

A Basic Introduction to Bible Study:

Part II

How the Bible is Practical
And Able to Mature Believers

Journal of Treasures - A Work in Progress

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A Basic Gospel Statement

- 1) In an expression of His great eternal love, God placed all of mankind's sin upon the perfect innocent Lamb, His dear Son, the Lord Jesus Christ. He made Him 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) Christ experienced terrible pain on the cross, but this agony was not what paid for sin. Instead, it was paid-in-full when He suffered our deserved, 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 that He conquered sin and death. God was well pleased with this perfect sacrifice. It was truly 'finished'!
- 4) All He desires is a simple faith response, to believe that His sacrifice was sufficient as payment for all your sin. He then gives you His righteousness as a free gift, which enables you to have eternal life.

Romans 3:21-26

“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: For all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God; Being justified freely by his grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus: 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; To declare, I say, at this time his righteousness: that he might be just, and the justifier of him which believeth in Jesus.”

This series is dedicated to my two children:

Josiah and Bri-Anna

Your time is valuable. Use it to realize how God designed Scripture and His way for you to mature. Grow, learning how wondrously practical His Word is to negotiate challenges. Prove His will in your life and understand how to gain victory over sin.

Special appreciation to

C. J.

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

Thanks also to my husband Brian for his kindness, longsuffering, and the ongoing Bible discussions and support.

Personal Thoughts

The book content was obtained through God's gracious teaching, led by the Spirit over the years and gleaned from the teachings of a few mighty in the Scriptures. This writer acknowledges that she is really a Bible student rather than a professional writer. However, as time grows short in this dispensation of grace, the motivation strengthens to share these basic insights to others, in spite of any writing deficits.

It is hoped that the issues in this book will be an encouragement, empowering and leading others to stay in the Word, as spiritual nourishment. Scripture is to be more highly prized than any earthly treasure, more important than necessary food. The goal is to open a small window so the light of the glorious Truth can shine to the reader in a new or more effective way; to obtain a fresh perspective of God's eternal treasures, motivating further reflection and study.

Note: The King James Version is the resource used for all Scripture quotes. Please note that some verses referenced have words underlined for emphasis. In addition, though accurately quoted, a few passages were arranged in list form to assist the reader to see the components of the verses, especially when explaining a process.

Feel free to copy and utilize this resource for personal use to assist others to understand how to be just before God and edify the saints. All questions, comments, or requests for additional copies can be directed to this writer.

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Introduction

How the Bible is Practical and Able to Mature Believers can empower students to realize that Scripture was particularly designed to be concrete, useful instruction to man. It unveils general things about how maturation takes place. Students are encouraged to see for themselves that Scripture is exceedingly relevant. When fully appreciated and incorporated as a conviction of heart, it can prompt a zealous Bible curiosity and exploration that can last a lifetime.

The intent of this writing is to assist students to develop motivation and stay energized to study Scripture. It provides an examination of how the Word is practical, why and how God wrote it, and ways to access and more fully realize God's personalized way of teaching. After detailing some basic study insights, the balance centers upon four ways the Bible provides practical application.

The first explains how to attain a mature attitude toward studying. Then, three key passages present processes that teach about *dealing with sin and ungodly practices. These are immediately applicable and work together to assist believers to gain practical victory over sin.

*Consult a wise, Christian professional if there are serious, underlying physiological/psychological issues.

The former book, What to Appreciate as We Approach God's Word addressed characteristics of the Bible. It also presented basic study suggestions and how to be empowered and prepared when approaching the Word of God. This second book works in conjunction with, and builds upon the first and assumes a basic orientation in these preliminary issues. As needed, students can go back to obtain clarity in these introductory issues.

*Assignment: Read Romans 1-12 as many times as possible to glean the most from Book II. This segment of Scripture teaches foundational material to mature a saint in the elementary issues, preparing him to serve as a living sacrifice unto God.

Enjoy the process!

Talk to your Father to gain a genuine desire to spend time
with Him, directly in the Word.

Personal Notes

Chapter 1

The Bible is Practical

The reader is encouraged to take ample time to reflect on things presented in this book and evaluate them using the authority of God's Word. This proving process is God-designed to develop personal conviction. One approach might be to read a small section, look up Scripture references in their context and put it to meditation and prayer, then, proceed on to the next.

Some of the topics in this chapter will be:

- How Scripture is generally relevant to man.
- Reflection on where you are in your thinking.
- Common uncertainties and misperceptions.
- Why so many are disrupted from reading.
- What is crucial to acquire God's training?

A. How is Scripture Relevant to You?

What does it mean when someone says that something is practical? Generally, it refers to being capable, functional, useful, or applicable. Scripture is practical to man when it relates in a way that is significantly helpful. Stated another way, it is relevant or pertinent to the details of daily living. Practical is an excellent word to describe the Bible.

Ways the Word Is Practical

Consider a few examples:

1. God relays who He is, His power, nature, and character
2. Scripture teaches of His master plan/purpose for heaven & earth
3. Creation and how life came into being is explained
4. It unfolds God's great love & how He is exceedingly 'for' man
5. God judges sin perfectly, explains man's responsibility & His mercy
6. Christ's cross work is the answer & perfect sacrifice...just believe
7. God, through Scripture, is our total provision for life
8. The Bible unveils man's past, present and things to come
9. God teaches man His wisdom and mind, affecting decision-making
10. Scripture provides instruction to live godly & accomplish His plan

Scripture is so comprehensive that it includes everything God desires man to know in one book. The Word teaches godliness, enabling one to be "...perfect, throughly furnished..." by Christ living in them. There is a two-fold purpose, explained in I Timothy:

- 1) Present: To live unto God in this current world, righteously, "...the life that now is..."
- 2) Future: To ready believers for eternity, enabling them to operate in a full capacity in Heaven as the Father desires, "...that which is to come."

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 Timothy 4:8

*“For bodily exercise profiteth little: but godliness is profitable unto all things, **1)** having promise of the life that now is, and **2)** of that which is to come.”*

From His all-knowing and all-powerful perspective, God designed the Bible realizing precisely what the generations of man would need. Way in advance, He wrote it by perfectly taking into consideration the changes and variations that would occur over all time, within cultures, races, genders, age, and individuals. It contains instructions with direction to function today and the future, using parables, analogies, examples, and basic principles, but was also completely relevant to those who lived in the past.

Scripture serves as a scientific manual, but also provides instruction about man's history. Over the years, the Bible has taught generations about how the universe was created, God Himself as Creator, and man, his growth, mistakes, relationship with God and key events. All these things are "...for our learning, that we through patience and comfort of the Scriptures might have hope." Scripture is most comprehensive, perfect and complete teaching, representing the Great God and Father to His creation.

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.”

The Word provides information about things to expect in the present. God teaches how the course of this world is proceeding and provides warning and specific guidelines for decisions. It unveils how we are to function during this ‘time of grace’ and the ability to understand His perspective on things. The Bible is also prophecy about what will happen at the end of this present dispensation, details about the future. For example, it unveils how saints will be forever changed to have a new and glorious heavenly body, “...the redemption of our body.”

Romans 8:22-23

“For we know that the whole creation groaneth and travaileth in pain together until now. And not only they, but ourselves also, which have the firstfruits of the Spirit, even we ourselves groan within ourselves, waiting for the adoption, to wit, the redemption of our body.”

Scripture will be equally applicable for those who live in the time to come. Saints can observe this for themselves. Future events with specific instruction about living in that time were documented in Hebrews to Revelation, specifically for the Tribulation Period. An example is found in Revelation 1, “The Revelation of Jesus Christ...to shew unto his servants things which must shortly come to pass...”

Revelation 1:1

“The Revelation of Jesus Christ, which God gave unto him, to shew unto his servants things which must shortly come to pass; and he sent and signified it by his angel unto his servant John.”

The Word describes God’s standards of behavior through laws and other doctrine over time and further defines His character, will, and relationship to man. The Bible manifests many things about man, who he is, his make-up and nature and need for God. The Scripture also reveals issues related to Satan and his evil desire to influence man.

God teaches about true religion, worship, and “...reasonable service...” However, He also warns about Satan’s subtle, evil ways to counterfeit the Most High God. This is manifest in “...the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air...”. All these are infused within this Book and so much more.

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.”

Ephesians 2:2

“Wherein in time past ye walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that now worketh in the children of disobedience”

Though this is just a small taste with a few verses to highlight points made, it is sufficient to obtain a basic awareness of a few things about the relevance of Scripture. Students can now be empowered to reflect on whether the Bible is practical. So, is it?

*Study Suggestion: Conviction. This would be a good place to pause and study information presented so far and verses in their context. Prayerfully, consider topics and new terms using a concordance. Determine what you believe.

At this point, some may be able to say with great conviction and without reservation, “Yes, the Bible is practical and God’s Word is the very foundation for man to understand Truth.” Others may not be so sure. Saints will find themselves at different places. It is good to be honest in reflection, this provides an opportunity to set a direction for progressing and develop focus for prayer.

Know the Father intimately by reading, studying and meditating upon Scripture in prayer. Paul relays it is God’s labor within, “...striving according to His working, which worketh in me mightily.” Reading deepens one’s relationship with the Father, but takes purpose of heart and wise use of time and resources. It is a lifelong journey of faith, with manifold treasure. It is a decision.

Colossians 1:29

“Whereunto I also labour, striving according to his working, which worketh in me mightily.”

Study things out using the authority of Scripture and proceed in faith, realizing it takes time and maturity to obtain understanding. When being taught, due consideration should be given before new or different ideas are accepted. But do be open to learn and become spiritually strong. Sometimes there is a need

to be reminded that considering new concepts is not bad, in fact, it is how growth occurs. Therefore, keep walls of defense down and stay open to what Scripture has to teach. Be advised, an idea based upon or mixed with man's wisdom instead of the purity of sound doctrine will prove to be inaccurate and dangerous.

God has made Scripture practical throughout time to the details of life and has included many instructions easily applied as one matures. Begin to look at the Word as a practical living manual. It "...is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness..." This is really the only way one can be "...perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works."

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, thoroughly furnished unto all good works."

B. Where Are You in Your Approach to the Bible?

To a great degree, what saints obtain from the Word is determined by the way they approach or respond to it. Thus, this section will be an opportunity to reflect upon one's own attitude in more depth. Be ready, receptive, and expectant.

Consider a few questions to prompt thought. What do you really believe? Is there anything worthwhile in the Bible? Does the

Bible provide what you need to live pleasing to the Father, or does it seem obsolete to the common person today? Do you personally study God's Word on a regular basis to renew your mind?

Remember to proceed in grace. Avoid condemning oneself as the focus for this section is to help students honestly think about where they are in their attitude and approach. Awareness is the first step to change. A common, unspoken belief, even in Christian circles, is that the Bible is really not applicable or understandable. This perspective concludes that if this is true, then it is not worth the effort to read. This is a prevalent reason why many do not begin or stay motivated to read Scripture.

This writer's basic assumption is that attitude is crucial. Believing that the Word is truly practical determines whether he will read, study, and then live it and how. The reason is that there is a cost to having God's Word as the focus of life. It will use a saint's resources of time and energy, but also have his heart. The challenge is that these are generally reserved for the most significant things in life. So, what is important to you?

*Assignment: Evaluate Motives: Observe in I Samuel 15 & 18 the attitude of King Saul and how it affected decisions. Did he trust in God and His Word or in his own ideas and feelings? At this point, take the time to graciously, but honestly reflect on what is behind your own personal life decisions and time use.

Recognizing one's own attitude can move a believer forward with an open mind and prepare him for an attitude adjustment. Students can have their current thinking fine-tuned by using Scripture as the authority. Be honest and patient with yourself, however, remembering God deals with the saint in grace.

Prayerfully, trust God and His Word. Know that the Father loves each person with an eternal, immeasurable, unconditional love. Scripture teaches us many things about our relationship with the Him, "while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us..." As "...enemies, we were reconciled to God by the death of his Son..." Romans 8 goes further to state, "...If God be for us, who can be against us? He that spared not his own Son, but delivered him up for us all, how shall he not with him also freely give us all things?" Now, the question is what is your attitude toward Him?

Romans 5:8-10

"But God commendeth his love toward us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us. Much more then, being now justified by his blood, we shall be saved from wrath through him. 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."

Romans 8:31-32

"What shall we then say to these things? If God be for us, who can be against us? He that spared not his own Son, but delivered him up for us all, how shall he not with him also freely give us all things?"

A few suggestions may assist while proceeding:

- Be open to the Word, knowing it is powerful, gloriously practical, and in time, becomes self-motivating to study.
- Rejoice, seeing the wonders and depth of God's grace and mercy through His eternal provision. His love is on every page.
- Pray to view the Scriptures as precious treasure from God and for help to believe and trust Him.

*Assignment: Study with purpose: Prayerfully read, and then think about Romans 1-5. This reviews the Father's magnificent mercy and love toward us. Study as a Berean; look up words, considering the context to gain a deep confidence, trust, and faith.

Where are you in your thinking?

Many believers never develop the desire or stay motivated over a lifetime to remain in the Word. Some begin to approach the Bible, but are overwhelmed or disrupted. Questions without answers over time can cause saints discouragement and distance from the Word. Consider a few common uncertainties:

1. Does God really care? A saint may not trust that God is truly all-knowing, all-powerful, and concerned with man. However, God proved His love by being his Creator and total provider. He even sent His Son to the cross to offer the solution to sin and wrote man a perfect, comprehensive, instructive book to help him find

Truth. The student may not recognize the Father's immeasurable love and further, has outstretched arms, longing to do him good. God is just waiting for him to respond in faith. Many blindly lay aside Scripture as just another resource, yet within it lies all of life's answers, validating God's unfathomable, immeasurable love.

2. Why does the Bible seem irrelevant? Many have come to believe the Bible is not really for them, does not apply to them, nor benefit them in real life situations. Why? Some saints were never taught clarity in these things. The world and even many religious systems teach believers to trust 'other things' rather than Scripture, causing confusion. Other believers have looked, but never found real answers or have tried to apply Scripture but it did not seem to work. However, it simply boils down to the fact they have faulty or incomplete thinking on some things.

3. Why does the Scripture seem overwhelming? It is, after all, God's eternal Book, but written for us and simply organized. Many are unaware of how and therefore, do not know where to begin or how to find answers. Sound advice is hard to locate. Saints earnest in their desire, start reading and may quickly become discouraged, lost in seemingly irrelevant information, such as genealogies, laws, feasts, or sacrifices. Saints can be sidetracked and never see the simple design to mature in sound doctrine.

Others, not knowing where to study, approach it randomly. They open their Bible to an arbitrary page and begin reading; believing God has led them to that passage. The underlying assumption is that God does not teach in an organized manner. This is error! It just takes time and maturity to learn and digest God's instructions; answers do not always come immediately.

4. Are there mistakes in the Word? Some observe 'apparent' contradictions and presume there are inaccuracies. This conclusion is often made because students lack the Bible study insights to navigate with the proper perspective and maturity. Students may not fully realize the context or purpose of a passage or book, which can cause confusion. Be confident, God never makes a mistake, nor includes irrelevant, inconsistent information!

5. What does God want from me? Many saints focus on performing 'good works' or become immobilized or discouraged, as to how to please God. They may become resolved to passively listen for a few important Bible nuggets from Church leaders to obtain the spiritual fix needed to carry them through another week. Some may cling to a few verses to use during trying times. Others believe that once saved, God will enlighten them by pouring it in whenever needed. Knowing God loves them as they are is vital. Maturity in sound doctrine teaches saints the answer.

Another common misunderstanding is that God will speak extra-biblically to tell them what to do. However, this 'inner voice' can replace Scripture and may actually be one's own heart speaking. A saint's personal feelings and desires influence what is heard. These can be held up at the same level or above God's Word. Reading Scripture, then, will never become a priority.

6. What is the proper attitude toward Scripture? Many approach the Word with reverence, but use it more as a resource book, consulting it from time to time. Others believe it is spiritual, something kept in an honored spot at home or taken to church, but rarely open it to find answers. Sadly, with the overhead electronic displays of passages, many see no need to bring their Bible to church. This projection of Scripture chooses the Bible version and limits the verses and immediate context of a passage being viewed. It also teaches passivity, reducing the student's experience and comfortable level using the Word. Scripture is to be one's daily sustenance, more necessary than physical food.

7. What can I really learn from reading the Bible? Many saints have become deterred from one of God's purposes, that is, to mature into being His servants and ambassadors. To do this, one needs to grow in wisdom and understanding. Some have developed a mental block thinking that they can't understand the

Bible and leave studying to scholars, those who seem better able to understand. However, Scripture is designed to be a daily living manual for man to use for maturity over the course of a lifetime.

8. How can Scripture be my authority? The world and the flesh can lead or pull saints into many things, devouring their time and resources. Even religious distractions can overshadow the need for quality time in the Scripture. The endless activities or service needs in a Church can sidetrack saints to focus on 'good works' rather than growth in the Word. There is a shift away from regularly taking in the purity of the Word, an alarming practice that is widespread in Christian circles today. Personally evaluate how much precious time is spent minding and studying God's Word? It is very feasible to keep the Scripture as the authority and center stage, but it takes a single-minded heart of faith and planning.

These and many other obstacles will be addressed further as the book proceeds. Consider this: what was God's purpose to spend so much time and effort to write Scripture through these holy men over the centuries, perfectly preserve it, and then instruct saints to read, study, and live it? Consider that He desires only the very best for mankind and knows perfectly well what they need as their Creator. Functionally, it is a believer's personal counsel from God. Believe it in faith, with confident expectation.

The Father wrote instructions particularly to help man learn and negotiate life. When God says something, He desires that saints realize it is Truth, important, always right, and eternally for their benefit. Similarly, during the teenage or young adult years, a parent hopes their kids realize that they have their best interests at heart. Rules, boundaries, and coaching protect, prevent costly mistakes, and can help them go on to maturity, but only if accepted with the proper outlook.

Can inactive practices like sitting in church or reading through a daily devotional build up the saint to provide real power to flourish and negotiate life's tough challenges? There is a whole other level of getting into the Word than just listening to or reading another man's viewpoint. It is going on to study and prove things for himself, as the Spirit leads and teaches. It is keeping the Bible as the authority and the center of life, food for the spirit and soul.

A personal investment of time, patience, and faith is basic to attain unto the Almighty's power in the details of life. God wrote Scripture with precise purpose and forethought. It is His desire for saints to revise their thinking so they mature to gain His perspective on all things. Therefore, subsequent chapters will concentrate on issues that can assist the reader in understanding, studying, and yielding to God and His Word, effectually.

Personal Notes

Chapter II

God Wrote the Book

This chapter will address four important issues: 1) How expectations affect attitude, 2) God's unique teaching design in Scripture, 3) How to access the counsel of God, and 4) Maturity is individual, requiring God's personal instruction.

A. Expectations

After many years of education, adults have digested many publications, resources, and web articles. Even so, in the initial approach to Scripture, many are not adequately prepared for what they will encounter. The Bible is unlike any other book known to man, though similar in many ways.

What Scripture is not

Some features of Scripture may be frustrating to some students as they first approach it. It may not be what they expect, are used to, or want. Therefore, saints can become detoured from growing and proceeding. Everyone has a few underlying misperceptions and hopes about the Scripture. This section will target just a few of these expectations.

The Word teaches that man was not the author of the Scripture, rather, "...holy men of God spake as they were moved

by the Holy Ghost.” God Almighty, the Creator Himself, wrote this unique manuscript. However, the Bible does not provide an individualized ‘how to’ for every situation encountered. It does not come with procedures, a set of directions or graphics. Scripture is not a catalog with an index listing resources to meet every need, nor does it record problems with perfectly packaged solutions.

II Peter 1:21

“For 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.”

A student cannot retrieve custom-made wisdom from the Word the moment he needs it. He cannot simply ‘Google it’, do a web search or even pull up Wikipedia to access the experience needed to apply Scriptures. Facts and verses can be found, but maturity is needed to understand how to solve complex, challenging problems.

The Word was written for the common man, designed perfectly to be practical and eternally beneficial. However, it takes time, study, and the work of the Spirit within to digest material with the heart attitude needed for application. Experience in its use can develop the ability to make wise judgments. This maturity enables application of God’s principles in complex challenges. Scripture is meant to be studied for daily for living and increasingly beneficial as it is applied in the details of life over time.

*Assignment: Reflect on what you think. Brainstorm on paper what you expect, desire, and believe about the Word. Review items on your list. Are they realistic?

Underlying beliefs about Scripture can actually be inaccurate and saints may not be mindful of their own thoughts. Expectations affect attitude, so it's important to be aware and honest in one's reflection. As life challenges or sufferings intensify or when in a desperate place, saints want answers immediately.

If believers are unacquainted with how God designed His Word, they may become quite exasperated, even frantic when answers do not come quickly. This expectation is much like a beginning student in electrical engineering, searching an advanced textbook to gain clarity to complex questions. Understanding and application is based upon assimilating course information over time, along with practical experience.

When answers continually seem out of reach, believers may lose hope and become angry, resistant, or even apathetic toward God and His Word. This is precisely in line with Satan's plan, his policy of evil for the course of this world. It is a part of his design. So then, how can saints obtain access to the eternal wisdom placed in the Scriptures? The next section will provide details about how God constructed His manual to refine expectations.

B. Appreciating God's Design for Teaching

This section touches upon a few main points about God's method of instruction, building upon the teachings in the first book. Reflect upon new concepts and be inspired to develop confidence, expanding personal study to gain depth and insight. Stay determined to read the Word, even when understanding seems allusive. Trust God's process; there are eternal benefits.

Considering the design of Scripture

God chose particular holy men to write His Word through the ministry of the Holy Ghost, over an enormous span of time. It is without error, perfectly consistent and interrelated. Scripture details many things, yet also provides generalities about a vast number of subjects. Its focus is God's relationship with man, with Satan and his evil influence always in the background. The Bible not only comprises historical, scientific, daily living and spiritual teaching, but includes counsel, encouragement, and warnings.

The Word contains simple yet profound information, that is, wisdom with an eternal nature and depth. It is important to know that God wrote it particularly for man to understand the things it contains for daily living. He designed it in the very best way possible for man to learn, live godly, and avoid Satan's traps, while attaining peace and hope. Can you trust God in this?

II Timothy 3:16

“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.”

God had a wealth of things in mind as He constructed the Bible, so believers could learn ‘His ways’. ”...God hath revealed them unto us by his Spirit: for the Spirit searcheth all things, yea, the deep things of God.” As designed, when saints mature in faith by taking in the Word, they develop “... the mind of Christ. God says Scripture will “...accomplish that which I please, and it shall prosper in the thing whereto I sent it.” Be fully persuaded on this matter! Then, a saint can rest and proceed in faith, trusting the Father in everything, even when challenges come and things are not completely understood.

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.”

I Corinthians 2:16

“For who hath known the mind of the Lord, that he may instruct him? But we have the mind of Christ.”

Isaiah 55:11

“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.”

*Assignment: Increase personal awareness. Expand understanding and heart conviction about the Word by doing a word search. Use a concordance to look up passages that teach about the written Word. Suggestions: 1) Study passages using the term ‘Scripture’. 2) Broaden the scope by finding related words referring to God’s Book. Examples might include, Word, commandments, instructions, precepts, truth, doctrine, etc. 3) Look up words about Bible characteristics, such as preserved, inspired, light, truth, living, or eternal.

