

A Suggested Approach to Bible Study

Introduction

So very many times, I have found myself involved in, or even leading group-discussions that question the accuracy, legitimacy, and efficacy of Biblical claims, and (more importantly) their application to one's daily life. This is certainly not unusual or unexpected for a Pastor, Bible-Teacher or any Dedicated Follower sharing their Biblical views. Indeed, it is part of what I consider "my job", so to speak.

However, my observation also indicates that when Biblical proof-points are presented, during said-discussions, the second "debate technique" (of usually dissenting opinion) is to challenge the "**scientific proof**" of a matter. Again, for me personally, not an issue, as I am a trained and practicing Engineer of over 40 years; Engineering is simply the disciplined application of an accepted branch of Science to accomplish a defined end-result.

What I do find "rather disheartening" is **the great number of people** that simply don't understand Science, the Scientific Method, and how to apply these techniques to *Biblical study* to understand tremendous **Experiential-Insights** presented in the Bible. I also grow weary of the **Inappropriate Perpetuation** of the **False Claim** that (somehow) Science and Biblical Teaching are forever *polar-opposites*, and **never to be addressed together**. I personally believe this to be **an intellectually narrow viewpoint**, to which most Bible-believers and "*the enlightened* (of today)" all-to-readily surrender. Those that know me have heard me say the following in many settings:

- Science is about The Nature of Things;
 - what something **is** and **how it works**.
 - The **Bible** is about What Could Be based on Faith and expressed in writings of:
 - Origins
 - Biblical history
 - (and most importantly) Relationships

Position Statement

First and foremost, whether we were **Created**, or we simply **Evolved**, it **is no doubt** we have a **marvelous capacity** within ourselves to **Intellectualize**:

- To understand in detail that which we perceive through our measurable senses;
 - An ability that, of necessity, precedes a **subsequent, deep understanding (called "Wisdom")** of our daily observations;
 - something that goes well beyond either:
 - **Rote Response** apart from intellectually considering the observable data
 - Or "**Knee-Jerk Reaction**", as most of the animal kingdom exhibits, called *instinct*.

Whether **Intellectual Capacity** is a blessing from God or the product of Natural Selection, **we have it**, so why not engage it!

It is my documented observation and personal experience that the clear majority of people would rather “emote-only” through life, abandoning the effort to Research (which means “Study Deeply”) and subsequently engage their Intellectual Capacity to decide for themselves. In short, it is easier (and certainly more dramatic) to simply go with “how you feel”. Most will vehemently defend the “most popular opinions”, “the most pleasant of choices” or “the path of least resistance” relative to most life-issues. They seem to want the quick and easy answer, and appear to prefer “being popular” to “being accurate”, per a self-chosen Source of Information.

Herein lies the issue to which I propose (not a new) but a more “Rational” and deliberate technique than The Traditional Rote Response to Biblical Study; a more Systematic Approach to understanding Biblical Claims. Then, based on that accumulated knowledge, analyze said data to determine a position for oneself.

- You Study to amass your body of knowledge
- You Analyze, which by the way includes both deep contemplation of the body of knowledge AND prayer (meditation for those offended by the word “prayer”)
- Only then do You Decide and choose to Apply ANY teaching to your life and the lives of those in your Family.

To this end, I present the delineation of my personal approach to Biblical Study and Teaching; how I study a passage or topic and subsequently present the written result to the Reader.

Proof Points / Data

Science posits the nature of “what is observable, intellectually congruent with existing scientific knowledge, and therefore experimentally repeatable”. It is more about “what is” rather than “where something came from” (known as “origins”).

The “Scientific Method” is a disciplined approach that seeks observable data as justifications for the answer to specific questions. Although over-simplified, the steps of a Scientific approach are:

1. Pose / Raise a Question
2. Conduct background Research
3. Construct a Hypothesis (basically, an opinion of the answer to the questions, supported by the Research data, to this point in the process)
4. Test the Hypothesis via repeatable Experimentation
5. Analyze both the Background Research Data AND the Experimentation Data to “Draw a Conclusion”
6. Logically communicate your findings.

