

Tool and intelligence (cognition) being synergistic, we now can "know" the Bible as nobody could before Alex. Graham Bell: our daily experience of the telephone can illumine the experience of sacred scripture (which, incidentally, should also be daily or it cannot be formative of inner and outer living)...Two other instances of this feedback factor: (1) Sexism [acc. to Eliz.Fisher in her summer/79 book] roots in animal husbandry, because the question of paternity could not arise at the food-gathering stage, and women were not oppressed till men confined them sexually in order to be sure of lineage from the male; and (2) Galen knew of blood circulation, but the water-pump had to be invented before Harvey could know that the heart "pumps" blood as the invented pump pumps water....The telephone is a less dramatic instance, since without it it's possible to hear only one side of a conversation (though the telephone has greatly multiplied this experience)...Atop this is the latter-day development of linguistics, semiotics, cybernetics--disciplines and tools widening, deepening, refining our understanding of the communication process....So here are the phone-understood styles:

1. NONPARTICIPANT. To Bible-reading, you are unborn or dead. (You've never even heard of the telephone. Or the phone rings, and you know it's the phone, but you don't "go." If Abraham hadn't answered the phone, no revelation. So no Bible. So no Bible-reading.)
2. PASSIVE ATTENTION. (You lift the receiver, but don't answer. The voice at the other end soon stops: you lose interest fast in "studying the Bible.")
3. PASSIVE ATTENTION TO "BIBLE HELPS." You read, passively, about the Bible, but not the Bible itself. (Somebody else lifts the receiver; and, without thinking about it, you hear this end of the conversation.)
4. ACTIVE ATTENTION TO "BIBLE HELPS." As you read about the Bible (dictionaries, commentaries, etc.), you really try to understand--indirectly--the Bible; but you're still not into reading the Bible. (Listening to this end of the phone conversation, you fantasize that end. When it's Loree who's on this end and one of our children [or anyone else I know well] on the other, I'm pretty good at this guessing---aren't you?) The "helps" help, but the Bible is not yet speaking directly to you.
5. ACTIVE ATTENTION TO THE BIBLE. (You answer the phone, and talk: active reading is conversing with a text worth talking with; almost everything printed isn't even worth saying hello to, but of all literature the Bible is most worthy of intimate converse. Maybe somebody else is on the line at this end: your home has two phones, or you have a gadget that lets everybody hear everybody at both ends; or maybe you've been in on arranging a "conference call." Extend the phoning analogy at will: don't let me do all the meditative exposition for you.)
6. GROUP ACTIVE ATTENTION TO THE BIBLE. (You got it: This is the "conference call.")

When it's what it should be, Bible-reading is:

STUDIOUS--really sweating on the text, to discover its sense and "make sense" of it.

SOCIAL--involving community, even if only one other person (before/during/after private study), for community was the Bible's matrix and is the Bible's intention.

DEVOTIONAL--an act of self-giving ["devote" meaning to give] to God on God's terms. And what are God's terms? Fellowship, dialog, conversation, [technical term] "prayer."

In #1 [above] I mentioned Abraham's listening. Now add the divine dimension to all the styles:

- 1'. Unalive both to the literature and to the literature's God. But can't folks be alive to God without Bible-reading? In that case, "God" becomes something other than the God of Scripture; and one is parasitic on others for the biblical meaning of "God."
- 2'. Aware of both, but unresonsive to either.
- 3'. Aware of both, but not in direct touch with either.
- 4'. You don't want any truck with God, but you feel a "truly educated" person should not be entirely ignorant of the Bible, so you read some material to help you see-feel "the Bible as literature"--e.g., schooltexts with snippets from the Bible. At a deeper level, yet not yet free of dilettantism or scholasticism, you read both the Bible and helps to understanding its matrix, the life it emerged from and first spoke to. You are archaizing, let's say, at the highest level of objectivity, trying to "hear" the originating cultures, the author(s), the addressees (those the author[s] had in mind when speaking-writing). But God is still missing because you're missing, and your own society and world are missing....So now add all three and write 5' and 6'.