

Bible Study

We Must Care About The Bible

There are many people today who believe that the Catholic Church was “the church” for a thousand years, and the reason the Reformation happened was because the church had become too corrupt. The thought is that the church started out as something good but went bad over time.

This is incorrect. The origin of the Catholic Church can be traced back to Augustine in the 4th century, and it was bad from the start. The Catholic Church has *always* taught a false gospel of salvation by works, and throughout its history there have always been genuine Christians who opposed it¹ and believed in salvation by grace through faith. The Catholic Church has *never* been the true church. Instead it has spent the past 15 centuries opposing the true church and doing everything in its power to stamp it out – up to and including the slaughter of tens of millions of people². You don't hear much about it anymore, but the Catholic Church has a long and bloody history.

One of the key threats to Catholicism during the past 1500 years was the Bible. It was obvious to many people who read the Bible that the teachings of the Catholic Church were wrong and heretical. Since the Bible was a threat, the Catholic Church made ownership of Bibles a crime punishable by death³. A great many people were hunted down and brutally murdered because they owned a copy of the Word of God. The Pope actually sent out

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- 1 This can be seen by the many people throughout the centuries who taught that the Pope was the antichrist:
https://www.wayoflife.org/reports/rome_and_the_harlot_of_revelation.html
 - 2 Source:
<https://static1.1.sqspcdn.com/static/f/827989/15116787/1321289366180/50+million+protestants+killed.pdf>
 - 3 Source:
https://www.wayoflife.org/reports/romes_persecution_of_bible.html

armies to find Christian cities and massacre everyone inside for the “crime” of believing in salvation by grace through faith.

Given the awful persecution that genuine believers suffered during the Middle Ages, you would think that their knowledge of the Bible would have suffered. After all, it was very difficult for people to obtain a copy of the Bible (especially before the printing press was invented), and it was incredibly dangerous to own one. Yet as it turned out, believers during this period had an amazing knowledge of the Bible. This is what one Catholic inquisitor had to say:

“They had the Old and New Testament in the vulgar tongue; and they teach and learn so well, that he had seen and heard a country clown recount all Job, word for word; and divers, who could perfectly deliver all the New Testament; and that men and women, little and great, day and night, cease not to learn and teach” (Orchard, p. 266).

What a testimony! Not only did these persecuted believers study and teach the Bible *day and night*, but there were some who could recite the entire book of Job – and others could recite *the entire New Testament!* Another inquisitor had this to say:

“They can repeat by heart, in the vulgar tongue, the whole text of the New Testament and great part of the Old: and, adhering to the text alone, they reject decretals⁴ and decrees with the sayings and expositions of the Saints” (Faber, p. 492).

These ancient Christians could not only recite the entire New Testament, but a *great part of the Old Testament as well*.

4 Statements issued by the Pope, which the Catholic Church claimed were binding on all Christians.

That is absolutely astounding!

Today things are very different. There are still parts of the world where Christians are hunted down and persecuted, but in the United States we're largely free to own Bibles and openly conduct Bible studies. Bible study material is readily available, and thanks to modern technology it's even possible to listen to the sermons of pastors who are thousands of miles away. The amount of Biblical knowledge that we have access to is simply staggering.

Yet in spite of all this, many Christians know far *less* about the Bible than those who came before us. There are many modern Christians who have never read the entire Bible – which is a far cry from the people in the Middle Ages who had most of the Bible memorized!

The reason for this is quite simple: prior generations cared a great deal more about the Bible than many people do today. The Bible really mattered to them – but in our day many churches are filled with people who simply don't care. I've lost track of how many times I've tried to tell a Christian about the Bible only to be told “Well, you know, I just don't really care.” People in ancient times cared so much about the Bible that they were willing to *risk their lives* to study it. That kind of passion is rare in this country. Many Christians think that reading the Bible is a chore – it's something they feel they should do, but it's not something they actually want to do. In 2023 the average American spent 5 hours *each day* watching television⁵, and yet many Christians can't be bothered to spend 15 minutes reading their Bible!

It's true that the Bible is long, but let's be honest: that's not the real problem. The Harry Potter series contains more than a million words⁶, but its fans can read the entire series in a matter of weeks. These fans spend endless hours studying the complex world of Harry Potter, learning about the characters and the plot and all of the tiny little details. Their passion for the books is so

5 Source: <https://www.marketingcharts.com/television/tv-audiences-and-consumption-229018>

6 Source: <https://wordrated.com/harry-potter-stats/>

great that the hours they spend reading them aren't a burden. In fact, they're so enthralled with the books that they don't even notice the passage of time.