It is important to note at this point in our discussion that NOT everything in the Bible is Scientifically provable, NOR should it be! God INTENDS some aspects of His Word to be taken on Faith by the reader. Yet, using a Scientific approach to Bible study does indeed yield many fascinating data-points that may augment and enlighten one’s existing Faith-Base. On the other hand, if one rejects “Faith” in general, no amount of Logic (Scientific or otherwise) will open their viewpoint to any opinion beside their own. It is simply a matter of either emotional, analytical or Spiritual choice.

So, let's take these "Scientific Method Steps" and apply them to my Biblical study technique, which will yield the format of the majority of my Biblical Teaching Documents, as found on our website, www.loyfellowship.org :

1. **Pose a Question:**

- a. Most of my "Teachings" begin by presenting a specific **Question**.
- b. Often, these questions are from either the LOY membership or Students of our online materials.
- c. Sometimes, they are simply my own questions, that I choose to share with a broader audience.

2. **Conduct Research:**

- a. We then **Research 2 often-opposing sets of data**, as well as **additional Sources** of information to **gain as much understanding** of the Biblical passage as possible
 - i. **First** and **foremost**, **Biblical passages** that presumably address the question
 1. **A good "cross-reference" Bible will assist with this "Harmony-among-books" effort.**
 - ii. **Secondly**, when **available**, **secular data** that **explain**, **illuminate**, **contradict** or otherwise **provide insight** into the topic in question
- b. **Next, research** the following:
 - i. **Translation Validation** – is there any **colloquial** or **idiomatic understanding** from the original language **missing or misrepresented** in the English translation (basically, did we lose any understanding in the choice of English words).
 1. This step is critical, as the original Language of all Books of the Bible were **not** English.
 - ii. The next step is to understand the **Textual Context** of the passage.
 1. Note, even though we deeply analyze many key words in a passage, we must **never forget** that the **Context of the passage** must be **foremost** in choosing among the several and varying definitions of the many words used in a passage under study. **Never lose sight of what the original Author was talking about.**
 2. **Try very hard NOT to take something out of Context;**
 - a. a tact I find all too frequently in many other teachings
- c. Next, I validate any claims of a passage with the remainder of the Bible; a **"cross-reference-check"** of the passage points, looking for **consistencies** and **inconsistencies** elsewhere in the Bible. This very-time-consuming step is how we understand the "Consistency of Messages / Themes" in the various Books of the Bible (as mentioned above, "Harmony of God's Word"). There are 2 considerations of importance:
 - i. What the original Question was (keep your own study-context in mind; "don't lose site of the forest for the trees")
 - ii. How many Bible passages address your original question?
- d. What then-follows is a comparison of the (above) research **relative to "Popular Teachings" on the original question**.
 - i. Point – all too often, the "Popular Religious Position" is not necessarily rooted in Biblical proof, or is only "partially rooted". Many, many times, the "popular religious position" is based on what other men have thought.
 1. By the way, there is nothing wrong with the opinions of other men, unless it contradicts or significantly "dilutes" what the Bible states.

