

Living by the Words of God

a study by dave scott



Understanding the Offer!

Pursuing the Opportunity!

Living by the Words of God

by David Lee Scott

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Your word is a doorway that lets in light,
and it helps gullible people understand.

(Psalms 119:130 God's Word)

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This study is organized as follows:

Introduction

Part One: Understanding the Offer

Part Two: Pursuing the Opportunity

Living what God says.
Living my life like Jesus paid for it.
Living past the cliché.

Father, I offer this prayer while still on your good earth living somewhere between faith and sight. Thank you for your words of life. Oh, God, I thank you for your words. I do listen, Lord, but help me to see more clearly the opportunities to bring you glory. Jesus, I greatly anticipate that time when I am able to look back and see that I did some things right -- I did some things that brought a smile to the face of God because faith is not only our struggle but also our victory.

dave

Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life.
(John 6:68 NKJV)



More than Sunday School stories. . .

More than someone's opinion. . .

Way more than pompous moralizing. . .

God's words are life.

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itsaboutGod.com

About dave. . .

Dave Scott
Terre Haute, Indiana

I grew up in the Terre Haute, Indiana area. Married for thirty-two years. Four children. Worked as a heavy equipment operator in Terre Haute and lived in Terre Haute for several years before leaving for formal training at Moody Bible Institute in the summer of 1980.



Lived in the Chicago area for five years while attending Moody Bible Institute and Morton College. In the process earned B.A. at MBI and A.A. & A.L.S. at Morton. Was senior pastor at churches in Indiana, Wyoming and Michigan. Completed my M.A. in Ministry in 1996. Moved back to Terre Haute in 1996.

In 2003 I injured the biceps muscle in my right arm on the job and was unable to work for six months. It seems the Lord gave me the time off to develop this study; it is designed to help anyone who has the desire to please God in his or her approach to Scripture regardless of formal education. I hope you will come to agree with me that Bible study has to be seen as more than "Bible study," high-lighters, theories, methods, principles and Sunday School curriculum. Bible study must lead to God speaking to us and changing our lives; that is God's design and purpose.

If you cannot express yourself on any subject, struggle until you can. If you do not, someone will be the poorer all the days of his life. Struggle to re-express some truth of God to yourself, and God will use that expression to someone else. Go through the winepress of God where the grapes are crushed. You must struggle to get expression experimentally, then there will come a time when that expression will become the very wine of strengthening to someone else; but if you say lazily -- "I am not going to struggle to express this thing for myself, I will borrow what I say," the expression will not only be of no use to you, but of no use to anyone.

(From "My Utmost for His Highest" December 15 reading.)

May my "struggle" on the following pages make you richer in Jesus Christ!

dave

If God doesn't say it, then we cannot say he did.
And why would we want to?

Why This Study?

"In carpentry the rule of thumb is measure twice and cut once, but in our Bible studies I sometimes honestly wondered if we measured at all."

This study began several years ago as a "how-to-study-the-Bible study" -- "The Treasures of Bible Study." What I had come to realize after several years as a pastor was that most of the Bible studies that we participated in were discussions about the Bible, expressions of opinion woven together into a religious theme, but very little actual study. Very little discovering what a passage actually said.

I have now come to realize that we need a different approach to Scripture in general. A new model (but it's not really new, just new to most of us). A more biblical model for us to follow when we take God's word in hand with the hope of hearing the voice of God.

Not an approach to find moral standards, or to point out the sin of the world, or to forward a "Christian" agenda, or to get more "blessings." But in some way we learn an approach that allows us to come to the Bible for life. Not only principles to follow but food to live by. . . living by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God.

An approach that gives God the best opportunity to take the written words from the pages of Scripture and bring them to life in me. An approach that allows me to see what God actually says, in black and white, and in the course of my life.

Beautiful words, wonderful words, wonderful words of life.

And wonderful words to live by.

dave

We have given fallen creatures living in
a fallen world too much wiggle room.



Start with GOD-

the first step in learning
is bowing down to GOD;

only fools thumb their noses at
such wisdom and learning.

Proverbs 1.7 Msg



Believing God for life.

Listen to me, you people who pursue what is right and seek the LORD.
Look to the rock from which you were cut and to the quarry from
which you were dug (Isaiah 51:1 God's Word).

If you were asked if you were a truth-seeker or a God-seeker, you may protest that you are both, that these concepts are one and the same. But it is interesting. Search your Bible and see how many times you are told to seek truth. (I was surprised to find none, as I believe you will be.) Now search your Bible and see how many times you are told to seek the Lord. Very interesting indeed.

The pattern seems to be that we seek God and receive truth "for the LORD gives wisdom; From His mouth come knowledge and understanding" (Proverbs 2:6 NKJV).

From the beginning the issue has been the same: Will we believe God for life or will we look to another source, another truth? As we shall see from the "story" that follows, Adam and Eve sought truth apart from God. They did not fully believe God for life, and as a result they brought death to themselves and this world.



Paradise.

We can only imagine this ideal world. Possibly a moment from our most surreal remembrance of a perfect summer evening as a child with God's creation all around us and a "Walt Disney" view of life within us.

What a paradise Paradise must have been! The Garden of Eden I mean.
Where it all began. God's perfect start for the human race.

God created the heavens and the earth, divided the light from darkness,
divided the waters above and below, made a dry place for human
activity.

Grass and trees followed, and the two great lights.

This was good. God saw to it.

Living creatures in the water and living creatures on the earth. Then man, made in God's image. And woman. Male and female he created them. And he gave them sovereignty over his created order.

Not stopping there, God planted a garden, the Garden of Eden. There he put the man whom he had formed.

Yes, Paradise was indeed paradise.

Life as God meant it to be.

Until. . . (Don't you just hate to ruin a good story with the reality of it all?)

Until, with the help of a snake, they (the man and the woman) began quibbling over God's words -- "Did God really say. . .?" Twisting his meaning and doubting his goodness, they disobeyed their Creator.

And if ever there were a time to say it: The rest is history.

Fast-forward a few thousand years later. A much different earth by now, but still God's earth.

Moses and the nation of Israel stand the width of a river away from the Promised Land. Not the Garden of Eden but a paradise in its own right - hand-picked by God himself for this group of people, a land flowing with milk and honey.

And the words of God were given to them so they might experience life as God meant it to be.

Moses speaks to a people who stand a stone's throw from Paradise II.

So He humbled you, allowed you to hunger, and fed you with manna which you did not know nor did your fathers know, that He might make you know that man shall not live by bread alone; but man lives by every word that proceeds from the mouth of the LORD (Deuteronomy 8:3 NKJV).

The message that followed was simple. Live by the words of God and enjoy the fruit of the land and the blessing of God.

Keep the words and live life as God defines life.

Fast-forward again.

Here we are. Our world has a few more miles on it but basically the same setting - God's earth, people, the words of God, as spoken by Jesus the Son of God, teaching us how to live.

But He answered and said, "It is written, 'Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God'" (Matthew 4:4 NKJV).

Much has changed since Paradise I (the Garden of Eden) and Paradise II (the Promised Land).

But some things haven't. If we want to live life as God defines living, as God meant it to be, then we must live by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God.

And that, my friends, is what this study is about. Learning how to believe God for life.

Jesus said he came "that they may have life, and that they may have it more abundantly" (John 10:10 NKJV).

"They" is us. You. Me.

We have all earth history behind us. We have the examples of Paradise Lost, I & II. Quibble over the words, change the meaning God intended, doubt his goodness and purpose, disobey, rebel, die lost.

Or not. Decide instead to find life in the words of God.

We have the hope of heaven in front of us. And the same admonishment. Live by the words of God and live.

The intent of this study is to help us to see the value of the words, to learn them, to understand them and to live them.

To live as God intends for us to live.

Blessed May We Be as we travel together this Path of Jesus!

dave

Quibble

**to raise trivial
objections**

or

**distinctions,
especially
so as to
avoid
the truth or
importance of
something**

Part One

Understanding the Offer!

A Biblical Understanding of the Christian's
Relationship to the Words of God.



Do we understand the offer?

Bread isn't enough. Here, eat this!

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Living by the Words of God!

Beginning: Do I believe God for life?

Do I approach the words of God for life?

The LORD was teaching you that people need more than food to live--they need every word that the LORD has spoken (Deuteronomy 8.3b CEV).

Do I continue in the process of believing God for life?

I want to learn only one thing from you. Did you receive the Spirit by your own efforts to live according to a set of standards or by believing what you heard? Are you that stupid? Did you begin in a spiritual way only to end up doing things in a human way (Galatians 3:2-3 God's Word)?

Do I factor in the reality of God now or will I wait until eternity when "every one of us shall give account of himself to God" (Romans 14:12 KJV)?

Am I living by the words of God?

This Essential for Life:

In Deuteronomy 8.3 and Matthew 4.4, we are confronted with this essential for life - that we need more than food to live as God would define living; in fact, we need to live by the words of God.

What should our response be?

It seems that we should first of all face the issue and confront the text. We should examine whether or not we know and believe this to be true intellectually and experientially. Upon confirming this truth, we should pursue a better understanding of those very words of God which we need to live by. And then we should live by the words written on the pages of our Bibles. Our attitude must be that we approach God's word for life.

The premises for this study:

To believe God for life, we must approach the words of God as life.

To believe God for life, we must establish the certainty of our need to live by the words of God in our minds and hearts.

To believe God for life, we need to grow in our understanding of the words of God.

To believe God for life, we need to live by the words of God.

Understanding the Offer!



Chapter One

Approaching the words of *God* for life

We need to approach the words of God for life. A paradigm shift is possibly in order as we face the truth in Deuteronomy 8.3 and Matthew 4.4.

Life as God defines it.

Think about it -- God, as Creator, Redeemer, Master, Provider, etc. would seem to be the hands-down expert on life. The Israelites would do well to listen. We would also.

We need to face the issue. To live as God defines living, then we must live by his words. We must take seriously what he has chosen to communicate to us regarding this subject. We must believe God for life.

1.1 We believe *God* for life by living by his words.

. . .that He might make you know that man shall not live by bread alone; but man lives by every word that proceeds from the mouth of the LORD (Deuteronomy 8:3 NKJV).

When these words were given to Moses - - the people of Israel stood waiting to enter the Promised Land. They were being presented with the opportunity for a wonderful life - beautiful real estate, new homes already filled with good things, rich farming and ranching. They were given these words, not as overbearing restrictions, but out of God's love so they could make the most of this opportunity. If they wanted to live, really live, then they would live by these words of God. The teaching goes as follows.

1.1a We need more than material food to live.

True living involves more than eating well, having a nice house, etc. If our idea of living does not go past good food, shelter, sports, religion, then we are not experiencing life as God intended.

1.1b We need the words from the mouth of *God* to live.

Jesus answered, "It is written: 'Man does not live on bread alone, but on every word that comes from the mouth of God'" (Matthew 4:4 NIV).

Why is understanding this so crucial? Because this is life. When God speaks of life he says that we are to live by every word that comes from his mouth. We are to live by the words of God. Jesus brings this teaching forward into the New Testament. Same deal. We live by the words of God. So we must ask and answer the question: Am I living by every word from God?

As the deer pants for the water brooks, So pants my soul for You,
O God. My soul thirsts for God, for the living God. When shall I
come and appear before God (Psalms 42:1-2 NKJV)?

1.1c We need to work (invest energy and time) for this spiritual food.

Don't waste your energy striving for perishable food like that. Work for the food that sticks with you, food that nourishes your lasting life, food the Son of Man provides. He and what he does are guaranteed by God the Father to last (John 6:27 MSG).

Okay. The Scripture is pretty clear, and we agree, but what does it mean? What does it mean to live by the words of God, to live by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God?

1.2 To believe God for life, we need to know what it actually means to live by the words of God.

Let's begin by looking at our text. ". . .man lives by every word that proceeds from the mouth of the LORD."

1.2a *God's words are life - a very biblical definition it seems.*
God defines the character and nature of his words in Deut 8.3 as something to live by. If we are to live by every word that comes from the mouth of God, then God's words are life to us.

"Lives by" includes the idea of obedience, but the concept is greater and broader and stronger. This is more than obeying a rule or following a moral standard because it is the right thing to do or even

because God said it. I obey God because God and his words are life to me.

1.2b Living by the words of God means keeping his words.

Keeping God's commandments (Deut 8.2) seems to run parallel to living by every word (8.3). It seems that true keeping God's commandments is done from the heart (Deut 8.2). As previously stated, keeping God's word is more than obedience.

Some translations (e.g. the NIV) use the word "obey" for the Heb. "shamar" and the Gk. "tereo." Although the concept of obey is definitely a part of the meaning of those words, it seems the KJV, NKJV and NASB make the better choice with the word "keep" because of its broader use (see Deut 8.2, 8.11; John 14.15, 23-24). Keep - to retain possession of; to have as a supply. Keep denotes preserving, holding fast (Gk. tereo) and hedging about, guarding, attending to, observing (Heb. shamar).

Jesus equates keeping his commands with loving him.

If you love Me, keep My commandments (John 14:15 NKJV).

Jesus answered and said to him, "If anyone loves Me, he will keep My word. . ." (John 14:23 NKJV).

Jesus equates not keeping his words with not loving him.

He who does not love Me does not keep My words; and the word which you hear is not Mine but the Father's who sent Me (John 14:24 NKJV).

1.2c Keeping God's words is a sacred trust that demonstrates love and gives life.

Living by the words of God is a sacred calling, a holy calling. Probably not sacred and holy as we sometimes think, as in overly religious, but picture yourself standing before God as you are presented with a most fantastic opportunity - As a royal priest of the Creator you have been chosen to serve him as one who keeps his words.

Not some heavy burden to bear but a calling to follow, a vision to pursue, a point set on the horizon as to what it means to live by, to keep, the words of God.

Think about it with me for a moment what this means. As God's emissaries we live the words of God and reflect that life in our world. God's words are living, and they come alive in our lives as we depend on those words for life.

Maybe. Maybe no one listens. Maybe no one reads the words that reflect from our lives of keeping the words. But maybe someone does.

And no maybe about it. We have honored the One who sent us with his message. Now possibly the picture of our calling comes into focus.

The obedience that arises from our love of God and our commitment to this sacred trust keeps the message intact, preserves and guards the words of life. This is our calling, our blessing.

Keepers of the words.

You show that you are a letter from Christ sent through us. This letter is not written with ink but with the Spirit of the living God. It is not written on stone tablets but on human hearts (2 Corinthians 3:3 NCV).

1.3 To believe God for life, we must move past the abstract to the concrete.

I have developed this very important concept more fully in Part Two, Lesson Nine, The Ladder of Abstraction, but let me at least lay the groundwork here.

1.3a The abstract guides us; the concrete acts out the reality of the abstract in everyday life.

1.3a.1 Abstract: Forgive one another.
(Ephesians 4:32 NKJV) And be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, just as God in Christ forgave you.

1.3a.2 Concrete: I forgive Bob for spreading gossip about me at church. I forgive Mary for her snide comments about my teaching methods. I forgive Sam for listening to her unkind and untruthful words.

1.3b The abstract PLUS the concrete brings life.

1.3b.1 This is like epoxy in which you combine two tubes with different contents to form a very strong bonding material. Left separately they have no strength.

1.3b.2 Honoring the abstract and the concrete allows God to nourish our hearts with what we need at the moment: healing, strength, courage, wisdom, vision, perspective, kindness, forgiveness, peace, etc.

Understanding the Offer!

Chapter Two: Establishing our need for the words of God



Chapter Two

Establishing our need for the words of God

To live as God defines living, we need to establish the certainty of our need to live by the words of God in our minds and hearts.

We need to establish the certainty of our need to live by the words of God in our own minds. Living by the words of God has to be established as a point on the horizon from which we never look away **because** our tendency is to look away. As in sheep going astray. If we look away or doubt the necessity of living by the words of God, then we will fail. How else can I put it?

Living by the words, keeping the words, is a sacred calling, a way of life that will bring transformation and change. Living by the words of God we will be driven to depend upon God, to live on what he says instead of living on the buzz of the day. Living on God's words our hearts will not rise and fall on the "breaking news" of this world because our minds will be more directed to eternity.

God is our harbour and our strength, a very present help in trouble. For this cause we will have no fear, even though the earth is changed, and though the mountains are moved in the heart of the sea (Psalms 46:1-2 BBE).

We cannot tread lightly as we continue down this path. We must give God every opportunity to develop this truth in our hearts and minds. Life as we know it will be changed as we follow God - sound familiar. . .?

"Whoever finds his life will lose it, and whoever loses his life for my sake will find it" (Matthew 10:39 NIV).

"He who loves his life will lose it, and he who hates his life in this world will keep it for eternal life" (John 12:25 NKJV).

Kind of sheds a different light on finding our niche in this world, doesn't it? Life as we know it will be changed as we live by God's words. To persevere we need to see the way clearly outlined and taught in Scripture. Where do we begin our journey?

Where do I start?

Start with GOD - the first step in learning is bowing down to GOD; only fools thumb their noses at such wisdom and learning (Proverbs 1.7 Msg).

2.1 We need to know our starting point: The fear of the LORD.

Where do we begin? Has our lack of reverence kept us from wisdom and from God?

Where and how do we begin? We all have the layers of our lives to deal with: culture, personal life experience, religious experience - often the greatest obstacle, physical and psychological hurdles, individual uniqueness, and our fallen nature. We are fallen people in a fallen world trying to relate to a God whose ways and thoughts are higher than our ways and thoughts as the heavens are higher than the earth - Isaiah 55.9. So where do we begin our quest? One viable option: We begin with the words of God, and the words of God tell us to begin with the fear of God.

2.1a Beginning with the fear of the LORD is well-established in Scripture.

2.1a.1 We see this necessary beginning in Scripture.

God, in his Holy Book, makes it pretty clear where we are to begin our journey: “The fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom.” We will look briefly at several of these passages to help establish this concept in our minds.

The fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom; A good understanding have all those who do His commandments. His praise endures forever (Psalm 111.10 NKJV).

The fear of the LORD is the beginning of knowledge, But fools despise wisdom and instruction (Proverbs 1:7 NKJV).

The fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom, And the knowledge of the Holy One is understanding (Proverbs 9:10 NKJV).

The fear of the LORD is the instruction of wisdom, And before honor is humility (Proverbs 15:33 NKJV).

The fear of the LORD leads to life, And he who has it will abide in satisfaction; He will not be visited with evil (Proverbs 19:23 NKJV).

By humility and the fear of the LORD are riches and honor and life (Proverbs 22:4 NKJV).

2.1a.2 We see where we must start, but why?

We start with “the fear of the LORD” because the fear of the LORD brings us face to face with our most formidable obstacle: A heart that “is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked” (Jer 17.9). The prophet Jeremiah goes on. “Who can know it [the heart]? I, the LORD, search the heart, I test the mind” (Jer 17.9b-10a NKJV).

Before the throne of God, bowed in reverence before God, we have hope to overcome the deceit of our own hearts. We cannot miss this. **If we do not begin here and let God deal with our hearts, then nothing else matters.**

All the Bible study in the world will not help us overcome the barrier of a heart not dealt with before our God.

2.1b **Beginning with the fear of the LORD deals with the heart: The heart of the issue is the heart.**

We must understand our most formidable obstacle. “We have met the enemy and they is us.” We cannot deal with our hearts on our own.

The heart is deceitful above all things and beyond cure. Who can understand it (Jeremiah 17:9 NIV)?

Allowing the word of God to do its work in our hearts is our only hope.

For the word of God is living and active. Sharper than any double-edged sword, it penetrates even to dividing soul and

spirit, joints and marrow; it judges the thoughts and attitudes of the heart (Hebrews 4:12 NIV).

The absolute necessity of beginning our journey in the fear of the LORD cannot be overstated. We can see this necessary beginning - bowing before God - illustrated and explained in life, even in our own lives, if we look. We must place our hearts in God's hands.

2.1b.1 The process of wisdom living begins when we place our hearts in God's hands.

This is what we do when we submit to the fear of the LORD, the knowledge of the Holy One. We place our lives in the Master's hands. Possibly the following will help us to do just that.

2.1b.2 Allow God to develop in us an appreciation for the restoration process of people, including ourselves.

The Craftsman's vision. Entering into the fear of the LORD begins a process of rebuke and restoration. If you have ever seen a craftsmen (or even better, you have done it yourself) restore a worn-out or broken piece of furniture or an automobile or an antique toy, or have just cleaned something up and made it useful again, then this may help you understand the process of submitting ourselves to the reverence of God. When we can even get a glimpse of God's vision for our lives, it helps us tremendously in our decision to submit to his process.

2.1b.3 Allow the process of restoration to speak to us.

You can appreciate this if you can appreciate the 1955 Chevrolet completely restored or a totally refinished table c.1874. Restoration speaks to us. The process of a craftsmen restoring what once looked to be junk enamors us. And even better when the craftsman was the only one who saw any value in the "junk" before it was restored.

2.1b.4 Look at ourselves as God's projects that he values greatly.

First of all, the craftsmen sees value in the broken object or he would not waste his time, as God sees value in each of us or he would not have “wasted” his time in sending Jesus Christ to redeem and rebuild. “For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand that we should walk in them” (Ephesians 2:10 NKJV).

2.1b.5 Be convinced of the success of the project.

The entire project has already been financed - The shed blood of Jesus Christ is the full payment. God will not waste his investment. Know and learn God’s truth concerning the facts of your salvation. God doesn’t build junk, and he does not partially restore junk. If his name goes on it, which it does, then the finished product will be absolutely perfect.

What then shall we say to these things? If God is for us, who can be against us? He who did not spare His own Son, but delivered Him up for us all, how shall He not with Him also freely give us all things (Romans 8:31-32 NKJV)?

Back to the fear of the LORD. Where do we start allowing the words of God to have God’s intended restorative effect? When we bow before God and surrender ourselves to his process.

2.1b.6 Know that bowing before God places us in the exact right place; smack dab in the Master's workshop; held in his hands.

Here our Savior begins dealing with the rust, dust, grime and broken pieces of our lives, the layers that we are often blind to and helpless before.

Here and no where else are we able to effectively deal with the restraints of our culture, personal life experience, religious experience and training, economic status, everything.

Here in the Master's workshop everything can and will be dealt with.

And you, the one created, will be perfectly restored in the image of the Creator.



2.1c A new way of thinking: Do I realize my need for restoration?

So brothers and sisters, since God has shown us great mercy, I beg you to offer your lives as a living sacrifice to him. Your offering must be only for God and pleasing to him, which is the spiritual way for you to worship (Romans 12:1 NCV).

Do not change yourselves to be like the people of this world, but be changed within by a new way of thinking. Then you will be able to decide what God wants for you; you will know what is good and pleasing to him and what is perfect (Romans 12:2 NCV).

Since God has shown us mercy, why don't we do our best to live in his mercy and let him address every area of our lives. Simply offer ourselves to God and step into his restoration process. Don't be so concerned about changing ourselves - changes we would bring about. Accept God's invitation to a new way of thinking, renewed minds and transformed lives.

Our cleansing agent -
 Forgiveness and redemption through **the shed blood of Jesus Christ.**
 Because of Jesus Christ we can submit every area of our lives to God, not for judgment, but for restoration.

Quite the ticket!

- 1. Fallen nature.
- 2. Educational background.
- 3. Personal life experience.
- 4. Religious experience.
- 5. Social status.
- 6. Economic status.
- 7. Thought life.
- 8. Daily routine.
- 9. Family.
- 10. Anything and everything; entire life.
- All of the above.

- 2.2 *We need to examine our perception and our value of God's words.*
 Have I surrendered everything to God? Have I begun my quest for life by bowing before God? And now we may want to ask ourselves: What is my true perception of the Word of God? Do I truly value the Word of God?

Simple questions, honest answers.

- Yes No 1. Do I read God's word?
- Yes No 2. Do I enjoy reading God's word?
- Yes No 3. Is reading God's word one of my favorite activities?
- Yes No 4. Do I hunger for God's words?
- Yes No 5. Do I ever have a "can't-wait-to-hear-what-God-says-about-this" attitude?
- Yes No 6. When I read my Bible, am I ever drawn away from this world?
- Yes No 7. Do I read the Bible because it is the right thing to do or because I meet God when I do?
- Yes No 8. Do I read the Bible because it is the Christian thing to do, or because I crave nourishment that I can get nowhere else?
- Yes No 9. Do I come to God in his word because I know that there is no other place to go to find the words of eternal life?
- Yes No 10. Do I come to God in his word to be transformed, changed?
- Yes No 11. Do I know I need the words of God to live?
- ___Essay___ 12. What do my honest answers to these questions tell me?

Recap. . .

- ___ I believe we should live by the words of God.
- ___ I agree that reverence for God is the beginning point in my search for wisdom.
- ___ I have examined my perception and value of the words of God. Now what?

Now we need to see if we can handle truth when we do find it, or when it finds us.

2.3 We need to examine our ability to handle truth in general and truth about ourselves specifically.

When I see, do I see? When I hear, do I hear? Do I hear but not understand?
Do I see but not perceive? Do I have God-blessed eyes?

"But you have God-blessed eyes--eyes that see! And God-blessed ears--ears that hear! (Matthew 13:16 MSG)

And that having the eyes of your heart full of light, you may have knowledge of what is the hope of his purpose, what is the wealth of the glory of his heritage in the saints. (Ephesians 1:18 BBE)

Paul prayed that the eyes of the Ephesians' hearts would be full of light. Jesus spoke of people who seeing, did not see, and hearing, did not hear or understand (Matt 13.13). In fact, quoting Isaiah, he said they were **ever** hearing but **never** understanding and **ever** seeing but **never** perceiving (Matt 13.14).

In them is fulfilled the prophecy of Isaiah: "You will be ever hearing but never understanding; you will be ever seeing but never perceiving" (Matthew 13:14 NIV).

Because we are in the habit of seeing and hearing the words of God does not mean that we are perceiving and understanding God's truth. We must examine our spiritual sight, our spiritual health, our spiritual identity and our spiritual vision to be able to assess our ability to handle truth.

2.3a Sight: We need to examine if our eyes are clear, good,
Matt 6.22-23.

Eyes: Are they good or bad? Clear or cluttered?
Do I have an eye for the truth?

¶The eye is the lamp of the body; so then if your eye is clear, your whole body will be full of light. But if your eye is bad, your whole body will be full of darkness. If then the light that is in you is darkness, how great is the darkness (Matt 6.22-23 NASB)!

2.3a.1 If our eyes are clear (good), then we will be full of light.

What these verses say seems obvious enough. But what do they mean? I did not really understand this passage for the longest time. How could light be darkness? But when the light bulb came on, I was amazed once again at God's wisdom. The key question seems to be - Is what you see with good or bad? It is not a given that since I am a professing Christian that my eye for truth is clear and sound and good. We must examine whether or not the lense we view life through is good or bad because if the lense is bad then even when we receive light that light becomes darkness.

Without going into an extended discussion it seems that an example of this is taught by James. "But be doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving yourselves" (James 1:22 NKJV). People who are hearers only have bad eyes; their eyes are clouded with deceit; consistently rationalizing away the reasons for not "doing" the word, they have taken the light and allowed it to become darkness, fooling themselves. Is there any greater darkness than the person deceived by his or her religion?

2.3a.2 If our eyes are bad, then we will be full of darkness.

If even the light in us in darkness, then how great is that darkness? Our eye can be obscured by our cause, religious or otherwise. You've probably heard the expression "You can make the Bible say anything you want it to." A bad eye, an unclear eye, incorporates the light of God's word into a human perspective. How great is that darkness? Fool ourselves with the word of God.

2.3a.3 Our eyes are cluttered by what we already believe.

None of us views our world from a clean slate. Our view is skewed from the start. "Behold, I was shapen in iniquity, and in sin did my mother conceive me" (Psalms 51:5 KJV). And we have sheep-like guidance systems. "All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned every one to his own way" (Isaiah 53:6 KJV). On top of that there are already things written on our lives from our culture, our personal life experience, our education, our sub-cultural roots, e.g. church. A seventy-year-old black man views the

1950's differently than a seventy-year-old white man. A thirty-nine-year-old Mexican immigrant views Texas border laws differently than a fifty-year-old white auto mechanic in Cleveland. Did I grow up Catholic or Protestant, liberal or fundamentalist? All these things matter when we attempt to open our eyes to truth. We need to know this if we are to have an eye that is clear and good.

When we make a decision, all manner of influences affect that decision. The key is letting the right influences win over the wrong ones. Letting the words of God and the Spirit of God clean our eye and make it good.

2.3b Health: We need to examine how alive we are (Deut 8.3, Matt 4.4).

Am I alive? Paul exhorts us to test ourselves so this is a very legitimate and compelling question. Dare we ask?

Examine yourselves to see whether you are in the faith; test yourselves. Do you not realize that Christ Jesus is in you--unless, of course, you fail the test (2 Corinthians 13:5 NIV)?

I believe that Deut 8.3 and Matt 4.4 give us a legitimate, practical criterion to do just that, to test ourselves. Are we living by the words of God?

Jesus answered by quoting Deuteronomy: "It takes more than bread to stay alive. It takes a steady stream of words from God's mouth" (Matt 4.4 Msg).

If Deuteronomy 8.3 and Matthew 4.4 teach that we are to live by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God, then it is a legitimate question to ask: How alive are we? What was revealed to us through the earlier diagnostics regarding our perception and value of God's words? If I am not even reading God's word, or not reading it regularly, or not understanding what I read, or reading it for the wrong reasons, then how spiritually alive can I be?

2.3c Identity: We need to remember who we are at all times (James 1.19-25).

But be doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving yourselves (James 1.22 NKJV).

For if anyone is a hearer of the word and not a doer, he is like a man observing his natural face in a mirror (23); for he observes himself, goes away, and immediately forgets what kind of man he was (24). But he who looks into the perfect law of liberty and continues in it, and is not a forgetful hearer but a doer of the work, this one will be blessed in what he does (James 1.19-25 NKJV).

The person who is a hearer of the word and not a doer, doesn't remember who he is. The irony of it all - Going around telling people who we are (Christians) but not remembering. Oops!

The above text highlights a very interesting correlation between not living by the words of God [being a hearer only] and our identity [hearer only. . .observing his face in a mirror. . .observes himself, steps away from the mirror, “and immediately forgets what kind of man he was.”] Please observe. The person being described here is not just “not a doer.” We should take note that this text addresses people who are hearers of the word. This person is a “hearer of the word.” The problem is not necessarily [although it can be] that the person does not read the Bible or does not go to Bible study or does not go to church every Sunday and hear preaching. The person may very well enjoy preaching. Look at what God spoke to Ezekiel about those who went to hear him preach.

So they come to you as people do, they sit before you as My people, and they **hear** your words, but they **do not do** them; for with their **mouth** they show much love, but their **hearts** pursue their own gain. Indeed you are to them as a very lovely song of one who has a pleasant voice and can play well on an instrument; for **they hear** your words, but they do not do them (Ezekiel 33:31-32 NKJV).

The criterion for the person who knows who he or she is before God by looking in the mirror of God's word is a combination of hearing and doing. It is neither valid nor sound to view someone as in step with God based on the fact that they love to hear good preaching, or love going to Bible studies. That is not God's standard.

The person who hears only is not blessed of God in what he does.

The person who looks into God's word and continues in it remembers who he is and is blessed in what he does.

But he who looks into the perfect law of liberty and continues in it, and is not a forgetful hearer but a doer of the work, this one will be blessed in what he does (James 1.25 NKJV).

The forgetful hearer is not blessed in what she does.

I am struck by the reality of it all. No wonder the proclaimed message is so confused at times. God's blessing is absent. People speaking in God's name without his blessing. James writes. "My brethren, let not many of you become teachers, knowing that we shall receive a stricter judgment" (James 3:1 NKJV). If we want to be blessed in our teaching and preaching, then we must be living the words.

2.3d Vision: *We need to examine whose vision for life do we live by.*

Our big question here is "To God be the glory or not?" Most of us do not realize when and where the actual decision for truth is made. We look at many of our decisions for truth as independent from the others. We need to think through the process. Our vision for life will determine how we handle truth. Earlier we looked at our eye - How we see. Now we will think through our vision - What we see. Is my picture of God bold enough to allow me to stay focused on him day to day, moment by moment?

God gives us a vision for life where he is the Creator and we are the created (Rom 1.18-25). Our ultimate decision for truth comes when we choose to worship the Creator and give him glory and thanks or choose to worship the created.

All subsequent decisions regarding truth follow that point on the horizon, our vision for life is created in our decision to glorify God, or not.

A fork-in-the-road in Romans 1: To God be the glory, or not.

(I DEVELOP THIS CONCEPT MORE IN APPENDIX A: A FORK IN THE ROAD...)

We will shape truth to fit our vision, the path we have chosen. Our vision for life develops from our true relationship with God. We will suppress what does not fit (Rom 1.18). We make our decision long before most realize it.

The issue of issues!

Here is what often happens. An issue comes up and we study the merits of our decision on an issue-by-issue basis. Mistake. What we overlook is one decision in our hearts, one ongoing directive, that influences every other decision we make. Will I glorify God as God?

God's anger is shown from heaven against all the evil and wrong things people do. By their own evil lives they hide the truth (1:18). God shows his anger because some knowledge of him has been made clear to them. Yes, God has shown himself to them (1:19). There are things about him that people cannot see--his eternal power and all the things that make him God. But since the beginning of the world those things have been easy to understand by what God has made. So people have no excuse for the bad things they do (1:20).

