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THE NEED FOR BIBLICAL RESEARCH AND PUBLICATION BEYOND SECULARISM: CONCEPTS AND IMPORTANCE

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Abstract

This study attempts to push back the frontiers of human ignorance. The paper presents the concepts of research and biblical research and explains the significance of biblical research work to the church and the world at large. Principles underlying biblical research, types of biblical research, biblical epistemic beliefs, and the biblical research cycle are discussed in a manner that would assist the biblical researchers in any field of biblical educational studies. The paper asserts that biblical research holds the touch of true knowledge and that true knowledge can only be found in the word of God, the Bible. The study claims that the Bible is the only single source of God's revelation to humanity that can be considered reliable, valid, inerrant, and infallible. The paper sets out to argue for the importance of engaging in biblical research with the aim of discouraging Christians and Christian scholars, pastors, and researchers from adopting and applying worldly or secular ideas to spiritual realities, rather encouraging them to conduct research from a biblical frame of reference. The study, therefore, adopts biblical exploratory research methodology to scholarly and deeply, with curiositydriven exploration, engage with biblical texts to uncover the biblical truths that will enable Christian researchers and scholars to conduct research from a biblical frame of reference without relying on secularism. The research paper recommends and concludes that biblical research centres, institutes, and publishing outlets should be encouraged and funded by heavenly focused churches, Christian individuals, and organisations.

Keywords: biblical research, publication, research, concepts, biblical epistemic beliefs, biblical research cycle, secularism.

Introduction

As a preface to this study, it is intriguing to note that "it is impossible to rightly govern the world without God and the Bible" (George Washington, the first president of the United States of America, 1732-1799). It is also interesting to know that it is impossible to understand the cosmos and the cosmic concepts without the cosmic designer (God). Invariably, it is practically impossible for the natural man to understand the things of the Spirit of God because they are spiritually discerned, investigated, and evaluated (1Cor 2:14)¹. Thus, biblical research is a spiritual inquiry that transcends scientific and any secular research. Biblical research holds the touch of truth because it deals with the word of God, the Bible, which guides humanity to true knowledge of God (Ps 119:105). What is more, according to Dele Alaba Ilesanmi (2024), "The Bible is the only single source of God's revelation to humanity that can be considered reliable, valid, inerrant, and infallible"². Therefore, the biblical researcher is expected to adhere strongly to the use of the Bible as the only reliable source of their data gathering.

Furthermore, Ilesanmi asks a pertinent question, what are the risks for Christians if they fail to explore God's Word through research as the basis for their faith and life?³ He argues that:

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).

It is imperative, therefore, for biblical Christians to briskly create a paradigm shift towards an eternal value through biblical research scholarship. With this in mind, this paper sets out to argue for the importance of engaging in biblical research with the aim of discouraging Christians and Christian scholars, pastors, and researchers from adopting and applying worldly or secular ideas to spiritual realities but rather encouraging them to conduct research from a biblical frame of reference. This study, therefore, adopts biblical exploratory research methodology to scholarly and deeply, with curiosity-driven exploration, engage with biblical texts to uncover the biblical truths that will enable Christian researchers to conduct research from a biblical frame of reference without relying on secularism.

 $^{^{1}}$ All biblical quotations in this work are from the King James Version except otherwise indicated

² Ilesanmi, Dele Alaba. "Biblical research: A theological and epistemological inquiry" in Mature journal of the international institute of Christian theologians, scholars, and professionals, Vol. 2(2), 2024.

