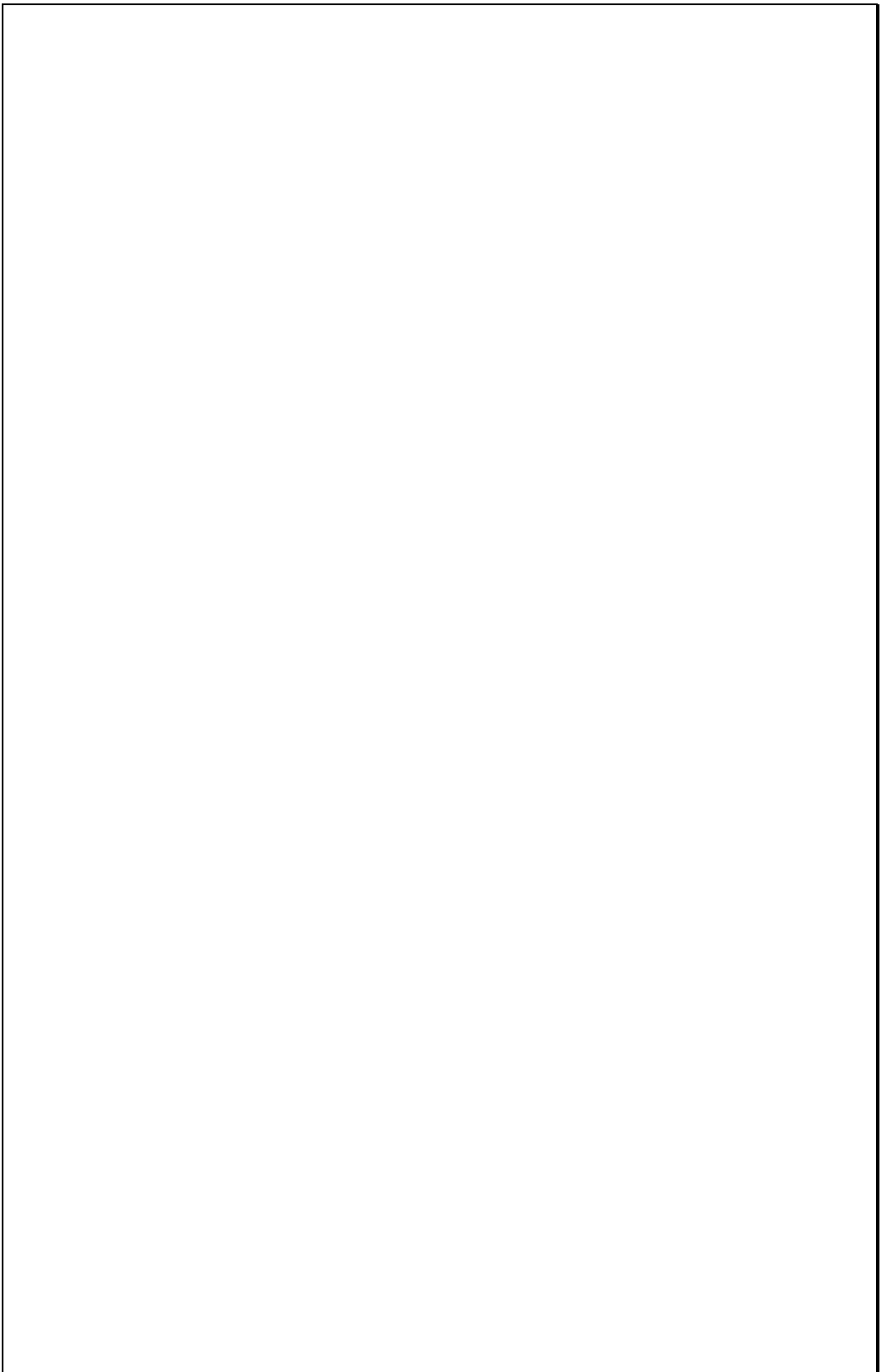

RIGHTLY DIVIDING THE WORD OF TRUTH

Seven Simple Lessons
in
Studying the Bible

LARRY E. FORD



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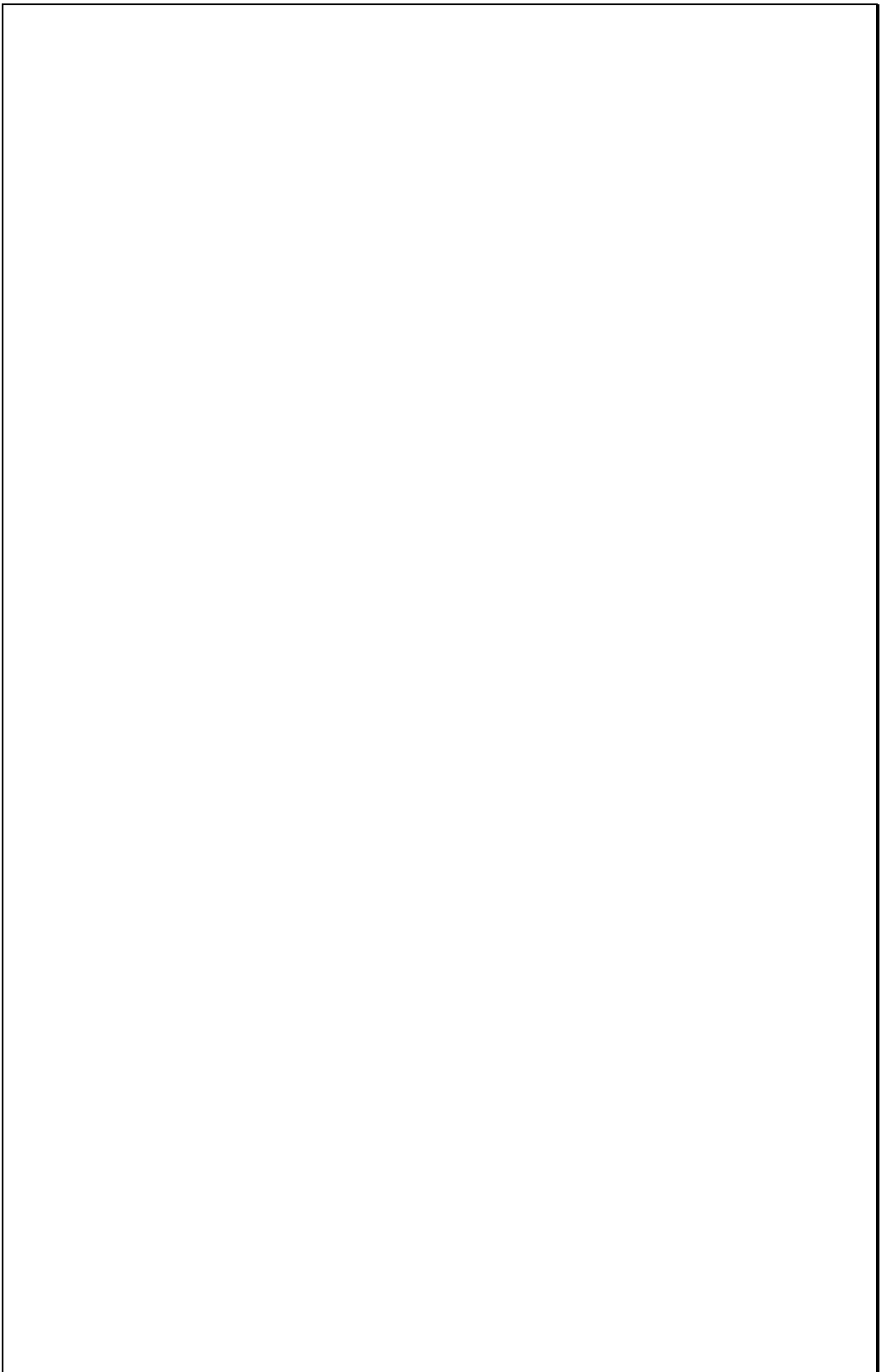
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Larry E. Ford

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Scriptures in this work are quoted from the King James Version of the Bible, unless otherwise noted. The author changes terms like “thee,” “thou,” “thine,” and other 17th Century expressions to more modern terms.

Unless otherwise stated, all definitions for Greek terms are from the Bauer-Arndt-Gingrich *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament* (University of Chicago Press, 1957). All definitions for Hebrew terms are from the Brown-Driver-Briggs *Hebrew and English Lexicon* (Hendrickson Publishers, 1999 – reprinted from the 1906 edition by Houghton, Mifflin and Company, Boston).



Scriptural Admonitions

Study to show yourself approved unto God, a workman that does not need to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth. (2 Timothy 2:15)

All scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness so that the man of God may be spiritually mature and thoroughly furnished to do all manner of good works. (2 Timothy 3:16, 17)

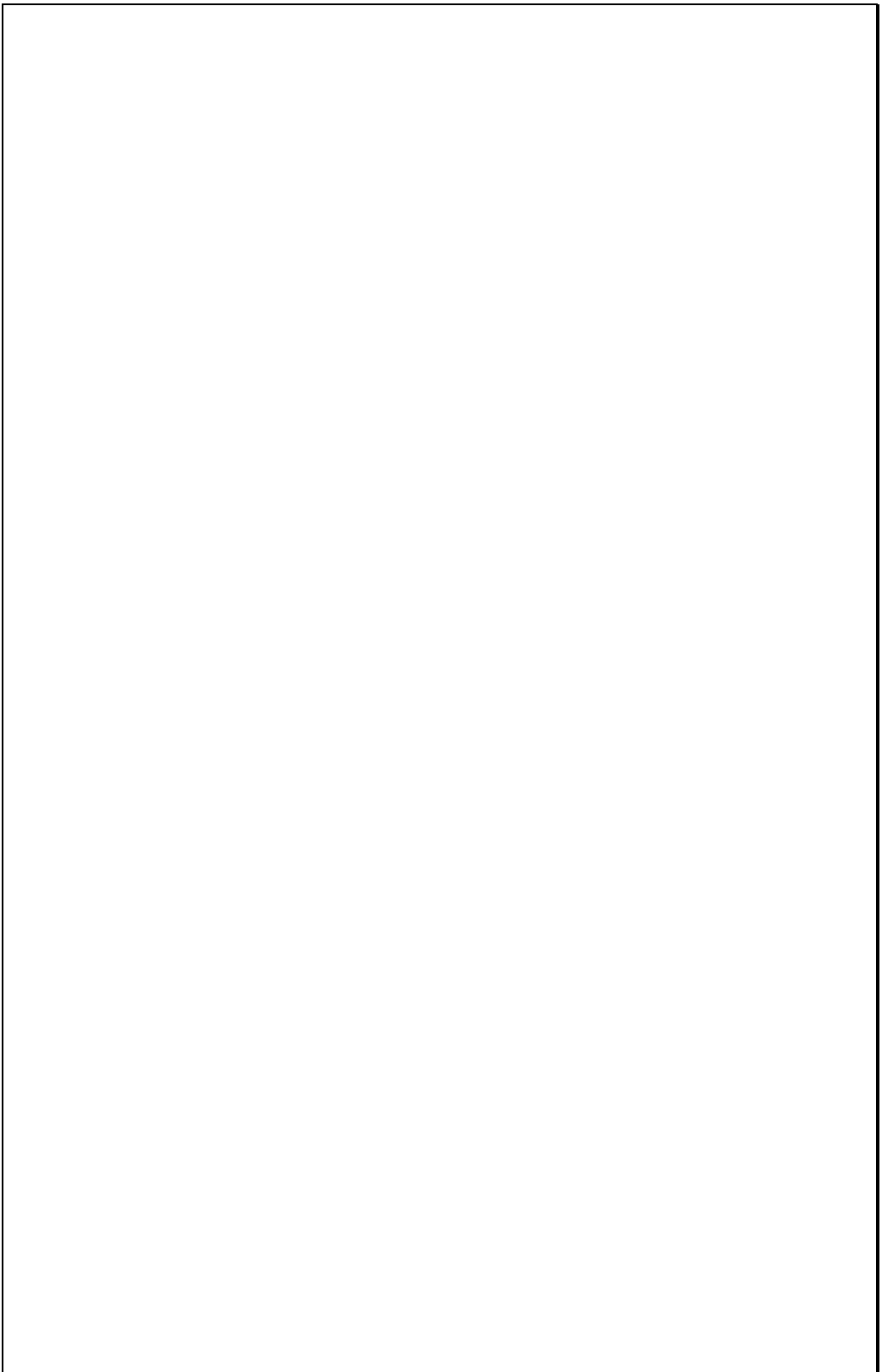
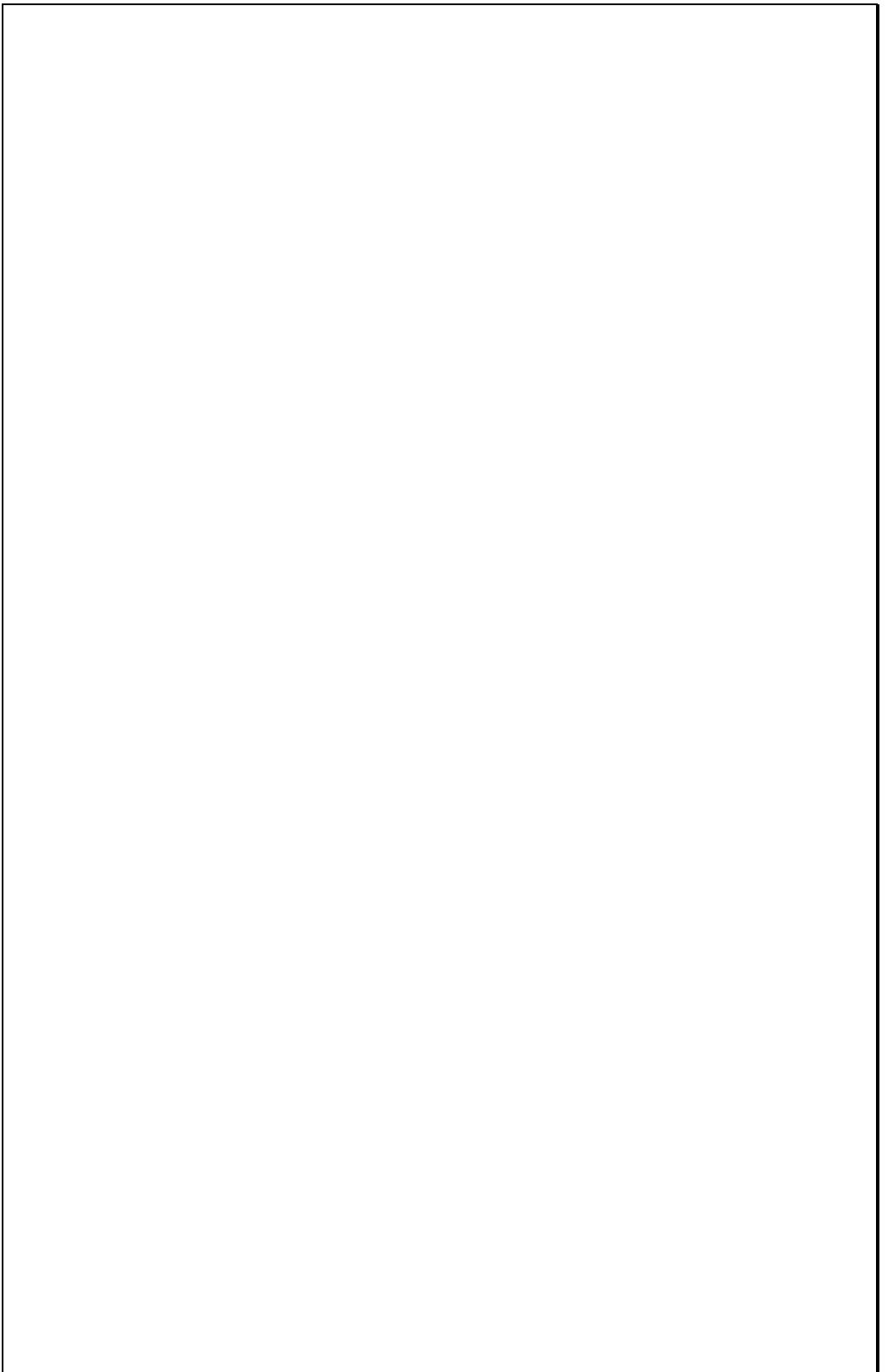


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INTRODUCTION

In the *King James Version* of the Bible, Proverbs 15:28 instructs us that: “The heart of the righteous studies to answer.” The *Revised Standard Version* reads: “The mind of the righteous ponders how to answer.” The *New International Version* reads: “The heart of the righteous weighs its answers.” For what kinds of things are the righteous to have answers? Why is it so imperative that the righteous study to answer, or ponder how to answer, or weigh their answers? Behind this short verse from the “wisdom” books of God’s holy word, is a veritable treasure of spiritual imperative – an admonition that, if faithfully followed, will lead the searcher for God’s truth to spiritual understanding and freedom experienced only by the few.

No doubt there are going to be situations that arise in our relationships with others in and out of the true faith that will require us to respond to difficult questions, idle curiosity, unfounded accusations, perplexities, and sincere inquiries. The Apostle Peter wrote: “...Sanctify the Lord God in your hearts; and always be ready to give an answer to every man that asks you for the reason for the hope that you have” (1 Pet. 3:15). So, part of the answer lies in the preparation of one’s heart to learn wisdom, while the rest of the answer lies in understanding how to use it appropriately in any given situation once we have it.

In order to gain this understanding, one needs to know *how to study the Bible*. It should be self-evident why we should study (for example, see 2 Tim. 2:15), but it is not always understood how to actually go about it in a way that will lead to the proper understanding of God’s truth. God’s word is truth (John 17:17) – and God requires those who worship Him to worship Him in spirit and in truth (John 4:23-24). Knowing how to study the Bible helps to facilitate that.

The point of Proverbs 15:28 is the same as the point of the entire book of Proverbs: Every spiritual faculty of a righteous person should be earnestly employed in the search for wisdom – the ears inclined to hearing it and the heart inclined to

understanding it. In most cases, however, wisdom is like a hidden treasure and cannot be readily discerned or found (Matt. 13:44). Proverbs 2:1-5 gives the impression that it is not easily acquired. It must be considered highly valuable – even to the point that you would raise your voice and cry out for it during your search.

It is not common sense – nor does it just fall out of the sky to hit you on the head with a bolt from some kind of divine magic wand. It is something gained by desiring it, searching for it, and meditating upon it. But ... in our helter-skelter world, it is not always convenient to find the time – much less set aside the time – to search and meditate on the spiritual matters of life.

The Apostle Paul instructed the Colossians to be wise in their dealings with those who are not of the faith, but ... to take every opportunity they had to discuss the ways of Christ with them. A most important point was that they should always be gracious – and, by all means, they should not act like religious zealots (Col. 4:5, 6). Rest assured, you will have plenty of opportunities to answer if you spend your time earnestly seeking God's wisdom and truth (James 1:5-8).

As you grow in God's wisdom and truth, you will be more apt to attract attention from others who are also seekers – as well as from those who are enemies of truth. It would only make sense that you should be spiritually prepared to deal with either eventuality. You cannot fake your way through it. You cannot allow yourself to be thrown off-message because of temper or fear of confrontation. This search for God's truth and wisdom necessitates that you be ready to answer and know how to answer each one who presents himself to you. Be superficial or lose your temper, and you most certainly will lose your opportunity to present an effective witness.

Finally, the Apostle John admonished us to be aware of the multitude of deceivers in the world who attempt to make religious merchandise of people. We should be familiar enough with God's word to be able to put them to the test to see if they really represent the interests of God (1 John 4:1). Jesus Christ said the same thing in Matthew 24:11 when He spoke of the many false prophets that shall arise during the course of history and deceive many – especially just prior to and during the great tribulation (vv.

23-26). Those who worship God in spirit and in truth must be able to learn, understand, and faithfully spread to others the “faith once delivered unto the saints” (Jude 3). We must understand that we will be outnumbered – many deceivers are presently out there. We must have answers for the pretensions of the ungodly. We must go into this spiritual fray understanding that there are many pretenders among us.

Being a faithful witness to God’s truth is a challenge well worth the effort. The danger that is inherent in the process lies in not knowing the real issue, not understanding the whole picture, and not knowing the difference between the commandment of God and the doctrine of man. It also involves being able to understand that which is self-evident in God’s word; understanding how to prove God’s word by belief, faith, and experience; having a sound method for examining the scriptures; and, most importantly, asking God for His help in the entire process. A faithful witness of God’s truth, first and foremost, is commissioned to “correctly explain the pattern of the word of truth” (2 Tim. 2:15) and to “prove all things; [and] hold fast to that which is good” (1 Thes. 5:21).

How do we do that? How do we get the Bible to give up its great wisdom and understanding to us? To help us gain God’s knowledge and learn to think as He thinks and act as He acts? It is possible – let me show you how you can do it in seven simple lessons!

The Proper Approach

This is a 12-volume study course designed to lead you to understand God's word of truth in a way that you, perhaps, have never experienced before. If you seriously accept the challenge posed by such a goal, then you will spend the next several months going through a series of lessons that will help you to grasp the significance of some of the most fundamental concepts of true biblical understanding. It will challenge you to dust off your Bible and pay attention to some of God's most basic instruction to mankind about who/what "God" is, why mankind exists, and what God plans to do with us.

I think that you will be surprised about the difference between what is commonly taught in the nearly 33,000 denominations of mainstream “Christianity” and what the Bible actually says! You will explore how to prove God's existence. How do we know? Where do we go to find such information? Can we really trust the Bible as God's very own INSPIRED word? Many do not – and many others believe that it is a convenient resource for inspiration, but ... they also believe that it's only one path of "truth" among many possibilities. What do you think? If you don't know right now, you will be far more capable of making a statement about it by the time you complete this course.

What about all of the doctrinal differences among almost 33,000 different "Christian" denominations? Are you sufficiently equipped with good, sound knowledge of scripture to navigate your way through their confusing maze and exit with God's revealed truth? What has God revealed to us about heaven, hell, salvation, law and grace, the great tribulation, the rapture? The virgin birth, the resurrection of the dead, the return of Christ, the 1,000-year Kingdom of God? What about the immortality of the soul? What does the Bible really teach? You really need to know (see Matt. 7:21-23 and John 4:23, 24). All of these questions – and many, many more – are some of the most vital, most important questions of your life.

You will thoroughly investigate them and will be shown how to find the clear, plain answers from your very own Bible! You will learn how to study the Bible – and why so few really understand it. The only equipment you will need is your own Bible, a three-ring notebook stocked with ruled paper, a pen or pencil, and a good dictionary. If you are able and wish to, you might want to purchase a few other translations of the Bible and a good exhaustive concordance like *Strong's* – but that is not absolutely necessary for you to truly benefit from this course.

