

Chapter 2 — The Holy Scriptures

Q21. Must we read the Holy Scriptures?

A. Yes. “Search the Scriptures, for in them ye thig ye have eternal life and they are they which testify of me” (John 5:29).

In other words, do we have to read the Bible? The question speaks about “read.” But what is not meant here? Skimming, pictures, shows, reading the headlines. We do this when we ‘read’ the newspaper or news on the internet. Then we skim the headlines and the things we find important. Is that how we need to read the Bible? No. The Bible text that is used in our answer is even stronger. We need to “search” the Scriptures. What difference between reading and searching? Reading can be done relaxed, without any need, or even done casually. Searching means to read with focus and need. So, we need to study the Bible. We are to read it for our profit. Let’s say that one day you drive down the highway and your car breaks down. You find in the back of your car a manual. How will you read it? Relaxed? No. You search it with urgency. You seek the section that describes what is needed to solve the issue. Also, you search for it until you have found it. That is the way how we need to read Scripture. With a need and with urgency.

Do we then have to read the Bible? Our answer says, “yes.” No, it is not optional. The answer does not say, maybe. But it says “yes.” Let’s imagine that you sent your boyfriend or girlfriend several messages. But he or she does not read them. Does that person truly love you? No. If it is right, he or she must read it. What if the person desires not to read them? Then the relation is not going to work. But who are to read the Bible? Only professors? No. The question is about “we.” That means, each one of us. We can never say, it was not meant for me. It is true that there are exceptions. Think of blind or handicapped people. But God has given them other means, like an audio Bible. But in our question, we speak about a normal person. And we may assure that all of us belong to this category, even though we might have different capacities.

How then do we need to read the Bible? Is it to research the facts? Is it to make a timeline of all Biblical persons and events? Do we need to compare challenging passages? Those things are not wrong. We are even encouraged to do so. But that is not meant in our answer. The purpose of reading Scripture is twofold. We find that in the text mentioned. First, to have eternal life, second, to have a testimony of Jesus Christ. No, it is not to search the facts, nice things, or points of interest. But it is ultimately for salvation and the glory of God. The first reason to read Scripture is for “eternal life.” What is eternal life? Is that to live forever? No. Those in hell do that as well. But eternal life here means that such people will receive close communion with God. They will enjoy God always. It is true that those have experienced the disruptions of that eternal life. But they have also experienced the love of God and His peace in their heart. Later, they will enjoy that communion forever. That is why searching the Scriptures is so important. The second purpose is to “testify of Me.” Who is that? Jesus Christ. He speaks in this verse. And to know Him is eternal life. But how do we exactly need to search the Scriptures? That is our next question.

Q22. How must we search the Scriptures?

A. (1) In the fear of God (Ps. 111:10); (2) with a praying heart (Ps. 119:18); (3) reverently (Isa. 66:5); (4) attentively and (5) with spiritual judgment (1 Cor. 2:13).

This question speaks more in depth how a person needs to study. In what way does he need to do it? What attitude is necessary? Do you need to seek as a professor? Does one need to have a critical attitude? Is it to find errors in Scripture? No! Do we then need to seek as a chicken? Determine what we like and what not? Pick what fits us and leave the rest? No. Certainly not. But the answer gives five different things. All have to do with our attitude. It has to do with what we think and how we behave. What are they?

First, studying the Scriptures needs to be “in the fear of God.” What is the fear of God? Does it mean to be afraid? It is true that God’s people learn to fear for their life. But that is not what the “fear of God” is. It is to have a deep childlike reverence. It is like a little child that looks up to his father. At the same time, he will fear his father when he does something wrong. We can say that there is reverence which is based on love. But what is needed for the fear of God? True conversion, regeneration, and a new heart. Then the person realizes that God exists. God is real. They begin to understand when they read the Bible that God speaks. One of the Psalms says, “The fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom: a good understanding have all they that do his commandments” (Ps. 111:10).

