

THIRSTING FOR WORD FROM GOD

Walking Humbly
By The Direction
Of God's Written Word

Biblical Research Library

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(CoverTheme: *THIRST* – The Namib Desert of Namibia – R.E.D.)

Preface

We live in a worldwide religious culture wherein people have become very timid about confronting one another over differences in religious beliefs. This avoidance of conflict over matters of faith has become so acute that there has arisen within the religious world a hesitance of teaching any Bible subjects that might be controversial. Some have gone so far as to terminate any preaching of Bible subjects that they would judge to be “doctrine.” For this reason, there has arisen a flood of “psychology preachers” who preach only “feel-good” lessons in order not to offend anyone who might be a possible adherent to the church for which the preacher receives his salary. Their psychology lessons could just as well be presented in the local psychiatric ward wherein the patients would be mentally soothed to live another day. But to pass off such to be “preaching the word of God” is to masquerade oneself as a preacher of the word of God.

Preaching that avoids truth that is revealed in the Bible is not preaching. It is religious lecturing. What is happening across Christendom is a non-convicting “faith” that is void of the word of God. Emphasis on truth that comes to us through the Bible seems to be something of the past, for those who seek to build great assemblies focus more on the “ear tickling” speeches of those who are skilled in rhetoric, but less in the word of God. The pews of big churches are thus packed with “ear ticklers” who would run away from their church if the preacher started preaching from a Bible book, chapter and verse that deals with truths that are absolutely necessary to believe and obey in order to be saved.

In our realm of the “developing world,” the curse seems to go beyond the lecturers of smooth and fair lessons. In our world, churches pop up across the continent under the leadership of those who can shout the loudest. No Bible knowledge required. Someone referred to these as “mushroom churches” that spontaneously pop up for the sake of producing a source of income for some “shouter” who presumes to be a representative of the word of God.

In view of this move away from the Bible as our sole source of belief and behavior, we felt it necessary to write this book in view of this move to noncommittal religion that is not based on Bible truth, but the religiosity of men. Those who are of the camp of God’s people, and who are searching the Scriptures, will understand fully our concerns. Though these faithful Bible searchers are few in the world, they are still that group of disciples who love their Bibles, and subsequently, study them every day lest they be deceived by the tidal wave of Bible ignorance that flows contrary to Bible authority in all matters of faith.

We need to be reminded that Christians are who they are because they are “people of the Book.” The Bible is the Christian’s source of life, for only through the Bible do we discover the one true and living God, and our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, who only has the sacrificial blood to bring us into the eternal presence of God. If you have wandered from this source book of inspiration, then it is our prayer that the following pages will renew your commitment to the word of God.

THIRSTING FOR WORD FROM GOD

The existence and survival of our faith depends entirely upon the Bible. Any faith that is based upon any other foundation is simply religious superstition. If one seeks to understand the true and living God apart from the Bible, then he will create a god after his own religious inclinations, a god who will bow to his own will. If we carried out such idolatry of our imaginations, then we would be emotionally wandering people to be pitied by the world of unbelievers. We would be such if it were not for God's providential work of bringing into our hands a copy of His inspired road map into eternal dwelling. Therefore, if one would seek to find his way out of the religious quagmire of a religiously misguided world, and into the eternal presence of God, then he must find direction through the word of God. If he does not seek this source for direction, then at the end of his life he will find himself at a destination that is far from that for which he hoped. Since we all have this spirit of idolatry within us to do it our way and go our own direction, it is imperative that all of us conclude that since God exists, then certainly our way into His eternal presence must be prescribed by Him alone. And since we are often masters at creating a supposed religious reality after our own imaginations, then it is crucial that we seek for guidance into eternity only from Him whose existence can guarantee that for which we so earnestly yearn. We seek to live forever, and thus, we must thirst for that which will lead us into the presence of Him who can grant us eternity. We must seek for God's message into eternity, which message is revealed through His word. There is no other way.

Psalm 19:7-11

The law of the LORD is perfect, converting the soul. The testimony of the LORD is sure, making wise the simple. The statutes of the LORD are right, rejoicing the heart. The commandment of the LORD is pure, enlightening the eyes. The fear of the LORD is clean, enduring forever. The judgments of the LORD are true and righteous altogether. More to be desired are they than gold, yes, than much fine gold. Sweeter also than honey and the honeycomb. Moreover by them is Your servant warned, and in keeping of them there is great reward.

INTRODUCTION

Psalm 23 would be the appropriate introduction to a study of this subject. David began the psalm by stating that **“the Lord is my shepherd.”** Jesus explained, *“I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd gives His life for the sheep”* (Jn 10:11). The Lord is not only our good shepherd, He is our great shepherd. He is *“that great Shepherd of the sheep”* (Hb 13:20). He is great, and thus, the Chief Shepherd we seek. *“When the Chief Shepherd appears, you will receive a crown of glory that does not fade away”* (1 Pt 5:4). It is this Shepherd about whom Isaiah spoke: *“He will feed His flock like a shepherd. He will gather the lambs with His arm and carry them in His bosom. And He will gently lead those who are with young”* (Is 40:11). What better picture could have been painted to illustrate God’s leading and feeding of His sheep through His word?

The Lord **“makes me to lie down in green pastures,”** therefore, we will have no lack of rest (Ps 23:2). In Him we find that grassy oasis in the middle of a desert. Our souls desire rest, but not laziness. We seek tranquility from the struggles of this life, but not escape into isolation. *“There remains, therefore, a rest for the people of God. For he who has entered into His rest has also ceased from his own works, as God did from His. Therefore, let us labor to enter into that rest lest anyone fall...”* (Hb 4:9-11). Our final rest will come when He comes. It will be as John wrote, *“Blessed are the dead who die in the Lord from now on,*

‘Yes,’ says the Spirit, so that they may rest from their labors, for their works follow them” (Rv 14:13). But until that time of His coming, or the end of life’s journey, we must remember the words of Paul, *“And the peace of God that surpasses all understanding will keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus”* (Ph 4:7). This is the emotional oasis that Jesus promised.

Peace I leave with you. My peace I give to you; not as the world gives do I give to you. Let not your heart be troubled, nor let it be afraid (Jn 14:27).

He leads us **“beside the still waters,”** therefore, we will not lack the direction from His counsel (Ps 23:2). God gives us tranquility in the midst of the white waters of a rushing river. He takes us through the tension of the rapids in order to bring us to quiet waters of peace. It is from these quiet waters that we, as His sheep, peacefully drink of the refreshing taste of His word.

“He restores my soul,” therefore, we will never lack His forgiveness to bring us back when we stray (Ps 23:3). He revives the fainthearted. He brings times of refreshing to the repentant (At 3:19). When we are lost, we find our way back to Him through the guidance of His inspired Road Map.

He leads us **“in the paths of righteousness for His name’s sake,”** therefore, we will never lack His guidance as long as we trust in His guiding word (Ps

23:3). Without a guiding word from our Shepherd, we as His sheep would be tossed from one pasture of error to another. For this reason, the word of God is ministered to the sheep that they “*no longer be children, tossed to and fro and carried about with every wind of teaching ...*” (Ep 4:14). Our guard from being tossed to and fro by the twisted doctrines of crafty men is to walk in the light of God’s word. And “*if we walk in the light as He is in the light, we have fellowship with one another and the blood of Jesus Christ His Son cleanses us from all sin*” (1 Jn 1:7). Therefore, “*as newborn babes*” we crave the sincere milk of the word so that we may grow up to the salvation that is in His presence (1 Pt 2:2).

And though we “*walk through the valley of the shadow of death,*” we can always know that He is there for us (Ps 23:4). We will go forth in our Christ-commanded mission with strength, for we know that He is with us always (Mt 28:20). We can remember the words of Isaiah,

“Do not fear, for I am with you. Do not be dismayed, for I am your God. I will strengthen you. Yes, I will help you. Yes, I will uphold you with the right hand of My righteousness (Is 41:10).

“*Your rod and Your staff, they comfort me,*” therefore, we will never lack direction through His word because through His correction we are led to and on the right path (Ps 23:4). His word is the rod of defense and the staff of help. It is as Jude wrote,

Now to Him who is able to keep you from falling and to present you faultless before the presence of His glory with exceeding joy, to the Only God and Savior, through Jesus Christ our Lord ... (Jd 24,25).

He prepares “*a table before me in the presence of my enemies,*” therefore, we will never lack security and a sense of assurance (Ps 23:5). There is a great deal of conflict in this world to make us afraid, but there is more in a faith that is founded upon the word of God to make us unafraid. So in order to be free from the fear that the world presents, we must fear God more than anything of this world. This would even include our fear of death. Jesus will come to deliver “*those who through fear of death were all their lifetime subject to bondage*” (Hb 2:15). With this promise, we can face the fear of death, for we know through the revelation of God’s word that we will be raised to walk in a new existence (See 1 Th 4:13-18). We grow in His promises of eternal life to the point that we can follow the example of Paul when he spoke to those who feared for his safety, “*What do you mean by weeping and breaking my heart? For I am ready not to be bound only, but also to die at Jerusalem for the name of the Lord Jesus*” (At 21:13).

He “*anoints my head with oil,*” therefore, we will never be far away from the joy of His comfort (Ps 23:5). “*My cup overflows,*” and thus, His blessings are showered upon us without measure (Ps 23:5). We have been anointed with

every spiritual blessing in Christ. So "blessed is the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places in Christ" (Ep 1:3). Through obedience to the word of God we have come into a covenant relationship with the One who can do that for us which is far beyond what we can fully understand. Paul was right: "Now to Him who is able to do exceedingly abundantly above all that we ask or think according to the power that works in us ..." (Ep 3:20).

"Surely goodness and mercy will follow me all the days of my life," therefore, we will not live outside His presence, nor fail to be sustained on our journey of this life (Ps 23:6). And finally, "I will dwell in the house of the Lord forever" because we have faithfully walked according to the guidance of His word (Ps 23:6). A life with Christ is a life with an endless hope. But without Christ, there is only a hopeless end. Our conclusion would be as Peter wrote:

For he who would love life and see good days, let him refrain his tongue from evil and his lips that they speak no deceit. Let him turn away from evil and do good.