Prior generations had that kind of love for the Bible. They were truly passionate about it and were willing to risk death to own a copy of the Scriptures. They loved the Bible so much that studying it wasn't a burden. In fact, some people nearly memorized the *entire Bible*, simply because they loved it *that much!* They weren't forcing themselves to go through some kind of painful religious exercise; no, they had genuine love for it. The Bible was a source of great joy to them. They had a tremendous love for God, and that love manifested itself in a love for God's word.

Our generation is quite different. The book of Revelation tells us that the modern church cares so little about the things of God that it makes Him want to vomit:

Revelation 3:15-18: "I know thy works, that thou art neither cold nor hot: I would thou wert cold or hot. So then because thou art lukewarm, and neither cold nor hot, I will spue thee out of my mouth. Because thou sayest, I am rich, and increased with goods, and have need of nothing; and knowest not that thou art wretched, and miserable, and poor, and blind, and naked: I counsel thee to buy of me gold tried in the fire, that thou mayest be rich; and white raiment, that thou mayest be clothed, and that the shame of thy nakedness do not appear; and anoint thine eyes with eyesalve, that thou mayest see."

Don't get me wrong – the modern church is quite busy. Its weekly calendar is filled with events that people are expected to attend. It's just that many Christians don't care very much about His Word, which is why they're so ignorant of what it teaches. Some people feel guilty about not reading it and try to squeeze in

a few minutes here or there as time permits, but even that falls far short of actually studying the Scriptures.

If Christians care about the Word then why is it so difficult to find people who have read the entire Bible? If you read just one chapter a day you can read the entire Bible in 3 years. How is it that people find time to watch 5 hours of television each day and yet can't find time to read even one chapter out of the Bible? Isn't this a rather glaring sign that they just don't care?

There are other people who try to read through the Bible but get stuck in Leviticus and then just give up. To me this is a sign that their heart wasn't in it. After all, if you really cared then wouldn't it make more sense to research the parts that are hard to understand – or, in a worst-case scenario, simply skip over them and move on to whatever is next and come back to the hard parts later? People who are die-hard Harry Potter fans will spend *years* discussing the parts of the series that don't make sense. Sadly, many Christians throw up their hands and say “I give up. What's on television tonight?”

This all comes down to a matter of the heart. If we *actually cared* about the Bible then we would read it and study it. In fact, we would do everything in our power to learn about it! If we truly loved God with all of our heart, soul, mind, and strength then we would have an incredible passion for His Word. We would *want* to know it. We would make it a priority. We wouldn't view reading it as a burden or afterthought; instead we would be all over it. We would care so much about it that we would know the Bible forward and backward, inside and out.

It is my prayer that God would give us the same passion for His word that former generations had! That would make a tremendous difference.

Let's take a closer look at what it means to study the Bible.

We Must Read All Of The Bible

God commands us to read His Word. He wants us to study it, think about it, meditate on it, and delight in it:

Psalm 1:2: “But his delight is in the law of the Lord; and in his law doth he meditate day and night.”

God also wants us to live by it, and to hunger for it the way we hunger for food:

Matthew 4:4: “But he answered and said, It is written, Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God.”

Think of it this way. God wants us to live by His Word. How can you possibly live in obedience to His Word if you haven't read it? How can His Word be a light to your path if you don't know it?

Some people treat the Bible as if it contains a few good passages that are mixed up with a lot of fluff. They study parts of it and leave large portions unread and unlearned. However, *all* of the Bible is important! It doesn't contain any extra or unnecessary parts:

2 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.”

Notice how clear this verse is! *All* Scripture is given by the inspiration of God. *All* Scripture is profitable. That means all of it is meaningful. Don't just read the “good parts” because it's *all* “good parts”. You need to read and know all of it.

One way to make sure that you don't miss anything is to start reading the Bible at the very beginning (Genesis 1) and read

straight through to the end (Revelation 22). I'm not saying this is the only way to study the Bible, but it's not a bad way. It makes sure that you don't miss anything (because all of it is important). If you read 3 chapters a day you can get through the entire Bible each year, which is a great practice.

There are some people who open their Bible at random and read whatever passage they happen to find. I don't like this approach because it makes it easy to skip entire portions of the Bible. I encourage you to come up with a study plan that encompasses the entire Bible on a regular basis.