The real value to you is the knowledge and understanding of the Bible that you will gain. Learn at your own pace and enjoy everything you do in the study course. The main idea is for you to make an honest, sincere effort to learn God's truth and to drink very deeply from this very special spiritual fountain. You need to

learn these fundamentals in order to move on to more stable, mature understanding (Read Heb. 5:11-6:3).

Do not begin this course if you do not have the heart or interest to complete it (see Luke 14:28-30). It is my assumption that you will select this course because you desire and expect to derive some spiritual benefit from it. If that is a correct assumption, then it follows that I want you to derive the maximum benefit possible.

This can be achieved if you will follow the approach I have outlined below:

1. Read through each lesson once before you begin your point-by-point study. This will mentally prepare you for the direction in which you will be headed in the lesson.

2. Write down and look up every scriptural reference. I know that this might seem to be monotonous and tedious, but your goal is to learn, not to just read. This approach helps you to thoroughly familiarize yourself with the actual scriptural content and to learn them more quickly.

3. Write down all of the answers to all of the questions. Try to be as complete as possible. It is important for you to think through your answers and to actually verbalize them in writing. It will help you to organize your thinking and review it as needed.

4. This is not a race. Take as much time as you need on each question in each section. The goal is to learn, not to see how quickly you can get through each lesson. Work on it in small, digestible increments. Do not be afraid of going back over material until you understand it. It could take you a couple of years to complete if you are thorough. Be thorough.

5. Understand that the content is somewhat mature. If there are words used that you do not understand, please take the time to refer to your dictionary to get definitions. In this way, you will also build your own maturity, vocabulary, and competence. This is a total learning experience, so willingly participate and enjoy the experience to the full!

6. Keep your study materials organized in the place where you will study. Select a well-lighted and comfortable place away from bothersome distractions.

7. Maintain a regular, planned study routine. Do not be scattered or irregular.

8. Prepare yourself spiritually for each study session by asking the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob for guidance, understanding, and the spirit to obey what you learn.

If you will employ these suggestions, you will find this course of study to be one of the richest learning experiences of your life. You will be amazed at the progress you will make in knowing and understanding God's truth.

This course is sponsored by The Seventh Day Christian Assembly, Inc. (Moultrie, GA) as part of its Christian Education Outreach Program. We are not part of or associated with the Seventh Day Adventist organization. All costs incurred in offering this course of study are paid through the tithes and offerings of the membership of The Seventh Day Christian Assembly, Inc. (Moultrie, GA).

If you have questions or need clarification about any aspect of the Bible Study Course, please contact me at larryf538@gmail.com. I will reply as soon as possible. May God bless your understanding of His truth as you complete this Bible Study Course. Please take advantage of our generous offering of study materials. There is a

treasure house of scriptural truth and understanding to be uncovered in it.

In Christ's Service,

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Chapter One:

Know the Real Issue

Walter Hooper, in his preface to C. S. Lewis's work *God in the Dock*, said: "Regardless of one's education, it is impossible to decide whether Christianity is true or false *if you do not know what it is about* ... there are many today who do not know what the *real issue* is" (p. 9; emphasis added). Wow! Such a statement is relevant to this study because, again, it points out the fact that many are at the root of the problem regarding knowing and understanding the mind and will of God. But ... how do you discover what the real issue is? And ... what are you supposed to do when you discover the real issue: Ignore it or put it into practice in your life? What do you really want from your study of God's word: true understanding ... or warm and fuzzy superficiality?

The Objective

How do you react to biblical instruction that tells you to "Prove all things..." (1 Thes. 5:21)? What methods would you employ to accomplish that? Can you always *prove* enough to keep you in the true faith revealed in the Bible? And ... can you avoid the syndrome in which you are "...ever learning, but never able to come to the knowledge of the truth" (2 Tim. 3:7)?

There is a simple, reliable method for discovering and checking the validity of ideas in the Bible that can certainly help you to become more adept in "rightly dividing the word of truth" (2 Tim. 2:15). So, the objective of this lesson is to help you to learn how to study the Bible and to fully understand that it is God's revelation of His thoughts and His ways. This process is made easier if you will

set your mind and heart to learning seven simple lessons about how to study the Bible.

In this first lesson, you will work with some scriptural situations that focus your attention on the *real issues* rather than the commonly accepted interpretations. This exercise might very well require some extra contemplation on your part, so be prepared to spiritually wrestle with each situation presented – especially if you are familiar with and have personally accepted and believed the commonly taught interpretations. Pay close attention to each situation and what the Bible *actually* says.

If we are to live by every word that proceeds out of the mouth of God (Matt. 4:4 – Jesus was quoting Deut. 8:3) and the Holy Scripture is given by inspiration of God (2 Tim. 3:16), then we must correct any misconceptions we might have had about the real issues. This will be a good challenge for you. *Rule #1* in gaining Godly wisdom so that you can be prepared to answer is simple: Know the **real issues** about God’s truth as it relates to Christianity and the problems of this world. You can often answer a multitude of questions if you know the truth of a single issue. Let’s see how that works in some practical applications.

I Corinthians 15:46-49

Paul’s thought here relates to *what man is*. In what order do the *natural* and *spiritual* bodies exist? How does the traditional view compare to the biblical description? Here is a direct quote from a typical “Christian” source that represents most of traditional thought:

[Man’s] soul, the real person, is immortal. It will never cease to be. Man is two-fold in nature. He is both spirit and body. *Man is not a body and has a soul. He is a soul and has a body.* The body is mortal; the soul is immortal (The Baptist Faith and Message; Herschel H. Hobbs; Convention Press, 1971; p. 51; emphases added).

Why would this knowledge be important to you? To some, the issue is simple: Based on the greatest wisdom this world has had to offer, the most common belief is that man was made to live forever. Here is the perceived real issue contained in that belief: If man is an immortal soul, then *the real person is the soul*, not the body in which it is encased. If man is a soul that has a body, then the death of the body is of little consequence because the soul does not die. It is incapable of dying because it is immortal.

You have, no doubt, heard this at funerals when the minister pointed to the casket and said: “This is the body which dearly departed So-and-So cast off when s/he went to be with Jesus in heaven.” By saying this, the minister was affirming/confirming the faith of the congregants that dear old So-and-So is not really dead – in fact, did not really die. S/He merely chucked the body before leaving the earth’s environs and going to heaven – an impossible undertaking, they believe, until the body dies.

Any who have read Plato’s work, *Phaedrus*, will understand this concept for which he is generally credited as being the author – which he actually learned from the Egyptians and the Eleusinian and Orphic mystery religions that emanated out of the Babylonian Mystery Religions (see Deut. 12:29-32). Plato said that:

(a) the soul *pre-exists* with God;

(b) it is *uncreated* – which presupposes that it has existed for eternity alongside of and separate from God; and,

(c) when it “falls” from its heavenly heights, it needs a human body (preferably a philosopher or artist) to help it regain its wings so it can soar back to its heavenly heights.

This concept presupposes that the immortal soul (a spirit body) exists first and is put into a human body, at some point just before or after its birth, and remains there until that body dies and releases it. This creates numerous other questions about man and his supposed *innate* immortality as described in Hobbs’s statement

above: going *immediately* to heaven or hell at death (the reward of the “saved” or “unsaved”), reincarnation, limbo, purgatory, et cetera. What is the *real issue* relative to the biblical truth of this matter? Does God’s word address what man is and what happens to him when he dies?

How Was Man Originally Made?

Let’s consider the first biblical revelation about what man is: Genesis 2:7. It says that the Lord God created man from the dust of the earth. Once He had formed the physical body in the manner He intended it to be (see Gen. 1:26-28), He breathed into that lifeless form the “breath of life.” This was a form of cardio-pulmonary resuscitation (CPR). The last part of v. 7 says: “...and man became a living soul” (KJV; emphases added). What does that mean?

The Hebrew term from which the word “soul” was translated is *nephesh*, which means “a living, breathing being.” The Lord God did not, at that or any other point, make man an immortal soul or insert into his body an immortal soul. Man became “a living, breathing being” that had been created out of the dust of the earth.

The earth’s “dust” does not have the ability to live, breathe, pump blood, or procreate to produce its “kind.” In order for this pile of dust to “live,” the Lord God had to change it into flesh, blood, bones, and all of the numerous systems that would operate to give “life” and function to this dust-become-flesh being. The name “Adam” is descriptive of the process of that change from dust to flesh.

The Hebrew term “adam” describes the new creature as being of ruddy complexion – which defines Adam as showing blood in the face. What had been “dust” was now changed into a fleshly body through which blood coursed. What had been dust now breathed. What had been dust was now capable of standing (supported by skeleton, muscles, sinews, tendons, et cetera) and moving and thinking with its activated brain. Scripture describes this new life-form as a “living, breathing creature.” Adam was the first human being and was capable of reproducing his own kind once his suitable female mate was created for him (Gen. 1:26-28; 2:18-24). That

dust-become-flesh creature was not merely a “house” for an immortal soul’s residence!

Psalm 44:25 says: “Our soul is bowed down to the dust: our belly cleaves unto the earth.” Again, “soul” is here translated from the Hebrew term *nephesh*. This verse is a *parallelism*: a rhetorical device by which the second part restates the first part in a different manner. *The Jerusalem Bible* translates it this way: “For we are bowed in the dust, our bodies crushed to the ground.” The term *bowed* means that our bodies “melt away” or are “caused to dwindle” back to the dust from which man was created. Adam was *nephesh*. His *real person* was *nephesh* that could melt away or dwindle back into the dust from which he was created.

We find in Leviticus 17:11 that “...the life of the flesh is in the blood.” That, of course, includes all “living, breathing creatures.” Check Ecclesiastes 3:18-22. Notice that v. 10 says that all living, breathing creatures were made from the dust and will return to the dust (see also Psa. 104:24-29). Cows and dogs and kangaroos did not become or possess immortal souls. If the blood is affected by a serious wound, disease, poison, or lack of oxygen, then the “flesh” will *die*. What is God’s first revelation about what *death* is?

In Genesis 2:17, the Lord God warned Adam that eating from the fruit of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil would warrant the *death* penalty. How does that fit Hobbs’s definition of man where he says that “[Man’s] soul, the real person, is immortal. It will never cease to be”? Hobbs claims that only the body dies.

You should read Genesis 3:19 to see Adam and Eve’s fate after they committed the first sin: “...until you return to the ground from which you were taken because you are dust, and you shall return to the dust” (author’s paraphrase of *KJV*). Some will say: “That’s just the body being destroyed, not the real person – the immortal soul.” How can we know God’s revealed truth about this?

Genesis 3:22 tells us the answer. The Lord God is concerned about man subsequently eating from the Tree of Life and gaining access to *immortality* (to “live forever”). If the real person is the immortal soul and will never cease to be, why should the Lord God be concerned about them gaining access to the Tree of Life?

Notice what Paul says in I Corinthians 15:42-45, 51-54. He speaks of a “resurrection of the dead.” *Resurrection* means to be

restored to life ... to be raised from the dead (see Dan. 12:2; John 5:24-29; Job 14:1-15; Acts 26:22, 23). Ecclesiastes 3:18-22 says that the human *nephesh* is just like the animal *nephesh* in that both die and return to their dust (v. 10). Ecclesiastes 9:4-6, 10 says that the grave is the end of the life of all *nephesh*. Ezekiel 18: 4, 20 says that the *nephesh* that sins will die. And ... it must be understood that the *nephesh* will remain in that dead condition unless and until God sets His mighty hand to call us forth from the grave at our appointed time and complete the work of His hand in making us in His image (Job 14:13-15; I Cor. 15:22, 23).

What is Paul's point in I Corinthians 15:51-54? *Putting on* immortality and incorruption. Paul says that we are going to be *changed* into beings who will never die again (immortality) ... who will not be subject to rotting away to dust (incorruption). If man already has that capacity as an immortal soul, why do these things have to be put on when Jesus Christ returns to resurrect the dead?

What is the real issue in I Corinthians 15:46-49? Does it have to do with when a person receives immortality? Yes. What does Paul say here? He says that *the spirit body did not come first*. That means that man presently cannot be an immortal soul. That means that Genesis 2:7 does not describe the creation of the physical body into which the real person (the immortal soul) is allowed to live. It means that someone has made a colossal goof in the definition of what man is according to God's revealed truth. Man is presently a natural body. Any life after death or otherwise that man will receive will not come until Jesus Christ returns to resurrect the dead and change the living.

I Corinthians 15:35-54

In I Corinthians 15:35-54, does Paul reveal a process by which man will bear the earthly (natural) image *first* ... *before* he bears the spiritual image? Make note of the following assertions by Paul:

- (a) a seed must "die" and be planted in order for it to be made alive again;

(b) there is a difference between the natural, corruptible body that is “sown” (that is, buried in the grave) and the spiritual, incorruptible body that will emerge from the grave;

(c) we are like Adam in that we have earthly bodies – that is, we are made of the dust of the earth because we are the “seed” of Adam (see Gen. 2:7 and 3:19; also, Psa. 103:13-18);

(d) we shall be like Jesus Christ was after His resurrection (as the second Adam; see vv. 12-22, 45-50) and have a heavenly (that is, a spiritual) body (see I John 3:1-3);

(e) this will occur only when Christ returns to set up the Kingdom of God (vv. 50-52); and

(f) since flesh and blood cannot inherit the Kingdom of God (that is, be in the God Family – see Hebrews 2), the mortal must put on immortality, and the corruptible must put on incorruption because it does not presently have it. It is self-evident that it must be put on if you do not presently have it.

Consider these points very carefully because they are keys to understanding this important biblical truth: Understand what the real issue is!

Paul reveals here that the physical body ultimately must be changed from flesh to spirit because “...at the last trumpet ... the mortal must put on immortality ...” (vv. 52, 53; see Rev. 11:15; emphases added). This is exactly what Jesus told Nicodemus in John 3:1-8. Being born again is more than having a spiritual conversion by which you begin to think and act according to God’s will. Nicodemus understood Jesus to have meant an actual rebirth (see John 3:4). Jesus explains His meaning in vv. 5-8. This change of composition is the final stage of God’s intention to create man in His very own image!

If man must be “born again” in order to become a spirit-being, could man presently be an immortal soul? Think deeply and seriously about this. Once you understand that man is mortal and cannot put on immortality until Christ returns, all other questions about the immortality of the soul and what happens immediately after you die are totally unnecessary.

How would knowing the real issue hold a person to a well-defined standard of belief and conduct? Knowing what the real issue is helps to cut straight through all of the arguments about the immortal soul and the accompanying issues. And, knowing what the Bible actually says makes a great deal of difference in the wisdom of your argument. Are you willing to be held to well-defined standards of belief and conduct?

Romans 3:4

Why are some people content to accept supposed contradictions in God’s word and allow God to be made a liar? Jesus acknowledged that the real issue has been withheld from many because they are not willing to be obedient in the face of God’s truth (Matt. 13:10-15; John 8:31, 32). He also acknowledged that many have blurred or completely set aside the real issue in favor of their own ideas and traditions (Matt. 15:3-20).

So, if you know that many of the so-called “early Church fathers” – like Origen, Tertullian, and Augustine of Hippo – were *Neo-Platonists* and that they applied Greek philosophical and religious concepts to their concepts of Christianity, then you would know that their writings would be suspect in light of Deuteronomy 12:29-32 and Jeremiah 10:1-3a: Don’t learn the ways of the heathen and apply them to God’s truth!

There are very few who pay attention to such Old Testament admonitions because they believe that “New Testament” Christians are not accountable to Old Testament Law. Well, let’s take a look at that issue and determine what the real issue is.

Matthew 15:3-20

Matthew 15:3-20 itself is an example of another problem with the real issue concerning God's Law. What is the real issue here? Is the issue as simple as answering these questions: What makes a person unclean? Is it what enters his body through food and drink that makes one unclean? Many have used this one to teach that Jesus took this opportunity to proclaim that it is now permissible for man to eat all manner of flesh that God had declared as unclean in the Old Testament (see Lev. 11 and Deut. 14:1-21). In effect, they say, Jesus Christ wipes out an entire section of God's Law because of a dispute about washing one's hands in an elaborate, man-made religious ceremony before eating.

A parenthetical statement in the *Revised Standard Version's* translation of Mark's account (7:19) muddies the waters a bit by adding the following remark: "(Thus He declared all *meats* [that is: *flesh*] clean.)" This does not coincide with the *King James Version*: "...goeth out into the draught, purging all *meats*." What is the difference?

Does the *KJV* translation give one the idea that the way uncleanness is purged from the body is via a bowel movement? Is anything that is taken into the body eventually discarded if it does not serve a nutritional purpose? Which translation is the correct understanding? What is the question set before Jesus Christ in this incident? Whether we obey man's traditions as opposed to God's truth ... especially when man's traditions render null and void God's commandments (v. 6).

Here's how you settle this issue: Use a dependable Greek-English lexicon and find out which Greek word is translated as *meat* in this scripture. Of what was Jesus speaking? *Strong's Exhaustive Concordance* shows that the word used in Jesus' statement is *broma*. The *Bauer-Arndt-Gingrich Greek-English Lexicon* gives this very plain, short definition: "...food...Esp. solid food." So, why would it be necessary for Jesus to declare all *solid foods* clean ... just because His disciples did not wash their hands? Are all *solid foods* unclean flesh? No.

Now look at Matthew 5:17, 18. Did Jesus come to do away with the Law of God? There are certain meats, that is, flesh, which the

Lord God of the Old Testament, by law, declared unclean. Why would Jesus say that He did not come to abolish the Law (Matt. 5:17) if He does exactly that by declaring unclean flesh now permissible to eat?" Do you grasp the nature of the contradiction involved?

He said in Matthew 5:18 that not one jot or one tittle would be excluded from the Law until: (a) heaven and earth pass away; and, (b) all of it is fulfilled. Neither of those conditions has occurred. Wiping out an entire section of God's law makes it null and void. Did Jesus say that He had come to do that? Let's see more evidence.

Acts 10

What happens in Acts 10:1-8? Cornelius was a Gentile, and Gentiles were considered to be "unclean" by the Jews. You can see this stated by Peter in v. 28. Devout Jews would take a bath after returning from the market because of the possibility that they had had casual bodily contact with a Gentile while shopping. So, this idea of "uncleanness" was a very serious matter to them.

What kind of vision is Peter shown in Acts 10:9-18? Why is the focus on the *animals* seen in this vision? What kind of animals are they? God shows Peter a vision about all manner of *unclean animals* and commands that Peter should kill and eat them. How many times does a voice from God tell him to kill and eat these *unclean* animals?

This was something specifically prohibited by Leviticus 11 and Deuteronomy 14:1-21. How many times does Peter refuse to do so, stating that he has *never* eaten anything common or unclean? How many times is he told not to consider as *unclean* the things that God considers to be clean?

According to Leviticus 11, God considered those animals in the vision as being unclean. Again, was He here making void His own Law? What exactly is the issue here? *Let the Bible explain it to you.*

What does Peter reveal here as the correct interpretation of the vision in Acts 10:28? Peter said:

...You know how it is an unlawful thing for a man that is a Jew to keep company, or come unto one of another nation; but **God has shown me** [that is,

God revealed to him in the vision about the sheet and the unclean animals] that I should not call any man common or unclean (emphases added).

Why? Verses 15 and 16 tell you that three times God showed Peter the vision to impress upon him that “You are not to consider common or unclean what God has cleansed.” If God considers a person clean, regardless of his nationality, then he is to be accepted by all those who claim to be God’s people. Who decides whether a person is clean or unclean? God. Had God here changed His mind about a law that He had previously given Israel about the relative cleanness or uncleanness of other nations? No.

Search the Old Testament until you are blue in the face, and you will not find any law of God forbidding social intercourse with other nations. He forbade adopting their religious practices, but not having social intercourse with them. You can compare Deuteronomy 4:1-8 and Deuteronomy 12:29-32 to understand this point. Israel was supposed to be an example to the other nations!

This avoidance of the Gentiles was a social custom adopted by the Jews after their 70 years of Babylonian captivity in an effort to build a “fence” around God’s written Law so they could, hopefully, avoid breaking it and incurring His wrath. It was Jewish law to consider Gentiles unclean, not God’s.

Read very carefully Galatians 3:6-9, 26-29 and Romans 11:16-29. What do you see there? You see God’s original intention was to include all nations in His covenant with Abraham ... who was not an *Israelite* or a *Jew*. Jacob was his grandson. Jacob’s name was changed to *Israel* (see Gen. 32:24-28; 35:9-12). Jacob had 12 sons with four wives (read Gen. 29, 30, 49; 1 Chron. 2:1). They became known as the 12 tribes of Israel. *Judah* (the father of the *Jews*) was one of the 12.

In Acts 10:19-22, what happened after the vision? God directed Peter to the home of a Gentile named Cornelius. Why? Because Cornelius sought salvation through Jesus Christ. Ask yourself how the gospel of salvation and the Kingdom of God could be presented to the Gentiles if such a gross prejudice was held concerning them.

Compare Acts 10:34-48 to Matthew 28:19-20 and Galatians 3:8, 28-29. Based on this information, was this incident about: (a) God

voiding His law about eating animals that He considers unclean – or about (b) a Jewish attitude toward Gentiles that inhibited the spreading of the true gospel?

The Interpreter's Bible adds this comment:

Many interpretations have been given to [the RSV translation of Mark 7:19], which may be a gloss [that is, an explanatory note from the margin, that was not part of the text of the original manuscript, was moved into the text of a succeeding manuscript by a copyist] (vol. 7, p. 753).

With that information before me, I must make a rational and logical decision about what I will believe as God's truth – even if it means disagreeing with some very prominent ministers and theologians past and present. Does that make me smarter than them? In one sense, perhaps – but remember: It is God's truth, not mine.

So, I have before me the facts that:

- (a) Jesus said that He did not come to abolish the Law;
- (b) the word *broma* ("solid foods" – not "meat" or "flesh") is used in Matthew and Mark;
- (c) Peter's vision was preparing him for meeting a Gentile because God was opening the door for the salvation of the Gentiles; and
- (d) the parenthetical clause is, in all likelihood, a marginal note by a copyist that was later moved from the margin into the text. It was not part of the original inspired text.

Conclusion

My conclusion, then, is that these scriptural situations are not about abandoning God's law about the unclean flesh spoken of in Leviticus 11 and Deuteronomy 14:1-21. I conclude that I am not free to eat just any kind of flesh I want to eat – even if it is good and nutritious. The law is still valid because it is God's revealed will – and ... heaven and earth have not passed away and all of the intents and purposes of God's law have not been fulfilled. It's that simple. That's how you discover the real issue!

I have shown you how to understand God's truth about the doctrine of the immortal soul and what man is. Along the way, you also have been taught about what constitutes *death* and whether or not you go immediately to heaven or hell when you die. In addition, I showed you some things about the resurrection from the dead and putting on immortality and incorruption. Finally, we covered the issue about obeying God rather than man and the problem with allowing *man's* religious traditions to make null and void God's commandments.