Let him seek peace and pursue it. For the eyes of the Lord are toward the righteous, and His ears are open to their prayers. But the face of the Lord is against those who do evil (1 Pt 3:10-12).

Someone once beautifully explained Psalm 23 in the following unique manner:

Possession: The Lord is my shepherd.

Provision: I will lack nothing.

Position: He makes me to lie down in green pastures.

Progress: He leads me beside the still waters.

Personal: He restores my soul.

Progression: He leads me in the paths of righteousness.

Purpose: For His name's sake.

Parting: Yes, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death.

Peace: I will fear no evil.

Protection: For You are with me.

Pilgrimage: Your rod and Your staff they comfort me.

Participation: You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies.

Preparation: You anoint my head with oil.

Plenty: My cup overflows.

Preservation: Surely goodness and mercy will follow me all the days of my life.

Place: I will dwell in the house of the Lord forever.

Chapter 1

"Burn The Book"

King Josiah was a restorationist king of Judah. He was only eight years old when he began to reign in Jerusalem (2 Kg 22:1). "And he did that which was right in the sight of the Lord" (2 Kg 22:2).

In the eighteenth year of his reign, the book of the law of God was found during some reconstruction work on the temple. The message of the book was one of doom if Judah continued on its

present moral course of rebellion against the law of God. The words of the book struck the young Josiah so deep in his heart that he set Judah on a radical course of national restoration to the word of God (2 Kg 23). It was a restoration so radical that all places of worship to pagan gods were destroyed throughout the land. This all transpired because one leader responded to the power of the written word of God. Unfortunately, this radical restoration through repentance because of a reading of a "Bible" was not passed on to Josiah's son, Jehoiakim.

A. Burning the Bible:

Jehoiakim did not respond to the written word of God as his father. At the beginning of his reign, God instructed Jeremiah, "*Take a scroll and write on it all the words that I have spoken to you concerning Israel and concerning Judah ...*" (Jr 36:2). Jeremiah subsequently called Baruch, his scribe, and he "*wrote all the words of the Lord*" (Jr 36:4). Jeremiah then instructed Baruch to go to Jehoiakim and "*read from the scroll that you have written from my mouth, the words of the Lord in the ears of the people in the Lord's house on the day of fasting. And you will also read them in the ears of all Judah who come out of their cities*" (Jr 36:6). Baruch was to do this because "*great is the anger and the fury that the Lord has pronounced against this people*" (Jr 36:7).

Everything went well with the reading of the words that Jeremiah wrote, until the matter came to the king's court.

The king's men had enough sense to fear when they heard the reading of the words of the scroll (Jr 36:16). They then instructed Baruch that he and Jeremiah should go and hide themselves, for they knew what the reaction would be from the king when the scroll ("the Bible") was read to him. And they were right. "*So it came to pass when Jehudi had read three or four columns [of the scroll], he [Jehoiakim] cut it with a penknife and cast it into the fire that was on the hearth, until all the scroll was consumed in the fire that was on the hearth*" (Jr 36:23). Why this response to the reading of the word of God? "*Yet the king and all his servants who heard all these words were not afraid, nor did they tear their garments*" (Jr 36:24).

When people in sin read of the eternal destruction that will eventually come upon them, but do not fear, then they are beyond response. They react with rage. When there is no longer any fear generated in the hearts of men to what the Bible says, then we know that people are long past restoration to obedience of their Creator. We live in such a world today. The reason why so few people study their Bibles today lies in either one or more of the following truths: (1) They are so traditionally set in the ways of their own religiosity that they are afraid to discover that their religious traditions might be contrary to the word of God. (2) They are traditionally set in their own behavior that is contrary to the word of God, and thus, do not want to change their ways. (3) They have handed their brains over to a religious leader who knows little

or nothing about the Bible, but with a gifted tongue of smooth and fair speech is able to charismatically lead them astray through his crafty speaking. In the case of Jehoiakim, it may have been all the preceding. But whatever the case with any individual, one can know if he has any respect for the word of God by the level of fear that is in his heart when he reads his Bible.

B. Obedience to the word of God:

As time progressed after Israel appointed her first kings, the kings themselves led the people into a disrespect for the word of God. As these kings began to trust in their own power, they trusted less in the power of God. Uzziah was such a king. *"When he was strong, his heart was lifted up to his own destruction, for he transgressed against the Lord his God ..."* (2 Ch 26:16).

When religious leaders start trusting in their own skills, their hearts are often lifted up against God. We have witnessed that those preachers who are blessed with a gift to speak often start trusting in their ability to persuade people with their words, rather than with the word of God. We live in a time wherein there are thousands of churches that are built around some gifted speaker or personality to whom everyone has given their allegiance. People come before the altar, not to hear the word of God, but to have their hearts excited by a cheerleading preacher, who, in ignorance of the word of God, has the ability to exhort the people with his own words.

When Uzziah lifted his heart up against God, he did that which was contrary to the word of God. He *"went into the temple of the Lord to burn incense on the altar of incense"* (2 Ch 26:16). But Azariah the priest went in after him, *"with eighty priests of the Lord who were valiant men"* (2 Ch 26:17). What Uzziah was doing was that which only the priests could do according to the law of God. But at this point in Uzziah's arrogance, he cared nothing for the law of God. Azariah said to Uzziah, *"It is not for you, Uzziah, to burn incense to the Lord, but for the priests the sons of Aaron who are consecrated to burn incense"* (2 Ch 26:18). Then Azariah rebuked Uzziah by saying, *"Go out of the sanctuary, for you have trespassed. You will have no honor from the Lord God"* (2 Ch 26:18).

In his arrogance, Uzziah *"was angry with the priests"* (2 Ch 26:19). But then God stepped in and took control of the matter. As a result, *"the leprosy broke out on his [Uzziah's] forehead before the priests in the house of the Lord, from beside the incense altar"* (2 Ch 26:19). Then the priests *"threw him out from there. And he himself also hastened to get out because the Lord had smitten him"* (2 Ch 26:20). Because of his disrespect for the law of God, Uzziah *"was a leper to the day of his death"* (2 Ch 26:21). We can learn a great lesson from the rebellion of Uzziah. The lesson is that God is serious about us keeping His law. We often deceive ourselves into believing that a little rebellion will be overlooked through the grace of God. But in Uzziah's case, God intends that

we follow His law. God seeks obedience, for it is through obedience to His will that we manifest that we are His children.

When religious leaders allow themselves to become ignorant of the word of God, they will sin. The point is this: **If one would assume to be a spiritual leader for the people of God, then he must be a student of the word of God.** He cannot lead people to follow God if he does not know where God wants His people to go. Willfully ignorant leaders of God's children will lead the people to destruction. The scribes and Pharisees, the religious leaders of Israel, were judged by Jesus to be such leaders. Jesus said of them, "*They are blind leaders of the blind. And if the blind lead the blind, both will fall into the ditch*" (Mt 15:14). **Religious leaders who do not study their Bibles manifest their arrogance and rebellion against God.** They know they should be Bible students for the sake of the people they lead. But because they, as Uzziah, trust in the strength of their own abilities, they are rebellious against the word of God by leading the people to also be ignorant of their Bibles. When the blind lead the blind, the ditch is their destiny.

We must not think that the followers of misguided religionists will sidestep the ditch of destruction because they were innocently led astray by the biblically ignorant. Jesus said that the followers will also fall into the ditch of destruction because they did not seek after those who were preachers of the Bible, nor did they study of their Bibles. They allowed themselves to be "*tossed to and fro and carried about with every wind of teaching, by the trickery of men in cleverness to the deceitfulness of error*" (Ep 4:14). The time is always present when the audience "*will not endure sound teaching. But to suit their itching ears, they will surround themselves with teachers who will agree with their own desires*" (2 Tm 4:3). Those who preach in ignorance of the word of God will be judged for their failure to preach the truth of God's word. Those who listen to preaching that is not the word of God will be judged because they did not seek the word of God. Both have burned their Bibles, for they have no thirst for what God seeks to reveal. There are more ways to burn a Bible than by throwing it into fiery flames. An unread Bible is as worthless to the owner as a Bible in ashes.

Chapter 2

Gone Astray From His Word

One of the most scary passages for any civilization is Hosea 4:6. Movies are made about giant meteorites headed toward earth that would destroy all life on earth. But when the destructive force of

moral degradation hits civilization, life as we know it ceases to exist. Hosea 4:6 was a statement by God concerning a people who had given up a knowledge of their Bibles. And because they had

become ignorant of the word of God, they had assigned themselves to national doom.

My people are destroyed for lack of knowledge. Because you have rejected knowledge, I will also reject you so that you will be no priest to Me. Seeing you have forgotten the law of your God, I will also forget your children.

Destruction often comes slowly ... without notice and without pain. Our present generation may be fine, but the statement says that the “children” will pay the price. The children will be doomed to eat the sour grapes from the vines that their fathers planted. *“In those days they will no longer say, ‘The fathers have eaten a sour grape and the children’s teeth are set on edge.’ But everyone will die for his own iniquity. Every man who eats the sour grape, his teeth will be set on edge”* (Jr 31:29,30). If the fathers forget the law of God, they will give their children sour grapes to eat. And so here we are in a worldwide Christendom that has little or no knowledge of the word of God. There are billions of religionists throughout the world, but few Christians.

If you think we are prophets of doom, then we would challenge you with some sociological norms that you must consider. Our work is among the masses of religionists in the developing world. Our frustration is that among the religious leaders of many churches, there is little Bible knowledge. We are not talking about novice believers, but about those

who are standing before church groups throughout the world pretending to be ministers of the word of God. These preachers are often shallow students of the Bible, and subsequently, shallow teachers of the Bible. In the context of their little knowledge of the word of Christ, one might ask why such people would be preaching to groups who seek to be “Christian” when actually they are not preaching the word of God. The answer is that they are great speakers, and being great speakers is their curse. A great speaker needs no knowledge of the Bible in order to gather a crowd. The people follow the speaker’s great oratory, but not the word of God. And thus, those who are gathered before such speakers are usually not there because they want to hear the word of God. They have come to be tossed to and fro by every wind of teaching that comes forth from a gifted speaker. In many churches today, many people follow speakers, not teachers of the word of God.

