

***unless
someone
guides me***

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1

Unless someone guides me

All of us Christians “read” the Bible, at least at times. Some of us “meditate” the Bible. But only very few of us “study” the Bible. The reason is most of us do not know “how” to study the Bible. I’m reminded of what the Finance Secretary from Ethiopia told Evangelist Philip. The Ethiopian official was reading the Book of Isaiah while journeying through desert Gaza. The Spirit of God led Philip to join the official in his chariot. When Philip asked him, “Do you understand what you are reading?”, the instant reply was, “How can I, **unless someone guides me?**” (Acts 8:26-31).

The fourfold profit of the Holy Scriptures is stated in Paul’s writing to young Timothy: 2 Timothy 3:16, “All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for **doctrine**, for **reproof**, for **correction**, for **instruction** in righteousness.” In this passage the Apostle speaks of “childhood” and

“manhood,” and then “salvation” and “service” (vv15,17). In other words, the purpose of Bible Study is to mature us from childhood to manhood, and to move us from just enjoying the gift of salvation to enrolling in the service of God for mankind. Interestingly, the very first of the four profits of the Bible is “doctrine.” Doctrine means teaching. It is not God’s will that we continue in the “milkstage” as babies. He longs for all His children to be able to chew strong “meat.” It is an embarrassment to the Heavenly Father to see His grown-up children who ought to be “teachers” still remain as “toddlers.” The unknown author of the Book of Hebrews lamented, “Though by this time you ought to be teachers... you have come to need milk and not solid food” (Heb 5:12). Dear reader, whatever is written in this booklet is to grow you to Christian maturity through the study of God’s Word. But how?

Divine Revelation or Human Instruction?

Bible study can be by ourselves or with the help of others. One is not superior or inferior to the other. Both have a place in the plan of God. Not everyone gets direct revelations from God. The revelation of the Gospel truth did not come to Paul through any human agency. About this he writes in Galatians 1:11,12, “The Gospel which was

preached by me is not according to man. For I neither received it from man, nor was I taught it, but it came through the revelation of Jesus Christ.” But that was not the case with Timothy. Paul wrote to him in 2 Timothy 2:2, “The things which you have heard from me among many witnesses, commit these to faithful men who will be able to teach others also.” Paul to Timothy, Timothy to faithful men, and faithful men to others! Four generations! In other words, Paul was an exception. The general rule is that we learn from other teachers.

Then comes a question: What’s the meaning of 1 John 2:27? “The anointing which you have received from God abides in you, and you do not need that anyone teach you.” The answer lies in verse 26. The Apostle was not referring to faithful Bible teachers but false teachers: “These things I have written to you **concerning** those who try to **deceive** you.” He was talking about the disturbance we will sense in our spirits if what we hear is alien to the Scriptures.

Studying the Bible is not easy. Because, the writers of the 66 Books of the Bible were human whereas the Author was divine. Also it’s not just an old Book, it’s ancient. It’s impossible to understand the Bible without painstaking study. This is what Paul stressed

to Timothy: 2 Timothy 2:15, “Be diligent to present yourself approved to God, a worker who does not need to be ashamed, rightly **dividing** the Word of Truth.” The Apostle was using a tentmaker’s language here. Tents in his days were patchwork of leather pieces. If the cutting (dividing) was not proper, the shape of the tent when erected would be odd to the shame of the tentmaker! In other words, unless the interpretation of the Scripture passage is right, the application would put us to shame.