Now, what will you do about the real issues found in God's word? Will you ignore them in favor of the traditional teachings of mainstream Christianity ... or live by every word of God's truth?

Review Questions

1. What did Walter Hooper mean when he said that many do not know the real issues of Christianity?
2. Why is it so imperative that the righteous study to answer, or ponder how to answer, or weigh their answers?
3. Using Isaiah 28:9, 10 as a guide, how do we get the Bible to give up its great wisdom and understanding to us?
4. How can you avoid the syndrome in which you are "...ever learning, but never able to come to the knowledge of the truth" (2 Timothy 3:7)?

5. What is the real issue relative to the biblical truth of what man is?
6. What does God's word teach about what man is and what happens to him when he dies?
7. What would you conclude about the existence of 32,000+ "Christian" denominations?
8. Do you believe that they agree upon what the Bible teaches?
9. Who is right? Who is wrong?
10. How can you know?
11. Explain the meaning of Genesis 2:7 and 3:19 relative to the doctrine of the immortal soul.
12. How is the idea of being "born again" (John 3:1-8) related to the idea of putting on immortality and incorruption (1 Cor. 15:50-54)?
13. In the context of 1 Corinthians 15:12-54, explain 1 Corinthians 15:46 regarding the natural body coming first and the spirit body coming later.
14. Did Jesus Christ come to do away with God's Law? Where in the Bible would you find the answer to that question? How is that knowledge part of a real issue?
15. Use Acts 10 to explain the real issue in Matthew 15:3-20.
16. How does this simple lesson about real issues help you to understand how to study the Bible?
17. From this point forward, what will you do about the real issues found in God's word? Consider Matthew 4:4 and John 8:31, 32.

Chapter Two:

Understand the Entire Matter

There is an abundance of ignorance in the world because many people either will not or cannot see the whole picture of why we exist and what we are supposed to accomplish because of our existence. Because of this, they remain blind to God's plan and will. Proverbs 4:7 explains to us that gaining understanding is the principal goal of gaining wisdom. How do you connect the real issue to understanding? How full should our understanding be?

If we are to ponder and weigh our answers, surely we must know rule #2: Understanding the entire matter enables you to speak intelligently about an issue. Proverbs 18:13 says that it is excessively costly and unprofitable to talk about something about which you know little or nothing. Being able to speak wisely and intelligently also requires considerable concentration and reliance upon God for the Spirit of Truth as we study God's word (John 8:31, 32; 14:26). Let's learn how this works.

A Scriptural Pattern

Isaiah 28:9-10 explains briefly how God presents the entire picture to His people. It is evident here that spiritual novices have not yet seen enough of the whole picture – that they must gain spiritual maturity in order to understand the weightier matters of spiritual truth (see also 1 Cor. 2:6-16). These verses make it abundantly clear to the hearing ear and the seeing eye that God

does not hide all of His wisdom and truth in one place in His word. It is strewn throughout all of the inspired scriptures.

How does God make it apparent that one must learn His truth systematically? The various situations represented in all parts of the scriptural record represent illustrations of God's revelation of Himself to mankind and how various situations are to be handled according to the determinate will of God. God's truth is a body of truth that consists of many parts and concepts – none of them having full meaning except in context with the body of truth. You cannot take one part and separate it from the body, teach it in isolation from the body, and be credited with teaching God's whole truth.

For example, Jude 3 tells us that there is a "...faith which was once delivered unto the saints." Whatever that "faith" is, it is systematically built line upon line, precept upon precept, from one place in scripture to another. A precept has to do with brief rules of conduct that are put into Scripture, command upon command, line upon line.

Paul tells us in 2 Timothy 2:15 that our task as true believers is to learn how to properly and faithfully follow God's pattern of instruction. In Matthew 4:4, Jesus Christ uses an Old Testament command from Deuteronomy 8:3 to teach us why it is important to know and understand God's pattern throughout all of Scripture. By the way, Jesus and Paul had only the Old Testament to use as Scriptures.

Mainstream Christianity claims to be "New Testament" believers and teaches that God did away with the Law through the crucifixion of Jesus Christ. Others claimed that it became unnecessary because Jesus Christ fulfilled it in His crucifixion. In those concepts, it has been deemed both necessary and proper for them to change and do away with vital rules of conduct revealed by God in the Old Testament.

For instance, what happened to observing the seventh-day Sabbath (Gen. 2:2, 3; Ex. 20:8-11)? Traditional Christianity opted for worshiping on Sunday because they believe that Jesus Christ was raised from the dead on Sunday. Can you find a single, specific Scripture that shows that God made such a change? If you cannot, then who is responsible for the unauthorized change?

Read Romans 1:18-25. Is this change of the Sabbath a case of changing God's truth into a lie? Doing away with portions of God's inspired truth simply because they do not agree with or uphold your own theological paradigm is not acceptable. The "entire picture" of God's word must be investigated and considered when searching for God's truth.

In Isaiah 28:11-13, what is the price to be paid for not properly receiving God's wisdom and understanding? Verse 13 suggests that the "precept upon precept, line upon line" nature of Scripture will be just a bunch of gibberish to those who do not take seriously this search for God's truth. If that is true, then those who do this correctly and systematically will gain the understanding, knowledge, and wisdom (spiritual maturity) that God intends. How can you tell that such is the case?

Read verse 13. How does God's word become a snare and a trap to those who are not obedient? What is the result of being snared and trapped? It becomes a snare and a trap to them and causes them to "...fall backward, and be broken, and snared, and taken" (see also Rom 11:7-10). You cannot be disobedient. Half-truth does not work. Nor does it work to twist and pervert God's word. Part of the problem with the people described in Matthew 7:21-23 is that they will have used God's word incorrectly – outside of God's will. Being "trapped" in that condition, they are denied entrance into God's Kingdom (v. 21) despite having been very serious, religious people.

Now read Hebrews 5:11-14. Who uses milk instead of meat? Are they skillful in their use and knowledge of the word of righteousness, or mere spiritual infants? Refer to verse 12 for more insightful information about those who have been in Christianity long enough to have become teachers. It could be legitimately inferred that such people have not become skillful in that which they claim they believe. They have been like the Corinthians whom Paul describes in 1 Corinthians 3. They have not taken seriously the special calling God has extended to them to be His people.

To whom does strong meat belong? It belongs to those who have put in the effort, on a regular basis, to become skillful in God's word ... not just in the knowledge aspect, but also in using God's instruction to bring order, maturity, and wisdom to their lives. Read

Hebrews 12 about how God is presently training us so that we can eventually become partakers of His divine nature (see also 2 Peter 1:2-4). That divine nature has to do with 1 John 3:1-3 ... not just with the spiritual conversion that takes place in one's heart and mind. When we put on immortality and incorruption, we will be in bodies composed of spirit like God's and Jesus Christ's.

Proverbs 14:12 tells us that there is a way that seems right but leads to death. What do you think this means? It is God's spiritual gift to the mature Christian to be able to recognize falsehoods and deceptions – something the spiritually immature might very well miss and by which they might very well be led astray (see Ephesians 4:11-16). Possessing spiritual wisdom makes it far more likely that an individual can begin to more effectively sort through the difference between appearances and the real thing.

Please notice how I refer you to various parts of scripture relating to comments I am making. This is a working example of “line upon line, precept upon precept, here a little, there a little.” We must become spiritually mature by learning God's truth “...precept upon precept, line upon line, here a little, and there a little.” These precepts will be bound together in unity, consistency, and truth. There will be no contradictions. There is a pattern to God's truth.

Proverbs 4:7 tells us that wisdom is the principal thing in life that we should acquire. But ... what else is vitally necessary? It concludes by saying: “...With all of your getting [of wisdom] get understanding.” How do you do that? One of the major lessons you learn in journalism is the six factors that go into writing a news article: who, what, when, where, why, and how. This, obviously, should enable you to get as much of the entire matter as possible so that you can write a good, informative article about a given event.

In Acts 17:10, 11, we read about a special group of people called the Bereans. The outstanding quality that Luke presents for us is that the Bereans not only listened intently to what they were being taught, they also took the time to go back through Scripture to make sure they were being presented the truth contained in them. Again, remember that the Bereans had only the Old Testament as Scripture. Nevertheless, they took the time on a regular basis to become familiar with those Scriptures so they could understand the

entire matter about what they were being taught. After all, Jesus Christ had taught that "...Moses ... wrote of me" (John 5:46).

Needless to say, some people do not know how to study things systematically. The process of getting the whole picture includes: (a) reading (1 Tim. 4:13), (b) careful consideration (2 Tim. 2:7), (c) search and inquiry (1 Pet. 1:10, 11), (d) diligence in study (1 Tim. 4:15b; 2 Tim. 2:15-19), (e) meditation (Psa. 1:2; Josh. 1:8; 1 Tim. 4:15a), (f) memorization (Psa. 119:11), and (g) learning from God-inspired teachers in oral and written form (Phil. 4:9; 1 Cor. 12:28, 29; Gal. 6:6). The overall goal in all of this is for the Lord to give you understanding in everything (2 Tim. 2:7). Let's see how that works.

How to Systematize Your Bible Study

In the first part of this lesson, you were shown that it is necessary to study God's word systematically. While Isaiah 28:10 speaks of "...precept upon precept ... line upon line ... here a little, and there a little....," the idea is to develop a system or method by which you come to grips with what God's word is all about. There are two major concepts that you must understand in order to reconcile all else in Scripture: (a) God's covenant with Abraham (read Rom. 4, Gal. 3, and Heb. 6:13-20) and (b) the appearance of Jesus Christ in history (read John 5:17-47; Gen. 3:15; 15:1-4; 26:1-4; and Gal. 3:16-22).

Here is the rationale: If a seed was promised to Adam and Eve, and that seed is to come as a result of God's covenant with Abraham, then that is the Bible's thesis: a proposition advanced and offered to maintain by argument. Some, at this point, will say: "I do not argue about Scripture!" Well, if you carry on any kind of conversation in which you set forth reasons for or against believing a certain theological concept, then you argue. If you offer a reason as proof of something, you argue. If you attempt to persuade, you argue. The entirety of Scripture is an argument! In other words, all of Scripture sustains an argument about Jesus of Nazareth being the promised seed and the rightful inheritor of all that God promised Abraham and swore a covenant oath to deliver (see Heb. 6:13-20).

Your task as a seeker of God's proof is to unravel His witness to this fact. You can see an excellent example of this in Acts 8:26-40 where Philip did exactly that from Isaiah 53:7, 8. Such an argument is put forward each time a writer of Scripture says: "That it might be fulfilled as written by the prophet...." You can find examples of this in places like Matthew 5:17-19 (Jesus), Luke 24:44 (Jesus), Acts 2:14-40 (Peter), and Acts 26 (Paul). What follows, then, is instruction about how to systematize your study of God's word in order to keep your focus on the great thesis of scripture. This is a method for gathering the proof you need to sustain your own argument about God's great revelation of our coming salvation. This instruction is in broad strokes, so be prepared to do the necessary legwork to fill in the blanks. This is part of the process of dealing with meat in due season.

Reading

Paul exhorted Timothy to spend an appreciable amount of time reading. Whether this is personal reading or public reading before an audience, reading is stressed as being vitally necessary for obtaining knowledge and understanding. The true faith is one that is built upon the necessity of being literate – able to read and write.

I know when I write this that there will be voices that say that people who cannot read and write, with God's help, can understand His truth. I understand that and admit that it is true. But, the true faith is a religion of written revelation: remember Jesus' statement in Matthew 5:17-19 about the permanence of God's Law – not a jot or tittle will be removed from it until it is all fulfilled. That is a reference to the written testimony of God's revelation of Himself to mankind. How much more effective will the learning process be when you can search it out independently and not have to rely on others to read and explain it to you?

The disciples were "uneducated" in that they did not get the classic Greek education that someone like Paul got, but they could read and write. Just take the few examples we have in the production of the New Testament: Matthew, Mark, Luke, John, Paul, James, Peter, and Jude. Add to that the written records given

in the Old Testament. What does this suggest to you about being literate?

The story in Acts 8:26-40 about the Ethiopian and Philip is indicative of the necessity of spending an appreciable amount of time reading. The Ethiopian needed someone to explain certain passages from Isaiah's written work – he was reading, but not understanding. Had Phillip been *illiterate*, how might his ability to explain Isaiah's writings in relationship to Christ have been hindered or limited? Might someone else who was *literate* have been used instead? Generally speaking, then, the literate person has more potential of being a broader and more independent learner than does the illiterate or non-reader – that is, he is potentially capable of getting more of the whole picture.

I am not saying by this that illiterate people are useless. God can and does use, at times, the illiterate in ways beyond comprehension. But ... I wonder how many of them remain illiterate after coming into the true faith. And ... your reading need not be confined to the word of God. Paul, evidently, read widely as a result of his education. He cited the writings of others that he probably studied.

You can get a glimpse of this in his address to the Athenians in Acts 17:16-34. I won't belabor the point, but Paul had observed the various gods they worshiped, including a statue labeled *To an Unknown God*. Paul was asked to address them – their great pleasure was to always learn something “new” (v. 21). At the end of his address, having made his point from Scripture, he provided an educational “scaffold” for them to relate to: “...In Him [that is, this Unknown God whom Paul claimed to represent] we live, and move, and have our being: as certain of *your poets* have said” (v. 28; emphases added). How would Paul have known to use that in his argument if he had not read widely enough? Some of their writings actually helped Paul to prove his point about their ignorance and superstition!

Just because you become familiar with the writings of others does not mean that you fall for their religious and/or philosophical paradigms hook, line, and sinker. You are simply adding to your storehouse of *knowledge*. Read! Read! Read!

Careful Consideration

Careful consideration of the demands and rewards of the true faith is also vitally necessary. In 2 Timothy 2:7, Paul included, with this instruction of practicing careful consideration, the hope/desire that the Lord would give Timothy understanding in all things. Consideration means that you will give careful thought to something – that you will meditate upon it, ponder it, make judgments concerning it, give thoughtful attention to it. Now, practice this admonition.

What was Paul's point? What did he intend to teach Timothy about being a faithful minister (see chapter 1:6 – a reference to the ordination of Timothy into the gospel ministry)? Is this any less required of the true Christian? If so, why? If not, why not? Backtrack in the context of Paul's letter and see what you find as points of instruction leading up to that conclusion.

In verses 3 and 4, he used the imagery of being "...a good soldier..." of Christ. What does that imagery of a soldier suggest? Unhesitating obedience, perfect loyalty, single-minded and heroic devotion, the ultimate in self-sacrifice, satisfying the demands of the one who enlisted him (*The Interpreter's Bible*, v. 11, p. 479 – notice that this is a reference to something that I read).

Careful consideration will point out that the minister – and no less the true Christian – will not be sidetracked from his given duty by ordinary, day-to-day pursuits because he will realize the nature of the spiritual warfare in which he is engaged. Would he completely ignore his ordinary duties and pursuits? Not likely. Would he forego marriage and family? Not likely – only if necessary. Would he, as a good soldier, allow himself to be sidetracked from the duties and obligations of his spiritual warfare by those things? Not likely. What are the chances of him becoming literate if he obeyed this fully? Great! Surely curiosity and a desire to grow in the grace and knowledge of Jesus Christ would be a prod to become literate!

Consider this as well: God has not made it a practice of calling into His work those of great knowledge, great power, or great wealth (1 Corinthians 1:26-31). Have there been any of them called

out? Yes – but Paul is quick to point out, however, “...not many...” (v. 26). Why?

Paul is apparently working from two vantage points in this. Although he probably did not have Matthew’s gospel handy, he probably understood the mind of Jesus Christ in a situation where He prayed to the Father: “I thank you, O Father, Lord of heaven and earth, because you have hidden these things from the wise and prudent, and have revealed them unto babes ... For it seemed good in your sight [to do so]” (Matthew 11:25, 26; emphases added).

Or, he might have learned from Luke the parable of the great supper where many were invited, but each had his own excuse for not attending. So the master of the house told his servant to “Go out quickly into the streets and lanes of the city, and bring in the poor, and the maimed, and the halt, and the blind” (Luke 14:16-24). When there was still room for guests, he commanded his servants to go out into the highways and hedges and compel enough people to attend so that his house could be filled (v. 23). Among that diverse, incongruent selection, you would not find many highly educated, powerful, and wealthy people.

From where did this lesson originally come? Again, he might have had in mind Jeremiah 9:23, 24. God was very weary with the sins of the Houses of Israel and Judah. The House of Israel had been removed from the land by Assyria between 721-718 B.C. – never to return (read 2 Kings 15-17 to get the background) – but Judah was not impressed by the punishment meted out to Israel.

In Jeremiah 9:12, Jeremiah is moved by God’s spirit to ask: “Who is the wise man who can understand this? Who is he to whom the Lord has spoken so that he can declare why the land is perishing and burned up like a wilderness to the point that none can pass through it?” Ultimately, in answer to his own question, Jeremiah gives this answer: “Do not let the wise man glory in his wisdom, do not let the mighty man glory in his strength, nor let the rich man glory in his riches. Let him who wants to rejoice in triumph rejoice in this: that he understands and knows me – that I am the Lord which exercises lovingkindness, judgment, and righteousness in the earth: for in these things I delight, says the Lord” (vv. 23, 24; emphases added).

All of the things that seem to be a natural advantage are no advantage at all: in Christ, we are utterly dependent upon God's spiritual gifts – godly wisdom and godly understanding. Why? Because God has chosen the weak and disenfranchised of the world to do a work that will confound the rich and powerful and learned in the ways of the world (v. 27). Then, Paul hit the nail squarely on the head with this: “That no flesh should glory in His presence” (1 Corinthians 1:29).

So, what do you think? Will the weak and disenfranchised make any progress to become literate? It appears that it will be *inevitable* as long as they are faithful and willingly grow in the grace and knowledge of Jesus Christ. Otherwise, they might very well come to nothing. Being literate and being able to sort out patterns of thought and instruction are great weapons in spiritual warfare! Great tools for putting into action your careful consideration. It is with things like this in mind that you are to give careful consideration to the demands and rewards of the true faith.

Jesus warned us to count the costs (Luke 14:28-33). We need to carefully consider what it will take to complete a task once it is begun. We need to carefully consider what it will take to win: how much of our own effort ... and how much dependence we must have upon God. We need to carefully consider what it will take for us to forsake everything in order to be true disciples of Jesus Christ. These are not things that one should take lightly. They are worthy of and demand our respect.

It is when we become careless with God's word and do not regard it as *the foundation of all truth* that we begin to lose the ability to say with David: “I opened my mouth, and panted: for I longed for your commandments ... I rejoice at your word, as one that has found great spoil” (Psalm 119:131, 162). This is the equivalent to what Christ admonished in Matthew 5:6: “Blessed are they which hunger and thirst after righteousness: for they shall be filled.” Food and drink are absolute necessities! Carefully consider this instruction.

How much do you wrestle with the meaning of scriptures? How much time and effort do you invest in studying through prophecies – attempting to understand how they apply to our present world circumstances? Are you even remotely interested in what God has

revealed to His prophets to inform you about things leading up to major world events that will affect all of mankind – or just your particular part of the world – especially, the unfolding of God’s great plan of salvation?

Search and Inquiry

If your search and inquiry into the meaning of God’s word is merely superficial – say, for personal devotional purposes only – then you will suffer a level of spiritual ignorance that will not serve you well. Let’s consider I Peter 1:10, 11 with this in mind. It is meaty in its revelation and implications.

Peter begins this letter with some heavy stuff:

- (a) an elect people according to the foreknowledge of God the Father;
- (b) sanctification of the Spirit, unto obedience and sprinkling of the blood of Jesus Christ;
- (c) begettal again unto a lively hope by the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead;
- (d) an incorruptible inheritance reserved in heaven that is undefiled and eternal;
- (e) the trial of one’s faith;
- (f) loving Jesus Christ in spite of not having ever seen Him; and
- (g) receiving the goal of your faith: the salvation you expect through Jesus Christ (vv. 1-9).

What does all of this mean? Have you really understood God’s truth about them – without the taint of man’s additions to and subtractions from God’s word? Peter brings them up as though those who received the letter understand them fully!

But ... in the context of the entire letter, they are only the *foundational* concepts leading up to his statements in vv. 10 and 11. Read vv. 10 and 11 carefully:

Of which salvation the prophets have *inquired* and *searched diligently*, who prophesied of the grace that should come unto you: *searching* what, or what manner of time the Spirit of Christ which was in them did signify, when it testified beforehand the sufferings of Christ and the glory that should follow (emphasis added).

What were they using to carry out this *search and inquiry*? Whatever manner of scripture was available to them during their days – some having nothing more than the first five books of the Old Testament; others having nothing more than writings left by previous generations that have since disappeared. They certainly did not have available to them what we have today! What greater responsibility do we have with our greater advantage?

The prophets referred to in 2 Chronicles 9:29 are a perfect example of this. Notice: Nathan, Ahijah, and Iddo left writings (see also 12:15, 13:22; Ezra 5:1; Neh. 12:4; and Zech. 1:1, 7). We presently have scant information about these prophets, much less about their writings. But God's word says that their writings were a source of information for His people at a certain time in history. And ... you get the idea that Iddo the prophet was particularly busy, but his writings are not even preserved as scripture – which would have made him at least a minor prophet like Amos, Hosea, and others.

In Luke 1:70, Zacharias, John the Baptist's father, says that God has had prophets "...since the world began..." Amos wrote that "Surely the Lord God will do nothing, [without] revealing His secret to His servants the prophets" (3:7).

So, Peter explains to us that it was nothing but this hope of the salvation revealed by God that demanded the attention and efforts of the prophets, both to understand it and to pass it along to others in succeeding generations. In spite of the revelation of God and the Spirit of Christ in them, they still had to search and inquire – and ...

I dare say that they were driven by both the revelation and Spirit to make the search and inquiry.

Peter says that they wanted to know when and how God's revelation would be fulfilled. But ... Peter also says here that they knew that these things would not be fulfilled during their time, but in a time in the distant future. He says that the time has arrived for us to pay more careful attention to these things.

What about you? Are you driven by what you learn and by the Spirit of God to search and inquire for more understanding? Are you curious about the when and how? If not, why not? You are familiar, no doubt, with the Bereans of Acts 17:10, 11. It says of them that they "...received the word with all readiness of mind, and searched the scripture daily, [to determine] whether those things [that Paul and Silas preached] were so." There is no way of determining exactly which scriptures they had, but it is safe to assume that it was, at the most, the Old Testament.

The key elements of this description are: (a) readiness of mind and (b) searching the scripture daily. Their concern was not for the novelty subject (what some call amazing new truths: ANTS) – nor was it an on-again-off-again or infrequent approach to reaping the treasures found in holy writ. The synonyms search and inquire denote a prolonged search – an approach not really exercised in a daily devotional format. It is more intense and time-consuming. It might be compared to searching for some great treasure or a lost, prized possession (see Matthew 13:44-46 and Luke 15). These are important concepts to understand.