The Bible is a complete manual, which incorporates everything God desired. Scripture says, “...thy word is truth” and God the Father is the source, “...out of his mouth cometh knowledge and understanding.” He longs to teach mankind these things. Saints can rejoice to know they have a loving Father and Provider, the Holy Spirit as our perfect teacher, and the Lord Jesus Christ, the Word and “...the way, the Truth, and the life...”

John 17:17

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

Proverbs 2:6-9

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

John 14:6

“Jesus saith unto him, I am the way, the truth, and the life: no man cometh unto the Father, but by me.”

*Assignment: Read with purpose. Examine, and meditate on Genesis 1-3. Ask yourself questions to prompt thought. Why did God write these chapters? Are

these things beneficial to know? Why? See if you can list ten things. Then, think about the relevance of the entirety of Genesis. Read it, if you never have done so. Romans 15:4 states that all Scripture written aforetime is “...for our learning, that we through patience and comfort of the scriptures might have hope.”

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.”

When believers are sure that the Bible is God’s living words, “...true Light...” they can trust it is always true. This is important, as He desires Scripture to be held up above all and to be the final authority on all matters. It requires trust to rely on it in life. In time, this confidence is developed by reading and believing the Word.

John 1: 1, 8-9, 14

“In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God...He was not that Light, but was sent to bear witness of that Light. That was the true Light, which lighteth every man that cometh into the world...And the Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us...”

God’s Word provides wise guidance and instruction so those coming to it in faith can learn and be secure. Notice the interesting analogy in Psalm 12 “The words of the Lord are pure words: as silver tried in a furnace of earth purified seven times.” The refining of silver requires purification by fire seven times. In like manner, Scripture has been kept in perfect form. “...thou shalt preserve them from this generation for ever.” This produces confidence!

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.”

The Bible contains characteristics that examine a man’s inner thinking. It’s “...a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart.” This can cause new insights, but at times, also discomfort and conviction to change thinking or lifestyle. It teaches exactly to where a student is and what he needs. To do this, the Spirit uses the Word as a tool, a ‘twoedged sword’, exceedingly more precise than any surgeon, to cut to the heart of things.

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.”

Scripture was written in the form of a curriculum, progressively teaching the believer slowly, verse-by-verse, with multi-layers of knowledge. Isaiah teaches, “For precept must be upon precept....line upon line; here a little, and there a little...” God’s Word contains a vast amount of doctrinal material so saints can understand innumerable issues and negotiate life challenges. It is by faith that believers are able to search out these things.

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 infuses general principles within His Word for man to apply as maturity takes place. It takes time to see these things and understand how to apply them. The Scripture teaches practical insights and documents historical experiences that help in making wise decisions. God accomplishes this within 66 books, laid out in the Old and New Testaments.

All Scripture is profitable through various times, cultures and people. One can look to Bible stories to locate characters, godly and ungodly, who have worked through common struggles and feelings. This can provide a valuable way to relate God's counsel to the challenges of life. "O the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God..." He is the source of all wisdom.

Romans 11:33

"O the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! how unsearchable are his judgments, and his ways past finding out!"

To review, God did not lay out the Bible like other books. It may not be what saints expect, nor written how they thought. However, the Almighty can be trusted to know what mankind needed over time and how it should be constructed to be most effective. These issues are basic to understand the 'how and why's' of God writing the Scripture. Be encouraged and motivated to examine things further, exploring them as wondrous treasure.

C. Access to the Counsel of God

Students have opportunity to grow and trust God in the Scripture as they are taught by the Spirit. Functionally, they do this by taking in the Word by faith with an open, ready mind, “...not as the word of men, but as it is in truth, the word of God, which effectually worketh also in you that believe.” However, there are many misperceptions about how saints acquire wisdom, therefore, let us put definition to God’s simple method.

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.”

The Father, Son and Holy Spirit work in unison to mature believers, and purposefully made the process uncomplicated. Saints can be “...led by the Spirit...” while reading and studying Scripture over a lifetime. This gives them access to His counsel.

Romans 8:14

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

It is simply and slowly taking in God’s Word, one verse and concept at a time, thinking on and digesting the material. It is gradually progressing and rereading through sections, learning, believing, and trusting God by faith. Over time, this develops a ‘storehouse’ of doctrine in one’s soul. Each reading time can

produce increased insight and understanding. These things can be used for life application, developing practical experience.

It is important to come to passages honestly, leaving personal ideas and bias aside. Prayerfully clear the mind and look at the words within a verse to attain the specific teaching it contains. Preconceptions based on one's own thoughts or feelings, or any type of man's philosophy or tradition, even Church views are to be put away in this process. The Spirit teaches the Word to a saint's spirit individually, one-to-one, in God's learning model. I Corinthians clarifies how this occurs, "...God hath revealed them unto us by his Spirit: for the Spirit searcheth all things, yea, the deep things of God."

I Corinthians 2:10

"But God hath revealed them unto us by his Spirit: for the Spirit searcheth all things, yea, the deep things of God."

A sad realization is that a majority of saints remain "...babes in Christ..." their entire journey as a Christian. For most it seems that even God's great desire for them to go on to maturity is veiled. There also may be underlying misconceptions, like supposing wisdom will just occur upon becoming a believer or by showing up to a service once or twice a week. Unconsciously, others may expect that somehow God will zap them with new insight when a major problem arises. However, God the Father

does not just pour wisdom in through a mysterious hole in one's mind. Believers have some biblical responsibilities.

I Corinthians 3:1-2

“And I, brethren, could not speak unto you as unto spiritual, but as unto carnal, even as unto babes in Christ. I have fed you with milk, and not with meat: for hitherto ye were not able to bear it, neither yet now are ye able.”

Interactive Design

Many individuals become blind, passive, or apathetic to taking in the purity of Scripture over a lifetime. Showing up at a study or service does not assure the digestion of the material. Reading and thinking about the Word are needed to acquire conviction. Filling the mind with information, without comprehension will result in high-mindedness or going through the motions. “For the heart of this people is waxed gross, and their ears are dull of hearing, and their eyes have they closed...” In contrast, “...Let every man be fully persuaded in his own mind...” This brings heart understanding not just head knowledge.

Romans 14:5

“One man esteemeth one day above another: another esteemeth every day alike. Let every man be fully persuaded in his own mind.”

Acts 28:27

“For the heart of this people is waxed gross, and their ears are dull of hearing, and their eyes have they closed; lest they should see with their eyes, and hear with their ears, and understand with their heart, and I should heal them.”

A goal of a believer can be to develop conviction and move from attaining knowledge, to understand and develop the ability to make godly, prudent decisions. In this way, saints can progress, moving away from being merely a 'storage unit', which holds information. Choose instead to be 'a processing plant'. Pray to seek for ways to apply it in the details of life, be open and led by the Spirit, and desire to be refined and mature. This is God's method, an interactive design to gain heart understanding in faith.

God instructs mankind to place Scripture in the most exalted position, before their eyes all day long. He gives the believer His Spirit "...that we might know the things that are freely given to us of God." This is how saints become aware of His mind on all matters and how they develop faith. The doctrine stored up becomes a resource for the Spirit's processing and refining work.

I Corinthians 2:12

"Now we have received, not the spirit of the world, but the spirit which is of God; that we might know the things that are freely given to us of God."

How is reading different from studying?

Though reading and studying function uniquely, they can work in unison within the saint to assimilate what God has embedded in His Word. Consider the activity of reading. Students take Scriptural words and sentences that make up verses into their mind and this becomes a reserve used by the Spirit.

As saints yield in faith to the Spirit “...hearing by the Word of God” they can choose to think about what was read. Students may consider specific words, the purpose of the verse, and the immediate context. He can also ponder the overall meaning, as it interacts with current beliefs. This reflection and meditation can happen in the mind throughout the day, with or without purposing to do so. This store of doctrine will be the resource God uses to teach believers individually, developing faith over a lifetime.

Romans 10:17

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

Studying builds on and works together with reading, and includes meditation and reflection. Saints reexamine, even dissect verses for a deeper, fuller appreciation. Proving things may include looking at detail, comparing, contrasting, and searching Scripture or things learned, gathering material to refine thinking.

One matures in the skill of studying over time with practice. This takes many forms, such as verse-by-verse analysis, valuing and defining terms, word searches, or topical studies. Saints are to receive “...the word with all readiness of mind...” and search the Scriptures daily, verifying things, “...led by the Spirit of God...”

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.”

Romans 8: 14

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

As students yield to the Spirit in study, they renew the mind and gain depth in understanding, growing their new man. Attaining a comprehensive understanding of a study topic or finding specific answers does not always occur immediately. It happens slowly, as one uncovers treasures within the Word and as a saint is ready.

Growth occurs whenever the saint seeks and searches Scripture as for hid treasure. This ‘read-search-study process’ builds, refines, and teaches a multiplicity of facets and topics, constructing an edifice of Scripture within the soul.

Sometimes a student is not equipped to comprehend the fullness of something. In prayer, he can request help to understand, have the proper attitude, believe, and apply it to life. Patient continuance in the learning process will enable the Spirit to prepare the heart for understanding.

As conviction is gained, doctrine can be practically ‘worked out’, exercised and applied to real life issues. This provides experience and faith that bring new opportunities to learn, even when mistakes occur. Think about the exhortation Paul gives his son in the faith, Timothy. He encourages him to, “...give attendance to reading, to exhortation, to doctrine...Meditate upon these things; give thyself wholly to them...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.”

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.”

To summarize, God has a method for saints to access His counsel. However, individuals may need to wait for answers, while being consistent to read and study Scripture in faith over the course of a lifetime. Believers can consult their processing plant of Scripture in study, meditation, reflection, and prayer. This allows them to access God’s personal counsel, as the Spirit teaches.

D. Personalized Instruction

The Spirit takes the Word and instructs individually. He deals with distinct needs, such as gaps in understanding, inaccurate perceptions, and roadblocks to learning. As believers realistically look ahead to mature as God desires, a few goals come to mind. Many saints seek to become independent and live godly, but also to effectively deal with problems and make wise decisions in life. Eventually, saints want to mature to attain and apply knowledge

and wisdom, then go on to counsel others. II Corinthians relays the focus, "...that they which live should not henceforth live unto themselves, but unto him which died for them, and rose again."

II Corinthians 5: 14-15

"For the love of Christ constraineth us; because we thus judge, that if one died for all, then were all dead: And that he died for all, that they which live should not henceforth live unto themselves,

but unto him which died for them, and rose again."

Choice and faith

How can a saint advance from a child to a mature adult? "...For every one that useth milk is unskilled in the word...a babe..." and knows very little spiritually. By faith he is able to take in and learn foundational doctrine, 'the milk' of the Word. Believers make choices every day as to how they will proceed to maturity. They can remain children or determine to grow up into adulthood by accessing the power of the Word. They progress by a choice of faith to yield to God. He does not do this for them; it is an individual decision to exalt, prioritize, and acquire Scripture.

Hebrews 5:13-14

"For every one that useth milk is unskilled in the word of righteousness: for he is a babe. But strong meat belongeth to them that are of full age, even those who by reason of use have their

senses exercised to discern both good and evil."

Once 'babes' move forward in their growth and "...are of full age..." as an adult, their digestive system has the capacity to take

in the 'strong meat' of the Word. This refers to the more advanced doctrine contained within the Bible. The Spirit teaches believers meat doctrine, as they understand foundational things.

There are two key factors that impact maturation in the Word: choice and faith. Each moment saints have decisions. They can live 'after the flesh' doing worldly things or 'yield unto God', regularly taking in Scripture. Yielding involves one's flesh being put aside in faith, trusting the Father and allowing the Spirit to lead and teach them. The Romans "...obeyed from the heart that form of doctrine delivered..." and went on to live it out in the details of life. Determining each moment to choose spiritual things, rather than to please the flesh and live Christ can be hard to do. In grace, one can pray for the desire to develop understanding and wisdom. God graciously helps saints reprioritize life to serve Him.

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."

Taking in the purity of the Word

Romans 10:17 states that "...faith cometh by hearing..." This refers to attending to and listening, "...hearing by the word of God." So receiving the purity of the Word is critical. Since the Son and the Word are one, hearkening to Scripture is taking Christ into your soul and spirit. "...I am the way, the truth, and the life..."

*Assignment: Reflection. Making a wise decision about time use will affect whether and how you mature. This responsibility is simply, it is progressively yielding your time and heart. Pray for awareness and resolve to be humble.

Romans 10:17

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

John 14:6

“Jesus saith unto him, I am the way, the truth, and the life: no man cometh unto the Father, but by me.”

God accomplishes maturity by His Spirit, resident in the believer. The Spirit teaches a saint’s spirit “...the deep things of God...” through the Word. The process is straightforward, taking time, prayerful effort, and purposefulness.

I Corinthians 2:10

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

Believers can learn to live by faith with a grace motivation in thankfulness, actively in the search for Truth. What a privilege it is to yield to what God instructs! Be led by the Spirit through the designated curriculum, then meditate, study, and pray. Saints can then be “...approved unto God...”

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.”

God has designed Scripture so believers will mature in a specific way, over a lifetime. This may not be what is expected when speedy answers are desired, so saints need to plan ahead. Doctrine digests, little by little over the weeks, months, and years, slowly implanted into thinking. Believers develop conviction by spending regular time reading and studying, in prayerful reflection.

Natural learning process

Learning moments permeate life. Things acquired are organized and stored, considered, and then refined as comprehension proceeds. God is ever teaching and sharpening a saint's Bible appreciation toward perfection. Spiritual learning can parallel developmental growth in man from infancy onward. Students can see the analogy of a babe, children, and sons throughout Scripture, especially Paul's epistles.

It is important to understand the 'natural learning process'. An infant responds according to his developmental stage. He is hungry, cries, and receives food. It begins as an instinctive process. At first, surroundings and experiences are confusing, but as the child grows he attains a simplistic understanding and can influence his environment. Life begins to make more sense, and the youth realizes some of life's complexities. In time, He is able to function with a rudimentary degree of skill and insight.

As a teen, learning takes place at a new level. Existence becomes an arena with complex opportunities and experiences. He develops fresh perspectives and depth for application. Eventually, the youth grows to maturity through observation, input and trial and error. As he becomes a young adult, his physical world unfolds a seemingly, unending learning environment.

Spiritual maturity is similar to human development. It takes time and experience to 'work out your own salvation'. Sometimes learning is slower than desired. Growth from a spiritual babe to an adult will happen as one is ready and able to digest, process, and apply doctrine. The ability to "...discern good and evil..." develops over time to "...those who by reason of use have their senses exercised..." applying the Word. Everyone has a unique journey.

Philippians 2:12-13

"Wherefore, my beloved, as ye have always obeyed, not as in my presence only, but now much more in my absence, work out your own salvation with fear and trembling. For it is God which worketh in you both to will and to do of his good pleasure."

Hebrews 5:13-14

"For every one that useth milk is unskillful in the word of righteousness: for he is a babe. But strong meat belongeth to them that are of full age, even those who by reason of use have their senses exercised to discern both good and evil."

Many things affect spiritual maturity: intellect, strengths and weaknesses, experiences, and outside influences, such as people

and environment. Individuality, motivation, faith, use of time, and choices also come into play. Saints can greatly impact their journey by planning consistent time in the Word, yielding to the Spirit. They can learn contentment in the process by realizing that clarity and growth will come in God's time, attaining an attitude to trust God with any obstacle that may present itself. "Is there any thing too hard for the Lord..." Abraham learned and was fully persuaded, "Who against hope believed in hope...He staggered not...through unbelief...strong in faith, giving glory to God."

Genesis 18:14

"Is any thing too hard for the Lord? At the time appointed I will return unto thee, according to the time of life and Sarah shall have a son "

Romans 4: 18-20

"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 Sara's womb: He staggered not at the promise of God through unbelief; but was strong in faith, giving glory to God"

Just as physical development is individual, so also is spiritual progression. Some have an internal drive to learn, others mature slowly, seem frozen, or apathetic. The journey can have some bumps with the struggle between the flesh and Spirit. This battle affects all believers, but manifests itself differently in each. The flesh and a saint's response to it will often be a main challenge in

maturity. Prayer with the Word's work within is powerful, and will be his help to push through obstacles to grow and stay focused.

*Assignment: Reflection. Become aware. Are you stagnating or progressing? Prayerfully determine personal challenges inhibiting growth. Decide what changes are necessary and proceed, but be aware of the motive. Remember to stay inspired by His love, with grace in the driver's seat.

Though intellectually man can know how human growth and learning occur, Bible maturity can baffle many. Why? One reason may be that believers do not realize that the 'time and effort' needed in the natural developmental learning process is also essential for spiritual growth. Spiritual maturity takes focus, time, energy, and application to gain the needed experience; valuable learning takes place from the successes and mistakes in life.

Growth does not happen spontaneously or quickly. Plainly, it is a work of faith to yield to God's method of edification. Generally, it is not clearly taught in Churches. Most are unaware of His design for training and remain babes. Spiritual maturity is a simple process, it is just not what most expect or want. However, regular intake of the Word is essential over a lifetime to renew the mind.

The Spirit teaches individually using layers of doctrine

God constructed the Word with depth, in layers and saints learn and assimilate doctrine in stages. He uses the Spirit to

uncover new insights to build the next level of doctrinal understanding as one is ready. When reading the same passage, some things are not evident to babes, but obvious to mature saints. It is an individual process, personalized to one's functional level, what one is searching for and what is needed.

Believers see and learn what they are able to digest. This is an eternal book and written by the Almighty God, "...so are my ways higher than your ways, and my thoughts than your thoughts..." This insight can help believers gain some understanding about the learning, realizing the magnitude and eternal nature of His wisdom. The Spirit searches the deep things of God, teaching in a personalized way.

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."

Yielding to God verses yielding to man

The Father's designed method for "...the sons of God..." is to be "...led by the Spirit..." God intimately matures saints through

Paul's curriculum, shedding light on the entirety of the Word. The Spirit takes Scripture and individually interacts within the heart, teaching the saint's spirit, affirming and clarifying what is read. Proving things is not a study method meant just for Bible teachers, but one God designed for all saints. The Spirit and the Word are tools used in this maturing process.

Romans 8:14-15

“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.”

There are three important issues to realize, that will bring clarity and awareness.

- 1) The Scripture is designed to be the direct authority.
- 2) God's way of maturing is the perfectly designed method to teach a saint through His Word.
- 3) Direct, two-way communication between a saint and the Father develops an intimate relationship.

Direct authority of Scripture:

Resources and teaching play important roles in edification, but ought not to be mishandled. Saints can routinely jump over God's maturation process without realizing it. Bible instructors can spend years of study to become mature, acquiring a base of knowledge, enabling them to condense understanding into sermons or books.

It naturally seems easy to just accept the fruit of their labor, rather than search things out in the Scripture. Regular study to progress through Paul's epistles is vital, but time is also needed to prove what is heard. At times, even sound preachers can be mistaken and saints are accountable for what they choose to believe.

The student's rapid acquisition of a new nugget of information from others, fortifies this faster and simpler approach creating a self-reinforcing cycle. It is actually a surrender to man's wisdom. Justification for doing this can be strong. It is so much simpler, not as time consuming, and, it seems, 'everyone is doing it'.

Many believers use much of their study time to acquire man's insights 'about' the Word, not directly and personally searching the Scripture to prove things. So then, who or what has become the authority? Much time in man-made books without the proving process develops a storehouse of man's exalted views, replacing Scripture. This will most definitely shape one's belief system.

As this occurs, personal awareness of what is happening within the mind is limited and decreases over time. In this way, dear saints, who desire to be taught of God, are pulled off course. They learn to exalt and trust other things more than God.

When using resources, let them remain resources. Solomon, the wisest man who ever lived, stated that studying the thoughts

of man, "...is a weariness of the flesh." For many it can be 'the' major distraction, diminishing the desire for reading the Word. It will take time, effort, and experience to feel comfortable using Scripture and trusting it implicitly.

Ecclesiastes 12:12

"And further, by these, my son, be admonished: of making many books there is no end; and much study is a weariness of the flesh."

To be sure, using spiritual time to take in insights from sound Bible teachers can be good. However, spiritual maturation ought not to be 'based' on a secondary source. Maintain primary focus on progressing through the curriculum, verse by verse.

To review, there are a few common obstacles. Many saints never appreciate the privilege and responsibility to study. When they do, they may not know that the Father has a particular, personal method, to teach them through the curriculum. Once there is an understanding of God's method, if the driving focus is finding the bottom line, which is, searching what others say 'about' Scripture, saints may become deterred from growing properly.

The design and purity of Scripture refines understanding, interacts with things learned, and is then assimilated. Determine to progress through the curriculum, with regular review. This gives access to the layers of doctrine in Scripture. The approach selected to mature has different outcomes and is a huge issue.

Seeking

Part of becoming an adult believer is to mature through the process found in Proverb 2:1-5, addressed in more depth, later in Chapter IV. The saint slowly progresses through the verses to attain the goal, to seek "...her as silver, and searchest for her as for hid treasures..." This passage unveils the hidden treasure available, driving saints to focus and learn. The discovery method helps them advance in study habits, become comfortable with how Scripture is written, and develop familiarity with key words and doctrines. This builds a warehouse of Scripture.

Proverbs 2: 4-5

"If thou seekest her as silver, and searchest for her as for hid treasures; Then shalt thou understand the fear of the Lord, and find the knowledge of God."

Exercising Doctrine

When a butterfly is ready to emerge from the cocoon, the struggle is absolutely necessary for it to develop properly. If helped along to make it easier, the wings will be malformed because they did not receive the proper exercise. Babies also need to struggle a bit while they learn to turn over, crawl, and walk; they discover how by trying and striving, over and over.

This 'fail-succeed struggle' teaches. Parents cannot rescue their children every time they falter or they will be hindered, become dependent and resentful, fear the process, and stop

trying. So too, saints need to actively "...have their senses exercised..." reading and studying Scripture to learn properly. Otherwise they will become dependent upon man's viewpoints' to obtain quick, intellectual answers, missing the Spirit's interactive teaching process. They will become blind, passive, hindered in growth or unable "...to discern both good and evil."

Hebrews 5:14

"But strong meat belongeth to them that are of full age, even those who by reason of use have their senses exercised to discern both good and evil."

3) Relationship with the Father:

When God's process is bypassed, something effectively comes between the direct interaction of God and the believer. It is man's teachings. As a result, saints miss the intimacy of the Father's direct teaching as His adult child. This will have a major impact on maturing and trust.

A relationship requires one-on-one time, getting to know one another face-to-face. Saints have access to this father-son/daughter relationship, when they make the decision to be led by the Spirit through the Word of God, and specifically Paul's curriculum. A constant intermediary can interfere with this process. Time is needed to listen and interact. How close can a relationship be if there is limited or no direct communication?

*Assignment: Reflection: Read and think about passages that reveal the closeness between God and David. Notice particularly how he spoke to and about God. Examine your own rapport, study time, and prayers with Him. Do you spend most of your time passively taking in man's viewpoint or seeking and searching Scripture in prayer and meditation? In grace, you can adjust things.

Helpers in the Body of Christ

Most, if not all believers can use guidance or feedback in their spiritual journey. Maybe someone objective is needed to be a sounding board to help think something out. God has fully provided for this need. Members in the Body of Christ can minister to one another, "...For the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ."

Ephesians 4:11-12

"And he gave some, apostles; and some, prophets; and some, evangelists; and some, pastors and teachers; For the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ."

