

# Let Us Grow in the Grace and Knowledge of Our Lord

(Compiled by Paul R. Blake from multiple sources, 2016)

## Introduction:

### A. 2Peter 3:18; 1John 5:20

1. Teaching is one of the critical cornerstones in the structure of a local church.
2. The Bible classes are an accurate gauge of the health of the congregation and a window into the future of that local church.
3. A dynamic preacher, sound elders, and faithful members are not made without good Bible classes, nor are they substitutes for interesting, edifying Bible classes.
4. Without good Bible classes, the local church will not have a good preacher, sound elders, and faithful members for very long.

### B. What we grew up with in Bible classes

1. Class books that just point to the answers without challenging students to think or reason from the scriptures
2. Issue oriented studies that are occasionally necessary, but seldom acquaint students with the word of God or with God who wrote it
3. Verse by verse textual studies that seldom did justice to the context and often led students away from the purpose of the text
4. Lecture oriented studies that discourage class participation or limit discussion to a few favorites of the teacher

### C. This is the institutionalizing of Bible study.

1. Instead of Bible study being an activity that promotes individual growth by personal application of the principles being taught, it degenerates into a lecture format where the same teacher recites the same facts familiar to him
2. Study guides are often designed to limit learning to just the facts with little or no opportunity for individual comment or personal application and growth.
3. Institutionalized Bible classes rob students and teachers of the true fellowship of the word in which both grow together in knowledge, understanding, and love for God and for one another.

### D. What is the purpose of Bible study?

1. Bible study is not about filling the minds of students with facts from the Bible. This is not learning; it is recitation.
2. Bible study is about transforming lives by means of coming to know God in Whose image we were created, and examining His self-revelation in order to transform our thoughts and emotions to become more like Him.
3. Illustration: The facts of obedience of the Gospel are: hear, believe, repent, confess, and be baptized; but, hear, believe, repent, confess, and be baptized save no one without first helping them to know the God who created them, loves them, and wants them to live with Him in heaven. Hear, believe, repent, confess, and be baptized converts no

one until they come to know themselves and their present state as revealed in God's word. Until they are moved by knowing God and knowing themselves to want to be saved, the facts about how to be saved will not save them.

4. Likewise with Bible study: Until students come to personally know God and His will for them and learn for themselves how to apply His word, all of the lectures that fill their memory banks with facts will not transform them into the Image of the Divine. This is done by studying the word for themselves; it is not done by fill in the blank, one word answer, true or false, multiple guess, and verse by verse Bible classes.

E. A study of Bible study in five points:

1. Delighted to meditate on God's word
2. Delighted to speak together of God's word
3. Delighted to teach the word of God
4. Teaching the word of God delightfully
5. Delighting in being edified by the word of God

## **I. DELIGHTED TO MEDITATE ON GOD'S WORD**

A. Psalm 1:2 - People need to go away moved and thoughtful about Bible study

1. The goal of a teacher is to get students to delight in the word of God which will translate into delighting in God and in the process of becoming more like Him.
2. What is our purpose in worship? We have delighted so much in God that we want to come together to express our love and praise for Him.
3. Likewise with Bible study - Psalm 119:97, 148

B. One can get all of the facts and keep all of the commands and still fail to grow and fail to love God.

1. How could the Jews search the scriptures and miss Christ?
  - a. John 5:38-40
2. Because it is possible to know the Bible from end to end and not be changed by it. The Pharisees put doing everything correctly before knowing God.
3. We read and study it incorrectly if we do not have as our primary goal learning to love God and transforming our lives into His image.

C. The first goal of any Bible student is to know God. We cannot put being correct before knowing God who defined correctness

1. John 6:44-45 - You cannot come to Jesus unless drawn by the Father; there is the element of being emotionally motivated to come to the Lord.
2. "Drawn" is similar in meaning to courting or wooing. Berry Kercheville's illustration about how he courted his wife: "I gave her a list of my expectations and instructions for her to be my wife on our first date and she fell madly in love with me. She was moved by all of the commands."
3. When one feels the need to come to Christ, then it is time to know how come to Him correctly - Acts 2:36-37; Rom. 6:17
4. When we are drawn to be more like God, we will seek to know how to do it correctly.

