

Fourteen Rules For Bible Study

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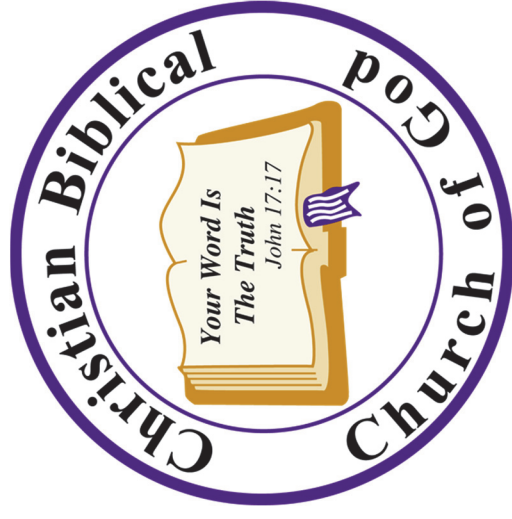
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by
Fred R. Coulter

historical **Chronologies** show an accurate timeline from creation to the present, and detailed **Footnotes** explain hard-to-understand passages. Includes center column references; word definitions and alternate renderings for key words; beautiful original artwork of the Temple in Jesus' time; various maps; and 280 pages of commentary.

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*The Most Unique Bible Ever Produced—
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The Holy Bible In Its Original Order

This is probably the *last* Bible you'll ever need to buy! Here's why...

- First, it is the **only complete Bible ever published in a single volume in which the books are arranged in the original, canonical manuscript order.** Scholars recognize this inspired order but overlook its importance. This Bible gives proof of the original order, tracing how it was altered in the 4th century. Restoring the Bible's original order substantiates its divine inspiration and unlocks vital keys to understanding.
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- Third, *The Holy Bible In Its Original Order recaptures the original, inspired teachings of the Scriptures through its translation and numerous commentaries. Over the centuries, doctrinal errors have developed from inaccurate translations and the adherence to religious tradition. Setting aside such traditions, this Bible restores more than the canonical order—it restores the very *truth* of God.*

Included are **Commentaries** providing key accounts of the writing, canonization, and preservation of the Bible. **Appendices** answer: When was Jesus born? How did Christ fulfill the Law and the Prophets? When was Jesus crucified? When was He resurrected? What does it mean to be “born again”? What are “works of law”? What are the true teachings of the New Testament Church? How do we understand Paul's difficult writings? Also, biblical and

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Jesus Christ is the crowning glory of God's plan, the supreme expression of God's love for each individual He calls. Through Jesus, God's marvelous love will ultimately be manifested to all mankind—past, present, and future. “For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, so that everyone who believes in Him may not perish, but may have everlasting life” (John 3:16). Indeed, God's love for us undergirds all that He does—including the revealing of His *plan* and *way of life* through the Scriptures.

Jesus Christ is the foundation of all biblical understanding. He said, “**I am the way, and the truth, and the life; no one comes to the Father except through Me**” (John 14:6). All scriptural truth comes from God the Father *through* Jesus. In order to properly understand the Scriptures, we must go *to* the Father *through* Christ—Who is the way, the truth, and the life. It is the Father Who imparts the Holy Spirit to guide us in understanding His word, which is the *truth* (John 17:17).

Jesus Revealed *How* to Understand God's Word

Jesus clearly taught that it is the Holy Spirit—the Spirit of truth—that enables us to come to a true and full understanding of the Word of God (John 16:13). In order to receive the Spirit of truth, Jesus revealed that we must *love* God the Father and Christ and be *keeping* their commandments. Fulfilling these requirements is absolutely essential for receiving the Holy Spirit and thus coming to a correct understanding of the Scriptures. The apostle John recorded Jesus' teaching on this very subject:

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“ If you love Me, keep the commandments—namely, My commandments. And I will ask the Father, and He shall give you another Comforter, that it may be with you throughout the age [until Jesus returns]; *even* the Spirit of the truth, which the world cannot receive because it perceives it not, nor knows it; but you know it because it dwells with you, and shall be within you.... In that day, you shall know that I am in My Father, and you *are* in Me, and I am in you.