Teachers and mentors have various ministries, capacities, and roles that can be enormously useful. However, this consulting process ought to be a limited portion of one's spiritual study and thought time. For even counsel is an opportunity to drive one to the Scriptures to prove and evaluate feedback.

Be open and ready to accept new ideas from the Word, depending on God, continuing to study. Evaluate whether to

accept something or put it on the side for future consideration. Prayerfully proceed as the Father provides conviction of heart.

Paul constructed a curriculum, a form of doctrine, for the Body of Christ to grow and function, "...According to the grace of God which is given unto me, as a wise master builder..." Teachers can use this to help and direct students. They can then encourage them to digest it slowly in order to develop conviction and a sound structure. In this way, they are "...labourers together with God..."

I Corinthians 3:9-10

"For we are labourers together with God: ye are God's husbandry, ye are God's building.

According to the grace of God which is given unto me, as a wise masterbuilder, I have laid the foundation, and another buildeth thereon. But let every man take heed how he buildeth thereupon."

This strong base provides a foundation, building trust and reliance in the Father and His way to progress. To develop an intimate relationship with God, we labor with Him in this process. I Corinthians 3 warns the babe to "...take heed how he buildeth thereupon." Trust God to teach, leading by the Spirit. Start in Romans, then slowly progress on through to Philemon.

Though it is an individual's responsibility to stay in the Word daily, they are under grace. Avoid doing it in the effort of the flesh. Pray for a godly heart motivation, follow through in love and appreciation for what God has and is doing. This can take saints out from under legalism and by faith, yield control to God.

Saints are encouraged to be prepared, because prayer is not like rubbing a genie lamp for an immediate response. Answers take time and are not always what is expected. God's response utilizes the Word and the Spirit, which often changes the saint and his attitude, rather than the situation. Sometimes this can be a long process, but God is exceedingly patient. So too, the believer can be patient to allow His Word to do its work.

Unique needs require personalized instruction

An individual has distinctive needs and requires personal training. Each is at a particular maturity level, with holes and gaps in his understanding. Everyone wears tinted glasses stained with the course of this world, experiences, abilities, and feelings. The Word "...is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart." Uniquely, each believer needs amplification of different aspects of the curriculum. A saint can read in meditation and prayer, which provides opportunity for correction and clarification of thoughts and beliefs. This work is specially accomplished by the Spirit.

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."

God's Word is amazing in that it contains everything needed for edification. Scripture teaches precisely where a saint is

developmentally, so he learns exactly what is needed and can be digested. God perfectly designed Scripture to teach man.

This chapter provided opportunities to expand awareness of expectations, appreciate God's design, and develop clarity in how spiritual growth takes place to energize students, encouraging maturity. His method to learn is simple reading and studying the purity of Scripture, allowing the Spirit to lead. If there is confusion or questions, take the time to reread the chapter and study references within their context to prove all things before moving forward. Chapter III will examine study insights to further expand effectual Bible study.

Personal Notes

Chapter III

Practical Bible Study Insights

This chapter contains a few essential suggestions to empower individuals in their study. Ultimately, it is to inspire the best use of time and access God's provisions, encouraging students in their spiritual journey. Topics are designed to stir up and build upon what has been presented in Book I and be utilized as a resource. It is highly significant to recognize and review a few keys at the forefront; some of which will be expounded upon further.

1) Attitude: The saint's attitude toward God is paramount. God and Scripture are to be exalted above all the things. Simply, the Lord desires basic humility and thankfulness.

2) Faith motivation: Approach the Word in faith, being fully expectant. Scripture is the perfect provision. Be fully persuaded that, because of His great love, whatever He says is for our good. Seek and search for it as 'hidden treasure' and 'the' priority in life.

3) A primed learner: a) Prepare your heart in prayer to seek God and His instruction. b) Time is needed to take in Scripture daily to renew the mind and replace vain imaginations acquired from the course of this world. c) In every opportunity, be ready to freshly evaluate what is believed and yield in faith to be fine-

tuned. d) Live to seek ways to apply new insights to the details of life. Basically, yielding in this way honors and glorifies the Lord, exercising faith to be conformed to Christ. It is an investment of time and humbling to be perfected by His Word, but essential. Be open, even driven, to put aside fleshly distractions to attain and live it.

4) Context: Apply basic wisdom when approaching Scripture.

a) Recognize the immediate context of passages, chapters and books. b) Understand that the Bible is laid out dispensationally, according to how God dealt with man over time. c) Use context to decide where to study and how or whether to apply it.

5) Unity of Scripture: The Word of God is interrelated and it is highly significant to study all of it to understand the depth of what He desires. Though today the primary focus ought to be Paul's epistles, even these are built on the foundation of Scripture written before. The Bible, in its entirety, is our personal training manual.

6) Progressive Course: There is a sense and sequence to His wisdom for saints to mature. Scripture, even Paul's doctrine, is setup as a curriculum; one concept built upon the next. Learning happens slowly. Make opportunities to advance, pray, meditate, and believe. Regular reexamination is needed to acquire the infused layers of wisdom contained in this eternal manuscript.

7) Sonship: God's longs for saints to realize the great privilege and responsibility to be led through the curriculum by the Spirit and grow up to function with maturity. This empowers them to be spiritually capable to work with Him in His plan and purpose.

Take these seven keys with an open heart to proceed through the remainder of this chapter. At the start, one may find it helpful to do a quick read through to glean a general impression of the practical study insights. Then, reread for detail, proving all things.

A. Organization and Context

As a quick review, God simply organized the Scriptures according to how He dealt with man over time. He provided particular guidelines during various times in history and used these to organize His Book. Another way to express this is that God's Word contains packages of instruction or doctrine primarily directed to certain people for particular periods.

Scripture is precisely laid out and written according to a predetermined design. It seems God's high priority was always to bring mankind into fellowship with Himself. The Father desires to instruct them to learn His wisdom and ways and be their all and all. This is perfectly in line with His overall plan and purpose. Isaiah prophecies, "Look unto me, and be ye saved, all the ends of the earth, for I am God and there is none else." Hosea writes

“O Israel, thou has destroyed thyself; but in me is thine help.”
Proverbs relays that as a person trusts and acknowledges the Lord, “...he shall direct thy paths.” His love is immeasurable.

Isaiah 45:22

“Look unto me, and be ye saved, all the ends of the earth, for I am God and there is none else.”

Hosea 13:9

“O Israel, thou has destroyed thyself; but in me is thine help.”

Proverb 3:3-6

*“Trust in the Lord with all thine heart; and lean not unto thine own understanding. In all thy ways
acknowledge him, and he shall direct thy paths.”*

*Assignment: Prove all things. Revisions in God’s program over time can be seen in many areas, such as doctrine, worship, ceremonies, even the gospel. Explore how God changed His spokespersons, along with their messages. (Use a concordance to study Adam, Noah, Abraham, Moses, Peter and Paul)

Three time periods

A Chicago pastor taught about ‘a key to understand the Bible’ in a service heard by this writer. It was a vital component that enhanced effectual Bible study. It also functioned as a reorientation to understand and apply Scripture. (Appendix VIII) This crucial component was that context needs to be considered. Students examine the depth of who is writing, to whom, the way God was dealing with man, and the specific topic at hand. This resolved many problematic concerns for application.

A significant aspect to know when approaching Scripture is that there are three time intervals. These include, Time Past, But Now, and To Come. In Scripture, Time Past includes Genesis through the Old Testament and into mid-Acts. Abram was raised up to be the Father of His special Nation. God's primary focus through this time was manifesting His great power and wisdom, using His Nation, Israel, as a vessel to reach the world.

Ephesians 2: 7, 11, 13

“That in the ages to come he might shew the exceeding riches of his grace in his kindness toward us through Christ Jesus... Wherefore remember, that ye being in time past Gentiles in the flesh, who are called Uncircumcision by that which is called the Circumcision in the flesh made by hands...But now in Christ Jesus ye who sometimes were far off are made nigh by the blood of Christ.”

However, in Acts, God sets Israel aside for a time and raises Paul, an Apostle with a new message to Gentiles, all nations. This period, God calls the Mystery, but also the dispensation of Grace. Paul summarizes this at the end of Romans, “Now to him that is of power to stablish you according to my gospel, and the preaching of Jesus Christ, according to the revelation of the mystery, which was kept secret since the world began, But now is made manifest...to all nations...”

Romans 16:25-26

“Now to him that is of power to stablish you according to my gospel, and the preaching of Jesus Christ, according to the revelation of the mystery, which was kept secret since the world began, But

now is made manifest, and by the scriptures of the prophets, according to the commandment of the everlasting God, made known to all nations for the obedience of faith”

Romans through Philemon contain Paul’s teaching for this present time, But Now and are written directly to the Body of Christ. Instructions contained in this section can be viewed as direct mail to believers today, to be applied in the details of life.

Sometime in the near future, I Thessalonians states believers will be caught up into Heaven, commonly known as the Rapture. “we...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.” Once this occurs, the current But Now dispensation of Grace will end.

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.”

Immediately, the last time period begins and God resumes His program with Israel. This refers to the time To Come, and will fulfill all promises and prophecy to them. Hebrews to Revelation is correspondence and teaching particularly written for Israel. It will help them understand and function in the great Tribulation period.

Basic awareness of how God constructed the Bible is critical to avoid misapplication and misunderstanding. This is a key. A simple time line captures how it was set up. Recognizing context provides a fresh outlook to view Scripture. It is similar to turning a

diamond to view it through a new facet, gaining an unexpected but vitally new perspective. Much confusion and apparent contradictions will finally dissolve, as this key is recognized.

Basic Time Line

| <u>TIME PAST</u> | <u>BUT NOW</u> | <u>TO COME</u> |
|--|--------------------------|---|
| (Genesis through Acts 8) | (Act 9 through Philemon) | (Hebrews through Revelation) |
| (Old Testament) | (New Testament) | |
| <u> Israel/Circumcision/Prophecy + (The Mystery/Gentile Grace) Israel/Circumcision/Prophecy</u> | | |
| Creation | Cross | Rapture Tribulation/Judgment/Kingdom |

Context

In this way, students can “...rightly divide the word of truth...” as they study, simply considering context. It enables them to be “...approved unto God...not to be ashamed...” This is orientation that helps individuals know who God is writing to and sets the stage to know the agenda in His plan and purpose. Succinctly, it practically helps to properly interpret and apply biblical instructions. However, saints are encouraged to be aware and objectively evaluate a few common practices.

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.”

1. Taking instruction from another dispensation to apply today.

Consider a particular situation in Acts about Israel, the Little Flock, "...all that believed were together, and had all things common; And sold their possessions and goods..." Basically, each believer at that time trusted God to work through faithful Jewish leaders to distribute "...as every man had need..." Some dear saints, in recent years, have zealously tried to follow this early Acts command. Sadly, those who applied this directive, practically realized God is not functioning this way today. Faith is the answer, "...Shall not the Judge of all the earth do right?" Of course, He always does, they just did not 'rightly divide' the Word.

Acts 2:44-45

"And all that believed were together, and had all things common; And sold their possessions and goods, and parted them to all men, as every man had need."

Genesis 18:25b

"...Shall not the Judge of all the earth do right?"

2. The practice of hastily jumping from one passage to another.

When doing verse by verse studies, it is essential to review verses slowly enough to provide ample time to ponder the setting and content. As the mind takes in new information, it automatically performs comparison and contrasts, interacting with prior input. If taken in too quickly, layers of facts are just stored, without time to question or get confirmation. Generally, the need to slow down

applies to students who are examining Scripture, but also the teacher, responsible to provide instruction to others.

When doing word searches or topical analysis, the necessity to proceed slowly increases, since many verses are examined and pulled out of a variety of contexts. If one rushes through the process or if consideration for context is missed, confusion can result, sometimes without awareness. One may merge doctrine or mail from one time period into another. Time to verify, weigh the evidence, or reflect on what is presented is to be part of the proving process necessary to develop conviction.

3. Unaware of the importance of inter-dispensational issues.

There are some saints who 'rightly divide' who tend to disregard studying Scripture written in 'other' time periods or generally avoid using it for practice application. However, there are important instructions, characteristics, and facts contained throughout the Bible that prove beneficial and applicable in all eras. Until one gains experience and maturity, however, it can be challenging to discern when studying. A few examples may help.

It is clear that desirable, godly character qualities like genuine love, friendship, faithfulness, and loyalty are good insight for man down through the ages. Biblical accounts documenting negative behavior can also be instructive, such as sinful practices,

enticements, strongholds, and idolatry. Each proves to be ‘inter-dispensational’, that is, they transcend time, and are relevant to all people and societies, in all three times.

There are many similar Bible truths, practical information through time periods. Some relate to science and health, like diet, use of herbs, cleanliness, and medical practices. Ideas on building construction, law enforcement, fair judgment, marriage-family relationships and even battle strategies are guidelines that can be insightful. How one uses this information is significant. Today, saints are under grace, and it is not mandatory to perform any of these instructions; they are just facts.

Consider another issue, the nature and attributes of the Lord. The Word manifests God’s character through various writers, in a multitude of situations. Similarly, students can see the character of man, as well as Satan through the Bible. These are teachings that are vital to understand for practical living. Do not dismiss doctrine just because it is outside of Pauline epistles. Even Paul refers back to issues in the Old Testament, information which adds to a student’s edification.

B. Recognize the Complete Curriculum

God has provided His Word as a training manual for man, organized in the best way possible to completely meet his needs

over time. With perfect forethought, God placed a specific and complete curriculum for believers to follow today. The package of instructions, Paul's epistles, is particularly designed to equip saints to live in this world by faith and prepares them for eternity. Paul is "...a pattern to them which should hereafter believe on him to life everlasting." He says, "Be ye followers of me..."

1 Timothy 1: 11, 16

"According to the glorious gospel of the blessed God, which was committed to my trust...Howbeit for this cause I obtained mercy, that in me first Jesus Christ might shew forth all longsuffering, for a pattern to them which should hereafter believe on him to life everlasting."

1 Corinthians 11:1

"Be ye followers of me, even as I also am of Christ."

Form of doctrine

Today, in this dispensation of grace, God designed a curriculum, called a "...form of doctrine which was delivered..." found in Paul's letters, Romans through Philemon. These are particular instructions to the Body of Christ, known as "...my gospel...the revelation of the mystery...made known to all nations for the obedience of faith..."

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."

Romans 16: 25

"Now to him that is of power to stablish you according to my gospel, and the preaching of Jesus

Christ, according to the revelation of the mystery, which was kept secret since the world began, But now is made manifest, and by the scriptures of the prophets, according to the commandment of the everlasting God, made known to all nations for the obedience of faith”

Saints are encouraged to start studying at the beginning of the curriculum, Romans 1, progress slowly to the end of the book, then on through all of his epistles. Regularly read through the entire Bible for depth to God’s overall plan and purpose. This is God’s simple technique to mature saints.

Advancing nature of Scripture

The traditional teaching model used in higher education can provide a glimpse of the wisdom of Scripture. Coursework to attain a degree teaches progressively, beginning with simple, factual information, building to multi-faceted, complex concepts. There is always a goal or purpose in mind, such as to prepare the student for the next component in the program of study, complete the course, and/or develop practical skills for application. This human model has actually patterned its approach after Scripture, yet God’s Word is an exceedingly more complex, wise system.

The Word is eternal in power, magnitude, and depth and to an even greater degree advances students in learning. Students proceed forward mastering a concept, adding deeper layers of understanding. When knowledge is acquired, it is integrated with prior material, compounding and expanding comprehension. As it

is taken in, the Spirit teaches connecting ideas, refining understanding, and bringing heart conviction for application. Notice one of the goals, “For who he did foreknow, he also did predestinate to be conformed to the image of his Son...”

Romans 8:29

“For whom he did foreknow, he also did predestinate to be conformed to the image of his Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brethren.”

God, through Isaiah, commands that one “...precept must be upon precept...” This is a specific order, a general instruction to be considered for all time periods. The material contained within the curriculum is to be attained in a logical, organized manner for maximum profit. Otherwise, holes and gaps in understanding will occur. When saints routinely skip around to various chapters or books, some learning will occur. However, disjointed pieces of information will be acquired, posing a challenge to piece together. Know that God’s method is tremendously effective for maturation.

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”

Examine a couple of popular study approaches to heighten insight. A common practice is to randomly choose a place in the Bible to read or study. Others find topical or word studies quite valuable as their study approach. Under scrutiny, these methods

routinely pull verses out of their setting. Thus, context is exceedingly important in order to maintain clarity.

Used carefully many study techniques can be extremely insightful. However, if context is not recognized, it would be similar to jumping into the middle of a sewing curriculum. The student would be choosing and exalting what 'he feels' is needed, rather than trusting the manual. He may skip to the chapter on how to lay out a pattern, realizing too late he never learned how to select a usable type of fabric for the garment.

Doctrinal construction occurs as one precept is built upon the next. Trust and yield to God's powerful design in the Word, "...let every man take heed how he buildeth thereupon." A line of Scripture is taken in, then the next line is taught according to Isaiah 28, "...here a little, and there a little." As a bit of sound doctrine is acquired, then, a little more learning and understanding from the next line takes place, building onto the last.

I Corinthians 3: 10

"According to the grace of God which is given unto me, as a wise masterbuilder, I have laid the foundation, and another buildeth thereon. But let every man take heed how he buildeth thereupon."

The books of Romans through Philemon are the package of information, written by God in a precise way and order for the edification today. To rephrase, Paul's epistles are personal mail written to the Church, predetermined and flawlessly arranged to

teach believers. Each book, chapter and verse is in perfect order, one building upon the last to progress doctrinal concepts, perfecting the saints.

*Assignment: Reflection. Teachers who regularly pull a verse from Scripture to hyper-focus and expound on, then apply without regard to context, instruct others to do the same. This can teach students bad study habits. A change in thinking is needed. Yield to God's way. Evaluate personal habits. Review passages in their context to gain conviction of heart. Consider these things.

Effectual progression through Paul's curriculum

What would progression through this curriculum look like? It would be slow and methodical. One verse built upon the one before, one chapter upon the last and one book upon the former one. It is simply reading and studying, considering context. In this way, students can give time to process and absorb Scripture, allowing it to interact with what is already known. The Spirit takes the storehouse of doctrine within the soul, helps to process and fit new pieces together, adding clarity over time.

Take a moment to grab the pages of Paul's epistles between the thumb and index finger. Notice the size of today's curriculum. It is relatively small as compared to the entirety of Scripture. These epistles are extremely concise and strategically written, fortified and compressed with God's eternal doctrine, infused in

layers, becoming progressively clearer as one matures. Just by using a particular term or phrase, Paul stirs up issues for the student's further reflection. This can encourage consideration of former teachings, new facets of the topic.

Thus, Paul does not again lay the foundation for concepts and topics God already addressed in Scripture. It was designed to make reference to a topic, like faith, to bring to mind a body of doctrine. For example, Romans 4 teaches about the faith of Abraham's, referring back to specific chapters in Genesis. Reexamining this Old Testament section would prove enlightening, providing depth to Paul's teaching. Regularly review of the entire Bible provides familiarity and awareness for access at a later point in study or for application.

To review, by using key terms or phrases, Paul encourages students to journey back to investigate issues for clarification. As saints approach Scripture, they can realize this method and be ready and excited to continue exploration. Students can return to a study passage for reexamination, gaining a deeper appreciation. This curriculum enables saints to mature in three ways: 1) A structured, perfect process to become edified 2) Fosters an intimate, deepening relationship with the Father, 3) Develops the mind of Christ, renewing the mind to apply in the details of life.

C. Be Led by the Spirit

Take a brief walk through the foundational process, which edifies a saint. The Spirit intimately teaches the believer one-to-one and verse-by-verse. Romans 1-7 imparts two main issues. Justification deals with how to be saved and assured in his position with God. Sanctification focuses on his new identity, how God made him. This readies a saint for weightier things, service and worship in chapters 8-16. Romans 8 begins with opportunity for a saint to transition from being a child to an adult, "...led by the Spirit of God...as sons of God..." This section instructs one to live Christ and mind spiritual things, as a living sacrifice in love.

Romans 8:14

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

"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." The adult saint can begin to see the bigger picture, trusting God, ready to proceed. It becomes a great privilege to yield and make wise decisions based upon the processing plant of doctrine within. This is being led by the Spirit.

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"

Our responsibility

The Father expects believers to yield so He can provide personal guidance through the doctrine for the dispensation of grace. Yielding in faith is simple, yet profound. All that is needed is to trust, stay open, and give place to the Spirit, "...to the end ye may be established." A saint's attitude can mature toward Scripture, to seek and search "...for her as for hid treasures..."

Romans 1: 11

"For I long to see you, that I may impart unto you some spiritual gift, to the end ye may be established"

Proverbs 2:4-5

"If thou seekest her as silver, and searchest for her as for hid treasures; Then shalt thou understand the fear of the Lord, and find the knowledge of God."

D. Keep Scripture Exalted as the Final Authority

God's Word is the standard and final authority in all matters. A saint ought not to place anything in the exalted position belonging to the Almighty. Many things within one's life and mind can become idolatry. Regular reflection on this issue is important for proper edification. What utilizes your time and thought life? The flesh and course of this world strive for the priority position.

Romans 12 teaches "...be not conformed to this world: but be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind..." Human ideas, thoughts, and desires naturally become vain. Their tendency is

self-exaltation as stated in Romans 1. “Professing themselves to be wise, they became fools.” This can drive the Christian life unconscious. It is easy to swerve off course when the focus is off the Scripture. Prayerful attentiveness is a key to prevent Satan’s subtle influence and to stay on track.

Romans 12:2

“And be not conformed to this world: but be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind, that ye may prove what is that good, and acceptable, and perfect, will of God.”

Romans 1:20-22

“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 thankful; but became vain in their imaginations, and their foolish heart was darkened. Professing themselves to

be wise, they became fools”

The Scripture is always correct and designed to be instructive. “A wise man will hear, and will increase learning...” Immature or faulty thinking is at the base of all ideas contrary to God. In any case, trust the Father and His Word. “...a man of understanding shall attain unto wise counsels...For the Lord giveth wisdom...knowledge and understanding.”

Proverbs 1:5, 2:6

“A wise man will hear, and will increase learning; and a man of understanding shall attain unto wise counsels...For the Lord giveth wisdom: out of his mouth cometh knowledge and

understanding.”

Proverbs 4 teaches to “Keep thy heart with all diligence; for out of it are the issues of life.” One reason is that whatever one decides to exalt and focus on will be in the driver’s seat when decisions are made. What is believed sets the course in life and will be the consumer of one’s precious time and resources. The center of what is important flows from the heart, therefore, keep God’s Words, “...in the midst of thine heart...”

Proverb 4:20-23

“My son, attend to my words; incline thine ear unto my sayings. Let them not depart from thine eyes; keep them in the midst of thine heart. For they are life unto those that find them, and health to all their flesh. Keep thy heart with all diligence; for out of it are the issues of life.”

E. Ask Questions

God's wisdom is eternal and vast. Students can mature to realize and even expect that some things will not be understood immediately. Everyone has questions. Determine to put it to prayer. God guides and helps His dear saints. “...the Spirit also helpeth our infirmities: for we know not what we should pray for as we ought: but the Spirit itself maketh intercession for us...”

