

Why and How Should We Study the Bible?

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Recorded on January 19, 2019

I want to start off by describing a typical scenario that I think all of us have experienced at one time or another in the Church. It gets close to the end of the day and we're tired and weary but we realize that we haven't studied our Bible that day. Thus we feel guilty. So we go sit in an easy chair and then we think, what to study—we haven't thought about it at all, so, what to study? Well, we might get an old booklet off the shelf from one of the churches of God and start reading that, or (I think we've all done this) close our eyes, place the Bible in our lap and then just open it to a section, and say, okay, God inspired me to read that so I'll read this page. After a few minutes we read, then we get sleepy and nod off and we call it a day, but at least we feel good about ourselves, because we think to ourselves, I got my Bible study in that day.

We've all done that, we've all been guilty of that. With that in mind let's go to a specific command by God about our Bible study. Let's go to 2 Timothy 2 and we'll read just one verse, verse 15. Paul is talking to this young minister and he's giving some advice—yes, it's advice, but it's also a commandment, as we're going to see as we go through. By the time we're finished there's going to be no doubt God wants us to study His word.

2 Timothy 2:15 *Study to shew thyself approved unto God [study to show yourself approved], a workman that needeth not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth. (KJV)*

It doesn't say to study the word of God, but it's obvious to anybody who reads God's word, what is there for us but to study God's word? What else can we study but God's word? It's interesting the Greek word for *approved* (*dokimos*) that we've covered before (relative to 1 Corinthians 11:19, where it says divisions are necessary to show those who are approved), is exactly the same word and it means "currency after it has been assayed", or it can mean "tried". It says here if we put it in that context, it means study to show yourself approved unto God.

If the people there were listening and reading this letter at the time Paul wrote it, the word *dokimos* would have been easily understood because it was applied to coinage. If a coin was *dokimos* that meant it was of the proper purity and the proper weight to be valued for a certain amount in trade. So if the coin was *dokimos* that meant it was a legitimate coin to be used in exchange for goods; in other words, it wasn't fake—it wasn't a counterfeit coin.

So God is saying to us, study to show yourself legitimate to Me, approved of Me, if you study. It goes on to say, *a workman* (the Greek means a toiler or a laborer), which means this isn't a casual thing—you roll up your sleeves, you get sweaty, you dig the ditch or whatever needs to be done; it's not something casual. It goes on to say not to

be ashamed for doing this because you are rightly dividing the word of truth. The term *rightly dividing* is one Greek word and it means “make a straight cut”. So if you are dividing two things you want a straight cut so you can split one from the other. It can also mean “to dissect correctly”; in other words, correctly dissect and understand the details of God’s word.

The point is, God commands us to study for our benefit, not because He is over us with a whip and a chair but because He wants us to benefit from studying His word. I’ve mentioned at least once, maybe twice, the fact that we visited Mark and Michelle Mickelson back in the spring of 2016, and Mark was recovering from his cancer surgery. We got into a discussion of who the God of the Old Testament was—he asked me that question—then we covered some scriptures that slapped me in the face as far as my previous beliefs were concerned. So on the way home and all through the summer the question just ate at me and ate at me, and I finally came to the conclusion—because looking at it as much as I did during those weeks and months—I realized that the tentacles of this understanding go everywhere in the Bible.

I thought to myself, this is too monumental a subject to sit down in my easy chair at the end of the day and put the Bible in my lap and try to discern—it couldn’t be done that way. So I get up now between four and five, as my wife will tell you, and I can get a lot of study in before I start the day. For me, I’m a morning person, so I’m more mentally alert in the morning and the house is quiet; it’s before sunrise and the phone isn’t ringing, and people aren’t coming to the door, and it is a very quiet time to be with God. Frankly, it’s changed my life—revolutionized my life. With all of this being mentioned and what we’ve all been through, it leads us to our subject today, which is: Why and How Should We Study the Bible?

I’ve discovered, through people calling and e-mailing me, that there are some who don’t know how to study the Bible. They’ve never been taught, they’ve never heard a sermon, they’ve never read anything about it, so they have a kind of take-it-as-it-comes, casual approach to Bible study, so we’re going to cover that today. Let’s go now to 2 Timothy 3:16—that’s the place to start. Notice what we’re told, this is the foundation:

2 Timothy 3:16 *All scripture is given by inspiration of God ...* (KJV)

Given by inspiration of God is one Greek word and it means “divinely breathed”. That one Greek word comes from two Greek words, one meaning “God”—*Theos*—and the other meaning “a breeze”. So it means a breeze, breathed-out by God.

16 continued) .. *and is profitable ...* (KJV)

It’s not a negative, it’s a positive. The Greek word for *profitable* just means “helpful” and “advantageous”, and we’ll find out it is so, in so many ways. Paul gives Timothy, and us today, four areas where it’s profitable.

16 continued) ... [1] *for doctrine*, [2] *for reproof*, [3] *for correction*, [4] *for instruction in righteousness*:

Then verse 17 tells us why.

17) ... *that the man of God may be complete, thoroughly equipped for every good work.* (NKJV)

So we're told here that scripture equips us to do every good work, and what is good work? It is following God's will—it's following His commandments, it's pleasing Him.

