

**GUIDE
TO
BIBLE STUDY**

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**HAUN PUBLISHING COMPANY
BOX 3426 • PASADENA, TEXAS 77501**

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IMPORTANCE OF BIBLE STUDY

That God has spoken to men in the Bible, the foundational fact of the discussion at hand, is wholeheartedly accepted by every redeemed, faithful follower of God, who has the hope of being eternally saved. Furthermore, it is the basic fact that pertains to every sinner who would enjoy salvation in Christ from his past sins, also to enjoy the hope of heavenly salvation. It is obvious, then, that the basic reason why men should study the Bible is that in so doing they are listening to the very voice of God, in whose image they are made and to whom they are responsible for their lives. Once any person recognizes this great foundational fact that God is speaking to him in the Bible, the only reverent, respectful response he can make is to listen with the intent of gratefully imbibing what he has heard.

In stressing the necessity of Bible study, of listening to the voice of God, we are not merely referring to Bible *reading*. Many so-called daily Bible readers, whatever the motives for their reading may be, dismally fail to come to an understanding of God's will and purpose concerning them. They may read the Bible day after day, from cover to cover, word for word; but they do not intelligently, reverently study and investigate its truths with the goal of comprehension. All Bible reading should be done in the spirit of careful *study* and *investigation*, always pointing to the immediate goal of *understanding*, so that the reader truly grasps the meaning of God's inspired message to him.

Now that we have stressed the primary reason for studying the Bible, reverent respect for the voice of God, let us note the reasons why God's children should seek to understand its inspired contents, always keeping in mind that the thrust of the Bible, the sacred scriptures, from Genesis to Revelation, has as its supreme aim and purpose to make all men "wise unto salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus" (2 Timothy 3:15).

STUDY HOW TO LIVE. The Bible was given for our happiness, spiritual and moral well-being, so that we can bask in the sunshine of God's approbation and blessings. We recall here the words of Jesus concerning His earthly ministry, "I came that they may have life, and may have it abundantly" (John 10:10). But to enjoy this abundance of life our Lord so graciously offers us, we must know the will of God. Carefully read the following passages: Ephesians 2:8-10; 5:17; Titus 2:11,12; 1 Peter 3:10-12; 2 Timothy 3:16,17.

No discussion of God's will for His children is scripturally sound

that does not focus on the person of Christ, for the very object of our earthly existence is to reproduce Christ's life in our lives (Galatians 2:20). This most worthy object is not possible without our knowledge of the *teaching* of Christ, the *example* of Christ, and the *presence* of Christ. Cf. 2 Peter 1:3, "Seeing that his divine power hath granted unto us all things that pertain unto life and godliness, through the knowledge of him that called us by his own glory and virtue." Carefully contemplate the Lord's winsome invitation recorded in Matthew 11:28-30, giving especial attention to the phrase "learn of me."

The *teaching* of Christ is the supreme authority concerning moral and spiritual conduct (Matthew 17:5; 28:18,20). See John 14:26; 16:12-15. In His revelation the Lord has laid down various and sundry commands, both negative and positive, concerning the conduct of His disciples. And whatever He commands us to think, to be, to say, and to do, is involved in our conduct as faithful Christians. The fundamental question the Christian needs to answer as he studies the Bible is: What does Christ want me to think, to be, to say, and to do in conducting my life in this present world?

Not only do we need to understand the Lord's teaching in order to live godly lives, but also His *example*. We need *showing* as well as telling the way of righteousness. His perfect example eloquently declares that the moral and spiritual precepts of His teaching are not just theoretical but entirely workable and practical. See 2 Corinthians 3:18; 5:21; Philippians 2:5-8; Hebrews 7:26; 1 Peter 2:21,22; 1 John 3:5.

To reproduce the Lord's life in our lives, the understanding we have of His teaching and example will be vain and futile unless it is made effective by His *presence*. We need not only to know about His precepts and example, but also about His divine presence, to realize His personal, intimate relationship to our lives. Carefully study John 15:5; Acts 2:38; Romans 8:5-11; Galatians 4:6; Philippians 4:13,19; Ephesians 1:13,14,19,20; Hebrews 13:5; 1 John 3:24.

STUDY TO KEEP FROM FALLING. In studying God's word to know how to live, we learn how to keep free from the dominion of sin and thus to keep from falling from the saving, sustaining, strengthening grace of God. The truth that frees us from the guilt, bondage, and condemnation of sin also keeps us free. Cf. John 8:32.

Every Christian should especially give heed to the warning and exhortation of 2 Peter 3:17,18, "Ye therefore, beloved, knowing these things beforehand, beware lest, being carried away with the error of the wicked, ye fall from your own steadfastness. But grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ." It is evident that divine grace and knowledge go hand in hand. If we would grow in

the grace that keeps us free from the dominion of sin and strengthens us to resist temptation, we must be knowledgeable concerning the Lord's teaching on the nature of sin and the wiles of the devil so that we can follow the injunctions to "abhor that which is evil" (Romans 12:9) and "abstain from every form of evil" (1 Thessalonians 5:22). See Romans 6:12-14; 8:12,13; 2 Corinthians 12:9; Galatians 1:4; Ephesians 6:11,13; 2 Thessalonians 3:3; Hebrews 4:16; James 4:7; 1 Peter 5:8.

In studying the life of Jesus, we note that the primary reason for his steadfast resistance against temptation was His knowledge of the divine word (Matthew 4:1-10).

In summing up the reasons we have thus far considered for studying the Bible—learning how to live and to keep from falling—we cannot emphasize too much that our spiritual and moral well-being, to abstain from evil and to do good, depends on our knowledge of God's word. Jesus said, "Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God" (Matthew 4:4). As the body needs physical food for its growth and development, so the soul needs spiritual food for its growth and development. One who does not imbibe the right food in sufficient quantities for his body, will fail to develop and grow physically. And the Christian who fails to imbibe God's word in sufficient quantities, will fail to develop and grow spiritually.

It is indeed axiomatic that physical life cannot exist without food and drink, which is just as true concerning spiritual life. Jesus declared, ". . . my Father giveth you the true bread out of heaven. For the bread of God is that which cometh down out of heaven, and giveth life unto the world. . . . I am the bread of life. . . . Except ye eat the flesh of the Son of man and drink his blood, ye have not life in yourselves. . . . He that eateth my flesh and drinketh my blood abideth in me, and I in him. . . . It is the spirit that giveth life; the flesh profiteth nothing: the words that I have spoken unto you are spirit, and are life" (John 6:32,33,48,53,56,63). It is evident from these words of Jesus that if we would imbibe Him in our lives, we must primarily study the words He has revealed to us, which are "spirit and life," described in Colossians 3:16 as "the word of Christ." We cannot know Christ as the one "who is our life" (Colossians 3:4) unless we first know *about* Him. And to know about Him is to study His word, which contains all the authoritative, reliable information concerning Him. Thus one who rejects the word of Christ rejects Christ Himself. See John 14:6.

Indeed, the sum total of Christian living, of a life that is pleasing to God in abstaining from evil and doing good, essentially involves a pro-

cess of spiritual growth. He who fails to so grow is without the grace of God and thus forfeits the salvation he received when he was baptized into Christ. See again 2 Peter 3:18.

Faithful Christians, in whom Christ dwells and who possess the grace of God, are Bible-studying and Bible-knowing Christians.

STUDY TO GO TO HEAVEN. The spiritual growth we have just noted is an absolute prerequisite for inheriting eternal life in heaven through the merits of Christ and the grace of God. That is the serious import of 1 Peter 2:1,2, "Putting away therefore all wickedness, and all guile, and hypocrisies, and envies, and all evil speakings, as newborn babes, long for the spiritual milk which is without guile, *that ye may grow thereby unto salvation.*" See 1 Corinthians 15:58. The phrase "newborn babes" does not mean new converts as such. All Christians are "newborn babes" in their tender relation to God (Isaiah 40:11) and in respect of what they will be in heaven. The apostle's thought is that all of his readers, whether young or old in the faith, are to ardently long for, intensely desire, God's word as a newborn babe longs for its mother's milk. Peter does not here contrast *milk* with solid food, as in 1 Corinthians 3:2 and Hebrews 5:12-14, but uses it to designate the entire word of God. As literal, physical milk is suited to man's physical being, so figurative, spiritual milk, God's word, is suited to man's spiritual being. Unlike the animal, whose needs are only temporal and physical, man needs sustenance for his soul, that part of him created in the image of God. He cannot enjoy the highest happiness of life and grow unto salvation on a diet limited to physical food and drink. He needs the food and drink that only his higher nature is capable of enjoying. He needs communion and fellowship with Deity.

Jesus commands, "Work not for the food which perisheth, but for the food which abideth unto eternal life, which the Son of man shall give unto you: for him the Father, even God, hath sealed" (John 6:27). It is so tragic that many Christians are far more concerned about sustenance for the body, which is temporal, than they are about sustenance for the soul, which is of eternal significance. They will spend much time during most of the days of their lives grubbing for the temporal necessities of life, but little time in searching for the truths of God's holy word that make for growth unto eternal salvation. Yea, verily, "Blessed is he that shall eat bread in the kingdom of God" (Luke 14:15). See Luke 14:16-24. We have been invited to the greatest feast of all, consisting of the soul-saving, sustaining food and drink of God's holy word. Have we insulted our Creator by excusing ourselves from accepting this supremely important invitation, or have we gladly sat down with our Lord to enjoy the spiritual repast that He has so graciously provided for us? Cf. Revelation 3:20.

The milk of which 1 Peter 2:2 speaks, unlike the doctrines of men, is "without *guile*" (Greek *adolos*, literally signifying "pure, unadulterated"). Being free from all error and deceit, it is thus the *only* food that is able to produce spiritual growth unto eternal salvation. Cf. 2 Corinthians 2:17; 4:2; Galatians 1:6,7.

In longing for the spiritual milk, the divine word, every faithful Christian longs for it just as he longs for heaven. Never losing sight of his heavenly home, he never loses sight of the importance of that which makes this eternal destiny possible: feeding the soul with God's word. He is constantly aware that to neglect Bible study is to "neglect so great a salvation" (Hebrews 2:3), thus to become spiritually weak and eventually to suffer the eternal death described in Revelation 20:14,15, just as one who neglects imbibing physical food will become physically weak and eventually suffer bodily death. How tragic it is for a child of God to starve to death spiritually in the midst of plenty, even the fulness of God's word!

We need to remember God's indictment of His people under the old covenant: "My people are destroyed for lack of knowledge: because thou hast rejected knowledge, I will also reject thee, that thou shalt be no priest to me: seeing thou hast forgotten the law of thy God, I will also forget thy children" (Hosea 4:6). Just as God rejected the Israelites who neglected His will in the old covenant, so also will He reject those of His children today who neglect His will under the new covenant. Can we not see how serious the matter is of our treatment of God's word? It is truly a matter of life or death, heaven or hell. If we give heed to the word, we will live eternally; if we reject the word, we will die eternally. The choice is ours to make: life or death, heaven or hell. Which will it be for you?

STUDY TO PREPARE FOR JUDGMENT. The seriousness of that which we have just discussed is intensified by the realization that each one of us has an appointment with God in the last judgment, an appointment he will not be able to break. "And inasmuch as it is appointed unto men once to die, and after this cometh judgment" (Hebrews 9:27). See Romans 14:10-12. It is sobering indeed to know that the account we will make of ourselves in the judgment will be according to our treatment of the divine word: "In the day when God shall judge the secrets of men, according to my gospel, by Jesus Christ" (Romans 2:16). In the judgment it will be too late for anyone to show concern for the understanding of God's word that he never showed during his earthly life. All those who are rejecting the divine word, whether alien sinners or children of God, should soberly contemplate the Lord's words in John 12:48, "He that rejecteth me, and receiveth not my sayings, hath one that judgeth him: the word that I

spake, the same shall judge him in the last day." While there is still time and opportunity, let us study God's word to so live that we will never fall, but will face judgment with confident expectation of receiving the Lord's welcome into the eternal mansions He has prepared for His faithful ones.

It would be most wise for each one of us to take stock at this time of his growth in the understanding of God's word since he became a child of God, keeping in mind the injunction of 2 Corinthians 13:5, "Try your own selves, whether ye are in the faith; prove your own selves. Or know ye not as to your own selves, that Jesus Christ is in you? unless indeed ye be reprobate." Can you honestly say that a candid, objective examination of your understanding of God's word is indeed indicative that you have grown closer and closer to the Lord, closer and closer to heaven, as the days and years have gone by, that Christ truly dwells in you, that you truly are in the faith, that you are a genuine disciple of Christ, a learner of Him? Or, to be perfectly honest, does such an examination show that you have sadly neglected the study of God's word, manifesting no real concern nor respect for heeding the voice of God, so that your soul has become weak through malnutrition and on the verge of eternal death. Yes, to be honest, have you failed in the examination: Christ not in you; you not in the faith? If that is your condition, what are you going to do about it: continue to neglect Bible study and continue on the road that leads to eternal destruction, or feel godly sorrow for your shoddy treatment of God's word, repenting of this so basic a sin, and seeking the forgiveness of God and the grace He will so amply supply you with to grow continually during the rest of your days in the knowledge of His saving truth?

QUESTIONS

1. Discuss the basic thesis of this study that God has spoken to men in the Bible.
2. What is the significance of the knowledge of the teaching, example, and presence of Christ in studying how to live?
3. How can the knowledge of God's word keep us from falling from God's grace?
4. Discuss the importance of Bible study in preparation for heaven.
5. What will we be judged by at the last judgment?
6. Have you taken stock of the extent of your growth in the knowledge of God's word?

LOVE OF THE TRUTH

This rule is fundamental in that it embraces every other rule, for if one sincerely loves the truth, he will do everything necessary to know God's word, applying in his study of the Bible every rule of interpretation, or understanding.

It is axiomatic that whatever one loves he will pursue; and if it is attainable, he will surely secure it. Jesus had this principle in mind in His comparison of earthly treasures to heavenly treasures: "Lay not up for yourselves treasures upon the earth, where moth and rust consume, and where thieves break through and steal: but lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust doth consume, and where thieves do not break through nor steal: for where thy treasure is, there will thy heart be also" (Matthew 6:19-21). Do you treasure the things of this world? If so, your heart is with earthly things, even the things you love; and you will diligently pursue them. Do you treasure the things pertaining to heaven? If so, your heart is with heavenly things, even the things you love; and you will diligently pursue them, seeking the heavenly riches by primarily seeking the knowledge of God's word. Cf. Matthew 6:24 and Colossians 3:1-4.

If a man loves error rather than truth, he will diligently seek after it, to be filled with error. See 2 Thessalonians 2:10,11. On the other hand, if a man loves truth rather than error, he will diligently seek after it, to be filled with truth. Jesus declared, "Blessed are they that hunger and thirst after righteousness: for they shall be filled" (Matthew 5:6). True, the import of the word "righteousness" here is that of godly living, which we shall discuss in the lesson to follow. But one cannot live righteously unless he understands the teaching of God's word, which contains all the valid information that pertains unto life and godliness. Thus for one to hunger and thirst after the righteousness that is the character and disposition of God, to be godlike, he must first hunger and thirst after the righteous teaching of God's word.

Those who hunger and thirst after the knowledge of the divine word do not need to be scolded and cajoled into studying the Bible, anymore than those who are physically hungry and thirsty need to be scolded and cajoled into eating and drinking. The basic prerequisite for Bible understanding, then, is a genuine, intense love of the truth: a sincere desire to know the will of God, to hunger and thirst after the food and drink for the soul, "to follow truth as blind men long for light." Without this love of the truth, long hours spent in Bible reading will avail little or nothing in bringing to any person a valid knowledge

and understanding of the divine word that will make for genuine growth in "the grace and knowledge of the Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ."

Why did not the Jews who were the Lord's contemporaries understand His teaching? Because their attitude was wrong; they did not love the truth. Thus the Lord said of them, "Therefore speak I to them in parables; because seeing they see not, and hearing they hear not, neither do they understand. And unto them is fulfilled the prophecy of Isaiah, which saith, By hearing ye shall hear, and shall in no wise understand; And seeing ye shall see, and shall in no wise perceive: For this people's heart is waxed gross, And their ears are dull of hearing, And their eyes they have closed; Lest haply they should perceive with their eyes, And hear with their ears, And understand with their heart, And should turn again, And I should heal them" (Matthew 13:13-15). Cf. Acts 7:51-53.

Note the following pertinent conclusions we can draw from the love of truth:

OBJECTIVITY. When one loves the truth, he is objective, fair-minded, in his study of the Bible. He does not seek to read into the Bible his preconceived opinions and ideas, but to read out of it the meaning God intends for him to have, the true import of the divine message. Since he bases his Bible study on the valid assumption that nothing is true religiously, spiritually, and morally unless it is taught in God's word, he willingly gives up any preconceived ideas he may hold that do not harmonize with divine revelation. He is not afraid of any position he holds being investigated or challenged. Neither does he become pugnacious and combative when some one differs with him. If he is wrong, he wants to know because he loves the truth, even if it means giving up long-held, cherished notions he has held about what the Bible teaches. He constantly keeps in mind the injunction of Romans 3:4, "Let God be found true, but every man a liar."

The prejudiced person obviously does not love the truth, even though he may blatantly claim otherwise. He inadvertently assumes that he be found true, but God a liar; for he believes that whatever conclusions he has drawn from reading the Bible or what he has accepted as Biblical from the teaching of others, is right and cannot be wrong. As he reads the Bible, he thus injects into it his hobbies, pet ideas, and preconceived notions, instead of reading out of it the undefiled will of God. We shall further deal with this prejudiced approach to Bible reading in lesson thirteen.

HUMILITY. The spirit of objectivity in studying the Bible is that of humility, of recognizing that at no stage of growth toward eternal salvation does any Christian know it all. Since love "vaunteth not

itself, is not puffed up" (1 Corinthians 13:4), the lover of truth is never conceited over his spiritual progress no matter how much he may understand of God's word. There will always be room for more growth. Even the best, most truth-loving Bible scholar among us can well understand the attitude of Isaac Newton, the great English savant and discoverer of calculus, who wrote toward the end of a long and distinguished career, "I do not know what I may appear to the world; but to myself I seem to have been like a boy, playing on the seashore, and diverting myself now and then by finding a smoother pebble or prettier shell than ordinary, while the great ocean of truth lay undiscovered before me."

The humble Bible student, who ardently seeks to understand God's will, is pronounced blessed by the Lord: "Blessed are the poor in spirit: for theirs is the kingdom of heaven" (Matthew 5:3). When any Christian senses his poverty in spirit, his ignorance as well as his knowledge of the Bible, he will possess the attitude of receptivity that makes for growth in his spiritual understanding. Since he recognizes the possibility that he can be wrong, he will never be arrogant concerning his conclusions as to what the Bible teaches. It is the exaltation of divine truth that he seeks in his life, not self-exaltation. With this receptive, truth-seeking, truth-exalting attitude, he will constantly grow in his knowledge of God's word.

Furthermore, humility in studying the Bible is quite naturally productive of prayer, the overt reliance of the Christian on God for his constant need of divine help. The humble Christian knows that he cannot grow in knowledge without that help which is above and beyond his own strength alone, so he constantly seeks for this help through prayer. Wisdom is an absolute prerequisite for the understanding of the divine word, and to obtain it the Christian must pray (James 1:5). Before the humble child of God, who intensely loves the truth, begins any session of Bible study, on his lips will be a fervent, reverent prayer for the guidance and wisdom of the Almighty. See Psalms 34:10; Matthew 21:22.

Consider the contrast between pride and humility in their relationship to the understanding of divine truth. The intellectually proud person allows what he has already gleaned from the Bible to go to his head. Since he has a know-it-all attitude, he feels no need for continually seeking the truth. Opinionated and prejudiced, he closes his mind to the light of new truth, with the ludicrous attitude "don't bother me with facts; my mind is made up." Inflated with an exaggerated sense of importance concerning his knowledge of the Bible, he is unable to intelligently and sympathetically understand the viewpoints of those who disagree with him.

