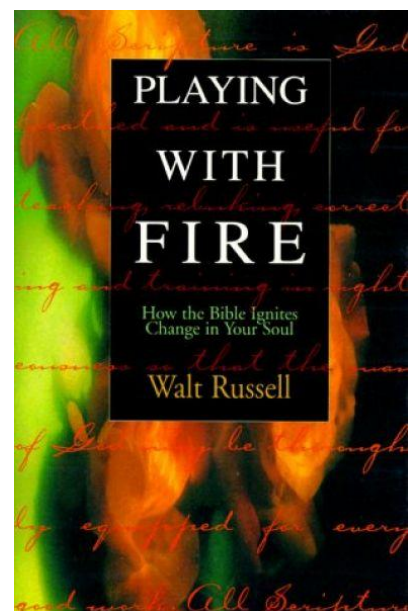


Playing With Fire: Learning to Understand the Bible

A Village class to help people learn how to read, understand, and apply
God's Word

Based on the book *Playing With Fire*,
by Walt Russell



Getting To Know Biblical Interpretation

Why learn how to study the Bible?

- Have you ever sat and read your Bible and finished without knowing what you just read?

Heb 5:6 as he says also in another place, "You are a priest forever, after the order of Melchizedek."

- What would you need to know to understand this verse?

- It is vital to our walk that we learn to correctly interpret the Bible. (*Acts 8:27-31*)
 1. Reading does not necessarily equal understanding
 2. Proper guidance can aid in understanding.
 3. It is essential to understand the text correctly to teach the Bible properly.
 4. Interpretation is essential for applying the Bible properly.

Observation -> Interpretation -> Application
 5. Handling God's Word accurately is commanded (*2 Tim 2:15*)
(*John 5:39-40, 2 Tim 3:16-17*)

What is Biblical Interpretation?

- Sometimes called Hermeneutics
 - From the Greek word "Hermeneia" meaning Interpretation or explanation.
 - The principles used to interpret and understand the meaning of a biblical passage.
(*Luke 24:27, Acts 8:27-31*)

- Picture interpretation exercise:



- What makes proper interpretation difficult?
 - We are separated from the message of the Bible:
 - Chronologically
 - Geographically
 - culturally
 - Linguistically
 - Literarily
 - sinfully

Quick Review! What do we believe about the Bible?



Inspiration:

- The Bible, both the Old and New Testaments, is the divinely inspired Word of God. We hold to the verbal (each word is inspired), plenary (all of the words in their entirety are inspired) inspiration of scripture.
- Inspiration is the act of God coming onto a man through the Holy Spirit and breathing the very words of scripture thus moving that man to write exactly what God wanted written.

Inerrancy:

- The Bible is inerrant (without error or fault) in its original authorship in all aspects including historically, factually, and spiritually.

Sufficiency:

- The Bible is the only divinely intended authority for faith and godly living.

Chapter 1 - Playing With Fire



When we correctly understand God's Word, its power is released in our lives.

A. One of the goals of reading scripture: Holy Heartburn!

"One of your primary goals in picking up this book is to end up with a burning heart by the time you put it down." (Russell)

- Read the Bible expecting to be convicted.
Disciples on Road to Emmaus (*Luke 24:13-35*)
 - Their hearts burned because they understood! (*32&33*)
 - Then they acted on it! (*see also James 1:22*)
- No other book has the revealing power of the Bible. (*Heb 4:12*)
- The main thing God uses to form us into Christ-likeness is His Word.
2 Pet 1:3-4 *2 Tim 3:16-17*
- We can understand God's Word if we are willing to open it, read it, and work to understand it.

Only happens with the help of the Holy Spirit. (*John 14:26, 1 Cor 2:10, 12-13*)

You must open it and digest it yourself though!

Doesn't work to put it under your pillow.

