

# Becoming A Roma Disciple of Jesus

By Bob Hitching

## How To Study The Bible

### **1 The Bible Is God's Word**

As a young man I was surrounded by all kinds of superstitions. On my mothers side there was tea leaf reading, palm reading, horoscopes and a mysterious crystal ball that was kept at my grandmothers house. I did not think much of it as a young person but it effected me deeply. The reason for its effect was that I grew up with many different ideas about how the future could be understood and also how I could find out the truth for how I should live.

Every March 1 in our house no one was supposed to speak without first saying some special words, we were “never” to look at the back of vehicle that had hay on it after a harvest. To break a mirror was going to bring seven years bad luck, to drop a glove meant someone else had to pick it up or bad luck would come. We could not walk under a ladder and if a black cat crossed our path we were in big trouble. My mother would make a certain sign on her forehead to ensure she awake at a certain time in the morning. There were so many of these superstitions that life seemed filled with a

hidden supernatural world.

My whole early life was haunted by strange dreams and terrible fears in the darkness, I was so aware of a strange spiritual place where God or devils would either speak or torment men and women.

If you had asked me at the age of ten how does God speak I probably would have said through the stars, through the Bible and through all the superstitions that make up every day life.

I would have put the Bible in there along with those other things but just one of many different ways. I was soon to learn that ONLY the Bible is the Word of God.

From my father's side we would receive every year a special book that gave predictions from the stars about how the world was going to be that next year. Faithfully, every year they purchased the book and read the predictions. Also, on my father's side was a long history of alcoholism and illegal gambling. Everyone in the family was effected emotionally because of this. It effected our whole view of right and wrong. What was wrong to many families was right to our family.

As I grew older I realised there was another powerful side to my life. It was my feelings. If I felt something was right or wrong I felt it must be true. I would just sense that something was right or wrong and it was this that guided my life. As a teenager I often felt things were wrong and I would feel guilt and yet at the same time I did some terrible things with no feeling of guilt at all. My feelings were real but they were very often wrong. I would actually say most of the time my feelings led me down the wrong path.

Growing up I was confused. I was confused by the superstitions and I was confused by my feelings that were so changeable.

Also, one of the hardest areas for me to learn about how to live, was when I listened to other people who told me that they were speaking from God and that because they were a prophet or that they were a spiritual leader, I should listen to them.

Some of these people seemed very powerful and it was easy to get confused.

As time went on I realised that God would NEVER say something through a Prophet that is different from his Word , the Bible.

In fact one of the great leaders of the Church said this:

“ If God should come down from heaven a hundred times he would not say anything that we need to know that He has not already told us in the Bible”

So Prophets may be helpful to help us understand what the Bible says but they can never be a substitute for the Bible itself.

Now after a lifetime I can see things so much more clearly.

God speaks to us through the Bible. It is through His word, the Bible that we can learn how to live in a way that is pleasing to Him.

**Psalm 119 v 106** Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light for my path.

The Bible is God's Word and God's Word is the truth. To look for the truth in any place other than the Bible is going to produce confusion. Fortune-tellers, superstitions and our own feelings are not reliable but the Bible is reliable. You can trust the Bible. The Bible is a safe place to learn. The Bible is the only place to look for answers on how to live our lives.

**Hebrews 4 v 12** For the word of God is living and active. Sharper than any double-edged sword.....it judges the thoughts and attitudes of men and women's hearts.

We need to be honest. In the Roma communities we live in there are superstitions, fortune tellers and Prophets. There is also lot of confusion in people's emotions concerning what is right and what is wrong.

The Lord Jesus taught people the Bible and from His teaching their lives were made strong and good.

**Luke 24 v 32** "Were not our hearts burning within us while Jesus talked with us on the road and taught the Bible, to us?"

For all of us this is very good news. God has spoken to us clearly and He wants us to learn what He has taught us so that we can live right lives and be pleasing to him.