Intellectual pride on the part of any Christian can only result in spiritual disaster. The Christian who feels that he has already reached the pinnacle of divine knowledge, who tenaciously holds to his religious prejudices, who cannot intelligently and graciously enter into dialogue with those who disagree with him, is devoid of the disposition for real growth in the understanding of God's word.

FINDING THE TIME. The principal excuse many members of the body of Christ offer concerning their lack of divine knowledge is that they just don't have the time for Bible study. What they are tacitly saying is that they do not have time to grow unto eternal salvation, to go to heaven. But where there is genuine love of the truth, to consider the word of God as great treasure, there will always be time for Bible study, no matter how many pressing obligations people may have. No sensible person who wants to live will argue that he does not have time to eat, and no loving Christian will fail to find the time to sufficiently imbibe the food and drink of God's word. To illustrate, think of a young person, even one in early youth of average intelligence, who comes to a saving knowledge of the gospel and consequently walks in newness of life with a deep love of God's word, craving it as a hungry man craves food. Let that love of truth motivate him to diligently study the Bible, allowing all the time he needs for his school studies, recreation, and home responsibilities. Within just a year's time following his conversion to Christ, he will become a spiritual giant in his Biblical knowledge.

Now think of those who have been members of the Lord's body for many, many years who are spiritual pygmies, whose Biblical knowledge is virtually nil — and all because "they just don't have time for Bible study." God knows that their excuse is a blatant lie. The time has been there for spiritual growth; but they obviously do not love and treasure the Bible, and they are thus without motivation to utilize the time they have to search out God's eternally significant truths. Isn't it interesting that they have found the time to read anything and everything but the Bible, which eloquently declares where their priorities are, what they really love, cherish, and treasure above and in lieu of God's holy word? See Ephesians 5:15-17.

The young man who is in love with a young lady, hoping to make her his wife, does not argue that he has no time to spend with her. One of the great delights of his life is to be with her. He will gladly forfeit many other interests in order to spend as much time with her as possible.

The baseball enthusiast (i.e. "fan," short for fanatic) does not argue that he has no time to devote to the activities of his favorite team. Every day during the baseball season he finds the time to check the

sports pages of the newspaper concerning scores, batting averages, etc.

The lover of pleasure does not argue that he has no time to devote to the pursuit of pleasure. He finds the time! Indeed, the Bible speaks of those who are "lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God" (2 Timothy 3:4).

And it goes without saying that you will never hear any child of God who truly loves the divine word even remotely argue that he has no time for Bible study. The love that "beareth all things, believeth all things, hopeth all things, endureth all things" (1 Corinthians 13:7) will always find the time to devote to its object. Remember, we always have the time for the things we put first in our lives.

MENTAL INDUSTRY. The price of scholarship in any realm is mental industry, a constant, unrelenting pursuit after knowledge. Those who truly love God's word, who ardently desire to grow in their understanding of it, are willing to pay the price of hard, persevering, intelligent, prayerful application to Bible study. The relationship of Bible understanding to Bible study is simply a matter of sowing and reaping. Only as one applies himself regularly and devotedly to the search for divine truth, finding the ample time he needs for feeding his soul, sowing seeds of mental industry, will he reap in extensive understanding of God's word. Cf. Romans 12:11.

True, there are portions of the Bible that take comparatively little effort to understand. Those dying in sin, who stand in immediate need of salvation, can obey the gospel, submitting themselves to the first principles of the Lord's teaching, without having to undergo a lengthy period of hard, difficult study in order to understand their responsibility to God. On the other hand, the Bible contains difficult passages that cannot be understood without great mental industry and intense, diligent study. Cf. 2 Peter 3:15,16. The growing, mentally industrious Christian is one who so diligently studies the Bible day in and day out that he progresses in his understanding from the shallows to the depths of divine truth; whereas the mentally lazy, stagnate Christian continually remains in the shallows of Bible understanding. Which of these are you?

QUESTIONS

1. Discuss love of the truth as the basic prerequisite for understanding the Bible.
2. What is the relationship of love to objectivity in Bible study?
3. Discuss the importance of humility in Bible study.

4. Discuss love as the motivating force in always finding the time for Bible study.
5. How does mental industry lead from the shallows to the depths of Bible understanding?
6. Do you have a deep, abiding love of the word of God? Are you finding the time for diligent Bible study?

OBEDIENCE TO THE TRUTH

Understanding the Bible in the fullest sense that the finite mind of man is able to comprehend the infinite mind of God, is inseparably part of obedience to the truth. This does not mean that one cannot understand anything in the Bible unless he is striving to obey God's will, for it is obvious that academic knowledge must always precede practical knowledge. The latter cannot exist without the former (Ephesians 5:15-17). But it is also undeniably true that the Biblical principles which pertain to the Christian's thinking, saying, and doing are never really learned until they are put into practice. No one, for example, has really learned the meaning of love who is not loving, of liberality who is not liberal, of honesty who is not honest, of peace who is not peaceful, of forgiveness who is not forgiving, etc.

Spiritual growth involves not only the knowledge of God's word but also the practice of God's word. Without the latter, the former is an exercise in futility. One does not have purity of soul who does not obey the truth (1 Peter 1:22), no matter how much he may grow in his academic knowledge of the Bible.

The word of God, being sustenance for the soul, as we previously noted (Matthew 4:4), consists symbolically of milk (that which can be assimilated, or understood, by the spiritually immature) and of solid food, or meat (that which can be assimilated, or understood, by the spiritually mature). Spiritual maturity is the result of constant submission to the divine word: obeying the Lord's precepts, following the Lord's example, and realizing the Lord's presence in one's life. Thus as one grows in the grace of God by upright living, he grows also in his understanding of the Bible, able to digest the solid food of divine inspiration. See 2 Peter 3:18. As the understanding of God's word makes possible the doing of God's word, so the doing of God's word contributes to growth in the understanding of God's word.

Those who indulge in selfish, carnal, licentious living, who fail to submit themselves to the divine will and who know not the power of the divine presence in their lives, find themselves entirely incapable of receiving the meat, the solid food, of God's word. Carefully consider the following indictments of spiritually immature people who have had sufficient time to grow into spiritual maturity: "And I, brethren, could not speak unto you as unto spiritual, but as unto carnal, as unto babes in Christ. I fed you with milk, not with meat; for ye were not yet able to bear it: nay, not even now are ye able; for ye are yet carnal: for whereas there is among you jealousy and strife, are ye not carnal, and

do ye not walk after the manner of men?" (1 Corinthians 3:1-3); "For when by reason of time ye ought to be teachers, ye have need again that some one teach you the rudiments of the first principles of the oracles of God; and are become such as have need of milk, and not of solid food. For every one that partaketh of milk is without *experience* of the word of righteousness; for he is a babe. But solid food is for full grown men, even those who by reason of *use* have their senses exercised to discern good and evil" (Hebrews 5:12,13).

Indeed, ungoldy living can destroy all desire for growth in Bible understanding. Cf. Matthew 13:15; Hebrews 5:11. When one is busy following the devil, filling his life with both sins of commission and omission, his spiritual appetite becomes so dull that he no longer has any relish for God's word, the living bread. Any studying he does of the Bible may be done out of intellectual curiosity or the desire to ease his conscience, but not out of a sincere desire to know God's will.

Moreover, when Christians become negligent concerning obedience to God's will, they will find themselves drifting away even from the things they have already learned in the divine word, to the ultimate detriment of their souls. Thus the significance of the warning in Hebrews 2:1-3, "Therefore we ought to give the more earnest heed to the things that were heard, lest haply we drift away from them. For if the word spoken by angels proved stedfast, and every transgression and disobedience received a just recompense of reward; how shall we escape, if we neglect so great a salvation? which having at the first been spoken through the Lord, was confirmed unto them by them that heard." It is sobering to realize that when we neglect giving heed to the things we have received from our Bible study, to "drift away from them," we are actually neglecting the eternal salvation of our souls, "so great a salvation."

It behooves every Christian to approach Bible study with the sincere intent of putting his knowledge into practice. Whenever he reads the Bible, he must focus all his heart, mind, and soul on seeking to translate his knowledge into his life. If he fails to do so, the devil will take over and control his life. Carefully read Luke 8:11-15.

The importance of doing God's will and the folly of hearing without doing, is set forth in James 1:21-25, "... receive with meekness the implanted word, which is able to save your souls. But be ye doers of the word, and not hearers only, deluding your own selves. For if any one is a hearer of the word and not a doer, he is like unto a man beholding his natural face in a mirror: for he beholdeth himself, and goeth away, and straightway forgetteth what manner of man he was. But he that looketh into the perfect law, the law of liberty, and so continueth, being not a hearer that forgetteth but a doer that worketh, this man shall be blessed in his doing." See Luke 6:46.

The Christian who thinks he will receive the Lord's blessing from his Bible study alone suffers from the worst kind of self-delusion. In fact, the church at large has been self-deluded in its limited use of the word "sound" to apply only to those who are considered loyal in their doctrine. How many unloving, boorish persons, even some well-known gospel preachers, have been labeled as "sound" just because they seemingly have a wide academic knowledge of the Bible. The church needs to learn and learn well that a person is *not* sound in the faith who is not sound in his life, even though he may be considered a good Bible scholar. The word "sound" as it is used in the New Testament is from the Greek *hugies*, signifying "healthy." See Titus 2:1-8. No one is spiritually healthy who does not combine Bible knowledge with obedience. In the parable of the sower, Jesus said concerning the word of God sown in the sound, healthy heart, "and that in the good ground, these are such as in an honest and good heart, having heard the word, hold it fast, and bring forth fruit with patience" (Luke 8:15). Only in the very doing of God's word, inherently and innately, is there true blessedness (1 Peter 3:9-12).

The significance of this conclusion is beautifully portrayed in the Beatitudes (Matthew 5:3-12). As Dean Alford expressed it, "The life of obedience is the element wherein the blessedness is found and consists." Only the Christian who obeys God from a loving heart and clean conscience will find life's greatest blessedness, the true happiness that is inherent in being a loyal disciple of Christ. See John 8:31; 10:10; 1 John 5:3. And with this wonderful blessedness that comes from doing God's will, is the guilt-free realization of the continual cleansing from sin through the blood of Christ (1 John 1:7).

The holy scriptures emphasize that the faith that trusts in, depends on, the saving merits of Christ to receive God's free gift of eternal life is a working faith. Consider the following passages: "But now being made free from sin and become servants to God, ye have your fruit unto sanctification, and the end eternal life. For the wages of sin is death; but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord" (Romans 6:22,23). "What doth it profit, my brethren, if a man say he hath faith, but have not works? can that faith save him? . . . Ye see that by works a man is justified, and not only by faith" (James 2:14,24); "Marvel not at this: for the hour cometh, in which all that are in the tombs shall hear his voice, and shall come forth; they that have done good, unto the resurrection of life; and they that have done evil, unto the resurrection of judgment" (John 5:28,29); "Though he was a Son, yet learned obedience by the things which he suffered; and having been made perfect, he became unto all them that obey him the author of eternal salvation" (Hebrews 5:8,9); "Wherefore, brethren, give the more diligence to make your calling and election sure: for if ye do

these things, ye shall never stumble: for thus shall be richly supplied unto you the entrance in the eternal kingdom of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ" (2 Peter 1:10,11). See 1 Corinthians 15:58; 1 Timothy 6:11,12; 2 Timothy 4:7,8; Hebrews 4:11.

As understanding God's word is involved in preparation for the judgment, so also is obedience. Jesus had in mind more than understanding the word in preparation for judgment when He said, "And if any man hear my sayings, and keep them not, I judge him not: for I came not to judge the world, but to save the world. He that rejecteth me, and receiveth not my sayings, hath one that judgeth him: the word that I spake, the same shall judge him in the last day" (John 12:47,48). The Christian's knowledge of the Lord's word can only be efficacious in preparing him for the judgment as it is translated into his life. "For we must all be made manifest before the judgment-seat of Christ; that each one may receive the things done in the body, according to what he hath done, whether it be good or bad" (2 Corinthians 5:10); "And if ye call on him as Father, who without respect of persons judgeth according to each man's work, pass the time of your sojourning with fear" (1 Peter 1:17); "And I saw the dead, the great and the small, standing before the throne; and books were opened: and another book was opened, which is the book of life: and the dead were judged out of the things that were written in the books, according to their works" (Revelation 20:12).

In lesson one, as we stressed the necessity of Bible study in order to keep from falling, we observed that the primary reason why Jesus, our perfect example, steadfastly resisted temptation was His knowledge of the word (Matthew 4:1-10). But it was not only His knowledge, the fact that he could quote scripture to the devil, but also His translation of the word into His life, made possible by His dependence on the spiritual resources of the indwelling Spirit which He possessed without measure. Cf. Matthew 12:28; Luke 4:14; John 1:32. For example, He quoted certain scriptures to the devil concerning the necessity of living by the Father's will and worshiping Him; but more, His entire life was a perfect, practical demonstration of the meaning of these scriptures. And we, too, can defeat temptation with the word of God when our knowledge is translated into our lives by reliance upon divine strength (2 Corinthians 9:8; Ephesians 3:14-20). Cf. Romans 12:21, "Be not overcome of evil, but overcome evil with good." See 1 Peter 5:8,9.

When we consider the need of divine strength to put our knowledge of the word into practice, to resist the devil and so live that we are prepared for judgment and heaven, we must not overlook the divinely revealed teaching concerning prayer. It is in God's word that we learn

how to pray, and it is through prayer that we overtly rely on divine power to actualize God's word in our lives. The divine wisdom we need to understand God's word is also the wisdom we need for Christian living. The prayers that were offered on behalf of the Philippian and Colossian saints are also prayers that every Christian should unceasingly offer on his own behalf: "And this I pray, that your love may abound yet more and more in knowledge and all discernment; so that ye may approve the things that are excellent; that ye may be sincere and void of offence unto the day of Christ; being filled with the fruits of righteousness, which are through Jesus Christ, unto the glory and praise of God" (Philippians 1:9-11); "For this cause we also, since the day we hear it, do not cease to pray and make request for you, that ye may be filled with the knowledge of his will in all spiritual wisdom and understanding, to walk worthily of the Lord unto all pleasing, bearing fruit in every good work, and increasing in the knowledge of God; strengthened with all power, according to the might of his glory, unto all patience and longsuffering with joy" (Colossians 1:9-11). See Proverbs 4:7; 14:8,15,16; Colossians 4:5,6.

In studying and obeying God's word, we must not forget our responsibility to teach others so that they, too, can become "wise unto salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus" (2 Timothy 3:15). We must fulfill this responsibility toward both saint and sinner, following the teaching of God's word on both *what* and *how* to teach. Carefully consider the import of the following passages: "Speaking truth in love" (Ephesians 4:15); "And the Lord's servant must not strive, but be gentle towards all, apt to teach, forbearing, in meekness correcting them that oppose themselves; if peradventure God may give them repentance unto the knowledge of the truth, and they may recover themselves out of the snare of the devil . . ." (2 Timothy 2:24-26); "But sanctify in your hearts Christ as Lord: being ready always to give answer to every man that asketh you a reason concerning the hope that is in you, yet with meekness and fear" (1 Peter 3:15); "But exhort one another day by day, so long as it is called To-day; lest any one of you be hardened by the deceitfulness of sin" (Hebrews 3:13). See 2 Timothy 2:2; Hebrews 5:12.

No more effective portrayal of the contrast between the "hearer only" and the "doer that worketh" is presented in the Bible than the parable of the two builders: "Every one therefore that heareth these words of mine, and doeth them, shall be likened unto a wise man, who built his house upon the rock: and the rain descended, and the floods came, and the winds blew, and beat upon that house; and it fell not: for it was founded upon the rock. And every one that heareth these words of mine, and doeth them not, shall be likened unto a foolish man, who

built his house upon the sand: and the rain descended, and the floods came, and the winds blew, and smote upon that house; and it fell: and great was the fall thereof" (Matthew 7:24-27).

Which of the two builders are you? When any Christian exercises wisdom in building on the solid rock of which the Lord speaks, he is striving to obey the Lord's precepts and to follow His example, prayerfully depending on His presence in the Holy Spirit to make the foregoing a reality in his life. By so doing, he is fulfilling the earthly goal of Bible study to reproduce in his life the life of Christ so that he can truthfully say, "I have been crucified with Christ; and it is no longer I that live, but Christ liveth in me: and that life which I now live in the flesh I live in faith, the faith which in the Son of God, who loved me, and gave himself up for me" (Galatians 2:20).

As a fitting conclusion to this lesson, we note the words of William E. Young: "To know Christ is to commit to his will. The true follower has no other viable alternative. A knowledge of Christ means more than a gathering of facts. It means that what is learned becomes a force in the life we live for and with Christ."

QUESTIONS

1. Discuss the fact that no one has really learned love, liberality, honesty, etc. unless he has put these principles into practice.
2. How does ungodly living hinder growth in the understanding of God's word?
3. What does the word "sound" mean? Describe the Christian who is truly *sound* in the faith.
4. Discuss the relationship of works to the faith that trusts in the saving merits of Christ to prepare for the judgment and to receive heavenly salvation.
5. How did the Lord's knowledge of the divine word enable Him to withstand temptation?
6. Discuss the significance of prayer in putting our knowledge of the Bible into practice.
7. Discuss the Christian's responsibility to use his Biblical knowledge in teaching others.
8. What was the difference between the wise man and the foolish man in the parable of the two builders?

PERSONAL RESPONSIBILITY

What we have discussed thus far concerning the relationship of Christians to the Bible—need of Bible study, love of the truth, and obedience to the truth—is an individual matter. Thus the need for emphasizing the personal responsibility of *each* individual Christian to study the Bible and to draw his sincere, honest conclusions as to what it teaches. This responsibility is God-given, God-ordained. In the Bible, God speaks directly to each individual, and it is the responsibility of each individual to listen to His voice. Illustrative of this are passages dealing with books of the Bible that were originally addressed to God's people in general and not to some kind of religious hierarchy that claims the right to interpret for the masses: Romans 1:7; 1 Corinthians 1:2; Galatians 1:2; Colossians 1:2; etc. Cf. 1 Thessalonians 5:27.

Not all who believe in the divine inspiration of the Bible accept the right and responsibility of each individual to interpret the Bible for himself. The Roman Catholic Church teaches that "the church alone, through its hierarchy, can reliably determine what the Bible teaches on any matter." This means that the average person can understand the Bible only as he accepts the official interpretation of "the church," contrary to the plain teaching of the passages we have already cited and others such as Acts 17:11; Ephesians 3:3,4; 1 John 2:12,13.

Hardly any one in the church of Christ will overtly, consciously deny the universal priesthood of all true believers (1 Peter 2:9) and their right to search the scriptures for themselves. But there is a widespread tendency in the church to deny this God-given right in actual practice. In many congregations there is an oppressive atmosphere that would put a quietus on independent thinking, on the asking of questions, on the objective search for truth. In contrast to this ugly situation, the membership of every congregation should be working to create an atmosphere in its midst that incites and supports spiritual growth. Instead of castigating those who want to "prove all things," we should give them all the praise they are due and warmly encourage them to search the scriptures boldly and unceasingly.

In a congregation composed of those who possess spiritual vitality and sensitiveness to the truth, there can be no room for pettiness, ill-will, and fear. No one will be afraid of long-standing prejudices and traditions being challenged by independent thinking and study, but will rather welcome it. If fresh, valid insights into spiritual truths are

brought into the thinking and life of the congregation, they are accepted with gratitude.