There is an account in Daniel 9 that gives us an excellent example of a person who regularly involved himself in search and inquiry. In v. 2, Daniel says that he "...was perusing [reading attentively] the scriptures, counting the number of years – as revealed by Yahweh to the prophet Jeremiah – that were to pass before the successive devastations of Jerusalem would come to an end, namely seventy years" (*The Jerusalem Bible*). The KJV says that he understood by "books." It is not altogether clear whether Daniel used only scriptures from Jeremiah, or if he used other writings from prophets like Iddo. Please note that a rather straightforward point is necessitated here: search and inquiry need not be limited to scriptures only – a point that I will revisit later in the chapter.

What is the idea presented in Daniel 9? Simply this: As a result of Daniel's curiosity, prayer, and fasting, he was enabled to be instructed about a greater spiritual meaning that God attached to the lesson of the 70-year captivity of the House of Judah: The Seventy Weeks Prophecy (read vv. 20-27) – a lesson meant for us, not Daniel. We, however, must not be led astray by all of the various interpretations men have put to this prophecy through the years.

In another event in Daniel 10:12-14, Daniel was given a vision about another future event. An angelic being said to him: "...From the first day that you set your heart to understand, and to chasten yourself before your God [by fasting and prayer], your words [prayers] were heard, and I have come because of them" (v. 12). Then the angel said something remarkable: "I will show you that which is noted *in the scripture of truth*" (v. 21; emphases added).

In chapter 11, the angel continued his explanation by revealing to Daniel that the Mede-Persian Empire would be subsequently overthrown after three more rulers had come to power (11:2). Because of our knowledge of the subsequent unfolding history, we know that his explanation included information about Alexander the Great's rule, his death, and the division of his empire among his four generals (vv. 3, 4). Subsequently, these generals would war among themselves, and two of them would ultimately become the King of the North and the King of the South.

Continue to read this explanation through chapter 12. It encompasses a great swath of time leading to the return of Jesus Christ, the first resurrection and beyond. But ... notice 12:8, 9: "...I heard, but *I did not understand*; then I said, 'O my Lord, what shall be the end of these things?' And he said, 'Go your way, Daniel: for *the words are closed up and sealed till the time of the end*'" (emphases added). What? In the end, Daniel did not understand what he wrote!!!

This certainly underscores Peter's assessment because we are able to understand things the prophets did not. Why do you suppose that is true? Peter says that God revealed to the prophets that their work was for our benefit, not theirs – and even the angels desire to look into them and understand them (1 Peter 1:12), which is an expression that denotes an envious interest on the part of the

angels. If God had us in mind, why should we be so casual in our approach to His word – which is so easily accessible to all of us?

I cannot promise you a personal angelic being to come and visit with you to give you understanding, but I can tell you that God will pay attention to your need for understanding if you approach Him as Daniel did (see John 14:13, 14, 26; 16:13, 14; and James 1:5-8).

Finally, Peter underscores the point that inspiration by God depends on two basic elements: (a) the inquiring mind of man and (b) the revealing Spirit of God. We should be able to understand that the Spirit of Christ has always been operative in the world. There are those who claim that the people of the Old Testament did not have the Holy Spirit. It was available to them, apparently, on a large enough scale to consider the need of future generations to know and understand God's existence and plan. If not, how, then, did we receive such a great treasure trove of God's revelation of Himself and His plan of salvation – the creation of man in His own image?

From the foundation of this present world, this gospel has been kept intact by that guiding Spirit and the inquiring minds who have sought to know God's truth. If we are not the last generation, then we must also preserve it for future generations.

Again and again, scripture makes it plain that not all will understand the message. Many do not understand – even though they might vociferously spout their opinions – because they look without seeing and hear without understanding (see Matt. 13:13), which is a fulfillment of prophecy against a Spiritless, superficially religious people (see Isaiah 6:9, 10). We should now understand why prophets and holy men of old did not understand (Matt. 13:17).

But ... why don't the rulers and wise men of the world understand (see Luke 10:24 and I Corinthians 2:6)? It is really very simple: God has not chosen to reveal it to them because they have not chosen to think it important enough to search and inquire into it (see Rom. 1:28 and I Cor. 2:7-16).

Will God condemn them to the second death because He has not chosen to reveal His truth to them? This is an important question you can use to begin a search and inquiry into God's word for the powerful answer. Never mind what is popularly taught. Make it a point to devote yourself to search and inquiry! Ask God

to give you an abundance of the Spirit that reveals the spiritual intent of His word to you. Otherwise, you, too, will look without “seeing” and hear without “understanding.” Have you made understanding God’s word a priority in your life? If not, why not?

Diligence in Study

Spiritual growth and maturity do not fall upon us like a great bolt of holy lightning out of heaven – or by divine miracle in public or private. The road to spiritual growth and maturity is never the easy, broad boulevard – which is often infested with wolves in sheep’s clothing (see Matthew 7:13-15). The straight and narrow demands persistence and single-minded devotion – as well as steady, determined progress. It is not a road for the inattentive, superficial, or flippant ... but, one for those who will earnestly and energetically take up the journey toward that road’s ultimate destination. We have a map for that road, but we must be diligent in our study of that map lest we fall by the wayside, victims of our own carelessness and inattention.

Jesus seems to have constantly wrestled with this problem among His own disciples. As He prepared Himself for His crucifixion and gave His disciples some final instruction, He said: “You know the way to the place I am going.” He meant, of course, the ultimate goal set out for Him from before the creation of the orderly universe – not the road to “heaven.” Thomas, not known for being shy about his doubts, said: “We do not know where you are going, so how can we know the way?” (*The Jerusalem Bible*; John 14:4, 5). This was quite a perplexing problem on the eve of His arrest and subsequent crucifixion! Which parts of His instruction over the past three-plus years had fallen on hard ground – victims to unseeing eyes and unhearing ears?

The answer, of course, is revealed in Luke 24:44-49: (a) He had not yet opened their understanding of the Scriptures about Himself, and (b) He had not yet given them the gift of the Holy Spirit (see also John 14:15-26 and 16:7-15). Upon our true repentance and baptism, God’s true ministers lay hands upon us for the receipt of the Holy Spirit (see Acts 2:38; 8:14-17; 9:1-22; Rom. 6; and Eph. 1:13, 14). From that point on, God will see by our conduct if we

truly hunger and thirst for spiritual growth and development (see Matt. 5:6 and 6:31-33).

In 1 Timothy 4:15, Paul admonishes Timothy to give himself fully to publicly reading Scriptures (in Church services – not out on the streets), preaching, and teaching. This is an admonition for Timothy to be diligent – steady, earnest, and energetic. The word translated by KJV as *meditate* is the Greek term *meletao*, which means “to be diligent in,” or “to prosecute diligently,” or “to practice intensely as an athlete does.”

The idea is that Timothy should sink himself into these duties so that they would fully engage his attention. It also involves practice – suggesting that Timothy should discipline himself with a planned, zealous approach to his studies. How else do you acquire the poise and confidence to carry out the Christian duties you have in service to God through Jesus Christ? This is certainly linked to additional instruction that Paul gave Timothy in 2 Timothy 2:15-19.

Demonstrating your *spiritual competence* before God is of utmost importance. How is such *competence* demonstrated? By learning how to correctly handle God’s word of truth: God’s revelation of Himself and His holiness, the stream and pattern of His prophetic thought, and the true doctrinal faith (the gospel of the coming Kingdom of God on the earth) deposited among true believers “once and for all” (Jude 3).

The Greek term for *divide* (*orthotomeo*) originally meant “to cut straight.” This term was used to describe how a farmer plows his fields and how a tailor cuts fabric according to a pattern. In this context, it involves a straightforward approach to discussing God’s word without beating around the bush about it or floundering around in uncertainty. Such is the meaning of the motto of The Seventh Day Christian Assembly: “Straight Talk – Plain Truth.” *Bauer-Arndt-Gingrich* defines it as: “...perh[aps] mean[ing] guide the word of truth along a straight path (like a road that goes straight to its goal), without being turned aside by wordy debates or impious talks...” (p. 584) – like those “profane and vain babblings” Paul warns of in v. 16. Such *incompetence* leads one away from God’s truth into a meaningless religiosity. God is not the God of confusion (1 Corinthians 14:33).

First Peter 1:10 says that the ancient prophets “...inquired and searched diligently...” in order to understand the salvation God is to bring to mankind. Paul uses the same word (Greek = *ekzeteo*) in Hebrews 11:6 and 12:15. The idea is that one will crave, or highly desire, God’s revelation of His truth to the point of investigating, searching out, and demanding to know – but, by inference, will do so carefully so as not to make a mistake in the conclusion(s) drawn.

As this search of the scriptures is done with this kind of diligence, one’s competence in rightly handling the word of truth will become more readily apparent to others – as well as one’s confidence that what s/he is telling others is “straight talk and plain truth,” not “fluff” and “warm and fuzzy” religiosity. “Warm and fuzzy” religiosity is designed to appeal to the emotions – often at the expense of setting aside God’s truth. It is too often nothing more than gross superficiality. Search and inquire about God’s truth.

Meditation

When David declared that the righteous person meditates day and night on God’s law (Psalm 1:2), he was not suggesting that s/he would assume a particular posture and chant some kind of mantra – a mystical formula of incantation. Such a thing suggests that the Divine is encountered only by verbal charms that are spoken or sung to attract it. Many times, such a mantra requires that one has to empty his mind in order to allow the “spirit” to enter it. It is a form of magic – a thing that the God of the Bible detests (see Lev. 19:31 and 20:6, 27 for examples). What David was suggesting was far different. I am not prepared here to give you a primer on meditation. I want to help you to focus on the bigger picture in order to whet your appetite for discovering the details about it in God’s word.

Stephen Covey, author of *The Seven Habits of Highly Effective People* and *Principle-Centered Leadership*, says that there are three universal resolutions you must make in order to overcome powerful restraining forces that frustrate your attempts to change your core values. They are:

(a) exercise self-discipline and self-denial – do not become the slave to any of your physical appetites and passions;

(b) work on building character and competence – do not be deceitful about your abilities and intentions and do not try to be “all things to all people”; and

(c) dedicate your talents and resources to noble purposes, and serve others unselfishly – do not simply look out for yourself (*Principle-Centered Leadership*, Simon & Schuster, 1991, pp. 48-56).

This is very much in keeping with Paul’s idea as expressed in I Corinthians 9:27: “I treat my body hard and make it obey me, for, having been [a preacher] myself, I should not want to be disqualified” (*The Jerusalem Bible*). Meditation is one means by which you become able to discipline your thoughts – and, by extension, your actions. The Hebrew term *hagah*, in this context, means “to be absorbed in thought” and “to soliloquize”: speaking audibly to oneself while alone.

While there is oral activity, it is not by reason of chanting formulaic mantras. It is a purposeful musing or pondering or contemplation of the various aspects of God’s revelation of Himself and His standards of holiness (see Isa. 55:8, 9). In Psalm 119, David extols the virtues of meditating upon God’s law. Why? We get a glimpse of his reasoning in verses like v. 92 (“Unless your law had been my delights, I should then have perished in my affliction.”) and vv. 97-104 (“...made me wiser than my enemies ... more understanding than all my teachers ... more understanding than the ancients...”). There is prayer, thanksgiving, repentance, and resolution to stay the course in God’s holiness – all part of the meditation process.

The entirety of the Psalms is, no doubt, the product of such meditation – but ... Psalm 119 is the meditations of the psalmist in which he takes the Hebrew alphabet and applies to each letter a lesson from God’s law and how it acts as a governing principle in his life. It is arranged in an elaborate acrostic form: for each letter

of the Hebrew alphabet there is a stanza of eight verses, which all begin with that letter. He does this with each of the 22 letters of the Hebrew alphabet. The repetition and pattern is, perhaps, a form of mnemonic (assisting the memory) device to aid his learning. When I was in elementary school, we had to learn how to spell “arithmetic.” It was a difficult word for such young minds to spell. The teacher gave us a mnemonic device to help us: **A Red Indian Thought He Might Eat Turkey In Church**. It was a silly sentence, but it helped us to learn how to spell the difficult word. What real purpose does such meditation serve?

Simply put, it has to do with building one’s understanding of his own worth and great potential in the mind and heart of God – a worth and potential bound up in his relationships with his fellow man, the natural world around him, and his Creator and Sustainer. Meditation is an important key to building the mental and spiritual components of one’s *self*. How, in the broad scheme of things, can one effectively love his neighbor as himself if he cares little for the building of a loving self? How can he effectively love God if he cannot effectively love himself enough to strive with his might to be like God in thought and deed?

This was part of an important lesson Jesus taught His disciples in Matthew 15:18-20:

...Those things which proceed out of the mouth come forth from the heart; and they defile the man. For out of the heart proceed evil thoughts, murders, adulteries, fornications, thefts, false witness, blasphemies: These are the things which defile a man....” (emphases added).

Proverbs 23:7a says: “For as he thinks in his heart, so is he...” (emphasis added). It is *within* the heart of man – one’s innermost being that constitutes the emotional and ethical core of his value system – that such things are set into motion. Scripture reveals here that one’s actions are driven by the ethics – the moral values – of this heart. Jesus declared that the thoughts and intents of the heart easily constitute sin if they are not the fruit of God’s holy spirit.

In Matthew 5:28, He said: "...Whosoever looks upon a woman to lust after her has already committed adultery with her in his heart" (emphases added). He doesn't even have to actually engage in the physical action in order to be an adulterer, murderer, thief, or so on! If that is what he has his mind set on, then he is that. Meditation like David's is the remedy for such a problem. Why?

Several answers are provided:

(a) the Apostle John warned: "Love not the world, neither the things that are in the world ... For all that is in the world – the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life – is not of the Father, but is of the world. And the world and its lusts pass away, but he that does the will of the Father abides forever" (1 John 2:15-17);

(b) the Apostle Paul wrote to the Philippians: "...Whatsoever things are true ... honest ... just... pure ... lovely ... of good report; if there be any virtue, and if there be any praise, think on these things" (Phil. 4:8; emphases added; see also Gal. 5:16-26); and

(c) Paul also wrote to the Romans: "...Do not be conformed to this world: but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what is God's good and acceptable and perfect will" (Rom. 12:2; emphases added).

Meditation helps you to set up an environment in which the heart can be trained to focus on the eternal values of God rather than the fleeting values of the world. As Joshua assumed the leadership role after the death of Moses, the Lord God spoke to him about his new role. After reviewing the basics of His covenant with Abraham about the Promised Land, He told Joshua to be strong and courageous in his obedience to all of God's law. Joshua 1:8 is very important in this regard:

This book of the law shall not depart out of your mouth; but you shall meditate therein day and night, that you may observe to do according to all that is written therein: for then you shall make your way prosperous, and then you shall have good success” (emphases added).

Notice that it was not simply an exercise in committing to memory the contents of the law; he was expected to perform the demands of the law. Prosperity and success would follow obedience. This is the heart and core of the importance of the New Covenant that the Lord God will make with both houses of Israel after the return of Jesus Christ: “...I will put my laws in their inward parts, and write it in their hearts...” (Jer. 31:31-34; emphases added).

True Christians are presently party to that New Covenant (see Matt. 26:26-29). The understanding of the spiritual intent of God’s law does not get there without some conscientious effort on your part to put it there and to reinforce its value by acting upon it in your everyday life (see Mal. 3:8-12 for an example of reinforcing by doing).

That is the message in I Timothy 4:15: “Meditate upon these things; give yourself fully to them so that it may be apparent to others how you benefit from living by them” (author’s paraphrase; emphases added). Meditation is an important tool in your spiritual growth and development in Christ. Do the legwork: think through your study of God’s word to get the details on how to meditate effectively on His revelation of Himself and His marvelous plan for humankind.

Memorization

How does one live by every word of God (Matt. 4:4) if he has not taken the time to commit a sizeable portion of it to memory? Does God expect you to memorize the entire Bible – book, chapter, verse? What, exactly, does the psalmist mean when he says that he has hidden God’s word in his heart? You are going to see that it has to do with more than simply memorizing scriptures.

Remember that Psalm 119 is made up of 22 eight-verse stanzas. Verse 11 is part of the second stanza, which begins with the question about how a young man can cleanse his life – followed by the assertion that this will be accomplished by guarding it according to the word of God. In these eight verses, he confesses that he is firmly convicted that cleansing his life will come by laying hold of God's eternal truths, keeping them in his mind and heart, and sharing that knowledge and wisdom with others as opportunities present themselves to do so.

In order to do this effectively, he must get to know God intimately, understand the condition of his own mind and heart, and be prepared to change whatever needs to be changed in order to advance to greater heights of wisdom and righteousness. Job confessed that he had not rejected God's commandments, but had esteemed God's words more than "necessary food" (Job 23:12; see also Matt. 6:24-34). That, too, is this psalmist's mind-set.

It is not that he would hide God's word so as not to reveal it to anyone. It is that he would make his heart and mind a storehouse into which he gathers God's thoughts and ways to preserve them for future use – especially when there might be a dearth of such knowledge abroad because of the great sinfulness of mankind (compare Amos 8:11 to Rom. 1:18-32 and 2 Tim. 3). So, the term esteem is also at work here.

To esteem something means that you hold it in high regard. Jesus is very pointed in His question and answer in Matthew 12:34, 35:

...How can you, being evil, speak good things?
Because out of the heart the mouth speaks. A good man out of the good treasure of the heart brings forth good things: and, an evil man out of the evil treasure brings forth evil things" (emphases added).

Whenever you treasure up something, you keep it as something that is valuable and precious, not common and readily available to everyone. It is highly regarded. It is something protected and preserved. So, in order to commit something to memory, you must regard it as highly valuable and worthy of being stored and preserved for future use as time and chance might dictate.

Effective Bible study requires that you: (a) read widely; (b) carefully consider the implications and dictates of living a holy life; (c) search and inquire about God's revelation of Himself, His plans, and His way of life; (d) study diligently on a regular basis with a purposeful, systematic approach; and (e) meditate – be absorbed in thought – about what you are discovering in God's word. All of these are interlocking building blocks for effective spiritual growth and development. But, does this mean that God expects you to commit to memory entire sections of scripture – verse, chapter, book?

I was once acquainted with an elderly minister, Dr. Charles Howard, who had committed an enormous amount of the Bible to memory. He suffered from something like macular degeneration and was slowly losing his sight – and ability to read the scriptures. So, he took it upon himself to commit them to memory – book, chapter, verse. This was an astonishing and highly commendable thing for him to do.

After he lost his sight, his wife continued to read to him to reinforce his memory. He accepted no crutch – and he continued his ministry until age and physical strength failed to support his efforts. He had, in effect, accomplished the intent and purpose of hiding God's word in his heart and mind. But God does not expect such a thing of us – at least not like Dr. Howard's accomplishment. He does, however, expect us to commit to memory His great themes, plans, thoughts, laws, and principles of holiness – so that out of the good treasure in our hearts we may be able to bring forth good things.

To the degree that we are able to commit to memory book, chapter, and verse – line upon line, precept upon precept, here a little, there a little (Isa. 28:9, 10) – we will be able to bring God's very own specific word to the table of conversation as an effective witness of God's intents and purposes and will. Do not think that it is unimportant to be able to cite specific scriptures.

You should gradually build your knowledge of the Bible so that you know where each book is located and the great messages contained in them. Will this happen overnight? Hardly! You should be prepared to devote the rest of your life to the task and approach it as though you have a limited amount of time to do so. And ... it

will never get done through procrastination and allowing yourself to become overwhelmed at the enormity of the task or at the cares and business of everyday life.

God understands that the conversion process is not complete in one fell-swoop moment of time. It takes time for His thoughts and ways to percolate into our lives to transform us into the holy, blameless, and loving individuals He desires us to be (Eph. 1:4). You can begin by getting to know, at the least, how to look them up in the Bible. Then – go from there.

Learning from God-Inspired Teachers

Paul pursues a line of reason in Romans 10:13-21 that lays out another path to effective Bible study: Learning from God-inspired teachers. Paul presents us here with a paradox – something that seems to contradict common sense, yet it is true. In Romans 9:17-23, he states that God will have mercy upon whom He will, and man has no right to question that – no more than the clay has the right to question why the potter makes a valuable vessel from a lump of clay and turns around and makes some trivial, worthless something from the same lump of clay.

In essence, the power and prerogative to create and bring to pass are God's; He is in control of everything. Yet, in Romans 10:13-21, Paul shows that it is through man's free will that he is responsible to see God's revelation of Himself and to react favorably to it. God purposes, creates, and brings to pass, but He does not force mankind to accept it just because He has done so. It is the paradox of the human situation that God is in control, but the human will is free to make choices. In order for mankind to receive the salvation God has made available, he must surrender to God's requirements and call upon the name of the Lord – Jesus Christ. Calling upon the name of the Lord suggests repentance, baptism, and receiving the gift of the Holy Spirit (see Acts 2:38).

Some, according to Paul, might raise the objection that such a thing is not possible if you do not believe in the Lord. It is also impossible to believe in Him if you have not heard about Him. Moreover, it is impossible to hear about Him if no one has come to proclaim the good news about Him. Therefore, if God is in

control, then **He** must send someone to teach others about this Christ. How has God – who is supposed to be in control – provided teachers and preachers to solve this dilemma?

To this objection, Paul quotes Isaiah 52:7. Isaiah shows how God’s people sold themselves into physical and spiritual slavery for nothing and came to nothing as a result. In spite of this, He plans to redeem them and gather them to Himself. After having suffered so much as a result of their own poor, rebellious choices, how will God’s people react to this redemption?

Isaiah quotes the Lord: “...My people shall know my name: therefore, they shall know in that day that I am he who speaks: behold, it is I” (v. 6). How, exactly, will this happen? Verse 7:

How beautiful upon the mountains are the feet of him that brings good news, that publishes peace; that brings good news of good [things to come], that publishes salvation; that says to Zion, “Your God reigns!”

Thus, Paul says that God, in fact, has provided, and will continue to provide, inspired teachers for His people. These teachers will explain to them the things of God and make them to know His truth. It should not go unnoticed that the people are rescued from despair and certain destruction because, once they know God’s truth, they willingly accept their responsibility to know the Lord.

In spite of the prevalence of false teachers throughout history and today (see Matt. 24:4, 5, 11, 23-28; 2 Cor. 11:4, 13- 15; Gal. 1:6-12; 2 Pet. 2; 1 John 4:1; and Jude 4), God has made available to mankind inspired teachers who have brought God’s truth. Ephesians 4:11-24 explicitly reveals that God has called out and prepared individuals who can instruct others on various levels of spiritual insight into God’s truth: apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors, and teachers (see also 1 Cor. 12:28, 29). Their insight into God’s truth enables you to become firmly founded in God’s thoughts and ways to the point that you are not the victim of the false teachers of this world – not “...tossed to and fro, and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the sleight of men, and cunning craftiness whereby they lie in wait to deceive...” (v. 14).

