How to Study Your Bible



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Christians know that they should read, study, and obey what is found in the Holy Bible We have designed this booklet to help you comprehend and retain what you read in the Scriptures. You will learn how to study your Bible, how to avoid common mistakes, and how to mark your Bible. We will also encourage you to "blow the dust off your Bible" and read it from cover to cover in just 365 days!

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Part 1

How to Study Your Bible

How much is your Bible worth to you? Would you take fifty dollars for your copy? Would you take a hundred dollars for it? If someone offered you one million dollars for your Bible, would you accept his offer? Let's rephrase the question. If you could not get another copy, what would your Bible be worth to you?

Jesus Christ likened the "kingdom of heaven" to a treasure hidden in a field, and later a pearl of great price (Matthew 13:44-46). Would you sell all that you had—just like the men in Jesus' parables—to possess the true gospel?

At various times in history there were great book burnings. English translators such as Wycliffe, Tyndale, and Cloverdale were hunted down and killed in the most horrendous ways. *Foxe's Book of Martyrs* tells a chilling story, indeed! Anyone found even *possessing* a Bible would be burned at the stake with his Bible chained around his neck!

In many parts of the world these days, the Holy Bible is commonplace. Even hotel and motel rooms across the land have Bibles in them; yet people inevitably turn on cable TV rather than devour the Word of God.

The Bible, What is it? It is a revelation from God about those things that would not otherwise be discoverable. To many it is a mystery, an enigma; to others it is a revelation, a marvel. Some live to ridicule and disdain it; many have died to preserve it.

Here are some notable quotations by famous people about the Bible:

George Washington: "It is impossible to rightly govern the world without God and the Bible."

Abraham Lincoln: "I believe the Bible is the greatest gift God has ever given to man." *Andrew Jackson:* "That book, sir, is the rock upon which our republic rests."

Queen Victoria: "That book accounts for the supremacy of England."

Sir Isaac Newton: "There are more sure marks of authenticity in the Bible than in any profane history."

If there were no Bibles, undoubtedly far fewer people would know about Christ's sacrifice. Far fewer people would repent and return to God. The United States, which was founded upon the Bible and religious freedom, would not exist as it does today if it were not for the Bible. The world would be a dark place, indeed. The Bible truly is God's greatest gift to man.

Why Study the Bible?

God, who at various times and in various ways spoke in lime past to the fathers by the prophets, and spoke through His Son Jesus Christ, also speaks to us today. How? Through the holy *written Word of God*,

God's Word, the Bible, really is God's communication to us. In it we find the history of God's interaction with mankind. We learn that He is the Creator. We learn the will and the way of God. We learn about the fall of man, the calling of Abraham, and God's awesome plan of restoration and redemption for all mankind.

In the Gospels and other New Testament books, we see God's plan more clearly in the central figure of all the Scriptures: Jesus Christ. Every one of us, if we respond with a pure heart, has the opportunity to be "heirs of God and joint heirs with Christ" (Romans 8:17)!

How exciting! How incredible! But first you have to repent. You must embrace the saving knowledge found in the Scriptures, "which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus" (2 Timothy 3:15).

It is imperative that you study the written Word of God on your own in addition to the preaching you hear at church. Why? For several reasons.

• All knowledge that is essential for salvation is found in your Bible. It will never lead you astray. The Bible doesn't claim to record all knowledge—only pertinent knowledge that is necessary for Christian faith and practice. The Bible is not a science textbook, a book of psychology, a money-making business guide, or a secret code book. It is God's inspired revelation of who He is, what He is doing, what He wants, and how to follow Him.

Scripture alone is our sufficient and infallible rule of faith, "All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, thoroughly equipped for every good work" (2 Timothy 3:16,17).

The Greek word translated "given by inspiration" here *(theopneustos)* literally means "God-breathed," as rendered in the New International Version. The archaic definition of the word *inspire* is "to infuse (as life) by breathing," or "to breathe or blow into or upon." But God did not "infuse" life *into* Scripture; rather, Scripture comes *from* the mouth of God! It is "God-breathed"!

Notice that Jesus viewed the Scriptures as "God-breathed." When He was confronted by the Sadducees about a doctrinal issue, Jesus said, "But concerning the resurrection of the dead, have you not *read* what was *spoken to you by God*, saying, 'I am the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob'?" (Matthew 22:31,32; cf. Exodus 3:6,15).

This clearly shows that ancient Scripture—written by Moses in this case—is equivalent to *God speaking*!

Yes, God speaks to us today—through the Scriptures!

• *False teachers can misguide us.* When Paul and Silas preached in a Berean synagogue, their listeners "searched the Scriptures daily to find out whether these things were so" (Acts 17:11). Why? Because they could have been deceived had Paul and Silas preached contrary to the Word of God. Since God had already "spoken" to them through

the Scriptures, they were diligent not to accept anything that contradicted what He said.