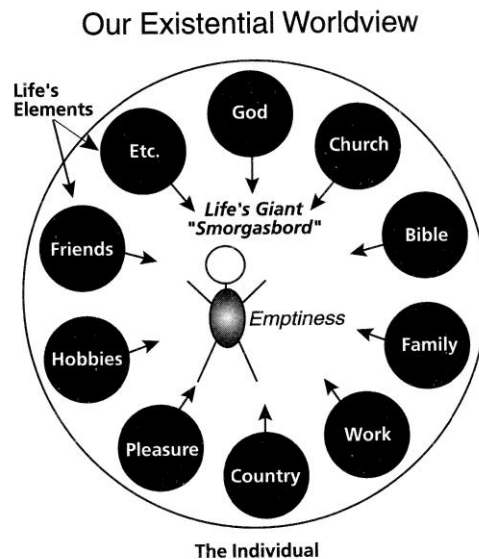
B. The fiery nature of the Bible

1. Getting a new pair of “glasses.”

- It challenges our worldview – How we interpret reality (our “glasses”).
 - Word of God torches the human-centered view of the world.
 - Our culture has an individualistic worldview influenced by existentialism.
- **Existentialism** – everything revolves around satisfying our needs or fulfilling ourselves as individuals.

Definitions:

- Finds the essence of human existence in freedom—in the duty of self-determination and the freedom of choice.
- A philosophical attitude that stresses the individual's unique position as a self-determining agent responsible for the authenticity of his or her choices.
- Existentialism stresses that people are entirely free and therefore responsible for what they make of themselves.



How it works out:

- “Each individual is earnestly seeking to give life meaning and purpose by creatively mixing elements from life’s “smorgasbord.”” (Russell)
- Even for the “Christian”, God, the Bible and church are just added items to choose from to make life meaningful and fulfilling.
- Existentialism naturally leads to other unbiblical worldviews.

Existentialism -> Narcissism -> Relativism

When does the story of creation become interesting?

- Biblical worldview “glasses” – God is working His plan through all of human history.
 - He is redeeming creation to himself through the work of Christ for His glory.
 - We are to align our lives with His plan rather than His actions to our plan.

These glasses help us read the Bible differently!

How can we help the kingdom? How do we fit into God’s plan?

(Isaiah 55:8, 9, 11)

2. Penetrating our sinful defenses and purifying the soul. (Heb 4:12-13)

Chapter 2 – Transformation through information



A. Reading the Bible for spiritual formation.

- Devotional reading is different from informational reading
 - Interpretation – what the text means (meaning) – one
 - Application – what God wants to teach you through the interpretation – several.
Most passages are not about you! They are about God.
 - Must be grounded in the proper interpretation
Protects us from strange applications.

We must know the meaning to know its significance to our lives.

B. Enriching formational reading of the Bible

- **Reject that there is a chasm between Informational vs. formational (devotional) reading.**

Not either/or, but both/and

- The balance of the two differs depending on how we are reading the Bible.

Studying The Bible	
Informational Emphasis	Transformational Concern

Devotionally Reading The Bible	
Informational Emphasis	Transformational Concern

Phil 4:13 I can do all things through him who strengthens me.

- How does the information around this verse (context) change the popular application of this verse?

- **Informational enhances the devotional**

- Further historical context of Phil 4:13 helps us know that Paul is in prison. How does this enhance the reading?

- **Informational protects devotional**

Don't ask "what does this text mean to me?" Rather, "what does it mean?"

Then, "How can I apply this to my life?"

First deals with interpretation, second application.

- Information of the genre helps us understand what is being said.
- Insight into ourselves is a secondary application.



The Student, The Fish, and Agassiz

This little story is an excellent example of right method – going directly into the subject of study. Search for its application to Bible study.

By the Student

It was more than fifteen years ago that I entered the laboratory of Professor Agassiz, and told him I had enrolled my name in the scientific school as a student of natural history. He asked me a few questions about my object in coming, my antecedents generally, the mode in which I afterwards proposed to use the knowledge I might acquire, and finally, whether I wished to study any special branch. To the latter I replied that while I wished to be well grounded in all departments of zoology, I purposed to devote myself specially to insects.

“When do you wish to begin?” he asked.

“Now,” I replied.

This seemed to please him, and with an energetic “Very well,” he reached from a shelf a huge jar of specimens in yellow alcohol.

“Take this fish,” said he, “and look at it; we call it a Haemulon [pronounced Hem-yú- lon]; by and by I will ask what you have seen.”

With that he left me, but in a moment returned with explicit instructions as to the care of the object entrusted to me.