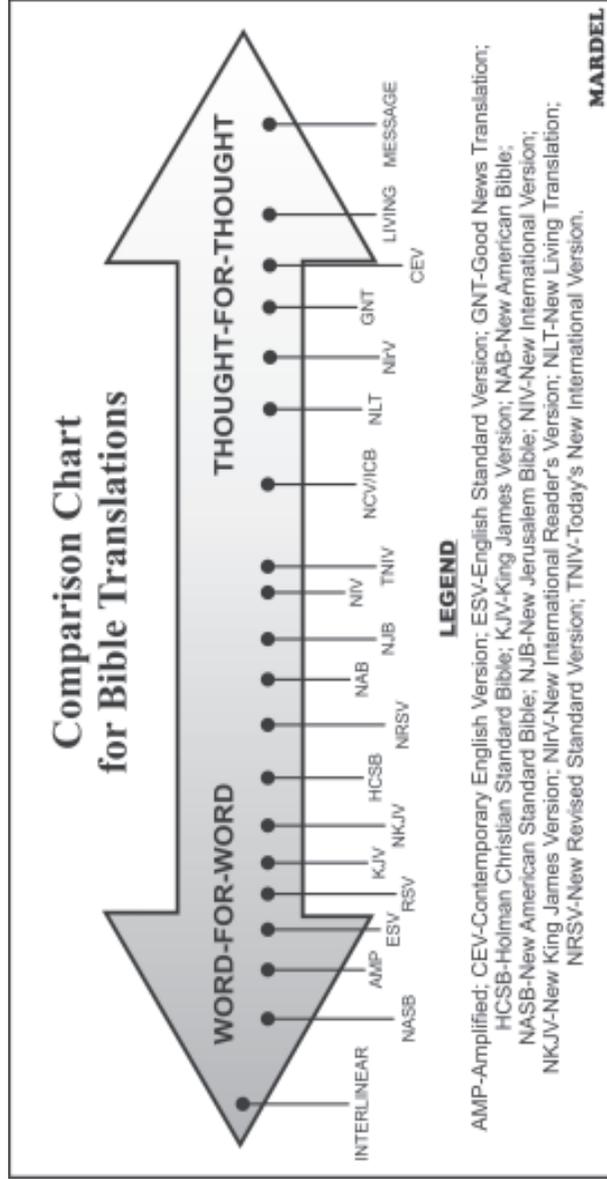
We therefore do need Bible teachers to guide us in the interpretation of the Scriptures. Today’s teachers can be “heard;” but how about the teachers of yesteryears? We have to mainly depend on what they’ve written. In the Christian world of Biblical literature, there are simply too many study helps. “Which one to choose?” is always a problem. From the year 1971, besides referring to several Bible study aids, I have been interested in browsing through whatever rolled off the press anywhere in the world. This exercise, under God, with the Spirit-given discernment, has enabled me over the last 40 years to recommend to keen believers and Christian workers “safe” study materials. I have helped thousands of missionaries, pastors, preachers, Christian leaders and zealous Christians in choosing the right study

aids. I'm humbled to testify in God's presence that not one of them who followed my guidance has been disappointed. This booklet is written mainly at the request of these beneficiaries. Go through the following guidelines carefully and see how God leads you.

2

Which Translation?

Christians are confused over the enormous number of Bible translations. Bible translations can be broadly classified as word-for-word translation and thought-for-thought translation. These two approaches are otherwise called “formal equivalence” and “dynamic equivalence.” Strictly speaking, Bible translations cannot be neatly sorted into these two categories. There’s always a combination to varying degrees. The *King James Version* (KJV), *New King James Version* (NKJV), *English Standard Version* (ESV), *New American Standard Bible* (NASB) and the like fall under the word-for-word category. The *Living Bible* (LB), *New Living Translation* (NLT), *Contemporary English Version* (CEV) and the like belong to the thought-for-thought category. The *New International Version* (NIV) is somewhere in between. See the Chart on page 11 for a comparative understanding of various translations.



The first type, namely the conservative translation, is ideal for meditation and memorization. Do include the other category for in-depth study. Because I was an addict to *King James Version* (KJV) for several years, the maximum I could move out was to the *New King James Version* (NKJV), which I use both for private study and pulpit ministry.

To facilitate comparative study, there are several *Parallel Bibles* which have two or three translations of the text printed side by side. These Bibles normally have one conservative translation and the other from free translations. Years ago I purchased the *Bible from 26 Translations*, published by Baker Book House (1967), and I'm greatly benefitted. I wonder whether it's in print now. Let me illustrate the benefit of such a Bible with the text from 2 Timothy 2:15 for the phrase, **"rightly dividing the Word of Truth"**—

*"ever cutting a straight path
for the message of the Truth"*

*"driving a straight furrow,
in your proclamation of the Truth"*

"straightforward dealing with the Word"

"declaring the Word without distortion"

Isn't it helpful?

Instead of going in for several Translations, you can also get hold of an “*Amplified Bible*.” The original Bible languages of Hebrew, Greek and Aramaic are highly energetic languages. To get just one exactly equivalent word in English or other languages for certain words is sometimes impossible. The *Amplified Bible* therefore gives various possible meanings and shades of difficult words in the text itself. I’ve found this Bible helpful while preparing sermons. No translation is perfect. Each has its strengths and weaknesses.