1. Because it says study is profitable in four ways, let's examine those four ways.

1A. The first is doctrine. The word "doctrine" simply means "teaching". Let's go to Isaiah 28:9. I'll be quoting out of the King James unless otherwise noted. A question is asked—a very important one:

Isaiah 28:9 *Whom shall he [and that means God, if you look at the context] teach knowledge? and whom shall he make to understand doctrine [or teaching]?*

[Then the answer is given] *them that are weaned from the milk, and drawn from the breasts.*

10) *For precept must be upon precept, [said again] precept upon precept; line upon line, [repeated again] line upon line; here a little, and there a little:* (KJV)

The Hebrew word for *precept* is interesting because it means "commandment". So we're told here that one commandment builds on another commandment. You can't go any further than the two great commandments that Christ brought out when asked, what is the great commandment?—what is the sum of it all?—and Christ said you have to love God with all your being, with all your might, with all your effort, and the second is to love your neighbor as yourself. One builds on the other.

If you love God with all your heart, and you know what God says and what Christ says, then you will love your neighbor as yourself. One commandment builds on another commandment. We could spend an hour talking about that throughout scripture but we just don't have the time; we're trying to hit the high spots. We see here when it says, *precept must be on precept*, it is one commandment building on another, adding another, adding another that makes complete sense. Then it says, *line upon line*, twice. The Hebrew word for *line* is interesting because it means "a connecting cord", like a multi-strand cord connecting two things and holding them together. It means a connecting cord, especially for measuring—taking the measure of something. So we see here that one line connects to another line.

A good analogy today would be working a puzzle and the puzzle pieces just snap together—they fit perfectly together. My wife and I like to work puzzles occasionally, and every once in a while I catch her jamming one piece into another and she's pounding that thing, she's going to make that work—it's going to fit one way or another

and that's not what this says. ((laughs)) This says that one line connects to another line. It makes sense, there's no confusion, there's no consternation. It does not mean "cut and paste" in modern terminology. In other words, you can't take out the middle of a verse—a few words—transfer it over to some totally different subject, and make it fit. It doesn't work that way; everything has to be connected. This is what Isaiah 28 tells us.

Wouldn't it be simple if the first book of the Bible was titled *God* and it told us everything we needed to know about God? And then the second book was titled *Jesus Christ* and it told us everything we needed to know about Jesus Christ? And then the third was titled *Holy Spirit*, telling us everything we needed to know about the Holy Spirit? Then we could go on to the Sabbath and each one of the holy days, and then faith and salvation and all of that, each with its own book, and everything you needed to know would be right there, but God didn't do it that way.

What we need to know is scattered throughout the Bible. The truth on a given subject God has put throughout the Bible and He did this on purpose—why?—so we would have to search, study, put in the effort, and work like a workman to discern it all; that is God's plan. To understand a specific subject you have to look throughout the Bible, and that takes work, it takes diligence, it takes time, it takes focus, it takes interest. God's word is profitable for our learning. What we're primarily learning is about Him and about Jesus Christ and about how we should live, how He wants us to live. That takes effort and it takes work, it takes study into God's word, rightly dividing, dissecting, and understanding the truth.

1B. The second way (in 2 Timothy 3:16) is reproof. That is not a word we often use. It means conviction, it means evidence, it means awareness—so we can be aware, we can have evidence, we can be convicted. Let's go to Romans 7:7. This tells us how reproof works. Paul says to the church at Rome and to us today:

Romans 7:7 *What shall we say then? Is the law sin? [Of course not.] God forbid. [No way!] Nay, I had not known sin, but by the law: for I had not known lust, except the law had said, Thou shalt not covet. (KJV)*

What this tells us is that the law makes us aware of sin. We become aware of sin by studying the law. It is evidence of what sin is. The more we study the more we understand the evil of sin and the ramifications of sin and the different kinds of sin. Let's go to Hebrews 4:12; Paul is explaining about rightly dividing, making the straight cut—God's word is the way to do that.

Hebrews 4:12 *For the word of God is quick, and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword ... (KJV)*

If you look at the history of Roman swordsmanship, those swords were strong and powerful and they were sharp as razors.

12 continued) ... *piercing even to the dividing asunder of soul* [the King James says “soul”, meaning life] *and spirit, and of the joints and marrow, and* [here’s the important part] *is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart.* (KJV)

What we’re told here is that the reproof found in God’s word gives us understanding of our innermost thoughts—an awareness of our intentions or motives. You can do something good but with the wrong motive. You can do something good for somebody in an effort to get something back. In other words, you do something good to take gain for the self and that’s a wrong motive. God’s word combined with God’s Holy Spirit allows us insight into our own thoughts and our own intents.

1C. The third way (in 2 Timothy 3:16) is correction. Correction is an interesting word because it means “straighten up again”. Correction straightens us up and if you’ve been in God’s Church and have God’s Spirit, it happens again and again and again and again. Not just once, but over and over—to straighten up again. This is the only place in the New Testament where this word is found. Let’s go to Psalm 119 and look at verse 9 because God’s word is useful to correct us. When we get off the path, God’s word gently nudges us back onto the correct path.

