

Knowing Scripture  
by R.C. Sproul

About 10 years ago, I thought it might be a good idea to read through the entire Bible at least once in my life. Part of my motivation was curiosity, and the other part was guilt. With a clear vision of finishing the scriptures, I sat down and started my journey in Genesis, and attempted to establish a habit of reading each night. Ultimately I got stuck in 2 Kings: the curiosity/guilt combination had run out of gas.

Fast forward 7 years, and I found myself engaged in a lively conversation with my younger sister about my (weak) understanding of Christianity. She rightly challenged my credentials for making broad, sweeping statements when I hadn't bothered to seriously consider what the Bible *actually* said. Once my pride yielded to her very accurate assessment, I decided to give reading the Bible another try. This time, however, I started in the New Testament and wrapped around to Genesis once I finished Revelation. While trying to stick to a reading plan of one year, I ended up taking two and a half. But with the Spirit's help this time, I was able to complete it.

Somewhere along the way, I encountered *Knowing Scripture* by R.C. Sproul and was clued into some very helpful insights that I wish I had known before attempting to read through the Bible. Most notably that the Bible is the inspired, inerrant revelation of God, that studying the Word is an essential (i.e. not optional) part of the Christian life, and that there is a method to how we can approach the Bible both as first time readers and as lifelong students of its truths. I would like to share more about these points below, and this is merely a taste of the wisdom to be found in *Knowing Scripture*.

***The Bible is the inspired, inerrant revelation of God***

First, consider that "all Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness" (2 Timothy 3:16 ESV). This implies that what scripture says is of utmost importance because it is not only the thoughts of godly men, but is actually inspired by God. While the way in which a human author and the Holy Spirit are both responsible for authoring scripture is a mystery, it's clear that scripture comes with an authority higher than any other book.

Further, when Christ prays for those who believe in him, he asks the Father to "sanctify them in the truth; thy word is truth" (John 17:17 ASV). These words from the lips of Christ affirm that God's Word (The Bible) is true, and thereby establishes its inerrancy. And without inerrancy, I would be in serious trouble trying to figure out which parts of scripture were actually true since it's in my sinful nature to disagree with a lot of it. But with its standard of perfection, I can always test my thinking against God's Word: it is the benchmark for me and not vice versa.

When I am confronted with the truths of scripture, I see just how far short of God's holy requirements I fall, and how there is only one solution for me to be restored to a relationship with Him: through faith in Jesus Christ and having a truly repentant heart.

***Studying the Word is an essential (i.e. not optional) part of the Christian life***

Sproul points out that while some of us would never consider ourselves to be theologians the fact of the matter is that each of us has ideas about God and therefore we are all theologians; it's just a question of being a good one or being a bad one.

Sproul further points out that being a bad theologian (by not studying God's Word) is being disobedient to what God has commanded of us. Thus, it's not out of a mere curiosity that we occasionally read the Bible. Rather, "the Christian who is not diligently involved in a serious study of Scripture is simply inadequate as a disciple of Christ."

The seriousness of this command is underscored by how many church fathers faced burning at the stake (some of whom were in fact martyred) for translating the Bible into the common man's language. Martin Luther, one such translator, considered it essential for each Christian to read through the entire Bible each year; a view that stands in contrast to my initial thought of trying to read it through just once in my life. Such a limited view of Scripture on my part missed the true importance of being immersed in God's Word each day. And Luther's view includes a yearly study of the entire Bible – not just the passages I find easy to understand or agree with.

***There is a method to how we can approach the Bible both as first time readers and as lifelong students of its truths.***

A key prerequisite for reading the Bible is to pray that the Holy Spirit will illuminate the text to you. This is because there are truths in the Bible that can only be understood with the light from the Spirit; truths that my natural mind is incapable of seeing (1 Corinthians 2:14). This view of scripture is one of plumbing the depths of God's truths, rather than simply reading it to say that we have read it.

A second prerequisite is to understand how we are to interpret scripture (hermeneutics). Sproul covers what it means to interpret the Bible literally (it's not what you might think!) as well as the approaches that were (re)established during the Reformation (e.g. the analogy of faith, the grammatico-historical method, etc).

For the new student desiring a diligent, daily study in God's Word, Sproul lays out a recommended reading plan for making it through the Bible in one year. He structures it in a way that first establishes a habit of daily reading by covering passages that are more easily understood. The more challenging passages come later in the year when we can rely on our daily habit (and constant prayer) to help us sustain our study.

For the advancing student, Sproul recommends study aides such as learning what other Christians have understood over time as captured in commentaries, learning the value of concordances and Bible dictionaries, and even studying in the original manuscript languages of Hebrew and Greek.

Sproul has taught me that "no one on the face of this Earth has a perfectly pure understanding of Scripture. We all hold some views and entertain some ideas that are not of God." Thus, it is our daily (lifelong) duty and joy to come ever closer to truly Knowing Scripture.

-Tom Wood