We need at this point in our discussion to rid ourselves, once and for all, of any notion that infallibility belongs to the church, a doctrine peculiar to the Roman Catholic Church but not to the Bible. Too often we allow "our practice" or "our doctrine" to be the determining factor as to what we accept as religiously and spiritually valid rather than our own, personal, individual study of the Bible. Oftentimes we are asked by our friends and neighbors what the church of Christ teaches about a particular subject. If we truly recognize infallibility being in the divine word rather than in the church, our response will be, "Let us examine the Bible to find out what *it* has to say, if anything, on this subject." The church, which is no more nor less than the members who compose it, can teach as well as practice error; but the word of God, being the infallible voice of the infallible God, is without error. We should only give heed to what the church says when we are personally, honestly convinced that it speaks according to the "oracles of God" (1 Peter 4:11).

We might be surprised if we took a good, honest look at ourselves to find out how much of our religious thinking is the result of "what we have been taught all of our lives," or "what most of us believe," or "what we are supposed to believe," rather than an essentially unprejudiced, candid answer to the question: *what saith the scriptures?*

Commitment to personal freedom in the search for divine truth is commitment to the freedom all Christians enjoy in Christ (John 8:36). When any Christian exercises his freedom in Christ to freely inquire after truth, he recognizes that his basic loyalty is to Christ rather than to man, and that any loyalty to man enjoined on him by the scriptures must always be in accord with his loyalty to Christ. See Acts 4:19; 5:29; 1 Corinthians 9:19-22; Galatians 1:9,10. As one who thus treasures his freedom in Christ, he cannot and will not surrender this freedom to any man. He has the courage to stand for his convictions no matter what criticism may be leveled against him by his brethren. He is not afraid of them because of his trust in the Lord, recalling the words of Hebrews 13:5,6, "For himself hath said, I will in no wise fail thee, neither will I in any wise forsake thee. So that with good courage we say, The Lord is my helper; I will not fear: What shall man do unto me?" Those who disagree with him may ridicule him with such epithets as "way out", "liberal," "modernist," etc., but he stands true to his convictions however unpopular they may be. He is not seeking to occupy a stance that will please others, but simply to be a faithful disciple of Christ who is constantly seeking to know and do His will.

This courage of the truly free man in Christ is as essential to

spiritual integrity as it is to physical heroism. A free, virile spiritual life, one that allows liberty of growth toward the full stature of Christ, is always a life of courage in the search for truth.

There are those in the church who would tacitly deny the right of each Christian to decide for himself what the Bible teaches by arguing that it condones and promotes a life without firm religious convictions. We forthrightly deny this! Certainly, the competent Bible student will form firm convictions; but the point is that they will be *his* convictions, not those of his father, mother, brother, sister, preacher, elder, etc. Cf. Luke 14:26. Just as genuine faith is personal because no one can believe for another, so are genuine convictions personal because no one can form convictions for another.

What we are pleading for here is intellectual honesty. It is every Christian's business to live on high terms with himself. Even if he is wrong in his convictions (better the honest acceptance of error than the prejudicial acceptance of truth), he must at least be conscientious about them if he maintains any semblance of a good conscience. True, to act from conscience does not necessarily make an interpretation of the Bible correct, but to act against conscience invariably makes it wrong. Cf. Romans 14:23. Only in the course of being true to one's conscience does the possibility of further enlightenment exist. To stifle the conscience can only result in shutting the door to additional light. Whoever persistently acts contrary to his conscience in his interpretation of the Bible, is in danger of losing his moral integrity and thus of losing all sense of his need of Christ and the forgiving power of His blood. Paul speaks of those "branded [seared] in their own conscience as with a hot iron" (1 Timothy 4:2). In his comments on this passage, E. Condor wrote, "A nerve diseased or almost paralyzed may possibly be healed; but when it is subjected to the cauterizing iron it is perished. What hope for a man whose conscience is cauterized?"

The humility which we previously noted as being involved in love of the truth, will cause the intellectually honest Christian to continue to expose his convictions to the light of God's word. In so doing he will continue to grow in the grace and knowledge of Christ, and his wrong convictions will consequently become less and less and his right convictions more and more. That is the very essence of spiritual growth, of launching out into the deep in one's search for truth.

And we need to add here that the truth-seeking Christian is not fearful of God because he is doing some honest thinking in his study of the Bible, even if along the way he makes some honest mistakes in his conclusions. See 1 John 1:7. Do you really believe that God is angry with such a Christian, threatening him with eternal condemnation? Preposterous! If God's disapproval is on any Christian, it is on the one

who blindly accepts the status quo without investigation, who refuses to use the mind God gave him in fearlessly studying the Bible and forming *his* convictions, whose convictions are not really his own but those of others.

This insistence upon the personal freedom of inquiry every child of God has in his search for truth, does not imply that we do not need each other, that we can make it all alone. It is true that God helps us in our Bible study in answer to prayer. But we must not forget the work He does on our behalf through earthen vessels, our fellow human beings. We need all the help God will give us from any and every source that will contribute to our knowledge of His word.

We Christians do indeed need each other in our search for truth. We can help each other in removing the burden of our ignorance. Cf. Galatians 6:2. That is why we encourage each other to attend the worship services to hear preaching, to get together in intimate study groups where we can freely exchange ideas (Proverbs 11:14), to attend Bible classes, to read religious periodicals and books, etc.

We can all learn something worthwhile from others and thus enhance our Bible knowledge. Indeed, the very humility involved in love of the truth will cause us to listen to others. But always remember that no person, whether he be preacher, elder, teacher, writer, or whoever else, is infallible. Those who preach and teach God's word have as their source of divinely revealed information the same as the rest of us. They may be better informed than we, but the fact is that they are fallible and can be wrong. Thus we must emphasize that in seeking help from others, we cannot forego independent thinking, the personal responsibility to study the Bible. No Christian must give up an iota of his freedom and responsibility to determine for himself what any passage of scripture teaches. The writer of this discussion earnestly desires your investigation of what he has to say, but only as you are willing to "prove all things" in light of your own, personal, individual study of the Bible.

Yes, we must be willing to listen to others, not with the intent of sharpening and confirming our prejudices but of shedding any possible light on our understanding of the Bible. Cf. James 1:19. One who is willing to learn from others will never arbitrarily reject the counsel of scholarship, but even "superior scholarship" should be fairly tested as the investigator is able to do so. Every Christian should learn to think for himself in all matters that pertain to the Bible, and he must acquire the courage to uphold unpopular doctrines when he believes them to be right. The principle of intellectual honesty can demand no less than this.

Let us not forget that in the judgment we will be given a private examination as to how we handled God's word. No person, whoever he

might be, will stand up for us and assume the responsibility for our convictions. "So then each one of us shall give account of himself to God" (Romans 14:12). It thus behooves every Christian to exercise his God-given responsibility to honestly, candidly, and fairly examine God's word to reach *his* conclusions as to what it teaches, but with the desire always that his conclusions will be the valid meaning of the divine message.

The principal Roman Catholic argument against the right of each individual disciple of Christ to interpret the Bible is that it inevitably leads to factionalism and division, contrary to Jesus' prayer for unity in John 17:20,21. As supposed proof of this, reference is made to the Protestant reformation that resulted in the rise of the many sects teaching and practicing contrary doctrines. Is it the secret fear some of us have that the freedom of our fellow Christian to study the Bible for themselves will inevitably lead to division? We may give lip service to this freedom, but in actual practice we may try to put a damper on the thinking of the brethren so that they will be coerced into agreeing with the thinking of "the establishment" — or else! Such tactics are considered necessary in order to keep the brethren "in line," to stave off division in the church. To say the least, it is spurious kind of unity that would result from killing of all independent thinking, that would put a premium on ignorance and discourage the inquiring, investigative spirit which is so necessary for Christians to grow in the grace and knowledge of the Lord. "Unity in ignorance and prejudice" — is that what faithful Christians want?

In recognizing that the church's growth in unity is entirely consistent with freedom of thought and investigation, we must not confuse reality with the ideal. Take a good look at the Lord's prayer for unity, "... that they may all be one; even as thou, Father, art in me, and I in thee, that they may also be in us . . ." (John 17:21). Notice that the unity spoken of here is comparable to the relationship of the Father and Son. Is such unity ever a reality in the church? The Father and Son are perfectly, one hundred per cent, in agreement concerning the meaning of every word in the Bible, from the first word of Genesis to the last word of Revelation — and every word in the sacred scriptures is of some importance or it wouldn't be there. But are we in the church in perfect agreement, one hundred per cent, as to what the Bible teaches? Will we ever so agree? Certainly not! We are not divine; we are fallible human beings who at our very best are never completely motivated by love in our Bible study, never completely free from all bias and prejudice.

We have done great injury to the cause of Christ by failing to distinguish between the ideal of unity as set forth in God's word and unity as it exists in reality. Certainly, it is God's will that we see all the

divine word alike as it reveals the mind of the Spirit. But by the same token, we are commanded, "Ye therefore shall be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect" (Matthew 5:48); "Be ye therefore imitators of God, as beloved children" (Ephesians 5:1). Cf. 1 Peter 2:21, Being like God, to fully and completely imitate Him, is the ideal or perfect standard for which all Christians are to strive. But how many perfect Christians do you know, who are like the Father in every respect, absolutely devoid of all error and sin? And how many Christians do you know with whom you are absolutely in agreement as to what the Bible teaches, in perfect agreement concerning the interpretation of every word in the Bible? The answer to these questions is obvious. To be sure, we are to strive for the goal of seeing the Bible alike, as the Father and Son see it alike. But if we are to maintain any semblance of fellowship in the church, we will have to accept each other somewhat short of the ideal, just as God accepts us.

In his fine essay, "Our Search for Truth," Mark Nitz pointed out that "F. D. Srygley apparently perceived some brethren to 'shut off all investigation and stop all discussion' lest the plea for unity 'burst into smithereens.' Srygley's reponse should ring in our ears, 'The shortest route I know to such a crash is to organize us and undertake to compel us all to quit thinking and arguing and accept the conclusions of the 'leading men and papers,' without the liberty of expressing an idea or opinion of our own!'"

Thank God for our freedom to study, to think, to grow, and to go to heaven!

QUESTIONS

1. Discuss the fact that in the Bible God speaks directly to each individual and that it is the responsibility of each individual to listen to His voice.
2. Why should the membership of every congregation work to create an atmosphere in its midst that incites each Christian to search the scriptures boldly and unceasingly?
3. Discuss infallibility as belonging to the divine word and not to the church.
4. Why must the Christian refuse to surrender his right to think for himself to others?
5. What is the significance of intellectual honesty in studying the Bible?
6. Discuss our need of each other in our search for truth.
7. What is the difference between the ideal of unity as set forth in God's word and unity as it exists in reality?
8. Discuss the spurious unity that is based upon ignorance and prejudice.

DIVISIONS OF THE BIBLE

In this guide to Bible study, before we get down to some specific rules of interpretation, it is most important that we consider Paul's advice to the young preacher Timothy: "Give diligence to present thyself approved unto God, a workman that needeth not to be ashamed, handling aright the word of truth" (2 Timothy 2:15). For any Christian to understand the Bible and to become an efficient servant of God, "handling aright the word of truth" is indispensable. But what is the meaning of this phrase, the rendering of the American Standard Version? The Greek for "handling aright" is the single word *orthotomeo*, defined by Thayer as "make straight and smooth." The rendering of the Authorized Version is "rightly dividing the word of truth." The footnote in the American Standard Version states, "holding a straight course in the word of truth, or rightly dividing the word of truth." There is no real difference in the meaning of these renderings: the sum of the matter is that in our study and use of God's word, we are to aim at pursuing a course that is in keeping with the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth. In our striving for understanding, it is God's will that we not deviate an iota from the course of truth, neither to the left nor to the right.

How do we adhere to this straight, unwavering course in our seeking for understanding of the Bible? It is the answer to this question that we shall devote our attention in the rest of this guide to Bible study. The limitation of space will not permit us to deal with all the specific rules of "handling aright the word of truth," but we shall consider some of the more significant, basic ones in as much detail as possible.

Primarily, we need to see the Bible as a whole, to understand the divisions that comprise the Bible. The two main divisions are the Old and New Testaments. There are various ways of dividing the Old Testament, one of which is expressed by Jesus in Luke 24:44, ". . . the law of Moses, and the prophets, and the psalms . . ." This was the common Hebrew way of dividing the Old Testament: *the law of Moses*, to include the five books of Moses—Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy; *the prophets*, to include the books of Joshua, Judges, 1 and 2 Samuel, 1 and 2 Kings, Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, and the twelve smaller books from Hosea to Malachi; *the psalms*, to include Ruth, 1 and 2 Chronicles, Ezra, Nehemiah, Esther, Job, Psalms, Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, Song of Solomon, Lamentations, and Daniel.

Another way of dividing the Old Testament is to consider it in terms of dispensations: the patriarchal and the Jewish. The patriarchal dispensation, so-called, began with the creation of man. Under this dispensation, God dealt directly with mankind; there were no written laws. The worship of God was carried on by each family under the leadership of the patriarch, or father. The Bible gives many examples of God's dealing with man under this dispensation in covenants He made with various individuals: with Adam and Eve (Genesis 1:28-30); with Noah (Genesis 6:13-22); with Abraham (Genesis 12:1-3); etc.

Approximately fifteen hundred years before the birth of Christ, God made a covenant at Mount Sinai with the Jews through the mediatorship of Moses. This covenant is called "the law of Moses" (Nehemiah 8:1), "the law of God" (Nehemiah 8:8), and "the law" (Isaiah 42:21). In the strictest sense, this law is synonymous with the Old Testament.

The law of Moses was given to one people only, fleshly Israel. See Deuteronomy 5:1. It was to last until the establishment of the New Testament. See Galatians 3:19; Hebrews 8:7-13; 10:9, 10.

The books of the Old Testament written after the giving and transcribing of the Mosaic law were not additions, but they were calculated to enhance the understanding of the law, its spirit as well as letter. They also deal with historical matters pertaining to the Jews: their trials, failures, and triumphs. They further deal with devotional and prophetic matters.

The most important thing we must keep in mind in our study of the Old Testament is that it pointed to and focused on Jesus Christ, the central figure of the entire Bible and the Saviour of the world. Before the Lord's ascension into heaven, following His resurrection, He said to His disciples, "These are my words which I spake unto you, while I was yet with you, that all things must needs be fulfilled, which are written in the law of Moses, and the prophets, and the psalms, concerning me" (Luke 24:44). He further declared, referring to the Old Testament, "Ye search the scriptures, because ye think that in them ye have eternal life; and these are they which bear witness of me" (John 5:39).

A great deal of confusion in which Bible readers find themselves is due to their failure to understand that the Old Testament is no longer binding on any people as a system of religious doctrine and practice, but that the only law of God now in force is that which He has given through His Son Jesus Christ, who is now the supreme authority in religion. Cf. 1 Corinthians 9:21, ". . . not being without law to God, but under law to Christ." The realization of the solely binding nature of

Christ's law in this present generation is reinforced by the knowledge that we will be judged not by the words of Moses but only by the words of Jesus (John 12:48).

It is futile and vain to study the Old Testament with the object of finding out what we must do to be saved and how we must expressly order our lives in divine worship and service. Such information is found only in the supreme authority of Christ, the New Testament. That is why we emphasized in the first lesson that in studying the Bible, we seek above all to know of and about Christ — His precepts, His example, and His presence — thus to know how to conduct our earthly lives.

Recalling the transfiguration of Jesus, we note that with Him on the holy mount were Moses and Elijah (Matthew 17:1-3), representing respectively the law and the prophets, whose voice the Jews were to listen to under the Old Testament. Cf. Luke 16:29. It was the appropriate and crucial time on that particular occasion for God's voice to descend out of heaven and declare, "This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased; hear ye him" (Matthew 17:5). In verses 6-8, the divinely inspired writer states that "when the disciples heard it, they fell on their face, and were sore afraid. And Jesus came and touched them and said, Arise, and be not afraid. And lifting up their eyes they saw *no one save Jesus only.*" No longer are men to see Moses and Elijah with the intent of listening to them as authority in religion, but to see Jesus only, with the intent of listening to Him alone as the supreme, final authority in religion.

In the Lord's final message to His apostles, He clearly delineated the divine authority that belongs to Him and to none other: "And Jesus came to them and spake to them, saying, All authority hath been given unto me in heaven and on earth. Go ye therefore, and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them into the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit: teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you: and lo, I am with you always, even unto the end of the world" (Matthew 28:18-20).

Other passages that teach the supremacy of Christ and His law, and the currently binding authority of the New Testament, are the following: "For the law was given through Moses; grace and truth came through Jesus Christ" (John 1:17); "Simon Peter answered him, Lord, to whom shall we go? thou hast the words of eternal life. And we have believed and know that thou art the Holy One of God" (John 6:68,69); "Jesus saith unto him, I am the way, and the truth, and the life: no one cometh unto the Father, but by me" (John 14:6); "And whatsoever ye do, in word or in deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, giving thanks to God the Father through him" (Colossians 3:17); "God,

having of old time spoken unto the fathers in the prophets by divers portions and divers manners, hath at the end of these days spoken unto us in his Son, whom he appointed heir of all things, through whom also he made the worlds" (Hebrews 1:1,2); "He taketh away the first, that he may establish the second. By which will we have been sanctified through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once for all" (Hebrews 10:9,10); "Grace to you and peace be multiplied in the knowledge of God and of Jesus our Lord; seeing that his divine power hath granted unto us all things that pertain unto life and godliness, through the knowledge of him that called us by his own grace and virtue" (2 Peter 1:2,3). See 2 Corinthians 3:6-11; Hebrews 8:6,7; 9:15-22.

In studying the New Testament, we must keep in mind its proper divisions and their relationship to the salvation and spiritual growth of man.

The first four books — Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John — are often called the gospels. The first three are designated as the synoptic gospels because of their similarity in subject, order, and language in dealing with the life of Jesus. Whereas the first three relate to the principal incidents in the Lord's life, John is more diligent in recording His discourses and gives very special attention to His nature, character, and office. "The real difference between the other evangelists and John is that they wrote the history of our Saviour's life, but John of His person and office."

The combined information contained in the four gospels gives us all the information we need to know concerning Jesus Christ that will produce faith in Him as the Saviour of men. See John 20:30,31 and Romans 10:17. The great commission, recorded in Matthew 28:18-20, Mark 16:15,16, and Luke 24:47, instructs sinners as to what they must do in order to accept Jesus Christ as their Saviour.

Although the Lord's earthly ministry took place while the Old Testament was still in force, these books belong to the New Testament in that they deal with the basic spiritual truths of the gospel dispensation; for example, the Sermon on the Mount, the golden rule, the Beatitudes, etc. They also deal with the essential facts of the sinless earthly life of Jesus as an example for His disciples. Cf. 1 Corinthians 11:1.

The next book in the New Testament is The Acts. This book contains Luke's treatment of the saving work of Christ that was begun in his gospel (Acts 1:1-11). It records the coming of the Holy Spirit. It also tells of the establishment of the church of Christ and historical facts concerning the trials and work of this divinely ordained and organized body during the first few years of its existence. It has been appropriately called the book of conversions because it reveals concrete

cases of the great commission being carried out in the preaching of the gospel of Christ to sinners, turning them from sin and condemnation to righteousness and salvation. It also presents ethical teaching, such as in Acts 20:35.

Following The Acts are the twenty-one New Testament epistles which deal with the most pressing problems that faced the early church. They also give an in-depth explanation of such great themes as divine grace, the meritorious basis for salvation in the death, resurrection, and ascension of Christ, the indwelling Spirit, the superiority of the New Testament over the Old Testament and the superiority of Christ over Moses, etc. They further deal with matters pertaining to the organization, work, and worship of the Lord's church. They also instruct Christians how to prepare for heaven, through Christ's merits and God's grace, by resisting the devil and conducting their lives in keeping with the divine will. See Matthew 28:20.

Two classifications are generally made of the epistles: 1. *The epistles of Paul*—Romans, 1 and 2 Corinthians, Galatians, Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians, 1 and 2 Thessalonians, 1 and 2 Timothy, Titus, Philemon, and possibly Hebrews (the authorship of which is not named, although generally attributed to Paul). Some of Paul's epistles were written to congregations; e.g. 1 and 2 Corinthians. Others were addressed to individuals; e. g. 1 and 2 Timothy. 2. *The general epistles*—James, 1 and 2 Peter, 1, 2, and 3 John, and Jude. These epistles are described as being general because they were not directed to any specific congregations or individuals, but to Christians in general.

