



## BIBLICAL RESEARCH: A THEOLOGICAL AND EPISTEMOLOGICAL INQUIRY

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## **ABSTRACT**

Biblical Christians believe that the Bible is the sole objective and primary source of all the revelations God has given us about Himself and His plan for humanity. The Bible contains a great deal of information about the natural world that has been confirmed by scientific observations and research. Science only confirms or discovers what has already been written in the Bible. They also (the biblical Christians) believe that the Bible is the only God-breathed. Hence, the Word of God does not change with new discoveries, either scientific, philosophical, or by any means of new discoveries. The Word of God, the Bible, is timely, timeless, and changeless. This again makes Biblical Research a unique field of study. This paper seeks to argue that biblical research is more than an academic inquiry but much more within the domain of spiritual or theological inquiry since research is about solving problems and finding the truth. This study asserts that a scientific inquiry, which cannot lead to absolute truth but is a miserable enterprise (Eccl 1:13), cannot be trusted unless it passes through the pneumagogical process. Thus, the study concludes that problems can only be solved and truths can only be found through the biblical research lens.

**Keywords:** biblical research, theological inquiry, epistemological inquiry, spiritual inquiry.

## INTRODUCTION

It is very pertinent to ask these epistemological questions: What lens do Christian scholars, researchers, educators, and preachers use to undertake their research if not through one of the common secular theories, methods and methodologies? What are the dangers for the church if Christians avoid exploring reality through biblical lens? What are the risks for Christians if they fail to exploring God's Word as the basis for their faith and life, including research? The Christians engage daily with both physical and metaphysical spheres of the realities of life. How can these realities be perfectly described and explained if they continue to adopt worldly or secular ideas to spiritual realities? No science can perfectly explain the "unseen" aspects of the realities of life, except through the biblical lens. Failure to accept biblical spiritual epistemology as a valid part of thinking and research will culminate in *catastrophic mortality of the Christian faith* (a huge loss of trust by a large number of people in Christian religion or Christianity).

God has given man the desire to know the truth and the ability to think and reason like Him, and has provided means whereby he can develop his intellect, and research is one of the ways to develop it. God has the repository power to make Himself known and unknown, searchable and unsearchable. The Bible is the only single source of God's revelation to humanity that can be considered reliable, valid, inerrant, and infallible. Thus, biblical inquiry methods help in no small measure in the practice of biblical research to discover truth. Biblical research is a distinct scholarly field of study, and its findings remain impeccable and watertight because of its nature of inquiry, varied applicability methods, and God of the Bible's unconventional and unpredictable way of solving a problem.

The characteristics of research are reflective thinking, an analytic or logical review of literature on the topic of interest, careful planning and examination, close attention to detail, and strict adherence to established procedures. The purpose of research, whether non-experimental or experimental, according to Nicceta Davis (2007), is to contribute to the body of knowledge in a particular field of study, and that contribution of knowledge is designed to maximise the effectiveness of practice in the field. The discovery of knowledge is undertaken, whether, through qualitative research, such as a study of the underlying causes of sexual harassment among church leaders, or quantitative research, such as the study of the effects of prosperity

messages on the spiritual lives of church members. But the discovery of true knowledge may take a different approach. Hence, the Biblical Research is unique. Researchers approach their studies in a systematic and orderly fashion. Key elements of research are the collection of data, the analysis of data collected, and interpretation of these data to establish facts<sup>1</sup>.

The Bible is the sole objective and primary source of all the revelations God has given us about Himself and His plan for humanity. The Bible contains a great deal of information about the natural world that has been confirmed by scientific observations and research. Some of these passages, among others, prove that science only confirms or discovers what has already been written in the Bible (Lev 17:11; Job 36:27–29; Ps 102:25–27; Eccl 1:6–7).<sup>2</sup> The Bible is only God-breathed (2 Tim 3:16–17). Hence, the Word of God does not change with new discoveries, either scientific, philosophical, or any means of new discoveries. The Word of God, the Bible, is timely and changeless. This again makes Biblical Research a unique field of study.

In biblical (educational) research or studies, the written word of God is approached in two quite different ways: spiritual (theological) epistemology and cognitive (intellectual) epistemology. Every biblical researcher must engage himself or herself in these two different epistemologies. However, the research pneumagogy (Holy Spirit-directed approach) must be adopted for a successful research work. If the researcher is to read, search, learn, preach, teach, and understand the Word of God rightly, the research epistemologies must be pneumagogically approached.<sup>3</sup> The academic study of Scripture, the Bible, is never an end in itself; Christian teachers, scholars, and researchers pursue truth in order to grasp the truth, and to be transformed by it. The paucity of good teaching and preaching today reflects the failure of contemporary Christian teachers and preachers to reflect deeply on the theology of the Bible and engaging

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<sup>1</sup> Nicceta Davis (2007). *The bible and research: Reflections for the christian researcher*. Lorna Linda University Lorna Linda, California, United States of America. Prepared for the 35th International Faith and Learning Seminar held at Hong Kong Adventist College, Hong Kong March 11 – 22.

