyone knows what we're supposed to do – don't have sex outside marriage, don't steal, etc.

But this is a flawed understanding of the Bible. We don't read the Bible simply for information. But through reading the Bible, we have a vivid experience of the presence of God that transforms us. We can almost speak of it like a person – it is a relationship with God.

Col. 3:16. The word “dwell” is interesting. Why speak of the Word dwelling in us? Where else have we seen this? In Ephesians, Paul says be filled with the Spirit. The Word is more than words on a page – it is alive and the very presence of Christ.

Deut. 6:6-9. Again, we see this dynamism of the Word of God not just as an intellectual thing, but being in the heart.

Conclusion: you cannot grow in grace without reading the Scriptures regularly, intensely, passionately.

(3) Hermeneutics is simply interpretation. Interpreting the Bible is not as easy as it might seem. There are a lot of complexities involved.

For example, the issue of homosexuality. You might think this is relatively clear cut from Scripture. See Lev. 20:13. But the argument made is that there are a lot of obsolete commandments in the OT, such as laws about mixing fabrics or not eating certain foods. The argument is that this prohibition against homosexuality is just like those other laws that don't have relevance today.

What do we make of this argument? How do we decide if it is right? And this is regarding the laws of the OT. How do we read biblical history? Poetry? Etc?

(4) Exegesis – the original intent/meaning of the author

Application – the meaning and relevance for us today (translate into modern equivalent)

We're going to focus on exegesis, but I want us to remember that application is key. We cannot neglect application or else studying Scripture remains academic. They always go hand-in-hand.

Example text: 1 Cor. 10

Exegesis: Eating meat sacrificed to pagan gods is fine. God made all things good and we shouldn't create legalistic rules about what is good and what is bad. Eat anything without your conscience bothering you.

But, if you're with someone who has problems with this kind of food, then you should abstain for their sake.

So the exegesis (original meaning) has to do with meat sacrificed in pagan temples. But that's not an issue anymore. So how do we apply it to our modern situation?

Application: when we apply it to the modern context, that is where things get tricky. What are the sorts of modern equivalents? Alcohol? Listening to secular music? Going to a party?

(5) There is an enormous time difference between us and when the Bible was written. This creates a huge cultural and historical gap that is not easy to overcome.

We sometimes think reading Bible should be like reading a devotional book. But it's not. And this is why we get so frustrated. Reading the Bible and really understanding the original meaning (exegesis) take enormous amounts of time and study.

Why should it be any different from other books? We spend so much time studying and reading for school. Doesn't Bible deserve same effort, if not more?

Some of us hate to read and study. Is there a way around it? No. If you want the Scriptures to dwell in you richly, you have to put in the time. We must not be lazy about reading the Bible.

Bible timeline

Galatians – AD 50

Revelation – AD 90

Malachi – 400 BC

Pentateuch – 1400 BC

King David – 1000 BC

Tower of Babel, Noah, Creation ?

Because of time gap, we don't understand certain cultural values. Such as the meaning of being barren.

(6) It cannot be purely intellectual exercise. The Word has to impact our hearts. This is the work of the Holy Spirit. The Spirit impresses it upon our hearts. So we need to read the Word constantly saturated with prayer.