“ The one who has My commandments and is keeping them, that is the one who loves [Greek, *who is loving*] Me; and the one who loves [*who is loving*] Me shall be loved by My Father, and I will love him and will manifest Myself to him.’ Judas (not Iscariot) said to him, ‘Lord, what has happened that You are about to manifest Yourself to us, and not to the world?’

“Jesus answered and said to him, ‘If anyone loves Me, he will keep My word [the entire message]; and My Father will love him, and We will come to him and make Our abode with him. The one who does not love Me does not keep My words; and the word [the entire message] that you hear is not Mine, but the Father’s, Who sent Me’ ” (John 14:15-17, 20-24).

These words reveal the loving, personal, spiritual relationship of God the Father and Jesus Christ with every true Christian. These words also reveal the wholehearted *obedience* that God requires of all who profess to love and believe in Christ. This teaching is the heart and core of the love that God gives to us through His Son, and the love that we, as true believers in Christ, show toward God. It is the daily way of life for a *true* Christian. **If we love Jesus, we will be keeping His commandments—and those commandments are from God the Father!**

Not many professing Christians, whether ministers or laymen, are living in obedience to all of the commandments of God. Jesus gave the following warning for those who would be using His name and claiming His

His promise to **lead us into all truth—if** we are diligently seeking to understand the Word of God.

Bible Study Aids

There are a number of Bible study aids that are recommended as valuable sources of information for the serious Bible student:

- *Strong’s Concordance* by James Strong
- *The Interlinear Greek-English New Testament* by George Ricker Berry
- *A Critical Lexicon and Concordance to the English and Greek New Testament* by E. W. Bullinger
- *The Englishman’s Greek Concordance and Lexicon* by Wigram-Green
- *The New Englishman’s Hebrew Concordance* by Wigram
- *The Schocken Bible: Volume I* by Everett Fox
- *The Interlinear Hebrew-Greek-English Bible* by Jay P. Green, Sr.
- *The Hebrew-Greek Key Study Bible* by Zodhiates
- *Gesenius’ Hebrew-Chaldee Lexicon to the Old Testament*
- *Halley’s Bible Handbook*
- *Unger’s Bible Dictionary*

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- 1) Begin with passages that are easy to understand, where there is little or no dispute as to the meaning—then move on to more difficult ones.
- 2) Let the Bible interpret and prove the Bible. Don't look for what you want to prove; look for what the Bible *actually* proves. Do this by looking at *all* of the passages relevant to the study.
- 3) Understand the context—the verses before and after, the chapters before and after. Does your understanding of a particular verse harmonize with the rest of the Bible?
- 4) Understand the original language, Hebrew or Greek. Never try to establish dogmatic doctrine or teachings by using *Strong's Concordance*. It can be helpful at times, but it is quite limited.
- 5) Ask, "What does the passage clearly say?"
- 6) Ask, "What does the passage not say?"
- 7) Ask, "To whom was the book written?"
- 8) Ask, "Who wrote it?"
- 9) Ask, "Who said it?"
- 10) Understand the historical time frame and cultural setting of when the book was written.
- 11) Don't bring your *personal* assumptions and preconceived notions into your understanding or conclusions.
- 12) Base your study on the biblical understanding you already have. What do you *know* up to this point in time?
- 13) Do not form conclusions based on partial facts or insufficient information, or the opinions and speculations of others.
- 14) Personal opinions or convictions, regardless of how sincere, don't count. Scripture alone must be your standard and guide.

These guidelines represent a thorough and careful approach to study. When undertaking a study of the Bible, we should always use this approach, coupled with prayer, trusting God to lead us with His Holy Spirit. We know that He will fulfill

promises and blessings—professing to be His followers and teachers of the Bible—but who would *not* be keeping the commandments of God: "Not everyone who says to Me, 'Lord, Lord,' shall enter into the kingdom of heaven; but the one who is doing the will of My Father, Who is in heaven.

"Many will say to Me in that day, 'Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy through Your name? And *did we not* cast out demons through Your name? And *did we not* perform many works of power through Your name?' And then I will confess to them, 'I never knew you. Depart from Me, you who work lawlessness' " (Matt. 7:21-23).