They knew God, but they did not give glory to God or thank him. Their thinking became useless. Their foolish minds were filled with darkness (1:21). They said they were wise, but they became fools (1:22). They traded the glory of God who lives forever for the worship of idols made to look like earthly people, birds, animals, and snakes (1:23).

Because they did these things, God left them and let them go their sinful way, wanting only to do evil. As a result, they became full of sexual sin, using their bodies wrongly with each other (1:24). They traded the truth of God for a lie. They worshiped and served what had been created instead of the God who created those things, who should be praised forever. Amen (Romans 1:18-25 NCV).

“. . .became futile in their thoughts, and their foolish hearts were darkened“ (Romans 1:21 NKJV).

I remember several years ago my brother telling me how car salesmen that he worked with bragged about selling cars to people who did not even know how much they actually paid for the car.

They did not know the ultimate cost because they only cared whether or not they could make the monthly payment.

It seems that sometimes we are like that with the bigger issues of life also. Going along, buying what happiness we can, making our monthly payment, neither knowing nor caring about the ultimate cost. But we need to stop and think. Don't I want to know the ultimate price I will end up paying for my current lifestyle? Am I paying glory to God looking to ultimate happiness? Or am I making monthly payments on a religion that is just enough to let me get by?

Look at the price Israel paid for not giving God the glory and living by his words? The irony of this text should astonish us. They abandoned God's words and the promise of true life for their own words that came with their "monthly-payment" religion. And God finally said "Okay, have it your way."

But you will never again say, "The message of the LORD," because the only message you speak is your own words. You have changed the words of our God, the living God, the LORD All-Powerful (Jeremiah 23:36 NCV).

After years of changing the words of God instead of living them, they were left with their own message, their own words, not God's. Is this what we are doing? Are we, as they did, changing the words for something that better fits our lives?

God's words are life and that is what I want more people to see - the life on the very pages of their Bibles.

And that brings us to Chapter Three.



Understanding the Offer!

Chapter Three: Growing in our understanding of the words of God



Chapter Three

Growing in our understanding of the words of God

To live as God defines living, we need to grow in our understanding of the words of God.

We need to continuously develop our ability to understand the words of God.

3.1 We need to continuously develop our learning skills and resources.

Never stop being students. We need to labor for the food that gives eternal life. Is there anything that deserves our attention more than the words of God?

Do not labor for the food which perishes, but for the food which endures to everlasting life, which the Son of Man will give you, because God the Father has set His seal on Him (John 6.27 NKJV).

3.1a We should evaluate our study and learning skills and develop them as needed.

Evaluate our learning skills. Find where we are, swallow our pride, and begin developing our study skills.

3.1a.1 Reading Skills

For instance, some people need to learn how to read, or read better or develop their comprehension skills. If I do not understand the meaning of the words, or read the wrong words, or do not understand the relationship of words to each other (grammar), then I am not going to be able to understand what God is saying.

A common mistake that really hampers our ability to find out what the text says - Read part of word and guess the rest; read part of sentence and fill in the blanks.

3.1a.2 Listening Skills

- Disciplining myself to stay attentive and to concentrate on what is actually being said.
- Disciplining myself to listen to learn.

The law of love and the discipline of listening. We can develop our ability to listen and still miss the main point if we are not listening to learn, to be renewed and transformed. Our motivation is crucial in the listening process. We can train ourselves to listen to gather facts to prove a point or bolster an argument. Or we can listen to learn. Actually learn. And let God make the points of emphasis. For the student a very practical application of the Great Command - Love God, love neighbor as yourself - is to make myself hear what the other person is in fact saying. If I am reading someone's book with only the intent to pick out words to oppose them, then I am not honoring the Great command, and I am undermining the learning process in my own life.

3.1a.3 Study Skills

Learn the value of knowing when to browse the material for an overview or being able to hone in on even one word as the situation may call for. How to “zoom in and zoom out”: big picture and little picture, detail and broad strokes.

Learn how to prioritize. How much time do I spend on what? How to take notes and organize notes. A “scribble” is all you need if you can read it enough to make sense of it later. Penmanship is not the issue in note-taking. You need to get the content down.

3.1b *We need to learn what resources are available to us and how to use them.*

Build our reservoir of resources. By shopping around on mailing lists and online you can find books and other study materials at discount prices. Grow in our expertise in using them. Don't just have a collection of tools on the wall; use them.

Here is a partial list of resources we want to be familiar with: English dictionaries, study Bibles, modern English translations, Bible dictionaries, theological dictionaries, Bible encyclopedias, word study books, Bible commentaries, concordances, Bible software, online resources for all the above.

A dictionary of the English language is one of the most valuable Bible study tools we can own and use. Some people become very interested in the Greek and Hebrew words and their meanings before they understand the significance and meaning of the word in their own language. Highly educated, dedicated scholars in the Greek and Hebrew languages carefully chose the words for our English translations so it seems that we would do very well to pay attention to their efforts.

3.1c *We need to remember and learn more about our most important resource - the Holy Spirit of God.*

God the Holy Spirit lives in every person who believes in Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of sins and has received eternal life through his shed blood. We must have an active, biblical relationship with the Spirit. Our relationship with the Spirit must be guided by the written words of God.

The Holy Spirit is not an escape from the process of a disciplined study of God's word. And, likewise, disciplined study is no excuse for not walking by the Spirit.

The teaching of the Holy Spirit is not to be separated from the clear, intended meaning of Scripture. If you are going to proclaim "the Holy Spirit told me. . .," then you should be able to show one and all where the Holy Spirit had the prophets write that truth down in his book.

The holy men of God wrote the words down "as they were moved by the Spirit," so the Spirit is not going to later change his teaching and contradict himself.

And so we have the prophetic word [the word of the prophets] confirmed, which you do well to heed as a light that shines in a dark place, until the day dawns and the morning star rises in your hearts (2 Peter 1:19); knowing this first, that no prophecy of Scripture is of any private interpretation (2 Peter 1:20), for prophecy never came by the will of man, but holy men of God spoke as they were moved by the Holy Spirit (2 Peter 1:21 NKJV).

If we submit to the Holy Spirit of God, he will teach us God's intended meaning of Scripture. When a person seeks hidden meanings and

mystical interpretations, it seems to reflect his shallow relationship with God through his words. I do not say this to be harsh or critical, but the person who really pursues the truth of Scripture has no time for idle talk and wives tales.

It is unfortunate that many invoke the name of the Holy Spirit to support their private interpretation instead of allowing God the Holy Spirit to teach them his intended meaning.

3.2 *We need to learn and practice an approach to Scripture that best equips us to answer "What does it say? What do the words of God on the pages of our Bibles say?"*

3.2a *We need an approach to Scripture that best enables us to rightly handle Scripture.*

Be diligent to present yourself approved to God, a worker who does not need to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth (2 Timothy 2:15 NKJV).

Let's look at what this passage says.

3.2a.1 We are to be diligent in presenting ourselves before God. Diligent to present ourselves approved before God; diligent to present ourselves as workers who do not need to be ashamed; this tells me that this is possible and expected because God doesn't give us impossible guidelines or unnecessary guidelines for living; we are to be diligent in how correctly we handle God's word of truth.

3.2a.2 We are to be diligent in presenting ourselves approved before God. If we are to be diligent to present ourselves approved before God, then it follows that we are to be diligent to live our lives with a consciousness of God, so much so that we are in the habit of presenting ourselves before him, and here Paul instructs Timothy to present himself approved. How might a person go about doing this? The verse continues.

3.2a.3 There is no need for shame.

A person is approved as a worker who does not need to be ashamed. So often our attitudes and methods that we teach and promote are built on shame and guilt. Our diligence will include both success and failure so in Christ we cannot let failure translate to shame and guilt and stop our journey. We offer sacrifices of praise of what we can do in our God’s name. We offer prayers of confession for the times we “miss the mark.” The point is we are to be diligent in living our lives before God. Even if that means diligently coming to be cleansed of our unrighteousness.

But if we walk in the light as He is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus Christ His Son cleanses us from all sin. If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness. If we say that we have not sinned, we make Him a liar, and His word is not in us (1 John 1:7-10 NKJV).

When you are doing what you can and living your life honestly before God, then you do not need to be ashamed. Authentic living in the presence of God does not bring judgment but freedom.

A spirit of fear - fear of failure and feeling shame - quenches our desire to step out in faith.

No Shame!

3.2a.4 We are approved as someone who is correctly handling the word of truth.

“The unexamined life is not worth living.” How about a spin off Socrates’ famous quote? “The unexamined approach to God’s word is unacceptable.” We must not dishonor God and his word with our sloppy, indifferent, selfish approach to his word of truth.

We are to be diligent to know that when it comes to how we handle God’s word that what we are doing is good enough to be presented before God. Lack of diligence in pursuing

“The unexamined life is not worth living.”
How about. . .
“The unexamined approach to God’s word is unacceptable.”

God's words of truth is sin we need to confess and be cleansed of.

Do your best to present yourself to God as one approved, a workman who does not need to be ashamed and who correctly handles the word of truth (2 Timothy 2:15 NIV).

Am I doing my best in this area? My life before God. . .he examines how I handle his word. Approval or shame? Find out now or find out at Christ's judgment seat.

3.2b We need an approach to Scripture that best fits the purpose of Scripture.

Every Scripture is God-breathed (given by His inspiration) and profitable for instruction, for reproof {and} conviction of sin, for correction of error {and} discipline in obedience, [and] for training in righteousness (in holy living, in conformity to God's will in thought, purpose, and action), so that the man of God may be complete {and} proficient, well fitted {and} thoroughly equipped for every good work (2 Tim 3.16-17 AMP).

3.2b.1 Purpose, profit, prepare. . .

The purpose of Scripture is to transform our lives that we may be equipped to serve God. All the words are God-breathed, inspired by God. The profit of the words is change in our lives. The change in our lives is to prepare us to work for God.

We may stop a moment and ask ourselves - Why do I study the Bible? What do I have in mind when I approach God's word?

3.2b.2 The purpose of preaching and teaching God's word is to change lives.

In the presence of God and of Christ Jesus, who will judge the living and the dead, and in view of his appearing and his kingdom, I give you this charge: Preach the Word; be prepared in season and out of season; correct, rebuke and encourage--with great patience and careful instruction (2 Timothy 4:1-2 NIV).

3.2b.3 The ultimate “big picture”

The ultimate
in “the big
picture.”

Have we
grabbed some
perspective
yet?

Interestingly we find ourselves in the presence of God once again as the subject becomes how we handle his word. The ultimate in “the big picture”: In the presence of God and of Christ Jesus and in view of Christ’s appearing and his kingdom. Have we grabbed some perspective yet?

Paul charges Timothy in the presence of God. Timothy is to be prepared to preach in season and out of season. When God’s word is preached and listened to it is to be done fully aware of the presence of God.

Timothy is to preach to change lives: correct, rebuke and exhort.

If the profit in God’s word is in changing our lives, then the profit in our preaching and teaching will be to change lives. So where will be the profit as we approach God’s word to study it? Change, transformation, metamorphosis in our lives.

Does my approach to studying God’s word confess the transforming nature of his word of truth?

3.2b.4 The nature and purpose of God’s word is to prepare me to meet God now.

God’s word is alive and working and is sharper than a double-edged sword. It cuts all the way into us, where the soul and the spirit are joined, to the center of our joints and bones. And it judges the thoughts and feelings in our hearts. Nothing in all the world can be hidden from God. Everything is clear and lies open before him, and to him we must explain the way we have lived (Hebrews 4:12-13 NCV).

For the Word that God speaks is alive and full of power [making it active, operative, energizing, and effective]; it is sharper than any two-edged sword, penetrating to the dividing line of the breath of life (soul) and [the immortal] spirit, and of joints and marrow [of the deepest parts of our nature], exposing and sifting and

analyzing and judging the very thoughts and purposes of the heart (Hebrews 4.12 AMP).

Full-Disclosure:

my life - an open book
before God

“me-to-me” networking
with God

Satan’s dark threats lose
their power because the
holy book of God has made
my life an open book in his
presence.

So each of us should ask -- Do I approach God’s word as something alive? Am I looking for God to cut inside me with his word to help me understand what is going on inside?

God’s word is alive and can penetrate my spiritual insides. God’s word can help me sift through and judge the thoughts and purposes of my heart. The Holy Spirit can use these penetrating words to expose me to me before God.

As verse thirteen explains, nothing can be hidden from God and one day we will all have to explain our lives to him. The great blessing is that the word of God can empower me to face my life and bring it before God now. If I will allow the words of God to cut into my life now and if I open myself up to the light of God, Satan will no longer be able to make his dark threats because I am now in the process of full-disclosure. I know my High Priest understands my weaknesses, and I hold on to my confession of faith and move with boldness to the throne of grace to find mercy and grace to help in my time of need. So much in these verses. Amen and amen!

3.2b.5 I cannot hide my life from God.

The absolutely great news is that I do not have to hide any part of my life from God. The living, powerful word of God opens me up, penetrates the deepest, darkest places of my life and prepares me for mercy and grace. No one needs to hide from God. Ever!

Do I have a witness?

3.2c *An inductive approach to Scripture is simple, effective and biblically sound.*

3.2c.1 Building biblical premises for our faith.

An inductive approach to Scripture will build biblical premises for our faith. People speak of cutting out the middle-man in business to increase profit, and in a sense that is what an inductive approach will do. We are put in

more direct contact with what God is actually saying as opposed to theology and standards that are given to us as already completed units. Instead of having the house brought in, we are building it ourselves. Please understand there is an advantage to systemizing theology, giving structure to what we believe. What I am presenting is that the inductive, “see-for-yourself” method of Bible study should be primary. Using the house illustration, we could look at it this way. A skilled carpenter knows better what he is getting if he would possibly seek to buy a house built by someone else. Having built a house himself he knows what to look for. Know how to build. Know where to build - on the Rock, Jesus Christ.

An inductive approach is very helpful in examining the premises and foundations of our belief system.

- 3.2c.2 An inductive approach comprises observation, interpretation and application.

Observation - What does it say?
Hear the voice of God.

Interpretation - What does it mean?
Understand the voice of God.

Application - How do I live this truth?
Obey the voice of God.

- 3.2c.3 Observation: What does it say? What do the words on the page of my Bible say?
Observation paves the way for interpretation; interpretation paves the way for application; and application will open our hearts and minds to further observations as the cycle continues.

If our observations are wrong, then everything is wrong. That is why in part two of our study we will pay a great deal of attention to developing the attitude and skill to find out: What does it say? What do the actual words on the pages of the Word of God tell us? We must get that right! That will be our primary focus.

Hear the voice of God.

In studying the Bible inductively we focus much attention on what the words are actually telling us apart from any preconceived ideas we bring with us. Don't jump to conclusions. Integrity calls us to make every effort to know what the words of God say before we attempt to determine what they mean.

3.2c.4 Interpretation: What does it mean?

Understand the voice of God.

Beginning and ending with interpretation is very possibly the most common mistake made in Bible study. We start talking about what it means before we really know what it says.

3.2c.5 Application: How do I live by that?

Obey the voice of God.

Here we ask ourselves how do we live on these words? What does this mean to me, not as far as what the passage means (interpretation), but now that I understand the teaching, how do I honor God in this?

Each part of this process is vital to a biblical approach to the words of God. Staying close to the words of Scripture also helps us deal with who we are. Fallen creatures living in a fallen world. We struggle. The next section will help us better understand this formidable obstacle we face in ourselves.

3.3 *We need to deal with the effect our fallen nature has had on our reasoning abilities.*

“It does not do to leave a live dragon out of your calculations, if you live near him” (J.R.R. Tolkien, *The Hobbit*).

If you have not yet faced the fact, then it is probably time to do so. As the old cartoon (Someone told me it was Pogo.) stated: “We have met the enemy, and they is us.” We are fallen people living in a fallen world. If we do not remember this and plan accordingly, then our plans will fail. Our “sheep-like” guidance systems are inherently flawed - We tend to stray from the path.

3.3a *Our default settings: By default we will use our reasoning abilities to edit incoming information to agree with what we already believe.*

This is how our the minds work. Our rationalizations know no limit as we look for evidence to support foregone conclusions. Apart from the direction of God we will contrive elaborate schemes to keep believing what we already believe and want to believe (universal sheep-like tendency). So how do we defeat this faulty editing system? Enter center stage, God’s word, as it is profitable in transforming our thinking. Through the words of God we can approach and receive truth outside the boundaries of our current knowledge in a way that is profitable to our spiritual growth. “All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness” (2 Timothy 3:16 NKJV).

For an understanding of what I mean by default settings read the explanation I give in Appendix B - A valid argument may not be a sound argument.

3.3b *There are no exceptions: Being fallen creatures we will find this true in the religious realm, the scientific realm, everywhere, everyone, you, me, no exceptions.*

This is important to note because often as Christians we either do not realize or refuse to believe this to be true. We attempt to maintain the notion that since “I am a Christian” or “I go to church every Sunday” that I cannot fall for this. We have our well-used “frog-in-the-kettle” analogy and the “fish-in-the-water” analogy, and we would never for a moment think it possible that we may be the ones in the kettle or the ones not realizing we are the “fish-in-the-water” unaware that we are wet.

But could we be right there in the kettle with everyone else?

If you think you can judge others, you are wrong. When you judge them, you are really judging yourself guilty, because you do the same things they do (Romans 2:1 NCV).

God brought this truth to my attention several years ago, and I am still learning it. Sometimes I have to chuckle because I will do something and here will come these words - “. . .you do the same thing.” When we take the position of judges, then this is what God says happens. When our judgmental approach to Scripture focuses on the other person, then we miss our blind spots. We need to take the mask off; deal with our lack of sight, then we can help someone else.

Hypocrite! First remove the plank from your own eye, and then you will see clearly to remove the speck from your brother's eye (Matthew 7:5 NKJV).

3.3c We absolutely (without question, to the fullest extent) must understand our “sheep-like” tendencies.

All we like sheep have gone astray; We have turned, every one, to his own way; And the LORD has laid on Him the iniquity of us all (Isaiah 53:6 NKJV).

3.3c.1 Our sheep-like tendencies are universal and all-inclusive: Every person turns to his own way by default.

3.3c.2 Our sheep-like tendencies result in separation (death): Each person's way seems right to her. There is a way that seems right to a man, but in the end it leads to death (Proverbs 14:12 NIV).

As Christians, we may assume that this verse has no application to us. We have turned from our way to the Way (Jesus Christ), and he will lead us to life. But the verse means so much more. It can help us look at the issue of salvation, but it can also help us understand the negative impact of decisions based on nothing more than what seemed right at the time upon our life in Christ. And, if a person's habit is to follow what seems right then the verse may indeed indicate that the person does not know God after all.

- 3.3c.3 Without a shepherd we are at the mercy of our own choices: Everyone needs a Shepherd.

How does Christ shepherd us? What goes on in that process? How does it work? We allow Christ to shepherd us as we follow him. It helps us when we clearly examine our choices. One, follow Christ. Or, two, follow ourselves. Here on earth this may seem doable, but when our journey stretches into eternity then we will become desperate for someone to guide and lead us.

An important text - (1 Peter 2:21-25 NKJV).

For a different perspective that helps us to understand our sheep-like tendencies please refer to **Appendix D: “Peace of mind” at the expense of truth.**

- 3.3d A biblical approach to Scripture that promotes and cultivates a life of faith is the way we overcome the effect our fallen nature has had on our reasoning abilities.

- 3.3d.1 We are to live by faith.

For we walk by faith, not by sight (2 Cor 5.7).

Living by the words of God, we learn to trust in the words God has given us. To live by faith means to step into the unknown as God directs. Uncertainty is part of life. By faith we live in the certainty of God and his words, but that certainty does not mean we see the road ahead, it merely means that we know God wants us on that road. We live the words and trust God for the rest.

- 3.3d.2 We are not to live by sight.

Opposites - faith and sight. If we live by sight we will fear the unknown and immobilize ourselves. Sight demands knowing what will happen if I do this or that. Faith trusts the words of God and the character of God. Faith breeds courage; sight breeds fear.

If we do not maintain a faith approach to Scripture, then we will fall prey to our natural, fallen reasoning abilities. We may deceive ourselves into thinking the approach is spiritual,

and in fact can be quite religious, but the choices are faith or sight.

- 3.3d.3 We are to avoid a fearful, sight-based approach to the words of God; a reactive/protective approach..
I will give an example from my pastoral experience that demonstrates a fearful approach to Scripture as a result of walking by sight rather than faith.

I remember preaching from 1 Peter 4.8 and having an experienced “Bible student” very upset over my “loose” teaching that “love will cover a multitude of sins.”

And above all things have fervent love for one another, for “love will cover a multitude of sins” (1 Peter 4:8 NKJV).

What was the problem? What did I say that stirred the emotions so? This is a very clear teaching and that person was very sincere and committed in his walk with God and belief in the Bible. Why was he so vehement in his disapproval? Why was he so angry with me?

Here is why? Cognitive dissonance. He perceived something coming in on the radar that disrupted his cognitive-consistency, and he took a reactive/protective stance. It’s like shooting a missile down before it can enter your airspace. The person who struggles with this (which includes all of us to some degree) is so protective of his belief system (which by the way taken to the extreme the person believes his belief system to be in perfect harmony to Scripture) and so wary of what a teaching potentially leads to (slippery-slope syndrome) that he sometimes/often struggles to see and accept what a passage says and to trust God with the resulting truth and direction.

This reactive/protective stance taints our ability to reason, skews the view, obscures the lense we see life and Scripture through. More simply put - We jump to conclusions, conclusions that, despite our declarations to the contrary, are not biblical. This person moves very quickly to interpretation and application before really observing the

text and what it actually says. It is not an exaggeration to say that this person often begins with interpretation and application at the expense of observation. Unfortunately this does not stop him or her from still declaring this to be God's truth as he or she attaches several biblical references to substantiate the claim.

In Part Two - Lesson 7 we will look at the difference between a message being biblically “wrapped” and biblically true. Briefly, a biblically wrapped message sounds true, usually preached to a group of like-minded people who will accept its veracity because they agree with it and several Bible passages were referred to and/or read. This type message seems to be especially powerful if many references are turned to in support of the main idea. The problem is that referencing a large number of passages usually only enables a surface examination but gives the appearance of really probing the depths of Scripture. Like a rock skipping fifteen times over the surface of a pond, we cover a lot of area but have no depth.

This is not to say that if several verses of Scripture are used that the message is not biblical, but as I listen to preachers this is generally the norm. If several verses are used, usually a good examination of what the verses actually say does not occur.

Contrasted with a biblically “wrapped” message is a biblically true message. The preacher or teacher stays with the announced text and actually probes what the words of that text say. Staying with the text and allowing God to speak his intended communication through that text allows him to penetrate our layers of defenses and speak to our hearts, which is the purpose of Scripture, to deal with our hearts.

Way back to my example. Remember we were in 1 Pet 4.8 “love will cover a multitude of sins”? In this text two observations stood out as I studied it. One, fervent love is given priority above everything else. And, two, love will cover a multitude of sins.

And above all things have fervent love for one another, for "love will cover a multitude of sins" (1 Peter 4:8 NKJV).

How could someone disagree with such plain teaching?

In this situation, the man feared that people would misuse this passage to justify their sinful lifestyle. So here it seems he jumped promptly to application in an attempt to shut down a "dangerous" teaching (in his eyes), even though this teaching was clearly the word of God.

Lack of Faith / Presence of Fear

Underlying this attitude would seem to be a lack of faith both in God and in his word. After all, we have to remember who wrote the Book. Since God included those words, then I taught them. We teach the word of God and trust God with the outcome. We have too many truths of Scripture that have been neutered in the process of becoming Sunday School stories. Look at the lives of David, Abraham. . .How did Esther actually become queen? Our fear of where a truth might lead us stifles the word of God. So our fear and lack of faith causes us to change the message.

The attitude is. . .

IF we teach this,
THEN they may do that,
THEREFORE we will not teach that truth.

The result is that we effectively block out portions of Scripture that those in leadership fear "the people" cannot handle. Even though God included those words in his holy book for "the people." And then, we reward this attitude and give it "spiritual maturity" status under the category of guarding the flock. Help me, Wanda!

Usually people with this mind-set not only do not teach these passages but they attack anyone who does in the interest of defending the faith. Go figure.

Another strain of this protective attitude that we should address is the same but different; same principles at work

with different circumstances and somewhat different motives; still however protecting turf but now on the more personal level.

Here is a variant strain.

IF	I believe that
THEN	I will have to change this [fill in the blank] in my life,
THEREFORE	<input type="checkbox"/> I will ignore this teaching altogether.
	<input type="checkbox"/> I will discredit the teaching.
	<input type="checkbox"/> I will discredit the teacher.
	<input type="checkbox"/> I will give it an interpretation that I can live with.

We should by now have a somewhat accurate picture of the battle for our hearts and minds both from within and without. And we should by now have somewhat of an idea how to fight that battle. And we surely must realize that there can be no letdown in our pursuit of truth.

So we follow through. Onward to the playing field. The laboratory. Life. Here is where we see what a splendid “product” God has given us. Here is where the words of God shine. When we live them. Oh, yeah!

**If we want to really live,
then we are going to listen to our God.**

Understanding the Offer!

Chapter Four: *Living by the words of God*



Chapter Four

Living by the words of God

To live as God defines living, we need to live by the words of God.

We have come to the hardest part and the easiest part at the same time. We have faced this truth and agreed with God. We have confirmed the truth in our minds and in our lives. We have developed our ability to understand and follow the words of God. And now we need to live by them. We need to do them.

Always good.

Remember that - always good. Living by the words of God is always a good thing, a very good thing. No matter where those words take us, living by the words of God is always the right thing to do. No matter what we lose, living by the words of God is always the right thing to do. As we live the words, the Holy Spirit causes the words to grow in strength in our lives.

The proverbial big picture.

It helps me invaluablely in my decisions for truth to understand better exactly what I am doing when I make my choice to obey God. What I want to do in this section is to help us understand what is actually going on in the universe when I obey God and live by his words. Too often we only look at what we think happens in our private world, in our space. This thinking leaves out eternity, leaves out God and ultimately leads to poor choices. It helps us tremendously to look at our lives on the Big Screen of eternity.

Let me share with you some very biblical propositions as to what happens when you and I obey God. Perspective, I believe, is absolutely essential to run the race set before us because living by the words of God is devoted obedience to our King but also much more.

Here is what I mean.

4.1 Living by the words of God, we love God.

“Teacher, which is the great commandment in the law?” Jesus said to him, “You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind” (Matthew 22:36-37 NKJV).

- 4.1a Living by the words of God, we learn to relate to God as a Person. This is way past obeying a command or upholding a standard. Jesus said, "If you love Me, keep My commandments" (John 14:15 NKJV). Personal and up close. I honor God; I show my love for God through my obedience. My relationship is with God, not rules and regulations, not theology. We speak much of having a personal relationship with Jesus Christ. I say let it happen. Even more, do everything we can to develop it.

And this is eternal life, that they may know You, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom You have sent (John 17:3 NKJV).

You search the Scriptures, for in them you think you have eternal life; and these are they which testify of Me. But you are not willing to come to Me that you may have life (John 5:39-40 NKJV).

Even though they searched the Scriptures - Bible study and more Bible study -- the religious leaders of the day could not recognize God the Person as he stood right in front of them. The great command is to "love the LORD your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind" (Matthew 22:37 NKJV). Personal. Love God. When I live by the words of God, I honor him, I show my love for him.

- 4.1b This benefits us when we both fail and succeed. When I succeed - obey the truth, then I honor a Person that I love. This brings great pleasure and satisfaction. Much more than just following a standard. Adam and Eve dishonored God by not trusting his words and doubting his goodness. They fractured the relationship between God and man. Now we have the opportunity to do it differently. Not by pride or human strength or ambition. Not religious zeal. Simply the created honoring the Creator in loving obedience. And we bring healing into the relationship between God and man. Oh, yes, I like that, I like that a lot. ☺

And when we fail? We approach a Person, someone we love, someone who loves us, not a rule or law or a standard. We confess our sin before the Person Jesus, the Person the Holy Spirit, the Person the Father.

- 4.1c We welcome God's walk in the garden of our lives no matter how our day has gone.

We are thankful for the opportunity to share our day with our best friend, triumph and defeat, doubts, fear, hope, excitement. Let God visit your life as a Person; how impressive, the King of the universe would submit himself to being my friend.

Wow!

4.2 Living by the words of God, we honor our calling and uphold our legacy.

Jesus Christ honored words that were hundreds of years old with his obedience. He recognized the eternal value of the words given by his Father through the prophets; he realized that six centuries of waiting did not diminish the life and quality of eternal words; he lived by the words as he walked this earth. From the dusty pages of the ancient writers Jesus read the words of his Father and lived by them.

So He came to Nazareth, where He had been brought up. And as His custom was, He went into the synagogue on the Sabbath day, and stood up to read (4:16). And He was handed the book of the prophet Isaiah. And when He had opened the book, He found the place where it was written(4:17): "The Spirit of the LORD is upon Me, Because He has anointed Me To preach the gospel to the poor; He has sent Me to heal the brokenhearted, To proclaim liberty to the captives And recovery of sight to the blind, To set at liberty those who are oppressed (4:18); To proclaim the acceptable year of the LORD" (4:19).

Then He closed the book, and gave it back to the attendant and sat down. And the eyes of all who were in the synagogue were fixed on Him (4:20). And He began to say to them, "Today this Scripture is fulfilled in your hearing" (Luke 4:16-21 NKJV).

He began to say to them, "While you heard these words just now, they were coming true" (Luke 4:21 NCV)!

Can we take a minute and absorb what has happened? Six-hundred years these words were waiting to happen. Jesus stands up, reads the text, and says "This is now happening, today."

Living by the words of God is more than obedience; we have a holy calling to follow the legacy of our spiritual ancestors and particularly the example of Jesus Christ.

A holy calling, the thread of trust, living by the words:

- *Scripture had to be fulfilled: After this, Jesus, knowing that all things were now accomplished, that the Scripture might be fulfilled, said, "I thirst!" (John 19:28 NKJV)
- *Jesus trusted and obeyed: He trusts in God, so let God save him now, if God really wants him. He himself said, 'I am the Son of God.'" (Matthew 27:43 NCV)
- *To this we are called: For to this you were called, because Christ also suffered for us, leaving us an example, that you should follow His steps (2:21): "Who committed no sin, Nor was deceit found in His mouth" (2:22); who, when He was reviled, did not revile in return; when He suffered, He did not threaten, but committed Himself to Him who judges righteously (1 Peter 2:21-23 NKJV).

It doesn't get any better than this, does it? The opportunity to honor our Savior and God by living the words he has given us for life. Isn't it amazing? How old are the words? Thousands of years, and, yet, when we follow the heavenly trail in obedience, they come alive in our lives today.

Oh, yeah!

4.3 Living by the words of God, we allow God to establish his priorities in our lives.

One general principle to follow, maybe two: Move from the simple to the complex. Let God establish the priorities. A biblical thought? Take a look.

One simple rule and another one just like it.

But when the Pharisees had heard that he had put the Sadducees to silence, they were gathered together. Then one of them, which was a lawyer, asked him a question, tempting him, and saying, Master, which is the great commandment in the law?

Jesus said unto him, Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind. This is the first and great commandment. And the second is like unto it, Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself. On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets (Matthew 22.34-40 KJV).

Have we thought enough about what this passage means when it comes to our approach to Scripture?

4.3a God's big statement from Scripture.

Love the Lord your God with all your heart and soul and mind. Here is the encouragement for me and the encouragement for you. I can do that. You can do that. One simple rule with another one just like it. And if I do those two, I am "getting it" as far as understanding what God wants. There are many more teachings in Scripture that are vastly more complex thus harder to understand. But there are no teachings more important than this simple rule: Love God, love neighbor as yourself.

Back to what should be very encouraging for you and me. When God himself broke it down to the basics, when Jesus prioritized, he came up with this one simple rule and the other one just like it as our top priority to obey and to understand all of Scripture.

4.3b God's big statement from Scripture and our method of approach.

I really hope you see what this means as we approach our Bibles. We proceed from the simple things that we can understand to the more complex things. I can understand giving a cup of water, a hot meal and some clothing for a hungry, weary traveler on this earth. I can understand that I am a sinner in need of a Savior. I can understand that gossip is always wrong. I can understand my need to forgive.

It doesn't matter what we have "right" religiously if we don't get the main teaching right. And if we do not keep the same priority that Jesus Christ put before us, our interpretation and teaching and preaching of the Bible will be skewed. Look at his answer to the

religious experts who were more interested in their answers than those of Christ.

Jesus answered and said to them, "Are you not therefore mistaken, because you do not know the Scriptures nor the power of God" (Mark 12:24 NKJV) ?

How horrible it will be for you, scribes and Pharisees! You hypocrites! You give God one-tenth of your mint, dill, and cumin. But you have neglected justice, mercy, and faithfulness. These are the most important things in Moses' Teachings. You should have done these things without neglecting the others (Matthew 23:23 God's Word).

4.3c A need in the Church today.

I believe that we have a need as a Church for this simple-to-complex approach to Scripture, and I hope to teach this in the study. Children want to do the complex before they master the simple; they want to begin with what seems more exciting and interesting before they learn the things that will make them exciting and interesting. Let's not be children.