Because there are so many gifted speakers who know little Bible, there are audiences throughout the world who are being destroyed for the lack of knowledge of the word of God. The result is that we live in a world of churches that are not based on obedience to the word of God, but on a social fellowship wherein lonely wanderers have found religious friends. What sparks one’s religiosity will define who he is in his relationship with God. If something of this world draws us to assemble with one another, then our assembly is not the serendipity of being drawn to Christ. We have

thus missed the focus of what Jesus said, “*And I, if I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all men to Me*” (Jn 12:32).

In the absence of a focus on the word of Christ, another catalyst is being used to draw and retain audiences. We have heard more than one prospective preacher say, “I wanted to start a church, and thus, I knew that I needed to learn how to play an instrument.” So in the absence of people being drawn to assemblies wherein the word of Christ is the drawing power, audiences are developed around the sound of orchestras or bands. Many assemblies, therefore, have become religious concerts of noise, during which it is no longer sung, “The Lord is in His holy temple; let all the earth keep silence before Him.” Assemblies are moved to cry out “Lord, Lord.” The people are drawn to the assembly by the sound of mechanical noise, not the preaching of the word of God. The appeal for assembly is to our ears. It is not to our hearts. We seek to assemble in order to be comforted by the word of God. Nevertheless, there are too many of those to whom Jesus would say, “*Not everyone who says to Me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ will enter into the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of My Father who is in heaven*” (Mt 7:21). **One cannot claim that he is doing the will of the Father if he is drawn into assembly by the noises of men and not the word of the Father.**

In the Qur’an, Muhammad wrote of the “people of the book.” To many Christians today, they have no idea to whom he was referring. If Muhammad were

living today, he would probably never make such a statement concerning many Christians. He would probably write, “people of the assembly,” or “people of their cellphones,” or maybe, “people of their concerts.” But by the seventh century when he had the Qur’an written, Christians were still known to be who focused on a “book.” His statement was a testimony of the identity of Christians. They were “people of the book.”

Because Muhammad realized that a “book” must be the center of authority in any religion, he also needed a book for his beliefs. And today, “Christians” who are no longer of “the book” cannot understand why Muslims are so reverent to their book, the Qur’an. Muhammad made sure that Muslims not be drawn away unto other books. He thus instilled within his theology an iconic worship of his book, the Qur’an. Christians today cannot understand why religious/political organizations can assemble such a radical group as ISIS around a militant interpretation of the Qur’an in order to promote their national agenda. Since most Christians have long lost their respect for and obedience to their “book,” they wonder why any religious group can be so committed to the writings of “a book.” Since the masses of Christendom have given up any reliance on “the book,” they wonder why any religious people could be so dedicated to a book of words. We are often more dedicated to the sound of instruments than the reading of the Scriptures. We have gone astray further than we think.

So you might think that we are

somewhat off course in our judgment of present dangers of planting vines that will set the teeth of our children on edge. Therefore, we would challenge you to walk into a classroom wherein a teacher is conducting a Bible class, especially in a classroom wherein there are assembled a young generation. Count the Bibles of paper and ink, and then count the cellphones and Ipads on which people are following an electronic version of the Bible. There will probably be more electronic Bibles than paper Bibles. There is nothing wrong with this. After all, did not Paul exhort Timothy, “*Give heed to reading*” (1 Tm 4:13). But we wonder if this is the only time the attendees have read their Bibles throughout the week?

We recently attended an assembly of a particular religious group in our area. It was the first time we had ever visited this particular religious group. But something impressed us about the people. It was not that almost everyone in the group was gray-headed, for it was an assembly of older people who continue to be faithful to their beliefs. What impressed us was that they had open Bible study, during which everyone had their Bible opened and were going through a chosen text verse by verse. This was a group that desired to stay on course with God because they sought to stay close to the road map of His word.

Our argument is that when one is a Bible student in his home, he seeks to use paper and ink, not exclusively electronics. People are moving away from personal Bible study with personal Bibles. And there is a vast difference be-

tween Bible reading and Bible study. If one does not know the difference, then herein is the problem. We have moved from a generation where every attendee at a Bible class was a Bible scholar with a marked personal Bible, being directed by a teacher who was also a Bible scholar. Now the classroom is filled with Bible readers who have not opened (sorry, “turned on”) their Bibles for a week. We are in the slow process of turning from a respect for the Bible. If you do not believe this, then when was the last time that you memorized a Bible verse?

In a Christendom wherein people are only “cellphone students” of the Bible, we have found it incredibly hard to encourage people to print and distribute Bibles for the world. The First World has long forgotten that it is the business of the church to get the word of God spread throughout the world, and thus, it is one of the prime objectives of the church to print “the Book” wherein is the message of the gospel. It is ironic that those who once built their heritage on the basis of Bible authority in all matters of faith now feel little compulsion to print the Bible for others to build their faith.

We have gone further away from our Bible heritage than we think. Military general Robert E. Lee of nineteenth century American history once said of one of the spiritual fathers of early America,

If I were asked to select a representative of the human race to the inhabitants of other spheres in our universe, of all men I have known, I would select Alexander

Campbell, then I know they would have a high impression of what our humanity is like.

In fact, a former nineteenth century president of the United States once said of Campbell, “He was the ablest and most original and powerful expounder of the Scripture I have ever known.”

Campbell was from Ireland, and later immigrated to America. The son of Thomas Campbell, Alexander became a model religious leader because of his devotion to the word of God. His spiritual lineage was from the Seceder Presbyterians who required that each family have daily Bible classes in their homes. The children were required to memorize passages of Scripture everyday that were to be quoted in the nightly family Bible class. All the memorized scriptures during the week were to be repeated on Sunday. In Campbell’s spiritual legacy, he once wrote in gratitude for his father and mother,

To my mother, as well as my father, I am indebted for having memorized in early life almost all the writings of King Solomon, his Proverbs, his Ecclesiastes, and many psalms of his father David.

The religious heritage of America was built on people as this. It seems almost strange for us today to believe that our forefathers had this great respect for the word of God, when we ourselves are so far away from the Bible being the central focus of our lives. If Hosea were here today, would he pronounce over our gen-

eration God’s judgement of 4:6, “*Seeing you have forgotten the law of your God, I will also forget your children.*”

The problem, or danger, with spiritual apostasy is that one never realizes where he is if he has forsaken “the book” of the One to whom he has supposedly given allegiance. Apostasy is rarely recognized by apostates. In fact, it can never be recognized if there is no reverence for the word of God. After one forgets “the book,” then the spiritual fervor of the individual must substitute other “spiritual placebos” in order to maintain some sort of religiosity. Ask any idolater and he will explain this. He will explain that when carvings of gods that we have created after our own imagination replace cravings for “the book” of the One who created all things, then we have satisfied ourselves and become content in our religion. Add a paid clergy to this religion and we are doomed to no return, for the clergy seeks to guarantee the existence of the constituency for the sake of a salary. See if you can see this in the following words of “the book”?

For the time will come when they will not endure sound teaching. But to suit their itching ears, they will surround themselves with teachers who will agree with their own desires. And they will turn away their ears from the truth and will be turned to fables (2 Tm 4:3,4).

Apostasy from the word of God will go to the extreme of what one young man called us up on the telephone and asked concerning some of our writings. He

asked, “What is apostasy?” If one does not realize what it is, then he does not know that he is there. We live in an age wherein there is more discussion going around about the latest “share” on Facebook, than the spiritual fruit that one

has gained from hours of Bible study. If some people would spend as much time in their Bibles as in their Facebook, we would experience a worldwide spiritual revival.

Chapter 3

Bible Obsession versus Itching Ears

We need only one exhortation from Jesus to be obsessively focused on study of His word. This exhortation came immediately before His departure from this world, and in prophecy of the consummation of national Israel. Jesus warned His disciples, “**Take heed that no one deceives you**” (Mt 24:4). The reason for this warning is obvious. “*For there will arise false christs and false prophets. And they will show great signs and wonders to deceive, if possible, even the elect*” (Mt 24:24). The “elect” is all of us. We are Bible students because we do not want to be “*tossed to and fro and carried about with every wind of teaching, by the trickery of men in cleverness to the deceitfulness of error*” (Ep 4:14).

A. Prevalent deception:

We live in a world where “*Satan masquerades himself as a messenger of light*” (2 Co 11:14). This statement of Paul is as true today as it was when he first wrote it to all the disciples in Achaia. There are all sorts of self-entitled religionists who are going forth with little or no knowledge of the word of God. And because of their charismatic personali-

ties and gift of smooth and fair speech, they are able to speak perverse “*things to draw away the disciples after themselves*” (At 20:30). This is the present world of Christendom. In Ghana there is the pastor who sells his wizardry. In Haiti there are “Christian” witches who practice sorcery. There are “money-for-miracles” masqueraders going about seeking profit for preaching. They are no different than Demetrius, the silversmith, who, with those in the same business, made their money by making idols to Artemis (At 19:24). But when the truth of God’s word was preached in Ephesus, the religious stock market crashed. So Demetrius called those of his idol-making trade together and complained, “*Sirs, you know that by this craft [of making idols] we have our wealth*” (At 19:25). The “money-for-miracles” preachers would say the same if the Holy Spirit were here today to pronounce the same over the miracle masqueraders of today. Nothing has changed as the ignorant and innocent desperately seek some hope in their world of despair.

But we would be Bible students in order to identify those who preach truth and those who are pompous religionists

as Simon the sorcerer. He was one who “*practiced magic and astonished the people of Samaria, claiming that he was someone great*” (At 8:9). Such is the great temptation of so many who would stand before the people and proclaim to be somewhat. And when such men present themselves as kings dressed in pastoral robes, the people “*from the least to the greatest*” give heed to such presumptuous masqueraders, claiming, “*This man is the great power of God*” (At 8:9,10).