<sup>2</sup> All Bible quotations are from King James Version, except otherwise stated.

<sup>3</sup> Consult Ilesanmi, Dele's "Pneumagogy: A proposed theory for effective teaching and learning in Kingdom Christian education", in *African Journal of Kingdom Education*, vol.1 (2), 2023.

themselves in these two different epistemologies.<sup>4</sup> Research conducted on the premise of human theories, philosophies, and ideologies without the Word of God cannot be regarded as quality and truth (Dele Alaba Ilesanmi, 2023).<sup>5</sup> This work focuses on etymology, concepts of research, and how truth can be found since research is all about solving problems and providing solutions to them to establish the truths.

## THE ETYMOLOGY OF RESEARCH: A CONCEPTUAL CLIRIFICATION

The origin of the word *research* can be traced to the Old French word, *recherche*, meaning “to seek, to look for”. The Early Modern French word, *rechercher*, means “to examine closely”, is from Old French word, *recherche*.<sup>6</sup> Similarly, the word *research* is derived from the Middle French word, *recherche*, which means "to go about seeking", the term itself being derived from the Old French term, *recherche*, a compound word from "re-" + "cerchier", or "sercher", meaning 'search'. The earliest recorded use of the term was in 1577<sup>7</sup>. Thus, the word *research* has its roots in the Middle French language, precisely the verb "*rechercher*," which means "to search again." This verb is derived from the Old French word, "re-," which means "again," and "*cerchier*," meaning "to search." Therefore, the word *research* initially referred to the “act of searching again or examining something more closely.”<sup>8</sup>

As time progressed, the meaning of "research" became more refined and specific.

In the late 19th and early 20th centuries, the term was increasingly used to describe

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<sup>4</sup> Mohrlang, Roger , "Teaching the Bible as Scripture in an Academic Setting" Whitworth University (2015). *Theology Faculty Scholarship. Paper 1*.

<sup>5</sup> See the quotation here, *Christopress Journal of Biblical Research*, <https://christopress.org.ng/christopress-journal-magazine/christopress-journal-of-biblical-researchcjbr/>

<sup>6</sup> English Dictionary, 6.2 version.

<sup>7</sup> See <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Research>, retrieved 19/01/2024.

<sup>8</sup> See <https://eduhutch.blogspot.com/2023/03/etymology-of-word-research.html> retrieved on 19/01/2024

scientific and academic inquiries into various fields. During this time, the concept of "research" became increasingly important in the development of modern scientific methods and the establishment of academic disciplines<sup>9</sup>.

Ogunniyi (1992, p.2, Citing Romberg 1975) describes research that:

The word Research has as its stem SEARCH, which means 'look for'. With the prefix 're' the word means to look for again; more carefully, more exhaustively. So, research involves looking for or examining something in a very careful, objective and exhaustive manner so as to develop a valid knowledge or understanding of that thing<sup>10</sup>.

What we can deduce from the etymological meaning of *research* as explained above, is that, research means "to seek for", "to look for", "to search for", "to examine closely", "to go about seeking", or act of searching again or "examining something more closely", to consider, to inquire, etc. Indeed, if all these phrases mean research, research has its root in the Word of God, the Bible, because they are a Biblical phraseology. We can conclude, therefore, that research is a theological inquiry because it is a search after the truth of God (Matt 6:33); it is a biblical inquiry, using berean model (Act 11:17); (Prov 25:2; Eccl 1:13; 7:27; Matt 6:33; John 5:39; 7:52; 1Pet 1:10; ). It is a spiritual inquiry (Job 11:7; 1Cor 2:10); it is an epistemological inquiry (Prov 2:3-5); it is an inquiry (Matt 7:7); it is a scientific inquiry, which cannot lead to absolute truth but a miserable enterprise (Eccl 1:13);

## CONCEPTUAL DEFINITIONS OF RESEARCH

Webster's dictionary, defines research as a "careful or diligent search", a "studious inquiry or examination" aimed at the discovery and interpretation of facts (Merriam Webster Dictionary. Available at <http://www.m-w.com/cgi-bin/dictionary>). Coryn defines it as a truth-seeking activity, conducted and governed by individuals with a high level of proficiency or expertise,

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<sup>9</sup> Ibid.

<sup>10</sup> Odugbemi, O O and Oyesiku, O. K.(eds.). *Research methods in the social and management sciences*, 2000

that contributes to knowledge and that is aimed at describing or explaining the world (Coryn CLS., 2006. The fundamental characteristics of research. *Journal of MultiDisciplinary Evaluation*.(5): 124-133. Available at <http://evaluation.wmich.edu/jmde/content/JMDE.>).