Unfortunately, I believe that is where the Church is today. We are like children trying to do things that we are not yet ready to do - teaching before we have learned - the pursuit of signs and wonders at the expense of simple, devoted obedience to Christ. So much talk about miracles and we ignore the wonder of daily walking with God.

4.3d Following the "one simple rule" principle is not anti-intellectual.

I am not against an intellectual pursuit of the truth of God and trying to understand the more complex issues of Scripture. I am in fact saying if we are not following the one simple rule, then our intellectual efforts will fail. My theology and culture and selfishness and self-centeredness and fallenness and whatever else will block my view of the words. Living by the words of the great command will establish and maintain our priorities.

4.4 Living by the words of God, we come to the light.

Look at the choice we make when we choose to "do" the truth. The one who does the truth is the one who comes to the light to have his life exposed before God.

But he who does the truth comes to the light, that his deeds may be clearly seen, that they have been done in God (John 3:21 NKJV).

Please note. Not the one who goes to Bible study comes to the light. Not the one who goes to church every Sunday and has for the last thirty years comes to the light. Not the one who teaches the S.S. class or preaches the sermon. But the one who lives the words comes to the light.

But everyone who lives by the truth will come to the light, because they want others to know that God is really the one doing what they do (John 3.21 CEV).

We speak of living our lives to the glory of God. Well, here is how we do that. Do the truth, come to the light, the good that is done is seen to be “done in God.” We don’t get the credit. Isn’t this what we want?

And conversely if we do not “do” the truth, what happens? Condemnation - light came but darkness was loved instead - because their deeds were evil - did not want them exposed. Don’t miss the distinction. The person who lives by the truth wants her life exposed to the light. Can we not say then that if we are not living by the words - doing them - that we prefer darkness?

And this is the condemnation, that the light has come into the world, and men loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil (John 3:19). For everyone practicing evil hates the light and does not come to the light, lest his deeds should be exposed (John 3:20 NKJV).

4.5 Living by the words of *God*, we live by the words of *God* now.

Therefore, as the Holy Spirit says: "Today, if you will hear His voice, Do not harden your hearts as in the rebellion, In the day of trial in the wilderness, Where your fathers tested Me, tried Me, And saw My works forty years (Hebrews 3:7-9 NKJV).

Now is the time to follow God. We never want to leave God’s mercy and grace and sovereignty out of the picture, but I do think these verses and others similar to them speak of a window of opportunity. Today if we hear his voice we need to respond. It is interesting to see that the context here in Hebrews is the same as in Deuteronomy 8.3. Forty years in the wilderness, on the verge of God’s promise, decision time.

Discipline ourselves;
 put it into our minds:
 The Giver of life is
 giving us instruction
 for living.

How we struggle with this. Our minds run ahead to all the things that will happen or might possibly happen if we take this step of faith. But we need to focus our minds on who is speaking- God himself. Discipline ourselves; put it into our minds: **The Giver of life is giving us instruction for living. I hear his voice; now is the time to obey my God.**

4.6 Living by the words of God, we take on the yoke of Jesus Christ.

And find rest for our souls.

Come to Me, all you who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take My yoke upon you and learn from Me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For My yoke is easy and My burden is light (Matthew 11:28-30 NKJV).

We tend to lay burdens on each other as the Pharisees did. "For they bind heavy burdens, hard to bear, and lay them on men's shoulders; but they themselves will not move them with one of their fingers" (Matthew 23:4 NKJV). But Jesus is different. I will not make even one little effort to pretend that I have this all figured out. But what I do have I will pass on. If you have trusted in Jesus, then you have "hitched your wagon" to the right Star. Now we need to take up his yoke and follow him. He gives rest along the way.

I, Jesus, have sent My angel to testify to you these things in the churches. I am the Root and the Offspring of David, the Bright and Morning Star (Revelation 22:16 NKJV).

It helps us so much to let God bring our lives up on the big screen of eternity. For all the things that I mess up, I know that I have made the right decision in what counts most: My relationship with Jesus Christ. Living by the words I learn from Jesus. I will find rest for my soul. The yoke symbolizes servitude. How do I learn from Jesus? I serve him. I bow, I listen, I wait, and I follow.

4.7 Living by the words of God, we lose our lives along the way.

No two ways about it. This is the commitment that Jesus Christ calls us to if we are to follow him.

He who finds his life will lose it, and he who loses his life for My sake will find it (Matthew 10:39 NKJV).

And how hard is this? To be able to give up anything God asks at a moment's notice. Ouch!

But this is what we are called to in following Jesus Christ. To find my life I must lose my life.

So we trust. We give up life and find life in God. And he calls us to follow him from this world to the next.

All these great people died in faith.

They did not get the things that God promised his people, but they saw them coming far in the future and were glad.

They said they were like visitors and strangers on earth.

When people say such things, they show they are looking for a country that will be their own.

If they had been thinking about the country they had left, they could have gone back.

But they were waiting for a better country--a heavenly country.

So God is not ashamed to be called their God, because he has prepared a city for them (Hebrews 11:13-16 NCV).

That heavenly country becomes more and more real to us as we live the words of God. Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven, Father.

Conclusion: Do I believe God for life?

We finish this section where we began.

With a question.

For me.

For you.

Am I living by the Words of God?

Do I believe God for life?

Hopefully at this point you feel as if you have been introduced to an accurate, biblical understanding of your relationship to the words of God. Part two of our study will move us toward the more practical aspects of a biblical model for an honest pursuit of the words of God.

Appendix A

A Fork in the Road: To God be the glory, or not!

1)	The Westminster Shorter Catechism A.D. 1647	ii
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The fool has said in his heart, "There is no God" (Psalms 14:1 NKJV).

For although they knew God, they neither glorified him as God nor gave thanks to him, but their thinking became futile and their foolish hearts were darkened. Although they claimed to be wise, they became fools (Romans 1:21-22 NIV).

1) The Westminster Shorter Catechism A.D. 1647

Question 1: What is the chief end of man?

Answer: Man's chief end is to glorify God, and to enjoy him forever.

Question 2: What rule hath God given to direct us how we may glorify and enjoy him?

Answer: The Word of God, which is contained in the Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments, is the only rule to direct us how we may glorify and enjoy him.

2) The Fork in the Road: Am I glorifying God as God, or not?

Negatively

Over the one-half century of my life I cannot think of one Christian who would not agree that each of us should glorify God as God and give him thanks. But I could list one after the other of those who profess to know Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord who seem to not have a clue what it actually means to glorify God as God and what this means to their daily pursuit of God and his truth. To those many, either the abstract has never connected with the concrete, or they never understood even the abstract concept, or both. If this sounds overly harsh or critical to you, then prove me wrong. I would in fact love to be wrong in this observation. But if this is true, if my observation is correct, then many people that we know are holding to a false hope and facing God's ultimate judgment. They blindly remain on the broad road. So you tell me. What is the easy or kind way to tell someone that their religion is leading them to hell?

Positively

If we glorify God as God, then the Spirit of God will give us a vision of God as we have never before experienced. Not a vision as in some manufactured

religious experience but a vision of life as God intended it to be as taught in his word; a vision of God's plan of life for this world; a vision of God's plan of life for me personally. Jesus stated that he came that we might have life and that we might have it in abundance. I believe that this is the way to step into that abundance: That we learn what it means to glorify God as God and give him thanks and that we live it.

To live life to the glory of God we must have some grasp of life as God offers it to us. What are our options? What have I chosen? Am I making decisions that please God? Am I making decisions actually based on his words?

Understanding God's offer of life we begin to understand his intent and we begin to understand how and why his glory must be at the forefront as we pursue life as God defines and gives life. To pursue the glory of God is to pursue life as God intended. We must allow God to first teach us and convince us of that truth (abstract). And then we must bring it home in the concrete happenings of our lives - we must live it.

Bringing this very powerful yet also very abstract truth to the concrete reality of our lives is a struggle. But struggle we must if we are to honor God and help someone else along the way. To begin our arduous journey let's examine three offers of life that are described in the Bible.

3) An overview of three offers of life.

Life at creation.

God offered life at creation; he created life; he created a paradise. God gave us life and the freedom to continue in this life, but beginning with Adam we have chosen ways contrary to God and his glory.

Life in Jesus Christ.

God offers life in Jesus Christ. Life is offered to men through the gospel of the Christ.

Life in men.

Men seek life in themselves. Life is offered to men by men.

Offer 1: God offered life in creation.

Offer 2: God offers life in Jesus Christ.

Offer 3: Men offer life to themselves.

4) Examining the three offers of life.

4.a Offer 1 -- God offered life in creation.

4.a.1 Adam and Eve rejected the first offer.

God offered life in creation; he presented his idea of Paradise to Adam and Eve. However this offer is no longer an option; we cannot go back to Paradise. Life as offered in the beginning is no longer available. Adam and Eve voided the deal with their disobedience in the Garden of Eden. So offer 1 is off the table. The original plan has been tainted beyond repair by the sinfulness of men. We, as the entire human race, have rejected God's initial offer. As a consequence God stationed a guard to block our access to the tree of life.

Then the LORD God said, "The man has become like one of us, since he knows good and evil. He must not reach out and take the fruit from the tree of life and eat. Then he would live forever." So the LORD God sent the man out of the Garden of Eden to farm the ground from which the man had been formed. After he sent the man out, God placed angels and a flaming sword that turned in all directions east of the Garden of Eden. He placed them there to guard the way to the tree of life. (Genesis 3:22-24 God's Word)

Even though this offer has "expired," we have much to learn from what God initially provided. We see from the beginning a God who wanted his human creation to enjoy life.

4.a.2 God's intent was our enjoyment.

Enjoy God, enjoy life as God has given it. Enjoy life; go for the gusto; live life to the fullest. Nothing wrong with that as God planned our enjoyment from the first moments of creation. Over and over in the creation account as God created the earth and sea, the sun, moon and stars, grass

and trees, every animal, and then people, man and woman, the refrain in Genesis went like this: “It was good, it was very good, now it’s all yours” as he handed over stewardship to us for our enjoyment.

And God made man in his image, in the image of God he made him: male and female he made them. And God gave them his blessing and said to them, Be fertile and have increase, and make the earth full and be masters of it; be rulers over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the air and over every living thing moving on the earth. (Genesis 1:27-28 BBE)

From the very beginning, we learn from God’s first offer of life that our thirst for life is God-given. Our desire to enjoy life is a legitimate, God-given desire.

4.a.3 Quenching our thirst for life.

So where do I quench my thirst for life? From the earliest account we observe that God created us with a thirst for life and the freedom to make our own choices concerning life. (Read on in Genesis for details.) So it seems fair to ask: Where do we go to quench that thirst? What well do we drink from? Have we learned anything from Adam and Eve who left the words of God for refreshment elsewhere?

A recent Pontiac commercial portrayed their automobiles as “food for the soul.” Mazda calls us to “zoom, zoom, zoom.” Beautiful homes, designer clothes, diamonds, expensive vacations all call us to a place beyond our humdrum existence as we search for significance and meaning. The offer, whether or not as explicit as the Pontiac commercial, is buy this, own this, wear this, drive this, live here, visit there and your soul will be fed.

We all sense the universal call to something beyond eating and drinking and sleeping. But the only true soul food is

Jesus Christ. The only water that quenches our thirst is God's living water. And the only way we eat and drink the abundance which God offers is when we glorify God as God and give him thanks. Whether professing Christians or devout sinners, as long as our "soul food" is automobiles or nice homes or sports or sex or anything other than Jesus Christ, we will remain hungry and thirsty.

The choices come down to the glory of God or the passion of men. Who will feed my soul? Many profess the glory of God as can be clearly seen from the vast religious influence on this earth through the centuries. And just as obvious it is that many openly embrace the passion of men. By passion I am speaking of that driving force that keeps us going, keeps us reaching beyond ourselves. Some people's passion is their art; for some it is family; for some their gun collection; or their home.

(Jeremiah 2:13 NKJV) For My people have committed two evils: They have forsaken Me, the fountain of living waters, And hewn themselves cisterns; broken cisterns that can hold no water.

We either drink living waters (glory to God) or we dig our own wells (the passion of men).

4.a.4 Answering the question in our hearts.

Where are you? Where am I? Our profession is not the main of what we are examining and pursuing at this time. We are not concerned with which side of the line drawn in the sand we have proclaimed ourselves to be on. We are not at issue with what position we have stated to be ours. At issue is - Where are you? Where am I? Not my stated position, but my actual position.

If I am wrong, do I want to know the truth? An evangelist I sometimes listen to on the radio states that he asks unbelievers a question which I presume to be regarding their world-view and the gospel of Jesus Christ: "If you are wrong, would you want to know the truth?" I think it is only

fair then that we ask ourselves as professing Christians as we tackle the various issues of life: “If we are wrong, do we want to know the truth?”

Do I want to know the truth? If we want to know the truth, if we want to know where we are, then what we say with our mouths must defer to what we say in our hearts. If you want to find out what you are saying in your heart when it comes to the glory of God, then read on. If you want to drink some encouragement that goes beyond what any person can offer in your pursuit of life, then read on. But if you are satisfied with the abstract clutter of religion or the common sense of your neighbor or the philosophy of your academics, if you want to maintain the obscure glaze of denial between what you profess and what you really know and live to be true, if you are satisfied with what you have, then there is no help here. As Paul describes it in Romans 1, you have that choice and God will leave you to it.

But if you want to answer the question in your heart. If you want to know, then ask God to help you answer the question in your heart. Where are you? Where are you before God? God asked this very question to Adam after his initial rebellion.

And there came to them the sound of the Lord God walking in the garden in the evening wind: and the man and his wife went to a secret place among the trees of the garden, away from the eyes of the Lord God (Genesis 3:8 BBE). And the voice of the Lord God came to the man, saying, Where are you (Genesis 3:9 BBE)? And he said, Hearing your voice in the garden I was full of fear, because I was without clothing: and I kept myself from your eyes (Genesis 3:10 BBE).

And we need to ask ourselves that same question. Not what am I saying I believe about God; not am I active in church; but where am I before God? What am I saying in my heart?

The fool has said in his heart, “There is no God”
(Psalms 14:1 NKJV).

I found this striking as I read Psalm 14.1 a few months ago. Yes, the fool says - “No God!” If you read this verse in the New King James or King James versions you will see that the words “There is” are in italics because they are supplied to help the meaning. The world-view of the fool is - “No God!” Many of us are familiar with this text, but what leaped off the page at me during this reading were the words “in his heart.” Both in Psalm 14.1 and Psalm 53.1 we read the same thing - “in his heart.” The fool can profess to know Christ; the fool can be very religious; the fool can be active in an evangelical, fundamental church; the fool can appear very righteous and say all the right things. But the pressing issue is -- What is the fool saying in his heart? A later study in Romans 1 revealed even more.

For although they knew God, they neither glorified him as God nor gave thanks to him, but their thinking became futile and their foolish hearts were darkened. Although they claimed to be wise, they became fools (Romans 1:21-22 NIV).

The fool actually claims to be wise, but his foolish heart is darkened. Why? Given the opportunity to respond to the truth that he had and to glorify God as God and give him thanks, he chose not to.

Back to Adam. . .Not enjoying God.

Now uncomfortable and fearful in the presence of God, Adam hid in the trees. But God in his grace and mercy asked “Where are you?” Can you feel the impact of this moment? Adam is hiding because he is fearful and naked before God, and God seeks him out. Later on we will realize that this will not always happen. God will come to a point where we will let us go our own way.

So what will our choice be as we walk the path?

The vision of the glory of God or the
passion of the glory of men.

So offer 1 is gone. We cannot ask for a “redo” of Paradise. But have we learned anything along the way? Adam and Eve came to the fork in the road: trust God and his words, honor him, glorify him or choose a seemingly attractive alternative; something that looked good in the short-term. Their foolish decision is clear and now easy to detect. Then it was not. Just as your decision and my decision are not as clear and evident as they sometimes appear.

How do I know if I have chosen God’s plan or the plan of men? How do I know if I am following the vision of the glory of God or the passion of men? What am I saying in my heart?

4.b Offer 2 -- God offers life in Jesus Christ.

4.b.1 Offer 2 is alive and well.

God still offers life through the redeeming work of Jesus Christ, through the shed blood of Jesus Christ. The gospel of Christ “is the power of God to salvation for everyone who believes.” We must make a decision in our hearts to believe.

For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ, for it is the power of God to salvation for everyone who believes, for the Jew first and also for the Greek. For in it the righteousness of God is revealed from faith to faith; as it is written, “The just shall live by faith” (Romans 1:16-17 NKJV).

If you use your mouth to say, “Jesus is Lord,” and if you believe in your heart that God raised Jesus from the dead, you will be saved. We believe with our hearts, and so we are made right with God. And we use our mouths to say that we believe, and so we are saved (Romans 10:9-10 NCV).

The person who makes a real and sincere decision of faith and believes in Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of sins receives God's gift of salvation. The person who does not receive the truth of God's offer of salvation is identified by Paul as one who does not glorify God as God or give him thanks (Rom 1.21). From this we deduce that the one who receives salvation should be one who does glorify God as God and give him thanks. That is the very powerful truth in the abstract, but what does it actually mean in my daily life?

How do I actually do that? How do I glorify God as God?

4.b.2 Crucial steps to identifying and living the reality.

First, I have to actually live in view of eternity. To make decisions in my daily existence regarding eternal truth I need to have a working perspective of eternity.

Second, I need to be prepared to lose anything and everything on this earth to follow God and give him glory.

Third, God must be the food for my soul.

With those three thoughts in mind, let's try to move from the abstract to the concrete and ask: What feeds my soul?

Does owning and maintaining my home feed my soul? Landscaping? Gardening? Home-improvement? All good things unless they become more important to me than God.

When I make a decision for truth to the glory of God, I must be willing to lose my earthly home. Possibly I have to change employers and accept a lower paying job because of ethical conflict. I just cannot continue to tell my clients untrue and misleading things to keep their accounts. So, less money, less home.

Do family relationships feed my soul? Is my focus on the family greater than my focus on God? In spite of our popular

trend that family is everything, Jesus pointed to the conflict caused in families when choosing to follow him.

Do not think that I came to bring peace on earth. I did not come to bring peace but a sword. For I have come to 'set a man against his father, a daughter against her mother, and a daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law; and a man's enemies will be those of his own household. He who loves father or mother more than Me is not worthy of Me. And he who loves son or daughter more than Me is not worthy of Me. And he who does not take his cross and follow after Me is not worthy of Me. He who finds his life will lose it, and he who loses his life for My sake will find it (Matthew 10:34-39 NKJV)

Please note that the first mention of taking up our cross and following Christ and losing our life to find it comes in the context of family relationships. Jesus warned of the danger of family coming before God and disabling a person from following him.

When I make a decision for truth to the glory of God, I must be willing to lose family. Maybe this means I offend a family member by addressing his spiritual condition. Possibly I alienate a child by not accepting her ungodly behavior. I may have to choose between having Sundays as God's day or family day.

What happens is that sometimes we broker a deal. You make me look good in the church and in the community, and I will reward you. If the child/teenager/adult makes the parent look good in the church and community the parent will in turn overlook indiscretions, help financially, etc. The parent knows that if she confronts her teenager's life style that she risks being embarrassed in her church and being perceived as poor at parenting thus not very spiritual.

With this mind set appearances are everything. Appearances to people, that is. How this appears to God is only an afterthought. Living in view of eternity means living more consciously with how our behavior and relationships appear before God rather than people. We might ask ourselves: Who am I really seeking to please?

So if our families are doing well we usually feed our souls on that; pouring ourselves into their lives. I believe that a popular Christian ministry that focuses on the family has misled us and hampered many people's ability to follow God by exalting family beyond the glory of God.

What else do we feed our souls on? Sports, guns, cars, women, men, entertainment, music, our jobs? To find out if I am glorifying God as God, I must identify on what do I feed my soul.

...and give him thanks.

How can I tell if I am glorifying God as God? Am I giving him thanks no matter how life turns out? Am I honoring him to the degree that I am still thankful when all my earthly soul food is gone (or so it seems)? Is my God big enough to be seen above the turmoil, heartache and discouragement of life? When the pantry of earthly "goodies" is empty, does God fill my being? Is my greatest desire to honor God above all?

Living in view of eternity, living in view of God, I am willing to lose anything and everything, and now God feeds my soul with food from heaven. I learn that in the wilderness he prepares a table for me. And it's a pretty good feeling.

4.c Offer 3: Men offer life to men.

4.c.1 No decision necessary. This is the default setting of every person born on this earth. We choose to be self-directed; to find life in ourselves. This no decision is a decision to remain

at odds with God and his offer of life through Jesus Christ. This began with Adam and Eve and has continued to this day.

4.c.2 Most do not know what they are saying in their hearts. I believe that most people continue to accept the offer of life by men to men without even realizing what they have done, including many professing Christians. I believe we vastly underestimate the effect of spiritual blindness and darkness and vastly overestimate our ability to make the right decision. We are far more dependent on our religion than we are on the words of God and the Wind of God. I believe that most people have not come to grips with the deceitfulness of their own hearts and as a result do not know what they are saying in their hearts.

5) Some final thoughts: Do we want to know?

5.a Do you want to know?

Here is the question for the person who wants to know what she believes in her heart. Am I following the vision of the glory of God as I live my days on this earth, or am I following the passion of the glory men?

Every choice I make is influenced by this decision concerning the glory of God or the glory of men! If I choose to walk the path of God's glory, I choose wisdom and light. If I choose not to walk the path of God's glory, in my heart I choose "no God" and become a fool claiming to be wise. The person claiming to be wise doesn't seek wisdom.

5.b I have to find out: What am I saying in my heart?

In every area of my life I can and should ask myself this question: Is it the vision of the glory of God or the passion of men? On my job, do my choices reflect a vision of the glory of God? At home, the way I relate to my wife and sons, does that reflect a vision of the glory of God?

How do I know if I am really giving God the glory in my life? How can I tell?

5.c Some helpful questions if we want to know.

Am I willing to not get the glory or credit when I serve God? Am I willing to lose my life, understanding that concept for everything God intended including daily giving myself to others for no other reason than to honor God?

Is God's glory more important to me than my position in the church? Or am I drinking the few drops of water from the man-made well of significance?

Is God's glory more important to me than the perceived well-being of my church? Many decisions that are made in local fellowships are based more on a desire to keep the church going than bringing God glory. In doing this truth is sacrificed in the pulpit and in personal relationships within the church.

Many in church leadership are more concerned with keeping people happy in the church than choosing what is right. This brings them glory. This is their water of significance, and in drinking these waters they show that possibly they have not even tasted living waters.

Many people busy themselves in what appears to be serving the Lord but in fact they are seeking glory for themselves; they spend their time and energy to win the admiration and applause of those whose goal it is to keep the wheels of the church turning. They drink in the kudos of men as opposed to the living waters of God. Often with their investment of time and energy they buy acceptance and power. If you asked them why they were doing it, they would say that they were doing it to the glory of God. Sometimes this is true but often it is not. Their goal is to appear spiritual before others in their fellowship. How can we tell this to be true? One prominent way this is demonstrated when a person will not stand for what they should for fear of losing their friends or their social standing. They remain silent and hope for the best, silently undermining their integrity and their faith in God.

6) Calling us away from "the way it is" to "the way it should be."

If everyone (or even the majority) is so intent, as we proclaim, on giving God the glory, then why do we deal with the heart attitudes that we do in our

church fellowships? I once had a prominent pastor whose name you would probably recognize tell me: “That’s the way it is.” Is that where we want to leave it? Is that what I want on my “resume” as I stand before Christ? “Well, Lord, you know how it was down there. That’s the way it was.”

I would ask you to even consider that “the way it is” is just not acceptable to present to our Lord and King and to consider how we by faith might move closer to “that’s the way it should be.”

Glorifying God as God is living in the presence of God and dying daily for his honor.

- 7) Some helpful stuff: An outline of Romans 1.16-32
I thought this outline may be helpful for further study. This helps to demonstrate the biblical direction and basis taken for some of what is said earlier in the study

The fork in the road as described in Romans 1.16-32.

- I. God’s answer to the wickedness of men is unashamedly the gospel of Christ, Romans 1.16-17.
(There is no reason in any context to be ashamed of the gospel.)
 1. We are not ashamed of the gospel because the message revealed through Christ has prophetic and historic roots that are centuries old (spoken by the prophets, recorded in history) Rom 1.1-4.

I, Paul, am a devoted slave of Jesus Christ on assignment, authorized as an apostle to proclaim God’s words and acts. I write this letter to all the Christians in Rome, God’s friends. (Rom 1:1) The sacred writings contain preliminary reports **by the prophets** (Rom 1:2) on God’s Son. His descent from David roots him **in history**; (Rom 1:3) his unique identity as Son of God was shown **by the Spirit** when Jesus was raised from the dead, setting him apart as the Messiah, our Master. (Rom 1:4)
 2. We are not ashamed of the gospel because it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes, 1.16.

For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ, for it is the power of God to salvation for everyone who believes, for the Jew first and also for the Greek (Romans 1:16 NKJV).

3. We are not ashamed of the gospel because in the gospel the righteousness of God is revealed, 1.17a.

For in it the righteousness of God is revealed from faith to faith; as it is written, "The just shall live by faith" (Romans 1:17 NKJV).

4. Those who believe and have been made righteous by the gospel unashamedly continue on the path of faith, 1.17b.

- II. Refusing the path of faith through the gospel of Christ brings God's anger and all the consequences of a self-directed life, Romans 1.18-25.

- A. God's anger is being revealed from heaven because the truth of God's righteousness is being suppressed (hidden) by the unrighteousness of people, 1.18-20.

1. Evil lives hide the truth, 1.18.

God's anger is shown from heaven against all the evil and wrong things people do. By their own evil lives they hide the truth (Romans 1:18 NCV).

2. Knowledge of God is plain to see, 1.19.

But the basic reality of God is plain enough. Open your eyes and there it is (Romans 1:19 Msg)!

3. What cannot be seen about God can be understood by his creation so we are without excuse, 1.20.

From the creation of the world, God's invisible qualities, his eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly observed in what he made. As a result, people have no excuse (Romans 1:20 God's Word).

- B. Refusing the opportunity to glorify God and thank him , men traded away the opportunity for truth, wisdom and the glory of an immortal God, for lies, foolishness and the passion of men, 1.21-23.

1. Paul outlines this progression: knew God - did not glorify or thank God - thinking became useless; foolish hearts were darkened.

(We, in effect, decide to hide the truth when we do not glorify God as God or thank him.)

They knew God, but they did not give glory to God or thank him. Their thinking became useless. Their foolish minds were filled with darkness. (Romans 1:21 NCV).

2. With useless thinking and foolish hearts people conclude they are wise when in fact they have become fools, see also Psalm 14.

They said they were wise, but they became fools (Romans 1:22 NCV).

3. As fools they now trade the glory of the immortal for the glory of the mortal.

(The vision of the glory of God has now been exchanged for the passion of men.)

They exchanged the glory of the immortal God for statues that looked like mortal humans, birds, animals, and snakes. (Romans 1:23 God's Word)

III. The wrath of God is revealed in the wickedness of men, 1.24-32.

- A. God's anger is shown as he leaves us to our own devices, Rom 1.24-27.

For this reason God gave them up to the evil desires of their hearts, working shame in their bodies with one another: (Rom 1:24) Because by them the true word of God was changed into that which is false, and they gave worship and honour to the thing which is made, and not to him who made it, to whom be blessing for ever. So be it. (Rom 1:25) Bible Basic English

1. Our passion becomes earthbound in sexual desire, 1.24.
 - a. We are given up to our own passion.

2. We trade the truth for a lie, 1.25a.
 - a. We need this exchange to rationalize what we are doing.
3. We worship and serve created things rather than the Creator, 1.25b.
 - a. Again a necessary fulfillment of our innate need and desire to serve and worship something beyond ourselves.
 - b. We have to have some vision for life.
(The tragedy is that we have now traded away God's best for man's best which is also man's worst.)
4. Our pursuit of passion crosses gender lines, 1.26-27.

For this reason God allowed their shameful passions to control them. Their women have exchanged natural sexual relations for unnatural ones. (Rom 1:26) Likewise, their men have given up natural sexual relations with women and burn with lust for each other. Men commit indecent acts with men, so they experience among themselves the punishment they deserve for their perversion. (Rom 1:27 God's Word)

(In our desperation to fill the void left by lives that have abandoned God, there are now no limits to the depths we will go. Now people will pursue the passion of man to fill the vacuum by a departed vision of the glory of God and there is no hope in sight.)

- C. We no longer understand the importance of having the true knowledge of God and we drown in the consequences, 1.28-32.
 1. God said "Okay, have it your way," but our way leads to death.

Due to our insistent rebellion, God left us to our own way of worthless thinking and doing what we should not do, 1.28.

People did not think it was important to have a true knowledge of God. So God left them and allowed them to have their own worthless thinking and to do things they should not do (Romans 1:28 NCV).

Our misdirected, sheep-like guidance system always has and always will lead us further from God and away from true life.

We're all like sheep who've wandered off and gotten lost. We've all done our own thing, gone our own way. And GOD has piled all our sins, everything we've done wrong, on him, on him (Isaiah 53:6 Msg).

Our way is a twisted route of quick fixes that will never lead us to the permanent "repair" of our souls. All we have to do is look at the line of philosophers and philosophies that have risen and fallen over the centuries as people pursued truth and meaning apart from God. The philosophies of Descartes, Hume, Hegel, Marx, Sartre rose and fell because God was not the centerpiece, the focal point.

God gave us the worst judgment possible; he left us to ourselves.

2. The void of separation is filled with what is left, which is what is in us apart from God, 1.29-31.

They are filled with every kind of sin, evil, selfishness, and hatred. They are full of jealousy, murder, fighting, lying, and thinking the worst about each other. They gossip (Romans 1:29 NCV) and say evil things about each other. They hate God. They are rude and conceited and brag about themselves. They invent ways of doing evil. They do not obey their parents. (Romans 1:30 NCV) They are foolish, they do not keep their promises, and they show no kindness or mercy to others. (Romans 1:31 NCV)

3. Even the threat of death cannot now stop the flood, 1.32.

They know God's law says that those who live like this should die. But they themselves not only continue to do these evil things, they applaud others who do them (Romans 1:32 NCV).

Our storm of controversy at this moment in our country is same-sex marriages. I believe that we can see from a study of Romans 1 that the beginning steps on the path toward homosexuality are from the lives of people who do not glorify God and God and give him thanks. Homosexuality is more a societal symptom of the sin of a people who do not glorify God than an individual life-style choice.

Here's my point. If I am not glorifying God as God and giving him thanks, then I am just as responsible for the moral state of our country as those in the gay parade. Before we become such critical condemners let's each of us ask ourselves this question in our hearts: Am I glorifying God as God and giving him thanks? Whether concerning homosexuality or any of the other previously listed sins, if I am not glorifying God as God and giving him thanks then I also have chosen this direction.

If I am not glorifying *God* as *God* and giving him thanks, then I am not some spiritually concerned crusader for *God* and country, I am merely a blind religious person leading or being led by other blind people toward the ditch.

APPENDIX B:

A VALID ARGUMENT MAY NOT BE A SOUND ARGUMENT

A valid argument may not be a sound argument.
A valid conclusion may not be a sound conclusion.
A valid syllogism may not be a sound syllogism.

Overview

- 1) A valid argument may not be a sound argument - ii -
- 2) By default give validity to what already believe to what want to believe - iv -
- 3) Some helpful examples - vi -

A valid argument can be very convincing and compelling, but that does not mean it is sound (as in true). This is why we must learn to distinguish between valid and sound. Whether it is a message someone preaches on the radio, the lesson in our Bible study or a coworker’s political commentary, we should be able to distinguish the difference.

A valid argument is sound logically. The relationship between conclusion and premise is correct, but this does not mean the premise is true. We might say a valid argument sounds logical because it is logical but that still does not mean it is true. Confused yet?

1) We need to understand that a valid argument may not be a sound argument

In deductive reasoning, a conclusion is proved if it follows logically from the premises, whether or not those premises are true. A conclusion is logically valid if deductively derived. A scientific argument requires not only validity but soundness, i.e. a conclusion derived from true premises.

(Scientific Proof - <http://www.tarleton.edu/~physci/CT/pg/Intro.html>)

Let me try to explain this concept and its importance. We agree with certain things that someone teaches us because they sound so valid (correctly inferred or deduced from a premise). These teachings seem right based on our existing knowledge base - premises which we have already accepted. These things seem especially true to us if they are taught by a respected teacher, such as the pastor of our church or our favorite professor at the university.

The problem is that (as stated in the above quote) “a conclusion is proved if it follows logically from the premises, whether or not those premises are true.” So the teaching can logically be presented very powerfully, very convincingly - sound very compelling and valid - even if the premises are not true.

Add some Bible verses and how could we argue with that?

If our country’s decline in morality is a direct result of prayer being taken out of our schools,
Then getting prayer back in schools will improve the morals of our country,
Therefore we need to work to get prayer back into our schools.

If the foundations be destroyed, what can the righteous do (Psalms 11:3 KJV)?