Satan the devil knows what the Bible says, but resorts to twisting the Scriptures. Satan brought Jesus to the highest point of the temple and told Him to cast Himself down, citing a scripture which seemed to promise protection from any harmful consequences that would normally occur (Matthew 4:5,6)! But Jesus knew that such an interpretation of Scripture was dead wrong, and refuted Satan with the proper use of Scripture. Jesus replied, "It is written again, 'You shall not tempt the LORD your God" (verse 7).

"Twisted scriptures" are still employed today. Peter even spoke of Paul's writings, "which untaught and unstable people *twist* to their own destruction, as they do also the rest of the Scriptures" (2 Peter **3**:16).

Keep in mind that just because a teacher or minister is popular or sounds good, it does not necessarily mean he cannot be in error (2 Corinthians 11:13-1 5).

• *Bible reading increases your faith.* Listening to a sermon once a week at church is not sufficient. If you are serious about the Christian faith, you must keep the Word of God at the forefront of your mind every day. Listen to what Moses told Israel concerning God's laws:

"You shall teach them diligently to your children, and shall talk of them when you sit in your house, when you walk by the way, when you lie down, and when you rise up. You shall bind them as a sign on your hand, and they shall be as frontlets between your eyes. You shall write them on the doorposts of your house and on your gates" (Deuteronomy 6:7-9).

Parents were to impress God's Word upon their children continually, turning everyday activities of life into opportunities to teach. The Israelites were to be conscious of God's Law, to have it figuratively tied around their finger, bound between their eyes, and posted on their doors.

If you allow it, the Word of God can work spiritual miracles in your life. "So then faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the word of God" (Romans 10:17).

Can We Study the Scriptures for Ourselves?

There are some who would have us believe that they cannot study the Scriptures for themselves. But what do the Scriptures themselves say about this matter?

Note that the salutation in Romans addresses the book "to all the saints" (Romans 1:7), that is, to ordinary believers, not to "kings," "priests," or "religious leaders" with documents from higher learning institutions. The Scriptures were even taught to children (2 Timothy 2:15). In Acts 17:11, we see that the Bible is considered understandable and that individuals are deemed competent to judge the truthfulness and correctness of the apostles' teachings. The saints, who were ordinary laymen, were recognized as competent to discern false doctrine (Galatians 1:8) and reject it. Thus, we can see the great value in personal Bible study.

On the other hand, there are those who would have us believe that there is no need for any instructor, guide, or teaching organization. But consider the example of Philip and the Ethiopian eunuch. The Ethiopian was studying the book of Isaiah and could not understand it. Philip, guided by the Holy Spirit, asked him, "Do you understand what you are reading?" The Ethiopian replied, "How can I, unless someone guides me?" (Acts 8:30,31).

There was certainly a need for a knowledgeable and experienced teacher to guide his studies or God would never have sent Philip to help him. Philip did not micro-manage, bully, or intimidate the Ethiopian, but merely showed him what the Scriptures plainly said. Paul admonished the saints, "Follow my example, as I follow the example of Christ" (1 Corinthians 11:1, NIV), showing that there is plainly the proper place for the ministry of Jesus Christ.

It is time that we blow the dust off our Bibles and prove all things and hold fast that which is good (1 Thessalonians 5:21).

How to Study Your Bible for All Its Worth

There are certain common-sense rules of logic and attitude that must be applied to sweep away the veil of mystery that clouds the minds of new and inexperienced Bible students. Following are ten brief points on how to study your Bible for all its worth:

1 Have a goal—a reason to study. Do not do it haphazardly. Some people approach Bible study with no real purpose in mind, and, as a result, come away with very little for their effort. Set aside a regular time and place for Bible study, Make it a daily habit. Determine what you want to study even before you open your Bible. Perhaps you would like to prove to yourself—from the Bible—whether Jesus was tempted or only tested. Can it be proven that the Ten Commandments are in full force and ought to be kept today? What does the Bible say about heaven and hell, or the immortality of the soul, or the trinity? Can you look it up in your own Bible and prove it? In other words, study for something specific, not generalities.

2 Pray for guidance and understanding and then reflect upon what you have learned, "But if any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask of God, who gives to all men generously and without reproach, and it will be given to him" (James 1:5, NASB). After prayer for wisdom and understanding, meditate on what you've studied. Understand the context—the chapters and verses before and after. A text without a context is only a pretext. Ask questions. Ask what the verse clearly says—and does not say. Ask who wrote the book and who he wrote it to. Ask how this could apply to real-life situations. What would the world be like if everyone kept this or that commandment? How would it affect the world, society as a whole, and me specifically? David, a man after God's own heart, said, "Oh, how I love Your law! It is my meditation all the day" (Psalm 119:97).