5. Eph. 5:22-33; 1John 4:10 - We are drawn to Him by knowing His love for us, just as a woman is drawn to a man when his love becomes fully evident in his proposal of marriage.
  6. "If you love me, keep my commandments" is not true in reverse. "Since I keep His commandments, I must love Him" does not necessarily follow
  7. We can go through the motions and not truly love Him. We need to become obedient people because we love Him
- D. Don't start a study from a negative viewpoint.
1. Don't begin with studying to know what to do to avoid hell or how to tell others why they are lost
  2. Study to know God and to learn to love Him, and then learn what you need to do to have a relationship with Him
  3. Deut. 30:6 - We have to come to love Him before we can live with Him. Husband and wife relationship is a good example of this.
  4. Ez. 36:26-27 - In what order did God place these? Know the Spirit of God first or do the works of God first?
  5. Jesus quoted Hosea 6:6 twice: "For I desire mercy and not sacrifice, And the knowledge of God more than burnt offerings." - Matt. 9:13, 12:7
  6. This is not to suggest that keeping the commandments is less important, but that it comes after knowing God and His love. If we put keeping commandments first, we get it wrong, out of scriptural order.
    - a. "I want you to know Me and love Me before you obey Me"
  7. Knowing the God of the text is the first priority
- E. Knowing God first or self-discovery study is the way to love God and His word.
1. Class materials can divert the teacher and students from knowing God first. They traditionally focus on what the author has seen rather than on helping the student discover God in the text for himself.
  2. This leads Christians to level out, to know the general doctrines about the work and worship of the church, moral dos and don'ts, and how to answer the issues and denominations. "I've got all of the doctrines."
  3. If I find a treasure, it is mine. "I found this treasure in the mine. As a teacher, I'll show you the mine, but you need to dig out the treasures for yourself, and then they will be yours.
  4. Imagine: instead of three people out of 50 in class making the same tired, old comments that we have heard endlessly, 50 students who cannot wait to share what they learned while studying. They come to class full, instead of empty and waiting to be filled.
- F. Lead the class to see it for themselves; do not tell them what to see.
1. Ask them to look again for more; keep the class focused on what they can learn from the text.
  2. We are trying to transform our own lives; we are not transforming the liberals, denominations, false teachers, and homosexuals. These matters can be addressed in a class designed for that, but some teachers cannot see anything in the text except how to apply it to error.

3. "Some people" and "They and them" should not be the words we use to begin an application in a Bible study; "we, us, and ourselves" is the most effective way to approach a passage.
- G. What makes a knowing God first or self-discovery class?
1. Give the context or big picture first. Ask the students to come prepared to tell the teacher what the context is.
    - a. The text is the answer; discover what the question is.
    - b. Guide the class to the key texts that define the question.
  2. Ask questions that require full sentence answers.
    - a. Ask questions about how the students can apply the passage.
    - b. Let the students answer your questions; wait for them to answer. Give them time to think of how to answer.
  3. Ask the students what they see in the text.
    - a. What is the tone or tenor of the message?
    - b. What is the condition of the brethren being addressed?
    - c. How does this passage reveal and glorify God and Christ?
    - d. What is the problem? How did this problem develop? What dangers are generated by the problem?
    - e. What arguments does the author make to identify the problem, and what arguments does he make for solving it?
    - f. What is the solution? How can I apply this to myself?
    - g. What is the biggest surprise you discovered in the text?
    - h. What is the biggest question you still have about the text?
  4. Ask the students what they see after answering these questions. When students discover the text for themselves, they do not forget it.

## II. DELIGHTED TO SPEAK TOGETHER OF GOD'S WORD

A. Mal. 3:16

B. The value of a Bible discussion class

1. There is a time and place where lectures and preaching without audience participation is of great value and effectiveness
  - a. Matt. 5-7, 10:1-42, 23:1-39, 25:1-46, et al
2. There is also a time and place where discussion and feedback in a class study setting is of great value and effectiveness
  - a. Matt. 13:1-30; John 4:7-42, 6:41-58, 7:14-31, 8:12-59, et al
3. What is a Bible study that consists of a teacher delivering a lecture without audience participation? It is called a sermon.
4. Sitting through a lecture is passive learning. Participating in a discussion class is active learning.
5. "The advantage of discussion is that it can get the class totally involved in active learning. Your challenge is to reduce the amount of lecture time and to devise ways to make them active, not just passive, learners." (Leo Myer, Teach!, p. 33, 48)
6. "Make students active participants in learning. Students learn by doing, making, writing, designing, creating, solving. Passivity dampens

students' motivation and curiosity. Don't tell students when you can ask them." (B. G. Davis, Tools for Teaching, p. 194)

