

THE BIBLE CLASS

by Metropolitan Ephraim of Boston

Some twenty years ago I was on a pastoral visit to a parish on the West Coast. We were visiting the home of one of our parishioners, when a young woman approached me.

"Your Grace I wanted to tell you about a Bible class that I went to," she said.

"Oh, Susan," I exclaimed, "you shouldn't be going to those things!"

"No, wait," she replied, "let me tell you what happened."

Then she began her tale:

The Bible class, naturally, was to be held at a local Protestant church, and Susan's friend had invited her to attend. So, Susan went, more out of curiosity than any real interest. It turns out that she was *truly* edified and left that Protestant church a much stronger Orthodox Christian!

The Pastor was there, of course, smiling and very pleasant, and so was his assistant and about twenty-five or so other members of the Protestant congregation. There were coffee and donuts and other tasty treats, and everyone was really friendly.

Then, they finally settled down to read the Holy Scriptures. The Pastor said a brief prayer, and everyone said, "Amen."

As Susan recalls, the Pastor read a passage from the epistles of Saint Paul, then he said something like:

"What Paul is trying to tell us here, I believe, is this and this and this....." He continued for about five minutes.

Then his assistant raised his hand, indicating that he would like to say something, and the Pastor assented.

The assistant began by saying something like, "I certainly understand what you are trying to say, Fred [the names are fictitious], but, with all due respect, I think what Paul really wants to tell us here is this and this and this....."

To which Pastor Fred responded, "Well, golly, Hank, I love the wonderful insights you sometimes have about God's amazing message to us when He

speaks to us through His Scriptures, but this time, I think, there seems to be a facet here, that I think you've overlooked."

Hank, however, held his ground and insisted on *his* interpretation. Then Pastor Fred tried to smooth things over, but Clara, Hank's wife, chimed in, supporting her husband.

Well, Mable, Pastor Fred's wife, wasn't about to stand by and see her husband's authority being trashed, so she broke in, and, for good measure, added a few really unwarranted remarks about Clara.

That was uncalled for, said Hank defending *his* wife. "Let's stick to the text, which obviously is telling us this and this and this....."

At this point, Wally spoke up and tried to find a compromise between the two views expressed by Pastor Fred and Hank, the assistant. Clarence and Daisy, also parishioners, disagreed, and well.... you get the drift of the story.

By the end, the participants were hardly on speaking terms with one another, and — very likely — another ten or fifteen Protestant denominations were born that day!

After Susan finished her story, we thanked her. Both she and we had learned our lesson well: Protestant-style Bible classes are *not* the way to study the Holy Scriptures.

[Know] this first, that no prophecy of the Scripture is of
any private interpretation.

(II Peter 1:20)

When Orthodox Christians study the Holy Scriptures, they study them with the assistance and guidance of the Holy and God-bearing Fathers:

Then said Philip unto the eunuch of Candace,
"Understandest thou what thou readest?" And the eunuch
replied, "How can I, *except some man should guide me?*"

(c f. Acts 8:30)

Especially some God-bearing man, who stands fast in the faith and tradition of the One, Holy, Catholic and Apostolic Church, handed down to us from our Saviour, the holy Prophets and holy Apostles of God.