The last book in the New Testament is Revelation. Its great underlying theme and the heart of its message is the exaltation of the resurrected, living Christ: "Fear not; I am the first and the last, and the Living one; and I was dead, and behold, I am alive for evermore, and I have the keys of death and of Hades" (1:17,18). It is addressed to "the seven churches that are in Asia" (1:4), telling them of "things which must shortly come to pass" (1:1), which things emphasize the conflict between Christ and Rome. It is the conviction of this writer that much of the misunderstanding of Revelation has resulted from the belief that its prophecies deal with an unfolding of the entire scope of history from the time of its writing to the end of time, with little or no interest to its first readers. But we can be certain that its author John wrote primarily for the benefit of his Christian brethren during his own generation. Whatever prophecies were fulfilled beyond that time, such as the consummation of the ages in the new heaven and new earth (chapters 20-22), were also primarily written to give hope to the seven churches of Asia as they faced death for the cause of Christ.

Revelation also deals with the special messages of the Lord to the seven churches of Asia (chapters 2 and 3). In these messages, we find a representation of the Lord's church as a whole, their problems and conditions being representative of all the churches of Christ throughout the ages. Which of the seven churches portrays the congregation of which you are a member?

QUESTIONS

1. What is the meaning of the phrase "handling aright the word of truth"?
2. What are the two main divisions of the Bible?
3. Discuss the two ways of dividing the Old Testament.
4. Discuss the Old Testament as focusing on Jesus Christ and His redemptive work.
5. Why must we listen to Jesus rather than to Moses and the prophets?
6. Discuss the divisions of the New Testament and their relationship to the salvation and spiritual growth of man.

THE USE OF THE OLD TESTAMENT

Just because the Old Testament is no longer in force as a system of religious doctrine and practice does not mean that it is of no use to the Christian. The study of it is essential in the development of a mature, deep, and broad understanding of man's relationship to God under the New Testament and the redemptive work of Christ. To illustrate, although the laws of England are not binding as such on the citizens of the United States, yet those who desire a rich, extensive understanding of the laws of this country will intensively study their background in English law.

Study of the Old Testament is important, as we have already noted, because it points to Jesus Christ. Read again Luke 24:44; John 5:39. We must see the miraculous birth, wondrous works, glorious death, and triumphant resurrection of Jesus as the fulfillment of types and shadows of the law and predictions of the prophets. In fact, much of the New Testament is meaningless without a knowledge of the Old Testament; e. g. the books of Hebrews and Galatians. Time and time again the New Testament uses direct quotations from the Old Testament. Whoever thus fails to see Jesus in the types, shadows, and prophecies of the Old Testament fails to have a mature appreciation and understanding of Him who is the only begotten Son of God and whose coming into the world fulfilled the eternal plan of the Creator for the redemption of man. See Matthew 1:23 and Isaiah 7:14; Matthew 2:6 and Micah 5:2; Acts 2:25-31 and Psalms 16:8-11; Acts 8:32-35 and Isaiah 53:7,8; etc. Cf. Ephesians 1:4; Hebrews 4:3; 1 Peter 1:20.

Then, too, we cannot have a mature understanding and appreciation of the rule of Jesus over His subjects unless we study the types, shadows, and prophecies of the Old Testament as fulfilled in the Lord's law and kingdom. See Acts 2:30-35, Colossians 1:13, and Psalms 16:8-11, 132:11; Acts 2:14-41 and Isaiah 2:3,4; Hebrews 8:1-13 and Jeremiah 31:31-34; etc.

To see the Bible as a whole in its focus on the scheme of redemption, we must begin with the innocency of the first human couple, Adam and Eve, in the garden of Eden: without sin, in perfect bliss, and in perfect harmony with God (Genesis 2:7-25). We then see them driven from the divine presence because of their disobedience to God (Genesis 3:1-21). In this connection, very early in the Bible record, we read of the first promise to sinful, fallen man respecting the Messiah, as God speaks to the serpent, "I will put enmity between thee and the woman, and between thy seed and her seed: he shall bruise thy head,

and thou shalt bruise his heel” (Genesis 3:15). Concerning this passage as illustrative of the need of seeing the Bible as a whole, Alexander Campbell wrote, “The whole Bible but demonstrates, and applies this great promise. Eve’s son of blessing is now to be elicited out of the human race; and *just so much* so of the human race as is necessary to his *identification, development, and glorification* is given and no more. Let the reader take this lamp in hand, read the historical books of both Testaments, note every fact, incident, and document found therein, and see if they do not arrange themselves in a proper position, either to identify, develop, or glorify this benefactor of the human race.”

As we move through the Bible, we see the seed promise made to Abraham concerning the Messiah (Genesis 22:18; Galatians 3:16-19) and the subsequent choosing of the descendents of his grandson Jacob (Israel) to be God’s people, from which lineage the Messiah would be brought into the world. We further see all the subsequent history of the Jews before the coming of the Messiah, the giving of the law with its ordinances that typify Jesus and His redemptive work, and all the prophecies concerning the Saviour Messiah and His kingdom.

Then in God’s due time (Galatians 4:4,5), which was exactly the right time, Jesus was sent into the world to engage in His earthly ministry “to seek and to save that which was lost” (Luke 19:10), to die on the cross, to be raised from the tomb, to ascend into heaven, and eventually to return to receive His faithful ones into the heavenly realm — to truly bruise the head of the serpent, overcoming the devil’s power and restoring man’s relationship with God as it had been in the garden of Eden. “To him that overcometh, to him will I give to eat of the tree of life, which is in the Paradise of God” (Revelation 2:7). See 2 Peter 1:19.

To designate and emphasize the Christian’s use of the Old Testament, Romans 15:4 declares, “For whatsoever things were written aforetime were written for our learning, that through patience and through comfort of the scriptures we might have hope.” In the context of this passage, Paul exhorts his readers to serve their neighbors (verses 1,2). Then in verse 3 Christ is presented as the perfect example of unselfishness in serving others, with this point being bolstered by a reference to the Old Testament, expressly Psalms 69:9. This is one of the “things written aforetime for our learning,” to enhance our understanding of Christ’s unselfishness that His example might be more effective in our lives, and so bring us the comfort and hope that comes from being faithful children of God.

When we study the thrilling stories of the patience of faithful men who lived under the Old Testament, who endured whatever trouble and suffering came their way because of their loyalty to God, with the

consequent comfort and hope they derived from God, it enhances our understanding and appreciation that those who follow the teaching of the New Testament, no matter what troubles and trials they must face, will be greatly rewarded by the Almighty.

In the eleventh chapter of Hebrews, we are given a very graphic picture of great and good men and women of the Old Testament who lived by obedient faith in God, some of whom even suffered persecution and death because of their steadfast faith in the face of all hindrances and difficulties. No faithful, loving Christian can study this chapter without being greatly inspired, incited, and encouraged to follow the command, "And let us not be weary in well-doing: for in due season we shall reap, if we faint not" (Galatians 6:9).

The principle of implicit submission to the Lord's will is enhanced by our knowledge of the obedience required of God's people under the Old Testament. Compare all the passages to be found in the Old Testament concerning the necessity of obedience (Exodus 19:5; Deuteronomy 11:27; 1 Samuel 15:22; etc.) with 1 John 5:3, "For this is the love of God, that we keep his commandments: and his commandments are not grievous."

Perhaps the greatest Old Testament example of obedience to God's will by implicit trust in Him was Abraham's willingness to offer his son Isaac upon the altar, with the consequent blessing he received from God (Genesis 22:1-18). It is imperative that we carefully read this Old Testament narrative if we would have a clear understanding of the following use God makes of it in the New Testament: "Was not Abraham our father justified by works, in that he offered up Isaac his son upon the altar? Thou seest that faith wrought with his works, and by works was faith made perfect; and the scripture was fulfilled which saith, And Abraham believed God, and it was reckoned unto him for righteousness; and he was called the friend of God. Ye see that by works a man is justified, and not only by faith" (James 2:21-24). See Genesis 15:6; 2 Chronicles 20:7; Isaiah 41:8.

Christians, to whom this Old Testament example is given, must be aware that their continual justification through the merits of Christ and the grace of God depends upon a living faith that strives continually to obey God's commands in the New Testament, to walk in the light as Jesus is in the light (1 John 1:7). See Ecclesiastes 12:13.

We further note that the moral and spiritual principles of the New Testament are enhanced by our knowledge of the Old Testament. Consider the following examples:

1. **The heart being the source of our speech and actions:** "Keep thy heart with all diligence; for out of it are the issues of life" (Proverbs 4:23); Matthew 12:34,35; 15:18,19.

2. **The loyal relationship of youth to God:** "Remember also thy Creator in the days of thy youth, before the evil days come, and the years draw nigh, when thou shalt say, I have no pleasure in them" (Ecclesiastes 12:1); Ephesians 6:1,2; 1 Timothy 4:12; Titus 2:4-6; Galatians 6:7,8.

3. **Works and judgment:** "For God will bring every work into judgment, with every hidden thing, whether it be good, or whether it be evil" (Ecclesiastes 12:14); 2 Corinthians 5:10; 1 Peter 1:17; Revelation 20:12,13.

4. **Correct human relationships:** "With the merciful thou wilt show thyself merciful" (Psalms 18:25); "For I desire goodness [kindness], and not sacrifice" (Hosea 6:6); "Wherewith shall I come before Jehovah, and bow myself before the high God? shall I come before him with burnt-offerings, with calves a year old? will Jehovah be pleased with thousands of rams, or with ten thousands of rivers of oil? shall I give my first-born for my transgression, the fruit of my body for the sin of my soul? He hath showed thee, O man, what is good; and what doth Jehovah require of thee, but to do justly, and to love kindness, and to walk humbly with thy God?" (Micah 6:6-8); Matthew 12:7; 23:23,24; 25:31-46; James 2:13.

In considering the Old Testament passages that enhance our understanding and appreciation of the ethical teaching of the New Testament, of special interest and concern is the subject of giving. Both the Old and New Testaments have much to say about the grace of generosity and the sin of covetousness. Indeed, so odious is covetousness in the eyes of the Lord that it is reckoned as the complete negation of spiritual worship: the worship of the created rather than the Creator. Thus the divine word declares, "... covetous man, who is an idolater ... covetousness, which is idolatry" (Ephesians 5:5; Colossians 3:5).

In light of the grace of liberal giving and the heinousness of covetousness in the teaching of the Bible, you are challenged to make a thorough, diligent, objective, personal study of giving under both the Old and New Testaments, constantly keeping before you the basically pertinent declaration of Hebrews 8:6, "But now hath he obtained a ministry the more excellent, by so much as he is also the mediator of a better covenant, which hath been enacted upon better promises." At the end of your study, you are honestly, in reverent fear of God and respect for His word, to decide for yourself whether your giving as a Christian is to be as much, the same, or more than the giving of the faithful Jew. Will you accept this challenge? It will take a great deal of time and mental sweat, but the rewards will be of eternal significance.

In our study of the Old Testament, we are impressed with the realization that human nature is always the same in every generation, that the basic temptations and sins of mankind today are the same as from the beginning. This fact impresses on our minds that all responsible human beings, even the best of us, are not without their faults, foibles, and shortcomings. See Isaiah 53:6; Romans 3:9-25; James 3:2; 1 John 1:8.

Consider the patriarch Noah as described in Genesis 6:9, "Noah was a righteous man, and perfect in his generations: Noah walked with God." Yet this great and good man, weak in the flesh like the rest of us, committed the sin of drunkenness (Genesis 9:20,21).

Consider the description of Lot in 2 Peter 2:7,8, "... righteous Lot, so distressed by the lascivious life of the wicked (for that righteous man dwelling among them, in seeing and hearing, vexed his righteous soul from day to day with their lawless deeds)." Yet this very same person succumbed to the weakness of the flesh and committed both the sins of drunkenness and incest (Genesis 19:30-38).

Consider Moses, who chose "to share ill-treatment with the people of God, than to enjoy the pleasures of sin for a season" (Hebrews 11:25). Yet this great spiritual leader of Israel was guilty of unbelief and carnal pride at the waters of Meribah, both he and his brother Aaron being duly denounced by God: "... ye believed not in me, to sanctify me in the eyes of the children of Israel." See Numbers 20:10-12.

Consider David, a man after God's own heart (1 Samuel 13:14; Acts 13:22). Yet in lusting after Bathsheba, the wife of Uriah the Hittite, he committed adultery with her and was tacitly guilty of murdering Uriah so that he might have her as his wife. (2 Samuel 11:2-27).

All great and good men! Yet men of like passion with the rest of us — willing in the spirit and weak in the flesh. Cf. Matthew 26:41; Acts 14:15; James 5:17. No one among us is so good, so strong spiritually and morally, so resistant against temptation, that he cannot make similarly foolish mistakes as the great characters of the Old Testament.

Then, too, the account given in the Old Testament of the sins and foibles of its heroes suggests the integrity of the divinely given historical record in contrast to the biased portrayals of our national heroes, which say little or nothing about their sins and foibles but make them appear bigger and better than life.

Also, study of the Old Testament record concerning the faithless, disobedient Jews who were kept out of the promised land of Caanan, will intensify and enhance our awareness that God's children today can fall from divine grace and be kept out of the promised land of

heaven. Carefully read Hebrews 3:12-19 and 1 Corinthians 10:1-12 in connection with Exodus 32:4,19; Numbers 11:4,34; 14:1-38; 16:41,49; 17:5,10; 21:5-8. Any child of God who believes it is impossible for him to fall from God's grace and miss heaven, who "thinketh he standeth," will do well to seriously consider the sobering lesson the New Testament writers have given us from the Hebrew apostates.

QUESTIONS

1. Why is the knowledge of the Old Testament so important in our understanding of the New Testament?
2. Discuss seeing the Bible as a whole in its focus on the scheme of redemption.
3. Discuss Romans 15:4.
4. How does the Old Testament enhance our knowledge of the obedience God requires of us under the New Testament?
5. Discuss the enhancement of the moral and spiritual principles of the New Testament by our knowledge of the Old Testament.
6. Discuss the lessons we get from the Old Testament concerning the sins, foibles, and failures of men, and the warning we receive from the Hebrew apostates concerning the possibility of falling from grace.

WORDS

In our first lesson, we set forth the basically basic thesis that God has spoken to man in the Bible. We now emphasize that the means God has used in revealing His mind through the Holy Spirit to the mind of man is *words*. The importance of these words is expressed in such passages as 1 Timothy 6:3,4; 2 Timothy 1:13. Cf. Acts 11:13,14; 1 Timothy 1:10; Titus 2:8.

However, as the reader is surely aware, the words used by the inspired writers of the Bible were not English words, not the words used for communication in the English-speaking world. For example, no inspired writer used such words as church, repentance, sin, righteousness, cross, forgiveness, mercy, worship, elder, bishop, preach, altar, sacrifice, Holy Spirit, God, faith, justification, heaven, hell, doctrine, etc. These are simply the words the translators of the English versions of the Bible have used to convey to English-speaking people the sense of the words originally used in the writing of Bible. Without the work of translators, we would not have the Bible in our own language.

It is obvious that if we would understand the Bible, we must know the meaning of the words that comprise it. To simply learn some words of the Bible, like a parrot might do, is not learning the message these words convey. *It is only as the words of the Bible convey their meaning to us, revealing the thoughts of God, that we are genuinely Bible learners.* In studying the Bible we are reading words, but our aim should always be to know what these words mean.

A basic principle of semantics (from the Greek *semantikos*, signifying "meaning") we need to consider is that words are not actual things but only their symbols. For example, you cannot eat the word "apple" or sit on the word "chair." You cannot ride the word "airplane" or be entertained by the word "actor." You cannot shake hands with the word "friend." You cannot show compassion to the words "sick person." You cannot make a home run with the word "baseball." You cannot pray to the word "God." These words, as well as all others, are only representatives or symbols of the things they stand for. In all of our study of the Bible, let us always remember that there cannot be learning of things without the recognition that words are only useful as they convey to our understanding the things for which they stand. Unless we thus translate the words of the Bible into the things for which they stand, to gain not just a knowledge of words but of things, we will fail to see the mind of the Spirit.

Any word is but an empty sound when it is divorced from its meaning. Instead of being a vehicle of thought it becomes a substitute for it. "Words," said Thomas Hobbes, "are wise men's counters, but they are money for fools. . . . The wise man has need to remember what every name he uses stands for, and to place it accordingly, or he will find himself entangled in words, as a bird in lime-twigs; the more he struggles, the more belimed. . . . The light of humane minds is Perspicuous Words, but first snuffed and purged from ambiguity."

It is evident that the person who does not know the valid meaning of the words of the Bible cannot possibly profit from them, to grow and prosper spiritually. If he boasts of his scriptural vocabulary, but does not know the meaning of the words he uses, he only exposes his ignorance.

An irrational preoccupation with words is quite widespread in the church. And "irrational" is the correct word to use here, for it is never sane to get excited over verbal machinery as such. Yet many church members do indeed get excited over words; consequently, they have incorporated into their system of doctrinal soundness what they consider to be a proper vocabulary, which they seriously believe to be the actual language of the inspired writers of the Bible, seemingly unaware that these writers did not write in the English language.

We must remember in our study of the Bible and desire to communicate its teaching to others, that a word or term is scriptural only as it symbolizes a scriptural thing, conveying a scriptural concept or idea, whether or not it is used in a particular translation of the scriptures. "Sound speech, that cannot be condemned" (Titus 2:8) is only the kind of speech that conveys scriptural concepts or ideas. "Sound words, even the words of our Lord Jesus Christ" (1 Timothy 6:3) are only the words that are guides to and conveyances of the things of Christ.

The irrational preoccupation with words that is so widely extant in the church is the basis for bibliolatry, the worship of the Bible. When members of the church become possessed of verbomania and give to words in a particular translation of the Bible a sanctity and significance separate and apart from the things they stand for, then they are guilty of word worship, of virtually ascribing deity to words. The undue regard they give to so-called scriptural words makes them allow such words to act as barriers between them and scriptural reality. What Francis Bacon perceived and decried in the secular realm is an effective portrayal of the bibliolater. Among the indictments he brought against the medieval schoolmen was their preoccupation with words as against the observation of things; that preoccupation he charged, was one of the three "distempers of learning." He railed ef-

fectively against what he described as “delicate learning” whereby “words usurp the place of substance, and polished phrases are accepted for real weight of meaning.” “Of this vanity,” he said, “Pygmalion’s frenzy is a good emblem; for words are but the images of matter, and except they have life of reason and invention, to fall in love with them is all one as to fall in love with a picture.”

In his many years as a minister of the gospel, this writer has observed the widespread ignorance in the church of the meaning of Biblical words. There are those who consider themselves faithful members of the church and who take great pride in their use of scriptural words, but many of them could not give the valid meaning of some of these words if their lives depended on it. They have indeed fallen in love with some words but have little regard for their meaning. And we are not referring here to the obscure words of the Bible, but to the more prominent ones — the words we often hear from the pulpit and in Bible classes. What about the Christian graces of 2 Peter 1:5-7: virtue, knowledge, self-control, patience, godliness, brotherly kindness, and love? Can you give a good account of yourself in defining these words? What about the Beatitudes of Jesus in the sermon on the mount (Matthew 5:3-12), those whom the Lord has pronounced “blessed”: the poor in spirit, they that mourn, the meek, they that hunger and thirst after righteousness, the merciful, the pure in heart, the peacemakers, and they that have been persecuted for righteousness sake? What kind of an account can you give of yourself in defining the meaning of these words? What about the works of the flesh: fornication, uncleanness, lasciviousness, idolatry, sorcery, enmities, strife, jealousies, wraths, factions, divisions, parties, envyings, drunkenness, revellings, and such like? How many of these words can you define as they are used in Galatians 5:19-21? What about some other familiar Biblical names and terms: Jesus, Christ, Israel, Jacob, repentance, church, mediator, propitiation, circumcision, gospel, evangelist, bishop, deacon, intercession, reconciliation, salvation, remission of sins, steward, grace, hospitality, etc.? Could you make a passing grade in a vocabulary test on these words? Just how *do* you really stand in your knowledge of the Biblical words you have seen and heard time and time again, remembering that one has not learned the message conveyed by the words of Bible who has not learned the concepts, things, or ideas that these words stand for?