Psalm 119:9 [We’re told] *Wherewithal shall a young man cleanse his way?* [That’s a question—how can a young man, maybe inexperienced, cleanse his way, his life? We’re told the answer] *by taking heed thereto according to thy word.* (KJV)

God’s word corrects us on the path to salvation. Now let’s jump to the New Testament, Ephesians 5:25. In the past, forty to fifty years ago, Ephesians 5 was used quite commonly to pound on husbands and wives, but let’s look at it from a different perspective here.

Ephesians 5:25 *Husbands, love your wives* [now it tells us how], *even as Christ also loved the church ...* (KJV)

So a contrast and a connection is being drawn by husbands and wives, husbands loving wives, and Christ loving the Church. We’re told here:

25 continued) .. *and gave himself for it* [for the church]; (KJV)

The implication is, husbands, you should give yourself to your wife; seek her benefit at all times.

26) *That he* [referring to Christ] *might sanctify and cleanse it* [referring to the church] *with the washing of water by the word ...* (KJV)

Washing of water by the word. We just read in Psalm 119, talking about a young man cleansing his ways; here you have this example of the word washing the church, but it also can wash us individually. The word here strictly means an utterance. As we read in

the beginning, what is scripture? It is God-breathed, God's utterance, God's breathed utterance. So when we obey God's word, we wash away our spiritual filth by changing our behavior so we don't do it anymore. We don't become filthy anymore; we have a clean heart and a clean spirit and clean deeds. Now let's go to James 1:22, talking about correction, and notice what James says here. It's very straightforward, very much to the point.

James 1:22 *But be ye doers of the word, [again we have the word—God's word, and how can we be doers if we don't study God's word to know what God's word says?] and not hearers only, deceiving your own selves. (KJV)*

If we just hear and don't do, it's very plain we're deceived. Verse 23.

23) *For if any be a hearer of the word, and not a doer, he is like unto a man beholding his natural face in a glass [meaning a mirror]:*

24) *For he beholdeth himself, and goeth his way, and straightway forgetteth what manner of man he was. (KJV)*

God's word is a mirror. God's word, in combination with God's Spirit, shows us who we are, how we think, and what our innermost thoughts and motives are.

25) *But whoso looketh into [what?—not a mirror] the perfect law of liberty, [and the law of liberty is located where?—in God's word; so if you look into God's word] and continueth therein [continue where?—in God's word], he being not a forgetful hearer, but a doer of the work, [the King James says, the work of obeying God, the work of studying God's word as a laborer, as we read in the beginning] this man [or woman] shall be blessed in his deed [or in his doing]. (KJV)*

You see, deeds reflect who we are, and if we have a change of character due to reading God's word and applying it through God's Holy Spirit, then we change our deeds. Then God knows by our deeds that our character is changing. If we change our thoughts (God knows our thoughts) He will discern that our character is changing because our thoughts are changing. It is all done through the revelation of God's word. We see it, we incorporate it and then we practice it, and Christ set the example, obviously, in His life.

1D. The fourth way (in 2 Timothy 3:16) is instruction in righteousness. What is righteousness? The poster scripture for that is Psalm 119:172. It was a memory scripture at one time, back in the old days.

Psalm 119:172 *My tongue shall speak of thy word ... (KJV)*

How can our tongue speak of God's word if we don't study God's word in the first place? So we're told here, my tongue is going to speak of your word because I know your word, I've studied your word,

172 continued) ... *for all thy commandments are righteousness.* (KJV)

In this one verse we're told that God's commandments define righteousness. God is righteous. God's commandments tell us about God, tell us about Jesus Christ. So if we want to be righteous, we have to keep the commandments. How do we know the commandments?—by studying God's word and we're told here, my tongue is going to speak about God's word, about God's commandments, about his righteousness. Now let's go to Proverbs 4:13; here's an encouragement about instruction in righteousness.

Proverbs 4:13 *Take fast hold of instruction; [then it personifies instruction and tells us] let her not go [grab it, hold on to instruction—don't let it go]: keep her; for she is thy life.* (KJV)

If we incorporate and hold on to instruction and righteousness, that leads to eternal life. This is our time, this our chance, this is our opportunity, and we need to take hold of instruction found in God's word, not let it go and understand that it shows us the path toward eternal life. Go two chapters over, Proverbs 6:23—this is one of my favorite scriptures. It tells us what is the function of God's commandments; it puts them into a context that all of us can understand.

Proverbs 6:23 *For the commandment is a lamp; [likening God's commandments to a lamp] and the law is light; and reproofs of instruction are the way of life:* (KJV)

God's word reveals the path to eternal life. It instructs us in righteousness. God doesn't want somebody eternally in His Kingdom, and Christ doesn't want to marry somebody, who behaves in an ungodly way, or who is selfish or self-centered or vain—who follows after Satan. Words of instruction are the way of life.

So what is the purpose of God's word, summing up these four? It teaches us what God is like, what His character is like, and then you look at the way Christ lived when He was on this earth, He reflected God's character, which is His own character; He lived accordingly, therefore we can learn the path to righteousness, the path to salvation by trying to walk in Christ's footsteps. We can do that so we can become like God and become like Christ.