3 Study with the intent to recall or teach. Don't just study with idle curiosity. We are to be kings and priests—teachers, if you will—in the kingdom (Revelation 5:10). Do you think you would like to be a teacher? Of course you do! Think for a moment of how you would feel if your mate, closest friend, relative, neighbor, or fellow worker began to ask you questions

about your beliefs. You would be bubbling over with excitement to tell him everything you know. We need to be ready always to give an answer to every man that asks us of the reason of the hope that is in us (1 Peter 3:15). We can help make ourselves ready by diligent Bible study. We need to realize, however, that we don't know our subject well enough until we are able to teach it to others. Study with the thought in mind of sharing your findings with others, and you will automatically remember and study more effectively.

4 Mark your Bible and take good notes. A well-marked Bible is like an old familiar friend. A well-thought-out scheme or methodology of marking, underlining, coloring, and cross-referencing your Bible will help you find what you are looking for in the least amount of time. It is also a good idea to keep a Bible study notebook at hand divided by subject for your own personal Bible study. Prove all things (1 Thessalonians 5:21). It is a well-known fact that when a person hears a sermon or a taped message, he forgets nearly 50 percent of the content within twenty-four hours! When one takes notes on what they hear, this ratio is cut down to between 5 and 10 percent. Take good notes and review them often. (Read Part 3 for Bible-marking ideas.)

5 Your attitude should be one of self-correction! Don't worry about correcting other people or proving their beliefs wrong. Take the Scriptures personally. You must ask yourself who, or what, is your final authority. Is it a church or organization? Is it a man or some group of people? Is it your personal feelings? Scripture must be your standard and guide. If God says anything, He means it. There is nothing to be gained by doubting, questioning, or arguing about everything He says. We stand to lose everything if we do, Realize that if God did not mean what He said, then He should not have said it; but if He did say it, who are we to make Him out a liar? The Bible is not hard to understand—it is hard to believe by those who do not take it personally and in faith.

6 Realize that the entire Bible is inspired by God. Remember, the Bible never contradicts itself. It is always safe to assume that any problem in understanding is with us, not the Bible. The secret of learning truth is to find out what God says and then believe it. "All Scripture," Paul explains, "is given by inspiration of God [or "God-breathed"], and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness" (2 Timothy 3:16). Psalm 12:6 informs us that "The words of the LORD are pure words, like silver tried in a furnace of earth, purified seven times."

7 Let the Bible speak for itself. Do not make conclusions based on partial facts, insufficient information, or the opinions and speculations of others. Opinions, regardless of how strongly you feel about them, are not necessarily truth. Get all the scriptures on a subject by studying by subject or topic. *Nave's Topical Bible* is an excellent reference for culling all the scriptures on a topic together. Important: Take the Bible literally, wherever possible. When the passage is obviously a parable, a metaphor, or an analogy, look for the literal truth that

it is describing. Do not seek to make the Bible conform to your ideas; conform your ideas to the Bible.

8 Read the Bible from cover to cover. Seven times Christ said to His detractors, "Have you not read?" showing the importance of reading the Scriptures. Reading the Bible all the way through gives you a sense of flow and context, which is vital to proper understanding. Comparing scripture with scripture is fine, indeed, but not at the expense of knowing their contexts. The Bible can be read through in one year by reading just three chapters per day. (Follow the "Daily Bible Reading Schedule" beginning on page 27 to read the entire Bible in *one year!*)

9 Be familiar with study aids. Understand, though, that you do not have to be a Hebrew or Greek scholar to understand the fundamentals of the Bible, "For you see your calling, brethren, that not many wise men according to the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble, are called. But God has chosen the foolish things of the world to put to shame the wise, and God has chosen the weak things of the world to put to shame the things which are mighty" (1 Corinthians 1:26,27). Also, be sure not to establish doctrine solely based on Bible "helps."

10 Live by what you learn. God will bless you only up to your last point of obedience. He cannot bless you for disobedience. Use what you learn—or lose it, "for not the hearers of the law are just in the sight of God, but the doers of the law will be justified" (Romans 2:13), James worded it even more strongly: "But be doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving yourselves" (James 1:22). We need to ask ourselves: "What is my sticking point? What is the thing that stands between me and complete obedience to God?" and then take steps to eliminate that obstacle. We must strive to enter through the narrow gate, "for wide is the gate and broad is the way that leads to destruction, and there are many who go in by it" (Matthew 7:13). The violent, or energetic, take the kingdom by force or strength (Matthew 11:12). The Greek word here is *harpa'zo* and means to seize, to carry off by force, to grasp on to, to claim for oneself eagerly. That's what we must do in our Christian lives: "Be diligent to present yourself approved to God, a worker who does not need to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth" (2 Timothy 2:15).