3. Following the accumulation of **all the above**, I will then begin to formulate and **present my opinion (Hypothesis)** relative to:
 - a. The **Original Question** AND...
 - b. The amassed **Data**:
 - i. The passage/s presented as potential “answers” to the Original Question
4. The Fourth Step is to conduct “**Experiments**” to “**Test the legitimacy and efficacy**” of the **Hypothesis**.
 - a. This is where ***we try to locate any prior examples*** of both proper and/or improper application of the proposed Hypothesis (answer to the question)
 - i. **Biblical** and **Secular Documents** may be cited as justification for Experimental Findings.
 - b. Now for the Scientific Part of this approach that **many people will NOT undertake**:
 - i. The only Scientific, Logical, Rational way to **Test** your Question’s Answer (which is your “Hypothesis”), is to “**Apply**” that “**Hypothesis**” in your own life. Only then can one speak experientially.
 1. In many cases, this is where the applicant / tester may need to engage **Faith**, a “**noun**” many find distasteful, since it requires action (the made-up **verb** I use to describe this is “**Faith**” – to put your faith into action)
 2. If one leaves this step out, then they are not truly:
 - a. **Applying the Bible to their Lives**
 - b. **Seeking “Truth”**
 - i. 2 Tim 2:15 – “**Do your best to present yourself to God as one approved, a workman who does not need to be ashamed and who correctly handles the word of truth.**”
NIV
 - ii. This Scripture cannot be realized without Personal Application of your findings (that is “**Testing**” for **yourself**).
 5. The next step takes all the above findings and provides ***intellectual Proof Points for the hypothesis / answer to the original question***. This requires analyzing all the above and presenting my findings ***for 2 purposes***:
 - a. For those that concur with your findings, **consideration of application** of the Analysis and Answer ***in their personal lives*** AND...
 - b. For those ***NOT*** concurring with your findings, a systematic “***starting-point***” for presenting ***their opposing, conflicting, and*** (possibly) ***corrective viewpoints***.
 - i. By-The-Way... we learn a significant amount in life **via our mistakes**, I’m sorry to have to confess. I may be a sexagenarian, but I am still very much open to being taught, and welcome questions, opposing views, and even respectful arguments.
 6. The final step involves **codifying my findings** (from above) into a **cogent article** that I truly believe explains my findings.

Yet, I fully recognize, in the long run, regardless of proof (or lack thereof) your Readers will judge the efficacy of your endeavor.

Summary

To summarize, I will always do my best, given available data sources, to follow the above approach. In some cases, ***secular documents*** and even ***Biblical evidence*** may be ***limited***, but that will not stop me

from trying to analyze all the available data before posing an “Answer” to a “Question”. I will also share my personal experiences in “Testing” the various hypothesis, relative to a Biblical passage, as well as my documented, observed application of the topic in the lives of others (over my years).

When data is limited or non-existent, I will so warn the reader that we are operating on Pure Opinion or even Speculation.

Never forget, that you are doing this for YOU; NOT to prove your peer/s wrong. Recall Yeshua (Jesus’) words in Matthew:

“If anyone will not welcome you or listen to your words, shake the dust off your feet when you leave that home or town.” Matt 10:14 NIV. A similar account may be found in Mark 6:11 and Luke 9:5

The point is, we don’t CONVERT anyone. That is the job of the Holy Spirit. Therefore, don’t Argue or try to force. Even Father God will not do that. He values the Free Choice of everyone, since He knows, without “Free Choice” there is NO real Love, so let’s choose “Love” over “being right”.

In closing, let me remind the reader that Science is about the “nature of things”; what something “is”. The Bible is about “what **could be**” for anyone logical and bold enough to try (that is to “**experiment**” on the Understood portions of the Bible they have studied). Additionally, it is a book describing “**Origins**”, “**Relationship**” and the “**History**” of those individuals that both followed Biblical Recommendations in this Relationship with God as well as several examples of those that **rejected** those Biblical Recommendations, and how that decision affected their relationship to God (if any existed).

Given the above 2 statements, **I readily admit** that not all the information / knowledge presented in the Bible is “Scientifically Provable”, at face value. To form a Relationship with the Creator (which I believe is the greatest goal of the entire Bible), one must “**Engage**” Biblical recommendations / try it for yourself / on Faith. **God Himself affords that choice to every human that has ever lived.** This Application (or Testing) requires something that **Science can neither prove nor disprove; Faith**. Science can only report on observed behavior of those claiming to any faith-based decision strategy.

As a warning, once one undertakes to “**Faith**” (yes, I made that noun a verb) per the teachings of the Bible, you will then experience 2 things that an otherwise good, logical, Intellectual-Only study could never yield:

1. The Empirical Proof missing from any Intellectual-Only study of Biblical knowledge. You obtain this empirical data **via Faithing in one’s life; living it out; testing it in your own life.**
2. A beautiful, wonderful, frightening, enlightening, awe-inspiring, scary, indescribably-rewarding relationship with the very Creator of all that we can observe in science. The Bible is about “Relationship”, not just “Scientific Proof”. Don’t miss out on this indescribable gift from far above and beyond anything our intellect can comprehend or even describe.

May God bless you richly as you Study and Apply His Teachings to your daily lives.