

Serious Bible Readers Are Not Serious Sinners

By Daryl Wingerd

I'll start by making a bold assertion: The true Christian who becomes absorbed in the study of God's word, who spends the largest percentage of his otherwise unallocated time in serious, concentrated and thoughtful Bible reading, who orders his life around this pursuit and the behaviors that flow naturally from it, will rarely suffer long-term defeat in his battle against sin.

Overly bold? Not at all. The Bible makes this precise claim in Psalm 119:9—"How can



a young man keep his way pure? By keeping it according to Your word." One's "way" is one's life—the way he lives from day to day. The "way" of purity is righteousness, obedience to God, holiness of life. To *keep one's way pure*, then, is to maintain a consistent practice of righteousness—to steadfastly resist the temptation to sin, and to do God's will instead of evil.

If you are a true Christian, you *can* live this kind of life (the Bible insists) by *reading* and *learning* and *knowing* and *meditating* on

Scripture. As the psalmist says in the verses that follow, "With all my heart I have sought You" (v. 10); "Your word I have treasured in my heart, that I may not sin against you" (v. 11); "I will meditate on Your precepts and regard Your ways" (v. 15); "I shall delight in Your statutes; I shall not forget Your word" (vv. 15-16). The Christian who absorbs himself in God's word *will* walk in purity.

Believers can only maintain purity by the Holy Spirit's guidance and empowerment, not merely by their moral resolve. But they *can* do it. They *can* practice righteousness rather than sin (1 John 3:4-10). They *can* walk in the good works God prepared beforehand for them to walk in (Eph. 2:10). They *can* be doers of the word, not merely hearers who delude themselves (James 1:22-25; Matt. 7:24-27). They *can* persevere in doing good (Rom. 2:7).

So how does this work? What are the mechanics of maintaining purity through serious Bible reading? Consider a few factors:

Serious Bible readers magnify their love for God. As they dedicate themselves to Bible study, they come to know God more intimately. The true believer cannot know God more intimately without loving Him more deeply, and ever-deepening love for God produces ever-strengthening obedience to His will. As Jesus said, "If you love Me you will keep My commandments" (John 14:15).

Serious Bible readers fear God more seriously. One cannot study the Bible with a true Christian's heart without developing a growing reverence for the God who created the world, and who one day will judge the living and the dead. This fear of God will steer a man toward the kind of behavior that pleases Him. As the book of

Proverbs says, "He who walks in uprightness fears the Lord" (14:2); "The fear of the Lord is to hate evil" (8:13); "By the fear of the Lord one keeps away from evil" (16:6).

Serious Bible readers learn to love the church. Let's face it: not everyone who claims to be a Christian *really* loves the church. True believers, on the other hand, learn to love the church when they study to understand the price Jesus paid to redeem it (Acts 20:28; Eph. 5:25), the great sacrifices the apostles made to spread it to all nations (Acts, all the way through), the effort Satan expends in seeking to pervert and overthrow it (Acts 20:28-30; 1 Tim. 4:1), and the unique and crucial role every true Christian plays in building up the church by walking in purity (Matt. 18:15-17; 1 Cor. 5; 1 Cor. 6:15-20; Eph. 4:14-16).

Serious Bible readers are more aware of their own weaknesses and more alert to sin's deceitful tactics. Serious Bible readers are warned of others who fell (1 Cor. 10:6). They are warned of the condemnation that awaits those who are overcome by the deceitfulness of sin (Heb. 3:12-14). They are instructed not to become overconfident themselves (1 Cor. 10:12), and they learn that there are no excuses for giving in to temptation (1 Cor. 10:13). They learn to keep watching and praying in order to avoid and resist temptation. As Jesus said to Peter, "The spirit is willing, but the flesh is weak" (Mark. 14:38).

Serious Bible readers are usually too busy to sin. Christians often sin when they allow themselves too much leisure time. They're bored, or they feel like they just need to unwind, so they hang out with unprofitable friends, watch questionable TV shows and movies, idly surf the Internet, gossip, or allow their mind to wander into lust, worry, or covetousness. In this way they not only waste the valuable time God has given them, but they also open themselves up to temptation. Were they busy reading their Bibles (alone or with others) instead during these otherwise idle times, their minds would be occupied by that which sanctifies rather than that which defiles.

Imagine the physical discomfort of climbing out of a 100-degree hot tub and jumping into an icy lake. The shock might be physically tolerable, but it would not be pleasant. Now imagine jumping back and forth and back and forth between these two extremes. No one in his right mind would want to do this. Likewise, the serious Bible reader will not be easily convinced to jump out of the warm, comfortable environment of growing closer and closer to God through concentrated, dedicated Bible study, only to dive into the spiritual discomfort of serious sin—to do the very thing God hates. It would be especially bizarre to see a true believer and serious Bible reader jumping back and forth and back and forth between these two extremes. The shock would simply be too unpleasant.