Overview of the Concept of Research

Dele Alaba Ilesanni (2024)⁴ traces the origin of the word *research* to the Old French word, *recerchier*, meaning "to seek, to look for". The Early Modern French word, *rechercher*, meaning "to examine closely," is from Old French word, *recerchier*⁵, that is, "to search or to look for". 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, *recerchier*, a compound word from "re-" + "cerchier", or "sercher", meaning 'search'. The earliest recorded use of the term was in 1577⁶. 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."⁷

Similarly, the Greek word for "search" is ψάχνω (psáchno) when referring to the act of looking for something, and it is often used in a broader context of searching or looking for information. Other related terms in Greek include έζευνα (érévna), which translates to "research," "investigation," or "inquiry", and εζευνώ (erevno), which means "to investigate" or "to search"⁸. In a biblical context, the term έζευνάω (ereunáo) means "to search, investigate, or explore". This is also used, particularly in verses like John 5:39, 1Cor 2: 10 where it implies an exhaustive examination or deep searching. Thus, the nuances of the Greek language provide a rich depth to the idea of searching, encompassing both physical and intellectual pursuits. What is more, the Hebrew word for "search" (לחקור) means "to explore, investigate, research, study, quest"⁹

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 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 disciplines¹⁰.

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 thing¹¹.

⁴ Ilesanmi, Dele Alaba. "Biblical research: A theological and epistemological inquiry" in *Mature journal of the institute of Christian theologians, scholars, and professionals*, Vol. 2(2), 2024.

⁵ English Dictionary, 6.2 version.

⁶ See <u>https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Research</u>, retrieved 19/01/2024.

⁷ See <u>https://eduhutch.blogspot.com/2023/03/etymology-of-word-research.html</u> retrieved on 19/01/2024

⁸ The Greek word for "search" https://www.wordhippo.com/what-is/the/greek-word-for-3559d7accf00360971961ca18989adc0614089c0.html

⁹ The Hebrew meaning of the word "search" https://www.wordhippo.com/what-is/the/hebrew-word-for-3559d7accf00360971961ca18989adc0614089c0.html

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ Odugbemi, O O and Oyesiku, O. K.(eds.). Research methods in the social and management sciences, 2000

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 or spiritual inquiry because it is a search after the truth of God (Matt 6:33); it is a biblical inquiry (Prov 25:2; Eccl 1:13; 7:27; Matt 6:33; John 5:39; 7:52; Acts 11: 17; 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 that cannot lead to absolute truth but is a miserable enterprise (Eccl 1:13)

Biblical Research: Conceptual Definitions

Research has been defined by various authors in many ways. A.K. Omoyola (1990, cited P. D. Leedy, 1989) defines research as "the manner with which we solve knotty problems in our attempt to push back the frontiers of human ignorance". Research can also be defined as a purposeful and systematic inquiry that seeks to advance true knowledge and understanding¹². Ilesanmi (2024) gives a list of definitions of research in his recent work titled *Biblical Research: A Theological and Epistemological Inquiry*¹³. He concisely defines research as a diligent search for truth to establish true knowledge¹⁴. On the other hands, biblical research directs us to the Truth (God/Jesus) who is the Source of all truths. The truth cannot be changed; the truth cannot be subverted. Biblical Research holds the torch of true knowledge. Thus, looking for true knowledge, there is a need to search and research the Scripture (the Bible). This is because the Bible, the Word of God, is truth (2Sam 7:28; Ps 12:6; 119: 151, 160; John 17:17) and biblical research holds the touch of truth. What then is biblical research?

According to Ilesanmi, the words *biblical research* are two different words, that is, "biblical" and "research." He explains that the word *biblical* itself is derived from the word, "Bible" which in turn is the Anglicised form of the Greek word *biblia* (books)¹⁵. The Greek form 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. 400¹⁶. Ilesanmi went further to do a thorough analysis of the concept of biblical research in his recent work when he theologically and exegetically proved Matthew 7:7¹⁷:

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

¹³ Op.cit. Ilesanmi, "Biblical Research: A Theological and Epistemological Inquiry" in *Mature Journal of the International Institute of Christian theologians, Scholars, and Professionals*, Vol. 2(2), 2024

¹⁴ Op.cit. 2024.

