



**EFFECTUAL**  
**BIBLE**

STUDENT

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*The Effectual Bible Student*  
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# Contents

Introduction.....	1
The Spiritual Requirements for Bible Study.....	3
A Habit of Daily Bible Study .....	19
Sound Rules of Bible Interpretation .....	37
Bible Study Tools.....	77

This course can be used as a stand alone teaching tool or in conjunction with *The Effectual Bible Student* video series, available for purchase on DVD or for free eVideo download from the Way of Life web site - [www.wayoflife.org](http://www.wayoflife.org).

# Introduction

## *Outline*

- Spiritual Requirements for Bible Study
- Tips for Daily Bible Study
- Sound Rules of Bible Interpretation
- Using Bible Study Tools

## **2 Timothy 2:15**

We see that the Bible is the Word of truth. I love the Bible! It is most amazing and important book on earth (“word of truth”). There is no admixture of error. This is the Bible’s claim. It is the revelation of the God who is truth. It is pure truth in a world of lies. In its pages we can find salvation, know God, find answer to every important question of life, get practical wisdom, spiritual strength, victory over the devil, find God’s perfect will, understand the past, know the future, prepare for Christ’s judgment seat, prepare for Christ’s kingdom.

We see that understanding the Bible requires work. This is God’s plan (“study ... a workman”). The word “study” is from the Greek word *spoudazo*, which means “to use speed, i.e. to make effort, to prompt or earnest.” It is elsewhere translated “be diligent” (2 Tim. 4:9, 21), “give diligence” (2 Pet. 1:10), “endeavour” (Eph. 4:3; 2 Pet. 1:15), and “labour” (Heb. 4:11). Compare Proverbs 2:1-9, which likens seeking wisdom in God’s Word to digging for silver and seeking worldly wealth.

We see that understanding the Bible requires learning (“rightly dividing”). The phrase “rightly divide” is translated from the Greek word *orthotomeo*, meaning “to make a straight cut, i.e. (figuratively) to dissect (expound) correctly

the divine message.” This tells us that there are also wrong ways to interpret the Bible. Even in the beginning of the church age, men were already mishandling the truth. Peter reminds us of this in 2 Peter 3:16. In this course, we will see how that false teachers abuse God’s Word.

We see that understanding it requires a right relationship with God (“shew thyself approved unto God”). I can know the truth because God will show me; the Bible is not given for confusion but for light.

# **The Spiritual Requirements for Bible Study**

The effectual Bible student meets the Spiritual requirements for Bible study.

## **1. Effective Bible study requires SPIRITUAL LIFE (1 Cor. 2:14 - 3:3).**

The first and foremost requirement for fruitful Bible study is a saved, Spirit-led life. Unlike other books, the Bible is a spiritual book and can only be understood by spiritual people.

a. There are three types of people described in 1 Corinthians chapters two and three: the natural man, the spiritual man, and the carnal man.

(1) The natural man is the unsaved person who is spiritually dead and blind (Eph. 2:1-3; 2 Cor. 4:4). He cannot understand the things of God. “The deepest biblical scholar, if he fails to find Christ, knows less of the real meaning of the Gospel than the humblest Christian who is living in the faith of the Son of God” (*Pulpit Commentary*). When the heart turns to the Lord, though, and receives Jesus Christ, the blindness is lifted (2 Cor. 3:14-17). When I was growing up in a Baptist church, I had a Bible and I studied the Bible in Sunday School and knew it well enough to win Sword Drills, but the Bible didn’t become a living Book for me until I was converted.

(2) *The spiritual man* (1 Cor. 2:15-16) and *the carnal man* (1 Cor. 3:1-4) refer to believers. The believer is either

spiritual or carnal depending on his walk with Christ, depending on whether he is walking in the flesh or the Spirit (Gal. 5:16-25). The carnal or worldly believer, because he is not walking in the Spirit, cannot understand the difficult things of Scripture. He can take milk but not meat. See also Hebrews 5:12-14. In the Parable of the Sower, Jesus warned that the Word of God can be “choked with cares and riches and pleasures of this life, and bring no fruit to perfection” (Luke 8:14). In Mark 4:19 He said the Word can be choked by “the lusts of other things entering in.” In Bible study spiritual life is more important than technical skills. R.A. Torrey said, “A person who understands the language of the Holy Spirit, but who does not understand a word of Greek or Hebrew or Aramaic, will get more out of the Bible than one who knows all about Greek and Hebrew but is not born again. It is a well-demonstrated fact that many plain men and women who possess no knowledge of the original languages in which the Bible was written have knowledge of the real contents of the Bible. Their understanding of its actual teaching and its depth, fullness, and beauty far surpasses that of many learned professors in theological faculties.”

b. Since salvation is so essential in effective Bible study and since there are so many nominal Christians in the churches, let's consider some Biblical evidences of salvation.

- (1) The first evidence is a conversion experience and new spiritual life and direction (John 3:3; Mat. 18:3; 2 Cor. 5:17). The testimonies we find in the Bible emphasize this conversion experience (e.g., Zacchaeus in Luke 19:1-10; the woman at the well in John 4:4-42; the Jews converted on the Day of Pentecost in Acts 2:37-42; the



Ethiopian eunuch in Acts 8:26-39, the Philippian jailer in Acts 16:23-34; and the idolaters at Thessalonica in 1 Thessalonians 1:9). Biblical salvation is not a process; it is a conversion experience!

- (2) Another evidence is a personal relationship with Christ (John 17:3; Mat. 7:21-23). Biblical salvation is not changing religions; it is to know Christ personally and as one's Lord and Saviour, to walk and talk with Him.
- (3) Another evidence is love of God's Word (John 8:31-32, 47; 10:27-28). One of the greatest evidences of salvation is one's attitude toward the Bible.
- (4) Another evidence is love of righteousness (1 John 2:3-4). The true believer can sin, because the "old man" still resides in him, but he has an entirely different attitude toward sin. He can no longer enjoy sin. He has been converted and the Holy Spirit lives within him and God is his Father. The things he once loved, he now hates, and the things he once hated he now loves.
- (5) Another evidence is divine chastisement (Heb. 12:6-8). The true believer can sin, but if he does he is chastened by God the Father. And if he persists in sin, there is the sin unto death (1 John 5:17). This passage makes it clear that those who can go their own way year after year, living in sin and rebellion to God's will, are not saved.

Dear friends, if we want to study the Bible fruitfully, we must make certain that we are born again and that we are walking in close fellowship with the Author of the Book. This is the first and foremost requirement. Studying the Bible is something like tuning in to a radio channel. Heaven is far away, but God broadcasts His glorious message to earth on a

clear and powerful station with the call letters BIBLE. If the believer is in fellowship with Christ, he has an open channel to Heaven through the Scriptures. The closer the fellowship with Christ, the sharper the reception and the more plainly the Bible speaks. If, on the other hand, a believer walks in carnality and in fellowship with the world, the reception becomes poor, because the Holy Spirit is grieved (Eph. 4:30). The static of the things of this world hinders the reception of a spiritual broadcast. Child of God, don't let unconfessed sin and worldliness rob you of the blessing of being tuned in to Heaven's glorious channel!

**2. Effective Bible study requires THE RIGHT PRIORITY** (Mat. 6:33 "seek ye FIRST"; this is associated with light - 6:19-24 "whole body shall be full of light")

God requires first place in our lives (Mat. 6:33); and since He has magnified His Word above His very name (Psa. 138:2), it is evident that He intends that we should make the study of His Word the very highest priority. Following are some of the ways that we can do this:

- a. The study of the Bible should come first in the day when we are still fresh and our minds are uncluttered with the concerns of life. Some have vowed to the Lord that they will not eat food until they have eaten God's Word. That is a noble and wise thing. For many years, I determined before the Lord that I would not read any other material until I had first read His Word. When I was engaged to my wife and she was still living in a foreign country and our only form of communication was by mail, I determined before the Lord that I would never read one of her letters until I had first spent my time studying His Word. I believe such things please the Lord, because they demonstrate our zeal toward spiritual matters.

- b. The study of the Bible should be given sufficient time. It is not honoring to God to apply a tiny amount of time to the study of His Word, or to read some little two-minute devotional in the place of serious Bible study. To learn the Bible properly, one must carve out significant time to read and study it.
- c. The study of the Bible should be a priority above the study of other books. It is not honoring to God to spend most of one's time reading *about* the Bible while neglecting the actual study of the Bible itself. While we do not despise the value of sound doctrinal books, they should never take the place of the Bible.

**3. Effective Bible study requires PRAYER** (Ps. 119:18; Prov. 2:3; 3:5-6; Eph. 1:17-18).

Bible study is not a mere intellectual exercise; it is a relationship with God

As we search the Bible, we must cry out to its Author for understanding. The Bible student must trust the Lord and "*lean not unto thine own understanding*" (Prov. 3:5-6). R. A. Torrey said, "Prayer will do more than a college education to make the Bible an open and glorious book." Charles Bridges warned: "Without this spirit of prayer there may be attention and earnestness; yet not one spiritual impression upon the conscience; not one ray of Divine light in the soul. Earthly wisdom is gained by study; heavenly wisdom by prayer. Study may form a Biblical scholar; prayer puts the heart under a heavenly tutorage, and therefore forms the wise and spiritual Christian. ... God keeps the key of the treasure-house in his own hand. ... We look for no other inspiration than Divine grace to make his word clear and impressive" (Bridges). When we pray for wisdom we acknowledge that we don't have it; we acknowledge our dependency upon God; we are

humbling ourselves. Earnest prayer to understand the Bible is the opposite of the spirit of pride of scholarship and the foolish dependency upon human intellect, and helps keep the heart humble and right. Twice the Scripture warns that God resisteth the proud, but giveth grace unto the humble (James 4:6; 1 Peter 5:5). As the Bible student grows in his understanding of the Scriptures and has success in applying the rules of interpretation, he is ever in danger of becoming self confident and lackadaisical. The old heart can deceive me into thinking that I have “arrived” and that I no longer need to cry out to the Lord for understanding. One way to resist this is to remind myself of what I don’t understand in the Word of God rather than focus on what I do understand. No man will ever truly master the Scriptures. The Bible, as God’s Word, is an eternal book containing endless truth. A man could study any one book of the Bible for his entire life, studying it diligently every day, and never completely master even that one portion of Scripture. As you grow in understanding the Bible you realize that your knowledge is only superficial, that there is much that still lies beyond your grasp. Thus we never come to the place in our Bible study whereby we do not need to cry out to the Author for help and understanding.

#### **4. Effective Bible study requires CONFESSION AND OBEDIENCE (Jn. 7:17; Heb. 5:14; Jam. 1:22-25; 1 Pet. 2:1-2).**

The Bible student must apply the Bible to his daily life. When he stops obeying, he stops growing and stops having good spiritual discernment.

The Parable of Sower teaches that worldly lusts and cares choke the Word (Mk 4:19).

#### **5. Effective Bible study requires PERSISTENCE (Luke 8:15; Jn. 8:31-32; Col. 1:23; 1 Tim. 4:16; James 1:6-8).**

Feelings come and go. The child of God must continue in the things of Christ whether he feels like it or not, whether the situation is difficult or easy. Certainly this is true for Bible study. There will be periods in which your heart will sing and the meaning of the Scripture will literally leap off the pages of the Bible and it will come alive. There will be other times in which everything is dull and dry, even the very study of God's Word.

Why are there dry times in the Christian life?

- a. We live in a *“body of this death”* (Rom. 7:24) and we are much affected by our physical condition. I remember a pastor friend who had kidney failure. Before his illness, he had a vibrant Christian life. He would memorize entire books of the Bible and the Scriptures were his delight. After his illness, he testified to me that though he continued to read the Bible, it only mocked him. David spoke of such a condition in Psalm 119:83. *“For I am become like a bottle in the smoke; yet do I not forget thy statutes.”* David was saying that he felt all dried up like a leather bottle that was left over a fire. The child of God will go through times like that experientially, and he must do what David did, *“yet do I not forget thy statutes.”* Even if Bible study becomes monotonous and discouraging at some point, just keep on keeping on and the blessing will return. One preacher wisely said, “Read the Bible when you feel like it, and when you don't feel like reading it, read it until you do.”
- b. God prunes us (John 15:1-2). Pruning is not a pleasant experience, but it is essential for spiritual growth. In Nepal and India, where we have lived for almost two decades, they grow world-famous tea. If left to itself, the tea plant grows large, almost tree-like, and in order to produce the best tea it must be carefully pruned. Sometimes the plant

is pruned back almost to the ground, and the plants look dead from a distance. But they are not dead; they are cut back so that they will produce sweeter tea. The same is true for the Christian life, and we must submit to the Lord's pruning work.

## **6. Effective Bible study requires CONCENTRATION (Psa. 119:97, 99).**

If you can't concentrate upon the Bible, your study time will not be very profitable. It is so easy for the mind to wander as you read the Bible, and we must do whatever is necessary to keep our thoughts on the Scriptures, to hold the words of God in our hearts so that they bring forth good fruit. Not only do we live in a weak, fleshly body (called the "*body of this death*" in Romans 7:24) that gets tired and sick, and not only do we dwell in a world full of cares and troubles, but we have an aggressive spiritual enemy that seeks to hinder our progress. His name is Satan, meaning *the adversary*, the one who stands before us to resist us. Bible study is spiritual warfare, and we must do everything necessary to win this war.

The Parable of the Sower teaches us that a man must make the effort to understand and apply the Scriptures, or the truth will be stolen away from his heart by the Devil (Matthew 13:19). We must capture the truth by meditating on it and finding out its meaning.

This is why MEMORIZATION of Scripture is so important. When Scriptures are memorized, the believer can then meditate upon them at any time. It is good to write Scripture verses down on cards and keep them with you so that you can spend time memorizing Scripture as you have opportunity, such as when you are waiting on someone or something. Redeem the time!

Following are some suggestions to help you concentrate upon the Word of God:

- a. A quiet, private place is required. I have seen Christians trying to study the Bible in a room where other people are talking and a radio is blaring, etc. That is not wise and it is not honoring to the Lord who deserves our undivided attention. The Bible is the very Word of God. Would it be proper to invite God over for a visit and then have many other things going on at the same time as He was talking to us? On some occasions when I have visited people in their homes to talk to them about spiritual matters, they have kept the television on and have continued watching it. That was very disrespectful to the message that I was bringing from God's Word. There have been occasions when I have gotten into my car and driven out to a country road or, if in a city, to the backside of the parking lot of a large shopping area in order to have a quiet and private place for Bible study.
- b. Ask the Lord to help you to keep your mind on His Word. If you find your mind frequently wandering during Bible study, lay the matter before the Lord. Tell Him that you desire to grow in knowledge of Him and His Word, explain your problem to Him, and beseech Him to help you concentrate.
- c. If you are particularly worried about some matter, cast it upon the Lord (1 Pet. 5:7) and trust Him to take care of it for you; then turn your full attention to His Word.
- d. Have pen in hand as you read. Just the action of picking up one's pen and being ready to write things down or to mark in one's Bible causes the mind to focus more on the reading.

- e. Remove things from your Bible study area that are distracting. I know a pastor who removed all of the bright colored covers from the books in his office, because they distracted him when he was trying to study the Bible.
- f. Be careful about using a computer during Bible reading time. I use my computer to study the Bible, because it is so efficient, but I do not use my computer when I have my daily devotional time in the Scriptures. It is too easy to get distracted with other things on the computer.
- g. Be careful about extraneous thoughts. When you are studying the Bible, it will often happen that thoughts about other things will rush in and you will be tempted to leave the study of the Bible and to rush off to take care of those things. For this reason, it is a good idea to have pen and paper handy and to jot down such thoughts so that you can take care of them later. This way, you can put them out of your mind for the time being and proceed with your study. If you get in the habit of allowing yourself to rush off and take care of other things, you will be crippled in your ability to study the Bible fruitfully.
- h. Go back and read the passage again. When you find that your mind has wandered during the reading of the Scripture, it is important to go back and read that passage again until you understand what you are reading, even if it takes several readings. It is better to read one verse with clear understanding than to read an entire chapter with the mind drifting to other things.
- i. Try not to read the Bible when you are tired. Sometimes this cannot be avoided, and it is better to read the Bible when you are tired than not at all. But the wise Bible student will arrange his schedule in such a way that he can study the Scriptures when his mind is fresh.



- j. If you find your mind wandering, it might help to put the Bible reading first before you do anything else in the day. I have found that if I start reading and studying other things first, it is much more difficult to concentrate on the Bible later.
- k. Sometimes it is helpful to read the Bible aloud if you find your mind wandering. This can help you maintain your concentration.
- l. A larger print Bible can also help with concentration because it is easier to read and the pages of the Bible are not as cluttered.
- m. Be persistent. Don't let the Devil defeat you in your Bible reading. If you find yourself unable to concentrate for a period, don't quit. There are ups and downs in Bible study as there are in everything else in life. The best tip for effective Bible study is to keep on keeping on!