Research has been conceptualised in several ways based on the worldviews of the researchers. Different definitions of research by authors<sup>11</sup> have been collated here for our understanding:

1. According to Richard Adekoya (2016), “Research is an investigative enterprise aimed at either increase or revising current knowledge by discovering new facts”. It also involves data gathering, data collation and data analysis in order to establish facts and reach new conclusions.
2. Research is “the essence of scientific enterprise which uses a wide variety of paradigms” (NSTA, 1992).
3. According to Wikipedia Research is "creative and systematic work undertaken to increase the stock of knowledge".
4. According to Payton (1979), Research is a systematic, formal, rigorous and precise process employed to gain solutions to problems or to discover and interpret new facts and relationships.
5. According to Kothari (2004), defines research as an original contribution to the existing stock of knowledge making for its development. He says that research can also be seen as a systematic approach concerning generalisations and formulation of a theory.
6. According to the American sociologist Earl Robert Babbie, “research is a systematic inquiry to describe, explain, predict, and control the observed phenomenon. It involves inductive and deductive methods.”
7. In their views, D. Slesinger and D. Stephenspn in the Encyclopedia of Social Sciences define research as "the manipulation of things, concepts or symbols for the purpose of generalizing to extend, correct or verify knowledge, whether that knowledge aids in construction of theory or in the practice of an art".

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<sup>11</sup> Some of these conceptual definitions by authors can be found in <https://eduhutch.blogspot.com/2023/03/research-definition-by-authors.html> retrieved 19/01/2024

8. According to John W. Creswell, who said that "research is a process of steps used to collect and analyze information to increase our understanding of a topic or issue".
9. Francis G. Cornell views research as, "the activity of collecting information in an orderly and systematic fashion".
10. Clarke and Clarke define research as a careful, systematic and objective investigation conducted to obtain valid facts, draw conclusions and established principles regarding an identifiable problem in some field of knowledge.
11. According to P.M. Cook, "Research is an honest exhaustive, intelligent searching for facts and their meanings or implications with reference to a given problem. The product or findings of a given piece of research should be an authentic, verifiable and contribution to knowledge in the field studied."
12. The Advanced Learner's Dictionary of Current English spells out the meaning of 'research' as 'a careful investigation or inquiry specifically through search for new facts in any branch of knowledge'.
13. According to William C. Emory, research is "any organized inquiry designed and carried out to provide information for solving a problem."
14. Redman and Mory simply define research as a 'systematized effort to gain new knowledge'.
15. According to the Webster's International Dictionary, 'research' is 'a careful, critical inquiry or explanation in seeking facts or principles; diligent investigation in order to ascertain something'.
16. D Slesinger and M Stephenson see the word "research" as 'the manipulation of things, concepts or symbols for the purpose of generalizing to extend, correct or verify knowledge, whether that knowledge aids in construction of theory or in the practice of an art'.
17. George J. Mouly who defines research as, "The systematic and scholarly application of the scientific method interpreted in its broader sense, to the solution of social studies problems; conversely, any systematic study designed to promote the development of social studies as a science can be considered research."
18. According to C.C. Crawford, who says that "Research is simply a systematic and refined technique of thinking, employing specialised tools, instruments, and procedures in order to obtain a more adequate solution of a problem than would be possible under



ordinary means. It starts with a problem, collects data or facts, analysis these critically and reaches decisions based on the actual evidence. It evolves original work instead of mere exercise of personal. It evolves from a genuine desire to know rather than a desire to prove something. It is quantitative, seeking to know not only what but how much, and measurement is therefore, a central feature of it.”

19. According to John W. Best, “Research is considered to be the more formal, systematic, intensive process of carrying on the scientific methods of analysis. It involves a more systematic structure of investigation, usually resulting in some sort of formal record of procedures and a report of results or conclusions.”
20. According to V. Redman and A.V.H. Mory, “Research is a systematized effort to gain new knowledge.”
21. According to The Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD), "Any creative systematic activity undertaken in order to increase the stock of knowledge, including knowledge of man, culture and society, and the use of this knowledge to devise new applications."
22. James Harvey Robinson defines research as a “diligent search which enjoys the high flavour or primitive hunting.”
23. According to Encyclopaedia of Social Science, research is “the manipulation of things concepts or symbols for the purpose of generalizing to extend, correct or verify knowledge, whether that knowledge aids in the practice of an art.”
24. According to C. Francies Rummel, research is “an endeavour to discover, develop and verify knowledge. It is an intellectual process that has developed over hundreds of years, ever changing in purpose and form and always searching for truth.”
25. Robert Ross says that research is “an essentially an investigation, a recording and analysis of evidence for the purpose of gaining knowledge.”
26. Longman Dictionary of contemporary English defines research as a serious study of a subject that is intended to discover new facts or test ideas.
27. According to The Merriam Webster online Dictionary, research is “a studious inquiry or examination, especially; investigation or experimentation aimed at the discovery and interpretation of facts, revision of accepted theories or law in the light of new facts or practical application of such new or revised theories or law.

