

# BIBLE INTRODUCTION FOR ORTHODOX CHRISTIANS

by Authors Various

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*A collection of essays by various Orthodox Christian authors on studying Holy Scripture, emphasizing reverence, prayer, and the goal of spiritual transformation through biblical practice.*

3 Chapters

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## 01 - Bishop Kallistos Ware - How to Read the Bible

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Bishop Kallistos Ware:

How to Read the Bible

WE BELIEVE THAT THE SCRIPTURES constitute a coherent whole. They are at once divinely inspired and humanly expressed. They bear authoritative witness to God's revelation of Himself - in creation, in the Incarnation of the Word, and the whole history of salvation. And as such they express the word of God in human language. We know, receive, and interpret Scripture through the Church and in the Church. Our approach to the Bible is one of obedience.

We may distinguish four key qualities that mark an Orthodox reading of Scripture, namely \* our reading should be obedient, \* it should be ecclesial, within the Church, \* it should be Christ-centered, \* it should be personal.

Reading the Bible with Obedience

FIRST OF ALL, when reading Scripture, we are to listen in a spirit of obedience. The Orthodox Church believes in divine inspiration of the Bible. Scripture is a "letter" from God, where Christ Himself is speaking. The Scriptures are God's authoritative witness of Himself. They express the Word of God in our human language. Since God Himself is speaking to us in the Bible, our response is rightly one of obedience, of receptivity, and listening. As we read, we wait on the Spirit.

But, while divinely inspired, the Bible is also humanly expressed. It is a whole library of different books written at varying times by distinct persons. Each book of the Bible reflects the outlook of the age in which it was written and the particular viewpoint of the author. For God does nothing in isolation, divine grace cooperates with human freedom. God does not abolish our individuality but enhances it. And so it is in the writing of inspired Scripture. The authors were not just a passive instrument, a dictation machine recording a message. Each writer of Scripture contributes his particular personal gifts. Alongside the divine aspect, there is also a human element in Scripture. We are to value both.

Each of the four Gospels, for example, has its own particular approach. Matthew presents more particularly a Jewish understanding of Christ, with an emphasis on the kingdom of heaven. Mark contains specific, picturesque details of Christ's ministry not given elsewhere. Luke expresses the universality of Christ's love, His all-embracing compassion that extends equally to Jew and to Gentile. In John there is a more inward and more mystical approach to Christ, with an emphasis on divine light and divine indwelling. We are to enjoy and explore to the full this life-giving variety within the Bible.

Because Scripture is in this way the word of God expressed in human language, there is room for honest and exacting inquiry when studying the Bible. Exploring the human aspect of the Bible, we are to use to the full our God-given human reason. The Orthodox Church does not exclude

scholarly research into the origin, dates, and authorship of books of the Bible.

Alongside this human element, however, we see always the divine element. These are not simply books written by individual human writers. We hear in Scripture not just human words, marked by a greater or lesser skill and perceptiveness, but the eternal, uncreated Word of God Himself, the divine Word of salvation. When we come to the Bible, then, we come not simply out of curiosity, to gain information. We come to the Bible with a specific question, a personal question about ourselves: "How can I be saved?" As God's divine word of salvation in human language, Scripture should evoke in us a sense of wonder. Do you ever feel, as you read or listen, that it has all become too familiar? Has the Bible grown rather boring? Continually we need to cleanse the doors of our perception and to look in amazement with new eyes at what the Lord sets before us.

We are to feel toward the Bible with a sense of wonder, and sense of expectation and surprise. There are so many rooms in Scripture that we have yet to enter. There is so much depth and majesty for us to discover. If obedience means wonder, it also means listening.