The one reason why you must not abandon the conservative word-for-word translations is that the “conjunctions” therein are helpful in understanding the sequential and logical development of any statement of truth. I mean “and...or...then...therefore...but...for... etc.” Take for example, the Epistle to the Romans. Chapter 2 begins with “therefore;” Chapter 3 with “then;” Chapter 4 again with “then;” Chapter 5 with “therefore;” Chapter 6, “then;” Chapter 7, “or;” Chapter 8, “therefore;” and so on. After all, the Bible was divided into Chapters only in the 12th Century, and into Verses in the 15th Century. Sadly, several modern translations leave out these conjunctions. I then find linking difficult. I still remember a sermon exclusively on

“conjunctions” by the famous hand-reconstructing surgeon Dr. Paul Brand (1914-2003). He illustrated this from the Book of Ephesians!

While choosing a Bible, make sure it’s a large print edition with sufficient marginal space. Thinline or Slimline Bibles may be convenient to tuck inside handbags or briefcases, but not good enough for study purposes involving underlining and marking. Go for quality paper though it might cost more. A leather-bound edition lasts longer than hardcover or paperback. It’s also more convenient to handle because of its flexibility.

3

Bible Concordances

A Concordance is an index of every occurrence of a word. The oldest Concordances were based on the *King James Version* (KJV). They are —

- 📖 *Cruden's Complete Concordance*
by Alexander Cruden (1699-1770)
- 📖 *Strong's Exhaustive Concordance*
by James Strong (1822-1894)
- 📖 *Young's Analytical Concordance*
by Robert Young (1822-1888)

The Strong's and Young's are somewhat too much for an average student of the Scriptures. The *Cruden's Concordance* is good enough. I'm using it regularly for many many years. Thanks to Operation Mobilisation (OM) for reprinting this time-tested Concordance in India.

Several new Concordances have come; but each is keyed to a particular Version. I'm

thrilled how Bible Scholars like Cruden, Strong and Young were able to do such a voluminous work before the invention of computers! Now it is not that difficult!

Bible Concordances are a must for topical study, and to locate verses. Ken Anderson's *Where to find it in the Bible*, published by Thomas Nelson Bible Publishers, is an excellent addition to topical study. Thank God for the ministry of Ken Anderson (1917-2006) who will be remembered for the over 200 Gospel films he has produced, especially the *Jesus Film*.

Another tool for topical study, similar to a Concordance, though not so exhaustive, is *Nave's Topical Bible*. Of this Dr. Billy Graham testifies, "Outside the Bible, this is the book I mostly rely upon!" Nowadays most of the Bibles have a Concordance at the end, but they are not extensive enough. You must have a complete Concordance if you want to get a glimpse of the "whole" counsel of God (Acts 20:27). I suggest that you sit with a Bible teacher to learn how to optimize the use of a Concordance.

4

Bible Dictionaries

A Bible Dictionary gives the background and description of places, people, events, festivals, customs and cultures relating to what is narrated in the Scriptures.

The Holy Bible was not written in the Western culture or Eastern culture. Thankfully, God in His wisdom chose the Middle-Eastern culture for its setting! The first five Books of the Old Testament were written in 1400 B.C. The last Book of the New Testament was written in A.D. 90. This means, between the time the Bible was written and when we read the Bible there's a gap of about 3000 years! Wow!

Each language has its own peculiar proverbs, which cannot be used as such in other languages. The customs vary from country to country. In some countries the rule for motorists is "Keep Left," whereas it's "Keep Right" in other countries. Similarly

cultures are so very different. When Elisha asked Elijah for the "double portion" of his spirit, he simply meant that he wanted to be the heir or successor (2 Ki 2:9; Dt 27:17). It's not to be arithmetically doubled as many preach today! While sending forth the 70 disciples, Jesus instructed them, "Greet no one along the way!" (Lk 10:4b). Was Jesus anti-social? No! Those days, greetings would mean making long enquiries relating to all family matters and business. The "urgency" of the Kingdom message demanded setting aside of things of secondary importance (v9b). Where do you get all these details? Of course from Bible Dictionaries!