In an undertaking such as this, no man can commission himself to deliver God's message: God gives him the message and the commission to publish it abroad to others. You, therefore, are responsible for learning God's truth well enough to recognize those who truly represent God. And ... to resist those who do not. I will continue to point out that there are many pretenders out there.

In Galatians 6:6, Paul broaches the topic of mutuality and reciprocity. The *KJV* use of the term communicate escapes our present-day English meaning. Not only does it convey the idea of sharing material things, it also conveys the idea of sharing spiritual things. The student takes upon himself the responsibility of contributing to the physical needs of the teacher to make possible the sharing of spiritual gifts. After all, if the teacher has to focus his attention on plying a trade, he is limited in the time he has to teach.

He that is taught in the word should be taught the entirety of the principles of the doctrine of Christ: repentance from dead works, faith toward the True God, baptisms, laying on of hands for various purposes (blessing, ordinations, healing, receipt of the Holy Spirit), the resurrection of the dead, the judgment, and going on to perfection (Hebrews 6:1, 2). It is important for the true Christian community to learn to share with one another so that God's truth will not be hindered or limited.

In Philippians 4:9, Paul admonished Timothy to imitate those things that he learned from Paul – things that he learned, received, heard, and saw. This describes a method by which this God-inspired man taught:

- (a) he imparted knowledge of true Christianity by giving instruction in the principles of true faith;
- (b) he handed down the true traditions of how Jesus Christ lived and died – what Jude refers to as “the faith once delivered” (Jude 3);
- (c) he counseled Timothy and others about their conduct in God's true Church; and

(d) he presented to them a personal example of a spirit-led life in the face of personal weaknesses, temptations, and persecutions.

The qualities of life referred to in v. 8 are realized only when someone lives by them – and ... Paul insists in v. 9 that he has set the example for Timothy and others. Keeping such an example of a spirit-led life constantly before you should inspire you to pursue such a life and knowledge.

Be careful as you learn about God’s truth. There are false ministers and prophets abroad who represent themselves as being the servants of the True God. If you are not very careful, you can be deceived into believing a lie just as Eve was (see Matt. 24:24 and 2 Cor. 11:4, 13-15).

Just One Last Thought

What you have received thus far in “Studying the Bible” is a broad outline to effective Bible study. It is a starting point – but it will serve you well only to the degree that you put it into action. I do not pretend that it is the only approach. Certainly, if you should come across other points that lead to more effective study of God’s word, incorporate that into your approach to studying. You should make it your business to set aside the time on a regular basis to study God’s word. Reading it serves a useful purpose, I know.

However, studying God’s word is training your mind to focus on learning the meaning and purpose of God’s word – purposefully examining the word to commit it to memory and practice. James reminds us that we should “...be doers of the word, and not just hearers ... For if any be a hearer of the word, and not a doer, he is like a man beholding his natural face in a glass: for he beholds himself, and goes his way, and straightway forgets what manner of man he was” (1:22-24; emphases added). Learn it! Do it!

Review Questions

1. Explain how God presents the entire picture throughout the Bible. Use Isaiah 28:9, 10 as a resource reference.

2. How does God make it apparent that one must learn His truth *systematically*? Be as specific as possible.
3. What is the price to be paid for receiving God's wisdom and understanding?
4. How does God's word become a snare and a trap to those who do not obey it? Hint: Think of how people are led astray by falsehoods.)
5. Who uses milk instead of meat? What distinguishes between a mere spiritual infant and one who is spiritually mature?
6. Explain Proverbs 14:12.
7. Explain Proverbs 4:7.
8. What was so special about the Bereans?
9. List seven ways by which you can systematize your Bible study.

Chapter Three:

Learn the Role of God's Law

What is the role of God's Law in Christianity today? Most believe that God's Law was either totally fulfilled or totally abolished as a result of the crucifixion of Jesus Christ. They use Scriptures like Colossians 2:14 to "prove" their assumption ... believing that it was God's Law that was nailed to the cross. This assumption is very difficult to maintain if you believe what God has revealed to us in Scripture.

For example, how do you explain Paul's question in Romans 3:31 about whether or not Christian faith makes God's Law void? How do you answer Paul's statement that the Christian faith actually preserves in perpetuity (that is, *establishes*) the Law? How do you explain Romans 7:7-14 ... where Paul asserts that the Law defines "sin" and that it is "holy, and just, and good"? How about 1 John 3:4 where John defines "sin" as being "the transgression of the Law"? Let's understand how that works in New Testament Christianity.

Did Jesus Destroy God's Law and Prophets?

The third rule for effective Bible study is this: Learn the role of God's Law. As a prelude, we must examine a peculiar statement by Jesus Christ so we can have a good reference point on which to base our discussion. In Matthew 5:17, 18, Jesus says that He did not come to destroy (KJV) the Law or the Prophets. What does destroy mean? That word is a very important part in determining whether

or not God's Law and Prophets have been made null and void by Christ's crucifixion. It would stand to reason, therefore, that this one question could save you a thousand more regarding what true Christianity should be teaching as Scriptural truth.

The Greek word translated as destroy is kataluo. Its definition flies in the face of the common concept in traditional Christianity that the Law has been "nailed to the cross" and done away with. Kataluo means "to do away with, abolish, annul, make invalid, and repeal." So, Jesus plainly said that He did not come to do that to either the Law or the Prophets. Do you trust Jesus to mean what He says – to tell you the truth? If not, further discussion will be an exercise in futility.

The truth is that He meant to leave the Law and the Prophets intact for the Church to use in proclaiming the gospel of the Kingdom – then and now. Next, when He used the terms join and tittle, He was referring specifically to the written Law and Prophets – not the oral law. True Christians are not accountable to the oral law (see Matt. 15:1-9 for an example of oral law). However, what is written in the Old Testament can be proved to be God's truth and very necessary in the true Christian's spiritual growth and development.

The Witness and Testimony of the Old Testament

Do you have a written record of the Law and the Prophets in the Old Testament of your Bible? Yes, it is that portion found between Genesis and Malachi – the entire Old Testament. You can get an idea of the importance of this portion of Scripture by reading Luke 24:44 where Jesus Christ – after His resurrection from the dead – told His disciples:

...All things must be fulfilled, which were written in the law of Moses [the first five books of the Bible], and in the prophets [known as the major and minor prophets from Isaiah to Malachi], and in the psalms, concerning me [containing other prophetic utterances by David and others] (emphases added).

This also does not render as invalid the history portions of Scripture. Your logic must include the fact that this comment by Jesus Christ is made after He was nailed to the cross and resurrected from the dead three days and three nights later (Matt. 12:40). Notice that Jesus is framing His comment in view of future actions to be taken in reference to those things written in those places about Him and His mission as Lord and Savior. So, ask yourself, according to Jesus' statement: Has God's Law been abolished, as some teach? Why/why not? According to the preceding comments, what do you conclude?

If you understand the development of the Bible with reference to both Testaments, then you will understand the significance of 2 Timothy 3:16, 17. What does Paul mean that Scripture is God-inspired? Since Paul did not have the New Testament, to which part of Scripture was he referring? The Old Testament ... which contains the Law and Prophets and Psalms about which Jesus spoke in Matthew 5:17, 18 and Luke 24:44.

For what purposes did Paul say that Scripture (in this case, the Old Testament) is useful and profitable? Paul says for: doctrine, reproof, correction, and instruction in righteousness. Let me give the fuller, longer version regarding Paul's use of those expressions:

1. Doctrine has to do with establishing the tenets/principles of instruction to be held in common as truth by a body of believers.

2. Reproof has to do with correcting faulty ideas, attitudes, and actions through evidence. In Romans 3:2, Paul speaks of the oracles of God that are found in the Old Testament. That body of work contains God's very own witness and testimony that the content is His truth (see Isa. 8:16, 20). Read Leviticus 18 and explain why God would have destroyed any of those laws.

3. Correction involves using the Old Testament for testing all religious theories, theologies, and ethical teachings for correctness and truth relative to the revealed thoughts

and ways of God. This book that you are presently reading represents such an endeavor in correction and testing.

4. Training the believer in righteousness is the process by which those who desire to worship God in spirit and in truth (John 4:23, 24) can learn how to become spiritually mature and thoroughly capable of doing the works for which God has called him/her into His truth (see Eph. 2:10).

What is your reaction to this revelation? Are you impressed by the witness and testimony taken from the Old Testament to prove the point that is being made?

Learn the Difference between Commandment and Non-commandment

There are areas of God's word where we are commanded to obey or suffer certain consequences. There are other areas where we are allowed to make decisions for ourselves. Not understanding the difference between the two can make for lots of unnecessary torment and guilt – not to mention all of the attendant problems that accompany those things. Here is the wisdom and understanding that is required: There are some things we may not decide for ourselves because God's Law is inviolable, and ... some things that we may (permissive) decide for ourselves. Let me demonstrate this for you.

In I Corinthians 7:1-9, Paul addresses whether or not his instructions to married Christians about rendering sexual dues to one another is by permission [from God] or by commandment [of God] (v. 6). What is the difference? If it is by permission, are we obligated to obey his instructions? Do we obey just because of someone's greatness or reputation? Or, does Paul simply mean that they were to take his advice into consideration? Read Ephesians 4:11-16.

In I Corinthians 7:10, 11, regarding divorce between believers, is Paul speaking by permission or by commandment? Must we obey

this instruction – or, may we ignore it – that is, does God allow Paul to make his judgment official in the Lord? Why/why not?

In I Corinthians 7:12-24 – Who is responsible for this instruction about believers married to unbelievers – Paul or God? Under what circumstances may a believer divorce an unbeliever? Under what circumstances must the believer remain with the unbeliever? Is it possible for the unbeliever to be made holy by his/her association with the believer? What effect does this have upon the children born under such circumstances?

Paul says that God honors the believer by allowing the mate and the children to be called into His truth if they want to be called. Does God consider the marriage binding if the unbeliever is not content to dwell with the believer in peace and departs? Write down the verse that specifically expresses that thought. Must we obey this instruction – or, may we ignore it? Why/why not?

Now read I Corinthians 7:25-40. Does Paul have any kind of commandment from the Lord here – or is this instruction he is giving because of the times in which they lived? How can you tell? Ultimately, what was Paul's judgment concerning this situation?

How important is it that all of this New Testament instruction was set aside as holy scripture – “...given by inspiration of God ... profitable for doctrine ... reproof ... correction ... instruction in righteousness”? Does that fact demand our attention to it? Why/why not?

With regard to whether virgins should marry in anticipation of the imminent return of Christ, Paul said:

Now concerning virgins: I have no commandment of the Lord; yet I give my judgment as one that has obtained mercy of the Lord to be faithful (v. 25; emphases added).

His judgment was that it really did not matter, but it might be wise to stay single so they could devote themselves to Christ's service.

Were they obligated to remain single? No. Were they obligated to marry? No. They were advised to consider the circumstances of the times and to act with wisdom – focusing their attention on their immediate spiritual needs. It is important to be able to understand the intent of the instruction given.

Conclusion

So, what does all of this teach us about studying the Bible – about knowing the role God’s Law plays in our lives? *First*, there are things that are clearly commanded for all people of all ages. The most obvious example of that would be the 10 Commandments (Ex. 20: 1-17). *Second*, there are things that were commanded of Israel as a covenant nation that have no application to our present-day situation: the structure of the Tabernacle and the nature of its furnishings are excellent examples (Ex. 25-30; 36-40). Another example would be the organization of the tribes and the marching orders (Num. 1-3). *Third*, there were things commanded that are written in scripture in incomplete form – leaving us with no way to understand or obey: for example, the formula for the oil used to anoint various things associated with the Tabernacle. How could we get the mixture correct today? Correct mixture and proper usage are very important (Ex. 30:22-38)! And ... there are no Temple and Temple furnishings today.

We are obligated to obey those things that are clear and those that are obviously applicable in today’s situations. We are under no obligation to force scripture and wrestle meaning out of something that is unclear and/or incomplete. In situations not covered by commandment, we can use our own judgment, tempered with wisdom and righteousness and based on scriptural principles.

For example: The Bible nowhere specifically addresses the issue of smoking, dipping, or chewing tobacco, but it does tell us that our bodies are the temple of the Holy Spirit, and we are to glorify God in our bodies (1 Cor. 6:19, 20). Would it make sense to virtually destroy that body with the attendant effects of tobacco? No.

Neither are we allowed to use *our own judgment* to pervert or annul the commandment of God – as many have done in situations like changing the weekly day of worship from the seventh-day Sabbath to the first day of the week ... as well as doing away with God’s Holy Days (Ex. 20:8; Lev. 23). In effect, they have done away with God’s clearly understood commandments.

In summary: We have been commissioned by God to “correctly explain the pattern of the word of truth” (2 Tim. 2:15) and to “prove all things; hold fast to that which is good.” (1 Thes. 5:21).

How do you do that if you subtly or blatantly eliminate vitally important pieces of the pattern? Can you always prove enough to keep yourself in the correct pattern of the true faith? Can you avoid the syndrome in which you would be “ever learning, but never able to come to the knowledge of the truth” (2 Tim. 3:7)? What methods would you employ in order to understand the correct pattern or prove the truth?

These are very important questions to consider – and you must keep them in the forefront of your mind as you search God’s word for the answers to fundamental questions about: why we are here; what we are as created beings; where we will go when we die; and the existence of God, His Christ, His Church, and His truth. Read Matthew 16:19 to understand this more clearly.

Review Questions

1. Read Galatians 3:19-25 and think about what happened after you learned the rules about spelling, reading, and arithmetic. Once you had learned those basic rules, did you need the teacher to continue to teach you those things? Why?
2. Read Jeremiah 31:33 and compare it to Romans 8:1-4. What lesson does this teach you about the role of God’s Law for the Christian?
3. When we learn something, does it become a part of our *spirit* (the power of our *mind*)?
4. Explain how Paul’s thought in Galatians 3:19-25 demonstrates the lesson about God’s Law being put into our “inward parts” and “hearts.”
5. Compare Job 32:8 to 1 Corinthians 2:6-16 and Romans 8:16. What does this teach us about how God reveals His thoughts and ways to us (see Isa. 55:8-11)?
6. How can you use this information to explain Matthew 5:17-19?

7. What does destroy mean in Matthew 5:17?
8. Are the Law and the Prophets part of God's inspired word?
9. How does that knowledge figure into the argument about whether or not God's Law was "nailed to the cross"?
10. Which Scriptures did Jesus and Paul have?
11. From our discussion, list four ways by which those Scriptures are useful to the Christian.
12. What is the difference between using scriptural principles by permission and by commandment?
13. Which New Testament Scripture is useful in explaining how Paul was able to do such a thing and expect the Church to obey? (Hint: Matthew 16)
14. How important is it that the things Paul and others taught was set aside as holy Scripture in the New Testament?
15. Does that demand our attention as Christians?
16. What is the role of God's Law in Christian faith and practice?
17. Explain how this lesson has helped you to better understand the role of God's Law in the Christian's life.

Chapter Four:

Pay Attention to the Self-Evident

Rule #4 involves an interesting word: *a priori*. *A priori* involves drawing conclusions based on *self-evident* factors. It also involves drawing conclusions *independent of experience*. It is deductive reasoning; that is, reasoning from the *general* to the *specific* based on various known facts/truths. The example of the silence of the Bible on the subject of tobacco usage was an exercise in *a priori* reasoning. Knowing what we know about various other situations – the known facts/truths – in God’s word, it would be *self-evident* to conclude that God would not condone the use of tobacco in its various forms: smoke, dip, chew. This involves being able to see and understand patterns of thoughts in order to derive that which is *self-evident*.

That Which is *Self-Evident*

There are certain ideas about studying God’s word that should be *self-evident*. In all conversations about this, there must be kept in the back of one’s mind the simple fact that God expects you to be obedient to the truth that He reveals to you through His word and/or His servants (Isa. 28:11, 12). Without that willingness and commitment to be obedient, you about as well get your religion from the Sunday comic strips! If you will not commit to being obedient, there’s no sense in even trying to teach you about truth and spiritual maturity! That is *self-evident*! So, it is patently sensible to pay attention to the *self-evident* truths.

Isaiah also provided another piece of instruction that should be self-evident: “To the Law and to the Testimony: if they speak **not** according to this word, it is because there is no light in them” (Isa. 8:20; emphases added). Beware of those who would do away with the foundational truths presented in the Old Testament. That foundation is necessary in order to support the edifice that is built upon it.

Matthew 7:24-27 is a case-in-point. What happens to the edifice if you destroy the foundation? Jesus makes it plain that the foundation is of primary importance when erecting a building. If you have the wrong kind of foundation, then your building has a precarious life-span because it is vulnerable to all kinds of situations that can come upon it. It would make little sense to erect a building on sand in a flood plain. It would be just a matter of time before the building would be severely damaged or destroyed.

Paul explains to us in I Corinthians 3:9-17 that there is a proper foundation on which the true Christian must build. However, take note that he cautions the Christian to use proper building materials on the superstructure – that part off the building above the foundation. He explains to the true Christian that, if poor materials are built upon the foundation of “Christ,” the superstructure itself can be destroyed ... leaving that Christian with only his personal salvation intact.

Paul’s advice is to use the most durable materials possible to build on the foundation of “Christ.” Do not be “penny-wise and pound-foolish” – being stingy in the small thing but wasteful in the larger. Yes, some Christians do things like that with God’s word. Matthew 23:24 is an example: “You blind guides, which strain at a gnat, and swallow a camel.” They get caught up in knit-picky minutiae in Scripture and overlook the larger, self-evident truths. They are like the Scribes and Pharisees whom Jesus was addressing.

An Applicable Exercise in the Self-Evident

Here’s an example: How would I build a case for opposition to something like abortion? Does God’s word specifically condemn the practice? A search of an exhaustive concordance like *Strong’s*, which is based on the *King James Version*, will not reveal the usage of the

word anywhere in the text of the Old or New Testament. To be opposed to it *in truth*, then, would mean that you would have to derive your truth from that which is *self-evident* in scripture. What general principles in God's word can you use to draw a specific conclusion?

The primary question involved in justifying abortion is based on the question about *when life begins*. Here are some of the arguments. The *Journal of the American Medical Association* (August 2005), in an article titled "Fetal Pain: A Systematic Multi-disciplinary Review of the Evidence," states that the fetus does not feel pain before the 29th or 30th week. It is for that reason that doctors do not feel it necessary to anesthetize the fetus before removing it from the womb and destroying it. They conclude that, since the fetus does not respond to pain stimuli, it has not developed the functional thalamocortical connections required to do so. It is, therefore, **not** a viable human being and to abort it is **not** really killing a human being.

Pro-abortionists often argue that, in the early stages of pregnancy, the embryo is merely a "blob of tissue" – that it is more like a *tadpole* than a human. A *tadpole is a living being*. They set three benchmarks by which to determine the beginning of life:

- (a) when movement is felt,
- (b) when the first breath is drawn outside the womb, **or**
- (c) when the fetus is viable on its own (Douglas Winnail, *Tomorrow's World*: "Abortion: A Modern Holocaust?", March-April 2005, p. 11).

There is one more that I have found particularly troubling ... especially since I know that a *tadpole* is a living creature. Several years ago, when Bill Clinton was President, he was involved in a forum with some college and university students – part of which involved a discussion about abortion (I think partial-birth abortion also entered into the discussion). One student in particular took President Clinton to task about his pro-abortion stance. The President's answer was very revealing about his belief.

In order to justify his position, the President asked the student to answer a question – the answer would, it seemed, justify a pro-abortion stance, as well as a partial-birth approach to it. Here is the question posed by the President: “When does the **soul** enter the body?” The inference is this: Absent a soul, you are not dealing with a human being! From where might that reasoning have come? Is it biblical reasoning? You would have to do a thorough search about the matter and include things that are self-evident.

Clinton’s answer is mere speculation, but it is important to the context of the matter at hand. In his book, *The Baptist Faith and Message* (Convention Press, Nashville, 1971), which is based on the doctrinal platform adopted by the Southern Baptist Convention in 1971, Herschel H. Hobbs set forth the statements of faith they agreed upon by consensus that year. In the introduction of the book, he clearly stated that “Such statements have never been regarded as complete, infallible statements of faith, nor as official creeds carrying mandatory authority” (p. 4). That statement is designed to leave room for others to “reasonably” disagree.

Nevertheless, let’s consider what they generally agreed upon in their discussion about what man is:

Because of sin, “. . . man’s animal principle of life shall cease; his body shall return to the ground (Gen. 3:19). But his soul, the **real person**, is immortal. It will never cease to be” (p. 51; emphases added).

Bill Clinton claimed to have been a Southern Baptist. One would assume that he espoused the general Southern Baptist theology described here, even if it is fallible and unofficial. What is the point?

If you believe that the body is basically a house for the real person (the soul), then it is of little consequence if the body is terminated before the real person actually enters it. President Clinton’s question insinuated as much – as well as the insinuation that the soul is not deposited into the body until the fetus is taken completely from the mother’s body and breath is taken in for the first time.

Hobbs continued his definition of man by saying:

Man is twofold in nature. He is both spirit and body. Man is not a body and has a soul. He is a soul and has a body" (emphases added).

So, according to this doctrinal statement, the real person is an immortal soul; the body is merely a place for it to dwell until the body dies from one cause or another. The real person never dies because s/he is immortal – incapable of dying!

All of this notwithstanding, I do not perceive that Southern Baptists as a body of believers are pro-abortionists. But their historical stance on the soul's competency before God, freedom in religion, and the priesthood of the believer makes it possible for any who are so persuaded to be pro-abortionists. The concept of the priesthood of the believer is a Lutheran argument that every believer is a priest under Jesus Christ and, therefore, has the right to read and interpret scripture for himself as the Holy Spirit leads. It is a good, religious sound-byte – but it is not in any way supported by or specifically stated in Scripture.

I wrote President Clinton a letter and expressed my personal opposition to his reasoning. I told him that he had entered into a theological question that is clearly not accepted by all people of faith. As President of the United States, his job was to defend the Constitution of the United States and not put himself in the position of pushing off his personal religious beliefs about the soul on the general public because there is definite concern expressed in the Constitution regarding the separation of Church and State. The President's concern with Constitutional matters includes defending our unalienable rights – rights that cannot be abridged or terminated – to life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness. I asked why the unborn's right to life should not be similarly protected. He did not pursue the issue with me; his office merely sent a generic, stock card thanking me for my input.

So, the question before you is: Does the Bible support any or all of these so-called "benchmarks" that are used to determine when life begins? When, according to the Bible, does life actually begin? Is there any indication in scripture that God considers a fetus a living being? Is the pro-abortion movement really about life – or is it about something entirely different?

These are the “guts” of *a priori*. By what measure of general statements in Scripture can you see it manifestly concluded that God is okay with abortion – especially with partial-birth abortion which advocates the murder of an infant as it is being born?

