

A Basic Introduction to Bible Study:

Part I

What To Appreciate

As We Approach God's Word

Journal of Learning Treasures - A Work in Progress

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(Revised October, 2014)

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Personal Notes

This series is dedicated to my two children:

Josiah and Bri-Anna

Realize and mature in all God desires for you: grow in His Word, learn the specific curriculum written 'to us' today, and be led of the Spirit as an adult son and daughter.

A special mention of appreciation to

C. J.

Thank you for your cheerful perseverance, encouragement, assistance, and patience in the completion of this lengthy undertaking.

Much appreciation to my husband Brian for being kind longsuffering and for the many Bible discussions and support.

To God Be The Glory!

Personal Thoughts

What has driven the series: A Basic Introduction To Bible Study has been the realization that so many believers are trying to live in this challenging world without the elementary instruction to understand and apply the Word. A large number seem to be unaware of God's 'desire' to daily study the Scriptures. Many do not know that the Bible was created especially for them. Most seem to be unaware that there is a simplistic, organizational design to the Bible. Therefore, saints wonder where to even start studying.

Other factors include a lack of awareness of the resource of tools and support available to study and live. Saints can become enveloped in the busyness of life or develop a focus on man-made 'religious' books or ideas, which can distract them, displacing the building of a strong foundation in the Word. These can inhibit a personal relationship with the Father. This is only accomplished through personal communication with Him, that is, meditation, prayer, reading and study of 'the Scriptures'. This 'void in the critical training' created a desire in this author to be used of God to help meet this need.

The writing of this series of books has been building for years, but the follow through was delayed for two reasons: 1) the conviction that believers should not be distracted by 'another' man-made book and 2) personal writing limitations. In time, honest reflection revealed that a book could be written to encourage others to expand awareness of their ability and great responsibility to stay focused on the Word. This author also acknowledges that she is really 'just a Bible student' not a professional writer but capable enough to communicate information learned about studying the Bible.

Contents

<u>Personal Thoughts</u>	4
<u>Contents</u>	5
<u>Introduction</u>	6
I. <u>What Is God's Word?</u>	10
A. Basic Characteristics of the Bible	11
B. General Organization	15
C. Basic Study Suggestions	34
II. <u>Selecting a Bible</u>	47
A. Which Version	47
B. Things to Consider When Purchasing a Bible	52
III. <u>How to Come To the Bible</u>	58
A. Know the Bible is the Absolute Authority	59
B. Know You Are Just Before the Living God	69
C. Come with Humility and Appreciation	85
D. Know Who We Are	87
E. Come with a Ready Mind	102
F. Come in Prayer	104
G. Come in Meditation	110
H. Know Some Things about the Relationship We Have with God	112
I. Come in Faith	117
IV. <u>Appendix</u>	123
Appendix I: Things to Consider When Purchasing a Bible	124
Appendix II: How to Be Just Before God	129
Appendix III: Know How to Live Your Identity	133

Introduction

A Basic Introduction To Bible Study: Part I - What to Appreciate as We Approach God's Word was written to be first in a series of books to assist the student in his journey through the Scriptures. But it is also meant to provide awareness of God's desire for us as believers and to enable the student to stay centered upon the work the Father has given him to do to help us avoid the distractions of the 'course of this world'.

This book has been designed to briefly address three introductory issues. The first chapter gives definition to, "What is the Word", the second briefly addresses how to select a Bible, and the third focuses on how a student can come prepared to study the Bible. Finally, there is an appendix which contains a synopsis of some of the tools laid forth for easy access and distribution or use for others.

As the student begins, he is encouraged to consider making time for some, if not all of the suggestions below as they can be of eternal value. If these are approached as great opportunities rather than a legalistic list of 'to do's' they can become a vehicle to obtain the most from this writing. Many things can interfere with our maturity, particularly when we desire to live a life pleasing to our Father. Prayerfully, ask Him for guidance as spiritual priorities are chosen and pursue them confidently.

-Read Romans 1-8 and Genesis: Read the first eight chapters of Romans several times while progressing through this book to maintain a focus on the foundational material God has provided for us in His Word. Also, read through the book of Genesis at least once, to stir up this important section of Scripture to become reoriented to the character of the Creator, man himself, and Satan.

-Be a Berean: Of all the suggestions that could be made, studying things out for yourself as did the Bereans in Acts 17 is the most important recommendation. It can become the mechanism that will shed the most light to develop understanding of sound doctrine, personal responsibility and conviction. When verses are referenced, look up and study them. Focus on their context and prove whether what has been presented in this book, is true according to the Word.

-Avoid building just 'head knowledge': Initially, some may want to just read the book through to the end. If this is done, then begin reading it a second time and after each chapter set it aside for a period of time to study things out for yourself to make the material your own. If due consideration is not given to the topics and verses presented, students may find they have acquired head knowledge, with little conviction or heart understanding.

-Read and Do the Assignments/Reflection/Study Suggestions: Sprinkled through the book are assignments designed to promote self-evaluation and encourage students to expand thinking, reading, and study. Opportunities for personal reflection and a number of study habits have also been inserted to focus attention on the Word itself, promote growth, provide direction and experience in studying the Word, and to encourage application.

-Enjoy the process! Talk to your Father! Speak to Him about your sincere desire to study, grow, and live being led of the Spirit. If a student's attitude toward reading and studying Scripture is just 'duty' or 'drudgery' he will not reap all of what could be gleaned. (Proverbs 2: 1-9) Developing and maturing in the proper attitude toward God and His Word can reap benefits beyond expectation. Therefore, as students proceed, rejoice with thanksgiving unto our great God and Savior for loving us, suffering in our place, and providing everything we need to live godly in this challenging world and on into eternity.

* Assignment: Journaling:

1. Take the time to think about and answer the questions below.

-What do you currently know about 'how to study' the Scriptures?

-Are you open to God's Word teaching you, even when it challenges current understanding?

-Do you set time aside for the Word, reading, studying, and meditating on Scripture?

-Do you prove what others teach or write by using the Word as your authority?

-Who is in control of your mind, God or your flesh? How are decisions made?

-How do you want to use your time so that it will be worthwhile from God's eternal perspective?

2. As students move forward in this series, jot down questions as they come to mind, together with the many 'light bulb' moments that occur when studying. Personal note pages have been included through this book for your convenience. Then, when each book has been completed, realize all of what God has taught and use the new insights acquired to determine and motivate where you want to proceed in your study time.

Note: Some of the words in Scripture references have been underlined for emphasis. In addition, though accurately quoted, some verses were arranged in list form to assist the reader to see their components, especially when explaining a process.

Please feel free to copy and utilize this resource for personal use to assist others in understanding how to be just before God and to edify the saints.

Questions, comments or requests for additional copies
can be directed to this writer.

Personal Notes

What Is God's Word?

As believers, we have been left on Earth for a set purpose. We need to be aware of our God given role, His provision and how to utilize all we have been given in order to yield to His work in us. What glorious opportunities God has provided for us. As we gain conviction and apply what is learned, we can mature in the sound doctrine of His Word. Then Christ can be observed, living in and through us to do His will. He accomplishes this as we navigate by faith through life's many obstacles and roadblocks in the course of this world.

As students begin their progression through, A Basic Introduction to Bible Study: Part I - What to Appreciate as We Approach God's Word, purpose to gain confidence in the Scriptures. Apply what has been learned, stay focused upon the Word to mature, and attain hope and direction for living. This will be the groundwork for becoming a more effective member of His Church.

This section serves as an introduction to important aspects about the Bible that set it apart from man-made books. It is crucial to become oriented to basic characteristics and foundational issues

of Scripture because they can affect attitudes toward the Word. We all have gaps in our understanding and incorrect or misplaced doctrine. Therefore, to fill in some of those areas, this book will first address elementary things the Bible teaches about itself. The intent is to enable the reader to look afresh at what is believed. Then, he can go on to evaluate and compare it to what is taught, and prayerfully make adjustments.

We will briefly address the structure of the Scriptures and the simplicity in its design. There are study suggestions provided in anticipation of questions and challenges that often confront students in their approach to the Word. Recommendations are also presented to assist students in purchasing a Bible, with a brief review of which version to use.

A. Basic Characteristics of the Bible

The Bible, also known as the Word or Scripture, contains 66 books in all. There are 39 in the Old Testament, Genesis through Malachi, and 27 in the New Testament, Matthew through Revelation. It is a book written and inspired by God through chosen men who wrote precisely what God intended. It was particularly developed for man, is profitable and effectual in those that believe, and uses a very simplistic organizational design.

II Peter 1:20-21

“Knowing this first, that no prophecy of the scripture is of any private interpretation. For the prophecy came not in old time by the will of man: but holy men of God spake as they were moved by the Holy Ghost.”

II Timothy 3:16-17

“All scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness: That the man of God may be perfect, throughly furnished unto all good works.”

I Thessalonians 2:13

“For this cause also thank we God without ceasing, because, when ye received the word of God which ye heard of us, ye received it not as the word of men, but as it is in truth, the word of God, which effectually worketh also in you that believe.”

There are some aspects about the Bible that may need clarity to impact our attitude as we begin. First, Scripture ought to be of primary importance to us, much more than just another book on a shelf. It has been prepared and particularly designed to be our spiritual sustenance, nourishment that is to be more essential than our necessary food. This teaching is evident in Job 23. Notice the similarity in the response made by the Lord Jesus Christ. He was tempted to turn stones into bread by Satan after He went hungry 40 days in the wilderness.

Job 23:12

“Neither have I gone back from the commandment of his lips; I have esteemed the words of his mouth more than my necessary food.”

Matthew 4:4

“But he answered and said, It is written, Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God.”

Additional insight about the Word can be gleaned from the writings of John, one of the twelve disciples of Jesus. In John 1 he wrote that 'the Word' was from the beginning, it was with God, and that “...the Word was God...” Later in verse 14 it also clarifies that “...the Word was made flesh...” revealing that the Word and Jesus Christ are one. Further evidence is given on this topic in Revelation 19, as it uncovers the 'name' of the Lord Jesus Christ, “The Word of God”. God, the Lord Jesus Christ and the Word are one and they are inseparable.

John 1:1-4, 14

“In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. The same was in the beginning with God. All things were made by him; and without him was not any thing made that was made. In him was life; and the life was the light of men... And the Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us, (and we beheld his glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father,) full of grace and truth.”

Revelation 19:13

“And he was clothed with a vesture dipped in blood: and his name is called the Word of God.”

Its authority and power will become self-evident as saints read it by faith. It is like no other book written. Note the high value God places on His Word in the book of Psalms. It is magnified even

above God's own name. The Word is truth, pure and without error. It will be forever preserved perfectly by 'the most capable' God of the universe.

Psalm 138:2

“I will worship toward thy holy temple, and praise thy name for thy lovingkindness and for thy truth: for thou hast magnified thy word above all thy name.”

John 17:17

“Sanctify them through thy truth: thy word is truth.”

Psalm 12:6-7

“The words of the Lord are pure words: as silver tried in a furnace of earth, purified seven times. Thou shalt keep them, O Lord, thou shalt preserve them from this generation for ever.”

In Hebrews 4 we can see that the Word is quick (alive), has power and is as sharp as a sword that has a two-sided blade. It has the ability to cut in both directions, all the way through to the bones and marrow, to our heart. It is fully able to discern our innermost thoughts and intents.

Hebrews 4:12

“For the word of God is quick, and powerful, and sharper than any twoedged sword, piercing even to the dividing asunder of soul and spirit, and of the joints and marrow, and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart.”

There are many additional characteristics about the Word of God found throughout the Bible. But space and the purpose of this section limit the time spent on this subject for an introduction.

Students will find that it will be well worth the effort to continue to search these things, so put it on a list of 'things to study' in the journal suggested earlier.

B. General Organization to the Scriptures

This section will go on to provide a brief introduction to the topic of how the Word is organized. To begin let us observe how it has been beautifully and wonderfully made, perfect in design and content. God is a God of organization and this is absolutely evident in the Creation. We can scan the first chapter of Genesis and see clear order in the six days God fashioned the Heaven and Earth.

Students can also reflect upon the detail and complexity of God's smallest creatures, even to their microscopic components including its highly sophisticated DNA programming. But do not forget to consider the expanse of space. Even with a limited awareness of the macroscopic structure of the universe, we can be confident in this thinking. There is complex organization to the planets, solar systems and galaxies.

Note how man's simple inventions, like a piece of furniture, a travel mug or a watch require creativity, organization, and forethought, in effect, intelligent design. Consider the intriguing instincts God created within the tiger-striped monarch butterfly. An

article was found in the Greater Philadelphia Newspapers: “Mexico butterfly country: Monarchs by the millions” on March 3, 2013. Marjorie Miller documented that millions of monarchs migrate south to central Mexico, a 2,000 mile journey in late October to hibernate until February.

She continued her article to relay a most interesting observation. Most monarchs live only 4-5 weeks, but the particular generations who make the migratory journey live 4-5 months. On their return north the female lays her eggs and dies with her mate. There is another amazing part of this process. Ms. Miller notes that a year and precisely 5 butterfly generations later, descendants return to the exact place in Mexico, using a GPS-like instinct to repeat the cycle. Who can even understand these astonishing things? Yes, there is definitely a wise design to the Universe.

The very nature of God would demand perfect organization to anything that He produces, most of all His Word. The complexity of the Scripture far surpasses anything mankind can fathom. It was directed and inspired by God Himself. He decided who was to be involved in writing it, what it was to contain, how it would work to teach, train and correct man, and finally when and how it was to be put together. All of this would accomplish His predetermined plan and purpose.

II Peter 1:20-21

“Knowing this first, that no prophecy of the scripture is of any private interpretation. For the prophecy came not in old time by the will of man: but holy men of God spake as they were moved by the Holy Ghost.”

II Timothy 3:16-17

“All scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness: That the man of God may be perfect, throughly furnished unto all good works.”

The student is encouraged to realize how God's thoughts, abilities and ways are far above ours and that He is fully able to write a complete manual containing all of what He has to teach and say to us. After all it is His Word and His communication to us, perfectly written and preserved by Him over the course of time. One of the wonders of this manual to man is that it has an eternal depth to it and was specifically made to be practical through the ages. It is perfectly able to achieve what God designed it to accomplish. It is profitable to any time, society, culture, race, sex or age when context is considered. It may challenge many of our current practices and norms requiring us to rethink our personal positions on some issues.

Isaiah 55:8-11

“For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways, saith the Lord. For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways, and my

thoughts than your thoughts. For as the rain cometh down, and the snow from heaven, and returneth not thither, but watereth the earth, and maketh it bring forth and bud, that it may give seed to the sower, and bread to the eater: So shall my word be that goeth forth out of my mouth: it shall not return unto me void, but it shall accomplish that which I please, and it shall prosper in the thing whereto I sent it."

Consider two questions, "Can the God of the universe do anything, or not?" and also, "Are we as created beings capable to adequately judge the worthiness, accuracy and practicality of God's Word?" The answer is obvious, "No, in no way!" Then it may be prudent to realize, God is the source of all wisdom and the student may need to begin to think differently about the Word. God Almighty desires to be our total provision, even today, and He has communicated this and many other things by writing and preserving Scripture so we can have access to His mind on these matters.

Proverbs 2:6

"For the Lord giveth wisdom: out of his mouth cometh knowledge and understanding."

God's Word is perfectly suited to our needs and anticipates whatever challenge that may arise. How did God accomplish this? He simply set up His Word according to how He dealt with man over time. God provided particular instruction and guidelines to man during various time periods in history and Scripture has been set up and written in this simple, precise way so that we can understand it. To explain this in another way, God's Word contains 'packages of

instruction or doctrine' in curriculum form directed to certain people for particular periods.

Example 1: The Law was a package of doctrine given to the Nation Israel by God through the prophet Moses. The people of Israel lived by these particular set of standards with order and structure of authority. Specifically, the priesthood and appointed leaders of the twelve tribes were created by God. Further, Deuteronomy relays that the Israelites were told to follow a system of laws, sacrifices, and holy days. In order to keep order and squelch evil and sin, for some offenses, like a stubborn and rebellious child or for those who commit adultery, elders were required to stone the offenders.

Deuteronomy 21:20-21

“And they shall say unto the elders of his city, This our son is stubborn and rebellious, he will not obey our voice; he is a glutton, and a drunkard. And all the men of his city shall stone him with stones, that he die: so shalt thou put evil away from among you; and all Israel shall hear, and fear.”

Deuteronomy 22:24

“Then ye shall bring them both out unto the gate of that city, and ye shall stone them with stones that they die; the damsel, because she cried not, being in the city; and the man, because he hath humbled his neighbour's wife: so thou shalt put away evil from among you.”

The Christian Church today is not Israel and functions under a different body of doctrine called 'Grace'. Pastors, deacons and elders are not instructed to follow the practice of these laws, animal

sacrifices, and the priesthood order of authority nor implement the numerous other standards of 'The Law'. Instead these were unique instructions 'to His Nation' for 'a particular period' of time as designated by God Himself in the Word. It can, however, still teach us very valuable information, such as to gain a clearer picture of God, His character, and standard of righteousness.

