

A MINISTER'S FILING SYSTEM

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You will not remember! That is the bottom line when it comes to libraries and filing systems. The efficiency with which a minister discharges his responsibilities is directly proportionate to the degree of ready access he has to his materials. The quality of his work is determined by the extent to which he can organize and preserve the information that he generates and that comes to him from a wide range of sources. A person needs to organize his files because he will remember only a small percent of what he learns and needs to know.

Information comes in different forms; consequently, you need to have a corresponding variety of forms for keeping track of it. (a) There are 3 x 5 cards for ideas that come to mind, bibliography, or short notes you take out of larger items you do not own or do not want to keep as a whole. (b) Books can be organized by areas and sub-topics on bookshelves. It is probably satisfactory to keep just a 3 x 5 author card for each book. In addition you need (c) folders in a filing system. In folders you can place articles from serials, newspaper clippings, class notes, sermons you preach, lessons you teach, even 3 x 5 cards on topics that do not require a whole separate card box. Stacking articles on the corner of a desk or jotting down little things on the back of envelopes is literally "useless" because they will not likely be used. A deficient filing system means that you will use only the information that is available in the books you happen to own, because books have titles, tables of content, and indices. Your library, 3 x 5 card system, and filing system can all follow the same topical breakdown, although they may vary in the degree of their specificness in different places.

Be sure to have materials on hand for preserving information: folders, 3 x 5 cards, card boxes, paper, and filing cabinets. If you do not have them readily available, you will either toss what should be kept or put it somewhere it does not naturally belong. For the same reason it is really best to go ahead and create files for topics you are certain to use. Otherwise in haste you will find yourself putting articles into folders that are too general or somewhat aside from the subject of this essay. As a result you will not remember where you put it, and it will get lost altogether or it will take more trouble to find it than it is worth. What you put away must be retrievable or a filing system becomes a systematic way of losing things.

There are several minister's filing systems on the market. Many of them are too complicated for practical purposes unless a person has a very capable secretary to keep them up to date. This problem applies particularly to something like Memory-O-Matic. You want to have a system that requires little recopying of information as possible.

There are two important guidelines for filing a system: (1) it must be expandable, and (2) it must be simple enough to remember. In the beginning your folders can be more general. For example, you may simply have a folder called "Salvation." Before long, however, that folder will become too thick. At that point you can sub-divide it into smaller categories: atonement, faith and works, perseverance, predestination, *etc.*, depending on how the collection is growing. Keep the general folder for articles that make a broad sweep through several of these topics. An expandable approach allows you

filing system to grow according to the emphasis of your ministry, something not predictable ahead of time. You do not have to begin with a folder for every conceivable sub-heading under the subjects you use. An expandable approach also allows you filing system to handle different degrees of specificity within topics. General folders (“Salvation”) can be placed ahead of the more detailed ones that are related to them.

The following scheme falls into five groupings: (1) biblical, which includes critical introduction and a format that follows the layout of biblical books; (2) theological, which covers doctrine topically; (3) practical, which covers Christian living; (4) ministerial, which deals with Christian service, and (5) general, which picks up several sets of topics not included under the other four.

In addition to the categories offered here, you may find it helpful to consult a resource like Paul Gericke, *The Minister's Filing System* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1978).

I. BIBLICAL STUDIES

A. Introduction

1. Critical Introduction to the Bible

A. Critical Introduction to the Old Testament (if this section grows large enough, you may have a folder for each book)

B. Critical Introduction to the New Testament (if this section grows large enough, you may have a folder for each book)

2. Apocrypha

3. Pseudepigrapha

B. Textual Criticism

C. Hermeneutics (suggested sub-topics can be found in the layout of the Interpretation course or the outline of a book on interpretation)

D. Biblical Languages

1. Hebrew

2. Greek

E. Archaeology

F. Exegesis

The breakdown here may begin with a folder per book. Later as need arises, there may be a folder for each chapter of some books. A similar system could be set up in notebooks, but bookshelves are not wide enough or deep enough to store them neatly. If need be, there may be one page per verse within each chapter's folder.