The word "lawlessness" is translated from the Greek *anomos*, which means *against law*—or being against the keeping of God's laws and commandments. This kind of pseudo-Christianity, which uses Jesus' name but refuses to do the will of God, is not accepted by God. The result of this pseudo-Christianity is death, not eternal life. And many, the vast majority of people, are following the broad path that leads to death—exactly as Jesus said (Matt. 7:13-14).

Those who are teaching and practicing a lawless pseudo-Christianity are doing the exact *opposite* of what Jesus said those who love Him will be doing: "**If you love Me, keep the commandments—namely, My commandments**" (John 14:15). The one who truly loves Jesus will be keeping His commandments—yes, *every one of His words*, which He received from the Father. That is the standard by which we can identify those who love God and those who do not.

Every commandment God has given is based on *love*. Here is the greatest commandment of all, just as Jesus said it: "**You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind.**" This is *the* first and greatest commandment. And *the* second *one* is like it: "You shall love your neighbor as

yourself.’ On these two commandments hang all the Law and the Prophets” (Matt. 22:37-40).

Without these two commandments, there would be no law, there would be no prophets, there would be no covenants, old or new. **Everything God does is based on love!**

John expresses the love of God quite clearly in his first epistle: “Beloved, we should love one another because love is from God; and everyone who loves [Greek, *who is loving*] has been begotten by God, and knows God. “**The one who does not love does not know God because God is love.** In this way the love of God was manifested toward us: that God sent His only begotten Son into the world, so that we might live through Him.

“In this *act* is the love—not that we loved God; rather, that He loved us and sent His Son *to be the* propitiation for our sins.... And we have known and have believed the love that God has toward us. God is love, and the one who dwells in love is dwelling in God, and God in him” (I John 4:7-10, 16).

This is the attitude of love, faith, and obedience that we must show toward God the Father and Jesus Christ in order to understand the Word of God. Without this love for God and His truth, a full understanding of the Scriptures can never be achieved!

Five Keys to Understanding the Word of God

In addition to a loving, faithful, and obedient attitude toward God, there are five major principles that are essential to a correct understanding of Scripture. These vital keys must always be kept in mind when we study the Word of God.

Key Number One: “All Scripture *is* God-breathed and *is* profitable for doctrine, for conviction, for

The *Fourteen Rules for Bible Study* listed on the following page will provide a systematic method for understanding all the essential doctrines of Scripture—even the most difficult ones.

disciple means *learner* or *student*. As students of Christ, we should be daily studying His teachings. We should not be following the doctrines and traditions of men, regardless of how authoritative they may appear to be. Nor should we base our beliefs on Bible commentaries or other writings of men. We should strictly follow the Word of God, rightly “dividing” it—putting “line upon line” and “precept upon precept.” Only by studying the Scriptures in this manner can we come to a full understanding of the truth.

Knowing that we must engage in serious, in-depth study of the Scriptures, we may have questions as to which *version* of the Bible we should use, especially for doctrinal study. Numerous translations of the Scriptures are available to us today, and new versions continue to be published. Modern versions may be easier to read than the older versions with their archaic words and expressions. However, modern versions are generally not reliable for doctrinal study because they do not closely follow the original texts. In some of these versions, thousands of words have been omitted.

A recently introduced version, *The Holy Bible In Its Original Order*, utilizes modern language while closely following the original Hebrew and Greek texts. It has proven to be an excellent study Bible for many (see below for more information).

In undertaking a study of any doctrinal subject, we should thoroughly examine every relevant passage. If the meaning of the text is questionable, or if the English phrasing is unclear, it may be necessary to study the passage in the original language (using Hebrew or Greek lexicons). This will help to determine the precise meaning of the original inspired words. This approach will give us a clear understanding of what the Bible is actually teaching and will enable us to arrive at a correct understanding on any doctrinal subject.

correction, for instruction in righteousness; so that the man of God may be complete, fully equipped for every good work” (II Tim. 3:16-17).

Many who profess to study the Bible completely disregard this vital principle. Rather than seeking the truth of Scripture, they look for verses that appear to support their personal beliefs—while ignoring those verses that clearly contradict their beliefs. This approach to study can never lead to understanding because it denies that every part of Scripture is inspired. Those who use this approach are exalting their own beliefs above the authority of Scripture.