Galatians 5:4

“Christ is become of no effect unto you, whosoever of you are justified by the law; ye are fallen from grace.”

Example 2: In another obvious example of instructions to Israel we can observe how the prophet Jeremiah was specifically raised up and sent with a particular message and warning to the Israelites who lived 'at that particular point' in history. At that time, the Nation was living contrary to God and His Word and needed specific reproof and correction, easily observed by the student who even just scans the book of Jeremiah. The passage below was targeted to people living during the designated time Jeremiah was sent by God. Notice in particular verse 17, stating that the judgment is “...upon Judah and upon all the inhabitants of Jerusalem...” because that group, at that time in Israel did not hear and obey.

Jeremiah 35: 12-13, 17

“Then came the word of the Lord unto Jeremiah, saying, Thus saith the Lord of hosts, the God of Israel; Go and tell the men of Judah and the inhabitants of Jerusalem, Will ye not receive

instruction to hearken to my words? saith the Lord...Therefore thus saith the Lord God of hosts, the God of Israel; Behold, I will bring upon Judah and upon all the inhabitants of Jerusalem all the evil that I have pronounced against them: because I have spoken unto them, but they have not heard; and I have called unto them, but they have not answered.”

It may be easy for students to see the context of the passages in the two examples given, that they are directed toward God's Nation Israel. We may also realize that while all Scripture is bursting with things we can learn and glean from even today; it is not specifically written to or about us. But there is a significant lesson to be learned here. It is important to consider the context of Scripture as it dramatically affects what is to be learned and 'how' or 'if' it is to be applied.

Romans 15:4

“For whatsoever things were written aforetime were written for our learning, that we through patience and comfort of the scriptures might have hope.”

Over time God altered His instructions to man regarding the doctrine to follow, how to worship, special ceremonies, and specifics of the gospel. He even changed His designated spokesmen and the messages they preached. The entirety of the Bible was written according to how God was dealing with man at a given point in time. But often students miss this important distinction. Clarity is needed to avoid the potential for confusion and the misapplication of Scripture.

Without a doubt, the student will need to be open and take some time and effort to think differently about how the Bible has been set up. But it is worth the effort. It makes everything so much clearer and many questions and 'apparent contradictions' resolve as things are seen in their proper perspective. The Bible is all for our learning and is all profitable yet it is critical to recognize the context in which it has been written. It is not all directed or written specifically 'to us'.

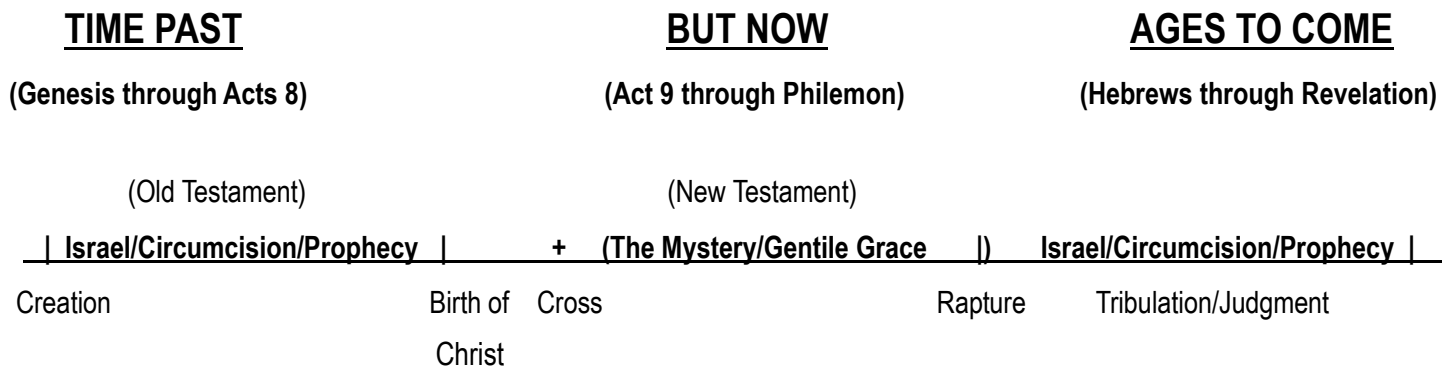
This is a topic that could be addressed at length. However, it is sufficient to recognize the tremendous need to consider the context rather than pull things out and apply them indiscriminately. As the student progresses through Scripture, prayerfully reflect upon this very important aspect of studying and prove these things.

Since this topic is broad in scope, this section will only provide a basic overview. But clarity in this issue is absolutely necessary to gain insight into studying the Bible. Little reflection is needed for a student to see that there are three main time periods, not only throughout the Scriptures but also in life as we observe it. These include: Time Past, But Now and To Come.

This writer first learned about how God set up His Word through a pastor at Shorewood Bible Church in Chicago, Richard Jordan, which became a key to understand the Bible with more

clarity. (Appendix IV) Scripture is laid out in a precise order, in a time line divided into these three sections. Let us take a brief look at this simple Bible design.

Basic Time Line on Layout of Scriptures



*Assignment: Concordance – Look up the phrases: 'time past', 'but now' and 'to come' and see how these time demarcations are used in Scripture. Notice how it gives clarity to what is being taught or said in the context of the passages.

'Time Past' in the Bible consists of two sections. Initially, we can observe that from Genesis 1-11 God dealt with all people in the world, speaking and dealing directly with individuals such as Adam, Cain and Noah.

Genesis 2:16-17

“And the Lord God commanded the man, saying, Of every tree of the garden thou mayest freely eat: But of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, thou shalt not eat of it: for in the day that thou eatest thereof thou shalt surely die.”

Genesis 4:6

“And the Lord said unto Cain, Why art thou wroth: and why is thy countenance fallen?”

Genesis 7:1

“And the Lord said unto Noah, Come thou and all thy house into the ark; for thee have I seen righteous before me in this generation.”

Yet very quickly in Genesis, in this 'Time Past' period, we see God made an adjustment after the Tower of Babel and set aside all the people and nations of the world, eventually known as Gentiles. Initially, He separated one particular man, Abram, and with him created His own Nation, 'Israel'.

Genesis 12:1-3

“Now the Lord had said unto Abram, Get thee out of thy country, and from thy kindred, and from thy father's house, unto a land that I will shew thee: And I will make of thee a great nation, and I will bless thee, and make thy name great; and thou shall be a blessing: and I will bless them that bless thee, and curse him that curseth thee: and in thee shall all families of the earth be blessed.”

Later, God used Moses to lead His people out of Egypt with great power and wonders and showed them 'He' was to be their total provision. God unveiled 'The Law' through Moses, which provided them with many instructions: dietary laws, offerings and sacrifices, holy days, statutes, ceremonies, judgments and the authority of the priesthood to guide them.

Deuteronomy 4: 5-8

Behold, I have taught you statutes and judgments, even as the Lord my God commanded me, that ye should do so in the land whither ye go to possess it. Keep therefore and do them; for this is your wisdom and your understanding in the sight of the nations, which shall hear all these statutes, and say, Surely this great nation is a wise and understanding people. For what nation is there so great, who hath God so nigh unto them, as the Lord our God is in all things that we call upon him for? And what nation is there so great, that hath statutes and judgments so righteous as all this law, which I set before you this day?”

Exodus 15: 10-13

Thou didst blow with thy wind, the sea covered them: they sank as lead in the mighty waters, Who is like unto thee, O Lord, among the gods? who is like thee, glorious in holiness, fearful in praises, doing wonders? Thou stretchest out thy right hand, the earth swallowed them. Thou in thy mercy hast led forth the people which thou hast redeemed: thou hast guided them in thy strength unto thy holy habitation.”

'Time Past' lasted through a large portion of Scripture, from Genesis 12 and continued on to include the four Gospels and Acts chapters 1-8. The focal point throughout this section and time was the Nation Israel. Specifically, God made 'them' to be a vessel to manifest His character, glory, and purpose to the world. This section is not written to the Christian Church today, but rather to Israel. During this time He made many specific prophecies to Israel, many of which have not yet been fulfilled.

*Assignment: Study with purpose. Since this may be a new concept for some, at this point students are encouraged to look at the context of this section of Scripture, Genesis 12 to Acts 8 to evaluate and prove these things. To get started, look at even one book, the first of the gospels, Matthew. Many see this as a book of doctrine written 'to the Church today'.

But look with an open mind to observe how chapter 1 begins; it is a 'Jewish' lineage, a link and continuation of the program and God's dealings with His Nation, taking you back through the history of the Old Testament. Our 'Old Testament books' are the same ones in the Jewish Scriptures. Study the context to see who Jesus came into the world to save in Matthew 1: 21. In chapter 2:1-2, we see the wise men knew Christ was King, but to what people? And in Matthew 10:5-6, the twelve were commanded to go preach. Who were they to preach to and who were they to avoid? Go on to other books within this section to develop your own awareness. (Often, a student can find the context in the first few verses of a book.)

The 'But Now' period is our present time, the Christian Church. This period begins in Acts 9 and goes through the book of Philemon. Immediately in Chapter 9 students can clearly observe that God makes another change in His approach to man.

Saul of Tarsus (Paul) was saved on the road to Damascus and given a unique apostleship 'to the Gentiles', that is, all the world. It was separate from Israel's specific program and prophecies and

therefore was not an extension of what God was doing with the Little Flock and the twelve disciples. Paul was given a distinctive message, 'a mystery' kept secret until the risen Christ began to reveal it to him. His epistles encapsulate this body of doctrine or instructions to the Church today.

Acts 9:3-4, 15-16

“And as he journeyed, he came near Damascus: and suddenly there shined round about him a light from heaven: And he fell to the earth, and heard a voice saying unto him, Saul, Saul, why persecutest thou me?...But the Lord said unto him, Go thy way: for he is a chosen vessel unto me, to bear my name before the Gentiles, and kings, and the children of Israel: For I will shew him how great things he must suffer for my name's sake.”

Initially, Peter and the Nation of Israel were center stage in Acts. But from Acts 9 onward they were in decline and Paul and his ministry became the main focus. Acts 9-15 details God's preparation of Peter and the Little Flock for a transition, a change in 'who and how' He was dealing with man. Thus, Acts documents historically how God gradually but temporarily sets aside Israel as His special Nation, and they become just 'one of the many nations' of the world.

This 'Mystery' message was kept secret since before the world. 'But Now' through Paul's ministry, it was being made known to the world. The many prophecies from God to His Nation from this 'Time

Past' period were temporarily placed 'on hold'. Now, it was the time of the Gentiles.

Romans 11:13-14, 25

“For I speak to you Gentiles, inasmuch as I am the apostle of the Gentiles, I magnify mine office: If by any means I may provoke to emulation them which are my flesh, and might save some of them...For I would not, brethren, that ye should be ignorant of this mystery, lest ye should be wise in your own conceits; that blindness in part is happened to Israel, until the fulness of the Gentiles be come in.”

I Corinthians 2:7-8

“But we speak the wisdom of God in a mystery, even the hidden wisdom which God ordained before the world unto our glory: which none of the princes of this world knew: for had they known it, they would not have crucified the Lord of glory.”

The specific Scripture written for this 'But Now' time period is found from Acts 9 through all of Paul's Epistles. This time is known as the 'Dispensation of the Grace of God' or 'The Mystery of Christ' and believers are known as the Body of Christ. The event noting the end of this time period is the Rapture or the “catching away” of believers to Heaven.

Ephesians 3:1-5

“For this cause I Paul, the prisoner of Jesus Christ for you Gentiles, If ye have heard of the dispensation of the grace of God which is given me to you-ward: How that by revelation he made known unto me the mystery: (as I wrote afore in a few words, Whereby, when ye read, ye may understand my knowledge in the mystery of Christ) Which in other ages was not

made known unto the sons of men, as it is now revealed unto his holy apostles and prophets

by the Spirit...”

I Corinthians 12:27

“Now ye are the body of Christ, and members in particular.

I Thessalonians 4:17

“Then we which are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds, to meet the Lord in the air: and so shall we ever be with the Lord.”

Finally in the 'To Come' time period, also called the “last days” throughout Scripture, God resumes His dealings with His Nation from where He set them aside in Acts 8. When this current Grace period ends, immediately Israel's program is re-established. The Nation once again becomes 'His appointed vessel' to manifest His power and glory.

The focus returns to the many things previously spoken about unto “the fathers by the prophets” in 'Time Past', such as 'The Law' and an earthly kingdom. This section, Hebrews to Revelation is the 'To Come' time period and was particularly written to the “twelve tribes' of Israel, a fact that is often missed or explained away, creating misapplication of Scripture. Students can skim through this section to observe the continuous references to Israel, “the fathers' of God's Nation and the fulfillment of the Nation's prophecies.

Matthew 6:9-10

“After this manner therefore pray ye: *Our Father which are in heaven, Hallowed by thy name.*”

Thy kingdom come. Thy will be done in earth, as it is in heaven.”

Hebrews 1:1

“God, who at sundry times and in divers manners spake in time past unto the fathers by the prophets, Hath in these last days spoken unto us by his Son, whom he hath appointed heir of all things, by whom also he made the worlds...”

James 1:1

“James, as servant of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ, to the twelve tribes which are scattered abroad, greeting.”

As predetermined by God, many of the things written about and required for Israel to do were just a shadow of things 'To Come'. Romans 11 states the Nation is 'grafted back in again' at this point. Then, God continues His goodness toward Israel once again as the Dispensation of Grace ends. The Body of Christ is raptured, and no longer functions as 'His vessel'.

Hebrews 10:1

*“For the law having a shadow of good things to come, and not the very image of the things, can never with those sacrifices which they offered year by year continually make the comers there-
unto perfect.”*

Romans 11: 22-23

“Behold therefore the goodness and severity of God: on them which fell, severity; but toward thee, goodness, if thou continue in his goodness: otherwise thou also shalt be cut off. And they also, if they abide not still in unbelief, shall be grafted in: for God is able to graff them in again.”

This last section was specifically written to 'the Hebrews' and where we see the fulfillment of all the prophecies and promises made unto the twelve tribes of Israel. This time period includes Christ's return in wrath during the Tribulation and the earthly Kingdom referenced in the 'Lord's Prayer'. At the appointed time, a city in Heaven, 'New Jerusalem' will come to Earth where God and the Lord Jesus will reside and sit on their throne. This section concludes the instructions and doctrine about His plan and purpose, designed specifically for mankind in His Word.

Revelation 21:2.

“And I John saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down from God out of heaven, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband...And I saw no temple therein: for the Lord God Almighty and the Lamb are the temple of it.”

***Assignment:** Prove all things. Look up the Scripture references in their context as a Berean (Acts 17) and evaluate who is being addressed in each of these time periods. Take the time to determine whether these things are true by using Scripture as the final authority.

Layout of Scriptures

According to How God Dealt with Mankind

<u>Time Period</u>	<u>How God Deals With Man</u>	<u>Range Of Scripture</u>	<u>Program</u>
Time Past	1. God dealt with individuals within the world like Adam, Cain and Noah. 2. God set aside all people and nations of the world to raise up Abram to begin His Nation Israel.	1. Genesis 1 - 11 2. Genesis 12 through to Acts 8	1. A personal relationship with man. 2. Israel's program, The Law, Prophecy, also called, The Kingdom.
But Now	God sets Israel aside for a time to raise up Saul (Paul) to be the Apostle of the Gentiles and creates the Body of Christ, Christians today. This period ends with the Rapture of the Church.	Acts 9-28 and Romans through to Philemon, all of Paul's epistles.	The Church The Body of Christ, also called The Mystery of Christ Or The Dispensation of the Grace of God.
Ages To Come	God resumes dealing with Israel as His Nation. It picks up from where God began to set them aside in Acts 8.	Hebrews through Revelation	Israel's Program, The Law, Prophecy fulfilled & The Kingdom resumes.

To review, assume Scripture is perfectly applicable. Each section is actually set up as a curriculum, one thing building upon the next for man's instruction. A definition of curriculum might be: the sum or collection of advancing courses or topics of study provided in a manual, class or school.

Scripture can be seen in this way. The Word has been organized as a body of information and instructions progressively

organized in a specific way to build understanding and practical direction to live and mature. The whole Bible can be seen as man's overall course of study and each section a specific curriculum designed with purpose and intent by God for that time. Still, each abundantly overflows with teachings for us, to be gleaned as context is considered.

Once we acknowledge that these were instructions to be followed by 'the people of that time' they provide valuable information to the observant student. Man can learn from this knowledge in many ways. For example, we can avoid similar mistakes that they made, acquire wisdom from what they experienced, learn about the character of God, His perfect standard of righteousness and man himself, etc.

Much can be learned as we spend time reading, studying and thinking on these things from Genesis through Revelation. Considering the context and circumstances sets the stage for understanding the, who, what, when, where, why and how of the passage and is vitally important.

But know there is so much more that God has infused within Scripture that is profitable for man than mere historical value. But this is clearly beyond the scope of this book. Recognizing God's design, how He directs sections of Scripture 'to particular people

within a given time' and 'contains particular instructions or doctrine' to them is imperative and alone, will prove most profitable to the student.