## **7. Effective Bible study requires PAYING ATTENTION TO THE DETAILS (Matt. 4:4).**

To benefit the most from Bible study, one must understand that every word of the Bible is important. In fact, the Lord Jesus Christ spoke even of the jots and tittles, which are tiny parts of Hebrew letters (Mat. 5:18). The wise Bible student pours over the pages of Scripture looking at every detail, knowing that nothing is there by accident. Every word of Scripture has a divine purpose. It was purified seven times (Psalm 12:6). Thus, it is imperative that the student have an accurately translated Bible that brings out the details of the Hebrew and Greek. "Andrew Bonar tells of a simple Christian in a farmhouse who had meditated the Bible through three times. This is precisely what this Psalmist had done, -- he had gone past reading into meditation. Like Luther, David had

shaken every fruit tree in God's garden, and gathered golden fruit therefrom. 'The most,' says Martin Boos, 'read their Bibles like cows that stand in the thick grass, and trample under their feet the finest flowers and herbs.' It is to be feared that we too often do the like. This is a miserable way of treating the pages of inspiration. May the Lord prevent us from repeating that sin while reading this priceless Psalm" (C.H. Spurgeon, *Treasury of David*).

**8. Effective Bible study requires A GOOD CHURCH** (1 Tim. 3:15; Eph. 4:11, 12; Heb. 13:7; Rev. 2:3 "hear what the Spirit sayeth *unto the churches*").

The church is the institution God has ordained to be the pillar and ground of the truth. To that institution He has given ministry-gifted men for the edification of the saints, and it is necessary for the child of God to benefit from this ministry. It is not God's will for a Christian to be a "lone maverick." The biblical pattern is for a Christian to join himself to a sound Bible-believing church. That is emphasized throughout the New Testament. It is particularly in the church that the Christian is to hear the Word of God. Seven times in Revelation chapters two and three we read that we are to "*hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches*" (Rev. 2:7, 11, 17, 29; 3:6, 13, 22). We believe there is a special sense in which God speaks to the believer in his own assembly through his own pastors. As the Lord had a special message for each of the churches of Asia Minor in the first century, He has a special message for each church today. Each church is a body (1 Cor. 12:27), and the members are to be taught and edified together by the Lord through the pastors and teachers. In addition to this the Christian can avail himself of sound teaching through books and tapes. He should take advantage of every avenue of sound teaching available to him, but the first place for sound teaching is in one's own church, assuming, of course, that the church is a

good one. When I was a new Christian, I didn't know where to go to church at first. I was led to Christ by a Christian man while I was traveling, and the day after I was converted he continued on his journey and I went back to my home town. I started visiting various churches and praying about which one to join. I also obtained some books by various false teachers that confused me. One was by a Seventh-day Adventist. Others were by Pentecostals. Soon the Lord led me to a little fundamental Baptist church in Bartow, Florida, and the pastor and mature Christians there were exceedingly helpful to me and assisted me to become grounded in the truth.

Don't waste the precious opportunity of learning from your church. So many Christians are so incredibly careless about the preaching and teaching they sit under. Many are not faithful to all of the services, and many of those who are faithful hardly look at their Bibles, never taking notes, and making no effort to capture something that will benefit them later. They don't come prepared with paper and pen. Don't follow this unwise example. Use every opportunity of sitting under good preaching and teaching to capture as much as possible for your spiritual life and ministry. Even dull preachers and teachers usually have something worthwhile to say, if the student will make the effort to get it. Come prepared to capture the things the Lord shows you during the preaching and teaching. Don't come complaining; come praying, beseeching the Lord to speak through the preaching. Come with pen and paper. Come with a Bible that has a margin wide enough to jot things down. Come with pencil or colored pens to mark your Bible. Underline important things. Jot down cross-references that you find during the teaching. Jot down definitions of words. Jot down good outlines that you can use later. Jot down good thoughts and helpful sayings. (We will deal with this under the next section on "Marking Your Bible.") As you sit under preaching in an

expectant manner, earnestly seeking something from the Lord, you will find that many thoughts come to you and that the Lord will give you many things. Don't let these slip away. Jot them down in a notebook. I am thankful for the godly example of a Christian friend the Lord gave me when I was first saved. His name is Richard Tedder, and he was saved only a short while before I was, but he had become a diligent Bible student and had grown spiritually. Richard was one of the members of the first church I joined after I was saved, and he befriended me and was a great help in my early Christian life. One thing I learned from Richard, and I don't know if he even knows this, was to have a proper study Bible with me when I came to church and to take notes during the preaching. His wise example in this matter got me off to a strong start in my Christian life and helped establish me in the path down which I have gone in my ministry.

## **REVIEW QUESTIONS ON SPIRITUAL REQUIREMENTS FOR EFFECTUAL BIBLE STUDY**

1. What are three types of men described in 1 Corinthians 2-3?
2. Why is it that the natural man cannot understand the Bible?
3. What verse says that the unsaved person is dead in trespasses and sins?
4. What book and chapter describes the difference between walking in the Spirit and walking in the flesh?
5. What book and chapter says that when man turns to God from his heart that the veil is lifted from his eyes?
6. What book and chapter says the baby Christian is unskillful in the word of righteousness?
7. In Bible study, \_\_\_\_\_ life is more important in Bible study than technical skills.
8. Why can the carnal Christian only understand simple things in the Bible?

9. What verse says the believer can grieve the Holy Spirit?
10. What verse says to seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness?
11. What are two ways you can put the Bible first in your life?
12. What Bible character said, "I have esteemed the words of his mouth more than my necessary food"?
13. In what parable and in what book and chapter did Jesus warn that if someone does not make the effort to understand the Scripture that the Devil catches it away?
14. What are five of the things you can do to keep your concentration on the Bible?
15. In what book and chapter is the search for wisdom in God's Word likened to the search for silver?
16. R. A. Torrey said, "\_\_\_\_\_ will do more than a college education to make the Bible an open and glorious book."
17. In what verse did Jesus say that those who are His disciples indeed continue in His Word?
18. What did David mean in Psalm 119:83 when he said he was like a bottle in the smoke?
19. One preacher wisely said, "Read the Bible when you \_\_\_\_\_ like it, and when you don't \_\_\_\_\_ like reading it, read it until you do."
20. In Matthew 4:4 Jesus said, "Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every \_\_\_\_\_ that proceedeth out of the \_\_\_\_\_ of God."
21. In what verse did Jesus say, "Blessed are they that hear the word of God, and keep it"?
22. In what verse did Jesus say, "If any man will do his will, he shall know of the doctrine, whether it be of God, or whether I speak of myself"?
23. In what book and chapter is the study of the Bible likened to someone who sees his face in the mirror?
24. 1 Peter 2:1-2 lists what two things that are necessary for learning the Bible?

25. What verse says the church is the pillar and ground of the truth?
26. How many times in Revelation 2-3 is the statement “I hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches” repeated?

# **A Habit of Daily Bible Study**

The effectual Bible student has a habit of daily Bible study.

It is important to develop godly habits in the Christian life. Jesus had “the custom” of attending the synagogue services (Luke 4:16). It was His habit. Likewise the believer must have habits of church attendance and daily Bible study.

The Word of God has the power to sanctify the believer and build him up in Christ. It imparts conviction, enlightenment, spiritual strength, faith, wisdom, repentance.

Consider the following Scriptures: Joshua 1:8; Psalm 1:1-3; 119:9, 105; John 8:31-32; Acts 20:32; 2 Timothy 3:15-17; Hebrews 4:12; 1 Peter 2:2; 2 Peter 1:19.

To grow in Christ and find His perfect will, the believer must be transformed by the renewing of the mind (Romans 12:1-2), and this is accomplished by the Word of God through the power of the indwelling Holy Spirit.

Jesus likened the Word of God to one's daily food (Mt. 4:4). As food is necessary for physical growth and health, so the Word of God is necessary for spiritual growth and health. As food must be eaten daily, so the Word of God must be studied daily. When the Israelites were in the wilderness, God gave them manna to eat, and it had to be gathered and eaten every day. It could not be left over for the next day. Likewise, the believer must have a habit of consistent, daily Bible study if he wants to grow strong and develop in God's will.

Following are some tips for daily Bible reading.

## **1. Establish a time.**

If you do not develop a habit of daily Bible reading at a certain time each day, you will probably only read it hit and miss. Decide what time would be best for your situation. At different periods in my life I have had different times for my devotions, depending on the situation. Usually first thing in the morning is best, before your mind becomes filled with the business of the day. But other times of the day might work better for you. It is something to pray about. The important thing is to establish a habit of daily Bible reading. If you carve out some time every day during which you meet with the Lord and read and study His Word, you can grow in your knowledge of the Bible and make progress in your Christian life, but you must establish this habit. I cannot emphasize too strongly how essential this is. to make progress in understanding the Bible, you must carve out significant time for study.

## **2. Establish a place**

A quiet, private place is necessary, if at all possible. I have seen Christians trying to study the Bible in a room where other people are talking and a radio is playing, etc. That might be necessary on some occasions, but as an ongoing practice it is not wise and it is not honoring to the Lord who deserves our undivided attention. The Bible is the very Word of God. Would it be proper to invite God over for a visit and then have many other things going on at the same time as He was talking to us?

## **3. Have some basic study tools.**

We deal with this in a separate section of the course.



#### **4. Have a notebook and pen.**

It is important to write things down that the Lord teaches you. In the first year that I was saved, I filled up several notebooks. For example, I designed one notebook for studying the topics of the Bible by dividing it into multiple categories, such as salvation, sin, comfort, Christ's deity, Satan, hell, angels, and various other subjects that interested me at the time. As I found verses dealing with those subjects I wrote them out under the proper category. I was reading the Bible through a couple of times a year so I was able to gather together what the Bible says on various topics and do my own doctrinal studies.

#### **5. Have a pencil for marking your Bible.**

I recommend a pencil because you can erase it if you make a mistake and the pencil doesn't bleed through to the other side of the page. A mechanical pencil is ideal, because it doesn't have to be sharpened.

Use the margins of your Bible to add cross-references, word definitions, outlines, and brief commentaries. By adding such things you are making your own study Bible. This is why a wide margin Bible is useful.

Following are some suggestions for marking your Bible:

- a. **Underline judiciously.** It is your Bible and you can do as you please, but let me recommend that you not just underline anything and everything indiscriminately. If you do that, your Bible will soon be a bewildering and almost indecipherable hodgepodge of underlines and marks. It is better to use some careful thought in underlining. Let me make some suggestions from Genesis 1:

*Underline things that will help you see at a glance the divisions of a passage.* In Genesis 1, I have underlined “the evening and the morning” because this phrase marks the days of creation. (In Revelation 2-3 I have marked the names of the seven churches, thus I can see at a glance the division of that section.)

*Underline the most important things.* In Genesis 1, I underlined verse 27.

*Underline repeated thoughts.* In Genesis 1, I marked things such as “God said” and “after his kind.” (In Ecclesiastes I underlined every mention of “under the sun,” and in Ezekiel I underlined “they shall know that I am the Lord.”)

- b. **Write notes in your Bible with caution.** As with underlining, if you write down anything and everything in your Bible, you will eventually find that the notes are almost useless. When writing things down that a preacher or teacher states, consider the source. Is that person a diligent student whose sayings are probably going to be accurate? If not, be cautious about writing it in your Bible. I have often heard preachers and teachers say many things that were not correct. Save the margins of your Bible for things that are special and that are doubtless true and accurate. Other things can be written down in a notebook.

### *Things to Write in the Margin of Your Bible*

*Definitions of Words and Names.* As you learn the definitions of difficult words and doctrinal terms and the names of people and places, jot them down in the margin of your Bible so you won't forget them. I have written hundreds of definitions in my Bible. The following are some examples that I wrote as a young Christian:

Romans 2:23 -- sacrilege = profane  
Romans 3:20 -- justified = declared righteous  
Romans 3:24 -- redeem = bought with a price  
Romans 3:25 -- propitiation = satisfaction of a debt

*Cross References.* No single cross-reference system is exhaustive. Not even the *Treasury of Scripture Knowledge* has every cross-reference. You will find many new cross-references to add to your Bible if you are diligent in study. For example, Matthew 6:23 can be cross-referenced to Proverbs 28:22, but it is not in any cross-reference system I have seen. And Ephesians 1:3 “spiritual blessings in heavenly places” can be cross-referenced with Colossians 3:1-3 and 1 Peter 1:4, but none of these are in the *Treasury of Scripture Knowledge*.

*Doctrinal and Teaching Outlines.* I can preach many sermons right from the margins of my Bible. I can also refute false teachings with the notes and outlines I have jotted there. I recall an occasion when I was a young Christian and I unknowingly visited the home of a Jehovah’s Witness female teacher. After being invited into the house, I found myself in the midst of a group of people who were there for a JW Bible study. She took control of the situation and asked me if I believed that Christians go to heaven when they die, and I replied in the affirmative. She then asked me to show her and her friends where the Bible specifically says that the believer goes to heaven. I searched for a few minutes and couldn’t find a passage that said exactly that and was thus put to shame before this false teacher. After that, I redoubled my effort to be ready at all times to give an answer to the heretics. One way I have done this is to write relevant things in the margin of my Bible so that I can find them quickly when the occasion presents itself. Following are some examples:

In Exodus 20, I have noted the reasons why we know that the sabbath is not binding on New Testament Christians.

In Proverbs 23, I have an outline on the danger of alcoholic beverages.

At Matthew 16:18, I have noted why the “rock” refers to Christ and not to Peter.

At Mark 1:23, I have jotted down some of the key textual errors in the modern Bible versions.

At Mark 9, I have written the various Bible descriptions of hell and the passages in which Christ preached on hell.

At John 3:5, I have written the reasons why “born of water” does not refer to baptism.

At John 13, I have noted why I believe footwashing is not a church ordinance.

At Acts 2:38, I have listed the reasons why this does not refer to baptismal regeneration.

These are a few examples. For a few years I taught the Bible in a county jail, and I used these notes almost every week when the prisoners would ask questions. If they asked a question for which I did not know the answer, I would find the answer and add it to my Bible, so I would have it the next time it came up.

*Annotations such as weights and Measures.* For example, in Exodus 25-27 I have noted the modern dimensions and weights of the various articles in the tabernacle.

*Brief Commentary on the Text.* When you learn something that is helpful about a passage, note it briefly in the margin. Every time you read that passage, the note will be there as a reminder. For example, in Luke 16:8, I have jotted down a couple of thoughts about how the children of this generation are wiser than the children of light. “How wiser? 1. In preparing for the future. 2. In the use of money. Christ is using the temporal to illustrate the eternal.” In Romans 3:31, I wrote, “Paul established the law for the purpose for which it was given. Compare vv. 19-22.”

*Divisions of a Passage.* Some study Bibles do this for you, but I have enjoyed doing it myself. For example, in Exodus 7-11, I have marked the 10 judgments on Egypt. In Exodus 20, I marked each of the 10 commandments. In Leviticus 1-7 I marked the various offerings.

*Leading Thoughts and Important Repetitions.* For example, in Paul’s Epistles I have bracketed all of his prayers, beginning at Romans 1:8-10, and I have annotated the prayer that precedes and follows. In the margin of Romans 1:8-10, I put Romans 15:5-6, for that is Paul’s next prayer. In the margin of Romans 15:5-6, I put Romans 1:8-10, for that is the preceding prayer, and Romans 15:3, for that is the next prayer. In Genesis I bracketed every occasion in which God repeated his covenant to Abraham, beginning in Genesis 12. I also added an asterisk so I can find each reference more easily.

- c. **Use color markings.** Colored pencils, pens, or highlighters are an excellent way to mark your Bible. Some try to use one marking system throughout their Bibles; but I have found that it is easier and more effective to use different color markings for different parts of the Bible. Following are some of the systems I have used in my own Bible:

In the Psalms I have used *red* to mark verses that mention everlasting and eternal, *dark blue* for the second coming, *orange* for trusting God, *green* for blessings, *purple* for trouble, *yellow* for praise, *pink* for prayer, and *brown* for the Word of God. I have circled the verse numbers of the Messianic prophecies with *blue*. I have also bracketed unfulfilled prophecy or future events in *red*.

In the prophetic portions of the Old Testament, I have used *brown* for verses pertaining to the Day of the Lord, *light blue* for the Messianic passages, *green* for passages referring to the remnant, *orange* for the New Covenant, *dark blue* for the regathering of Israel, *yellow* for passages describing the millennial kingdom, and *red* for the second coming. I have also bracketed unfulfilled prophecy or future events in *red*.

In Proverbs, I have used *red* to mark verses dealing with counsel and learning, *yellow* for references to the tongue and speaking, *green* for correction, *purple* for anger and strife, *orange* for immorality, *brown* for friendship, *blue* for child training. I have used a blue circle around the verse number for verses about the home or family, a penciled circle for those about the sluggard, a green circle for those about the government, a brown circle for those dealing with the poor and poverty, and a purple circle for pride.

In the book of Acts, I have used *red* for the verses that teach salvation by faith, *blue* for the verses about baptism, *green* for the verses about repentance, *yellow* for the names of the places visited by Paul, and *orange* for the verses that speak of Christ's resurrection. In addition, I have marked the travels of Paul with brackets at the beginning and end of each journey.

In Revelation, I have marked the names of the seven churches in *blue*, the seals in *purple*, the trumpets in *orange*, the mentions of God's wrath in *red*, and the vials in *brown*.

## **6. Have a reading plan.**

It is important both to *READ* the Bible (Deut. 17:18-19; Rev. 1:3) and to *STUDY* the Bible (2 Tim. 2:15). Reading and studying are two different things.