Don’t give up hope, don’t lose heart, if things don’t look too well for you at present! As long as there is the capacity for a penitent attitude concerning the neglect of the past and a sincere desire to grow in your understanding of the words you see in your Bible study, there is genuine hope for better things in the future. Why not begin *now* to realize

these better things by diligent application in your search for meaning in the words of the Bible.

In determining the meaning of Biblical words as they are used in relationship to each other in phrases, clauses, and sentences, we need to have a working knowledge of grammar: parts of speech, tenses, moods, cases, modifiers, punctuation marks, etc. The Bible is written in grammatical form and structure, just as every secular literary work is so written, and to ignore such form and structure is to fail to gain understanding. That does not mean that one must be able to give the usual labels used in grammar, such as verb, noun, adverb, subject, predicate, etc., but he must know the concepts these words stand for. For example, the Bible learner does not need to give the grammatical label to the words "will build" in the phrase "I will build my church" (Matthew 16:18), but to understand their meaning he must know they describe an action in the future, what the grammarian calls the future tense.

Another example is the use of the word "unworthily" in 1 Corinthians 11:27, "Wherefore, whosoever shall eat this bread, and drink this cup of the Lord, unworthily, shall be guilty, etc." (KJV). Grammatically, "unworthily" is an adverb, describing "the unworthy manner" (ASV) in which some of the Corinthian Christians were partaking of the Lord's supper. Many in the church who have failed to see the grammatical construction of this word have concluded that it describes the personal unworthiness of the partakers, not the manner of their partaking, which would make it an adjective rather than an adverb.

The basically available source of information for a direct study of words themselves in the English Bible is a dictionary of the English language. It is a mistake, however, to conclude that dictionary definitions are infallibly authoritative, that they are divinely sanctioned. Yet it is almost universally believed that every word has a "correct meaning" and that the dictionary is the supreme authority in determining the meaning. Dr. Philip B. Gove said, "There's no divine sanction in language. It's an instrument of the people who use it. If dictionaries did not follow the language you'd end up with a literary language separate and apart from the spoken language." Exactly! The writer of a dictionary is not a law-giver but a historian, or as expressed by R. C. Trench, "He is a historian of the language, not a critic." All he can do to the best of his ability is to record how various words have been used in the distant or immediate past. He cannot tell, unless he has the gift of prophecy, how any word will be used by any particular person at any particular time. General historical usage is the criteria of his definitions, not divine inspiration.

Consider, for example, the dictionary definition of the word "baptism": "The application of water to a person, as a sacrament or religious ceremony, by which he is initiated into the visible church. This is usually performed by sprinkling, pouring, or immersion, the manner of performing the act varying with the tenets of various churches." Since the dictionary only intends to tell us how the word "baptism" is generally used, it is absurd to argue that the partial definition of baptism as sprinkling or pouring is wrong because it does not agree with the use of the word in the New Testament.

We must not, however, overlook the special usefulness of the more complete dictionaries, especially the unabridged editions, in giving us the meaning of the Greek equivalents of many of the words in the English New Testament. For instance, in *Webster's New Twentieth Century Dictionary of the English Language Unabridged*, we note the following definition: "baptism (from Greek *baptismos*, that which is dipped, from *baptizein*, to dip)." In addition to its valid definition of the Greek, in some instances it tells how a word is used in the New Testament; e. g. "*bishop* (Greek *episkopos*, a bishop, an overseer; *epi*, upon, and *skopos*, from *skopein*, to look). 1. In the early church, a spiritual overseer."

The better dictionaries are also useful in defining proper names and other words that are historically significant only in their Biblical usage; e. g. "1. *Joshua*, in the Bible, Moses' successor, and leader of the Israelites into the promised land. 2. a book of the Old Testament telling about him."

Since many words found in the English Bible do not have a single "correct meaning" in general usage, we must see them as applying to groups of similar situations, which we can designate as *areas of meaning*. An English dictionary can thus be an invaluable guide in defining words in our Bible study as it gives us these areas of meaning. In each use of the word we examine the context to find out the point intended within the particular area of meaning.

Considering the proper use of the dictionary, the reader is asked to look back to the definition of baptism as "sprinkling, pouring, or immersion" and determine which of these words applies to its meaning in the Biblical setting (John 3:23; Acts 8:38,39; Romans 6:4; Colossians 2:12).

Realizing that a dictionary is a historical work, we should thus understand it to say, "The word 'mother' has been most frequently used in the English-speaking world as meaning 'a female parent,' and that is obviously what it means in the sentence I am now trying to understand: 'And he went down with them, and came to Nazareth; and he was subject unto them: and his *mother* kept all these sayings in her

heart' (Luke 2:51)." Of course, we must always carefully re-examine the context to be sure that the definition fits. For example, the most frequent use of the word "fox" as "any carnivorous mammals, smaller than wolves" is the obvious meaning of the word in Matthew 8:20, but not in Luke 13:32, where in this context the dictionary's appropriate definition is "a sly, cunning fellow."

We must recognize that merely quoting a dictionary definition does not necessarily mean genuine understanding. One may glibly quote the dictionary definition of a particular word without remotely comprehending the thing or idea it stands for. The dictionary must be used to obtain understanding rather than to cover up one's ignorance. H. R. Huse said, "Dictionary definitions frequently offer verbal substitutes for an unknown term which only conceal a lack of real understanding. Thus a person might look up a foreign word and be quite satisfied with the meaning 'bullfinch' without the slightest ability to identify or describe the bird. Understanding does not come through dealing with words alone, but rather with the things for which they stand."

QUESTIONS

1. Discuss the thesis that it is only as the words of the Bible convey their meaning to us that we are genuinely Bible learners.
2. Discuss words as not actual things but only their symbols.
3. What is the attitude toward Biblical words of the bibliolater?
4. What is the importance of a working knowledge of grammar in understanding the Bible?
5. What is the proper use of the English dictionary in our Bible study?
6. How do you stand in your knowledge of the meaning of the more familiar Biblical terms and names?

MEANING FROM CONTEXT (1)

Some words in the Bible have only one meaning; thus in whatever setting they are used, they always have the same meaning. Sometimes the Bible itself either suggests or explicitly explains their meaning. Otherwise, we must resort to whatever available help we have at hand: Bible dictionary, English dictionary, Greek lexicon, etc. But as we previously noted, there are Biblical words that have more than one meaning. In any study involving the use of these words, due attention must be given to the things for which they stand in their particular settings, which simply means that no final definition can be ascertained until the context (the discourse that surrounds a word) has been examined.

We can illustrate this rule of context by considering a word found in secular literature: *check*. Who would be so foolish as to give this word a single meaning, such as "a written order directing a bank or banker to pay money as therein stated," insisting that this is the sole meaning wherever and whenever it is used? Actually, "check" can be used as a noun, verb, or adjective. The noun form is used in fifteen senses and the combined transitive and intransitive verb forms in fourteen senses. Note some of the meanings: a pattern of squares, one employed to check or to control, a rabbit-shaped cutting, to mark, as an item, with a check, etc. It is evident that to know what meaning is attached to this word in a particular setting, we must examine its context.

Let us now illustrate the need of explaining words in their context by giving attention to three New Testament words, each of which is used in more than one sense.

1. **Judge**, from the Greek *krino*. If this word were to have just one meaning in the New Testament, we would be forced to conclude that the scriptures are contradictory in their teaching. 1 Corinthians 5:12 advocates judging on the part of Christians: "Do not ye *judge* them that are within?" James 4:1:1,12, however, condemns judging: "Speak not one against another, brethren. He that speaketh against a brother, or *judgeth* his brother, speaketh against the law, and judgeth the law: but if thou judgest the law, thou art not a doer of the law, but a judge. One only is the lawgiver and judge, even he who is able to save and to destroy: but who art thou that *judgest* thy neighbor?" A brief examination of the use of the word "judge" in these passages will show that different meanings are conveyed; thus no contradiction is involved.

In the context of 1 Corinthians 5:12, the apostle Paul teaches the necessity of each Christian estimating by known facts the evil conduct of any of his fellow Christians with whom he is associated so that he can know when to withdraw fellowship from them (1 Corinthians 5:9-13). Hence, the meaning of *judge* in this particular situation is “to conclude or decide by the exercise of judgment, to estimate.”

The inspired writer in James 4:11,12 combines speaking against a brother with judging that brother, which means that one who runs his brother down thereby judges his own brother. In light of the context, the word “judgeth” does not mean that we cannot draw valid conclusions concerning others by the standard of God’s law, as in 1 Corinthians 5:9-13. But it does mean that we are not to pronounce any judgment that has no evidence to substantiate it, that is malice-motivated, that impugnes the motives of others, that censures the conduct of others concerning things which the divine law does not embrace either in its prohibitions or requirements.

When one speaks evil of his brother, it is virtually equivalent to passing judgment on him as to his eternal destiny, thus presumptuously assuming a prerogative that is God’s alone. As we have not power to save a person, neither do we have any power to condemn him.

2. *Hate*, from the Greek *miseo*. “If any man cometh after me, and *hateth* not his own father, and mother, and wife, and children, and brethren, and sisters, yea, and his own life also, he cannot be my disciple” (Luke 14:26). In the context of this passage, verses 27-33, Jesus describes the exacting, sacrificial nature of discipleship, that those who follow Him must be willing to renounce anything and everything that would stand between them and Him, even if it necessitates giving up those who are nearest and dearest to them, or even giving up their physical life. Thus *hating* those of one’s earthly family and “his own life also,” does not mean any feeling of rancor or bitterness, but simply the attitude of putting Jesus first and uppermost in one’s affections. Thus if a choice must be made between the Lord and one’s family or even his physical life, it must be made in favor of the former rather than the latter. Cf. Revelation 12:11.

“He that loveth not abideth in death. Whosoever *hateth* his brother is a murderer . . .” (1 John 3:14,15). Here the contexts indicates that the word “hate” is used to mean the opposite of love — a feeling of rancor, bitterness, and animosity — such an attitude as we are to have toward no one. Cf. Matthew 5:43-48.

3. *Anxiety*, from the Greek *merimna* (verb *merimnao*). “In nothing be anxious; but in everything by prayer and supplication let your requests be made known unto God. And the peace of God, which passeth

all understanding, shall guard your hearts and your thought in Christ Jesus" (Philippians 4:6,7). Here, and in kindred contexts, the word "anxious" denotes worry, that painful, fearful uneasiness of mind that shows lack of faith in God, that accomplishes no good at all, that is the opposite of "the peace of God which . . . shall guard your hearts and thoughts in Christ Jesus." Anxiety in the sense of worry is always wrong, under any and all circumstances. See Matthew 6:24-34; 13:22; 1 Peter 5:7.

" . . . the members should have the same *care* [Greek *merimnos*] one for another" (1 Corinthians 12:25). Here the care, or anxiety, we should have is the solicitous, constructive, helpful concern for our fellow members of the body of Christ.

"Besides those things that are without, there is that which presseth upon me daily, *anxiety* for all the churches" (2 Corinthians 11:28). Here the apostle expressed his concern for the welfare of all the churches of Christ. This loving, solicitous concern for his brethren in the Lord was a prominent characteristic of the beloved apostle, causing him not only to work on their behalf but also incessantly to pray for them (Romans 1:9; Philippians 1:4; etc.). See Philippians 2:19,20. Anxiety in the sense of loving concern for the welfare of others is always right, under any and all circumstances.

In determining the contextual meaning and import of words in phrases, sentences, paragraphs, etc., the following rules should be applied in our Bible study:

1. Consider the author. In this connection, two important questions need to be asked before we can determine the meaning of any word or statement in the Bible: Was the author God or the devil? If a man, was he inspired or uninspired?

When the devil was contending with Jehovah for the life of Job, he said, "Skin for skin, yea, all that a man hath will he give for his life" (Job 2:4). This crass, cynical observation on the frailty of man is typical of the utterances of the arch enemy of God. For one to offer this quotation as divine truth, applicable to all men, just because it is found in the Bible, is to lift it out of its context and thus misinterpret its meaning. Its author is not God but the devil, the father of lies. Time and time again in the history of mankind this particular lie of the devil has been refuted. Every man does not have his price! In every generation there are those lovers of truth, righteousness, and God whose moral and spiritual convictions are more precious to them than life itself, who gladly would forfeit their physical life rather than compromise their convictions. See Matthew 26:53; Acts 20:24; Hebrews 11:32-39.

The Pharisees spoke blasphemy against Jesus when they said, "This man doth not cast out demons, but by Beelzebub, the prince of

demons" (Matthew 12:24). Surely, no sane person would accept this statement as true just because it is found in the Bible. The assumption is valid that the Bible gives a faithful record of all that is spoken in it (in this sense we can consider the entire Bible as being the voice of God, the divine historian), but this does not mean that all whose language it records spoke the truth. The words of some of the worst men that ever lived are recorded in the Bible, even as also the words of the devil himself. Thus we must be certain that we know who is speaking, whether God or the devil, an inspired or uninspired man, before we draw a conclusion concerning the meaning of that which is spoken and its applicability to men. To overlook the author of a passage is to violate a basic rule in determining its context and thus its meaning and significance.

2. **Consider who is addressed.** When Nathan declared, "Thou art the man" (2 Samuel 12:7), he was speaking to David and to none other. How absurd to apply it to everyone!

When God commanded in the decalogue, "Remember the sabbath day, to keep it holy" (Exodus 20:8), He was speaking to fleshly Israel and to none other. The prologue of the decalogue plainly affirms this conclusion: "And God spake all these words, saying, I am Jehovah thy God, who brought thee out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of bondage" (Exodus 20:1,2). Now, if any person can prove that Jesus has commanded sabbath keeping of those who are bound to His law, then he would prove that men today are amenable to the sabbath law. But such a commandment is to be found nowhere in the authority of Christ, the New Testament. All those today who have submitted themselves to certain practices peculiar to the law of God in the Old Testament would do well to consider to whom that law was addressed, solely to fleshly Israel.

3. **Consider when written or spoken.** The penitent thief who was crucified beside Jesus made the request, "Jesus, remember me when thou comest in thy kingdom." Jesus responded, "Verily I say unto thee, Today shalt thou be with me in Paradise." See Luke 23:42,43. There can be no question that the penitent thief was saved eternally; yet he was not baptized. Does not this prove that all responsible persons today who believe in Christ as the Saviour can be saved without being baptized? Not at all. The promise Jesus made to the penitent thief was during the Old Testament dispensation, before the New Testament was made possible by the Saviour's death and His subsequent resurrection from the grave and ascension into heaven. See Hebrews 9:15-28; 10:9,10. The faith that saves men under the New Testament not only includes repentance but also baptism (Acts 2:38). Once the New Testament came into force, the terms of redemption by

dependence upon the saving power of Christ and His blood were set forth in the great commission (Matthew 28:18-20; Mark 16:15,16; Luke 24:45-47). Those today who would be received into the divine kingdom must comply with the terms of this last commission Jesus gave his followers, thus to trust in Him for salvation according to His will under the New Testament.

“And he that smiteth his father, or his mother, shall be surely put to death . . . And he that curseth his father or his mother, shall surely be put to death” (Exodus 21:15,17). These Old Testament words expressing the will of God were applicable to the Jews only. Would any one favor the death penalty today for children who mistreat their parents? Does the New Testament advocate such a practice?

4. Consider the circumstances or connective teaching that gave rise to the word or passage being studied. Needless to say, we should always strive to obtain from any word or passage in the Bible the lesson that the divinely inspired writer or speaker intended to convey by it. In so doing, we must not overlook the circumstances or connective teaching that gave rise to it. We can easily understand, for example, that the parables of the lost sheep, lost coin, and prodigal son (Luke 15) teach, according to the intent of Jesus, the love of God for sinners, His desire for their salvation, and His willingness to accept them when they depart from sin by coming to Him according to His will. This conclusion is derived from the fact that giving rise to these parables was the criticism leveled by the scribes and Pharisees against Jesus because of the love He showed sinners by having social intercourse with them. Carefully note Luke 15:1,2, “Now all the publicans and sinners were drawing near unto him to hear him. And both the Pharisees and scribes murmured, saying, This man receiveth sinners, and eateth with them.”

In Acts 4:32-35 we read of the pooling of the material resources of the church at Jerusalem in a common fund to meet the physical needs of the saints: “And the multitude of them that believed were of one heart and soul: and not one of them said that aught of the things which he possessed was his own; but they had all things common. And with great power gave the apostles their witness of the resurrection of the Lord Jesus: and great grace was upon them all. For neither was there among them any that lacked: for as many as were possessors of lands or houses sold them, and brought the prices of the things that were sold, and laid them down at the apostles' feet: and distribution was made unto each, according as any one had need.”

Does the fact that the inspired historian recorded the Jerusalem church as having all its material goods in common mean that he advocated this practice for all congregations of every generation? When

we consider the peculiar situation that gave rise to this particular practice, we must conclude that it has no application to any other congregation unless the circumstances are the same.

The Jerusalem church was composed of Jews “from every nation under heaven” (Acts 2:5) who had obeyed the gospel of Christ and continued to abide in Jerusalem after their conversion. Removed from their home lands, a large number of them ran out of funds and were consequently in dire straits. Moved by the love of Christ, those who were endowed with worldly goods sold them and pooled the proceeds to meet the urgent needs of their indigent brethren. Should such a situation of dire need arise in any congregation today, then the action of the Jerusalem church could be followed as a pattern in meeting this need.

QUESTIONS

1. If a particular word has only one meaning in the Bible, how do we determine that meaning?
2. What is the significance of the context in determining the meaning of words?
3. Discuss the different meanings given to the words “judge,” “hate,” and “anxiety” in the New Testament.
4. Discuss what should be considered in determining the contextual meaning and import of words in phrases, sentences, paragraphs, etc.: the author, who is addressed, etc.

MEANING FROM CONTEXT (2)

In Luke 10:37 Jesus is recorded as saying to a certain lawyer, "Go, and do thou likewise." What was he to do that was "likewise"? To be a good neighbor, to render mercy and service to those in need, as the context of the parable of the good Samaritan plainly reveals. Concerning the mercy the good Samaritan had on the traveler who had been assaulted, robbed, and left half-dead by thieves on the Jericho road, Jesus asked the lawyer, "Which of these three [the priest, Levite, and Samaritan], thinkest thou, proved neighbor unto him that fell among the robbers?" (Luke 10:36). Then in the next verse we get the response of the lawyer and the command of Jesus: "And he said, He that showed mercy on him. And Jesus said unto him, Go, and do thou likewise." Is this command that was expressly directed to the lawyer applicable to all of the Lord's disciples of every generation? Indeed so, because enjoined on every disciple by the New Testament is love of his neighbor as himself and the treatment of others with mercy (Matthew 5:7; Romans 13:9; James 2:13; 3:17).

To the rich, morally upright young ruler, Jesus said, "One thing thou lackest yet: sell all thou hast, and distribute unto the poor, and thou shalt have treasure in heaven: and come, follow me" (Luke 18:22). The context of this particular request of Jesus is given in the next verse, indicating why it was necessary for the ruler to give up all his material possessions in order to follow Jesus and to have heavenly treasures: "But when he heard these things, he became exceeding sorrowful; for he was very rich." He obviously loved his riches more than God Himself, and Jesus knew that only by the drastic, humbling means of divesting himself of all his riches, could he be put in the right frame of mind to give his life to God. That is the principle of Jesus' teaching in Matthew 5:29,30 concerning the offending hand and eye; namely, that we must give up anything and everything that stand between us and the Lord.

