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1

General Bible Study Methods

A serious study of the Bible requires concentration of the mind upon a specific passage. It involves giving careful consideration to words and phrases. The best available tools of biblical scholarship must be used in an honest attempt to learn as precisely as possible what the writer intended to communicate in the historical situation within which he wrote.

INDUCTIVE METHOD

The inductive method of Bible study is scientific in approach. It is the logic of discovery, whereas deduction is the logic of proof. Inductive Bible study involves four processes:

1. Observation (What does it say?)
2. Interpretation (What does it mean?)
3. Application (How does it relate to me?)
4. Communication (How do I give it to others?)

The inductive method places the emphasis on the process of reasoning or drawing conclusions from particular cases.

The Word of God must be given careful attention. It must be interpreted in full harmony with its literal, historical, and grammatical meaning. Full attention must be given to the inspired writer's purpose. When the student is face to face with the minute parts of Scripture, he must seek to know the intent of that Scripture in its context.

Robert A. Traina emphasizes the fact that the student should give special attention to the connectives within a passage. The following types of connectives are found in the New Testament:

1. Temporal or chronological connective:
"After" (Rev. 11:11)

2. Local or geographical connective:
"Where" (Heb. 6:20)
3. Logical connectives:
Reason—"Because" (Rom. 1:25)
"For" (Rom. 1:11)
Result—"Therefore" (1 Cor. 10:12)
Contrast—"Nevertheless" (1 Cor. 10:5)
4. Emphatic connective:
"Only" (1 Cor. 8:9).²

Traina also suggests that special attention be given to the structural relations between paragraphs and sections of the book. Out of his more extended list, we have selected five:

1. *Comparison*—the association of like things
2. *Contrast*—the association of opposites
3. *Repetition*—the reiteration of the same terms, phrases, and clauses
4. *Climax*—the arrangement of material in such a way as to progress from the lesser to the greater and ultimately to the greatest
5. *Causation and substantiation*—the progression from cause to effect and from effect to cause.³

SYNTHESIS

Synthesis is the "putting together of a book" or the consideration of it as a whole. This is the direct opposite of analysis, which attempts to partition a book into small units of study for the purpose of detailed investigation. With induction, conclusions are drawn on the basis of detailed observation; in synthesis, general impressions are gained by means of less detailed investigation, and the ramifications of those main ideas are not followed out in detail.⁴

ANALYSIS

Analysis is a detailed study of a book in order to ascertain its message in all its ramifications. It is the direct opposite of synthesis, which attempts to look at the book as a whole and to determine its message in general. In the development of this method, there must first be grammatical analysis, in which a study is made paragraph by paragraph. Determine the principal sentences and note the grouping around them of subordinate sentences and clauses, and their interrelationships. The analytical method begins with a grammatical diagram of the text, followed by a careful outline based on the diagram, and concludes with various observations on the message set forth.⁵

BIOGRAPHICAL METHOD

The biographical method may be studied factually as biographical narrative, homiletically as narrative or character exposition, and polemically or apologetically as biographical argument. In the biographical narrative, the aim is simply to learn the biographical facts concerning a biblical personality, as those details are revealed either in a single book or in all of Scripture. Some of the points to consider in a character's life include: 1) birth and early life; 2) conversion experience and call to a specific task; 3) ministry for the Lord; 4) character evaluation; 5) relationships with others; 6) death and comments about it; and 7) reasons for the inclusion of these facts in the text.⁶

THEOLOGICAL METHOD

The theological method may be defined as the process of searching through an individual book or the Bible as a whole to collect, compare, and organize doctrinal statements and assumptions.⁷

DEVOTIONAL METHOD

The devotional method may be effectively executed by means of a careful study of words, verses, paragraphs, chapters, books, Bible characters, and Christ in a given portion. In a survey course on the Bible one should include name, authorship, date, occasion, destination, key verse, literary style, outline and survey of contents, important chapters, special problems, canonicity, interpretation, the Christological element, and relationship to other Bible books.⁸

ADDITIONAL SUGGESTIONS

Additional suggestions are presented by Lawrence Richards. This is not Richards's complete list, but it includes items especially helpful in discovering the content of a passage.