Nothing has changed since Philip walked into Samaria and Paul stepped into Ephesus. Because the people are ignorant of the word of God, there is no lack for fertile soil for false teaching and marvelous signs and wonders to be believed as supernatural works of God. So we continually remind ourselves of the precious words of Jesus, “**Take heed that no one deceives you**” (Mt 24:4). There is absolutely only one guarantee that one not be deceived. It is his knowledge of and obedience to the word of God.

B. Made for deception:

The inherent curse of a free-moral individual is the freedom to choose all sorts of nonsense. God knew that for His justice to stand without accusation in the condemnation of the wicked, He had to give man the freedom to make decisions. In this way, every person who will stand condemned in judgment can blame only himself, for he alone made a choice to rebel against God. God gives the law, but men can make a free-moral decision

to ignore His law, or simply be ignorant thereof. Because God knew that it was not within man to make his own laws for correct moral living, He not only gave man law, but He also gave man the opportunity to rebel.

We rebel by creating a god in our minds who will condone our rebellion. We create a god for whom we can make laws, which laws justify our moral degradation. God knew this would happen. And because He knew that this was within the nature of a free-moral being, He placed signposts of warning throughout His word that those who love Him should be reminded that they must not follow after that which they can create in rebellion against Him. He was serious with Israel. He warned,

If there is found among you ... anyone who does wickedness ... and has gone and served other gods and worshiped them ... then you will bring forth to your gates that man or that woman who has committed that wicked thing, even that man or that woman, and you will stone them with stones until they die (Dt 17:2-5).

God ruled that “*there will not be found among you anyone who ... uses divination or an observer of times or an enchanter or a witch, or one who casts a spell or a medium or a spiritist or one who consults the dead. For all who do these things are an abomination to the Lord*” (Dt 18:10-12). How is it that we can read these strikingly clear warnings, and at the same time, allow ourselves to believe in such imaginations as Chris-

tians? Is it because we have so little knowledge of the word of God that we cannot determine what is truth and what is a lie? And because we have been so cleverly deceived, we must judge ourselves to be those about whom Paul wrote.

For the time will come when they will not endure sound teaching. But to suit their itching ears, they will surround themselves with teachers who will agree with their own desires. And they will turn away their ears from the truth and will be turned to fables (2 Tm 4:3,4).

When one hears of a supposed resurrection of one from the dead, and believes it, then he has itching ears. When one hears rumors of demons, and believes it, then he has itching ears. When one hears of those to whom he can possibly go for miracles, and believes it by making the trip, he has itching ears.

Why cannot we simply obey what God commanded Israel: “*Do not turn to mediums or spiritualists. Do not seek them out to be defiled by them*” (Lv 19:31). If one would be so inclined to follow after those things about which he knows nothing, or has those itching ears to be convinced to believe in that which is not real, then he should read again Leviticus 20:6:

And the soul who turns to mediums and to spiritists, or plays the harlot after them, I will even set My face against that soul and will cut him off from among his people (See Lv 20:27).

We would assume that if one seeks

to be a Christian in belief and behavior, he will make every effort not to be led astray by the supposed prophets who masquerade to be pastors for God. At least God asked that if one would claim to be one of His children, then certainly that person should not be seeking those who would lead them astray from the word of God. Isaiah wrote,

And when they will say to you, “Consult those who are mediums and wizards, who whisper and mutter,” should not a people consult their God? Should they consult the dead on behalf of the living? (Is 8:19).

And we would ask, Should not a Christian consult the word of God and not those who would lead them astray after the desires of their itching ears? **We know we are in difficult times when people follow their itching ears rather than seek out the word of God and read.**

So why are we so obsessed with the Bible? The answer is obvious. It is our only hope of finding our way through the quagmire of religious confusion that is so prevalent in our world today. If we are not so obsessed, then certainly we have become fertile soil for those who masquerade themselves as messengers of light. We have set ourselves up to be deceived. We must keep in mind that itching ears are always looking for something outside the word of God. In fact, “itching ear” people are never satisfied with the Bible alone as a foundation for their faith.

Chapter 4

Seeking To Be "Biblical"

Have you ever heard the statement, "We must be biblical"? Or maybe you have stated, "That is not biblical." These are common statements that are made in reference to our efforts to be obedient, or lack of obedience, to the word of God. But these statements can often reveal a great misunderstanding, if not, inconsistency on the part of the one who makes them. For instance, we seek to establish the authority of God in our lives by doing what we believe God requires of us. But in our zeal, we often misunderstand the authority of God in our lives by developing our own conclusions to what is "biblical." By stating that we are "biblical" in doing what we believe God requires of us to do in obedience to His word, we are often revealing inconsistencies on our part in our judgment of others who also claim that they are "biblical."

In being "biblical" it is assumed that we are "doing Bible things in Bible ways." But in the realm of our obedience to the word of God, doing Bible things in Bible ways sometimes leads us into being somewhat inconsistent, if not ignorant of the freedom by which God expects us to have in reference to our obedience to the principles of His will. A legalist may try to convince himself that he is being "biblical" by attaching a supposed proof-text to everything he does. But the reality of his response to the word

of God reveals something very different. What does he do religiously when he has no proof-text? His legalistic approach to obedience leads him into all sorts of contradictions, if not hypocritical behavior in reference to his claim to be "biblical." For example, one might claim to be "biblical" in reference to using a songbook to carry out the mandate to sing and make melody in one's heart (Ep 5:19). The singing from the songbook is "biblical," but the use of the songbook is nowhere found in the Bible, and thus, there is no proof-text. We are doing something "biblical" by using something that is "unbiblical."

Another example may help. Suppose we seek to build for ourselves a building in which to assemble. The assembly of the saints is certainly "biblical," for we read about such in the Bible (Hb 10:24,25). But the building of a facility for assembly is nowhere found in the Bible, and thus, the building of such an edifice would be "unbiblical" according to legal thinking. There would be no Bible verse to build a church building to carry out the mandate to assemble. And so for the legalist who needs his proof-texts in order to be "biblical," he is stuck with a theological inconsistency, if not hypocrisy, if he accuses others for not being "biblical" in the absence of proof-texts.

So do Christians have the freedom

to use “unbiblical” songbooks to sing and “unbiblical” facilities for assembly? Certainly. Doing such is in the realm of freedom, regardless of the lack of “prooftexts” for doing such. Christians have the freedom to do that which is “biblical” in principle by using “unbiblical” things or means in order to carry out the “biblical” principles. Simply because either songbooks or church buildings are not mentioned in the Bible does not make them “unbiblical.” Since there is silence in the Scriptures concerning both, then we correctly conclude that Christians can work in the area of freedom to use both, and yet be in obedience to the word and will of God. Silence of the Scriptures on many things allows freedom, not condemnation.

We would suggest, therefore, that one be very careful about condemning something with which he may not agree on the basis of it being “unbiblical.” If one does, he will find himself playing the part of a hypocrite. Upon close examination, he will be found to be doing several religious things in his own life for which he has no “biblical” authority. In

his “unbiblical” behavior he will be found to be a judge and lawgiver of those he believes are doing “unbiblical” things or methods according to what he judges to be “biblical.” However, he himself would be judged “unbiblical” by his own standards by which he judges others. And because he makes arbitrary judgments, he will be the one who causes division over differences that he has made matters of faith. Simply because someone does something religiously that is not found in the Bible does not mean that he is “unbiblical.”

Simply because someone does something traditionally, does not mean he is “unbiblical” if he has no prooftext for his traditional way of doing something religiously. We can count numerous things we do traditionally for which we have no prooftext. Are we “unbiblical” to do things traditionally for which we do not have a Bible verse? Certainly not! As long as we do not bind as law that which we do traditionally, then we can carry on with our traditions, for we are all humanly traditional in almost everything we do.

Chapter 5

In Search Of Authority

When we speak of Bible authority in matters of faith, we must be careful. If we are not, we will be binding laws—our laws—where God has not made any law. If we are honest, we will wake up one day and see our own inconsistencies, and then discover that we have been be-

having hypocritically. At the same time, however, if we do not use the Bible as our sole authority in matters of faith, then we manifest our disrespect for the word of God, if not our rejection of its teaching, which thing the religious leaders of Jesus’ day did. He said to them, “*All too*

well you reject the commandment of God so that you may keep your own tradition” (Mk 7:9). Therefore, though there are many areas of freedom in which we have the right to determine how we can carry out the mandates of God, our source for obedience in matters of faith must always be the word of God.

Everyone has a reason for their religious beliefs and behavior. We believe and do according to that for which we have authority. We seek authority from God for our beliefs and behavior simply because we want to do what we feel God wants us to believe and behave. There are several sources of authority that religious people use as the foundation upon which they establish their beliefs and behavior. All of the following sources of authority **are not rooted in the word of God, and thus, they are sources of authority that lead one away from God.** They do so because they are authorities that seek to have priority over anything that is revealed in the word of God. One may have the Bible in his religiosity, but if the Bible is not consulted as a reference for determining final authority, then one is led away from God by that which he considers to have priority in his life.

A. Subjective authority:

Subjectivism in the realm of religion is when one considers his emotions or feelings as validation for his religious beliefs. In other words, “if it feels right, then it must be right.” One may firmly believe that the Holy Spirit is directing

his feelings, and thus, he assumes that the Spirit is validating his religiosity by a direct manipulation of his emotions. Take the Holy Spirit out of the religious experience, or one’s claim to believe in Jesus, and thus in the “non-Christian” world, subjectivism would be the authority for witches and sorcerers. Through emotional incantations, such people have subdued themselves and others to what can be conjured up in the mind. And by doing such, they have sought to impose their beliefs and behavior upon their followers. When Paul and Barnabas passed through the island of Cyprus, they encountered such a person. *“They found a certain sorcerer, a false prophet, a Jew whose name was Bar-Jesus”* (At 13:6). Philip also encountered a subjectivist in the city of Samaria by the name of Simon. Simon *“practiced magic and astonished the people of Samaria, claiming that he was someone great”* (At 8:9). As a result, Simon became the authority of their religiosity. *“They all, from the least to the greatest, gave heed to him, saying, ‘This man is the great power of God’”* (At 8:10).