We are better at talking than listening. We hear the sound of our own voice, but often we don't pause to hear the voice of the other person who is speaking to us. So the first requirement, as we read Scripture, is to stop talking and to listen - to listen with obedience. When we enter an Orthodox Church, decorated in the traditional manner, and look up toward the sanctuary at the east end, we see there, in the apse, an icon of the Virgin Mary with her hands raised to heaven - the ancient Scriptural manner of praying that many still use today. This icon symbolizes the attitude we are to assume as we read Scripture - an attitude of receptivity, of hands invisibly raised to heaven. Reading the Bible, we are to model ourselves on the Blessed Virgin Mary, for she is supremely the one who listens. At the Annunciation she listens with obedience and responds to the angel, "Be it unto me according to thy word" (Luke 1:38). She could not have borne the Word of God in her body if she had not first, listened to the Word of God in her heart. After the shepherds have adored the newborn Christ, it is said of her: "Mary kept all these things and pondered them in her heart" (Luke 2:19). Again, when Mary finds Jesus in the temple, we are told: "His mother kept all these things in her heart" (Luke 2:51). The same need for listening is emphasized in the last words attributed to the Mother of God in Scripture, at the wedding feast in Cana of Galilee: "Whatsoever He saith unto you, do it" (John 2:5), she says to the servants - and to all of us. In all this the Blessed Virgin Mary serves as a mirror, as a living icon of the Biblical Christian. We are to be like her as we hear the Word of God: pondering, keeping all these things in our hearts, doing whatever He tells us. We are to listen in obedience as God speaks.

Understanding the Bible Through the Church IN THE SECOND PLACE, we should receive and interpret Scripture through the Church and in the Church. Our approach to the Bible is not only obedient but ecclesial.

It is the Church that tells us what is Scripture. A book is not part of Scripture because of any particular theory about its dating and authorship. Even if it could be proved, for example, that the Fourth Gospel was not actually written by John the beloved disciple of Christ, this would not alter the fact that we Orthodox accept the Fourth Gospel as Holy Scripture. Why? Because the Gospel of John is accepted by the Church and in the Church.

It is the Church that tells us what is Scripture, and it is also the Church that tells us how Scripture is to be understood. Coming upon the Ethiopian as he read the Old Testament in his chariot, Philip the Apostle asked him, "Understandest thou what thou readest?" And the Ethiopian answered, "How can I, unless some man should guide me?" (Acts 8:30-31). We are all in the position of the Ethiopian. The words of Scripture are not always self-explanatory. God speaks directly to the heart of each one of us as we read our Bible. Scripture reading is a personal dialogue between each one of us and Christ - but we also need guidance. And our guide is the Church. We make full use of our own personal understanding, assisted by the Spirit, we make full use of the findings of modern Biblical research, but always we submit private opinion - whether our own or that of the scholars - to the total experience of the Church throughout the ages. The Orthodox standpoint here is summed up in the question asked of a convert at the reception service used by the Russian Church: "Do you acknowledge that the Holy Scripture must be accepted and interpreted in accordance with the belief which has been handed down by the Holy Fathers, and which the Holy Orthodox Church, our Mother, has always held and still does hold?"

We read the Bible personally, but not as isolated individuals. We read as the members of a family, the family of the Orthodox Catholic Church. When reading Scripture, we say not

"I" but "We." We read in communion with all the other members of the Body of Christ, in all parts of the world and in all generations of time. The decisive test and criterion for our understanding of what the Scripture means is the mind of the Church. The Bible is the book of the Church. To discover this "mind of the Church," where do we begin? Our first step is to see how Scripture is used in worship. How, in particular, are Biblical lessons chosen for reading at the different feasts? We should also consult the writings of the Church Fathers, and consider how they interpret the Bible. Our Orthodox manner of reading Scripture is in this way both liturgical and patristic. And this, as we all realize, is far from easy to do in practice, because we have at our disposal so few Orthodox commentaries on Scripture available in English, and most of the Western commentaries do not employ this liturgical and Patristic approach. As an example of what it means to interpret Scripture in a liturgical way, guided by the use made of it at Church feasts, let us look at the Old Testament lessons appointed for Vespers on the Feast of the Annunciation. They are three in number: Genesis 28:10-17; Jacob's dream of a ladder set up from earth to heaven; Ezekiel 43:27; Ezekiel 44:1-4; the prophet's vision of the Jerusalem sanctuary, with the closed gate through which none but the Prince may pass; Proverbs 9:1-11 : one of the great Sophianic passages in the Old Testament, beginning "Wisdom has built her house."

These texts in the Old Testament, then, as their selection for the feast of the Virgin Mary indicates, are all to be understood as prophecies concerning the Incarnation from the Virgin. Mary is Jacob's ladder, supplying the flesh that God incarnate takes upon entering our human world. Mary is the closed gate who alone among women bore a child while still remaining inviolate. Mary provides the house which Christ the Wisdom of God (1 Corinthians 1:24) takes as his dwelling. Exploring in this manner the choice of lessons for the various feasts, we discover layers of Biblical interpretation that are by no means obvious on a first reading.