It is important, first, simply to *READ* the Bible. There is probably no other one thing that can help a believer better understand the Bible than simply reading it and reading it and reading it. My mother started reading the Bible through twice a year when she was about 77 years old, and every time I have seen her since then she has told me what a great blessing this has been.

It is necessary, also, to *STUDY* the Bible. This involves slowing down the pace, doing word studies, analyzing individual passages, doing topical studies, outlining books, using commentaries, etc.

### *SOME TIPS ON READING THE BIBLE:*

- a. Read it systematically. That means read it through. Why should the Bible be read systematically? The Bible is not merely a collection of writings; it is one Book; and to be understood it needs to be read and studied as one Book. Each individual book of the Bible complements the other books, and as the Bible is read systematically the pieces gradually fit together.

## When I Read the Bible Through

I supposed I knew my Bible,  
    Reading piecemeal, hit or miss,  
Now a bit of John or Matthew,  
    Now a snatch of Genesis,  
Certain chapters of Isaiah,  
    Certain Psalms (the twenty-third)  
Twelfth of Romans, First of Proverbs--  
    Yes, I thought I knew the Word!  
But I found that thorough reading  
    Was a different thing to do,  
And the way was unfamiliar  
    When I read the Bible through.  
You who like to play at Bible,  
    Dip and dabble, here and there.  
Just before you kneel weary,  
    And yawn through a hurried prayer;  
You who treat the Crown of Writings  
    As you treat no other book--  
Just a paragraph disjointed,  
    Just a crude impatient look--  
Try a worthier procedure  
    Try a broad and steady view;  
You will kneel in very rapture  
    When you read the Bible through!  
-- Amos R. Wells

- b. I recommend reading from the Old Testament and the New Testament. You can do this by reading from a portion of the Old and New Testaments each day, or by alternating between the Old and the New on a regular basis, such as by reading an entire book or section of books from the Old Testament (such as Genesis or the entire Pentateuch), followed by reading a book or section from the New (such as Matthew or the entire Four Gospels). The following two plans follow this system



(reading a portion from the Old and the New Testaments each day) and take the student through the Bible in a year.

<http://www.blueletterbible.org/dailyreading/>

<http://www.backtothebible.org/index.php/Bible-Reading-Guides.html>

The 52-Week Bible Reading Plan is also a good one. By this method you will read the Old Testament once and the New Testament twice in a year. It requires reading about 4 chapters per day.

<u>Week</u>	<u>Passage</u>
1	Genesis 1-26
2	Genesis 27-50
3	Matthew
4	Mark
5	Exodus 1-21
6	Exodus 22-40
7	Luke
8	John
9	Leviticus
10	Acts
11	Numbers 1-18
12	Numbers 19-36
13	Romans, Galatians
14	1 and 2 Corinthians
15	Deuteronomy 1-17
16	Deuteronomy 17-34
17	Ephesians to Philemon
18	Hebrews to 2 Peter
19	Joshua
20	1 John to Revelation
21	Judges, Ruth
22	Job 1-31

23	Job 32-42, Ecclesiastes, Song of Solomon
24	1 Samuel
25	2 Samuel
26	Psalms 1-50
27	1 Kings
28	2 Kings
29	Psalms 51-100
30	1 Chronicles
31	2 Chronicles
32	Psalms 101-150
33	Ezra, Nehemiah, Esther
34	Proverbs
35	Matthew
36	Isaiah 1-35
37	Isaiah 36-66
38	Mark
39	Luke
40	Jeremiah 1-29
41	Jeremiah 30-52, Lamentations
42	John
43	Acts
44	Ezekiel 1-24
45	Ezekiel 25-48
46	Romans, Galatians
47	1 and 2 Corinthians
48	Daniel, Hosea, Joel, Amos
49	Ephesians to Philemon
50	Obadiah to Malachi
51	Hebrews to 2 Peter
52	1 John to Revelation

c. Bible reading can also be divided into two parts, such as morning and evening (Psalm 119:147-148), or morning and mid-day. Following are some suggestions:

- (1) Read a portion of the Old Testament in the morning and a portion of the New Testament in the evening.
  - (2) Read the Scriptures systematically in the morning, three or four chapters a day, and then read more devotionally in the evening, allowing the Holy Spirit to lead to various passages.
  - (3) Read systematically in the morning and then read in the Psalms and Proverbs at evening.
- d. You can also divide Bible devotional time into two parts: the first part for reading and the next part for studying. It doesn't take very long to read the four chapters a day required to read the Bible through in a year. This can be followed by a time of study. We have listed many suggested studies in the course "How to Study the Bible." Following are some suggestions of how to divide your time in this way:
- (1) You can do your reading and studying at one sitting, dedicating an hour or so to this important endeavor.
  - (2) You can divide reading and studying into two separate times during the day, reading during one session and studying during the other.
  - (3) You can focus on reading during the first part of the year, while focusing on study the rest of the year. For example, during the first part of the year you could read six chapters a day and read the Bible through in six and a half months (the Bible contains 1,189 chapters). That would leave about half of the year for the study of the Bible.

- e. If you are starting out your Bible reading career (whether as a new Christian or as an older one), I suggest that you set out to read the Bible through in one year and that you read it in conjunction with a simple Bible survey. One I recommend for this purpose is “Genesis to Revelation Bible Course” by William Groom. (This was put together in 1921 and is out of print, but you can download it in e-book format at the Way of Life web site.) This volume has a brief study of each book of the Bible, and by reading it in conjunction with the Bible, the student can begin to gain a basic idea of the major teachings of each book and of how the individual books fit into message of the whole Bible. As the student progresses in his learning, I suggest that he use more thorough Bible surveys which we mention in the section on Using Bible Study Tools.

## **7. Start with prayer.**

Ask God to open the eyes of your understanding. Don't be presumptuous, assuming that you can understand the Bible on your own. We must follow the example of the Psalmist who cried, “Open thou mine eyes, that I may behold wondrous things out of thy law” (Psalms 119:18). Proverbs says that we will find wisdom only when we cry out for understanding (Proverbs 2:1-5).

## **8. Try to get something practical each day from your Bible reading.**

Don't just read for head knowledge; read with the purpose of growing in your relationship with Christ and in your daily walk with Him.

It is good to keep a Bible reading dairy. Write down the date, list the passage that you read, and then jot down the practical

thoughts that you got from that reading. Ask yourself, “What is God saying to me from this passage today?”

## **9. Maintain a prayer diary.**

Many believers combine their daily Bible reading with a time of intercessory prayer. This is when you pray for others. It is described in 1 Timothy 2:1-2. It is helpful to keep a prayer diary, listing the various things and people you pray for on a daily basis. Some suggestions are husbands, wives, children, mothers, fathers, pastors, missionaries, relatives, the sick, persecuted believers, the government, unsaved contacts. Pray for specific things and use the prayer diary to list God’s answers to your prayers.

## **REVIEW QUESTIONS ON RULES OF BIBLE INTERPRETATION AND DAILY BIBLE STUDY TIPS**

1. What is another term for the rules of Bible interpretation?
2. What does *exegesis* mean?
3. What does *eisegesis* mean?
4. What is the most important rule of Bible interpretation?
5. How is the word “perfect” in 2 Timothy 3:17 explained in its own context?
6. How does context explain the apparent contradiction between James 2:24 and Romans 3 and 4?
7. What Bible study tool has thousands of cross-references?
8. What are three advantages of comparing Scripture with Scripture?
9. What is the one key to spiritual victory?
10. In what verse did Peter say that baptism is a figure?
11. How do we know that the believer should not give to anyone who asks regardless of the situation?
12. Why do false teachers use obscure and difficult verses to build their doctrine?

13. Dr. David Cooper said, "When the \_\_\_\_\_ sense of scripture makes \_\_\_\_\_ sense, seek no \_\_\_\_\_ sense..."
14. What is the non-literal approach to Bible interpretation called?
15. What are four reasons why we interpret Bible prophecy literally?
16. By the non-literal method, the \_\_\_\_\_ of the interpreter becomes the authority and one can never be \_\_\_\_\_ what the Bible means.
17. What are the two ways that we find the meaning to figurative language in the Bible?
18. It is a mistake to build \_\_\_\_\_ upon a parable.
19. Parables \_\_\_\_\_ doctrine.
20. Parables usually have one \_\_\_\_\_ teaching.
21. Hebrew poetry does not contain parallels of \_\_\_\_\_ as in western style poetry, but parallels of \_\_\_\_\_.
22. What are two kinds of Hebrew parallelism that we need to understand to rightly interpret the Bible?
23. How does Hebrew parallelism explain the meaning of "gods" in Exodus 22:28?
24. That God's revelation is progressive in nature means what?
25. In what book of the Bible does the doctrine of the Trinity begin to be unfolded?
26. Many heresies have been developed by the failure to understand the \_\_\_\_\_ nature of the Gospels and Acts.
27. In the Gospels, Christ first presents Himself as the Messiah to what people?
28. What verse says that Christ came unto his own and his own received him not?
29. In what chapter of Matthew is the church first mentioned?
30. How did Jesus establish the Law for its intended purpose in the Sermon on the Mount?

31. What is the first reason that we know that the commission in Matthew 10 is not for the churches today?
32. In what three ways is the book of Acts transitional?
33. In what verse did Paul mention the “signs of an apostle”?
34. What was the work of the apostles according to Ephesians 2:20?
35. What is the key to understanding the doctrine of tongues?
37. What is dispensationalism?
38. Charles Ryrie said: “If plain or normal interpretation is the only valid hermeneutical principle and if it is \_\_\_\_\_ applied, it will cause one to be a dispensationalist.”
39. The Bible teaches that there are great periods of time in which God is working out His eternal plan. These periods are called “\_\_\_\_\_,” “\_\_\_\_\_,” “\_\_\_\_\_,” and “\_\_\_\_\_.”
40. The Greek word translated “dispensation” is translated by what other English word?
41. To what does the “times of the restitution of all things” refer?
42. The Greek word translated “ages” is translated by what other English word?
43. What are three dispensations that are in the future?
44. What are three benefits of dispensationalism?
45. What are two chapters in the New Testament that teach the purpose of the Law of Moses?
46. What verse in the New Testament says there are three groups of people, Jews, Gentiles, and the church?
47. In what book and chapter of the Pentateuch did God describe all of the judgments that would fall upon Israel if she turned away from Him?
48. What passage in Romans says that God will fulfill His promises to Israel?
49. To confuse the Church with Israel is called \_\_\_\_\_ Theology.
50. What is the lie about dispensationalism?

51. What Baptist leader taught dispensationalism and a pre-tribulational Rapture in the first half of the 18th century?

52. Is it right to make laws based on the Bible's silence (such as the silence about musical instruments in the New Testament and the silence about Sunday Schools)?

53. What Bible passage refutes the principle of making laws out of the Bible's silence?

54. What is one verse in which Paul said he is the apostle to the Gentiles?

55. Paul is the New Testament believer's chief \_\_\_\_\_.

56. In what passage did Jesus promise that those who continue in His Word will know the truth?

57. What passage of the Bible that those who meditate in God's Word day and night will be like a tree planted by the river of waters?

58. What man in the Old Testament was told that if he meditated in God's Word day and night he would have good success?

59. Why is it important to establish a habit of reading the Bible at a certain time every day?

60. It is important both to \_\_\_\_\_ the Bible and to \_\_\_\_\_ the Bible.



# Sound Rules of Bible Interpretation

## *Outline*

1. The effectual Bible student defines the Bible's words.
2. The effectual Bible student interprets by *exegesis* rather than *eisegesis*.
3. The effectual Bible student interprets by context.
4. The effectual Bible student compares Scripture with Scripture
5. The effectual Bible student lets clear passages interpret the less clear.
6. The effectual Bible student lets the literal sense of Scripture rule.
7. The effectual Bible student lets the Bible define its own figurative language.
8. The effectual Bible student understands the basic meaning of parables.
9. The effectual Bible student understands Old Testament parallelism.
10. The effectual Bible student understands that God's revelation in the Scriptures is progressive in nature.
11. The effectual Bible student understands that the Gospels and the book of Acts are transitional.
12. The effectual Bible student interprets the Bible by dispensations.
13. The effectual Bible student does not build doctrine on the Bible's silence.
14. The effectual Bible student does not delve beyond what the Bible says.

## **1. THE EFFECTUAL BIBLE STUDENT DEFINES THE BIBLE'S WORDS.**

It is impossible to understand the Bible unless the student understands the meaning of its words. This is fundamental. It is the first step. When I read a passage, I must make the effort to find the definition of every word in the passage.

Consider Romans 3:19-25. This important passage on the gospel cannot even begin to be understood until the following words are defined: the law (v. 19), justified (v. 20), sin (v. 23), glory of God (v. 23), redemption (v. 24), propitiation (v. 25), remission (v. 25), forbearance (v. 25).

For this I need to have a good Bible dictionary, and I need to have it available as I study the Bible, and I need to use it.

One of the best is the *Way of Life Encyclopedia of the Bible & Christianity*, because not only does it define Bible words and offer practical word studies, but it also defines all of the old English words that have changed meaning since the King James Bible was first published in 1611.

Of those who purchase the *Way of Life Encyclopedia of the Bible & Christianity*, I wonder how many use it? For one thing, it is typical that only one person in the family purchases this Bible study tool, but in reality each Bible student in the family needs his own Bible dictionary so that he or she has it handy while studying.

## **2. THE EFFECTUAL BIBLE STUDENT INTERPRETS BY EXEGESIS RATHER THAN EISEGESIS.**

Sound doctrine is doctrine that is developed directly from the Bible (*exegesis*) rather than being read into the Bible (*eisegesis*).

The believer who wants to “rightly divide” the Word of God (2 Timothy 2:15) must make the Bible the book of his life. He must learn how to interpret it and spend a lot of time studying it.

Very few do this. It is more common for the believer to dabble with Bible study while spending most of his study time learning from man rather than directly from God’s Word. Godly teachers are important, but the believer should not depend on them. His dependence must be upon God’s Word and God’s Spirit (1 John 2:27).

False teachers develop doctrine from some human source and then read this doctrine into Scripture. It is called *eisegesis* (to draw into) as opposed to *exegesis* (to draw out of).

Larry Crabb does this with Freud’s doctrine that unconscious thoughts and feelings control human life. Crabb takes this doctrine to the Bible word “mind” [Greek *phronema*] in Romans 8:

“From my study of these passages, it appears that the central concept expressed by the word is a part of personality which develops and holds on to deep, reflective assumptions. ... Let me tentatively suggest that this concept corresponds closely to what psychologists call the ‘unconscious mind’” (Crabb, *Effective Biblical Counseling*, p. 91).

E.S. Williams, M.D., rightly comments:

“Crabb’s interpretation is wide of the mark. The word *phronema* ‘denotes what one has in the mind, the thought, or an object of thought.’ In Romans 8:27 the word *phronema* is used of the mind of the Holy Spirit. There is not the slightest hint that the apostle Paul, when he used the word *phronema*, was teaching about the

unconscious” (*The Dark Side of Christian Counselling*, p. 100)

The self-esteem heresy misuses Matthew 22:39, “Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself.” This is interpreted to mean that man needs to love himself just as he needs to love his neighbor, but Christ was not saying there is a need for self-love, and He was not encouraging any sort of self-esteem agenda. He was saying that *men already love themselves*! The essence of the fallen nature is self love. Paul said the same thing in Ephesians 5:29, “For no man ever yet hated his own flesh...” The fallen man’s problem is not a lack of self-esteem but far too much of it and a lack of God-esteem! Fallen man is an idolater who worships himself in the place of the Almighty Creator. The very essence of sin is that we’ve “turned every one to his own way” (Isaiah 53:6).

Consider John Piper and his heresy of Christian Hedonism. In *Desiring God*, Piper builds his case for Christian Hedonism from the writings of Blaise Pascal, C.S. Lewis, Jonathan Edwards, etc. Throughout the rest of his book he assumes the truth of Christian Hedonism and speaks of it as an established doctrine. He speaks, for example, of “this fact--that praise means consummate pleasure and that the highest end of man is to drink deeply of this pleasure.” But this is presumption, because he has not established from Scripture alone that this is a fact. Rather, he has developed this heresy from the aforementioned heretics and read this doctrine into the Scripture.

Consider Genesis 2:3. Seventh-day Adventists claim that God gave the sabbath to man at this point in time, but the Bible doesn’t say this. This is *eisegesis* rather than *exegesis*. It is reading doctrine into the Bible’s silence rather than allowing the Bible to speak for itself. God plainly says that He first gave the sabbath to Israel in the wilderness and that it is a sign

between Him and Israel, which it could not have been had God given the sabbath to mankind in general from the time of creation (Ex. 31:13; Neh. 9:14).

Consider the alleged “gap” between Genesis 1:1 and 1:2. Many of the old dispensational commentators taught that there is a gap of time here but the Bible is silent. This is *eisegesis* rather than *exegesis*.

Men cry foul when you make the claim that they are misusing Scripture and reading their doctrine into it, but the evidence that they are wrong is the fact that no one has ever developed that particular doctrine from Scripture alone.

*Eisegesis* is a great danger. It is a very easy thing to do, so it is necessary to learn how to interpret the Bible for yourself.