Readings:

1. Read different interpretations of the passage to be studied.
2. Read parallel accounts in Scripture.
3. Read various versions.
4. Read looking for relationships (why? where? when? which? how?).

Projects:

1. Construct charts and graphs.
2. Diagram a passage of Scripture.
3. Prepare a research paper on a topic.
4. Write up a subject as a newspaper article.

Interviews and Surveys:

1. Interview resource individuals on the subject.
2. Interview "man on the street" for his opinion.
3. Prepare and distribute a questionnaire.
4. Make a list of problems people have with this subject.⁹

In reading a passage one should note carefully every verse that raises a question in one's mind, tells something about the person of God, pictures the thinking and actions of God's people, or seems to have parallels in modern life.¹⁰

The key to profitable Bible study is the addition of application to the exposition. The student should isolate the key thoughts, summarize those thoughts, and then draw some generalizations as to how they might apply to daily living.

The process of applying discovered biblical truth involves at least four steps according to Lawrence Richards in his *Creative Bible Study*.¹¹ First, derive from the passage of Scripture a principle that has relevance to daily living. The second step is to determine areas of life to which that principle might apply. In the third step one lists areas most relevant to personal needs. The last step sets forth the ways in which the applications can be made during the forthcoming week. Richards lists those steps as generalization, varied application, personalization, and determination.

NOTES

1. William G. Coltman, *The Cathedral of Christian Truth: Studies in Romans* (Findlay, Oh.: Fundamental Truth Publishers, 1943), Foreword.
2. Robert A. Traina, *Methodical Bible Study* (New York: Ganis and Harris, 1952), pp. 41-43.
3. *Ibid.*, pp. 50-52.
4. Howard F. Vos, *Effective Bible Study* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1956), p. 25.
5. *Ibid.*, pp. 33-34.
6. *Ibid.*, pp. 47-48.
7. *Ibid.*, p. 74.
8. *Ibid.*, pp. 173, 194.
9. Lawrence O. Richards, *Creative Bible Teaching* (Chicago: Moody, 1970), pp. 244-47.
10. *Ibid.*, p. 249.
11. Lawrence O. Richards, *Creative Bible Study* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1979), p. 164.

Probably this epistle should be regarded as the supreme masterpiece of the great apostle. It is a marvel of intellectual acumen, of logical power, and of spiritual insight. However, it was first intended, not for the philosophers of the Imperial City, not for the savants of the schools, nor for the circle of Caesar's household, but for the members of an infant Christian church, composed largely of slaves and freedmen, recently delivered from a degrading heathenism and from the bondage of pagan superstitions. Therefore, in spite of its depth and its difficulties, it has been bringing light and strength to persons of widely differing degrees of intelligence through all the succeeding centuries. To none has its guidance been more grateful than to those troubled by the problems and perplexities of modern thought; for the gospel of Christ, which it sets forth, is still the sweetest music ever heard upon earth, the most powerful message proclaimed among men, the most precious treasure entrusted to the people of God.¹

Charles R. Erdman

2

Personal Bible Study Projects in Romans

1. Read Romans at one sitting. If you cannot do this, read chapters 1-11, and at another sitting chapters 12-16. Or, read chapters 1-8, then chapters 9-16. In your first reading of Romans be alert to historical references and allusions that shed light on the circumstances under which Paul wrote the book. If possible, do your reading in a translation which you have not used before, or at least in a translation which employs modern English. An accurate, readable rendering is *The New American Standard Bible*, published by Moody Press.
2. After several overall readings, give an original title to each chapter, using the same criteria as above. These are more difficult because now you have to combine more ideas in a few words.
3. After several readings of individual chapters, give an original title to each paragraph. Good titles are brief—no more than three or four words; memorable—serve as mental hooks to recall the main idea(s) of the paragraph; and original—the product of your own mental mill.
4. In Romans 1:1-17, record *everything* this passage says about Paul, Christ, and the gospel.
5. Using a concordance, check the references to Rome in this epistle and in the book of Acts.
6. In Romans 1:1-32, How is the wrath of God revealed from heaven? Can you find at least four ways? What can we learn about God from nature? Why are the heathen lost? How can God be righteous and allow that?
7. Read Romans 1:18—3:20, looking for references to the ideas of wrath, punishment, and judgment.
8. Read Luke's account of Paul's sermon preached in Athens (Acts 17:22-31) and the account of the message preached at Lystra (Acts 14:15-17). Is there anything in those sermons that is similar to the thought in Romans 1:18-32?