To conclude, we are to look at Scripture by 'rightly dividing' it into how God deals with mankind. When this is done the pieces fall into place simply and naturally as the student studies and allows the Spirit to lead him through His Word. These are important study insights and the student is encouraged to consider these things as we move forward in Part I - What To Appreciate As We Approach God's Word.

II Timothy 2:15

“Study to shew thyself approved unto God, a workman that needeth not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth.”

Romans 8:14

“For as many as are led by the Spirit of God, they are the sons of God.”

C. Basic Study Suggestions

The introductory thoughts listed below anticipate challenges and the questions that may naturally develop in the mind of a student who desires to expand skills in studying Scripture. These will show themselves to be only a brief synopsis and many will be addressed more completely later in this series. Students may find

that these recommendations may become instrumental in developing or redefining good Bible study habits.

Most insights in this book have been developed over the course of over 30 years, collected from other Bible students and teachers or learned through practical experience. Study suggestions have also been infused into the chapters to come. Approach these as resources to consider rather than a legalistic 'to do list'. Taken in grace, they can become useful tools to make the studying process easier, more enjoyable, effectual, and prove to increase self-awareness.

1. Stay Open to Learn and Grow in the Word

If the things presented so far about God's Word seem to be new concepts, hard to believe or unclear, a 'red flag' should go up in the mind of the student indicating there is a need for further attention to this matter. God created us with a 'natural response' to sense discomfort when approached with something new or conflicting. It is in place as a 'protective defense mechanism'. Remember, it may take time to process new things.

But for many, this provokes a 'fear response', slamming shut the door or putting up a thick wall of protection from 'new ideas'. Sometimes we need to be reminded that 'new concepts' are not bad, in fact, this is how we grow. It is an idea based on or mixed

with 'man's wisdom' instead of 'sound doctrine' within Scripture that will prove to be inaccurate and dangerous. When questions arise, due consideration should be given before new or different ideas are accepted. Study things out. But prayerfully proceed, even if it feels a little awkward as there are many things God would have us learn in His Word.

The Bereans in Acts 17:11 had this precise, noble attitude. Look at the context to fully realize how they were 'open and ready' to new things from the Word. But just as important, they realized the need to move forward in their faith by 'proving things' with the Word before accepting them as true. Much can be learned by the wisdom shown by this mature group of saints.

Acts 17: 11

“These were more noble than those in Thessalonica, in that they received the word with all readiness of mind, and searched the scriptures daily, whether those things were so.”

New convictions occur over time as clarity is obtained; then, it becomes a part of us. Simply pray for a desire to learn and grow with His Word as your authority. Review and study things yourself in prayer until there is a peace that you have acquired, at least a basic understanding and then proceed with caution with eyes and hearts open. As receptive believers, God is constantly refining or revising

our understanding through the Word and by His Spirit. Rest in His work in you and be open by stepping forward in faith.

2. Your Standard and Final Authority

We often cling to beliefs that give us security, yet they may not be accurate at all. Instead, they can become strongholds in our life, which actually prevent growth. Examples of this may include keeping a doctrinal position based upon 'what you always believed', 'traditional views' held by the church, ties to religious systems, or 'what others say or believe'. So, as students proceed through this book, regularly give thought to what is believed and determine if underlying assumptions are Scriptural.

II Corinthians 10:3-5

“(For the weapons of our warfare are not carnal, but mighty through God to the pulling down of strongholds;) Casting down imaginations, and every high thing that exalteth itself against the knowledge of God, and bringing into captivity every thought to the obedience of Christ;”

When self-appraisal reveals a belief is founded upon anything but sound doctrine, reconsider your position. God's Word is the standard and the final authority, not men. That is why regular reflection on this issue is so important for proper edification.

When we disagree with something in the Scriptures, know the Word of God is always right. Our ideas never are to be placed above what God instructs. If we think God or His instructions are

incorrect, the issue will always default back to the fact that we just may not fully understand yet. If there appears to be a contradiction, remember there never is, since God inspired and preserved it perfectly. Some things in Scripture may not be understood immediately and may take time to become clear as one matures. Assume that the all-knowing God knew what He was writing. As we proceed look for more about the authority of God's Word.

3. Glorify and Exalt God and His Word

As an introduction to this topic let us consider a few questions. Who or what is given 'the' glorified position in your thinking? Who do you recognize as the source of 'all good things'? Is it God, your own efforts, or something else? Do you have an appreciation for what you have received? It is important to know that, what is believed in the heart can motivate actions. Read the context of Proverbs 4:23 to gain insight into this principle.

Proverbs 4:23

“Keep thy heart with all diligence: for out of it are the issues of life.”

The Word teaches God has given us all things unconditionally in grace, such as life, light, soil, seed, and rain, which bring forth food, drink, clothing and shelter. He also provides spiritual sustenance: all knowledge, wisdom, and understanding, found in the Scriptures. Is there anything that we have of our own selves?

John 1:2-4

“All things were made by him; and without him was not any thing made that was made. In him was life; and the life was the light of men.”

Proverbs 1:7, 2:6

“The fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge: but fools despise wisdom and instruction... For the Lord giveth wisdom: out of his mouth cometh knowledge and understanding.”

God has an unfathomable love for each one of us, giving His own Son to suffer our eternal penalty for sin. He knows what we need before we ask as He created us and knows everything. If we were to compare our intellect with the Creator of all things, it would be obvious that we are unable to approach the same level of thinking since His ways are so far above ours. Do we really understand how much He has and is giving us, or appreciate the depth of His love and the wonders of all He provides?

Romans 5:8,10

“But God commendeth his love toward us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us... For if, when we were enemies, we were reconciled to God by the death of His Son, much more, being reconciled, we shall be saved by his life.”

Isaiah 55:8-9

“For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways, saith the Lord. For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways, and my thoughts than your thoughts.”

When we complain, become angry at God, continually ask for more, or live only 'for ourselves', what does this reflect about our

attitude? A 'child's perspective' would cry out for more and more things and never be satisfied, aware, or thankful for what his parents continually provide. This way of viewing life is self-absorbed, self-centered, and driven by the flesh. It shows an immaturity in thinking and a lack of consideration and thankfulness. We all know how parents must 'teach' children the habit of saying, 'Thank you'. True appreciation grows over time, with awareness and maturity.

Students are encouraged to take a moment to reflect. Do you elevate the things of the 'flesh' and 'world' or are God and His Word in this glorified position? Whatever one decides to exalt and focus on, it will be in the driver's seat when decisions are made. It will actually set our course in life and be the consumer of our time and resources. These are weighty matters to consider.

Colossians 3: 1-5a

“If ye then be risen with Christ, seek those things which are above, where Christ sitteth on the right hand of God. Set your affection on things above, not on things on the earth. For ye are dead, and your life is hid with Christ in God. When Christ, who is our life, shall appear, then shall ye also appear with him in glory. Mortify therefore your members which are upon the earth...”

God and His Word deserve the ultimate position of exaltation in our minds at all times, in every situation and issue. So then, where are you in your thinking? Is there an adjustment needed?

Knowing this, an appreciative saint can mature to be “...constrained by the love of Christ”. He can live as who God made him, manifest a pleasing life to the Father and motivated to grow in His Word. He does this by minding sound doctrine, yielding to God's work in him. Think on these things.

II Corinthians 5:14

“For the love of Christ constraineth us; because we thus judge, that if one died for all, then were all dead.”

4. Proceed Trusting God

So then, trusting God is important. Know ahead of time, however, that there are deep things in Scripture that are just 'hard to understand'. This is so for everyone and ought to be expected because it is an eternal book. Scripture is designed to be fully capable to teach a young believer but challenge a mature saint at the same time. There is a depth to Scripture that comes from God and He teaches us new things in the Word when we are ready, willing and able to receive it.

Determine to take in the Word by faith but know He actually decides the timing by how He constructed the Word, one thing being built upon the next. Pray and continue in His Word and know that understanding doesn't always come to us just because we want it to or when we have a question. Some things need to come

before others. Rest in His process, and keep studying prayerfully, knowing it was perfectly designed with us in mind and that He is truly for us!

Isaiah 28:10

“For precept must be upon precept, precept upon precept; line upon line, line upon line; here a little, and there a little:”

***Assignment:** Self-awareness: At this point, take a few moments to evaluate what you believe on the topics presented thus far and the questions below. Go back to review areas that seem unclear and put them to prayer before moving forward.

-Are there any limitations to God's power and abilities?

-Is the mighty God and Creator of the Universe perfectly able to do anything?

-Can God write a book without error and preserve it perfectly through time?

-Is it possible for the Living God to perfectly anticipate all that would be needed down through the ages, cultures and societies and place it into one, eternal book? Is there anything too hard for the Lord?

-Is He really for us? (Romans 8:31-39)

5. Questions Are Good

Students can have questions about Scripture and at the same time totally trust what God says as being always and completely true. Learn to expect to have queries about various subjects and verses. They actually help us think out what He is teaching on a topic or in a verse and to develop conviction about the issue.

It is important to realize that sometimes we can only take 'baby steps' in learning something new. And though it may seem to be a small progression forward, even this can only occur as we are ready and in God's time. In faith, we can realize the vastness of God's wisdom. We can mature to believe and accept that we will not understand some things, but encouraged to continue to have questions and prove things by Scripture. It is also important to learn to be patient, give our questions over to God in prayer, then move forward in our study, being thankful for His teaching.

Questions or topics can always be 'tabled' for a time. But regularly re-evaluate and study them later to gain a fuller understanding as your heart and mind are ready. To do this some students may keep them in a journal or log to remind them of future topics to examine.

6. Read the Verses in This Book and Look up the Context

It is important not to skip over the Scripture references placed in this book. Read the verses that have been typed out. Then, as this becomes a habit, keep progressing by going on to look up references in your own Bible to analyze the context in which the Scripture was pulled.

Think about this, what does it mean when a reader skips over the verses to read an author's text? This is a most uncomfortable

thought for this writer. Priority is being given to the text more than His Word when the opposite ought to be true in one's life. God speaks to and teaches us through His Word and this is how we grow. It is hoped 'the text' of this book always points the student back to the Word.

7. The 'Assignments' in this Book can be Profitable

You may decide to do every assignment contained in this series of books or pick and choose those that seem most relevant. You may decide not to do any at first, and read the book through to the end. But then, purpose to go back to do a second reading and do at least some of the assignments.

It is strongly suggested that even the first time through that each student at least 'read' the assignments. They will be teaching important concepts, presenting ideas that will be helpful for your mind to consider as you proceed. They are meant to be profitable and contain study methods and practical application of what is being taught. Once read, they may still be entertained in your mind and can be working for you during the day.

To conclude, it is important to realize that the Bible cannot be compared to man-made books; it has been written and directed by God Himself. Students would be wise to consider its many characteristics because it will prepare them to approach the

Scriptures with the reverence and respect that it deserves. As we have seen in Psalm 138, even the Father magnifies it above His own name.

Additionally, this chapter has reviewed the general organization of the Bible, which is critical to enable the student to realize the context, the who, what, when, where and why of passages. And finally, there was a preview of a few preliminary study insights to prepare the student to the things that will follow and further enable effectual study. The student is encouraged to consider these things and go back at this point to review any areas that seem unclear.

Personal Notes

Selecting a Bible

Once a person becomes interested in reading or studying God's Word, there are numerous related issues that can seem overwhelming. For many, selecting a Bible is one of these issues. For example: “Is there a difference between the various Bibles available”, “Why are there so many versions and styles?” “What are the best options to choose from and what are the pros and the cons?” These are just a few of the many important issues and this chapter cannot hope to deal with even one exhaustively. Therefore, this section will briefly touch upon two issues, which version and things to consider when purchasing a Bible.

A. Which Version

Immediately upon entering a book store, purchasing Bible software, e-Bibles or electronics, but even just looking on-line, a priority issue seems to hit us squarely in the face. Which Bible version should be selected? Determining which version to use can be quite a challenge especially for the young believer, when there are many viewpoints and a variety of 'Christian groups or leaders' recommending or discrediting various versions.

The topic becomes increasingly more complicated knowing that each version has been taken from a particular text line. A text is a particular line of Greek manuscript and there are two main text lines, the Majority and the Minority text. One is often viewed as being corrupt while the other is seen as true. This writer defers this interesting, but complicated topic to the resources in the last Appendix that can more adequately address these issues in detail. A course within a Bible training program taught by Richard Jordan, taken years ago, provided insight into some of these issues. (Appendix IV)

For many reasons, this writer uses the King James Version recognizing it as 'the Book' God has preserved over time for us in the English language. It will take very little comparison to realize that 'words' are 'different' in the various translations. Some leave out whole verses and others contain verses with different wording. It can be seen that words have been added, changed or omitted. At times, notations are made in the margin of a Bible calling into question the validity of some words or verses in Scripture. These practices are dangerous!

Words are important to God. Each has precise meanings and changing even one is a problem. Note the warning in the final verses of the Bible, in Revelation 22. Is there any doubt as to the

passion of God's position on this issue? Know that every word has been preserved and is significant. God's viewpoint ought to speak volumes to a saint on this matter.

Revelation 22: 18-19

“For I testify unto every man that heareth the words of the prophecy of this book, If any man shall add unto these things, God shall add unto him the plagues that are written in this book: And if any man shall take away from the words of the book of this prophecy, God shall take away his part out of the book of life, and out of the holy city, and from the things which are written in this book.”

Psalms 12: 6-7

“The words of the Lord are pure words: as silver tried in a furnace of earth, purified seven times. Thou shalt keep them, O Lord, thou shalt preserve them from this generation for ever.”

Deuteronomy 8:3

“And he humbled thee, and suffered thee to hunger, and fed thee with manna, which thou knewest not, neither did thy fathers know; that he might make thee know that man doth not live by bread only, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of the Lord doth man live.”

The King James has proven itself to be more precise, using the older English at a time when the English language was more exact and pure, with increased precision in word definitions. Therefore, students need not be intimidated or detoured by the King James' use of the older English, nor by those who criticize its use. Actually our modern English is by far less formal and accurate, infiltrated with slang term usage, with a more relaxed grammatical posture.

Students can purpose to keep the door of their mind open. Just because the older English is a little different from what is normally read does not mean it is the wrong version or should be avoided. Expect that it may take some prayerful time to adjust and become comfortable in its use. It will be eternally well worth the effort.

How can the student evaluate for himself which version to use? Actually this writer found a method that seems to work that is quite uncomplicated. It is one that keeps the Scripture as the final authority. Just prayerfully look at key passages and compare the differences in the various translations and objectively evaluate which glorifies the Lord the most, yielding to the basic guidelines God has provided in the Word.

For example, is the Lord Jesus Christ's name altered or omitted? Is Christ's deity, being equal to God or His position within the Godhead changed? Are there places where 'the blood' or being saved by 'faith alone' taken out? Take the time necessary to do this study and one translation will rise to the top and a decision can be made objectively.

So is there one Book that has been perfectly preserved by God? The answer is obvious, of course! He has said He has preserved it in Psalm 12. The results of this writer's study have confidently lead to the decision to use The King James Bible. At this

point, it may 'seem' reasonable for at least some students to assume this writer's conclusions are true. Others may ask a respected Christian leader or read a man-made book to help make this decision, but then, who or what is the final authority? It would not be Scripture.

We are called to do the evaluation necessary, taking responsibility to make sure we have and are studying the Word of God. So then, how will you move forward in selecting a version to study? (The resources in Appendix IV may have a list of verses to make these comparisons or gain a fuller appreciation on this topic, but the Word is always to be the final authority.)

*Assignment: Meditate and Reflect - Ask yourself questions to think out what you understand and believe about 'the effect of changes' made to God's Word: Does it matter if a word, here and there, is changed in the Bible? Is it just the 'general ideas' that God preserved or is it the very 'words' of God? Can we rely on His Word as being perfect and complete or not? Use these questions as a beginning point to consider and be motivated to study things for yourself.

To get started, the words underlined below are just some of the many places where words were omitted in other translations as compared to the King James. Look at some of the major translations and compare the verses. Then, go on to also evaluate what has been 'changed' and 'added'.

Matthew 8:29

*“And, behold, they cried out, saying, What have we to do with thee, Jesus, thou Son of God?
Art thou come hither to torment us before the time?”*

Romans 5:2

*“By whom also we have access by faith, into this grace wherein we stand, and rejoice in hope
of the glory of God.”*

Colossians 1:14

“In whom we have redemption through his blood, even the forgiveness of sins”

Hebrews 1:3

*“Who being the brightness of his glory, and the express image of his person, and upholding all
things by the word of his power, when he had by himself purged our sins, sat down on the
right hand of the Majesty on high”*

I John 5:7-8

*“For there are three that bear record in heaven, the Father, the Word, and the Holy Ghost: and
these three are one. And there are three that bear witness in earth, the Spirit, and the water,
and the blood: and these three agree in one.”*

(Note: All of I John 5:7-8 is underlined because 'some versions' completely omit both verses. These passages clearly address the issue of the Trinity and Godhead.)

B. Things to Consider When Purchasing a Bible (Appendix 1)

Next, let us concentrate efforts upon selecting a specific book that meets the individual needs of the student. The student ought to know that there is an option to select a Bible that strictly lays forth

the purity of Scripture, void of publisher comments, study insights, or other resources. But there are also a great many Bible choices with one or more of the following: cross reference systems, notes, concordances, maps dictionaries, and historical background information. These can be very helpful, especially when a little direction is provided to the buyer.