I go first to the Bible and do everything I can to understand the passage on my own before going to commentaries or other books. I need teachers and I benefit greatly from teachers, but I must be able to test man’s teaching by the Bible.

### **3. THE EFFECTUAL BIBLE STUDENT INTERPRETS BY CONTEXT.**

Context is the most important rule of Bible interpretation.

The Bible is a self-interpreting Book if we interpret its words according to context.

For this purpose, it is necessary to know the subject of the particular book you are studying.

For example, each of the four Gospels has a different purpose. Jesus is presented four different ways, according to the

purpose of the individual Gospel. Matthew presents Jesus as the Messiah of the Jews. Mark presents Jesus as God's Servant. Luke presents Jesus as the perfect Man. John presents Jesus as the eternal Son of God.

To understand the purpose of the Bible's individual books helps us interpret their contents properly. In Matthew, for example, we find many things that are purely Jewish in nature and that pertain to Israel rather than to the churches. The Sermon on the Mount is an example. This sermon was not delivered to the churches but to the Jews, and it will not be fulfilled until Israel comes into her promised kingdom and Jesus rules as the Messianic king. See, for instance, Matthew 5:21-26. Consider three things in this passage that pertain to Israel. First, Jesus speaks of the danger of hell fire, but the church-age believer is forgiven of his sins and justified and has eternal life and is already seated in the heavenlies with Christ positionally (Ephesians 2:4-9), so he cannot be in danger of hell fire. Jesus' warning about hell fire is directed to the unsaved people who will be born during the millennial kingdom and will live under the rule of the rod of iron. Second, Jesus speaks of bringing one's gift to the altar. Christians don't have an altar on earth. This refers to when the Jewish Temple will be rebuilt as described in Ezekiel 40-48 and the Jews will bring their sacrifices to the Temple to offer to God. Third, Jesus speaks of being cast into prison, but the churches don't operate prisons. We can discipline church members, but we can't imprison them. Thus we see how that the meaning of Scripture becomes clear when we interpret the Bible according to its own context.

Context is why it is so important to read and re-read passages, to study them very carefully. If you don't understand a Bible verse, stop and read the whole chapter repeatedly until you understand the context.

False teachers, on the other hand, twist verses out of their context and force their pre-determined meanings upon them. For example, there are Korean false teachers in Nepal who are aggressive in having home Bible studies with people, but they don't let the people write down the verses they use to support their teachings and they don't let the people look at the verses that are before and after the ones they are discussing. That is a recipe for spiritual disaster!

- a. Consider the phrase “profane and vain babblings” in 2 Timothy 2:16. What does this mean? The very first thing to do is to look at the context. There we learn that “profane and vain babblings” are (1) those things that are contrary to sound doctrine (v. 15, 18), (2) those things that produce confusion and bad fruit (v. 16), and (3) those things that are harmful to the Christian life (v. 17).
- b. Consider the phrase “foolish questions” in Titus 3:9. What is this? Again, the context defines the phrase. Foolish questions are questions (1) that claim that good works are not important (v. 8), (2) that produce strife (v. 9), (3) that misuse the law (v. 9), (4) that are unprofitable (v. 9), (5) that are used by false teachers (v. 10).
- c. Consider the phrase “that no prophecy of the scripture is of any private interpretation” in 2 Peter 1:20. This has been interpreted in several ways, but the meaning is clearly given in the next verse. It means that the human authors of the Bible did not invent the words that they wrote, but that they wrote what they were given by the Holy Spirit.
- d. Consider the word “perfect” in 2 Timothy 3:17. Does this mean sinlessly perfect? No, the word is defined in the rest of the verse. It means “*thoroughly furnished unto all good works.*” It means perfect in the sense of fully equipped to do God's will.

- e. Consider “sin willfully” in Hebrews 10:26. This is explained in Hebrews 10:29. In this context, the word “sin” does not refer to sin in general but to the particular sin of rejecting Christ.
- f. Compare 1 John 4:18 with Hebrews 12:28. John is talking about fear of God in the sense of being under His eternal condemnation. That is the context. See 1 John 4:14-17. On the other hand, the writer of Hebrews is talking about the fear of God in Christian living, in the sense of being afraid of His displeasure and chastisement, like a son fearing a father’s loving discipline. This is also clear in the context. See Hebrews 12:5-11
- g. Consider the apparent contradiction between James 2:24 and Romans 3:24 and 4:5. The apparent contradiction between James and Paul disappears when we consider the context. Paul, on one hand, was addressing the subject of salvation, of how a lost man can be made right with God, and he tells us that the sinner must trust exclusively in the grace of Jesus Christ for salvation. James, on the other hand, is addressing the subject of Christian service, of how a saved man can please God in this life. He tells us that true faith is evident by works. There is no contradiction if one considers the context of each statement. Paul is addressing the unsaved sinner’s perspective. The sinner must trust Jesus Christ exclusively for salvation; he must reject his own filthy works (Isaiah 64:6) and all self-righteousness (Romans 9:30-33) and lean totally upon the Lord Jesus Christ, trusting wholly in His perfect and complete redemption. James, on the other hand, is addressing the Christian’s perspective. The Christian claims to have faith in Jesus Christ. He is therefore to diligently serve God and to walk in His commandments. Those who live in rebellion and who ignore the Word of God demonstrate that they do not



possess true saving faith, that they are deceiving themselves.

- h. Compare Luke 21:13-15 and 2 Timothy 2:15. There are many preachers in the southern part of the United States that do not believe in studying to prepare sermons. They follow this passage in Luke, but in so doing they ignore the context. Jesus was talking about imprisonment for His name's sake. In that situation, we are instructed simply to trust Him to give us the right answer for our persecutors. But generally speaking, the preacher is instructed to study diligently in order to rightly interpret the Scripture, and that is the context of 2 Timothy 2. See also 2 Timothy 2:2 and Titus 1:9 which require that the preacher be taught the Word of God so that he can be qualified to teach others.

#### **4. THE EFFECTUAL BIBLE STUDENT COMPARES SCRIPTURE WITH SCRIPTURE.**

Another important rule of Bible interpretation is to compare Scripture with Scripture (1 Cor. 2:13). That is why it is good to have a study Bible with cross-references. The very best tool for comparing Scripture with Scripture is the *Treasury of Scripture Knowledge*, which has thousands of thousands of cross-references.

- a. Comparing Scripture with Scripture is essential for developing sound doctrine.

If Scripture is interpreted in an isolated fashion, the result will often be a wrong interpretation. Arthur T. Pierson wisely warns: "No investigation of Scripture, in its various parts and separate texts, however important, must impair the sense of the supreme value of its united witness. There is not a form of evil doctrine or practice that may not

claim apparent sanction and support from isolated passages; but nothing erroneous or vicious can ever find countenance from the Word of God when the whole united testimony of Scripture is weighed against it. Partial examination will result in partial views of truth which are necessarily imperfect; only careful comparison will show the complete mind of God.”

Consider the passages that deal with Christian sanctification and spiritual victory. Some have committed heresy by focusing on one verse or passage to the exclusion of others. In this manner they have come up with some one “key” to spiritual victory, such as a second blessing, the “crucified life,” and John Piper’s “Christian hedonism.” But by comparing Scripture with Scripture we find that there is no one “key.” Instead there are many different things. Consider the epistle of Ephesians. Chapter 4-6 is a treatise on the Christian life, and Paul dealt with all sorts of things, such as putting off the old man and putting on the new (4:22-24), not grieving the Holy Spirit (4:30), having no fellowship with evil (5:11), walking circumspectly (5:15), redeeming the time (5:16), being filled with the Spirit (5:18), giving thanks always to the Lord (5:20), wives submitting to their husbands and husbands loving their wives (5:22-33), and putting on the whole armor of God (6:10-18).

Consider the Christian’s relationship with Christ. By isolating one truth, it is possible to get the wrong idea. For example, the believer is said to be Christ’s friend in John 15:15 and not His servant. But elsewhere we find that the believer is Christ’s servant and will always be His servant (Luke 17:10; John 18:36; Philippians 1:1; 1 Peter 2:16; Revelation 22:3). What Jesus was emphasizing in John 15:15 is that the believer is not *merely* a servant; he is much more than that in relation to Christ. Similarly, the

believer is BOTH a son of God (Gal. 3:26), a part of Christ's body (Eph. 5:30), an ambassador (2 Cor. 5:20), a soldier (2 Tim. 2:3-4), a priest (1 Pet. 2:5), a pilgrim (1 Pet. 2:11), etc.

Consider John 14:13-14. If we interpret this passage as it stands alone, it appears that God will answer any prayer that we ask, but by comparing Scripture with Scripture we see that this is not true. James 4:3 says we can pray for the wrong thing. And in 1 John 5:14-15 we see that prayer must be according to God's will.

Consider Acts 2:38, which some isolate in order to teach that baptism is necessary for salvation, in spite of the fact that large numbers of verses teach that salvation is by faith alone through God's grace alone, and that works do not save us (i.e., John 1:11-12; 3:16-18, 36; 6:29; Acts 16:30-31; Romans 3:24; 4:1-8; 11:6; Ephesians 2:8-9; Titus 3:4-7; 1 John 5:11-13). Other verses teach that baptism is an act that follows salvation by faith (Acts 8:36-38; 10:43-48; 16:30-33; 18:8). Peter himself later said that baptism is a "figure" (1 Pet. 3:21). Acts 2:38 must not be interpreted privately, by itself but it must be interpreted in light of the teaching of the entire Bible. When we do this, we see that the baptism for remission of sins means baptism *because* one's sins have been remitted by faith in Jesus Christ, not *in order for* one's sins to be remitted.

In 1 Corinthians 9:22 Paul says, "*I am made all things to all men, that I might by all means save some.*" If this is isolated from the rest of Scripture one can assume that Paul was willing to do anything to reach the lost, including adopt their lifestyle. This is a doctrine that is popular among the "rock & roll Christian" crowd today. However, when one compares Scripture with Scripture, we find that Paul did not mean this. For example, in Galatians 5:13

Paul said, “*For, brethren, ye have been called unto liberty; only use not liberty for an occasion to the flesh, but by love serve one another.*” Thus Paul’s liberty was not the liberty to serve the flesh in any way. For example, he would never have allowed any of the Christian women ministering with him to dress immodestly, as the Christian rock crowd does today. Paul also taught that believers are to “*abstain from all appearance of evil*” (1 Thess. 5:22). That is the strictest form of separation, and Paul would not have done anything contrary to this in his own life and ministry. For instance, he would not worn long hair, because the Bible says that is a shame and thus would have the appearance of evil (1 Cor. 11:14). Thus when we compare Scripture with Scripture under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, we are able to interpret the Bible accurately and to know sound doctrine.

Consider Matthew 5:42, which says give to every man who asks. but if we compare other Scriptures, we see that we should not help everyone who asks (2 Thes. 3:10; Prov. 6:1-2; 22:26).

- b. Comparing Scripture with Scripture is necessary to solve Bible difficulties.

Consider, for example, Numbers 13:1-3 and Deuteronomy 1:22-23. The account in Numbers says that God ordered the spies to be sent; whereas the account in Deuteronomy says that the people requested this. By comparing the passages one with the other we find that both are true. In Deuteronomy Moses gives the details behind the command given in Number 13. The people were hesitant to enter immediately into the land and wanted spies to be sent to reconnoiter the situation. God allowed the people to follow their desire and commanded Moses to send the spies. Of course, God knew that most of the spies would

return with an evil report and that their unbelief and the unbelief of the nation would result in judgment. The fact that God often allows men to pursue their sin and unbelief is a fearful thing.

If we compare Lk. 14:26 with Mat. 10:37, we see the meaning of “hate” in this context. It refers to loving Christ preeminently, above all human relations.

If we compare Mat. 19:23-24 with Mark 10:23-25, we see that Christ is referring to those who *trust in* riches.

- c. Comparing Scripture with Scripture is necessary for getting the full meaning of passages.

Consider the sign on Jesus’ cross:

Mat 27:37 “this is Jesus the king of the Jews”

Mk. 15:26 “the king of the Jews”

Lk. 23:38 “this is the king of the Jews”

Jn. 19:19 “Jesus of Nazareth the king of the Jews”

By comparing Scripture with Scripture, we find that the complete inscription read: “This is Jesus of Nazareth the king of the Jews.”

Consider the Parable of the Sower, which is repeated three times in the Gospels (Matthew 13:1-8, 18-23; Mark 4:2-8, 14-20; Luke 8:4-15). By comparing the three accounts, we get the full teaching of the parable. For example, consider the seed that falls by the wayside:

“When any one heareth the word of the kingdom, *and understandeth it not*, then cometh the wicked one, and catcheth away that which was sown in his heart. This is he which received seed by the way side” (Mat. 13:19).

“And these are they by the way side, where the word is sown; but when they have heard, *Satan cometh immediately*, and taketh away the word that was sown in their hearts” (Mark 4:15).

“Those by the way side are they that hear; then cometh the devil, and taketh away the word out of their hearts, *lest they should believe and be saved*” (Luke 8:12).

Matthew tells us *why* the wayside seed doesn't bear fruit. It is because the individual doesn't make the effort to understand the gospel. He hears something about Jesus or he receives a gospel tract or he passes by a church sign, but he isn't interested enough to try to understand. Thus Satan snatches away the seed. Mark tells us that Satan comes immediately to snatch away the seed. Luke tells us that Satan's motive is to keep the individual from believing and being saved.

## **5. THE EFFECTUAL BIBLE STUDENT LET'S CLEAR PASSAGES INTERPRET THE LESS CLEAR.**

False teachers like to use difficult and obscure passages to build their doctrines while allowing such verses to overthrow the teaching of many clear verses. They do this because their doctrine is false and is not based on the clear teaching of Scripture.

For example, Seventh-day Adventists build their doctrine of “soul sleep” on some fairly obscure verses in the Old Testament. They point to Job 27:3, for example, which says that the breath is the spirit. They then say that since the breath is the spirit, man does not have a spirit that can live after he dies. Thus, when man dies, he is simply dead and non-existent until the resurrection. But when we look at the clear teaching of other verses, we see that man is a three-part

being (body, soul, and spirit) and the spirit of man lives after he is dead. Compare 1 Thessalonians 5:23 and James 2:26. The Seventh-day Adventists also use Ecclesiastes 9:5, which says the “dead know not any thing.” They claim that this supports their doctrine that the dead merely sleep in the grave until the resurrection, but they ignore the rest of the Bible which teaches that the dead are conscious. For example, compare Luke 9:28-33; 1 Thessalonians 4:14; and Revelation 6:9-11.

## **6. THE EFFECTUAL BIBLE STUDENT LETS THE LITERAL SENSE OF SCRIPTURE RULE.**

Dr. David Cooper said, “When the plain sense of scripture makes common sense, seek no other sense, but take every word at its primary literal meaning unless the facts of the immediate context clearly indicate otherwise.”

This is called “the normal-literal” method of interpretation. In contrast is the ALLEGORICAL METHOD, which is particularly applied to the prophetic portions of Scripture. Consider some examples:

- a. The Geneva Bible note at Revelation 9:11 identifies “the Angel of the bottomless pit” as “Antichrist the Pope, king of hypocrites and Satan’s ambassador.” There is no reason, though, to see the angel of the bottomless pit as anything other than a literal fallen angel in a literal bottomless pit.
- b. Adam Clarke on Revelation 20:2: “In what this binding of Satan consists, who can tell? ... it is not likely that the number, a thousand years, is to be taken literally here.”
- c. Jamieson, Fausset, Brown on Revelation 20:2: “Thousand symbolizes that the world is perfectly leavened and pervaded by the divine; since thousand is ten, the number

of the world, raised to the third power, three being the number of God.”

- d. Harold Camping, founder of Family Christian Radio, came up with the following allegorical interpretation of Revelation 11:7. He says the two witnesses represent the church. The church has been in the great tribulation but has now been killed. Therefore, the church is dead; God is through with churches and pastors and they have no more Scriptural authority.
- e. Charismatic “prophet” Mike Bickle of the International House of Prayer (IHOP), says the Parable of Virgins means that wise virgins are believers who enter a higher level of intimacy with God and miracle-working power so that they take control of the world and bring Christ back.
- f. New Agers also interpret the Bible “spiritually.” Levi Dowling, in *The Aquarian Gospel of Jesus the Christ*, says that the man bearing a pitcher of water in Luke 22:10 signifies coming of Age of Aquarius.

### **Why we interpret Bible prophecy literally:**

- a. God gave the Scripture to reveal truth to man, not to hide it or confuse it (Deut. 29:29). He therefore used the normal rules of human language.
- b. Jesus encouraged the literal method (Lk. 10:25-26). Jesus expected man to interpret the Word of God in a literal fashion.
- c. If the literal sense is not followed, no one can be certain of the meaning. By the allegorical method the mind of the interpreter becomes the authority. Consider Revelation 20:1-3. If this passage does not mean that a literal angel



binds a literal devil in a literal bottomless pit for a literal thousand years, we have no way of knowing what it does mean. If it does not mean what it says, it could mean anything that any interpreter says it means. Thus, the teaching of the Bible is thrown into complete and permanent confusion by the allegorical method.