Take as another example Vespers on Holy Saturday, the first part of the ancient Paschal Vigil. Here we have no less than fifteen Old Testament lessons. This sequence of lessons sets before us the whole scheme of sacred history, while at the same time underlining the deeper meaning of

Christ's Resurrection. First among the lessons is Genesis 1:1-13, the account of Creation: Christ's Resurrection is a new Creation. The fourth lesson is the book of Jonah in its entirety, with the prophet's three days in the belly of the whale foreshadowing Christ's Resurrection after three days in the tomb (cf. Matthew 12:40). The sixth lesson recounts the crossing of the Red Sea by the Israelites (Exodus 13:20-22; Exodus 14:1-31; Exodus 15:1-19), which anticipates the new Passover of Pascha whereby Christ passes over from death to life (cf. 1 Corinthians 5:7; 1 Corinthians 10:1-4). The final lesson is the story of the three Holy Children in the fiery furnace (Daniel 3:1-30), once more a "type" or prophecy of Christ's rising from the tomb.

Such is the effect of reading Scripture ecclesially, in the Church and with the Church. Studying the Old Testament in this liturgical way and using the Fathers to help us, everywhere we uncover signposts pointing forward to the mystery of Christ and of His Mother. Reading the Old Testament in the light of the New, and the New in the light of the, Old - as the Church's calendar encourages us to do - we discover the unity of Holy Scripture. One of the best ways of identifying correspondences between the Old and New Testaments is to use a good Biblical concordance. This can often tell us more about the meaning of Scripture than any commentary. In Bible study groups within our parishes, it is helpful to give one person the special task of noting whenever a particular passage in the Old or New Testament is used for a festival or a saint's day. We can then discuss together the reasons why each specific passage has been so chosen. Others in the group can be assigned to do homework among the Fathers, using for example the Biblical homilies of Saint John Chrysostom (which have been translated into English). Christians need to acquire a patristic mind.

Christ, the Heart of the Bible THE THIRD ELEMENT in our reading of Scripture is that it should be Christ-centered. The Scriptures constitute a coherent whole because they all are Christ-centered. Salvation through the Messiah is their central and unifying topic. He is as a "thread" that runs through all of Holy Scripture, from the first sentence to the last. We have already mentioned the way in which Christ may be seen foreshadowed on the pages of the Old Testament.

Much modern critical study of Scripture in the West has adopted an analytical approach, breaking up each book into different sources. The connecting links are unraveled, and the Bible is reduced to a series of bare primary units. There is certainly value in this. But we need to see the unity as well as the diversity of Scripture, the all-embracing end as well as the scattered beginnings. Orthodoxy prefers on the whole a synthetic rather than an analytical approach, seeing Scripture as an integrated whole, with Christ everywhere as the bond of union.

Always we seek for the point of convergence between the Old Testament and the New, and this we find in Jesus Christ. Orthodoxy assigns particular significance to the "typological" method of interpretation, whereby "types" of Christ, signs and symbols of His work, are discerned throughout the Old Testament. A notable example of this is Melchizedek, the priest-king of Salem, who offered bread and wine to Abraham (Genesis 14:18), and who is seen as a type of Christ not only by the Fathers but even in the New Testament itself (Hebrews 5:6; Hebrews 7:1-28 !). Another instance is the way in which, as we have seen, the Old Passover foreshadows the New; Israel's deliverance from Pharaoh at the Red Sea anticipates our deliverance from sin through the death and Resurrection of the Savior. This is the method of interpretation that we are to apply throughout the Bible. Why, for instance, in the second half of Lent are the Old Testament readings from

Genesis dominated by the figure of Joseph? Why in Holy Week do we read from the book of Job? Because Joseph and Job are innocent sufferers, and as such they are types or foreshadowings of Jesus Christ, whose innocent suffering upon the Cross the Church is at the point of celebrating. It all ties up. A Biblical Christian is the one who, wherever he looks, on every page of Scripture, finds everywhere Christ. The Bible as Personal IN THE WORDS of an early ascetic writer in the Christian East, Saint Mark the Monk: "He who is humble in his thoughts and engaged in spiritual work, when he reads the Holy Scriptures, will apply everything to himself and not to his neighbor." As Orthodox Christians we are to look everywhere in Scripture for a personal application. We are to ask not just "What does it mean?" but "What does it mean to me?" Scripture is a personal dialogue between the Savior and myself - Christ speaking to me, and me answering. That is the fourth criterion in our Bible reading.