Of the numerous Bible Dictionaries in the market, I would strongly recommend anyone of the following—

📖 *Zondervan Pictorial Bible Dictionary*
1962 (Black & White)

📖 *Holman Illustrated Bible Dictionary*
2003 (Colour)

📖 *Nelson New Illustrated Bible Dictionary*
1995 (Colour)

Some Bible Dictionaries are too academic, and one feels dry while reading the details. The ones I have recommended here are known for their both academic and devotional value. Read through one or two pages of a Bible Dictionary every day from page one. Underline

whatever you consider important or find as interesting. I honestly believe, whenever you read and meditate on the pages of the Bible you will be reminded of the relevant informations from the Bible Dictionary. This is my experience. I claim the “reminding” ministry of the Holy Spirit.

My wife and I have been to countries in the Middle East several times for the ministry of God’s Word. Somehow we were not too keen on visiting Israel. We made it in 2008 when our friend, the British Bible Teacher, Rev. David Pawson invited us to join his tour. No doubt it was a moving experience. But I would say that reading through a reliable Bible Dictionary is more than visiting the “Holy Land” one hundred times!

4

Study Bibles

Ever since the Lord saved me in 1962 I was longing to possess a Study Bible. All I had till 1970, until I finished my college studies, was just a Tamil Bible, a Gideon’s New Testament and a plain English Bible. My dream was fulfilled when my wife gave me a *Dake’s Annotated Reference Bible* as her engagement gift in August 1970. Since then I committed myself to the introduction of Study Bibles to God’s people.

There are three types of Study Bibles: Reference Bibles, Bibles with General Study Notes and Specialised Bibles.

a) Reference Bibles

The oldest Study Bibles under this category are—

- 📖 *Scofield Reference Bible* (1909)
- 📖 *Thompson Chain Reference Bible* (1908)

Dr. C.I. Scofield (1843-1921) was an Episcopalian minister influenced by both the

D.L. Moody ministry and Plymouth Brethren. His interpretation of the Scripture is dispensational. F.C. Thompson (1858-1940) was a Methodist preacher. Both in the Scofield and the Thompson Bibles you have chains of references. The former is more of themes and the latter subjects. The marginal references given in these two Bibles are of course limited. If you desire an exhaustive reference work, you must go in for the *New Treasury of Scripture Knowledge*. In this each verse in the Bible is covered by a “paragraph” of references. For example, there are at least 100 references for Genesis 1:1 alone!!! The first edition of this treasure-house was highly recommended by Revivalists like R. A. Torrey (1856-1928) who was the successor to D.L. Moody at the Moody Bible Institute in Chicago. I regularly use this “library!”

The underlying principle of these reference systems is that Scripture explains Scripture. The Bible is the Bible’s best Commentary. One passage of the Bible throws light on another passage. This is where we see the amazing unity of the Bible!

b) Bibles with Study Notes

I highly recommended any one of these Study Bibles which have extensive marginal and footnotes alongwith references—

- 📖 *NIV Study Bible* (1985)
- 📖 *NKJV Study Bible* (1997)
- 📖 *ESV Study Bible* (2008)

Obviously the third one, namely *ESV Study Bible*, has more updated Biblical scholarship. It’s good to have all these three Study Bibles, but if you want to pick up just one, go in for the *ESV Study Bible*. This comes with a secret number for each buyer to load the entire Bible online. It also will be updated free of charge for lifetime.

The Book Introductions to each of the 66 Books of the Bible in these Study Bibles make the reader understand why each author says what he says. This helps contextual interpretation of the Scriptures. The footnotes, though brief, are crisp and to the point.

c) Specialised Study Bibles

While the above two categories of Study Bibles are meant for the general meditation and study of the Scriptures, here’s a list of Study Bibles catering to specific needs:

- 📖 Doctrinal Study—
Disciple’s Study Bible
- 📖 Devotional Helps—
Max Lucado Devotional Bible
Life Application Study Bible
Experiencing God Study Bible
(Henry T. Blackaby)
Transformation Study Bible
(Warren W. Wiersbe)

- 📖 Family Issues —
Family Foundation Study Bible
- 📖 Leadership Lessons —
Maxwell Leadership Bible
- 📖 Prophecy —
Prophecy Study Bible (John Hegre)
- 📖 Questions & Answers —
Quest Study Bible
Evidence Bible (Science)
- 📖 Youth Needs —
Revolution Bible (Teen Boys)
True Images Bible (Teen Girls)
- 📖 Cultural & Archaeological Background—
Holman Illustrated Study Bible
- 📖 Hebrew-Greek Word Studies—
HCSB Study Bible
- 📖 Charismatic Emphasis —
Full Life Study Bible
New Spirit-filled Life Bible

Pick up these Bibles according to your specific need. Remember, these Bibles, unlike the *NIV Study Bible*, *NKJV Study Bible* and *ESV Study Bible*, are not good enough for the in-depth study of the Scriptures.