9. From Romans 2:17—3:8:
List and explain all the privileges and advantages of having been a Jew.
List and explain all of the sins of which the Jews were guilty.
List as many life principles as you can derive from this passage. Those are timeless truths applicable to anyone anywhere.
10. Name four principles of divine judgment as stated in chapter 2.
11. Read Romans 3:21—5:21, watching for recurring words and phrases.
12. In 4:1-25, list and explain everything Abraham illustrated about justification—especially of its acquisition and the results of having it.
13. Why could not God justify the Jews in one way, and the Gentiles in another way?
14. Read Romans 5:1-11. List and explain the benefits of having justification.
15. Study every occurrence of the word “life” in Romans 5-8. (Use a concordance if you wish.) Write out in your own words the essential teaching of each passage.
16. What is the ground of the believer’s joy according to Romans 5:11? Why?
17. Study Romans 5:12-21. Contrast the two Adams, using this passage only. Make a chart of all the differences given here.
18. What was the function of law when it was introduced?
19. Read Romans 6:1-14. From this entire chapter, list at least ten spiritual truths and how they apply to you personally.
20. Explain why objections are raised to justification by faith alone as opposed to justification by faith and works.
21. From Romans 7:7-25, list everything mentioned in the passage about the old and new natures and their significances.
22. What is the main teaching of Romans 7:14-24? Think carefully.
23. Read Romans 8:1-39. Chart the work of the Trinity in this chapter. On separate sheets of paper, list everything said about the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit and the significance of each entry.
24. Use a concordance to study the New Testament teachings about the Holy Spirit. Where are most of the references to the Holy Spirit clustered?
25. What is the believer’s greatest source of joy and strength in sufferings according to Romans 8:17-27?
26. List the references to Israel and define Paul’s uses of the term.

27. From Romans 10:1-21, find as many answers as possible to the following questions:
 - Is there an example to follow (positive example)?
 - Is there an error to avoid (negative example)?
 - Is there a command to be obeyed (my responsibility)?
 - Is there a promise to claim (God's responsibility)?
 - Is there a sin to confess (my responsibility)?
28. What is meant by the words, "going about to establish their own righteousness" (KJV) in Romans 10:3? How did Israel attempt this?
29. Read Romans 11:1-36. What warnings are given in this chapter? What personal application does each have?
30. How does Paul use the word "mercy" in chapters 9, 10, and 11?
31. How was the Gentile tempted to boast over Israel? Why should he not do it?
32. List the guidelines in chapter 12 for effective ministry in the church, and compare them with the spiritual gifts in 1 Corinthians 12 and Ephesians 4.
33. What is the outstanding virtue (in your opinion) enjoined upon the believer in Romans 12?
34. From Romans 12:9-21, list as many personal applications of Paul's admonitions as possible.
35. List the fifteen characteristics of God's love found in 1 Corinthians 13:4-7. See if you can find all of them in Romans 12 and 13.
36. After studying Romans 13:1-6, What is your opinion of a Christian's going to war for his country?
37. In Romans 14:1—15:13, What principles does God give us to make decisions in those areas where Scripture is not specific?
38. Read Romans 16:1-27. Note what is said about each individual.
39. Name some characteristics of first-century church life that can be gleaned from chapter 16.

NOTE

1. Charles R. Erdman, *The Epistle of Paul to the Romans: An Exposition* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1925), Foreword.

*The Epistle to the Romans is therefore encyclopædic in its structure; it is round and full, like the circle of Giotto, and contains all the elements of both natural and revealed religion. The human mind need not go outside of this Epistle, in order to know all religious truth.*¹

William G. T. Shedd

3

Comparative Bible Book Outlines

It is important for a Bible student to develop some proficiency in outlining Bible content. One or more of the following suggestions may prove helpful.

The starting point for the outlining process is to read the Bible book through several times. A short book such as James could be read each day for a month. At the end of that time the main theme of the book and several of its logical divisions would have emerged. In studying a large book such as Acts, the individual might divide the twenty-eight chapters into seven parts and read each segment of the chapters each day for a week. That would mean spending seven weeks on that one book, but at the end of that time the theme and segments would have emerged.