I am to see all the stories in Scripture as part of my own personal story. Who is Adam? The name Adam means "man," "human," and so the Genesis account of Adam's fall is also a story about me. I am Adam. It is to me that God speaks when He says to Adam, "Where art thou?" (Genesis 3:9). "Where is God?" we often ask. But the real question is what God asks the Adam in each of us: "Where art thou?"

When, in the story of Cain and Abel, we read God's words to Cain, "Where is Abel thy brother?" (Genesis 4:9), these words, too, are addressed to each of us. Who is Cain? It is myself. And God asks the Cain in each of us, "Where is thy brother?" The way to God lies through love of other people, and there is no other way. Disowning my brother, I replace the image of God with the mark of Cain, and deny my own vital humanity. In reading Scripture, we may take three steps. First, what we have in Scripture is sacred history: the history of the world from the Creation, the history of the chosen people, the history of God Incarnate in Palestine, and the "mighty works" after Pentecost. The Christianity that we find in the Bible is not an ideology, not a philosophical theory, but a historical faith.

Then we are to take a second step. The history presented in the Bible is a personal history. We see God intervening at specific times and in specific places, as He enters into dialogue with individual persons. He addresses each one by name. We see set before us the specific calls issued by God to Abraham, Moses and David, to Rebekah and Ruth, to Isaiah and the prophets, and then to Mary and the Apostles. We see the selectivity of the divine action in history, not as a scandal but as a blessing. God's love is universal in scope, but He chooses to become Incarnate in a particular corner of the earth, at a particular time and from a particular Mother. We are in this manner to savor all the uniqueness of God's action as recorded in Scripture. The person who loves the Bible loves details of dating and geography. Orthodoxy has an intense devotion to the Holy Land, to the exact places where Christ lived and taught, died and rose again. An excellent way to enter more deeply into our Scripture reading is to undertake a pilgrimage to Jerusalem and Galilee. Walk where Christ walked. Go down to the Dead Sea, sit alone on the rocks, feel how Christ felt during the forty days of His temptation in the wilderness. Drink from the well where He spoke with the Samaritan woman. Go at night to the Garden of Gethsemane, sit in the dark under the ancient olives and look across the valley to the lights of the city. Experience to the full the reality of the historical setting, and take that experience back with you to your daily Scripture reading.

Then we are to take a third step. Reliving Biblical history in all its particularity, we are to apply it directly to ourselves. We are to say to ourselves, "All these places and events are not just far away and long ago, but are also part of my own personal encounter with Christ. The stories include me."

Betrayal, for example, is part of the personal story of everyone. Have we not all betrayed others at some time in our life, and have we not all known what it is to be betrayed, and does not the memory of these moments leave continuing scars on our psyche? Reading, then, the account of Saint Peter's betrayal of Christ and of his restoration after the Resurrection, we can see ourselves as actors in the story. Imagining what both Peter and Jesus must have experienced at the moment immediately after the betrayal, we enter into their feelings and make them our own. I am Peter; in this situation can I also be Christ? Reflecting likewise on the process of reconciliation - seeing how the Risen Christ with a love utterly devoid of sentimentality restored the fallen Peter to fellowship, seeing how Peter on his side had the courage to accept this restoration - we ask ourselves: How Christ-like am I to those who have betrayed me? And, after my own acts of betrayal, am I able to accept the forgiveness of others - am I able to forgive myself? Or am I timid, mean, holding myself back, never ready to give myself fully to anything, either good or bad? As the Desert Fathers say, "Better someone who has sinned, if he knows he has sinned and repents, than a person who has not sinned and thinks of himself as righteous." Have I gained the boldness of Saint Mary Magdalene, her constancy and loyalty, when she went out to anoint the body of Christ in the tomb (John 20:1-31 :!)? Do I hear the Risen Savior call me by name, as He called her, and do I respond Rabboni (Teacher) with her simplicity and completeness (John 20:16)?

Reading Scripture in this way - in obedience, as a member of the Church, finding Christ everywhere, seeing everything as a part of my own personal story - we shall sense something of the variety and depth to be found in the Bible. Yet always we shall feel that in our Biblical exploration we are only at the very beginning. We are like someone launching out in a tiny boat across a limitless ocean.