But does Jesus make the same demand of every person who would follow Him that he made of the rich young ruler? Certainly not! This divine demand can only apply to those who have the same attitude of the ruler, who also can only be humbled at the feet of Jesus by giving up all their material possessions. Cf. 1 Timothy 6:10,17-19.

Jesus said to His disciples, "And I say unto you, Make to yourselves friends by means of the mammon of unrighteousness; that, when it shall fail, they may receive you into the eternal tabernacles" (Luke 16:9). This is a seemingly strange request for Jesus to make of His

disciples, virtually meaningless unless we consider what the context reveals. Jesus made this command in connection with the parable of the unrighteous steward (Luke 16:1-8). This steward used "the mammon of unrighteousness" as the means of being received into the houses of certain of his master's debtors after he would lose his job and be turned out into the cold. The lesson Jesus teaches here is that His disciples are to use "the mammon of unrighteousness," their material possessions, to help the poor and needy so that they will be received into "the eternal tabernacles," the mansions Jesus has gone to prepare for them (John 14:1-3).

This does not mean that the Lord's disciples can buy their way into heaven. But Jesus does teach that the loving service we render others in the use of the material means entrusted in our care, is inherent in and expressive of genuine faith in Christ, and that without such faith no Christian can have access to the saving merits of Christ through the grace of God. See Matthew 25:31-46; Romans 6:23; Ephesians 2:8-10; James 2:14-26; 1 John 3:14-18; 4:7-21.

It is in the context we are considering that Jesus said, "If therefore ye have not been faithful in the unrighteous mammon, who will commit to your trust the true riches?" (verse 11). The answer to this question is obvious: if we do not wisely use our money to the glory of God and the good of mankind, it is evident that our faith is dead, that we have not the Spirit in our lives, that we reject God's grace and Christ's merits, and that we are not laying up for ourselves "treasures in heaven" (Matthew 6:20).

What is meant by the word "judgment" in the phrase "for the time is come for judgment to begin at the house of God: and if it begin first at us, what shall be the end of them that obey not the gospel of God?" (1 Peter 4:17)? Some kind of impending persecution the apostle's readers would receive, not to condemn them but to keep them from being condemned. See 1 Corinthians 11:32; 1 Peter 1:3-9. This conclusion is warranted by what is said preceding the text concerning the persecution that confronted "the house of God," the church, beginning with verse 12: "Beloved, think it not strange concerning the fiery trial among you, which cometh upon you to prove you, as though a strange thing happened unto you, etc."

In light of the fact that "judgment begins first at us," which judgment is calculated to keep us saved because of our trust in and obedience to Christ, the question the apostle asks concerning those who "obey not the gospel of God" is entirely rhetorical: the judgment eventually to be brought on sinners is divine wrath. See 2 Thessalonians 1:8,9.

"If even the godly have chastening judgment now, how much more

shall the ungodly be doomed to damnable judgment at last" (A. R. Faussett).

A familiar passage of which we may fail to see the significance because of our failure to see its context is Matthew 10:32,33, "Every one therefore who shall confess me before men, him will I confess before my Father who is in heaven. But whosoever shall deny me before men, him will I also deny before my Father who is in heaven." The teaching preceding these two verses, beginning with verse 16, gives the context, dealing with the persecution the Lord's disciples would endure for His name. Carefully read this entire context, especially noting the four verses immediately preceding our text: "And be not afraid of them that kill the body, but are not able to kill the soul: but rather fear him who is able to destroy both body and soul in hell. Are not two sparrows sold for a penny? and not one of them shall fall to the ground without your Father: but the very hairs of your head are numbered. Fear not therefore; ye are of more value than many sparrows." Then follows the text, beginning with "Everyone therefore." What is the import of the word "therefore"? That whatever follows is explained by that which precedes; namely, in this context, that to confess Christ is to suffer persecution, even the possible loss of one's life, but to deny Him is to avoid persecution and save one's skin. This confession of Jesus before men does not remotely pertain to the formal confession made by a candidate for baptism before believers, who will praise and congratulate him for his verbal acknowledgement of Christ. Cf. Acts 8:36,37. As significant is confession before baptism, it is not what Jesus had in mind in our text. Here Jesus deals with the stand His disciples will take in the daily walks of life, when to confess Him is to be ridiculed, insulted, or mistreated in any other way, and when to deny Him is to avoid persecution, to be praised and congratulated by unbelievers.

Consider those early saints who were brought before governors and kings who had the power of life and death over them. What would they do now when they faced those who detested Christianity? Confess Jesus and suffer torture and death, or deny Him and save their skin? What will you do when facing men who are antagonistic toward Christ and His teaching: confess Him or deny Him?

In his definition of the Greek word for "deny," *arneomai*, J. H. Thayer says that it "... is used of followers of Jesus who, for fear of death or persecution, deny their master and desert his cause, [to disown]." Note the following translations: "Whosoever disowns me before men" (Weymouth); "Any one who disowns me before men" (Goodspeed); "Whoever disowns me before men" (Verkuyl).

The literal translation of the Greek in our text shows that the con-

fession of Christ is that of His disciples: "Every one therefore who shall confess *in* me before men, *in* him will I also confess before my Father who is in heaven." See footnote of the ASV. Note the appropriate comments of Marvin R. Vincent: "Lit. 'confess *in* me.' The idea of confessing Christ out of state of oneness with him. 'Abide in me, and being in me, confess me.' It implies identification of the confession with the confessed, and thus takes confession out of the category of mere formal or verbal acknowledgment. . . The true confessor of Christ is one whose faith rests in him. Observe that this gives great force to the corresponding clause, in which Christ places himself in a similar relation with those whom he confesses. 'I will confess *in* him.' It shall be as if I spoke abiding in him. 'I in them and thou in me, that they may be perfected into one, and that *the world may know* that thou hast sent me, and hast loved them as thou hast loved me' (John 17:23)."

"Whoever declares publicly that he belongs to me, I will do the same before my Father in heaven" (Today's English Version).

What does Jesus mean by the words "Rabbi, father, and master" in the following context: "But all their [scribes and Pharisees] works they do to be seen of men: for they make broad their phylacteries, and enlarge the borders of their garments, and love the chief place at feasts, and the chief seats in the synagogues, and the salutations in the marketplaces, and to be called of men, Rabbi. But be ye not called Rabbi: for one is your teacher, and all ye are brethren. And call no man your father on the earth: for one is your Father, even he who is in heaven. Neither be ye called masters: for one is your master, even the Christ. But he that is greatest among you shall be your servant. And whosoever shall exalt himself shall be humbled and whosoever shall humble himself shall be exalted" (Matthew 23:5-12)?

The word "Rabbi" is applied only to Jesus in the New Testament with one exception, in John 3:26, where the uninspired disciples of John the Baptist called him by this title. In condemning the use of Rabbi as a human title, Jesus refers to Himself as man's only "teacher," from the Greek *didaskalos*, which is used legitimately in several New Testament passages to designate those who teach the Lord's word (1 Corinthians 12:28; Hebrews 5:12; etc.). Surely, if one teaches anything, he can rightly be called what he is, a teacher. In what sense, then, is Jesus man's only teacher?

The word "father," Jesus affirms, can only be used to designate the heavenly Father; yet the original Greek for this word, *pater*, is used legitimately many times in reference to our fleshly fathers (Matthew 19:5,19; Mark 1:20; Ephesians 6:2; etc.) Is it wrong to call an earthly father what he is, a father? Then, too, the word *pater* is legitimately

used to designate one who converts men to Christ through the teaching of the gospel. Paul declared, "For though ye have ten thousand tutors in Christ, yet have ye not many fathers; for in Christ Jesus I begat you through the gospel" (1 Corinthians 4:15). See 1 Timothy 1:2. Is it wrong to call those who beget others in Christ through the gospel what they are, fathers?

Jesus also tells us that He is our only master, that we are to call no man by this name. The word "master" is from the *kathegetes*, literally signifying a guide, or leader. Is not there a legitimate sense in which men are to be guides, or leaders? Surely, the principle of leadership is implied in the relationship of the husband to his wife and of parents to their children (Ephesians 5:22,23; 6:1,2). Surely, bishops, who are to "exercise the oversight . . . making yourselves ensamples to the flock" (1 Peter 5:2,3), serve as leaders, or guides, giving leadership and guidance to the flock of God among them. Is it wrong to call a person who exercises leadership what he is, a leader?

What, then, does Jesus mean in His prohibitions of calling men Rabbi, teacher, father, and master? The answer is to be found in the context, Matthew 23:5-12, where we see the pride of the scribes and Pharisees, whose egotistical desire to be elevated above their fellow Jews caused them to covet the best place at feasts, the chief seats in the synagogues, the salutations in the marketplace, and to be called by the reverential title of Rabbi. They virtually thought of themselves as having a kind of divinity, to deserve the reverence men give to God Himself. Thus in principle Jesus prohibits all titles that tend to elevate one brother above another ("for ye are all brethren"), that gives him a kind of respect and reverence that belongs only to Deity.

The original concept behind all religious titles, such as pope (literally meaning father), Holy Father, Your Eminence, Lord Bishop, Father, Your Holiness, Reverend, Right Reverend, Very Right Reverend, Reverend Mother, Mother Superior, Your Worship, Monsignor, etc., was the elevation of the so-called clergy above the laity, which is contrary to the universal brotherhood and priesthood of all members of the family of God. In this sense, only God is our Father and only Christ is our master and teacher, with all the members of God's family, the body of Christ, being each other's peers in their standing before God.

Then, too, Jesus emphasizes the evil of men-exalting titles by insisting in the last two verses of the context that serving others is the true mark of greatness and that those who exalt themselves shall be humbled, but those who humble themselves shall be exalted. Even elders who have the oversight of the local congregation are not to be lords but servants, for both the overseers and the overseen are to

serve one another. Read 1 Peter 5:1-5, especially noting verse 5: "Yea, all of you gird yourselves with humility, to serve one another: for God resisteth the proud, but giveth grace to the humble." No faithful child of God will ever accept any title that would cater to human pride, that would exalt him above his brethren, that would assume any kind of respect that is God's right alone. Carefully consider the entire New Testament and see if you can find a single instance in which any person, whether, apostle, elder, deacon, evangelist, teacher, or any other brother in Christ, was ever given any kind of so-called clerical title.

QUESTIONS

1. Why are we to follow the Lord's command to the lawyer, "Go, and do thou likewise"?
2. Is every person who would follow Jesus bound to do as He commanded the rich young ruler? Discuss.
3. What lesson is given us in Luke 16:9?
4. What was the "judgment" that would "begin at the house of God"?
5. Discuss the confession and denial of Christ spoken of in Matthew 10:32,33.
6. In what sense are we not to call any man Rabbi, teacher, father, or master?

FIGURATIVE LANGUAGE

Much of the Bible is written in figurative language, and unless we distinguish between figurative and literal words, we will find ourselves confused and frustrated. In determining whether words are to be defined as figurative or literal, a knowledge of the context is indispensable. In this regard, a basic rule of interpretation is that all words are to be accepted as literal unless the context demands that they be defined figuratively.

When Jesus said, "Go and say to that fox, Behold, I cast out demons . . ." (Luke 13:32), he obviously used the word "fox" figuratively since it would be absurd to think of a message being delivered to a literal fox, a brute beast. The "fox" in this case was King Herod. In Luke 9:58, however, Jesus used the word "fox" in a literal sense: "The foxes have holes, and the birds of the heaven have nests; but the Son of man hath not where to lay his head." Consider the use of the word "Jerusalem" in Matthew 21:1 and Revelation 21:2.

The Catholic dogma of transubstantiation is a striking example of a false doctrine due to the ignoring of a context which clearly shows that certain words are used figuratively. When Jesus held bread and fruit of the vine before His disciples, declaring, ". . . this is my body . . . this is my blood . . ." (Matthew 26:26,28), the context reveals that He could not possibly have spoken of His literal body and blood, which were distinct entities from the substances He held in His hands.

There are various figures of speech used in the Bible: metaphor, simile, type, synecdoche, parable, fable, metonymy, hyperbole, allegory, etc.; because, however, of the limitation of space, we must limit our discussion only to some of them.

METAPHOR. This figure is derived from two Greek words: *meta*, beyond, over, *pherein*, to bring, to carry. It is a comparison between two ideas or objects where the likeness is implied or suggested rather than stated explicitly. It is very common in our language. One will say concerning a picture of his mother, "This *is* my mother," or of a map of the United States, "This *is* the United States." Yet no person can be so ignorant as to miss these metaphors, to believe that a picture of a person is really that person or that a map of a place is really that place. The metaphor is also commonly used throughout the Bible. Consider the following examples:

"The seven good kine are seven years" (Genesis 41:26). In this interpretation by Joseph of Pharaoh's dream, the seven good kine are not literally seven years, but represent or symbolize them.

“Naphtali is a hind let loose” (Genesis 49:21). The likeness implied here is between one of Jacob’s sons and a particular animal turned loose. “In his history, or that of his descendents, he has more running to do than any other of the tribes. Stationed at the northeast of their territory, and most of the attacks on the land coming from that direction, they affected the tribe of Naphtali: He is first to be carried away on that account” (D. R. Dungan).

“For my people have committed two evils: they have forsaken me, the fountain of living waters, and hewed them out cisterns, broken cisterns, that can hold no water” (Jeremiah 2:13). The providential care and benevolent character of God are described by the figure of “the fountain of living waters,” and the tragic condition into which Israel had come is described by the figure of hewing out “broken cisterns, that can hold no water.”

“Thou art the head of gold” (Daniel 2:38). Here King Nebuchadnezzar is depicted by Daniel, in interpreting the king’s dream, as a head of gold, not literally so but represented or symbolized by it.

“I am the vine, ye are the branches” (John 15:5). Jesus is not literally a vine any more than His disciples are literally branches; but He is symbolized by a vine, as His disciples are symbolized by branches. See 1 Corinthians 10:4 and Revelation 1:20.

SIMILE. This figure is a comparison between two ideas or objects where the likeness between the two is stated explicitly. Whereas the metaphor says that one thing *is* another, the simile says that it is *like* or *as* it. The Bible is full of similes, but a few examples should suffice for this figure of speech.

“And it shall be as when a hungry man dreameth, and, behold, he eateth; but he awaketh, and his soul is empty: or as when a thirsty man dreameth, and, behold, he drinketh; but he awaketh, and, behold, is faint, and his soul hath appetite: so shall the multitude of all the nations be, that fight against mount Zion” (Isaiah 29:8). Note the use of the word “as” to depict explicitly the likeness between the thwarted expectations of the Jews’ enemies in taking Jerusalem and the disappointment of the man who dreams of eating and drinking but wakes up hungry and thirsty.

“Woe unto you scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! for ye are like unto whited sepulchres, which outwardly appear beautiful, but inwardly are full of dead men’s bones, and of all uncleanness” (Matthew 23:27). Here Jesus explicitly depicts the likeness between whited sepulchres and the hypocritical scribes and Pharisees. “As the whitewashing of the sepulchre was an appearance of cleanness, but really a warning of uncleanness, so outward scrupulousness and obtruded show of righteousness in any man is a clear sign of much that is wrong inside” (M. F. Sadler).

"All we *like* sheep have gone astray . . . *as* a lamb that before its shearers is dumb, so he openeth not his mouth" (Isaiah 53:6,7); "Lest my wrath go forth *like* a fire, and burn so that none can quench it, because of the evil of your doings" (Jeremiah 4:4); "And he saw the Spirit of God descending *as* a dove, and coming upon him" (Matthew 3:6); "And when ye pray, ye shall not be *as* the hypocrites" (Matthew 6:5); "They are *like* unto children that sit in the marketplace, and call to one another; who say, We piped unto you, and ye did not dance; we wailed, and ye did not weep" (Luke 7:32).

METONYMY. The Greek derivation of this word depicts its meaning: *meta*, change, and *omna*, name; thus a change of names. Webster defines it as "use of one word for another that suggests, as the effect for the cause, the cause for the effect, the sign for the thing signified, the container for the thing contained, etc. (a man keeps a good *table*, instead of good food)." Consider the following examples of this figure in the Bible:

"Cursed be Caanan; A servant of servants shall he be unto his brethren. And he said, Blessed be Jehovah, the God of Shem; And let Caanan be his servant. God enlarge Japheth, And let him dwell in the tents of Shem; And let Caanan be his servant" (Genesis 9:25-27). The names of Noah's sons Caanan, Shem, and Japheth are used here of their posterity. Enlarging Japheth was not increasing the size of the man, but making his descendents numerous.

"Oh give thanks unto Jehovah, call upon his name" (Psalms 105:1); "Whosoever shall call upon the name of the Lord shall be saved" (Romans 10:13). These are two examples of the name being substituted for the person, a frequent use of metonymy in the Bible. No one actually calls upon the name of a person, but the name stands for person himself. Thus to call upon the name of Jehovah is to call upon the person of Jehovah, and to call upon the name of the Lord is to call upon the person of the Lord. Then, too, men are not saved by the name of the Lord, but only by what the name stands for, the person of the Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. See Psalms 20:1; Proverbs 18:10; Isaiah 30:27; Jeremiah 10:25.

"For they have devoured Jacob, And laid waste his habitation" (Psalms 79:7). This is a double metonymy: the name of Jacob designates his descendents, and his descendents stand for the land they owned and occupied.

"Egypt was glad when they departed; For the fear of them had fallen upon them" (Psalms 105:38); "Then went out unto him Jerusalem, and all Judaea, and all the region round about the Jordan" (Matthew 3:5). Here the metonymy is the substitution of the name of a place for its inhabitants.

"And beginning from Moses and from all the prophets, he inter-

preted to them in all the scriptures the things concerning himself" (Luke 24:27); "For Moses from generations of old hath in every city them that preach him, being read in the synagogues every sabbath" (Acts 15:21). These references to Moses and the prophets are not to them personally but to what they represent, their writings.

SYNECDOCHE. This word is defined by Webster as "a figure of speech by which a part is put for the whole (fifty *sails* for fifty *ships*), the whole for a part (the smiling *year* for the *spring*), the species for the genus (*cutthroat* for *assassin*), the genus for the species (a *creature* for a *man*), the name of a material for the thing made, etc." This figure is also common in Bible usage. Consider the following examples:

"Now it came to pass in those days, there went out a decree from Caesar Augustus, that all the world should be enrolled" (Luke 2:1). "All the world" is much larger than the Roman provinces to which Augustus' decree was sent; thus the whole is put here for the part.

"The kingdom of heaven is like unto a grain of mustard seed" (Matthew 13:31). The divine kingdom as a whole is not illustrated by this analogy between it and a grain of mustard seed; there are other characteristics of the divine kingdom (Matthew 13:33,44,45; etc.). Thus Jesus is here using the whole kingdom in place of a part.

"And he said unto them, Go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel to the whole creation" (Mark 16:15). The recipients of the gospel are human beings, who are only a part of the whole creation. This is another example of the whole being put for a part.

"All the souls of the house of Jacob, that came into Egypt, were threescore and ten" (Genesis 46:27). The word "soul" here, as it is also used in many other places in the Bible, stands for the whole person, which consists not only of the soul but also of the body and spirit (1 Thessalonians 5:23). Thus we are to understand that the soul in this context is used to designate the entire person, a part being put for the whole.

"Give us this day our daily bread" (Matthew 6:11). This reference is to food in general, bread being only part of it; thus a part is put for the whole. Another example is Acts 20:27, where the inspired historian Luke speaks of disciples in Troas coming together on the first day of the week to partake of the Lord's supper, describing it as "to break bread." Since the Lord's supper consists not only of bread but also of the fruit of the vine, we understand that Luke is putting a part for the whole.