Romans 8:26-27

“Likewise the Spirit also helpeth our infirmities: for we know not what we should pray for as we ought: but the Spirit itself maketh intercession for us with groanings which cannot be uttered. And he that searcheth the hearts knoweth what is the mind of the Spirit, because he maketh intercession for the saints according to the will of God.”

The "...Spirit searcheth all things, yea, the deep things of God." He unfolds the deep Truths in the Word and answers questions when saints are ready, willing, and able to receive it. This is an interactive process. Questions prompt a search for answers and to think out and apply what is taught. It develops conviction, moving it from head knowledge to the heart.

I Corinthians 2:10

"But God hath revealed them unto us by his Spirit: for the Spirit searcheth all things, yea, the deep things of God."

At times, students can only take baby steps at learning. Even a small progression forward can only occur when ready. If a saint holds tightly to 'religious traditions' that are contrary to the Word, it may take him awhile to embrace a new way of looking at a passage or doctrine. The Word pierces the heart to convict and refine, in time.

Meditating on verses can be effective to gain openness. Man resists letting go of long-standing beliefs. Graciously, God would have saints take all the time they need to perfect thinking, and help develop conviction of heart. Proceeding slowly, in prayer, helps in the digestion of Scripture and to exercise the doctrine in life. Actually, it can be motivating to have questions on the back burner waiting for answers. Be observant, as often, when least expected, an answer will be revealed.

F. The Context of Verses and Assignments in This Book

It is important to read the Scripture references typed out in this book since this is the power to teach Truth. Saints are also encouraged to look at the verses in their own Bible to analyze the context. There are a few reasons for this. Context teaches depth and clarity to concepts. Considering verses enables the student to evaluate whether something is accurate or simply being used to prove the author's viewpoint.

Assignments are also significant. Think about doing as many as possible. Even just reading them will expand self-awareness, develop insight with a new perspective, and encourage practical application. Once read, the mind may continue to consider these things, which can teach the student through the day.

G. Develop Good Study, Thinking and Living Habits

Take responsibility for setting daily Bible study habits and use time well. 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.

Yet, God's desire is for saints to function as adults and at times, rise above feelings to do things necessary. They can choose to give up things for the short term that feed the flesh, to

mind "...the things of the Spirit." This does not need to be done in the heavy weight of legalism, an 'I have to' scenario. But can be done by responding in love and thankfulness unto God, a desire of the heart. Prayer helps the saint develop this grace attitude.

Romans 8:5

"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."

Individuals are called to put aside ungodly or unprofitable things, "Neither give place to the devil." However, when the flesh is denied, realize it will scream for attention, resist, and justify fulfilling its lustful desires. Plainly, at times, this is tough to do and does not feel good. However, it will be eternally beneficial. God is the power and provision, and enables saints to reject ungodliness and make decisions based on sound doctrine.

Ephesians 4:27

"Neither give place to the devil."

H. Notice Word Patterns and Checkpoints

Pray to notice repeated key terms or phrases, as they are useful in study. Recognizing strategic words in passages is like seeing a little sign pop up indicating something important. The term 'justified' is an example in Romans 3, 'faith' is the theme in Chapter 4 and 'much more' is a repeated phrase in Romans 5. Words have precise meanings, are important to God, and a

valuable teaching tool. As the student takes time to consider a word, it may prompt thought and add depth to understanding. It may also send him back to study the term in earlier passages.

There are many 'helping words' used throughout the Scripture, often seen as inconsequential. These are actually highly significant. For example, Paul begins thoughts with terms or phrases like: therefore, but, for, now, know ye not, likewise, knowing, and for this cause. The precise meaning of each and their placement in the passage is quite noteworthy. Some clarify thoughts; others summarize or build upon what has come before. They are also used for comparison or contrast or to progress students from one precept to the next.

As a lawyer, Paul was a highly organized, meticulous writer unfolding doctrine, strategically covering points in an orderly manner. Highlighting terms used and looking up definitions can provide opportunity for increased insight. Whenever encountered, therefore, pause to recognize the connections between ideas and the overall purpose.

Another technique, 'a checkpoint,' is used to help students take stock of what is known. They are sprinkled through Paul's writings and refer one back to consider things covered in a previous section. It may take the form of a question or begin by

using a helping word. They often summarize points made and indicate that a significant teaching needs to be clearly understood before moving forward. If clarity has not been achieved, it can be a signal to go back to re-examine the section.

An example would be Romans 5:1-2. Note how this summary verse begins with a helping term. “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.” Since understanding is needed before proceeding further, Paul summarizes the conclusions presented in Chapters 1-4. Succinctly, it details the status of a justified believer.

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.”

Another obvious checkpoint is Romans 8:31-39. It is a key passage using a question to reflect on basic things taught thus far in Romans 8 and also in the whole book of Romans, regarding God and His provision. “What shall we then say to these things? If God be for us, who can be against us? If the answer to this question is not obvious to the student, it ought to send him back to consider the issue in further detail.

“What shall we then say to these things? If God be for us, who can be against us?”

1. Investigate by Looking Back and Ahead

There are a few relevant issues to be introduced in this section, which can be helpful to promote clarity in personal study.

Looking back

As discussed, looking back in Scripture to obtain more depth on a topic is a very effective study method. This translates into examining the initial, more foundational teaching of a passage or word. As a student studies ‘suffering’ in Romans 8:16-30 for example, it is helpful to know Paul is actually building upon what he introduced earlier, in Romans 5:1-5. This passage provides clarity as it is the foundational teaching of Paul on suffering.

Students can also go further back to Acts, the Gospels, and the Old Testament to visit issues God has taught prior to Paul’s epistles on the issue of ‘suffering’. However, saints are encouraged to remember the context in this endeavor, that is, to whom it is written and the purpose of the passage and book.

God reinforces the connectedness and progressive nature of Scripture, when it refers back to previous Scripture. For example, phrases used are, “As it is written...,” “What saith the Scriptures...”, or “For Esaias saith...” The original passage can

provide detail and context broadening understanding with the doctrine that is foundational to what is being taught.

Saints are encouraged to utilize opportunities to search Scripture and personally realize how it is progressive and builds upon what comes before. Observing study and teaching techniques in individuals mighty in Scripture can be insightful.

Looking ahead

Looking ahead to investigate passages that come after the one being studied can be helpful, but merits further examination. Students can look ahead to study in the, Ages to come books, Hebrews to Revelation, directed to Israel. They may not be direct instructions for us to live today, but can contain valuable information for us to know. When saints fully realize the context, much can be gleaned. Recall that context includes noticing the who, what, where, when, why and how of passages.

Using this looking ahead study practice in today's designated curriculum, Romans through Philemon, also bears further consideration. This approach provides insight on what Paul is progressively teaching about a topic or word. However, when jumping ahead to study in Paul's epistles, the student is actually moving to more advanced teaching. This instruction is built upon what has come before, with added wisdom.

A curriculum can be defined as an aggregate of courses of study. Paul's epistles are laid out in this way, milk to meat, in order to build godliness, conforming saints to the image of Christ. God does so in an organized, progressive fashion, which advances students to more complex issues. It builds upon prior, more foundational concepts, books, chapters, and verses for maturity.

When students look ahead in today's curriculum for additional insight, they are jumping into more advanced ideas or precepts. This is highly significant to realize, especially when one is searching for answers or clarity. Consider an analogy. If a Math student looked to the last chapter to answer elementary questions from chapter 2, what would happen? This practice will cause confusion and frustration. This section teaches more advanced concepts. Obviously, the student ought to go back to chapter 1 for clarity in the fundamentals.

To make this practical for Bible study, the simplest suggestion for a novice would be to stay focused on the immediate context of what is being studied. The advancing student can look ahead to gain more progressive information about what is taught by Paul on a subject. However, it may pose some unexpected challenges.

Examination of a Bible study scenario may be advantageous. Return to the issue of the study of suffering. A young believer

negotiating grievous challenges may desire immediate relief and help to endure. He may choose to consult advanced teaching like Philippians 4. What will be the result?

A novice may be unaware of the level of teaching in this section. Philippians 4 assumes the reader has Romans through Philippians 3 under his belt. The instruction of obtaining peace, contentment, and joy in Chapter 4 is progressive, fully attained by mature saints as wisdom is processed and assimilated.

There are many insights to be learned from reading Philippians. However, discouragement and frustration can result when saints expect solutions, but instead perceive unattainable, lofty ideals. The fruit of the Spirit is acquired through experience exercising doctrine in faith as Christ is formed in their inner man.

The context, purpose, and where a passage is located in the curriculum, must be taken into consideration when looking ahead, even within Paul's curriculum. God provides more depth on topics as the curriculum proceeds, as is typical even in man's educational materials. Pray to see that reading all of God's Word is immensely important, while recognizing these major Truths.

Units of Study

Paul's epistles are organized into three major subdivisions, in perfect progressive order for learning.

1) The Foundational section includes Romans through Galatians. The first book, Romans, establishes a student with basic instruction. (Romans 1: 11) The Corinthian and Galatians letters display application to this foundational teaching and include reproof and correction. The Corinthians struggled with carnality, never really progressing in the elementary things of Romans. (I Corinthians 1:10-11, 3:1-3) The Galatians had matured, but were seduced and turned from the truth of grace to a perverted gospel of legalism. (Galatians 1:6-7, 3:1-3) God's foresight knew these would be the same major challenges faced by the Church today. Thus, these epistles show how the doctrine from Romans can be practical to reprove, correct and instruct oneself and others.

2) Advanced teaching is found in Ephesians through Thessalonians. Again, the first book is the doctrinal book and those that follow are application. The churches at Philippi, Colosse, and Thessalonica were built up, mature Churches, but struggled with application of some aspects of Ephesians.

The Philippians were encouraged to abound more and more in love, while serving with one heart and mind, allowing Christ to be magnified in them. (Philippians 1: 9-11) The Colossians needed to go on to perfection, not moved away from the hope of the gospel, even in tribulation and persecution. (Colossians 1:22-

23) The Thessalonians, possibly the most mature church, were confused about the order of things, wondering if they missed the Rapture. (I Thessalonians 1:9-10, 4:13-18, 5:1-11) In each case, instruction is based on the advanced doctrine in Ephesians, which in turn is founded upon the former part of the curriculum, Romans through Galatians

3) The Leadership epistles include Timothy, Titus, and Philemon. These were written to Church leaders and contain targeted instructions, encouragement and warnings for guiding churches. This material incorporates and builds on the two prior sections with more depth, to assist in leading and giving practical counsel.

The two epistles to Timothy reveal struggles as he operated as a faithful son with Paul, learning to fight a good warfare and hold fast, even with tremendous adversity. (I Timothy 1:18-19) Titus discloses instruction to set things in order within the carnal Church at Crete. (Titus 1:5-12) Finally, Philemon is application of Paul's doctrine within the local assembly. He was called to respond graciously with his runaway slave, becoming a grace example to his assembly. (Verse 6)

Since Paul's epistles are arranged progressively, simple to complex, when looking ahead or looking back, this needs to be considered. Jumping back and forth out of one unit or book, then

to another without this conscious awareness can cause misunderstandings. For the young student of the Word, staying within a unit to understand what it is teaching, before going to the next unit would be logical and makes the most sense

Included below is a progressive guide, just an example of how one could proceed in studying. Maturity in understanding how God laid out Scripture naturally expands one's ability to study.

- 1) Read and reread Scripture by staying within a passage for meditation, word analysis and determining the meaning.
- 2) The student can expand his learning to observe the immediate context and purpose of the chapter. Sectioning off subtopics Paul is addressing within a passage can be helpful to see its fullness.
- 3) Progress to study the surrounding chapters in their context.
- 4) Look back to evaluate what has come before on a topic or word, within Paul's epistles, keeping in mind the writer's intent and context, using a concordance as needed.
- 5) Eventually, the saint can broaden the scope of his study and consider how the passage fits in to the overall book or unit.
- 6) The saint can go on to look further back in Scripture, out of Paul's letters on the topic, keeping in mind dispensational issues.
- 7) When ready, broaden the perspective to word or topical studies looking ahead in Scripture, realizing the unit of study.

J. Fill in the Gaps

Each saint is on a unique, spiritual expedition, a learning journey, having opportunity to grow in sound doctrine. However, everyone has gaps in comprehension or misplaced, inaccurate perceptions about various Scripture. When believers remain open to fill in the holes as maturity takes place by sound doctrine, the new pieces will fit together. The Spirit teaches individually and will bring this understanding as he is ready and desires to learn.

Insights can occur any time the Word is taken into the mind and considered. Romans 12 says, “And be not conformed to this world: but be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind...” and II Timothy instructs that, “All Scripture is...profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness...”

Romans 12: 2

“And be not conformed to this world: but be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind, that ye may prove what is that good, and acceptable, and perfect, will of God.”

II Timothy 3:16

“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, thoroughly furnished unto all good works.”

The Spirit takes the Word and refines certain areas of understanding over time, as saints are ready to accept it. In this way, the pieces of the puzzle are realigned and fit together; bits

are added as time and consideration are given. As saints yield, they can allow the Spirit to remove the tinted layers on their eyes, placed there by the course of this world, perfecting believers.

While this chapter focused on insights about how to study the Bible to get practical wisdom, the remainder of the book will focus upon four processes. Each chapter focuses on a passage containing a process, that is, a structured approach to understand a concept from the Word. These were particularly selected to enable the student to clearly see how Scripture is exceedingly practical and how verses can be immediately applied.

Personal Notes

Chapter IV

Process to Become a Wise Son

Students have had opportunity to reflect on their attitude toward the Word, been given a basic understanding of God's design for learning, and an awareness of a few study methods. The next chapters focus on easy-to-apply examples of how Scripture is practical. First, this chapter is an opportunity for students to appreciate a few issues about one's attitude when approaching Scripture. This can affect the ability to make godly choices and more fully understand and apply practical suggestions about lust, temptation, and sin in the latter chapters.

A 'process' defined

Recognizing a process contained within Scripture can enable a believer to see passages more clearly for application. Generally, a biblical process refers to a list of instructions or components on a particular topic or doctrine. It can be a step-by-step outline in passages teaching a blueprint or pattern. It provides the 'how to' in the practical application of a concept taught in the Bible.

Processes can be helpful in understanding and living out the Word. Some are easy to observe and others, at least initially, may

not be as visibly apparent. Passages can become clear, more functional, and more easily recognized when thought of in this new way. There are many processes to be discovered within the Word, they are tools to exercise the doctrine in the details of life.

A. Introduction: Proverbs 2

This chapter will examine an example of a practical process found within Proverbs 2. In this section, students can observe the uncomplicated progression of a believer as he matures in the Word. The attitude in a student's approach to God and His Word affects his openness to learn, the retaining of what is taken in, and whether one will progress in faith. This determines whether the saint develops heart conviction or just takes in information to store as head knowledge.

While the entirety of Scripture is for a saint's learning, as reviewed, it is always important to recognize the context. King From counsel given to him by his father David, Solomon writes the book of Proverbs to his Nation Israel and specifically his sons, in the Time Past period. The general topic is growing up to be wise and understanding adult sons. It is learning from godly instruction, while navigating through the challenges of life. When context is considered, saints can glean important insights. Of course, everything ought to be viewed through one's

understanding of Paul's epistles, Romans through Philemon. Understanding doctrinal components within the dispensation of grace sheds critical light on the entirety of the Scriptures.

Proverbs 2 deals with factual truths about how to approach sound instruction from the Scriptures. This teaching is clearly applicable through time. When saints recognize where they are in their attitude toward learning the Word, they can pray specifically for the proper way to grow and mature. Grace is always the motivation; therefore, it is not done under the heavy weight and guilt of not measuring up under a system of works. Rather, a grace motivation to study would produce a desire to please the Father in all things, with joyful thankfulness and an expectation to learn. Prayer and meditation can be effectual.

Each verse in Proverbs 2:1-4 specifies a functional status in a student's approach to God's Word. As the verses advance, they indicate a deeper awareness, conviction, and involvement in setting one's heart on exalting and learning what God desires to teach. As the believer's attitude progresses, he becomes increasingly more confident and determined to allow Scripture to be exalted above all, the center of his desires.

Observe the 'if' in verse 1 and the word 'then' in verse 5. This indicates there will be results or a harvesting of what is sown. A

saint who moves through the process will reap full benefits. The approach of positive responsiveness and faith to His Word has been God's desire for man throughout time.

This is the simple, yet profound faith of Abraham. He progressed and matured in what the Father was teaching him, fully believing. This was the result of yielding and reflects that Abraham acquired the fear of the Lord. God stated, "...for now I know that thou fearest God, seeing thou hast not withheld thy son, thine only son from me."

Genesis 22:12

"And he said, Lay not thine hand upon the lad, neither do thou any thing unto him: for now I know that thou fearest God, seeing thou hast not withheld thy son, thine only son from me."

Even when all circumstances and feelings seem to say otherwise, the response God desires is to do His Word and trust Him. The concluding counsel in Romans about this faith relates to being 'stablished' in Paul's gospel. It was designed to bring forth "...the obedience of faith..." The conclusion of the matter is the Father, through the Word, is to be highly exalted: "...To God only wise, be glory through Jesus Christ for ever. Amen."

Romans 16:25-27

"Now to him that is of power to stablish you according to my gospel, and the preaching of Jesus Christ, according to the revelation of the mystery, which was kept secret since the world began, But now is made manifest, and by the scriptures of the prophets, according to the commandment of the

everlasting God, made known to all nations for the obedience of faith: To God only wise, be glory through Jesus Christ for ever. Amen.”

What one holds up as important in the mind will direct the decisions of life. This is why throughout the Bible God instructs that He is to be trusted and depended upon for all things. Acknowledging Him in this way will direct a saint’s course. “Trust in the Lord with all thine heart; and lean not unto thine own understanding. In all thy ways acknowledge him, and he shall direct thy paths.”

Proverbs 3:5-6

“Trust in the Lord with all thine heart; and lean not unto thine own understanding. In all thy ways acknowledge him, and he shall direct thy paths.”

Solomon desired his sons to grow up to be wise, appreciating the instruction of him, but ultimately God the Father. He wanted them to develop a faithful response, responding with trust, longing for His instruction. So, the question is what impresses you as important? Knowing and being honest about one’s attitude, then being open to these key issues are fundamental to understand and respond in faith to what God teaches in Proverbs 2.

*Assignment: Preparation: 1) Read through Proverbs 2:1-4 and notice the verbs or ‘action words’. These indicate a status in approaching the Word. 2) Who is the ruler in your life? Everyone could use regular reflection on how they are living to evaluate if changes are needed. Then, it is important to pray for God’s help.

B. Process: To Become a Wise Son

Learn from this marvelously progressive process. It begins in verse 1 with ‘passive’ openness to take in Scripture and evolves over time. It can transition into purposeful, exhilarating searching and seeking out all that God provides in verse 4. Yielding in faith, desiring to grow seems to be prerequisite for progressing through these stages “...to find the knowledge of God.” Each section below contains a few insights to prompt further thought and study.

Proverbs 2: 1-5

1. “My son, **if** thou wilt receive my words, and hide my commandments with thee;
2. So that thou incline thine ear unto wisdom, and apply thine heart to understanding;
3. Yea, if thou criest after knowledge, and liftest up thy voice for understanding;
4. If thou seekest her as silver, and searchest for her as for hid treasures;
5. **Then** shalt thou understand the fear of the Lord, and find the knowledge of God.”

1. Receptive to the Word (Verse 1)

a) God’s Word: Notice the verse states there is a need to take in actual Scripture. He says “...if thou wilt receive my words...” not just, what someone says about Scripture. The Word is where the power is and this promotes growth and builds the storehouse of material for use by the Spirit to develop heart understanding.

b) Show up and listen: Here a decision happens to receive the Word. There may not be a lot of interaction and generally, it is a

passive effort, but it reflects a choice. This is the start of yielding to God. At times, the student may be approachable to consider spiritual things, showing openness to God and Scripture.

c) Hide the Word with thee: It appears that the saint is intrigued at this stage, enough to hide the Scripture inside for further consideration. However, at this point he may not be consistent or aware of what is happening inside. As saints stay receptive, they can move forward in faith. The Word can work to progress them to the next stage. At every stage, prayer can be an effective tool.

2. Inclined unto wisdom and heart application (Verse 2)

a) Leaning in to the Word: At this point, students begin to take purposeful initiative and action, a 'yielding of the ear' to the Word. They intentionally listen up and begin to hearken in faith. Saints have advanced, and begin to place godly instruction in a more exalted position, counting it worthy of consideration. The aim is not just to be inclined to religious activities or spiritually oriented. The emphasis needs to be transitioned from exalting man and his wisdom to the purity of the Word, or progress will be inhibited.

b) Applied heart: The main characteristic in Verse 2 seems to be a clear intent to understand, a yielding of the heart. Students are responsive to God's wisdom. They purposefully act to harness the teaching to understand and read with a new perspective. Saints

can now decisively place a storehouse of Scripture in the core of their being. When this is done regularly, it works the Truth within to produce faith and obedience. At this stage, the saint has a glimpse and begins to understand the importance of Scripture.

The goal is in sight. King David reached a clear maturity in his attitude when he determined to hide the Word in his heart, “...that I might not sin against thee...” This was the “...fear of the Lord...” the desire to obey, and please God. Keeping the Father in ‘the’ exalted position is the only way to do this in faith.

Proverb 1:7

“The fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge: but fools despise wisdom and instruction.”

Psalms 119:11

“Thy word have I hid in my heart, that I might not sin against thee.”

3. Cries after knowledge, lifts up voice (Verse 3)

a) Targeted, fervent prayers: Believers are stirred and realize Scripture’s importance at a new level. They yearn to know spiritual things and discern it cannot be done in their own effort. God is becoming their provision and power. Saints recognize the need for direction in this great privilege and responsibility, which impacts them emotionally, crying out for help.

b) Thirsty to attain understanding: The goal is not to simply achieve head knowledge. It is using opportunity and resources to become all God desires. In faith, saints begin to understand what

God has to teach and develop a thirst for this instruction that needs quenching.

c) A building energy: With the goal now in view, believers know God is their help and the journey can begin to gain momentum. Progressing students become active, specifically beseeching the Father to help them flourish and develop His mind on things.

4. Seeking for silver, searching for hid treasure (Verse 4)

a) The believer has caught the fire: At this stage, the Word grips the saint and kindles a fire. From conviction within the depth of his soul, the student purposes to yield in faith, in active pursuit of the prize, God's wisdom and knowledge. The emphasis is to live as the Father desires and builds in importance. New insight is seen and priorities shift to a hyper-focus on God's will, becoming more important than things of this life. Motivated within, the student goes on a hunt to uncover new nuggets of Truth. Momentum intensifies and Scripture is seen as precious gold, a treasury of eternal instruction.

b) A treasure hunter: The believer now recognizes God's most desired treasure and the basic sustenance for life. It is His Word, sound doctrine. With this glimpse, he willingly and diligently does whatever is necessary to continue exploration to acquire what God has prepared for him and to live it out to please Him.

In time, treasure hunting in the Scripture may well become an all-consuming focus. Searching for Truth is like the ‘gold fever’ in America’s early history. All of one’s resources and dreams may be realigned in order to grow and live the will of the Father.