Here's another way to look at it. Are you absolutely sure that *everything* in your life is more important than reading the Bible? It's true that we all have important responsibilities. There are some people who read the Bible instead of doing their jobs, and that's a terrible thing to do. But are you really so busy that there's *no way* you could possibly spend some time with God in His Word?

I realize that sometimes things come up. I'm *not* saying that it's a sin to go an entire day without reading your Bible. What I am saying is that we need to more with our Bibles than let them collect dust on a shelf. We need to have a plan to not only read it, but to read *all* of it *on a continual basis*. It's not good enough to read it once and then put it back on the shelf and forget about it. We need to stay in the Word our entire lives! A true sports fan would never say "Well, I've seen one football game so I'm good to go." Since he's a true fan he keeps watching football games. If we truly love God then we will *keep* reading His word – not because we should, but because we love it.

We Must Know The Bible

As Christians we must know what the Bible teaches:

2 Timothy 2:15: "Study to shew thyself approved unto God, a workman that needeth not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of

truth."

The reason we should read the Bible is so that *we can learn what it teaches*. Reading the Bible isn't an end to itself! Instead it's how we learn what it teaches. (We also need to learn how to properly interpret the Bible, which is a topic I'll discuss more later on).

The reason we need to learn what the Bible teaches is twofold. First, it's so that we can honor God with our lives. We can't possibly honor God if we don't know what His Word says! The Bible is the only document we have that tells us what honors God and what doesn't. Without the teachings of the Bible we're walking in darkness.

We must also learn it so that we can defend the faith:

I Peter 3:15: "But sanctify the Lord God in your hearts: and be ready always to give an answer to every man that asketh you a reason of the hope that is in you with meekness and fear:"

We need to know what the Bible teaches so that we can give an answer to those who ask questions. Some Christians are absolutely terrible at this. They can tell you *what* they believe, but they can't tell you *why* they believe it. They can't defend their beliefs. In some cases they can't even point you to Bible verses that defend their positions! The reason for this is because their beliefs aren't based on the Bible; instead they're based on what their pastors or parents have told them. When they were growing up they were told to believe certain things, and so they do. Their beliefs have no Biblical foundation.

That's *not* how God wants us to be. God wants us to believe things *because His Word teaches them*, not because that's how we were raised. As Christians we *must* have the ability to defend our beliefs with the Bible. In fact, the truth is that our beliefs *ought to come from the Scriptures in the first place!* If we're taking our beliefs and trying to justify them with the Bible

then we're doing it backwards. Instead of imposing our beliefs on the Bible or using it as a prop to defend what we already believe, we ought to be reading the Bible and believing whatever it teaches. If it disagrees with what we believe (which will happen quite often) then we need to *change the way we think* and believe what the Bible says.

There are some people who look at the Bible and say “Well, I just don't believe that”. As a Christian *you have no choice but to believe it!* If what you believe disagrees with the Bible then *you are wrong* and you need to change. You don't have the option of rejecting the Bible's teachings and doing your own thing.

We Must Not Believe Everything We Hear

Some people treat their pastor as if he was God. They simply believe whatever he says. If a pastor or teacher stands up and tells them that the Bible says something, they will believe it. This may seem like a very spiritual thing to do, but the truth is it's a terrible mistake. God commands us to study the Bible *for ourselves*. We must compare everything we hear to the Word of God to make sure that it's true. We ought to be like the Bereans:

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.”

Why were the Bereans “more noble”? Because when they were told something they *searched the Scriptures for themselves* to see if it was true. In fact, they did this *on a daily basis*. They exercised discernment!

The modern church desperately needs to learn this skill because there's a staggering lack of discernment today. When a pastor preaches a sermon, too many people simply believe him instead of going home and searching the Scriptures to see if he

was right.

Sadly, a lot of things that pastors teach aren't actually true. To give one very trivial example, many people believe that angels sang at the birth of Christ. There's even a famous hymn entitled "Hark, The Herald Angel Sings". People have heard this their entire lives and don't even question it – *but it's wrong*. Angels did *not* sing at the birth of Christ. In Luke 2 we find the account of Christ's birth, and this is what it says:

Luke 2:13-14: "And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host praising God, and saying, Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good will toward men."

The angels *said* "Glory to God in the highest". They didn't sing it. This isn't some complicated and hard-to-find truth; it's right there in Luke 2. It takes all of five minutes to look up the chapter, read it, and verify what the song says – but how many people actually do that?

I could give many more examples. This doesn't just affect minor things; there are all sorts of major doctrines that pastors commonly get wrong. The Bereans searched the Scriptures daily, and we must do the same thing. How else will we know the truth?