A book of the Bible could be outlined by noting the chapter themes and charting them. The Bible as it was originally written had no chapter and verse divisions. But in A.D. 1250 Cardinal Hugot introduced chapter divisions that form fairly satisfactory groupings of content. There are 1,189 chapters in the Bible. The themes of the sixteen chapters in the book of Romans should then be related to the dominant theme of the entire book.

There are several types of outlines. Those include, among others, the thematic, geographical, chronological, and biographical. Illustrations of the first three can be seen in *How to Search the Scriptures*.² The biographical highlights the outstanding people within a Bible book. It would be evident through such an outline of the book of Acts, for instance, that Peter had the preeminence in the first half of the book and that Paul had the preeminence in the latter portion.

There are occasions in which a key verse will provide a possible clue for a Bible book outline. That is evident in some of the outlines of the book of Revelation, which are based upon the three emphases in Revelation 1:19.

Two additional devices include noting repeated words and phrases, and changes in the type of content. The latter can be illus-

trated in the book of Job, where several messages are inserted in the narrative text.

The four outlines included in this section have unique features. The first one shows the development of a doctrinal theme within the book. The second also develops a doctrinal theme but adds additional doctrinal emphases. The third outline highlights the major divisions of the book in terms of major emphases such as doctrinal, dispensational, and practical. The fourth outline emphasizes the rhetorical device of alliteration, which is often used in outlining since it provides assistance in memorizing the content of the outline.

Outline showing development of a doctrinal theme within Romans.

OUTLINE: BOOK OF ROMANS

- I. Introduction (1:1-17)
 - A. The Preface of the Epistle (1:1-7)
 1. The salutation (1:1)
 2. The signification (1:2-7)
 - B. The Personalities of the Epistle (1:8-13)
 1. The interest (1:8-10)
 2. The intent (1:11-13)
 - C. The Purpose of the Epistle (1:14-17)
 1. The motive (1:14-15)
 2. The method (1:16-17)
- II. The Lack of Righteousness (1:18—3:20)
 - A. The Gentile world is proved guilty of sin (1:18—2:16)
 1. The revelation that God made of Himself (1:18-20)
 2. The stages of Gentile apostasy from God (1:21-23)
 3. The results of the Gentile apostasy (1:24-32)
 4. The principles of divine judgment (2:1-16)
 - B. The Jewish world is guilty of sin (2:17—3:20)
 1. The law finds the Jewish world guilty of sin (2:17-29)
 2. The Old Testament Scriptures generally find the Jewish world guilty of sin (3:1-18)
 3. The final verdict—The world is guilty of sin before God, hence, the imperative need of righteousness (3:19-20)
- III. The Provision of Righteousness (3:21-26)
 - A. The righteousness defined (3:22)
 - B. The righteousness attested (3:21)
 - C. The righteousness offered (3:22)

1. To all
2. On faith
3. Freely
4. By grace
- D. The ground of righteousness (3:24)
- E. The purpose of the righteousness (3:26)
- F. The Author of the righteousness (3:25)
- IV. The Appropriation of Righteousness (3:27—4:25)
 - A. On faith in Christ (3:27—4:4)
 - B. Not of works (4:5-8)
 - C. Not of ordinances (4:9-12)
 - D. Not of law (4:13-23)
 - E. But through the death and resurrection of Christ (4:24-25)
- V. The Realization of Righteousness (5:1—8:17)
 - A. Deliverance from condemnation before God through the death of Christ (5:1-21)
 - B. Deliverance from indwelling sin (6:1-12)
 - C. Deliverance from the law (6:13—7:25)
 - D. Deliverance from the flesh (or self life) through the Holy Spirit who comes from Christ (8:1-17)
- VI. The Guarantee of Righteousness (8:18-39)
 - A. Creation being kept for the children of God (8:18-25)
 - B. The indwelling of the Holy Spirit (8:26-27)
 - C. The eternal purpose of God (8:28-30)
 - D. The death, resurrection, and exaltation of Christ (8:31-32, 34)
 - E. The character of God (8:33)
 - F. The one made righteous before God in the righteousness provided in Christ is made eternally safe (8:35-39)
- VII. The Rejection of Righteousness (9:1—11:36)
 - A. Notwithstanding the covenant blessings (9:1-5)
 - B. Notwithstanding a holy natural descent (9:6-13)
 - C. Notwithstanding the sovereignty of divine mercy (9:14-33)
 - D. The rejection of God's righteousness on the part of the Jews; their own fault (10:1-21)
 - E. But spiritual Israel is finding and receiving the righteousness of God (11:1-6)
 - F. National Israel is judicially blinded and cannot even see the righteousness of God (11:7-12)
 - G. Gentile Christians who have received the righteousness of God are warned (11:13-26)
 - H. National Israel notwithstanding their past and present rejection of that righteousness shall in the future be saved through that righteousness (11:27-36)