28. The Merriam-Webster Online Dictionary defines research in a more general way to include studying already existing knowledge: "studious inquiry or examination; *especially*: investigation or experimentation aimed at the discovery and interpretation of facts, revision of accepted theories or laws in the light of new facts, or practical application of such new or revised theories or laws.
29. "Research holding the torch of knowledge" (1896) by Olin *Levi Warner*
30. According to Waltz and Bansell (1981), research is a systematic, formal, rigorous and precise process employed to gain solutions to problems or to discover and interpret new facts and relationships.
31. "Research is a voyage of discovery; a journey; an attitude; an experience; a method of critical thinking; an activity caused by instinct of inquisitiveness to gain fresh insight/find answers to question/acquire knowledge." (**Mimansha Patel and Nitin Patel**, International Journal of Research & Review ([www.ijrrjournal.com](http://www.ijrrjournal.com)) Vol.6; Issue: 3; March 2019)

To summarise all these definitions above, research, in simplest term, is a diligent search for truth to establish true knowledge. The questions that are begging for answers are: which knowledge and truth are we searching for? Knowledge of God or Satan? What is truth and where can we find the truth? Only biblical research has adequate answers to the questions of truth because, research, in biblical concept, is truth-seeking activity to uncover or discover the *revealed hidden truth* of God's word.

## CONCEPTUALISATION OF BIBLICAL RESEARCH

*Biblical research* are two different words, that is, "biblical" and "research". The word biblical itself is derived from the word, "Bible" which in turn is the Anglicised form of the Greek word *biblia* (books) (Schoville, Keith N 1978:16-17). The Greek form, according to John Arierhi Ottuh (2014), is traceable to Byblos, the name of a Phoenician port city famed in antiquity for its commercial name *Gebal*. Since papyrus was derived from the earlier materials used by ancients, it was adopted for the Greek word for book. He opines that the use of the word "Bible"

to signify a collection of *sacred books* is traceable to approximately A.D. 400; the adjective biblical developed later from the noun (Ottuh cited Schoville).

The biblical concept of research is replete with different words in Scripture. It uses the phrasal expressions as *research*, such as “to seek for”, “to look for”, “to search for”, “to examine”, “to consider”, “to inquire”, etc. If research is an inquiry, Matthew 7:7 epitomises, encapsulates, and construes the concept of biblical research. That is, research is about the three-letter word, “ASK”: where letter “A” stands for “ASK”, letter “S” stands for “SEEK”, and letter “K” stands for “KNOCK”. If the purpose of research is to discover the truth, the three words in Matthew 7:7: “ask”, “seek”, and “knock” are elements or components of biblical research to discover the truth. Thus, research is a command by God. Jesus says, “ask, and it shall be given you; seek, and ye shall find; knock, and it shall be opened unto you:” (Matt 7:7). Thus, “to ask” here, is “to inquire or make an inquiry,” “to seek” here means to “to search for”, “try to find” or “look for”, “to knock” here means to get access to *the revealed hidden truth* or to the mysteries of God’s revelations. This requires that one must knock, a way of consistent seeking, at God’s door to access His blessings, mysteries, or to get what you want in accordance with His will. Therefore, “to knock” here is an emphasis on “ask” and “seek”. In summary, biblical research is about *asking for truth*, *seeking for truth*, and *knocking in for truth*. The concept of research in the Bible is well captured by Matthew as commanded by Jesus. The way the Bible uses words such as “studying”, “searching or search”, “knowing or know”, “understand”, “considering or consider”, “examine”, “perceiving”, and “seeking or seek” suggests that the practice of research is not only an appropriate activity for Christian believers, but it is actually supported and promoted by God (Prov 25: 2; Isa 34:16; Jer 29:13; Matt 7:7-8; etc).

Biblical research is about a search for true knowledge. Nicceta Davis (2007) says that Words such as “search, consider, perceive, understand, and know that are found in the Bible, are rich with meaning in the original language”. For example, he stresses words, such as *baqash* (1245) and *darash* (1875) suggest a diligent inquiry or searching or pursuit in worship or prayer. This seems to indicate the worshipper is seeking God. *Bin* (995), in the Hebrew language, includes meanings such as to discern, perceive, observe, pay attention to, understand, and to be intelligent. Davis says that the primary meaning of *bin* is understanding or insights. If this suggests the mere accumulation of data is not adequate, but superior knowledge and knowing how to use the information wisely is of greater importance. Another word is *Ylida* (3045) or knowledge, which encompasses the idea to perceive, understand, and acquire knowledge. It

expresses a broad variety of meanings for various types of knowledge gained through the senses. It can also be referred to being acquainted or familiar with a person in a physically intimate or sexual way, or to being known, or reveal oneself, and to being able to distinguish between two things, say, right and wrong. Indeed, all of these terms require deep and thoughtful reflection and thinking and imply God desires that man develops his mind and intellect<sup>12</sup>. What is Biblical Research?

Biblical research can be defined as truth-seeking activity to uncover or discover the revealed hidden truth of God's Word (Deut 4:29; Job 11:7; Prov 25:2; Eccl 1:13; 7:25; Isa 34:16; Jer 29:13; Hos 10:12; Matt 7:7-8; Lk 7:11-10; John 5:39; 7:52; Acts 17:11; 1 Cor 2:10; 1 Peter 1:10, 11; etc). It can also be seen as truth-seeking, evidence-based, epistemologically and theologically inquired research. What is more, in the Scriptures, we find references where believers studied, searched, or sought after knowledge to undergird their faith. For instance, the Bereans, who were more noble-minded than the those in Thessalonica, reportedly received the Word of God with all diligence and readiness of mind, and "search the Scripture daily" to find out the truth to see if the things they had been told were true<sup>13</sup>. To search the Scripture to know the truth is a noble quality, an excellent quality that is expected of a good Christian. It is an honourable thing to search the Scripture or do research. The *Berean model of research* is an excellent one to discover and establish the truth.