When Does Life Begin?

About one in four pregnancies is ended by abortion – about 40 to 50 million occur around the world every year (Winnail). Does each and every one of these represent the necessity of taking a drastic measure to save the mother’s life? Hardly! It is pregnancy termination on demand; it is, primarily, birth control. And ... if these fetuses represent individual lives, then humanity is guilty of infanticide on a greater scale than anything we have ever witnessed in history!

Many who are so righteously indignant about Hitler’s holocaust pay scant attention to it. What is supposed to have been a drastic measure to protect the health and well-being of a mother whose life is endangered by the pregnancy has actually become another method of birth control and population control foisted off on a gullible, self-centered world as being no more serious than getting rid of an appendix or a hangnail (Ibid.). Tadpoles!

It has come to be the great symbol of a woman’s right to control her own body. It has evolved into a means by which stem cells and body organs can be harvested and sold to help find cures for various birth defects, diseases, and injuries – what might amount to nothing more or less than harvesting body parts. And, some cosmetic companies actually use human tissue from aborted fetuses in the manufacture of their face creams (Ibid.)!

Let’s consider the logic of the various benchmarks. Does the fetus move before the mother actually feels it? Yes – several weeks before. Why should it not be considered a sign of life if the mother has not felt it? It can be observed by modern technology. Whether voluntary or involuntary, the fetus has at least some measure of nerve pathways that induce the movement. We also have to remember that the fetus is a life-form that is developing inside the womb. It is not viable in the womb, and it cannot immediately survive outside the womb, either!

Many mammals need the continued support of the mother once separated from the womb. Why should that not be considered as a sign of life? What about drawing breath? Drawing breath is a means by which the body gathers the oxygen it needs to carry out the various life functions of the body. When the child exits the womb, it has to draw its own supply because it is no longer connected to the mother's supply.

Even though the fetus gets its nourishment and oxygen from the mother – and eliminates waste through the mother's system – from conception it is a genetically unique individual; that is, it has its own peculiar genetic identity that is made up from hereditary factors from both parents. While the make-up is similar to both parents, it is, nevertheless, unique. It is a life-form that operates independently within the mother even though it is dependent on the mother to be a supplier of its various needs – just as it is for a while outside the womb.

It is interesting, therefore, that the Encyclopaedia Britannica would write:

Death during embryonic life ... does not differ fundamentally from death at other times during the life cycle ... it is not surprising that embryonic death rates, where they are known, are generally higher than juvenile death rates” (v. 9, p. 205, 1969 edition; emphases added).

Notice how *Britannica* associates embryonic life and death to juvenile life and death.

Those three benchmarks mentioned above do not determine the beginning of life. The time that passes between conception and parturition is most definitely part of a life cycle. As one of my college psychology professors was fond of saying: “The secret of life is simple: At the point of conception, your state is fetal!” What did he mean?

According to Leviticus 17:11, where is the life of a creature found? In the blood. By biblical standards, then, we should expect the life of a fetus to begin when it acquires blood and a circulatory system to move it through the body. When does the creature receive the blood and circulatory system?

During the second week after conception, when the embryo is 1/25th of an inch long, the heart and a primitive circulatory system are formed. At week three, when the baby is 1/17th of an inch long, the blood vessels will complete a circuit (that is, become the circulatory system), and the heart will begin to beat. This makes the circulatory system the first functioning organ system. While you cannot yet hear the heartbeat, the motion can be detected by an ultra-sound exam (revolutionhealth.com). This means that blood is flowing through the baby's system driven by its own heartbeat. Does that mean that God would accept aborting the fetus within the first three weeks after conception? No – and for very good reason.

Individual Uniqueness

What do Isaiah 44:2 and Jeremiah 1:5 add to this conversation? Where is the unique individual formed? It is in the womb at the point of fertilization that the individuality of the person is established. When fertilization occurs, the uniting of the sperm and the egg forms a one-cell entity called a zygote. This zygote will have 46 chromosomes – 23 from the male and 23 from the female. These chromosomes contain genetic material that determines the individuality of the baby: the gender, eye color, hair color, height, facial features, and (in part) the personality and intelligence. As this zygote enters into a rapid division to form a cluster of cells, the inner portion will become the embryo, and the outer portion will protect and nourish it. This process takes about a week – the first week after conception (Ibid.).

It is self-evident that the fertilization process is the beginning of a life cycle. As in any building process, the foundation for life must be laid first. By the end of the first three weeks, that developing life form will move to the stage where it has a functioning circulatory system complete with blood and heartbeat. Thus, we have the foundation for viable life.

According to Genesis 1:28, God intended for man to be engaged in managing life on the earth and bringing it under his control. One of the ways by which that would be accomplished was through the multiplication of the numbers of humans to share the

workload. The fact that He created mankind male and female supports the inference that He created within the human body the potential of generating life. Same-sex sexual activity and bestiality are personal sexual pleasures incapable of procreating. God, evidently, did not design the human to engage in same-sex or bestial sexual pleasure (see Lev. 18:22, 23; 20:13, 15) – or a long list of other inordinate sexual pleasures. What do you see in this that makes it a priori? How do these generalizations give you evidence for a more specific conclusion about the matter?

It is self-evident that reproducing one's kind is the process of bringing forth life. Read Genesis 1:11, 12, 21, 22, 24, and 25. You should see that kind producing kind is a repetitive reproduction of the life cycle of plant, animal, and human. You can read in Genesis 1:26, 27 that God created the human kind as a stage in the reproduction of the God kind (“in our image”). When God created Adam (Gen. 2:7), He put him in the Garden of Eden to take care of it and to keep it from going to wreck and ruin (Gen. 2:19, 20). In essence, Adam was to be a guardian of the life within that Garden ... whether it was plant, animal, or human.

Notice the name Adam gave to his newly-created mate in vv. 21-23. The name Eve in Hebrew is Chavvah, which means “Life” and “the mother of all living.” This presents us with a picture of some importance: the female is a fountain of life. Why?

The average human female has about one to two million immature eggs in her ovaries when she is born. Throughout her life, only about 400 or so of them will ever reach maturity. By the time she reaches puberty, only about 400,000 of them remain, and she will lose about 1,000 of them each time she menstruates (goaskalice.columbia.edu). What's the point here? Does this give us any clues about why Eve was given her name?

Each egg represents the potential of an individual personality and life. While it is true that millions of the immature, undeveloped ova are sloughed off as the female grows to puberty and begins to menstruate, it was never intended that she should give birth through each of the one to two million ova – no more than it was intended that all of the 40 million to 1.2 billion sperm cells in a single male ejaculation (526 billion sperm cells over a lifetime; cited from www.lifescience.com) would be used to fertilize one or more ova.

Once that egg is fertilized, it begins a process that is best described by the Greek term entelechy: the “...unfolding of potential present right from the beginning” (christiananswers.net). Potential represents the capability of becoming actual. Within three weeks after conception, the completion of the circulatory system marks the point at which the blood is capable of circulating throughout the developing fetus body. This demonstrates that, from conception to birth, the potential for life is unfolding toward actualization.

How does Paul describe God in Romans 4:17? Does Paul suggest that God treats the potential as though it actually exists? What do the ovum and sperm represent? Life. Granted, it is only potential life until it is fertilized, but my psychology professor was exactly right when he said: “At the moment of conception, your state is fetal.” In other words, the conception has become the beginning of the unfolding of an individual personality and life. Unless it is terminated for whatever reason, it will be born to become an independent human being with the potential of reproducing itself – perhaps numerous times – and continuing the life cycle. All that we are – potentially and actually – is part of the life cycle!

Is that something that God values? If so, what should be our attitudes about it? By God’s standard of holiness, does it make sense that He simply allows us to abort a fetus as though it is nothing? Even if the conception is an accidental occurrence? The tadpole itself is a living, breathing being.

Here is where mankind in general is connected to Adam: We have the holy duty of “tending the Garden of Life” in order to prevent it from coming to wreck and ruin. How can we do that if we senselessly murder one another (Ex. 20:13)?

Conclusion

In God’s revelation of what a human being is, does it include the component called an immortal soul? No. (Remember here our previous discussion.) Is that important to this discussion? Yes, it is because of the truth of the matter. We are not allowed to hijack God’s truth in favor of human wisdom and beliefs.

Bill Clinton and those who believe as he does (did?) notwithstanding, life is life – in the womb or out of it. And ... it is self-evident that God values life. The Constitution of the United States of America says that the Creator has imbued us with certain unalienable rights, including the right to life. How can we ever exercise the right to liberty and the pursuit of happiness if our right to life is not protected – from others and ourselves? If life is to unfold from the moment of conception, how dare we hijack God’s will and plan through our own will?

Second Timothy 2:23 shows that it is self-evident that we must not get entangled in foolish questions and endless arguments. We are to “...avoid foolish and unlearned questions.” There are many questions that are designed to subvert truth and reason through absurdity. The abortion issue is fertile ground for such foolish questions and endless arguments.

Why does Paul warn us in I Timothy 6:4, 5 about quarreling with those who are conceited and do not understand anything except how to ask knit-picking questions and to quarrel about meanings of insignificant words? Think of situations like this that you have experienced. Give yourself some notes to help you remember what those questions and quarrels were about.

Now, read Romans 1:18-32. What has been the result of man’s paying scant attention to the things that God has made self-evident? (Read very closely verses 24, 26, and 28 where Paul uses the expression “God gave them over to...”) The expression “...gave them over to...” means that God’s judgment, at present, has been to make mankind suffer the natural consequences of their actions, which include the prevalence of all manner of perversions and wickedness. By this very fact alone, it should be self-evident that ignoring God, His thoughts, and His ways is a gravely dangerous thing to do. Learn to pay attention to the self-evident.

Review Questions

1. Define *a priori*.
2. Why is it important to pay attention to the *a priori*?

3. What happens to the edifice if you destroy the foundation? Can the same thing happen if you have the wrong kind of foundation?
4. Where is the life of a creature found?
5. Where is the unique individual formed?
6. How long does it take for that uniqueness to be established?
7. After creating mankind, what did God command them to do regarding life in His creation?
8. What did Adam name his newly-created mate? Why?
9. Define the Greek term entelechy.
10. What does the term potential represent?
11. How does all of this relate to Romans 4:17?
12. Assuming that it is self-evident, what do the sperm and ovum represent?
13. Explain this comment: “At the moment of conception, your state is fetal.”
14. What role does the “immortal soul” play in this discussion?
15. Is there anything self-evident about the doctrine of the immortal soul?
16. How evident is it that God values life?
17. Why should we avoid foolish questions and endless arguments?
18. What has been the result of man’s paying scant attention to the things that God has made self-evident?

Chapter Five:

Prove the Truth of God's Word

In John 20:25, Thomas demanded proof of things before he believed them. Was he wrong for doing so? Did he pretend that his doubts did not exist? Did he readily and whole-heartedly seek to be obedient once he had proved his doubts to be unfounded and he knew the truth about the matter at hand?

It is important to realize that Thomas' proof came to him as a result of his relationship with Jesus. Some things will have to be proved in order to enter that relationship, while others will be proved as a result of that relationship. This is a fundamental piece of wisdom. We should understand what it means to prove something by God's word.

The Fundamental Steps for Proving Something

When someone wants to prove something, they usually establish a hypothesis (an assumption about how something might work) and then begin to gather evidence to determine whether or not the hypothesis is valid. If it is, then a truth is constructed to explain the nature of the observed and/or tested evidence. Therefore, if you want to establish the truth of a matter, you must line up the evidence discovered in the experiments and observations in order to draw some kind of conclusion based on them. If you skew the evidence, then the validity of the truth derived from it is tainted. This is Paul's point in Romans 1:18-32. Let's see how that works.

If you take the existence of “God” as the hypothesis, then Paul’s primary evidence is that God has openly manifested His existence through the things He has created (v. 19). So, the essential, underlying questions would be whether there can be creation and the laws that govern it without there being a Creator and a Law-giver. The most self-evident answers would be: “No.” Creation and the attendant laws that govern it are not there by accident. However, when mankind knew God, they did not accept His thoughts and ways because they preferred their own (v. 21). Thus, the conflict about truth arises.

If we focus on what Paul meant when he said that they knew God, then we can understand some of the attendant details of his argument. The Greek term is ginosko. There are several possible meanings for this term, but the one applied to it in the *Bauer-Arndt-Gingrich Greek/English Lexicon* is as follows: “know, come to know.” What does this mean?

The first thing it means is that men had come to understand, at the least, some of the “mysteries” of God ... which suggests a measure of an intimate knowledge of God (read I Cor. 2:6-16). Such understanding presupposes that they knew of His will, truth, glory, and love. While it can include those who had only a fragmentary knowledge of God, it, nevertheless, means that even the part they knew is evidence of a knowledge of “God.” They believed that some kind of “God” exists. The net effect of the search for the truth about the existence of “God” lies, therefore, in the “God” you pick to serve. Even the atheist has faith that “God” does not exist ... which assumes that they know all about what defines “God” and are willing to ignore the existence of a power in the creation that exhibits those characteristics. In doing so, they admit a concept of “God” into their knowledge – whether or not they believe in “God.”

The second thing that it means is that they knew the “fruits” of “God” (see Matt. 12:33; Luke 6:44; and I John 4:6). How does this serve as evidence for what Paul is attempting to prove about the existence of God? Read very carefully Romans 1:23-25. What went on among those who suppressed God’s truth through their wickedness? They maintained a perverted concept of “God.” Does a perverted concept still demonstrate a “knowledge” of “God”? Yes. The problem with their perverted concept was that they ceased to worship the incorruptible “God” in favor of their own images of

corruptible “gods.” They did not actually cease to worship “God.” They ceased to worship the true “God.” Their concept of the true “God” was perverted ... which also caused the true “God’s” truth to be changed into a lie. But ... it was a lie about who/what the Creator is and the laws He uses to bring order and stability to His creation. The atheist also changes God’s truth into a lie by denying His existence.

Next, Paul deals with the question about why mankind deserves blame for the suppression of God’s truth. The lie affects how mankind thinks and acts. You cannot live apart from the truth of the true God and have the eternal order and stability that He represents in His thoughts and ways (see Isa. 55:8, 9). Ungodliness and unrighteousness relentlessly fill the knowledge vacuum.

Paul demonstrates this in vv. 24, 26, and 28 by saying that God has allowed mankind to pursue such a mindset in order for them to learn the absolute vanity involved (see Rom. 8:20, 21 re: vanity and bondage of corruption). How do they learn that? God allows them to suffer the consequences of their own thoughts and actions. It is self-evident that such a lesson should impress one that his/her own thoughts and ways have no validity because s/he has no power to cause them to be eternally actualized (see John 3:3; 1 Cor. 15:50).

Read Romans 1:24-32 and understand the social and sexual consequences that occur when God’s truth is suppressed by human-centered thoughts and ways. There is both social and sexual degeneration that cascades from one generation to another until human society is so rife with degeneration of every sort that society teeters on the brink of self-destruction. Paul concludes in v. 32 that “...They which do such things are worthy of death.” That death, simply put, is eternal destruction.

Hebrews 11:6 briefly states why proving the existence of God is a preliminary issue that must be established by one’s faith in the true God. His first point is that you cannot please God without having that particular, distinct faith. His second point is that the individual must believe that this specific God exists and blesses those who diligently seek Him (that is, His thoughts and ways).

On what is this faith based? Paul sets forth the conditions in v. 1: That faith maintains that the things that the true God offers as blessings and inheritances actually exist, cannot help but exist

(because of the ethics, morals, and character of God), and can be nothing more or less than what God has said they will be. This is in harmony with Romans 4:17, where Paul declares that the true God is a Being who can and will restore life to the dead and who considers those things that presently do not exist are as good as done (read Isa. 44:6-8; 45:21; 55:10, 11). It should be very clear that the person in the true faith will be looking for and gathering the evidence that such a God exists and that our blessings are derived from Him. This most definitely is not the ubiquitous “God” to which mankind generally and loosely refers. This is the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob ... the God of the Bible.

These are the fundamental steps one should take in proving this God’s existence. You do not get that proof without getting to know His “mysteries” and “fruits.” Gather your evidence (1 Thes. 5:21).

Using the Bible as a Research Tool

Why would it be important to prove that the Bible is God’s divinely inspired word of truth? In Matthew 4:4, Jesus told Satan that “...Man ... [shall live by] every word that proceeds out of the mouth of God.” That is a command given by the Lord God in Deuteronomy 8:1-3. How shall we know those commandments?

Romans 3:2 declares that God’s oracles have been preserved. Isaiah 8:16 says that the Lord God preserved them among His true disciples/followers. This term is also used in Acts 7:38, Hebrews 5:12, and 1 Peter 4:11. What is meant by the term oracles? BAG defines the Greek term logion thus: “...Short sayings originating from a divinity; ...the revelations received by Moses (Acts 7:38) ... God’s promises (Rom. 3:2) ... words of Scripture (Heb. 5:12) ... the utterances of Christians gifted with [divine inspiration]” (p. 477). It also includes “oracles of God’s teachings” and “the sayings of the Lord Jesus.” So, we have a wide range of things in Scripture from which to derive evidence.

It is interesting that Jesus Christ is described in John 1:1-3 as being the Word in His pre-human existence. It is also interesting that the Greek word John uses in that description is logos. Logion is related to logos. Logos, in the context of John 1:1-3, identifies the one who became Jesus Christ as being the Spokesman of God. We

seldom find among mainstream Christianity the thought that the Lord God of the Old Testament was God's Spokesman ... and that He existed alongside another Being known as "God." How does the Bible reveal that relationship to have existed prior to the creation?

Philippians 2:5-11 identifies Jesus Christ as a divine Being who existed alongside another divine Being prior to the creation. Paul asserts that He was equal to His divine partner ... and there was no jealousy or competition between them because of that equality. Jesus Christ volunteered to give up that equality in order to become the servant of mankind (yet to be created). As a result, His divine partner (whom we now know as the *Father*) gave Him all power in heaven and on the earth to carry out the great plan they had agreed upon relative to creating man in the image of God (see Matt. 28:18 and Col. 1:19).

Peter reveals in 1 Peter 1:18-21 that the Word (Jesus Christ) was designated to be the sacrifice for man's sins before the creation of the orderly universe. Ephesians 1:4-18 demonstrates that God chose mankind in Christ before the creation of the orderly universe to be adopted into the "God" family and to be made acceptable through that same sacrifice. What does knowing this teach us about the God of the Old Testament? Follow the evidence:

1. There are two Beings known as "God" (John 1:1-3; Phil. 2:5-11; Col. 1:19).

2. The Word became Jesus Christ (John 1:14) ... which left one God-being in heaven to be the "Father" (Matt. 6:9-15; John 17; Eph. 1:3). Jesus did not pray to Himself.

3. The word "God" in Genesis 1:1-2:4 is a plural (*Elohim*) ... which shows the same concept in the Old Testament.

4. Genesis 2:4 reveals an individual in *Elohim* who is called the Lord God. He is in control of the creation of mankind and most other relationships with mankind in the Old Testament. He is the "God" of the Old Testament. He is Jesus Christ, the Lord. How can we understand this to be

true? There must be a logic to the trail of evidence left in the oracles, mysteries, and sayings found there that points to the fact that He could be no other than that Yahweh Elohim so prominent in the record.

5. If Jesus Christ was also known as God, the Spokesman (the Logos), then His role in the Old Testament was to use the power vested in Him by the “Father” to put all things in order and accomplish the plan He and the Father constructed before the creation of the orderly universe. That role made Jesus subject to the “Father” (1 Cor. 15:24-28; John 14:28; Phil. 2:10, 11).

6. Notice how Jesus describes His office in John 12:48-50: He did not speak His own words. He spoke only the words that the Father commanded Him to speak. I do not get the sense that Jesus was merely a mouthpiece through which the Father spoke. Whether it was His instructions to Adam in the Garden of Eden (see Gen. 2:7-24), to Moses relative to Israel, or to the prophets, the Lord God did it according to the will and plan made before the creation of the orderly universe. Read John 10:19-30. Understand that Jesus’ remark in v. 30 means that He and the Father are in perfect unity ... not that they are one and the same Being (see John 17:5, 11-18). Follow the evidence.

Why is it important to prove the role of Jesus Christ in God’s great plan? Why should you be able to prove where God’s true Church is and who God’s true ministers are (Matthew 16:18; 2 Corinthians 11:4-15)? Why are these things important to the study of the Bible?

These are the issues that enable you to enter into a relationship with Jesus Christ. If you don’t believe in God, why would you believe in His Christ? If you don’t believe in God, why would you give any credence to a book that claims to be His direct revelation of Himself to the world? And why would you care whether or not He has a Church? Hebrews 11:6 says: “...Without faith it is

impossible to please [God]: for he that comes to God must believe that He exists, and that He is one who rewards them that diligently seek Him.”

So, God expects us to gather evidence that will verify the truth about His existence and His plan. He is not interested in blind faith. But, what about the proving part?

What Does It Mean to Prove God’s Word?

Luke 14:19 gives us one sense of the term prove that is very important in gathering evidence. Some translations like *The Jerusalem Bible* and the *New International Version* show that it means to “try them out.” The idea is that you put something through a series of tests to determine if it is going to successfully live up to the claims made about it and the benefits that should be derived from it. What would this meaning of the term prove teach us about how to determine the truth of any or all of the claims and promises God has made in His word? How would you put Him to the test? What does it teach us about getting into a relationship with God in order to build a history of experiences that will prove the reliability of the claims that He has made?

Malachi 3:10 provides an example of how God offers challenges to believer and non-believer alike to test or prove or try Him out to see if He will do the things that He claims He can do and has promised to do. In this particular example, His challenge to the Israelites is to actually participate in giving the first 10th part of their increase to Him as an offering so that His work can be done by His ministry. They have not done so; therefore, they have not received the benefits He promised.

Read Deuteronomy 28. How does this proof come as a result of establishing and maintaining a relationship with God? Pay close attention to His encouragement to “observe” and “do.” This demonstrates the point of Ephesians 2:10 and James 2:8-26: God expects His people to do the works He expects of them as His people (see Eph. 1:4 and Rom. 12:1-3). You have to implement the laws and principles of the righteousness of God (His thoughts and ways) in your thoughts and ways in order to see and understand how they truly benefit you.

One of the greatest examples of this type of proving is shown in the life of Abraham (read Genesis 12-25). The great lesson gleaned from Abraham's example should be self-evident: faith alone is not enough – you need to demonstrate your faith by acting upon what you have faith in. Obedience to God is the key! Read Romans 4:13-25 and pay attention to how seriously Abraham put God to the test so he could derive the greatest benefit from that relationship. James 1:1-8 teaches us not to waver in our determination to have a successful relationship with God. We must not waver. We must not doubt. We must not be double-minded.

In James 2:14-26, what did James teach about faith and works? Which two people did he use as examples? Why? (Read also Joshua 1-6 and Hebrews 11:31.) What set them apart as examples worthy of God's praise? What was James' conclusion about faith without works?