C. Three reasons to have discussion Bible classes:

1. It is a means of edification. We come to know, appreciate, and love one another more when we hear each other talk of our common faith.
2. It is a means to communicate that we can and are teaching each other. No single teacher has all of the answers, and all of us benefit when we share our understanding.
3. It is a means by which the teacher can know if and when his students have an understanding of the word. Discussion provides feedback that reveals where the students are in their grasp of the material.
4. "Discussion methods are superior to lectures in student retention of information after the end of a course; in transfer of knowledge to new situations; in development of problem solving, thinking, or attitude change; and in motivation for further learning." (McKeachie & Svinicki, McKeachie's Teaching Tips, p. 36)

### III. DELIGHTED TO TEACH THE WORD OF GOD

A. 1Tim. 4:15-16

B. Get the discussion started with questions:

1. Ask questions that require more than a one or two word answer. In a study of 1John 4, the teacher could ask: How does John describe God? Answer: God is love. No discussion.
2. Or, the teacher could ask: What does John mean when he says God is love? Explain the difference between God has love and God is love. How has John demonstrated that God is love? Discussion generated.
3. Avoid yes/no, true/false, fill in the blanks, and multiple guess questions.
4. Wait for the students to answer. Often these kinds of questions are new to them, and they will need time to formulate a complete answer and decide how to say it. Give them time.
5. Asking and answering your own questions is a form of lecture teaching. The students will learn to out-wait the teacher.

C. Build a rapport and a relationship with your students

1. Respect the student's personal dignity. Many will not answer or comment because they think they will get it wrong or not say it well. The only silly question is one that the questioner is afraid to ask.
  - a. But no one will participate in a class when he expects the teacher to address him in a demeaning manner or silenced by an insecure teacher trying to assert his superior knowledge.
2. Teach the students to trust you as the teacher to have not only their best interests but their personal dignity at heart.
  - a. "When trust is present, communication is open, self-disclosure is possible, and the discussion of issues transcends small talk and word games. When trust is absent in the institutional situation, communication tends to take place only at superficial level and learners do not become seriously engaged in the quest for

knowledge and insight” (McKenzie & Harton, *The Religious Education of Adults*, p. 207)

3. Praise the student’s efforts to answer a question or make a comment, even if it is in error. If it is mistaken, ask the student to consider the answer in light of a specific passage. He or she can discover it for themselves and be happy about learning more, rather than be discouraged for getting it wrong. Point out that they are mistaken in the same manner in which you would want to be told if the circumstances were reversed. Some helpful responses might be:
  - a. “That’s getting close to what is written.”
  - b. “I appreciate your thinking, but I must disagree in part.”
  - c. “Is that what the text says? How does it harmonize with the text?”

D. Direct rather than dominate the class.

1. The best teacher of a Bible discussion class is more of a moderator than a lecturer. It is necessary for the teacher and the class to realize that he is in control, and he does so by calling on the students who wish to comment.
  - a. Without a firm moderator, the class can degenerate into a mass sharing of ignorance. A Bible study is not a democracy.
2. It is not necessary for the teacher to add to every student’s comment. Sometimes thanking the student and moving on to the next student is effective because the first student made his point clearly.
3. On occasion, students will make comments that create tangents and divert the attention of the class from the teacher’s goal. While some tangents can lead to good discussions, most require the teacher to address the matter quickly and redirect attention to the current study.
  - a. If it is a question or comment that must be pursued, ask the student to defer it to another class, discuss it after class, or to allow you to complete the current matter.

E. Students need to cooperate with the teacher’s direction. Students’ comments should not:

1. Repeat the teacher’s instruction or other students’ comments
2. Go back in the material to re-make a point or to embellish it; this breaks the flow of the class and is difficult for the class to find the point of reference for the comment
3. Run the center column references for the class; these were inserted as study helps by the denominational book publisher and often contribute very little to Bible study
4. Read long passages to make a point; use only the passage that is immediately relevant to the point

F. The teacher must be completely honest.

1. Do not make up an answer or guess the answer; that is a foolproof recipe for error
2. Do not offer your opinion as if it were the correct answer. It is a Bible class, not a teacher’s opinion class

3. If you don't know the answer, say so; and then, tell the class that you will come to the next study prepared to answer that question. And be certain that you do so in order to maintain your integrity as a teacher.
4. Make the class understand that you don't have all of the answers and that you are learning along with them. Do not be afraid to say that you learned something new or that you are struggling with understanding a difficult matter. It helps the students to identify with you and increases the bond between you.