"Thy word is a lamp unto my feet, and a light unto my path" (Psalms 118:1-29 [119]:105).

## 02 - Metr Cyprian - The Study of Holy Scripture

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The Study of Holy Scripture by Metropolitan Cyprian of Oropos and Fili "Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly." (Colossians 3:16) Our pious lay brethren in Christ should not forget and neglect a very beneficial gift of God's compassion for their spiritual edification: the study of Holy Scripture.\*

Assuredly, it is possible for one to study Holy Scripture, but certain questions of necessity arise: Does the "word of Christ" abide in such a student "richly"? Is this so each time that he studies it? Does he know Holy Scripture sufficiently? Is it a shining guide and arbiter of his life? Does it have great power and influence over him...? The Holy Fathers advise us to undertake the unceasing and pious reading of the Holy Scriptures in such a way that this continual effort may familiarize our hearts with the teaching of Christ and that our minds might be literally bathed in it: then our actions will more easily and more naturally come into concord with the Gospel. In this vein, let us note that Saint Pachomios the Great, the very Father of coenobitic monasticism, knew the Holy Gospel by heart and, prompted by Divine Revelation, imposed on his disciples the duty of memorizing the Gospel, so that it would always accompany and guide them.

Special care must be taken, so that the Book of Life is not read intellectually, for "lofty flights," or out of curiosity and simply to gain knowledge: we are required to read Holy Scripture with our actions, by putting it into practice, so that its Life becomes our life.

We shall understand this better when we take heed of the following truth, one so simple but so profound: The New Testament begins with the Holy Gospel of Saint Matthew, which directs us to the "practice" and keeping of the Commandments, and it concludes with the Apocalypse of St. John the Theologian, which guides those who have been purified by "practice" to union with our Lord, to "vision" ["theoria"]. But let no one think that the study of the "word of Christ" is an easy undertaking, or that it is achieved by our own mental skills: prayer, with a spirit of contrition and humility, is indispensable in order that the Divine Comforter might open the eyes of our souls and that the Divine Truths might be revealed to us.

Likewise, insofar as the interpretation of the Divine Texts is a gift of the Holy Spirit, we ought sedulously to avoid our own "easy" interpretations and have recourse with confidence to the hermeneutical perspectives of the Holy Fathers of our Church.

It should also not escape our notice that in Holy Scripture there is nothing insignificant and unworthy of attention; on the contrary, everything in it radiates the Light of Grace, and, consequently, it should be studied with much reverence, attentiveness, and dedication. The God-Bearing Teachers of our Faith advise pious Christians to study the Holy Gospel standing, out of respect for the Sacred Words. Of course, one can study the Divine Word kneeling or sitting down-and this by condescension-, but in such a circumstance, reverence, fear of God, compunction, and attentiveness should dominate the soul.

Saint John Chrysostomos preserves for us an astonishing example of reverence toward the Sacred Books of our Holy Faith: The Christians of his age had a custom, when they were about to read any Sacred Book, of first washing their hands and then taking up the Book; and men read it with their heads uncovered, while women covered their heads...!

"We immediately brace ourselves and wash our hands, when we wish to take up a Book. Do you see how much reverence there is before the reading? And a woman, even if her head is uncovered, at once puts on her kerchief, displaying a sign of her inward piety; and a man, if he has his head covered, bares his head. Do you see how the outward clothing becomes a herald of inward piety?" (Saint John Chrysostomos, Homily LIII on the Holy Gospel of Saint John).

Therefore, "Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly!"

\* The Greek word used here, *melete*, which we have translated as "study," has a very special meaning, akin to the English word "meditation." As Professor Cavarinos has observed, it entails a withdrawal "from worldly objects into the heart," where "the mind should meditate, exercise inner attention and pray." It is "the focusing of the mind on God, death, judgment, hell, heaven, the lives of saints, the words of Christ, the apothegms of the Fathers, and the like" (Constantine Cavarinos, *Byzantine Thought and Art* [Belmont, MA: Institute for Byzantine and Modern Greek Studies, 1980], p. 54).