For the second point, let's ask the question (and think about why God does all of this, why He has inspired all these scriptures) and the question comes to mind:

2. Why does God want us to study?

Do you ever think about that? He could have done it a different way—when we had hands laid on us, all this could have just come into our head; He could have done it that way but He didn't do it that way; that would have been easy, we wouldn't have had to work for it.

The next point, if you like to outline:

2A. The Bible tells us God's word is spiritual food.

It's not physical food, but spiritual food. Let's go to John 6:63, just that one verse. We're told here that God's words, Christ's words are Spirit. Yes, they are on a physical page, and yes, we read them with our physical eyes, but they're Spirit.

John 6:63 [Christ is speaking] *It is the spirit that quickeneth* [that means to make alive]; *the flesh profiteth nothing*: [notice this] *the words that I speak unto you, they are spirit, and they are life.* (KJV)

So Christ's words, which are God's words, lead us to eternal life. If God's words and Christ's words lead us to eternal life, shouldn't we be studying them? It's obvious. If the words lead to eternal life it means we should spend a great deal of our life studying those words—not just at the end of the day, five minutes, nodding the head, eyelids growing heavy, and five minutes later we call it a day. That doesn't show God much, frankly. Let's go to Romans 8:5. This is a principle. We live in Satan's world; we have to navigate through Satan's world; we have to survive Satan's world.

Romans 8:5 *For they that are after the flesh* [meaning they who pursue the things of the flesh] *do mind the things of the flesh* [that's their focus, their concern, what takes up their time—football games, vacations, toys, clothes]; *but they that are after the Spirit the things of the Spirit.* (KJV)

So if we are pursuing things of the Spirit, that means then that we go after the things of the Spirit. That means we pay attention to them and we spend time studying things of the Spirit because Christ just told us in John 6 that His words are Spirit. So if we go after the things of the Spirit we should be studying the things of the Spirit. To survive in Satan's world we have to have a spiritual mind and that can only come through daily study in cooperation with exercising God's Spirit. Now let's go to Romans 12:2.

Romans 12:2 [Paul, in the same vein, says] *And be not conformed to this world*: [don't mold yourself after the world because it's Satan's world] *but be ye transformed* [that means changed from one thing to another thing; how?] *by the renewing of your mind* [from a physical mind to a spiritual mind], *that ye may prove what is that good, and acceptable, and perfect, will of God.* (KJV)

I spend a lot of time praying and thinking, God, what do you want me to do here in this situation? What would Christ do if He were involved in this situation? God, how would you handle this situation? Basically I say, God, show me Your will, show me what you want me to do. We're just told here that if we have a spiritual mind and we study God's word, we can prove what is the will of God, so that we're not like a blind man stumbling around in the darkness—we know because our mind is focused on God's word.

Here is an important principle to always remember. There is nothing permanent about a spiritual mind in a physical body. We have physical bodies. We have God's Holy Spirit in us while we are physical but that is not necessarily permanent; we can lose that if we don't cultivate that. One of the ways we renew God's Spirit in us and one of the ways we grow God's Spirit in us is to spiritually renew ourselves through the study of God's word, which is His mind, Christ's mind, His thoughts, Christ's thoughts—the deeds of a righteous mind all throughout the Bible. So our spiritual mind gets renewed by studying God's word. Look at 2 Corinthians 4:16; it says that.

2 Corinthians 4:16 [Paul says] *For which cause we faint not; but though our outward man perish ...* (KJV)

The older we get, we know this old body of ours is slowly winding down and slowly perishing. When you're a teenager, or twenty or thirty years old, you don't even think about it, but as you get older you realize that the body is slowing down.

16 continued) ... *yet the inward man is renewed day by day.* (KJV)

How does that happen? Obviously it can happen through prayer but it also happens through study. If we don't immerse ourselves in God's word how can the inward spiritual man be renewed? If we're not immersing ourselves in God's word where is our mind then? It's on television, Internet, movies, video games, things like that, and who controls all of that?—it's Satan. How can we spend hours involved in Satan's mind and world through television, movies, Internet and all of that, and then want a spiritual mind? Especially if we spend proportionally far less time studying God's word, which helps us have a spiritual mind. You see, the daily study of God's word helps renew our minds and we need to be very much aware of that.

A second reason why God wants us to study:

2B. We need to learn to fear God.

In Deuteronomy 17, verses 14-19 (we won't turn there), prior to his death and their entry into the Promised Land, Moses warns Israel, you're going to want to have a king over you (he knew this because God inspired him). He says, down the road, you're going to want to have a king over you and you're going to want to be just like the other nations. When that happens you'd better pick somebody that is of the tribe of Israel and you'd better have that king do—what?—read the law and write his own copy of it. God says, through Moses, you make sure that that king does that so that he won't be lifted up above his brethren, so he won't turn aside from the commandments, and that he will follow Me, and then if he follows Me then all is going to go well with Israel.