Religious authority that is based on the subjective feelings and emotions of man is one of the most difficult systems of authority to change in reference to our subjection to the mandates of the word of God. Subjectivism is narcissistic in that man is the center of reference for one’s religious faith as opposed to the influence of God through His word.

Inevitably, subjectivism leads to religious anarchy and division among fellow subjectivists. It produces religious

chaos in that everyone seeks to do that which is right in his own eyes. It is the same religious chaos that is pictured in Judges 17:6: *“In those days there was no king in Israel, but every man did what was right in his own eyes.”* When Israel initially went into the land of promise, God warned them concerning this religious behavior. *“You will not do after all the things that we do here this day, every man doing whatever is right in his own eyes”* (Dt 12:8). In order to guard them against moving into subjective religiosity, God condemned the practices of divination, spiritism, witches and similar practices among the Israelites (See Ex 20:4,5; Lv 19:26,31; Dt 4:15-19; 18:9-14).

The reason subjectivism is not a valid authority in matters of faith is that it is simply *“not in man who walks to direct his steps”* (Jr 10:23). Those who would subject themselves to their own emotions in reference to religious authority, will certainly lead themselves astray from God (See 2 Tm 4:3). If one would serve God, then he must seek that which is from God. For this reason, the will of God was written in order that we have a validation for our faith that is above and beyond our own selves.

B. Autistic authority:

The dictionary defines “autistic” as “a state of mind characterized by day-dreaming, hallucinations, **and disregard of external reality.**” In reference to the reality of what the Bible says, the autistic individual continues to believe exactly

what he wants to believe, regardless of what the Bible says. This tendency to see, hear and believe what we want is to some degree characteristic with everyone. If one has little regard for the Bible, then the autistic thinking of the individual is out of control in reference to any authority that comes from God through His word. Autistic authority places man at the center of his source of authority.

What people perceive to be reality, or that which they accept as the authority for their faith, depends a great deal on their spiritual and emotional needs. It is for this reason that reality is often masked by what one wants to see and hear. This is a particular problem in reference to the preceding point concerning emotional subjectivism. If one concludes that his emotional experiences are directly caused by the Holy Spirit, then it is almost impossible for that person to have an objective understanding of any statements of Scripture that might contradict either his beliefs or behavior. The subjectivist is often autistic in that he rejects scriptural reality for the sake of emotion, or allows emotion to override reality.

What usually occurs is that the autistic interpreter submits his understanding of Scripture to that which he seeks in order to fulfill personal needs. If the Scriptures state something that is contrary to his desires at the time, then he concludes that he is not properly understanding a particular passage. Since the authority of his faith is based on what he personally desires, then he sees only that which conforms to his desires. He will

often randomly open the Bible at any location, and from reading a random passage, conclude that the Scriptures were speaking directly to him concerning his need at the time. What often happens in this case, is that he will twist the passage to conform to his desires or needs at the time of reading.

The autistic interpreter inherently twists the Scriptures. This would be the interpreter about whom Peter wrote concerning things that Paul wrote *“in his letters, speaking in them of these things, in which are some things hard to understand, which those who are untaught and unstable distort to their own destruction, as they do also the other Scriptures”* (2 Pt 3:16). **Autistic interpreters always find the Bible hard to understand, and thus, they continually twist the Scriptures.** The Bible is difficult for them to understand simply because that which they desire is often not plainly taught in the Scriptures. When one approaches the word of God with the desire to find a solution for his own problems, then certainly he will often read into a passage that which a particular passage may never have stated. The autistic interpreter simply reads into the Bible what he wants to know. He is not objectively reading the Bible in order to discover solutions for his situation. He comes to the Bible with preconceived conclusions without allowing the Bible to reveal God’s conclusions. He speaks for the Bible instead of allowing the Bible to speak for itself.

When a particular statement of Scripture is pointed out that contradicts

the beliefs of the autistic interpreter, he will often respond to the one who points out the correct understanding, by saying, **“Are you saying”** The autistic interpreter seeks to dodge what he wants a scripture to state by assuming that the correct teaching of the scripture has originated from the one who pointed out the inconsistent interpretation. It is very difficult for the autistic interpreter to allow the Bible to mean what it says and say what it means. His first source of authority for what the Bible says is his own self-seeking beliefs and desires.

C. Traditional authority:

We seek to show our respect for our fathers by keeping the traditions of their faith. This is only natural. In fact, the authority of the traditions of our fathers is almost always stronger in our faith than any mandates of the word of God. This is certainly true when those of any religious persuasion stop studying their Bibles. Or, it is true when the adherents of a particular religion turn their knowledge of the Bible over to the clergy of the group whom they have programmed through seminary training to maintain the traditions of the fathers.

This was the problem that the disciples of Jesus encountered with the religious leaders of the Jews. On one occasion, the Pharisees and scribes came to Jesus, complaining, *“Why do Your disciples not walk according to the tradition of the elders ...”* (Mk 7:5). What the disciples had failed to do was wash their hands before they ate. Jesus used

the occasion to judge the authority of the religious leaders' beliefs and behavior. He first identified the authority of their religion by saying, "*In vain they worship Me, teaching as doctrines the commandments of men*" (Mk 7:7). The problem with teaching "as doctrines the commandments of men" is that the doctrines of men almost always override the doctrines of God. Listen to what Jesus said: "*For laying aside the commandment of God, you hold the tradition of men ...*" (Mk 7:8). This system of religious authority does not stop with the binding of the authority of the fathers. Jesus continued, "*All too well you reject the commandment of God so that you may keep your own tradition*" (Mk 7:9).

The Jewish religious leaders manifested their disrespect for the word of God by elevating the religious traditions of their fathers over the word of God. The traditions became doctrine, and then the doctrine of men led them to reject the commandment of God. At this time in their digression from the authority of the word of God that Paul referred to their faith as the "Jew's religion," (Judaism) a religion in which he excelled before he came to Jesus (See Gl 1:13,14). When men allow the traditions of the fathers to become the doctrines of men, then they can no longer claim that they are of Christianity, for the validation of their faith is not the word of Christ, but the word of the fathers.

D. Apostolic succession authority:

This source of authority supposes

that Jesus gave personal authority to the apostles, particularly Peter. This personal authority was then passed on from the apostles to those the apostles personally chose. These chosen men personally passed on the authority from generation to generation through the ordained officials of the church. The church, and the officials thereof, became the authority for belief and behavior of the members.

The supposed authority that was given to the apostles by Jesus was passed on to their successors, and eventually, it has arrived in our day as the authority of the church. This is a similar principle of religious authority as the preceding point, wherein the religious leaders of the Jews established authority according to the traditions of the fathers. But the added emphasis of apostolic succession authority is that the living officials of the church have the right to establish mandates for the church today. What the officials of the church teach according to their majority vote, therefore, becomes the official mandate for obedience by the church. This means that the teachings of the church can change throughout history as circumstances and culture change.

The fallacy of the teaching that authority is established by the church lies in the fact that the Bible can never be a final authority. The faith that was once and for all delivered to the saints must change (See Jd 3). Those who promote this teaching suppose that church officials today have a right to change the word of God. In fact, this system of religious authority places the Bible in a time warp wherein its principles are not applicable

outside their relevance in the first century. A good example of this is revealed in the change from immersion to sprinkling in reference to the mode of baptism. Cardinal Gibbons, in his book, *Faith of Our Fathers*, wrote,

For several centuries after the establishment of Christianity, Baptism was usually conferred by immersion; but since the twelfth century the practice of Baptizing by infusion [sprinkling] has prevailed in the Catholic Church, as this manner is attended with less inconvenience than Baptism by immersion.

What happened was that the Catholic Church assumed the authority to change the mode of baptism to sprinkling. And since the officials of the church are supposedly functioning from “authority by succession” from the apostles, then they have the right to change the mandates of the Bible.

Before anyone becomes somewhat irritated with this system of establishing authority, he should look around and make a note of all the traditional practices and particular names of various churches that are commonly accepted among the networks of churches that adhere to common doctrines and names of men. If one sought to change something that is commonly practiced among a particular denomination, the statement could be made, “That is just not the way it has been done.” This too, is a system of allowing the majority of “the church” to have the right to establish authority in matters of belief and behavior.

E. Autocratic authority:

This system of establishing authority is centered around either an individual or group of individuals. It is usually oriented around one specific group. Peter explained in 1 Peter 5 the origin of this system of authority that would arise among the people of God. He exhorted the shepherds not to be “*lords over those entrusted to you ...*” (1 Pt 5:3). This is a system of authority of which Paul spoke to the shepherds of Ephesus during his final visit with them. “*Also from your own selves will men arise, speaking perverse things, to draw away the disciples after themselves*” (At 20:30).

Individuals who assume authority over a particular group of disciples are behaving autocratically. Such was the autocratic behavior of Diotrephes who loved to be first among the disciples (3 Jn 9). In order to maintain his position of authority, he slandered those whom he thought would be in competition with him (3 Jn 10). In fact, he threatened to excommunicate from the fellowship of the disciples those who would not submit to his authority. Those over whom he had assumed authority, therefore, submitted to his authority in fear of being disfellowshipped from the body. When one rules with autocratic authority, he steals away from the people their total submission to God.

When any system of authority is brought into the church from the world, and bound on the disciples, then the disciples are headed into apostasy, if not

already there. Since religious authority that originates from man is determined by man, then those who submit to such authority are headed in the direction to which the group of men are going, or in the case of a single person, the people are moving in the direction of that one person. Notice that this was behind the words of Paul's statement in 1 Corinthians 11:1 when he was speaking to a group of disciples who had allowed themselves to be brought under the influence of some arrogant leaders: "*Be imitators of me even as I also am of Christ.*"

The fact that we do not call ourselves Paulites today proves that Paul was successful in directing the minds of the disciples in the direction of Jesus Christ. We know numerous churches today who are called after the man who originated the group. Some even identify a particu-

lar group to be, for example, "Pastor John's church." But when preachers allow others to call themselves after them, then they have failed to be leaders for Jesus.