This “message” pushes all the right buttons
to move us toward accepting its validity.

appeals to our reason	prayer out of school, country has gone downhill since
appeals to our emotions	we should be fearful for our children
appeals to relationship with speaker	he is such a man of God

However valid it seems and it does for many people, we should in the interest of truth investigate how sound the argument is. For us to prove the soundness of this argument we must be able to prove the premise to be true. Can we do that? Can we prove that our country's decline in morality is a direct result of prayer being taken out of our schools?

Being in agreement with each other is not proof, it just means that we are all either right or wrong. It just means that we agree; it does not mean the premise is true. Having large numbers of people in agreement is not proof. But still, we let popular opinion drive our decision-making even in the Church.

In my research on the web I ran into a site providing content and "state of the art" analysis of American public opinion. Public opinion is a driving force in decision-making. But should it be?

From Americans & the World / Public Opinion on International Affairs
http://www.americans-world.org/digest/global_issues/global_warming/gw1.cfm

The Program on International Policy Attitudes (PIPA) now offers a new website, Americans and the World . This website will report on US public opinion on a broad range of international policy issues, integrating all publicly available polling data. It will be continually updated as new data become available, so that users are assured of getting a 'state of the art' analysis.

Over the coming weeks and months PIPA will be releasing additional reports on such subjects as Russia, the United Nations, population, trade, America's role in the world, human rights, the Middle East, global warming, and many other topics. Gradually we will build a comprehensive resource on US public opinion on international issues.

Americans and the World will provide comprehensive reports on a wide range of topics—each report integrating and explaining as much as a decade of polling data.

Our hope and expectation is that this will provide a valuable resource for policymakers, journalists, researchers, non-governmental organizations,

students, and all individuals who would like to know more about American public opinion.

Why is this important? Because it seems we are of the mind that if enough people believe it then it must be true. What we want to understand is that the way we approach truth in general is the way we will approach truth in the word of God. Because the majority believe it to be true does not make it true in the world. And because the majority believe it to be true does not make it true in our Bible study, our morning worship service, our seminary, our university, or our denomination.

Validity is not soundness. As we read, or as we are taught, we need to remember that the premise or premises must be true.

By the way. . .all those “If the foundations be destroyed” messages? I heard that so many times I went to the text. Very interesting indeed. These words were actually part of the cowardly advice being given to David to run in fear as opposed to taking refuge in the Lord. What are the next words following the fearful, trembling proclamation that “the sky is falling”?

The LORD is in his holy temple; the LORD sits on his throne in heaven. He sees what people do; he keeps his eye on them (Psalms 11:4 NCV).

What a difference the truth makes!

- 2) By default we give validity to what we already believe and to what we want to believe

What do I mean by **default**? The **default settings are the factory settings**. When you buy a new computer, it comes with preset conditions. For instance, if you purchased a computer that included a word processor as part of the software package, it has **default settings** for the font type, style and size.

I believe my WordPerfect default font was Times Roman / regular / 12.

There are some **default settings** where many of us do not even know we have settings. Deep inside the inner-workings of the computer in the BIOS the system settings lurk that determine whether or not our computer recognizes our hard drive or CD or DVD, the order the system boots up, etc. Settings that most of us

are unaware of and do not need to be aware of. However, human beings “**come from the factory**” with default settings that we do need to be aware of.

Let’s look at the definition of “default” from yourDictionary.com.

“Default”: Computer Science -- A particular setting or value for a variable that is assigned automatically by an operating system and remains in effect unless canceled or overridden by the operator: changed the default for the font in the word processing program.

A situation or condition that obtains in the absence of active intervention.

As explained above default settings remain in effect unless canceled or overridden. We are born into this world with preset conditions which once we come to Christ he begins resetting. Here is a biblical representation of what I am talking about.

We are taught to change the default settings.

You were taught to leave your old self--to stop living the evil way you lived before. That old self becomes worse, because people are fooled by the evil things they want to do (Ephesians 4:22 NCV).

We are taught that new person settings must be made.

But you were taught to be made new in your hearts, to become a new person. That new person is made to be like God--made to be truly good and holy (Ephesians 4:23-24 NCV).

A few thoughts concerning default settings that are relevant to our current study.

By default we automatically give validity to what we **ALREADY** believe.

By default we automatically give validity to what we **WANT** to believe.

This is how we “come off the line.” Now some of the things we already believe are true, and some of the things we want to believe are true. But not all of them. In fact many of the things that seem entirely valid to us are entirely wrong.

There is a way that seemeth right unto a man, but the end thereof are the ways of death (Proverbs 16:25 KJV).

There is a way built into each of us that seems valid, but we need to review and change the settings where necessary because this way of validating life leads to death. We do not realize this without the help of God; we cannot change the settings without the help of God. Some of the settings are like our CMOS settings in our computer; we don't even know they are there.

And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what is that good and acceptable and perfect will of God (Romans 12:2 NKJV).

Search me, O God, and know my heart; Try me, and know my anxieties; And see if there is any wicked way [old settings] in me, And lead me in the way [new settings] everlasting (Psalms 139:23-24 NKJV).

Becoming a Christian does not mean all the settings are changed immediately. Becoming a Christian does mean that the process has started, and we need to recognize our problem and bring it before God for his scrutiny.

The heart is deceitful above all things, And desperately wicked; Who can know it? I, the LORD, search the heart, I test the mind. . . (Jeremiah 17:9-10a NKJV).

Let God run the diagnostics. Let him search the system and test our programs for living. The nature of his word allows him to penetrate the deepest places and restore the system.

For the word of God is living and active. Sharper than any double-edged sword, it penetrates even to dividing soul and spirit, joints and marrow; it judges the thoughts and attitudes of the heart (Hebrews 4:12 NIV).

3) Some helpful examples

Thought the following examples might be helpful.

Silly Syllogisms by Fergus Duniho
<http://www.duniho.com/fergus/sillysyllogisms.html>

A valid syllogism is one whose conclusion logically follows from its premises.
[There is a] difference between a valid argument and a sound argument. The

validity of an argument does not depend upon whether its premises or conclusions are true. It merely depends on the formal relation between the premises and conclusion. Valid syllogisms can have false premises or false conclusions. An argument is sound when it is valid and has true premises.

Examples of different types of syllogisms.

Categorical Syllogism

All humans are mortal / All Greeks are human / All Greeks are mortal

Hypothetical Syllogism

If all humans are mortal / And all Greeks human / Then all Greeks are mortal.

Examples of valid but not sound

All philosophers are men / All men are mortal / All philosophers are mortal

All philosophers are men / Judy is a philosopher / Judy is a man

All people who do not eat red meat believe in New Age philosophy / John does not eat red meat / John believes in New Age philosophy

Global warming is an imminent danger to the planet / Global warming is caused by human industrial activity / We should regulate human industrial activity to solve global warming

Syllogism

Good Christians go to church twice on Sunday and every Wednesday / Bill goes to church twice on Sunday and every Wednesday / Bill is a good Christian

Good Christians give ten-percent of their income every week to the church / Bill gives ten-percent of his income to the church every week / Bill is a good Christian

Enthymeme

Good Christians go to church twice on Sunday and every Wednesday / Sam only goes to church on Sunday morning

Good Christians give ten-percent of their income every week to the church / Sam gives five-percent of his income to the church every week

APPENDIX C:

STANDING ON THE PROMISES OR FALSE PREMISES?

How do we know the conclusions that we have reached are sound?

What can we do to see that we are basing our lives on premises that are true?

Some Guidelines - An Overview

- 1) Do the work: Examine the premises of our stated beliefs - ii -
 - 2) Be careful not to fall in love with concept or idea before proved true . . - iii -
 - 3) Let go of your theory when the facts do not support it - iv -
 - 4) Oops: When you see you are wrong, and you will, change your mind . . - v -
 - 5) Give it a rest already: Do not allow rhetoric to be your argument - vi -
 - 6) Some relevant excerpts - vii -
-

Please note that some of the specific web pages listed are no longer active. I found this out while testing my hyperlinks. To follow up on these subjects or any others all you have to do is highlight the text, copy it and then paste it into Google or another search engine. I am sure with minimal effort you will find more than enough information to help you in your study. My point of emphasis for the study is not so much the information itself but how we continue to learn to “handle” the information that enters our world. How we examine the content, premises, etc. How we remain open to new information changing our minds. How we attempt to not allow emotions to dictate our course.

dave

Some Guidelines

- 1) Examine the premises of our stated beliefs. Do the work.

A valid syllogism is one whose conclusion logically follows from its premises. [There is a] difference between a valid argument and a sound argument. The validity of an argument does not depend upon whether its premises or conclusions are true. It merely depends on the formal relation between the premises and conclusion. Valid syllogisms can have false premises or false conclusions. An argument is sound when it is valid and has true premises. (Silly Syllogisms by Fergus Duniho <http://www.duniho.com/fergus/sillysyllogisms.html>)

Premises are like the foundation of a house. You can build a very impressive house on a poor foundation, but it will not stand the storm. And it will not stand the test of time. We need to be sure of our salvation. We must build on Rock. We must have a foundation that can withstand life now and forever.

Therefore whoever hears these sayings of Mine, and does them, I will liken him to a wise man who built his house on the rock: and the rain descended, the floods came, and the winds blew and beat on that house; and it did not fall, for it was founded on the rock (Matthew 7:24-25 NKJV).

Premises build the foundation of the path we walk. I am a heavy equipment operator; I sometimes build or repair roads in our pit. What is most important? The foundation. If the foundation is not solid, the top part, the finish layer, will fall through and break up when the trucks drive over it no matter how solid it looked or how smooth it appeared before being put to the test. My satisfaction in building a road, especially over an area that was previously undeveloped? Watching the trucks make it across.

As Christians, we build on Jesus Christ (1 Corinthians 3.11); we walk the path he walked. From that perfect foundation we must work to know the truth. We must examine the premises of our beliefs. Do original research. Study the words of God on our own. If you are not examining the premises, you may not be standing on the promises.

Don't be fooled because you are building; everyone is building. The difference is whether or not you are building on the Rock!

Of course we cannot do original research in every area we study. We cannot reinvent the wheel in every topic, but when it comes to our search for truth then we should establish some priorities.

Previously in this appendix I had included more excerpts addressing academic fraud and biases. Because of copyright restrictions I have limited this. However a quick search of academic fraud, global warming, gun control, etc. will give you more than enough information to examine.

We need to examine how we and others process information. How our biases come into play. Our laziness. And our habits. We develop habits, or patterns of thinking, which carry over into all areas of our lives. Whether consciously or not we pretty much handle all information the same because that is how we have trained ourselves. In other words if I do not handle truth well in my job as a researcher, then I will not handle truth well when I study the words of God. The same strengths and weaknesses will be evident. We may think that we study God's words differently, but we will study as we have trained ourselves through experience.

What I would like us to see is that the issue is not necessarily a Christian versus non-Christian way of thinking. If I, as a Christian, am not walking by the Spirit, then I will fulfill the desires of my fallen humanity (Gal 5.16). We need to remember this as we look at the various examples I have given and ones you will come across. And not judge. Because when we become judges Paul tells us that we do the same things as the ones we are judging (Romans 2.1-3).

- 2) Be careful not to fall in love with a concept or an idea before it is proved to be true

This was something I dealt with on a regular basis as a pastor in preparing messages. I would sometimes have to let go of an idea or change the direction of a message as my study took a different course. We have an expression - "That'll preach" - when a thought just begs to be shared. We have to try to temper our emotions so we do not blind ourselves to the text in case the words of God direct us elsewhere. Do not be so enamored with a thesis that we ignore the evidence.

From History News Network on Web
Subject: Bellesiles, Poulshock and Academic Fraud
Posted By:Jerome L. Sternstein
Date Posted:June 17, 2002, 6:58 PM

There was no reason to have suspected that Poulshock was deliberately seeking to deceive, though, as I mentioned in my article on the case, Poulshock's dissertation adviser was so enamored by the thesis Poulshock argued that he believed it to be true even after the book's evidence supporting that thesis proved to be fraudulent.

Similarly, I think, some historians today who are unwilling to pronounce judgment on Bellesiles' book without leave from a higher authority -- perhaps

Emory's panel -- are constrained not so much by their commitment to "due process" but by their unwillingness to believe the worst about a book whose thesis they find very appealing.

(From History News Network on Web / Bellesiles, Poulshock and Academic Fraud / Posted By: Jerome L. Sternstein / June 17, 2002, 6:58 PM)

3) Let go of your theory when the facts do not support it

When facts collide with the activists' cause

The Northern California Cancer Center sits in a nondescript industrial park in Union City, a few minutes off the 880 freeway. The scientists work quietly in separate small offices crammed with three-ring binders and stacks of paper. They spend their days looking for clues, for connections, for even one tiny piece of the picture that advances the confounding jigsaw puzzle of cancer.

So when the results of the long-awaited study of breast cancer on Long Island, N.Y. hit newsstands last week, the NCCC epidemiologists - like cancer epidemiologists everywhere - examined the data like detectives at a crime scene.

One thing became clear to them right away:

The controversial results would further strain the delicate relationship between the hard-working activists who raise money for cancer research and the scientists who carry it out.

The Long Island study found no solid environmental link to breast cancer. The seven-year, \$8 million project concluded that a woman isn't any more likely to get breast cancer if she has high levels of four toxic chemicals in her blood than if she has low levels.

This is not the conclusion that the Long Island activists, or other environmentalists, expected when they pushed Congress to mandate the elaborate study. It is so contradictory to their long-held assumptions that they are unwilling to accept the findings.

They remain convinced, as do many reasonable women across the country, that the high rates of breast cancer in their communities are the result of toxins.

It is so contradictory to their long-held assumptions that they are unwilling to accept the findings.

(Joan Ryan columnist for San Francisco Chronicle / Terre Haute Tribune Star / 08-23-02)

Gunning for A Bad Book

In a large event, much commented on, the Justice Department last week told the Supreme Court that the Second Amendment (“A well regulated militia, being necessary to the security of a free State, the right of the people to keep and bear arms, shall not be infringed”) “broadly protects the rights of individuals,” not just the right of states to organize militias. This event was pertinent to a small event two weeks earlier, noticed by almost no one. The National Endowment for the Humanities demanded a review of “the serious charges that have been made against Michael Bellesiles’ scholarship,” which the NEH helped to finance.

.....

Bellesiles’s thesis is startling. It is that guns were not widely owned, or reliable enough to be important, at the time the Second Amendment was written. The implication is that the amendment should be read to protect only the collective rights of states, not the rights of individuals. The book pleased partisans of a cause popular in the liberal political culture of academia - gun control. Reviews were rapturous: “exhaustive research,” “intellectual rigor,” “inescapable policy implications,” “the NRA’s worst nightmare.”

Not exactly.

What has become Bellesiles’s nightmare began when a historian, suspecting nothing and hoping to build upon Bellesiles’s data, asked for more details about the 18th and early-19th-century probate records that Bellesiles says show that guns were infrequently listed among the estates of deceased people. He also purported to find that many of the guns that were listed were in disrepair.

His errors are so consistently convenient for this thesis, it is difficult to believe that the explanation is mere sloppiness or incompetence. It looks like fraud.

When Bellesiles’s evasive response led to more tugging on the threads of his argument, it unraveled. The unraveling revealed a pattern of gross misstatements of facts and unfounded conclusions. His errors are so consistently convenient for this thesis, it is difficult to believe that the explanation is mere sloppiness or incompetence. It looks like fraud.

(Newsweek May 20, 2002 / The Last Word George F. Will)

4) When you see you are wrong, and you will, change your mind

Skeptical environmentalist now optimistic about Earth

Anthrax in the mall. The Taliban hanging on in Afghanistan. The economy sliding into recession. O.J. beating the rap once again. Lately, all you’ve been hearing is bad news. Today’s subject is the environment, and

you're no doubt expecting more of the same. We all know there is never any good environmental news. Surprise.

The tale begins in 1997, when a Danish professor saw a magazine article about a University of Maryland economist, Julian Simon, who disputed the prevailing view that the state of the environment is bad and getting worse. To political scientist and statistician Bjorn Lomborg, a leftist and vegetarian, this sounded like "simple, American right-wing propaganda." So he decided to prove it wrong.

He put 10 of his best students at the University of Aarhus to examine Simon's absurd claims in depth. What they found was not what he anticipated. "A surprisingly large amount of his points," reports Lomborg, "stood up to scrutiny and conflicted with what we believed ourselves to know."

Faced with these chastening facts, Lomborg did something rare among committed political activists: He changed his mind. His new book, *The Skeptical Environmentalist* (Cambridge University Press), is the result.

Faced with these chastening facts, Lomborg did something rare among committed political activists: He changed his mind.

(Steve Chapman columnist for Chicago Tribune / Indianapolis Star / November 1, 2002)

5) Do not allow rhetoric to be your argument

September 15, 1997

The Heated Rhetoric of Global Warming by Jerry Taylor

As the nations of the world busily prepare an international treaty to address greenhouse gas emissions, the public debate over global climate change is heating up. Yet the political debate over what to do about global warming is far different from the scientific debate surrounding the issue, and the gulf between the two is widening, not closing. Politics -- not science -- is increasingly driving this debate, and truth is increasingly the casualty.

.....

On July 19, the distinguished British journal *New Scientist* published a cover story titled "Greenhouse Wars: Why the Rebels Have a Cause." After a thorough review of the scientific evidence marshaled by both sides, the magazine concluded that the skeptics are "among the world's top scientists." The unmistakable if unspoken bottom line of the article is that these skeptics have the better of the scientific argument at present.

Have Babbitt and Gelbspan somehow failed to notice this genuine debate in the world of science? Of course not. As the old lawyers adage goes: When you have the facts on your side, hammer the facts; when you have the law on your side, hammer the law; when you have neither, hammer the table.

(Jerry Taylor / director of natural resource studies at the Cato Institute / senior editor of Regulation magazine
<http://www.cato.org/dailys/9-15-97.html>

As the old lawyers' adage goes: When you have the facts on your side, hammer the facts; when you have the law on your side, hammer the law; when you have neither, hammer the table.

6) Some Relevant Excerpts

Tried to share several excerpts that I believe are not only relevant to the points in this appendix but also relevant to things discussed earlier in the study concerning our approach to the data around us.

Left to ourselves we will not only interpret information according to our vision of life, or our world-view, or our philosophy of life, but we will change it to fit our design and agenda. Whatever we decide to call it we need to be aware of this obstacle to truth and allow God to grow a measure of humility in us and dependence on him as we realize how formidable our task is.

The excerpts I share here are just a glimpse of our world. Once you understand the principles we have discussed earlier in the study, you will begin to see these things everywhere. It's like after I put new siding on the house I began to notice all these siding jobs. "That one looks nice." "That one was a lot of work." "Looks like they nailed too tight."

I have tried to include web addresses where applicable. Search the web. Go to Google or Yahoo and key in "academic fraud" or "how our minds work" or . . .

One Reporter Punctures Global-Warming Hysteria;
Others at Networks Prove His Point
Washington, D.C. -- MEDIA RESEARCH CENTER REPORT: ABC News' Michael Guillen: Beware of Climate Hype -- Thursday, August 13, 1998
<http://www.globalwarming.org>

Something unprecedented happened on ABC's Good Morning America on Tuesday: A correspondent questioned global-warming hysteria.

Unfortunately, such basic skepticism was missing in every other report on climate change this week, as other network reporters continued to parrot Al Gore's warnings that the Earth is catastrophically warming.

The sole dissenter from the party line was ABC News Science Editor Michael Guillen. "The earth does things in cycles," Guillen noted. "Everything from the 24-hour day-night cycle, to a woman's 28-day menstrual cycle, to the yearly seasonal cycle, what goes up must come down and what goes down must come up. And from a geological point of view, we were in an ice age not so long ago, and what we've been doing for the last 10,000 years, if you take a really big picture, is warming up since then, rebounding from that ice age. So this might be just part of that."

Other reporters went further. Jim Moret, anchor of CNN's The World Today, told August 10 viewers that July "was the hottest month ever recorded on earth." Reporter Sharon Collins then claimed that "this year's extreme weather adds to the body of evidence that climate change is not only real, it's already here."

She did note that there are skeptics of global-warming theories, and even ran a quote from Fred Smith of the Competitive Enterprise Institute, but then proceeded to taint the credibility of skeptics: "The oil and coal industries bankrolled a multi-million dollar campaign to throw cold water on predictions of a warming earth." Collins then falsely claimed that "most climate scientists agree with Al Gore's general assessment."

Making the Data Fit the Model

Science May 15, 2003 <http://www.globalwarming.org/>

The standard dataset is produced by a team at the University of Alabama in Huntsville (UAH), led by John Christy.

.....

Christy cast doubt on the reliability of Santer's model, telling Reason magazine science correspondent Ron Bailey, "It's a lot easier to model the stratosphere because you only have to consider radiational effects. The troposphere is much messier. It contains complicated things like clouds, convection, moisture and dust."

He went on to tell the Oakland Tribune, "It does not bother me that our data do not agree with their virtual model of the world ... It's a curious

way to do science, to use a model to verify data rather than the other way around. If you follow this too far down that road, you're in danger of saying, 'It's my theory that's correct and the real world that's wrong.'" (Ron Bailey, Tech Central Station, May 1).

Peer trouble: How failsafe is our current system at ensuring the quality and integrity of research? Not very, says John Crace
<http://education.guardian.co.uk/print/0,3858,4602456-48826,00.html>

Tuesday February 11, 2003 The Guardian

Last year wasn't the greatest for US science. First the journal Nature withdrew its support for an article it had published the previous November alleging that GM genes had contaminated non-GM crops in Mexico, after serious doubts were raised about the scientific data. Then the Lawrence Berkeley National Laboratory in California admitted that one of its scientists, Victor Ninov, had fabricated the discovery of two new chemical elements. And in October, Jan Hendrik Schön, the wunderkind of nanotechnology at Bell Laboratories, based in New Jersey, was outed as a fraud. Of the 25 papers he had published in the previous three years, 16 were deemed to be entirely false, with a further six under suspicion. The journal Science has since withdrawn eight of Schön's papers.

Some see this as just bad luck. After all, they argue, academic fraud has been around since the year dot and it's just coincidence that three high-profile cases come along at once. Others are less certain, and believe that the past 10 years have seen a marked increase in malpractice as competition for research funds, development money and jobs has intensified. A recent study by the university of Minnesota of 4,000 researchers in more than 100 faculties found that one in three scientists plagiarized, 22% handled data "carelessly" and 15% occasionally withheld unfavorable data.

Acknowledging Academic Fraud **By Tanya Metaksa**
FrontPageMagazine.com | June 13, 2002

IT'S SPRING CLEANING time in the academic world. The Journal of the American Medical Association (JAMA) has recently admitted bias in their research. Historian Doris Kearns Goodwin has resigned from both the McNeil-Lehrer Newshour and the Pulitzer Prize Board in the wake of a plagiarism scandal involving her book *The Fitzgeralds and the Kennedys*.

Now it is time for Columbia University follow suit by rescinding its award of the prestigious 2001 Bancroft Prize for History to Michael Bellesiles, author of the fraudulent and discredited anti-gun tract Arming America.

From History News Network on Web

Subject: Bellesiles, Poulshock and Academic Fraud

Posted By: Jerome L. Sternstein

Date Posted: June 17, 2002, 6:58 PM

I was amused by James Oakes post about the experience of the historian he referred to, whose original comment about giving Bellesiles' book to a group of students to parse for errors in citations and quotes says they found none. I, too, read her comment on H-NET -- which was slightly different than what Prof. Oakes relates -- and thought to respond then about a similar experience of mine dealing with a book of acknowledged fraud, S. Walter Poulshock's, "The Two Parties and the Tariff in the 1880s", but didn't. Let me relate this story now, because it might add something to the discussion about how academic fraud reveals itself. Also, since Ralph Luker referred to Poulshock's fraud, which I uncovered in 1966 and wrote about last February on HNN, I'd like to clear up one of Luker's misapprehensions. Not EVERY citation was fraudulent, but 173 out of 195 that I and three other historians were able to check in manuscript collections were, as well as scores from other sources.

.....

What this indicates is not that students are poor checkers of citations but that Poulshock included accurate citations with his fraudulent ones, as any intelligent person who sets out to deceive would do. And remember his deception fooled at least three distinguished scholars in late 19th century American History at the University of Pennsylvania and several outside readers, also specialists in the field. But I mention this not to criticize them but merely to demonstrate that skillful fraud is not obvious. The only way they could have uncovered Poulshock's fraud earlier was to travel to the Library of Congress and go through the manuscript collections Poulshock cited. And why should they have done so? There was no reason to have suspected that Poulshock was deliberately seeking to deceive, though, as I mentioned in my article on the case, Poulshock's dissertation adviser was so enamored by the thesis Poulshock argued that he believed it to be true even after the book's evidence supporting that thesis proved to be fraudulent.

Part Two

Pursuing the Opportunity!

A Biblical, Practical Model for an Honest Pursuit of God and His Truth!



“I was very happy when some brothers and sisters came and told me about the truth in your life and how you are following the way of truth” (3 John 1.3 NCV).

PART TWO A Biblical, Practical Model for an Honest Pursuit of God and His Truth!**LESSON TITLES & OVERVIEW**

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Show me Your ways,
O LORD; Teach me Your paths.

Lead me in Your truth and teach me,
For You are the God of my salvation;
On You I wait all the day.

Good and upright is the LORD;
Therefore He teaches sinners in the way.

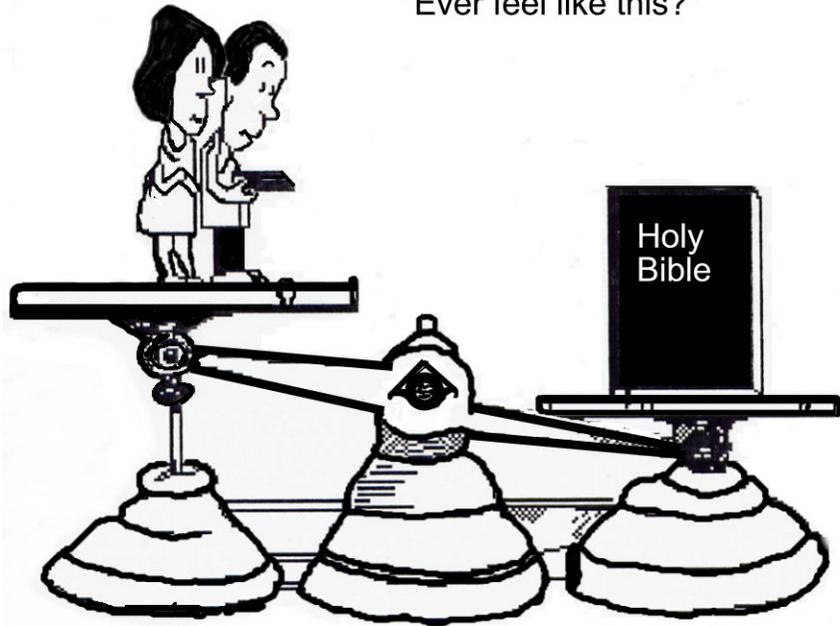
The humble He guides in justice,
And the humble He teaches His way.

Who is the man that fears the LORD?
Him shall He teach in the way He chooses.

Psalm 25.4-5,8-9,12 New King James Version



"Ever feel like this?"



a method

+

Some principles

+

Various resources

+

your desire

Introduction

A beginning point, a starting place. . .

This study is a beginning point, a starting place, a way to approach the Scriptures. If you believe my major premise that God calls us to live by his words, then I believe the following pages will help.

What do I hope to accomplish?

I will do my very best to present to you a biblical model for an honest pursuit of God's words. I hope to. . .

- a. Introduce you to a method of approach that fits God's design and desire - read, write, reflect and respond; simple, yet powerful.
- b. Instill in you some valuable principles - such as, seeking God's intended meaning, not some hidden meaning; going to Scripture to learn, not to prove a point; and most of all looking for words to live by.
- c. Acquaint you with a variety of helpful resources (English dictionary, exhaustive concordance, Bible software, commentaries, etc.) with this qualification -- Our main goal is to come into direct contact with the words of God on the pages of our Bibles so that we first hear what God has to say,
- d. Inspire you to crave and live the words of God, to believe God for life. God's word is amazing if we let God tell the story; he speaks, we tremble and listen; God will strengthen and amaze you as you live by his truth.
- e. Invite you to taste God's goodness.

(1Peter 2:2-3) Desire God's pure word as newborn babies desire milk. Then you will grow in your salvation. Certainly you have tasted that the Lord is good!

I once purchased a Microsoft Natural Multi Media Keyboard. I thought that the ergonomic design would help me deal with the limitations from a brace I was wearing on my right arm due to an injury to my biceps muscle.

And it did help because this keyboard better fits the natural design of my hands. My point is that I believe this study can help you pursue God and his truth because it fits God's design for

communicating his truth to his human creation. I am not saying it is the only way or that anything presented on these pages is original with me. I am saying that it fits God's design and it will help you overcome the limitations of your humanness and your fallenness, even as it continues to help me.

God chose to write things down. And a person writes things down with the intent that they will be read. The biblical concept goes even further. God wrote it down for us to read it and then to live it. God didn't write everything down, but he wrote enough that we could live well.

If we want to truly live, then we will live by the words of God. The Bible was never intended to be just a book to be studied. Studying the Bible was never God's primary purpose in giving us his words. Our goal should never be to only study the Bible. Our goal should be to live the truth to the glory of our God, to believe what God tells us about real life.

That is how this study will help you and me - directing us to live by the words of God. That, at least, is my prayer. I encourage you to let God create in you a new, more biblical vision of life as you live the words he has given us.

He wrote it down.

We read it and live. Simple, profound.

We should be eternally grateful.

That is what fits the hands of the person whose heart is bowed before God, the person who trembles in reverence before the words of our Creator and Redeemer.

May we grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ.

Dave

Along the way. . .

We cry out to God

I rise before the dawning of the morning, And cry for help; I hope in Your word (Psalms 119:147 NKJV).

We present ourselves to God

Do your best to present yourself to God as one approved, a workman who does not need to be ashamed and who correctly handles the word of truth (2 Timothy 2:15 NIV).

We continue in God's word

But the man who looks intently into the perfect law that gives freedom, and continues to do this, not forgetting what he has heard, but doing it--he will be blessed in what he does (James 1:25 NIV).

Lesson One

Examining a biblical approach
to the words of God.



Lesson 1 Examining a biblical approach to the words of God.

“I have made all these things. That is why all these things have come into being,” declares the LORD. “I will pay attention to those who are humble and sorry for their sins and who tremble at my word” (Isaiah 66:2 God’s Word).

Overview

- 1.1 Highlighted Resource: A dictionary of the English language
- 1.2 Introduction to an Inductive method of Bible study
- 1.3 Three major problems with Bible study
- 1.4 Jumping to conclusions

1.1 Highlighted Resource: An English dictionary

To understand our Bibles we need to understand the words. God chose the words. Understanding word meaning and placement is essential to understanding God’s message. Miss the words; miss the message. English dictionaries teach us the meanings of the words.

An English dictionary will prove to be one of your most valuable tools. Look at it this way - If you do not know the meaning of a word, then you neither understand the sentence that contains that word nor do you understand the paragraph that contains the sentence that contains that word. When you do not know the meaning of a word, stop and look it up. If this is not already your habit, you will be pleasantly surprised with the insights gained from simply looking up the meaning of a word.

Many people undervalue this excellent tool. Some are more interested in Greek and Hebrew meanings of words before they understand what is written in the Bibles they actually use. This is a mistake. Excellent scholars work countless hours precisely choosing the words in our English translations. We would do well to pay attention to what they have given us as a result of long hours of intense labor.

Principle: Stop and look up a word in my dictionary if I do not know its meaning.

1.2 Introduction to an Inductive method of Bible study

An inductive method of study could be described as a discovery method. As a detective gathers evidence, so the person using the inductive method gathers his evidence from the text and lets the “evidence” (the text) speak to the truth of the matter. Inductive

Bible study is made up of three interwoven and inseparable units: observation, interpretation and application.

Observation: *What does it say?*

Interpretation: *What does it mean?*

Application: *How do I live this truth?*

Do not misunderstand. The lines are not always clearly drawn between these three. In fact they form a never-ending, interwoven loop. We observe, we interpret, we apply and then we “go back to the drawing board” with even more observations after we have “taken our truth out for a field trial.” Product testing. . .whatever we want to call it; this is God’s truth - living and active. We can’t capture it and confine it to concept and theory and expect to fully understand it because doing so voids a very necessary maturation process in our hearts.

Some mistakenly believe that they can learn to distinguish good from evil, right from wrong, righteousness from wickedness without going to the playing field. They mistakenly believe that study and more study can provide their answers. But Scripture teaches us that we learn to distinguish between good and evil through constant use, not through constant study, of the words of God.

“But solid food is for the mature, who by constant use have trained themselves to distinguish good from evil” (Hebrews 5:14 NIV).

Another misconception I have observed is the idea that studying truth or hearing preaching is the equivalent of coming to the light. But listen to what John says.

“But whoever lives by the truth comes into the light, so that it may be seen plainly that what he has done has been done through God” (John 3:21 NIV).

Live by the truth; come into the light; God gets the glory!

Principle: Discipline myself to examine what a text says before I try to interpret what it means.

The inductive method of studying God’s word provides a framework for us to approach God’s word in a way that fits the Master’s design. We read and observe the words of God, to the best of our ability we find God’s intended meaning in his words, we take our newfound truth out of the box and into our lives and God renews and transforms.