Now we must understand that God speaks to people in many different ways. Dreams and visions are part of the way that God works but the clearest way that He has spoken and speaks to us today is through His Word the Bible. This little book is all about this, God speaking to us, you and I through the Bible.

In the next few pages we will study together on how to study the Bible so that we can hear from God on how to live, what pleases him and what causes him to be angry.

## **2 Where Do We Begin?**

**Deuteronomy 4 v10** "Assemble the people before me to hear my words so that they may learn to revere me

I have visited hundreds of Roma Homes in Croatia, Hungary, Romania, Montenegro, Bosnia, Turkey and of course in my own country of England. Very few homes had a Bible. The few homes that did have a Bible very often kept it in a safe place. Sometimes it was on a high shelf or in a special cupboard. Very few people read the Bible every day in Roma villages around the world. One of the things that God is changing in these days is that He is causing the Roma to discover the Bible, often in their own languages and as a result they are learning to hear God's voice to give them guidance on how to live their lives.

So for you reading this little book let us assume that you have not read the Bible much at all and that you need to learn how to study the Bible from a very basic starting point.

If you find this section too simple, read it anyway and pray for those people who are reading this and learning from God's Word for the first time.

When you look at the Bible it seems very big and very complicated. The temptation is just to open it

anywhere and start reading but that only creates more confusion so don't do it that way.

The Bible is not for fortune telling so we need to be careful not to treat it like a magic box hoping that if we open it and point our finger to a place that God will speak to us.

Let us think of it in this way. Reading and learning from the Bible is like starting a fire.

- First you find a place to make a fire..
- Then you find some small twigs and then you start the fire by lighting the small twigs.
- Then you add some larger pieces of wood when the flames start to get going.
- When the fire is really going you can sit down in front of it and warm yourself.

You do not start a fire by trying to light big logs so when you read the Bible you start with the easier places and then build upon it step by step.

- First we need to find the right place in the Bible to begin.
- Then we read just a small amount until we begin to understand it.
- Then we read more as we get used to it.
- Then we stop and think about what we have read and let it warm our hearts.

Let us try this together.

We need to find the right place to light the fire.

In your Bible when you open it up right at the very beginning you will see a page that says Table of Contents. That page tells you where different parts of the Bible are and what page number to turn to. The best way to start is to read the part of the Bible that is called the New Testament and the best section to read first is The Gospel of Mark. Let us do this together now. Find The Gospel of Mark, this is where you will start the fire.

The Gospel of Mark is made up of sections called chapters and verses. The Chapters are the bigger sections and the verses are short sections. These are in the Bible to help us find our way around the different parts. It also helps to remember certain truths. Also, most Bibles give a small heading to tell us what the next few verses are going to be about.

So lets us now look at The Gospel of Mark Chapter one.

Remember we are looking for small twigs right now. So let us look at verses 21 to 28.

In this section the Bible tells the story of how Jesus cast out a demon from a man. Read those few verses now.

Now lets us think about this for a moment.

- Demon's are very powerful. We see them at work in peoples lives. Demon's are evil and hurt children and weak people.
- Jesus was not afraid of demons because He was mightier than the demons. Jesus is the King in the Spirit world.
- When Jesus told the demon to leave the man the demon obeyed Jesus. Why? Because Jesus is the King in the Spirit world.
- If we trust Jesus with our every day lives demons can not hurt us, Why? Jesus is the King in the Spirit world.

Read the story again and think about it.

These are very simple truths but really quite wonderful. There is no power on earth greater than Jesus Christ.

Now my feelings may not feel that is the truth when I see so much evil all around me. It would be easy to look around the village and see so much evil and feel like evil is greater.

The spirit people who do the fortune telling and curses will certainly tell you that they have access to a greater power. But the Word of God is clear Jesus is the King in the Spirit world and that is the truth because the Bible is the Word of God.

Now let us put some bigger logs of wood on our fire.