We must force ourselves, if necessary, to energetically study the Word of God, to concentrate, memorize, devote the time and effort, or whatever it takes. Nothing is more important. Your eternal life may depend upon it, "Behold, I am coming quickly!" Christ warned. "Hold fast what you have, that no one may take your crown" (Revelation 3:11).

What is your Bible worth to you? Simply everything. It is a priceless possession. It is your light in a darkening world. It is your key to understanding, And it reveals the Gate to eternal life in the soon-coming Kingdom of God. If you will incorporate these ten guidelines into your personal study habits, you'll find that your Bible study is easier, more profitable, and, yes, more exciting than ever before. And most of all, you'll be studying your Bible for all its worth! "Therefore, brethren, be even more diligent to make your call and

election sure, for if you do these things you will never stumble" (2 Peter 1:10).

Part 2

How to Avoid Common Mistakes

Not surprisingly, new students of the Bible stumble into all sorts of problems as they embark on their biblical studies. It's all new to them. They're not familiar with the text, so they stumble frequently until they are more able to grasp the material, That is to be expected at first, but you would be surprised to learn how many seasoned teachers of Scripture make the very same careless mistakes,

While no one has the corner market on perfect biblical understanding, you can look for and avoid some of the most common mistakes Bible readers make.

But before you can recognize the mistakes, you have to learn how to properly interpret the Bible—how to rightly divide the Word of Truth.

Interpreting the Bible

There are two procedures you should follow when interpreting the Bible: *exegesis* and *hermeneutics*. If you can remember these words and their meanings—and do them in that order—you will automatically find it easier to come to sound, balanced conclusions in your studies.

Exegesis is the study of a text to discover its original meaning. Forget about us, forget about our modern age, forget popular theology, forget how we believe Christianity ought to be practiced today—just be concerned with the intent of the biblical author in history. Who was his audience? Why did he write what he did? What was his purpose? What did he believe? Where was he at the time? Where was his audience at the time? How did his original readers respond? What were his circumstances in history?

Walk in his sandals. See through his eyes. Do some extra homework and read him in the light of his ancient culture. His here-and-now writings, after all, are to us historical documents. If you have access to one, a good Bible dictionary, encyclopedia, handbook, or commentary will be sufficient in many cases if you want to learn the history of a particular book of the Bible, or perhaps of its author. It will help you fit important pieces of the historical jigsaw puzzle together.

As you read the Bible, you should constantly ask yourself the "five w's" and the "one h": *who, what, where, when, why*, and *how*. It may be a conscious struggle at first to keep asking these questions, but soon it will become second nature—almost a sixth sense.

The second step in biblical interpretation is hermeneutics, This term has a broad

definition that traditionally includes exegesis. But for our purposes and terminology, we will define *hermeneutics* as the study of how to apply our exegetical findings to ourselves. In other words, "How is all this stuff relevant to me?"

This is what most people of faith are primarily concerned with. The historians, archaeologists, and textual critics simply deal with the cold facts of history; the modern Christian is interested in what the Bible means for us, The ideal is to be concerned with both, because the first is essential to discerning the second.

It is this balance between exegesis and hermeneutics—the then and now—that presents us with our challenge. We must first find out what the original *meant*, realizing it can't change or mean something now that it didn't mean then. Once the writer's purpose is determined, then we are able to see how his teachings apply to us—for indeed God's Word is universal.

In performing this task, Bible readers will still unknowingly violate sound principles of biblical interpretation.

Prooftexting

Can anything be more impressive than a rapid-fire delivery of scriptures "supporting" a certain doctrine? Anyone who hears a preacher or teacher rattle off a litany of memorized scripture references can be easily impressed. "Wow—he must really know his Bible!"

Maybe he does, and maybe he doesn't.

One who relies on this approach—called "prooftexting"—must be very cautious. He often is so concerned with bombarding his listener with a load of scriptures, he may not take responsible care in selecting applicable scriptures. Whether one comes up with an entire list of scriptures or just one or two, he should first honestly consider whether they indeed say what he wants them to say.

For example, a master prooftexter with an anti-law bias can smother you with scripture after scripture: Romans 6:14; 10:4; 14:5,6; Galatians 3:24,25; 4:10,11; Ephesians 2:15; Colossians 2:14,16,17; and many others. But a closer examination of each of the chosen scriptures, individually, taking time to consider them carefully in context, will show their true meanings. You will see that the law is in fact upheld as an authority, a guide that is holy and just and good (Romans 7:12),

Always keep in mind that the *number* of scriptures "supporting" an idea is not as important as *what they really mean*. "Forced" scriptures do not prove anything.