5. Understands fear of the Lord, finds knowledge: (Verse 5)

a) Profit to the Word, understanding: Verse 5 is a key passage and the product of growing through the first four. The time and energy taken by the saint to gradually sow the Word into his being by faith, is profitable and designed to continue to produce a bountiful harvest, “...he that soweth to the Spirit shall of the Spirit reap life everlasting.” When the saint has personally matured through these four verses, functionally having his mind and heart transformed to be a ‘treasure seeker’, then he will experience what is listed in verse 5. It is to “...understand the fear of the Lord, and find the knowledge of God.” This is the ‘sowing and reaping’ process in action.

Galatians 6:8-9

“For he that soweth to his flesh shall of the flesh reap corruption; but he that soweth to the Spirit shall of the Spirit reap life everlasting. And let us not be weary in well doing: for in due season we shall reap, if we faint not.”

b) Attainment of the goal: As saints actively press forward, enduring what is necessary, God and the Word are exalted and this brings knowledge. A student understands “...the fear of the

Lord...” which really just starts his training, “...the beginning of knowledge...” He is convicted about God, “...even his eternal power and Godhead...” and now ready to be led by the Spirit to progress in God’s instruction in the weightier things.

Proverbs 1:7

“The fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge; but fools despise wisdom and instruction.”

Romans 1: 20

“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.”

c) A building process: At this point, believers realize knowledge comes from the Creator. Man starts with a rudimentary awareness of Him. These things are “...clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made...” as taught in Romans 1. Saints can choose to continue to build upon this understanding with sound doctrine or not. Choices continue to be important even after one has decided to trust Christ as their Savior. God desires maturity, worship, and service.

d) Eternal Benefits: Maintaining this perspective, a saint’s spiritual life and intimate communication with the Father can continue to mature on into eternity, walking in unity with Him. What a joy! This is a personal relationship with the Creator of the Universe.

How one builds on the foundation is important, as addressed by Paul in I Corinthians 3:10-15. “According to the grace of God

which is given unto me, as a wise master builder, I have laid the foundation, and another buildeth thereon. But let every man take heed how he buildeth thereupon.” Staying focused is a key. Often by adulthood, however, many lose sight of some of this basic discernment. It is corrupted or replaced by ‘faulty thinking’ that is generally accepted by society.

I Corinthians 3:10

“According to the grace of God which is given unto me, as a wise master builder, I have laid the foundation, and another buildeth thereon. But let every man take heed how he buildeth thereupon.”

This faulty reasoning process envelopes individual saints to live after enticing things. It often begins as children take in the wisdom and false teaching of this world. They grow up and become high-minded and addicted to pleasing their flesh. Thus, they can become hardened, foolish, and resist God’s instruction. The Bible documents man’s history, they “...became vain in their imaginations, and their foolish heart was darkened. Professing themselves to be wise, they became fools.”

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.”

Therefore, it is important even for children and young adults to regularly have their minds renewed. As they yield to sound

doctrine, it will help them maintain what God placed within their conscience. In order to progress and gain momentum in learning, saints need to realize the importance of seeking and searching for God's provision in His Word.

Though reading and study requires dedication and purpose of mind, it provides man with everything he needs. As one reflects, the time and effort it takes is truly a small price to pay for such eternal treasure. It is the basic sustenance for life now and what is to come.

*Assignment: Evaluation and reflection: Bible study is not: 1) Reading or discussing study books, commentaries or devotionals. 2) Attending worship services, prayer meetings, or listening to sermons. 3) Time in individual or group prayer. 4) Participation in 'religious activities', such as fellowship time, volunteering at church, participating in ministries, or hearing testimonies, updates on missionary trips or other church business. What is Bible study? It is taking in actual Scripture and considering, examining and meditating on passages. It is direct interactive reading, studying and proving things in the Word. Among many things, it includes defining words, cross referencing, and proving what's taught. Each time a person studies it is a brand-new experience, with the Spirit leading him through passages. It provides new insights and connections between verses and topics. A student is refined and progressed in his understanding as he applies faith to the Word.

C. Recognizing the Source

It is equally fascinating to go on and view the next section of the process. Proverbs 2:6-9 is a continuation of teaching how to become a wise son. It addresses the critical issue of recognizing the source of all wisdom. Clarity in the words below is a key for a full appreciation. Continue personal study to prove all things.

Proverbs 2:6-9

1. *“For the Lord giveth wisdom:*
2. *out of his mouth cometh knowledge and understanding.*
3. *He layeth up sound wisdom for the righteous:*
4. *he is a buckler to them that walk uprightly.*
5. *He keepeth the paths of judgment,*
6. *and preserveth the way of his saints.*
7. *Then, shalt thou understand righteousness, and judgment, and equity; yea, every good path.”*

This section addresses the foundation of wisdom, and how God uses it to teach and protect believers. It moves the student forward in Proverbs 2, from just “...understanding the fear of the Lord and finding the knowledge of God,” to the goal of the next section in Verse 7, to “...understand righteousness, and judgment, and equity, yea, every good path...” In this part of the process, the saint develops increased clarity and confidence that God is ‘the’ source and power. He is the total provision and it is all His work.

The believer needs to step out of the way and just yield in faith.

1. The Lord giveth wisdom (Verse 6)

a) Defined: Wisdom: The right, informed, discerning use or exercise of knowledge. Application of sound judgment, avoiding evil, and rather, doing good.

b) Source of wisdom: The Lord is the supplier and basis of all wisdom. He imparts or distributes it in His way.

2. From His mouth: knowledge and understanding (Verse 6)

a) Defined: Knowledge: Particular perception; truth or illumination. Understanding: Comprehending; apprehending ideas. Being aware and mindful, realizing the true state of things.

b) God speaks: It is His Word and from His mouth that there is true knowledge and understanding. "...how unsearchable are his judgments, and his ways past finding out!"

Romans 11:33

"O the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! how unsearchable are his judgments, and his ways past finding out!

3. He lays up sound wisdom for the righteous (Verse 7)

a) Defined: Sound Wisdom: Perfect, discerning knowledge, founded in truth; firm strong; valid; solid; that which cannot be overthrown or refuted.

b) God wrote down Truth: As God spoke His Word, He constructed a perfect Book. In it is a curriculum to teach man

precisely what is needed. Simply seeing how God designed His Word will empower. "...that we might know the things that are freely given to us of God." He organized His Word in a precise way to teach saints toward perfection.

I Corinthians 2: 12

"Now we have received, not the spirit of the world, but the spirit which is of God; that we might know the things that are freely given to us of God."

4. He is a buckler for those who live uprightly (Verse 7)

a) Defined: Buckler: Support or defense. This is a kind of shield, or piece of defensive armor that covered the whole body, about four feet long. Useful to cause stones and darts to 'glance off'.

b) God the Word protects: The Word empowers saint's to put on Christ. He is literally 'Truth' and 'Light', one's armor and this enables believers to live godly, enduring sufferings. "...let us put on the amour of light."

Romans 13:12

"The night is far spent, the day is at hand: let us therefore cast off the works of darkness, and let us put on the amour of light."

5. The Lord keeps the paths of judgment (Verse 8)

a) Defined: Paths of judgment: A narrow way of right and wrong.

b) The Lord does the 'keeping': He is the Creator, protector and implementer, eternally responsible to make sure His standards and judgments remain perfect and just. God delegates authority in

the world to execute judgment, yet He is the revenger to make all things right. "...Vengeance is mine; I will repay saith the Lord." God, through the Lord Jesus Christ and Paul's gospel will judge, even things hidden, with perfect precision. "...God shall judge the secrets of men by Jesus Christ according to my gospel."

Romans 12:19

"Dearly beloved, avenge not yourselves, but rather give place unto wrath: for it is written,

Vengeance is mine; I will repay saith the Lord."

Romans 2:16

"In the day when God shall judge the secrets of men by Jesus Christ according to my gospel."

6. He preserves the way of His saints (Verse 8)

a) Defined: Preserve: To keep safe from injury or destruction. To uphold, sustain, to save from decay or destruction.

b) God's responsibility: He is to be a saint's total sustenance. When sufferings come, God uses them to bring glory, now and on into eternity. "...the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us."

Romans 8:18

"For I reckon that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us."

7. Righteousness, judgment, equity/every good path (Verse 9)

a) Defined: Righteousness: Perfect holiness. The perfect standard of God. To be just, honorable, and holy, without blame.

Judgment: Discerning right and wrong. Weight and balance of facts to determine sentence or judicial decision.

Equity: The unbiased distribution of justice. Treating a person according to truth and reason; impartiality, uprightness

Every Good Path: This is an acceptable path unto the Lord. Today, the Spirit indwells believers to enable Christ to be formed, which empowers them to slowly acquire "...the mind of Christ." In this way, Christ can be manifest within the believer.

I Corinthians 2: 15-16

"But he that is spiritual judgeth all things, yet he himself is judged of no man. For who hath known the mind of the Lord, that he may instruct him? But we have the mind of Christ."

b) The reaping process: God uncovers the specific results for doing what He teaches, listing four issues: "...righteousness, judgment, equity and every good path." Understanding is the major result of taking in the Scripture by faith, keeping him safe, established on the 'good path', and exalting His Word. It further advances the saint's closeness with God, in a father-son or daughter relationship. The Father teaches the important things of life with the purpose to bring him to maturity as an adult. This section leaves no doubt as to where to go for training in wisdom.

God's wisdom is effectual and practical

King Solomon proceeds in Proverbs 2:10-22 to define how these things will be effectual in the life of an individual. A detailed

review of this section of Scripture goes beyond the scope of this section. The student is encouraged to go on and study further in chapter 2, considering context.

Briefly, this section moves the saint forward to realize that there are choices. Some follow evil and others follow righteousness. The verses lay forth the sowing and reaping when wisdom and knowledge are obtained and exalted in one's heart and soul. (Verse 10) Discretion, that is, the ability to judge things accurately, with self-reflection, and understanding will preserve the saint. The mature believer will be empowered to make choices, and be introspective and circumspect. He is also sensitive, wise, ready to respond, and pleasing to his Father.

The word 'that' begins verse 20, this refers to the purpose or result of this section. When a believing adult attains to the zealous pursuit of Father's wisdom in faith, it will drive him through the details of life so that he can "...walk in the way of good men, and keep the paths of the righteous."

Proverbs 2:20

"That thou mayest walk in the way of good men, and keep the paths of the righteous."

Similarly, studying through the beginning chapters of Romans builds confident trust in God today. These things enable believers to make wise choices, yielding to the path of

righteousness trusting God. Paul teaches the Church that they have the ability to choose which path to walk, by what they decide to 'mind'. Will it be things pleasing to the flesh or God? Study in Romans is imperative for saints to grasp how to live today.

Enveloped into the course of this world

Satan has infiltrated every aspect of this present world. He is lurking on the sidelines, ready to pounce and lure believers to trust a worldly perspective, anything apart from God and His Word. When saints are unaware and do not actively renew the mind, when challenges arise the tendency will be to be derailed, sidetracked or regress. A saint will not even maintain their faith, unless they are purposefully in the Word regularly. He will take steps backward, right into the deceiver's hands. Believers will be vulnerable and yield to ungodly influences, which can happen without conscious awareness.

Over time, unresolved questions and the continuing bombardment of challenges living in this world can produce a lack of hope. Even with such freedom and access to Scripture in this country, many are severely limited in their ability to find answers. Today, the attitudes of frustration, anger, and apathy, actually being desensitized to and hardened toward God, are increasing, especially in Christian circles.

Functionally, saints regularly need to review their own approach to the Word of God. The secular world and even our own youth view the Christian Church at large as hypocritical. Why? There is a lack of understanding and follow through with even the basics of the faith.

*Assignment: Reflection: Be honest and transparent. A saint can live as an unbeliever, with one foot in 'Christianity' and the other out. Do you easily blend in with the unsaved in attitude, values, and day-to-day living? Is your Bible on a shelf until the next weekly spiritual meeting, as a dress shoe put in a closet until the next formal occasion? Or, do you regularly read and study Scripture with a thankful excitement, living what you know in faith? How does a saint attain this type of godly perspective? Think on these things.

The simple answer

There is an uncomplicated solution. All believers have sin tendencies in the flesh, yet as saints yield to God, He can help them develop a hyper-focused, faithful attitude. They can pray to trust God as their full provision. In this process, saints evaluate their attitude, praying to attain the desire for faith, an openness to learn and live the Word.

Communicating with sincere openness to the Father then, is exceedingly important. The believer can ask God specifically for the way to proceed in order to grow and mature. Regular prayer

time can also be used to express feelings and obstacles inhibiting growth. It can also bring awareness to areas in need of attention in one's life, with the desire to trust and walk in faith.

Openness to God and His Word by faith, seeking for ways to apply it is the answer. Attitude is everything. The saint's approach to life and sound doctrine, Paul's curriculum, will enable believers to acquire what is taught in Proverbs 2:5, "...the fear of the Lord and find the knowledge of God." It will also help them to move forward to, "...understand righteousness, and judgment, and equity; yea, every good path".

To conclude, the Bible is practical. As a godly internal motivation and desire develops to recognize His Word as 'the' ultimate treasure, the formal edification process commences. The mind begins to be conformed to the image of Christ, and enables the saint to serve and worship the Father, as an adult believer.

The remainder of this book will focus upon three specific processes found in Scripture. They work in unison to uncover concrete, useful insight and strategies to deal with sin. It can empower the reader to effectively deal with tangible, personal challenges and help mature him to attain freedom from the power of sin and strongholds.

Personal Notes

Chapter V

Process of Sin: An Examination

This chapter will continue to present examples from Scripture that are remarkably practical. It will center upon understanding the issue of sin and how it occurs, reinforcing the ability in Christ to make informed choices to live godly. Before actually examining the steps leading to sin, clarity is needed as to the concepts of lust, temptation, and sin. Students are encouraged to do additional research to expand appreciation of these and other terms as they move through this process.

1. Lust: Longing, eager desire. Focus or preoccupation with experiencing physical pleasure. Eagerness and hunger to satisfy carnal, fleshly appetite.
2. Temptation: Conscious or unconsciously being drawn away of one's own lust and enticed to do evil and sin. (James 1)
3. Sin: Wickedness. Departing from exalting God to focus on ungodliness. Neglect of a known duty. Following after evil thoughts, purposes, words, and desires, things contrary to God. Looking to think about or do unrighteousness.

God particularly designed the Word to be practical. Therefore, the student is encouraged to pray to seek the Truth

and to be open to see what Scripture teaches about sin. God progressively revealed aspects of sin over time, giving various views from different angles, situations and people. The basic facts on the topic of sin found in this James 1 process are practical and clarify concepts to understand sinfulness in any age.

In preparation, read through Genesis 1-11 to observe how man's increasing depravity prompts strong responses from God. Sadly, He acknowledged that "...the wickedness of man was great in the earth and that every imagination of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually." God states, "...man's heart is evil from his youth..."

Genesis 6:5

"And God saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that every imagination of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually."

Genesis 8:21

"And the Lord smelled a sweet savour, and the Lord said in his heart, I will not again curse the ground any more for man's sake; for the imagination of man's heart is evil from his youth; neither will I again smite any more every thing living, as I have done."

Judgment against sin is seen throughout Scripture. Genesis clearly teaches about the vileness of the flesh and Satan's influence. Man's only hope is to trust and rely on the Living God.

*Assignment: Topical studies: Consider doing further research on the issue of man's disobedience and sin. Examples: 1) Using a dictionary and concordance,

define and distinguish between sin, iniquity, and transgression. 2) Character study: Use a concordance to investigate the manifestation of sin in key Bible characters. Examples: Cain's behavior with Abel, Israel's response to God over the years, and Eli and his sons.

The three tools found in the next chapters can help students gain practical *victory over sin. These processes include, 1) The Process of Sin, 2) The Renewing of the Mind, and 3) Pulling Down Strongholds. Each unfold different features of how to live; 'minding' sound Bible doctrine. Together, they can teach and mature saints to practically live out the Truth, realizing the power of the Spirit and the Word in the details of life.

The first process in this chapter helps the saint recognize temptation and sin as it starts within the mind. The second builds onto this understanding and explains how sinful ideas can be replaced with sound doctrine. Third, is instruction on how to cast down strongholds in obedience to Christ.

These tools work closely together to equip saints to practically understand how sin works, man's responsibility, and how to find victory over sin. They also provide great opportunity for further study and can be life-changing tools.

*Consult a wise, Christian professional if there are serious, underlying physiological/psychological issues.

A. Introduction: Sin

Romans 1 contains an interesting and key process on its own, but will only be utilized briefly as an introduction to our topic. Paul uses this chapter as a base, establishing saints in fundamentals about sin. In particular, it points out man's tendency toward self-exaltation. This understanding works together with James 1 to teach about the steps leading to sin. Worship of 'self' instead of God (Romans 1)

Reflect upon Romans 1:21 and its context. Consider the observation that all sin and disobedience narrows down to a couple of core reasons contained within this verse.

1) Man elevates himself, secular ideas, or other things above God. "...when they knew God, they glorified him not as God..."

2) Individuals are not appreciative unto the Father as the Provider of all things. "...neither were thankful..."

Romans 1:21

1) "*Because that, when they knew God, they glorified him not as God, 2) neither were thankful; but became vain in their imaginations, and their foolish heart was darkened"*

Sinfulness has a root, and it seems these two issues are at the center. Together, they reinforce one another propelling man down a path of sin. Man holds "...the truth in unrighteousness..." exalting other things. This develops a lack of gratitude, even a

feeling of entitlement, resentment and rebellion toward God, ending in anger and alienation from his own Provider results.

Romans 1:18-20

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

This then, causes a chain reaction, the fruit of unrighteousness:

- 1) Mankind becomes “...vain in their imaginations...”
- 2) “...their foolish heart was darkened...”
- 3) They profess “...themselves to be wise...” in the place of God, and “...became fools...”
- 4) Man projects himself down the path of vanity, void of Truth.

Romans 1:21b-23,26

*1) ...but became vain in their imaginations, and 2) their foolish heart was 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...Who changed the truth of God into a lie, and worshiped and served the creature more than the Creator, who is blessed for ever. Amen.”*

Romans 1:26 summarizes the end of man in this thinking. It states, “Who changed the truth of God into a lie, and worshiped

and served the creature more than the Creator, who is blessed for ever. Amen.” Man becomes effectively blinded, serving himself and the god of this world, desperate and bound for judgment.

Ponder the meaning of worship. It is an act of exalting or paying divine honors to a supreme being; the reverence and homage paid to a deity. When saints worship, exalt, and honor themselves, Satan becomes the ultimate victor. He is behind the scenes of ungodliness and unrighteousness. It is one of his devices to deceive man and replace faith and true worship of the Almighty God for other things, ultimately, Satan and his doctrine.

This is precisely what happened in Genesis 3. Satan is “...more subtle than any beast of the field...” Knowing this, we ought to be especially cautious and circumspect, aware and prepared to deal with situations and surroundings.

Genesis 3:1a

“Now the serpent was more subtil than any beast of the field which the Lord God had made...”

Think about Adam and Eve's responses, yielding to Satan's lies more than to God. Their feelings and ideas were exalted, becoming the object of worship. They liked what Satan said, and believed him to be the most credible and worthy, exalting him.

Jeremiah says, “...the heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked...” Should saints trust their own feelings and thoughts? We are to trust Him, “...I the Lord search the heart...”

Jeremiah 17:9-10

“The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked: who can know it? I the Lord search the heart, I try the reins, even to give every man according to his ways, and according to the fruit of his doings.”

God has given believers the Word as the objective standard to evaluate whether something is true, rather than using one's own heart. The responsibility in grace is to realize the wondrous forgiveness provided, know God's Word is always true and right, then yield in faith, trusting Him in whatever He says.

Genesis 3 gives insight into the two traps, both lead to sin.

1) Deceived: Man allows himself to be 'tricked' into sinful thinking by: a) not believing, b) not knowing, or c) not being clear and confident in God's Word. This produces sinful actions, as was the case with Eve. Satan fooled Eve, encouraging the elevation of her fleshly thoughts, emotions, and desires. Her mind and heart was not properly equipped or aware how to deal with his trickery.

2) Disobedience: Purposing to sin. Adam exalted his flesh and simply chose to disobey. He elevated and worshiped his own thinking and feelings, above what God had commanded, yielding to and promoting his own flesh. Adam did not prepare his heart to stay focused and faithful to exalt God.

Adam and Eve lost sight of a few key things. God was the total provision for their very life, breath, all things. He is the all-

knowing Creator and personal instructor. However, the focus became "...the lust of the flesh, and the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life..." They became distracted, sought after self-exaltation and Satan's wisdom and reaped the consequences.

I John 2:16

"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."

It is important to observe what happened in this incident. In the end, Satan triumphed and was revered. His evil policy working in the course of this world affecting Adam and Eve was exceedingly successful. What can be learned? Be prepared and do what God's Word instructs. Regularly take in Scripture to developing conviction and to prepare the heart in faith.

Plan to understand the process of sin

There are two operating systems with which one can live, law and grace. Romans 6 teaches believers, that in this present time, "...ye are not under the law, but under grace...." Grace is the system that produces acceptable service to the Lord. Saints can become motivated by the love of Christ working in them, which produces a genuine thankfulness for God's immeasurable mercy, and kindness. Such appreciation can be used to inspire a desire to deal with habits of sin, a result of "...the fruit of the Spirit..."

Romans 6:14

“For sin shall not have dominion over you: for ye are not under the law, but under grace.”

Galatians 5:22-23

“But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, Meekness, temperance: against such there is no law.”

Legalism is functioning “...under the law...” A saint’s natural tendency is to keep themselves under the bondage of a performance based system, with the characteristic motivation of fear. This practice is centered strictly on the works of the flesh and follows the ‘if-then’ principal. If one does well, good things will follow, if one does not, negative consequences result.

Inner thoughts tend toward a sense of guilt and duty such as, ‘I must’, ‘I have to’ or ‘I should’, with fear of ramifications. Short-term, some behavior may change, but the long-term fruit of this thinking eventually ends in anger, bitterness, and defeat. The reason is because it is “...not by faith, but as it were by the works of the law...” As stated in Romans 4, “...the law worketh wrath...” and develops a feeling of never measuring up to the standard.

Romans 9:31-32

“But Israel, which followed after the law of righteousness, hath not attained to the law of righteousness. Wherefore? Because they sought it not by faith, but as it were by the works of the law. For they stumbled at that stumblingstone”

Romans 4:15

“Because the law worketh wrath: for where no law is, there is no transgression.”

The fruit of the flesh is unacceptable labor to God. Israel's history documents that they did not learn this issue. The result was "...a zeal of God, but not according to knowledge...and going about to establish their own righteousness...not submitted...unto the righteousness of God."

Romans 10:2-3

"For I bear them record that they have a zeal of God, but not according to knowledge. For they being ignorant of God's righteousness, and going about to establish their own righteousness, have not submitted themselves unto the righteousness of God."

As students go on to understand the specifics taught in James 1, be clear on the goal. It is to become more aware and effective in practically dealing with temptation and sin in life. To glean the most, saints need to be founded, developing maturity in the fundamentals found in the book of Romans.

Romans 1-4 teaches that saints are declared righteous when they believe, trusting Christ's finished work on the cross. The next chapter clarifies that believers have an at peace relationship with the Father and also a standing in grace. His grace is now what reigns and further assures security in a saint's eternal position with God. Chapter 6 explains the new ability to choose. Yielding to God in faith enables the saint to live a sanctified life. However, when saints surrender to the flesh, it actually gives power to Satan, allowing him through sin to rule or reign in their life.

Therefore, Paul gives the admonition, "...Let not sin therefore reign in your mortal body..."