We must keep in mind that when men start following the authority of men, then the followers are on their way away from God. It was for this reason that Jesus mandated one very important principle when it came to establishing the leadership of His disciples. We respect the word of Jesus because we do not overlook this point.

*You know that those who are recognized as rulers over the Gentiles exercise lordship over them. And their great ones exercise authority over them. **But it will not be so among you** (Mk 10:42,43).*

Chapter 6

Finding God's Authority

If one would seek to be a disciple of Jesus, then he must be willing to submit to the authority of Jesus. Jesus said, "*If you continue in My word, then you are truly My disciples*" (Jn 8:31). In order to know that one is submitting to the authority of Jesus, then he must know that to which he is submitting. He must know the word (commandments) of Jesus. It is imperative, therefore, that any true disciple of Jesus will know the will of his Teacher if he claims to be a disciple of Jesus.

A. Discipleship means relinquishing oneself totally to Jesus' authority.

The application of this point was illustrated by Jesus on one occasion during His ministry. There were great multitudes following Him because He fed them with fish and bread, and healed their sick. So at the time this event happened, Jesus wanted to separate the true followers from the takers. Notice carefully what happened. "*Now great multitudes went with Him. And He turned and said to*

them ..." (Lk 14:25). It was at this point in His ministry that He called on the great multitudes who would follow Him to reveal their commitment to being His disciples. In order to do this, He turned around and said to the great multitude, "*If anyone comes to Me and does not hate his father and mother ... does not bear his own cross ... does not forsake all that he has, cannot be My disciple*" (Lk 14:26-33).

Jesus' condition for discipleship was extreme commitment to Him. If one could not put Jesus before family relationships, survive under the persecution of the world, and be willing, if necessary, to relinquish the material possessions of this world, **then he simply could not be a disciple**. All these things would distract the individual from allowing Jesus to have authority over the totality of his life. Jesus could not be the head of anyone who was not willing to allow Him to control their destiny.

Upon His departure from this world, Jesus wanted to make it clear that He had to be the final authority in the lives of all those who would seek to be His disciples. So He gave to His immediate disciples a message that was communicated to us through them, "***All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth***" (Mt 28:18). If Jesus now has all authority, and He does, then He must have all authority in the lives of those who would be His disciples. When we submit to His word, therefore, we reaffirm the fact that He has authority over all things.

B. Discipleship means submitting to the authority of the truth.

If one would be committed to Jesus, **then he must be committed to the truth that comes forth from Jesus**. Jesus promised the apostles that "*when He, the Spirit of truth, has come, He will guide you into all the truth*" (Jn 16:13; see 14:26). The truth first came orally to man through the inspirational guidance of the apostles of Jesus. One's response or reaction to this truth would determine his discipleship to Jesus. So Paul wrote, "*The presence of the lawless one is according to ... all deception of wickedness among those who perish, because they did not receive the love of the truth so that they might be saved*" (2 Th 2:9,10). If one does not love the truth, then it is conclusive that he is not a disciple of Jesus, for Jesus is the origin of the truth.

If a person does not love the truth of God that came through the apostles, then he is simply a religionist who will be judged by the works of his own religiosity. Such a person would not be a "**Christian**", a follower of Christ. He is not a Christian because he is not following the truth that the Holy Spirit revealed through the apostles. It is imperative, therefore, that one study the truth in order to determine if he is a disciple of Jesus by submission to it. Those who do not love and know their Bibles can never determine if they are true disciples of Jesus. They cannot because they can never be sure that what they believe or do is ac-

cording to the truth of God. If one is simply walking in what he believes to be truth, then he is a religionist who may have blended his desires with some truth from the word of God and error that he does not recognize as error. It is for this reason that true discipleship is validated only by the word of God.

C. Discipleship means doing the commandments of Jesus.

Jesus reminded those who would be His disciples, “*You are My friends, if you do whatever I command you*” (Jn 15:14). He said to His immediate disciples, “*If you love Me you will keep My commandments*” (Jn 14:15). Discipleship means loving the commandments of Jesus and doing them. Commitment to Jesus, means commitment to what He says. Being a disciple of Jesus means learning His commandments in order that we not be deceived, and thus tossed to and fro with every wind of teaching (Ep 4:14). **When people say that they love Jesus, then it is assumed that they are diligent students of His commandments. Those who say they love Jesus, but do not seek the authority of His word in their lives, have deceived themselves into thinking that they are “Christian.”** They are actually disciples of their own religion that they have invented after their own desires. We must never forget that if we claim to be a Christian, but refuse to study and know the commandments of Jesus, then we reveal our unwillingness to be Jesus’ disciple. Discipleship is determined by one’s love

of the word of Jesus.

D. Discipleship infers Bible study.

Christendom is cluttered with the calamity of misinterpretations of the word of God. Religionists often stumble over their ignorance of the Bible in order to maintain a following. We would conclude that the most severe onslaught against the word of God in these days is an ignorance that is based on the twisted theologies of those who know little or nothing about the Bible. It is not that the Bible is difficult to understand. This is far from the problem. The problem is that few people in these times have any love for the truth of the Bible. In a narcissistic world wherein most people want to do that which is pleasing in their own minds, there is little desire to “*seek out the scroll of the Lord and read*” (Is 34:16). The little love for the truth that many have is revealed by a world population that has little desire to study the Bible. We know this simply because of what the Holy Spirit recorded of those who were true Bible students.

These were more noble-minded than those in Thessalonica, in that they received the word with all readiness of mind and searched the Scriptures daily to see whether these things were so (At 17:11).

This is the Holy Spirit speaking about good Bible students. These Bereans loved the truth, and thus, they searched their Bibles in order to make sure that

what Paul and Silas preached was true. We do not love the Bible as the Muslims reverence the Qu'ran as an icon. Christians love their Bibles because of the truth of God therein revealed, and the message of the gospel. Give a telescope to a monkey and he beats it around as a toy. Give it to a man, and he sees the wonders of the universe beyond the telescope. Give a Bible to an intellectual who does not consider it to be the word of God, and he reads it as simply a good piece of literature. Give it to one who seeks to bring his life under the authority of God, and he searches for the message of the God that is beyond the book. And it is herein that one establishes the word of God as the authority of all matters of faith in his life.

E. Discipleship means active love in obedience to the word of God.

Using the Bible as the authority of our faith does not mean using it as a catechism to establish legal laws. Paul helps us understand this in 1 Timothy 1:5,6.

Now the purpose of the commandment is love out of a pure heart, and a good conscience and a sincere faith, which some, having swerved, have turned aside to meaningless discussion"

The "commandment is love." But what is the commandment to those who are identified by their love of one another (See Jn 13:34,35)? Keep reading 1 Timothy 1:

*Knowing this, that **the law is not made for a righteous man**, but for the lawless and disobedient, for the ungodly and for sinners, for unholy and profane, for murderers of fathers and murders of mothers, for murderers ..."* (See 1 Tm 1:9,10).

The person who sees his brother in need, needs no law to tell him to help his brother. Love is the "law." Love as law needs no subpoints as to how it goes into action. When one loves his brother, all that is necessary to fulfill a brother's need goes into action. Love is the action that brings the behavior of Jesus into the lives of those who seek to serve one another. John explained this clearly in 1 John 3:10. "*In this the children of God and the children of the devil are manifest: Whoever does not practice righteousness is not from God, nor the one who does not love his brother.*" So John questioned, "*But whoever has this world's goods, and sees his brother in need and closes his heart against him, how does the love of God abide in Him?*" (1 Jn 3:17). Therefore, "*let us not love in word or in tongue, but in deed and in truth*" (1 Jn 3:18). Love in action is bringing the authority of the word of God into one's life. Our love in action is evidence that we are the disciples of Jesus.

Among loving disciples there need be no commandment to care for one another. It is simply the nature of true disciples to make sure that needs are fulfilled when a fellow disciple is in need. The legalist can sleep well at night because he has concluded that he has ful-

filled all his self-imposed laws. The loving disciple sleeps well at night because

he trusts in the grace of God to cover his lack of ability to love people more.

Chapter 7

Legally Led Astray

Those who approach the Bible as a legal code of laws to be followed as precept upon precept cannot understand the authority of the word of God that is brought into one's life through love. They simply cannot understand why the law was not made for the righteous, but for the ungodly. The righteous need no law to take action if their brother is in need. Love is their action. But the legal oriented religionist needs a law before he acts. He prides himself in the fact that he has kept all the law. He has done his duty. But he has forgotten what Jesus said to those who would act upon the basis of legal obedience to law, "*So likewise you, when you have done all those things that are commanded you, say, 'We are unprofitable bondservants. We have done that which is our duty to do'*" (Lk 17:10). This statement is explained by Jesus' response to the rich young ruler who had legally acted according to law by keeping all the commandments (See Lk 18:18-21). He had done all things that he was commanded to do. But Jesus responded to his supposed legal perfection, "***You still lack one thing. Sell all that you possess ...***" (Lk 18:22).

When a legalist realizes that he still lacks something after doing all the commandments, he will do as the rich young ruler whom Jesus said still lacked. "*Then*

when he heard this, he was very sorrowful ..." (Lk 18:23). The young man was sorrowful because his performance of law did not qualify him to be a disciple of Jesus. The legalist deceives himself into thinking that he has submitted to the authority of God by submitting to a code of laws. But the problem with this theology is that in some point of obedience we will always lack. There is some commandment we may not have obeyed. Keep in mind that the rich young ruler was not sorrowful when he initially came to Jesus. He was sorrowful only after he heard the pronouncement that he was not perfect in all his legal obedience.