- VIII. The Practice of Righteousness (12:1—15:13)
- A. In Christian duties (12:1-21)
 - 1. In Christian consecration (12:1)
 - 2. In Christian transformation (12:2)
 - 3. In Christian service (12:3-8)
 - 4. In Christian fellowship (12:9-16)
 - 5. In Christian conduct in relation to those without (12:17-21)
 - B. In civil duties (13:1-7)
 - C. In social duties (13:8-14)
 - D. In fraternal duties (14:1—15:13)
- IX. Conclusion: Personal Matters (15:14—16:27)
- A. The apostle's ministry (15:14-22)
 - B. His approaching journey (15:23-33)
 - C. His commendatory note (16:1-16)
 - D. His word of warning (16:17-18)
 - E. His word of praise (16:19)
 - F. His word of promise (16:20 α)
 - G. His benediction (16:20 b)
 - H. His salutation (16:21-24)
 - I. His ascription of praise (16:25-27)

Outline showing doctrinal themes with additional doctrinal emphases.

THE EPISTLE OF PAUL TO THE ROMANS

Introduction—salutation	1:1-17
The author—Paul	1:1
The theme—"The gospel of God"	1:1
The readers—the saints at Rome	1:7-15
Key verses—Romans 1:16-17	
Key word—"righteousness"	
I. Righteousness Required—condemnation	1:18—3:20
A. The Gentile guilty	1:18—2:16
B. The Jew guilty	2:17—3:18
C. Final verdict—a guilty world	3:19-20
II. Righteousness Revealed—salvation	3:21—4:25
A. Redemption in Christ	
1. Without the law	
2. By grace	
3. Through faith	
4. Without works	3:21-31

B. Old Testament illustrations of redemption	
1. Abraham	4:1-5, 9-25
2. David	4:6-8
III. Righteousness Received—justification	5:1-21
A. Our heritage in Christ	5:1-11
1. Justification	5:1
2. Peace	5:1
3. Access	5:2
4. Glory	5:2
5. Hope	5:4-5
6. Love	5:5, 8
7. Joy	5:11
B. Our heritage in Adam	5:12-21
1. Sin	5:12-15
2. Death	5:16-17
3. Judgment	5:18-21
IV. Righteousness Realized—sanctification	6:1—7:25
A. The believer to reckon himself	
1. Dead to sin	
2. Alive to the law	
3. Alive and yielded to Christ	6:1—7:25
B. The Holy Spirit operates in the life of the yielded believer	8:1-39
V. Righteousness Rejected—repudiation	9:1—11:36
A. Israel's past	9:1-33
B. Israel's present	10:1-21
C. Israel's future	11:1-36
VI. Righteousness Reproduced—consecration (The will of God for the Christian) The Christian's Responsibility	12:1—15:7
A. To God	12:1-2
B. To the body of Christ	12:3-16
C. To the world	12:17—13:14
D. To government	13:1-7
E. To "the one who is weak in faith"	14:1—15:7
Conclusion—benediction	15:8—16:27
Praise	15:8-13
Paul—the apostle to the Gentiles	15:14-21
Personal greetings	15:22—16:23
Benediction	16:20, 24-27

Outline showing major divisions in terms of major emphases.

