

the slow and sad death of many followers of Christ!

- C) When it comes to study tools, I recommend purchasing (gasp!) two items which will help you to understand the culture, language, and customs of the original audience.
- D) First, I recommend an easy-to-understand single or two-volume commentary on the whole Bible. I recommend the *New Bible Commentary: Twenty-first Century Edition* (Carson, France, Motyer, Wenham) or *The Bible Knowledge Commentary* (Walvoord & Zuck, OT & NT Volumes).
- E) Secondly, (and of equal importance) is a Bible Dictionary or Encyclopedia. I recommend *The International Standard Bible Encyclopedia* (ISBE) or a specific volume from the InterVarsity Press (IVP) *Bible Backgrounds Series*.
- F) I should also note that the Internet is loaded with great resources for studying the Bible. Of course, only use resources which come from a trusted source when using the Internet. www.biblegateway.com is an excellent springboard for Internet resources.
- G) The idea of resources are to look at what scholars have discovered through years of research and study. Going back to Ephesians 4:29, commentaries and encyclopedias helped me discover:
 - i) "Unwholesome talk" is "rotten" and "decaying" talk. This phrase is contrasted against "building up," which means it carries a "deconstructive" meaning. Thus, unwholesome talk is anything which "tears down."
 - ii) "helpful or building up" relates to words which are "good, edifying, and reconstruct"
 - iii) "according to their needs" means choosing just the right word at just the right moment. First aid for the soul.
 - iv) "that it may benefit those who listen" means to extend God's grace to the listener. This is the goal, to extend God's grace through words to those who listen.

What's In Your Toolbox?

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**GREAT ARE THE WORKS OF THE LORD;
THEY ARE STUDIED BY ALL WHO DELIGHT
IN THEM. THE WORKS OF HIS HANDS ARE
TRUTH AND JUSTICE; ALL HIS PRECEPTS
ARE SURE. THEY ARE UPHELD FOREVER
AND EVER; THEY ARE PERFORMED IN
TRUTH AND UPRIGHTNESS. HE HAS SENT
REDEMPTION TO HIS PEOPLE; HE HAS
ORDAINED HIS COVENANT FOREVER; HOLY
AND AWESOME IS HIS NAME. THE FEAR OF
THE LORD IS THE BEGINNING OF WISDOM;
A GOOD UNDERSTANDING HAVE ALL THOSE
WHO DO HIS COMMANDMENTS; HIS
PRAISE ENDURES FOREVER.**

~PSALM 111:2, 7-10 (NASB)

1) An Essential Ingredient For Spiritual Growth

- A) Clearly, the diligent study of God's Word (the Bible) is a call to which every follower of Christ should respond with dedication and discipline (2nd Timothy 2:15, John 17:17).
- B) Despite this truth, many followers of Christ are more diligent in developing areas of their lives which have less eternal value (1st Timothy 4:6-8) than the study of the Bible.
- C) As followers of Christ, we should prioritize the study of God's Word in our lives to an essential level. God's Word is to our spiritual lives what food and drink are to our bodies.

2) The "Bible Only" Approach To Bible Study

- A) There is a great danger of polluting God's Word with false teaching (2nd Peter 2:1-3), and false teaching can even become the desire of the listener (2nd Timothy 4:3-4).
- B) Because of these possibilities, there are groups who propose the study of the Bible without any help from any outside source except others who practice the same method of "Bible Only" study.
- C) The weakness of this approach is an inevitable repetition of past mistakes and heresies. This approach actually leads to a repetition of early church doctrinal issues which gives greater rise to heresy, less purity and development of doctrine, and greater rise to false teaching.

3) The "Ecclesiastical Only" Approach To Bible Study

- A) The second approach Bible study recognizes that the Bible was written 2,000 - 4,000+ years ago, about long forgotten practices and cultures, and by writers who came from ancient world views.
- B) Because of this historical/cultural chasm, there are groups who propose only the highly trained professional church worker can interpret, contextualize, and explain God's Word. This is the "Ecclesiastical Only" method of study.
- C) The weakness of this approach is the creation of a group of people who control the ultimate knowledge, interpretation, and study of God's Word (denies 1st Peter 2:9-10).

4) The "Inductive/Deductive" Approach To Bible Study

- A) Another approach to Bible study attempts to recognize both the need for pure/sound Bible doctrine (1st Timothy 4:6) and the existing historical/cultural chasm (1st Timothy 4:11-13).

- B) This approach begins with prayer and reading a Bible passage (e.g. Ephesians 4:29). This is ALWAYS where Bible study must begin. Pray and read God's Word!
- C) Repetitively read your passage/verse (at least three or four times). Grab a note pad and write down your observations and a corresponding question for each observation. For example:
 - i) "Unwholesome talk is prohibited... What qualifies as unwholesome?"
 - ii) "helpful or building up..." How does this compare to unwholesome talk?
 - iii) "according to their needs..." What needs is Paul talking about?
 - iv) "that it may benefit those who listen..." What is the result, what is the desirable benefit?
- D) At this point, I usually write down my own answers to these questions. After that, I want you to do something you might not normally consider. Walk away and think about what you have read and written for at least a day. Meditate on God's Word (Joshua 1:8).
- E) This initial process might go on for a couple of days as you read and re-read your passage, developing new observations and questions while inquiring of the Lord and meditating on His Word.

5) Adding To Your Bible Study Tool Box

- A) After you have allowed God's Word to "soak in" to your heart, it is time to benefit from the many generations of scholars and writers who have studied God's Word through the generations. It is time to utilize study tools.
- B) WARNING! Using study tools too early in the process or as a substitute for prayer, study and meditation leads to knowledge without transformation (cf. Romans 12:2). This is