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 yourselves unto God, as those that are alive from the dead, and your members as instruments of righteousness unto God."

Chapter 7 provides instruction about man's efforts apart from faith and God, "...the motions of sin...did work in our members to bring forth fruit unto death...wherein we were held..." Man becomes a victim of his own desires, thoughts, and actions. A saint wants to do right, but in 'the efforts of the flesh' where sin resides, he realizes, "...how to perform that which is good I find not..." Experience leads to defeat with no real, lasting answers. It is a sad place to be, without hope and in a deep hole of sin. Even earnest attempts to climb and stay out of this sin pit, eventually results in failure. The end is fruit unto death, that is, death to one's precious spiritual life. Satan is the only victor.

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."

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.”

Romans 7 teaches that the battle of the flesh is not won by personal efforts. Sin resides in the flesh. This makes a believer weak and incapable of effectively stopping sin apart from God. The lust of the flesh and pride naturally drives the believer's walk. It is much stronger than often realized, as Adam and Eve realized.

Therefore, the fruit of the flesh results in the cry at the end of Romans 7, “O wretched man that I am, who shall deliver me from the body of this death?” The answer is provided in verse 25. It is only through Jesus Christ that saints can be triumphant. The chapter ends by relaying that it is “...with the mind I myself serve the law of God...” not with the flesh. This issue is quite significant really and functions as the transitional verse to Romans 8. It prepares the reader for the teaching contained in the next chapter.

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.”

Romans 8 picks up the theme of 'the mind'. Paul reviews that as long as a saint lives in this body, it will contend with issues of

sin in the flesh. The inner man, the true, newly saved 'I', is separate from this corrupt fleshly housing. Believers have been freed from sin and forgiven. God's focus is not on the believer's fleshly works at all, but rather on his inner man and the mind. Graciously, God sees the saint as righteous, through Christ.

Paul teaches "...they that are after the flesh do mind the things of the flesh..." So then, are saints minding carnal issues or focused on "...the things of the Spirit"? Often, people are unaware of what is happening in their mind. This lack of mindfulness is not wise.

Romans 8:5-6

"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."

It seems like the thoughts of the mind have a life of their own. They naturally follow and are "...conformed to this world..." The mind is where information, thoughts, and doctrine are processed and stored, driving actions. Individuals need to be conscious and in control of their thought life because they are responsible for what they believe and how they live.

Romans 12: 2

"And be not conformed to this world: but be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind, that ye may prove what is that good, and acceptable, and perfect, will of God."

Look to the Word to find the answers. Thought patterns often become automatic and hard to detect. Sinful thoughts lead to behavior, and are offensive to God. It is also contrary to the believer and therefore, needs to be changed.

Slow down to think and obtain God's mind on the matter. Become aware of how sin functions within the mind and ask God for help to see what Scripture teaches on the issue. Proceed wisely and daily renew the mind by depositing Scripture inside.

*Assignment: Reading. Prepare for the next three processes by reviewing the fundamentals, reading and reflecting upon Romans 5-8. Saints will find it beneficial to be reminded about their identity in Christ and new ability to make godly choices, empowering them to be more effective when dealing with sin.

B. The Steps that Lead to Sin

As consideration is given to the topic of sin taught in James, it is wise to consider context. This letter was directed "...to the twelve tribes which are scattered abroad..." Specifically, it was written to the people of Israel to use for the future, time to come.

James 1: 1

"James, a servant of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ, to the twelve tribes which are scattered abroad, greeting."

While not directly written for this present 'but now' age, James contains relevant doctrine to assist in understanding this

inter-dispensational issue. The factual stages leading to sin is critical to know in all time periods, in order to understand how temptation and sin develop. Knowing this information can impact choices, when handling ungodly thoughts, affecting worship and service to the Lord. They provide depth to Paul's teachings.

Notice that each progressive stage in James 1: 13-15 leads a saint further down the road of sin. An analogy in this passage relates to human development. It strategically utilizes a term and phrase that connect to conception and birth, to teach the progressive nature of sin within the mind. Notice also that this process is basically another sowing and reaping process, as was the process, To Become a Wise Son.

Read the steps of this process and give thought to each before proceeding. Note James 1:13-15 has been accurately quoted, but arranged to list the various steps of temptation and sin to facilitate seeing them as such.

James 1:13-15

- 1) *“Let no man say when he is tempted, I am tempted of God: for God cannot be tempted with evil, neither tempted he any man:*
- 2) *But every man is tempted, when he is drawn away of his own lust, and enticed.*
- 3) *Then when lust hath conceived*
- 4) *it bringeth forth sin:*
- 5) *and sin, when it is finished, bringeth forth death.”*

Step 1. Responsibility (Verse 13)

a) Orientation: This verse orients the student to the section. God cannot be lured or enticed to do evil. He is not the source of temptation and therefore, man cannot justly blame God.

b) Acknowledgement: Man alone is responsible for his choices.

Step 2. Temptation (Verse 14)

a) Defined: Temptation: Every man is tempted when he is pulled off course or “...drawn away...” by “...his own lust, and enticed.”

b) Enticed: Temptations originate from within man, when an idea or feeling of lust comes to mind. This presents an opportunity to fulfill “...the lust of the flesh, and the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life...” As one is lured off the path to consider ungodliness, it provides “...an occasion to the flesh...”

I John 2:16

“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.”

Galatians 5:13

“For, brethren, ye have been called unto liberty; only use not liberty for an occasion to the flesh, but by love serve one another.”

c) Choices: Having the opportunity to make a choice is not sin, but some options can be a temptation, enticing him to do evil. Doctrine from Romans 6 teaches that God gives the believer this new freedom. They now have power to “...yield... unto God...as

instruments of righteousness...” and dismiss lustful thoughts. However, as each person has free will. They can decide to ‘open the door’ to sin, grab onto a lustful idea and pull it in. This decision gives opportunity to consider evil, supplying it with power, and secures the initial place in his mind for Satan and his works.

Romans 6:12-13

“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 yourselves unto God, as those that are alive from the dead, and your members as instruments of righteousness unto God.”

Remember what God warned Cain in Genesis 4, “...sin lieth at the door...” Believers are responsible to respond by being aware, yielding to Truth. However, the natural tendency is to react in the flesh, unlock and open the mind’s door, giving a “...place to the devil.” Sin ought to be an unwelcome visitor. Lustful ideas can be rejected; this will leave them with no place to dwell. Will the saint let the thought in to linger or will it pass on through?

Ephesians 4: 27

“Neither give place to the devil.”

Genesis 4:7a

“If thou doest well, shalt thou not be accepted? and if thou doest not well, sin lieth at the door...”

d) War of the mind: Romans 7:21-25 teaches that there are struggles between the flesh and the Spirit. Once saints are saved,

they become alive unto God and are given the Spirit. As a result, laws within are warring. Reflect upon terms used in this section.

-The law of God: “For I delight in the law of God after the inward man...” In faith, God’s law is deposited in the center of the believer, their ‘inward man’, where Christ the Word now resides. It is doctrine built in the heart, becoming a governing law functioning within, affecting thought and deeds. The saint can delight in living and serving God with this newly developed, “...law of my mind.”

Romans 7:21-25

*“I find then a law, that, when I would do good, evil is present with me. 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? 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.”*

-Evil ‘law of sin’: Even when trying to do good, Paul reflects “...evil is present with me...” Each individual ought to know evil actively operates as a law in their members. It rules and is a driving force of bondage in the body. The flesh naturally serves itself, enslaved by “...the law of sin...” The ‘wretched man’ has become an active ‘body of death’, perpetuating itself as sinful works. It competes in opposition, striving against the law of God.

-The war: The battle is actually a struggle between the two laws within. The “...flesh lusts against the Spirit and the Spirit against

the flesh...” These laws “...are contrary the one to the other...” They have opposite ways of operating and produce different fruit in the saint’s walk. Will the evil ‘law of sin’, which screams for attention, triumph over the perfect ‘law of God’ held forth in grace?

Galatians 5:13, 16-17

“For, brethren, ye have been called unto liberty; only use not liberty for an occasion to the flesh, but by love serve one another...This I say then, Walk in the Spirit, and ye shall not fulfill the lust of the flesh. For the flesh lusteth against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh: and these are contrary the one to the other: so that ye cannot do the things that ye would.”

To review, the law of God and the law of sin are two operating systems. The law of my mind and the law in my members are the places where these systems function or rule. So, the inward man (renewed mind) serves God, desiring ‘good’. The wretched man (fleshly members where sin resides, the body of this death) yields to lust and ‘evil’ exalting ‘self’ and Satan.

Lustful temptation entices the flesh to respond in sin. The war is actually a battle for the exalted position in the mind. Will it be God or the flesh? Will the saint be free to yield, serving God with thankfulness, ‘walking in the Spirit’? Or, will he become blind to serve Satan and yield “...in captivity to the law of sin...” and go down the path of sin and death? Study these important issues further in Romans 6-8.

Step 3. Lust hath conceived: Initial sin, a thought. (Verse 15)

a) Yielding has a driver: Every moment choices are made. Will saints dismiss fleeting thoughts or plant the seeds of lust. When believers decide to entertain enticing thoughts, they begin down a path. It is to worship and serve themselves, their flesh and pride. What is in the driver's seat? Whatever feels good, best for the flesh, and poses the least resistance is what urges decisions. Self is in 'the' exalted position, with the goal of feeling good, even at the expense of safety, health, and wisdom, with limited consideration or restraint even knowing the consequences.

b) Conception of sin: Yielding to temptation is a choice. The conception of sin occurs here. As a saint purposes to give a place to lustful thoughts, it becomes a decision point and transforms into sinful thoughts. The saint has chosen to step onto the sin path.

c) Life has begun: In conception, as an egg is fertilized it moves to find a place to attach and grow inside the mother (its host). Choices can fertilize lust, bringing together the idea with a viable opportunity to live. Yielding creates life, provides an open door for the seed of sin to enter, take hold, and grow in the mind (its host).

d) Sustenance: Lustful ideas seek nourishment. Saints proceed further down the road of sin as they justify themselves, giving permission to feed sin with more time, space, and consideration.

Over time, sin can gain momentum and become quite powerful.

e) Conscious or unconscious: At this stage, saints may generally be unaware of what is taking place. At first, only occasionally are they able to catch a glimpse of what is going on in their mind. They are responsible nonetheless.

It is exceedingly important then, to be more observant to thoughts as believers can become unaware or calloused. Satan, "...the god of this world..." also has tactics and these can entice and blind man from the truth of what is happening in the mind and heart. These challenges can develop faulty thinking, propelling saints further down the road of sin. Therefore, the moment there is awareness, all windows and doors of the mind are to be shut tightly to lust and ungodliness. Pray to choose in faith to stop the sin cycle right away, yielding unto righteousness.

II Corinthians 4:4

"In whom the god of this world hath blinded the minds of them which believe not, lest the light of the glorious gospel of Christ, who is the image of God, should shine unto them."

Step 4. Sinful actions: The jump to sinful behavior. (Verse 15)

a) The transition: birthing behavior: As sinful ideas find living quarters in the mind, ungodliness advances, consuming more and more time and space. Thoughts mature, gaining in strength and depravity, degenerating to be increasingly uncontrolled, selfish, and single-minded. At this stage, sin often can no longer be

contained. Just as birthing a full-term baby, physical evidence of thoughts surface. It transitions to 'bring forth' ungodly behavior.

b) Given to sin: At this point, it is difficult to redirect or silence wickedness and evil lustfulness. Similar to a newborn, birthing sin results in screams for attention and nourishment. As aspects of evil are enjoyed, the saint goes on to justify, excuse, tolerate, or resign himself to the evil thoughts and actions. This actually gives permission to 'continue'. The believer now begins to freely yield himself over to sin, feeding the unquenchable lust on demand.

Step 5. Death to spiritual life (Verse 15)

a) Depravity: As with a babe, when sin matures so do its needs. When a saint yields, wickedness grows and desires abound. More and more resources and energy are consumed. Escalating enjoyment is experienced, which prompts the cancer-like sin to thrive. This fuels the longing for more, motivating further depravity. The lust and exaltation of self is the driving force, producing increasingly vile thoughts and behavior, contrary to God.

b) Consequences: The pleasures of sin are for a season, as who is the real victor? The saint is often unaware that he has just handed Satan the reigns to at least one aspect of his life. He has been used by the god of this world and as a result, he will suffer a great price, though he may not be aware of it.

Romans 6 teaches "...for the end of those things is death." This is the functional death of one's own spiritual life, which significantly affects eternity. The work of sin in the flesh causes damage, not only in his own thoughts and behavior, but impacts a saint's potential ministry, those in his 'circle of influence'.

Romans 6:21-23

"What fruit had ye then in those things whereof ye are now ashamed? for the end of those things is death. But now being made free from sin, and become servants to God, ye have your fruit unto holiness, and the end everlasting life. For the wages of sin is death; but the gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord."

God set in place a sowing and reaping process, reviewed in Galatians 5-6. "...for whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap." There is a harvesting of one's labor, consequences to decisions. For example, if one does not eat, the body will become weak, sick, and eventually die. A driver speeding at 100 MPH, will eventually be ticketed. There are consequences. "... For the wages of sin is death; but the gift of God is eternal life..."

Galatians 6:7-8

"Be not deceived; God is not mocked: for whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap. For he that soweth to the flesh shall of the flesh reap corruption; but he that soweth to the Spirit shall of the Spirit reap life everlasting."

There is another consequence to decisions, specifically for a justified individual. Being forgiven, saints definitely do not face

God's wrath, the eternal judgment in the Lake of Fire. However, Paul relays they are accountable for their time on earth.

It takes time and effort to acquire a storehouse of doctrine. As stated in I Corinthians 3, saints choose what they will build. They can construct sound teaching or ungodly, worldly wisdom in their soul. Make no mistake, when believers do nothing, the course of this world is acquired. This quality of this work will be eventually evaluated. "...the fire will try every man's work of what sort it is..."

I Corinthians 3:13-15

"Every man's work shall be made manifest: for the day shall declare it, because it shall be revealed by fire; and the fire shall try every man's work of what sort it is. If any man's work abide which he hath built thereupon, he shall receive a reward. If any man's work shall be burned, he shall suffer loss: but he himself shall be saved; yet so as by fire."

Saints are accountable for decisions made, "...for we shall all stand before the judgment seat of Christ..." Though Satan would like to obscure the fact, it matters greatly what believers do here on earth, every moment. Will they waste time or live unto God? It boils down to choices made every moment.

Romans 14: 10-12

"But why dost thou judge thy brother? or why dost thou set at nought thy brother? for we shall all stand before the judgment seat of Christ. For it is written, As I live, saith the Lord, every knee shall bow to me, and every tongue shall confess to God. So then every one of us shall give account of himself to God."

*Assignment: Character study: King Saul's behavior toward David provides an exceptional example of how lust transitions into actions. Read I Samuel 17-31. Once David slays Goliath, notice how Saul begins down a path that gains momentum. This historical event documents the details of the move from thoughts of jealousy and anger to an active pursuit of David to accomplish premeditated murder.

The mind is conformed by the course and doctrine of this world. Since sin resides in the flesh, saints can do nothing pleasing to God in their own effort. "For all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God." Christ is the only answer and provision.

Romans 3:23

"For all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God."

The flesh naturally desires to thrust itself down that path toward self-gratification. Many times, believers first become aware when lust has already transitioned into a behavior, far down the road of sin. Saints may often wonder how they got to this place, engulfed in sin, not recognizing personal responsibility. The mind often acts without one's conscious awareness. Once thoughts become actions it is difficult to dismiss personal accountability.

Something the Lord Jesus dealt with in Matthew 5 may help in the awareness of the process of sin. He amplified the law, showing that inner thoughts are the issue, not just behavior.

Observe the wording in the verse and notice how important key words and phrases are to understand this passage. Just looking at a woman is not sin. Verse 28 states, 'to look to do' something is determining to sin and is a decision of the heart. Jesus says that "...whosoever looketh on a woman to lust after her hath committed adultery with her already in his heart."

Matthew 5:27-28

"Ye have heard that it was said by them of old time, Thou shalt not commit adultery. But I say unto you, That whosoever looketh on a woman to lust after her hath committed adultery with her already in his heart."

***Assignment:** Read and meditate. Study key verb phrases in Romans 6. Pay attention to a saint's responsibility and privilege to make decisions, below.

Romans 6: 6, 11-13

"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...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 yourselves unto God, as those that are alive from the dead, and your members as instruments of righteousness unto God."

C. Dealing with Sin

It can help practically to understand that James 1:13-15 is a Bible process, as it clarifies steps or stages of enticement, temptation, and sin. Once known, saints can more fully realize the

responsibility to be aware of their thought life and make wise choices. In this way, understanding the process is empowering.

How do we deal with sin?

Romans 6-8 can be evaluated to uncover the simple solution. It brings one back to a decision of faith. 1) Saints can stop where they are, 2) step off road of sin, and 3) yield to God for His power and work within. This is the simplicity of God's method. It is accomplished by faith, a decision of the mind based upon doctrine believed. It is not striving in one's own efforts to improve the flesh to be good. Rather, it is yielding to the Word, the power of God.

A resource of insights may prove helpful. Take time to personalize the list, as it makes them more practical.

1) Prepare the heart to serve and worship God. Be aware of what is happening within and all around. Feeding the heart and mind daily by taking in the Word is critical. Now is the time to prepare for what is ahead, as there are always challenges lurking around the corner.

2) Pray to realize what is running through your mind. Slow life down and take time to think. Determine to develop the habit of regular, honest 'perception checks'. Be observant to notice lust and sinful thoughts. Although it takes focus of mind, saints can develop this ability.

3) Slam the door shut to sin once recognized. Purpose to let ungodly thoughts pass through without providing a place to grow and thrive. (Romans 6 & 13) Make no provision for the flesh to fulfill its lusts. (Romans 13:14)

4) Keep an open dialog with God in faith. Turn problems over to God in prayer, with an earnest, confident expectation that He will do the work within, just yield in faith. (Romans 6)

5) Don't use the efforts of the flesh. The tendency will be to use personal efforts and abilities to stop sin. (Romans 6:17)

6) Realize sin is more powerful than can be imagined! The flesh is weak and its efforts are unacceptable to God. Walk by faith and yield to the Father. Remember David's sins with Uriah. Be alert to tendencies, weaknesses, and strongholds. (Romans 7)

7) Choose to think differently. Whenever there is awareness of temptation or when on the path of sin, pray and refocus. Mind the things pleasing and glorifying to God. More will come on how to do this in the next two chapters of this book. (Romans 6)

8) Prevention.

a) Pray with purpose to recognize sinful thoughts earlier and earlier. The goal is to catch them before starting down the sin road. Eventually, the mind can 'flag' the saint in the temptation phase, when lustful thoughts occur. This gives opportunity to put

ungodly thoughts away, far, far away. The goal is to deny sin a place, removing all nourishment. Keep the door securely bolted.

b) Determine ahead of time not to sin and whenever possible, position oneself in such a way so as not to be tempted. “Avoid it, pass by it, turn from it, and pass away.”

c) Anticipate possible problematic scenarios and have a godly response planned to keep boundaries clear. (I Timothy 6:11, 19)

Proverbs 4:13-15

“Take fast hold of instruction; let her not go: keep her; for she is thy life. Enter not into the path of the wicked, and go not in the way of evil men. Avoid it, pass not by it, turn from it, and pass away.”

9) Exalt God and be thankful. This is the key. God is the absolute authority, to be exalted above all. Gratitude to the Almighty is the motivation and the Word is the power, not the flesh. Meditate and pray on these things. (Romans 1)

10) Develop a toolbox. Personalize a supportive list of resources and proven strategies for you, such as keeping phone numbers of spiritual friends, memory verse cards, or a travel Bible, etc.

To summarize, the process to deal with sin is straightforward. Live by yielding to His Word in faith. Paul encouraged Timothy, “...O man of God, flee these things; and follow after righteousness, godliness, faith, love, patience, meekness...Laying up in store for themselves a good foundation...”

I Timothy 6:11, 19

“But thou, O man of God, flee these things; and follow after righteousness, godliness, faith, love, patience, meekness...Laying up in store for themselves a good foundation against the time to come, that they may lay hold on eternal life.”

The next process works in conjunction with James 1 and Romans 6-8. It explains more fully God’s method to work within the believer and causes victory in his life. Maturity and application of doctrine take time to develop and is a decision of faith.

Personal Notes

Chapter VI

Process of Renewing the Mind:

Godly Thinking In, Faulty Thinking Out

God wants faulty, secular thinking replaced by the Truth of sound doctrine. He uses the renewing principle in Romans 12 to enable saints to mature. Then, they are able to serve and worship as adult believers who mind godly things, replacing worldly thinking. This process is the focus of the chapter and further empowers believers to effectively deal with sin and live peaceably. Paul relays, "...to be spiritually minded is life and peace."

Romans 8:5-6

"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."

In preparation, reflect upon the context of Romans 12. Up to this point in the book, Paul has already laid groundwork to mature saints. Romans 1-11 establish students with a basic appreciation of justification, sanctification and God's plan and purpose for believers. Saints can also realize their new and wonderful position as adult sons, learning to be led by the Spirit. These teachings mature saint in the fundamentals, while exalting God and His

Word. It further develops a thankful trust in what He provides with a response of godly love as His servant. Romans 12 imparts details about the new 'worship and service' for the Body of Christ.

A. Introduction: Being Conformed

It is helpful to develop an awareness of how one matures and is conformed to things around him. Man learns and adapts as he gains awareness through experience, observation, and being open to learn. The question is will the influence be godly?

It is important to be aware that Satan has an evil plan that is in opposition to God. As "...the prince of the power of the air..." his doctrine influences everyone, permeating "...the course of this world..." This has been true since the Garden of Eden.

Ephesians 2:2

"Wherein in time past ye walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that now worketh in the children of disobedience"

***Assignment:** Topical study. Search Paul's epistles for what he teaches about Satan: being an angel of light, a counterfeit, a god of this world and one who blinds men from the Truth. Study him in all of the Word, considering context.

Ungodliness and unrighteousness initially entered the world in Genesis 3 when "...the serpent beguiled Eve through his subtilty..." Sin degenerated and corrupted everything and this is why God instructs "...be not conformed to this world..." Satan's

ways saturate this present world system and are contrary to Truth. Take time to further examine the context of these verses

II Corinthians 11:3

“But I fear, lest by any means, as the serpent beguiled Eve through his subtilty, so your minds should be corrupted from the simplicity that is in Christ.”

Romans 12:2

“And be not conformed to this world: but be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind, that ye may prove what is that good, and acceptable, and perfect will of God.”

As children grow and seek to make sense of the environment, they are influenced by the world around them. This input becomes a part of their identity and gives them understanding and a sense of security. Naturally, man learns and is conformed to what ‘seems right’ in his experiences and life.

However, be aware, “That your faith should not stand in the wisdom of men, but in the power of God...” Satan has put into place “...the wisdom of this world...” and he and his princes are the temporary rulers of this system. Satan seized this authority in the Garden, when he initiated a plan in opposition to God’s wisdom. Without faith in the Word to counter this, even today, man will become blind and ‘deem plausible’ this wickedness.

