

Bible Study Methods - Part 1

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Introduction.

- A. In Bible study methods we have many analysts, but few who can synthesize.
- B. Synthesis is the most difficult aspect of Bible study and needs to be mastered.
 - 1. This requires extensive experience.
 - 2. This concept packages the Bible so others can understand it.

I. Today I want to discuss three things.

- A. Define the method of synthesis.
- B. Define the critical value of synthesis.
- C. Set out seven procedural steps involved in the process of synthesis.

II. The definition: Synthetic Bible study approaches the book as a unit and seeks to understand its meaning as a whole.

- A. It does not concern itself with detail.
 - 1. It gets the broad outline of the book and its strokes.
 - 2. In the analytical method you move from the whole to the parts, and in the synthetic you move from the parts to whole.
 - a. Analytical method is the worm's eye view.
 - b. The Synthetic approach uses the bird's eye view.
 - c. We need both.
 - 3. I get more mileage if I start with a holistic view and then apply meaning to the parts.
 - 4. Get an overall impression of the book before picking it apart.
 - 5. Thorough study will either affirm or contradict my initial impression.
 - 6. Get an overall view, then pick it apart, then repackage it for your students.
- B. The Greek word for synthesis means "together" with "to place or put."
 - 1. Synthetic study is placing together.
 - 2. Analysis is taking apart.

II. The critical value of synthesis.

A. Synthesis is the basis and the goal of all analysis.

1. It is the initial and final goal of studying a book.
2. The mind works best moving from whole top part to whole.
 - a. I toured a newspaper plant and toured first the whole plant.
 - b. Second I saw how each department functioned.
 - c. Then I understood the whole better.
 - d. When visiting New York I also didn't appreciate the city until I saw the big picture from the Empire State Building

B. Synthesis is an indispensable aid to effective communication.

1. I've had too many classes in school where the teacher didn't have a plan of where he was going.
2. Many Bible teachers spend much time going through the first chapters of a book and fail to finish the book.
3. One of the greatest needs today is teaching whole books of the Bible.
 - a. Most Christians cannot think their way through books of the Bible.
 - b. Making disciples should include giving them a holistic view of the New and Old Testaments.
4. 1 John has five chapters.
 - a. If you were teaching this book structure it by dividing it into 7 sessions.
 - b. The first session is an overview; this creates a need in the mind of the learner.
 1. I was invited recently to teach Ephesians in depth in four sessions.
 2. I first drew a synthesis of the book.
 3. Use visuals to encourage note taking.
 4. I gave them an overview of the whole book.
 - c. Settle for limited objectives when you begin teaching the details because you can't teach everything.
 1. Determine your time limits.

2. Adjust your teaching according to your time restraints.
- d. Each time you begin a new chapter, go back to the beginning to review where you've come from.
 1. Don't just rehash.
 2. You need to get into fresh material each time you meet.
 3. If you build on each chapter you will build into your students' new understanding.
 4. Building on a solid foundation is essential to new understanding.
 - e. End with a quick review of what you have taught each time.
- C. Synthesis is the best means of apprehending the overall argument of a book.
1. Chapter divisions are artificial and sometimes confusing.
 - a. 1 Corinthians 2 and 3 is a good example of this explaining the natural, spiritual, and carnal man.
 - b. The chapter division here creates an artificial break.
 2. Each book or letter was intended to be read as a continuous book.
 3. The beauty of a passage depends on its setting.
 - a. In art the setting is essential.
 - b. If you remove a figure from its setting you destroy its beauty.
 - c. God's revelation is best understood in its setting.

III. Seven procedures for synthetic study.

- A. Ransack the word by exploring the book as a detective looking for clues.
 1. Read repeatedly, for this yields the best results.
 - a. Many students can't write and think because they don't read.
 - b. Romans, for example, might require 2 hours to read, but if I cut that down to 1 hour I can get more out of it.
 - c. A fallacy is that to understand more I need to read more slowly, but the truth is that reading faster increases understanding.
 - i. Read a book in one setting.

- ii. One half of the 66 books of the Bible can be read in one setting.
- iii. Matthew was a struggle for me until I read it in one setting.
- d. There are four purposes for reading.
 - i. Reading is to discover a theme.
 - ii. Reading is to develop that theme.
 - iii. Reading is to unraveling the argument of that theme.
 - iv. Reading is to development of an outline that will express the theme.
 - a. This is fourfold purpose, not four readings.
 - b. We need to read till we understand on all these levels.

2. Love meditation on the word.

- a. Do this by continued exposure.
- b. The mind works like a muscle that needs to be exercised.
- c. I have seen hundreds of brains dissected and not one was slightly used.
- d. The more we feed the mind the more it flourishes.
 - i. I think my way through books while I drive and while I do mundane things all day.
 - ii. Develop a perspective on the text.
 - iii. If working on Mark you need to be able to stop at any part in the book and tell what is going on in light of the whole.
 - iv. This is a great way to memorize Scripture.
 - a. The best preparation for using Scripture is in proper context.
 - b. Bring people to maturity by using Scripture in context rather than isolated verses.
- e. Approach the Bible with a pencil or pen.
 - i. I write things down.
 - ii. Think yourself clear on paper.
 - iii. If you can't write out your thoughts, your thinking isn't clear.

3. Repeated reading.

a. Read much.

b. Read often.

B. Analyze and catalogue the distinctive structure of a book.

1. Structure involves the interrelationships of its parts.

a. Ephesians divides into two major sections.

i. First comes theology.

ii. Chapters 4-6 provide principles for living.

iii. Paul uses this approach often.

b. Every book is different and must be studied distinctly.

c. Look for structures in many ways

i. Look for similar things.

ii. Look for dissimilar.

iii. Look for repeated things.

iv. Look for cause and effect.

v. Look for movements from general to specific.

vi. Look for progression, climax, and movement.

vii. Look for emphasis in terms of space or time.

a. Mark places much emphasis on the passion of Christ.

b. Genesis early chapters covers thousands of years but from chapter 12 to the end only four generations is covered.

c. Suggested books:

a. *Methodical Bible Study*, by Trainer.

b. *These Words Upon thine Heart*.

c. *The Joy of Discovery*.

2. Discover the organizing principle that gives the book its unity.

a. Three questions.

1. What is uppermost in the mind of the author?

2. How is the author developing his idea?

i. Imperatives.

ii. Interrogatives.

iii. What is the structure of the book?

iv. What is the topical format?

a. Matthew is not chronological but thematic.

b. Each book has a topical format.

3. What verse states the main idea of the book?

i. Mark 10:45 Jesus came not to be ministered to but to minister.

ii. James 2:14-26 the relation between faith and works dominates James.

iii. Acts chapter 2 outlines the book.