In this study I will emphasize observation as an essential first step to any productive Bible study. Maybe our first three “rules” could be: Observe, observe, observe. What does it say? What does it say? What does it say?

1.3 Three Major Problems with Bible Study

1.3a Not doing it.

1.3b Beginning and ending with interpretation.

1.3c Approaching Bible study as if Bible study were the goal.

Principle: Do not begin with interpretation.

1.3a Not doing it.

For many people this is the main problem. They do not study their Bibles. And there are reasons for this. Some people simply do not care. They do not want more in their walk with God until they are confronted with a crisis then their spirituality seems to matter. But when life is “good,” they either do not want to hear what God has to say or they do not think God has anything to say to them or they feel that God has said everything he is going to say at this time and they remain satisfied with the status quo.

But some people (many I think and hope) do care, however, they do not know how to effectively study their Bibles, and they have not really tasted the goodness of the Lord in their Bible study. If this second group identifies your situation, then I believe this study will help you. Some people only need to develop a few skills and taste the amazing words of God, and they are off and running. Those are the ones I believe this study will benefit the most.

1.3b Beginning and ending with interpretation.

When we begin and end with interpretation,
opinion rules the day and ruins the exploration.

To avoid this common mistake, we must discipline ourselves to this order of discovery: Observation / Interpretation / Application.

We must know what a text says before we can know what it means. And we must know what it means before we know how to apply the teaching to our lives.

Many studies begin and end with interpretation. “What does this mean to you?” is often the focus. I can recall far too many Bible studies where people began sharing their opinion on the meaning of the text before even an initial inquiry as to what the words actually said. In fact I have found it to be common that people would not only share their opinion on the text under examination, but would not hesitate to leap to another passage to express their opinion with not even passing notice given to the text we were supposed to be studying or to the one referred to.

I remember one study I was leading where I asked: From this passage what can we learn about [prayer]? I think the subject was prayer; this was several years ago. I emphasized: Stay with this passage we are studying. Guess what? It was not until the sixth comment before anyone mentioned anything connected with the text we were studying.

I remember another study in which we were studying the will of God. Immediately we were consulting reference books and the notes of a favorite theologian. I still remember the puzzled, annoyed looks I received when I suggested that one approach would be to look up all the direct references to the will of God in the Bible and begin there. There are over twenty references in the New Testament that use the words “the will of God.” After a slight pause, we soon returned to our discussion centered on the comments from our favorite reference books.

Principle: When studying a topic, try to find the most direct references possible.

How can we really know what it means without a close examination of what it says? The words and the message they contain are our life. Just ask God (Deut 8.3, Matt 4.4). Many Bible studies fall short because the people involved do not understand the immense value of the words of God, and so instead of sitting in front of the words and letting God speak his truth to them, they are listening to themselves or listening to people who they know will say what they already believe either directly by preaching and teaching or indirectly by what they read.

Good idea, bad idea? Listen to ourselves or listen to God. We may not view it this way, but we need to see precisely what is going on. When we allow our opinion to overlay God’s words with a human perspective, no matter how noble or religious or well-intended, we seal off a window of opportunity for God to speak to our hearts.

We should examine our method: When we begin and end with interpretation, we are assuming we already know what a text teaches. We also should examine our motive: Do we have a desire to live the truth?

Principle: Study the Bible for words to live by.

1.3c Approaching Bible study as if Bible study were the goal.

Similar to but different than point two - beginning and ending with interpretation. If Bible study is our goal, then what have we actually accomplished when we reach our goal? We've found truth and admired it, discussed it, raved about it. So what?

Bible study is a means to an end. We study the Bible to learn and understand the words of God so that we can live by the words of God. This is our sustenance. If we are not living by the words of God, then we are not living as God defines or explains living.

Our approach to Scripture means everything. We should ask ourselves "Why?" Why am I studying the Bible? Am I reading and studying the Bible to discover words to live by?

A word of caution: Studying the Bible to discover words of God to live by does not mean jumping directly to application. Doing that often results in adapting God's word to our lifestyle and culture because jumping directly to application assumes too much, beginning with the assumption that I already know the right thing to do and often this is not the case. The correct approach is to allow God to renew our minds - change the way we think - as we do the truth, and in that process he transforms our lives to the image of his Son. God will give us a point on the horizon (the right and righteous thing to do) to move toward. Too many people allow another person, usually through guilt, to set their vision. Bad idea.

The reason I even bring this up is because there are people who "preach" application at the expense of accuracy. Their frustration has been an overexposure to theory, and they want to jump in and do something. But this is a mistake. Good, solid Bible study will lead to an exposing of God's truth and that becomes our point on the horizon to keep our lines straight.

Illustration: I had heard several years ago that farmers sometimes pick an object in the distance for their reference point while plowing to keep their rows straight. They would choose a fence post or tree, something on the far

side of the field they were plowing. Remembering this I tried it on my loader when I would have to make a long pass while working a large area. It works.

The point I am trying to make is that we need these reference points to move toward, and we absolutely have to allow God to set the points for us, or we spend a lifetime moving toward the wrong goals. So we must know what God is saying and what he means by what he says before we can know what to do. Let God set our coordinates. And then we have a call word - "Let come what may!"

Whatever your reference point is, whatever your vision for life is, the longer you move toward that point on the horizon, the more invested you become and the greater the investment, the harder the decision to change. But better to change after twenty years with my ladder against the wrong wall, than to never reposition my "ladder" at all. Any time before eternity is a good time to get on track with God.

"Your heart will be where your treasure is" (Matthew 6.21 NCV).

Don't miss this: Mere Bible study does not threaten our lifestyle. What I am saying is that with mere Bible study, we safely remain the same. That is not good since we are supposed to be transformed. Living by the words of God is an immediate threat to who we currently are. And that is good because we are supposed to change, to be transformed by the renewing of our minds. If we are sincere in our desire to live by the words of God, then we have to know what we truly value, where our treasure really is. If we are too heavily invested in this earth, we will not be able to make decisions of faith. But that doesn't mean we will not continue to deceive ourselves and only study our Bibles.

If so many people are buying and (we hope) studying expensive and elaborate study Bibles, and using study guides in Bible study groups, why is it that the church today is so divided, disgraced and defeated? What is all of this so-called "Bible study" accomplishing? It seems that no matter where you go, you find God's people living at a sub-Christian level but still rejoicing that they are "studying" the Word of God. (Warren Wiersbe, *Beyond Bible Study*, Pulpit helps, August 1993).

Interlude

What song are we singing?

When I taught piano, one of the problems I dealt with was my students' approach to their music. They relied far too heavily on memory and not enough on what was written. Because previous teachers had not taught them the discipline of playing what was written, they came up with their own songs; they played what sounded right to them.

The problem is that if you play different notes and a different rhythm, then you are playing a different song. What we play is still something. It is a song; it may sound better to us than what is written; we may say that it is the song written on the page; we may even look at the written music as we play the song.

But it is not that song.

What I have also discovered is that the longer we have played our version of the song, the more emotionally attached we become, and the harder it is to accept the written music as the song.

We don't like to change our tune.

And here I would like to point us to a very strong parallel between learning the music as written and learning the words of God as written. Many Christians rely too much on memory; we may be looking right at the page, chapter and verse; we may even quote the words; but we are not reading for a changed heart. And many are not willing to change their tune even if someone shows them that what they are "singing" does not match the written word.

We have become too attached to the tune we have been singing all these years. We have become so emotionally attached to the "melody" of this verse that we just cannot accept what is written.

The parallel continues.

In music if you play the piano without disciplining yourself to play what is written and continue in that direction, overly reliant on memory, then that becomes your method of approach. The difficulty is this: It works; at least for a time it works, at first blush. Because this method is easier you often succeed sooner. However, a caveat is warranted. You will have success sooner but it will be limited and it will be misleading.

Limited success:

You can only go so far playing by memory, and you will not learn how to read music for yourself so you will be dependent on an outside source to teach you.

Success misleading:

A person can memorize and play one “cool” song, and it seems very impressive until everyone realizes that this is the only song the person knows. I heard Warren Wiersbe once say that some Christians do not have twenty years experience in the faith; they have one year’s experience twenty times. They keep singing the same song and refuse to change for anyone, even God.

This attitude is what I have evidenced in the professing Church over the last twenty-five years: A stubborn unwillingness to change our tune even when it does not match the written word.

I have to wonder with our unwillingness to change our tune, with our unwillingness to “sing” what is written, and with our unwillingness to confront the words of God on the pages of our Bibles, what do we expect the “world” to hear?

What songs are we really singing?

And. . .

Whose music is it anyway?



1.4 Jumping to conclusions. . .

Observation: What does it say?

The first, second and third rules of Bible study: Observe, observe, observe.
Disciplining ourselves to not make dogmatic assertions in our initial observations allows us to progress into the excavation of the passage.

“Open thou mine eyes, that I may behold
wondrous things out of thy law.”
(Psalms 119:18 KJV)

Interpretation: What does it mean?

The question is “What does it mean?” not “What does it mean to me?”

“First of all you must understand this,
that no prophecy of scripture is a
matter of one's own interpretation.”
(2 Peter 1:20 NRSV)

Application: What should I do?

Studying God's word without the intent of obedience leaves us open to sin and deceit.

“Do what God's teaching says;
when you only listen and do nothing,
you are fooling yourselves.”
(James 1:22 NCV)

“Anyone who knows the right thing to do,
but does not do it, is sinning.”
(James 4:17 NCV)

. . .has its consequences.

Jumping to conclusions closes the door of opportunity.
Jumping to conclusions quashes the truth of the text.
Jumping to conclusions quenches the spirit of learning.



Lesson Two

Doing our best and our best
means awareness and effort.



Lesson 2 Doing our best and our best means awareness and effort.

“Do your best to present yourself to God as one approved, a workman who does not need to be ashamed and who correctly handles the word of truth”

(2 Timothy 2:15 NIV).

Overview

- 2.1 Highlighted Resource: A parallel study Bible
& a modern English translation
- 2.2 God’s holy wash cycle Introduction,
Parts 1 & 2 Reading & Writing
- 2.3 The boy and the basket

2.1 Highlighted Resource:

A Parallel Study Bible & A Modern English Translation

The Bible is basically written in Hebrew (Old Testament) and Greek (New Testament). Translators not only have to discover the meanings of the Hebrew and Greek words, but they also have to deal with multiple shades of meaning and nuance in translating these words from ancient, foreign languages to English.

Not only that but they must deal with idioms. An idiom conveys a meaning by using words “outside” of their normal boundaries but which someone of the same customs and culture will understand, e.g. I am going to “catch a flight” to Boston tomorrow. I am not going to “catch” anything, and you know that because we are contemporaries living in the same culture and sharing the same customs. You know that what I mean is that I am going to drive to the airport, park my car, walk through the airport to the correct location, board a plane and fly to Boston. Except I am not really because I will probably be home all day continuing with lesson three in this workbook. I was “pulling your leg.”

Translators must learn the language, and they must learn the way the language is used. We should be thankful for their effort because this means that we do not have to learn Hebrew and Greek to be able to read the Bible for ourselves, and we do not have to acquire first-hand knowledge of the customs and culture of these ancient times to interpret their expressions.

So what does this have to do with a parallel study Bible? You can see the different word choices translators have made by comparing their work side-by-side. A parallel study Bible has two or more Bible translations laid out in parallel columns on one or two pages. One that I have used quite a bit is The Comparative Study Bible which has the King James, Amplified, New American Standard and the New International versions in four columns across two facing pages for quick comparison. I can now get a better feel

for the original text by seeing the different ways the words were translated and placed in the sentences. Very helpful.

Using a parallel study Bible helps us to gain further insight without having to use a Bible commentary, or a Bible dictionary at this point in our study. This is to our advantage because we want to give the words on the page plenty of time to speak to us before someone else tells us what they mean.

Also a parallel study Bible is helpful if a person decides to stay with their trusty KJV and just cannot make the change to a modern translation. With a parallel Bible you can have the benefit of the modern English translation and still see the text in the KJV as you read the other.

Another alternative is to buy a modern English translation to use alongside your KJV. This would be the same principle as using a parallel Bible; it is just not quite as easy and effective.

Principle: Try to understand as much as I can on my own before referring to an outside source.

2.2 God's Holy Wash Cycle (Read, Write, Reflect, Respond)

Use the truth to make them holy. Your words are truth (John 17:17 GOD'S WORD).

Rain and snow come down from the sky. They do not go back again until they water the earth. They make it sprout and grow so that it produces seed for farmers and food for people to eat. My word, which comes from my mouth, is like the rain and snow. It will not come back to me without results. It will accomplish whatever I want and achieve whatever I send it to do (Isaiah 55:10-11 GOD'S WORD).

Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her to make her holy, cleansing her by the washing with water through the word (Ephesians 5:25-26 NIV).

Remember how I mentioned that the ergonomic keyboard better fit my hands because the design matched? This approach to Scripture matches God's design. We sit before God with his book, the words he chose for us and breathed to us, and we read. And we ponder and write and reflect. And we ask for God's wisdom and we seek truth to live. And then we live what God gives us.

Principle: Allow the word pictures God uses to speak to my heart. In Isaiah 55.11 God pictures his word as rain and snow. Powerful imagery!

This should be the focus of our approach to the words of God.

Establish a habit of reading our Bibles, write down our thoughts and reflect on the truth before us, and we have taken an excellent first step in drawing closer to God through the words of life that he has given us. Sometimes I wonder if we bring too many apparatuses when we approach God's word. Sometimes I wonder if we begin the journey with too much equipment - study Bibles, commentaries, Bible dictionaries -- and the equipment dominates our time. We spend more time fiddling with the equipment than reading the words. Our initial approach should be a direct encounter with God through the words of God. Later on there will be plenty of time to add some tools to our repertoire.

Gone fishin' and knowing what tools we might need.

Maybe this illustration will help us understand timing and choice when it comes to tools. Say we decide that we are going to take up fishing as a pastime. We can choose from at least two approaches. One, we can go to the sporting goods store and start buying equipment - rods, reels, tackle box, tackle, videos, books, boat. We can buy anything and everything that we think that we are going to need. Or, two, we can get the very basics - a rod and reel and some bait - and go fishing. Which approach is going to more quickly show us what we are going to need to be a successful fisherman? Many people find their greatest happiness in purchasing the equipment, daydreaming over the equipment, talking about fishing and watching fishing shows. Others go fishing.

Principle: Don't become more interested in Bible study tools than in the Bible.

Reading, writing and reflecting prepare us to respond.

Reading, writing and reflecting begin our journey but to complete the process of having our minds and hearts cleansed and renewed, we must respond to the Spirit's call. By faith we become keepers of the words of God. Along the way we will learn that in God's way of doing things even our failures can become part of our success if we continue in faith.

2.2a Reading

Simple, yet very powerful.

Reading the Bible begins a process of opening our eyes to the world of God, to his "otherness," the ways and thoughts of God that are higher than our ways and thoughts as the heavens are above the earth (Isaiah 55.9). Reading is so clean and simple and yet very powerful.

2.2a.1 Time for the goose bumps.

I can (you can) pick up the Bible and (now think about this - here come the goose bumps) read an overview of the entire history of

mankind - Creation, redemption, kingdoms rising and falling, future events. And not only that but I can sit with my Bible on my lap and read the intimate details of the lives of people who have walked this earth thousands of years earlier. Amazing, simply amazing, that I can read the details of Job's struggle of faith. Equally amazing that I can read the Psalms and chart much of David's spiritual journey whether he wrote while hiding in a cave or ruling his kingdom. The New Testament is equally revealing as Paul, the great apostle and leader, exposes his inner struggles. "So when I came to you, I was weak and fearful and trembling" (1 Corinthians 2:3 NCV).

2.2a.2 **Never underestimate.**

Never underestimate how God can speak to your heart as you read the word of God knowing that it is indeed the word of God you are holding in your hands. Sometimes what we call study is more of a barrier than a connection when it comes to approaching God through the words he has given us. Sometimes we come to the fray wearing Saul's armor when all we needed was a sling and two or three smooth stones from the creek.

2.2a.3 **Reading fits our Master's design.**

God breathed words for us, directed prophets and apostles to write them down to be passed on, so that thousands of years after God gave the words, we still have access to them. So let's read.

2.2a.4 **Read with discipline.**

Discipline yourself to regularly read God's word; make yourself do it. But do not enslave yourself to a system. I think it is a very good idea to have a Bible reading plan. I got behind on my reading last year and took an extra six months to finish. That is okay; there is no rule saying read the Bible through in a year. So don't set your goal too high but do push yourself.

Principle: Discipline myself to read God's word but don't enslave myself to a plan.

2.2a.5 **Push but don't enslave yourself.**

Be flexible in whatever plan you come up with and do not let your plan keep you from your main goal of living the words of God and drawing closer to God. We can miss the mark two different ways. One, we can push through our reading, checking the boxes off, and finish but not hear God's voice. Two, we can fall behind and begin to

feel so guilty that picking up our Bible only reminds us of our failure to keep up so we fall behind even more and give up.

Principle: Never give up.

2.2b Writing

If nothing else, writing slows us down to think through the passage. But writing does so much more.

Principle: Don't teach a topic until I can clearly articulate my thoughts in writing.

2.2b.1 Writing brings precision and accuracy to our thoughts.

I agree with the suggestion that if we cannot write down our thoughts on a particular subject, then we probably are not ready to teach that subject. If you have a passion to teach, then you need to bring the precision of writing into your study regimen. This would seem to be part of doing our best to present ourselves to God as workmen who do not need to be ashamed.

It is a common experience that thoughts become more precise as they are expressed. In this connection it may be said that a student can understand better with a pencil than with any other instrument; because, if a thought can be apprehended and expressed in writing, it must have been clearly understood. Another illustration of the precision of language is the difference between one's active and his passive vocabularies. It is possible to read and understand, in a general way, more words than one can use or write in a specific way. This is true because the accurate usage of words requires a more precise understanding of them, and precision is attained by expression (*Norman Geisler and William Nix, A General Introduction to the Bible, Moody Press: Chicago, p.213*).

2.2b.2 Writing captures our thoughts.

Sometimes a brief window of illumination will open. God will bring a thought to our minds in the morning and if not written down, by afternoon it will possibly have become a vague memory, if remembered at all. As I was writing my thoughts down I compared this one day with the coloring of the sky and earth by the sun early in the morning and late in the evening. At sunrise and sunset for what

seems to be just brief moments we have brilliant hues of color and then poof they are gone, like we had only imagined them. Sometimes God will open a window of insight as his light reflects a facet of his truth which we have not previously seen. Often this happens as we are going through a different stage in our lives, such as I have over the last few months with the injury to my arm. But there it is, a glimpse of truth, a reflection of his thoughts that if we do not write it down, we return later to the scene empty-handed.

2.2b.3 When in doubt, write it down.

Sometimes you may look later at what you've written and acknowledge that it wasn't very noteworthy, maybe even silly. But if you wrote it down at least you can decide that. If you do not write it down and forget it, then it is gone. There is no decision to make. Some things seem frivolous at the time but later give you insight. Sometimes it becomes awkward writing down our thoughts, we struggle and bumble about, but we come back later and God uses that to speak to us. Maybe we revise the thought. Maybe we never read it again, but the process has served its purpose in helping to clarify what is going on in our mind.

Principle: Write it down. I can always throw it away later.

2.2b.4 Your writings can be a tremendous blessing to others.

And although not ruling out published works, that is not what I am speaking of. We should write for what it does inside of us and the blessing that it can be to others. We should be authors for God. The sincere reflections of an honest pilgrim will speak to the hearts of fellow travelers. The truth about what is going on in your life will be meaningful to someone.

Oswald Chambers writes this:

If you cannot express yourself on any subject, struggle until you can. If you do not, someone will be the poorer all the days of his life. Struggle to re-express some truth of God to yourself, and God will use that expression to someone else. Go through the winepress of God where the grapes are crushed. You must struggle to get expression experimentally, then there will come a time when that expression will become the very wine of strengthening to someone else; but if you say lazily -- "I am not going to struggle to express this thing for myself, I will borrow

what I say," the expression will not only be of no use to you, but of no use to anyone (Oswald Chambers).

Principle: Struggle for someone else.

2.2b.5 Too much borrowed truth means too much distance between you and God.

And I suppose that this is one of the reasons I have put together this study: Too many professing believers in Jesus Christ live their lives on "borrowed" truth. They have either not experienced the amazing dynamic of first-hand knowledge from the word of God, or they have experienced this and for whatever reason have chosen a different course. And the community of believers is weaker.

2.2b.6 Yes, we must learn from others.

I am not encouraging anyone to reinvent the wheel or Bible study or reinvent anything. What I am strongly calling people to though is a living relationship with God through the words of God. Personal and up close. I can't believe some of the expressions we have such as the pastor gets the cookies off the top shelf and puts them down where the poor, little sheep can reach them so they can be fed. Not a biblical concept. Paul rebuked people for staying with milk and cookies when they should have been going for the meat and potatoes.

Doesn't it follow that the closer I am to God, the better part I am of the community of God?

"For the strength of the Pack is the Wolf, and the strength of the Wolf is the Pack" (Excerpt from The Law of the Jungle by Rudyard Kipling).

Weak is the Church where the members are too dependent on the pastor for the words from God. The stronger the individual's commitment to the Word of God; the stronger the church community.

2.2b.7 Write your thoughts down.

Don't qualify everything. Don't judge your thoughts at this time. Express them. Go back later if necessary and make your revisions, but don't quench your spirit and the Holy Spirit at this time by deciding whether this is good theology or not or whether someone would be mad at you for believing this. Trust God in the process to honor your pursuit of truth and your willingness to expose yourself to the light so that you can be exposed in God's presence.

2.2b.8 A unique perspective.

You have a perspective as a child of God on this earth that no one else has, and if you so choose to share your spiritual diary or parts of it, you will bless someone in the process.

2.2b.9 Sometimes less is more.

Sometimes reading just a few verses and letting God speak to us through them and giving ourselves time to write is better than reading chapters. Sometimes our reading schedule, as valuable as it can be, puts too much pressure on us on a given day. I know sometimes I am more in “conquer” mode than learning and listening mode.

2.2b.10 Make it special, unique, planned for a specific purpose.

Your thoughts are valuable so treat them that way. Buy a notebook to write your thoughts down and reserve it for only this. Buy an ink pen that writes well and feels good in your hand. Keep your journal where you will always know where it is. My method is very simple. I buy a particular type of notebook that I use for nothing else. At the top of the page I record my initials, the date and a brief title, and then I write.

2.2b.11 Web Connection.

I have on my web site -- itsaboutGod.com - a connecting point for people to share their thoughts. I would like to have pages and pages of collected writings (“the wine of strengthening”) where fellow sojourners recount their honest walk with God and share them with other believers and seekers. Can you imagine what a reservoir of strength and encouragement this could be?

2.3 The boy and the basket.

The illustration went something like this. . .

Several years ago I read an illustration about a boy asking his dad about what seemed to him to be wasted time memorizing Scripture. The son’s frustration was his own awareness of how many verses he had forgotten over a period of time. The father answered with an analogy comparing what the boy was doing in learning and forgetting Bible verses with pouring water in a basket. Pour clean, fresh water in a basket and almost all of it runs through and spills out. However, in the process of doing so the basket is cleaned by the washing of water over and through it.

When I began reading this my first thought was - another dumb illustration. But the picture has stayed with me for years now. Reading, studying and doing God’s word is like stepping under a fountain and washing in God’s words. Remember everything? No. Benefit from the process? Oh, yeah!

Principle: Think rain and snow.

Principle: Look at my relationship with the words of God more as an opportunity for cleansing and growth, less as achievement or a hurdle to be conquered.

Lesson Three

Being called and cleansed
by the words of God.



Lesson 3 Being called and cleansed by the words of God.

Then Jesus turned to the Jews who had claimed to believe in him. "If you stick with this, living out what I tell you, you are my disciples for sure. Then you will experience for yourselves the truth, and the truth will free you"

(John 8:31-32 Msg).

Overview

- 3.1 *Highlighted Resource:* *Dictionary of theology*
- 3.2 *God's holy wash cycle* *Parts 3 & 4 Reflecting, Responding*

3.1 Highlighted Resource: Dictionary of Theology

Boring, not relevant, very possibly your first thoughts when seeing this resource listed. However, give it a chance and you may find a dictionary of theology to be one of your most valuable tools. I first discovered this tool when I was a freshman at Moody Bible Institute. I was trying to better understand the concept of either redemption or sanctification, maybe both. Anyway, I could find no help in the Bible dictionary I was using, and after asking around discovered Baker's Dictionary of Theology. (Shucks, Jethro, I did not know there was even such a thing.) Later this book was expanded to become The Evangelical Dictionary of Theology, and I am sure there are others. These are the two I possess, and I have found them invaluable.

A dictionary of theology helps you make sense of words such as sanctification, imputation and redemption. Remember we need to understand the words to continue the thought that God is revealing to us. A dictionary of theology will usually give you a pretty thorough answer without completely overwhelming you with a huge amount of content. Even while saying that I would still warn you that it is very easy to be overloaded with information. We need to work to bring this information together. Sometimes even here using the English dictionary is surprisingly helpful in grasping theological terms.

Speaking of being helpful, I sometimes look up words and concepts that I am already familiar with because it seems I always gain additional insight. Sometimes I look up a word thinking I have a good understanding to find out I did not at all have a good grasp of its meaning.

Although you will still run into theological biases - impossible not to do - the dictionary of theology is an excellent tool for your initial excavation of the passage. Typically the

words are explained, not the entire text, so you are still not having someone tell what your text means before you have opportunity to examine it.

Principle: Work to organize and refine my research to help crystallize my understanding.

3.2 God's holy wash cycle Parts 3 & 4 Reflecting, Responding

3.2a Reflecting

To think or consider seriously; meditate; ponder; to engage in contemplation; to ponder or consider thoughtfully.

We need to learn to sit in the presence of God and listen and think. Read the words of God and then just sit in the silence before him. Let me say this. When I suggest reading, writing, reflecting and responding, I am not saying this is a rigid order to follow. As long as all four things become part of our lives, we are opening ourselves up to the truth of God.

Sometimes the best thing to do is to sit quietly and think and listen. I love to sit in my study in the morning especially and turn off all the artificial lights and sit in the partial darkness with only the light of a new day coming through my window.

And sit there with God. And pray. And listen. And just be quiet.

And sometimes inspiration will hit and I practically leap from my chair to look at a verse in my Bible or write a thought down before it flies away.

And sometimes I just sit there and share the morning with God. And I love this and it makes me so ready for my day because God has gotten my attention for even a little while. Even if just for a little while when I have bowed before God in this way, my eyes begin to open for the day.

But beware the thorns

- the worries of this life and the temptation of wealth (Matt 13.22).

We must have a time to sit in the silence of God's presence before everything in our day drags us back to earth. Thirty minutes reading our Bible but preoccupied with the day's events is not very profitable. Better even five minutes on good ground with no thorns where we can actually hear God instead of just reading words on a page.

Don't miss the distinction please. Thirty minutes in God's presence is better than five, but any amount of time where we can actually be in God's presence is invaluable.

Principle: Don't let the thorns (worry & wealth) choke the words.

Reflection is not fluff. Call it meditation, spending time with God, quiet time, whatever but I would encourage you to not downplay the role that reflection has in your spiritual growth. I know I mentioned my study earlier, but on workdays I do not have time in the morning to sit in my study for thirty minutes. I could get up earlier but too much of my thought is given to getting to work on time. What I do is leave early, sit in the parking lot in my truck and read and pray. No worries about traffic or weather. I am already on site, and I can devote my full attention to God.

Seeing God and eternity gives me the perspective I so desperately need for the day.

3.2b Responding

I wonder sometimes if this is where we most misunderstand God and his call to obedience. We must let God shift our thinking, transform our minds, as we respond to the invitation to live by his words. How do we answer the voice of God?

As we read our Bibles we must learn from the accounts of the lives of the people in the Bible; the people whom God has put on display as our examples. What does this teach us about our response to God and his word?

3.2b.1 Learn from these stories that God has given to us.

So then, look at the lives of David, Solomon, Abraham, Lot, Ruth, Jacob & Rachel, Isaac & Rebecca, and on and on. Very, very imperfect people. And yet they were commended for their faith. David, a man after God's own heart, but look at the shocking truth of his life as revealed in Scripture.

3.2b.2 Respond to his word in spite of our failures.

God calls us to respond to his word in spite of our failures, in spite of our sinfulness. Something is drastically wrong when we narrow truth down to a set of rules and regulations which make us look and feel moral and righteous, but in reality all that happens is that the inside of the cup does not get cleaned. The Pharisees in Jesus' time did that - obeyed God in hand-picked details that made them look great in the public eye, but they missed the main point of God's teaching. Their pursuit of man-made morality diverted their attention away from true

righteousness. The path of righteousness pursued is strewn with failure and the confession of sin.

3.2b.3 Try to understand the relationship between faith and failure.

If we do not understand the relationship between faith and failure, weakness and strength, then we do not understand God's way of doing things. As we hold fast to our confession of Jesus the Son of God, our weaknesses will be exposed. But we continue boldly in our confession of faith in spite of our weaknesses because we now understand that we can boldly approach the throne of grace to obtain mercy and grace because of what Jesus has done, not because of what we have done or are doing.

And He said to me, "My grace is sufficient for you, for My strength is made perfect in weakness." Therefore most gladly I will rather boast in my infirmities, that the power of Christ may rest upon me. Therefore I take pleasure in infirmities, in reproaches, in needs, in persecutions, in distresses, for Christ's sake. For when I am weak, then I am strong (2 Corinthians 12:9-10 NKJV).

Christ's grace is sufficient; Christ's strength is made perfect in our weakness; when we are weak then we are strong. Got it?

3.2b.4 Understand - only, always, must.

We can only respond to God's call of faith and obedience because of Jesus Christ, and we must respond to God's call of faith and obedience because of Jesus Christ. There is never a good reason to not live the words of God except the damage to our pride as we are exposed for what we are. Oh, I guess that's not a very good reason after all.

We have a High Priest who understands, who happens to be the same Person who paid our way. The shed blood of Jesus Christ is the only way I take one more step of faith.

I need no other argument, I need no other plea,
It is enough that Jesus died and that he died for me.
(My Faith Has Found a Resting Place)

We can only properly respond to the words of God because of what Jesus Christ accomplished on the Cross. And respond we must.

ONLY respond -- because of Jesus Christ and his finished work

ALWAYS respond -- because of Jesus Christ and his finished work

MUST respond -- because of Jesus Christ and his finished work

Our weaknesses will become glaring as we by faith respond to the word of God. **And two things will happen.** Our self-righteousness will be destroyed and the Holy Spirit of God will produce righteousness. Many folk adhere to rules and regulations to the detriment of their pursuit of truth. Rules and regulations cultivate man-made morality and self-righteousness.

People sometimes do not respond to the truth of God's word because their self-righteous attitude is protecting their weaknesses. And this is a shame. As long as we struggle to not be seen for who we are, we will never see who we are in Jesus Christ.

The obedient responder to the words of God keeps walking toward the light even though his weaknesses become more and more evident.

The obedient responder has the boldness to approach the throne of grace and allows the High Priest to do his work because she trusts God to do all he has promised through Jesus Christ.

The obedient responder knows 1 John 1.9.

If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness" (1 John 1:9 NKJV).

Lesson Four

Examine all things:
Spiritual approach or good approach?



Lesson 4 Examine all things: Spiritual approach or good approach?

But the natural man does not receive the things of the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him; nor can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned. But he who is spiritual judges all things, yet he himself is rightly judged by no one (1 Corinthians 2:14-15 NKJV).

Overview

- 4.1 Highlighted Resource Bible commentary
- 4.2 A Spiritual Approach or a Good Approach to the Words of God
- 4.3 Assumptions / Text / Conclusions

4.1 Highlighted Resource Bible commentary

Bible commentaries can be very valuable tools if we use them wisely and choose them wisely. I have many commentaries in my library. We can look at commentaries in two very broad categories: quantity (size, number of pages, volumes, etc.) and quality (liberal, evangelical, fundamental, well-written, thorough, etc.).

4.1a Let's take a minute and think about how and why we would use a Bible commentary.

And maybe I should start with the basics and not assume everyone knows what a commentary is. Briefly put, a Bible commentary is someone's thoughts, explanations and interpretations written down to be used as a resource to help others. So I would use a Bible commentary if I needed someone to help me understand a word or verse or passage in Scripture. That is okay as long as we consult a commentary only after first exhausting our other options - meaning, I have done my homework. Remember our primary resource is the word of God.

Principle: Acknowledge my need to grow in my study skills.

Some people do not grow because they do not believe they can do it. Some people do not grow because they are lazy and indifferent. Some people do not grow because they are deceived. Read Revelation two and three with this thought in mind: Christ was addressing church people; church people who thought they had it together.

4.1b Study Bibles

Study Bibles are Bibles with the commentary already included for handy reference. I am really not trying to be critical, but some people spend more

time reading the commentary in the notes of their Bibles than actually reading the words of Scripture. And some fundamental groups have almost canonized the notes contained in certain study Bibles. I'm sorry but Mr. Scofield and others should not come between you and the words of God.

4.1c Let me suggest a few principles in choosing a commentary.

Choose based on your need. Choose based on your finances. Choose based on the theological bias of the author. Choose based on the competency of the author.