Let us go back to the Beginning of Chapter One and read the first verse.

It speaks about two things:

- The Gospel
- Jesus the Son of God

Remember we have just read that Jesus is the King in the Spirit world and He has all power over all evil spirits. Let us ask ourselves a question. Is this good news or bad news? Well the answer is that it is bad news if you are demon but it is good news if you want to be a follower of Jesus.

Whenever you read the word Gospel in the Bible it means Good News.

So lets think about this for a moment. The good news of Jesus Christ is that He has power over all evil. Then we read the second part of the verse that says the Gospel belongs to Jesus Christ the Son of God. The reason Jesus has all power is because He is the Son of God.

This is the bigger lumps of wood on the fire.

Now what do we do with this information. We warm our hearts in its glow just like a lovely fire on a spring evening.

- Think about the truth that Jesus has greater power than any demon.
- Jesus is the son of God and he cares about people who are hurt by demons or any kind of evil.
- Jesus is the King in the Spirit world

What we have just done here is work on a Bible study together. Obviously, if you are just beginning in your study of the Bible you may need someone to help you. That is why we have created some Bible studies to help you get started. The truth is though that you can quickly learn to study the Bible on your own. God wants us to learn about Him that is why He has promised to teach us by His Holy Spirit.

**John 14 v 26** But the Counselor, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, will teach you all things

### **3 How to Look at the Word Of God**

**2 Timothy 2 verse 15** Study to shew thyself approved unto God, a workman that needs not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth.

Many Roma families still follow very strictly the codes for washing clothes. Different kinds of clothing must never be mixed with other kinds of clothing. There are always different washing bowls in every home, one for each type of clothing. When the women wash the clothing they separate the clothing into piles and the piles must never touch each other. Each pile is then washed separately in each of the bowls. The clothes are then taken and hung out to dry separately.

When read the Bible we have to be very careful to separate what we read into three sections. Firstly, there are the **Blessings of the Bible** and then there **Warnings of the Bible** and then there are the **Commands of the Bible**.

We separate these three just like the woman who separates the clothes for washing into different bowls.

- The Blessings of the Bible are all the wonderful passages of the Word of God that tell us some good news about what God has done for us.
- The Warnings of the Bible are those passages that tell us what will happen to us if we ignore or disobey to do what God has said.
- The Commands of the Bible are those places where God clearly tells through the Word of God what we should do, when we should do it and how it should be done.

Just as it is important for the woman not to mix up the different clothing then it is important for us not mix up these three areas of the Bible.

Let us look at a passage and see if we can see how this works. **Read John 13 verses 1 to 17**

This is a beautiful story about how Jesus showed how humble he was by washing the feet of his disciples. Peter says to Jesus that he will not let him wash his feet and Jesus says in return if he does not wash Peter's feet then Peter could not be a part of Jesus' special group of friends. Peter then allows Jesus to wash his feet. Afterward Jesus then gives a command and tells his friends I have washed your feet now you must wash each other's feet.

**Let us look first of all for the blessing.**

The blessing was how humble Jesus was and how he was willing to be as a servant to those he loved. It is a beautiful picture of what Jesus is like.

**Now let us look for the warning.**

Peter did not want to have Jesus wash his feet. His feelings were telling him it was not right. Jesus said if I do not wash your feet you can not be a part of this special group of friends.

**Now let us look at the command.**

Jesus tells his disciples that they must follow his example. They must be humble towards other people. They must become like a servant to others.

When you read through the Bible you will see it will be either one of these three areas, Blessing, warning or commands. Just like the piles of clothes there are the three different areas of the Bible that must not be mixed up.

#### **4 The Blessings and warnings of the Bible**

**Numbers 6 verses 24 to 26** May the LORD bless you and protect you. May the LORD smile on you and be gracious to you. May the LORD show you his favor and give you his peace.'

As you read the Bible more and more you will discover that it speaks far more about what God has done for us compared to what we are to do for him.