In Romans 4, on what did Paul focus regarding Abraham – faith or works? Is it self-evident that Paul agreed with James about faith and works? In other words, how could you prove by Paul's account that Abraham acted upon his faith?

In another application of this discussion, how can you prove in Romans 3:19-31 that Paul did not accept the idea that an individual could simply obey the law and cause God to owe him anything? Sort it out and write it down. What is the evidence?

There was no way Abraham could have believed that God would bless him, give him an heir, give him the "promised land," and then allow Abraham to stay in Haran, instead of leaving his father's household as God had told him to do (Genesis 12:1-3). This would be equally true of God's demand that Abraham should actually sacrifice Isaac (Genesis 22:1-19). It is self-evident that Abraham had to act upon what he believed – yet, what God promised him was not owed to him; it was a product of grace: Abraham did not deserve it, could not earn it, and could never repay God for it ... even if he did have to do "works" as a part of his faith. This is how Abraham proved God's faithfulness to His promises. It was not a simple intellectual acceptance of a spiritual hypothesis without going through the actual experimentation – without doing it.

What Your Works Demonstrate About You

Matthew 7:21-23 says that your works have to agree with God's will. God's basic will is deeply embedded in the gospel of the Kingdom of God: God created mankind to be adopted into His family through Jesus Christ. God's will is that we should be holy, blameless, and loving in all that we do and say. God's will is that we should be conformed to His image (see Gen. 1:26-28 and 1 John 3:1-3). We are to be in spiritual unity with Him and one another (Eph. 4:1-16). Your works must conform to God's will; otherwise, they might appear to be really fantastic but are really unacceptable.

What three things do the people in Matthew 7:21-23 present as proof of their eligibility to enter God's Kingdom? Are they proofs that are commonly used by religious people? Does Jesus agree with their claim? Why/why not? What is Jesus' judgment regarding these people? Is He being fair? Why/why not? All of these questions are used to provoke thoughtful analysis of God's word so you can gather evidence about God's existence, His will, His truth, and His faithfulness to His promises.

In John 4:23, 24, what two things must your worship of God include? Why? John 14:15-17, 26; 16:13-15 tell us about the purpose of the gift of the Holy Spirit. Make a complete list of the benefits of having the gift of the Spirit. How does this gift help you to prove the truth of God's word and build the proper edifice on the foundation of true faith?

Now read Galatians 5:16-26. What characteristics do you develop in your mind and heart as you act upon God's revealed truth? How do they differ from those that are a natural part of the human mind and heart (see also Rom. 8:5-9)? It is of utmost importance that you come to know and understand God's thoughts and ways by learning to prove the truth He reveals.

Conclusion

In proving the truth of God's word, you also should be learning to act upon what God has revealed to us. But: You are not allowed to skew the evidence to make it say what it does not reveal (see Rom. 1:18-25; Gal. 1:6-9; 2 Cor. 11:4, 13-15). That includes ignoring

numerous parts of God's word and treating them as though they never existed – which many do when they claim that the Law of God was nailed to the cross! This would not be a problem if they understood more completely what the term prove means. It would not be a problem if they also had a sound, systematic study method.

Review Questions

1. Why did Thomas demand proof of things before he would believe them?
2. Was he wrong in doing this? Why/why not?
3. Why is proving the existence of God a prerequisite to proving His truth?
4. Why is it important to prove that the Bible is God's revelation of His truth ... His thoughts and ways?
5. What is so important about the role of Jesus Christ in God's great plan and will?
6. Why should you be able to prove where God's true Church is and who God's true ministers are?
7. Why are these things important to the study of the Bible?
8. What does Luke 14:19 teach us about proving something from the Bible?
9. What would it teach us about how to determine the truth regarding all of the claims and promises made by God in Scripture?
10. Using this Luke 14:19 and Malachi 3:10, how would you put God to the test?

11. What does Deuteronomy 28 teach us about establishing and maintaining a relationship with God?
12. Can a person simply obey God's Law and cause God to owe Him anything? Why/why not?
13. What does Matthew 7:21-23 teach us about people's religious works?
14. How important is God's will in such matters?
15. What two things must your worship of God include?
16. Why?
17. Explain the role of God's Holy Spirit and its importance in proving God's truth.
18. Can you define proof differently from the above discussion?
19. How would that definition add to the discussion about proving God's truth?
20. What would be your scriptural evidence? (Hint: One definition of proof requires you to "put something to the test" – shown in Malachi 3:10 and Luke 14:19. The other definition of proof involves definition and evidence: For which claim are Acts 26:26, and 1 Corinthians 15:20 definition and evidence? What do they prove?)

Chapter Six:

Develop a Method for Examining God's Word

First Thessalonians 5:21 admonishes us to examine and put to the test all things. If one wants to test an idea about something in relationship to the word of God, they should use a sound method that can be used by anyone with reasonable ability to carry out a search of the scriptures. In the research process, this would be like examining the literature to see where others have written about how they have tested a similar hypothesis – or a related hypothesis – and understand their conclusions based on their experiences.

One does not need to get caught up in some fancy-schmancy methodology that serves more to confuse than to enlighten. Coming to understand truth need not be difficult or unpleasant. Below are four easy-to-follow steps that will serve as a basic methodology for examining the scriptures. Learn it first; then, expand it as needed.

Step #1: What does the Bible say?

This is simple enough, right? But many wrestle with the concept and end up corrupting or distorting what the Bible actually says. Let's look at some examples of some things that are said but generally ignored because of denominational biases and/or traditions.

Compare Colossians 2:14 to Matthew 5:17-19. What does Jesus say in Matthew 5:17-19? Based on what it says, would you accept the traditional teaching – supposedly based on Colossians 2:14 – that the Law has been done away with through the death of Jesus

Christ – having been “nailed to the cross”? Why or why not? Would your logic demand an explanation of the seeming contradiction between the two Scriptures? It should. But ... if religious people in your life whom you love, trust, and respect have believed that Colossians 2:14 proves, without a doubt, that God’s Law was nailed to the cross, then you are likely to be more influenced by your love, trust, and respect than you are by the scriptural evidence being presented to you. Read Matthew 22:37. Whom should you love more: God or your relatives and friends?

While I greatly respect the Apostle Paul, I do not believe that he outranks Jesus Christ – or that he double-crossed Him – in this matter. Some seem to believe that Paul had a new revelation. Close examination of Colossians 2 demonstrates that Paul is talking about another issue altogether regarding the Law. What is that evidence?

Numerous commentators explain that Paul was dealing with a “Colossian heresy” emanating out of “Christian” Gnosticism (re-read 2 Cor. 11:4, 13-15). They point out that Colossians 2:14 should be understood as a reference to the “death warrant” issued against those who have sinned (see 1 John 3:4 and Rom. 6:23). In Jesus Christ, they have had that “death warrant” nailed to the cross because Jesus Christ’s sacrifice is the redemption price paid for our sins (see v. 15 and 1 Cor. 6:19, 20). Verses 16-23 explain the claims of this “Colossians heresy”:

1. Verses 16, 17 explain that God’s Law regarding meat, drink, holy days, new moons, and Sabbath days are a “shadow of good things to come” (see also Heb. 10:1).

2. Verses 18-23 explain that the “heresy” involved religious practices created by humans outside of the will of God: voluntary humility, worshipping angels, bragging about visions, self-imposed humiliation, and severe treatment of the body.

3. In v. 20, Paul points out that they worship “elemental spirits” (earth, wind, fire, and water) ... principles that are under the world’s control as opposed to God’s control. In other words, refer to Romans 1:21-25. These “rudiments

of the world” (KJV) are part of the process of changing “the glory of the incorruptible God into an image like to corruptible man” (Rom. 1:23, 25). It is that which constitutes “changing the truth of God into a lie.”

4. In v. 21, he speaks of their asceticism (controlling one’s body by strict self-denial). Paul says in v. 22 that “...they [their religious practices] are governed by human injunctions and instructions...”. Because of that, they have no value at all as far as God’s truth is concerned.

Knowing this, can you understand how people have been led astray from God’s truth? What else would you look up in order to see what the Bible really says about this subject? Here is where you would use your Bible concordance to look up key words – use “Law” as a starter in this case. Since doing away with the Law is supposedly a New Testament concept, use only New Testament scriptures. Consider scriptures like Romans 3:31; 7:1-13; 13:8-10; Hebrews 10:15-17; and 1 John 1:6-10; 2:1-5; 3:4. Do not accept the idea that God’s word contradicts itself!

After reading Isaiah 8:16, 20, would you believe that the Law and the Prophets are no longer applicable to what God expects of us? Have heaven and earth passed away (Matt. 5:18, 19)? Read Luke 24:44. What did Christ mean when He said: “...All things must be fulfilled, which were written in the law of Moses, and in the prophets, and in the psalms, concerning me” (read again Isa. 55:10, 11)? He said this after having been nailed to the cross!

Did you realize that the context of this statement in Luke shows that this was after His crucifixion and resurrection? That being the case, what does logic demand relative to the claims of some regarding Colossians 2:14? If God’s Law was “nailed to the cross,” why does Jesus make this statement in Luke 24:44 after His crucifixion? Have all of those things been fulfilled? Completely? Can you find anything that has not yet been fulfilled?

Here are a few examples of unfulfilled prophecies to ponder: Isaiah 65:17-25; Daniel 2:44, 45; 7:13-28; and, Zechariah 14. There are many other examples of this type of misunderstanding in traditional beliefs. For example, what does the Bible say about the

change of the seventh-day Sabbath to Sunday? Does any specific commandment by Jesus Christ or God support the change? Look up what the Bible says about the doctrine of the immortal soul. Is it there anywhere – or is this simply the imposition of man's ideas upon the message about life after death as found in God's word? It is important for you to know the answers to these questions – if you want to worship God in spirit and truth (John 4:23, 24). Personal opinion is not enough.

One of the great failures of traditional “Christianity” to meet the requirements of God's truth is that the “line upon line, precept upon precept” model of scriptural investigation is not followed with due diligence. Too many people “cherry pick” Scriptures that seemingly support a particular point-of-view they want to follow. They leave out Scriptures that are inconvenient to the “truth” they want Scripture to support. They have little interest in supporting the truth that Scripture actually reveals. It negates too much “tradition.”

Step #2: Check the Context.

Ask all of the news reporter questions: Who? What? When? Where? Why? How? Can you tell, after answering all of these questions, what is going on? These questions enable you to apply a very important piece of the meaning of context: “the whole background or environment of a matter.” In other words, you want to understand as much as possible about the matter at hand. The idea of “line upon line ... precept on precept ... here a little, there a little” is that you are not going to be narrow in your investigation of Scripture in order to know God's truth.

There is one caution that you should take to heart. If you have checked a commentary for help, have you been able to see where the author has stated any contradictions to the plain statements of the Scriptures? If so, then you can immediately dismiss those statements from consideration. You do not have to accept comments from the “experts” that obviously contradict Scripture.

Let's consider a translation of a popular Scripture from John 14:1-3 and demonstrate the above. Jesus is speaking to His disciples before His crucifixion and makes a commitment to them that they,

in the future, will ultimately be where He is. Let's read how one translation states it, then we will look at a few Scriptures to figure out where Jesus is going to be when the disciples join Him:

There are many homes up there where my Father lives, and I am going to prepare them for your coming [to where He lives] (vv. 2, 3; *Living Bible*; emphases added).

This translation implies that the disciples are going to join Jesus Christ and the Father in heaven. Why would they translate it like that? It is because they follow traditional "Christianity" in the belief that the Christian's eternal reward is to go to heaven when they die. Why? Because they believe in the doctrine of the immortality of the soul and its concept that the immortal soul goes immediately to heaven or hell when the body dies. Let's do our "homework." Some, immediately after Fidel Castro (the notorious Cuban dictator) died in November 2015, declared that he is burning in hell for all of his crimes against humanity. Is that true, according to God's word? Let's see what Scripture reveals.

In John 14:2, the term mansions (KJV) is the only place in Scripture where that term is used. It comes from the Greek term monē (pronounced mo-nay). BAG defines it as "a heavenly dwelling; a dwelling place, room, abode" (p. 529). The information in the lexicon seems to support the popular idea. Are we to stop there and accept that heaven is, therefore, the reward of the saved?

Unfortunately, that is exactly what many do because of the overwhelming number of Christians who believe such a doctrine. How could so many be so wrong through the centuries? Haven't great Christian giants taught and preached this for centuries? Is it possible they could have been wrong? You must remember that your job is to discover and obey God's truth, not man's. Are you brave enough to do that?

Look back in v. 2 at the term house (KJV). It is translated from the Greek term oikia. It can mean a building, a house, and heaven as God's dwelling place. BAG also defines it as figuratively being "the body as the habitation of the soul." But ... it can also mean household and family and "a middle position between meanings 1 and 2" – that is: a house or household/family. They use Matthew 12:25

and Philippians 4:22 to justify their third definition. How so? Even if God presently lives in heaven, does that automatically presuppose that the eternal reward for Christians is to go to heaven when they die? The comment about the immortal soul is not biblical truth.

BAG says that Philippians 4:22 can be translated: “those in the house (dwelling place) of the Emperor” or “those in the household of the Emperor” (p. 560). They add that the prevailing usage of household does not mean “family or relationship, but servants in his court.” Yet, the second definition of oikia holds that the term can mean “family.”

So, we can admit that it is possible for John 14:1-3 to be translated in such a way that it does not demand that the reward of the saved is heaven. How would that translation be framed? Let’s see:

There are many places in my Father’s family (or, household – that is, servants/court), and I am going to His right hand to prepare them for you.

How could you prove such a translation to be God’s truth? You have to work from Jesus Christ’s statement about the saved being where He is going to be. Where is **He** going to be? What do Matthew 25:18-34 and Luke 22:28-30 suggest to you at this point? Let’s string together a series of Scriptures (in this application of the term context) to get our answer.

We see in 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18 that He is going to return in the clouds to resurrect the dead and change the living faithful and take them to the cloud on which He has been sitting in the earth’s upper atmosphere. Revelation 14:14-16 supports that idea. Are they going to perpetually remain on that cloud with Him? No. They will follow Him from there to go somewhere else. Where? Heaven?

Now read Zechariah 14:5 to understand that He is going to come to the earth with His saints to conquer the armies that He has gathered against Jerusalem. To what end will this warfare lead? Read v. 9: “And the Lord shall be king over all the earth.” Where is Jesus Christ at this point? Ruling the earth. Will He remain there for an appreciable amount of time without taking His saints to heaven? Check out Daniel 2:44, 45; 7:13-28 and Isaiah 2:1-5. Where

is all of this activity taking place? The earth. Who is reigning over the earth? Jesus Christ. Where will His saints be?

Now, turn your attention to Revelation 5:10. Where will those who have been redeemed by the blood of Christ serve in His court? Earth. At the least, can you say that they will be “servants in his court”? What does Revelation 11:15 tell us? Which kingdoms will belong to Him? For how long? Remember this: The *Revelation* is a vision that is filled with cryptic imagery and symbolism. It is not an account of what actually, presently exists.

Now read Revelation 20:1-7. Are there saints who will be given offices in Christ’s government? Judges, priests, and kings? What is the least amount of time they will reign on the earth? Is 1,000 years on the earth immediately after His return significant enough to claim that they did not go immediately to heaven for their eternal reward? How does this lend meaning to the idea that “flesh and blood cannot enter the Kingdom of God” (John 3:3; 1 Cor. 15:50) – especially when “kingdom” also has to do with the “ruling realm” (“flesh and blood cannot enter the ruling realm of God”)?

Now read Isaiah 65:17-25 and Revelation 21. Which place is the focus of these Scriptures? Earth. Who also joins Jesus Christ and the saints on the earth after the 1,000 years are over? The Father God. Is the New Jerusalem moved from heaven to the earth? You will see something below that reveals something about this.

What does this tell you ... despite the centuries of “Christian” tradition? Are you brave enough to believe that and change your mind away from the prevailing Christian tradition of going to heaven? Besides that, why would God want to resurrect someone who has already died and gone to heaven or hell in the form of an immortal soul? Does that make sense?

There is an additional manner in which you check the context. Read above and below the scriptural focal point. You cannot rely on something that is taken out of the context in which it is written. For example, traditional teachings use 1 Thessalonians 4:16-18, along with other scriptures, to support their idea that there is going to be a rapture of all Christians about seven years before the actual return of Jesus Christ. If you have read the *Left Behind* series, then you are familiar with the concept. In the rapture theory, no

Christian will have to endure the tribulation period. It's a wonderful thought. But ... is it true? Let's practice this sense of context.

Read I Thessalonians 4:16-18 aloud very carefully. What is the context of Paul's instruction? The return of Jesus Christ to raise the dead in Christ back to life and to change the living in Christ from flesh to spirit just before He brings them up to the cloud where He is. Paul says: "And so shall we ever be with the Lord." Does that mean that we will eternally be with Jesus in the clouds in the upper atmosphere of the earth? No. If one stopped reading Scripture at that point, would it be possible for him/her to believe such a thing? Yes.

Now, compare this to I Corinthians 15:50-57. How are they similar? What is the context of this instruction? One should be able to see that the context of both situations is the second coming of Jesus Christ – which, by the way, comes at the end of the tribulation period, not before. That would make the rapture concept irrelevant in this discussion.

Let's make another comparison: I Thessalonians 4:16, 17 to Hebrews 11:39, 40. Can you see that the living and the dead experience God's reward together? What is the context of Paul's statement here? The Old Testament Scriptures. Read all of Hebrews 11 and see during which period of time these people lived. Notice the last part of v. 40: "...They without us should not be made perfect." In saying this, Paul ties the New Testament Christians to the Old Testament saints (who, in fact, were "Christians") because they believed in the coming Messiah (who is the Christ).

Why would God resurrect the dead to save them from the Tribulation? Is He afraid that someone is going to find their "dust" to which they have returned and desecrate it? According to Revelation 6:9-11; 7:13, 14; 12:12-13:18; and 20:4, 5, the context reveals that at least some Christians will have to endure the Tribulation!

Do not settle for the explanation that some of these (Rev. 12:12-13:18) are those who are left behind and subsequently convert to Christianity. You should see the consistency of God's word by comparing this to Daniel 7:16-28. You should also be able to read I Corinthians 15:50-54 and harmonize it with I Thessalonians 4:16-18. Some have written a great many books and made lots of money

from writing and selling the rapture idea to people who are unskilled in God's word! It is wise to check the context!

Finally, compare Genesis 15 to Hebrews 6:13-20 and 11:8-10. Note in Genesis 15 that Abraham is promised that he will inherit from the Lord God a piece of land on the earth between the Nile and Euphrates Rivers. Note also that Paul addresses this matter in Hebrews 6:13-20 relative to the Christian point-of-view. Note the same context in Hebrews 11:8-10, with the revelation that Abraham expected God to design and build a city to put in that land on the earth in the future (see Rev. 21 re: the New Jerusalem). How does that affect the Christian's "reward of the saved" concept? Read Paul's statements in Romans 8:14-17 and Galatians 3:26-29. Does it appear that heaven is the reward of the saved? Where will Jesus reign when He returns (Isa. 2:1-5)? Do not be willfully blind and deaf.

You should see by this exercise that scriptural context is very important. "Line upon line ... precept upon precept ... here a little, there a little."

Step #3: Get ALL of the Scriptures.

It is also important to apply Isaiah's instruction about "...precept upon precept ... line upon line ... here a little, there a little" in this case. It is important to check every available angle in searching out the truth. In doing so, you stand a better chance of seeing the pattern God has established – without getting confused with the imposition of man's ideas and traditions.

Purchase an exhaustive concordance like *Strong's* so you can find all of the scriptural references you need. Many of them provide definitions and intended meanings within the context in which they are found. However, be aware that some authors and editors fall prey to tradition, too. Do not accept their understanding simply because they contributed some thoughts to a publication. You should be like the Bereans in Acts 17:11. Remember this: The Bereans only had the Old Testament. So, check the scriptures daily to see if what is being taught is in agreement with God's word. It is not wrong to study into what you are being taught.

What is Jesus teaching in John 10:35? Jesus told the Pharisees, in essence, that scripture cannot be done away with or ignored just to protect someone's personal, wrong interpretation. The term broken (KJV) is from the Greek term luo, which has an assortment of meanings ... from setting free, to breaking up into the component parts in order to break up and/or destroy, and to abolish in order to do away with. Your first task is to figure out what the situation involved.

In the context of Jesus' conversation with the Pharisees, they asked Him if He was the Christ. He believed that it was useless to answer them because they did not believe anything He said (vv. 24-26). That being the case, they would not belong to Him even if He were the Christ. He told them that He had the power to give His "sheep" eternal life, and the Father and He were in spiritual unity about the matter (vv. 27-30). They took umbrage at that claim and took up stones to kill Him (v. 31). Now, the question: "For which of the good works that I do in my Father's name do you want to kill me?" Their answer was, essentially: "None of your works; but because you claim to be God" (emphases added). What is Jesus' defense?

Jesus cites Psalm 82:6; but ... He says that it is part of their law. Read the context of Psalm 82. Of what is He speaking? Asaph is speaking of God judging among the "gods" He has appointed to represent Him in judgment among men (v. 1; see also Rom. 13:1-7). What does Psalm 82:6 say? Can you understand this better when consulting Genesis 1:26-28 and Ephesians 1:4-14? How about laying out Psalm 8 as compared with Hebrews 2 ... especially vv. 10-18 and 1 John 3:1-3? Why are we called the "children" of God?

Exodus 4:16 and 7:1 shows that Moses was to act in God's place relative to Aaron. In that sense, Moses became an elohiym – one who acts and judges in God's place (that is, according to God's authority). Read Exodus 18 in order to understand this matter more completely. Does Moses appoint other trusted men to be judges (elohiym) among Israel? Compare that to Matthew 16:16-19 and 18:15-20. What is the fundamental difference? There is no fundamental difference.

Jesus Christ pointed out that His service ("works") in the name of God made Him a judge in God's service (see John 5:22). The

Hebrew term is elohiym ... the most used Hebrew term in the Old Testament identifying “God.” All of this is in the Law which Jesus Christ did not come to destroy (Matt. 5:17). Therefore, the Scripture that relates to this matter cannot be set aside just because your religious paradigm does not allow its authority to exist! Scripture holds the last word about the matter.

According to 2 Peter 1:20, 21, are you entitled to your own interpretation of scripture? Why/why not? What role does the Holy Spirit play in the matter? How would you use this Scripture to answer someone who tells you: “Well, that’s just your opinion – and I am entitled to mine”? When it comes to God’s truth, you are not entitled to your own opinion about what it is or what it means. There has to be a reason why the Lord God admonished Israel not to add to or diminish from His word (Deut. 4:1-40; 12:28-32; Josh. 1:7-9; Prov. 30:5, 6; and Rev. 22:18, 19).