4.1c.1 Choose based on your need.

When we are just beginning to build our library, we may want to purchase a two-volume set that covers the entire Bible. That way we have at least some help for every book in the Bible.

Possibly you are going to lead a study on a particular book of the Bible, or you have chosen a book to study on your own. You may want to buy one or more commentaries on just that book. When I was still a pastor, I would sometimes buy several commentaries on one book of the Bible as I prepared a series of messages, e.g. a series of messages from the book of Job.

You can also purchase large sets of commentaries covering every book in the Bible in individual volumes. Some larger books of the Bible such as Psalms may be presented in more than one volume. I have a two-volume set of the Psalms by John Phillips. I have two of John MacArthur's commentaries on Matthew that only cover chapters one to fifteen. So you have many choices.

4.1c.2 Choose based on your finances.

Like with anything else the more money you have the more you can buy. But do you want to? Choose wisely, Grasshopper. Three questions you may want to consider. Do I need it? Will I use it? Would it please the Lord more if I used the money for something else? Don't fall in love with the tools. Another caution: If you buy too many resources at once, you will very likely buy things that will end up on the shelf collecting dust. Learn what you want and will use before making a purchase. Before buying a set just buy one volume and see if it suits you.

4.1c.3 Choose based on the theological bias of the author.

I am not saying only purchase or use commentaries of people with whom you agree. I am saying that if you are going to invest your

money in these books that you want some common ground. Personally my main criterion is - Does the person believe the Bible is the word of God and is that evidenced in their writing. I may reference a liberal work, but I will not add it to my library. I also will not purchase books by people who are on the fringe. I will not give examples here because there is not enough room to deal with the subject. Basically I want to hear what someone says who values the word of God and who values the word of God over his own opinion and agenda.

4.1c.4 Choose based on the competency of the author.

The person writing the commentary may or may not be right. Because it is on the printed page does not mean it is true. The better you become at understanding the Bible for yourself; the better you will be at discerning the truthfulness and help a commentary offers. I try to avoid authors who refuse to get down from their soapbox. Some people allow their theological or political agenda to drive their writing and in doing so they undermine their intellectual integrity.

Maybe the person cannot write or hasn't taken the time to organize and refine. Maybe the person knows his subject but does not know how to present the material in a way that is understandable and usable. I do not want to have to read three paragraphs to learn what could have been stated in three sentences. I do not want to spend much time finding where the comments written on chapter fifteen, verse three are. I want to look at the top of the page and find where I am.

4.1c.5 My main test: Does it help me?

Most of all I want a commentary that will actually help me when I do refer to it. My primary way of testing a commentary or a particular author is to choose a passage and see if he addresses the verse I need help on. Some commentaries seem to always, or almost always, have the verse I am interested in lumped in with a group of verses and never really addressed. So as you make your decision you may want to have two or three verses that have been of interest to you and see if your perspective author addresses those verses.

4.1c.6 The good news.

There are many excellent commentaries available, but before you invest your hard-earned dollars in a commentary, put it to the test.

4.2 A Spiritual approach or good approach to the words of God?

But the natural man does not receive the things of the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him; nor can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned. But he who is spiritual judges all things, yet he himself is rightly judged by no one (1 Corinthians 2:14-15 NKJV).

4.2a The Wind and the Word.

From several choices -- audible voice, angels, creation, conscience, visions, dreams, miracles, etc. -- God chose the written word as his primary means of communicating with us. It seems to follow then that the spiritual person would want to focus on the words of God. However, we cannot find the sense of and live on the words of God apart from the Spirit of God. We need to understand the Spirit's intended role. The intent of the teaching of the Spirit of God is to direct us to words to live by, not intellectual or mystical speculations to entertain us or feed our pride.

4.2b Things we must know.

As with anything else in our pursuit of God we need to develop our understanding of the relationship between our spirituality and the words of God.

4.2b.1 We must know that our natural goodness is not enough.

The good efforts of a good man or a good woman are not enough. The moral efforts of a moral man or a moral woman are not enough. When I approach the words of God I must identify my "natural" tendencies toward what is right and good as insufficient in the eyes of God, falling short of God's glory. Much of what we believe to be God's truth is merely Man's morality and good intentions dressed up in their Sunday best.

The natural man.

"But the natural man does not receive the things of the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him; nor can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned" (1 Corinthians 2:14 NKJV).

The person described here is the good man, possibly a very religious person, the excellent neighbor, the wonderful co-worker. This person is fallen but exhibits the best of the image of God. This person may attend a Bible study and speak highly of the Bible and find many good principles to live by, but he cannot receive the things of the Spirit of God.

The natural man is limited in his goodness to what helps now in this life on earth. If being religious helps him to have a better life now, then fine, but he is not capable of living in view of eternity.

This good person cannot receive the things of the Spirit of God because they are foolishness to him because they are beyond his faithless horizon.

4.2b.2 We must know that nothing can be left up to us and our natural tendencies.

To hear what God has to say we have to be willing to look beyond ourselves. Everything in our lives, every teaching, every principle, must be examined in the light of God's word. We must allow the Spirit of God and the word of God to have full access to our lives.

The spiritual man.

“But he who is spiritual judges all things, yet he himself is rightly judged by no one” (1 Corinthians 2:15 NKJV).

The person spoken of here “judges” all things. This word means to scrutinize, investigate, interrogate, ask, question, discern, examine, judge, search. This person examines everything, even his own assumptions and conclusions, based on the words of God as directed by the Holy Spirit of God. This person is willing to “leave no stone unturned” in her search for truth. See this illustrated at the end of this chapter -- **Assumptions/Biblical Text/Conclusions.**

4.2b.3 We must know what condition our condition is in -- Spiritual or natural?

A diagnostic question(s).

Do I receive truth from the Spirit of God that is past my view of goodness or righteousness? Am I willing to receive truth that is beyond my moral and religious horizon? Am I willing to believe God for righteousness that exceeds the religious experts of my day?

Jesus' paradigm shift.

Jesus gave us teaching just like this; teaching that went beyond contemporary standards. He taught the people of his day that they needed to pursue righteousness beyond the horizons of their religious leaders.

"For I say to you, that unless your righteousness exceeds the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees, you will by no means enter the kingdom of heaven" (Matthew 5:20 NKJV).

With his teaching he attempted to shift their perspective and raise their sights to heaven and the way the heavenly Father approached righteousness. Jesus exhorted them to look beyond the example that was given to them by the religious leaders. Jesus continued in Matthew 5 stating several times: "You have heard. . .but I say to you." They needed to shift their thinking from a human perspective to a godly perspective. Here are some specifics that Jesus gave them.

"But I say to you, love your enemies, bless those who curse you, do good to those who hate you, and pray for those who spitefully use you and persecute you, that you may be sons of your Father in heaven; for He makes His sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the just and on the unjust (Matthew 5:44-45 NKJV).

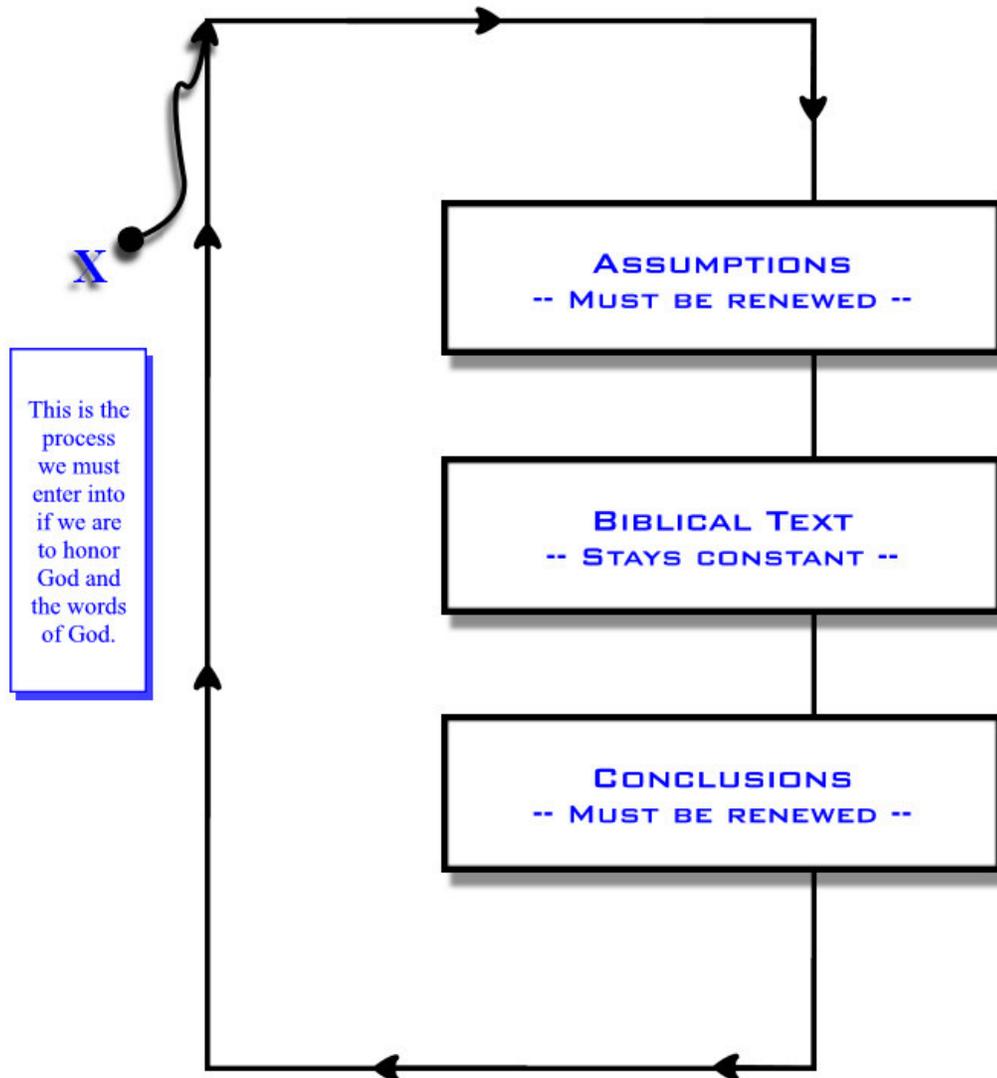
. . .that you may be sons of your Father in heaven! Oh, yeah!

The spiritual person lets God take him beyond himself with the words of God. The spirit-led person lives differently than she did before. Bless not curse, good for hate, pray instead of spite and payback, sunshine and rain, like our Father in heaven.

4.2b.4 We must know that merely a good approach to Scripture is not nearly good enough.

We must examine everything through the words of God and be willing to receive whatever truth the Wind (Spirit) of God would teach us as a result of our inquiries.

4.3 Assumptions / Biblical Text / Conclusions

TRANSFORMED BY THE RENEWING. . .**. . . OF YOUR MIND!**

We all live with certain assumptions, things that we acknowledge as true without necessarily having proof. This is human experience; this is how we are; we live with assumptions. To bring our assumptions closer to biblical conclusions we must step into the flow of the words of God for renewing.

In that process, conclusions will be formed that are closer to the truth of God. We are transformed by the renewing of our minds, however, we are still very imperfect and the process must continue. While on this earth, we should be in a continuous cycle of “running” our beliefs through the grid of the words of God for renewal.

Lesson Five

Helpers and barriers.



Lesson 5 *Helpers and barriers.*

You make search in the holy Writings, in the belief that through them you get eternal life; and it is those Writings which give witness about me. And still you have no desire to come to me so that you may have life (John 5:39-40 BBE).

Overview

- 5.1 Highlighted Resource: Bible encyclopedia
- 5.2 Study helpers
- 5.3 Barriers to effective study

5.1 *Highlighted Resource: Bible encyclopedia*

A one or two-volume Bible encyclopedia is helpful as a general information source. This “tool” is especially helpful for someone who has become a Christian very recently but it also can prove very useful for anyone. Maybe you are reading and would like to know what Urim and Thummim are, or would like more information on a biblical character such as Ruth or David. Grab your handy Bible encyclopedia and you have this information alphabetically arranged and at your disposal.

The preface to the Baker Encyclopedia of the Bible contains this helpful information:

How can concepts drawn from ancient civilizations, written in obsolete languages, in the context of cultures long dead, be made vibrant and understandable for today’s world?

This Bible encyclopedia is an attempt to solve that problem. It is designed to be a bridge between the past and the present, a mine, a source of information about those days long past that opens them up to us (Baker Encyclopedia of the Bible, Walter Elwell, Editor, Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1988, p. v).

Also helpful is a list, from the same encyclopedia, of a dozen items that the editors felt were needed to help make the Bible understandable for today. I have summarized their points.

1. Mini-commentaries of each book.
2. Theological content of the Bible.
3. General life and times of the biblical world.
4. Information concerning nations surrounding Israel.
5. Persons in the Bible.
6. Extensive historical entries.
7. Religious practices and groups.
8. The Bible as a document.

9. Selective current scholarly opinion.
10. The social customs of Bible times.
11. Geographical information.
12. Archaeology.

One bit of advice. You probably want to purchase a Bible encyclopedia which is written from a conservative viewpoint. Although encyclopedias from a liberal perspective may have some value, most of us have decided these issues and do not have the time to wade through information that has its roots in a viewpoint very contradictory to our own.

5.2 Study Helpers

What I would like to do now is introduce you to what I call “study helpers.” Words, phrases and expressions that can help us explore passages in each aspect of our inductive study. These expressions are probably most valuable in the observation stage, but since we are to continually investigate and inquire, we will find them helpful also as we interpret and apply.

What these expressions do is help us to probe without locking ourselves into preconceived ideas. For instance:

As we write down our thoughts we may find it beneficial in some places to say “This seems to say” as opposed to “This teaches us that. . .”

Let me give an example from Ephesians 5.21-22.

submitting to one another in the fear of God. (Ephesians 5:21 NKJV)

Wives, submit to your own husbands, as to the Lord. (Ephesians 5:22 NKJV)

In Ephesians 5.22, if we were writing down our thoughts for the day as we read this passage, we could write that Paul instructs wives to submit to your own husbands. I am not trying to stir controversy; this just came to mind. Paul’s teaching is very clear. We would not use our “study helper” here and say “This seems to say” because it clearly states “Wives, submit. . .”

However, in Ephesians 5.21, as we develop our context, we may (I would) write in our notebook. “This seems to say that in some form submission goes both ways.” Verses 18-21 speak to being filled by the Holy Spirit and seem to be giving us a descriptive account of the characteristics evident of a person filled with the Holy Spirit. So it seems that husbands are to be submissive also as fellow-believers in Christ.

Preliminary observations need to be identified as such.

5.2a Study Helpers: Listed

“This seems to say. . .”
 “Could this mean. . .?”
 “Huh?”
 “What if. . .”
 “What about. . .”
 “Is this a command?”
 “Does this show a contrast?”
 “Is this a comparison?”
 “What does this say about character?”

5.2b Study Helpers: usage and usefulness.

We use these words and expressions and whatever other ones you might come up with to instigate our thinking and to free up our writing so we do not become locked into drawing premature conclusions. Don't stop and figure it all out at this moment; write it down. This will help the Holy Spirit direct our minds to what a passage of Scripture actually says. Remember -- we read, we write, we reflect and we respond. These expressions can help us in all the stages of our pursuit to find God's intended meaning.

When we approach Scripture with this openness to learn, we will be much more confident in the truth of God's word as he is the one doing the teaching. Trusting in the words of God more than our system of theology is a very liberating experience; liberating as in “the truth shall make you free.”

5.3 **Barriers to effective study**

I do not have these necessarily listed in any order of importance; just some helpful observations that I have collected over the years. I read this once: “Learn from the mistakes of others; you don't have time to make them all.”

5.3a **Our opinion**

More on this in lesson six but if I had intentionally listed these “barriers” in order of importance, I would very likely have started here.

“Fools have no desire to learn; they would much rather give their own opinion” (Proverbs 18.2).

5.3b **Wanting to impress**

“It is not good to eat much honey; so to seek one's own glory is not glory” (Proverbs 25:27 NKJV).

5.3c **Wanting to justify**, looking for a loophole (Luke 10.25-29)

“What is written in the Law?” he replied. “How do you read it?” He answered: “Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your

soul and with all your strength and with all your mind' ; and, 'Love your neighbor as yourself.' "You have answered correctly," Jesus replied. "Do this and you will live." But he wanted to justify himself, so he asked Jesus. . .

Please follow the sequence:

- 1) Jesus directed him to the written word.
- 2) Jesus directed him to clarify his understanding of what was written.
- 3) The man knew the words.
- 4) Jesus directed him to do this.
- 5) But the man wanted to justify himself so he asked another question. More study?

5.3d **Thinking we can't**

You can understand much more than you realize if your heart attitude is right before God. I can remember many years ago with no training at all reading my Bible faithfully and not understanding a whole lot. This study can help you.

5.3e **Familiarity with a passage**

"Oh, I know what this passage is about. . .click."

Too often we think we already know a passage inside and out and this blocks us from seeing what God is actually saying. This is one of the drawbacks to using highlighters and using the same Bible all the time. Your eyes will always be drawn to the highlighted sections, and you will mentally check that off the list as something you already know.

5.3f **Undue urgency to have the answer**

Thinking that you have to have the answer in a prescribed period of time, e.g. during a Bible study and your pride is on the line to come up with an answer. Hint: Use the "WD-40" approach. For those of you not familiar with WD-40, it is a lubricant developed to break loose rusty bolts. Sometimes a bolt is rusted on; you have to spray it and come back later because if you force the issue you will damage the bolt. Sometimes we have to let a passage soak; come back later so we don't "damage" the passage by forcing the issue.

5.3g **Searching for the hidden meaning**

I remember a man in our first church talking to me about searching the Bible for the hidden meanings. Some take the saying "God moves in mysterious ways" into their study. God is certainly beyond us as the heavens are beyond the earth, but he gave us his written word with the purpose that we would understand it and live it. We search for God's intended meaning, not a hidden meaning.

5.3h **Proving our point**

Some people only study the Bible to prove a point, or better yet, to prove someone else wrong. Sorry but we have missed the point. We are the ones the words of God need to speak to and renew and transform first. Even the text we so often use for apologetics states “give an answer to everyone who asks.”

But in your hearts set apart Christ as Lord. Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have. But do this with gentleness and respect (1 Peter 3:15 NIV).

In fact, the preceding paragraph which sets the tone and the context deals with our attitude toward others and our tongue.

. . .not returning evil for evil or insult for insult, but giving a blessing instead; for you were called for the very purpose that you might inherit a blessing. . .must keep his tongue from evil and his lips from speaking deceit (1 Peter 3.9-10).

If we study the Bible to prove a point, we have fallen into a trap, and we will become too emotionally invested in what we are “standing for” to accept the truth.

5.3i **Jumping to conclusions**

Covered at the end of lesson one. Interpreting before we really know what is going on.

5.3j **Not living by truth we do learn**

Possibly the worst because here we are up to our ears in deceit. We must understand the dynamic nature of knowing truth. If we do not live the truth, do the truth, we will deceive ourselves.

But be doers of the word, and not only hearers of it, blinding yourselves with false ideas” (James 1:22 BBE).

Lesson Six

Captive to Christ or free to our opinion.



Lesson 6 Captive to Christ or free to our opinion

We fight with weapons that are different from those the world uses. Our weapons have power from God that can destroy the enemy's strong places. We destroy people's arguments and every proud thing that raises itself against the knowledge of God. We capture every thought and make it give up and obey Christ (2 Corinthians 10:4-5 NCV).

Overview

- 6.1 Highlighted Resource Bible software
- 6.2 Captive to Christ or free to our opinion

6.1 Highlighted Resource Bible software

Okay. I admit it. Maybe, possibly, I overuse the word amazing, but the things that a good Bible software program allows us to do are amazing, fantastic, and spectacular. And very inexpensive so instead of sinking a bunch of money in software, we can send fifty dollars to World Vision to provide winter clothing for people in eastern Europe, or buy a goat for a family in Africa for \$75; or purchase "wonder trees" for farmers in Zimbabwe for a mere \$28; clothe a homeless child in the USA for \$25.

The following will be an overview addressing function, cost, need and care. I am giving you a bare-bones explanation, but I think it is enough to acquaint you with this tool if you are not already familiar with it.

6.1a Function: What it does.

6.1a.1 Find and display.

Most, if not all, programs allow you to find information in two general ways

Search by word, combination of words or phrase.

Search by book, chapter and verse.

If you are looking for a verse and can only remember a word or two, or a phrase, simply enter your information in the appropriate place and the program will find and display the references matching your criteria.

Or if you already know chapter and verse, you can find your text by entering the information or sometimes by a tree structure.

So now what do you do?

6.1a.2 *Examine and compare.*

You have your text displayed but maybe you would like to compare it with similar texts. Or maybe you would like to see the same verse in two or more translations for comparison. You can do this, usually in a matter of seconds.

You can display your verse and cross-references. You can display your verse in multiple translations. You can display commentary on the verse in another window. . .root words. . .word meanings, etc.

6.1a.3 *Collect; bring things together in usable form.*

Now you can organize and collect this information to use in lesson preparation, personal study, Scripture memory, inspirational poster.

All you have to do is copy the material you want and paste it into your word processor. Some programs have this function built in. Now you can print it; add it to notes; whatever you choose. One way I use this is to copy, then paste, a text into Word that I want to either simply write my thoughts down concerning this text or bring it under more intensive study. After I put it into my word processor, I will triple space it (or more), and I will create a wide left or right margin for my thoughts.

Sometimes I just print out a passage so I can carry it to work with me and reference it throughout the day, or I isolate a single verse with a graphic - grove of trees, a mountain, river - as an inspirational mini-poster.

6.1a.4 *Access outside sources.*

What I mean is that many programs give you access to other study aides that are designed to work within your program: commentaries, encyclopedias, dictionaries, Bible atlases, word studies.

There are also many web sites that perform the exact functions that I have just outlined so if you have internet access you have abundant resources available to you. I have at least two pages on my site -- itsaboutGod.com - that provide links to helpful sites.

6.1b *Cost: How much do I have to pay?*

Nothing. You could potentially spend hundreds, but there are so many excellent free resources most of us really need to spend little if anything.

6.1c **Need: Will I use it?**

If you use a computer, and if you study your Bible, then, yes, you will probably use it. One key is - Don't get too fancy! Don't make it too hard and increase your learning curve by trying to do too much.

I have used an old version of Quick Verse that I bought maybe 8 years ago; two free programs from the Lockman Foundation (Quick Bible - NASB and AMP); and just recently I found e-Sword while "googling" for information for this study.

6.1d **e-Sword**

This program is just excellent. It is free, but the author - Rick Meyer -- does accept donations to help him with his ministry. The attitude this guy has is very encouraging; a very giving person. I am used to finding good stuff on the web but not this good. I was able for free (and of course completely legally) to download resources that not that many years ago would have cost hundreds of dollars. And the program installs and functions flawlessly. It is easy to use and very intuitive. You really have to see it to believe it.

6.2 **Captive to Christ or free to my opinion.**

The truth that I am about to share with you developed in my life as I was doing what I am trying to teach in this study.

6.2a **Captive to Christ**

I was reading God's word and listening. And as has happened so many times, I was flabbergasted when God finally peeled off enough layers of preconception and misconception so I could see what God was actually saying in the text I am going to discuss.

Please note that I am relating my experience; I am not saying everyone shares this same experience but probably many people do. Here it is. I had always (and only) heard this verse used to help someone trying to overcome temptation or break a bad habit.

“. . .casting down arguments and every high thing that exalts itself against the knowledge of God, bringing every thought into captivity to the obedience of Christ” (2 Corinthians 10:5 NKJV).

In my mind it read - “. . .bringing every [**bad**] thought into captivity to the obedience of Christ.” If that temptation came, you would bring that bad, tempting thought in obedience to Christ.

But the verse doesn't say that, does it? It hit me - bringing **every** thought, not just bad ones. By now bells are ringing, the light bulb has come on. I realize that every thought needs to be brought before Christ for his approval; we

assume too much if we are selective at this point. We must submit every thought or we overstep our bounds.

6.2a.1 Bringing down strongholds

This is how we bring down the strongholds and arguments against the cause of Christ because everything we put on display has been brought under the scrutiny of our Lord first. We get our stuff together first and then we are ready to battle.

Every thought. So we march our theology and doctrine before Christ. We drag our sacred cows before his throne. And we only leave with what gives up and obeys Christ. The favorite interpretation of my favorite verse must be brought before the King of glory. And that soap box I have been standing on all these years? Doesn't have a chance.

Every thought we capture and make it give up and obey Christ. Before the throne of Jesus what before "seemed right" might now not seem quite so right. So in our spiritual battle as we pursue the truth of the words of God, let's not forget where to begin. In my heart am I willing to bring every thought before Christ?

6.2a.2 Building and purifying our database

Bringing every thought captive to Christ is a purifying and refining process in our lives. As we obey our Lord in this, he filters out the contaminants that have accumulated in our theology from our fallen nature, our human frailty, our culture, our sub-culture, etc. until only the truth is left.

If after this filtering process, we see that the truth in our hands gives up and obeys Christ, then we allow it to become part of our database for Christian living and theology.

6.2b Free to my opinion: the fool's delight

"A fool finds no pleasure in understanding but delights in airing his own opinions" (Proverbs 18:2 NIV).

What is an opinion? In this wise saying in Proverbs 18.2, the writer tethers the fool to his opinion. I once heard a professor of philosophy quote someone else saying, "The opinion is the lowest living life-form on Planet Earth." At yourDictionary.com I find that an opinion is "a belief or idea held with confidence, but not substantiated by direct proof or knowledge."

So when I hear statements such as "I have every right to my opinion" and "I have every right to voice my opinion" I suppose I would concede a certain

degree of truthfulness. God certainly allows you to make that choice. It seems that some people hold their ability to possess and express their opinion as proof of their personhood, their individuality and significance.

But that is not where we actually find our individuality and significance, is it? No, we find our true selves only as we are bowed before the throne of God.

And we will bow; it is merely a question of now or later.

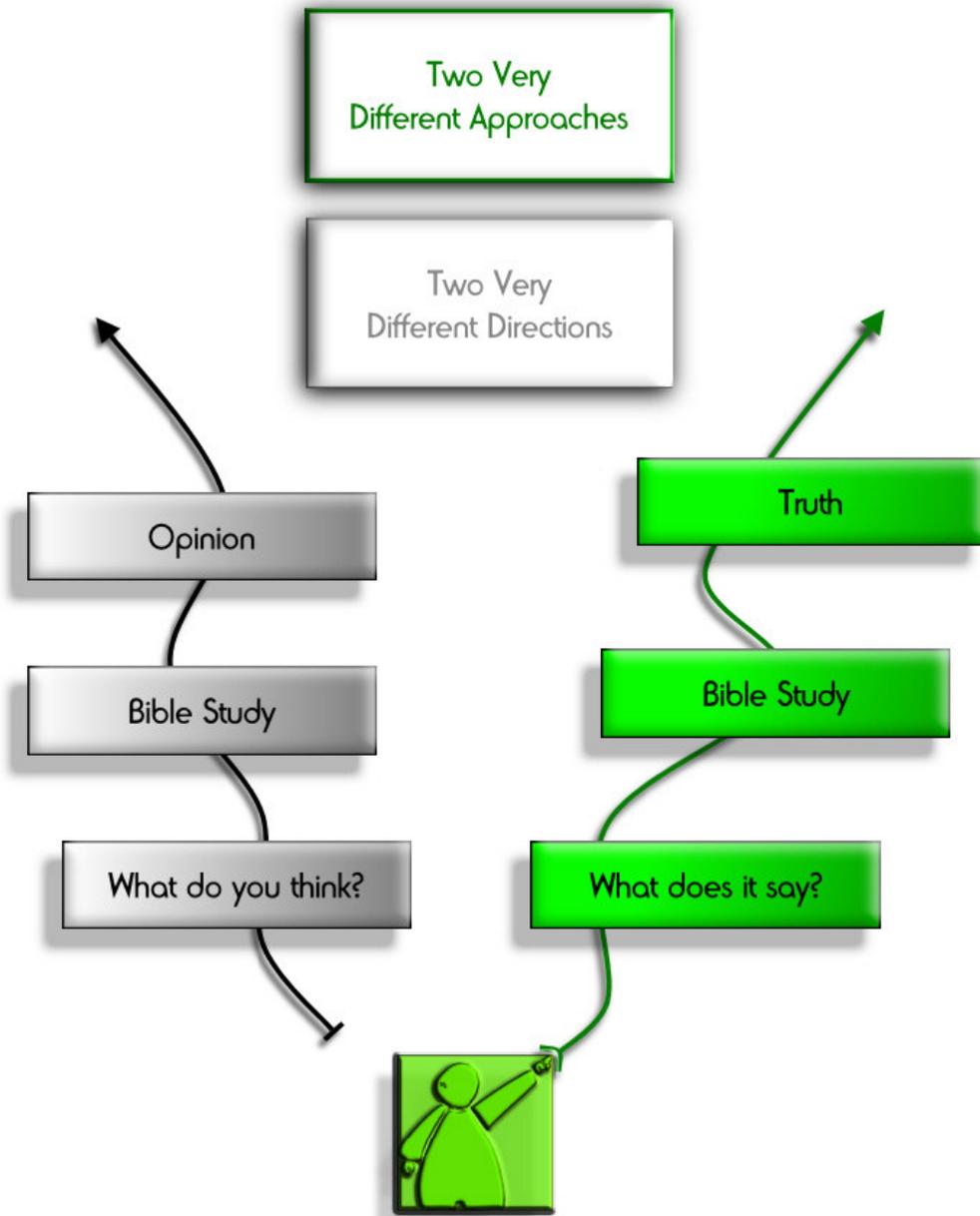
Personally, I would rather submit my “opinions” to Christ now and have him substantiate their veracity as opposed to standing in defiance of Christ until my knee is bent and my tongue confesses his lordship in a setting of judgment.

The fool tries to find significance in his defiance; the wise person finds their significance as the creature bowed before the Creator. It certainly puzzles me why so many professing Christians hold such high regard for their own opinion. And how they can have any confidence in truth that they refuse to take captive and make it give up and obey Christ.

6.2c Practical application

So when I am reading and studying and discover a “new” truth, before I become too emotionally attached, I need to bring it before Jesus Christ. What I learned in church growing up - bring before Christ.

Every thought - before Christ.



Lesson Seven

Biblically wrapped or biblically true?



Lesson 7 Biblically wrapped or biblically true?

“First, you must understand this: No prophecy in Scripture is a matter of one’s own interpretation” (2 Peter 1:20).

Overview

- 7.1 Highlighted Resource Exhaustive concordance
- 7.2 Cross-references
- 7.3 Biblically wrapped or biblically true?

7.1 Highlighted Resource Exhaustive concordance

7.1a An extremely valuable tool.

An exhaustive concordance is an extremely valuable tool for Bible study. An exhaustive concordance contains every reference to every word in the Bible, but actually some “exhaustive” concordances are not technically exhaustive as they do not index every word, such as, the most common articles, prepositions, pronouns, etc.; words like a, an, are, he, then and the like.

7.1b Uses of the concordance

- Finding that elusive verse.
- Finding related verses (cross-references).
- Finding root meanings of words.
- Finding the various ways the word is translated.

With a concordance you can find any word in the Bible, the verses where it is found and even some information as to its Hebrew or Greek roots and meanings. And you can do this with no training in the foreign languages.

There are many benefits to using a concordance, but there is also one major caution which I would like to bring our attention to. A concordance allows you to often find many verses which seem to be related. The person who is studying the Bible to try to prove a point can easily be overcome by the temptation to determine what a passage means before knowing what it really says or whether or not it furthers his or her point, but they use the verses anyway to overwhelm the recipients of their teaching by sheer numbers. We have all seen it. More time spent listing and reading cross-references than actually finding what the main text has to say.

We will have more to say about that in a moment but first let’s look at what a cross-reference is.

7.2 Cross-references

7.2a *A cross-reference is:*

A cross-reference is a verse which is related or “connected” to another by comparison or contrast and which increases our insight by studying both passages together. Please note that this can be a very subjective process, so we proceed with using cross-references but we proceed with caution and discernment.

7.2b *Cross-references can be associated by a word or by a concept.*

With the concordance we can find the same word in many verses. They are not necessarily cross-references however. To be a cross-reference they must in some way address the same concept under study. Also a verse does not have to have the exact same word to be a cross-reference. Sometimes the concept is expressed with completely different words. But probably most cross-references will have direct word associations.

7.2c *Some examples of cross-references.*

- Love and sin Proverbs 10.12, 28.13; 1 Peter 4.8
- Beauty 1 Peter 3.3-4; 1 Timothy 2.9-10; Ezekiel 16.11-13,15.
- The ways of God Isaiah 55.8-9; Job 21.14

7.3 *Biblically wrapped or biblically true?*

7.3a *Biblically wrapped*

Sometimes we hear a message preached that sounds very biblical, not because it is actually true or biblical, but because of the way it has been presented, the way it has been “wrapped” with emotion or information, appealing usually to what we already know or think we know and what we want to believe.

7.3b *An example of a message “wrapped” in emotion.*

I gave an example of this in the first part of this study concerning a message preached from Psalm 11.3: “If the foundations be destroyed, what can the righteous do?”