Do you know that present arrangement of the Books in our Bible is not in the “chronological” order? The canonical arrangement in our regular Bibles is sometimes confusing. But there are **Chronological Bibles** which will help us

follow the flow of events in the Scriptures to better understand the unfolding of the Drama of Redemption. The following two Chronological Bibles are commendable—

- 📖 *The Narrated Bible* (NIV) 1984
(With devotional notes as links)
- 📖 *The Chronological Study Bible* (NKJV) 2008
(With colour photographs and pictures)

After giving one reading through any of these two Bibles, when you get back to your regular Bible you will be better equipped to understand it.

Choice of Study Bibles

While talking about Study Bibles I want to make another observation. Some Study Bibles are authored by individual authors, whereas others are by teams of Bible Scholars. Let me illustrate —

The *Dake’s Annotated Reference Bible* was authored by Mr. Finis Jennings Dake (1902-1987) who was a Pentecostal, first in the Assemblies of God and later in the Church of God. Dr. C.I. Scofield the author of the *Scofield Reference Bible* largely held Brethren views. The author of the *Thompson Chain Reference Bible* was a Methodist. Dr. John MacArthur of the *MacArthur Study Bible* is an anti-Charismatic. Inevitably their notes and comments will have some bias and

prejudice according to their theological and denominational persuasion. It's not so with the Study Bibles like *NIV Study Bible*, *NKJV Study Bible*, *ESV Study Bible*, *HCSB Study Bible*, *NASB Study Bible* and *NLT Study Bible* which are authored by "teams" of Bible Scholars representing many nations and a wide spectrum of denominations. Their views therefore are inter-national and inter-denominational. Obviously these Study Bibles are safer and more balanced than the first category.

6

Bible Commentaries

The notes in the Study Bibles are usually brief because of space consideration. Also not every verse is commented on. For a detailed study and understanding of the Bible verses and passages, we need Bible Commentaries. There are too many Bible Commentaries but I would like to present here two time-tested Commentaries —

*a) Matthew Henry's Commentary
on the Whole Bible*

Matthew Henry (1662-1714) was a Presbyterian with Puritan emphasis. He worked for 10 years, each day from 4 am. He had finished upto the Acts of the Apostles when God called him Home. His ministerial friends completed the New Testament from his notes and writings. His highly spiritualised exposition was greatly acknowledged by C.H. Spurgeon called the Prince of Preachers. Matthew Henry's Commentary is available both as a 7-volume set and a single volume of abridged or unabridged version.

b) *Jamieson, Fausset & Brown's*

Commentary on the Whole Bible

While Matthew Henry's is more devotional in style, the Jamieson-Fausset-Brown's is verse-by-verse exposition. The original 6-volume set is now condensed to a single volume retaining its essence. Dr. Herbert Lockyer the famous author calls this Commentary as "the treasure store of Bible information par excellence!"

With anyone of these two classic Commentaries, you must add —

c) *Bible Background Commentary (OT&NT)*

The Inter-Varsity Press (IVP) has published this as two volumes, Old Testament & New Testament, 830 pages each. This unique Commentary provides, in verse-by-verse format, the crucial cultural background we need for richer Bible Study. I refer to this Commentary frequently and I am not disappointed. Unfortunately, because this is not stocked in most of the Indian Christian bookstores, many Christians are not aware of such an excellent Bible Study aid.

The Bethany Fellowship in the USA had published, years ago, the *Bethany Parallel Commentary* (OT & NT, 2 Vols) which had side by side the 3 Commentaries of Matthew Henry, Jamieson-Fausset-Brown, and Adam Clarke. It is now out of print. Grab it even if you come across used volumes. It's worth it.

