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Five Major Ideas/Concepts from *Effective Bible Teaching*

1. Effective Teaching

Many ministers admit that it is very difficult for them to "popularize the methods of technical biblical scholarship that they learned in seminary" (12). Furthermore, there seems to be a great need for qualified ministers to ensure that lay people are being trained properly in studying and teaching the Bible. To be an effective teacher requires training and practice.

Effective Bible teachers are those who are able to provide an environment in which the students learn and apply the Bible. The ideal teacher is like a guide: an expert in his field, a fellow participant, an instructor, people-oriented, and views himself as a servant. Good teachers have knowledge, enthusiasm, interaction with their students, empathy, and the ability to challenge their students in their thinking and in their spiritual walk. An effective teacher has a passion for people, for the truth, for study and learning, to share what he has learned, for practical application of what is taught, and a passion for God.

I believe that understanding the characteristics of an effective teacher will help strengthen my teaching as I strive to model my behavior and character according to these admirable qualities. With God's help, I will prayerfully focus on these characteristics before, during, and after my teaching sessions.

2. Principles of Biblical Interpretation

Effective Bible teaching is based upon sound principles of interpretation known as *hermeneutics*. 2 Tim 3:16 states that "all Scripture is . . . profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training in righteousness." To get the most profit from the Scriptures, we must interpret them appropriately.

The first step is to understand the nature of the Bible. First, the Bible "is God's revealed word, inspired by the Holy Spirit and therefore without error" (125). Second, assume "that the Bible is a total unity in which the parts fit together harmoniously." Third, "the story and revelation of the Bible unfold in a progressive manner" (128).

The second step is to understand the language of the Bible. First, "determine the straightforward, literal, or normal meanings of words, phrases, and sentences" (128) and do not allegorize unless a passage declares itself to be allegorical.

The third step is to understand the rules for individual passages. First, assume that there is a conscious purpose, unity, and coherence in the passage designed by the author. Second, "interpret a passage in light of what you know about its genre" (132). Third, meaning is usually derived from literary wholes -- whole books, whole chapters, whole paragraphs, whole stories, whole poems, and not moralizing on specific details. Fourth, interpret passages in its surrounding context.

The fourth step is to actually interpret the text. First, differentiate between descriptive and interpretive conclusions. Second, determine what the passage is about and then focus on what the passage says about that topic. Third, "base your understanding of theme of the passage on the

central concern of the passage, not on peripheral details" (138). Fourth, determine whether a given detail is something that the writer merely records or observes, or whether it is a prescription that we are intended to follow. Lastly, we must research information about the original historical/cultural context that surrounds the passage.

I believe that understanding the right principles of interpretation of the Bible will help strengthen my teaching as I strive to properly interpret the Scriptures and steer away from erroneous interpretations. With hermeneutic principles, I will be able to assess commentaries more accurately and critically and determine which ones should be used to supplement my teaching research and study. As a teacher, I have a responsibility to God and people to nurture Christians by expounding on sound doctrine.

3. Inductive and Directed Bible Studies

Inductive Bible study "emphasizes the process of careful and controlled *discovery*" and "places the burden for learning where it belongs--on the student... In the inductive approach, the teacher facilitates and supports the learner's investigation and discovery" (140). In this method, "the leader and the participants probe the meaning of a text in a careful and thorough manner" (141). Each participant is encouraged to share their insights with the others, thereby contributing to the wealth of insights that come from several observers. Additionally, their interpretation is able to be tested by the others for validity. "Educational research has shown that discovered truth tends to be better understood, more meaningful, and less likely to be forgotten than 'told truth'" (143). Since this method is not dominated by one leader, the atmosphere is more conducive to people sharing their ideas, asking questions, and seeking clarification about the Scriptures being discussed. The inductive method is scientific in that the group comes up with observations (not opinions) and tests the validity of their interpretations on their careful observations and with each other. The group's emphasis is always on application of the Scriptures as opposed to academic knowledge. "Through mutual example, prayer, exhortation, creative imagining, and critical reflection, participants encourage each other to see how the truth of a passage relates to life" (148).