Apply this to Martin Luther’s assertion that: “Every believer is a priest under Jesus Christ and has the right to read and interpret scripture for himself as the Holy Spirit leads him.” What do you think about the prevalence of 32,000⁺ different Christian denominations who have conflicting, contradictory ideas about the meaning of scripture? Do you think that this is indicative of the leadership of the Holy Spirit? Do you think that every man’s individual interpretation of Scripture has served “Christianity very well? Think of that question in relationship to Ephesians 4:1-16. Where is the spiritual unity among all of those differences (see also John 17:1-11)?

Why would God not allow Scripture to be put together by the will of man? Compare this to 2 Timothy 3:14-17. Who was the driving force behind the development of the Scriptures? Paul says that all Scripture is divinely inspired by God Himself – and you should have the faith that God would not allow it to be contradictory. Therefore, it would make sense that all Scripture – Old and New Testaments – is profitable to us in learning God’s truth. Do not fall into the trap that so-called “New Testament” Christians fall into about the relative value of the New Testament as opposed to that of the Old Testament. The lack of spiritual unity is evidence that something is wrong among the 32,000⁺ denominations.

Step #4: Let the Bible Interpret the Bible.

How do you do this? It is so easy for you to let others tell you what to believe – to go along with the traditional teachings you have heard from family and friends through the years. It is much more difficult to take the time needed to let God’s word speak to you. For example, you can understand that there would be no confusion about the role of God’s Law in His New Testament Church if people understood a couple of simple, verifiable biblical truths.

There are four steps in letting the Bible interpret itself:

- (a) check all verifiable biblical doctrines;
- (b) eliminate all that contradicts biblical definitions;
- (c) use different translations; and
- (d) do not try to establish doctrine based on Bible helps and aids.

In I John 3:4 – under the leadership of the Holy Spirit – how does John define sin? If you read that correctly, you will understand that God’s Law is still in force because Romans 4:15 says that there is no transgression where there is no law. If Romans 6:23 is correct, then your transgression of God’s Law (sin) has merited a death sentence against you (see Ezek. 18:4, 20). That, in and of itself, means that God’s Law must still be in force. Why else would you need **grace**? Grace and mercy are unnecessary if you have not transgressed God’s Law ... or no Law is in force anymore.

According to Romans 7:1, how long does the Law have dominion over mankind? By reading the rest of the context in verses 2-6, you see that the marriage vow that says “...’til death parts us...” is in play... according to God’s Law. We have already discussed some exceptions in I Corinthians 7:10-16. You can see more discussion in Matthew 5:31, 32; 19:3-12. Read Deuteronomy 24:1-4 to see the original law regarding divorce and understand, from what you have read, why it was given. It is important to

understand the statement: “cause the land to sin” in this discussion. What was the Lord God saying to Israel?

First of all, notice that the divorce is for cause: the wife, in this case, has committed some act of indecency against her husband (RSV; v. 1). If the indecency was bad enough to trigger a divorce, then it is bad enough to prevent that remarriage. The Law does not permit divorce for any reason ... only for adultery (gross indecency; Matt. 5:31, 32). If you allow people to have frivolous divorcements with or without cause, then you promote adultery. The people involved in multiple marriages display either: (a) a gross disregard for the purpose of marriage or (b) a gross disregard for the decency of marriage (Mark 10:1-12).

Second, if this is allowed on whatever scale, the inhabitants of the country suffer. They suffer from the instability caused by the faulty marriages, and they suffer from the confusion/disorder caused by all of the split families (see Matt. 12:30). God is not the God of chaos and confusion (1 Cor. 14:33). Read Leviticus 18; it is an important discussion about the problem with faulty sexual relationships. Read especially vv. 24-30. How does the Bible interpret the Bible with regard to this situation? Note that this discussion includes incest, homosexuality, and bestiality – all manner of sexual perversion (compare this to Rom. 1:18-32 and 1 Cor. 6:9, 10).

In Romans 3:20; 7:7, 13, what, according to Paul, is the role of God’s Law? In both references, Paul says that the Law tells us what constitutes sin. Why do away with such a reference point ... especially if God does not want mankind to sin? If the Bible interprets itself, then there is no room for any individual or religious groups to come along and speak against, deny, or contradict its declarations. If God is the source from whom we derive the scriptural declarations (2 Tim. 3:14-17), then speaking against, denying, and contradicting His word flies in the face of the Creator’s authority! God’s word, then, becomes a trap – like a spiritual spider web – whereby people are prevented from discovering God’s truth ... truth that brings spiritual freedom (see John 8:31, 32 and Rom. 11:7-10).

In Romans 3:31, Paul asks a most important question: Do faith and grace make the Law pointless – that is, make it void? What is the result of true faith and grace? Use the translation from The

Jerusalem Bible to think about this: “Do we mean that faith makes the Law pointless? Not at all [compare this to the KJV: “God forbid...”]: we are giving the Law its true value” (emphases added). Compare this to Ephesians 2:8, 9.

Read again Romans 4:15. Compare the following translations:

Moffatt: “(What the Law produces is the Wrath, not the promise of God; where there is no law, there is no transgression either.)”

New International Version: “...because law brings wrath. And where there is no law there is no transgression.”

The Jerusalem Bible: “Law involves the possibility of punishment for breaking the law – only where there is no law can that be avoided.”

These translations present an important question: When can God’s punishment be avoided? There are three possibilities: (1) when a person does not transgress God’s Law; (2) when there is no law prohibiting their actions; or (3) when God offers a means by which their transgressions can be forgiven and forgotten. In all of these cases, it is very manifest that God’s Law plays a central role in our relationship to Him (read Matt. 22:34-40). It governs the covenant relationship between Him and His people.

What about New Testament Christians?

Can a New Testament Christian receive punishment for sinning? Yes. Anyone who sins will suffer the ultimate consequence of their sin (eternal death) ... unless they repent before God of having done so (see Acts 2:38, 39). Repent means more than just admitting that you have sinned; it means that you will take steps in the future to change whatever thinking puts you on the path to that sin and others (Rom. 12:1, 2; Matt. 15:18, 19). True regret about the transgression should motivate the individual to change that thought and action.

Read I John 1:6-10. James 3:11, 12 suggests that it is unnatural for a fountain to send forth salt and fresh water and a fig tree to bear olives and a vine to bear figs. Is it possible for a Christian to bear true fruit of the Holy Spirit (see Gal. 5:13-26) and the fruit of the carnal mind? Unlike the fig tree, the grape vine, and the olive tree, humans have the mental and spiritual capacity to be spiritually conflicted (Rom. 7:14-25). Spiritual growth and development is a daily struggle against the carnal mind (see Rom. 8:5-14 and 7:1-25). John admits that such is the case. In I John 1:7, John also admits that through Jesus Christ we have an avenue for forgiveness and cleansing (see Eph. 1:4-14). God's ideal objective is found in Ephesians 1:4: We should become holy, blameless, and loving. God's Law provides the criteria by which that is possible (see Rom. 8:1-4 regarding the righteousness of the Law).

Now, read I John 2:1-17. John reveals a few interesting and profound things in these verses:

1. Jesus Christ intervenes with the Father on our behalf when we sin (vv. 1, 2).
2. It is easy to tell who is really walking in God's truth: Those who do keep God's commandments and try to imitate Jesus Christ in His faithfulness (vv. 3-6; see also John 14:15).
3. The old commandment is still valid for the Christian (v. 7).
4. The new commandment is in addition to the old. In Jesus Christ, God has made it possible for us to know His truth more profoundly. God's light of truth is made more perfectly visible (vv. 8, 9).
5. We are able to overcome the darkness of the world's system and be forgiven of our sins through Jesus Christ (vv. 10-17).

That being the case, can a New Testament Christian receive punishment for sinning? Now, read Hebrews 6:4-8 and 10:26, 27. What do you think these verses tell you about the Christian who persists in sin? Does it appear that the New Testament Christian can forfeit her/his opportunity for salvation if s/he does not change the way s/he believes and acts relative to God's truth? It is one thing to say that you believe God's truth; it is another for you to actually live what God has revealed to you.

How does God intend to use His Law in relationship to the new covenant He will make with Israel in the future? Jeremiah 31:31-34 and Hebrews 10:1-17 give us some clues. What does He reveal will be the qualitative difference this time as compared to His original covenant with Israel? How do you think that concept is presently applied to New Testament Christians? With just this superficial treatment, would you be convinced that the Law of God has been done away with as a result of the coming of Jesus Christ? Explain.

Let me complete this section with a little "brain teaser" exercise:

1. Using Genesis 2:2, 3, Exodus 20:8-11, and Leviticus 23:3, look up God's instruction about the Sabbath and determine if God is more interested in the rest factor in the term "sabbath" than He is in the number of the day on which that rest should occur. Pay attention to what the Bible says, write down your thoughts, look up other scriptures (try Mark 2:23-28, for instance), and let the Bible interpret the Bible.

2. Based on what you find here, which day of the week should be God's commanded day of worship? Is anything wrong with this picture?

I know that traditions are going to arise and attempt to squelch your understanding of God's truth. Do not allow that to happen. Regardless of what you have been taught in the past, your responsibility is to obey God's revealed truth. Are you willing to do that? If not, then you need to re-study Matthew 15:1-9 and Romans 3:4. **Obey God!**

Review Questions

1. Why is it important to develop a reasonable method for examining God's word?
2. List the four steps for doing so.
3. In your own words, explain why you must pay attention to what the Bible actually says?
4. Is it possible to demonstrate ways by which "Christian" traditions have perverted what God's word actually says? List a few examples.
5. How do Bible aids like commentaries, concordances, and lexicons aid you in your search for God's truth?
6. Are they always correct in the information they provide? List an example we discussed in this lesson.
7. What are the "reporter questions," and how do they aid you in your search for information?
8. What are two meanings of the term "context"?
9. Why is the context important in understanding the meaning of an idea presented in Scripture?
10. What is the context of I Thessalonians 4:16-18 and I Corinthians 15:50-58? How does Hebrews 11:39, 40 relate to this context?
11. Does the context of Revelation 12:12-13:8 reveal that at least some Christians will have to endure the Tribulation Period? How do Matthew 24:13 and Ephesians 6:10-18 support that context?
12. Which step is represented by Isaiah 28:9, 10?

13. Explain how Acts 17:11, 1 Corinthians 3:1-3, and Hebrews 5:11-6:3 support Isaiah 28:9, 10.
14. What does Jesus teach us in John 10:35? Why is this important?
15. What does 2 Peter 2:20, 21 teach us about our own opinion relative to Scriptural revelation?
16. How would you apply this Scripture to Luther's idea about the "priesthood of the believer"?
17. Why would God not allow Scripture to be put together by the will of man?
18. To which Scripture did 2 Timothy 3:14-17 originally refer?
19. Would God allow Scripture in the New Testament to contradict Scripture in the Old Testament? Why/why not?
20. Explain the four steps in letting the Bible interpret itself.
21. In what three ways can a person avoid being punished for his/her sins? How can a New Testament Christian receive punishment for sins? By the way, what is "sin"?
22. What is the qualitative difference between the Old and New Testaments? (Hint: The term new is from the Greek term kainos, which means "new in quality ... as opposed to age." Use Jer. 31:31-34 and Hebrews 10:1-17 as references for your explanation.)
23. Do faith and grace make God's Law pointless?
24. How would you prove your answer according to Scripture?
25. Would you accept Ephesians 2:8, 9 as proof that God's Law has been made void? Why/why not?

26. How would you explain Colossians 2:13-17? (Use additional verses to add to your “proof.”)

27. How would you explain Peter’s experience in Acts 10:5-16?

28. Was this vision given to Peter in order to teach the New Testament Church that they could now eat unclean meats because God had done away with a portion of His Law from Leviticus 11 and Deuteronomy 14?

29. How does Matthew 15:1-11 relate to the context of this discussion?

30. What major lesson have you learned from this chapter?

31. What do you intend to do about that newly acquired knowledge?

Chapter Seven:

Ask God for Help

According to James 1:5-8, how must we approach God when we desire His assistance in gaining wisdom? James says that we must approach God with unwavering faith. He says that we must not be “double minded” when we approach God. What does he mean by that? Simply put, he means that we must not vacillate between our opinions or purposes (see also 1 Kings 18:21). To do so shows God that we are not very stable “believers.”

Read Hebrews 4:14-16. Notice that Paul says that we have to “hold fast [firmly; fixedly] to our profession [of faith]” and “come boldly unto the throne of grace” (emphases added). If God has given us a “sound mind” that keeps us from having a “spirit of fear” (2 Tim. 1:7), then there should be no reason for us to be anything other than bold, sound minded, and full of faith in His presence. It would be a shame to us to be denied God’s help because of wavering faith and double mindedness – struck with a spirit of fear and reluctance to call upon Him for help. Let’s understand the importance of this.

Asking “in Faith”

What does asking “in faith” mean to you? First of all, it presupposes that one can ask out of faith. Secondly, it presupposes that there are “faith” parameters that govern the things for which you can petition God. If the true “faith” involves being with Jesus Christ where He is, as we have discussed previously, then it would do little good to pray to go to heaven when you die (read Matt. 6:5-15) ... regardless of how long and hard such a “gospel” is preached. That would be asking outside the bounds of true faith.

Another aspect of asking in faith has to do with God's will. Matthew 6:10 is part of a model prayer that asks God to send His Kingdom to earth to execute His will over mankind (see Isa. 2:1-5). According to logic, this would be a proper request of the Father because the instruction comes from the mouth of His Son Jesus Christ. That makes it part of the faith. It is not God's will that mankind should go to heaven immediately upon death ... or at all. Such a desire invalidates God's will from the beginning (see Matt. 25:34; Luke 12:32).

In Luke 22:18, Jesus Christ told His disciples that He would not take the Passover wine with them again "until the Kingdom of God shall come" (emphases added). That is a clear signal that the Kingdom is coming to the earth. It is an article of the true faith that such will be the case.

Read the parables in Matthew 25:14-30 and Luke 19:11-27. Ask yourself this: Did the Master return to his servants and whisk them away to another place? Follow up with this: Where was the kingdom he received located ... in the faraway country where he received it or in the area to which he returned and gave his servants their rewards of ruling with him? The answer makes a difference to true faith.

Read Mark 1:14, 15 and ask yourself what the true gospel is about. Read 2 Corinthians 11:4 and ask yourself what Paul meant by the expression "another gospel." Which other "gospel" were the false apostles preaching? Whatever it was, it is plain that Paul did not consider it to be part of the true Christian faith. In fact, he considered it to be part and parcel to Satan's involvement with deceiving the whole world (see Rev. 12:9).

We cannot assume that those who preach "another Jesus, another gospel, another spirit" are preaching God's truth – that they are merely different paths to the same destination. Matthew 7:21-23 is a cautionary comment about the "pretenders" among us. Matthew 24:4, 5 is another cautionary comment about the problem we face with counterfeit Christianity. Your task, if you want to worship God in spirit and in truth (John 4:23, 24), is to get to know what the true faith is.

Many are not sufficiently skilled in being able to sort out the pretenders from the real thing. As a result, many are deceived and

accept the counterfeit. They might have fine religious dispositions and conduct great public religious rallies ... with beautiful songs and extraordinary messages that supposedly come straight out of the Bible. Both Jesus Christ and Paul warn that such things can be deceitful and lead you astray from God's will and truth. Surely, you would want your worship, praise, and prayers to God to be addressed to Him according to true faith and His will.

What is the Function of the Holy Spirit?

The Holy Spirit is not a third personage of a "trinity" in the Godhead. It is God's power to accomplish whatever His will is. In actual fact, you will find in Scripture that the Father and Jesus Christ are referred to as being "God," but the Holy Spirit is not. You can refer to the second lesson of the Bible Study Course series to understand our teaching about who/what "God" is. That understood, you can now more effectively understand the role of the Holy Spirit in studying the Bible.

Read Romans 8:14-17. Note how Paul stresses that "The Spirit itself bears witness with our spirit." What does this mean? It means that God communicates with us through His spirit power. He puts things into our minds and hearts that enable us to understand more fully His thoughts and ways.

Just before His ascension to the Father's right hand, Jesus revealed two very important concepts to His Disciples: (1) They would be "baptized" with the Holy Spirit (Acts 1:5), and (2) they would receive "power" when that Holy Spirit had come upon them (v. 8). In other words, they would be completely submerged in the Holy Spirit of God, and that Spirit would give them the power they needed for their spiritual growth and development so they could accomplish the mission for which they were sent into the world.

How does this work? Read I Corinthians 2:6-16. Spiritual growth and development is an educational process ... a training ground for growing to be like God through Jesus Christ (read Hebrews 12:1-13 and 2 Peter 3:13-18). Paul shows in I Corinthians 2:6-16 that we learn the secret things of God as this Holy Spirit reveals them to us (vv. 9-13). *These are things not commonly known among humans.* What is the result of such power? Verse 16 says

that, in the process, we come to have the mind of Jesus Christ – what Paul often refers to as being “Christ in you.” That expression does not mean that Jesus Christ personally comes and takes up residence in your body and mind to actually live His life in you. Some well-meaning Christian ministers teach that concept. “Christ in you” means that you will submit to the will of God the Father in the same manner Jesus did/does.

What do you suppose Jesus meant in John 6:63 about His words being *spirit* and *life*? What relationship does His comment have to John 4:23, 24 and John 8:31, 32? Do you get the sense that the function of this Holy Spirit in our minds and hearts is to teach us the things of God that we need to *know* and *do*? Would Ephesians 1:6 indicate that this is the way that we are made “acceptable” to God the Father?

As you try to understand this better, think of the glass filled with dirty water. As you pour more clean water into the glass, the dirty water is displaced. Eventually, the water in the glass becomes thoroughly clean. That is a simple way to explain how one’s total immersion in the Holy Spirit cleanses you from evil and makes you more acceptable to God the Father. It is a process of spiritual communication between you and God. The more you learn God’s thoughts and ways, the more spiritual you become and the more like Jesus Christ you think.

John 14:17, 26 and 16:13, 14 explain more fully the function of the Holy Spirit. What Jesus is explaining to His Disciples in John 14 is this: The Holy Spirit must be *in you* because it is not some abstract power that works from the *outside* (v. 17). The idea is to effect a spiritual change in the way that you think and act (see Rom. 12:1, 2). Also, the Holy Spirit is to teach you and remind you of things you have already learned (v. 26).

In John 16, Jesus reveals that the Holy Spirit is the Spirit of truth that is to guide you into true spiritual understanding and give you understanding about things to come. In short, the Holy Spirit is actually God’s means by which He enables us to be holy people – *it is the Spirit that enables us to become like God in thought, word, and deed.*

From this discussion, you should derive the idea that it makes perfectly good sense to ask God for help as you try to know and

understand His thoughts and ways. Isaiah 55:8, 9 demonstrates that the Lord God (the one who became Jesus Christ) understands the huge gap between man's thoughts and ways and God's. Otherwise, you are not going to gain enough knowledge and understanding on your own to significantly close that gap. There are things over which you will wrestle with God ... over which you will resist God. Read John 6:35-66 to understand one very good example of this. In those moments, you need to continue to ask God for help. Do not give up.

Conclusion

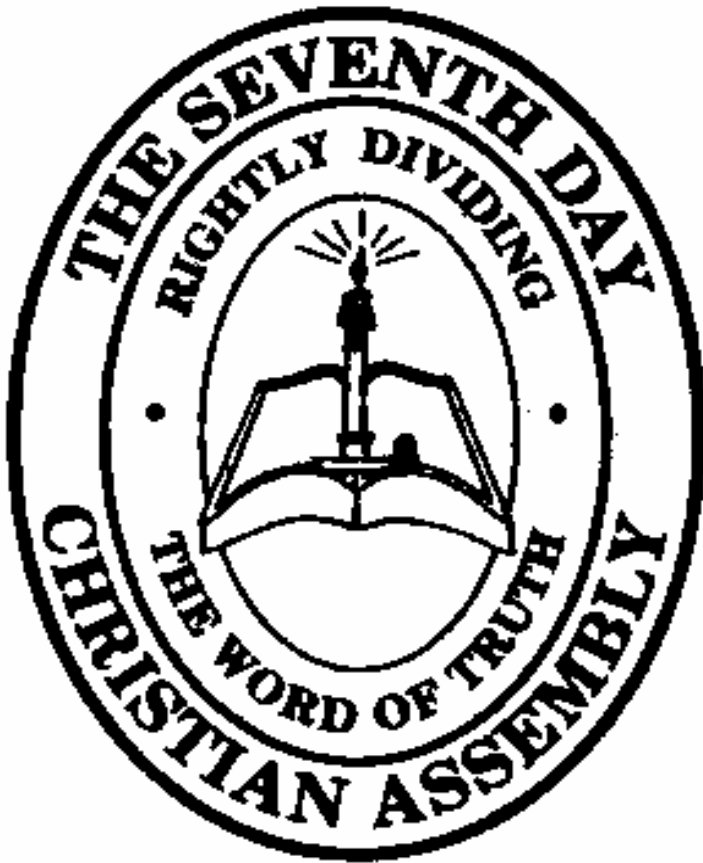
If you have failed to include the Author of Truth in your studies, how else would you come to know the truth? Remember this admonition of the Apostle Paul: "...The word of God is quick, and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing even to the dividing asunder [a] the life-principle of one's body [*psuche*] from his mind [*pneuma*], and [b] of the joints and marrow, and it makes known the thoughts and intents of the heart" (Hebrews 4:12). Notice how the last part of Paul's thought [b] reflects/restates the first part [a] (that is, the separation of the body and mind).

Be prepared for God to show you things that you must change about your thoughts and desires and hopes and plans. Be prepared to obey without wavering or being double-minded. Ask God for help before you even begin to apply all of the lessons found in this study and ... continue to do so as you study them. There is great spiritual treasure to be found in God's holy word.

Review Questions

1. How does God make sure that we understand the "...Things which God has prepared for them that love Him ... the deep things of God"?
2. Explain how John 14:12 and 1 John 2:3-6 relate to "loving God".

3. How does I John 3:4 demonstrate that someone does not love God?
4. Read I Corinthians 2:13, 16. How does the Holy Spirit teach us the things of God?
5. Whom do we think like as a result of this experience?
6. Why is that important in the faith?
7. How must you approach God when you ask Him for something?
8. What two things must you avoid when you ask in faith?
9. List the various functions served by the Holy Spirit.
10. What is Holy Spirit?
11. What kinds of things will the Holy Spirit teach you and bring to your remembrance?
12. Refer to I Corinthians 1, 2. Why has God's truth not been commonly understood among the greats and near-greats of the world?
13. Understanding the point of this seventh lesson, why is it important to ask God for help in understanding His truth?
14. How have these seven simple lessons in studying God's word helped you to be a better student of the Bible?



Straight Talk ... Plain Truth

THIS BOOK IS NOT TO BE SOLD

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