Translated by Novice Patrick from the Greek periodical *Hagios Kyprianos* (Saint Cyprian), No. 259 (March-April, 1994), pp. 217-218. Novice Patrick is now Hieromonk Patapios. This translation appeared in *Orthodox Tradition*, Vol. XII, No. 4 (1995), pp. 3-4.

## 03 - St Justin - How to Read the Bible & Why

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How to Read the Bible and Why by Archimandrite St. Justin (Popovich) of Chelije The Bible is in a sense a biography of God in this world. In it the Indescribable One has in a sense described Himself. The Holy Scriptures of the New Testament are a biography of the incarnate God in this world. In them it is related how God, in order to reveal Himself to men, sent God the Logos, who took on flesh and became man-and as a man told men everything that God is, everything that God wants from this world and the people in it.

God the Logos revealed God's plan for the world and God's love for the world. God the Word spoke to men about God with the help of words, insofar as human words can contain the uncontainable God.

All that is necessary for this world and the people in it-the Lord has stated in the Bible. In it He has given the answers to all questions. There is no question which can torment the human soul, and not find its answer, either directly or indirectly in the Bible.

Men cannot devise more questions than there are answers in the Bible. If you fail to find the answer to any of your questions in the Bible, it means that you have either posed a senseless question or did not know how to read the Bible and did not finish reading the answer in it. In the Bible God has made known:

[1] what the world is; where it came from; why it exists; where it is heading; how it will end;

[2] what man is; where he comes from; where he is going; what he is made of; what his purpose is; how he will end;

[3] what animals and plants are; what their purpose is; what they are used for;

[4] what good is; where it comes from; what it leads to; what its purpose is; how it is attained;

[5] what evil is; where it comes from; how it came to exist; why it exists-how it will come to an end;

[6] what the righteous are and what sinners are; how a sinner becomes righteous and how an arrogant righteous man becomes a sinner; how a man serves God and how he serves satan; the whole path from good to evil, and from God to satan;

[7] everything-from the beginning to the end; man's entire path from the body to God, from his conception in the womb to his resurrection from the dead;

[8] what the history of the world is, the history of heaven and earth, the history of mankind; what their path, purpose, and end are. In the Bible God has said absolutely everything that was necessary to be said to men. The biography of every man-everyone without exception-is found in the Bible. In it each of us can find himself portrayed and thoroughly described in detail: all those virtues and vices which you have and can have and cannot have.

You will find the paths on which your own soul and everyone else's journey from sin to sinlessness, and the entire path from man to God and from man to satan. You will find the means to free yourself from sin. In short, you will find the complete history of sin and sinfulness, and the complete history of righteousness and the righteous.

If you are mournful, you will find consolation in the Bible; if you are sad, you will find joy; if you are angry-tranquility; if you are lustful-continnence; if you are foolish-wisdom; if you are bad-goodness; if you are a criminal-mercy and righteousness; if you hate your fellow man-love. In it you will find a remedy for all your vices and weak points, and nourishment for all your virtues and accomplishments.

If you are good, the Bible will teach you how to become better; if you are kind, it will teach you angelic tenderness; if you are intelligent, it will teach you wisdom.

If you appreciate the beauty and music of literary style, there is nothing more beautiful or more moving than what is contained in Job, Isaiah, Solomon, David, John the Theologian and the Apostle Paul. Here music-the angelic music of the eternal truth of God-is clothed in human words. The more one reads and studies the Bible, the more he finds reasons to study it as often and as frequently as he can. According to St. John Chrysostom, it is like an aromatic root, which produces more and more aroma the more it is rubbed.

Just as important as knowing why we should read the Bible is knowing how we should read the Bible. The best guides for this are the holy Fathers, headed by St. John Chrysostom who, in a manner of speaking, has written a fifth Gospel. The holy Fathers recommend serious preparation before reading and studying the Bible; but of what does this preparation consist?

First of all in prayer. Pray to the Lord to illuminate your mind-so that you may understand the words of the Bible-and to fill your heart with His grace-so that you may feel the truth and life of those words. Be aware that these are God's words, which He is speaking and saying to you personally. Prayer, together with the other virtues found in the Gospel, is the best preparation a person can have for understanding the Bible.

How should we read the Bible? Prayerfully and reverently, for in each word there is another drop of eternal truth, and all the words together make up the boundless ocean of the Eternal Truth. The Bible is not a book but life; because its words are "spirit and life" (John 6:63). Therefore its words can be comprehended if we study them with the spirit of its spirit, and with the life of its life.