¹⁵ Ilesanmi, "Biblical Research: A Theological and Epistemological Inquiry" in *Mature Journal of the International Institute of Christian theologians, Scholars, and Professionals*, Vol. 2(2), 2024

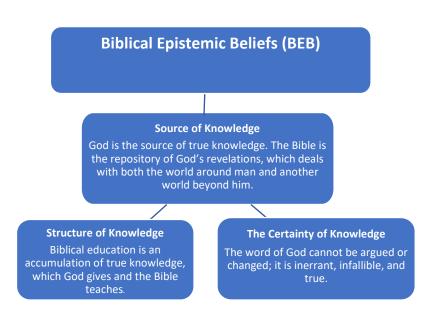
¹⁶ Ibid. ¹⁷ Ibid.

¹² John Wesley Taylor V. "A Biblical Perspective for Research". *Journal of Adventist Education*, 2019.

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).

After his theological and exegetical analysis, Ilesanmi defined Biblical Research as truth-seeking spiritual activity to uncover or discover the revealed hidden truth of God's Word (Deut 4:29; Job 11:7; Prov 25:2; Eccl 7:25; Isa 34:16; Jer 29:13; Hos 10:12; Matt 7:7-8; Lk 11:5-10; John 5:39; 7:52; Acts 17:11; 1 Cor 2:10; 1 Peter 1:10, 11; etc)¹⁸. Similarly, in a broader sense, Biblical Research is a purposeful, systematic, and spiritual epistemological inquiry into the truth to uncover the *revealed hidden truth* of God's word as recorded in Scripture to establish and advance true wisdom, knowledge and understanding. It can also be simply defined as an inquiry into the truth of God's word to establish the truth in God's word ((John 8:32; Acts 17:11; 2Tim 2:15; cf. Ps 119: 160; Prov 23:23; John 17:17; 1Pet 3:15).

Biblical research is both theological and spiritual inquiries. It is a theological inquiry because it employs 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 – this is pneumatic research¹⁹. Ilesanmi explains further biblical research is an epistemological inquiry in that it adopts the application of the mental or intellectual faculties to the acquisition of knowledge to discover biblical truth. He diagrammatically explains biblical epistemic beliefs, that is, the source of true knowledge claims, how it is acquired, and the certainty of the true knowledge.



¹⁸ Ibid. ¹⁹ Ibid.

Why Biblical Research?

Doing research is the best way to learn to read and think critically. It is important for Christians, pastors, theologians, Bible students, Christian scholars, and professionals to engage in biblical research for many reasons. Some of the purposes and importance of conducting biblical research are listed below, though inexhaustive:

- i. To reveal God to human beings. Revelation can be seen as "that which is revealed or made known that which has been hidden or not known before."²⁰ Only the Christian Bible contains the revelation of God. Hence, we need to search and research the Bible because in it the God's truth can be found.
- ii. To uncover and establish the revealed hidden truth of God
- iii. To have a deeper understanding of God's word. Biblical research helps you understand the Bible's meaning, context, and application.
- iv. Biblical research helps to accurately interprete the word of God, avoiding misconceptions and misapplications.
- v. To obey divine order.
- vi. It helps to pray according to God's will.
- vii. It increases human knowledge and understanding of God.
- viii. It leads to discovery. Searching the Bible will lead to new discoveries about God and His intention for us.
- ix. It leads to breakthroughs. Understanding God's word will give us brilliant ideas that will lead to spiritual, scientific, and technological breakthroughs and other breakthroughs in all areas of human endeavours.
- x. It helps to appreciate God and His works.
- xi. It helps to understand the historical, cultural, and literary context of the Bible.
- xii. Biblical research fosters personal spiritual growth, applying biblical truths to life.
- xiii. Research equips teachers and pastors (preachers) to share the Bible's message effectively.
- xiv. Biblical research provides a strong foundation for defending and sharing the Christian faith.
- xv. Research contributes to the advancement of biblical scholarship. It will also expand the frontiers of biblical and theological knowledge.
- xvi. Biblical research develops critical thinking and discernment skills.
- xvii. Understanding different perspectives: Research exposes you to various interpretations and viewpoints.
- xviii. By engaging in biblical research, you can gain a richer understanding of the Bible, its message, and its application to life.
- xix. It helps to seek wisdom and guidance for life's challenges and decisions.
- xx. It helps to apply biblical truths to one's life, leading to spiritual growth and transformation.
- xxi. It helps to effectively teach the word of God, such as able to prepare and deliver sermons, lessons, and other teachings that are grounded in a deep understanding of Scripture.

