



An OPEN Approach

Chuck Northrop

In almost any task, its success or accomplishment is determined by one's approach. If a person is unwilling, then the task will probably not be completed, or if it is, it will likely be poorly done. If a person has an "I can't" attitude, the task will be prone to failure. And if a person has a closed mind, then the task will cultivate stagnation. But, if approached properly, great accomplishments can be made. It's all in the approach. So, it is with Bible study. The proper results of Bible Study can only be accomplished if there are some things that are opened.

OPEN BIBLE

First, there must be an **OPEN BIBLE**. For real Bible study to occur, the Bible must be opened and studied. David wrote, "The entrance [opening, ASV] of thy words giveth light; it giveth understanding unto the simple" (Psalm 119:130). In Acts 8:26-40, we read of the conversion of the eunuch of Ethiopia. God had sent Philip the evangelist to "the way that goeth down from Jerusalem unto Gaza." As the eunuch journeyed, he was reading Isaiah 53. At the Spirit's urging, Philip came up to the chariot and asked, "Understandest thou what thou readest?" And the eunuch replied, "How can I, except some man should guide me?" He desired Philip to give him spiritual instruction. So, "Philip opened his mouth, and began at the same scripture, and preached unto him Jesus." Instruction was accomplished because the Bible was opened.

Notice also the nobility of the Bereans. Luke said, "These were more noble than those in Thessalonica, in that they received the word with all readiness of mind, and searched the scriptures daily, whether those things were so" (Acts 17:11). In part, they were noble because the Book of books was opened. They searched the scriptures daily! They examined what they were being taught by comparing it to the word of God. And when the teaching proved to be scriptural, they readily accepted it.

Philip, the eunuch, and the Bereans illustrate the need of an open Bible. Paul's admonition of 2 Timothy 2:15 helps us to make the application. Paul wrote, "Study to shew thyself approved unto God, a workman that needeth not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth." The purpose of handling accurately the word of truth is so that we can be approved of God and an unashamed workman.

OPEN MIND

Not only must there be an **OPEN BIBLE**, we must also have an **OPEN MIND**. A person who has closed their mind to honest evaluation and/or to the word of God are hopelessly lost. Evaluation of one's self and one's beliefs is of absolute necessity. To Timothy, Paul wrote, "Take heed unto thyself, and unto the doctrine; continue in them: for in doing this thou shalt both save thyself, and them that hear thee" (1 Timothy 4:16).

Open mindedness is the opposite of prejudice. Prejudice comes in many forms. Prejudice can be based upon race, economics, religion, and a host of other things. Prejudice means to pre-judge or judge before full examination. Though the word "prejudice" is not used in Scripture, it is clearly condemned. Peter wrote, "Be ye holy; for I am holy" (1 Peter 1:16). A part of God's holiness is the fact that He "is no respecter of persons" (Acts 17:34). God is not prejudice. Thus, we should not be prejudice whether we are speaking of individuals or otherwise. Rather than going to God's word to prove what we already believe, let us go to God's word to see what God teaches and accept the truth thereof.

Sometimes a person's beliefs are based upon the conviction of others such as parents or grandparents. This, too, is the opposite of an open mind. Though we must love and respect our parents, we must have our own convictions. Judgment will be based upon what we have done in our bodies (2 Corinthians 5:10). It will not be based upon our parent's or any other person's conviction whether right or wrong.

Sadly, it is the case that some people base their beliefs upon their own desires. They desire an adulterous union or some such like thing, and, thus, they decide such is not wrong. In this way, they justify themselves. Honest people, however, will approach God's word with an open mind looking to God for His directions as revealed in His word. This was the attitude of the noble Bereans, and it should be our attitude as well.

OPEN HEART

Not only must there be an **OPEN BIBLE** and an **OPEN MIND**, we must also have an **OPEN HEART**. Jesus said, "thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind, and with all thy strength" (Mark 12:30). This passage shows that there is some basic difference between the mind and heart. The mind is the seat of the intelligence whereas the heart is the seat of the emotions. Acceptance and obedience of the gospel is more than just intellectual. It is also a matter of emotions. One can intellectually understand and accept a certain teaching, but not obey it because of some emotional conflict. Thus, holy scripture must be approached with an open heart.

In the Beatitudes, Jesus said, "Blessed are the pure in heart: for they shall see God" (Matthew 5:8). Pure means that the heart is without defilement or hypocrisy. Before one will accept God's truth on any given subject, the heart of that individual must be pure — desiring to do God's will rather than his or her own will. For this reason, David prayed, "Create in me a clean heart, O God; and renew a right spirit within me" (Psalm 51:10). This does not mean that we are passive in this, and that God somehow does something to change our hearts. We are responsible to make heart changes. James says, "Draw nigh to God, and he will draw nigh to you. Cleanse your hands, ye sinners; and **purify your hearts**, ye double minded" (James 4:8).

"An evil heart of unbelief" (Hebrews 3:12) is the opposite of an open heart. It will lead us away from the living God, and it is "hardened by the deceitfulness of sin" (Hebrews 3:13). Instead of an evil heart of unbelief, let us open our hearts to God and His word, and let us be so pricked in the heart that we obey the will of God. Appealing to the heart, the emotions, Peter "with many other words did he testify and exhort, saying, Save yourselves from this untoward generation" (Acts 2:40).

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