When we study the Bible, we should always be careful to seek the true meaning of the words that were inspired by God. No study should be designed to support the position of a doctrinal board, or to justify a time-honored church tradition, or to “prove” a personal interpretation of the Bible. None of these motives are acceptable. And if these or similar motives are involved, for whatever reason, can we really expect God to overlook such deceptive use of the Scriptures? If we think we can fool God, we are only deceiving ourselves.

Let us not be guilty of such a presumptuous and self-righteous attitude toward the Word of God. Rather, let us humbly allow the inspired words of Scripture to correct us and instruct us in the true righteousness of Jesus Christ.

Key Number Two: The prophet Isaiah brings out this vital principle: “Whom shall He teach knowledge? And whom shall He make to understand doctrine? *Those* who are weaned from the milk and drawn from the breasts [that is, fully grounded in the Word of God and not an immature Christian feeding only on the milk of Scripture]. For precept *must be* upon precept, precept upon precept; line upon line, line upon line; here a little, there a little” (Isa. 28:9-10).

Isaiah is telling us that, in order to understand the

Scriptures, we must *connect* “precept with precept” and *connect* “line with line.” In practice, this means searching throughout the Bible for *all* of the relevant passages on any given subject. No subject is covered in any one place in Scripture. Rather, there will be relevant passages *here and there*—just as Isaiah said. We must *link all of these passages together* if we are to come to a full and right understanding on a particular subject.

This is exactly how we should study every doctrinal question. The New Testament confirms this approach to understanding the Word of God and establishing sound doctrine. “Diligently *study* to show yourself approved unto God, a workman [in the Word of God] who does not *need to be* ashamed, **rightly dividing** [putting precept with precept, line with line] **the Word of the truth**” (II Tim. 2:15).

In order to come to the knowledge of the truth, we must always follow this biblically sanctioned method of study—“straightly cutting” or “rightly dividing” the Word of God. Any other type of study is useless! As Paul instructed Timothy, “See that *they* remain mindful of these things, earnestly charging *them* in the sight of the Lord not to argue over words that are not profitable in any way, *but which lead to the* subverting of those who hear” (II Tim. 2:14).

This is exactly what many ministers and scholars have done in their doctrinal teachings—because they have not “rightly divided” the Word of God! Whole congregations have been subverted by strivings and disputations over the meaning of key words that are used in Scripture. Some teachers and ministers have even engaged in redefining words—attaching their own personal interpretations and rejecting the authoritative definitions that are found in Hebrew and Greek lexicons. Anyone who undertakes such practices is “using the law unlawfully,” as Paul said, and will end up teaching false,

remained in a state of spiritual infancy—and are easily misled. As Paul admonished, “For truly, by this time you ought to be teachers, *but instead* you need to have *someone* teach you again what *are* the beginning principles of the oracles of God, and have become those in need of milk, and not of solid food. For everyone who is partaking of milk *is* unskilled in *the* word of righteousness because he is an infant” (Heb. 5:12–13).

Christians who are not spiritually mature are ripe to be carried about with every wind of doctrine. They are like dry leaves, caught up in a whirlwind, swirling and spinning around. Because they are oblivious to their weak spiritual condition, it is easy to get caught up in false doctrines that *seem* to be right—but in reality are so wrong. **The most clever deception that Satan has devised is false doctrine that sounds blessedly true.**

This is what Christians are facing today—cleverly devised false doctrines, more fitly called fables or myths. It is not sufficient simply to proclaim that a doctrine is true, or to denounce a doctrine as false. Those who truly want to follow Christ need to study sound doctrine and know and understand the truth—and *why* it is true. And we must know and understand false doctrine and why it is false.

Unless we are able to discern truth from error, we will end up straying from the narrow pathway of the Scriptures—the path that leads to eternal life. To keep from following the broad way to destruction, as so many have, we need to be diligently studying the Word of God, following all the biblical principles and rules for discerning the true meaning of Scripture. **Please read the Fourteen Rules for Bible Study in the next section. These rules present a step-by-step systematic method for proper Bible study.**

Few Christians think of themselves as students, but every true Christian is a disciple of Christ. The word

entire message—all the words of Christ] which I have spoken, that shall judge him in the last day. For I have not spoken from Myself [He taught nothing on His own initiative]; but the Father, Who sent Me, gave Me commandment Himself, what I should say and what I should speak. And I know that His commandment is eternal life” (John 12:47-50).