It's very clear that God wants us to study so we learn to fear Him; that is the exact word used, that we *may learn to fear the LORD*—YWVH—our God. The word *fear* means “to morally revere”. It doesn't mean trembling in a corner, shaking and quaking, it means to revere God, to honor God, to uplift God, and by writing the commandments, or, in our

case, studying them, we do the same. So point B, why does God want us to study? To learn to fear Him.

A third reason God wants us to study:

2C. To become teachers.

I've heard, several times, over the years, particularly from women in their seventies and eighties, "I don't want to be a teacher, I'm not equipped to be a teacher", or, "How can God want me to be a teacher—look at me." Let's go to Hebrews 5:12, and we're going to find out, whether we like it or not, that we're all teachers. Paul is correcting the Jews here. He is not happy with them; they should be farther down the road but they aren't.

Hebrews 5:12 *For when for the time ye ought to be teachers [he's not separating age, he's not separating sex or gender], ye have need that one teach you again which be the first principles of the oracles of God [you don't even know the first principles]; and are become such as have need of milk, and not of strong meat [not strong food].*

13) *For every one that useth milk is unskillful in the word of righteousness: for he is a babe. (KJV)*

Paul is saying, you Jews out there are unskillful in using God's word. They were applying it in the wrong way. They thought they knew it but they didn't know it. Today this is sadly true in the greater Church of God, because I personally don't believe that brethren diligently, diligently study enough time every day. I just don't think that happens and that's a sad commentary on us who say we love God with all our heart, and we want to be in His Kingdom, and we won't take the time to study more than five or ten minutes a day and just superficially study at that. I'm just amazed how superficial is the knowledge of some of God's people. I'm not talking about anybody here in the room, I'm talking about the questions I get, comments I get that come from out there in the greater churches of God. Going on in verse 14.

14) *But strong meat belongeth to them that are of full age, even those who by reason of use [meaning using God's word, studying God's word] have their senses exercised to discern both good and evil. (KJV)*

I think we all know, God's word tells us the difference between good and evil. We wouldn't know it unless God's word defined what evil was or what sin was. Let's go back to Matthew 5, talking about teachers. Notice what Christ said, in the sermon on the mount, in Matthew 5; we'll read verse 19, just one verse. This is addressed to those who say, I don't want to be a teacher.

Matthew 5:19 *Whosoever therefore shall break one of these least commandments, and shall teach men so, he shall be called the least in the kingdom of heaven: but whosoever shall do and teach them, the same shall be called great in the kingdom of heaven. (KJV)*

You could say to yourself, I'm 80 years old, I'm a widow, I live by myself. How do I teach? How can I teach? The fact is we don't have a choice, because what is the greatest teacher of all? Our example. That's how we teach. Remember the old saying, your example is shouting so loud I can't hear what you're saying? Our example tells everybody who and what we are. So we are teachers whether we like it or not. We're teachers in the grocery store or in the bank or standing in line somewhere; we are teachers, and people watch and take note.

The fourth reason why God wants us to study:

2D. To build a spiritual foundation.

We won't turn there but in Matthew 7 (again, the sermon on the mount) what did Christ say? He said, look, whoever hears these sayings of Mine and does them—then He draws an analogy—is like a wise man building his house on a rock; the storms come and the winds come and the waves come and the hurricanes come, all of that, and the house is buffeted but it doesn't come down—why?—because it was built on a rock.

What is our foundation? When you think about it, obviously our foundation is God and Christ, and the Holy Spirit inside us, yes, but what does all that lead to? If we have daily, serious, Bible study, we build a spiritual foundation. We look at all the examples in the Bible, of people who failed and people who succeeded, of people who had horrible trials, yet they succeeded, and we learn all of these lessons. We are building a spiritual foundation, then when our trials come, as they surely will, we will not waiver. We will not be blown off the rock, we will not crumble, our house will not crumble. So we need to build a spiritual foundation.

The fifth and last point, why does God want us to study?

2E. It's for our benefit—for comfort and for patience.

Look at Romans 15:4.

Romans 15:4 *For whatsoever things were written aforetime were written for our learning [and what are we supposed to learn?], that we through patience and comfort of the scriptures might have hope. (KJV)*

We look at all the examples in the Bible of people who had patience and it seemed dark: Daniel in the lions den; the three young men who were going to be burned alive, and it seemed very bleak, but look at what happened; in the end everything worked out fine. That leads us to understand that we don't give up on God; there's patience—we need to have patience and the comfort of the scriptures. I can't tell you how many times people have told me, when they're going through trials, they go to the book of Psalms because it's so comforting in times of trial. And when they need to get back to the basics, they go to the sermon on the mount, what Christ said in the very beginning; it

lays it out so simply, and is so easy to understand that it turns them and they get back to the basics. So this fifth reason to study is that it gives us patience and it gives us comfort. So we've seen five reasons.

Now we get to the essence of the matter, where the rubber meets the road, so to speak.

