

COMMUNICATING WITH PRECISION

The first element for communicating the Bible clearly is *precision*. When sharing and teaching Scripture, we are not to be giving people our opinions. Our primary task is to “cut it straight” (cf. 2 Tim. 2:15). We are to speak the meaning of God’s Word with accuracy. This is important because when we do this, we are rightly representing our Lord God, and we are helping people hear the life changing Word of the Lord. How is this done? In this section, we will consider three steps to communicating with precision: *Investigation*, *Interpretation*, and *Compilation*.

I. Investigation

In-order for effective Bible study to take place, it is essential that you take time to *investigate* the text you are studying. In this section, we will consider three practical stages in which we can study the Bible with the purpose of effective investigation.

A. Reading

Before you consult commentaries or other Bible study resources, you should begin your examination of the passage by reading it repeatedly. There is no magic number, but depending on the size of the passage I normally find reading a passage at least 10 times is a great start. The key is to read, then read, and then read again. Keep reading until the passage becomes very familiar. It is also helpful to read it in other literal translations of the Bible (ESV, KJV/KNJV, NASB, CSB). After reading your passage multiple times you will begin to gain an understanding of what it says and its flow. You may even begin to anticipate what the next word or line is. This is a good indication that the passage is something you are now well acquainted with. Don’t get discouraged if you think the passage is unclear, in this stage your task is to keep on reading until you begin to become familiar with the passage and you start noticing things in the passage.

When it comes to reading, it is helpful to make use of variety. Our contemporary reading style is most often silent, swift, and secluded.¹ Interestingly, up until around the seventeenth century, reading out loud

¹ See Paul Saenger, *Space Between Words: The Origins of Silent Reading*, Sanford University Press, 1997

commonly co-existed as a normal way of reading.² Some studies have demonstrated that the mode of audible reading helps with retention. The main point I want to make is that the use varying approaches to reading will help reinforce what we are reading. Read silently and read audibly.

B. Observing

After you have taken time to read your selected passage repetitiously, read it again, but this time start looking for things in the text. You have probably done this naturally as you read it multiple times, but this time you are being deliberate in your observation. The practice of observant reading is something that takes time and effort, but it is important if we are going to be precise in our communication of the Bible. Observation is more than simply seeing things in the passage. In one of his many exchanges with Watson, Sherlock Holmes made clear the distinction between seeing something and observing it.

“You see, but you do not observe. The distinction is clear. For example, you have frequently seen the steps which lead up from the hall to this room.”

“Frequently.”

“How often?”

“Well, some hundreds of times.”

“Then how many are there?”

“How many? I don’t know.”

“Quite so! You have not observed. And yet you have seen. That is just my point. Now, I know that there are seventeen steps, because I have both seen and observed.”³

When we learn the skill of carefully observing the text of Scripture, we will begin to notice things we have read before, but now we notice their significance. Some people spend lots of time trying to find hidden meanings in the passage. This is not our goal. As you start actively observing as much as you can from the text, look for obvious things like repeated words or phrases, key words, the connection from one verse to another, and contrasts.

² In earlier centuries, reading included the social element as audible reading would include public readings and group readings etc.

³ Sir Arthur Conan Doyle, *The Adventures of Sherlock Holmes*, Chapter 1 “A Scandal in Bohemia”

