

PART 5

THE READING COMMANDED IN THE NEW TESTAMENT

¶ *Jesus said, “Really? Didn’t you ever read...”*

Matthew 12:3a

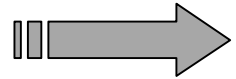
The ability to read text is one of the greatest gifts God has given mankind. When the Creator chose a means to communicate with mankind, He chose to do so with *text*. Even in a digital, special effects age, *text* still prevails. Reading and religion have always been connected. Every major religion has at least one “Holy Book”. But Christianity’s Holy Book is unique. Unlike other books, it is not merely a collection of man-made ideas about God and religion, but rather: *God’s special revelation about Himself, His plan, and His story*. Yet the Bible itself encourages reading other literature to expand our knowledge, hone our wisdom, improve our gifts, develop our vocabulary and explore the glory of God.

Some people scoff at reading. They claim that the best lessons cannot be learned from a book. But Christians should not talk this way. We, of all people, should have a deep appreciation for God’s gift to mankind of the ability to read.

“I find television very educating. Every time somebody turns on the set, I go into the other room and read a book.”

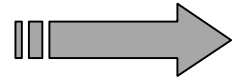
Groucho Marx

Let’s explore what the New Testament says about *reading, memorising, meditating on, and studying* God’s Word.



FURTHER READING

“How To Read The Bible For All It’s Worth”, Gordon Fee & Douglas Stuart,
Zondervan.



Study 17

THE

READING

COMMANDED IN

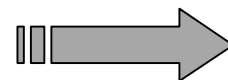
THE NEW TESTAMENT

¶ *Then the LORD said to Moses, “Write this as a memorial in a book and recite it...”*

Exodus 17:14a

Reading is one of the hallmarks of humanity. It is one of the abilities that make us unique among other creatures. There is a saying: “*A picture paints a thousand words.*” But this is not true. Sometimes only a thousand well-crafted words will do. Another well-worn expression is “*No words could comfort you at this time.*” But this is not true either. The right words can bring enormous comfort to the hurting. Written language is one of the most powerful means of communication we possess. Well written words can transform civilisations, change hearts, amuse the masses, enlighten the ignorant, and frustrate the opponents of freedom. And no other book has produced these responses more noticeably or better than the Bible.

1. Based on Colossians 4:16, how important was the ability to read in the early church?



2. What does Revelation 1:3 promise?

3. What Paul tell Timothy to do in 1Timothy 4:13?

4. What was John commanded to do in Revelation 14:13, and how does this reveal that God expected His people to be readers?

God expects that His people will read His Word. The Bible is comprised of 66 books written by around 40 different authors, from three different continents, over a period of about 1500 years, yet all telling the same story without any contradiction!

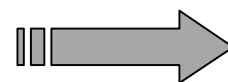
5. How does 2Timothy 3:16 claim that Scripture is different to any other book?

“When I get a little money I buy books; and if any is left I buy food and clothes.”

Desiderius Erasmus

The Bible should be read in books not bits. Reading the Word of God is an act of devotion to God. It should be done reverently, prayerfully, and regularly.

6. What does Psalm 119:11 suggest is the connection between taking the Word of God to heart and the way a person lives?



There is a very recent period in human history called “The Dark Ages”. One of the reasons this period was “dark” was because the light of Scripture was withheld from the public. It was an offence punishable by death for a layman (non-priest) to possess a copy of the Bible. As long as the Scriptures were unavailable to ordinary people, corrupt church leaders could claim God’s authority for their series of abuses and general oppression of the people. But one priest in the 1300s set in motion a chain of events that would change all this.



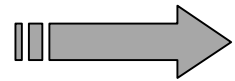
John Wyclif (variously spelt: Wycliff or Wycliffe), was the first man to produce an English Bible. He did this in 1382 from the Latin Vulgate. He also wrote many other books. He died in 1384. On May 4th 1415, the Council of Constance declared John Wyclif “a stiff-necked heretic”. They decreed that all his books be burned and that his bones be dug up and burned and for his ashes to be cast in the River Swift.

Wyclif was followed by William Tyndale who, in 1525, was the first man to translate the New Testament into English from the original Greek. He was charged with heresy in 1536 and sentenced death. He was tied to a stake, strangled, and his body burned. After Tyndale there were many, many more Christians who promoted the English Bible and its message who were burned at the stake. This is the price that has been paid to provide us with our English Bible! These martyrs shed their blood so that we could have a Bible freely available to us to read.

7. According to John 17:14, what did Jesus give the world?

8. Consider what Jesus said in Luke 24:44. What did Jesus say was the message of the Bible ?

May God help us to not only be *readers* of His Word, but also *heeders* of His Word.



9. Have you ever heard of someone receiving guidance from reading God's Word? Discuss.
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10. In what way is taking time out to read the Bible a form of tithing our time?
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The careful reading of other books can be a blessing to our walk with and understanding of God. But it is a wrong idea that any other book apart from the Bible is equal in its divine inspiration to the Bible. Some people claim that just as God used Paul to write inspired literature to the world in the first century, in exactly the same way He is using other authors today. Some authors even claim that "God told" them to write their book. They present their books as if God merely dictated them.

11. In what way can we apply the principle of 1Thessalonians 5:21 to such claims?
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The great English preacher, John Wesley, encouraged his assistant preachers to read widely. He saw this as invaluable in their ability to stretch their minds, increase their vocabulary and develop an increased means by which they could converse with people from a variety of backgrounds. My literary hero, Frank William Boreham, was one of the greatest Christian writers of all time. The secret to his giftedness was the amount of reading he did. It is my pastoral goal that we all become familiar with the story of God's revelation to mankind by the daily reading of the Bible so that we have eventually read it from cover to cover.

Then Jesus said to them, "Have you never read the Scriptures?"

Matthew 21:42a

Amen.