- d. The Bible's prophecies were fulfilled literally, which means that the Bible must be interpreted literally. Consider the prophecy of Christ's first coming in Psalm 22. In this Psalm alone, there are many specific prophecies about Christ's death, and they were literally fulfilled:

Psa. 22:1 – Jesus' words on the cross (Mat. 27:46)

Psa. 22:6-8, 12-13 – The people reviled Jesus (Mat. 27:39-44)

Psa. 22:11 – There were none to help Him (Mk. 14:50; Heb. 1:3)

Psa. 22:14-16 – They crucified Him (Mat. 27:35)

Psa. 22:17a – They did not break his bones (Jn. 19:33)

Psa. 22:17b – They stared at Him (Mat. 27:36)

Psa. 22:18 – They gambled for his garments (Mat. 27:35; Jn. 19:24)

For more about the literal interpretation of Scripture as opposed to the allegorical, see the Advanced Bible Studies Series course *Understanding Bible Prophecy*, which has been completely re-written and enlarged for 2012.

## **7. THE EFFECTUAL BIBLE STUDENT LETS THE BIBLE DEFINE ITS OWN FIGURATIVE LANGUAGE.**

The Bible contains symbolism, figures of speech, and poetry; but, as in normal language, these are identifiable and can be interpreted. (For more about this see the *Advanced Bible Studies Series* course on "Understanding Bible Prophecy.")

Figurative language is defined first by the immediate context and second by comparing Scripture with Scripture.

- a. *Oftentimes the figurative language is explained in the immediate context, and that is the first place to look.* Consider the book of Revelation. Chapter one uses some figurative language, but it is clearly identified. In Revelation 1:12 and 16, we see “seven golden candlesticks” and “seven stars,” but those are explained in verse 20. In verses 12-16 we have a description of Christ, and some of it is symbolic, as we see by the use of terms such as “like wool” (v. 14), “white as snow” (v. 14), “as a flame of fire” (v. 14), “like unto fine brass” (v. 15), “as the sound of many waters” (v. 15), “as the sun shineth in his strength” (v. 16). When we come to Revelation 4, the future prophecies begin, and figurative language is still clearly identified. In verse 3 we read that the one on the throne was “to look upon like a jasper and a sardine stone” and that around the throne was a rainbow “like unto an emerald.” In verse 7 we find that the beasts were like things that are known on earth. The rest of the things described in that chapter are not figurative.
- b. Sometimes the reader of the Bible has to go to another passage to explain figurative language. For example, Revelation 3:1 says, “And unto the angel of the church in Sardis write; These things saith he that hath *the seven Spirits of God*, and the seven stars; I know thy works, that thou hast a name that thou livest, and art dead.” The “seven Spirits of God” is explained in other Scripture. The same description is used in Rev. 5:6 and Isaiah 11:2. These passages teach us that this figurative description of the Holy Spirit refers to the following things. (1) The omniscience and omnipresence of the Holy Spirit. This is what we see in Rev. 4:5 and in Rev. 5:6. In Rev. 5:6 the seven Spirits are “sent forth into all the earth,” referring to

the Holy Spirit being everywhere present on the earth. In Rev. 5:6 the seven Spirits are likened to seven eyes, which refers to perfect knowledge and wisdom. In Rev. 4:5 the seven Spirits are likened to lamps of fire, which speaks of enlightenment, describing the Holy Spirit's work of giving wisdom and understanding to all of the creation. (2) The seven Spirits also refers to the seven characteristics or offices of the Holy Spirit, as described in Isaiah 11:2.

## **8. THE EFFECTUAL BIBLE STUDENT UNDERSTANDS THE BASIC MEANING OF PARABLES.**

Parables have one central teaching.

Consider Luke 18:1-8. The parable has one main point -- "men ought always to pray, and not to faint" (verse 1). The parable was not given to teach doctrine about God or salvation or the Christian life in general; it was given to illustrate one main truth about prayer. If we try to find lessons in every point of the parable, the result is confusion. Consider the contrasts between the woman and the judge and the believer and God: (1) She came to an unjust judge; we come to the righteous Father (Jn. 17:25). (2) She was kept at a distance; we come boldly (Heb. 4:16). (3) She had no friend to plead her case; we have an Advocate (1 John 2:1). (4) She seldom had access; we always have access. (5) She had nothing to encourage her; we have many promises (1 Pet. 1:4). (6) She was no relation to the judge; God is our Father (Rom. 8:15). (7) The judge only complied because he was wearied by the woman's persistence, whereas God answers our prayers because He loves us (Rom. 8:32).

## **9. THE THE EFFECTUAL BIBLE STUDENT UNDERSTANDS OLD TESTAMENT PARALLELISM.**

Hebrew poetry does not contain parallels of *rhythm* as in western style poetry, but parallels of *ideas*.

a. There are two major kinds of parallels in Hebrew poetry that we want to mention here: COMPLETIVE and CONTRASTIVE. The following is partially adapted from J. Sidlow Baxter.

(1) In COMPLETIVE PARALLELISM the second part of the parallel completes or fulfills or explains or amplifies the first part. It concurs with the first and develops it to an intended further point.

(a) Consider the following two examples. We will see that more than being mere empty or flowery repetition, the second part colors, enriches, develops, and completes the first part.

*“Offer the sacrifices of righteousness,  
and put your trust in the LORD.”  
Psalm 4:5*

When the segments of the parallel are combined, we learn that God not only requires men to put their trust in Him but also to do righteousness. In a New Testament context putting one's trust in Christ is salvation, while doing righteousness is the fruit and effect of salvation. See Ephesians 2:8-10; Titus 2:11-12; 3:4-8.

*“Our God is our refuge and strength,  
A very present help in trouble.”  
Psalm 46:1*

The second segment of this verse emphasizes and reinforces the thought that God is our refuge and

strength by adding that He is a very present help in trouble.

- (b) In the following example we find a multiple complete parallel:

“Blessed is the man  
that *walketh* not in the *counsel* of the *ungodly*,  
nor *standeth* in the *way* of *sinner*s,  
nor *sitteth* in the *seat* of the *scornful*.”  
*Psalms 1:1*

The three lines form the completion of the one thought of what is required for a man to be blessed.

walk	stand	sit
counsel	way	seat
ungodly	sinner	scornful

There is a progress of thought in the verse itself and in each of the parallels.

The verse teaches that if an individual chooses to walk in the counsel of the ungodly he can eventually find himself sitting in the seat of the scornful.

There is a progress from *walking* to *standing* to *sitting*. “Walking” refers to casual relationship and an uncommitted stance; “standing” refers to a more permanent relationship and stance; “sitting” refers to an intimate relationship and a settled position.

There is a progress from *counsel* to *way* to *seat*. When we listen to wrong counsel and instruction, it affects the “way” that we live. Eventually, we settle down into the seat

of a settled way of error, and we are thoroughly committed to it.

There is a progress from *ungodly* to *sinners* to *scornful*. Each one is a more rebellious, more wicked type of sinner. As we associate with ungodly type of people, we come into association with more and more of these type of people. Eventually we will associate closely with people that we would not have associated with previously.

I experienced this as a young man. When I left church as a teenager, I remained sympathetic to Christ and the Bible, though non-committal and determined to “live my own life.” At first, my associations were with people who were not so brazen in their sin, but eventually I moved into close association with drug users, criminals, atheists, idolators, and those who openly mocked the Bible. During this process, my own thinking changed so that I, too, became a scorner of the Bible and an open Christ-rejector.

- (2) In CONTRASTIVE PARALLELISM the first line or thought is contrasted by the next. Consider a simple example:

*Weeping may endure for a night;  
but joy cometh in the morning.*  
*Psalm 30:5*

The contrast is between weeping and joy. In the Christian life weeping may endure for a night, but joy always follows. Thus we learn that while weeping is limited in scope and has a definite end, joy has no such restriction.

- b. Obscurities are often dissolved by examining the parallels. Sometimes one line states the thought figuratively while

the other states it literally, or sometimes one states it positively while the other states it negatively.

Exodus 22:28 says, *“Thou shalt not revile the gods, nor curse the ruler of thy people.”* The expression “the gods” here is explained in the last part of the verse. It refers to rulers. Men are gods and lords in an earthly context only, referring to the divine image they bear from creation (Gen. 1:26, 27) and the royal authority they sometimes exercise under God. 1 Corinthians 8:5 also speaks of this. The Devil is called the “god of this world” (2 Cor. 4:4). There is only one true God, of course, but the Devil is called a god because he is served by men in this world.

Isaiah 45:7 says, *“I form the light, and create darkness: I make peace, and create evil: I the Lord do all these things.”* The parallelism tells us the meaning of the verse. “I form the light, and create darkness” is the first half of the parallel. This clause contains a contrast between light and darkness. “I make peace, and create evil” is the second part of the parallel. This clause, too, contains a contrast—between peace and evil. Here evil means a lack of peace, referring to trouble of various sorts. The verse is not speaking of moral evil, but times of evil. God does not create sin, but He is in control of all times and seasons and circumstances.

## **10. THE EFFECTUAL BIBLE STUDENT UNDERSTANDS THAT REVELATION IN SCRIPTURE IS PROGRESSIVE IN NATURE.**

This means that God revealed His truth gradually as the Scriptures unfolded. Charles Hodge observes: “The progressive character of divine revelation is recognized in relation to all the great doctrines of the Bible.”

- a. One example of the progressive nature of revelation is the doctrine of the Trinity. We are given a hint of it in Genesis, in chapter one where God says “let us” (Gen. 1:26) and the plural Hebrew word “Elohim” is used for God. In Genesis 11:6-7, God is revealed both as one and as a plural. In Psalm 45:6, God the Father addresses God the Son, but this was not clear until Hebrews 1:8 was written. Thus, the doctrine of the Trinity does not shine in its fullest brightness until the New Testament.
- b. The same is true for the doctrine of life after death. The Old Testament teaches many important things about life after death, but it was left for the New Testament to bring this doctrine out more clearly (2 Tim. 1:10). The false teacher often ignores this rule, deriving his doctrine from the Old Testament and then forcing that doctrine upon the New. An example is the Seventh-day Adventist doctrine of soul sleep, which is derived largely from a few Old Testament proof texts.

## **11. THE EFFECTUAL BIBLE STUDENT UNDERSTANDS THAT THE GOSPELS AND THE BOOK OF ACTS ARE TRANSITIONAL.**

Many heresies have resulted by the failure to understand the transitional nature of the Gospels and Acts.

- a. In the Gospels, Christ first comes to “his own” (Jn. 1:11), the people of Israel, presents Himself as the Messiah, and is rejected. The church is not mentioned until Matthew 16:18, where Jesus says: *“And I say also unto thee, That thou art Peter, and upon this rock I will build my church; and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it.”* This statement was made after the Jewish leaders rejected Jesus’ great miracles of Matthew 15:30-39. In His earthly life, Christ lived as a Jew, living under the Law of Moses. He



said, *“Think not that I am come to destroy the law, or the prophets: I am not come to destroy, but to fulfil”* (Mat. 5:17). Much that is in the Gospels is therefore directed to Israel rather than to church age believers, and we must understand this if we are to properly interpret this part of Scripture.

- (1) Consider the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus established the Law for its intended purpose, which is to reveal sin and lead sinners to Christ. He showed that the Law must be obeyed from the heart (Mat. 5:17-19). By this teaching, we see that it is impossible for a fallen sinner to keep the Law and thus obtain salvation through it. The Law is not the gospel; it prepares the way for the gospel by exposing man’s sin and need for a Savior (Rom. 3:19-22; Gal. 3:10-13, 24-25). In the Sermon on the Mount Jesus also preached the principles of the kingdom of God. These are the principles by which men will live in the kingdom that Christ will establish upon His return, after He turns His attention back to Israel and the fulfillment of her promises. Thus, while the Sermon on the Mount contains many lessons about how we are to live in the church age, it is not written directly to church age believers.
- (2) Consider Matthew 10. Here Jesus sent the apostles out to preach. Note that they were to preach only to Jews (vv. 5-6); they were to preach that the kingdom of heaven is at hand (v. 7); they were to take no money (vv. 9-10). This is different from the commission that Christ gave to the churches. We are to preach to all nations (Mat. 28:19; Acts 1:8). We are to preach the gospel of Christ’s death, burial, and resurrection (Luke 24:46-48). We have the authority to take wages for the work of preaching (1 Cor. 9:1-14; 2 Cor. 11:8).

b. The book of Acts is also transitional in three ways, and it is important to understand this if we are to understand the book properly.

(1) First, the book of Acts is transitioning between Israel and the Church. In the early part of Acts, the Jewish believers do not properly understand that the Gentiles are being accepted by God on the same basis and into the same spiritual body as Jews. Thus God had to give Peter a vision about accepting the Gentiles (Acts 10:9-17), and the church at Jerusalem had to hold a special conference on the subject of the Gentiles and their relationship to the law of Moses (Acts 15). In interpreting the book of Acts we must keep this in mind. For example, the Jewish disciples continued to go to the Jewish temple (Acts 3:1), but this is not something we should do today, except perhaps to witness to the unsaved. (We must hasten to note that though there is this type of transition in Acts, this does not mean that the gospel preached in the first part of the book is different from the gospel preached later or that the gospel preached by Peter is different from the gospel preached by Paul. Those are hyper-dispensational principles that we reject and refute in the report “[Study the Bible Dispensationally](http://www.wayoflife.org),” available at [www.wayoflife.org](http://www.wayoflife.org).)

(2) Second, Acts is transitioning between the apostolic sign-gift age and the passing of that age (2 Cor. 12:12). The apostles were given special signs to authenticate their ministries and we see them exercising these signs in Acts (e.g., 2:43; 4:33; 5:12, 15; 19:12). When the work of the apostles was completed, which was laying the foundation of the church (Eph. 2:20), their signs ceased. Thus we must understand that not everything in the book of Acts has a permanent life in the churches. The very office of the apostle itself was temporary. The special healings (Acts

3:1-8; 9:32-34), the raising from the dead (Acts 9:36-42), the blinding of heretics (Acts 13:9-11), and other such things were signs of an apostle. If all believers could perform such things in that age or if believers could perform such things since the apostles died, they would cease to be a sign.

- (3) Third, Acts is transitioning between the use of tongues and its cessation (1 Cor. 13:8). Tongues were spoken on the day of Pentecost to the Jews assembled from many places (Acts 2:4-11). The tongues were earthly languages that were spoken miraculously by the believers. On two other occasions, tongues were spoken in Acts (10:46; 19:6), and on all occasions Jews were present. In 1 Corinthians 14:20-22, Paul explains that tongues-speaking was a sign to the unbelieving nation Israel. He quotes from Isaiah 28:11, where the prophet says that the sign would be rejected (“*yet they would not hear*,” Isa. 28:12). This is the key to understanding the doctrine of tongues. God gave the sign of tongues to the Jews during the early days of the church age, signifying the new thing that God was doing, which was extending the gospel to all men and bringing both Jews and Gentiles into one new spiritual body. In Acts 2 Jews spoke in Gentile tongues, and in Acts 10 Gentiles spoke in tongues in the presence of the Jews. *Every time that tongues were spoken in the book of Acts Jews were present.* Israel rejected the sign and continued in unbelief, and Gentile churches were established across the world. Acts 19 is the final time that tongues was spoken in the book of Acts. The fact that tongues speaking was a sign to the Jews and was rejected and ceased, must be understood if the book of Acts is to be interpreted properly. (For more about this see the book “The Pentecostal-Charismatic Movements,” which is available from Way of Life Literature.)

## **12. THE EFFECTUAL BIBLE STUDENT BIBLE INTERPRETS THE BIBLE DISPENSATIONALLY.**

Dispensationalism refers to the fact that Bible history can be divided into distinct periods of time during which God works out His purposes. Dispensationalism is based on a consistent literal interpretation of the Bible and a clear distinction between Israel and the church.

One of the things that I am most thankful for in my Bible education is learning the importance of a normal-literal method of interpretation of prophecy. I fondly recall how that this opened up the Scriptures to me when I was a young Christian. I didn't accept it blindly. I had filled my mind and heart with Scripture before I went to Bible College, and I had learned to test all things by it. I was trusting in promises such as John 7:17 and 8:31-32, and the normal-literal method of interpretation rang true to me as soon as I heard it. I knew that it was the truth, and I sensed that it was a very important truth.

I believe that a consistent application of the literal method of interpretation will result in a dispensational theology. We agree with the following statement by Charles Ryrie: "If plain or normal interpretation is the only valid hermeneutical principle and if it is consistently applied, it will cause one to be a dispensationalist. As basic as one believes normal interpretation to be, and as consistently as he uses it in interpreting Scripture, to that extent he will of necessity become a dispensationalist" (*Dispensationalism*, revised 1995, p. 20).

This, to me, is the bottom line, because I am convinced that the normal literal method of interpretation is the only proper method.