While the main thrust of this section is to assist the reader in purchasing a hard copy of the Bible, in today's electronic age there are many options available to obtain the Word of God. One can use the Internet and access Scripture on various websites. E-Bibles and devices specifically made for downloading books such as the Word of God are also available. These can provide easy access to Scripture, even when a hard copy is unavailable.

Many of the considerations below can also assist in making an informed choice when considering an electronic option. With that in mind, let us now go on to consider ten specific topics regarding the selection of a study Bible. This can provide a starting point in the process of thinking out this decision.

1. Version

This is probably one of the most important issues to determine as a student. If you are unsure which version to use, do research to develop your own conviction. As suggested earlier, compare verses

from various versions to the King James and determine which glorifies the Lord the most. Until then, stay in your Bible and prayerfully make the decision to continue to study.

2. Study Notes

Maps, pictures and historical information can prove interesting, providing technical data from man's point of view. Background information on each book, characters and historical times can also be quite insightful. There can be many useful and interesting points, observations and thoughts in Bible notes. But be aware that publishers often include 'scholarly' notes that are founded upon current views or archaeological findings. This is opinion and some may lead to verses or words being questioned, omitted, or changed. When this occurs, there is usually a note as to the reason. This ought to raise an 'enormous red flag' in the mind of the believer.

3. Cross References

In order to assist the student in finding verses, cross reference notations are made in Bibles linking words or topics to other places in Scripture. Some cross reference notes or verses are listed between columns of text, while others are noted at the top or bottom of a page of Scripture. It can be seen as a mini-study linking Scripture to be considered. Each publisher has its own method of

cross referencing verses. Some are more factual, referring back to a specific verse where the topic or quote originated. Others may offer personal notes on a topic.

4. Binding

Leather bound Bibles will definitely last longer, though are markedly more expensive. Before investing in a pricey Bible, an inexperienced student may want to start with an inexpensive book until preferences are known.

5. Size/Width

When choosing a Bible, deciding upon the characteristics takes some thought. Larger print is the main reason for purchasing larger Bibles. During the selection process, consider vision needs and weight for transporting. There are thin width books also available.

6. Tabs

Some Bibles can be bought with built in tabs on the end of the pages, indicating the location of the books of the Bible. This makes them easier to locate and can be a very useful tool for studying, especially for those unfamiliar with the books of the Bible.

7. Margins

Some Bibles come with little or no margin. Others have borders all around the print and many have them on both sides or on the top and bottom of the page. Margins can be used for personal notes or

jotting down references which can help to refresh insights gained in earlier studies or sermons.

8. Concordance/Dictionary

Having these resources in the back of a Bible can be convenient, though limited in scope and content often due to space constrictions.

9. Bible Covers

A protective cover is a good investment to safeguard your Bible. It can also provide organization to store paper, writing implements, maps, previous studies, etc.

10. Red Letter Edition

Many prefer Bibles with the 'words of Jesus' in red. An interesting question to study would be, are 'these words' more important than the rest of Scripture? Note in John 1:1-3,14 and Revelation 19:13, respectfully, which teaches that the Word and Christ are one. Consider also that God inspired every word of the Bible as holy men were moved by the Holy Ghost to write it. (II Timothy 3:16 & II Peter 1:19-21) Each verse and word has also been perfectly preserved (Psalm 12: 6-7). Then, entertain the possibility that the actual 'words Christ spoke when He lived on Earth' and 'every word throughout Scripture' are all the words of Christ.

Personal Notes

How to Come to the Bible

Once a Bible has been selected there are many issues that can equip and enable believers to approach studying more effectively. As students consider the issues that follow, be reflective, earnestly and objectively taking in the Word by faith even when it disagrees with long held views or traditions. Be open to all of what God would desire to teach you.

As we approach Scripture we need to have some things 'under our belts' so to speak, in order to appreciate what God has in His Word. We are to come to the Word, knowing some things: it is the absolute authority, confident that we are saved, humble and thankful, realizing who we are, with a ready mind, in prayer and meditation, knowing some things about our relationship with God and of course, with the heart of faith. Each of these will be addressed in this section, but only to introduce the topic and to encourage the student to do further study. Many topics will be fleshed out more fully as the series; *A Basic Introduction to Bible Study* unfolds.

A. Know That the Bible is the Absolute Authority

One of the first issues to consider, building upon what has already been addressed, is our attitude toward the Word. We need to develop a sustained effort to peel back the many tinted layers on the glasses we all wear being stained with the course of this world, keeping us from making the Word alone our final authority. This is not always easy to do. It is natural to respond in pride and become high-minded, closed off to change even when it is sound teaching. So, we will need to decide to stay properly motivated, to stay open and focused. This might be effectively accomplished by realizing the consequences when we put other things above God. He has preserved examples of this precise instruction for us in His Word.

Therefore, let us reflect upon two of many instances when the Bible records major errors made by man and also a recent life example. We will then examine one powerful account in Scripture when a faithful man held God and His Word as the Absolute Authority.

Study Suggestion: Learning through examples. Contained within the Scriptures are illustrations recorded by God, some are 'godly' examples and some are 'not'. We have the opportunity to learn from them by viewing them as God does. He tells us that all Scripture is profitable. Look for these valuable opportunities to learn.

Romans 15:4

“For whatsoever things were written aforetime were written for our learning, that we through patience and comfort of the scriptures might have hope.”

II Timothy 3:16, 17

“All scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness: That the man of God might be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works.”

Error #1

Our first situation is taken from the Old Testament from the first few chapters of Genesis and interestingly is the first thing God decides to reveal about man and his choices. What deadly error did Adam and Eve make in the Garden of Eden, particularly recorded for our learning? After careful examination of Genesis 2-3, basically, they hearkened unto Satan's word, their own flesh and pride, rather than keeping God as their highest authority.

Genesis 3: 1,6

“Now the serpent was more subtil than any beast of the field which the Lord God had made. And he said unto the woman, Yea, hath God said, Ye shall not eat of every tree of the garden... And when the woman saw that the tree was good for food, and that it was pleasant to the eyes, and a tree to be desired to make one wise, she took of the fruit thereof, and did eat, and gave also unto her husband with her; and he did eat.”

Read the full context for yourselves and observe how Eve was deceived by Satan and lured away from Truth. Then, as a result,

she exalted her flesh above God's instructions, being tricked, yielding to her own desires. She saw that the tree was 'good for food', was 'pleasant to the eyes' and would 'make her wise'.

Adam, on the other hand, consciously chose to sin against God but also placed the desires of his flesh above God and His command. In this way, Adam and Eve followed 'Satan's word' and 'his evil plan' above God and His Word, the Creator of all. The disciple John specifies this basic tendency of man to serve himself, exalting his own lust and pride in the following passage.

I John 2:15-16

“Love not the world, neither the things that are in the world. If any man love the world, the love of the Father is not in him. For all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh, and the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life, is not of the Father, but is of the world.”

Notice how Paul targets the key problem for us in Romans 1:21-23. This core issue is what man falls prey to whenever he allows sin to enter the picture and it is a two-fold problem. Man does not 'glorify God' for all of who He is and secondly, man is 'not thankful' for God and His provision.

Romans 1:21-23

“Because that, when they knew God, they glorified him not as God, neither were they thankful; 1) but became vain in their imaginations, 2) and their foolish hearts were darkened. 3) Professing themselves to be wise, they became fools, 4) and changed the glory of the uncorruptible God into an image made like to corruptible man, and to birds, and fourfooted beasts, and creeping things.”

Notice the specific consequences or results of such thinking in the verses, numbered to assist readers to see the four specific points. This section of Scripture seems to be a Bible process, though not specifically being studied here, but important to note as it is the spiraling degeneration of man because of sin.

Consider what is taught to us in I Corinthians 4:7. All that we are and all that we have is because God gave it to us. We added nothing when we came into the world and we will not take anything with us when we exit. It is clear that we can learn from this awareness. God is the one to be given all the honor and credit for all good things provided to us, since He is our total provision. To Him is all the glory. This can develop an awareness to motivate us to be thankful.

I Corinthians 4: 7

“For who maketh thee to differ from another? and what hast thou that thou didst not receive? now if thou didst receive it, why dost thou glory, as if thou hadst not received it?”

I Timothy 6:7

“For we brought nothing into this world, and it is certain we can carry nothing out.”

*Assignment: Reflect and consider these things: Is then the creature (man and his flesh and pride) to be placed above the Creator? Of course not! But on what do we base life decisions? Are decisions and use of time driven by the flesh and the pride of life or by what God instructs in His Word? The question then that comes to

mind is, “Are there areas in your own life that need to be refocused?” Take the time to practically think about these things because we all can benefit from reflection on this topic. But remember not to allow yourself to be burdened by guilt or legalism. Put it to prayer for a grace motivation to make any changes needed.

Error #2

Next, as the second example, examine the Nation of Israel in the New Testament, when Jesus lived on the Earth. Though God had a unique relationship with His Nation and provided everything for them: prophets and priests, ongoing, personal instruction, miracles and warnings, they still gave place to Satan’s influence. Even when God sent His own Son to Earth with the specific purpose of saving 'His people', the religious leaders rejected Him and the people blindly followed. It is clear throughout the gospel accounts of Matthew, Mark, Luke and John that, with the exception of a small remnant of believers, Israel listened to their envious, self-focused religious leaders and were easily led astray, even to crucify their Messiah. How sad! They did not even recognize 'The One' who came to save them and fulfill their prophecies.

Matthew 1: 21

“And she shall bring forth a son, and thou shalt call his name JESUS: for he shall save his people from their sins.”

Matthew 27: 18, 20, 25

“For he knew that for envy they had delivered him...But the chief priests and elders persuaded the multitude that they should ask Barabbas, and destroy Jesus...Then answered all the people, and said, His blood be on us, and on our children.”

Why did this happen? What was being lifted up above God and His Word? Could 'religion' and their 'leaders' been placed above the Scriptures? Does God hold each individual responsible for their own faith and decisions or are the leaders only to be held accountable? How can this impact our thinking and faith?

Error #3

Now, let us take a few moments to look at a recent experience, that of a dear saint who trusted in man-made resources more than God's Word, providing a concrete picture of what can happen. After relocating to a new state, this writer's family took a year or two to search and finally considered attending one particular church.

One individual within the new assembly stood out from the others and studied for hours each day and desired to discuss spiritual things. Beginning a personal Bible study and fellowship with this saint was eagerly anticipated. Over the course of time, in our study we naturally happened upon a subject that brought varying viewpoints. We agreed to individually study the issue to gain clarity and then present our findings the following week.

Upon arriving to her home for Bible study, it was found that she had five or six commentaries laid out and shared what she had 'desperately' searched out regarding what each author wrote about the topic. Finally, without even opening the Bible and after an emotional presentation, she relayed being 'at peace' when a commentary was finally found that agreed with 'her opinion' on the issue.

This writer's heart sank. What was being held up above the Word of God? Basically, she had become 'mighty in commentaries', rather than 'mighty in the Scriptures' and allowed the commentaries to be her final authority rather than the Scriptures. She did not even seem to hear this writer's presentation from Scripture. She promptly called during the next week to cancel all further study because it made her too emotional.

Acts 18:24

“And a certain Jew named Apollos, born at Alexandria, an eloquent man, and mighty in the scriptures, came to Ephesus.”

Godly Example

But now, let us recall a situation where we see a godly attitude. Consider the man Abraham of the Old Testament, who had both understanding and deep conviction. Paul uses Romans 4 to hone in on 'faith' as the key issue and Abraham as the faithful example.

Basically, Abraham believed God would do what He said, even when everything around him said otherwise, including his own flesh, feelings and thoughts.

God promised to raise up a nation through the fruit of his own seed with his wife Sarah, even though both were very old and physically past the reproductive age. His faith remained strong in this situation and it continued even after Isaac was born. Abraham had such trust and confidence in God and His Word that he was able to respond in faith to God's instructions, even being able to offer his own son Isaac as a sacrifice.

Abraham knew Isaac was the seed-line through which God would fulfill His promises to him, yet he trusted God completely. Imagine the faith Abraham had to raise a knife to kill his own son, being stopped only at the last second. Abraham was “fully persuaded” and confident, trusting that what God said was so sure that it was the same as if it had already happened. Read for Romans 4 and Genesis 22 to gain more depth on this issue of faith.

Romans 4:20-21

“He staggered not at the promise of God through unbelief; but was strong in faith, giving glory to God; And being fully persuaded that, what he had promised, he was able also to perform.”

Consider the personal responsibility in your approach to Scripture. Are you aware of your own attitude? Let us take a few

moments now to ponder some of the things presented so far, to provide the opportunity to evaluate your own attitude toward God's Word.

There is an important lesson to be learned here, a simple solution to this tragic pattern seen in man, which is exalting other things above God and His Word. The solution is taking responsibility and not blindly giving ourselves over to the flesh, pride, or other things in the course of this world, designed by Satan. That even includes well-meaning religious leaders or groups.

This is only accomplished by a decision of faith. That is, being fully persuaded that His Word is the absolute authority, always perfect, true and powerful and held up above all. We also need to know how much He loves us, being confident that He always desires, encourages and has provided perfectly for us in His Word.

Change and maturity come with time and study. Think on these things to gain personal conviction from the verses presented thus far. When a saint has an attitude of faith even in one area of life it will produce a simple response "What God says I will to do". Prayerfully purpose to gain this faith response in the details of life as you mature in Christ and go forward to learn what God has to teach you.

*Study Suggestion: Take responsibility for study habits and time use. What determines these things? Will the flesh wisely prioritize our spiritual life? No, because these things are just plain inconvenient and some are just hard to do. They take time away from things we like! We just don't want to do them! This sounds like a child's response. But we all have these fleshly feelings and thoughts, and they are real. Yet, we are called to function as adults and at times, need to rise above our feelings to do things necessary for the long term good, temporarily giving up things for the short term.

Therefore, begin to think and function as an adult son of God and make time to regularly reflect on how you are prioritizing life. Do the things that are beneficial for your growth and develop good study habits, staying focused. For many, prayer may be needed first to gain the heart to desire these things.

So then, we each determine our priorities and our final authority. Will we stay focused on the Word or spend exorbitant amounts of time elsewhere? Whatever we give ourselves to, we can expect to be influenced by it. The most deceptive part of yielding to the flesh and the world is that we often do not realize the extent to which we are affected.

There are some man-made books and resources that can be helpful and prayerfully, even a series such as this one. But evaluate

them for yourselves. Do they hold up the Word as the authority in all matters, focusing on verses and directing us to Scripture? It alone is the power of God. Know assuredly that all man-made books contain some error and may misdirect us, even unintentionally, because they are neither perfect nor God-inspired. (II Timothy 3:16)

This is one good reason for us to look up verses in their context. It enables us to discern and assure things are understood accurately and over time, the Spirit through the Word can lead us to develop heart conviction. The key issue is to take responsibility to maintain a godly perspective, holding God's Word as the authority in all matters and to be vigilant to have our minds renewed daily in the Scripture, proving things before believing them.

B. Know You Are Just Before the Living God (Appendix II)

Interactions with others over the years uncover some who believe they have 'attained to' all of what God wants for them just because they 'go to church' or because they 'are saved'. Many seem satisfied to stay 'status quo' in their spiritual growth because 'they have arrived' and there is no new destination known. Some may determine that all God wants now is for them to 'ride out' the remainder of life, go to church and try to 'be a good person'.

This pervasive attitude today is one of the many driving forces that prompted the writing of this book and the desire to share God's Word with other saints. God has so much more for us as believers! Becoming saved was just the first step in all of what God desires!

He has a plan and purpose and wants us to work with Him in pursuing that goal. But for now, let us go on to concentrate on defining the gospel, as this is the starting point. Then, we will continue to lay some groundwork in preparation to move forward in effectually taking in God's Word to build maturity.

*Assignment: Question: What is the gospel? Pause to put into words what is actually believed. After ample time is given to write out your thoughts, read on to evaluate 'my' gospel statement. (Side note: The following summarizes 'my best effort' at this point in my maturity, but know assuredly that a detailed examination of what 'Scripture specifically teaches' will follow.)

1. 'My' Gospel Statement For Salvation

'Gospel': 1) In an expression of His great love, God placed all of mankind's sin upon the perfectly innocent Lamb, His dear Son, the Lord Jesus Christ. He made Christ to be sin for us, who chose to die, shedding His blood to pay the eternal death and penalty of sin for each one of us. 2) While the Lord Jesus Christ experienced terrible physical pain on the cross, this agony was not what paid for sin. Instead, it was paid-in-full when He suffered our deserved and eternal,

unrestrained wrath and separation from the Father. 3) But Christ was victorious! He rose from the dead showing Himself to be alive and proving indeed He conquered sin and death. This was a perfect sacrifice with which God was well-pleased. It was truly 'finished'! 4) All He desires is a simple faith response, to believe that His sacrifice was sufficient as payment for sin. He then gives us His Righteousness as a free gift, which enables us to have eternal life.