Another notable prooftexter's problem is his selective arsenal. To protect his theological interests, the prooftexter will naturally only quote scriptures which at least *seem* to support his judgment. If he is sidetracked from his train of thought, if he is introduced to some "difficult scriptures," his logic will likely derail in order to defend his predetermined conclusion. Don't let pride keep you from an honest investigation of the Scriptures.

Failing to Recognize Context

You should always view what you're reading in light of its context. Do not read with

laser-beam singularity—expand your field of vision to see the whole picture the writer is presenting. Without practicing contextual care, you can indeed "make the Bible say whatever you want." That's when the prooftexter has a field day!

As was mentioned in Part 1, a text without a context is a pretext. However, there are two kinds of contexts you should be sensitive to:

A scripture's *historical context* involves the time element. It involves the whens and whys, the cultural settings, and the customs and traditions of the historical characters. Why did Paul command women in the church to wear coverings? Why were people exhorted to greet each other with a "holy kiss"? What did Jesus mean when He said not to pray like the "pagans"—how did the pagans pray? Answers to these types of questions will prove invaluable to our hermeneutical work—how to apply the Scriptures to us today.

The *literary context* of a verse is the surrounding verses. It reveals antecedents to pronouns, what is being discussed, who is being addressed, what the real problem is. Not only is the immediate context vital—the few verses before and after—but the general context; that is, the writer's theme throughout the book. He had a purpose in mind when he wrote the book. That is why it is recommended to read Paul's epistles in particular all the way through in one setting if possible, for they were intended to be read that way. (On the other hand, the book of Proverbs for the most part can be read in bits and pieces and in any order. It was written as a collection of individual proverbs, but the Pauline epistles were written as letters—to be read straight through!)

Striving About Words

Paul wrote to Timothy, "Remind them of these things, charging them before the Lord not to strive about words to no profit, to the ruin of the hearers" (2 Timothy 2:14).

Nevertheless, amateurish self-proclaimed theologians love more than anything to strive about words, Equipped with a *Strong's Exhaustive Concordance* and perhaps a lexicon, they suddenly think they are in the same league as leading experts in ancient languages. Scholars who are well trained in translating these languages face difficulties themselves; how much more, then, will an uneducated gainsayer do the same and stumble into serious error? Their pick-and-choose method of deciding the "proper translation" of a word can result in the "ruin of the hearers," because often their decisions are based on their preconceptions rather than linguistic or contextual evidence.

Common sense should make plain the difficulties involved in constructing doctrines from secondary or tertiary—even primary—word definitions. As one experienced Bible student puts it, "You could replace a word with 'giraffe' if you wanted to and the context still makes the overall meaning crystal clear."

Here's an extreme example: Suppose a preacher said in a sermon that we should "tremble" at God's Word. Someone in his congregation could look that up in an English dictionary and then conclude that the preacher believes we should enter a fit or spell of involuntary shaking or quivering when in the presence of a Bible! That is ridiculous, but it is this same absurd, bizarre approach that many have taken in biblical interpretation—

striving about words.

We must give biblical writers the same liberty in their use of words as we give ourselves. Words are not limited to a restricted definition or even a set of definitions. Hebrew and Greek words, like English, can mean different things depending on how they are used.

Carried by Every Wind of Doctrine

With so many inconsistencies, with so much misinformation and poorly developed ideas making their rounds, it is wise to practice caution. Do not embrace others' pet theories or coddle your own "idea babies" too hastily. When a new idea comes along, wrestle with it. Does it make sense? Is it strange-sounding? Has it ever been addressed before? "New truths," so called, should be put on a shelf and collect dust for a while. Take it down after a year or so and look at it again. Does it still make sense? Have you learned anything in the meantime that exposes any major flaws within it?

If your "idea baby" turns out to be ugly, it's okay to abandon it. Don't mother a sick theory and try to nurse it to health. Let it go. Let it die.

Think of pet theories and scriptural teachings as pieces of two different jigsaw puzzles: If they don't fit, no matter how much you want them to, don't force them—because they were never intended to fit, If you force an idea or theory to fit a biblical text, you'll come out with a warped and distorted picture—one that's different from the picture shown on the box.

The Question of Scholarship

In the church world, there are two unbalanced views of theological scholarship. The first one says that scholars are of no use, Most people holding to this belief consider themselves "fundamentalists," and rely on the Holy Ghost, or their anointing, to teach them all things (1 John 2:27).

One "minister," a proponent of this view, was taking exception with a Church of God International leader while confronting a CGI member.

"Did that man go to college?" the minister asked bluntly.

"Sure," was the member's response.

He chuckled and shook his head gleefully, "Well, you know what the Bible says about education, don't you?"

"No-why don't you tell me."

