

REVISED EDITION

KNOWING

SCRIPTURE

R. C. SPROUL

Foreword by J. I. PACKER


IVP Books

An imprint of InterVarsity Press
Downers Grove, Illinois

Contents

<i>Foreword by J. I. Packer</i>	9
<i>Preface.</i>	13
1 Why Study the Bible	15
Two Myths	15
The Clarity of Scripture	17
The Problem of Motivation	20
The Biblical Basis for Bible Study	22
The Bible as Revelation	26
Theory and Practice	28
The Sensuous Christian	30
A Matter of Duty	35
2 Personal Bible Study and Private Interpretation	36
Martin Luther and Private Interpretation	36
Objectivity and Subjectivity	41
The Role of the Teacher	45
3 Hermeneutics: The Science of Interpretation	49
The Analogy of Faith	51
Interpreting the Bible Literally.	53
Literal Interpretation and Genre Analysis	54
The Problem of Metaphor	59
The Medieval Quadriga	60
The Grammatical-Historical Method.	62
Source Criticism	64
Authorship and Dating	65
Grammatical Errors.	67
4 Practical Rules for Biblical Interpretation	69
Rule 1: Read the Bible Like Any Other Book.	69

Rule 2: Read the Bible Existentially	71
Rule 3: Interpret the Historical Narratives by the Didactic	76
Rule 4: Interpret the Implicit by the Explicit	83
Rule 5: Determine Carefully the Meaning of Words	87
Rule 6: Note the Presence of Parallelisms	95
Rule 7: Note the Difference Between Proverb and Law	99
Rule 8: Observe the Difference Between the Spirit and the Letter of the Law	101
Rule 9: Be Careful with Parables	105
Rule 10: Be Careful with Predictive Prophecy	108
Rule 11: Interpret the Bible with a Spirit of Humility	111
5 Culture and the Bible	114
Cultural Conditioning and the Bible	114
Cultural Conditioning and the Reader	117
Principle and Custom	120
Practical Guidelines	122
6 Practical Tools for Bible Study	128
Bible Translations	128
Study Bibles	130
The King James Version	132
Commentaries	134
Concordances, Bible Dictionaries and Atlases	136
Word Studies	137
Foreign Translations	138
What About Greek and Hebrew?	138
Bible Software	141
Bible Reading Program for Beginners	142
Conclusion	145
<i>Notes</i>	146
<i>Glossary</i>	150

Foreword

If I were the devil (please, no comment), one of my first aims would be to stop folk from digging into the Bible. Knowing that it is the Word of God, teaching people to know and love and serve the God of the Word, I should do all I could to surround it with the spiritual equivalent of pits, thorn hedges and traps, to frighten people off. With smug conceit, no doubt, as if receiving a compliment, I should acknowledge that wise old Jonathan Edwards (1703-1758) had me absolutely pegged when he wrote:

The devil never would attempt to beget in persons a regard to that divine word which God has given to be the great and standing rule. . . . Would the spirit of error, in order to deceive men, beget in them a high opinion of the infallible rule, and incline them to think much of it, and be very conversant with it? . . . The devil has ever shown a mortal spite and hatred towards that holy book the Bible: he has done all in his power to extinguish that light. . . . He is engaged against the Bible, and hates every word in it.

I should labor every day to prove Edwards's words true.

How? Well, I should try to distract all clergy from preaching and teaching the Bible, and spread the feeling that to study this ancient book directly is a burdensome extra that modern Christians can forgo without loss. I should broadcast doubts about the truth and relevance and good sense and straightforwardness of the Bible, and if any still insisted on reading it I should lure them into assuming that the benefit of the practice lies in the noble and tranquil feelings evoked by it rather than in noting what Scripture actually says. At all costs I should want to keep them from using their minds in a disciplined way to get the measure of its message.

Were I the devil, taking stock today, I think I might be pleased at the progress I had made. But I should be very far from pleased to see this book by my friend—sorry, J. I. Packer’s friend—“R. C.”

For more than a century, Protestant theology has been in conflict about the Bible. The first storm center was inspiration and its corollary, inerrancy. Eighty years ago, the debate shifted to revelation, the method and content of God’s communication through allegedly fallible Scriptures. Interpretation is now the central interest, and the subjectivism which yesterday concluded that the Bible is neither true nor trustworthy today interprets it on the basis that its message to us is neither consistent nor clear. The results of so doing are often muddled and messy. Against this background, Dr. Sproul’s vigorous layman’s introduction to the interpretive task is more than welcome.

What are its special qualities? Clarity, common sense, mastery of material and a bubbling enthusiasm which turns the author from a good communicator into a superb one. The Bible excites him and his excitement is infectious. O taste and see! Sproul on Bible study will make you want to study the Bible, as well as equipping you to do so: and what greater virtue could such a book have than that? There are technical problems in hermeneutics that lie beyond its

scope, but the basics are here, with a most salutary stress on the objectivity (the “there-ness”) of God’s instruction in the Scriptures and on the rationality of the method of deciphering and applying it. It is a pleasure and a privilege to commend to the Christian public a book calculated to do so much good.

J. I. Packer