ANALYSIS OF ROMANS

Prologue (1:1-17)

1. Salutation (1:1-7)
2. Introduction (1:8-15)
3. Proposition (1:16-17)

I. DOCTRINAL—PHILOSOPHY OF SALVATION (1:18—8:39)

The righteousness of God in relation to sin and sins

A. The Christian Message (1:18—5:21)

(Propitiation and Foundation)

Christ for Us—Key: 1:16-17

1. Theme: Condemnation (1:18—3:20)
 - a. The Gentiles under condemnation (1:18-32)
 - b. The Jews under condemnation (2:1—3:8)
 - c. The world under condemnation (3:9-20)
2. Theme: Justification (3:21—5:11)
 - a. The ground of justification—God's grace (3:21-26)
 - b. The means of justification—our faith (3:27—4:25)
 - c. The effects of justification—spiritual fruit (5:1-11)

Supplementary (5:12-21)

Condemnation and justification traced to their historical sources in Adam and Christ.

B. The Christian Life (6:1—8:39)

(Identification and Superstructure)

Christ in Us—Key: 5:9-10

1. Theme: Sanctification (6:1—8:11)
 - a. The principle of holiness (6:1-11)
(in death and resurrection with Christ)
 - b. The practice of holiness (6:12—7:6)
(in recognition of, and abandonment to, the new relations)
 - c. The preventive of holiness (7:7-25)
(in the activity within—of sin and self)
 - d. The power of holiness (8:1-11)
(in the unhindered dominion of the Spirit of God)
2. Theme: Glorification (8:12-30)
 - a. The evidence of coming glory (12-17)
 - b. The expectation of coming glory (18-27)
 - c. The certainty of coming glory (28-30)

Supplementary (8:31-39)

From condemnation to glorification; celebrated in a triumphant song.

- II. DISPENSATIONAL—PHILOSOPHY OF HISTORY (9:1—11:36)
The righteousness of God in relation to the calling of Israel
 - A. The Election of Israel—past (9:1-29)
 - B. The Rejection of Israel—present (9:30—10:21)
 - C. The Conversion of Israel—future (11:1-32)
Doxology (11:33-36)
- III. PRACTICAL—PHILOSOPHY OF CONDUCT (12:1—16:27)
The righteousness of God in relation to everyday life
 - A. Paths of Duty (12:1—13:14)
 - 1. Religious (12:1-13)
 - 2. Social (12:14-21)
 - 3. Civil (13:1-14)
 - B. Principles of Action (14:1—15:13)
 - 1. Christian liberty (14:1-12)
 - 2. Christian love (14:13-23)
 - 3. Christian unity (15:1-13)
 Epilogue (15:14—16:27)
 - 1. Purpose and plans (15:14-33)
 - 2. Greetings and warning (16:1-24)
 - 3. Ascription of praise (16:25-27)

Outline using rhetorical device of alliteration.

ROMANS: THE THEOLOGY OF THE GOSPEL

- Prologue (1:1-17)
- I. The Principles of Christianity (1-8)
 - A. The Question of Sin (1:18—3:20)
 - B. The Question of Salvation (3:21—5:21)
 - C. The Question of Sanctification (6:1—8:39)
 - II. The Problem of Christianity (9-11)
 - A. God's Past Dealings with Israel (9:1-33)
 - B. God's Present Dealings with Israel (10:1-21)
 - C. God's Promise Dealings with Israel (11:1-36)
 - III. The Practice of Christianity (12-16)
 - A. The Laws of Christian Life (12:1—13:7)
 - 1. The spiritual life of the Christian (12:1-13)
 - 2. The social life of the Christian (12:14-21)
 - 3. The secular life of the Christian (13:1-7)
 - B. The Laws of Christian Love (13:8—16:24)

1. Love's conscience (13:8-14)
 2. Love's considerations (14:1 — 15:3)
 3. Love's convictions (15:4-13)
 4. Love's concern (15:14-33)
 5. Love's contacts (16:1-16)
 6. Love's conquests (16:17-20)
 7. Love's companionships (16:21-24)
- Epilogue (16:25-27)

NOTES

1. William G. T. Shedd, *A Critical and Doctrinal Commentary of the Epistle of St. Paul to the Romans* (Minneapolis: Klock & Klock, 1978), Preface.
2. Lloyd M. Perry and Robert D. Culver, *How to Search the Scriptures* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1967).