"It says the wisdom of the world is foolishness!" he exclaimed, misapplying 1 Corinthians 3:19.

When one considers the fact that this "minister" is illiterate, it is easy to see why he finds this interpretation to be comforting: It shows he is not of the world! Even though he made a "fundamentalist" appeal to the *Bible*, he was still in error.

To others, scholars are nearly worshiped, They are so intelligent, some believe, so brilliant, that they couldn't possibly be in error, Surely they've examined each issue with utmost care and honesty. "Who am *I* to question *them*? I only have a high school education!"

This over-exaltation of those trained in higher theological studies is unhealthy as well. Respect for their work is often due, but they are not immune to bias and tradition. Even scholars are vulnerable to theological peer pressure.

The truth is, scholars are a blessing to us. They have the access and ability to read ancient languages, discover and process important archaeological finds, and construct detailed, often sound Bible explanations and interpretations. Their work is especially critical for our own exegesis,

But what of the claims of those who insist that the Holy Ghost teaches all things? Well, the Holy Spirit does not teach history; nor does it somehow tell the Christian about ancient customs, expressions, traditions, or textual variants.

What is the role of the Holy Spirit when it comes to Christians reading the Bible? The Holy Spirit convicts you that the story and message of God's Word is true. It cements your belief, increases your faith. In that sense it teaches you.

In contrast, many "scholars" believe that Abraham, Moses, and King David were nothing more than legends and folklore. They don't believe in the resurrection of Christ, that He was the Son of God, born of a virgin! So sometimes—though not always—there is a difference between *scholar* and *believer*.

Along with belief, the Holy Spirit moves us to action. If we are Christ's, if He is calling us, we will want to obey Him—and will do our best to do so. This separates those with only head knowledge from those whose knowledge is in the Lord.

False ministers, and careless well-intentioned ones, will lead us astray and have us see "their" picture if we don't stick with the foundation: the Word of God. We must study it, learn it, feed off it. Most importantly, we must believe it. What good is knowing facts, historical data, and ancient languages if we don't believe the very thing we are studying? Will you believe what "the Book" says, or will you cling to the erroneous traditions of popular Christianity?

Jesus Christ's ministry is set up for our perfection, "that we should no longer be children, tossed to and fro and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the trickery of men, in the cunning craftiness of deceitful plotting, but, speaking the truth in love, may grow up in all things into Him who is the head—Christ" (Ephesians 4:14,15).

Part 3

How to Mark Your Bible

Have you ever met anyone who always seemed to be able to pull up just the right scripture at just the right time? Either he or she has a phenomenal memory, or a well-marked Bible— or both, How to memorize Scripture is the subject for another discussion. But now let's address the subject of Bible marking.

While not many of us have a phenomenal memory per se, it is possible to develop a system of Bible marking that will improve our memory automatically as we use it. Often people are told to "mark your Bible," but little help is offered as to why or what to mark or how to mark it.

Why Mark Your Bible?

Anything that we can do to enhance our copy will only serve to "sharpen our swords" and make them more usable. There is much to be gained from regular Bible marking.

A well-marked Bible with one's personal notes becomes a "personal friend" and companion. If you can remember, for example, that Gentiles as well as Jews were taught on the Sabbath "somewhere" in the book of Acts, the right verses in a well-marked Bible will practically leap off the page at you.

Marking your Bible helps you pull related verses together in a logical fashion. It becomes a new and exciting way to study your Bible! Instead of the Bible being a frightening array of disjointed topics, it becomes logical and plain. Once you have your well-marked Bible in your hand, you will "always be ready to give a defense to everyone who asks you a reason for the hope that is in you, with meekness and fear" (1 Peter 3:15). The Scriptures cannot be broken!

Now let's see what to mark and how to mark it. But first you need to get your supplies together.

Your Bible-Marking Kit

A small plastic box such as a school pencil box is handy to use as your "Bible-Marking Kit." Your "kit" should consist of a set of pens for underscoring and note-taking; a mechanical pencil; colored pencils; a six-inch plastic ruler for underlining and "boxing in" a verse to color; a template for making uniform symbols, if any; a piece of thin cardboard the size of a page in your Bible; and a folded paper towel to wipe off excess colored pencil so it will not rub off on the opposite page.

Pens: A fine-line black pen is recommended fox underscoring and note making. A fine-line red pen is recommended for underscoring important verses. Ball-point pens work OK but may glob or bleed through the thin Bible pages with the passage of time. The Parker Jotter is the best ball-point pen; its ink doesn't bleed through the paper. Better are drafting pens, such as Rapidograph or Castel. Drafting pens, however, need refilling and occasional cleaning. The Micron Pigma pens are an excellent choice. The .01 and .03 fine points work best. Do not use felt-tip or roller points under any circumstances, because these will nearly always bleed through the page. It is best to test out your pen on a page in the back of your Bible before using it,

Mechanical pencil: Use a thin lead (.05) pencil for outlining verses to be colored and to draw light guide lines for personal study notes.