It is a book that must be read with life-by putting it into practice. One should first live it, and then understand it.

Here the words of the Saviour apply: "Whoever is willing to do it-will understand that this teaching is from God" (John 7:17). Do it, so that you may understand it. This is the fundamental rule of Orthodox exegesis. At first one usually reads the Bible quickly, and then more and more slowly, until finally he will begin to read not even word by word, because in each word he is discovering an everlasting truth and an ineffable mystery.

Every day read at least one chapter from the Old and the New Testament; but side by side with this put a virtue from each into practice. Practice it until it becomes a habit to you.

Let us say, for instance, that the first virtue is forgiveness of insults. Let this be your daily obligation. And along with it pray to the Lord: "O gentle Lord, grant me love towards those who insult me!" And when you have made this virtue into a habit, each of the other virtues after it will be easier for you, and so on until the final one. The main thing is to read the Bible as much as possible. When the mind does not understand, the heart will feel; and if neither the mind understands nor the heart feels, read it over again, because by reading it you are sowing God's words in your soul. And there they will not perish, but will gradually and imperceptibly pass into the nature of your soul; and there will happen to you what the Saviour said about the man who "casts seed on the ground, and sleeps and rises night and day, and the seed sprouts and grows, while the man does not know it" (Mark 4:26-27). The main thing is: sow, and it is God who causes and allows what is sown to grow (1 Corinthians 3:6). But do not rush success, lest you become like a man who sows today, but tomorrow already wants to reap. By reading the Bible you are adding yeast to the dough of your soul and body, which gradually expands and fills the soul until it has thoroughly permeated it and makes it rise with the truth and righteousness of the Gospel. In every instance, the Saviour's parable about the sower and the seed can be applied to every one of us. The seed of Divine Truth is given to us in the Bible. By reading it, we sow that seed in our own soul. It falls on the rocky and thorny ground of our soul, but a little also falls on the good soil of our heart-and bears fruit. And when you catch sight of the fruit and taste it, the sweetness and joy will spur you to clear and plow the rocky and thorny areas of your soul and sow it with the seed of the word of God. Do you know when a man is wise in the sight of Christ the Lord?-When he listens to His word and carries it out. The beginning of wisdom is to listen to God's word (Matthew 7:24-25).

Every word of the Saviour has the power and the might to heal both physical and spiritual ailments. "Say the word and my servant will be healed" (Matthew 8:8). The Saviour said the word-and the centurion's servant was healed.

Just as He once did, the Lord even now ceaselessly says His words to you, to me, and to all of us. But we must pause, and immerse ourselves in them and receive them-with the centurion's faith. And a miracle will happen to us, and our souls will be healed just as the centurion's servant was healed. For it is related in the Gospel that they brought many possessed people to Him, and He drove out the spirits with a word, and healed all the sick (Matthew 8:16).

He still does this today, because the Lord Jesus "is the same yesterday and today and forever" (Hebrews 13:8)

Those who do not listen to God's words will be judged at the Dreadful Judgment, and it will be worse for them on the Day of Judgment than it was for Sodom and Gomorrah (Matthew 10:14-15).

Beware-at the Dreadful Judgment you will be asked to give an account for what you have done with the words of God, whether you have listened to them and kept them, whether you have rejoiced in them or been ashamed of them.

If you have been ashamed of them, the Lord will also be ashamed of you when He comes in the glory of His Father together with the holy angels (Mark 8:38).

There are few words of men that are not vain and idle. Thus there are few words for which we do not mind being judged (Matthew 12:36). In order to avoid this, we must study and learn the words of God from the Bible and make them our own; for God proclaimed them to men so that they might

accept them, and by means of them also accept the Truth of God itself. In each word of the Saviour there is more eternity and permanence than in all of heaven and earth with all their history.

Hence He said: "Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will not pass away" (Matthew 24:35). This means that God and all that is of God is in the Saviour's words. Therefore they cannot pass away.

If a man accepts them, he is more permanent than heaven and earth, because there is a power in them that immortalizes man and makes him eternal.

