

BIBLE STUDY POSITION PAPER APOSTOLIC CHRISTIAN CHURCH

Approved: August 6, 2008

The Statement of Faith confirms that the Bible, the infallible Word of God, is the foundation of the doctrine of our church. We have all been taught the necessity of reading God's Word and prayer for our spiritual sustenance. We readily affirm that the purpose of these efforts is to help us grow in understanding and personal application of God's Word—to the honor and glory of God and the edification of His holy church.

We are to know and understand God's Word so that we may "*observe to do according to all that is written therein*" (Josh. 1:8) and to avoid sinning against God (Psa. 119:9, 11). We are to be "*searching the scriptures daily*" (Acts 17:11) so that we can be mature, godly men and women of understanding (1 Cor. 14:20). Spiritual maturity requires exercising our senses (constant training of our minds and practice) which involves diligent study and application of God's Word, so that we are able to "*discern both good and evil*" (Heb. 5:14) by "*rightly dividing*" (accurately interpreting) the Bible (2 Tim. 2:15). Peter was strongly exhorted by Jesus to feed the lambs and sheep, motivated by love for the Lord. Later in Peter's own writings he taught that we are to "*grow in the grace, and in the knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ*" (2 Pet. 3:18).

Purposeful spiritual growth through teaching, learning, understanding and application of God's Word is described by a number of terms and is accomplished in many ways in our churches: personal devotions; topical Bible exhortations; focused meetings with specific groups by elders and ministers; small group interactive discussions; conference exhortations and many others. The most inclusive term for all of these activities is "Bible Study." It is the sincere desire and intent of the church leadership to clarify its position on sound, edifying Bible Study in the Apostolic Christian Church, so that these scriptural mandates can be promoted for the strengthening of the Brotherhood and the glory of God.

Process leading to position

The Elder Body acknowledges that it has not clearly articulated an instructive position on Bible Study. Most of the exhortations over the years have been warnings about inappropriate approaches and motives which can lead to confusion or even deception, without communicating directly that sound, appropriate Bible Studies are acceptable.

Through a series of elder meetings, there has been extensive discussion of many different aspects of Bible Study: concerns, benefits, lessons learned from experience and the scriptural directives and responsibilities of church leadership to promote effective methods for growth in understanding and application of the Word of God. "*And I will give you pastors (shepherds) according to mine heart, which shall feed you with knowledge and understanding*" Jer. 3:15). The full range of highly varied activities already existing in our Brotherhood, along with the collective experiences of the elders, was discussed. A consensus developed through the leading of the Holy Spirit and prayer, that we should provide biblically directed support and oversight for Bible Study in our church. An important element in ensuring the Lord's blessings on such activities is that they are undertaken with proper motivation and purpose.

Motivation and purpose for study of the Bible

God has promised to give grace to those who approach His Word with a humble, reverent spirit (Is. 66:2; Jam. 4:6). It is the Holy Spirit who “*guides (us) into all truth*” (John 16:13). Sincere prayer should always be offered, beseeching God to reveal His truth as a “*plain path*” (Psa. 27:11) which should then be followed through obedience.

The purpose of Bible Study is to help us walk on the narrow way which leads to life (Matt. 7:14). It should serve to inspire us to godly living, and to be less carnally minded and less conformed to the things of this world which will soon pass away (Rom. 8:6; 12:2). It should not be solely to obtain biblical knowledge, but to gather spiritual resources, putting on the “*whole armor of God*” (Eph. 6:13-17) to combat our Enemy. An essential test for all forms of Bible Study is to determine if it is strengthening to the overall spiritual welfare of the church. The Corinthian church was zealous and had many ideas on how to praise God and interpret His teachings. Paul cautioned them that all must be done in order (1 Cor. 14:40) and he also shared the critically important exhortation: “*Let all things be done unto edifying*” (1 Cor. 14:26). Finally, we must always examine our hearts and determine that we are constrained (driven) by the “*love of Christ*” (2 Cor. 5:14); for unless there is “*charity out of a pure heart*” (1 Tim. 1:5) in all of these endeavors, no matter how much we may know and speak and do, “*without charity it profiteth me nothing*” (1 Cor. 13:1-3).

Statement of position

The Apostolic Christian Church supports Bible Studies which are structured in accord with biblical principles, for the purpose of increased understanding and application of God’s Word, the edification of participants and the church and are to the glory of God.

Guidelines for Bible Study

1. Bible Study activity should be under the general oversight of the church (1 Pet. 5:2). Oversight includes responsibility (directly or by delegation) for adherence to relevant biblical principles, provision for faithful leadership, selection of acceptable, sound materials, coordination of scheduling with church functions and maintenance of overall accountability for each activity (1 Tim. 4:6; 2 Tim. 2:2).
2. An atmosphere should be maintained which edifies the church, and does not condone self-exaltation or strife, introduction of false doctrine, undermining of the church or diminishing of participation in or support for other church functions (Eph. 4:12-15, Phil. 2:3).
3. Approaches may be used to meet the special needs within the church (friends, singles, married, men, women, etc.).
4. The King James version should be used for English speaking Bible Studies, and other sound versions for other languages i.e. Japanese, Spanish, etc.
5. Specific guidelines, in accord with the above Statement of Position and the above four broad guidelines and within the spirit of this document, may be established by each church.

This paper is approved for distribution within the Apostolic Christian Church.