Types of Biblical Research

- 1. Exegetical Research: Detailed analysis, explanation or interpretation of a specific biblical passage or verse.
- 2. Literary Research: Studies the literary structure, genre, and themes of a biblical text.

²⁰ The Bible and the Church, (International Correspondence Institute, Brussels, Belgium, 1987) p. 19.

4. Theological Research: Explores the theological themes and concepts within a biblical text.

5. Comparative Research: Compares two or more biblical texts, authors, or genres.

6. Hermeneutical Research: Focuses on the interpretation and understanding of biblical texts.

7. Sociological Research: Examines the social context and implications of biblical texts.

8. Redactional Research: Analyses the editorial process and changes made to biblical texts, such as language, etc.

9. Intertextuality Research: Explores relationships and connections between different biblical texts.

10. Biblical Criticism Research: Examines the authenticity, authorship, and historical accuracy of biblical texts.

11. Biblical Archaeology Research: Examines the archaeological evidence related to biblical sites and events.

12. Biblical Linguistics Research: Studies the languages and linguistic features of biblical texts.

13. Biblical Historical-Critical Research: Examination of a biblical text's historical context, authorship, and redaction history to understand its original meaning.

14. Pneumatic Research: Unlike secular research, biblical research is Spirit-led inquiry. Only the spiritual man can understand the things of the spirit because they are spiritually coded and interpreted (2Cor 2: 1-16). In this type of research, the researcher engages himself or herself in what this author calls, *spiritual-intellectual epistemology*.

15. Biblical Biographical Research: This can be called biographical or character study. It is a method of studying the Bible by examining the lives of its characters. This type of biblical research relates to the account of a biblical figure, his or her life, roles, ministry (office), how God used him or her, etc.

Other types of biblical research are: exploratory, explanatory, descriptive, quasi-experimental approach, quantitative, qualitative, action research, etc.

Process of Writing a Biblical Research Paper

In general, research is understood to follow a certain structural process. However, the step order may largely depend on the field of study, subject matter, and the researcher. In formal biblical research, the following steps can be followed:

Prayer: A biblical researcher needs to seek the face of God first before putting pen to paper.

Formulate or choose a topic with the help of the Holy Spirit: Select a specific theme, passage, or issue in the Bible to research.

Formulate the hypotheses or research questions that will guide the study.

Conduct research: Gather sources, including biblical commentaries, biblical scholarly articles, and biblical texts.

Develop a thesis statement: Clearly articulate your argument or position.

Write the paper: This typically includes:

- Introduction or Background to the study
 - Conceptual Definition (if any)
 - Operational Definition (if any)
 - Review of related literature (Literature review)

- Exegetical analysis of the biblical text/data
- Theological implications (if any)
- Recommendation (if any)
- Conclusion
- Bibliography/References

Edit and proofread the work: Ensure clarity, good grammar, and accuracy devoid of plagiarism. Plagiarism above 20% in a paper is not good.

Publication Options:

1. Academic journals: Submit to peer-reviewed journals, such as Mature Journal of the International Institute of Christian Theologians, Scholars, and Professionals, African Journal of Kingdom Education, Christopress Journal of Biblical Research and Intellectual Transformation, etc.

2. Book publishers: Consider publishing with reputable Christian publishers.

3. Online platforms: Share your research on websites, such as Research Gate, Google Scholar, Open Science Framework, Web of Science, Zenodo, Figshare, Dimensions, etc. All these online platforms are free.