Not surprisingly, those who are committed to Reformed theology and its allegorical method of interpretation despise dispensationalism. Charles Ryrie, in his book *Dispensationalism*, gives many examples of this, such as the following: Arthur W. Pink warned of the “crudities and vagaries” of dispensationalism and described those who follow it as “poor dupes” (Pink, *The Divine Covenants*, p. 10). John Gerstner called dispensationalism “a cult and not a branch of the Christian church” (Gerstner, *Wrongly Dividing the Word of Truth*, pp. 150, 262). John Bowman said Scofield dispensationalism “represents perhaps the most dangerous heresy currently to be found within Christian circles” (Bowman, “The Bible and Modern Religions: II. Dispensationalism,” *Interpretation*, April 1956, p. 172). *The Presbyterian Journal* called dispensationalism “a conservative heresy” (*Presbyterian Journal*, Jan. 2, 1963, p. 8). Rousas Rushdoony called dispensationalism “unbelief and heresy” (Rushdoony, foreword to *Theonomy in Christian Ethics*, 2nd ed., 1984). The faculty of Louisville Presbyterian Theological Seminary included dispensationalism in their list of “isms” alongside of Seventh-day Adventism and Perfectionism (Arnold Rhodes, ed., *The Church Faces the Isms*, 1958).

Following are terms used in the Bible to refer to dispensations:

The Bible uses the word “**DISPENSATION**” in Ephesians 1:10. “That in the dispensation of the fulness of times he might gather together in one all things in Christ, both which are in heaven, and which are on earth; even in him.” This is the Greek word *oikonomia* (oy-kon-om-ee’-ah), which Strong defines as “administration (of a household or estate); specially, a (religious) ‘economy.’” This Greek word is also translated “stewardship” (Lk. 16:2-4). It refers to a period of time during which God is doing some particular work.

Another Bible word for this is **“TIME.”** We see this word in Ephesians 1:10—“the fulness of times...” Though the word “time” means different things in the Bible, one of its meanings is a period of time during which God is working out His purposes. In Acts 1:7 we find the phrase “the times,” referring to God’s plan. These are also called “the seasons.” It refers to a period of time on God’s great calendar. The Bible speaks of the “times of the Gentiles” (Lk. 21:24), the “times of the restitution of all things” (Acts 3:21), and “this present time” (Rom. 11:5).

Another Bible word for this is **“AGE.”** The Bible refers to “ages past” (Eph. 3:5), “ages to come” (Eph. 2:7), and “all ages” (Eph. 3:21).

Another Bible word for this is **“DAY.”** This term is used in many different ways in the Bible, but one of the ways it is used is to refer to a period during which God performs a certain work. Examples are “the day of salvation” (Isa. 49:8; 2 Co. 6:2), “the day of the Lord” (Isa. 2:12), “the last day” (Jn. 6:54), and “the day of our Lord Jesus Christ” (1 Co. 1:8; Ph. 1:10; 2:16; 2 Th. 2:2).

Thus the Bible teaches that there are great periods of time during which God works out His eternal plan. These periods are called “dispensations,” “ages,” “times,” and “days.” Some make a clear distinction between these terms, but it appears to me that they all describe the same general thing and are used in much the same way in Scripture.

### **What Are the Dispensations?**

The Bible does not specifically tell us how many ages there have been since God made man or how many there will be in the future. C.I. Scofield, author of the famous Scofield Bible, and many other well-known dispensational teachers, have

taught that there are seven dispensations. Scofield said, "Each of the dispensations may be regarded as a new test of the natural man, and each ends in judgment, marking his utter failure in every dispensation."

That is one way that the ages of God can be explained and divided; but there are other ways to look at them, and the number seven is not necessary. The exact number of dispensations or ages is not what is important. You could say there are five dispensations, or eight, or ten, depending on how you define an age. The important point is that there HAVE been various periods during which God has worked out His purposes, and during these periods God has related to men in different ways and has required different things of him. To understand and interpret the Bible properly, one must understand this.

Personally, I believe it is profitable to divide the ages into the following dispensations:

1. *Garden of Eden*: Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden (Genesis 1-2).
2. *The Fall* (Gen. 3)
3. *The beginning of civilization* (Gen. 4)
4. *Noah and the Flood* (Gen. 6-9)
5. *The division of the nations and the Tower of Babel* (Gen. 10-11)
6. *The Patriarchs and founders of Israel* (Gen. 12-50)
7. *The Law of Moses* (Exodus to Malachi). During this period, God put Israel under the Mosaic Law to prepare for the coming of Christ. The law does this in two ways: (1) It shows man his sinful condition and his need of salvation. (2) It foreshadows Christ by many types. It is important to understand that men were never saved by keeping the law. Salvation has always been by grace through faith in God's

Word (Romans 4:1-8). The law was given to reveal sin not to save men from sin. This period lasted roughly 1,500 years.

8. *The Church age* (Acts to Jude).

9. *The Great Tribulation* (Revelation 6-18).

10. *The Millennial Reign of Christ*: (Revelation 19-20).

11. *The New Heaven and New Earth* (Rev. 21-22). The Greek phrase translated “forever and ever” is *eis tous aionas ton aionon*, which means “into the ages of the ages” (1 Pet. 4:11; Rev. 11:15; 20:10; 22:5).

### **Three Advantages of Dispensational Theology**

#### **a. Dispensational theology enables us to know that the church is not Israel.**

Israel’s covenants will be fulfilled literally in Israel and not spiritually in the church.

Israel’s sabbath is her sign from God and has nothing to do with the church.

Israel’s law is not the church’s law.

Israel and the church share many things, but they are different bodies of believers. They share the same God, the same Saviour, the same spiritual blessings in Abraham, the same Bible.

#### **b. Dispensational theology enables us to study the Bible within its proper context.**

Paul instructed Timothy to rightly divide God’s Word (2 Tim. 2:15). The Greek word *orthotomeo*, which is translated “rightly divide,” means “to make a straight cut, to dissect correctly.” The Bible is one Book, but it is also divided into individual books and major divisions (e.g., law, prophecy,



Gospels, Acts, Epistles), and each segment must be interpreted within its proper context. Dispensational theology enables the student to accomplish this.

Consider Genesis 1:29-30, which says that man may eat only vegetables. This is no longer in effect, though, since after the Flood God told Noah that he could eat meat (Gen. 9:3).

Consider Leviticus 11:7-8, which forbids the eating of pork. These dietary restrictions were required by the law of Moses, but Paul taught that the New Testament believer is not under dietary restrictions (1 Tim. 4:3-5).

Consider Deuteronomy 13:6-10 and Exodus 22:18, which command that idolators and witches be stoned to death. That was true in Israel under the law of Moses, and it will be true in Christ's kingdom, but in the church age Christians don't put idolators and witches to death. Paul didn't call for the death of the witch in Acts 16:16-18. When he visited the idolatrous city of Athens, Paul didn't try to seek to have idolators put to death; instead, he preached the gospel to them (Acts 17:22-34). We aren't living in the age of the law of Moses; we are living in the age of the Great Commission.

Consider 2 Kings 1:10-14 where Elijah called down fire on the soldiers. When John wanted to do this, Jesus rebuked him, because the present age is the gospel age during which God is offering men salvation (Lk. 9:52-56).

Consider 2 Kings 23:14-15, where King Josiah destroyed the idols. As a king of Israel operating under the law of Moses, he had God's authority to do this. But we never see the apostles and early churches breaking up idols, except for their own personal idols after they were saved. When Christ returns, He will destroy all idols from the earth, but today is the Great Commission age. It is not time to destroy idolators and break

down their idols; it is time to preach the gospel to every person to give sinners an opportunity to be saved. This is what we see in the book of Acts. A believer can and should destroy his own idols, but he cannot destroy idols not belonging to him. If he rents a house or apartment that has an idol, he should ask the landlord if he can cover up the idol while he is occupying the facility. If the landlord does not agree, the believer should find another place to rent, but he is not authorized by the Bible to destroy idols that don't belong to him.

Consider Ezekiel 33:12-16, which says men are judged by whether or not they keep the law. Those who believe you can lose your salvation use verses like these to prove their doctrine. But the Bible student must interpret every passage in its context, and the context here is the law of Moses. We know from the New Testament that Moses' law was not written to show men how to be saved. It was written to show men that they are sinners under God's judgment and that they need to flee to Christ for salvation (Romans 3:19-20). The law of Moses required perfect obedience (Ezek. 33:15), which no sinner can give. Compare Galatians 3:10-12.

Consider Matthew 10:5-15. Here Christ sends out His disciples to preach, but note the following restrictions: (1) They were to preach only to Jews (v. 6). (2) They were to preach that the kingdom of Heaven is at hand (v. 7). (3) They were to do miracles (v. 8). (4) They were not to carry any money or extra clothes (v. 9-10). (5) They were to carry no weapons (a staff). This is directly contradictory to the commands given later in the New Testament. Later Christ Himself commanded His disciples to preach to all men (Mat. 28:18-20), to preach the gospel of the death, burial, and resurrection rather than the kingdom of Heaven is at hand (Mark 16:15), to carry both money and a sword (Lk. 22:35-26), and there is no command to do miracles. The

difference between these accounts is that they are spoken under different dispensations. In Matthew 10, Christ sent His disciples to proclaim to Israel that their Messiah and King was present. That is the meaning of the message they preached, saying, "The kingdom of heaven is at hand." It was at hand because the King was standing right there! Thus in Matthew 10 the messengers were to preach only to Jews, were to do miracles to demonstrate that the Messiah had come as foretold in the prophets, were not to provide anything for themselves because it was just a short period of time and they were operating under the direct earthly supervision of the Messiah. Later, after Israel had rejected Christ, He began to prepare for the church age and the preaching of the gospel to the ends of the earth. In the church age, the program of God changed.

Consider the miracles of Christ in the Gospels and the miracles of the apostles in the book of Acts. These are not examples for believers to imitate today. Rather, they were signs to authenticate special ministries. Jesus did miracles to prove that He was the Messiah (John 5:36; 20:30-31). The apostles did miracles to demonstrate that they were the Lord's special apostles (2 Cor. 12:12).

Consider Revelation 13:10. This is written in the context of the reign of the antichrist (see verses 1-8). When verse 10 says, "He that leadeth into captivity shall go into captivity; he that killeth with the sword must be killed with the sword," it refers to the antichrist's law that will require all people to worship him (v. 8). It is not referring to using the sword at any time and in any age. Pacifists who use this verse to forbid the use of weapons in every situation are abusing the Scripture by taking things out of context. Jesus Himself at one point instructed His disciples to get a sword (Lk. 22:36). What Revelation 13:10 is warning about is joining with the antichrist in his war against those who refuse to bow to him.

**c. Dispensational theology allows us to see that not everything in the Bible was written *to* the church-age believer, but everything in the Bible is *for* the church-age believer in that everything has lessons for us.**

See Romans 15:4; 1 Corinthians 10:1-11.

For example, we interpret the prophecies about the return of Christ literally as belonging to the future and the prophecies of the Lord's blessing upon Israel as literal events of the future, but we obtain spiritual application from those prophecies for our Christian lives today. An example is Isaiah 59:18-21. This passage describes the coming of the Lord and the establishment of His kingdom. Verse 18 refers to His judgments during the Great Tribulation; verse 19 refers to the worldwide kingdom; verses 20-21 refer to the restoration of Israel and the fulfillment of the New Covenant. This is the literal interpretation. These things will occur in the future, but there are many applications for church-age believers. Some of these are as follows: God judges sin (v. 18). The Lord is to be feared (v. 19). God is the God of the whole earth (v. 19). The Lord protects His people against the enemy's fiercest attacks (v. 19). The Lord is the Redeemer, the Saviour (v. 20). God demands turning or repentance (v. 20). God offers a covenant of salvation today through Jesus Christ (v. 21). The Spirit of God opens men's hearts and minds to the truth (v. 21). Salvation is eternal (v. 21).

### **The Lie about Dispensationalism**

Some who despise dispensationalism have claimed that it was not taught until the 1800s. Some claim it was started by John Darby, founder of the Plymouth Brethren movement.

While it might be true that a certain form of dispensationalism, such as Darby dispensationalism or

Scofield dispensationalism, might not have been taught until more recent times, it is plain that a belief in dispensations goes back to the apostles.

1. We have seen that the New Testament teaches that there are dispensations during which God has worked out His great purposes. These are also called ages, times, and days. In this sense, dispensationalism is 2,000 years old!

2. The early Christians after the apostles taught a form of dispensationalism. Justin Martyr (A.D. 100-165) believed in four phases of history in God's plan: From Adam to Abraham, from Abraham to Moses, from Moses to Christ, and from Christ to the eternal state. Irenaeus (A.D. 120-202) taught something similar, dividing the dispensations into (1) the creation to the flood, (2) the flood to the law, (3) the law to the gospel, (4) the gospel to the eternal state, (5) the eternal state. In *Ages and Dispensations of the Ante-Nicene Fathers*, Larry Crutchfield observes that some of the early church leaders "came very close to making nearly the same divisions modern dispensationalists do."

3. Influential Baptist leader Morgan Edwards, the founder of Brown University, taught pre-tribulational doctrine in the first half of the 18th century. Between 1742 and 1744 he wrote a book presenting this doctrine. The book was published in 1788 in Philadelphia where Edwards was a pastor. John Bray, who for many years published a challenge that he would give \$500 to anyone who could prove that the pre-tribulational rapture was taught before 1830, was forced to pay out! The *Plains Baptist Challenger* observed: "If Morgan Edwards wrote a book in 1742-44 teaching the Pre-Trib Rapture, then many people must have read it. No doubt there must have been other preachers who read the same Bible that Edwards did and preached the same truth. I wonder if John L. Bray will offer \$500 to anyone teaching the

Pre-Trib Rapture before Morgan Edwards? I hope he does. Of course, Paul taught it, but the enemies of the Pre-Trib Rapture will never accept that. They just explain it away. Of course, the Apostle John taught it in the book of Revelation, but they spiritualize the book of Revelation” (*Plains Baptist Challenger*, Lubbock, Texas, September 1995).

For more about dispensationalism and a warning about “hyper-dispensationalism,” see the report “Study the Bible Dispensationally” at [www.wayoflife.org](http://www.wayoflife.org).

### **13. THE EFFECTUAL BIBLE STUDENT DOES NOT BUILD DOCTRINE ON THE BIBLE’S SILENCE.**

Consider Romans 14:1-6. The theme of Romans 14 is that when the Bible is silent, there is liberty. If the Bible does not contain clear doctrine about something, there is individual liberty to follow the Spirit’s guidance. The two examples that Paul gives are diet and holy days. There are no dietary laws in the New Testament. In such matters, we cannot make laws for everyone, but each individual, family, and church has liberty to make their own decision.

The silence of the Bible cannot be made into laws.

The Church of Christ commits this error. This is why they do not allow musical instruments in their churches. They argue that since we do not read about musical instruments in the New Testament, churches have no authority to use them. In fact, this silence means that churches *are at liberty to use them or not to use them*. There is nothing in the New Testament epistles that would forbid the use of musical instruments. Those who use them, use them to the glory of God (as long as they are used in a spiritual way and not a worldly way), and those who do not use them, do not use them to the glory of God.

The same is true of pulpits, church buildings, baptistries, Sunday Schools, youth ministries, senior ministries, church socials, etc. None of these things are mentioned in the Bible, but none of them are forbidden, either. Paul's rule in Romans 14 is that when the Bible is silent there is liberty, so churches have liberty in these and all other such matters. A church that uses a Sunday School or a youth ministry or a senior ministry to fulfill the Lord's command in Matthew 28:19-20 cannot make laws about this for other churches, and churches that don't use such ministries cannot make laws for those who do. It is a matter of liberty.

It is also a matter of practicality. Many things that a church does are matters of practicality. The Bible doesn't say that a church should have a mid-week prayer meeting or a Sunday morning school or a Sunday evening training union or a Monday evening Bible Institute, but it does say that churches should pray and evangelize and disciple. Each church makes its own decision before the Lord as to how to accomplish the things that the Lord has commanded as it seeks God's will and considers its particular situation.

When church leaders make these decisions, their decisions then become the rule for their church's members (Heb. 10:25; 13:17). But they must be careful not to contradict any clear teaching of the Bible, because if they teach and act contrary to the Bible's teaching they have no authority.

Consider the issue of a nursery for children. Many churches operate a nursery so that infants and very young children can be out of the main preaching service. This is a matter of practicality. It is done so that children don't distract the preaching. Many times I have been in services in which it was very difficult to concentrate on God's Word because of the infants and children. In fact, I have preached in churches in which it was both difficult to preach and difficult to listen

because of infants and small children. Some parents are adamant that their children must be with them at all times, but the Bible doesn't command this, and I don't believe that crying infants and rowdy toddlers honor God's Word. Visitors and unbelievers cannot be expected to have their children properly trained to sit quietly through a preaching service. A nursery is neither right nor wrong, but it can be a wise thing if done properly.

When the Bible is silent there is liberty.

#### **14. THE THE EFFECTUAL BIBLE STUDENT DOES NOT DELVE BEYOND WHAT THE BIBLE SAYS.**

If God did not say something in the Bible, it is because He did not want to say it and we do not need to know that particular thing at this time (Deut. 29:29).

The content of the Bible was settled in heaven before it was given to the holy prophets who wrote it (Psa. 119:89).

For example, the Bible does not tell us everything we would like to know about the sons of God in Genesis 6 or Melchisedek in Genesis 14 or the Two Witnesses in Revelation 11. It is vain to speculate beyond what the Bible actually says.

Many "problems" are created by attempting to answer questions that the Bible doesn't answer. An example is the attempt to harmonize the life of Christ in the four Gospels. God did not chose to give us a perfect timeline of Christ's life, so it is not possible or necessary to harmonize every event with certainty.