3. How should we study?

In too many cases we haven't been taught to study. I was never taught to study and in my first twenty to twenty-five years in the Church I don't think I ever heard a sermon on how we should study. You learn by osmosis but nobody ever spelled it out. I had a woman tell me a while back, no one has ever taught me how to study the Bible—I've been in the Church for decades and now I'm embarrassed to ask. She felt that if she asked it would reveal her ignorance and she would be embarrassed, so you don't ask. You don't want to be embarrassed because somebody could come back and say, you should know by now, and that has happened. You should be aware by now—well, the only ignorant question is the one that's never asked, and we should ask. So she asked, can you do a sermon on how to study the Bible some time? Because I've never heard one. Frankly, over the years, the Church has done a very poor job in this area. If our goal is to know about God and study God's word, we should hear that all the time but it's never brought up—I'm going back decades now. So we're going to do that. How should we study?

3A. We need to have a proper approach; a proper mindset to approaching study.

It won't be successful if we don't have the proper mindset. That means we need to be positive. We need to look forward to Bible study. Too often we look at Bible study as a chore: I've got to keep God happy therefore I have to study the Bible. It's akin to taking out the garbage—my wife's not going to be happy if I don't take out that garbage so I do it to make my wife happy, not because I enjoy it. So we do it to make God happy with us even though we don't enjoy it. It's a chore to be done, and that's not the mindset God wants—not at all. If we view it as a chore then when we get it done we feel better about ourselves but we haven't learned a thing—we haven't learned a thing. Rather than view it that way, we should view it as precious time spent with God.

When you think about it—and we've learned a lot about God in the last couple of years—when you think about who He is and what He is, that He would know us by name, and would know how we think and what we do, and we can pray to Him personally and He will hear and answer. Then when God says, I'd like you to read My book because it tells you about Me, we should stop, take a deep breath, and say, this is very precious time and I'm going to take advantage of it. We need to be curious. A lot of people say, I can't read about this, I don't want you talking about that—no, the fact is we need to be curious so we learn more about God. We learn things, deeper things that we've never even thought about or considered.

We're told to hunger and thirst after righteousness. Remember what Christ said on the sermon on the mount, again, in Matthew 5:6: Blessed are they who hunger and thirst after righteousness because they will be filled. The scripture is very plain that God's word is righteous, the commandments are righteous, and so if we hunger and thirst after that righteousness, we're going to be filled. I can't tell you the number of people—in fact, someone told me here today, she said, I have never felt so full of God and God's Spirit—I've never felt this way before, and she's been in the Church almost fifty years. All of a sudden we're seeking righteousness and that's the proper approach—we're eager—I want to study some more, I want to learn some more. So the proper approach, you see, is that it's not a chore; it's an opportunity and it's precious time spent alone with God.

3B. We have to have a regular and proper environment in which to study.

We have to. There's a principle that Christ brought out, again in the sermon on the mount, in Matthew 6:6. The subject is prayer but wouldn't it apply to Bible study too?

Matthew 6:6 [Christ is talking about prayer] *But thou, when thou prayest, [where are you supposed to go when you pray?] enter into thy closet ...* (KJV)

Let's just stop there, at the Greek word for *closet*; I'm reading from Strong's (#5009) right now: "A chamber on the interior of an Oriental house (generally used for storage or privacy, a spot for retirement)—a secret chamber, closet, storehouse." So when you enter into your private place, we would say today,

6 continued) *... and when thou hast shut thy door,*

There's a principle—close out all of the stuff that's going on outside that chamber,

6 continued) *pray to thy Father which is in secret; and thy Father which seeth in secret shall reward thee openly.* (KJV)

We're communicating with God when we pray, but when we study, God is communicating with us, so should we not do exactly the same thing and have a place every day to go and study? Where we have all the tools we need (we'll talk about those in a minute) to study properly? It should be a definite place that is conducive to study. With quiet, and no interruptions, no telephone, no TV on, no soft recliner where we can go to sleep—it should be conducive to study.

We need to study at a time when we will get the most out of it. As I mentioned earlier, I'm a morning person; my wife needs three or four cups of coffee to ease her into the day, and then she's a late-morning or early-afternoon person so that's when she studies. We should study when we are most alert mentally. Sometimes you can't, if you're raising children—you can't always have it the way you'd like it. My point is, if Bible study is exciting, even if you're tired, once you get into it, you start waking up and focusing because you are enthusiastic. You can study any time but if you can plan your

life, it's better to do it when you'll get the most out of it. So have a regular environment; that's point B.

3C. Have a goal and a direction in your study.

You've got to have a goal so let's propose this. Tomorrow starts a new week and let's say tonight or tomorrow morning you have the thought, okay, by the end of this week, by next Sabbath, I want to know more about—and then pick something. It could be a book. Who knows about the book of Nahum? Not many of us. Okay, let's make it our mission this week to study Nahum—who he is, where he lived, when he wrote, what he had to say, what the theme of the book is that bears his name. That would be a goal. Or you could study a person, such as Mordecai. We might ask, okay, where is Mordecai in the Bible? Let's go find out. What was his life, why did God call him, what was his purpose?—so we learn about this individual. An event—you could study an event. What about the fall of Saul? He was anointed a king, was given high praise, he stood head and shoulders above everybody; everybody loved Saul and it wasn't long before his downfall came faster than his rise. How did that happen? What caused it? What was his fatal flaw? Maybe we could learn some lessons from that. Or you could study a doctrine. I want to know more about the fifth commandment; honoring my father and mother—how do I do that? Well, you go into the Old Testament and look at the examples, good and bad. Absalom turned on his father, not honoring him, and yet Isaac was obedient to the point of death—that's an example. Then you go into the New Testament and look at other examples, so by the end of next week, you have the fifth commandment kind of nailed down, and you know it well. So you see, we have to have a goal and direction in our study, and when we learn more, we become more excited, and then we want to learn even more, so Bible study takes on a whole new meaning.