According to an **Inductive** methodology, the leader's main function is to pose questions to the group members that leads all of them to observation, interpretation, and application of the text. On the other hand, a **Directed** Bible study replaces most of the "group discovery with the leader's sharing of his or her insights into a passage," allowing the leader to do the majority of the talking (149). The main difference in the two approaches is the amount of involvement of the leader compared to the groups' response.

Although there are many benefits to the Inductive method, there are times when the Directed method would be preferable. It may be impractical to use the inductive method on a very large class, and it may be unwise to use this method on a class that is made up of new Christians or high-schoolers with limited Christian knowledge. "People without much knowledge of the Bible or Christian doctrine often undermine the effectiveness of an inductive Bible study with their lack of knowledge or hesitancy to speak in front of people who 'know so much.'" (150). The directed method is also preferable when there is much material that must be conveyed in a short amount of time. The inductive approach excels at honoring the "priesthood of all believers", but there is a time when "people must receive educated teaching" from those "who are gifted and trained to teach the Bible" in a Directed Bible study format.

I believe that understanding the advantages and the differences of the Inductive and Directed Bible study methods will help strengthen my teaching as I strive to appropriately choose

and apply a method for a given class situation.

4. Leading Inductive Bible Studies

Preparation is the key to leading effective inductive Bible studies. A leader must saturate the up-coming study with prayer--prayer for the participants and prayer for the content of the discussion. A leader must methodically and thoroughly analyze a section of Scripture before he leads the group study. He should make use of a number of tools including a good study Bible, a concordance, a Bible dictionary, a Bible atlas, and a Bible commentary. Additionally, he should read a passage of Scripture from a variety of different translations: a literal translation such as NASB or KJV; a dynamic equivalent translation such as the NIV; and a free translation such as the LB. After intently observing the passage, the leader can formulate the main idea in the passage that will be the focus for the discussion.

Central to the inductive Bible study are "creative and thought provoking questions" (160). The leader uses these questions to promote "group discovery and discussion." Good questions are precise, focus on important issues, have a purpose, are thought-provoking, can be answered by the group, and are at least somewhat open-ended. Questions should address each of the three distinct main stages of the inductive process: observation, interpretation, and application.

An observation must meet the test of accuracy. If someone comes up with a wrong answer to an observation question, a leader should challenge the answer. By contrast, interpretive statements are much less likely to have a single right answer. In such cases, a leader might wish to let an answer stand unchallenged even though he or she might disagree with it. (168)

"The way a leader responds to questions will help set the tone of the study" (174). After observing and interpreting the text, the leader should guide the questions and discussion to conclude with some appropriate applications.

"The discussion group leader's role is to keep the discussion moving"; to be a **catalyst** in stimulating discussion; to be a **guide** in keeping the discussion on track and focused; to be a **clarifier** for the group of what another member is trying to say based on his/her background; to be an **affirmer** "who encourages others by recognizing the value in each person and contribution" (173).

I believe that gaining the understanding that leading an effective inductive Bible study requires preparation and the development of thought-provoking questions will help strengthen my teaching as I strive to prepare myself intellectually and prayerfully for leading a group discussion that is centered on a question-and-answer format.

5. The Bible We Teach

Effective Bible teaching occurs when a teacher "bridges the gap" from "what a passage *meant* to the original audience [to] what it *means* to us today" (32). In order to properly teach what the Bible means for us today, a teacher must properly understand the Bible and its different types of writing, known as a *genres*.

The Bible is a collection of ancient interdependent religious books that has an amazing theological and narrative unity. It was written by men who were inspired by God. Studying the Scriptures is the means in which God communicates to people and enables God's life-transforming power to work in our lives. This Book challenges human conduct, attitudes, and values by providing

God's standard of right and wrong. "The unifying purpose of the Bible is to reveal God to people so they might know how to order their lives" (184).

Much of the Bible is literary in nature. "Literature aims to recreate a [human] experience with enough vivid details that a reader can relive the experience" (194). The Bible contains a variety of writing styles: stories, poems, theological expositions, proverbs, satire, visionary writing, epistles, and parables. Therefore, "stories must be taught as stories, poems as poems, and theological exposition as theological exposition" (34).

I believe that understanding both the divine and human aspect of the Bible will help strengthen my teaching as I strive to properly interpret the Scriptures according to its *genre* and then proclaim a contemporary application for us today that allows God to teach us and transform us as we get to know Him and His Word.