God inspired Jesus to speak these words and caused them to be preserved for us today. Indeed, anyone who presumptuously misapplies the Scriptures and teaches false doctrines already has the judgment of God pronounced against him. Yet Christians everywhere are being assaulted with false teachings. Moreover, these teachings are being received and believed because people cannot endure sound doctrine. They cannot sit and listen to the wholesome words of the Bible.

This unfortunate spiritual condition was foreseen by Paul: “For there shall come a time [and now is] when they [professing Christians] will not tolerate [or accept] sound doctrine; but according to their own lusts they shall accumulate to themselves a *great number of teachers, having ears itching to hear what satisfies their cravings. And they shall turn away their own ears from the truth* [of the Bible]; and **they shall be turned aside** [from the way of the Lord] **unto myths** [deceptive false doctrines]” (II Tim. 4:3-4).

Today, whole churches are falling prey to such deception. In fact, a great number of ministers and pastors are being swept away with every kind of doctrine imaginable. While some have served in their churches for many years, they are not spiritually grounded—because they have not diligently studied the Scriptures! As a result, they are woefully ill-equipped to recognize clever, true-sounding false doctrines. They have not been trained and grounded in the Scriptures—they have only been feeding on the milk of the Word of God. Consequently, they have

satanic doctrines that subvert the minds of their followers. Unfortunately, the landscape of religious history is filled with the bodies of people who have taught false doctrines, and the bodies of people who have embraced their teachings. Only by learning to *rightly divide* the Word of God will we be able to recognize and resist false doctrines.

Key Number Three: In the second epistle of Peter, we read: “Knowing this first [Greek, *protos*—meaning the primary, or first and foremost thing], that no prophecy of Scripture originated as anyone’s own *private* interpretation; because prophecy was not brought at any time by human will, but the holy men of God spoke as they were moved by *the Holy Spirit*” (II Pet. 1:20-21).

In today’s world, we find many pseudo-teachers who are twisting the Scriptures and deceitfully using their own *personal* interpretations in order to persuade others to believe their false doctrines. To support their teachings, they may quote numerous passages. To their listeners, their teachings sound authoritative, but the way that they apply the Scriptures exposes their craftiness. They are using the same subtle methods of deception that Satan the devil uses.

Yes, even Satan the devil quotes Scripture! When Jesus was being tempted by the devil in person, Satan did not hesitate to quote Scripture. “If You are the Son of God, cast Yourself down; for it is written, ‘He shall give His angels charge concerning You, and they shall bear You up in *their* hands, lest You strike Your foot against a stone’ ” (Matt. 4:6; Psa. 91:11-12).

Satan correctly quoted this passage, but *misapplied* it in a crafty effort to tempt Jesus to jump from the pinnacle of the Temple. Jesus resisted Satan’s deception by rightly applying the Scriptures. He said, “Again, it is written, ‘You shall not tempt *the* Lord your God’ ” (Matt. 4:7).

What is the lesson for us in this account? It is this: Those who quote the Scriptures correctly, but twist and misapply the meaning, are following Satan—not serving God! This example is recorded in Scripture as a warning for us to be on guard. The fact that a minister or teacher may quote the Bible does not guarantee that he is teaching the truth. **Indeed, Scripture that is quoted accurately is often misapplied to promote false teachings!**

True servants of God do not use such deceitful tactics. The apostle Paul wrote of his ministry: “For we have personally renounced the hidden things of dishonest gain, not walking in *cunning* craftiness [having a hidden agenda], nor handling the Word of God deceitfully [falsely applying the Scriptures]; but by manifestation of the truth, we are commending ourselves to every man’s conscience before God” (II Cor. 4:2).

Those who are truly serving God will not deceitfully use Scripture to promote their own ideas and personal interpretations. They will seek to understand and teach the true meaning of the words that God has inspired by the power of His Holy Spirit.