This is very important as it is easy to get into a situation where you see the life of a follower of

Jesus being a list of things that you are supposed to do and if you do not do them then God will punish you. This is not true.

In the last chapter we said that the Bible is made up of three sections Blessings, Warnings and Commands. This is true. What we have to see though is how these three areas work together.

Let us look at a passage together. I have put the passage in here so we can look at it very carefully together. It may seem a little complicated but do not worry. If you go through it slowly you will get the meaning.

### **Romans Chapter 3 verses 21 to 24**

21 But now God has shown us a way to be made right with him without keeping the requirements of the law, as was promised in the writings of Moses and the prophets long ago.<sup>22</sup> We are made right with God by placing our faith in Jesus Christ. And this is true for everyone who believes, no matter who we are.

23 For everyone has sinned; we all fall short of God's glorious standard. 24 Yet God, with undeserved kindness, declares that we are righteous. He did this through Christ Jesus when he freed us from the penalty for our sins.

**Blessings** God has shown us a way to be right with him

We are made right with God when we put our faith in Jesus Christ

This is true for everyone no matter who we are

God declares us righteous because of His kindness

He set us free from the Judgment for our sins

**Warning** Everyone has sinned

Everyone has fallen short of God's standard

**Command** Believe in Him

Have faith in Him

So let us look at this carefully. If it is a little hard to understand do not worry but just keep reading.

- We have all sinned.
- Our sins deserves Judgment
- Jesus took the judgment in our place when He died on the Cross. God punished Jesus for our sins because we could not do anything in ourselves to be right with God
- If we believe this and trust Jesus to forgive us of our sins then God makes us right with him
- This is not because of something we do but because of the kindness of God.

The Blessings and warnings and commands are all here.

**The Blessing** - God wants to forgive us our sins because he is kind.

**The Warning** - If we refuse his kindness then we are left with the guilt of our sins.

**The Command** - We must believe in Him and have faith and trust him.

God's desire for us is blessing. That comes first. He warns us of the consequences of refusing his blessing and then he shows us how we can obey him to receive the blessings.

The Word of God is not a rule book that gives us lists of things to do. It is a book of blessings that are revealed with warnings of what happens when we refuse the blessings and commands on how we can receive those blessings.

## **Chapter Five Being Obedient to the Word of God**

Jesus said that we can tell if we love him or not by whether or not we obey him. This seems very hard to accept and yet obedience is at the heart of the Bible's teaching for our lives.

**John 14 v 15** "If you love me, you will obey what I command.

**Luke 11 v 28** "Happy is the person who hears the Word of God and obeys it"

One day a young Roma woman and I were talking. She said she could not respect her father because he was so evil to her. It took my mind back to when I was a young man after I had just become a Christian and I was going to be Baptised. My father refused to come and instead he got drunk and said some terrible things to me when I got home. I was so discouraged and unhappy. Now the Bible is very clear on this subject.

**Deuteronomy 5 v 16** "Honor your father and your mother, as the LORD your God has commanded you,

So as you look at this you can see that obedience is not always easy.

For me one day I had to go to the Lord Jesus and ask him to give me the power to honor my father even though I thought it was impossible. He did give me that power and I was able to honor him but it was not easy. Following Jesus is not easy all the time. My feelings could tell me that it was wrong to show honor to someone who treated me the way that he did. My friends and the fortune tellers would say he does not deserve honor and I should curse him. But the Bible tells me that I must show honor and if I want to follow Jesus then I am going to have to make some really hard decisions in life and it is not going to be easy.

So let us look then at how the Bible helps us at times like this.

It is so important to see the commands of Jesus in the Bible and then ask him for strength to be able to obey them. Here is a little outline to help:

- I ask myself what is the command when I read a passage of the Bible.
- I remind myself this is the Word of God
- I ask myself if I am obeying that command.

