

Doing the Word

As James tells us it is no good reading the Word and not doing what it tells us (James 1:22-25). There is no blessing in having great knowledge about the Scriptures unless we put them into practice.

Remember though that the Bible is more of a “love letter” than a “rule book.”

Conclusion

The Bible contains everything we need to know for salvation and for ordering our lives on earth. Christians don't always agree on the details of everything in the Bible but we do agree that it is vital to read it regularly and to learn what it says.

Whatever version you read, whatever stage of the christian walk you are up to, make it a practice to read, meditate and obey the Word of God.



NEW LIFE
CHRISTIAN
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WHAT WE BELIEVE #5

The Bible

Introduction

The Bible is God's written word to the human race. In a few hundred pages we see everything we need to know about the nature of God, about sin, salvation, judgment and how God's people should live.

As the Bible is God's word to us, it is important that we know how to read and interpret it so that we can understand God's plan for our lives.

The Bible is “Inspired.”

The word often translated as “inspired” means literally “God-breathed.” In 2 Timothy 3:16,17 we read “All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness so that the man of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work.” The meaning of this is that every word in the Bible carries the same authority as if God literally spoke it.

“Inspired” does not mean the same as “dictated.” The various writers of Scripture may not always have been aware that they were writing something that later would be called “God's Word.” Yet in the guidance of the Holy Spirit, these people wrote words which became recognised as inspired.

The term “inspiration of Scripture” strictly applies only to the original manuscripts. Scholars over the last 100 years have

worked hard to ensure that the versions of scripture that we have are as faithful to the original as is possible. There are literally thousands of copies of early versions of the Old and New Testaments (or parts thereof) still in existence. Checking the variations in words and in spellings makes it possible to be quite confident that the versions we have now are extremely close in meaning to the originals.

Reading the Word

With any piece of writing it is vital to read a sentence in context. Many false doctrines have arisen because people take a sentence by itself and interpret it in a way that was never intended. When we read the Bible we need to read a whole chapter to understand what a particular sentence really means. What other things are being discussed in the chapter? Who is being addressed? Is this verse aimed at all believers or just a select group?

We need to recognise the difference between story (of which there is a lot in the Bible), poetry (such as the Psalms), law and letters. We also need to recognise that as Christians we interpret the Old Testament through the eyes of the New Testament.

Having said that, it is important to take the words at face value and not seek any “secret” or “hidden” meaning. It is a basic rule of interpretation that where possible the plain meaning of a text is what is usually intended.

When we read the Bible it's a good idea that we do it prayerfully, asking the Holy Spirit to lead us into the truth.

Which Bible is the best?

The Bible was originally written in Hebrew (Old Testament) and Greek (New Testament). Now there are literally hundreds of English versions of the Bible available with thousands of study

Bibles with additional maps, notes and helpful aids.

The aim should be to have a translation of the Bible which most closely reflects the meaning that God wanted to convey. Unfortunately this is something of an art rather than an exact science. Translators can't just take a Hebrew word and assign it an English equivalent, because in both languages every word actually conveys a range of meanings, and may in some situations mean something very different in different contexts. Just think of the difficulties we sometimes have communicating in English, let alone trying to cross a language barrier.

Among the various modern translations, the NIV is regarded by many people as being the most “accurate” translation in the sense of trying to catch the objective meaning of the text. The CEV tries to convey the “feeling” of the words used and also to provide a text which is more easily read aloud. Both versions are good translations in their own right.

We need to be careful of using paraphrases of the Bible such as The Message and The Living Bible. Instead of starting with the original languages, these start with an English version which they then try to render in a more understandable fashion. There is nothing wrong with this, but it is a step further away from the original languages with a greater scope for errors to creep in. They are fine to read as an extra resource but we should not rely on them.

Many Bibles come with additional resources, sometimes with footnotes explaining each verse. These “Study” Bibles are great for helping us understand God's word more fully, but we need to remember that it is the Scriptures that are inspired not the footnotes! The notes and articles represent someone's opinion (which may be a very knowledgeable opinion) but it is still the thoughts of man not the word of God.