Usually this is a call to stand up and fight for our country, and fight for prayer in our schools, fight to have the ten commandments publicly displayed and, generally speaking, fight to save America from crumbling into a moral abyss.

The message has a fearful tone impelling us to run and do something for our country to fight off this grave threat. The problem is, and it is a formidable problem at that, is that Psalm 11 teaches nothing of the sort. I heard this type message so many times that I finally went to the text and studied the entire psalm. In this psalm David ignored the message of fear; his response was to seek God in worship, in his holy temple. The tone and tenor is so different than the “wrapped” message of fear and rush to judgment.

7.3c **A common tactic: Proving by numbers**

A common way to do this is to list a long line of cross-references which are presented in a way that seems to bolster whatever claim is being made at the time. So the person announces a text, often makes an emotional declaration, and then proceeds to reference verse after verse to substantiate his or her deduction.

Making a “mole hill” of an idea into a “mountain” of truth.

Here is what we must understand. Several verses that seem to support our conclusion mean nothing. Until we take every verse, every phrase, every thought captive and bring it to obedience before Christ, then we do not have credible truth to base our lives on. We have merely attempted to make a “mole hill” of an idea into a mountain of truth. And shame on us!

Cross-references can be great, but we still have to allow Scripture to speak for itself, and we always, always, have to ask - What does it say?

7.3d **Another proven method: You can't say “no” to me**

People sometimes use the emotional tack of an overpowering personality. The person is so charismatic you just cannot say no. Or you know you will be rejected if you say no. Mix this with an emotional theme, something you already want to believe and a long list of cross-references from the front of the Bible to the back, and you don't have a chance.

To me this is a danger sign if someone is trying to exert his will over me, even if he is well-intended, and many are. But they are still wrong. The truth of God's words has to be our ultimate goal; the truly spiritual leader will do everything in his or her power to allow me to see and make a decision for truth.

7.3e **A New Testament cross-reference “saves Lot's bacon.”**

Sometimes a message is so heavily wrapped in what we already believe to be true that we do not need an emotional hot-button pushed, and neither do we need a charismatic personality or an abundance of cross-references to drive the point home. The point has already been driven home many messages ago; we just need to ride along in the familiar.

Enter Lot, stage left, well-known reprobate in the Old Testament. He played the bad boy nephew to Abraham's good uncle. He took the low road; Abraham took the high road. Lot went left; Abraham went right. One man said, as many have and will continue to say, that Lot lost “all sense of moral value.”

And here is where they say it all began.

Abram dwelled in the land of Canaan, and Lot dwelled in the cities of the plain, and pitched his tent toward Sodom (Genesis 13:12 KJV).

How many messages have you heard on Genesis 13.10 about how Lot turned his eyes to sin and away from God, how he wasn't separated from the world; how he compromised his faith, yada, yada, yada. When the preacher announces his text and mentions Lot, we already know where he is going -- Something along the line of a warning to not make a fateful decision as Lot did and ruining our lives.

I have to admit that things look pretty bad for Lot in the Genesis account. Part of the real problem with Lot is that his story raises more questions than answers, and we don't like that. So we wrap it up and make it presentable; being true to the text gets lost in the shuffle somewhere. We have preached this story and preached it again and again and said more than what God said. As a result we were way off base.

But I would not have known this had I not read the Bible through on my own. One day as I was reading I came upon a very interesting text.

“and delivered righteous Lot, who was oppressed by the filthy conduct of the wicked (for that righteous man, dwelling among them, tormented his righteous soul from day to day by seeing and hearing their lawless deeds)” (2 Peter 2:7-8 NKJV).

For all of our messages on bad boy Lot's bad decisions and waywardness, this is what counts. What does God say about Lot?

Righteous Lot. . .righteous man. . .righteous soul.

The wrapping is now off; the truth can be seen.

7.3f Long nails are needed for the job.

I would summarize with this. A message is not true because someone has connected one or a hundred verses to it. We find the truth only when we are not satisfied with a surface examination. A surface examination yields superficial results. Only when we allow the words to speak to us, penetrate our hearts and change us do we please God in our pursuit of his truth.

When I put new siding on my house six or seven years ago, I found that I had to use 3 ½ inch nails to penetrate all the layers so the siding would be secure. No way did I ever think that they would have to be that long. But if I had not used the long nails that went deep enough into the house, then my siding would never have withstood the storms that inevitably would come.

Using a larger number of short nails would not have done the job, just like using many cross-references that only go surface deep will not do the job. For a while it would have looked good; I could have invited family, friends and neighbors to come over and admire how nice it looked but it would not have stood the test.

Not this



Love covers all sins!
Proverbs 10.12b



He who covers his sins will not prosper!
Proverbs 28.13a

But this



Love covers all sins!
Proverbs 10.12b



He who covers his sins will not prosper!
Proverbs 28.13a

Principle: Letting the passage speak for itself often takes the “fight” out of Bible study!

Lesson Eight

Breaking it down!



Lesson 8 Breaking it down!

Now the Bereans were of more noble character than the Thessalonians, for they received the message with great eagerness and examined the Scriptures every day to see if what Paul said was true (Acts 17:11 NIV).

Overview

- 8.1 *Highlighted Resource* Books on diagramming sentences; web sites
- 8.2 *Diagramming*
- 8.3 *Parallelism*
- 8.4 *Examples, principles & practice*

8.1 Highlighted Resource Books on diagramming sentences; web sites

This is possibly the easiest tool to overlook in our entire discussion of Bible study aids. Diagramming sentences probably doesn't seem very spiritual. After all, you're thinking, "Hey, Dave, I got over English grammar in high school." I assure you that I would not waste the space and your time if this were not an excellent tool.

Remember at the beginning of this section I first highlighted an English dictionary saying how important it was to know the meanings of the words we read in our Bibles. Well, how the words fit and work together is also essential to understanding God's message. If we can pick up even a few simple ways to break down the structure of a phrase, or sentence or verse to understand God's thought better, we will boost our study.

Be patient and let me acquaint you with the process or re-acquaint you with the process, and I think you will see the potential rewards. First let me steer you toward some web sites and some written material.

If you have internet access, you will find the following sites very helpful, especially the first one.

8.1a Recommended web sites for diagramming

One Way of Learning English Grammar

http://www.geocities.com/gene_moutoux/basicdiagrams.htm

Diagramming Sentences

<http://webster.commnet.edu/grammar/diagrams/diagrams.htm>

Grammar Now

<http://www.grammarnow.com/>

Older Systems of Sentence Diagramming
<http://www.polysyllabic.com/olddiagrams.html>

Basics of Reed-Kellogg diagrams
http://www.utexas.edu/courses/langling/e360k/handouts/diagrams/diagram_basics/basics.html

8.1b Recommended books for diagramming

The second edition of *A Workbook of Sentence Diagramming* is now available. The price of the second edition is \$12.50 (including book-rate shipment within the United States. If you want to buy one or more copies of this book, please email the author at ermoutoux@juno.com.

For further information about diagramming, see Martha Kolln's *Understanding English Grammar* (4th Edition. MacMillan Publishing Company: New York. 1994) or Thomas Klammer and Muriel R. Schulz's *Analyzing English Grammar* (2nd Edition. Allyn & Bacon: Boston. 1996).

8.2 Diagramming

With the web sites and books recommended above I do not feel the need to attempt to explain all the details of diagramming (as if I could anyway). If I can help you to begin using the basics, I will give myself an attaboy.

The diagram below breaks the sentence into parts - subject, verb, direct object. Illustrating the verse in this way also yields several insights and observations as we compare parts to parts.

For instance, look at the parallel illustrated with the subjects. We will learn later in parallelism that this is antithetical parallelism: Gives opposite ideas or contrasts.

8.2a An example of diagramming a Scripture verse loosely borrowing from Reed-Kellogg.

8.2a.1 A possible diagram of Proverbs 11.13 NIV

A gossip betrays a confidence, but a trustworthy man keeps a secret (Proverbs 11:13 NIV).

A gossip	betrays	a confidence
a trustworthy man	keeps	a secret

8.2a.2 A few observations

Gossip contrasted with trustworthy man

A gossip betrays

A trustworthy person keeps, does not betray

Gossip is betrayal

A gossip is untrustworthy

Who do I not want to tell my secret to?

Can you see the benefit of learning to identify and organize this information? Look at what I was able to observe in just a very brief time. In the writing stage of our process I might diagram this sentence on a blank piece of paper and just start writing down my thoughts as fast as they come. Then stop and think about it and possibly write some more. Remember during our initial observations we want to guard against at least two tendencies: Being afraid to express our thoughts freely or locking ourselves into a thought (premature interpretation).

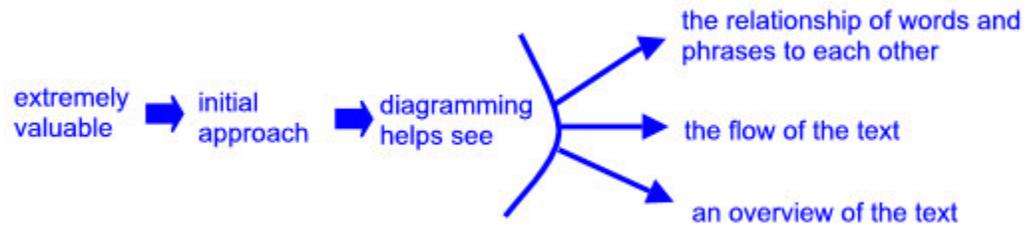
We must let the text speak to us. This is one very effective way to help that process.

Now let's look at an informal and extremely useful method of diagramming.

Principle: Save your paper. I very seldom use new paper during this stage of writing and studying. I save all my paper that goes through my printer, flip it over to the blank side, clip it to a clipboard and save a tree or two.

8.2b Examples of non-traditional, informal diagramming.

I find it extremely valuable in my initial approach to a verse (or verses) to use some form of diagramming to help me see the relationship of the words and phrases to each other, the flow of the verse and an overview. No rules here. The well-worn phrase “if it works for you” certainly applies.



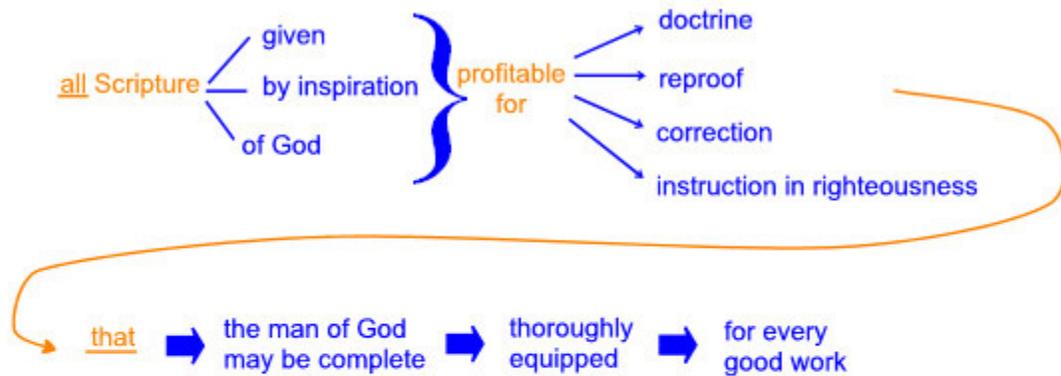
Becoming familiar with the rules of grammar and understanding the structure of a sentence will help you even with your informal methods of diagramming because you will learn to identify apples with apples, oranges with oranges. For instance in the first example I gave, you can clearly identify the subjects - gossip, trustworthy man; the verbs - betrays, keeps; and the direct objects - confidence, secret.

For some this is very easy to do, for others this may seem a daunting task. Don't let this intimidate you; you can do it. The hyperlinks to the grammar sites above are excellent. Persevere in this and you will be rewarded.

Let's move on to some examples but first a couple notes. First note: I did these examples using DrawPlus 7.0, a drawing program by Serif. Excellent program. If you are interesting in finding out more, let me know. Second note: When I am actually doing this for myself, at this stage, I do this by hand, not computer-assisted. By illustrating these with DrawPlus I conserve space. At the end of this section or chapter I will give one or two handwritten examples to hopefully give you a better feel for what I am attempting to communicate. I will simply take something I have done, scan it and save it as a JPEG and include it for your perusal.

8.2b.1 2 Timothy 3:16-17 Example & observations

All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, thoroughly equipped for every good work. (2 Timothy 3:16-17 NKJV)



- All Scripture inspired
- Scripture - gift from God
- Profitable for?
- What does “complete” mean?
- Thoroughly equipped
- Equipped - every good work

8.2b.2 John 8:31-32 Example & observations

Then Jesus said to those Jews who believed Him, “If you abide in My word, you are My disciples indeed. And you shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free.” (John 8:31-32 NKJV)

Then Jesus said ➡ to Jews who believed Him

If you abide in my word

you are my disciples indeed

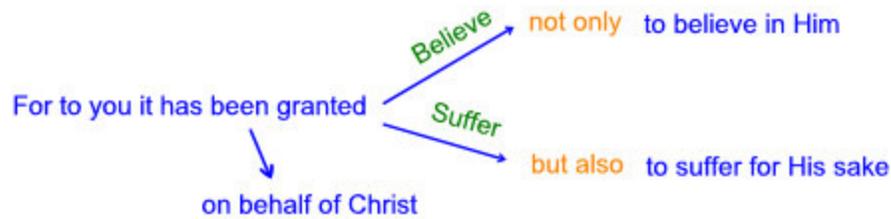
And you shall know the truth

and the truth shall make you free

- We hear “the truth shall make you free” quoted liberally, but look what some basic “detective” work reveals.
- Truth makes free -- if know truth - know truth if my disciples - my disciples if abide in my word
- Living in God’s words yields this truth that frees.
- Also, Jesus was speaking to people who believed him.

8.2b.3 Philippians 2.29 Example & observations

For to you it has been granted on behalf of Christ, not only to believe in Him, but also to suffer for His sake (Philippians 1:29 NKJV).

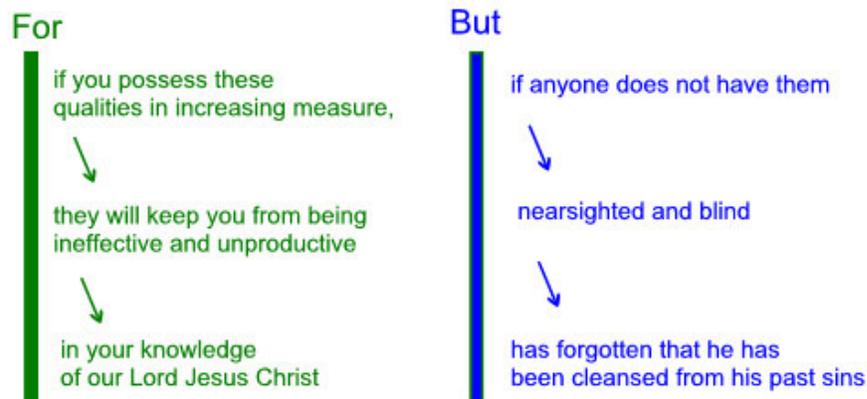


- Grant -- two-pronged
- Believe & suffer
- Where does this fit with the “blessing” mentality that seems so prevalent today?

8.2b.4 2 Peter 1:8-9 Example & observations

For if you possess these qualities in increasing measure, they will keep you from being ineffective and unproductive in your knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ (2 Peter 1:8 NIV).

But if anyone does not have them, he is nearsighted and blind, and has forgotten that he has been cleansed from his past sins (2 Peter 1:9 NIV).

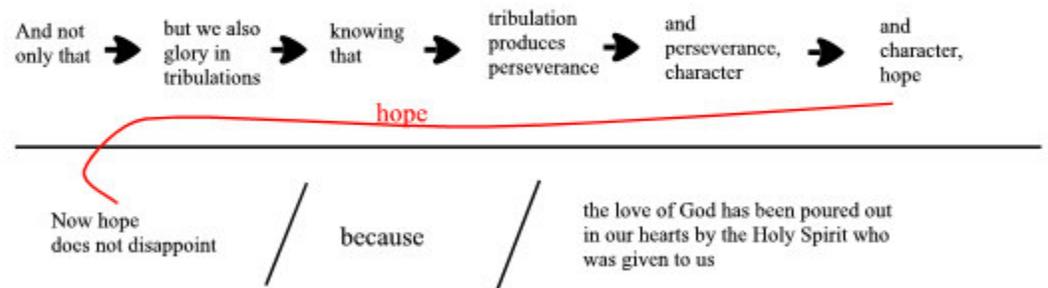


- Qualities - increasing measure

- Seems possible to have knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ but be ineffective and unproductive in it
- So knowledge alone is not enough
- Increasing measure - “treading water” not enough; must be increasing
- If not, then - nearsighted, can’t see for distance; blind, can’t see at all
- How sad
- Forgot about our cleansing, equally sad

8.2b.5 Romans 5.3-5 NKJV Example & observations

And not only that, but we also glory in tribulations, knowing that tribulation produces perseverance; and perseverance, character; and character, hope. Now hope does not disappoint, because the love of God has been poured out in our hearts by the Holy Spirit who was given to us (Romans 5.3-5 NKJV).



- Glory in tribulations? Really?
- Look at progression - tribulation, perseverance, character, hope
- Maybe hope doesn’t come by merely reading a verse.
- Hope that does not disappoint - now that’s hope
- Could it be that this hope is created because as we are going through the process above our line in verses 3-4 that this is where and when “the love of God is being poured out in our hearts”
- So if we avoid tribulation at all costs, or if we become bitter during these times, what happens to the process?

8.3 Parallelism

Basic tools.

As we have arrived at the subject of parallelism, please keep this in mind - basic tools. That is what I have pursued in this entire study -- to introduce you to basic tools and to help you become skilled in using them.

Appetizer, not the meal.

Continuing with the previous thought I believe that what I will share is accurate and helpful, but it is more the appetizer than the meal. These thoughts come to me as I have waded through a tremendous volume of material in seeking the highest degree of accuracy and quality for what I communicate in these pages.

On to parallelism.

8.3a Parallelism defined

8.3a.1 Parallelism: *Grammar* The use of identical or equivalent syntactic constructions in corresponding clauses or phrases
(yourDictionary.com)

8.3a.2 Parallel words and thoughts used to communicate God's truth.
In Scripture, especially in the Psalms and Proverbs, we can observe God using parallel words and thoughts to communicate his truth.
Hopefully this concept will become clearer to you as we move through our types and examples of parallelism.

8.3b The three types of parallelism discussed in this study.

- Antithetic parallelism: Gives opposite ideas or contrasts.
- Synthetic parallelism: Adds to or amplifies.
- Synonymous parallelism: Repeats in a subsequent line approximately the same thought contained in the earlier line.
- For reference to and explanation of other types, see hyperlinks below.

8.3c Web links to related sites.

<http://www.wcg.org/lit/bible/poet/poetry.htm>

<http://www.eyeoftheneedle.net/structur/define.html>

<http://www.biblicalhebrew.com/nt/beatitudes.htm>

8.3d Antithetic parallelism: Gives opposite ideas or contrasts.

A key word to look for in antithetic parallelism is “but.” As in the following verse, a gossip. . .but a trustworthy man.

A gossip betrays a confidence, but a trustworthy man keeps a secret (Proverbs 11:13 NIV).

A gossip	betrays	a confidence
a trustworthy man	keeps	a secret

- Notice that I can learn more about the trustworthy person because of the parallel relationship with the gossip
- Trustworthy person - not a gossip
- Trustworthy person - doesn't betray
- Trustworthy person - keeps a confidence
- And conversely for a gossip

The integrity of the upright guides them, but the unfaithful are destroyed by their duplicity (Proverbs 11:3 NIV).

integrity	guides	them	[the upright]
the unfaithful	are destroyed	[by their]	duplicity

- This sentence structure is not as easily diagrammed, but we can still identify the parallel relationships
- Upright - integrity - guides
- Unfaithful - duplicity - destroys
- Duplicity - Hmm. Good place to use Webster's, huh?

People without good sense find fault with their neighbors,
but those with understanding keep quiet (Proverbs 11:12 NCV).

People without good sense	find fault	with their neighbors
those with understanding	keep quiet	[about their neighbors]

- How about the insight this diagram reveals in my actions and attitudes toward my neighbors
- When I begin finding fault, this verse cuts me to the quick
- This is not quite the values of our society and unfortunately
- We might even ask ourselves as the Church how significant we would find this truth.

8.3e Synthetic parallelism: Adds to or amplifies.

Whoever hides hate is a liar.
Whoever tells lies is a fool.
(Proverbs 10:18 NCV)

Whoever hides hate	is	a liar
Whoever tells lies	is	a fool

- The character of a liar is further exposed
- Not only lies but hides hate
- Not only a liar but a fool also
- Synthetic parallelism develops the idea

A false witness will not go unpunished,
and he who pours out lies will perish (Proverbs 19:9 NIV).

A false witness	will not go	unpunished
he who pours out lies	will	perish

- Develops thought - not only will be punished but will perish
- Develops nature of false witness - pours out lies

8.3.f **Synonymous parallelism:** Repeats in a subsequent line approximately the same thought contained in the earlier line.

She opens her arms to the poor and extends
her hands to the needy (Proverbs 31:20 NIV).

She	opens her arms	to the poor
[she]	extends her hands	to the needy

- Synonymous and synthetic often a judgment call; the idea is to begin seeing the insights the parallel relationship yields, not just correctly identifying terms in a somewhat subjective process
- Opens arms - extends hands
- To the poor - to the needy

Liars hate the people they hurt, and false
praise can ruin others (Proverbs 26:28 NCV).

Liars	hate	the people they hurt
false praise	can ruin	others

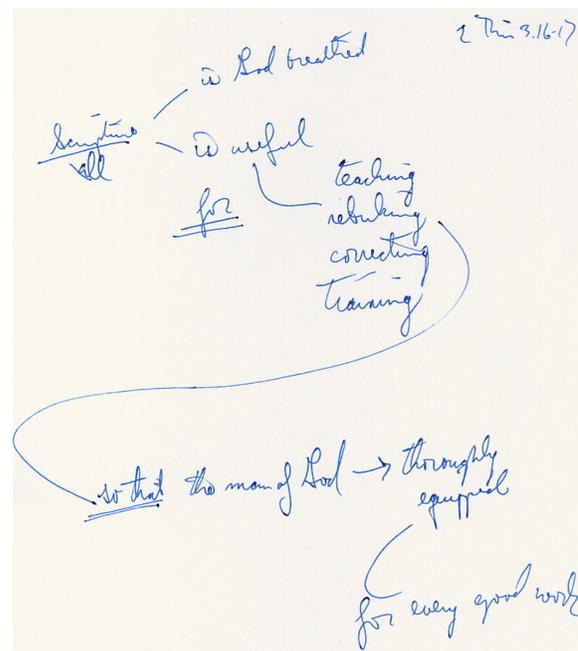
- Liars - people who give false praise
- Hate - can ruin
- This example might be closer to synthetic parallelism

8.4 Examples, principles & practice

8.4a Examples

8.4a.1 Dave - 2 Timothy 3:16-17

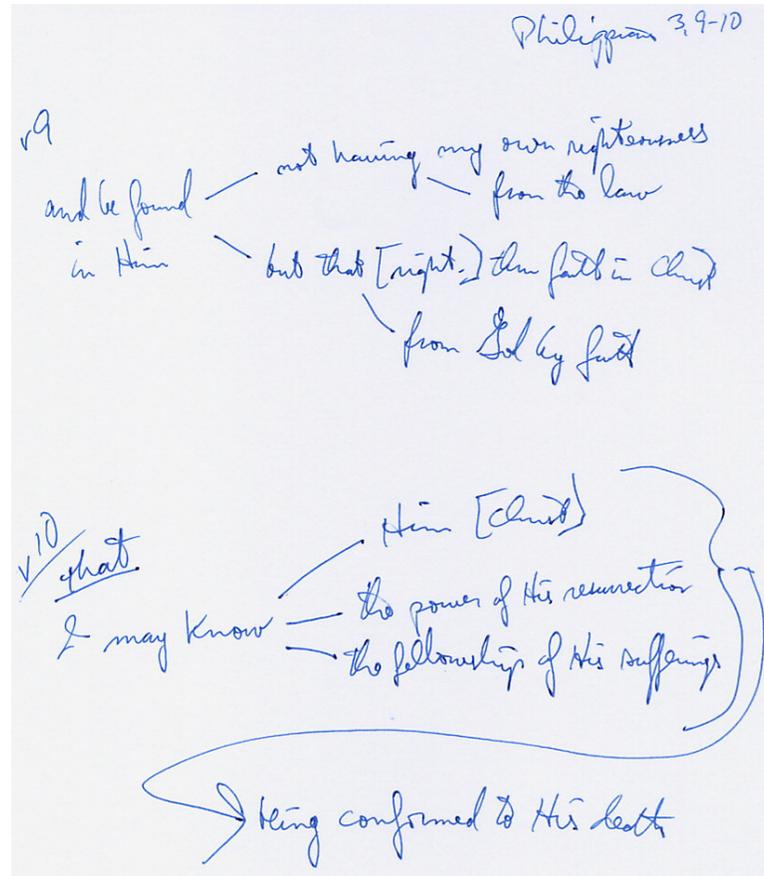
All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, so that the man of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work (2 Timothy 3:16-17 NIV).



- Please note that I have reduced this example to save space; was actually done on an 8 ½ X 11 sheet of paper
- This is often my beginning step but look how quickly the relationships between words and phrases begin to develop
- Scripture - God-breathed
- Useful for. . .
- That. . .
- We then can build on this; start writing your thoughts down, even basic simple things and let the Spirit of God do his work as he yields to you valuable insight

8.4a.2 Dave - Philippians 3:9-10

and be found in Him, not having my own righteousness, which is from the law, but that which is through faith in Christ, the righteousness which is from God by faith; that I may know Him and the power of His resurrection, and the fellowship of His sufferings, being conformed to His death (Philippians 3:9-10 NKJV).



- Once again look at how quickly relationships develop
- In verse 9, we see a clear contrast between “my own righteousness” and the righteousness “which is through faith in Christ”
- A key to verse 10 is “that” as it looks back to verse 9; something going on in verse 9 is prerequisite to “that I may know” in verse 10
- The triplets in verse 10 as to what Paul seeks to know - Him [being Christ]; the power of his resurrection; the fellowship of his sufferings
- The three phrases are a package it seems in Paul’s perspective

- Etc., etc. . .

8.4b Principles

8.4b.1 Don't force the issue.

As with your entire study approach, let things develop; more specifically give God the greatest opportunity to speak to you through your willing spirit and disciplined approach.

8.4b.2 *Get it right.*

Pursue accuracy to the best of your ability; try to make sure your comparisons are valid, apples to apples, oranges to oranges.

8.4b.3 Don't be fearful.

Yes, get it right; pursue accuracy. But don't be afraid to make a mistake. An honest mistake is not what God will frown on; we are all far from perfect. What is displeasing is a stiff-necked, unrepentant attitude. We bow before God; we do our best; we step forward with courage and confidence.

8.4b.4 *Write now, qualify later.*

Once you are satisfied with how you have diagrammed your verse, then be free in writing down your thoughts. Don't qualify here; get it all down and later you can bring your thoughts under more scrutiny. Unless the Holy Spirit makes an issue in your heart about something, you can bring these thoughts in captivity to Christ a little later.

8.4b.5 *Be creative and enjoy the process.*

God made us all unique; we think differently; we learn differently. Discipline yourself to become more familiar with the Reed-Kellogg procedure and then allow your God-given creativity to express itself.

Discipline and freedom and creativity work great together. When I studied piano and classic guitar in college, I disciplined myself to practice scales, technique, fingering methods, etc. The funny thing that happened on the way to the store was that the more I disciplined myself in these things the more freedom of expression I enjoyed in playing.

8.4b.6 Don't overlook.

We don't want to force the issue, but we also don't want to be in too big of a hurry. An insight does not have to immediately stand out to

us to still be a solid and powerful truth. Sometimes we have to stare at the picture to see what is actually there.

8.4b.7 Persevere.

As in writing, many times the inspiration is nowhere to be seen at the start, but go ahead and take that first step. Diagram the sentence, break it down, and give God the opportunity to speak to your heart. He will.

8.4b.8 Exercise freedom.

Remember what I said. There are no rules as you develop your system. If it works for you and accurately reflects the relationships within the passage, then it is good.

Please do not misunderstand. There are rules in diagramming in Reed-Kellogg. This is not what we are speaking of here. However, I will say that the more familiar we are with Reed-Kellogg, the better job we will do in seeing and illustrating the relationships in the text. Remember the earlier analogy of practicing our scales and technique.

8.4b.9 Provide plenty of room to work.

Give yourself plenty of space to express your thoughts and to leave room to develop your ideas. This is one reason why I recommend using the back of previously used paper. Less wasteful, less expensive. I almost always use both sides of a sheet of paper.

8.4b.10 Live the words.

Don't fall in love with the study part. This method will yield tremendous insight, so let the words live in your life. Do not let the fear of failure, or the fear of repeated failures, or projected scenarios of "but if I do this, then this might happen" deter you from in some way trusting God and living by his words.

This is where we find life. We live by the words of God.

But He answered and said, "It is written, 'Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God'" (Matthew 4:4 NKJV).

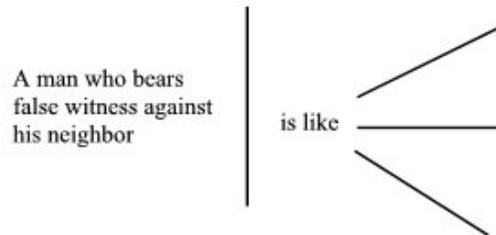
8.4c Practice

The following examples are given for you to finish. Hopefully this will encourage you to give this a try in your personal study.

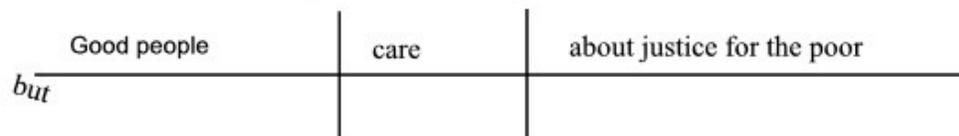
The poor beg for mercy, but the rich give
rude answers (Proverbs 18:23 NCV).



A man who bears false witness against his neighbor
Is like a club, a sword, and a sharp arrow (Proverbs 25:18 NKJV).



Good people care about justice for the poor, but the
wicked are not concerned (Proverbs 29:7 NCV).



Lesson Nine

The Ladder of Abstraction



Lesson 9 The Ladder of Abstraction

The Lord says, “These people worship me with their mouths and honor me with their lips. But their hearts are far from me, and their worship of me is based on rules made by humans” (Isaiah 29:13 GOD’S WORD).

Overview

- 9.1 The ladder of abstraction, an introduction
- 9.2 Understanding the ladder of abstraction can help us to understand which truths are most relevant and how they are relevant as we read the Old and New Testaments.
- 9.3 Understanding the ladder of abstraction will help us to understand the importance of focusing on the abstract and the concrete in our obedient response to the words of God.
- 9.4 Examples and illustrations
- 9.5 Practice sheets

9.1 The ladder of abstraction, an introduction

Several years ago in a preaching class in grad school Dr. A. Duane Litfin introduced me to “the ladder of abstraction.” I have found the concept practical and useful, and I hope as I present the idea to you some of the same will happen, but I introduce this subject with some hesitancy.

9.1a The reason I am hesitant is two-fold:

9.1a.1 The subject area is quite broad.

I will be challenged to present the material clearly, but I believe I can do this, and in the process if I convey even one or two principles it will be well worth the effort and the humility lesson. I am reminded of the Oswald Chambers quote previously mentioned and worth repeating.

If you cannot express yourself on any subject, struggle until you can. If you do not, someone will be the poorer all the days of his life. Struggle to re-express some truth of God to yourself, and God will use that expression to someone else. Go through the winepress of God where the grapes are crushed. You must struggle to get expression experimentally, then there will come a time when that expression will become the very wine of strengthening to someone else; but if you say lazily -- "I am not going to struggle to express this thing for myself, I

will borrow what I say," the expression will not only be of no use to you, but of no use to anyone (Oswald Chambers).

9.1a.2 The temptation can be to view what is presented as merely intellectual exercise which it is not.

The ladder of abstraction can be a very practical tool in helping us understand the powerful relationship between the abstract and the concrete. The concept is not a toy but a tool, not something to entertain our minds but to enrich our souls.

9.1b So let's try to explain our terms.

9.1b.1 The abstract is our standard, our principle, our guiding light, our ideal, the point on the horizon that God would call us to. The concrete is doing it where it counts.

Abstract (General)	Love your neighbor
Concrete (Specific)	Help your neighbor fix his roof

Abstract (General)	Love your neighbor
Concrete (More Specific)	You helped your neighbor, John, fix his roof in the middle of yesterday's rain storm

Both are essential. We need to know the right thing to do, and then we need to do it. Inseparable concepts if we are going to honor God and be keepers of his words. The ladder of abstraction will help us to understand the relationship between the abstract/general and the concrete/specific and how that makes a difference in our treatment of Scripture.

9.1b.2 Here are some examples from the Old Testament.