4. Let's talk about things that help us study the Bible.

I know people who are intimidated by this subject. They feel like, this is too much for me, I just can't do this; I'll read a booklet or I'll read the Bible but I just feel intimidated by all these helps. Okay, don't be; let's just talk about a few—not all of them, just a few.

The first one, the one easiest to access, is the marginal reference that's already in your Bible. Most Bibles have a column down the center; it's a marginal reference, and sometimes you're reading along and there's either a letter or a number at the end of a word, and then you go over to the center column and there's a corresponding letter or number that sometimes shows related scriptures. For example, in the New Testament, if it's quoting the Old Testament, then generally there's a reference that you can follow over, and you can find out where that scripture is in the Old Testament. Stop there, and go read it in the Old Testament, because it will expand your understanding of the scripture. Sometimes there is a note at the end of a word, and there is an alternative translation for that word, and it's in the margin, so just quickly go over there and see if that helps you. So look at the margins because they are a helpful tool.

The second is a study Bible. A study Bible is just a Bible but it has more notes, more references and more commentary. There are all kinds of study Bibles. They are helpful with background information; sometimes a study Bible at the beginning of a chapter will tell you when it was written, to whom it was written, and what the historical setting was, and that can be useful information. We have to remember though that study Bibles are written by men. These men are very knowledgeable but they are not converted; they're doing the best they can and you can't weigh their commentary the same as you would scripture, but it might be helpful.

Another Bible help, and this is the big one, is a concordance. I've known people who have been in Church thirty or forty years and they've heard of concordances but they've never used one because it was intimidating to them. A concordance is just an alphabetical listing of all the words in the Bible. Every word, such as *kingdom*, *Jesus*, *Sabbath*, *holy*—all the words. They are listed in the Bible and there is a number assigned to each word. In other words, there is a listing of all the scriptures that are used with that word, and beside it is a number assigned to that particular word, used in that particular scripture. You'll notice sometimes, if you pick a word, such as *God*, that the word *God* can be in all of these scriptures but there are many different words that are used, as was pointed out in the sermonette. So then that gives you a clue—maybe I should go look at that word. In the back of the concordance is a dictionary. So you take that number, go to the back, look up that number, and that gives you a definition of the word. So it's very easy once you get used to it and it's a way of opening one's mind to the true meaning of a given scripture.

Strong's Exhaustive Concordance is the standard. We often talk about Strong's numbers; that's the number that Strong assigned to a particular word. If you have a separate dictionary of the Bible—sometimes they're called lexicons; a lexicon in Greek means "book of words"—a dictionary will take the Strong's word and then you can look it up in a separate dictionary, not just the dictionary in the back of Strong's Concordance. Sometimes we'll quote Zodhiates' Complete Word Study Dictionary of the New Testament; we can take the Strong's reference number, look it up in Zodhiates, and now we have a more complete explanation of the word. Baker and Carpenter's Complete Word Study Dictionary of the Old Testament is another source.

My point is we can expand our knowledge and deepen our understanding of scripture if we use a concordance. It's a very simple process; look up the word, there's a number, go to the dictionary, and look up the meaning of the word if that's important to you, as it should be. There are other Bible dictionaries that are keyed into subjects; you might have a dictionary that has the term *temple*. Such a dictionary doesn't go back to the scriptures, what it does is describe the temple, so it might have a diagram of the temple, a listing of all the artifacts in the temple and where they were placed, and then it might talk about the ceremonies in the temple; some dictionaries do that and are helpful for background information.

So we've talked about study Bibles, concordances, and dictionaries, and now we're going to talk about one that is not often talked about, which is the Interlinear Bible. The

Interlinear Bible is a Bible that displays an English verse, and then right above it or right below it is the same verse written out in Hebrew or Greek. So you have a Hebrew or Greek word coupled with the corresponding English word and then you have the Strong's number. Let's go to John 1:1 and see a perfect example.

John 1:1 *In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.* (KJV)

If you go to an Interlinear Bible you find out one important fact, that the Interlinear says, *In the beginning was the Word and the Word was with ...* and then the Interlinear will have a Greek word that whatever translation you're using doesn't have, and guess what that is; it's the accusative, masculine, singular article, "the", and it's not in any modern translations, it's just left out—and yes, it is hard to find. So John 1:1 should be translated, according to the Interlinear, as, *In the beginning was the Word and the Word was with the God.* So the point is, why would they do that? There's no note that says, we dropped a word out and here's why—it doesn't say that. We remember this egregious omission occurs because all the translators, including those of the King James, were trinitarians. If in translating, you translate something that goes against your preconceived idea then it's easy to just drop this little word "the" and all of a sudden it now makes sense to a trinitarian. If you say the God, how can three be in one if there is the God, or to a binitarian, how can two be in one if there is the God—it can't be done. Again, an interlinear Bible is critical to catching errors, so that is worth knowing.