Second, it ought to be done “with a praying heart.” Why do we need to pray? Because we are so ignorant of ourselves. This is even true after receiving grace. That is why we need the light of the Holy Spirit besides our Bible. But what are some ways that someone can pray? It can be with the mouth only, in a demanding way, or with a proud heart. Think of the Pharisee in the temple and the apostle Paul before his conversion. But what do we need? To pray with our heart. That means, it must come out of our heart. And what do we then need to pray? “Lord open my eyes. Give me attention to thy Word. Give me true reverence. Grant me understanding of the Scriptures.” This is what we find with the writer of one of the Psalms, “Open thou mine eyes, that I may behold wondrous things out of thy law” (Ps. 119:18).

Third, we need to study the Scriptures “reverently.” What is reverent? Is that to shout? To have some quick words to God? Is that to throw with our Bible? No! Certainly not. Let’s give an example. One day you sit in class. When the teacher comes in, you say, “Hey guy. Noddy boy. Please, check my exam of last week as quickly as you can. I expect you to give a high grades. If not, I will tell my dad.” Do you think that the teacher will accept such language? No. Why? It shows no respect at all. How about God? Would He hear prayers that are irreverent? No! God would be offended. But how can you see that a person prays reverently? In the attitude of his body, the tone of his voice, and the words he uses. These things can show that he has deep respect. You can feel that he has an impression of God’s majesty. Think about Isaiah. When he saw a vision of God, he cried out, “Woe is me! for I am undone; because I am a man of unclean lips, and I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips: for mine eyes have seen the King, the LORD of hosts” (Isa. 6:5). He realized who he was in the sight of God. Is that a child of God? Yes. But Isaiah is so overwhelmed. Then the question comes to us, how can we read the Bible reverently? Then we try to understand who speaks. That is God. He is the Majesty. No, then you do not see the Bible as just

another ‘book,’ or ‘letters on paper,’ but the living Word of the highest God. Isaiah describes such readers that have reverence as follows, “Hear the word of the LORD, ye that *tremble at his word*” (Isa. 66:5).

Fourth, the Bible needs to be read “attentively.” That means with all possible attention. Practically, we can say that you plan time to study your Bible. You put your phone away. You try to sit in a silent room. No, you do not quick reading but truly try to study the passage. And is that often not the issue today? Is that not why many want to have an easy translation? They do not study the Scriptures but want to quickly read it. But we encourage you, study the Word. Study it! Use all means possible.

Lastly, we see in our answer that it needs to be “with spiritual judgment.” No, not in a judging or critical spirit. But with spiritual discernment. In Corinthians, it says, “Which things also we speak, not in the words which man's wisdom teacheth, but which the Holy Ghost teacheth; comparing spiritual things with spiritual” (1 Cor. 2:13). Then you try to understand the Bible in a spiritual way. Then you will compare the text with other passages of Scripture.

Let’s now give some practical tips in how to study the Bible. First, the time of Bible study. Begin with short passages. Read for five minutes or just a chapter. Then make it gradually longer. Add every time five minutes more until you reach a study time between a half our and one hour. Second, the difficulty of a passage. Begin with easy passages and work towards more difficult ones. For example, Genesis and John are easier. After you studied them, you can go to the prophets and doctrinal passages. Also, study first the things that are needed for salvation. For example, who am I? Who is Jesus Christ? In a later stage you can study more difficult passages that are not directly necessary for salvation. Then you can think of election and the different views of baptism. Third, the study itself. Set aside a specific time each day. For example, each morning at 7am you will study for 30 minutes. Study first a whole paragraph, then the chapter and then the whole book. It would be good to begin with small books like Jonah or Ruth. To have some clarity, you could separate paragraphs in your Bible by drawing a line between them. After this, look at the context. What did happen before? What happens after the verse? Moreover, use questions while studying. For example, who wrote this? What is the target audience? Next is to outline your passage. This gives you a better overview. The following step is to look for keywords. Think verbs and words that are repeated. You can use markers to color the same kind of words. This gives you a visible picture of your passage. Then check the reference texts. What do they say? Wherein do they differ? In the fourth place, use other sources. You can think of a Study Bible or commentaries. They can be a helpful resource. Also, you can use certain tools in trying to understand the Bible in the original languages. Bible software like Logos Bible software and apps as MySword can be useful. In this way, you have some useful tips for studying Scripture. But do not forget that the reading of Scripture has one goal, to know God and the sinner’s salvation.