II. THEOLOGICAL STUDIES

The large headings may be arranged alphabetically by standard designations or according to some natural progression that makes sense to you. Below is an alphabetical arrangement in formal terminology. A logical sequence could be based on the headings in Christian Doctrine I and II: Interpersonalism, revelation (nature and scripture), God (trinity, Father, Son, Spirit), creation and providence (man, angels, providence, miracle), salvation (faith, atonement, baptism), dispensations, Christian life and worship, eschatology.

A. Angels (angelology): use of the term angel; classes of angels (demons, Satan; unfallen angels, archangels, cherubs, seraphs); nature of angels, work of angels

B. Man (anthropology): image of God, male-female, depravity, conditional immortality (see "eschatology")

C. Church (ecclesiology)

1. nature: non-denominationalism, interdenominationalism, denominationalism
2. purpose
3. offices (church organization): Lord, apostle, evangelist, prophets, elder, deacon, deaconess issue
4. restorationism
5. reformationism
6. successionism
7. ordination
8. women and ministry
9. church-state relationship
10. parachurch agencies
11. precedent vs. example
12. church discipline and restoration

D. Creation (cosmology) and providence: predestination

E. Last Things (eschatology)

1. death (Near Death Experiences)
1. resurrection: vs. immortality of the soul
3. reincarnation
2. intermediate states: paradise, tartarus, soul-sleeping, purgatory, limbo

3. second coming
4. millennium: historic premillennialism, dispensational premillennialism, postmillennialism, amillennialism
5. tribulation
5. rapture: pre-tribulation, mid-tribulation, post-tribulation
6. judgment
7. eternal states: heaven, hell, conditional immortality, annihilationism
8. miscellaneous: “man of sin,” “antichrist,” “two witnesses”

F. Christian Living (ethics)

1. ethical theory
2. ethical issues
 - abortion
 - abuse (emotional abuse, spouse abuse, child abuse, animal abuse)
 - alcohol (total abstinence, social drinking)
 - animal rights (vivisection)
 - asceticism
 - card playing
 - capital punishment (penal codes, torture)
 - censorship
 - civil disobedience
 - contraception
 - corporal punishment
 - cremation
 - cursing/using the Lord’s name in vain
 - dancing
 - dietary regulations (vegetarianism, Old Testament dietary regulations, eating blood)
 - discrimination (sexual, racial, economic, societal, ethnic, political, religious)
 - disfigurement of the body (tattoos, pierced ears, scarring)
 - divorce
 - dress (hair length, facial hair, modesty, nakedness, straightened hair among blacks)
 - dueling
 - ecology
 - euthanasia (voluntary euthanasia)
 - fertilization in vitro (artificial insemination)
 - fetal tissue research
 - gambling (bingo, casinos, lottery; betting on athletic contests, horses, cock fights, greyhound races, *etc.*)
 - genetic engineering
 - gluttony
 - honesty (cheating, lying, lapsing under torture, placebos)
 - infanticide (exposure)
 - leisure

litigation
 lust (temperance)
 marriage (polygamy-bigamy, kinship limitations, interracial marriage, religiously mixed marriage)
 mass media (TV, radio, newspapers)
 monasticism
 oaths (swearing, legal oaths)
 pacifism ("just war," self-defense, police force)
 play (games of skill, games of chance) pornography
 psychosurgery
 racism (apartheid, interracial marriage)
 remarriage (divorce and remarriage, deuterogamy)
 right to die (heroic measure, life support systems)
 rock music
 separation (marital)
 sexual behavior (adultery, bestiality, birth control, fornication, homosexuality, incest, levirate impregnation, masturbation, rape, premarital sex, sex for procreation only, prostitution, marital rape, premarital sex-play, withdrawal)
 sex roles
 slavery
 stewardship (poverty, wealth, ecology, see also "Worship")
 substance abuse (alcoholism, drugs, smoking)
 suicide (suicide pacts; as a prevention against capture, abuse, divulging information)
 surrogate parenting
 theft (duplication of copyrighted material)
 test-tube babies
 "victimless crimes"
 work (labor unions, right-to-work laws, strikes),
 3. home: single state, monogamy, structure of the home (husband-wife, parent-child)

G. Revelation: general revelation, special revelation (bibliology: authenticity, authority, credibility, illumination, inerrancy, infallibility, inspiration/God-breathedness (canonicity, verbal inspiration, plenary inspiration, dynamic inspiration), integrity, perspicuity, sufficiency, progressive revelation, credalism, etc.