HYPERBOLE Another familiar figure of speech used in the Bible is the hyperbole, defined by Webster as "prop. an overstating, excess, deriv. of Greek *hyper*, over, and *ballein*, to throw . . . a figure of speech in which an expression is an exaggeration of a meaning intended to be

conveyed, or by which things are represented as much greater or less, better or worse, than they really are. . . a statement exaggerated for the sake of effect." To treat the exaggerations of the Bible literally would be to find it guilty of many false statements, of misrepresenting reality. But to see them as figures that exaggerate for the sake of emphasis, that galvanize our attention on them, is to understand their great effectiveness in presenting the truth. Consider some examples:

"And the Philistines assembled themselves together to fight with Israel, thirty thousand chariots, and six thousand horsemen, and people as the sand which is on the sea-shore in multitude" (1 Samuel 13:5). We know that all the people who ever lived on the earth are only a tiny fraction of the billions upon billions of grains of sand on the seashore. Thus we understand that the great number of Philistines is exaggerated in order to emphasize the comparative insignificance of the army of Israel, so indirectly emphasizing the strength of the Lord that would make victory possible for the Israelites against such seemingly an overwhelming number of the enemy.

"Woe unto you scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! for ye tithe mint and anise and cummin, and have left undone the weightier matters of the law, justice, and mercy, and faith: but these ye ought to have done, and not to have left the other undone. Ye blind guides, that strain out the gnat, and swallow the camel!" (Matthew 23:23,24). Swallowing a camel, of course, is literally impossible. Jesus thus uses this obvious exaggeration to illustrate those who overlook the weightier matters of God's will, but are fastidious and meticulous in their attention to smaller matters, to "strain out a gnat." This is a description of an ugly spirit found in the Lord's church of every generation.

IRONY. Webster defines this figure as "a sort of humor, ridicule, or light sarcasm, the intended implication of which is the opposite of the literal sense of the words." The use of irony is to reduce to an absurdity whatever one opposes or deems false. It is used effectively in the Bible to expose error and sin.

"And it came to pass at noon, that Elijah mocked them, and said, Cry aloud; for he is a god; either he is musing, or he is gone aside, or he is on a journey, or peradventure he sleepeth and must be awaked" (1 Kings 18:27). Elijah used irony to taunt the false prophets who had all morning long been crying to the false god Baal to answer their prayer. The prophet spoke as if Baal were a real divinity who was either musing, traveling, or sleeping and could not pay attention to the cry of his worshippers. This is indeed pure irony, reducing to an absurdity any claims made for the power and reality of Baal.

"We are fools for Christ's sake, but ye are wise in Christ; we are weak, but ye are strong; ye have glory, but we have dishonor" (1 Corin-

thians 4:10). The wisdom and power that the disciples in Corinth boasted of possessing, but did not have, made it necessary for the apostle Paul to deal with them in such ironical language so that they would be brought to their senses, to humble themselves before God. See also Judges 10:14 and Job 12:2.

QUESTIONS

1. How can we tell when a word is used figuratively?
2. Why do we know that the Catholic dogma of transubstantiation is false?
3. Give the meaning of the following figures of speech: metaphor, simile, metonymy, syndecdoche, hyperbole, and irony. Discuss examples of the use of each of these figures in the Bible.

SUFFICIENCY OF BIBLE EXPLANATIONS

A very necessary rule in "handling aright the word of truth" is that no valid conclusion can be made about any Bible subject until all the pertinent testimony concerning it has been collected.

When Paul and his companions, including Barnabas, met with the church at Jerusalem and the apostles, all who were present considered the question of whether the Gentiles could be saved without being circumcised. All pertinent information bearing on the subject was seriously and objectively examined: Peter's account of his divinely guided work with the Gentiles at the house of Cornelius, the testimony of Paul and Barnabas concerning the things the Lord had done by their hands during the missionary journey they had just ended, and James' speech concerning the testimony of one of the prophets (Amos 9:11,12). Read Acts 15:1-20. When all the facts were in, there was only one conclusion possible: circumcision was not a condition of salvation, contrary to the teaching of the Judaizers.

When Moses was preparing Israel to enter the promised land of Caanan, he made three speeches, which include most of the book of Deuteronomy. In these speeches he presented them with all the responsibilities God had enjoined upon them to keep His commandments. This he did so that they would have all the facts in the case before them, that they might be guided thereby.

In Paul's farewell message to the elders of the church in Ephesus, referring to the time he had labored with them, he declared, "I shrank not from declaring unto you anything that was profitable, and teaching you publicly, and from house to house. . . For I shrank not from declaring unto the whole counsel of God" (Acts 20:20,27). In his Ephesian ministry, the apostle withheld none of the facts from his brethren that were necessary for their spiritual growth and prosperity. In the words of a fellow apostle, he taught them "all things that pertain unto life and godliness, through the knowledge of him that called us by his own glory and virtue" (2 Peter 1:3).

Too often in our Bible study we are prone to read a single passage on a particular subject and feel that we possess all that needs to be known about it. Many wrong religious practices and doctrines are the result of the failure of men to secure all the pertinent information on certain Bible subjects before drawing conclusions concerning their meaning. Carefully note the following examples:

JUSTIFYING FAITH. That sinners are justified by faith is plainly taught in the Bible: "Being therefore justified by faith, we have peace

with God through our Lord Jesus Christ" (Romans 5:1). In studying this passage alone, one could readily conclude that belief alone in the saving power of Jesus Christ is all that sinners need for their salvation. But using the same method of reasoning, we could also conclude that the Bible teaches salvation by baptism alone, since there are passages that present baptism in connection with salvation but do not expressly mention faith, or belief. See Acts 22:16; 1 Peter 3:21.

How then can we know what the Bible teaches concerning the sinner's faith that trusts in, depends on, God's grace and Christ's merits for salvation? By collecting all the divine testimony concerning the matter. When we do this, we find that sinners are indeed to have faith in Christ as the Son of God and Saviour of the world for their justification and salvation, but such a faith as causes them to repent of their sins and to be baptized into Christ. See Mark 16:15,16; Luke 24:47; Acts 2:38; Galatians 3:26, 27.

FORGIVING OTHERS THEIR TRESPASSES. Jesus declared in what is commonly known as the Lord's prayer, "... for if ye forgive men their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. But if ye forgive not men their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses" (Matthew 6:14,15). Many believe that Jesus teaches here that when any one sins against us, we are immediately to forgive him, regardless of his attitude as to whether or not he is sorry and penitent concerning the wrong he has done. One could justifiably draw this conclusion if the Lord's utterance here is all that is said on the subject in the New Testament. But there are other divinely revealed passages that give the conditions to be fulfilled by the offender in order for him be forgiven by those he has sinned against. Before we consider these passages, let us note two things: the meaning of forgiveness and the conditions God's children must meet before they can receive His forgiveness.

The word "forgive" in our text is from the Greek *aphiemi*, literally meaning "to send forth, send away (*apo*, from, *hiemi*, send)." Thus to forgive the sins of others against us is to send them away, dismiss them as if they never existed. Once we truly forgive any person, we dismiss the matter forever. Remember that human forgiveness is strictly analagous to divine forgiveness (Matthew 6:12; Ephesians 4:32). When God forgives, He forgets; never does He take us to task concerning any wrongdoing He has forgiven. He promised, "Their sins will I remember no more" (Hebrews 8:12).

But we must also remember that God will not dismiss our sins against Him unless we meet the conditions He has set forth for forgiveness: repentance and confession (Acts 8:22; 2 Corinthians 7:9,10; 1 John 1:9). Meeting these conditions is involved in our walk in

the light that makes possible the continual cleansing from any and all sins through Christ's blood (1 John 1:7). And these are exactly the same conditions that must be met before we can forgive others their trespasses against us: "Take heed to yourselves: if thy brother sin, rebuke him; and if he repent, forgive him. And if he sin against thee seven times in the day, and seven times turn again unto thee, saying, I repent; thou shalt forgive him" (Luke 17:3,4). "If he repent . . . saying I repent [his confession]," these are the conditions plainly set forth for our forgiveness of others.

"And if thy brother sin against thee, go, show him his fault between thee and him alone: if he hear thee, thou hast gained thy brother. But if he hear thee not, take with thee one or two more, that at the mouth of two or three witnesses every word may be established. And if he refuse to hear them, tell it to the church: and if he refuse to hear the church also, let him be unto thee as the Gentile and the publican" (Matthew 18:15-17). Why go to your offending brother concerning his sin against you if you have already forgiven him? The ostensible purpose of this action, as well as what follows if he fails to hear you, is to bring him to repentance and confession so that you can forgive him, thus to dismiss the offense once and for all.

The objection is often raised that to fail immediately to forgive one who has sinned against us is to harbor an unforgiving spirit. This is not a valid objection. God certainly always has a forgiving spirit; but that does not mean He automatically forgives men their trespasses before they meet the conditions He has set forth, whether the conditions are those that apply to the alien sinner or to the erring child of God. In the anguish and suffering of the cross, Jesus requested God's forgiveness of those who were guilty of His crucifixion: "Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do" (Luke 23:34). But God did not answer this request immediately. Several days later in the city of Jerusalem this prayer of Jesus was answered when His persecutors responded to the sermon of the apostle Peter: "Let all the house of Israel know assuredly, that God hath made him both Lord and Christ, this Jesus whom ye crucified. Now when they heard this, they were pricked in their heart, and said unto Peter and the rest of the apostles, Brethren, what shall we do? And Peter said unto them, Repent ye, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ unto the remission of your sins; and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. . . They then that received his word were baptized: and there were added unto them that day about three thousand souls" (Acts 2:36-38,41).

Between the prayer of Jesus and the subsequent answer given it, God's forgiving spirit was there, as it always is, in His readiness, willingness, and ability to forgive those who would fulfill His conditions of

forgiveness. Thus to be godlike we must always have a forgiving spirit, a loving attitude toward those who sin against us, the willingness, readiness, and ability to forgive them when they meet the proper conditions.

ANSWERED PRAYER. "Ask, and it shall be given you; seek, and ye shall find; knock, and it shall be opened unto you: for every one that asketh receiveth; and he that seeketh findeth; and to him that knocketh it shall be opened. Or what man is there of you, who, if his son shall ask him for a loaf, will give him a stone; or if he shall ask for a fish, will give him a serpent? If ye then, being evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more shall your Father who is in heaven give good things to them that ask him? (Matthew 7:7-11).

In this divine assurance that God answers the prayers of His children, are we to assume that He does so regardless of any and all moral and spiritual deficiencies in their lives? Some spiritually sick members of the body of Christ may only use prayer as an emergency measure when they are physically ill or in trouble, expecting God to come to their rescue every time they cry out for help. But they are sadly deluded. There are irrevocable conditions that must be met before God answers any Christian's prayer. God does indeed "give good things to them that ask him," but only when the proper conditions of efficacious prayer are met.

This passage concerning the God who gives to those who ask him in prayer is not the only teaching on the subject. Let us briefly consider the pertinent facts concerning the kind of prayer that truly reaches the throne of God's grace; then, and only then, can we know when God answers our prayers.

1. **Faith.** "And all things, whatsoever ye shall ask in prayer, believing, ye shall receive" (Matthew 21:22). See Mark 11:24; James 1:5.

2. **Sincerity, humility, and fervency.** "And when ye pray, ye shall not be as the hypocrites: for they love to stand and pray in the synagogues and in the corners of the streets, that they may be seen of men" (Matthew 6:5); "Wherefore the scripture saith, God resisteth the proud, but giveth grace to the humble" (James 4:6); "Elijah was a man of like passions with us, and he prayed fervently" (James 5:17). See Psalms 17:1; Matthew 15:8; Luke 18:10-14; Colossians 4:12; 1 Corinthians 14:15.

3. **Persistency.** "And he spake a parable unto them to the end that they ought always to pray, and not to faint, etc." (Luke 18:1-8). See Luke 11:5-13.

4. **Watchfulness.** "Continue stedfastly in prayer, watching therein with thanksgiving" (Colossians 4:2). See Mark 13:33; 14:38; Luke 21:36; Ephesians 6:18.

5. **Thoughtfulness.** "I will pray with the understanding" (1 Corinthians 14:15). See Matthew 6:7,8.

6. **Godly living.** "Beloved, if our heart condemn us not, we have boldness toward God; and whatsoever we ask we receive of him, because we keep his commandments and do the things that are pleasing in his sight" (1 John 3:21,22). See Proverbs 15:29; John 15:7; James 5:16.

7. **According to God's will.** "And this is the boldness which we have toward him, that, if we ask anything according to his will, he heareth us; and if we know that he heareth us whatsoever we ask, we know that we have the petitions which we have asked of him" (1 John 5:14,15). See Matthew 6:10; Romans 8:26,27.

8. **In the name of Christ.** "And whatsoever ye shall ask in my name, that will I do, that the Father may be glorified in the Son. If ye shall ask anything in my name, that will I do" (John 14:13,14). See John 15:16; 16:23,26; 1 Peter 2:5.

In collecting all the pertinent facts on a particular subject, we must remember that when anything is taught in the Bible and then expressly explained by the author or some other inspired person, his explanation is to be accepted as sufficient and final. There are many examples of this rule in the Bible. Note the following:

When the angel of the Lord spoke to Joseph about the forthcoming birth of Jesus, he said, "And she shall bring forth a son; and thou shalt call his name JESUS; for it is he that shall save his people from their sins. . . Behold, the virgin shall be with child, and shall bring forth a son, And they shall call his name Immanuel, which is, being interpreted, God with us" (Matthew 1:21,23). JESUS, *Saviour*; Immanuel, *God with us* — that is the explanation given by the angel, leaving no room for any person's speculation or guess work as to the meaning of these names.

In the closing words of the Old Testament (Malachi 4:5,6), God speaks of the eventual return to earth of Elijah: "Behold, I will send you Elijah the prophet before the great and terrible day of Jehovah come. And he shall turn the heart of the fathers to the children, and the heart of the children to their fathers; lest I come and smite the earth with a curse." Centuries later Jesus declared that John the Baptist was the fulfillment of this prophecy, leaving no room for any other interpretation: "For all the prophets and the law prophesied unto John. And if ye are willing to receive it, this is Elijah, that is to come" (Matthew 11:13,14).

In Matthew 13:3-8 is recorded the Lord's parable of the sower, with His explanation being given in verses 18-23. Any other explanation that we might give would be presumptuous. The Lord's explanation is

final and sufficient, telling us all we need to know about this parable. See Mark 5:41; 15:22,34; John 1:41,42; 9:7; Acts 4:36; 9:36; 13:8; Hebrews 7:1,2.

QUESTIONS

1. Why must all pertinent information be collected before a valid conclusion can be made about any Bible subject?
2. In answer to the foregoing question, discuss the examples given: the council of Jerusalem, the three speeches of Moses to the Israelites, and Paul's farewell message to the elders of the church at Ephesus.
3. What is justifying faith?
4. When are we to forgive others their sins against us?
5. Discuss the conditions of answered prayer.
6. Discuss the finality of Bible explanations.

USE OF THE GREEK

The knowledge of both the Hebrew of the Old Testament and the Greek of the New Testament will prove most helpful to any Bible student. But because the Christian's main thrust in Bible study is understanding the New Testament, and because of the limitation of space, we shall limit ourselves in the study at hand to the significance of the Greek.

In the main, the books of the New Testament were originally written in the ancient Greek language. Virtually all the New Testament manuscripts now extant are written in Greek, not in classical Greek, nor even in the literary Greek of the New Testament period, but in the vernacular known as the Koine, meaning "common," the language of every day life. It became the international language of the Roman empire during apostolic times. It was in such general use that the Roman Senate and imperial governors had the decrees translated into it and scattered over the empire. Is it not entirely appropriate that the New Testament, the message of greatest importance for all the people, should be originally written in the language most familiar to those who first received it, the language they daily used and understood? The aversion that many Christians have toward modern versions as such has no reasonable basis at all. We should encourage rather than discourage those who would read and study translations of the New Testament in the current vernacular, not in language used three hundred years ago, not in a special, ecclesiastical, pseudo-pious kind of language, but in the plain language commonly used by contemporary society.

Since the words in the English New Testament are translated from the original Greek, it is obvious that if we know the meaning of their Greek equivalents, we can best understand the ideas and concepts contained in the mind of the Spirit. It is surely evident that any meaning we might give to a word in the English New Testament that conflicts with its Greek equivalent is definitely wrong. Those who ridicule the study of the Greek New Testament would tacitly put a premium on ignorance. But those who are preeminently interested in knowing the truth in their study of the New Testament are willing to use every available means to reach their goal, and they will find that nothing is more basic to this than the study of the language in which the New Testament was originally written.

A primary reason for the study of the Greek New Testament is that translation from one language to another can be extremely difficult.

William Barclay observed, "It is always possible to translate words with accuracy when they refer to things. A chair is a chair in any language. But it is a different matter when it is a question of *ideas*. In that case some words need, not another to translate them, but a phrase, or a sentence, or even a paragraph. Further, words have associations. They have associations with people, with history, with ideas, with other words and these associations give words certain flavour which cannot be rendered in translation, but which affect the meaning in a most important way."

Let us now consider some examples of the increase in knowledge of God's word through the use of the Greek.

CLARIFICATION OF MEANING. "Communicating to the necessities of the saints; given to *hospitality*" (Romans 12:13). See 1 Timothy 3:2; Titus 1:8; 1 Peter 4:9. Just what trait does the word "hospitality" denote? Webster defines it as "the act, practice, or quality of being hospitable; friendly and generous entertainment of guests." Nothing in this passage or in any other New Testament passage tells us whether the guests to whom we are to extend hospitality are acquaintances and/or strangers. The meaning of the Greek *philoxenia* makes it clear: "a love of strangers (*philos*, loving, *xenos*, a stranger)." This word is so translated in Hebrews 13:2, "Forget not to show *love unto strangers* [*philoxenias*]."

"In like manner, ye wives, be in subjection to your own husbands; that, even if any obey not the word, they may without the word be gained by the behavior of their wives; beholding your chaste behavior coupled with fear "(1 Peter 3:12). How can those who "obey not the word" be gained "without the word" when God's word is the only means of saving men (Romans 1:16; James 1:18; 1 Peter 1:23; Acts 2:41; 20:32; etc.)? The literal meaning of the Greek makes it clear: "obey not the word [*to logō*], they may without a word [*logon*]." The apostle is not saying that unbelieving husbands can be saved without *the* word, the gospel. It is obvious that these husbands had already been taught the word of God, but had refused to obey it. Nothing would be gained by further direct effort to teach and persuade them, which would only tend to irritate them. Thus Christian wives would not depend on a word, or conversation, but on deed to gain their husbands for Christ.

"And if the righteous is *scarcely* saved" (1 Peter 4:18). To scarcely be saved does not mean "by the skin of our teeth," as some believe. Quite to the contrary, the apostle teaches that the entrance of the faithful Christian into the everlasting kingdom will be rich and abundant (2 Peter 1:11). The meaning of the word "scarcely" is clarified by the Greek *molis*, signifying "with difficulty, from *molos*, toil," referring here to the many difficulties Christians must face in order to be eternally saved.

ENHANCEMENT OF UNDERSTANDING. Our understanding of many words and phrases in the New Testament is enhanced and deepened by the use of the Greek. Some examples follow.

“*Fervent in spirit*” (Romans 12:11). The word “fervent” is from the Greek *zeo*, “boil, seeth . . . with burning zeal” (Arndt-Gingrich). One who is fervent in spirit is boiling, seething, burning with enthusiasm.

“ . . . our Saviour Jesus Christ; who gave himself for us, that he might redeem us from all iniquity, and purify unto himself for us, that he might redeem us from all iniquity, and purify unto himself a people *for his own possession, zealous of good works*” (Titus 2:13,14). The phrase “for his own possession” is from the Greek *periousios*, defined as “chosen, especial” (Arndt-Gingrich); “beyond ordinary” (Robert Young). The Lord’s own possession are those people who have been chosen out of the world to be peculiarly His own, to belong *only* to Him. *Periousios* is the same word used in the Septuagint version of the Old Testament to designate God’s chosen people the Jews: “. . . mine *own possession* from among all peoples. . .”(Exodus 19:5). When Christians truly realize that they are *especial* people, not of the mill and run of mankind, they will then be “zealous of good works,” to be and act as people who are servants and imitators of their divine Master.