I Corinthians 2: 5-6

“That your faith should not stand in the wisdom of men, but in the power of God. Howbeit we speak wisdom among them that are perfect: yet not the wisdom of this world, nor of the princes of this world, that come to nought:”

The term 'conformed' is found in Romans 12 and means to comply with or to yield. A person lives and is shaped by what he decides to believe, sometimes unconsciously. However, verses in Romans 6 teach that saints are responsible to make wise choices.

The course of this world will impact Christian adults and their youth alike. To some degree evil permeates everything. Examples include, reading material, school curriculum, TV, movies, Internet, advertisements, music, radio, politics, government, and even religious groups and activities. Satan teaches doctrine in all these things. This subtly conforms man's thinking to his ungodly ways. Staying in God's Word daily, being aware of personal convictions and thoughts, and keeping alert to Satan's ways is imperative.

Example of 'counterfeit doctrine'

To assure understanding, this section will examine a very clear example of a system of doctrine that competes with what is taught in God's Word, the Theory of Evolution. The scientific and educational communities of this society hold strongly to this view. Many regard Evolution as 'the only' credible response to the question of how things in this world came into being. Children are indoctrinated from an early age, teaching that Evolution is a fact rather than what it is, a secular scientific 'theory'. Most institutions do not even acknowledge Creation in the Bible as an alternative.

There is no way around it. When someone believes in Evolution, it is a clear rejection of what God says in the Scripture regarding how life came into being. One must discard part of the Bible, explain it away, or come to believe that at least some of the Word is just not true or literal. This is dangerous and destructive.

The world's doctrinal view, Evolution, is glorified above God and His Word. This reduces Creation to a mere 'story', discrediting the Scriptural account, God Himself, and His work as Creator. By association, it calls in question all the historical accounts within the Word of God and so much more. In this way, people are very effectively turned from God and conformed to Satan's lie. Take a moment to reflect, be objective about this 'counterfeit doctrine'.

The present educational society has embraced Evolution as a fact and law, even though the scientific community itself still labels it as a theory. Reflect upon how institutions today teach this concept in government run, educational facilities, their curriculums and literature, such as public schools, colleges and museums.

During a recent visit at the Smithsonian Natural History Museum in Washington D.C., Darwinism permeated the entire experience. Room after room, display upon display were laid out to bombard visitors with this evolutionary teaching. Make no mistake; students receive years of this instruction in many forms,

especially from academic institutions. This is one of many ways Satan tries to replace Truth. If evolution 'seems' plausible, it will be acquired unless there is Divine intervention through the Word.

*Assignment: Study Creation and Evolution to develop conviction.

a) Individual study: Evaluate Creation from a Biblical standpoint. Read through the book of Genesis and study the many terms encountered. Reflect and ask yourself about the characters and events recorded. Did Adam and Eve truly exist, being descendants of Christ as documented in Luke 3? Was there a real Garden of Eden as stated in Genesis 2:14? A river ran through it that parted into four branches, one was called the Euphrates. Was this a real body of water? Was there actually a great flood in the earth's history as recorded in Genesis? Did Abraham exist and did God start the practice of circumcision with him? Consider that if other events, places and people in Scripture are real, would Creation be just a story or a documented historical fact?

b) Physical, personal experience: Visit and observe for yourself the teaching, curriculum, and materials used in museums and schools regarding Evolution.

c) Research: Investigate to uncover why the scientific community has not raised the Theory of Evolution to a law as the Law of Gravity.

A final question will conclude this topic for the present. Why do so many believe in Evolution? Could the term 'brainwash' apply in this situation? A dictionary definition states it is a method of controlled, systematic indoctrination. Victims of this kind of

programming are encouraged to neither think for themselves nor prove whether things are true. They are told, repeatedly, what to think with little or no real evidence.

How to stand apart from Satan's counterfeit system

Perceptions and convictions evolve over a lifetime and provide security and a method to understand the world. Humans do not easily abandon pieces of themselves to attain new ways of thinking. Yet, God instructs believers to be transformed. Romans says, "...be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind..."

Romans 12:2

"And be not conformed to this world: but be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind, that ye may prove what is that good, and acceptable, and perfect, will of God."

The Father desires saints to leave the doctrine of this world, to be transformed by Scripture. This renovation or refining process is slow. It takes time, effort, and purpose of heart. God works as a saint makes a decision in faith to yield. "For it is God which worketh in you both to will and to do of his good pleasure."

Philippians 2:13

"For it is God which worketh in you both to will and to do of his good pleasure"

Acquiring God's perspective is like putting together sections of a puzzle. Saints can evaluate a new piece with the help of the Spirit and then determine if it is Truth. The credibility of the piece is 'proved' by the Word, being evaluated and tried in several ways.

Prayerful study, reflection and meditation can help determine its fate. It may be set aside for later consideration, discarded, or fit into the proper position within the mind.

Man is to be wise, cautiously appraise input, and finally acquire a conviction. Many accept opinions and ideas, without fully weighing the evidence as to its credibility, using the Word. Over time, saints can base confidence in the ideas of others, above Scripture. This leads to being conformed to falsehoods. Man can merge and incorporate inaccuracies into his thinking, being unaware. Satan ‘bewitches’, ‘beguiles,’ and uses ‘subtilty,’ “...Satan himself is transformed into an angel of light.” Warnings are found throughout the Scripture. Prove all things by the Word.

Galatians 3:1a

“O foolish Galatians, who hath bewitched you, that ye should not obey the truth...”

II Corinthians 11:3, 13-14

“But I fear, lest by any means, as the serpent beguiled Eve through his subtilty, so your minds should be corrupted from the simplicity that is in Christ...For such are false apostles, deceitful workers, transforming themselves into the apostles of Christ. And no marvel; for Satan himself is transformed into an angel of light.”

Statements made by individuals reveal the attitude of what is being exalted. “Pastor Andrew says...” “My church believes...” or “This commentary teaches...” Saints can merge what others think and believe with Truth. As time proceeds they are conformed to

and acquire ideas from ‘these authorities’ in place of God. What others think needs to be studied and proven, no matter how credible the source seems. Now evaluate these testimonies: “After personal Bible study, I believe...,” “Scripture says...,” or “The verse teaches...” This reflects a different authority.

Similarly, the Galatian church was influenced to believe a lie. Paul states that false teachers “...zealously affect you, but not well...” But he also says, “Am I...your enemy, because I tell you the truth?” Sound doctrine was pushed out, so Paul had to reprove them and reform the doctrine in their inward man.

Galatians 4:16-17,19

“Am I therefore become your enemy, because I tell you the truth? They zealously affect you, but not well; yea, they would exclude you, that ye might affect them...My little children, of whom I travail in birth again until Christ be formed in you...”

Religious institutions and instructors are not perfect. In this case, teachers actually interfered with the maturing process. Who can discern these things except one who is strongly founded in sound doctrine? Anyone can be pulled off course or deceived, therefore, the Word is to be the only standard and authority. Some may find it helpful to choose an individual mighty in Scripture as a mentor or coach, but be in prayer. Continually reevaluate alliances such as these, being circumspect, proving things by the Word.

B. The Process: Renewing the Mind

Without deliberate study in the Word, saints will be diverted and develop faulty thinking, often without conscious awareness. Satan designed a competing system to God's in the course of this world. It contains doctrine and activities with 'the appearance' of being acceptable or neutral, but bewitching in purpose. Within the world are enticements that are pleasing to the flesh, captivating, and controlling believers, using up their precious time, energy and affections. Satan aims to subtly sweep saints up into his ways, anything to derail or distract them from the Scriptures, true faith and godliness.

The only way to avoid this is regular intake of Scripture. This will replace faulty, inaccurate pieces of the puzzle, renewing the mind. Read ahead, giving thought to the steps in Romans 12:1-7 before proceeding. A few insights have been included for each section. Be encouraged to study these issues further.

Romans 12: 1-7

- 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.*
- 2) *And be not conformed to this world:*
- 3) *but be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind,*
- 4) *that ye may prove what is that good, and acceptable, and perfect, will of God.*

5) *For I say, through the grace given unto me, to every man that is among you, not to think of himself more highly than he ought to think; but to think soberly, according as God hath dealt to every man the measure of faith.*

6) *For as we have many members in one body, and all members have not the same office:*

7) *So we, being many, are one body in Christ, and every one members one of another.”*

1. A living sacrifice: A decision each moment (Verse 1)

a) Opportunity to ‘present yourself’: Paul ‘beseeches’ saints in grace to live for God, their Creator. They can use this opportunity and privilege to yield unto Him by making wise choices. The new life each saint has in Christ involves the spirit and soul living and functioning within the mortal body, as a daily offering to God. The ability to do this is totally from God through the Lord Jesus Christ. He is the Word, and the believer’s total provision.

Saints were bought with the price of Christ’s own blood and this clay vessel or housing is now His temple. Saints can mortify the fleshly desires and deeds of the body by denying it nourishment. Then, each moment in faith, they can yield and allow God’s Word and work to be manifest. (Romans 5-12)

b) A love offering: Saints practically learn some things as they mature and become absorbed with God’s desires and will. Believers can experience and appreciate His grace and great personal love. As the mind of Christ is formed, they develop godly love and desire to be used of God to meet other’s needs.

In this priority shift, saints allow ‘agape love’, selfless, godly love to define motives, setting aside the desires of their own flesh. They long to please the Father in thankfulness, focusing and exalting others. Paul says “...the love of Christ constraineth us...”

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”

c) Reasonable service: The depth of God’s eternal love can motivate saints to joyfully place self aside. Exalting others and their needs as a living sacrifice in faith is responding and manifesting respect, honor, and holiness unto God. This is the daily worship and service He desires.

2. Avoid being conformed to this world: A decision (Verse 2)

a) Prepare ahead: The first step is to realize the subtle, deceptive dangers of Satan. Reflect, and then determine to stand apart from being conformed to the ensnarement of his evil ways.

b) Protect the mind through wise choices: Behavior is driven by thoughts and beliefs, therefore, be conscious of what happens in the mind. Ungodliness permeates publications, conversation, relationships, electronics, TV, movies, music, personal habits, and the environment. Be observant, screening what goes in and the use of time, evaluating it by the Word. Stop ungodliness in thought and behavior, stepping off the path of sin, living unto God.

3. Be transformed, renewed: Critical decision (Verse 2)

a) The replacement principle: Take in sound doctrine by faith to displace worldly input. This is God's work in the believer, a choice, and decision of faith, which holds the Word as the authority.

b) Perception checks: Regularly reflect upon Scripture and thoughts, actions and time use. Prayerfully make the choices and revisions needed, ever being refined by the Word. "Keep thy heart with all diligence: for out of it are the issues of life."

Proverb 4:23

"Keep thy heart with all diligence; for out of it are the issues of life."

*Assignment: Reflection. Over your lifetime, think about how much ungodly input and doctrine has already gone into your mind and heart? Now, as a believer, what is still being taken into your vessel? What changes can be made?

4. Proving the will of God: Christ magnified (Verse 3)

a) Mind of Christ is formed: Christ's thinking is developed and matured within the believer as the Word is taken in, mixed with faith. Saints are "...conformed to the image of his Son..." as they are renewed with sound doctrine, pushing out carnal thinking. In this way, it's all God's work as believers yield.

Romans 8:29

"For whom he did foreknow, he also did predestinate to be conformed to the image of his Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brethren."

b) Proving His will: As saints live out what they believe, this proves and displays God's accomplished will and Christ is magnified. As a result, their life is a testimony to Christ, "...yet not I, but Christ liveth in me..."

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."

5. Think soberly (Verse 3)

a) Avoid high-mindedness: Paul earnestly beckons every man, by the wondrous grace of God, not to be high-minded, puffed up, and vain, exalting himself. Self-adoration and worship makes it impossible to glorify God. High mindedness puts self on top, elevating personal needs, desires, and lusts over everything. Can someone genuinely love and prefer others, while being self-absorbed? It is not likely. Remember, yielding is different from doing good works to please. Just be thankful and walk by faith.

b) Sober-minded: Functioning with a sober-mind relates to being clear and sharp concerning God's will. A saint can replace self-importance with the Truth, enabling an unobstructed viewpoint.

c) The measure of faith: Believers have been dealt a 'measure of faith', acquired by taking in Scripture, believing. This constructs a store of practical teaching and empowers the saint. What is learned and processed enables him to operate in faith.

6. Think differently, as members together (Verse 4)

a) Body of Christ: Collectively, the Body of Christ refers to all believers who live in the dispensation of grace. Christ is "...the head of the body, the church..." Together, individual believers frame its structure. (Ephesians 1:17-23) He also calls it a Temple.

Colossians 1:18

"And he is the head of the body, the church: who is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead; that in all things he might have the preeminence."

b) Distinct offices: Maturity fosters a heightened awareness and value for each member and their unique function. God nurtures a natural love and care within members as they grow, ministering to one another to live out their purpose. Scripture teaches the unique and vital role of each, but what one 'minds' or thinks determines whether one functions in this way.

7. Many, but One (Verse 5)

a) Many in one: With maturity and insight, a sense of single-mindedness develops, similar to the members of the human body.

b) Members, one of another: All saints are intimately linked by Christ's mind. They are interdependent, affecting each other's health and ability to minister. I Corinthians 12 unveils clarity, "...all the members of that one body, being many, are one body: so also is Christ...whether one member suffer, all the members suffer..."

I Corinthians 12: 12-14, 20, 26-27

“For as the body is one, and hath many members, and all the members of that one body, being many, are one body: so also is Christ. For by one Spirit are we all baptized into one body, whether we be Jews or Gentiles, whether we be bond or free; and have been all made to drink into one Spirit. For the body is not one member, but many...But now are they many members, yet but one body...And whether one member suffer, all the members suffer with it; or one member be honoured, all members rejoice with it. Now ye are the body of Christ, and members in particular.”

As a result, competition and friction have no place. All can work in harmony toward the same goal, serving and growing in Christ. The care, connectedness, and ability to work in unison develop over time. Saints realize that choices have an impact upon Church, family members, and the unsaved. A selfless love for others can motivate saints to live as a sacrifice unto God.

Paul’s response to the Lord

An interesting example of how this ‘mind renewing principle’ works is found at the start of this dispensation. Readers are encouraged to recall that, leading up to this Grace period, Saul (Paul) was Satan’s man. He was seeking out, hounding, imprisoning, and killing followers of the Lord Jesus Christ.

Unexpectedly, the Lord deals with Saul on the road to Damascus in Acts 9. Notice his response when Christ appeared to him. Saul dropped to the ground; a picture of Saul falling from his exalted religious position, humbled before the Living Word.

Acts 9 documents that "...suddenly there shined round about him a light from heaven..." above the brightness of the sun, it was the Lord Jesus. Saul found that he was blinded, which represents his visual impairment toward God and His plan and purpose. Saints can follow Paul's example and recognize God's exalted position and be humbled to think about their own attitude.

Acts 9: 3-6, 9

"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? And he said, Who art thou, Lord? And the Lord said, I am Jesus whom thou persecutest: it is hard for thee to kick against the pricks. And he trembling and astonished said, Lord, what wilt thou have me to do? And the Lord said unto him, Arise and go into the city, and it shall be told thee what thou must do...And he was three days without sight, and neither did eat nor drink."

Notice that Christ did not chasten Saul for his zealous persecution of believers. Instead, the Lord functioned as a teacher in grace. He held forth Scripture for reflection, to correct by using a question to cause him to think. "...Saul, Saul, why persecutes thou me?" He responds to the Lord by recognizing the error of his religious thinking, yielding in faith. He then offered himself as a living sacrifice. "And he trembling and astonished said, what wilt thou have me to do?" Christ the Word transformed and renewed Saul's mind as he yielded in faith.

What can saints learn from this example? When thinking or walking contrary to sound doctrine, awareness can be quite humbling. However, believers can just change their mind, even when everything in one's being screams to continue to sin. Acknowledge the wrong and get onto a godly path. There is no condemnation, just yield to Truth in faith.

Saul puts aside past feelings and ways, even zealous religious practices. His eyes were opened and instruction enabled him to acquire new, sober thinking, "And straightway he preached..." Saul proves "...that good and acceptable and perfect will of God," christening this dispensation of grace. (Romans 12)

Acts 9 18-20

"And immediately there fell from his eyes as it had been scales: and he received sight forthwith, and arose, and was baptized. And when he had received meat, he was strengthened. Then was Saul certain days with the disciples which were at Damascus. And straightway he preached Christ in the synagogues, that he is the Son of God."

In order to grow and mature properly, it is important to see the renewing of the mind as practical. The next chapter reinforces the need for reading, study-time, and prayer to lay-up sound doctrine within the heart. This provides ammunition and resources to negotiate this life as a fully equipped soldier, prepared for eternity. It is beneficial to be open to see how the three processes about sin are interrelated and work together to live victorious.

Personal Notes

Chapter VII

Process of Pulling Down Strongholds:

Invisible but Powerful

James 1 teaches that saints are enticed to sin when tempted by their own lustful thoughts. The process in Romans 12 provides instruction to renew the mind, which effectually deals with lust and sin thoughts, pushing them out! However, saints also need to understand about strongholds because, if gone unchecked, these can have devastating power and impact upon one's spiritual life.

A. Introduction: Fortress of the Mind

To gain clarity on the development of a stronghold, a sinful habit forms when one repeatedly thinks about or does something contrary to God and His Word. This is serving one's own flesh. Routinely practicing ungodliness leads to a fortress within the mind, controlling believers. It keeps them on the path of wickedness, becoming a fortified place vehemently protected.

Most have many areas where strongholds reside. It is imperative this is fully appreciated, in order for them to be pulled down and rendered ineffectual. Man thinks and behaves from what is dwelling in the heart. "...for out of it are the issues of life."

Proverb 4:23

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

Therefore, God has set in place a method of protection, which purges sin. It is one that is “...mighty through God to the pulling down of strongholds...” This promotes a godly thought life, protects the heart, and provides motivation to study the Scripture.

II Corinthians 10: 3

“For though we walk in the flesh, we do not war after the flesh: (For the weapons of our warfare are not carnal, but mighty through God to the pulling down of strongholds;)”

Strongholds are habits of corrupt or inaccurate thinking, which lead to ungodliness. Man formulates many ideas without conscious awareness. Humans are “...vain in their imaginations, and their foolish heart...” darkened. This is thinking that is clearly separate from Truth, with perversions that impact the heart. Maintaining the purity of the Word is then, the highest priority. Adding even a bit of untruth to Truth is an affront to God and changes it into a lie.

Romans 1:21-23, 25

“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, 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...Who changed the truth of God into a lie, and worshipped and served the creature more than the Creator, who is blessed for ever. Amen.”

How do strongholds develop and what are Satan's tactics?

Ungodly patterns and behavior are not always clear-cut and obvious. When identifying how one acquires a stronghold, there are innumerable scenarios and circumstances. No matter what the issue, God and the Word is the solution. However, be alert to Satan's thriving tactics and devices; some are listed below.

1. The mind may be taught inaccurately by the course of this world or one can distort or dismiss Truth to form habits of vain, faulty thinking, developing strongholds. Within every home, school, and society there are things taught apart from the Truth. These systems contain some ignorance and at times confusion, but also deceitfulness, conforming individuals to error. For example, religious leaders were twisting the Word, and motivated by envy when they sought to persecute and crucify the Lord.

The term imagination refers to the power of the mind to conceive and develop ideas, based upon the senses, decoding information and experiences. "The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked..." so life is not always evaluated accurately. Emotions, hopes, and imaginations also play a role in how things are communicated and perceived.

Jeremiah 17:9

"The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked: who can know it?"

2. There is a general lack of awareness of one's own thought life.

The Bible teaches that sin begins with thoughts. Sinful thinking may continue, building in strength, breeding lustful pleasure before one truly realizes what is happening. Thoughts are more difficult to perceive than the behaviors they produce.

3. A behavior can be a problem for one person, but not for others, like eating snacks, playing video games and gambling. This can lure saints to join behaviors with others perpetuating strongholds.

4. Certain activities are especially tempting as they possess obvious benefits, but come with built in consequences. Chronic over-spending indulges the flesh and is fun, but can produce devastating financial and relationship challenges. Similarly, one can become addicted to things, like electronics, activities promising an extreme adrenaline rush or even drugs. An alcoholic rejects factual dangers and council to overindulge, affecting family, work, life goals, and even risk personal health.

5. Behavior can 'appear' wholesome and even Christian, enticing a saint, but actually can be contrary to God. Closely associating with carnal saints can be pleasurable. However, it will have negative influences and can become habitual, and easily justified.

6. Many things are socially acceptable, but may encourage, teach, or glamorize ungodly behavior. Examples include practices such

as intimacy or sex outside of marriage and immodest dress. Questionable movies, music or publications also fit in this category. In addition, some designated family television shows can be entertaining but often push the limits in speech and behavior. Romans warns saints about enjoying sin, “Who knowing the judgment of God...have pleasure in them that do them.”

Romans 1:32

“Who knowing the judgment of God, that they which commit such things are worthy of death, not only do the same, but have pleasure in them that do them.”

7. A stronghold can be a result of a decision to trust false teachers, doctrine or even religion, rather than Scripture. Paul provides feedback to the Galatians as teachers bewitched them into adding law to grace. This made grace no more grace. (Galatians 5) Another example is using ‘Christian’ self-help material. These can assist a person in the moment of crises, but when regularly used, can actually distract saints from exalting God, reading and trusting the Word for answers.

Reframing the truth is a common practice in society and can become a roadblock. Examples include, violence, addiction, and homosexuality. In the last 50 years, some are labeled as a disease, inherited tendency or being environmentally deprived. This may instill ‘a form’ of tolerance, but teaches some things: accepting evil, avoiding responsibility, and remaining in sin. Faulty

doctrine conceals the Truth, and can redefine sin or mix it with aspects of Truth.

God's response to man has always been the same. He loves the person but hates sin. Understanding and believing God's righteous standards, one's responsibility, and how lust and sin operates is needed to overcome strongholds.

8. Some use denial, accuse others by blame shifting or excuse sin. Actually, there are many mechanisms used to avoid responsibility and justify behavior. Recall what happened when sin was addressed with Adam; he blamed Eve, and then Eve accused Satan. (Genesis 3)

9. At times, saints lack awareness as to the power of sin, a specific sin problem or even their own faulty thinking. This can be a major roadblock to deal with strongholds. In Acts, Saul was blind to the Truth and led the great persecution against Christians. He zealously believed he was in the will of God until Christ appeared.

Satan's influence has made it easy to justify ungodliness, cloud issues of sin, and even makes it difficult to recognize Truth. The bottom line is that Satan's ways are contrary to the God. They hold up man as the authority, with his feelings and ways as all-important, rather than God and His Word. Alone, man will never be able to successfully deal with Satan's tactics. The

answer is God's power through the Word. This is the only effectual weapon and a saint's total provision. Faith is the issue.

Tangible strongholds

There are different categories of strongholds. Concrete sinful habits may include physical addictions like smoking or drugs, or a hyper-focus on something like eating, TV, sports, sex, or hoarding.

Intangible strongholds

Intangible habits are less visible fortresses, such as dependence or obsession, lust, fame, beauty, self-centeredness, or pleasing others. It may be views such as materialism, or religious traditions or ideas. It may even be a faulty way of thinking or behaving, like prejudice, legalism, high mindedness, or being driven by anger.

Strongholds differ from person to person but all saints have them and the issue is the always the same. As taught in Romans, the thought or behavior always stand apart from Truth and elevates the stranglehold of sin and self. The saint has been..."brought under the power of..." something; just what Satan's desires. Plainly, God and His Word are not glorified as the Absolute authority in this area of a believer's life, "they glorified him not as God, neither were thankful; but became vain in their imaginations, and their foolish heart was darkened."