- If I am not, I ask God to forgive me.
- I then ask for power and strength to obey his command.

Let us look at another command and then see how we can work with this in our own lives.

**Ephesians 5 v 25** Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her

As we look at this passage we can see the command. I am to love my wife so much it is like the way Jesus loves His followers and died on the Cross to forgive them of their sins. What do your feelings say? Your wife has done so many wrong things how can you love her? The spirit people may say she should be cursed to die so you can have a new wife. The Bible commands me to love my wife with a deep love. I remind myself this is the Word of God. My feelings and other people do not matter, what does God say? I ask myself am I obeying this command? Am I really loving my wife by being gentle and kind and caring. I then stop right there, while I am reading and I pray and ask God to forgive me for not loving my wife. I realise that this is the Word of God and I must obey and so I call out to God for power and strength to love my wife. It is not easy to be a follower of Jesus but it is wonderful to be a follower of Jesus.

## **Chapter Six This Bible Is My Bible**

I remember so well my first Bible after I became a Christian. I had been a very bad young man and was always getting into trouble fighting and drinking and other things. When I was converted the first thing that I wanted was my own Bible. I walked into a small shop and there was a man and his wife who owned the shop standing there. When I came in they looked afraid. They looked like I may steal something or maybe start some trouble. I walked up to them and in a soft voice I said I wanted to buy a Bible. The look of relief on their faces was something I will always remember. The man got a Bible and showed it to me. When I held it in my hands it was like gold it was so precious to me. It was not just a Bible it was MY Bible.

I have had many Bibles since then and I have loved them all. Why because it is something I can trust. People disappoint us. Feelings lead us the wrong way but the Bible is the Word of God and it never fails.

**2 Samuel 7 verse 28** O Sovereign LORD, you are God! Your words are trustworthy,

The Bible is like a house. Everyone's house is different but they still all have the same things.

Tables, chairs, beds, cupboards and sinks. What makes our house our own house is the way that we organise it and lay all the furniture out. So it is with the Bible.

Your Bible is not something to be hidden away or placed on a special shelf. Your Bible is to be used every day. In the same way as you use pots and pans in the kitchen or tools on your car or bike. The Bible is an everyday Bible to give direction on how to live our lives. Because it is your Bible then it is a good idea to make markings in it that help you in your study. When you read the Bible look for the **Commands**. When you see a command mark a little x next to that verse so it will remind you the next time you read it. When you see a **Blessing** in the Bible that really encourages you then underline the words carefully so it will be a reminder to you how you were blessed. When you read and you see a **Warning** then put a mark next to that verse like a little star \*

Some people write notes in their Bible about what they have learned. Others use different coloured pens to mark their Bible in a way that helps them remember things. The important thing is the Bible is YOUR Bible.

A special part of the Bible being your Bible is that it is something that is for you when you are alone and not just in a Church meeting or a Bible study group. It is important to make your Bible a part of your everyday life.

Here are some ideas:

- When you go to bed at night read one verse that has blessed you. It may be a favourite verse it could be the same verse that you use every night before you sleep.
- When you wake up in the morning you need to find a quiet place to be alone with God. That

is sometimes quite difficult but it can be done.

- The first thing you do before you read is pray. You ask God to show you His Blessings, Warnings and Commands so that you can become the person He desires you to be.
- Then read the Word of God with an open heart to hear what God is saying to you

God is doing a wonderful work among the Roma around the world. Never before have so many come to Christ. God is also doing a work among the Roma to see thousands reading the Bible every day and asking God to show them how to live.

Many people are praying for you as you read this little book that God would cause you to make the decision to follow him by being obedient to his word.

### **Psalm 1 verses 1 to 3**

Oh, the joys of those who do not follow the advice of the wicked, or stand around with sinners, or join in with mockers. But they delight in the law of the LORD, meditating on it day and night. They are like trees planted along the riverbank, bearing fruit each season. Their leaves never wither, and they prosper in all they do.