H. Salvation (soteriology):

sin: nature of sin (behavior, state, nature), consequences of sin, power of sin, "sin not unto death," terminal sin ("sin not unto death," "blasphemy of the Holy Spirit," "sin with a high hand," "impossible to be renewed to repentance")
 atonement
 faith-works
 baptism
 meaning

candidate
 form including: immersion, sprinkling, pouring, trine, single-action
 administrator
 forgiveness, justification, regeneration,
 restitution
 apostasy, perseverance, eternal security, restoration
 treasury of the saints
 indulgences

I. God (theology proper)

1. Characteristics of deity: interpersonality, omnipotence, omniscience, immutability, omnipresence (foreknowledge and free will), sovereignty, spirituality, love/lovingkindness, holiness, grace and mercy, justice, wrath
2. Trinity (vs. monarchianism, tritheism; see below under “Antibiblical Views of God”)
3. Father
4. Son (Christology)
 - two-natures: deity, humanity, incarnation, “only begotten,”
 - pre-existence (“firstborn,” “kenosis”)
 - virgin birth
 - resurrection (see also under “Apologetics”)
 - ascension
5. Holy Spirit (pneumatology)
 - nature of the Spirit: personality, deity
 - work of the Spirit in creation, conversion, regeneration, guidance, empowerment/growth, intercession;
 - relationship to the spirit: the concept of indwelling, filling, baptism in the Spirit, miraculous gifts: tongues, interpretation of tongues, healing, prophecy
 - exorcism, duration of miraculous manifestation.
 - For additional categories, see class notes for Gifts of the Spirit.
6. Views of God: agnosticism, animism, atheism, deism, dialecticism, docetism, fetishism, god of the gaps, henotheism, monarchianism (dualistic, adoptionistic), pantheism, panentheism, polytheism, theism, totemism,

J. Corporate Worship:

communion: meaning, candidate, elements, frequency, form (one-cup controversy)
 instrumental music
 Sabbath-Sunday
 footwashing (or put under “Sacraments”/“Ordinances”)
 church buildings
 tithing
 patternism/formulaism, formalism, ritualism, legalism

idolatry
 icons and relics
 veneration/adoration of the saints

K. Apologetics (Christian evidences)

1. Archaeology
2. Prophecy-Fulfillment
3. Miraculous manifestation: resurrection
4. Critical Introduction (see “Critical Introduction”)
5. Alleged Discrepancies in the Bible
6. Creation-Evolution Controversy: see essays for Apologetics for subheadings
6. Theistic proofs
7. Theodicy (problem of evil, problem of pain/suffering)

In some lists of topics the terms ordinances or sacraments is a separate heading that covers baptism and communion/eucharist/Lord’s Supper (as well as footwashing) and the other five enumerated in the Roman Catholic church: confirmation, matrimony, extreme unction, holy orders, penance.

III. Practical Christian Living (note topics for the Basic Christianity)

A. Vertical

1. Worship: meditation, celebration, communion,
2. Guidance
3. Christian freedom
4. Meaning
5. Stewardship
6. devotional reading of scripture and other materials
7. Prayer
8. Assurance of salvation
9. Faith
10. Love

B. Horizontal items with and asterisk could be put under the “Ministry” category)

1. Marriage
2. Parenting
3. *Christian Leadership
4. Basic values
5. Conversation
6. *Conflict resolution
7. *Influencing for Christ (evangelism)
8. Weaker-brother relationships

C. Personal

1. Sanctification
2. Spiritual exercises: fasting, Bible reading, devotional reading, fellowship, etc.)
3. Spiritual fruit
4. Fasting
5. Will
6. Temptation
7. Emotions
8. Self-image
9. Body
10. Mind
11. Suffering