“Only let your *manner of life* be worthy of the gospel of Christ” (Philippians 1:27). The words “manner of life” are from the Greek *politeuo* (the derivation of our word “politics”), literally meaning “to be a citizen,” thus here signifying a conduct that is characteristic of those whose “citizenship is in heaven” (Philippians 3:20). Christians are a heavenly people with the obligation and privilege of living a heavenly life on earth. They are a colony of citizens of heaven in the midst of a crooked and perverse generation, among whom they are “seen as lights in the world” (Philippians 2:15). They are never to forget who they are: citizens of heaven, God’s chosen, special, peculiar people.

“ . . . Christ: in whom ye also, having heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation, — in whom, having believed, ye were sealed with the Holy Spirit of promise, which is an *earnest* of our inheritance, unto the redemption of God’s own possession, unto the praise of his glory” (Ephesians 1:12-14). The word “earnest” in the Greek is *arrabon*, literally meaning “caution-money deposited by a purchaser in pledge of full payment” (Marvin Vincent). In general usage it came to denote a pledge of any kind. The Holy Spirit is given to Christians as a pledge of their future blessedness in heaven. Without this pledge no one has the hope of receiving the heavenly inheritance. See Acts 5:32 and 1 John 3:24.

“When therefore thou doest alms, sound not a trumpet before thee,

as the *hypocrites* do in the synagogues and in the streets, that they may have glory of men. Verily I say unto you, *They have received their reward*" (Matthew 6:2). The word "hypocrite" primarily denotes "one who answers; then one playing a part, a stage actor." Like the stage actor, who plays the part of another person, the hypocrite pretends to be something that he is not. The hypocrites of whom Jesus spoke were pretending to be loving and generous in their almsgiving, but their true motive was to exalt themselves in receiving the praise of men. Jesus observed that "they have received their reward." The words "have received" are from the Greek *apecho*, meaning "receive in full." The Lord's words here can be translated, "They have received their reward in full!" These play actors, hypocrites, had been paid in full and had no further claim of reward. And so it is that when we render Christian service to others in order to be seen of men, when we exalt ourselves instead of the Lord, we are paid in full on earth — our pay, the plaudits of men. We have no reward awaiting us in heaven.

"Now we command you, brethren, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that ye withdraw yourselves from every brother that walketh *disorderly*, and not after the tradition which they received of us" (2 Thessalonians 3:6). The word "disorderly" is from the Greek *ataktos*, "to live in idleness" (Arndt-Gingrich). It literally means "not keeping order," often used as a military term to describe soldiers who broke rank and refused to do their soldierly duties. In the papyri, the verb form *atakteo* is used to describe one under contract with his father who is to make up any days that he "plays truant" or fails to attend. Contextually, we note that certain of the Thessalonian saints were playing truant from their daily employment: "For we hear of some that walk among you *disorderly*, that work not at all, but are busybodies" (verse 11). This was in contrast to the industry of Paul and his fellow apostles: "For yourselves know how ye ought to imitate us: for we behaved not ourselves *disorderly* among you; neither did we eat bread for nought at any man's hand; but in labor and travail, working night and day, that we might not burden any of you" (verses 7,8). The disorderly brother, who is able to work but refuses to do so, is to be withdrawn from; that is, he is not to have the company of his faithful brethren (verse 14) and not to eat (verse 10).

"For hereunto were ye called: because Christ also suffered for you, leaving you an *example*, that ye should follow his steps" (1 Peter 2:21). The word "example" is translated from *hupogrammos*, literally meaning "an underwriting" (from *hupographo*, to write under). It is a graphic word describing a copy set by writing masters for their pupils. Just as school children learn to write by copying the pattern given them by their writing masters, so Christians learn the value of

suffering by copying the example of Christ's suffering, thus to live noble lives. See Matthew 5:10-12; 2 Timothy 3:12; Philippians 3:10; Romans 8:17.

Let us now briefly note the enhancement of understanding of some other New Testament words through the use of the Greek.

Bishop. Greek *episkopos*, literally "an overseer (*epi*, over, *skopeo*, look or watch)." See Acts 20:28; Philippians 1:1; 1 Timothy 3:2; Titus 1:7; 1 Peter 2:25. "*Presbuteros*, an elder, is another term for the same person as bishop or overseer. See Acts 20:17 with verse 28. The term 'elder' indicates the mature spiritual experience and understanding of those so described; the term 'bishop,' or 'overseer,' indicates the character of the work undertaken according to the Divine will and appointment, as in the N.T., there were to be bishops in every local church, Acts 14:23; 20:17; Phil. 1:1; Tit. 1:5; Jas. 5:14" (W.E.Vine).

Confirm. Greek *episterizo*, "make to lean upon, strengthen (*epi*, upon, *sterix*, a prop, support)." The word is used of the strengthening of the Lord's people through the divine word. See Acts 14:22; 15:32; 15:41; 18:23.

Decease. Greek *exodos*, Literally "a way out (*ex*, out, *hodos*, a way) hence, a departure, especially from life." See Luke 9:31; 2 Peter 1:15.

Entice. Greek *deleazo*, literally "to take away bait, as fish are caught (from *delear*, a bait)." See James 1:14; 2 Peter 2:14. It is only as fish take the bait that they are caught by the angler, and it is only as men accept the temptations of the devil that they are caught by him.

Gospel. Greek *euagglion*, originally signifying "a present given in return for joyful news. Thus Homer makes Ulysses say to *Eumaeus*, 'Let this reward (*euaggelion*) be given me for my good news' (Od. 14:152)" (Marvin R. Vincent). In time it came to mean good news itself. In the New Testament it denotes the glad tidings of Christ and His kingdom. See Matthew 4:23; Acts 20:24; Romans 1: 16; 1 Corinthians 15:1-4; Ephesians 1:13; etc. Closely associated with *euaggelion* is *euaggelistes*, literally "a messenger of good (*eu*, well, *aggelos*, a messenger)," translated in the New Testament by the word "evangelist" and signifying a preacher of the gospel. See Acts 21:8; Ephesians 4:11; 2 Timothy 4:5. The common idea of an itinerant preacher is not inherent in the meaning of the word. Whether one faithfully proclaims the gospel at home or abroad, of long or short duration in a particular place, he is an evangelist, a gospel preacher.

Justify. Greek *dikaioo*. "declare, pronounce, one to be just, righteous or such as he ought to be. . . to declare guiltless one accused or who may be accused, acquit of a charge or reproach. . . to judge, declare, pronounce righteous, and therefore acceptable. . . Especially it is so used, in the technical phraseology of Paul, respecting God who

judges and declares such men as put faith in Jesus Christ to be righteous and acceptable to him, and accordingly fit to receive pardon from their sins and eternal life" (J.H.Thayer). See Romans 3:24-26,30; 4:24,25; 5:8,9,15-21; 2 Corinthians 5:21; Titus 3:7.

Reconcile. Greek *katallasso*, "... properly denotes to change, exchange (especially of money); hence, of persons, to change from enmity to friendship, to reconcile. With regard to this relationship between God and man, the use of the word and connected words shows that primarily reconciliation is what God accomplishes, exercising his grace towards sinful man on the ground of the death of Christ in propitiatory sacrifice under the judgment due to sin, 2 Cor. 5:19, where both the verb and noun are used. By reason of this men in their sinful condition and alienation from God are invited to be reconciled to him" (W.E.Vine). See Romans 5:10 and Colossians 1:21,22.

QUESTIONS

1. Discuss the Koine as the original language of the New Testament.
2. Why is it reasonable that the Bible should be translated into the language commonly used by contemporary society?
3. Why is the knowledge of the Greek so basic in our understanding of the New Testament?
4. Discuss the meaning of the Greek words that clarify the meaning of the following passages: Romans 12:13; 1 Peter 3:1,2; 1 Peter 4:18.
5. Discuss the meaning of the Greek words that enhance our understanding of the following passages: Romans 12:11; Titus 2:13,14; Philippians 1:27; Ephesians 1:12-14; Matthew 6:12; 2 Thessalonians 3:6; 1 Peter 2:21.
6. Give the meaning of the following words in the Greek: bishop, confirm, de cease, entice, gospel, evangelist, justify, and reconcile.

MISHANDLING THE BIBLE

We have previously considered the responsibility of every child of God to follow the injunction of 2 Timothy 2:15, "handling aright the word of truth." Since the positive always assumes the negative, it is evident that if we can handle God's word aright, we can also mishandle it. It is therefore important that we be aware of the things that will hinder as well as help us in our understanding of the Bible. Constantly before us is the danger of mishandling the Bible either from ignorance or sinister motives, to play fast and loose with the sacred scriptures. Cf. 2 Peter 3:15,16, ". . . even as our beloved brother Paul, also, according to the wisdom given to him, wrote unto you; as also in all his epistles, speaking in them of these things; wherein are some things hard to be understood, which the ignorant and unstedfast wrest, as they do also the other scriptures, unto their own destruction." We shall now consider some ways in which we can mishandle the word of truth.

READING TO EASE CONSCIENCE. Those who so read the Bible do so from a cold sense of duty, not because they want to but because they have to. So they will read and concentrate on just as little as they can to ease their conscience, thus to feel that they will not incur the wrath of God. They are not desirous of growing toward eternal salvation, of going to heaven, but only of escaping hell. *They mishandle the word of truth.*

READING TO RECEIVE THE PRAISE OF MEN. There are those who diligently read the Bible with the desire to be praised for their extensive knowledge, thirsting for distinction. They flaunt their knowledge with an "I-know-more-than-you" kind of attitude. Cf. Matthew 23:5-7. They want to be known as persons of leading thought, to exalt self rather than God and His word. They may indeed be competent academic scholars of the Bible, but their knowledge is of no spiritual value to them and receives no praise from God. See James 4:6,10. *They mishandle the word of truth.*

READING WITHOUT SYSTEM. Many Christians diligently read the Bible, but without any system — a verse here and a verse there, a chapter here and a chapter there, a book here and a book there. Such reading is without purpose, having no fixed goals of understanding. It can only result in shallow, insubstantial knowledge. Those who so study the Bible never truly grow spiritually. *They mishandle the word of truth.*

READING ONLY FAVORITE SCRIPTURES. There are those who

have their favorite scriptures which they read again and again, to the neglect of other and equally important scriptures. This is the *modus operandi* of the hobbyist, who rides his favorite subject or subjects to the neglect of others. This kind of Bible study results in a lopsided, warped understanding of the truth. It is sad, for example, that some Christians are well informed about the action, element, design, and subjects of water baptism, but know little about such basically basic subjects as the grace of God and His redeeming mercy in Christ. Indeed, this writer has known teachers of adult Bible classes who can expound on some favorite subjects such as baptism, the one church, etc., but whose knowledge of divine grace is virtually nil, who are entirely incapable of teaching on this preeminently significant theme. *They mishandle the word of truth.*

READING TO WIN ARGUMENTS. In the church there are those argumentive, pugnacious, aggressive, rambunctious souls who read the Bible with the principal purpose of finding ammunition to verbally assault and destroy those whom they consider to be in religious error. They are not interested in winning them to Christ but only in humiliating them, in winning arguments at any cost. This is a sinister motive in Bible study — unloving, bitter, and vicious — and can never result in true spiritual growth but only in divine disapproval and condemnation. *They mishandle the word of truth.*

READING WITH THE DESIRE TO DO AS WE PLEASE. Many read the Bible not with the intent of conforming themselves to God's will but bending and wresting what they read to conform to their will, to live as they please and not as God pleases. For example, the man who fails to contribute liberally of his means for the work of the local church may attempt to find justification by hiding behind his family responsibility, arguing that "after all, doesn't the Bible say, 'But if any provideth not for his own, and specially his own household, he hath denied the faith, and is worse than an unbeliever' (1 Timothy 5:8)?" The man who wants to justify his failure to have fellowship with his brethren in public worship may argue, "I can pray at home as well as at church. Doesn't Jesus speak in Matthew 6:6 about praying in private?"

This desire to do as we please causes the Bible reader to overlook or shrug off any teaching that is contrary to what he does or does not want to do, what he does or does not endorse. In seeking to please himself, he sorely displeases God and places himself in jeopardy of being eternally lost. *He mishandles the word of truth.*

PROOF TEXTING. This is the sin that involves a multitude of sins in mishandling the word of truth. It is the misapplication of divine truth for whatever motives the Bible reader may have in mind,

whether done through prejudice, ignorance, misguided zeal, or just plain dishonesty. It is, of course, not wrong to give book, chapter, and verse in citing scriptural authority for any doctrine or practice one holds as the result of objective, unprejudiced search for truth. But in proof texting, the Bible is twisted, forced into some sort of endorsement of whatever practice or doctrine one espouses. Almost anything can be proved by the Bible to the satisfaction of the one who wants to find the proof without regard for the valid rules of interpretation.

And we must also remember that proof texting is sometimes practiced in regard to entirely scriptural practices and doctrines, as we shall later note. This is often justified by the premise that the end justifies the means, that if we can get a valid point over to others, it really doesn't matter if we do it by hook or crook just so the proper end is reached. But this is mishandling God's word. When done deliberately it is dishonest. See 2 Corinthians 4:2. When done through ignorance it is still wrong. *A true end never justifies a false means.* Truth must not be defended, upheld, or propagated by error of any kind. Let us now consider some examples of proof texting that are common in the church, first stating the doctrine or practice and then the text or texts offered as proof.

1. **Unless the sinner repents of his sins, he will perish in hell.** "Except ye repent, ye shall in all like manner perish . . . Except ye repent, ye shall all likewise perish" (Luke 13:3,5). These verses pertain to physical death as the result of unrepented sin, not the second death as described in Revelation 21:8. See Luke 24:47; 1 Thessalonians 1:8. The antecedents of "like manner" and "likewise" are, respectively, certain Galilaeans who had been killed by Pilate (verse 1,2) and the eighteen persons who were killed when the tower of Siloam fell upon them (verse 4). So "in like manner," "likewise," physical death would come upon the Lord's impenitent hearers. In all probability, this is a prophecy concerning the end of the Jewish nation at the destruction of Jerusalem.

2. **The Christian is to be faithful to the Lord long as he lives.** "Be thou faithful unto death, and I will give thee the crown of life" (Revelation 2:10). True, the Christian is to remain faithful during all his earthly days (1 Corinthians 15:58; 2 Timothy 4:6-8; Hebrews 12:1,2). But that is not the teaching of the text at hand, which contextually commands the Christian to be faithful in the face of death, when death threatens him because of his faith (verses 10-13). See Revelation 12:11. The sense of the text is, "Be faithful even if you have to die for it" (Weymouth); "Be loyal, though it means your death" (Verkuyl).

3. **We must not add to nor subtract from the Bible.** "I testify unto every man that heareth the words of the prophecy of this book, If any

man shall add to them, God shall add unto him the plagues which are written in this book: and if any man shall take away from the words of the book of this prophecy, God shall take away his part from the tree of life, and out of the holy city, which are written in this book" (Revelation 22:18,19). Another case of the right doctrine but the wrong text. The book referred to here is not the entire Bible but specifically "this book . . . the book of this prophecy," the book of Revelation.

4. **To be forgiven of his sins, one must obey the gospel.** "Seeing ye have purified your souls in your obedience to the truth" (1 Peter 1:22). Another right doctrine but wrong text. The word "purify" is from the Greek *hagnizo*, which is used in the New Testament of both ceremonial and moral purifying. The purifying of the soul from the guilt of sin through the sin-offering Christ is designated by a different word, *katharizo*, as in Titus 2:14. So the text does not pertain to *katharizo*, purifying the soul from the guilt of sin, but to *hagnizo*, purifying the soul from the practice of sin. It is in obedience to the truth in such passages as Colossians 3:5-8 and James 1:21 that we can so morally purify our souls. Concerning the forgiveness of sins, the salvation wrought through obedience to the gospel, note such passages as Romans 1:16 and 2 Thessalonians 1:8.

5. **We must abstain from everything that looks like it is evil.** "Abstain from all appearance of evil" (1 Thessalonians 5:22 KJV). This is a favorite text of those who project their dislikes in determining what others should not do. One can condemn even the most harmless pleasures that he does not like by maintaining that even though they may not be wrong in themselves, they look like or appear to be wrong and thus are to be abstained from. That could include a thousand and one things, so to speak: baseball, checkers, dominoes, billiards, swimming, golf, tennis, bowling, etc.—anything and everything that one does not like. The real wrong is not in these things but in the eye of the beholder. What then is the writer speaking about in the text? Actual, intrinsic evil, those things that are transgressions of God's law. The rendering of the ASV is "abstain from every form of evil." The Greek word for form is *eidos*, denoting "every kind of evil" 1 Th. 5:22 (Arndt-Gingrich); "every kind of evil or wrong 1 Th. V. 22" (Thayer). Christians are to abstain from every kind of evil, in whatever form it may be: fornication, covetousness, drunkenness, lasciviousness, anxiety, etc. That is the import of the text.

6. **The terms "church of the firstborn" and "church of Christ" are synonymous since Christ is "the firstborn from the dead"** (Colossians 1:18). "To the general assembly and church of the firstborn who are enrolled in heaven" (Hebrews 12:23). The word "firstborn" cannot refer here to Christ since in the Greek it is the genitive plural *pro-*

totokon, firstborn ones, or elder sons, "who *are*[not *is*] enrolled in heaven."

7. We are to mark in the sense of brand those in our midst that hold to religious error. "Now I beseech you, brethren, mark them that are causing the divisions and occasions of stumbling, contrary to the doctrine which ye learned: and turn away from them" (Romans 16:17). There is the widespread idea in the church that we are to mark in the sense of label or brand any fellow Christian who holds a position we consider to be erroneous. It would do well for all who are so ready to pounce on any brother who disagrees with them and to label him as unsound, a brother in error, to consider the words of F. F. Bruce, "When a man's standing in the constituency which he serves, not to mention his livelihood depends on his reputation for fidelity to the truth of Scripture, it is a very serious matter for anyone else to broadcast doubts about his fidelity or orthodoxy. If he himself stately renounces something which is the essence of the historic Christian faith, he will be prepared for the consequences, but he should not be held responsible for the inferences which other people may draw from his statements. Most deplorable of all is the launching of a whispering campaign to the effect that so and so is 'going off the rails' or is 'getting far from the Lord'."

The word "mark" in the text is from the Greek *skopein*, with the connotation of "to take notice of," "to give attention to." In the monumental work of Moulton and Milligan dealing with the regular usage of the Koine, the original language of the New Testament, *skopein* is defined as "'look upon', 'watch', 'contemplate' . . . In Luke 11:35 we may render, 'Look! perhaps the light is darkness.'" Never did the word, either in classical usage or in the Koine, have any connotation of marking in the sense of labeling or branding. Note the following translations: "take note of" (RSV); "keep an eye on" (NEB); "keep a watch on" (Weymouth); "keep your eye on" (Moffatt); "keep an eye on" (Verkuyl).

QUESTIONS

1. Discuss the danger of mishandling the word of truth.
2. Why do men read the Bible to ease their conscience?
3. Discuss reading the Bible to receive the praise of men.
4. Why does haphazard reading of the Bible produce no deep, substantial understanding?

5. Discuss the lopsided, warped understanding of the truth that results from reading only favorite scriptures.
6. Discuss the sinister motive in reading the Bible to win arguments.
7. How does one mishandle the truth in reading the Bible to do as he pleases?
8. What is proof texting? Discuss the following examples: Luke 13:3,5; Revelation 2:10; 22:18,19; 1 Peter 1:22; 1 Thessalonians 5:22 (KJV); Hebrews 12:23; Romans 16: 17.