The gospel of Luke opens with Luke saying he thought a perfect understanding of the things they believed was important. As a result, he carefully investigated everything that had been handed down from eyewitnesses, and then wrote down an orderly accounts or histories so that Theophilus could "know" the certainty of the things he had been taught. Luke states clearly that the main purpose of his inquiry or diligent investigation into the accounts or histories told by the eyewitnesses is for Theophilus to "know the full truth and understand with certainty and security against errors the accounts (histories) and doctrines of the faith of which you [he] have been informed and in which you [he] have been orally instructed" (Luke 1:1-4, AMP).

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<sup>12</sup> Nicceta Davis (2007). *The bible and research: Reflections for the christian researcher*

<sup>13</sup> Acts 17:11

Scientific research is most wide-spread and, perhaps, reliable type of research globally. People wrongly believe that everything must be proved scientifically. According to John Wesley Taylor V (2019):

One of the more pervasive truth criteria is that of empirical evidence. This approach is frequently expressed in statements such as, “It’s supported by research” and “It’s scientifically sound.” Research, with its systematic methodology and its checks and balances, such as peer review and replication of findings, is certainly one of the more promising avenues through which we can approximate truth.

Scientific research has a lot of limitations. Scientific research is not absolute; scientific research is not an absolute reliable way to discover the truth; scientific research cannot lead man to divine truth; scientific and other research types can only investigate the world around us but not the world beyond us. Researchers will be naïve if they do not recognise the limitations of research, particularly scientific research. Several of these limitations are highlighted in the Bible. We need biblical research to unlock the mysteries of God, that is, *the revealed hidden truth* of God. Indeed, a careful application of scientific inquiry is not a guarantee of truth. we recognize that we cannot arrive at certainty based on empirical data. We can never state, “Research has proved that . . .” or “Science has verified that . . .” Rather, we must speak in terms of evidence that “bear[s] witness to the truth” (John 18:37; see also 3 John 1:12). God only reveal to us what He wants us to know; no one can discover what God has not revealed (Deut 29:29).

## **TRUTH AND BIBLICAL RESEARCH**

Since biblical research is curiosity to know or discover the truth, knowledge accepted as “true knowledge” must be based on the written word (the word of God) gathered by using the Bible as a tool. Biblical research can also be called a *Timeless Evidence-Based (TEB) Research* that can either be proved scientifically or theologically. Biblical research findings cannot all be proved scientifically but can be proved theologically because of its spiritual nature. If one cannot see God, it is evidentially clear that He exists; if no one cannot see and touch air, it is evidentially clear that it exists; and if no one can see another world beyond us, it is evidentially clear that it exists. Thus, biblical research is evidence-based research that majorly relies on theological inquiry methods to discover truth. That is why biblical research is not only concern

about the world around us, it is also concern about another world beyond us. Biblical research operates at the level of both empirical and metaphysical realms. It is an inquiry into the natural and supernatural worlds. Scientific research cannot be relied on because of its inaccurate and changing nature. Its results are subject to time, place, culture, and behaviour. On the contrary, biblical research is timeless evidence-based. This is evidently clear in the Bible, the word of God. Hence, biblical research is an inquiry into the natural and supernatural worlds, while scientific inquiry only limits itself to the world around us. Thus, biblical research is more of theological inquiry than scientific inquiry. Biblical research can therefore be defined as truth-seeking, evidence-based, epistemologically and theologically inquired research.

### **What Is Truth?**

According to Ilesanmi (2019), Biblical Christian education is a corpus of biblical truth, oxygen and vehicle of Christianity and without it, Christianity is endangered, petrified and atrophied”<sup>14</sup>. This implies that only the Bible holds the truth of God because it is a revelation of Him to humanity. Thus, finding the truth, biblical Christian educational research is required. The whole body of Biblical Christian educational theory rests on the recognition that all truth is of God the Father. He is the God of truth (Ps 31:5); God the Son, our Lord Jesus Christ, is the Lord of truth (John 14:6); and God the Holy Spirit, His Spirit is the Spirit of truth (John 14:16–17). All truth, whether discerned or undiscerned by man, springs from a single source, the triune God and therefore consists as one harmonious whole. Therefore, God’s written self-revelation is the starting point of all rational inquiry and the guide to all interpretation of reality. No concept can be true that conflicts with the statements of the Scriptures. Equally, no untruth is a legitimate support of divine revelation or has any place in the ministry of spiritual truth. A genuine reverence for the God of truth compels a conscientious regard for accuracy in all areas

