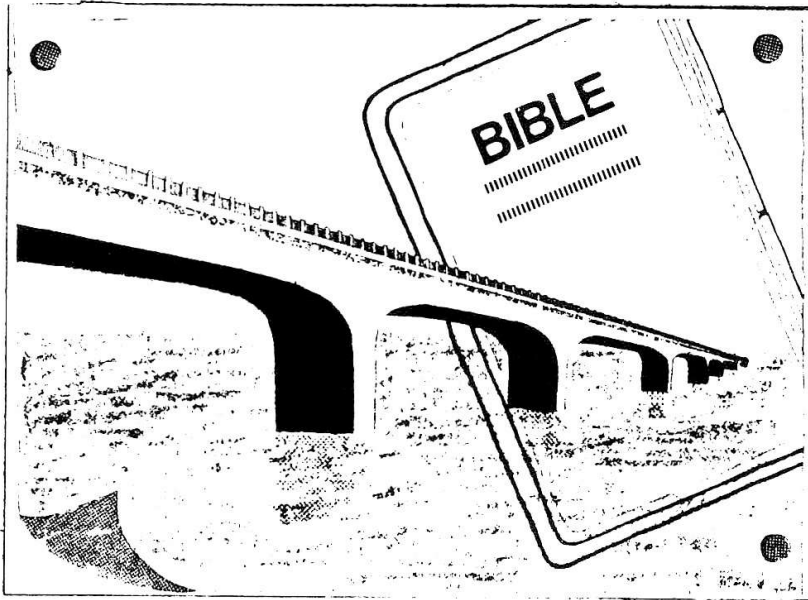


HOW TO UNDERSTAND AND

READ THE BIBLE

by Ou Jue



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Without doubt, Christians need to read the Bible. But after all, how can we derive spiritual benefit from reading the Bible? First of all we must clearly recognize what the Bible is. The Bible is God's word in written form, containing the ultimate mysteries of God, his purpose and his plan; so the Bible's position is very exalted - beyond compare - and the Church has always considered it of great importance. The Bible is the root of Christian life, and is our foundation. The Bible is the truth which God firmly, reliably, and infallibly teaches us for our salvation.

So we read the Bible, not in search of secular learning, but primarily to listen to God's eternal word. We search carefully to find the real intention expressed by the biblical writers, and what is revealed of God's will through these words. As a result, we can discover the correct way to live as virtuous Christians, and we can walk the straight road of faith.

It must be noted that one should emphasize quality and not quantity in reading the Bible, intensive not extensive reading, and especially perseverance. The Bible definitely is not merely a book which records historical events; the sacred teaching of the Bible is always new. That which is recorded in the Bible is the word of the everlasting God, the truth of God's teaching for our salvation, the criterion for our way of life, and the dynamic for our faith.

In the Old Testament book of Wisdom it is said, "So that your beloved children, Lord, might learn that the various crops are not what nourishes man, but it is your word which preserves all who trust in you" (Wisdom 16:26). In the New Testament Jesus has said as well, "Man does not live by bread alone, but by every word that comes from the mouth of God" (Matthew 4:4).

In fact, people do need material food to sustain the life of the body; in the same way, they certainly need spiritual food to nourish and develop the life of the soul.

We also need to read the Bible in a spirit of prayer, that is, through reading the Bible to communicate and dialogue with God: on the one hand, to listen to God's word, and on the other hand to open one's heart to God. We should also understand that prayer must accompany Bible reading in order to facilitate communication between God and man, because when we pray, we are conversing with God; and when we read God's holy word, we are listening to him speak, just as in conversations with friends.

So, many wise men teach us that when we read the Bible we should put ourselves in the presence of God, just as the prophet Samuel said to God: "Speak, Lord! Your servant listens" (I Samuel 3:10). So, before we read the Bible, we should humbly and sincerely request the guidance of God's

light, and listen with our heart for the voice of God, and receive God's revelation with humility.

The sages also all encourage us: "We should use our head, our heart and our feet to read the Bible." First, to use our head is to utilize our intelligence for rational reflection; second, to use our heart is to pray with heart and spirit, to meditate, and to enable the Bible teachings to enter the depths of our heart and to subtly influence us. Third, to use our feet, is to do our best to carry out God's word, because when we read the Bible we are not only searching for wisdom, but more importantly, for a more holy way of life. In the gospel Jesus Christ has emphasized, "Blessed are those who hear the word of God and keep it" (Luke 11:28 and Matthew 7:24); and "Go, and do likewise!" (Luke 10:37).

Saint Bonaventure said, "While we are guests in the world and do not yet see God, then we need the Bible as the light of faith to illuminate supernatural principles, and as the foundation for our moral beliefs." He also said, "That which is recorded in the Bible is the eternal word, and the reason why this eternal word is recorded in the Bible is not only to give us faith, but also eternal life."

It should be known that the core beliefs of our Catholic Church are established on Christ the incarnate Son of God. So it is the responsibility of every Christian believer to know Christ, to love Christ, to follow Christ, to imitate Christ, even to give his life for him, to identify with Christ, to live in Christ, and to witness for Christ. However, in order to achieve this goal and ideal, we must know the Bible, read the Bible, meditate on the Bible, and constantly keep in contact with the Bible so that we can gain the supreme wisdom of Jesus Christ and recognize the unsurpassed value of Jesus Christ; just as Saint Jerome said: "Those who do not know the Bible do not know the wisdom and power of God; to be ignorant of the Bible is to be ignorant of Christ."

From this we can see how important it is for God's children to read and understand the Bible, how intimate the relationship is between Christians and the Bible, and how much divine benefit is derived from the Bible. Saint Ephrem once wrote, "Stored up in God's own word are treasures of every kind to enable those of us who diligently study God's word to discover those treasures in it."