Colored pencils: Use soft, thick lead pencils such as Berol or Castel. These are "creamy" in consistency, so they cover well and are easy to work with.

Different Ways to Mark Your Bible

In your studies, you will come across certain key passages or words that you want to stand out. Marking techniques depend largely upon personal taste and need, but we want to give you some ideas.

Underscoring: It is often wise to underscore or underline key words or phrases that you want to stand out in order to find them quickly. You can use two colored fine-line pens for your underscoring, black for generally important verses and red for very important verses. Do not overdo this by underlining every time a new thought strikes you, or the time will come when you will have more verses underlined than not, and this can lead to a confusing hodgepodge.

Symbols: Some people use a plastic template for making lines or symbols in their Bible's margins. You must predetermine which symbol you wish to represent each topic. Usually symbols are used to indicate a type of message in the Bible. A hollow star could be used, for example, for a prophecy; a solid star could be used for a fulfilled prophecy. A circle could be used for a command from God. A pyramid, either upright or on its side, could be used to signify a promise from God. A square could mean a message from God. You can decide what other topics and symbols to use.

Chain Referencing: This is done by first gathering a list of all the relevant scriptures you want to have in your "chain." Give each topic a consecutive number. God's Sabbath could be, for example, #1. Prayer could be #2. God's grace could be #10, and so on. Now begin transferring your list to your Bible. Turn where you want to begin your chain and put the number of your topic next to your verse in the margin of your Bible with a little circle around it. Just beneath the circled number, neatly print the second scripture in your chain. Now turn to this place in your Bible, write the number of your topic, and, just beneath it, print the third scripture in your chain. Continue this process on through the whole list of scriptures you want to chain. Be sure to put the key to your topics on a flyleaf of your Bible

so you don't forget which topics your numbers signify.

The strength of this method is that you will find all the scriptures you are looking for. The weakness of this system is that you may have to go through an entire chain of scriptures to find the specific one that you are looking for.

Color Scheme: By far, one of the most useful methods is the color scheme. You can assign different colors to various topics, and use colored pencils to color over the appropriate verses. (See the example "Topical Color Guide" on the next page.)

Once you have decided which verses you wish to color code, begin by placing your page-sized cardboard or index card under the page you are going to color so that your markings do not make indentations on the page beneath it, Next, take your mechanical pencil and six-inch ruler and lightly outline all sides of the verse. This makes the verse stand out neatly and lets you "stay inside the lines" when you color.

After you have outlined your verse, take your colored pencil at about a thirty-degree angle and lightly color in the verse, taking care to stay within the lines. Try for a "pastel" look rather than a dark, gaudy, or heavy look. When finished, take your folded paper towel and gently smooth or smudge your colors—always towards the center—to remove excess color. This prevents the color from rubbing off onto the opposite page. It would be wise to practice your technique on an old paperback book before coloring your Bible for the first time.

It is not important that you adopt the system suggested here. What is important is that you devise a workable system of your own—one that works for you. It is said that the best thing to do with the Bible is to know it in your head, stow it in your heart, sow it in the world, and show it in your life. Marking your Bible will help you to accomplish all these ends. Try it and see.

TOPICAL COLOR GUIDE: COLOR • TOPIC • MNEMONIC AID

RED Sabbath & holy days Stop—rest, and relax. Think of a stoplight.

LT. BLUE Prayer Think of prayers going up into blue sky.

DK. BLUE

Healing/Sickness Think of Blue-Cross, or a dark blue wound.

ORANGE Resurrection Sons of God rising, [remember: Sunrise].

PINK Marriage/Divorce Think of pink, fluffy clouds of marriage.

BLACK/GRAY Satan/Demons Evil, darkness, blackness. **LT. GREEN** Millennium/Kingdom of God When the earth will be green and beautiful.

DK. GREEN Man's Mortality Man's days are like grass— Psalm 103:15.

PURPLE Promises to Israel and heirs Purple—color of royalty.

YELLOW/GOLD Law & Commandments Golden Rule; the Law is worth more than gold.

BROWN Repentance/Baptism Picture autumn leaves falling; dying of the old self.

Remember: devise a workable system of your own—one that works for <u>you</u>.

Daily Bible Reading Schedule Read Your Bible in 365 Days

How many times do people start out to read the Bible only to give up in frustration? Endless genealogies, lists of tribes, and repetitive sacrificial descriptions can be a sure cure for insomnia. Most people start reading in the book of Genesis only to give up somewhere near the sixth chapter of Leviticus.