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<sup>14</sup> Ilesanmi writes on ‘Dimension of Accountability in Christian education’ in Ayantayo (eds. et.al) “African Pentecostalism: Probity and accountability”pp.262-292. See also Ilesanmi, Dele A. *An Evaluation of Accountability in Christian Education in the Redeemed Christian Church of God, Nigeria*, 2021

of factual investigation and reporting. Anything short of this cannot be regarded as truth.<sup>15</sup> If research is search for truth, what is truth? Where can we find what is considered as truth? Is it in the scientific inquiry or experimentation? Or in the philosophical inquiry and debate? Is it in the secular university or market place? The truth can be found in no other place than in the Word of God, the Bible. The Bible is a corpus of truth and magazine of life; the Bible is the only repository of true knowledge and only single source of truth. Any research finding that cannot be established by the Word of God cannot be considered as *truth* and, by extension, not biblical research. In biblical research, truth can only be found in the Word of God (John 17:17). Any research finding that is incongruous with the Word of God contained in the Bible cannot be regarded biblical research. For example, scientific permutations, data, and experiment, and philosophical arguments cannot be considered *truth* in biblical research. Indeed, scientific methods, methodologies, and theories cannot lead to *truth*. The truth is the *written Word of God*, the truth is the *Living Word of God*. The word of God is Truth, God is the Truth (John 1:1, 14; 14: 6; 17:17; Heb 4:12).

Indeed, rules for what qualifies as scientific data, methods, categories and theories are subject to change but the Word of God cannot change. If “scientific truth” can change with time, behaviour, and place, it is not truth. If what the science regarded as truth is not permanent, changing as time evolves, then it is not truth in biblical education. In scientific research, if you conduct research today and repeat the same tomorrow, you are most likely to get a different result. This kind of knowledge is not true and reliable. But in biblical research, this is not so. The Bible says, “Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, today, and forever” (Heb 13:8). The personality we are studying is unchanging, His word is unchanging. The good thing is that God’s Word does not change with societal changes. God Himself does not change with societal changes. God is not human, that he should lie, not a human being, that he should change his mind” (Numbers 23:19, NIV). God remains the same, and His years will never end (Psalm 102:27). His Word is eternal and unchanging; it stands firm forever, even in heavens (Psalm 119:89). “The grass withers and the flowers fades, but the Word of our God stands forever”

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<sup>15</sup> Lucas Yakobi, “The Philosophy of Christian Education”: Course Number PHD805.[https://www.academia.edu/51008089/The\\_Philosophy\\_of\\_Christian\\_Education?sm=b](https://www.academia.edu/51008089/The_Philosophy_of_Christian_Education?sm=b)

(Isaiah 40:8). God says, “I the Lord do not change ...” (Malachi 3:6, NIV). “Heaven and earth shall pass away, but my Words shall not pass away” (Matthew 24:35). “Every good and perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of the heavenly lights, who does not change like shifting shadows” (James 1:17, NIV).

People do not change what God calls sin by their consensus of words, actions or researches. For example, God’s Word remains unchangeable regardless of the change in the society<sup>16</sup>:

If ending the lives of the unborn in the womb has become an “acceptable part of society,” it does not mean that that murder is no longer a sin. The unchanging word of God says, “You shall not murder” (Exodus 20:13). If having children without first being married has become an “acceptable part of society,” it does not mean that sexual relations outside the marriage bond is no longer sinful. The unchanging word of God says, “Marriage should be honored by all, and the marriage bed kept pure, for God will judge the adulterer and all the sexually immoral” (Hebrews 13:4). People do not determine morality, or right or wrong. God does.

In biblical educational research, truth cannot be discovered through scientific or secular research but through the Holy Spirit, who is the Spirit of truth and who teaches truth and guides believers into all truth (John 16:13). Thus, truth is pneumagogical.

## **RESEARCH AND BIBLICAL RESEARCH: AN EPISTEMOLOGICAL INQUIRY**

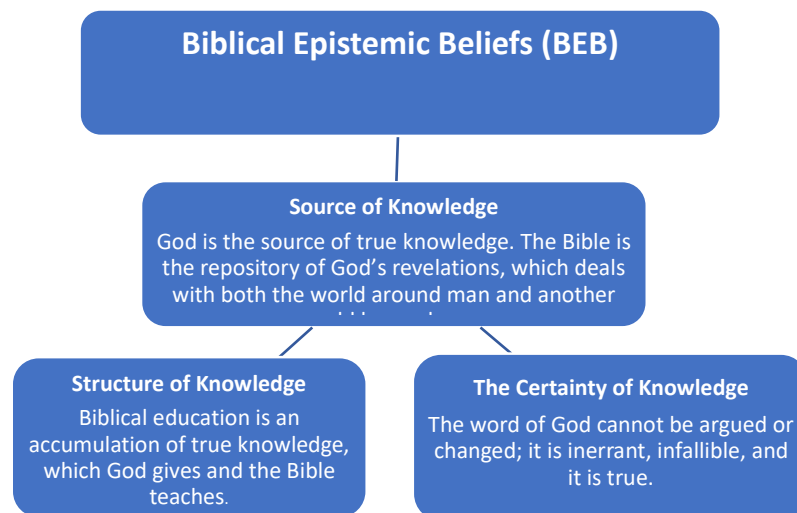
Research is an epistemological inquiry aimed at finding out the truth about a phenomenon to expand the frontiers of knowledge. This involves data gathering, data collation, and analysis of data to establish truths (facts) and reach accurate conclusion. In other words, research is an epistemological inquiry into the nature of a phenomenon aimed at discovering the truth or providing answers to problems. Epistemology is not merely about the acquisition of knowledge and not merely about understanding the process of knowledge acquisition but about intellectual or mental exploration to attain a level of knowledge that is true and acceptable. Biblical epistemology, therefore, is an intellectual enterprise aimed at attaining true wisdom, knowledge, and understanding of divine mysteries. Epistemological inquiry is an intellectual