This gospel summary can be considered 'my' best human attempt to comprehensively and succinctly write a gospel statement. But students are encouraged to think this through. How can any description of the gospel be evaluated for accuracy and thoroughness? Is there something missing or inaccurate? Clearly a most important issue since most of us as Christians base our faith on 'the gospel'.

One could consult popular views today, such as the leading Bible teachers, churches or 'mainstream Christianity'. But first, students ought to realize that any statement or synopsis written by mere humans is lacking, no matter how highly thought of the person is in our society. After a short time one can make an obvious conclusion, there are many different perceptions on 'the gospel'. Who can discern these things?

There is a simple answer. Set aside 'what others say' about the gospel. Ask yourself, "Is there something that has been learned so

far in, Part I: What to Appreciate as We Approach God's Word, that will help us with this question?" Hopefully, it has pointed students to the Scripture as the final authority and that it alone is the standard by which we can objectively evaluate all spiritual things, including this one. Each individual is encouraged to look here for the answer, practically applying this significant perspective.

Interestingly, during the process of having others review this book for its completion, there was feedback that suggested that this writer 'left something out' of her 'gospel statement', which proved this significant point. Whether it is this author's perception of the gospel or another's, the standard must remain clear and firm. God, by the Holy Ghost, moved holy men to write His Word in a book particularly for us and this is our only standard of measure in this and all things. (II Peter 1:20-21)

*Assignment: The Gospel: Verse by Verse Study: Begin in Romans 1 and read through to chapter 5. Then, go back and take the time to prayerfully and slowly study the first three chapters. Contained within are the very basic components of the gospel. See if you can locate them for yourself. Most would be able to find at least some of the details contained within the gospel. It may prove additionally helpful to notice key words like: gospel, justified, sin, blood, works, faith, believe, righteousness, etc. Underline key words as they are observed.

*Study Suggestion: Notice word patterns. While students are encouraged to focus their attention on content, that is, what Scripture is communicating, examine word usage also. Pray to notice words or phrases that are repeated. Recognizing repetitious words in passages is like seeing a little sign pop up indicating that something is important.

From this point forward, let us use time and space wisely and draw conclusions by searching the Scriptures on all matters. We will now go to our curriculum, the beginning of Romans to evaluate what the Apostle Paul is teaching to us about the gospel for today. As this occurs, each student is encouraged to prayerfully desire that the Spirit lead him to gain insights and draw conclusions based upon this sound doctrine as the standard. So then, what does Scripture teach about, 'the gospel of Christ'?

2. The Gospel of Christ

We are going to examine this issue as Isaiah instructs, “For precept must be upon precept...line upon line...here a little, and there a little”, to as-sure understanding. It also provides a brief example for students on 'how to study' a portion of Scripture in some detail. It is to be done in a specified order, the way God has laid out Scripture, one parcel of doctrine built upon another, slowly adding on small pieces, one after another as we move forward.

Students are encouraged to notice key words and phrases as they proceed in their study.

Isaiah 28:10

“For precept must be upon precept, precept upon precept; line upon line, line upon line; here a little, and there a little:”

God's explanation of the basics of the “gospel of Christ” is located in Romans 1-3 and unfolds the fundamentals of this 'good news', perfectly and effectively designed to bring any person no matter what their background to a saving knowledge of the Lord Jesus Christ. Its priority should be clear, evidenced simply by where Paul placed it in his writings, first. Let us now look at this in more depth to gain a fuller appreciation of what God teaches on the subject of salvation.

Notice what Paul claims, he says that he is “ready’ to preach the gospel, but why? There are four reasons listed in Romans 1: 16-18. Each is introduced by the word 'for' and provides insight into Paul and his attitude and motivation. It also identifies aspects of the gospel. 1) “...For I am not ashamed...” 2) “...For it is the power of God...” 3) “...For therein is the righteousness of God revealed” 4) “...For the wrath of God is revealed...”

Romans 1:15

“So, as much as in me is, I am ready to preach the gospel to you that are at Rome also.”

Romans 1:16-18

*“1) **For** I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ: 2) **for** it is the power of God unto salvation to everyone that believeth; to the Jew first, and also to the Greek. 3) **For** therein is the righteousness of God revealed from faith to faith: as it is written, The just shall live by faith. 4) **For** the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who hold the truth in unrighteousness;”*

The Apostle Paul addresses the “Gospel of Christ”, states it is the power of God and how it brings a person to salvation. Specifically, the person who believes is saved. Look up and read for yourself the passage below in its context.

Romans 1:16-18

*“For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ: for it is the power of God unto salvation to everyone that believeth; to the Jew first, and also to the Greek. For **therein** is 1) the righteousness of God **revealed** from faith to faith: as it is written, The just shall live by faith. For 2) the wrath of God is **revealed** from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who hold the truth in unrighteousness;”*

Now, notice the key word “therein” in Romans 1:17. This word is important, instructing the reader to realize what is about to be stated. Something is 'therein' or contained within the gospel that we need to see. Observe two aspects of the gospel, 1) “the righteousness of God” and 2) “the wrath of God”.

In addition, note another key word. Each of these two parts of the gospel is followed by the term, “revealed”. God is 'uncovering'

or 'making manifest' two aspects about the gospel. To be saved, man needs to distinctly understand both components.

3. “The Wrath of God”

As Paul explains the two issues of the gospel, he begins by focusing upon 'the wrath'. It is important that man clearly understands his very real and desperate sin condition, which requires a just judgment before the Living God. This will enable him to be open and see 'his great need' for a remedy. The 'good news', of course, is the solution to man's problem. It is “the righteousness of God”, which begins in Romans 3: 21. Let us now analyze the two aspects of the gospel in more depth, beginning with the wrath.

God immediately and progressively reveals the details about “the wrath of God”, starting in Romans 1: 19 through to Romans 3:20. Some may believe that God is angry with man, but His wrath is not against the individual. The student is encouraged to recall that God has so much love for man that He laid His life down for each one of us. Verse 18 uncovers clarity. Notice how His wrath is against sin, “...all the ungodliness and unrighteousness of men”. But we also should notice that God lays responsibility for these decisions at the feet of man, “...who holds the truth in unrighteousness.” He has given us the freedom to choose, and our choices have consequences.

Romans 1:18

“For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who hold the truth in unrighteousness;”

Since there are many issues in 'the wrath of God', we will be careful to review only a few aspects to prompt more study. Let us take notice that in Romans 1:19 and 21 both open with the word, 'because'. This word teaches the 'reason' for the prior statement, that is, why we are accountable.

Romans 1:19-21

*“ 1) **Because** that which may be known of God is manifest in them; for God hath shewed it unto them. For the invisible things of him from the creation of the world are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, even his eternal power and Godhead; so that they are without excuse: 2) **Because** that, when they knew God, they glorified him not as God, neither were thankful; but became vain in their imaginations, and their foolish heart was darkened.”*

In this case, what is about to be laid forth are the two specific things God holds man accountable for, deserving of His wrath. He placed within man an awareness of His eternal power and Godhead and knowing this, 1) they did not glorify Him as God, 2) nor were they thankful. God instructs that when man continues in unbelief, consequences will result. Romans 1: 21-23 reveals that man will become vain, have their foolish heart darkened and become unwise fools, spiraling downward into an evil course, worshiping and exalting other things rather than God.

Romans 1:21-23

“Because that, when they knew God, 1) they glorified him not as God, 2) neither were thankful; but became vain in their imaginations, and their foolish heart was darkened. Professing themselves to be wise, they became fools, And changed the glory of the uncorruptible God into an image made like to corruptible man, and to birds, and fourfooted beasts, and creeping things.”

Paul continues on through to the first part of chapter 3, providing detail about the 'bad news' of God's wrath. God addresses man's rebellious, sinful ways being worthy of death. In His righteous judgment, God concludes that the Jew and Gentile alike are without excuse and guilty before Him. He squashes all of man's excuses, attempts at avoiding judgment, his reply against God, and denial that he will be held accountable.

As 'the Wrath' section comes to a close, Paul provides the student with a clear summary of man's dire condition before the Living and True God in Romans 3:19-20. This also serves as a 'checkpoint' for the student. It basically concludes that mankind is unable to solve his own dilemma even by his best efforts or the 'good works' of his flesh, proving that the entire world is guilty before God. At this point, if the student is confused, this checkpoint ought to send him back to revisit the fundamentals of this section.

Romans 3:19-20

*“Now we know that what things soever the law saith, it saith to them who are under the law: that every mouth may be stopped, and all the world may become guilty before God. **Therefore** by*

the deeds of the law there shall no flesh be justified in his sight: for by the law is the knowledge of sin.”

*Study Suggestion: 'Checkpoints' often summarize what has been covered previously. It may even take the form of a question. This writer first heard Keith Blades teach about checkpoints in some of the materials he produced in Enjoy the Bible Ministries. (See Appendix IV) They seem to be placed in Scripture to help students pause and take stock of what they know. If the reader does not understand what is being summarized or the question being posed, it ought to send him back to re-examine the previous section again for clarity before moving forward. Each 'precept' is built on the one before and if the understanding of the first is faulty, the one after will not be on solid ground.

Paul uses a 'summary checkpoint' here at the end of 'the wrath of God'. When he uses a word like 'therefore' in the passage, it should alert the reader to notice something that has come before, but also to know that it will be used as the basis of the statement or information to come. In this case, the law taught man that he could never measure up to God's standard, not able to do 'any works' that are good enough to be justified before God. Romans 3 builds a case to prove the fact that the 'only acceptable remedy' has already been provided. God is man's perfect provision. It is Christ Jesus our Lord.

Romans 3:19-20

*“Now we know that what things soever the law saith, it saith to them who are under the law: that every mouth may be stopped, and all the world may become guilty before God. **Therefore** by the deeds of the law there shall no flesh be justified in his sight: for by the law is the knowledge of sin.”*

Students are encouraged to go on to observe the use of checkpoints for themselves in other sections of Scripture. For example, a checkpoint is also used at the end of 'the righteousness of God', in Romans 3: 28. Notice here how this verse actually uses two summary words, 'therefore' and 'conclude'. As a result of what came before, the student can make a conclusion, "...that a man is justified by faith without the deeds of the law.”

Romans 3:28

*“**Therefore** we **conclude** that a man is justified by faith without the deeds of the law.”*

*Study Suggestion: 'Looking back' in Scripture can be quite instructive. Recognizing repeated words or phrases can help the student recall a similar word, topic, or phrase pattern used in Scripture. Often 'going back' to passages to study what has already been taught before on an issue can provide more depth and clarity, bringing him back to foundational precepts. A deeper appreciation of this concept can be found in Keith Blades materials. (Appendix IV)

On the other hand, 'looking ahead' in Scripture, at doctrine laid forth after the point being studied jumps the student forward in doctrine and provides more

'advanced' information on a topic. God has purposed for this doctrine to build onto the structure already laid down, teaching one concept upon the next. So then, when going to more advanced teaching on a subject being studied, this needs to be taken into consideration.

For example, when studying a topic from Romans and hopping over to I Timothy to consider passages with subjects that are similar or related, we may not fully realize the extent of the doctrine being taught in between, the fullness of this advanced teaching. Misunderstanding can be a result. So instead, it may be most profitable to gain clarity on a topic by looking back to its foundation, to the many facets of the issue already revealed within the Word. Thus, context and God's progressive order to the curriculum needs to be considered as we study.

Saints may want to rethink the habit of jumping back and forth over segments of Scripture as a regular practice in studying, especially once they realize the profound and progressive nature of Scripture. Study all Scripture but keep aware of these issues. While all the Word is for us and our learning, studying without the realization of God's order and context in writing Scripture can produce misapplication, misunderstanding, and gaps in understanding. An appreciation of these study insights can help to make the process more effectual.

4. “The Righteousness of God”

The conclusion of part one of the gospel in Romans 3: 19-20 seems quite grim for man. God and His righteous judgment are against man's sin. But notice how the second section begins, in

Romans 3:21-31. Paul uses the term “But now”. At this point in history, when man was totally in a hopeless condition, God through the Apostle Paul revealed the only true solution to the desperate situation of mankind.

Romans 3: 21

“But now, the righteousness of God without the law is manifested, being witnessed by the law and the prophets;”

This is actually the beginning of the wonderful news of the second component of the gospel. The student should now prepare his mind by reading Romans 3:21-31 in its context. Notice the precise wording used in this section of Scripture: “the righteousness of God...is manifested”.

Romans 3: 21-22

“But now, the righteousness of God without the law is manifested, being witnessed by the law and the prophets; Even the righteousness of God which is by faith of Jesus Christ unto all and upon all them that believe: for there is no difference:”

A similar phrase has been used before and ought to prompt the student to recall and 'look back' to consider an earlier passage, that of Romans 1:17. The phrases are alike but not exactly the same. One states, “..the righteousness of God is revealed...” the other, “..the righteousness of God...is manifested...”. Both use the phrase, “the righteousness of God” and the terms 'revealed' and 'manifested' are actually quite similar. The righteousness of God is

precisely what is about to be presented or manifested now for the first time by the Apostle Paul in Romans 3.

Romans 1:16-17

“For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ: for it is the power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth; to the Jew first, and also to the Greek. For therein is the righteousness of God is revealed from faith to faith: as it is written, The just shall live by faith.”

The body of doctrine that relates to the 'righteousness of God' includes many important issues. Look at Romans 3:21-26 and notice for yourself some of the various topics to be considered in each verse. (Note: Each verse has been designated with its verse number for the purpose of this section.)

Romans 3: 21-26

21 “But now the righteousness of God without the law is manifested, being witnessed by the law and the prophets; 22 Even the righteousness of God which is by faith of Jesus Christ unto all and upon all them that believe: for there is no difference: 23 For all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God; 24 Being justified freely by his grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus: 25 Whom God hath set forth to be a propitiation through faith in his blood, to declare his righteousness for the remission of sins that are past, through the forbearance of God; 26 To declare, I say, at this time his righteousness: that he might be just, and the justifier of him which believeth in Jesus.”

There are a multitude of issues that could be addressed in each verse. Therefore, only a brief statement will be made for each verse regarding the gospel.

Verse 21: At this time, God has decided to make known to us how we can have His own righteousness without the law. He refers to the imputed righteousness that He has shown to others in time past, such as with Abraham and David, addressed later by Paul in Romans 4.

Verse 22: God is at liberty to give us His righteousness as a free gift because of the faithfulness of Jesus Christ to go to the cross and pay for all our sin. The only part we play is 'faith alone', placing our faith in His Word, trusting His faithfulness and work as sufficient.

Verse 23: Every man has sinned and fallen short of God's perfect righteousness and glory. God's righteousness is absolutely necessary in order to live eternally with God in Heaven.

Verse 24: Therefore, we are made just and perfect by God's own grace, His unmerited favor toward us. He did the justifying. We are then redeemed.

Verse 25: God has offered Christ, as a fully satisfying sacrifice. Simply by faith in His blood, we are given His righteousness as a free gift.

Verse 26: It is God that justifies and He is also the justifier of those who believe in the 'finished' work of Christ.

*Assignment: The gospel:

a) Clarity of the Gospel: If this information is unclear or if you have not yet trusted the Lord Jesus Christ and His sacrifice for sin, seek out these things in the Scriptures for yourself, particularly in Romans, chapters 1-3. Find a believer who is 'mighty in the Word' that is able bring you to Christ, answering your questions using Romans doctrine. If you are unable to find such a person, do not hesitate to contact this writer and it would be a joy to share or find a godly person to review this wonderful news with you. (Appendix IV)

b) What have you learned? When evaluating any gospel statement, use Romans 1-3 as the standard. This is how God had the Apostle Paul lay out the simple components of this very important message. Take a few moments to evaluate your own 'gospel message', assigned at the start of this section. Refine it using what God has taught you in these verses. If you never actually took the time to write it, see if you can put it down clearly now. If you are able to do this, it is a major accomplishment as many have only glimpses of its fullness.

C. Come with Humility and Heartfelt Appreciation

Maintaining an exalted view of God and His Word above all things in this world, enables us to keep a godly perspective. All that we are and have comes from Him. In addition, the entirety of His Word testifies that He is the Creator and unfolds His character. He is perfect, righteous and deserving of appreciation and exaltation.

Acts 17:24-25,28

“God that made the world and all things therein, seeing that he is Lord of heaven and earth, dwelleth not in temples made with hands; Neither is worshiped with men's hands, as though he needed anything, seeing he giveth to all life, and breath, and all things...For in him we live, and move, and have our being; as certain also of your own poets have said, For we are also his offspring.”

As we have seen, Romans 1 teaches that this issue is a key in our approach to God and His Word. It has a clear reaping of what is sown. We have the blessed opportunity to approach God and His Word in a humble, thankful manner, knowing that He is the Almighty God who is our total provision.

Romans 1: 21-22

“Because that, when they knew God, they glorified him not as God, neither were thankful; but became vain in their imaginations, and their foolish heart was darkened. Professing themselves to be wise, they became fools...”

As our Father, God desires to lead us by His Holy Spirit as adult sons through toward maturity in His Word. When students rest in the fact that the Lord Jesus Christ is the Word, and that the Bible is always true and perfect, we can maintain a humble attitude of faith with thanksgiving, which can develop an unshakable foundation.