We Must Interpret The Bible Correctly

When some people read the Bible, the question they ask themselves is this: "What does this passage mean to me?" *That's the wrong question to ask*. The question you should be asking is this: **what does the passage actually mean?** What is God doing in this particular passage and what can we learn from it?

Think of it this way. When you get a bill in the mail you don't look for hidden personal meanings. Instead you interpret the bill objectively using the standard rules of grammar. You understand that when the electric company sends you a bill for

\$293.11, it's because you owe them that amount of money and they want you to pay them (and if you don't they will cut off your power). You understand that bills are *bills* and you know what to do in response. It's not complicated.

This is very simple – but some people don't interpret the Bible that way at all. Instead of reading the entire passage, studying the context, and trying to figure out what the writer was trying to say, they read verses out of context and utterly mangle them. Some people interpret Bible verses as if they were some kind of personal fortune cookie – and as a result they get into all kinds of trouble.

For example, take this verse from Joel:

Joel 3:10: “.. let the weak say, I am strong.”

This verse is quite famous. There are even hymns about it! Some people read that and say “See, God is telling me that I'm actually a strong person.” We thunderously sing “Let the weak say, I am strong!” It's a cheer – a rallying cry. It gets us all excited. It's great – except we're *completely butchering what the passage is actually saying*.

If you read the entire chapter of Joel 3 you'll discover that God is talking about the battle of Armageddon. At the end of the tribulation the armies of the world will gather and attack Jerusalem. They are determined to wipe out the Jews, but God mocks them. God says that He will defend His people and utterly wipe out the invaders. He then mockingly tells them this:

Joel 3:9-12: “Proclaim ye this among the Gentiles; Prepare war, wake up the mighty men, let all the men of war draw near; let them come up: Beat your plowshares into swords and your pruninghooks into spears: **let the weak say, I am strong**. Assemble yourselves, and come, all ye heathen, and gather yourselves together round about: thither cause thy mighty ones to

come down, O Lord. Let the heathen be wakened, and come up to the valley of Jehoshaphat: for there will I sit to judge all the heathen round about."

God isn't encouraging the Gentiles. He's making fun of them! He's saying that the Gentile nations are claiming to be strong but are actually weak. They are coming to wipe out Israel, but instead God will judge them and wipe them out. When God says "let the weak say, I am strong", what He's actually saying is this: you Gentiles are claiming to be strong, but in reality you're weak and I am going to annihilate you.

Do you see how the actual meaning of the verse is completely different from the way most people interpret it? Finding the real interpretation wasn't difficult. All we had to do was read the entire chapter instead of focus on just that one verse.

The rules for interpreting the Bible aren't difficult. These simple rules will set you on the right path:

Rule #1: if plain sense makes sense, seek no other sense.

If the text can be taken literally then it *should* be taken literally. A symbolic or "spiritual" interpretation should *only* be used when a literal interpretation makes no sense or when the passage is clearly symbolic. Whatever you do, *do not* interpret the entire Bible symbolically. Only apply a symbolic interpretation when it's absolutely clear that the Bible is using symbolism. *The Bible is not an allegory!* You don't have the right to make it mean whatever you want it to mean. Your job is to find the *actual* meaning of the passage.

For example, take this passage:

2 Samuel 5:4: "David was thirty years old when he began to reign, and he reigned forty years."

This verse tells us that David was a real person who actually existed. He began reigning over Judah when he was 30 years old and he reigned for a total of 40 years. It means exactly what it says it means, and that's how it should be interpreted.

Rule #2: interpret Scripture with Scripture.

When you find a case of Biblical symbolism you aren't allowed to decide for yourself what the symbol means. In order to find out the meaning of the symbol you must look the symbol up in the Bible and see how the Bible interprets that symbol. *The Bible defines the symbols it uses!*

Let me give an example. This verse from Revelation makes use of symbolism:

Revelation 1:12-13: "And I turned to see the voice that spake with me. And being turned, I saw seven golden candlesticks; And in the midst of the seven candlesticks one like unto the Son of man, clothed with a garment down to the foot, and girt about the paps with a golden girdle."

What are the seven golden candlesticks? In order to find the answer, all we have to do is find the verse in the Bible that gives us the interpretation. In this case we can find the answer in the same chapter:

Revelation 1:20: "The mystery of the seven stars which thou sawest in my right hand, and the seven golden candlesticks. The seven stars are the angels of the seven churches: and the seven candlesticks which thou sawest are the seven churches."