Learning and fulfilling the words of God makes a person a relative of the Lord Jesus. He Himself revealed this when He said: "My mother and my brothers are those who hear the word of God and carry it out" (Luke 9:21). This means that if you hear and read the word of God, you are a half-brother of Christ. If you carry it out, you are a full brother of Christ. And that is a joy and privilege greater than that of the angels. In learning from the Bible, a certain blessedness floods the soul which resembles nothing on earth. The Saviour spoke about this when He said, "Blessed are those who hear the word of God and keep it" (Luke 11:28).

Great is the mystery of the word-so great that the second Person of the Holy Trinity, Christ the Lord, is called "the Word" or "the Logos" in the Bible.

God is the Word (John 1:1). All those words which come from the eternal and absolute Word are full of God, Divine Truth, Eternity, and Righteousness. If you listen to them, you are listening to God. If you read them, you are reading the direct words of God.

God the Word became flesh, became man (John 1:14), and mute, stuttering man began to proclaim the words of the eternal truth and righteousness of God. In the Saviour's words there is a certain elixir of immortality, which drips drop by drop into the soul of the man who reads His words and brings his soul from death to life, from impermanence to permanence. The Saviour indicated this when He said: "Truly, truly I say unto you, whoever listens to my word and believes in the One who sent me has eternal life ... and has passed over from death to life" (John 5:24).

Thus the Saviour makes the crucial assertion: "Truly, truly I say unto you, whoever keeps my words will never see death" (John 8:51).

Every word of Christ is full of God. Thus, when it enters a man's soul it cleanses it from every defilement. From each of His words comes a power that cleanses us from sin.

Hence at the Mystical Supper the Saviour told His disciples, who used to listen to His word without ceasing: "You have already been cleansed by the word which I have spoken to you" (John 15:3).

Christ the Lord and His Apostles call everything that is written in the Bible the word of God, the word of the Lord (John 17:14; Acts 6:2; Acts 13:46; Acts 16:32; Acts 19:20; Acts 11:1-30 Cor. 2:17; Colossians 1:15, 2 Thessalonians 3:1), and unless you read it and receive it as such, you will remain in the mute, stuttering words of men, vain and idle.

Every word of God is full of God's Truth, which sanctifies the soul for all eternity once it enters it.

Thus does the Saviour turn to His heavenly Father in prayer: "Father! Sanctify them with Thy Truth; Thy word is truth" (John 17:17).

If you do not accept the word of Christ as the word of God, as the word of the Truth, then falsehood and the father of lies within you is rebelling against it. In every word of the Saviour there is much that is supernatural and full of grace, and this is what sheds grace on the soul of man when the word of Christ visits it.

Therefore the Holy Apostle calls the whole structure of the house of salvation "the word of the grace of God" (Acts 20:32).

Like a living grace-filled power, the word of God has a wonder-working and life-giving effect on a man, so long as he hears it with faith and receives it with faith (1 Thess. 2:13).

Everything is defiled by sin, but everything is cleansed by the word of God and prayer-everything-all creation from man on down to a worm (1 Timothy 4:5). By the Truth which it carries in itself and by the Power which it has in itself, the word of God is "sharper than any sword and pierces to the point of dividing soul and spirit, and discerns the thoughts and intentions of joints and marrow, the heart" (Hebrews 4:12). Nothing remains secret before it or for it.

Because every word of God contains the eternal Word of God-the Logos-it has the power to give birth and regenerate men. And when a man is born of the Word, he is born of the Truth. For this reason St. James the Apostle writes to the Christians that God the Father has brought them forth "by the word of truth" (1:18); and St. Peter tells them that they "have been born anew ... by the word of the living God, which abides forever" (1 Peter 1:23).

All the words of God, which God has spoken to men, come from the Eternal Word-the Logos, who is the Word of life and bestows Life eternal. By living for the Word, a man brings himself from death to life. By filling himself with eternal life, a man becomes a conqueror of death and "a partaker of the Divine nature" (2 Peter 1:4), and of his blessedness there shall be no end. The main and most important point of all this is faith and feeling love towards Christ the Lord, because the mystery of every word of God is opened beneath the warmth of that feeling, just as the petals of a fragrant flower are opened beneath the warmth of the sun's rays. Amen. From *The Struggle for Faith, Vol. IV, A Treasury of Serbian Orthodox Spirituality*, Trans. Rt. Rev. Archimandrite Todor Mika, S.T.M and the Very Rev. Dr. Stevan Scott (Grayslake, IL: The Free Serbian Orthodox Diocese of United States of America and Canada, 1989), pp. 74-85.

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