G. Psalm 119:7-16

#### **IV. TEACHING THE WORD OF GOD DELIGHTFULLY**

A. Deut. 32:1-3

B. Twelve "Don'ts" when teaching a discussion Bible class:

1. Do not begin the class by spending too much time in review. Most of the class already knows those things and will shift their minds into neutral until the teacher begins to talk about new material.
  - a. Students who were absent should have studied it at home before coming to class.
  - b. A brief statement to develop a context for the study is helpful, perhaps three or four sentences, not three or four minutes.
2. Do not ask questions that have obvious answers. This is appropriate for children's Bible drill for students aged four to eight, not adults aged 18 to 80. No one will answer; teachers will interpret this as ignorance of the material. At best, it is tedious.
3. Do not lecture endlessly. Lead the class to discover the text for themselves. Don't read the commentaries to the class; they can read them for themselves. Quoting resource material is helpful. Teaching from them is not. Lecturing implies that no one in the class has anything to contribute or that the teacher is afraid of questions and comments.
  - a. Research demonstrates that the average person remembers 5% of what is heard, 10% of what is read, 30% of what is seen, 50% of what is both seen and heard, 70% of what is said ourselves, and 90% of what is said and done ourselves.
  - b. Lecture classes discourage personal study at home, attendance at classes, and participation in classes.
4. Do not put down persons who give wrong answers or offer misguided comments. It may be that the teacher did not clearly state the material or the question. Ask instead, "Why do you believe that?" or "What passage would you use to reinforce that?"
5. Do not teach based on what you previously studied without re-studying the material, ever. At best, the teacher will be merely parroting back the things he has taught the class in the past. In all likelihood, he will be tedious and possibly mistaken. No aged Bible student can know every passage so well that he cannot learn something new by looking at it again with fresh eyes.

6. Never study and teach the scriptures verse by verse. This is the most ineffective means of teaching a Bible class, apart from not using the Bible at all.
  - a. First, the Bible was not written in chapters and verses, they were added 1600 years later by persons unskilled in understanding the context of the passages.
  - b. Second, it invariably loses the context and purpose of the passage. "A text without a context is a pretext." This means that apart from the context, the passage has little value alone.
  - c. Third, most brethren who teach verse by verse unintentionally, but inevitably, do violence to the text by using and applying in ways unintended by the Divine.
7. Do not show signs of frustration, impatience, or boredom. Some teachers have their favorite students they can count on for reading, answering, or comment, and will often treat them indulgently. If someone else makes a comment, the teacher is often tempted to brush it aside and move on.
  - a. Paul told the Corinthians that the less presentable members are to be treated with greater honor and that the weak are to be encouraged and upheld - 1Cor. 12:23-24; 1Thes. 5:14.
  - b. A teacher who cannot treat all of his students with courtesy needs to sit down until he learns to respect others.
8. Do not allow students to hijack the class. Good teachers have a design and purpose for the class and can skillfully guide the class to those goals without discouraging discussion.
  - a. The best teachers can take all of the questions and comments and weave and synthesize all of them together into a tapestry that facilitates the study goals.
  - b. Encourage students that have comments to be prepared to back them up with scripture.
  - c. Sometimes it becomes necessary to stop a student and return to the material. It rarely happens, but sometimes students will attempt to teach the class from their pew. Thank them for their zeal and then retake control of the material.
9. Maintain a productive pace through the material.
  - a. Do not go too fast. Students will not perceive the class is deep enough or edifying enough to prepare and participate.
  - b. Do not move too slowly. Repetitiveness is an interest killer. Say it once with emphasis, support it with a text, and move on. The repetitive, plodding teacher will insist that he is teaching important sound doctrines. He may be doing that, but he is edifying no one.
  - c. Teachers who go too fast or too slow imply that they have little confidence in their students.



- 1) The teacher who goes too fast communicates to the class that getting through the material is more important than whether the class gets it or not.
  - 2) The teacher who goes too slow underestimates his students' capacity for learning.
10. Do not become adversarial with your class or individual students in it. Teachers and students are part of the same family, and often subject to the same dynamics as typical families.
    - a. Work through conflicts both in and out of class, as prudence dictates. Do not be afraid of conflict or confrontation, do not view it as a threat or take it personal. "We be brethren," so act like it.
    - b. Some will not prepare for class, some will not answer, some will not attend regularly, some will have a bad day, you will have a bad day; allow for this.
  11. Do not answer your own questions. Trust the silence at the end of a question; it is your friend; it is your superpower.
    - a. Let the class tell you what the text means, and when they have finished, complete their understanding from your own studies and notes.
    - b. Teach them to think and to speak for themselves; they will be better equipped to speak of these things to others.
  12. Do not teach the material the same way every time. Good teachers and preachers change things up, not only for their hearers but also for themselves. Use different media, methods, techniques PRN (pro re nata) (as needed).