What is needed is a *goal* for Bible reading, and a systematic approach to *attain* that goal. With that in mind, we have supplied you with a program of daily Bible reading which will take the reader through the entire Bible in one year.

Simply check the appropriate box after you have read the assigned scriptures. Feel free to read ahead if you desire; you will simply finish reading the Bible before the year is up. If you are sidetracked from your Bible reading for a few days or more, don't worry—you can pick up where you left off. Just be sure to get back to your schedule as soon as possible.

When you finish reading the Bible from cover to cover, be happy! Be thankful that you were able to read every last bit of the written Word of God which has been preserved down through the ages! Then reward yourself by doing it again (perhaps in a different translation)! The more you internalize God's Word, the more potential you have for dynamic Christian development and effectiveness. "So get rid of all the filth and evil in your lives, and humbly accept the message God has planted in your hearts, for it is strong enough to save your souls. And remember, it is a message to obey, not just to listen to" (James 1:21,22, NLT).

So grab your Bible and turn to Genesis 1. Start your Bible-reading plan right now!

Day 1—Genesis 1-3; Matthew 1 Day 2—Genesis 4-6; Matthew 2 Day 3—Genesis 7-9; Matthew 3 [] Day 4—Genesis 10-12; Matthew 4] Day 5—Genesis 13-15; Matthew 5:1-26 Day 6—Genesis 16,17; Matthew 5:27-48] Day 7—Genesis 18,19; Matthew 6:1-18 [] Day 8—Genesis 20-22; Matthew 6:19-34 Day 9—Genesis 23,24; Matthew 7 [] Day 10—Genesis 25,26; Matthew 8:1-17] Day 11—Genesis 27,28; Matthew 8:18-34 Day 12—Genesis 29,30; Matthew 9:1-17 [] Day 13—Genesis 31,32; Matthew 9:18-38] Day 14—Genesis 33-35; Matthew 10:1-20 Day 15—Genesis 36-38; Matthew 10:21-42 Day 16—Genesis 39,40; Matthew 11 Day 17—Genesis 41,42; Matthew 12:1-23 [] Day 18—Genesis 43-45; Matthew 12:24-50 [] Day 19—Genesis 46-48; Matthew 13:1-30 [] Day 20—Genesis 49,50; Matthew 13:31-51 [] Day 21—Exodus 1-3; Matthew 14:1-21] Day 22—Exodus 4-6; Matthew 14:22-36 [] Day 23—Exodus 7,8; Matthew 15:1-20 [] Day 24—Exodus 9-11; Matthew 15:21-39 [] Day 25—Exodus 12,13; Matthew 16 Day 26—Exodus 14,15; Matthew 17 [] Day 27—Exodus 16-18; Matthew 18:1-20] Day 28—Exodus 19,20; Matthew 18:21-35 [] Day 29—Exodus 21,22; Matthew 19] Day 30—Exodus 23,24; Matthew 20:1-16 Day 31—Exodus 25,26; Matthew 20:17-34 [] Day 32—Exodus 27,28; Matthew 21:1-22 [] Day 33—Exodus 29,30; Matthew 21:23-46 [] Day 34—Exodus 31-33; Matthew 22:1-22 [] Day 35—Exodus 34,35; Matthew 22:23-46 [] Day 36—Exodus 36-38; Matthew 23:1-22 [] Day 37—Exodus 39,40; Matthew 23:23-39 Day 38—Leviticus 1-3; Matthew 24:1-28 Day 39—Leviticus 4,5; Matthew 24:29-51] Day 40—Leviticus 6,7; Matthew 25:1-30] Day 41—Leviticus 8-10; Matthew 25:31-46

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Congratulations!

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About the Church of God International

This literature is published by the Church of God International, based in Tyler, Texas. Incorporated in 1978, the CGI has ministers and congregations scattered throughout the United States and Canada. We also have churches in Jamaica, the Philippines, and Australia.

The CGI's mission is to preach the gospel of Jesus Christ throughout the world (Matthew 28:19). We are blessed with four basic tools to accomplish this:

- 1. Personal and local church evangelism.
- 2. Television and radio broadcasting.
- 3. Booklets, brochures, and study tapes.
- 4. The Internet.

How You Can Help

All our materials and services are offered to the public free of charge. Many naturally ask us how we can afford to send out thousands of booklets and study tapes each month. The answer is simple.

On a regular basis, prayerful friends and members of the Church of God International voluntarily support us with tithes and offerings to further the advancement of the gospel to the world. No financial obligation is ever demanded, but if you are moved to support this work of God, donations are gratefully accepted at the addresses listed. (Contributions in the United States and Canada are tax deductible.) Giving to and through us is an effective way for people like you to help spread the gospel of Jesus Christ.

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