7

General Study Helps

If you have never read through the Bible anytime, as a preparation you may start with a "Bible Handbook." *The Lion's Handbook of the Bible*, or *What the Bible is All About* by Henrietta Mears are remarkable.

To get a sweep of Biblical overview you can go in for *Unlocking the Bible*, a 900 page classic by Rev. J. David Pawson, which I have reprinted in India, or *Willmington's Guide to the Bible* by Herald Willmington. Willmington's analytical understanding of the Scriptures is seen in his *Outline Bible* which outlines every chapter and every verse in the Bible. Those struggling with arriving at an outline while preparing lessons or sermons will find this Bible handy. I have introduced this to many Pastors.

For a pictorial and diagrammatic presentation of Bible history, Church history and

World history, I recommend *Rose Book of Bible Charts* (Vols. 1&2, full-colour pages, art paper, hardcover, spiral-binding, 23 cm x 28 cm). Excellent artwork! The pages can be reproduced or projected overhead for teaching purposes.

There are titles like *The Big Book of Bible Difficulties* by Geisler & Howe, published by Baker Book House; *The Encyclopedia of Bible Difficulties* by Gleason Archer; and *The Hard Sayings of the Bible* by Walter Kaiser and team. The seeming contradictions in the Bible and very difficult passages are explained in these books.

8

Bible Software

Some of the study materials recommended in this booklet are available as software or in websites. But they cannot become a substitute for hard copies. They can only serve as a supplement. People kept “standing” for about three hours while the Book of God was being read out in Ezra and Nehemiah’s time (Neh 9:3). To assume reverential postures like “kneeling” while meditating the Bible, software is not suitable. Also, whatever you underline in your Bible and write on the margin will make your Bible your spiritual journal. Whichever page you turn to in your Bible, markings and handwritten words or sentences will remind you of how God had been carrying you through over the years! We do not study the Bible just to boost our academic knowledge but to affect our very lifestyle (Js 1:22). Also, when your naked eyes actually fall again and again on Bible pages, contextual interpretation of any verse becomes easier, especially to observe the immediate context.

9

Conclusion

You may ask, “Do I need all these helps to study the Bible?” Well, you don’t need all these if you just want to go to Heaven. If you want to take others to Heaven, you need to study the Bible deeply. The twin-purpose of Christian life is “to know Him and to make Him known!” One leads to the other. It’s through the Word of God we get to know and understand the God of the Word.

You may also wonder whether using so many Study Aids would not paralyse your personal meditational skills. No, these would only enhance your meditation and study, serving as guidelines and safeguards.

When Billy Graham was asked how he would live if he were given another life, his instant reply was, “I will preach less and study more!” May be he reflected Apostle Paul’s desire to read his books again while awaiting execution (2 Tim 4:13).

In their hectic daily schedule, career people find it difficult to set aside time for serious Bible study on a daily basis. Keep the morning quiet time for personal meditation, and allot a few hours in weekends for rigorous study. Don’t you apply for leave from your workplace for sickness or family needs? Why not avail leave for a day or two every month for the exclusive purpose of studying the Bible?

Compared to the hours and days and years of labour the Bible scholars have put in to give us these study aids, the cost of these volumes is nothing. How much does a pair of dress cost these days? If not for you, buy these materials for your children. This will be the most valuable treasure you would leave behind. You must also remember that several Bible Study Aids suddenly go out of print. The *Disciple’s Study Bible* (page 22) is one such example.

I request Pastors to introduce Bible Study Aids to their members and help them in whatever way possible to buy and use them. I’m sure they would find the informations in this booklet useful. To those who cannot follow English, introduce whatever Study Aid is available and safe in the vernaculars. The goal of every minister in the New Testament should be to make every believer a minister (Eph 4:11-13).

I'm not a Seminarian with formal theological education. Several Biblical truths I had to learn the hard way. Whatever I've written in these pages is from a non-theologian to non-theologians, technically speaking. It's my passion to see every believer grow into a mature understanding of God's Word. Feel free to contact me when you need some specific guidance in buying Bible Study aids. I'm at your service. Visit fine Christian bookstores where you will get most of these materials. I also hold a stock of select materials with my limited resources to bless God's people.

Let me conclude with the confession of the Psalmist: "I have seen the consummation of all perfection, but Your commandment is exceedingly broad!" (Psa 119:96).

I invite your corrections and suggestions to improve and update the future editions of this booklet.

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