#### C. Believe in the students

1. "Students will rise to your level of expectation." (Jaime Escalante, Stand and Deliver, teaching AP calculus to LA barrio children who barely had basic math skills)
2. What do most elderships expect of the students in an adult Bible class? Beyond showing up? Very little. "Bring your Bible and class book." Wow! Underwhelming.
3. Develop high, yet realistic expectations of your students. Assume they can learn it, and work slowly, but inexorably toward that goal.
4. Illustration: How many of you had the same vocabulary today that you had 20 years ago? My girls used to tease me about "vocabulary word of the day" every Sunday afternoon. Folks used to complain about me using words they now use freely. I did it on purpose; it was a trick I learned from Dee Bowman. I expected folks in a country congregation to develop the speech of serious Bible students, and they bypassed my expectations.
5. Teachers, believe in your students ability to learn. Teach them with the assumption that they really want to learn what you have to share. They will borrow from your belief in them in the beginning, but over time will come to believe in themselves.

- a. First, communicate your expectations for the class and your conviction that they can do it.
- b. Second, adjust your expectations if it becomes necessary, not if you become disappointed, but if it becomes clear that you misjudged the level and pace of understanding.
- c. Communicate this to the class and state the new goal and pace. Don't be afraid to increase the pace or toughen the goal if it seems clear that the class can handle it. Learning is like weight lifting: the more you lift, the more you become able to lift.

## **V. DELIGHTING IN BEING EDIFIED BY THE WORD OF GOD**

A. Eph. 4:11-16

B. How to have an edifying class, for students:

1. Learn to love the word of God and the God Who gave it to us. In every reading of the text, look for an "Aha" breakthrough or a "Wow" moment. There are jewels and golden nuggets in every reading. Communicate your excitement out loud to others. Get a highlighter and a pen and mark and circle every line that captures your thought.
  - a. Begin with the text itself, not with commentaries, cross references, or class books. After reading it through, ask yourself: "What do I see here?"
  - b. Read it a second time. Make notes, highlight, and ask yourself: "Now what else have I seen here that I did not see before?"
  - c. Do it a third time.
  - d. Write down what the writer was trying to say.
  - e. Write down things about which you want to know more or things that were difficult to understand.
  - f. Write down ways you can incorporate the passage in your personal life.
  - g. If you have time, read the class book and answer the author's questions. Perhaps supplement your study with reading a trustworthy commentary.
  - h. Read the text a fourth time and ask: "What else do I see here?"
  - i. Over time, these practices will become automatic in our thought processes in personal Bible studies
2. Bring your notes to class
  - a. Ask the questions you wrote in your notes
  - b. Make comments about your "Aha" moment
3. Prepare for open discussion
  - a. It enables us to be better equipped for the ministry - Eph. 4:11-12
  - b. By sharing a discussion, we learn to speak the truth in love to one another - Eph. 4:15
  - c. It enables us to explore questions and comments that we would not have considered on our own. Classes are not for rehearsing an unwritten creed; we should not be afraid to challenge our own

- beliefs, not with the intent of overthrowing the faith, but of discovering new means of reinforcing it.
- d. It contributes to unity of the faith when we study together and come to a common understanding.
  - e. It gives us the opportunity know the Lord and His word at a deep level. There are three levels to Bible study:
    - 1) Surface - What is the obvious meaning of the text?
    - 2) Structural - How does this passage contribute to the local context and harmonize with the theme of all scripture?
    - 3) Sublime - What does this passage reveal about God and me? Most brethren never go any deeper than level one.

Conclusion:

A. Acts 17:10-12

B. Teachers, there is nothing more rewarding than witnessing Christians grow in grace and knowledge. To be instrumental in that process is the greatest work to which one can aspire. Conversely, a great source of sorrow is the sense of loss felt when one witnesses a brother fail to thrive and begin to drift backward. Being effective teachers in spiritually flourishing Bible classes can reduce and potentially eliminate such losses. One must live righteously, teach soundly, and maintain his Christian joy through the good and bad experiences of life.

**Resources:**

40 years of experience teaching adult Bible classes  
Charles Willis, Effectively Teaching Adult Bible Classes, 2008  
Leo Myer, Teach! The Art of Teaching Adults, 2005  
B.G. Davis, Tools for Teaching, 2001  
McKeachie & Svinicki, McKeachie's Teaching Tips, 2006  
McKenzie & Harton, The Religious Education of Adults, 2002  
Berry Kercheville, Preparing Young Men to Preach, 2005  
Berry Kercheville, How to Teach a Self-Discovery Class, 2016 Florida College Lectures  
Stanley Leavitt, Teaching Bible Classes