The seven candlesticks represent seven churches. Do you see how easy that was? If you want to read the book of Revelation and understand it, all you have to do is use the Bible itself to interpret the symbolism that it uses.

Whatever you do, never use external sources to define the Bible's symbols! If you do that you will get the wrong answer:

2 Peter 1:20: “Knowing this first, that no prophecy of the scripture is of any private interpretation.”

Use the Bible to interpret the Bible.

Rule #3: context is everything.

When you are studying the Bible, don't just read one verse in isolation. Instead read the entire chapter. In fact, it's really best to keep the entire Bible in mind (as much as you can), because sometimes the answer isn't in the chapter that you're reading.

For example, in 2 Kings 18 Rab-shakeh told the Israelites that King Hezekiah had taken away God's altars and high places. That may sound plausible but it's actually a lie. The truth is that Hezekiah loved the Lord and served Him – but that isn't mentioned in 2 Kings 18! The only way to find this out is to know the entire story of Hezekiah. You have to do your homework if you want to find the right answer.

Rule #4: keep the audience in mind.

Just because God told Israel that they couldn't eat bacon doesn't mean *you* can't eat bacon. The Mosaic Law applied to ancient Israel. It doesn't apply to modern Christians! Likewise, God made some promises to Israel that He didn't make to the church. Just because God promised it in the Bible *doesn't mean God promised it to you.* When reading a passage you need to

figure out who the passage is talking about. This can be difficult to do, but fortunately there are lots of good commentaries available which can help. If you read the Bible and mistakenly assume that all of it applies to you then you will end up in a lot of trouble. This does *not* mean you can ignore some parts of the Bible, but it does mean that parts of it are used in different ways.

Take this famous passage as an example:

Joel 2:25: “And I will restore to you the years that the locust hath eaten, the cankerworm, and the caterpillar, and the palmerworm, my great army which I sent among you.”

Some people interpret this verse to mean that if they repent of their sin, God will restore to them the years of their life that were lost to sinful rebellion. They interpret this as a personal promise that God is making to each individual believer. However, that is not correct. This is addressed to the nation of Israel, not to the church. At the time the Jews had rebelled against God. The Lord said that He was going to punish them, but if they repented them He would bless them instead:

Joel 2:12-14: “Therefore also now, saith the Lord, turn ye even to me with all your heart, and with fasting, and with weeping, and with mourning: And rend your heart, and not your garments, and turn unto the Lord your God: for he is gracious and merciful, slow to anger, and of great kindness, and repenteth him of the evil. Who knoweth if he will return and repent, and leave a blessing behind him; even a meat offering and a drink offering unto the Lord your God?”

At the time this message was given, the Jews were living under the Mosaic Law. That law stated that if the Jews obeyed

God then He would bless them, but if they rebelled against Him then He would curse them and ultimately drive them out of the promised land. That's how that covenant worked.

The church, however, is not under the Mosaic Law (John 1:17, Romans 6:14). The promise in this passage that God gave to the Jews before the time of Christ doesn't apply to us today.

In Conclusion

It's *vital* that we study the Bible and learn what it teaches. It's vital that we take what we hear and compare it to the Scriptures. It's also vital that we know how to defend our beliefs and answer those who question us.

More than that, though, and above all else, it's vital that we develop a true passion for the Word of God. We must learn to love it and cherish it. If we truly love God with all our heart then we will love His word. If we're passionate about Him then we will also be passionate about the things He has said.

If we have no love for the Bible then the chances are very great that we have no love for God either. We must cry out to God and ask Him to create in us a heart that passionately seeks Him. If our heart is cold then our Bible studies are never going to get very far.

The Bible will never grow old no matter how many times you read it. Each time you read through the Scriptures and study them diligently you'll discover things you hadn't seen before. The Bible is a book of endless wonder and can never be exhausted. Even the seemingly boring parts have treasures hidden in them, if we will just take the time to dig them out.

Finally, I strongly suggest doing more than just reading your Bible. Reading the Bible is good, but it's easy to read a passage and then immediately forget what you just read. One way to retain what you've learned is to get a journal and write a few brief notes about the chapter you just read. What did the chapter mean? Did you learn anything? Was there anything that you found strange or difficult to understand? Is there anything that

you might want to research later?

You don't have to spend a lot of time on this. But if you take the time to think about the chapter and write about it, you will get a great deal more out of the Bible than you did before. It will open up entirely new vistas.