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<sup>16</sup> The unchanging word of God, <https://wels.net/faq/the-unchanging-word-of-god/>



investigation aimed at understanding the world around us. But, in biblical research, epistemological inquiry is an intellectual exploration or investigation aimed at understanding both the world around us and another world beyond us to establish the truth. This is biblical research. Biblical epistemological inquiry can also be defined as the application of the mental or intellectual faculties to the acquisition of Knowledge to discover biblical truth.



When we inquire, we use biblical evidence to answer questions. All researches operate at epistemological level but not all researches attain a level of knowledge that is true and acceptable. No successful research can be conducted without an epistemological assistance. Every research begins with epistemological inquiry (the use of intellectual faculties to ask questions about a phenomenon or problem). What this means is that epistemological inquiry is a curiosity to know, an investigative enterprise, a cognitive or intellectual response to a certain phenomenon in order to find out the truth, which normally begins with the question of “what?”, “why?”, “where?” “when?” or “how?” (WH). Epistemological inquiry is the use of mental faculty, cognitive power or prowess to gather data or information relevant for analysis to solve problems. Thus, research is an epistemological enquiry, a search for truth, information, or knowledge; it is an examination of facts, principles, or realities. This is biblically supported. For example, King Solomon says that: “And I applied myself by heart and mind to seek and search out by [human] wisdom all human activity under heaven. ...” (Eccl 1:13, AMP). All our search for truth without the help of the Holy Spirit, who is the Truth and who teaches truth and

guides believe into all truth (John 16:13), will lead to vanity (Eccl 1:14). The more we search for truth, by increasing our human knowledge and worldly wisdom, without the involvement of God the Spirit, the result of our efforts will be sorrow, pains, and failure (Eccl 1: 16-18). In other word, any application of scientific research approach or any kind of research approach without the Holy Spirit-directed approach will lead to what Paul describes in 2 Timothy 3:7, “Ever learning, and never able to come to the knowledge of the truth”. Truth never be found anywhere except in the Word of God, the Bible. Thus, research is a spiritual epistemological inquiry, not just any spiritual inquiry but a biblical spiritual epistemological inquiry.

### **BIBLICAL RESEARCH: A THEOLOGICAL OR SPIRITUAL INQUIRY**

Biblical research is a spiritual or theological inquiry. Biblical theological inquiry can be defined as the application of theological tools to the acquisition of Knowledge to discover biblical truth through the help of the Holy Spirit. Similarly, it is a spiritual inquiry because it involves the Holy Spirit. Since research is about truth, biblical research is nothing but the search for truth. And, since the Bible contains God’s truth, research has a biblical root. What is biblical research? Biblical research can also be seen as a theological and epistemological enquiry or inquiry into the world around us and another world beyond us with the sole aim to know God’s truth and way as established in the Bible with the help of the Holy Spirit. Biblical research is all about the truth of God. It is searching or looking for the truth and way of God in the Bible to establish a fact, solve a problem, interpret a phenomenon, and translate divine discovery into application. It is about discovering truth and truth begins with God, not humankind. Biblical research leads to a deeper understanding of God’s character and His laws, resulting in a more intimate acquaintance with God. Biblical research is both spiritual epistemological and theological inquiry because it is a cognitive and spiritual discipline that deals with the questions of realities about the world around us and another world beyond us. All biblical researches centre on theological inquiry. What is theological inquiry? Theological inquiry deals with curiosity to know God, His nature and the universe in which He has created through His word to interpret phenomena or realities with the purpose of establishing the truth about God with the help of the Holy Spirit. Theological inquiry refers to the process of investigating and exploring questions related to theology, which is the study of God, religious beliefs, the nature of the divine, and the universe He has created. It deals with the realities around us and beyond us. This is done within the confine of the Bible. This is because the Bible is the only reliable, inerrant, and infallible source book to discover the truth. If we rely on opinion polls to confirm

truth, we would run the risk of following the whims or caprices of the masses or of the group making the most noise. Opinion polls are not sure way of giving us the truth. The majority may be wrong at times. This kind of research may not be useful in Biblical Research. This is why biblical research is different from other kinds of research. This type of research is conducted within the frame of reference of the Bible.