I Corinthians 2:9-10

“But as it is written, Eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of man,

the things which God hath prepared for them that love him. But God hath revealed them unto us by his Spirit: for the Spirit searcheth all things, yea, the deep things of God.”

Romans 8:14

“For as many as are led by the Spirit of God, they are the sons of God.”

D. Know 'Who' We are (Appendix III)

God desires for us to think and act as who we are 'in Christ' once we are saved. It is amazing to list out some of the many new roles we actually have once we become saved. The Word teaches that as a believer, we are now a saint, servant, living sacrifice, ambassador, prisoner, soldier, and workman, to complete the vocation that He has called us to fulfill. This is a tall order as we begin our lives as Christians, but obviously it will take a lifetime to thoroughly learn about each of these positions.

Romans 1: 7

“To all that be in Rome, beloved of God, called to be saints: Grace to you and peace from God our Father, and the Lord Jesus Christ.”

Romans 6:18

“Being then made free from sin, ye became the servants of righteousness.”

Romans 12: 1

“I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that ye present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, which is your reasonable service.”

II Corinthians 5:20

“Now then we are ambassadors for Christ, as though God did beseech you by us: we pray you in Christ’s stead, be ye reconciled to God.”

Ephesians 4: 1

“I therefore, the prisoner of the Lord, beseech you that ye walk worthy of the vocation wherewith ye are called”

II Timothy 2:3, 15

“Thou therefore, endure hardness as a good soldier of Jesus Christ...Study to shew thyself approved unto God, a workman that needeth not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth.”

Defining and learning how to function in these new roles, is not the focus of this section. Rather, it is to be aware that some things definitely changed once we were saved. God provides definition to a new way we are to function and view ourselves, so we will turn our attention to what is laid forth next in Romans on this topic.

Once we become justified believers God begins something new in us, by His Spirit through the Word that enables and empowers us to live a life pleasing to Him. We begin as a babe and can grow up into a mature believer over the course of a lifetime, taking in sound doctrine by faith.

As we are edified we learn some things about who God has made us as saints. This is the topic of this section posing quite a challenge to know what to address, as so many things happen to

us once we were saved. Let us narrow the scope to a few things addressed in Romans 6-8, which unveils God's desire for us to know confidently some things about our new identity in Christ.

Believers notice, if they are honest with themselves, that once saved they still seem to have problems with the issue of sin, sinful thoughts, and behavior. The reason is that, contrary to popular thought, one thing that does not change when we become believers is 'our flesh'.

Scripture teaches that we actually experience a battle within us now. We have two laws battling within. Our inward man delights in serving the law of God as we function in the Spirit. But the flesh tries to keep certain standards (the law) and bring us back under the control (captivity) of sin by the lusts of our fleshly members. These are things that can discourage and shipwreck believers if they are not understood.

Romans 7: 22-23

“For I delight in the law of God after the inward man: But I see another law in my members, warring against the law of my mind, and bringing me into captivity to the law of sin which is in my members.”

*Study Suggestion: Bible Process: There are many 'processes' contained within the Word of God and once this writer realized it was a tool God used to teach, many sections of Scripture came to view in this new light. A 'Bible process' can be

seen as the 'how to' or specifics of what God is teaching within a section of Scripture. Often times, it is a step-by-step list or pattern to understand a doctrine or concept to facilitate application. When recognized as a process, it can illuminate a section of the Word.

How to Live Your New Identity in Christ

We will focus our attention on a large section of Scripture, Romans 6–8 and address just a few of the major components this process teaches us about how to live as who we are in Christ. It is hoped that these issues will encourage further thought and study.

1. Know Your Old Man is Crucified

Believe what God is teaching in Romans 6. God does not want us to be controlled any longer by sin, but rather be able to live a new life pleasing unto Him. Our old man or sin nature has been crucified, and the word 'that' indicates the reason. It had to be done so 'that' the body of sin might be destroyed and 'that' we should no longer serve sin. Sin had total control over us as an un-saved person and now that control has been effectively broken.

Romans 6:6-8

*“Knowing this, that our old man is crucified with him, **that** the body of sin might be destroyed, **that** henceforth we should not serve sin. For he that is dead is freed from sin. Now, if we be dead with Christ, we believe that we shall also live with him.”*

2. We Have Choices: Now We No Longer Have to Serve Sin

Believers are now freed from sin and have the wonderful ability to choose. Before being saved, saints could do nothing acceptable unto God; at their very best they could only produce 'self-righteous works', filthy rags to God. But now, our 'old man' is dead indeed unto sin and we are now free. This 'sin cycle' is broken and we do not have to obey sin.

Isaiah 64:6

“But we are all as an unclean thing, and all our righteousness are as filthy rags; and we all do fade as a leaf; and our iniquities, like the wind, have taken us away.”

Romans 6:7

“For he that is dead is freed from sin.”

We now have choices to make each moment. Scripture teaches us to “...let not sin therefore reign...” Will we choose to continue to be 'tools of Satan' or be God's servants as 'instruments of righteousness'? We can continue to obey the pride and lusts of our own flesh, unrighteousness, and the course of this world or to be alive unto God, to yield and serve Him. Decisions of the mind occur all day long and we need to be properly oriented to who we are to properly respond. The key is being aware of the choice.

Romans 6:11-13

“Likewise reckon ye also yourselves to be dead indeed unto sin, but alive unto God through Jesus Christ our Lord. Let not sin therefore reign in your mortal body, that ye should obey it

in the lusts thereof. Neither yield ye your members as instruments of unrighteousness unto sin: but yield unto God, as those that are alive from the dead, and your members as instruments of righteousness unto God.”

3. Reckon Yourself Alive, Yielding Unto God

God desires us to see ourselves as He does; we are to 'reckon' or 'determine as true' that we are crucified with Christ and dead to sin, and now alive unto God. We have a new identity and are to yield ourselves unto God as His vessels, confident that what He desires for us is what is always for the best. How is it that we can live a life acceptable unto God? It is Christ's work. He is living in us. All we do is 'yield'.

Galatians 2:20

“I am crucified with Christ: nevertheless I live; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me: and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me, and gave himself for me.”

4. Our New Identity is Separate from Sin and Dead to the Law

Romans 7 goes on to explain that once we are justified something has changed within us that has further defined our identity. ‘The flesh’ and the newly saved ‘I’ are now separate, even though they both reside within us. This change affects how God sees us, but can also affect how we function and see ourselves.

Romans 7: 17-18

“Now then it is no more I that do it, but sin that dwelleth in me. For I know that in me (that is, in

my flesh,) dwelleth no good thing: for to will is present with me; but how to perform that which is good I find not. ”

Verses in Romans 7 repeat a statement twice, indicating the importance of the issue: It is no more 'I' that does the sin, but it is the 'sin' in me. What the unsaved man (in the flesh) could not do, the saved man (Christ living in us) is now able to do, empowered by God through His Word.

Romans 7: 17-18, 20

“Now then it is no more I that do it, but sin that dwelleth in me. For I know that in me (that is, in my flesh,) dwelleth no good thing: for to will is present with me; but how to perform that which is good I find not. Now if I do that I would not, it is no more I that do it, but sin that dwelleth in me.”

As saints, we can allow the Spirit and Word to work in us and can set aside the “motions of sin” that used to control us. 'But now' we are able to choose 'not to sin' and 'not yield' to our fleshly desires and be victorious in this spiritual battle.

Romans 7:5-6

*“For when we were in the flesh, the motions of sins, which were by the law, did work in our members to bring forth fruit unto death. **But now**, we are delivered from the law, that being dead wherein we were held; that we should serve in newness of spirit, and not in the oldness of the letter.”*

This produces fruit that is well pleasing to our Father. As we understand that 'sin' and 'I' are disconnected, guilt is all gone. God

sees us as saved saints, perfect and righteous and therefore our guilt no longer has to hinder us. We can just pick ourselves up, step onto the path serving God and walk as who we are in Christ.

*Study Suggestion: Fill in any holes in your edification and gain depth to understanding. The things here in Romans 6-8 are not easy things to understand, but are so important to the Christian life. Once saints understand some of the basics of Romans 1-5, they have the foundation needed to understand these things that follow. Put these chapters to prayerful study and then go on to learn the more advanced things God placed for us in Romans 6-8.

Much time spent in these sections will be eternally beneficial to the student. God has laid forth the doctrine in a progressive manner, as a curriculum; therefore, don't 'skip' the simple process God has provided. Go slowly, chapter by chapter to build your doctrinal foundation properly, filling in the 'cracks or voids' of understanding.

Let us now return, for a moment, to the war we experience between the 'members' our body and 'the mind' to be sure this issue is clear. It can be a grievous struggle indeed. We cannot do the things that we want to do because of the sin that dwells in our flesh, battling our mind for control.

When we stay in this battle, note the inevitable, seemingly hopeless question that results from the believer's realization that he

is still unable to make his flesh any better. He is unable to gain control of the lusts of the flesh in verse 24: “O wretched man that I am, who shall deliver me from the body of this death?” We find ourselves in a desperate situation, even though we are saved. The reason is, simply, that we still need to learn some things!

Romans 7:22-24

“For I delight in the law of God after the inward man: But I see another law in my members, warring against the law of my mind, and bringing me into captivity to the law of sin which is in my members. O wretched man that I am! who shall deliver me from the body of this death?”

It is in verse 25 that we see the answer. It is not about us and our efforts to keep the law in order to please God, even after we are saved. It’s all about God and His work, Christ being manifest in us. We can thank God because He is our total provision. He gave us His Son to take care of the problem of sin so that we can have eternal life with God, but also to have freedom from the sin that works in our members. We are dead to the law, and are now free.

Romans 7:24-25

“O wretched man that I am! who shall deliver me from the body of this death? I thank God through Jesus Christ our Lord. So then with the mind I myself serve the law of God; but with the flesh the law of sin.”

We have been changed and Romans 6-7 teaches us that we no longer are bound by the law, we are forgiven. As believers we have new identities. The issue is not a struggle to make the flesh

better; the focus is 'our mind'. This transitions us to Romans 8, where God begins to deal with this issue.

5. Minding Things of the Spirit Maturing as an Adult Son

We have the glorious privilege to 'put our mind' on the things God tells us are important. This will enable and empower us to walk as who we are in Christ. As we are led of the Spirit, we can move forward in maturity.

Romans 8:5-6, 14

“For they that are after the flesh do mind the things of the flesh; but they that are after the Spirit the things of the Spirit. For to be carnally minded is death; but to be spiritually minded is life and peace...For as many as are led by the Spirit of God, they are the sons of God.”

Choosing to be led of the Spirit, functioning as an adult son, we can learn what the Father desires for us. There is a choice to be made, an important one, since our mind will lead our choices and inevitably affect our walk. Will we walk as who we are in Christ or contrary to God? The battle in the mind is real.

To summarize, believers have a new identity because many things have changed. After the saint trusts in the basics of the gospel message located in Romans 1-3, Paul goes on in Romans to lay forth additional things that have happened to the believer, important but not visibly apparent. Let us do a very brief review of some of these major issues.

Romans 1-3 explains that the gift of God's own righteousness and eternal life have been freely given to the person who trusts the sacrifice of the Lord Jesus Christ, God's provision for sin.

Romans 4 teaches that by faith we are perfectly just and God will not impute sin to a believer's account. Faith alone has always been the issue.

Romans 5 certifies our 'at peace' relationship with God, our standing in grace by faith, our hope of future glory and uncovers that we have received the atonement.

Romans 6 gives us the mechanics of what happened to our "old man". It was crucified, "...that its body of sin might be destroyed..." Now we no longer 'have to sin' and are free to choose to serve Him or continue to serve our flesh. When we make mistakes, we can just pick ourselves up and get back onto the right road, there is no guilt. The Lord Jesus Christ has already paid for all sin. We are free to live with and for Him.

Romans 7 relays that there is now a real battle within the believer. Allowing sin to live in the flesh is contrary to who God has made us in Christ. We may desire to serve and please God, but we cannot do so in the efforts of our flesh, though we may continue to try. This new identity is the inward man, which can serve God in newness of life as we yield. When we see ourselves as God does,

alive unto God, we can yield in faith to His Word and have a fruitful life in Christ. This can functionally mean freedom for the saint.

Romans 8 shows our need to mind spiritual things, realizing that God is for us and that He desires for us to move forward, to learn and mature by being led of the Spirit, living as who He made us. But we still have much to learn about sufferings of this present world, how prayer works, motivation to serve and developing a firm confidence in our relationship with Him as a son.

What a blessed opportunity to come to an appreciation of what happened when we decided to trust in the blood of Christ. We have progressed forward from how we were justified, found in Romans 1-5, to what Paul has laid forth for us in chapters 6-8. This provides clarity in our new identity in Christ.

*Study Suggestion: A curriculum is the 'form of sound doctrine'. As we have seen, there is doctrine specifically written for us. God has provided instructions that He desires us to learn once we become believers. It is the foundation for our faith and walk and is laid forth in a similar way to a curriculum. This writer first began to view Paul's epistles in this way through Keith Blades ministry. (Appendix IV)

Romans 6:17

“But God be thanked, that ye were the servants of sin, but ye have obeyed from the heart that form of doctrine which was delivered you.”

Just as in a Math book, things are built, one thing upon another. The simple, but foundational concepts are placed first in Romans, providing the basis for the weightier things to come in his later epistles. Reviewing the more foundational concepts in Romans is imperative in order for us to progress properly. Taking time to prayerfully go back in Romans 1-8 and study these things in more detail will provide a solid foundation. While the entirety of Scripture is critical in our training, Paul's epistles uniquely address some things God desires to teach us today, the Body of Christ, in this Dispensation of Grace.

Isaiah 28:9-10

“Whom shall he teach knowledge? and whom shall he make to understand doctrine? them that are weaned from the milk, and drawn from the breasts. For precept must be upon precept, precept upon precept; line upon line, line upon line; here a little, and there a little.”

Take this opportunity to think about a real situation that will expose a common error that occurs in the approach to the Word. Consider the inner thoughts of a one studying a challenging textbook like Calculus. If this writer picked up such a curriculum and even read the foundational material in the first section, of the first chapter, a definite thought would arise. “I don't understand what I just read.” Experience would reveal that after reading it several more times, this writer's response would be the same.

However, over the course of time and continued effort there is a glimmer of hope, an outside chance that finally there would be a

gain, the tiniest parcel of understanding regarding paragraph 1, in section 1, of chapter 1 of this advanced math textbook. But then, add to this the inevitable realization that there is so much more to learn, one could easily see how this writer could become discouraged enough to lay it aside, determining to just leave it to the Mathematicians.

What can be learned from this? Laying aside the Calculus textbook is one thing, but it is totally a different thing to do so with our God-given training manual, the Word of God! God Himself wrote it just for us and desires to be our teacher, using the Spirit in us, enabling and empowering us to mature, increasing our understanding over time.

But this is precisely what happens to derail many believers today from their great privilege and responsibility to study the Scripture. Some never even try and just 'leave it to the scholars and Bible teachers'. But honestly, it is work to study and at times, it can seem intimidating. But we are to walk by faith, as our father Abraham did. We can just believe God and rest, knowing He will be our power to move forward.

If we are honest, we might admit that we just 'don't want to read and study' because it is uncomfortable and takes time and energy. That is our 'flesh' talking. It is here that lays the battle of

Romans 7:22-25. But as we have learned, God is with us and is our provision. He has the answer and gives us the power to do it. This may be an area for further thought, one that will be addressed later.

*Study Suggestion: Think differently. Sometimes we just do not understand a passage or phrase even when we read it many times. Consider that maybe expectations need to change. It is in God's time that understanding comes. Do not let a lack of understanding discourage you, but rather, let it awaken you to the vast knowledge and wisdom placed within the pages of Scripture and the eternal nature of His Book. Allow it to further reinforce your faith in it, as the final authority in all things. Let it build your confidence in the magnificence of His Word. Be driven to read God's Word, even 'addicted' to its study and ministry. (I Corinthians 16:15)

To highlight a few things, when it comes to Scripture consider:

1) We can think differently: We can trust and, glorify Him and His way of teaching us so we will not be deterred. The God of the universe wrote this perfect Book, and did so particularly for you, knowing your needs and the best way to construct it. Decide to rely on Him and go forward. Just trust and stay in the Book!

2) Simply change your expectations. Expect to get a small piece of understanding each time, knowing God builds doctrine over time. As we take it in, Scripture is stored in our inner man for use when

we are ready. Often, learning takes place without conscious awareness, but we can rest, knowing that the Spirit is leading.

3) Be thankful! Think on these things, prayerfully.

E. Come with a Ready Mind

There are so many things in Scripture that teach us how to gain a ready and willing mind as we study the Word. Some will be presented later in the series; others will be discovered as students seek them out as for hidden treasures. For the purpose of this section we will briefly address only three issues to assure understanding and to prompt further thought.

First, let us refresh our mind to what God says about our approach to Him. We can respond positively by glorifying Him as God and then to acknowledge His eternal power and Godhead, being thankful for all things. When we approach the Word in such a way, we will not exalt ourselves or other things above God and His Word and can then recognize what He has given us. This can only lead us to more light in the Scriptures, keeping us open and motivated.