# Bible Study Tools

The effectual Bible student uses Bible study tools.

Effective Bible study **REQUIRES WORK** (Prov. 2:1-5). You will get out of your Bible study what you put into it.

“Most great truths do not lie on the surface. They must be brought up into the light by patient toil” (Frank Thompson)

A few Bible study tools well used are better than a thousand less used. Many men and women of God, in fact, have gained a mature understanding of the Scriptures without any tools whatsoever, other than their own well-worn Bibles. The Bible did not have chapter and verse divisions until more than 1300 years after the completion of the New Testament. It was divided into chapters in the 1300s and into verses in the 1500s.

This is not to despise the use of the tools God has made available to us in these times. In this course we will deal with five of the most important Bible study tools: (1) *A good reference Bible*. (2) *Strong’s Exhaustive Concordance*. (3) *Treasury of Scripture Knowledge*. (4) *Way of Life Encyclopedia of the Bible*. (5) Some well-chosen Bible *commentaries*. The Bible student who will master the use of these valuable tools and apply them to diligent, persistent, and heartfelt Bible study will be well on his way to becoming a “workman that needeth not to be ashamed.”

## REFERENCE BIBLES

A reference Bible contains cross references, notes, concordance, maps and other helps in addition to the Bible text.

At the very least, it is extremely helpful to have a study Bible with cross-references and a concordance. Examples are the Old Scofield Reference Bible, Thompson Chain Reference Bible, and the King James Study Bible. (For more information on this see “Reference Bibles” at the Way of Life web site.)

## **Things to Beware of**

1. *Study Bibles often Use the Wrong Greek Text and Undependable English Versions.* Most of the newer study Bibles are based on undependable English versions and incorporate corrupt readings from the modern critical Greek New Testament. These will have notes that say things such as “oldest and best manuscripts omit this verse” (Matthew 17:21) or “oldest and best manuscripts read he who instead of God” (1 Tim. 3:16). But this is misleading, because what they should say, in the majority of cases, is that one or two or at most a handful of old manuscripts make these changes whereas the vast majority of manuscripts read the same as the Received Greek New Testament underlying King James Bible. The *Old Scofield Reference Bible*, though based on the King James Bible, contains marginal notes supporting the modern critical Greek text. The *New Scofield Reference Bible* places the textual changes directly into the Bible text.

2. *Study Bibles Can Contain Heretical Notes.* Another problem with reference Bibles is that many of them contain false or misleading notes. As with commentaries, the student must be careful to “*prove all things*” (1 Thess. 5:21) and not merely believe everything that is written.

For example, Dake’s *Annotated Reference Bible*, edited by Finis Jennings Dake and published in 1961, was written by a Pentecostal, and his theology is reflected in his comments. A pamphlet that accompanies the Bible from the publisher claims that Dake received his teaching by divine revelation.

Dake taught that there was a pre-Adamite world ruled by Lucifer between Genesis 1:1 and 1:2, that healing is guaranteed for the Christian, that tongues are for today, that the believer can lose his salvation, that God has a body, that each member of the Trinity has his own soul and spirit, that God created the races to “reproduce after their kind,” and many other fanciful and false things.

Another example is the *New Oxford Annotated Bible*, edited by Bruce Metzger and Herbert May. It is filled with heretical modernistic statements. The notes claim that the Pentateuch is “a matrix of myth, legend, and history.” The worldwide flood of Noah’s day is said to be a mere “tradition” based on “heightened versions of local inundations.” The book of Job is called an “ancient folktale.” The book of Isaiah supposedly was written by at least three men. Jonah is called a “popular legend.” The *HarperCollins Study Bible* is also filled with this type of modernistic teaching.

The notes in the *New Jerusalem Bible* and *New American Bible* contain Roman Catholic heresies. For example, they say that Matthew 16:18 refers to the pope.

## **STRONG’S EXHAUSTIVE CONCORDANCE**

It was produced by James Strong (1822-1916), a conservative Methodist who was proficient in biblical Greek and Hebrew as well as some other ancient languages. As a professor at two Bible colleges, he defended biblical inspiration against the onslaught of Modernism. He spent 35 years compiling his concordance, which was first published in 1890.

We believe it is the most important single Bible study tool ever published.

## Design

1. Strong's Concordance has two major sections: the concordance itself and the Hebrew and Greek dictionaries in the back.

2. In the concordance, the Bible words are listed alphabetically in bold, all-capitalized letters. The words are followed by the list of verses in which the word appears. The Bible student can see the immediate context of the word as it appears in each verse. At the end of each line is a number corresponding to the Hebrew or Greek word which is translated by the English word. Numbers for Hebrew words are straight or normal, while numbers for Greek word are slanted or italics.

3. The Bible student can see how many different Greek or Hebrew words have been translated into that particular English word.

4. By looking up the number in the Hebrew or Greek dictionary, the Bible student can find the following information: (1) English spelling and pronunciation, (2) the etymology or history of the word, (3) a definition of the word, and (4) other English translations from this Hebrew or Greek word.

## How to Use the Strong's Concordance

### 1. Use the Concordance to find verses.

The first use of a concordance is to help the student find verses in the Bible. When searching for a particular verse, *it is important to choose a word that is as unique as possible*. If you choose a common word, there will be too many verses listed and it will be difficult to find the one you are looking for. For

example, suppose you are trying to find the verse that says “Delight thyself also in the LORD; and he shall give thee the desires of thine heart.” You can’t remember the reference, but you remember some of the words in the verse. If you tried to look up “thyself” you would find nearly 200 verses, and if you tried to find “heart” you would find 767 verses. Instead, you should look for “delight” or “desires.” There are 52 verses in the Bible that contain the word “delight” and only 3 that contain “desires.”

## **2. Use the Concordance to study the meaning of words.**

Word study is the most basic of all forms of Bible study. You can’t possibly understand a passage of the Scripture until first you understand the individual words. The following important four steps are used to find the fullest possible meaning of a Bible word in the Strong’s Concordance:

- a. First, look up the meaning of the Greek or Hebrew word.
- b. Second, see how the Greek or Hebrew word is translated elsewhere.
- c. Third, examine the immediate context. Always be careful *first* to interpret the word in its own immediate context.
- d. Fourth, see how the word is used in other passages. Bible words also interpret themselves within the context of key passages.

Let’s use some examples to illustrate this method:

HOPE (Heb. 6:17)

(1) 1680 “elpis” (el-pece’), from a primary elpo (to anticipate, usually with pleasure); expectation (abstractly or concretely) or confidence.

(2) faith, hope

(3) Heb. 6:17-19. Here we see that hope means something that is absolutely certain. It is based on God's promise (v. 18). It is a "strong consolation" (v. 18). It is sure and steadfast (v. 19). It is called an anchor (v. 19) Thus, there is nothing uncertain about the believer's hope.

SIMPLE (Rom. 16:18)

(1) Old Testament: 6612 "paethiy" (peth-ee'), silly (i.e. seducible)

New Testament: 172 "akakos" (ak'-ak-os), not bad, i.e. (objectively) innocent or (subjectively) unsuspecting.

(2) foolish, simple(-icity, one); harmless, simple

(3) In the context, we see that "simple" means one who is easily misled, one who is not careful in testing things by the Bible.

(4) Two other verses that use the term "simple" are Prov. 14:15 and Prov. 22:3. These verses teach us that "simple" means gullible and careless.

BEWRAY (Prov. 29:24)

(1) 5046 "nagad" (naw-gad), properly, to front, i.e. stand boldly out opposite; by implication (causatively), to manifest; figuratively, to announce (always by word of mouth to one present); specifically, to expose, predict, explain, praise

(2) bewray, X certainly, certify, declare(-ing), denounce, expound, X fully, messenger, plainly, profess, rehearse, report, shew (forth), speak, X surely, tell, utter. For example, the Hebrew word is translated "sheweth forth" in Prov. 12:17.

(3) The context is warning about having intimate knowledge of evil and not doing anything about it. Thus, even without consulting a dictionary, we would assume that the word "bewray" means to expose.

(4) When we seek at the word "bewray" in Pro. 27:16 and Matt. 26:73, we see that it means to discover, to reveal, to uncover, or to expose something.

## TAKE NO THOUGHT (Matt. 6:25,28,31,34)

- (1) 3309 “merimnao” (mer-im-nah'-o), to be anxious about
- (2) (be, have) care(-ful), take thought
- (3) In the immediate context, “take no thought” refers to being full of worldly care in the manner of unsaved people (v. 32). It also means not putting God first (v. 33).
- (3) By comparing this phrase in 1 Sam. 9:5, we see that to “take thought” means to be anxious, fretful.

## MYSTERY (Matt. 13:10-11)

- (1) 3466 “musterion” (moos-tay'-ree-on), from a derivative of muo (to shut the mouth); a secret or "mystery" (through the idea of silence imposed by initiation into religious rites)
- (2) mystery
- (3) The context tells us that a mystery is something that was not revealed in the Old Testament. The Old Testament foretold the kingdom of heaven by the coming of the Messiah and the establishment of his glorious throne; but the Old Testament prophets did not foresee this present church age, during which the kingdom will be delayed and God is calling out a people from all nations. During this time, the Devil will be allowed to work and sow corruption in the midst of God's kingdom.
- (4) When we look at other passages that use the term “mystery,” we see plainly that it means things that were previously hidden but now are revealed (Rom. 16:25; Eph. 3:3-5; Col. 1:26).

## 3. Use the Concordance for topical studies.

I use the concordance in this way continually. For example, this week I studied the Bible word “fruit” using a concordance, seeking to better understand spiritual fruit in the Christian life.

To use the concordance in this way, the Bible student must first determine what words are associated with that topic.

- a. For example, if you are studying SATAN, you will need to look up not only Satan, but also devil, devils, god of this world, prince of the power of the air, Beelzebub, serpent, etc.
- b. Or if you are studying the topic of CHASTENING, you would need to look up all of its forms — chasten, chastened, chastenest, chasteneth, chastening, chastise, chastised, chastisement, chastiseth — plus associated words such as admonish, affliction, convince, correction, rebuke, reproof, suffer, trouble, and, trial.

## **TREASURY OF SCRIPTURE KNOWLEDGE**

The best commentary on the Bible is the Bible itself, and herein lies the value of the *Treasury of Scripture Knowledge*.

It was first published circa 1836. The original *Treasury* had roughly 4,000 cross references; the newer editions have more than 500,000 references. The original was compiled by Thomas Scott (1747-1821), an Anglican minister who converted from Unitarianism.

The *New Treasury of Scripture Knowledge* edited by Jerome Smith contains more than 670,000 references, plus extensive additional topical and word studies, but we cannot recommend it because of the undependable nature of the notes. For example, the note by 1 Timothy 3:16 claims the word “God” should be omitted, and the note by Acts 8:38 claims that baptism is not by immersion.

1. Use cross references to find quotations from another part of the Bible.



For this purpose a good reference Bible is actually more useful than the *Treasury of Scripture Knowledge*, because there are not as many references to sort through.

Matthew 26-27 (first note 26:56)

26:15 - Zech. 11:12

26:23 - Ps. 41:9

26:31 - Zech. 13:7

26:38 - Is. 53:3

26:50 - Ps. 41:9

26:55 - Is. 53:8

26:63 - Is. 53:7

26:64 - Dan. 7:13

26:67 - Is. 53:5,7; 50:6

27:3 - Zech. 11:13

27:12-14 - Is. 53:7

27:22 - Is. 49:7

27:26 - Is. 50:6

27:29 - Ps. 35:15; 69:7

27:34 - Ps. 69:21

27:35 - Ps. 22:16, 14

27:35 - Ps. 22:18

27:36 - Ps. 22:17

27:38 - Is. 53:12

27:39 - Ps. 22:6,7

27:41 - Ps. 22:12

27:42 - Is. 53:4

27:43 - Ps. 22:8

27:45 - Is. 50:3

27:46 - Ps. 22:1

27:48 - Ps. 69:21

27:57-60 - Is. 53:9

## 2. Use cross references to find the meaning of verses.

This is one of the most important means of finding the interpretation of passages, because you are comparing Scripture with Scripture.

Matt. 11:14 -- Mal. 4:5-6; Lk. 1:17

## 3. Use cross references to find more meaning from verses.

Cross-references can help the student find companion passages that will provide additional meaning. For example, compare Christ's healing of the withered hand in Matt. 12:9-14 with the same account in Mark 3 and Luke 6. Mark adds that Jesus "looked round about him with anger" (Mk. 3:5), and Luke adds that the Pharisees "were filled with madness" (Lk. 6:11).

## **WAY OF LIFE ENCYCLOPEDIA OF THE BIBLE & CHRISTIANITY**

Many preachers have told us that it is their favorite Bible study tool. Missionary author Jack Moorman says: "The encyclopedia is excellent; the entries show a 'distilled spirituality.'"

We must sound a warning about the rationalism and incipient modernism that has infected most of the Bible dictionaries and encyclopedias. Consider the *International Standard Bible Encyclopedia* (ISBE). It is widely respected as an evangelical Bible study tool and it does contain a vast amount of helpful information, yet its statements on the Bible's inspiration, canonization, and preservation are undependable and dangerous. Consider the following example:

“When the actual work of writing began no one who sent forth an epistle or framed a gospel had before him the definite purpose of contributing toward the formation of what we call ‘the Bible.’ ... They had no thought of creating a new sacred literature” (“Canon, New Testament,” *International Standard Bible Encyclopedia*).

This is false doctrine. The apostles and prophets who authored the New Testament *knew* that they were writing under divine inspiration. They knew that the Lord Jesus Christ had promised that the Holy Spirit would guide them “into all truth” (Jn. 14:26; 16:13). Paul considered his writings to be authoritative (1 Cor. 14:37; Gal. 1:11-12; Eph. 3:4-5; Col. 1:25-26, 28; 1 Thess. 2:13; 3:6-14) and expected them to be circulated from church to church (Gal. 1:2; Col. 4:16; 1 Thess. 5:27). Paul stated that Scripture was being written by the New Testament prophets under inspiration of the Holy Spirit (Rom. 16:25-26; 1 Cor. 2:6-16; Eph. 3:4-5). Peter said that the word being preached by the apostles was the Word of God (1 Pet. 1:25). He put the commandments of the apostles on the same level as those of the Old Testament prophets (2 Pet. 3:2). Peter called the Epistles of Paul Scripture and put them on the same level of authority as the Old Testament (2 Pet. 3:15-16). The book of Revelation was written as the prophetic Word of God (Rev. 1:3; 21:5; 22:18-19). Luke claimed perfect understanding of the gospel of Christ, which can only come by divine revelation (Luke 1:3). Paul quoted from the Gospel of Luke and called it Scripture, putting it on the same level as Deuteronomy (compare 1 Tim. 5:18; Deut. 25:4; Lk. 10:7). In warning of false teachers, Jude refers to the “words which were spoken before of the apostles of our Lord Jesus Christ” (Jude 17). John upheld apostolic teaching as the absolute standard of truth (1 John 4:6).

The Bible student will not find any such heresy in the *Way of Life Encyclopedia*.

The fourth edition contains 560 large-format pages of information with over 6,000 entries and over 7,000 cross-references.

1. Use it to find the meaning of practically any word in the Bible. In addition to the editor's own extensive doctrinal word studies and the consultation of many other resources, we have liberally included definitions from the famous Webster's 1828 *American Dictionary of the English Language*.

2. Use it to study antiquated words and difficult phrases from the King James Bible. (Examples are Abusers of Themselves, Besom, Blood Guiltiness, Charger, Conversation, God Speed, Itching Ears, Puffed Up, Quench, Set On, Set Them At One, Superfluity of Naughtiness, Taken with the Manner.)

3. Use it to do topical studies, to study doctrine.

The Encyclopedia features an extensive system of cross references. (For example, consider the cross references listed with the topics Church, Eternal Security, Fear of God, God, Heaven, Hell, Holy Spirit, Jesus Christ, Judgment, Prophecy, Salvation, Sin, Soul, Spirit, Trinity.)

4. Use it to study extra-biblical Christian terms. (Examples are Apostate, Apocrypha, Catechism, Christmas, Cremation, Denomination, Diocese, Dispensationalism, Easter, Faith Promise, Infallible, Parallelism, Protestant, Rapture.)

5. Use it to study various issues relating to morality and practical Christian living. (Examples are Adultery, Capital Punishment, Child Training, Cremation, Dancing, Divorce, Modesty, Pacifism, Polygamy, Sodomy, Wine.)

6. Use it to study Old Testament types. (Examples are Ark, Day of Atonement, Boaz, Brass Serpent, Candlestick, Laver, High Priest, Joseph, Passover.)

7. Use it to find the meaning of Bible customs. (Agriculture, Calendar, Military, Money, Music, Weights and Measures, etc.)

8. Use it to study Bible Prophecy. (Abomination of Desolation, Allegorical, Antichrist, Babylon, Covenant, Daniel, Day of the Lord, Double Fulfillment, Ethiopia, Gog, Great Tribulation, Kingdom of God, Judgment, Millennium, Revelation, Second Coming, Seventy Weeks.)