Then we have Bible commentaries (of all kinds). It's a Bible with commentary that the writer deems important. Remember commentaries are written by men who have agendas, and none of them are converted that I know of, so we have to avoid taking commentaries to the level of scripture. We can't establish doctrine based on a commentary but I've seen the Church do it and I've seen individuals do it. About a year ago I had a guy argue with me about a truth in the Bible and one scripture, and he never quoted any other scripture, he just quoted about eight commentaries, and that was his answer. Well, you can't do that.

Another Bible help is an atlas. An atlas is a book of maps, and Bible atlases have maps of the time of the patriarchs, the time of Ancient Israel, the time of Christ, and the time of the apostles. Let me give you one example of how a map is helpful. This isn't salvational, but it's helpful. We won't turn there but in Luke 10:30, Christ was giving the parable of the good Samaritan, and He said, *a certain man went down from Jerusalem to Jericho ...* Well, if you look at an atlas—and I love maps, I just do; when I was a pilot I learned to study maps very carefully (if you don't it's to your own peril)—but if you look up Jerusalem on a relief map, it's 2,850 feet (or about 868 meters) above sea level and if you look up Jericho, it's 845 feet (or about 257 meters) below sea level. Jericho is the lowest city in the world. So when you go from Jerusalem to Jericho you have an altitude loss or gain of 3,700 feet (or about 1128 meters) in about fifteen miles (or 24 kilometers)—that's like climbing Pike's Peak. So when Christ said the Samaritan went down from Jerusalem to Jericho, He literally meant that. People would stop along the way and get tired and weary. So what the Bible atlas does is give us a sense of place,

and you can track Paul's journeys and all of that. It just gives you an idea of where these words were written, where the trail was, and where they went, and it expands our appreciation of God's word.

Another help is a topical index, in which topics are listed in alphabetical order with scriptures related to each topic. Mark Mickelson has given out free topical indexes for a very long time. His latest edition came out in March (of 2019), and if you want a free copy, contact us on our website and we'll make sure you get one. The point is you can go to a topical index to learn more about something, such as faith. Look up "faith" and there are all these scriptures showing levels of faith and examples of faith, and you can look at them and then go to the Bible and read them to learn about that particular subject or topic. Everything I have told you up to this point is available on your computer through an application, or it's stored up there in the cloud and you can go grab it and get it. Everything we've talked about is there, although some of us like to use books—you have your hands on something tangible, you can turn the pages and you feel more connected. If you like that, you can order every one I've mentioned plus many, many more from Christian Book Distributors (www.christianbook.com). They have a toll-free number and they give incredible discounts—sometimes half, sometimes 60-70 percent off, if your timing is right, but they're always having a sale on something. Get on their mailing list and they'll send you a catalog every month. If you're looking for these materials, wait for a sale to come along and you can save a lot of money.

Well, I thought I would be done by now but I'm not. ((laughs)) We're going to have to continue at another time. We'll close with this question:

5. How much time should I spend studying?

When I came into the Church, it was hard and fast. In fact, the brethren told me, and it was announced from Pasadena by a certain individual, that when you came into the Church in the mid-60s you studied half an hour a day and you prayed half an hour a day, and that's the way it was (and you fasted once a month, by the way). That was just it, that was the rule. I don't know how many did it but that's what they were told to do, what we were all told to do.

We don't make those kind of rules now because if you figuratively have a gun to your head—I'm going to feel guilty if I don't study thirty minutes a day—then you're just putting in time. You're doing it not because you want to but because you have to. In answering this question, ask another question: How much time do I spend studying God's word versus other things I do? Well, we need to sleep for eight hours, we need to work for eight hours (normally), we need to play with the children, and eat and get some exercise, but let's also ask the question, how many hours a day do I spend on all of this other stuff versus studying the Bible? If we spend three hours a day watching TV and five minutes a day studying the Bible, we have a problem, Houston—we really do. Ask another question: How long does it take to get in deeply, to delve into a subject? Can you do it in five minutes, ten minutes, twenty minutes? No, you can't; it takes time. God watches us and says, okay, are you willing to devote the time to study My word? Proper

study takes time and our attitude makes all the difference. Do we look at Bible study like washing windows? Is it just a chore that's got to be done, with gritted teeth, not liking it but hoping to feel better when we're finished? If that's the case, God knows, He watches. Or do we look forward to the time with eagerness and anticipation because we want to know more about our Creator? So how much time? I'm not going to say but we should certainly take enough time to get to know God and to get to know God's word, and this has to be done every day.

Next time we're going to talk about fundamental principles of Bible study. We're going to talk about some techniques to make the study stick—how to retain what we've learned—because, especially as we get older, we can remember what happened forty years ago but we can't remember what happened yesterday, so we'll look into that. We'll address this subject a second time down the road.