Key Number Four: Paul thus instructed the Thessalonian believers: “Prove all things. Hold fast to *that which is good*” (I Thess. 5:21).

The instruction to “prove all things” is a lifelong responsibility for every believer. As Christians, we must continually be *testing* every teaching we read or hear by carefully studying the Scriptures. The Bereans were commended because they diligently searched the Scriptures to *confirm* what Paul was teaching: “Now these [Bereans] were more noble than those in Thessalonica [where unbelieving Jews immediately rejected Paul’s teaching that Christ was raised from the dead], *for* they [the Bereans] received the Word with all readiness of mind *and* examined the Scriptures daily *to see* if these things were so” (Acts 17: 11).

unhindered by the ideas and doctrines of men. Christians who look to the authority of men, rather than to Scripture, are easy prey for ministers and teachers who profess to serve God but are not obeying His commandments and are not teaching the truth.

A Dire Warning Against the Disobedient and Those Who Teach False Doctrines

The book of Deuteronomy contains a prophecy of Christ’s ministry coupled with a dire warning against those who refuse to obey His words and those who teach false doctrines in His name: “I will raise them up a Prophet [Jesus Christ] from among their brethren, *One* like you [Moses], and will put My words in His mouth. And He shall speak to them all that I shall command Him. And it shall come to pass, whatever man will not hearken to My words [listen attentively to obey] which He [Jesus] shall speak in My name, I will require *it* of him [hold him accountable unto judgment]” (Deut. 18:18-19). This warning applies to every human being, but particularly to those who are claiming to follow Jesus!

The next verse pronounces even more severe judgment upon those who are teachers, or claim to be teachers, of the Word of God. “But the prophet [anyone who is teaching] who shall presume to speak a word [teach] in My name which I have not commanded him to speak or who shall speak in the name of other gods [false doctrines palmed off as teachings of God], **even that prophet shall die**” (verse 20).

Jesus, the Prophet God said was to come, repeated the same warning: “But if anyone hears My words and does not believe [in order to obey], I do not judge him; for I did not come [at that time] to judge the world, but to save the world. The one who rejects Me and does not receive My words has one who judges him; the word [the

Paul taught that it is not through human intelligence or reason that we are able to come to the knowledge of the truth, but through the *Spirit of God*. “But according as it is written, ‘*The eye has not seen, nor the ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of man, the things which God has prepared for those who love Him.*’

“**But God has revealed *them* to us by His Spirit, for the Spirit searches all things—even the deep things of God.** For who among men understands the things of man except *by* the spirit of man which *is* in him? In the same way also, **the things of God no one understands except by the Spirit of God.** Now we have not received the spirit of the world, but the Spirit that *is* of God, so that we might know the things graciously given to us by God; which things we also speak, not in words taught by human wisdom, but in *words* taught by the Holy Spirit *in order to* communicate spiritual things by spiritual *means*. But *the* natural man [the carnal mind without the Holy Spirit] does not receive the things of the Spirit of God; for they are foolishness to him, and he cannot understand *them* because they are spiritually discerned” (1 Cor. 2:9-14).

Without the Holy Spirit, no human being—no matter how intelligent—can understand the Word of God! And even individuals who *have* received the Holy Spirit from God are often beset by obstacles that keep them from coming to a full understanding of the truth. Too many Christians get caught up in the politics of religion, or the power structure of an ecclesiastical hierarchy, and they end up submitting to a humanly-devised church authority. They blindly accept the teachings of so-called Bible scholars, adhering to the *approved* doctrines of their church. Thus, they are unable to open-mindedly study and completely understand the spiritual truth of the Scriptures.

The Holy Spirit cannot guide us into all truth unless we diligently study the Bible with an open mind,

The Bereans were diligently studying the Scriptures to *prove* whether or not the things they had heard were true. They did not react with blind emotion and refuse to consider the teachings of Paul. Rather, they carefully examined the Scriptures and proved to themselves that Paul was, in fact, preaching the true message of God.

We, like the Bereans, must diligently examine the Bible in order to discern true doctrine from false doctrine. As we do so, we will become *skillful* in using the Scriptures—no longer feeding on the “milk” of the Word of God, but able to handle “solid food.” If we do not exercise our minds and learn to discern truth from error, we will not become spiritually mature. “For everyone who is partaking of milk *is* unskilled in *the* word of righteousness because he is an infant. But solid food is for those who are fully grown, who **through repeated practice have had their senses trained to discern between good and evil**” (Heb. 5:13-14).