Romans 1:20-23

“For the invisible things of him from the creation of the world are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, even his eternal power and Godhead; so that they are without excuse: Because that, when they knew God, they glorified him not as God, neither were they thankful; but

became vain in their imaginations, and their foolish heart was darkened. Professing themselves to be wise, they became fools, and changed the glory of the uncorruptible God into an image made like to corruptible man, and to birds, and fourfooted beasts, and creeping things.”

Second, we need to be aware of our changing attitude. Our mood and circumstances affect what we are thinking and feeling, but also how or whether we even decide to come to the Word. We may be sad or angry, which can cause some to push God away. Saints can become distracted, caught up in circumstances or sin. Either can prevent an open, ready mind.

So then, self-awareness and reflection are needed, along with regular intake of the Word to counter the things that influence our response to Scripture. Once we are aware, adjustments can be made accordingly. We can even use this insight to plan ahead, stay vigilant and alert and work to prevent them altogether.

How can this work out in the details of life? With this new awareness saints can keep our emotions in check, avoid circumstances that do not have a positive influence and keep the mind primed. We can take in the Word and put aside philosophy or ideas of the world, as soon as they are recognized. Students can go on to stay open and ready for what God is teaching, and move away from...“I always thought,” or “ My church believes,” or “I can’t believe that is true”. They can come with a ready and willing mind to

the Word praying: “Help me to desire to read and study daily”, “Assist me by faith, to believe it”, or “If I disagree with the Word, help me to know confidently it is always right.”

Finally, when we come to the Word we can be properly prepared and take responsibility for what we learn. In Acts chapter 17, the Bereans had a noble, godly attitude when the Word was studied. They desired to be open to what God was teaching, desiring to separate the world’s view. They had a mind 'ready' to receive the Word and searched the Scriptures for themselves each day, proving whether the things that were heard were true when compared with the perfect standard of the Word. We can learn much from their example.

Acts 17:11

“These were more noble than those in Thessalonica, in that they received the word with all readiness of mind, and searched the scriptures daily, whether those things were so.”

F. Come In Prayer

We each have a built in need to communicate with God. He speaks to us through the Word, but we also can converse with Him, expressing our thoughts through prayer. In a sense, prayer can help us step out of ourselves and reflect on how things are 'really going' and how we are 'really feeling'. It is an opportunity for honesty and directness in our relationship with our Father.

Because of who and what He is as the God of all Creation, He knows everything and there is no need to 'put on a face' to maintain appearances. We can just pour ourselves out to Him knowing His great love for us and that we have an eternal, 'at peace' relationship with Him. What a relief! And, what an amazing thing to have the ear of the Almighty God, the Maker of all things!

Saints can talk out their feelings, problems, frustrations, and sorrows and give them over to God in the process, knowing He is all-knowing, all-powerful, and all-loving. Once we become believers, He is always with us, in us and for us! He speaks to us through the Word, and as we choose to do so, we listen. This then, is where we have responsibility. Will we nourish the relationship we have with God with our time, energy, and resources or not?

A student can observe a common instruction that runs throughout the Bible, that is, for us to pray. Therefore, we know that following this instruction can only benefit us. For example, He says that we do not need to be careful or anxious, rather 'in everything' we are to make our requests known and be thankful 'in and for' all things. Over time, saints can realize that during prayer they gain a peace, which gives strength to continue through the details of life.

Philippians 4:6-7

“Be careful for nothing; but in every thing by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your

requests be made known unto God. And the peace of God, which passeth all understanding, shall keep your hearts and mind through Christ Jesus.”

Ephesians 5:20

“Giving thanks always for all things unto God and the Father in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ.”

Talking with Him also helps us to think through what the Word is teaching. Prayer can be the place where we can talk to God about solving a problem and the 'how to' of applying the Word in a situation. Making changes in our life by Scripture can be challenging and prayer makes the process easier. A side benefit to spending time in prayer can also be a way to feel close to God and safe as we deal with these many problem situations and obstacles, trusting His life and power in us to effectually work.

I Thessalonians 2: 13

“For this cause also thank we God without ceasing, because, when ye received the word of God which ye heard of us, ye received it not as the word of men, but as it is in truth, the word of God, which effectually worketh also in you that believe.”

As we use prayer to process through the concerns of life, we have the opportunity to turn them over to the Lord, realizing our answers lie in His strength working in us. II Corinthians 12 shows how the Apostle Paul gained maturity in the Word to handle problems in a new way. We also can attain unto this mature attitude through prayerful study of the Word. We can come to trust

that when we are weak, Christ's strength can be more fully manifest in us, enabling us to glory and take pleasure in the very things that, as a babe in Christ, we used to ask God to take away.

II Corinthians 12: 9-10

“And he said unto me, My grace is sufficient for thee: for my strength is made perfect in weakness. Most gladly therefore will I rather glory in my infirmities, that the power of Christ may rest upon me. Therefore I take pleasure in infirmities, in reproaches, in necessities, in persecutions, in distresses for Christ's sake: for when I am weak, then am I strong.”

Romans 12:12:

“Rejoicing in hope; patient in tribulation; continuing instant in prayer;”

This insight empowers us to acquire and function with the mind of Christ and have the Word effectually working in us. Eventually, the Scripture in us becomes how we think and function. It is who we are. Verses and spiritual songs pop up in the mind, keeping us focused on Him. To prepare, saints can develop fellowship with God, be in the Word daily, and pray without ceasing.

*Assignment: Topical Study: Take time to look up verses in the concordance on the topic of prayer. Limit the scope of your study to the epistles of Paul, at present. To get started con-sider: Romans 12:12, Philippians 4, and I Thessalonians 5:17.

Soon after trusting Christ over 30 years ago, this writer asked God for a heart desire to read and study, knowing it was how faith was developed. (Romans 10:17) After experiencing little enjoyment

from reading any type of book up through to adulthood, God developed a driving motivation in this writer to read and study His Word after only a year of prayer. This desire has never diminished, but rather has actually strengthened over the course of time. To Him be the glory indeed!

Romans10:17

“So then faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the word of God.”

How can prayer help us in our study of God's Word? A primary issue is that it helps us to stay focused on 'spiritual things'. Before we begin a time of study, starting with prayer can orient our minds to a spiritual perspective: realize we are about to read and listen to 'Christ, the Word', stir up a thankful heart, and humble us to realize that we have the great opportunity to grow, mature, and live for God, the Creator Himself.

It is sometimes a challenge to determine where prayer ends and meditation begins. They are closely linked in many ways. But put simply, prayer is the expression of our thoughts to God, providing opportunity to become aware and articulate what is on our mind and heart.

*Study Suggestion: Pray all day long. But a regular, 'daily quiet time to pray' is also enormously beneficial. Some enjoy starting off the day with prayer, others prefer ending it this way and many choose both. Let us evaluate one method that is not

usually thought about, 'writing prayers'. This method can be instructive especially during tumultuous life experiences.

With the many things that 'cloud the mind', our conversations with God can frequently wander off onto the many 'to dos' and concerns of the day. Writing our communication to God can help us, not only stay focused, but also enables us to reread our communication to assess the real concerns being relayed to God. Is there a focus on 'fleshly concerns' more than the 'spiritual things'? Are we thankful or are we focused on asking God for more? These insights can dramatically affect how the challenges of life are handled and as needed, to refocus life in a spiritual direction.

*Assignment: Reflection/Word Study: Further study of prayer could be quite beneficial. Some of the questions below may provoke thought and reveal areas that need to be looked at in a new light. Prayer is very important, but do you know why you pray as you do?

- Do we need to make sure we pray for 'every' thing, or 'every' single person, 'each and every day' to make sure they are 'covered'? What if we forget?
- Is God 'more likely' to fix a problem or answer our prayer if we 'pray more often', 'try to be a better person' or 'get more saints' to pray? Why?
- Is it important to inform others about our problems so they can pray? Who, how many and why?
- Do we enlighten Him in some way when we tell Him what 'we think' we need or what we want in prayer?

- Do we ever surprise God about our feelings or needs? Doesn't He know our concerns and the things we are worried about before we say them? If yes, then, why pray?
- What is your purpose in praying? How are you praying, as a babe in Christ or an adult believer? Would it differ?
- How did Paul pray? This is important since he is our pattern. Think on these things.

Matthew 6:7-8

“But when ye pray, use not vain repetitions, as the heathen do: for they think that they shall be heard for their much speaking. Be not ye therefore like unto them: for your Father knoweth what things ye have need of, before ye ask him.”

G. Come In Meditation

Meditation occurs in our mind and spirit and it is communing with God through His Word and Spirit. Many times we may not even know we are meditating on spiritual things, as we do not always 'have' to make a conscious decision for it to happen. But it can be purposefully focusing our mind, considering verses as they relate to the issues, thoughts, or feelings we are experiencing to gain a new appreciation and perspective.

A student who is open, allowing His Spirit to teach and bring verses to mind throughout the day, can see the effectual working of the Word and gain new insights on Scripture and its application in

this way. God gave instruction to Jewish parents regarding the Word; to keep it center stage in their mind, throughout the day by fastening the Word on their arm, around their forehead and upon their door post. This enabled children to have their senses exercised with the Word, continually. There may be a lesson for us also in these instructions, if it directs us to set our affections on spiritual things above.

Deuteronomy 6:7,9

“And thou shalt teach them diligently unto thy children, and shalt talk of them when thou sittest in thine house, and when thou walkest by the way, and when thou liest down, and when thou risest up. And thou shalt bind them for a sign upon thine hand, and they shall be frontlets between thine eyes. And thou shalt write them upon the posts of thy house, and on thy gates.”

Proverbs 6:20-22

“My son keep thy father’s commandment, and forsake not the law of thy mother: Bind them continually upon thine heart, and tie them about thy neck. When thou goest, it shall lead thee; when thou sleepest, it shall keep thee; and when thou awakest, it shall talk with thee. For the commandment is a lamp; and the law is light; and reproofs of instruction are the way of life”

It is helpful to approach the Word through meditation; this can enhance our understanding and uncover new aspects contained within Scripture. Meditation works in close unison with prayer and the Word. The more we prayerfully take in the Word and think on spiritual things, the more we have opportunity to learn and grow.

Notice the instruction that Paul gave to his spiritual son, Timothy, both a pastor and teacher of the Word as it may help us understand a few things. Giving ourselves to the Word and meditating on these things, wholly, has a reaping in our lives. It can even affect those in our 'circle of influence', that is, those with whom we touch or can impact.

I Timothy 4:13-16

“Till I come, give attendance to reading, to exhortation, to doctrine. Neglect not the gift that is in thee, which was given thee by prophecy, with the laying on of the hands of the presbytery. Meditate upon these things; give thyself wholly to them; that thy profiting may appear to all. Take heed unto thyself, and unto the doctrine; continue in them: for in doing this thou shalt both save thyself, and them that hear thee.”

H. Know Some Things about our Relationship with God

As we have seen, Romans 5 teaches that once we are saved we have an 'at peace' relationship with God. Sin has been totally and effectively dealt with at the cross. When we realize this wonderful aspect of being a believer, we can view ourselves and our relationship with God differently.

Romans 5: 1-2

“Therefore being justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ: By whom also we have access by faith into this grace wherein we stand, and rejoice in hope of the glory of God.”

As we have seen, the doctrine contained within Romans 1-8 fully provides the training needed to 'ready' us to become aware of and function in a way that God has desired for man all along. He has always wanted to function in the role of a 'Father', and to actually develop a father-son (daughter) relationship with man, even in the Garden with Adam and Eve. He never meant us to stay 'babes'. For how much more profitable can we be as adult sons, built up in the form of sound doctrine, the curriculum He has provided.

We are to be a part of what He is doing; He has a plan and purpose. Today, we can choose to be led of the Spirit and mature into this 'sonship role', more fully recognizing the blessed position we have available to us. However, this topic has more depth to it than can be addressed at this point. It is sufficient to note its significance and realize that it will be addressed further as this series progresses. Until then, the student is encouraged to go on to study this on his own. Materials by Keith Blades have been found helpful to this writer on this topic. (Appendix IV)

Romans 8:14-16

“For as many as are led by the Spirit of God, they are the sons of God. For ye have not received the spirit of bondage again to fear; but ye have received the Spirit of adoption, whereby we cry, Abba, Father. The Spirit itself beareth witness with our spirit, that we are the children of God”

Another issue that seems important is to observe a new facet of how prayer, meditation, reading, and studying the Word work in unison to actually build our relationship with God. They are actually communication tools, building 'godly intimacy' with the Father. Much like the relationship developed with our human father, openness and regular effort needs to be put forth from both sides to enable the relationship to even maintain, but especially to go on to grow and mature. It is the same with God our Father.

Believers have the wonderful privilege of free expression. We each can use our unique personality and all of what makes us individuals, to share personal thoughts with God. We can count on God as He is always listening but also prepared to intimately communicate to us through His Scripture.

However, many Christians today often do most of the 'talking' in their relationship and little direct, 'personal listening' in the Word itself. When this happens between people, the 'lack of listening' actually functions as a wall inhibiting closeness. This type of one-sided communication will also affect the growth of our relationship with God.

It is important to realize that His desire never diminishes. Our loving Father wants this 'godly intimacy' with all His children. A saint who may find he is doing 'most of the talking' can just begin to

think differently. He can pick himself up off this 'one-sided communication road' and put himself on 'the road to better communication' with God, listening and taking in Scripture.

It is imperative to regularly hear what our all-knowing God and Father has to say to us. We need to do this by listening daily, but also listening properly, considering the context and simple way the Word has been written. He teaches and speaks to us individually through His Spirit, developing personal intimacy with us as we are reading, studying, and meditating upon Scripture in faith.

Begin to see it as so much more than just building cold hard facts in the mind to attain head knowledge. Taking in the Word and making time to consider these things is how He has chosen, not only to mature us, but to develop a close relationship with us as His 'cherished adult son'. We are acquiring the mind of Christ. As the series continues, students will be able to acquire clarity in 'listening properly' by more fully understanding how God has designed His Word.

Romans 8:14

“For as many as are led by the Spirit of God, they are the sons of God.”

Remember, prayer is not the same as talking to just anyone, and listening to God is not like reading a man-made book. Scripture is Christ! (Revelation 19:13) The Word and God are one. (John 1)

His Word is living and has powerful qualities, some of which we may be unaware. (Hebrews 4:12// Timothy 3:16-17) As we read it, it reads us and the thoughts and intents of our heart.

So then, let us take stock of what has been presented. First, we are to recognize God desires us to function as adult sons and be led by the Spirit, slowly progressing through the curriculum He has provided. Next, relationship building is a 'two-way, interactive process' and this is exactly how an intimate relationship is developed with our Father.

The study of man's writings 'about the Word' cannot even be compared to 'directly taking in the Scripture', nor even be considered a near replacement. When we focus our study on man-made books or are content with passively listening to what others say 'about' the Word, we skip over this 'living process' designed for us by God and will just plain 'miss out' on many aspects of a deepening, personal relationship with Him and so much more. God has purposed to use the Spirit through the Word to teach our spirit the mind of Christ. It transforms us to realize our living union with Him, con-formed to the image of His dear Son. (Romans 8)

Isaiah 55:10-11

“For as the rain cometh down, and the snow from heaven, and returneth not thither, but watereth the earth, and maketh it bring forth and bud, that it may give seed to the sower, and bread to the

eater: So shall my word be that goeth forth out of my mouth: it shall not return unto me void, but it shall accomplish that which I please, and it shall prosper in the thing whereto I sent it.”

I. Come in Faith

A dictionary definition of 'faith' can provide insight: To trust, to believe, to have a firm confidence; unreserved surrender of the will. But, it is in Romans chapter 4 where God defines it for us with His words and an example. He describes how Abraham put his faith in what God had promised to him. Yet in human effort and experience, it was simply impossible. How could he and Sarah have a child at such an old age? Yet Abraham walked by faith and not sight.

He whole-heartedly trusted in God's Word, with an unwavering, mighty, appreciative faith in God and gave Him the glory. He believed in hope, was strong in faith, staggered not and was fully persuaded in what God had promised. This underlying assumption toward God is the premise and foundation for a faithful approach to the Word. Notice the descriptions given in this section of Scripture.

Romans 4: 18-21

“Who against hope believed in hope, that he might become the father of many nations, according to that which was spoken, So shall thy seed be. And being not weak in faith, he considered not his own body now dead, when he was about an hundred years old, neither yet the deadness of Sarah's womb: He staggered not at the promise of God through unbelief; but was strong in faith, giving

glory to God; And being fully persuaded that, what he had promised, he was able also to perform.”

To know how faith works when coming to the Scriptures, be refreshed in things already laid forth. Scripture is Christ, and Christ is God, and He magnifies the Word above all His name. (John 1/Psalm 138) It is always true and perfect, preserved for us by God Himself. (Revelation 19/Psalm 12) Whenever we disagree with it, we are wrong or we just don't understand yet. This is the attitude of faith.