9. Use it to do research into the Christian denominations and movements. (Anglican Church, Assemblies of God, Brethren, Charismatic Movement, Eastern Orthodoxy, Episcopal Church, Evangelical, Fundamentalism, Lutheran, Mennonite, Methodist, Modernism, Presbyterian, Unitarian, United Church of Christ, World Council of Churches.)

10. Use it to do research into cults and false groups. (Charismatic Movement, Christian Science, Churches of Christ, Ecumenical Movement, Jehovah's Witnesses, Modernism, Mormonism, Neo-orthodoxy, Roman Catholic Church, Seventh-day Adventism, World Council of Churches.)

11. Use it to study the church. The Encyclopedia is a practical manual for church leaders and missionaries. (Examples are Apostle, Immersion Baptism, Infant Baptism, Church Discipline, Deacon, Evangelism, Footwashing, Lord's Supper, Ordination, Pastor.)

12. Use it to study the subject of Bible versions. (See, for example, the articles on Erasmus, King James Bible,

Masoretic Text, Preservation, Pseudepigrapha, Greek Received Text, Westcott-Hort.)

13. Use it for preaching and teaching. (The doctrinal outlines are each to teach from. For example, Angels, Bible, Church, Cremation, Doctrine, Eternal Security, Evolution, Heaven, Hell, Holy Spirit, Jesus Christ, Prophecy, Resurrection.)

## **BIBLE COMMENTARIES**

Two common problems in using commentaries:

1. Leaning on them too much.

The Bible student should go to the Bible and dig it out for himself. For this, he must get a good understanding of how to interpret the Bible.

2. Despising them completely.

On several occasions I have heard people condemn commentaries. When I was a young Christian, I determined to read and study the Bible alone and to forgo consulting any commentaries or other extra-biblical sources. I did this religiously for a few weeks, and I can testify that the Lord made it plain to me that I need help from men and that He was not going to give me everything by direct enlightenment. It is not that the Bible is weak or insufficient; it is that I am only one weak man and can't possibly know and understand everything without help. When I rejected the use of commentaries, I was left with my own meager resources. And though I have some gifts in understanding and teaching the Bible, I am at best only a very puny man with very limited ideas. Any man who is honest before God will acknowledge that most of his knowledge and understanding was gleaned from other men. God has ordained this. That is why we start

life as a child and are dependent upon parents and tutors, and even as we grow older we remain very dependent upon the help of others.

This is why I believe in good commentaries. If I were shut up on a remote island with only the Bible, I am sure the Lord would give me everything I needed directly through His Word, but that is not His normal way of operation. He has given ministry-gifted men to the churches and He uses them to edify the saints (Ephesians 4:11-14; 2 Tim. 2:2). I praise the Lord that some of the excellent teaching of past and present generations has been captured in print so I can possess it and consult it whenever I please. Such material is priceless.

Some preachers seem to be afraid of books. I once heard a preacher say, “We don’t need more books; we need more preaching.” Yet a good Christian book is simply good preaching. While it is true that there are many heretical books available in the average Christian bookstore (we have warned about that in our video presentation and free eBook “Dangers in Christian Bookstores”), it is not true that books themselves are wrong. God wrote a book! In Psalm 45:1, He said, “*My tongue is the pen of a ready writer.*” Indeed, God has a powerful pen, and what a Book He wrote! The apostles communicated with the churches and individual believers through writing, and if they had possessed printing presses I have no doubt that they would have used them. Men of God through the centuries have valued the written and printed page. Charles Spurgeon advised the preachers in his Bible College to “sell your shirt and buy books.” Recently the *History Channel* made a survey of a wide range of knowledgeable people in various fields on the most important invention of history, and the majority picked the printing press.

Charles Spurgeon did not have a lot of patience with preachers who despise commentaries. He addressed the following statement to his Bible School students:

“Of course, you are not such wiseacres as to think or say that you can expound Scripture without assistance from the works of divines and learned men who have laboured before you in the field of exposition. If you are of that opinion, pray remain so, for you are not worth the trouble of conversion, and like a little coterie who think with you, would resent the attempt as an insult to your infallibility. It seems odd, that certain men who talk so much of what the Holy Spirit reveals to themselves, should think so little of what he has revealed to others. My chat this afternoon is not for these great originals, but for you who are content to learn of holy men, taught of God, and mighty in the Scriptures. It has been the fashion of late years to speak against the use of commentaries. If there were any fear that the expositions of Matthew Henry, Gill, Scott, and others, would be exalted into Christian Targums, we would join the chorus of objectors, but the existence or approach of such a danger we do not suspect. The temptations of our times lie rather in empty pretensions to novelty of sentiment, than in a slavish following of accepted guides. A respectable acquaintance with the opinions of the giants of the past, might have saved many an erratic thinker from wild interpretations and outrageous inferences. Usually, we have found the despisers of commentaries to be men who have no sort of acquaintance with them; in their case, it is the opposite of familiarity which has bred contempt” (Spurgeon, *Two Lectures Addressed to the Students of the Pastor’s College, Metropolitan Tabernacle*, <http://www.book-academy.co.uk/lectures/index.html>).

Commentaries must be judged carefully by the Scriptures  
(Acts 17:11; 1 Cor. 14:29; 1 Thess. 5:21).



No commentator is infallible. The wise Bible student will carefully test everything the commentator says by comparing it to Scripture itself. Beware of the presumption of commentators who try to add to the Word of God.

- a. For example, Jamieson, Fausset, Brown comments on Genesis 4:3 “*And in process of time it came to pass, that Cain brought of the fruit of the ground an offering unto the LORD,*” as follows: “Hebrew, ‘at the end of days,’ probably on the Sabbath.” In fact, there is nothing in the Hebrew to signify that it was the sabbath, and the KJV translation is perfectly fine.
- b. In 1 Corinthians 1:16, Jamieson, Fausset, Brown comments: “It is likely that such ‘households’ included infants (Ac 16:33). The history of the Church favors this view, as infant baptism was the usage from the earliest ages.” In fact, this is unscriptural nonsense. Though Paul baptized “the household of Stephanas” (1 Cor. 1:16), there is no mention of infants. In fact, in 1 Corinthians 16:15 we are told that this household addicted themselves to the ministry. This could not be said of infants. It is not legitimate to build doctrine on the silence of Scripture. Doctrine can only be established legitimately upon a clear “thus saith the Lord.” And what did the Lord Jesus teach: “*He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved; but he that believeth not shall be damned*” (Mk. 16:16). It is obvious that an infant is incapable of believing on Christ as his Lord and Saviour and is not therefore a proper candidate for baptism.
- c. In his commentary on Noah’s flood, Matthew Henry claims that Noah sent out the raven and dove on the sabbath. He says, “This intimates that it was done on the sabbath day, which, it should seem, Noah religiously observed in the ark.” In fact, Henry, one of my favorite commentators, was

letting his imagination run wild, for there is not even a hint of such a thing in Scripture.

These are examples of presumption on the part of the commentator.

The Bible student should know the theological position of the commentator.

It is important to know the theological position of the commentator, as this will usually be reflected in his notes.

For example, Adam Clarke, a Methodist, inserts infant baptism into his commentary on Matthew 28:19, even though there is no mention of such a thing in the Scripture: “But, certainly, no argument can be drawn from this concession against the baptism of children. When the Gentiles and Jews had received the faith and blessings of the gospel, it is natural enough to suppose they should wish to get their children incorporated with the visible Church of Christ; especially if, as many pious and learned men have believed, baptism succeeded to circumcision, which I think has never yet been disproved” (Adam Clarke’s *Commentary on the Bible*).

Along this line, most of the most widely-used commentaries are written from an a-millennial perspective. This is true of Matthew Henry, Jamieson, Fausset-Brown, John Wesley, John Calvin, Adam Clarke, Albert Barnes, Matthew Poole, and John Gill.

We have published many Pre-tribulational commentaries in the *Treasury of Rare Dispensational Commentaries*, available in the Fundamental Baptist Digital Library ([www.wayoflife.org](http://www.wayoflife.org)).

**Helpful one-volume commentaries:** Wiersbe's Expository Outlines, Willmington's Guide to the Bible, Unger's Bible Handbook, Halley's Bible Handbook, Believer's Bible Commentary, Bible Knowledge Commentary, Unger's Commentary on the Old Testament, Explore the Book J. Sidlow Baxter

## **Helpful larger commentaries**

See the report entitled "Bible Commentaries" at the Way of Life web site.

## **SWORDSEARCHER**

- I'm not going to train you how to use these programs but simply demonstrate some of the features
- There are training tools to teach you how to use the software

The Swordsearcher Bible Program contains many of our recommended study tools in one convenient package. Version 5.1.1 has 14 Bible texts; 10 dictionaries and encyclopedias (including the complete 1828 *WEBSTER'S DICTIONARY OF THE ENGLISH LANGUAGE*, the complete multi-volume *INTERNATIONAL STANDARD BIBLE ENCYCLOPEDIA*, *Smith's Bible Dictionary*, *American Tract Society Bible Dictionary*, *Fausett's Bible Dictionary*, *Easton's Bible Dictionary*, *Hitchcock Bible Dictionary*, *Treasury of Scripture Knowledge*, *Torrey's Topical Textbook*); 24 commentaries (including Matthew Henry unabridged, Barnes--both Old and New Testament, Jamieson-Fausset-Brown, Abbott, Burkitt, Adam Clarke, Keil and Delitzsch, John Gill's *Exposition of the Bible*, Spurgeon's *Treasury of David*, Lightfoot's commentary on the Gospels, Newell's commentary on Romans, and Larkin's commentaries on Daniel and Revelation); 3 ancient pre-KJV English versions (*WYCLIFFE*, *TYNDALE*, AND *THE BISHOPS*); the

ORIGINAL 1611 KJV; 2 Greek New Testaments (the Received Text and the Westcott and Hort); 4 foreign language versions (Spanish, German, French, Dutch); 4 topical Bible guides (*Thompson Chain Reference*, *Nave's Topical Bible*, *Torrey's New Topical Textbook*, *Condensed Biblical Cyclopedia*); other books; and over 360 maps, charts, and illustrations. The Swordsearcher Bible program is available from Way of Life Literature, P.O. Box 610368, Port Huron, MI 48061, 866-295-4143 (toll free), [fbns@wayoflife.org](mailto:fbns@wayoflife.org), <http://www.wayoflife.org/>. Swordsearcher modules for the *Way of Life Encyclopedia of the Bible & Christianity* and *Things Hard to Be Understood: A Handbook of Biblical Difficulties* can also be obtained from Way of Life Literature.

- I run it on Mac via Parallels Windows emulator

## Layout

### Find passage

- via reference jer. 9:24
- search by words (lovingkindness judgment righteousness)
- advanced search

### Using KJV with Strong's

- takes place of Strong's
- takes place of old Englishman's Greek and Hebrew concordances

### Using TSK

### Using Commentaries

- my favorite Barnes, Gill, JFB, MH, Poole, Pulpit, Trapp
- Gaebelein is premillennial

### Using Dictionaries

- I don't do my Bible reading on the Mac because it is too easy to get distracted

## **OLIVE TREE**

On my iPhone and iPad, I use the Olive Tree Bible app. It has a very efficient and simple Bible reading/study interface.

It has available many of the commentaries I use the most, including Matthew Henry, Barnes, Believer's Bible Commentary, Bible Knowledge Commentary, Jamieson, Fausset, and Brown, John Phillips, and New Unger's.

The iPad is a great tool for computer illiterate people. I know several Bible students who love to study the Bible on the iPad with Olive Tree even though they never used a computer and never had an interest in using one until they discovered the iPad.

## **SHOULD I BUY BOOKS OR COMPUTER SOFTWARE?**

Computer Bible research tools are not necessarily for everyone. While it is true that Bible research can be more efficient on a computer than with books, this does not mean that such is always the case. The computer is only more efficient if it is readily available when you need it and if the Bible student can use it properly and in a godly manner. *Books well used are certainly more efficient than a computer not used! Books that produce godliness and wisdom are more to be desired than computer programs that distract from the same.*

If you have already incorporated the computer into your daily Bible study, you know by experience that computer Bible study software can be very efficient. There are many Christians, though, who do not use a computer, who use it

only occasionally, or who use it only for an occupation other than Bible study, and who are asking themselves the question, "In making further additions to my Bible study library, should I obtain books or should I turn to computer software?" Let me offer some tips that might help you answer that.

*First, if you do already have a computer, ask yourself if you are committed to using that computer for your daily Bible studies.* It is one thing to own a computer or to have access to one and even to use the computer for various other tasks; it is another thing to integrate the use of the computer into your personal daily Bible study routine. There are many people who own computers but who do not have ready access to that computer every day for their Bible study. Perhaps the computer is shared by several family members and is kept in a central location for that purpose. If that is the case, you might not be in the habit of using the computer for your daily Bible studies even though there might be a computer in your home. If such is the case, I would recommend that you continue to purchase and use books until you can obtain a computer which is used strictly by you for your own studies. For Bible software to be practical for you, it must be readily available every time you do Bible research. The computer must be handy, it must be turned on, and it must be mastered. Otherwise, you will tend not to use the computer for Bible study even if you own Bible search software because it will not be convenient. *Owning Bible study software is not the same as using Bible study software!*

*Second, if you do not already have a computer, ask yourself if you are truly committed to obtaining one, mastering it, keeping control of it, and then actually using it for Bible study.* Many computer programs are purchased which are not used. This is a waste of money. There is a real learning curve with computers. The personal computer is easier than ever to use,

but to master its use still requires dedication and time. Children seem to take to them naturally, but that is not always the case with the “old fogies.” If you are contemplating purchasing a computer and incorporating it into your Bible study routine, I would encourage you to go for it. It is doubtful that you will regret it, IF YOU ARE COMMITTED TO GIVE ENOUGH TIME TO THE PROJECT TO GAIN A MASTERY OVER IT. Otherwise, you are probably wasting your time and money. As noted previously, books well used are certainly more efficient than a computer not used.

*Third, are you easily distracted from your study of God’s Word?* Do you find yourself daydreaming a lot? Do you find your attention drawn away from the Lord by the thought of other things entering in? If so, you might be wise to avoid trying to incorporate the computer into your Bible studies. I have used a computer every day for 24 years and I am sold on its value, but I also have a ministry somewhat different from that of many preachers, because of the publishing and research aspects. I do not believe the computer has produced more godliness in the ministry and I do not believe it is necessary for the ministry. It can as easily be a distraction and a hindrance as it can be a help. I have seen preachers waste many hours simply playing with their computers. One can play with his computer even when he isn’t using computer games! A man might say, “Look at all the time I save with my Bible search program.” That is no doubt true, but the other side of that coin is to consider all the hours you might be wasting by merely playing around with your computer. Each man must answer these questions for himself. A man who is able to use his books without distraction to study God’s Word in such a manner that he draws near to the Lord and increases in holiness and wisdom is far ahead of the man who owns and masters the most expensive Bible software but who frequently gets distracted from godly worship of Christ and

serious meditation on God's Word by the bells and whistles of his software and of his computer system.

*It is also important that a man get the right software.* An important challenge was contained in a note I received from a brother in the Lord: "I love Logos [Bible software] but I would not suggest it to anyone unless they had excellent computer skills and the right computer. Also, I believe Logos is an excellent tool for the advanced student of the word but not for everybody. When I first purchased Logos, I spent all my time 'playing with the computer' rather than studying God's Word. I was ready to toss Logos. If I had to do it all over again, I wouldn't buy Logos even though I do realize its potential." In contrast to Logos, which has a higher learning curve, are programs like Parsons *Quick Verse*, the *Online Bible*, and *SwordSearcher*, which are easier to use.

I am saying that there is danger with technology. High technology does not equate to deep spirituality. It can be a servant, or it can be a master. Each man must make this determination for himself. I am merely saying that you don't need to be intimidated into putting away your books unless you are certain that is God's will for you. The greatest sermons ever preached and the greatest Bible study tools and commentaries ever made were produced with BOOKS WITHOUT COMPUTER ASSISTANCE!

If you can use a computer effectively and spiritually for your Bible study, that is great. If not, that is also great.

## **REVIEW QUESTIONS ON USING BIBLE STUDY TOOLS**

1. A few tools \_\_\_\_\_ used are better than a thousand \_\_\_\_\_ used.
3. What Bible verse says we are to prove all things?
3. What are two things to beware of about study Bibles?



4. What was the doctrinal position of the editor of the Dake Reference Bible?
5. In the estimation of the author of this course, what is the most important Bible study tool ever published?
6. When searching for a particular verse, it is important to choose a word that is as \_\_\_\_\_ as possible.
7. Fill in the following blanks from the four steps in studying a word of the Bible using Strong's Concordance.  
Look up the meaning of the \_\_\_\_\_ or \_\_\_\_\_ word.  
See how the word is translated \_\_\_\_\_.  
Examine the immediate \_\_\_\_\_.  
See how the word is used in other \_\_\_\_\_.
8. To use the concordance to study topics, the Bible student must first determine what words are \_\_\_\_\_ with that topic.
9. What Bible study book contains 570,000 cross-references?
10. The best commentary on the Bible is the \_\_\_\_\_.
11. What is the most basic use for cross-references?
12. How does searching cross-references help to interpret a Bible passage?

***Way of Life Literature***

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The Effectual Bible Student

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