Too many Christians have remained as spiritual infants because they have transferred their God-given responsibility to discern truth from error to a minister or church board. Their ministers have told them that they, the laity, are incapable of understanding the Scriptures and must submit to the doctrinal decisions of their church leaders, who alone can interpret the Bible. But it was never God’s intention that we, as individual believers, place our trust in human leaders who claim sole authority to establish doctrine. Christians who have done so have left themselves open to dangerous deception. They have forgotten the many warnings throughout the New Testament to be on guard against false teachers and false apostles who make a pretense of serving God. Paul warned, “For I know this: that after my departure grievous wolves will come in among you, not sparing the flock. And from among your own selves men will rise up

speaking perverse things to draw away disciples after themselves” (Acts 20:29-30).

Likewise, the apostle Peter strongly admonished the brethren. “But there were also false prophets among the people, as indeed there will be false teachers among you, who will stealthily introduce destructive heresies, personally denying *the* Lord who bought them, and bringing swift destruction upon themselves. And many people will follow *as authoritative* their destructive ways; *and* because of them, the way of the truth will be blasphemed. Also, through insatiable greed they will with enticing messages exploit you for gain; for whom the judgment of old is in *full* force, and their destruction is *ever watching*” (II Pet. 2:1-3).

True to the warnings of Paul and Peter, many Christians in the first century were subverted and drawn away from the true doctrines of Scripture. They neglected to “prove all things” and did not *test* the teachings of false apostles. But the church at Ephesus did not forget the admonitions of Paul and Peter, as well as of the other apostles. In the book of Revelation, Jesus commended the Ephesian believers because they *tried* and *tested* those who falsely claimed to be apostles and proved them to be liars. “I know your works, and your labor, and your endurance, and that you cannot bear those who are evil; and *that* you did test those who proclaim *themselves* to be apostles, but are not, and did find them liars” (Rev. 2:2).

Since these false apostles professed to be ministers of Christ, we can be sure that they quoted the Scriptures. Their false doctrines must have *sounded* authoritative and convincing, because they succeeded in undermining the faith of many New Testament Christians. How was the church at Ephesus able to withstand such powerful deception? If the Ephesian brethren had not been exercising their senses to discern truth from error, they would not have recognized these men as false apostles.

But because the brethren at Ephesus were skillful in using the Scriptures, they were able to discern that these men were not teaching the true doctrines of Jesus Christ.

Like the brethren at Ephesus, Christians today must constantly be on guard against false ministers whose scriptural-sounding teachings are actually a perversion of the true doctrines of Scripture. It is our *personal responsibility* as Christians to test and try the teachings of every minister, pastor, teacher, or scholar by carefully examining the Scriptures. By following the instruction to “prove all things,” we can learn to recognize and reject false doctrine, and we will be able to stand fast in the true doctrines of Christ.

Key Number Five: The Word of God is called the word of *truth*. Furthermore, it is the Spirit of truth that teaches us all things. Thus, we must be *led* by the Holy Spirit if we are to understand the truth. The Bible makes it clear that the *Spirit of truth* works hand-in-hand with the *word of truth* to give us the understanding God wants us to have. Jesus said, “But *when* the Comforter *comes*, *even* the Holy Spirit, which the Father will send in My name, **that one shall teach you all things**, and shall bring to your remembrance everything that I have told you” (John 14:26). This is the promise Jesus gives to all who repent and are converted in their hearts and minds by the Holy Spirit.

It is not possible for the *unconverted* human mind, which is deceitful above all things (Jer. 17:9), to come to the knowledge of the truth of God. In fact, the carnal mind is *hostile* toward God and is not willing to be subject to God’s laws (Rom. 8:7). The word of truth and the Spirit of truth cannot work hand-in-hand with the carnal, deceitful mind. Regardless of how brilliant or intellectual one may be, God’s truth is not understood through *human* wisdom and rationale. It is only through the Spirit of God that the Word of God can be understood.