The first and great commandment is still to "*love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind*" (Mt 22:37). When one loves God in obedience to this commitment, then all the commandments of behavior are covered. Our love of God brings the authority of God's instructions into our lives for we seek to do His will. "*We love because He first loved us*" (1 Jn 4:19). The authority of God's word in our lives, therefore, is not based upon defining laws by which we can determine if we are legally performing perfectly according to His will. The Christian is not as the rich young ruler. Because the Christian loves his Lord above all, it is

inherent in his love that he keeps the commandments of God.

Remember what John said? ***“For this is the love of God, that we keep His commandments”*** (1 Jn 5:3). John added something that no legalist will ever understand. *“And His commandments are not burdensome”* (1 Jn 5:3). For those who are moved by their love of the authority of God’s word in their lives, obedience is a pleasure, not a burden. And when the loving obedient lack perfect obedience, they do not question their own salvation because they failed to keep all the commandments perfectly. They are driven to the grace of their Father in thanksgiving for His forgiveness.

It is imperative to understand this paradigm of the authority of God in our lives. When most theologians speak of the authority of the word of God, they are speaking of a legal catechism by which the religiosity of man is judged. This catechism is often written and published, and thus, it becomes the catechism by which churches and individuals are determined to be “of the truth.” If some individual or group does not perform exactly according to the catechism of prooftexts, then often the judge becomes almost unloving in his relationship with anyone who would fail to be obedient to every point of the catechism. The problem with this system of religiosity is that the disciples of Jesus are not being identified by their love. They are being identified by legal points that they have drawn up as an outline by which to judge others either faithful or unfaithful to God.

If we move ourselves into the pre-

ceding system of religious authority, then we will have to determine who has the authority to produce the correct outline by which everyone is to be judged. And now we have moved ourselves into a most contradictory and condemning predicament. If we must have authorities on earth to produce the correct catechism by which we would judge others legally correct, then we have moved from the authority of God to the authority of some man or group of men. In all this wrangle of theology we have moved from a foundational principle of being identified by love to being identified as those who are exclusively adherent to their self-imposed outline of laws. We have forgotten that the love by which we are to be identified is not presenting our self-imposed legal code of laws to others. It is our love that should draw others to us (See Jn 13:34,35). It is our love that encourages others to ask why we are what we are. Is this not what Peter meant in the following words?

But sanctify Christ as Lord God in your hearts and be ready always to give a defense to everyone who asks you a reason for the hope that is in you, yet with meekness and fear” (1 Pt 3:15).

There must be something in the life of the true disciple of Jesus that draws others to ask concerning his hope. It is love that draws others to ask. Peter would conclude, *“Finally, all of you be of one mind, having compassion one for another. Love as brethren, be kindhearted, humble”* (1 Pt 3:8). When people see

Jesus' disciples behaving according to the principle of love, not law, then they are drawn to ask concerning their hope. They are drawn to ask because they seek freedom from the bondage of law that they have often imposed on themselves.

We would advise the noble-minded Bible student to be as the Bereans who searched the Scriptures daily (At 17:11). Keep in mind the one who was bringing them the teaching that sparked their study. **It was the apostle Paul** (At 17:10). The Scriptures that they searched was the Old Testament. Paul had sparked their thinking concerning Jesus being the fulfillment of all the prophecies concerning the Messiah (See Lk 24:44). When Paul pointed out the prophecies, they searched the prophecies concerning the Messiah in the Old Testament. They sought the authority of the Old Testament in order to come to the conclusion that what Paul was saying was true. Paul was not their authority. The Scriptures were.

We live in a world today that is flooded with theologians who would come our way to proclaim what they believe to be the truth of God. Too many people have accepted as truth from God those who do not preach the word of God. They have consequently submitted to the authority of the speaker and not the word of God. **But we must remember that all great minds are subject to some error somewhere, though not all minds are subject to the same error.** When truth is sifted through the minds of men, it sometimes picks up some baggage of past theologies, or is often reflected to us through the theological prejudices of

the presenter. The nobility of the Bereans was in the fact that they did not accept what Paul said because Paul said it. Their authority was in the written word of God, the Old Testament Scriptures. What Paul said, therefore, was sifted through the written word of God, not through the next tele-evangelist who might come through town.

Silas was also with Paul, speaking the same thing as Paul. But the Bereans would neither accept a company of preachers as authority, as they would not accept a powerful preacher. They still went to their Bibles. Simply because a company of authorities might be spouting the same thing does not determine that what is said is true, and thus to be accepted as authoritative. **God gave no council of men on earth the authority to be authorities on behalf of Him.**

The serious Bible student will make use of all the pronouncements of a host of preachers, or commentaries, or books, but he will never give his brain over to "what the pastor says." Those who have determined what they believe to be truth because of the proclamation of some religious authority, or some quote from a respected book, have placed themselves on a road to apostasy from the word of God. Those who believe something on the foundation of an accepted authority on earth, or group of supposed authorities, have condemned themselves to be tossed to and fro by the passing of one preacher after another. We are now in such a world of theological chaos. Our time is as Paul wrote to Timothy:

For the time will come when they will not endure sound teaching. But to suit their itching ears, they will surround themselves with teachers who will agree with their own desires. And they will turn away their ears from the truth and will be turned to fables (2 Tm 4:3,4).

Someone once wrote an acrostic on how

a good Bible student will search for the authority of God in his life.

S – eriously (At 17:11; 2 Tm 2:15)

E – arnestly (Ja 1:8; Ps 119:11)

A – nxiously (Jn 20:31; Ps 119:9)

R – egularly (At 17:11; Ps 1:2)

C – arefully (Lk 24:27; 2 Tm 3:16,17)

H – umbly (Lk 24:45; Js 1:22)

Chapter 8

We Yearn For The Word

Have you ever studied through Psalm 19:7-11? If we would use one context of statements in Scripture to describe the awesome nature of the word of God, it would be this context. It seems that David came to climax in these statements concerning his appreciation for the word of God. In these inspired words, he also wanted us to appreciate the impact that God's word should have on the hearts of the faithful. Therefore, we must take this journey through his metaphors as he seeks to reveal his heart of appreciation for all that would come from the mouth of our Creator.

As David progresses through Psalm 19:7-11, he uses several words to refer to the word of God: law, testimony, statutes, commandment, fear, judgments. Every word presents a different angle of definition of the word of God and its effect on the beliefs and behavior of the faithful. Through the use of so many words in reference to the word of God, David seeks to apply the word of God to every conceivable aspect of our lives.

A. Identity of the word of God:

“The law of the Lord is perfect ...” (Ps 19:7). When one feels that the word of God was dropped from heaven into his hands, then there is response from the heart of the believing receiver. The response is in the fact that one seeks to mold his beliefs and behavior around to what he reads in the Bible. He is transformed. His life is as that which the Holy Spirit has exhorted, *“And be not conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, so that you may prove what is that good and acceptable and perfect will of God”* (Rm 12:2). God's law is perfect for transforming the character of the obedient. Paul wrote, *“All Scripture is given by inspiration of God ... so that the man of God may be complete, thoroughly equipped for every good work”* (2 Tm 3:16,17).

“The testimony of the Lord is sure ...” (Ps 19:7). The word of God is steadfast and unchanging. It is such because it originated from One who is of an un-

changing nature. God is of the nature and behavior as that which was expressed by the Hebrew writer. "... so that by two unchangeable things in which it is impossible for God to lie, we might have a strong encouragement, who have fled for refuge to lay hold of the hope set before us" (Hb 6:18). Because God assures us of His promises, our trust in His word is not only wise, but it makes us wise because we so trust in Him. Therefore, we ask wisdom of God. "If any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask of God who gives to all liberally and without reproach. And it will be given to him." (Js 1:5). The most common (simple) person can trust in God's testimony simply because God comes through on His promises.

"Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, and comes down from the Father of lights, **with whom there is no variation nor shadow of turning**" (Js 1:17). God's word makes common people wiser than the most educated man on earth who has no knowledge of God. This is true because the common believer has invested his soul in the testimonies of God. It is as James wrote,

But the wisdom that is from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, reasonable, full of mercy and good fruit, without partiality and without hypocrisy (Js 3:17).

"**The statutes of the Lord are right ...**" (Ps 19:8). When in any dilemma to make a decision, one can always have confidence that making a decision based on the directions of God's word is right. When one lives in such a manner after

the instructions of God's will, then he can rejoice in the satisfaction that he is being led by His Father. The obedient Christian seeks to bring glory to God by living in harmony with divine instructions. Paul wrote of such in the following words: "And whatever you do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through Him" (Cl 3:17).

"**The commandment of the Lord is pure ...**" (Ps 19:8). As opposed to the darkness that comes with a life of sin, the word of God brings pure light. It is the light that shines in the darkness. It is the light in which we walk (1 Jn 1:7). And because we walk in the light of His word, the blood of Jesus keeps us pure of sin. Though some may claim to be enlightened by the wisdom of the world, the wisdom of the world is only darkness if not possessed by one who has allowed the light of the word of God to brighten his way. Psalm 119:105 is still true. "Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path."

"**The fear of the Lord is clean ...**" (Ps 19:9). In this context, the word "fear" refers to the word of God. This is an appropriate word since those who believe in God should respond with fear in reference at what He says. Because the "fear" (word of God) comes from God, then it is eternal as God. God's word exists without end. "The word of the Lord endures forever" (1 Pt 1:25).

"**The judgments of the Lord are true and righteous altogether**" (Ps 19:9). The word of God is inerrant, and thus, when the Lord speaks, what is said is true

and right (See 2 Tm 3:16,17). Our God cannot speak against Himself, neither can He speak that which is false (Ti 1:2). It would be superfluous to say that “God is good for His word.” God is God and what He says is always truth. What He promises will always come to pass. He does not act in any way that would bring His being or character into question.

B. Desire for the word of God:

Newborn babes cry for the milk that sustains their lives. It is only natural for them to yearn for nourishment when they are hungry. It is the same with Christians. Peter wrote, “... as newborn babes, *desire the sincere milk of the word so that you may grow up to salvation*” (1 Pt 2:2). Though gold is precious, and can buy many possessions and activities, the word of God gives eternal life. And because it gives life, its taste to the soul of man is sweet.