“No man is fit to be a naturalist,” said he, “who does not know how to take care of specimens.”

I was to keep the fish before me in a tin tray, and occasionally moisten the surface with alcohol from the jar, always taking care to replace the stopper tightly. Those were not the days of ground glass stoppers, and elegantly shaped exhibition jars; all the old students will recall the huge, neckless glass bottles with their leaky, wax-besmeared corks half eaten by insects and begrimed with cellar dust. Entomology was a cleaner science than ichthyology, but the example of the professor, who had unhesitatingly plunged to the bottom of the jar to produce the fish, was infectious; and though this alcohol had “a very ancient and fishlike smell,” I really dared not show any aversion within these sacred precincts, and treated the alcohol as though it were pure water. Still I was conscious of a passing feeling of disappointment, for gazing at a fish did not commend itself to an ardent entomologist. My friends at home, too, were annoyed, when they discovered that no amount of eau de cologne would drown the perfume which haunted me like a shadow.

In ten minutes I had seen all that could be seen in that fish, and started in search of the professor, who had, however, left the museum; and when I returned, after lingering over some of the odd animals stored in the upper apartment, my specimen was dry all over. I dashed the fluid over the fish as if to resuscitate it from a fainting-fit, and looked with anxiety for a return of the normal, sloppy appearance. This little excitement over, nothing was to be done but return to a steadfast gaze at my mute companion. Half an hour passed, an hour, another hour; the fish began to look loathsome. I turned it over and around; looked it in the face-ghastly; from behind, beneath, above, sideways, at a

three-quarters' view-just as ghastly. I was in despair; at an early hour I concluded that lunch was necessary; so, with infinite relief, the fish was carefully replaced in the jar, and for an hour I was free.

On my return, I learned that Professor Agassiz had been at the museum, but had gone and would not return for several hours. My fellow students were too busy to be disturbed by continued conversation. Slowly I drew forth that hideous fish, and with a feeling of desperation again looked at it. I might not use a magnifying glass; instruments of all kinds were interdicted. My two hands, my two eyes, and the fish; it seemed a most limited field. I pushed my finger down its throat to feel how sharp its teeth were. I began to count the scales in the different rows until I was convinced that that was nonsense. At last a happy thought struck me-I would draw the fish; and now with surprise I began to discover new features in the creature. Just then the professor returned.

"That is right," said he; "a pencil is one of the best of eyes. I am glad to notice, too, that you keep your specimen wet and your bottle corked."

With these encouraging words he added,-

"Well, what was it like? "He listened attentively to my brief rehearsal of the structure of parts whose names were still unknown to me: the fringed gill-arches and movable operculum; the pores of the head, fleshy lips, and lidless eyes; the lateral line, the spinous fin, and forked tail; the compressed and arched body. When I had finished, he waited as if expecting more, and then, with an air of disappointment,-

"You have not looked very carefully; why," he continued, more earnestly, "you haven't seen one of the most conspicuous features of the animal, which is as plainly before your eyes as the fish itself; look again, look again!" and he left me to my misery.

I was piqued; I was mortified. Still more of that wretched fish! But now I set myself to my task with a will, and discovered one new thing after another, until I saw how just the professor's criticism had been. The afternoon passed quickly, and when, towards its close, the professor inquired,-

"Do you see it yet?"

"No," I replied, "I am certain I do not, but I see how little I saw before."

"That is next best," said he earnestly, "but I won't hear you now; put away your fish and go home; perhaps you will be ready with a better answer in the morning. I will examine you before you look at the fish."

This was disconcerting; not only must I think of my fish all night, studying, without the object before me, what this unknown but most visible feature might be; but also, without reviewing my new discoveries, I must give an exact account of them the next day. I had a bad memory; so I walked home by Charles River in a distracted state, with my two perplexities.

The cordial greeting from the professor the next morning was reassuring; here was a man who seemed to be quite as anxious as I that I should see for myself what he saw.

"Do you perhaps mean," I asked, "that the fish has symmetrical side with paired organs?"

His thoroughly pleased, "Of course, of course!" repaid the wakeful hours of the previous night. After he had discoursed most happily and enthusiastically-as he always did-upon the importance of this point, I ventured to ask what I should do next.