Awareness of a stronghold can motivate saints to change this pattern to God-centered thinking, developing a desire to renew the mind, yielding unto God to break this cycle.

I Corinthians 6:12

“All things are lawful unto me, but all things are not expedient: all things are lawful for me, but I will not be brought under the power of any.”

Romans 1:21

“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.”

Motivation behind strongholds

What specifically drives behavior?

A saint is “...drawn away of his own lust and enticed...” by “...the lust of the flesh, and the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life...” When the flesh is elevated, self-centered vanity and corruption is the result. This is the core of all ungodliness.

James 1:14

“But every man is tempted, when he is drawn away of his own lust, and enticed.”

I John 2:16

“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.”

More specifically, pleasure, satisfying wants and needs, safety benefits, appearing good or wise, allegiance to false practices, or inaccurate perceptions can motivate sin. Anticipated

gratification or satisfaction of sin can also drive ungodliness. The longer the cycle continues the pattern strengthens.

Man can be motivated to stay addicted by an emotion, like fear of a negative consequence. Withdrawal symptoms, being hurt, anger, or jealousy can drive behavior. Maintaining a state of safety and equilibrium can also motivate, taking the path of the least resistance, such as laziness. Lusting self-indulgence can be a 'driving force', like over-buying designer clothes or shoes.

When a stronghold develops it can create addiction or a pattern of behavior that brings one under bondage. However, this body is not our own and has been "...bought with a price..." by Christ's sacrifice on the cross. While sin wastes precious time and energy, the wonderful privilege is missed to serve the Lord.

I Corinthians 6:20

"For ye are bought with a price: therefore glorify God in your body, and in your spirit, which are God's."

Knowing what drives strongholds provides specifics in which to pray. God uses the Spirit with the Word to transform believers. He desires that a saint be "...a living sacrifice, holy acceptable unto God..." but "...Not of works lest any man should boast. "

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."

Ephesians 2:8-9

“For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is a gift of God: Not of works, lest any man should boast.”

B. Steps to Pull Down Strongholds

To review, a stronghold is a secured, protected place within the mind, kept there by exalted vain imaginations and thoughts. Another way to express it is a way of thinking kept safe in a high place of the mind. When entrenched in sin, a saint actually holds himself in bondage by maintaining inaccurate or ungodly views.

God teaches in Romans 8 that a saint's walk is based upon how he thinks. What he minds or values is a key. Habitually minding unrighteous thinking is natural to the flesh and is strongly self-motivated by its pleasurable benefits. Most saints have many areas where strongholds take up residence and they are often unaware of or do not want to acknowledge their presence.

The Father has equipped saints with all they need in the Word to effectually deal with fortresses as they are led by the Spirit. Believers need awareness of what they are minding and then choose to yield, being obedient to the Word in every thought. What does this look like practically? The following process provides clarity. Read the four steps in the passage and the surrounding context before proceeding.

II Corinthians 10: 3-6:

- 1) *“For though we walk in the flesh, we do not war after the flesh: (For the weapons of our warfare are not carnal, but mighty through God to the pulling down of strongholds;)*
- 2) *Casting down imaginations, and every high thing that exalteth itself against the knowledge of God,*
- 3) *and bringing into captivity every thought to the obedience of Christ;*
- 4) *And having in a readiness to revenge all disobedience, when your obedience is fulfilled.”*

1. The war is spiritual (Verse 3-4)

a) **Battleground:** The warfare is a spiritual one, fought on the battleground within the mind. The flesh and its works are not the issue, though Satan would like believers to think so. God’s focus is the mind.

b) **The amour:** God’s Word is the provision, equipping saints with spiritual protection. Therefore, suit up with sound doctrine, armed for the war that awaits. Success is sure when saints rely by faith on this resource. “...Put on all of whole armour of God, that ye may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil.”

Ephesians 6:10-11

“Finally, my brethren, be strong in the Lord, and in the power of his might. Put on the whole armour of God, that ye may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil.”

c) **A perfect defense:** God’s spiritual weapons are mightily effective, because it is all His power and work. The warfare requires only two defensive tools, which seems to be wrapped into one, “...the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God.”

Their purpose is to pull down strongholds and defend the territory within the mind. But it requires faith indeed to just rest in Him and His work, not adding any of one's own effort. Saints "...are more than conquerors, through him that loved us." The priority is by faith to acquire a storehouse or armory of the Word in one's heart and mind, as this is the ammunition of our provision.

Ephesians 6:17

"And take the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God"

Romans 8:36-37

"As it is written, For thy sake we are killed all the day long; we are accounted as sheep for the slaughter. Nay, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him that loved us."

d) A ready mind: To be prepared, saints must first realize the battle's existence and the dangers involved. Fleshly weapons, even personal works, are of no value. Saints are to trust God and put on "...the whole armour of God...and... to stand"?

Ephesians 6:13-14

"Wherefore take unto you the whole armour of God, that ye may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand. Stand therefore, having your loins girt about with truth, and having on the breastplate of righteousness"

There are numerous examples of faithful believers in Scripture who did this very thing. Daniel stood alone in faith in the lion's den and God prevailed. Daniel's three companions walked into the fiery furnace trusting God and walked out not singed. Paul learned to 'most gladly' endure his 'thorn in his flesh'. God taught

him "...My grace is sufficient for thee: for my strength is made perfect in weakness...that the power of Christ may rest upon me."

II Corinthians 12:7-9

"And lest I should be exalted above measure through the abundance of the revelations, there was given to me a thorn in the flesh, the messenger of Satan to buffet me, lest I should be exalted above measure. For this thing I besought the Lord thrice, that it might depart from me. 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."

e) The goal: It is more than just pulling down strongholds, but living by faith, trusting God will accomplish what He says. Can believers rest in Christ the Word as their full power, while they not only observe and experience the fierce battles all around, but also within? It takes thinking and seeing things as God does.

2. Cast down imaginations and high things (Verse 5)

a) Awareness: God brings to light things that are false by His Word. The Truth shines upon the battlefield to empower the warrior with clarity about what is really happening.

A stronghold may be a way of thinking, a long-time belief, even an addiction or habit held above Truth. The saint may exalt these to idolatry and worship them above God. If he is to 'cast down imaginations', awareness seems to be the first step. What are the 'false things' and the dangers that lie in wait to infiltrate and take over the mind to gain a stronghold?

-Imagination: A conceived notion that comes from within, a manufactured belief or idea based on input from the senses.

-High things: A thought, idea, or thing viewed with elevated excellence, surpassing others in importance, relevance, or rank.

b) Ready and willing:

-Be humbled: It is often difficult to see and then admit having a stronghold. However, God knows saints have idolatrous high places within their mind. While God still loves the saint, it offends Him. It ought to offend the saint also. Pray to see it as God does.

-Renew the mind: Taking in and thinking through sound doctrine can ready believers to respond in faith. It is important to realize that the power to cast down fleshly thinking and ways is of God. It is not the saint using his flesh to correct the issue, like trying real hard to push out ungodly thinking. Prayer prepares saints to develop the desire to attain and rely on this renewing habit.

-Who one is serving: The flesh is no longer a priority, nor is it in an exalted position to be worshipped. What is all important is God's righteousness, prompted by a decision of faith. There will be a tendency to default back to serving self, driven by the flesh.

-Enduring hardness: As a natural part of the battle, when high things are replaced, there may be discomfort, inconvenience, or pain. Believers are called to "...endure hardness as a good soldier

of Jesus Christ...” and to stay separate from “...the affairs of this life; that he may please him who hath chosen him to be a soldier.”

II Timothy 2:3-4

“Thou therefore endure hardness, as a good soldier of Jesus Christ. No man that warreth entangleth himself with the affairs of this life; that he may please him who hath chosen him to be a soldier.”

-The motivation: Regularly, saints are encouraged to reflect upon who God is and His great love to gain a thankful heart. The focus is to “Set your affection on things above...”

Colossians 3:2

“Set your affection on things above, not on things on the earth.”

-In Christ: As saints mature they can learn about their new identity in Christ. This is done by reading and studying through Paul’s epistles, beginning with the foundational doctrine provided in Romans 1-8. This will empower and enable them to yield so Christ can live in and through him as life happens around him.

c) Godly choices: Saints can step off the unrighteous road of thinking and behaving, to step onto a path of righteousness where the inner man can serve God. Proper thinking casts out improper, exalted thinking and renders it ineffectual. (Romans 6-8, 12)

3. Obedience from the heart (Verse 6)

a) Under subjection: It is critical for saints to place themselves under the authority of Scripture and remain there. In this way, the

Word can function in the exalted position of the mind and life. The saint can then become open to being led by the Spirit as empowered living sacrifices. (Romans 8, 12)

b) Obedient in thought: It is not acceptable to pull down a stronghold in the efforts of the flesh. Fleshly thinking or behavior will just resurface or take another form. Step back, take time to renew the mind, reflect and listen to the Father. Then yield, apply what is known to be true, leading captive "...every thought to the obedience of Christ..." This is submission to God, denying a place for idolatry and vanity to reign. (Romans 12)

4. Revenging disobedience

a) Readiness: As with any soldier, a goal is to be combat ready, with complete provisions, fully prepared. So too, each moment a saint is to be equipped by taking in the Word, then seek ways to capture moments to leave self-centered ways behind and yield.

b) Thwarting Satan's plan: When God's soldiers are obedient to the Word, it is sweet revenge on evil. They are cutting out, denying a place, and effectively rendering dead the fortresses of the mind, disobedience, and Satan's impact.

b) Obedience brings fruit: Each opportunity used to put this process into practice strengthens and teaches toward maturity. Individuals become increasingly proficient using the sword of the

Spirit defensively, preventing high places or at least, effectually dealing with them sooner and sooner. Believers can learn from challenges; "...tribulation worketh patience; And patience, experience; and experience, hope: And hope maketh not ashamed..." then, in faith, all can "...work together for good..."

Romans 5:3-5

"And not only so, but we glory in tribulations also: knowing that tribulation worketh patience; And patience, experience; and experience, hope: And hope maketh not ashamed; because the love of God is shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Ghost which is given unto us."

Romans 8: 28

"And we know that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to his purpose."

C. Examples of Strongholds

It is important to understand that there are many ways that strongholds can blindside an unprepared saint. Three examples follow. Each is designed to enable the reader to generalize and more readily recognize strongholds in their own lives.

Example1: King David

Anyone, even a God-appointed king, a man after God's own heart, can become totally blind to sin and its power. David did not seem to see what he was doing nor realize the strength of sin in his flesh. He was blindsided by his own behavior, though he was

the God appointed judge over all of Israel. This ought to be a powerful example to emphasize the strength of sin in one's flesh.

Though well versed in the Mosaic Law, David could not see his own blatant, vile sin, worthy of death. His adulterous behavior toward Bathsheba prompted a guilt-motivated cover-up. It degenerated into the premeditated murder of her husband, Uriah, which seemed an automatic response to cover sin. Immediately, when aware Bathsheba was pregnant, David had Uriah brought before him to cover his tracks, "...Send me Uriah the Hittite..." A natural, human fear response is to conceal sin, similar to Genesis 3. Recall the first sin documented in Genesis, how Adam and Eve 'hid' from God "...and they sewed fig leaves together, and made themselves aprons."

II Samuel 11:5-6

"And the woman conceived, and sent and told David, and said, I am with child. And David sent to Joab, saying, Send me Uriah the Hittite. And Joab sent Uriah to David."

Genesis 3:7

"And the eyes of them both were opened, and they knew that they were naked; and they sewed fig leaves together, and made themselves aprons."

David had effectively built a stronghold, sufficient to justify his behavior and became so consumed with self and fleshly desires that he became unaware of the reality of what he was doing. As King of Israel, intellectually he knew well the penalty of adultery

and murder. Yet, he took this path of sin and rationalized and dismissed his behavior so fully, he was blind to reality.

When Nathan prophesized, directly accusing David saying, "...Thou art the man..." he snapped out of the faulty thinking and recognized the vileness of his actions. As a faithful servant, with godly sorrow David heard the Word and submitted to the Truth. He had his mind renewed, and responded in faith.

What can be learned from this event? It is important to know the overwhelming power of sin, personal weaknesses, and the tendency toward blindness to personal habits of ungodliness. Each saint has the same weak flesh being in Adam. Most have the capacity to develop an effective, self-blinding excuse and justification system as did David. This is a mighty force indeed!

Anyone thinking that he couldn't be deceived as was David, places himself in a very dangerous position, one that needs rethinking. The power of lust and sin can be far greater than most are aware of or will admit. Knowing this reality and one's particular vulnerabilities can help a saint pray and position themselves wisely.

Developing the mind of Christ enables saints to prayerfully respond, yielding to God even when sin is at the door. They can avoid Cain's mistake of ignoring the wise counsel of God and going down the path of rebellion, following feelings and what one

thinks is right. The solution is always the same in the sin process; it is to know what God desires by the Word and respond in faith.

Example 2: People pleasing.

Next, there will be a more personal example to put an exclamation point to the importance of recognizing the power of sin and strongholds. This writer's identity was strongly linked to what people thought. Others were elevated above the Word, and God was not given the thanks or the glory.

The praise of men was paramount. An offering of personal works was held up, along with maintaining works of the flesh taking the roles of perfectionist and workaholic. Obviously, this writer traveled the path of self-centeredness, with self-righteous good works as the sacrifice. The response and opinions of others defined self, so that their views and standards became the motivating doctrine incorporated. It was 'I' that became the focus and center of all things, even as a god unto myself.

While difficult to acknowledge, this people-pleasing behavior has provided an important life learning experience. Trying to be a good person in the eyes of others is what Christ called being a 'whited sepulcher'. Read the context of the passage in Matthew to gain a full appreciation of how religious men were pure looking on the outside, "...but are within full of dead man's bones, and of all

uncleanness...outwardly appear righteous unto men, but within...full of hypocrisy and iniquity”

Matthew 23:27-28

“Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! for ye are like unto whited sepulchers, which indeed appear beautiful outward, but are within full of dead men’s bones, and of all uncleanness.

Even so ye also outwardly appear righteous unto men, but within ye are full of hypocrisy and iniquity.”

Some may be interested to know that as with many strongholds, this deeply ingrained habit still attempts to rise up and regain its powerful position. Prayerful awareness is needed in order to step off this path of sin when it tries to reappear. Over time, it occurs less frequently and is easier to recognize.

Example 3: The precious use of time

A second personal example would be the stronghold of wasting time, specifically, watching movies. How much time will be used to feed the flesh, viewing the, not so bad PG or PG-13 movies? Is it wise entertainment for relaxation or over-the-top?

It is important to recall that saints are not under a performance system, but grace. So how ought one to proceed? God calls each saint to make wise decisions based on the sound doctrine built within. Galatians instructs, “ye have been called unto liberty; only use not liberty for an occasion to the flesh...”

Galatians 5:13

*“For, brethren, ye have been called unto liberty; only use not liberty for an occasion to the flesh,
but by love serve one another.”*

Watching a movie is easily justified, by focusing on the need to unwind and clear the mind. It seems a reasonable and logical method of recreation within the home, though not a replacement for true rest of spirit in study, prayer, and meditation. In order to think this out, it boils down to: the type of material being viewed, the amount of time given, and whether ‘it’ is in control. Paul instructs “All things are lawful...but all things are not expedient...I will not be brought under the power of any.” These things can determine whether looking at movies is an ungodly stronghold.

I Corinthians 6:12

*“All things are lawful unto me, but all things are not expedient: all things are lawful for me, but I
will not be brought under the power of any.”*

In this scenario, passive entertainment can be exalted above spending time the Word, relationships, responsibilities, or service opportunities. In the mind, finding ways to justify or excuse oneself can enable the behavior to continue. Accusing others or joining or engaging others to watch films defuses responsibility. Sin always loves company.

Is it wrong to watch movies or TV? In grace, each must decide for himself. Saints can recall that most everything in this

world system in some way is teaching doctrine. I Corinthians states "...all things are lawful for me, but all things edify not." When saints are in bondage to a behavior or thought pattern, they can be led of the Spirit to deal with it. Regular reflection can help.

I Corinthians 10: 23

"All things are lawful for me, but all things are not expedient: all things are lawful for me, but all things edify not."

Assessing personal time usage was beneficial. A percent of time was used to sleep, care for the kids, maintain the home, earn money, eat, complete responsibilities, spend with key people and use for recreation. The Lord was squeezed into a short morning slot, but additional time given if convenient. Reflection revealed that cyclically, this writer spent too much time for this relaxation method. Movies ate away precious time for more profitable things.

A new perspective caused a different approach and a shift in priorities. This writer decided to first take a percent of the day for the most important relationship of all, the Lord Jesus Christ and then divide what was left for things needful to live responsibly? Waking earlier helped to gain precious moments for additional study and prayer. Reprioritization placed God at the forefront and life fell into place.

*Assignment: Character studies: Research the Scriptures to find other individuals who had chronic ungodly habits and how they dealt with them.

Think differently with a renewed mind

Sometimes, believers cling to or depend on a particular way of thinking and behaving for a very long time. This may have held them in bondage. Some habits become strongholds, such as anger, bitterness, people pleasing or pornography. Some may seem monumental and overwhelming to address. Just think differently! The flesh is not the tool to pull down these strongholds. It is the sword of the Spirit and Christ that do the work.

A saint can view themselves as a military paratrooper dropped in a dark world, behind enemy lines. The battle surrounds, yet there is perfect support. The Creator of the Universe is by his side. Sometimes the saint is alone with the Lord, other times fellow soldiers are with him. It is important to know these saints are at various levels of readiness and maturity, with challenges of their own. They could require more help than they can give. But the mighty God is faithful, ever offering full support and supplies; develop trust in the Father's provision.

God calls each believer to be circumspect, observant to his surroundings, knowing how to respond as a good soldier with a renewed mind. He will be victorious, as he relies on Christ as his power. Remember and follow Paul in what he knew, "At my first answer no man stood with me... Notwithstanding the Lord stood

with me, and strengthened me...the Lord shall deliver me from every evil work, and will preserve me...”

II Timothy 4:16-18

“At my first answer no man stood with me, but all men forsook me: I pray God that it may not be laid to their charge. Notwithstanding the Lord stood with me, and strengthened me; that by me the preaching might be fully known, and that all the Gentiles might hear: and I was delivered out of the mouth of the lion. And the Lord shall deliver me from every evil work, and will preserve me unto his heavenly kingdom: to whom be glory for ever and ever. Amen.”

Attaining hope, that is, confident expectation and the faith of Abraham is paramount and develops as one matures. Be “...strong in faith, giving glory to God; and being fully persuaded that, what he had promised...” He is able also to perform.

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.”

Practical assistance to live now!

What did the stronghold examples, the four processes, and the practical insights in this book teach? Coming to the end of oneself is important to see clearly. Paul concluded, “Oh wretched man that I am! who shall deliver me from the body of this death?” There is one answer to sin and strongholds. Romans 7 clearly instructs that it is not making the flesh better or trying harder. This approach needs to be completely set aside, it will not work!

Romans 7:24-25

“Oh 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.”

Paul provides the answer in the next verse, “...I thank God through Jesus Christ our Lord...” It is His work in us. He is the power and ability; Christ is the Provision to deal with all issues. We are not to provide space for Satan or sin. The old man is crucified and gone, now sin acting within the flesh can also be reckoned dead. Romans 8 targets how, “...but if ye through the Spirit do mortify the deeds of the body ye shall live.”

Romans 8:13

“For if ye live after the flesh, ye shall die: but if ye through the Spirit do mortify the deeds of the body ye shall live.”

Notice a phrase in Romans 7:25, “...I myself serve the law of God...” I myself, is the new you, the inward man Christ is forming. Distance yourself from the “...wretched man...” This is who you were before salvation. Thinking differently is how to gain victory over sin, “...lead captive every thought to the obedience of Christ.

The Lord’s mind becomes your mind. Live in every moment of life, thinking with His mind. He then does the ‘leading captive of our thought life’, which will deal with any sin or stronghold and produce a walk pleasing to Him. “

Basically, saints put off the old and put on the new mind or way of thinking. As the mind is renewed by the Word, seek ways to apply it. "...put ye on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make not provision for the flesh, to fulfill the lusts thereof." When the 'wretched man' shows up, get off that road of thinking, onto the path serving God. Stop sin in your mortal body, it is not you!

Romans 13:14

"But put ye on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make not provision for the flesh, to fulfill the lusts thereof."

A few insights to remember:

1) Prepare the heart daily, week upon week, year upon year, to seek and exalt God and His Word. Don't give up. This develops confidence: a hope and trusting faith, to rest in His mighty power.

2) Pray through the day to desire God's mind, attitude, and will. He is in you always and desires to be your full Provision

3) Be humble to trust God and give Him the glory. Realize it is His power and wisdom to enact change. The efforts of the flesh will not succeed, and will actually be a hindrance and distraction.

4) Be quiet and reflect. Seek to be honest, open, and ready to be aware and responsible for thoughts and actions.

5) Make a decision in faith, to honestly listen and yield to the Spirit. Simply, step off the path of sin, and replace it with the Truth. Then, stay in prayer, yielding every moment.

Reflection on what has been learned

So then, evaluate your current direction in life. Are there changes or new priorities desired? What would your ideal daily faith walk look like? Prayerfully, make it happen!

It could include a goal to attain a 'dogged tenacity', holding a fixed grip like a pit bull to read and study, progressing through the curriculum, seeing it as the total provision and armor. A saint could prioritize Scripture to seek "...her as silver, and searchest for her as for hid treasures..." Christ's love has impacted some so "they have addicted themselves to the ministry of the saints," being an instrument of righteousness. Decisions are made each moment, determine ahead of time what and how to apply new insights from the Word and determine to live it.

Proverb 2: 4-5

*"If thou seekest her as silver, and searchest for her as for hid treasures; **Then** shalt thou understand the fear of the Lord, and find the knowledge of God."*

I Corinthians 16:15

"I beseech you, brethren, (ye know the house of Stephanas, that it is the firstfruits of Achaia, and that they have addicted themselves to the ministry of the saints"

It is hoped that How the Bible is Practical and Able to Mature Believers has opened new windows of understanding or awareness, to catch a glimpse of how God marvelously designed Scripture to teach practical application. A main goal has also been

to empower the reader to realize concrete ways the Bible can be functional, even to deal with sin issues and faulty thinking.

Saints are encouraged to stay in the Word, progressing through Paul's epistles, but also, to continue forward in the series, Part III – Growing Up in Christ to Become Adult Believers. This last book in the series fleshes out the 'how and why' of where to go from here, because there is so much more to being a Christian than just being saved. A basic outline of Romans offers an introduction to foundational doctrine. This provides opportunity to mature to gain depth in acquiring the Father's mind to live out His plan and purpose. Additional study tools are laid forth to further access practical application of Scripture. Rejoice in His Grace.

To God be the Glory!

Personal Notes

Chapter VIII

Appendix of Resources

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 Versteegen's ministry: www.helpersyourjoy.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 organization or individual has the corner on the Truth. Therefore this writer would not state total agreement with any, nor would any of these resources necessarily agree with everything written in this document. We are called to think independently and develop our own convictions, maintaining the Word as the Absolute Authority. Proceed, as a Berean, always giving God the glory.