Obedience to the word of God brings both warning and reward. Through His word, God is warning of impending destruction that will come upon all those who do not obey the gospel (See 2 Th 1:6-9). But in being obedient to the instructions of our Father, there is the coming fulfillment of the promise of which Jesus spoke. “*Come, you blessed of My Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the founda-*

tion of the world” (Mt 25:34).

Anyone who would claim to be a believer in the existence of God must conclude that this God in whom he believes would communicate to His creation. There would be no sense in believing in a god that would not communicate with man. Only false gods are mute. But the true and living God seeks to reveal His presence, not only through that which He created (Rm 1:20), but also through words of instruction. This He did through the prophets of old. “*For the prophecy did not come in the old time by the will of man, but holy men spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit*” (2 Pt 1:21).

God revealed His instructions for His creation in order that we not wander aimlessly in a world which we could not understand. Once we conclude that the Creator has communicated, then it should be the yearning of every person to seek out this communication as the newborn babe thirsts for the sustenance of life. It is only natural for all of us to so yearn. Once we set our course to know God, then the Bible becomes our source of life. The true believer cannot help himself but to search the Scriptures daily. As there is no need to exhort an infant to drink the sustenance of milk, there need be no exhortations to the true believer to study his Bible.

Chapter 9

Let God In

There is one statement made in Scripture that separates the one true and living God from all other gods that are created after the imagination of man.

“He who does not love does not know God, for God is love” (1 Jn 4:8).

This one statement should make the rebellious person lay down his life in humble reverence for God. It should make the religious terrorist lay down his gun. The suicide bomber will wake up after the blast and discover that his god sent him to the wrong place, and that place was not a land of virgins, but a realm of vengeance by a just God who must work according to the law of an “eye for an eye, and a tooth for a tooth.”

The fact that God is love necessitates justice, for there is no love where there is no justice. Love without law is a frivolous mockery of God. Love without law would be creating a god after our own desires to do that which we want without any chastisement. The one true and living God would say to those He loves, *“For whom the Lord loves He disciplines, and scourges every son whom He receives”* (Hb 12:6).

We desire to be received by a loving God, and thus, we understand that we must be disciplined when we fail to allow His instructions to permeate the entirety of our beliefs and behavior. We do

not desire discipline, but we understand that when we are rebellious children it is because of God’s love that He disciplines us to keep us close to Him. His discipline is proof of His love for us. It is for this reason that we accept the Bible as the only road map into the presence of our Father. We consider the Bible to be this road map simply because our loving Father would never leave His creation without instructions on how to find and stay close to Him.

A. Direction from God:

We would logically conclude that if God is love, then as our Creator He would certainly reveal instructions as to how we would avoid His discipline. So Paul said, *“All Scripture is given by inspiration of God ... so that the man of God may be complete, thoroughly equipped for every good work”* (2 Tm 3:16,17). Essentially, Paul was saying that Scripture must be God’s authority in all aspects of our lives because all Scripture came from God.

Jesus referred to Scripture as the word of God (Jn 10:35). Daniel referred to it as the “Scripture of truth” (Dn 10:21). Since the Bible claims to be Scripture from God, truth revealed to man, then it must be concluded that the word of God must have authority in our lives in order that we avoid the discipline

of our Creator. Therefore, any word we would have from our Creator must be considered the final authority in all matters of belief and behavior.

B. Understandable direction from God:

One of the most preposterous accusations of those who seek to avoid the authority of the word of God over their lives is that God revealed Scripture (the Bible) in a manner by which it cannot be clearly understood. Some go as far as to say that the Bible cannot be our guide to heaven simply because there are so many different interpretations, some even contradicting one another. They conclude that certainly God would not demand that His word be the final authority for those who seek eternal life, since it is supposedly so difficult to understand.

The problem is not the Bible, but the lack of sincere students. Because there is so little study of the Bible by those who make the preceding statements, we would expect nothing less on the part of those who find the Bible difficult to understand. **It would be correct to state that the less one knows the Bible, the more he will accuse the Bible of being a book that is not possible to understand in a way that will bring unity among believers, and subsequently, be our road map to heaven.** We have found it interesting that men will read the daily newspaper and clearly understand it, but when it comes to the Bible, they accuse it of being difficult to understand. The Bible is always diffi-

cult to understand by those who seek to create a religion (their own road map) after their own intellect or emotions. The Bible is always difficult to understand by those who are simply Bible readers, but not Bible students.

So why do so many quote from the same Bible, but come to different conclusions? If two people come to different conclusions of the same passage, then we would first say that someone is not interpreting the Bible correctly. There cannot be two differing correct conclusions from the same passage. Someone, or both parties, has to be wrong. Or one party is right and the other is wrong. Both parties may be wrong, but both parties cannot be right. For example, the Sadducees interpreted Deuteronomy 25:5 to mean that there would be no resurrection (See Mt 22:23-33). The Pharisees believed in the resurrection (See At 23:6-8). In Jesus' personal conversation with the Sadducees on this subject, He said, ***"You are in error, not knowing the Scriptures nor the power of God"*** (Mt 22:29).

It was important to Jesus, therefore, that we interpret the Scriptures properly. But some do not, for Peter said that some twist the Scriptures to their own destruction (2 Pt 3:15,16). Peter also identified why some err in their twisted interpretations of the Scriptures. They do so because they are ***"untaught and unstable"*** (2 Pt 3:16). Both Jesus and Peter were giving us a word of caution. If we sign off the Bible as impossible to understand, then we have judged ourselves to be ***"untaught and unstable,"*** and subsequently,

in error in reference to our interpretations.

We must keep in mind that our attitude toward the Scriptures is critical. If we have twisted motives in our study of the Bible, we will end up with twisted interpretations. If we are unstable in our moral life, we will end up with twisted interpretations of God's instructions for moral behavior. On the other hand, a desire to search the Scriptures daily from a sincere and obedient heart will lead us into understanding and using the Bible as God meant it to be for His children (See At 17:11).

C. The message of the Bible.

The message of the Bible is Jesus Christ. No matter what translation one may have, this message comes through loud and clear, without any contradictions or misunderstandings. If one cannot understand the message of God's redemption of man through the cross, then certainly he is not a willing believer. Though this gospel message was hidden from man for centuries, it was revealed in the fullness of time, and subsequently recorded for those who did not personally experience the cross and resurrection. The good news was recorded for us through the inspired hands of the New Testament apostles and prophets. It was of this message that Paul wrote,

*... how that by revelation He made known to me **the mystery**, as I wrote before in few words. Therefore, when you read **you can understand** my knowledge in the*

mystery of Christ, which in other generations was not made known to the sons of men, as it has now been revealed by the Spirit to His holy apostles and prophets ... (Ep 3:3-5).

The Holy Spirit used Paul and the other New Testament prophets to reveal the mystery, which is the message of the good news of Jesus' death for our sins and His resurrection for our hope (See 1 Co 15:1-4). This message was not revealed to the Old Testament prophets who wrote of what was to come after them.

"Of this salvation the [Old Testament] prophets have inquired and searched diligently, who prophesied of the grace that would come to you, searching what, or what manner of time the Spirit of Christ who was in them did signify, when He testified beforehand of the sufferings of Christ and the glory that would follow. To them it was revealed, that not to themselves, but to you ... (1 Pt 1:10-12).

Though the message of the gospel was a mystery to the Old Testament prophets, it is not to us who live this side of the revelation of Jesus and the event of His atoning sacrifice. Anyone can pick up a New Testament and understand this message. This was Paul's affirmation of Ephesians 3:3-5. His readers did not have to have a commentary of what he said he clearly revealed through writing. If one wants to understand what was a mystery to the Old Testament prophets, then all that is needed is to pick up a New Testa-

ment and clearly read the fundamental facts of the event of the gospel. No commentaries are needed.

Since the gospel has been clearly revealed through the Bible, it is no longer a mystery. It was a mystery to those Old Testament prophets who first wrote of it in prophetic writings. But it has now been revealed to all mankind through the New Testament. It is for this reason that Peter and John could stand up and say to the unbelieving world the following words:

And there is salvation in no other, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved (At 4:12).

The salvation that comes only through Jesus is for all men, and thus if one would be with God for eternity, then this gospel message must have authority in one's life. One must submit in obedience to the gospel. If one does not allow the message of the death of Jesus for our sins and His resurrection for our hope, to have authority in his life through obedience thereof, then the Holy Spirit's message of his end was clearly revealed through Paul.

... and to give you who are afflicted rest with us when the Lord Jesus will be revealed from heaven with His mighty angels in flaming fire, taking vengeance on those who do not know God and who do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ. These will be punished with everlasting destruction away from the presence of the Lord and away from the glory

of His power (2 Th 1:7-9).

If one would allow the authority of God's salvation (the gospel) to come into his life through obedience thereof, **then we must conclude that obedience to the gospel is absolutely necessary to bring one into the eternal presence of God.** Now one should be asking, How can I obey the death, burial and resurrection of Jesus that took place over two thousand years ago? This was what thousands on the day of Pentecost asked when the message of the gospel was revealed and preached for the first time in human history. In response to Peter's preaching of the good news of Jesus in Acts 2, the people "*were cut to the heart. And they said to Peter and the rest of the apostles, 'Men and brethren, what will we do?'*" (At 2:37). There was only one answer that Peter could give to this repentant response of the people.

Then Peter said to them, "Repent and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins." (At 2:38).

And how would they obey the death of Jesus for their sins and His resurrection for their hope? Paul explained:

Or do you now know that as many of us as were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into His death? Therefore, we are buried with Him through baptism into death, that just as Christ was raised up from the dead through the glory of the Father, even so we also might walk

in newness of life. For if we have been united together in the likeness of His death, we will also be in the likeness of His resurrection” (Rm 6:3-6).

And now we know why Jesus said to all humanity in His parting words before He

ascended into heaven,

Go into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature. He who believes and is baptized will be saved. But he who does not believe will be condemned (Mk 16:15,16).