Biblical Research is conducted with a purpose to:

- Discover divine truth
- Establish the divine truth
- Uncover the revelled hidden truth of God.
- Increase our knowledge of God
- Obey divine order
- Expand the frontiers of biblical and theological knowledge

### **PRINCIPLES UNDERLYING BIBLICAL RESEARCH**

1. Truth is revelatory. Biblical research is an inquiry into divine revelation to uncover divine truth. The Holy Spirit is needed to understand the revelation of God to discover the truth (1Cor 2:14).
2. Truth is not based on logical reasoning or rationalism but on biblical facts, the word of God as typified in the Bible. Rationalism or reasoning power is not sufficient in biblical research. Therefore, it cannot be ultimately considered as the source of truth but can help to discover the truth if God is involved backed with faith.
3. Truth is a function of revelation. Man only search for the revelled hidden truth of God (Deut 29:29; Prov 2:4; 25: 2; Matt 13: 44). Until God reveals, no one can find. Successful research cannot be said to have been conducted if God does not reveal or involve.
4. Biblical research is a spiritual inquiry. It does not follow the tradition of men and science methodically or regimentally.
5. All research findings are validated by the word of God. Research is regarded as quality and truth if it is founded on the word of God. Researchers receive revelation or truth through the written word of and living word of God.

6. The chief concern of biblical research is God's Kingdom and His righteousness (Matt 6:33).
7. Research is relational. Revelation of truth is predicated on researcher's relationship with God (John 15:15; cf. Gen 18:17; James 2:3).
8. Extra-biblical evidence is not sufficient enough to establish the truth. It can only be used as a supportive and not as concrete evidence because it can be subjective.
9. The Bible is a research repository used as a single source of truth
10. Biblical research is a theological inquiry not a scientific inquiry.

## **The Sources of Biblical Research**

### **Primary Sources:**

- The Bible/Scriptures (both the Old and New Testaments).
- Field sources, such as archaeological remains

### **Secondary Sources (library):**

- Bible Atlas
- Concordance
- Bible Commentaries
- Bible Dictionaries
- Encyclopaedias
- Lexicon
- Journals
- Christian Books

### **Electronic Sources:**

- Christian websites
- Christian online Journals

## RECOMMENDATIONS AND CONCLUSION

What we can deduce from the etymological meaning of *research* as explained above, is that, research means “to seek for”, “to look for”, “to search for”, “to examine closely”, "to go about seeking", or act of searching again or “examining something more closely”, to consider, to inquire, etc. Indeed, if all these phrases mean research, research has its root in the Word of God, the Bible, because they are a Biblical phraseology. We can conclude, therefore, that research is a theological inquiry because it is a search after the truth of God (Matt 6:33); it is a biblical inquiry, using Berean model (Act 11:17); (Prov 25:2; Eccl 1:13; 7:27; Matt 6:33; John 5:39; 7:52; 1Pet 1:10;). It is a spiritual inquiry (Job 11:7; 1Cor 2:10); it is an epistemological inquiry (Prov 2:3-5); and it is an inquiry (Matt 7:7). This study asserts that a scientific inquiry, which cannot lead to absolute truth but a miserable enterprise (Eccl 1:13) cannot be trusted except it pass through the pneumagogical process. Therefore, this research study recommends that believing scholars must come together, under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, to build a dynamic, Word-based community in search of truth and the Bible should be the primary textbook of all research if timeless and unchanging truth is to be established.

## About The Author



Pastor Dele Alaba (B.Ed., PGDE, PGDTh., PDGM., M.A., and Ph.D.) has been a lecturer at the Redeemed Christian Bible College (Satellite Campuses) for over 15 years now and an Associate Research Professor at Testament Theological Seminary with expertise in Biblical Christian Education and Biblical Research. His academic interest is primarily in the fields of Biblical Christian Educational Theories, such as Theogogy, Pneumagogy, Christogogy, Bibliogogy, Homeogogy, etc., Biblical Christian Education, Biblical Research and Theory (the fields he is currently pioneering), Christian Education, and Theology. As of 2023, he has over 80 publications to his credit, including nine books and Christian research articles published in different reputable and registered journals and websites. He is the Chair of the Centre for Biblical Research and Theological Education (CENBRATED), now the Centre for Training, Research, and Development (CTRD), Dean of the School of Christian Education at Testament Theological Seminary, and an editor of three peer-reviewed journals: the African Journal of Kingdom Education (AJOK), the Mature Journal of the International Institute of Christian Theologians, Scholars, and Professionals (MJIITSP), and the ChristoPress Journal of Biblical Research (CJBR). Ilesanmi is also one of the International Reviewers with the Academic Business of Current Data (ABCD) Index. He serves as the President and CEO of ChristoPress Biblical Research Centre (CBRC), an online-based research institute. He is married and the marriage is gloriously blessed. To connect with this author: <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-4874-0759>; [pstdeleilesanmi3@gmail.com](mailto:pstdeleilesanmi3@gmail.com); +234-08062197040

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