Concrete	Abstract principle
If you see the donkey of someone who hates you fallen down under its load, do not leave it there; be sure you help him with it. (Exodus 23:5 NIV)	love your enemy (the one who hates you)

Concrete	Abstract principle
""When you harvest your crops on your land, do not harvest all the way to the corners of your fields. If grain falls onto the ground, don't gather it up. (Leviticus 19:9 NCV)	love your neighbor
Don't pick all the grapes in your vineyards, and don't pick up the grapes that fall to the ground. You must leave those things for poor people and for people traveling through your country. I am the LORD your God. (Leviticus 19:10 NCV)	love your neighbor

9.1b.3 *Jesus gives these examples.*

Concrete (from Matthew 25.35-36 NCV)	Abstract principle
I was hungry, and you gave me food.	Love your neighbor
I was thirsty, and you gave me something to drink.	Love your neighbor
I was alone and away from home, and you invited me into your house.	Love your neighbor
I was without clothes, and you gave me something to wear	Love your neighbor
I was sick, and you cared for me.	Love your neighbor
I was in prison, and you visited me.	Love your neighbor

We will look at two ways this tool can help us.

9.2 Understanding the ladder of abstraction can help us to understand which truths are most relevant and how they are relevant as we read the Old and New Testaments.

First, the ladder of abstraction will help in your reading of the Old Testament as you actively seek words to live by. Many regulations and laws recorded in the Old Testament do not apply to our lives today. However, there are abstract principles underlying these laws which can be lived out in our lives. We just have to learn how to

maneuver our way up the ladder from the concrete until we find the abstract principle that carries over to today.

Let me give an example from Exodus 23.14-19.

Three times each year you must hold a feast to honor me (14). You must celebrate the Feast of Unleavened Bread in the way I commanded you. For seven days you must eat bread that is made without yeast at the set time during the month of Abib, the month when you came out of Egypt. No one is to come to worship me without bringing an offering (15).

You must celebrate the Feast of Weeks. Offer to God the first things you harvest from the crops you planted in your fields. "You must celebrate the Feast of Shelters in the fall, when you gather all the crops from your fields (16). So three times during every year all your males must come to worship the LORD God (17). You must not offer animal blood along with anything that has yeast in it. "You must not save any of the fat from the sacrifice for the next day (18). You must bring the best of the firstfruits of your land to the Holy Tent of the LORD your God. "You must not cook a young goat in its mother's milk (19).

1	Love God	Abstract	Carry over
2	Honor God	Abstract	Carry over
3	Obey God	Abstract	Carry over
4	Worship God	Abstract	Carry over
5	Three times each year must hold feast to honor me 14	Concrete	Not carry over
6	You must celebrate the Feast of Unleavened Bread 15	Concrete	Not carry over
7	You must celebrate the Feast of Weeks 16	Concrete	Not carry over
8	So three times during every year all your males must come to worship the LORD God 17	Concrete	Not carry over
9	You must not offer animal blood along with anything that has yeast in it 18	Concrete	Not carry over
10	You must not save any of the fat from the sacrifice for the next day 18	Concrete	Not carry over
11	You must bring the best of the firstfruits of your land to the Holy Tent 19	Concrete	Not carry over
12	You must not cook a young goat in its mother's milk 19	Concrete	Not carry over

You can see from the table that we have to move all the way up to 4 Worship God before we come to an abstract principle which carries over to today because the information in verses 5-12 is specific to the nation of Israel in the Old Testament. This table demonstrates one way to understand the ladder of abstraction, but it is only scaffolding, a framework. Please note the words I have emphasized in the text -- “you must, honor, worship, you must not” - which give us a pretty good hint at the underlying abstract principles which are foundational to the concrete commands.

Also I should say that going up the ladder does not mean the abstract is loftier than the concrete; this is merely a way to present and explain the process.

The more abstract/general, the higher on the ladder. The more concrete/specific, the lower.

Every concrete instruction has an abstract truth connecting it with the words of God. Interestingly, it seems according to Jesus’ teaching, we could put the Great command - love God - and the second one like it - love your neighbor as yourself - at the top of every “ladder.”

“On these two commandments hang all the Law and the Prophets” (Matthew 22:40 NKJV).

We could very generally divide the Bible into three parts - Old Testament (dealing primarily with Israel) / Transitional (time of Christ, Gospels and Acts / New Testament beginning with Romans (dealing primarily with the Church). There are truths that are specific to each of these areas, and learning to differentiate between the abstract and the concrete using the ladder of abstraction will help us see what is most applicable to us.

For instance, there are commands given and promises offered to the Israelites in the OT that in their concrete terms should not be applied to or sought by the Church today.

9.3 Understanding the ladder of abstraction will help us to understand the importance of focusing on the abstract and the concrete in our obedient response to the words of God.

9.3a An obedient response to God’s truth is the only thing that will maintain a proper relationship between the abstract and the concrete
Life is harder “in the concrete” but much more rewarding and much more pleasing to God. If we do not make the connection and follow the abstract truth with an obedient response, then God sees us as he saw the people of Israel in Isaiah’s time, and that is as a people who seemingly agreed with God in the abstract but who thoroughly tainted the truth with human limitations by the time it reached the practical areas of their lives.

The Lord says, “These people worship me with their mouths and honor me with their lips. But their hearts are far from me, and their worship of me is based on rules made by humans” (Isaiah 29:13 GOD’S WORD).

Can we see what happened here? The people of Israel agreed at least generally with the abstract - worship God, honor God. But it was not an obedient response. By the time they re-engineered the truth and lived out their version, their worship of God was based on human rules.

Why? We should ask why. Their hearts were far from God, and because their hearts were far from God, they corrupted the flow between the abstract and the concrete.

9.3b *An obedient response to God’s truth grows in strength and insight from the reciprocal relationship between the abstract and the concrete.*

Not only must we honor God’s process with an obedient response to abstract truth, but we must recognize the reciprocal relationship between the abstract and the concrete. For the abstract to flourish we must respond “in the concrete;” by faith we please God as we step onto the playing field.

But solid food is for the mature, who by constant use have trained themselves to distinguish good from evil (Hebrews 5:14 NIV).

The person who does not live out the abstract truth God gives her in concrete ways that honor God’s truth stunts her spiritual growth. In fact Scripture states it more clearly and more boldly than that.

“Do not merely listen to the word, and so deceive yourselves. Do what it says” (James 1:22 NIV).

9.3c *An obedient response to God’s truth involves more than agreement.*

A proper response to God’s truth does not merely involve agreement with the truth. Relating to the words of God at the abstract level is an essential but only partial response to God’s truth.

I think I can correctly say that the abstract is sometimes easier to accept than the concrete. What I am speaking of here would be commonly held views of certain abstract truths; areas of general agreement, not intellectual and theological war zones, such as election vs. free will, Arminianism vs. Calvinism, baptism by immersion vs. sprinkling, infant baptism, tongues, etc. Those battles are going to be ardently contended on the abstract level or any level.

What I am speaking of, as in the abstract being easier to accept, are generally agreed upon areas such as, love your neighbor, kindness, forgiveness. On the

way to becoming active and living in a person's life is where these viewpoints tend to separate.

In other words, somewhere between the abstract and the concrete, whether consciously or sub-consciously, sometimes both, we revise the idea to make it fit what we are about. The heart far from God brings God's truth down to human standards; the heart close to God bows to God and honors his truth as written. Usually, we find our struggle somewhere in between; we do both.

For instance: Forgive. Yes, a person would agree with the idea of forgiveness, but for many people when it comes to practice, they become very selective. "I could never forgive such-and-such person." And in so doing we have broken the line of truth between the abstract and the concrete, we have interrupted the flow, the dynamic. God's truth that we agreed on in our minds is no longer God's truth as it works its way into our lives. Something happened on the way to the store.

The more general we can keep the truth; the more "play" we have when deciding how we will live out the truth in our lives. This is why some people do not want the specifics of Scripture; having more specifics makes it more difficult for them to rationalize the truth; having more specifics is harder on their conscience as they retrofit the words of God per their lifestyle.

Another example: Speaking the truth to each other. We will agree with the abstract principle, but in our minds we are already revising how this "truth" will work itself out in "the real world."

That seems for some to be the "test" for God's truth. How we can adapt it to "the real world." We take the idealistic notion from Scripture, which is well and good in itself, but being the good, mature Christians we are, we know how these things play out in reality. We have to help things along. So after we re-engineer the truth it is now ready to be launched into practice. We have made it useful for "our world." But what we have done is we have humanized (as in human rules, human perspective, lack of faith) God's truth. Now his ways are not so high above ours as we have brought them within human reach.

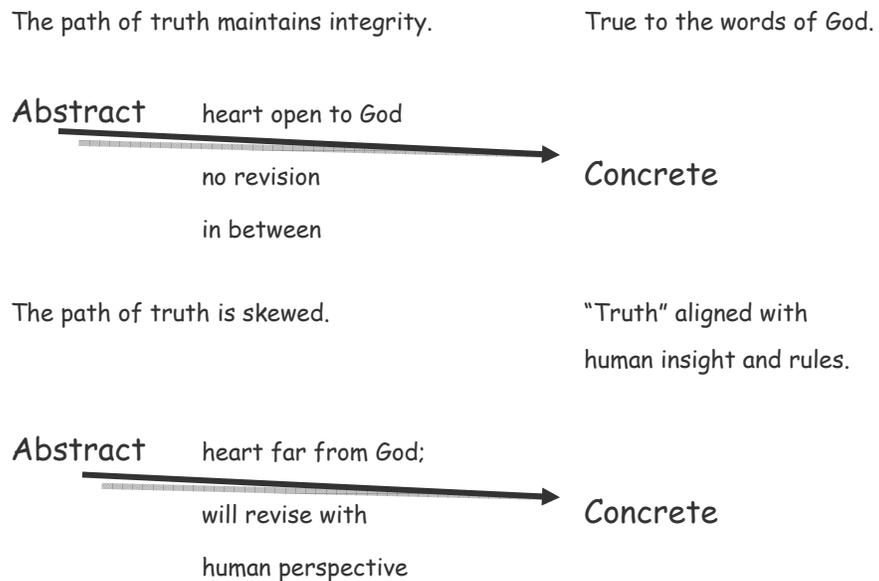
What happens in reality is that by the time the truth reaches the practical areas of our lives, we have tweaked the life out of it. We have only religious platitudes or "Christian" principles or "moral" standards, but the real question is whose platitudes, whose principles and whose morals did we leave ourselves with?

Here is another twist to the plot: Most Christians would agree in the abstract that gossip is wrong. But what seems to happen is that many people begin

tweaking this concept in its very early stages. They do not want specifics on gossip even at the abstract level as this will allow them to more quickly and effectively rationalize their human perspective. And the result is that when they gossip, it is not really gossip in their minds. (Can someone spell d-e-c-e-i-v-e-d?) In fact we have so successfully “spun” the idea that what God calls sin we now call “concern” and “care” and “sharing.”

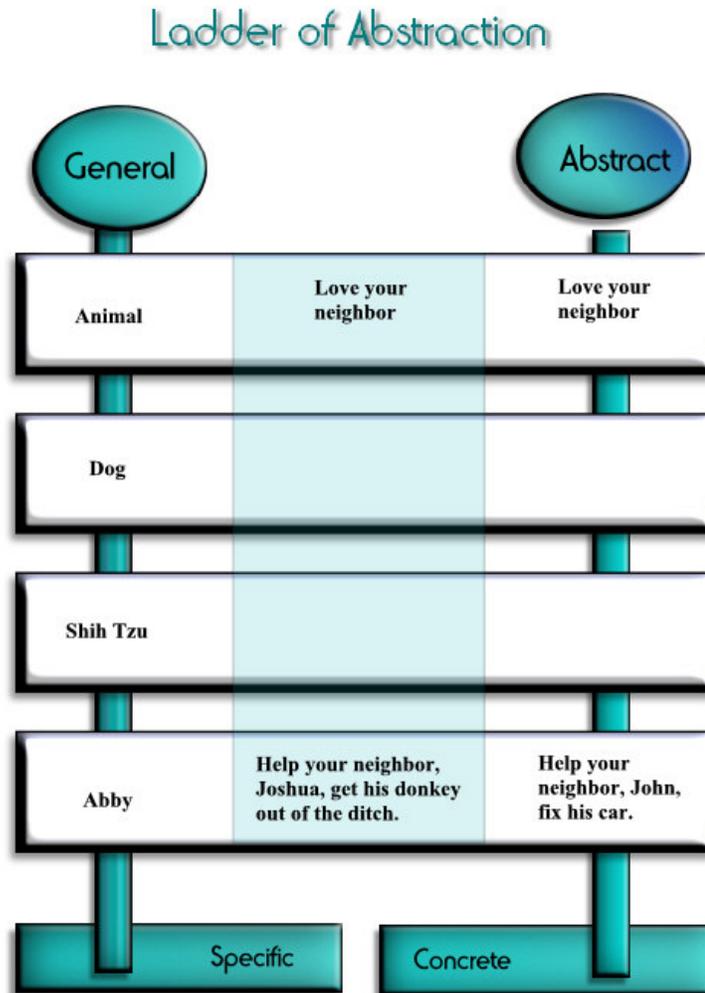
How to rationalize the sin of gossip. (As if we needed any help.)
God’s word teaches that gossip is wrong.
I agree that gossip is wrong.
People should not gossip.
People should not say things that are untrue or unnecessary about another person.
There are some people in the church who are gossips.
My friends and I do not gossip. We may “share” information about people but only because we “care” about people and are “concerned” for the well-being of the church.

Our response to God’s truth:



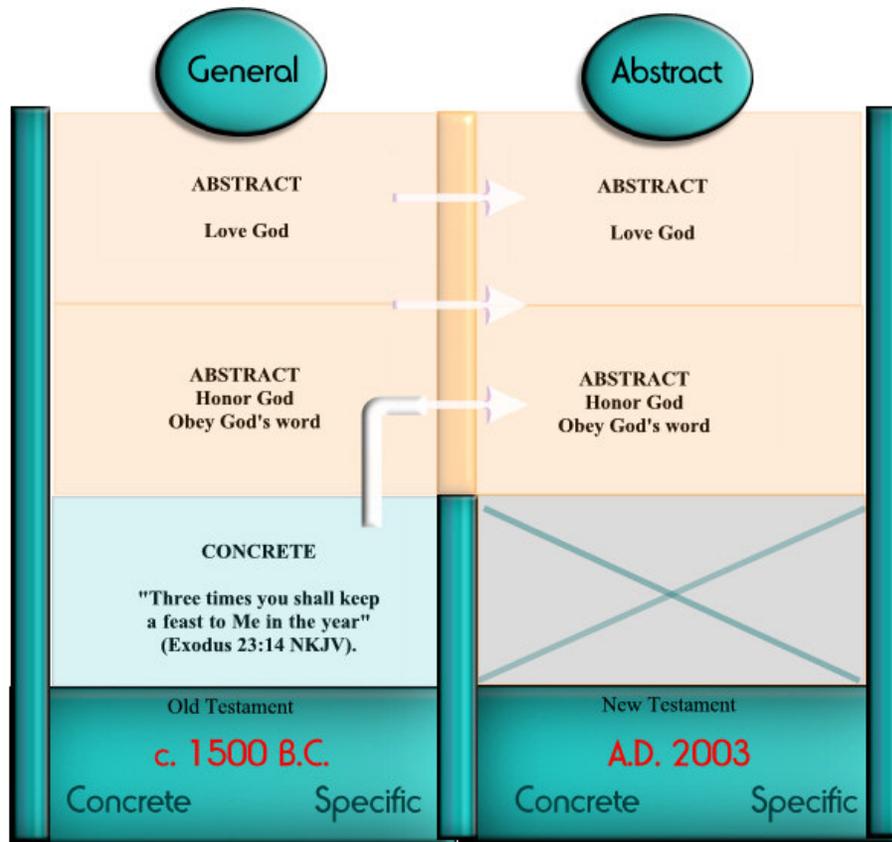
When I was a pastor, probably the greatest divide I saw between the abstract and the concrete was in the area of truth-telling. While we held so firmly to our commitment to the truthfulness (the authority and inspiration) of Scripture - the abstract, we somehow failed to “deliver” God’s truth to our relationships with each other, as in speaking the truth in love, or in the leadership of the church, as in leading in integrity, in the concrete.

9.4 Examples and illustrations

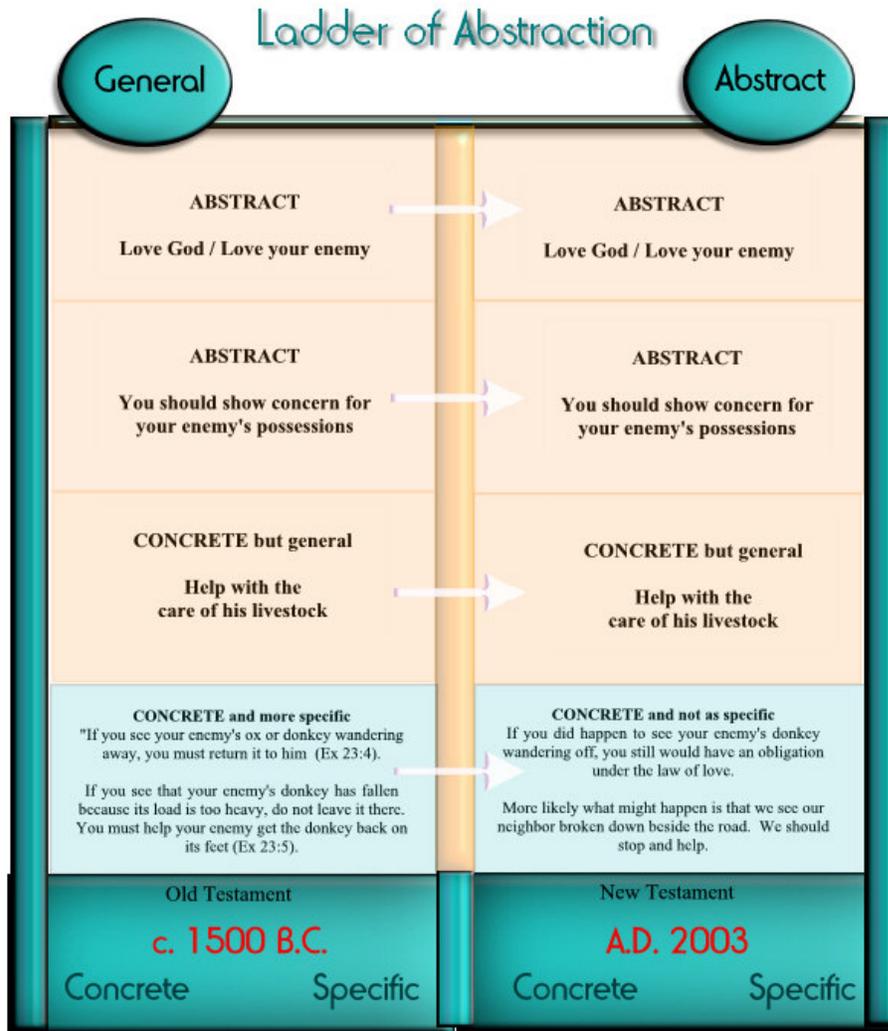


9.4a This table can help us differentiate between the abstract (general) and the concrete (specific).

Ladder of Abstraction



9.4b Here the abstract was honor, obey, love God. The concrete - Three times you shall . . . feast. If we move up one level, we see that this is something that we also should do - honor and obey God. So then we need to examine how to do this in a specific, concrete way.



9.4c This table illustrates an example where a person could apply the more specific teaching in the OT but would not be required to.

If you put Exodus 23.1-9 in our table you could see that everything is abstract enough and general enough that every truth could, not required, but could carry directly over to today.

9.5 Practice sheets
9.5a Practice Sheet One

Concrete	Abstract
<i>Every male among you is to be circumcised. Genesis 17:10b</i>	<i>This is how you are to be faithful to my promise: Genesis 17.10a</i>
<i>The boy must be circumcised when he is eight days old. (Lev 12:3)</i>	

Select several verses and practice, just remember specific is concrete.

9.5b Practice Sheet Two

Abstract / General c. 1500 BC	Abstract / General AD 2005
Concrete / Specific c. 1500 BC	Concrete / Specific AD 2005

Choose a verse that has a very concrete application, then try to identify the abstract truth supporting that instruction and see how “high” up the ladder you need to know before you can cross over to contemporary times with your obedient response to the words of God.

Lesson Ten

Context
Surrounding God's words
with God's words



Lesson 10 Context -- Surrounding God's words with God's words.

The unfolding of your words gives light; it gives understanding to the simple (Psalm 119:130 NIV).

Overview

- 10.1 Context defined
- 10.2 The value of context: Reducing “me factor,” increasing “God factor”
- 10.3 Examples of commonly misunderstood verses
- 10.4 “Formulas” for context illustrated and explained

As I reviewed my notes attempting once again to grasp an overview of what I was presenting in this study, I realized that I had not addressed context as directly as I could have and should have. I do believe that the importance of context has been implicit in the study. The inductive approach I pursue relies on context. Reading and writing build context. A disciplined approach to reading the entire Bible is all about context. But it seems I need to make a bigger statement, so I am.

My next thought then was location: Where do I put this information? Do I tack it on the end for convenience or do I find a more appropriate place somewhere earlier in the study?

As I thought this through over the course of several days I now believe that focusing on context in the last lesson is actually a good choice. It is in fact possibly the best way to end by asking a question that many neither consider nor understand: Do I surround God's words with God's words or my words? If you haven't asked yourself that question, and it seems many people have not, then you are missing it. If we are truly interested in what God has to say, and if we truly believe the value of God's words as we so vehemently profess, then we will be more than willing to do anything to discover the pure milk of God's words, even if it means limiting our own words.

10.1 Context defined

Once again we turn to our trusted English dictionary for help, and with this particular word Mr. Webster certainly shines.

Context: 1. The part of a written or spoken statement that surrounds a word or passage and that often specifies its meaning. 2. The circumstances in which a particular event occurs: situation (Webster's New Riverside Dictionary, Houghton Mifflin Company, 1988).

The words that surround the words. . .

Maybe we could put it like this then: Context - the words that surround the words that help specify the meaning. So I ask: Do you surround God's words with God's words (staying true to the context) or do you surround God's words with your own words? And

if we do not surround the words of God with the words of God, then what is our excuse? Ignorance - I was uninformed. Laziness - I didn't care to be informed. Deceitfulness - I was more attentive to my purpose than God's glory; my words blocked the view.

10.2 The value of context: Reducing the "me factor," increasing the "God factor."

Paying proper attention to context drives us closer to God's intended meaning and further away from our opinion. Studying the context helps specify God's intent, throws light on what he wants us to see and understand. I desperately need (not overstating) the context to avoid foisting my opinion (my private interpretation) on a Scripture text.

I have to somehow grasp how many things influence me as I read God's word seeking truth. If I make an honest attempt to surround God's words with God's words, then I am much closer to the truth of the passage. Let's look at some examples.

10.3 Examples of commonly misunderstood verses

10.3a "The truth will set you free."

We hear this famous quotation in church, in personal conversations, movies, books, public speakers, in just about any social setting. For the sake of our study I would like to ask two questions.

Is it true?

Is it true as it is used?

Let's look at the text:

(John 8:31 NIV) To the Jews who had believed him, Jesus said, "If you hold to my teaching, you are really my disciples. (John 8:32 NIV) Then you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free."

We see this truth in Scripture so we know it is true. God breathed it so it is true. So, we see in the context of Scripture the answer to our first question. Yes, it is true. The truth will set us free.

But in what context? Second question -- Is it true as it is used?

Answer: Usually not and a basic study of the context reveals why.

Here are the keys: "And, then, if."

"And" points to the preceding phrase in verse 32 - "you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free." So we discover that when you know the truth the truth will set you free. "Then" also points us backward to the previous verse and the phrase "you are really my disciples. Then you will know the

truth.” The context now tells us that Christ is addressing his disciples. And who are his disciples? “If” is our clue. “If” you hold to, live in, abide in, continue in, dwell in my teaching, you are really my disciples.

To..... the Jews who had believed him
 If.....you hold to my teaching
 [then]..... you really are my disciples
 Then..... you will know the truth
 And..... the truth will set you free

So we now see this truth - the truth will set you free - in its proper context as God intended it to be understood. It begins with living in God’s word (here the teaching of Christ) and the result is being a disciple, knowing truth and that truth setting you free.

Is it true to a lesser degree taken out of context as a universal principle? Yes, to a lesser degree, but who wants to pursue truth at a lesser degree as opposed to pursuing a life of truth to the glory of God?

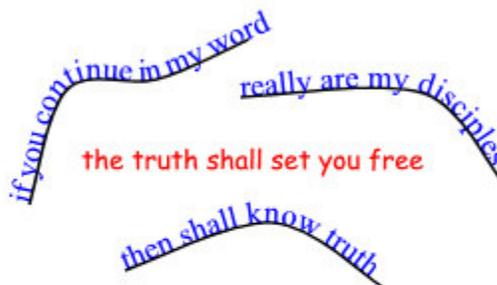


Figure 1 God's words surrounding God's words in John 8.31-32

10.3b “Casting all you cares on him.”

(1 Peter 5:7 NKJV) casting all your care upon Him, for He cares for you.

As I was reading through the Bible I saw this verse one day in its rightful context. The truth of this verse happened on me because I did not begin with this isolated statement but I read these words in the flow of the context.

Why do we so often begin with a verse totally isolated from its surroundings and somehow think we understand what God is saying to us. To be exhorted to

cast all our care upon God because he cares for me is a very comforting thought. But shared as it usually is, it is only a partial thought; it is in fact incomplete to the point of being misleading.

Remember the two previous questions? Is it true? Is it true as it is used?

Casting all your cares on him is said in almost the same breath as humble yourselves under the mighty hand of God.

(1 Peter 5:6-7 NKJV) Therefore humble yourselves under the mighty hand of God, that He may exalt you in due time, casting all your care upon Him, for He cares for you.

We miss so much by coming in on the tail-end of the “conversation.” In fact, we mislead people by leaving out the previous teaching on submission, humility and pride. We need to “paint” in the background or we may direct someone to a promise that is not true for them.

(1 Peter 5:5 NKJV) Likewise you younger people, submit yourselves to your elders. Yes, all of you be submissive to one another, and be clothed with humility, for “God resists the proud, But gives grace to the humble.”

Casting our cares on God comes as we bow before God and submit ourselves to one another clothing ourselves in humility. Casting our care on God does not stand alone. If we are not dealing with our pride before God, then we are not understanding the truth of this passage.



It is more than can merely be explained by saying that the offer is invalid. Unless we humble ourselves under the mighty hand of God and trust him to work in “due time,” then we learn nothing of the might of the mighty hand of God, and our faith in him falters because we miss believing in his greatness.

So is it true? Yes. Is it true as we use it? Not if we are not directing people to the issues of humility, pride, submissiveness, and trust as presented by the context.

The person who cannot bring himself to bow before God cannot in the same breath trust him with his cares and worries. He has undermined his ability to trust God.

Figure 2 God's words surrounding God's words in 1 Peter 5.5-7

10.3c "If the foundations be destroyed."

(Psalms 11:3 KJV) If the foundations be destroyed, what can the righteous do?

(I previously discussed the misuse of this phrase in Part One, Appendix B, "A valid argument may not be a sound argument," but I thought it fit well here also.)

I heard this verse used so much, and actually tired of hearing it, that I found it in the Psalms and read and studied it in context. Amazing how different the meaning becomes when surrounded by God's words in context. Contrary to its popular usage where we surround the phrase with all manner of political/religious/moral rhetoric, this is not some righteous call to arms, but instead merely cowardly, misleading advice given to David in an attempt to undermine his faith.

Contrary to the naysayers' frantic "the sky is falling" approach to the circumstances at hand, David responded with confidence in the holiness of God.

(Psalms 11:4 KJV) The LORD is in his holy temple, the LORD'S throne is in heaven: his eyes behold, his eyelids try, the children of men.

Many people believe that their cause is righteous enough to justify this approach to Scripture and that is sad. And many people follow along giving no thought or consideration to what God intended. We do not stop and think and that is even more sad.

Has this verse been used true to its intended meaning? No.

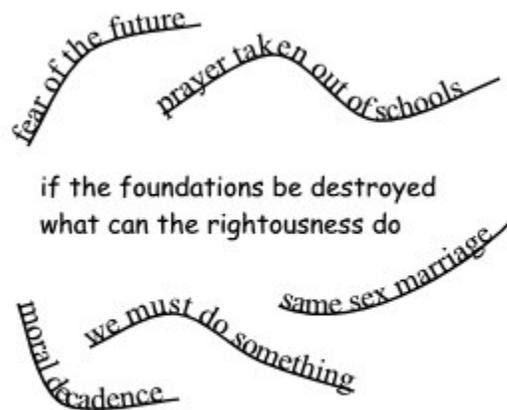


Figure 3 Man's words surrounding God's words in Psalm 11

10.4 "Formulas" for context illustrated and explained

Bear with me as I try to explain some common approaches as to how we build our commentary or interpretations of various texts. Here are four possible "formulas" in our pursuit and presentation of the truth of God's words.

God's words + my words = truth.

God's words + more of God's words = truth.

God's words in context = truth.

God's words in context + more of God's words in context = truth.

10.4a *God's words + my words = truth.*

Some people will believe anything if a Scripture verse or even a fragment of a verse is mentioned or attached or loosely paraphrased in a message. Here I will remind us. By default we believe what we want to believe and what we already believe. So mix just a smidgen of Scripture with a thought popular to an individual or a group of people and it must be God's truth. Remember the lesson on biblically wrapped or biblically true.

We have all heard politicians, celebrities and preachers use a "line" from Scripture and then surround it with their own words to shape it to their own

intended purpose. Just because the Bible is quoted does not mean, often does not mean, that God's truth is being presented or pursued.

10.4b *God's words + more of God's words = truth.*

This formula is more readily accepted in Christian circles. With this approach the speaker seemingly surrounds God's words with God's words by directing his or her listeners to several cross-references in the Bible. However, because the speaker does not respect and explore the context of either the main text or the cross-references, then too much subjectivity enters our equation and that usually means that truth suffers at the hands of private interpretation, a.k.a. opinion.

Sometimes we refer to this as preaching the whole Bible when in fact we have merely wrapped our own thoughts in Scripture and have supposed ourselves to be speaking for God. Merely using a multitude of Scripture references does not mean that we are surrounding God's words with God's words. One danger in this approach is that we rationalize the process of presenting our opinion as God's because, after all, look at all the Scriptures we looked up.

Using a flood of references usually means a surface examination of the text and as previously stated this yields only superficial results. If we only touch the surface, then we will only change the surface.

10.4c *God's words in context = truth.*

This has to be our preferred approach if our desire is truly to let God speak to us beyond ourselves. Let God build the house.

10.4d *God's words in context + more of God's words in context = truth.*

Same as above with the addition of using cross-references but allowing the context in the cross-references to also direct us to the truth of the passage.

A few thoughts as you continue along the Way.



Not everything. . .

I have put a great deal of time into this study, agonizing over details and direction, but as I stated early on, this is just a beginning, a starting point, a place to join the path.

But enough. . .

You don't need another cute technique; you need a good shovel and the skill to use it. I hope you will find enough in these pages to help you dig down deep and build on the solid Rock, Jesus Christ.

My part. . .

This study has been my calling over the last two years. I heard an illustration once concerning a railroad track that was built over the Alps before there was even a train that could climb the mountainside. I don't know if the anecdote is true or not but the thought stayed with me. My spin on this is that I also have built a track, not knowing if or when the train is supposed to arrive. I only know I was supposed to build the track.

Your part. . .

If you want to live the words of God, this study will help. The track is ready. May God bless your journey!

Love in Christ,
dave



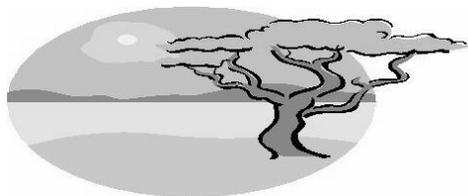
To God our Savior, Who alone is wise,
Be glory and majesty, Dominion and power,
Both now and forever. Amen (Jude 1:25 NKJV) .



I will show you what he is like who comes to me and hears my words and puts them into practice. He is like a man building a house, who dug down deep and laid the foundation on rock. When a flood came, the torrent struck that house but could not shake it, because it was well built. But the one who hears my words and does not put them into practice is like a man who built a house on the ground without a foundation. The moment the torrent struck that house, it collapsed and its destruction was complete.

(Luke 6:47-49 NIV).

In the end. . .



But he also did this
so that things
would go well for you in the end
 (Deuteronomy 8:16 GOD'S WORD).

I encourage you to picture this opportunity.

One day each of us will stand before Jesus Christ and give an account.

Earth is over, done, finished. Relief, triumph, joy.

Heaven is more real than we could have imagined.

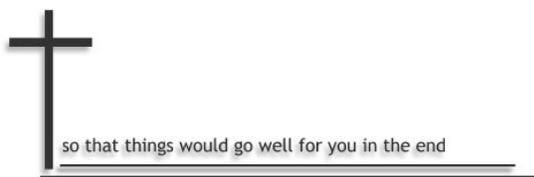
And now we are face to face with the Person responsible

for our joy unspeakable and full of glory,

Jesus Christ our Savior and Lord.

How satisfying it will be to know that we did not wait
 until this moment to listen to and bow before our King.

May God bless our journey.



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