4. Conference presentations: Present your research at Christian scholarly and academic conferences and seminars, such as the Conference of the International Institute of Christian Theologians, Scholars, and Professionals.

5. Thesis or dissertation: If you're a student, consider publishing your research as a thesis or dissertation.

Special Instructions

- Adhere to academic writing standards of the chosen publication outlet (e.g., SBL, Chicago Manual of Style, APA, MLA, etc).

- Engage with diverse perspectives and scholarship.
- Ensure your research is original and contributes to the field.
- Follow submission guidelines for your chosen publication outlet.

Note: Biblical Research Publication is a process that takes time, effort, and perseverance because the researcher engages in both spiritual and academic epistemologies. The researcher studies the world around and beyond him or her.

The Sources and Tools 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: They are maps and geographical information on biblical locations.

Concordances: They are indexes of biblical words, phrases, and their occurrences.

Interlinear Bibles: Translations with original language texts and literal translations. Study Bibles: Bibles with notes, cross-references, and study materials. Bible Commentaries: They are in-depth explanations of biblical texts, often written by experts. Lexicons: Dictionaries of biblical languages (Hebrew, Greek, Aramaic) defining words and their meanings. Bible Dictionaries: They are Reference works on biblical terms, concepts, and themes. Biblical Encyclopedias: Comprehensive reference works on biblical topics. Lexicon Original Language Texts: Access to Hebrew, Greek, and Aramaic texts. Journals: Christian theological Journals: Scholarly articles and essays on biblical topics.

Historical and Cultural Resources: Works on ancient history, culture, and archaeology.

Christian Books

Electronic Sources:

Christian websites

Christian online Journals Here are some common Biblical Research Tools:

Bible Software: Digital tools like Logos, Accordance, or BibleWorks for research and analysis..

These tools aid researchers in understanding the biblical text, its context, and its meaning, helping to uncover new insights and deepen understanding.

Biblical Research Cycle/Process

The Biblical Research Cycle is a process used to systematically study and interpret the Bible. It involves a series of steps that help you thoroughly understand a passage or topic. Here's an overview of the cycle.

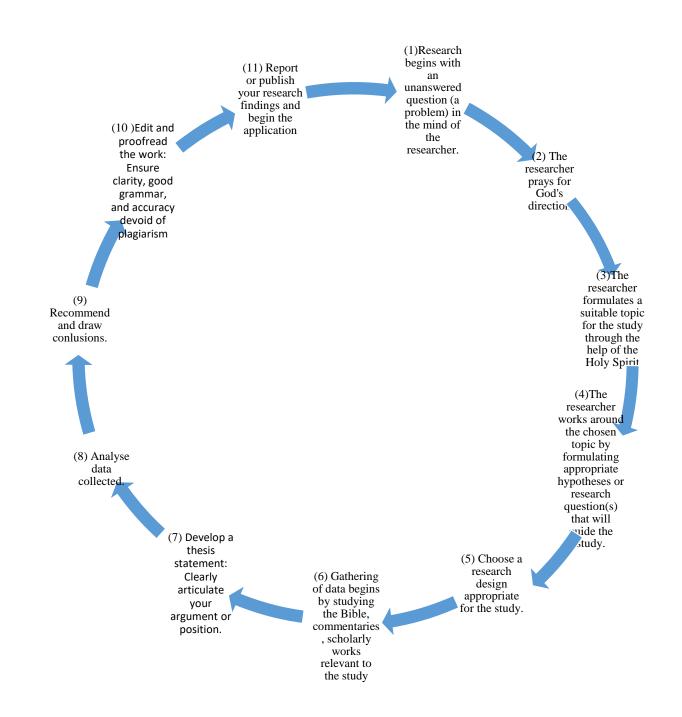


Figure 2: Research Cycle developed by D. A. Ilesanmi, 2024

Obstacles to Biblical Research

A number of perceived obstacles to biblical research are mentioned here as follows:

- i. Biblical researchers lack interest in biblical education
- ii. Lack of interest of pastors and Christian individuals and organisations in biblical research.
- iii. Lack of clear-cut policies on Biblical Christian Education and Biblical Research. "Biblical Christian Education" here means all Christian education programmes or courses that use the Bible as their inspired textbook and source of true information, such as Theology, Biblical Studies, Biblical Archaeology, etc.
- iv. Lack of unified centre for biblical research among biblical researchers.
- v. Lack of funds for biblical research by churches, Christian individuals, and organisations.
- vi. Lack of biblical research outlets dedicated mainly for the dissemination of biblical research findings.
- vii. Non-utilisation of the few available biblical research findings by Bible practitioners.

Recommendations

- Biblical research should be the focus of the contemporary churches to be able to have answers to some knotty questions being asked by non-Christians with the aim to pull down the church.
- Church pastors or leaders should foster biblical research among their congregants, not only to have answers to difficult questions but to bring them closer to God.
- Bible College or seminary students should be prepared and trained in the art and science of biblical research. "Science" here means "knowledge."
- Theological or Bible colleges should make quality biblical research their main focus.
- The use of secular methodologies and approaches in Christian institutions, Bible colleges, and churches should be discouraged.
- Biblical theories should be developed and encouraged in the conduct of biblical research.
- Quality biblical research should be encouraged and funded by churches, Christian individuals, and organisations.
- Publishing outlets, such as the Journal of Biblical Research in Theology, in Biblical Christian education, in Leadership, Biblical Studies, Biblical Languages, etc., should be encouraged and funded.
- Biblical research should be recognised as a distinct field of study.
- Biblical research institutes or centres should be established, funded, and encouraged.
- Biblical Christian Churches (churches that are biblically based and focused) should be fund biblical research centres or institutes.

Conclusion

The concepts of research and biblical research have been given some working definitions to illuminate the imagination of the biblical researchers to the task ahead of them, with emphasis placed on the biblical frame of reference rather than just a display of empty secular academic theories. The study also presented the need for a biblically based research by highlighting the important role of biblical research. This paper argued that biblical research directs researchers to the Truth (God) they are searching for because it holds the touch of truths and true knowledge. The research work asserts that biblical research is a purposeful, systematic, spiritual, and epistemological inquiry into the truth to uncover the *revealed hidden truth* of God's word to establish and advance true wisdom, knowledge and understanding. The biblical researchers are strongly advised to hold on to the word of God, the Bible, as the only reliable source of their data collection because the Bible is the only single source of God's revelation to humanity that can be considered reliable, valid, inerrant, and infallible. The paper finally gave some recommendations that will spun biblical researchers into action if adequately obeyed.

The Author



Pastor Dele Alaba Ilesanni (B.Ed., PGDE, PGDTh., PDGM., M.A., Ph.D, ThD.) is a theoretical and applied biblical Christian educator who has been a lecturer at the Redeemed Christian Bible College (Satellite Campuses) since 2008 and an Associate Research Professor at Testament Theological Seminary with expertise in Biblical Christian Education and Biblical Research (the fields he is currently pioneering). His academic interest is primarily in the fields of Theoretical and Applied Biblical Christian Education and Research. He has developed some biblical theories and concepts, such *as Theogenesial Theory, Pneumagenesial Theory, Quantum Theory, Theory of Absolute Ownership-Creationism, Parabolic Differential Learning Theory, Supra-nationalistic Salvation Theory, Divino-Experiential Learning Theory, Divino-Constructivism, Continual Learning Theory, Theogogy, Pneumagogy, Christogogy, Bibliogogy, Bibliogogics, Homeogogy/Filiogogy, etc. 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. To connect with this astute author: https://orcid.org/0000-0002-4874-0759; pstdeleilesanmi3@gmail.com; +234-08062197040*

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