Faith in the Word is increased and strengthened as we take in the Scriptures. Faith is generated by the Word itself, Romans 10 states that "...faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the Word of God." By it we can see Truth, God's character, His great love for man, and its living nature. It accomplishes what God sent it to do, fully able to make an effectual impact. Faith works by love.

Romans 10:17

“So then faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the Word of God.”

II Corinthians 5:14

“For the love of Christ constraineth us; because we thus judge, that if one died for all, then were all dead:”

Galatians 5: 6

“For in Jesus Christ neither circumcision availed any thing, nor uncircumcision; but faith which worketh by love.”

*Assignment: Read with purpose: As students continue their reading of the Scripture, purpose to observe this issue of faith. Be mindful of Bible characters 'of faith', and those who exhibit a 'lack of faith'. Examples are helpful in learning life applications, whether good examples or bad. Notice the many areas that require faithful service to God as progression is made through the Bible. Having faith is related to many areas, not just in our approach to God and His Word. For example, faith is necessary for living our life, dealing with problems, in communication and in relationships. It is the very foundation for which we live the Christian life, and much more.

So then, how do we approach the Bible in faith? It is taking God at His Word. Simply, He says it, therefore, it is true. Additionally, there is an underlying attitude that affects what we get out of the Word because it determines our expectations. It seems there are three major ways people come to the Word.

The first is one of trust and faith, with open arms. As the saint opens the Scriptures he is motivated, confidently expecting a continuous and abounding pouring out of all God is graciously free to give and do for us in love. A person with this approach knows that God has written the Word 'for man', has an unfathomable, enduring love for us and 'always' wants, does and teaches what is best for us. This kind of trust is built over time and Romans 1-8 teaches and matures saints in these things.

The second two approaches are more closed, often a wall is up, and man closes himself off to the power of the Word. One may be apathetic, the other could feel defeated and/or angry, either not believing it will be practical or applies to him or with a guilt-laden expectation that the Word will just reveal more areas in which he falls short. He expects it to 'pound' on him with a continuous, unattainable list of things he 'has to do' in order to please a wrathful or distant God.

Of course, there are variations in the intensity of each position, but these seem to be the three main ways a saint approaches Scripture. It may be prudent, once we now know there are options to approach God's Word that we use this to reflect and evaluate where we are and if needed, purpose to adjust our thinking to one of faith.

As Book I comes to its conclusion, reflection reveals that students have had the opportunity to gain a fuller appreciation of God's Word. This can enable a more prepared approach in reading, knowing some basic things to mature and move ahead in their Christian life. It is hoped that the reader is more aware to make a wise decision when selecting a Bible and finally, enlightened to how his attitude and approach to the Scripture affects what is learned and his ability to mature and apply it to the details of life.

The reader is encouraged to continue his study and move forward to the next book in the series, Part II – How the Bible is Practical. It will address how Scripture has been designed to help the student deal with the challenges of life. Readers will have the opportunity to obtain a glimpse of the 'practicality' of Scripture. This is an important topic as many Christians set aside the Bible thinking that it does not relate to them.

Be confident to know there is applicable information, direction and processes contained throughout Scripture. These are practical to the details of your life, such as understanding the sin process, how to deal with sin, habits, and strongholds, and finally how to have a mind adjustment to allow Christ to live within your earthen vessels. Take time to digest what has been gleaned from Part I and continue to study the referenced passages in their context to build understanding and application.

Personal Notes

Appendix

The content of this Appendix contains resources to be used as a guide to facilitate practical application and to share with others. Most of these tools are a condensed version and originate from within the body of this book. At times, the student may desire more detail on the subject, therefore the location of this material has been referenced at the top of each resource.

Finally, it is recognized that another writer or teacher could have written or worded most things differently because each has different perspectives and are at different points in maturation. As with the entirety of this book, therefore, prove all things and then glean what you can from these tools.

Please feel free to copy and utilize these resources freely for personal use to assist others to understand how to be just before God and to edify the saints. Questions, comments or requests for additional copies can be directed to this writer. Contact information is contained in the last resource.

Rejoice in His Grace!

Appendix I

(p.47)

Things to Consider When Purchasing a Bible

This tool will concentrate on the selection of a Bible that meets the particular needs of the student. There is an option for the buyer to select a Bible that strictly lays forth Scripture and is void of publisher comments, study insights, or other resources. But, there are also a great many books with cross reference systems, notes, maps, dictionaries, concordances, and historical background information.

Realize that there are many man-made resources contained within 'the Bible cover', so caution is advised as they are purchased or utilized. It seems prudent to interject that only the Scripture contained within the cover is God-inspired. When man is involved, writings will be tainted with personal beliefs and ideas and they will be lacking in some areas. Even a caption below a picture could contain biased information that could misdirect the reader.

While the main thrust of this section is to assist the reader in purchasing a hard copy of the Bible, in today's electronic age there are many options available to obtain the Word of God. One can use

the Internet and access Scripture on various websites. E-Bibles and devices specifically made for downloading books such as the Word of God are also available. These can provide easy access to Scripture, even when a hard copy is unavailable.

Many of the considerations below can also assist in making an informed choice when considering an electronic option. With that in mind, consider these ten topics regarding the selection of a study Bible. These can provide a starting point for the student in the process of thinking out this decision.

Note: Each saint is accountable to make choices wisely when selecting a Bible, taking into consideration their own ability to separate bias from Scripture. Prove all things by Scripture. This resource is just a summary of what is contained within, Part I – What to Appreciate as we Approach God's Word.

1. Version

This is probably one of the most important issues to determine as a student. If you are unsure which version to use, do research to develop your own conviction. Compare verses from various versions to the King James and determine which glorifies the Lord the most. Until then, stay in your Bible and prayerfully make the decision to continue to study.

2. Study Notes

Maps, pictures, and historical information proves quite interesting and provides technical data from man's point of view. Background information on the various books, characters and historical times can also be quite insightful. There can be useful and interesting points, observations and thoughts within Bible notes. But be aware that publishers often include 'scholarly' notes that are founded upon current views or archaeological findings. This is opinion. Some may lead to verses or words being questioned, omitted, or changed. When this occurs, there is usually a note as to the reason. This ought to raise an enormous 'red flag' in the mind of the believer.

3. Cross References

In order to assist the student in finding verses, cross reference notations are made in Bibles linking words or topics to other places in Scripture. Some cross reference notes or verses are listed between columns of text, while others are noted at the top or bottom of a page of Scripture. It is like a mini-study linking Scripture together. Each publisher has its own method of cross referencing verses. Some are more factual, referring back to a specific verse where the topic or quote originated. Others may offer personal notes.

4. Binding

Leather bound Bibles will definitely last longer, though are markedly more expensive. Before investing in a pricey Bible, an inexperienced student may want to start with an inexpensive book until preferences are known.

5. Size/Width

When choosing a Bible, deciding upon the characteristics desired takes some thought. Larger print is the main reason for purchasing larger Bibles. During the selection process, consider vision needs and weight for transporting. There are thin width books also available.

6. Tabs

Some Bibles can be bought with built in tabs on the end of the pages, indicating the location of the books of the Bible. This makes them easier to locate and can be a very useful tool for studying, especially for those unfamiliar with the books of the Bible.

7. Margins

Some Bibles come with little or no margin. Others have borders all around the print and many have them on both sides or on the top and bottom of the page. Margins are good places for personal notes or jotting down references, which can help to refresh insights gained in earlier studies.

8. Concordance/Dictionary

Having these resources in the back of a Bible can be convenient, though limited in scope and content often due to space constrictions.

9. Bible Covers

A protective cover is a good investment to safeguard your Bible. It can provide organization to store paper, pens or pencils, maps, previous studies, etc.

10. Red Letter Edition

Many prefer Bibles with the 'words of Jesus' in red. An interesting question to study would be, are 'these words' more important than the rest of Scripture? John 1:1-3,14 and Revelation 19:13 teaches that the Word and Christ are one. Consider also that God inspired every word of the Bible as holy men were moved by the Holy Ghost to write it. (II Timothy 3:16 & II Peter 1:19-21) Each verse and word has also been perfectly preserved (Psalm 12: 6-7). Then, entertain the possibility that the actual 'words Christ spoke when He lived on Earth' and 'every word in Scripture' are all the words of Christ.

Appendix II

(p.61)

How to Be Just Before God

Key Aspects of Salvation- Romans 1-3

Note: God's explanation of the “gospel of Christ” is located in the book of Romans, the first of Paul's thirteen epistles. Romans 1-3 unfold the fundamentals of the gospel, perfectly designed to effectively bring any person no matter what their background to a saving knowledge of the Lord Jesus Christ. Its priority is clear, evidenced simply by where Paul placed it in his writings, first.

Let us now look at this in more depth to gain a fuller appreciation of what God teaches on the subject of salvation. Decide to study these things within their context to gain what God is teaching. The listing below is just a summary of what was written in, A Basic Introduction to Bible Study: Part I – What to Appreciate as we Approach God's Word.

1. **The Bad News**: God's wrath is against sin, specifically, ungodliness and unrighteousness, but man is held responsible. (Romans 1-3)

a) **Recognition there is a God**: Man knows in his conscience about God’s eternal power and Godhead. (Romans 1:20)

b) Man's attitude: Man ought to give all glory to God, having a thankful heart for life itself and all provisions. (Romans 1:21)

c) There is a judgment: Man knows there is a righteous judgment and the entire world is guilty before God, because no flesh is justified by his own works. He is unable to justify himself or come up with a valid excuse to explain away this just judgment against him. (Romans 2, 3:19-20)

Man is accountable and deserves God's wrath for his ungodliness and unrighteousness, knowingly proceeding in unbelief and ungodliness. Man is without excuse. God placed within man's conscience certain things which hold him accountable.

We see that God revealed to man two invisible things, His eternal power and His Godhead. God further states that when man continues in unbelief, not glorifying Him as God, neither being thankful, he became unwise and foolish actually proceeding down an evil course in life, worshiping other things. Man has a desperate condition before God and he is unable to solve the problem with his own self-righteous works.

2. The Good News: God's Love and Perfect Provision: The Gift of His Righteousness - Romans 3: 21-31

a) God's provision: Romans 3:21-26 sets forth details of the basic gospel. It is because of His great love, the Lord Jesus Christ paid the full price. He is the only perfect, fully satisfying sacrifice that God will accept to pay for sin once and for all.

b) Our response: By faith alone, trusting in His blood for full payment for sin: past, present and future; the only way to be saved.

c) Result: God freely gives eternal life, and His perfect righteousness.

The 'righteousness of God' includes many important issues. Look at Romans 3:21-26 and notice some of the various topics to be considered. Key aspects of each verse are provided below.

Verse 21: At this time, God has decided to make known how we can have His righteousness. He refers to the same imputed righteousness that He has shown to others in time past, such as Abraham and David, cited later in Romans 4.

Verse 22: God is free to give us His righteousness as a free gift by the faithfulness of Jesus Christ to go to the cross and pay for all our sin.

Verse 23: Every man has sinned and fallen short of God's perfect righteousness and His glory.

Verse 24: We are made just, perfect, by God's own grace, His unmerited favor toward us. We are redeemed and the price is paid in full by Christ's work.

Verse 25: God has provided to each of us Christ, as a fully satisfying sacrifice. It is simple faith in His blood. He offers His righteousness as a free gift to all who believe.

Verse 26: It is God that justifies and is the justifier of those who believe in Jesus' finished work.

A personal synopsis of some of the many issues within the 'gospel message' has been included below. It is a challenge for any man to capture all of what Christ accomplished in just one paragraph. Thus remember, only the Word is the Absolute Authority on spiritual matters.

'Gospel Summary':

1) In an expression of His great love, God placed all of mankind's sin upon the perfectly innocent Lamb, His dear Son the Lord Jesus Christ. He made Christ to be sin for us, who chose to die, shedding His blood to pay the eternal death and penalty of sin for each one of us. 2) While the Lord Jesus Christ experienced terrible physical pain on the cross, this agony was not what paid for sin. Instead, it was paid-in-full when He suffered our deserved and eternal, unrestrained wrath and separation from the Father. 3) But Christ was victorious! He rose from the dead showing Himself to be alive and proving indeed He conquered sin and death. This was a perfect sacrifice with which God was well-pleased. It was truly 'finished'! 4) All He desires is a simple faith response, to believe that His sacrifice was sufficient as payment for sin. He then gives us His Righteousness as a free gift, which enables us to have eternal life.

Appendix III

(p. 77)

Know How to Live Your New Identity:

Who We Are In Christ

(Romans 6-8)

Note: God desires for us to think and act as who we are in Christ once we are saved, receiving the free gift of His righteousness. It is amazing how many things there are to learn as God begins something new in us, by His Spirit through the Word. Now He enables and empowers us to live a life pleasing to Him.

Let us narrow our focus to Romans 6-8, which deals with our new identity in Christ. It is hoped that this very basic overview will spark the desire to go on to examine this section of Scripture. Decide to study these things within their context to gain all of what God is teaching. The listing below is just a summary of what is contained within, A Basic Introduction to Bible Study: Part I – What to Appreciate as we Approach God's Word.

1. Know Your Old Man Is Crucified: God does not want us to be controlled any longer by sin, but rather able to live a new life pleasing unto Him. Our old man or sin nature has been crucified. It had to be done so that the body of sin might be destroyed and 'that'

we should no longer serve sin. Sin had total control over us as an unsaved person and now that control has been effectively dealt with for good. (Romans 6:6-8)

2. We Have Choices: We no longer have to serve sin. Believers are now free from sin and have the wonderful ability to choose. Before being saved, sinners could do nothing acceptable unto God. At the very best, they could produce self-righteous works, filthy rags to God. (Isaiah 64:6) Now, our 'old man' is dead indeed unto sin.

This 'sin cycle' is broken and we have choices to make. Will we choose to be 'tools of unrighteousness' or serve as "instruments of righteousness"? The key is being aware of the choice. (Romans 6:11-13).

3. Reckon Yourself Alive, Yielding Unto God

God desires us to see ourselves as He does, we are to 'reckon' or determine as true, that we are crucified with Christ and dead to sin, and now alive unto God. We have a new identity and are to yield ourselves unto God as His vessels, confident that what He desires for us is what is always for the best. How is it that we can live a life acceptable unto God? It is Christ's work; He is living in us as we yield. (Galatians 2:20)

4. Our New Identity Separate from Sin: Romans 7 goes on to explain that once we are justified something has changed within us

that has further defined our identity. 'The flesh' and the newly saved "I" are now separate, even though they both reside within us. (Romans 7:17-18) What the unsaved man (in the flesh) could not do, the saved man (Christ living in us) is now able to do, empowered by God. (Romans 7)

As saints, we can allow the Spirit and Word to work in us and can set aside the "motions of sin" that used to control us. 'But now' we are able to choose 'not to sin' and 'not yield' to our fleshly desires and be victorious in this spiritual battle. (Romans 7)

This produces fruit that is well pleasing to our Father. As we understand that 'sin' and 'I' are now separated, guilt is all gone. God sees us as saved saints, perfect and righteous and therefore our guilt no longer has to hinder us. We can just pick ourselves up, step onto the path serving God and walk as who we are in Christ.

But when we stay in this battle, note the inevitable, seemingly hopeless question that results from the believer's realization that he is still unable to make his flesh any better, nor gain control of the lusts of the flesh. Verse 24 states: "O wretched man that I am, who shall deliver me from the body of this death?" We find ourselves in a desperate situation, even though we are saved. The reason is we still need to learn some things! (Romans 7:22-24)

It is in verse 25 that we see the answer. It is not about us and our efforts to please God, even after we are saved. It's all about God and His work, Christ being manifest in us. We can thank God because He is our total provision. He gave us His Son to take care of the problem of sin so that we can have eternal life with God, and freedom from the sin that works in our members. (Romans 7:24-25)

We have been changed and Romans 6-7 teaches us that we no longer are bound by it, we are forgiven and as believers we have new identities. The issue is not a struggle to make the flesh better; the focus is now 'our mind'. This transitions us into the next chapter where God begins to deal with this very issue.

5. Minding Things of The Spirit, Maturing as an Adult Son: We have the glorious privilege to put our mind on the things God tells us are important. This will enable and empower us to walk as who we are in Christ, functioning as an adult son. When we are led of the Spirit we can move forward in maturity and live as who He made us. (Romans 8:5-14)

Resource Contact Information

A. Bible Resources

The resources below were instrumental in the spiritual growth and maturation of this writer. They direct students into the Word itself, rather than man's wisdom and assist individuals in the understanding of Paul's distinctive ministry to us, the Gentiles. These are the most reliable, Bible centered Christian organizations personally known for over 25 years to this writer and are recommended to anyone interested in seeking sound teaching and resources.

1. Berean Bible Ministries, John Verstegen's ministry: www.helpersforyourjoy.com
2. Enjoy the Bible Ministries, Keith Blade's ministry: www.enjoythebible.com
3. Grace School of the Bible, Richard Jordan's ministry: www.graceimpact.org

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*NOTE: It seems prudent to acknowledge that no one organization or individual has the corner on the Truth. This writer would not state total agreement with any one group or individual, nor would any of these resources necessarily agree with everything written in this document. We are all called to think independently and develop our own convictions, maintaining the Word as the Absolute Authority.

Personal Notes