

Knowing God Through His Word

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Chapter 1

Knowing God through His Word

Introduction

John 1:1-2

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. 2 He was in the beginning with God.

John 17:3

And this is eternal life, that they may know You, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom You have sent.

God can be known through Jesus Christ God's son. Jesus is and always be the living Word revealed and illuminated by the Holy Spirit through the written and spoken Word. God uses the Word (scripture) as His objective reference and daily guide to life and even the eternal hereafter. His Word working in and through you causes you to grow spiritually (1 Peter 2:2), helps you stand your ground in difficult times (Matthew 7: 24-27), and even strengthens you against temptation (Matthew 4: 10).

Why 'Revelation' Knowledge is Important

Revelation knowledge is the knowledge that only the Holy Spirit can reveal to you. It cannot be gained by mental logic and reasoning apart from God. You must engage with God in faith to receive revelation knowledge.

When Jesus approached two confused disciples on the road to Emmaus shortly after His dramatic and unprecedented resurrection, He underlined the importance of scripture (and revelation knowledge) over mental reasoning. Their reasoning's had taken them further and further away from God's purposes for their lives as they walked the road that day.

In a way Jesus needed to wean them off their reliance on natural sensory inputs – what they understood through their subjective senses alone, and focus their attention on what the Holy Spirit wanted to reveal to them through the more reliable scripture.

Luke 24:15-16, 25-27, 30-33

So it was, while they conversed and reasoned, that Jesus Himself drew near and went with them. 16 But their eyes were restrained, so that they did not know Him...

...Then He said to them, "O foolish ones, and slow of heart to believe in all that the prophets have spoken! 26 Ought not the Christ to have suffered these things and to enter into His glory?" 27 And beginning at Moses and all the Prophets, He expounded to them in all the Scriptures the things concerning Himself.

...Now it came to pass, as He sat at the table with them, that He took bread, blessed and broke it, and gave it to them. 31 Then their eyes were opened and they knew Him; and He vanished from

their sight. 32 And they said to one another, "Did not our heart burn within us while He talked with us on the road, and while He opened the Scriptures to us?" 33 So they rose up that very hour and returned to Jerusalem...

Jesus had to approach them and work with the Holy Spirit to 'burn' the scripture into their hearts and minds. When their (spiritual) eyes were opened His work was done. They now operated on revelation knowledge and returned to Jerusalem where they should have been all the time.

Mental reasoning about the things of God apart from Him (His Word) can be flawed. Any reasoning must have God's Word as the medium of exchange.

Isaiah 1:18

*"Come now, and let us reason together ,"
Says the LORD,*

God wants our mental faculties to be submitted to His Word, which is truth. (Later in Chapter Six there is more on the vital importance of a 'renewed mind' in fulfilling God's purposes in your life).

Encountering God

God is personal and wants us to encounter His wonderful, saving and enriching presence every time we engage with Him through His Word. He does not want His Word to become a 'dead letter' to us where we neither understand nor apply it in a relevant way. No one can afford to be trapped in empty religion. (More on this in Chapter Three entitled: 'The Letter and Spirit of the Word').

Bible Basics

2 Timothy 2:15

Be diligent to present yourself approved to God, a worker who does not need to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth.

In order to 'rightly divide' the Word or properly set the context of a passage of scripture, know that The Bible is divided into two main sections or Covenants: the Old Testament characterized by Law, and the New Testament by grace. Thank God that we now live in an age of grace!

John 1:17

For the law was given through Moses, but grace and truth came through Jesus Christ.

Then, all scripture is inspired truth and profitable to equip you for service.

2 Timothy 3:16-17

All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness, 17 that the man of God may be complete, thoroughly equipped for every good work.

Yet, not all scripture directly applies to us as New Covenant believers today. Some practices like animal sacrifice in the ancient Jewish temple for example, are no longer required. Jesus has paid the ultimate price of sacrifice once and for all. As such, all scripture it must be 'rightly divided' as to what applies to us today. Old Testament truths must be passed through the 'cross filter' – of what was finished there.

Jesus work on the cross is pivotal. Like a hinge point on a door, all of history hinges on what God achieved in sending Jesus to the cross and three days later raising him from the dead to set mankind free. Jesus is the focus of God's plan to redeem and restore man to his rightful position of authority under God. Whenever you read the Word especially the doctrine and practice of the Old Testament, the application of this truth must correlate with what Jesus has already done. If what was practiced in the Old Testament has been done away with in Christ, then we have no business in our time doing what has already been paid for in Christ's blood.

Another principle in understanding the Bible is the principle of balance. What may seem as opposites must be balanced by the nature and will of God as revealed in Jesus. Law and judgment must be balanced with grace and mercy the same way as faith must be 'balanced' (evidenced) with works.

Also, only God can ensure that the 'light' (spiritual illumination we claim to have) within us is not in fact 'darkness'.

Luke 11:34-35

The lamp of the body is the eye. Therefore, when your eye is good, your whole body also is full of light. But when your eye is bad, your body also is full of darkness. 35 Therefore take heed that the light which is in you is not darkness.

Saul, the persecutor, thought he was doing God's work, when in fact he was deceived. His religious yet unregenerate heart caused him to use the 'letter' of the law to persecute Christ followers. Only when he encountered the risen Christ on the road to Damascus, and fell of his 'high horse' did he see clearly what the Holy Spirit was 'goading' him about. Jesus was in fact Lord and Savior.

Acts 9:1-5

Then Saul, still breathing threats and murder against the disciples of the Lord, went to the high priest 2 and asked letters from him to the synagogues of Damascus, so that if he found any who were of the Way, whether men or women, he might bring them bound to Jerusalem. 3 And as he journeyed he came near Damascus, and suddenly a light shone around him from heaven. 4 Then he fell to the ground, and heard a voice saying to him, "Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting Me?" 5 And he said, "Who are You, Lord?" And the Lord said, "I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting. It is hard for you to kick against the goads."

He was never the same after this encounter, becoming a faithful and fruitful witness of God's mercy and goodness. He let go of the 'false light' he so cherished, and embraced the true light.

Vital Statistics

The Bible (a library of 66 books in one) was written by almost 40 inspired authors in 3 languages over a 1400 year time span, and is marked by miraculous unity, continuity and harmony of truth. God chose to use fallible man to bring to us infallible truth about His plan to seek and save mankind from itself (sin) through the Jewish Messiah Jesus.

He chose the Jewish people to be the carriers of His revelation not for their size or inherent qualities, but in order to show His grace and mercy. Most of the Old Testament deals with the history of the Jewish people whom He called to be a witness to the world at that time. The Old Testament may be divided up into:

- Law – as recorded by Moses
- History – of primarily the Jewish nation in the world
- Poetry & Wisdom Literature – Psalms of Praise, Proverbs and Ecclesiastes
- Major and Minor Prophets – who spoke God's plan for His people and the coming Kingdom a Messiah.

The New Testament focuses on the church and its relationships with God, one another and the world in need of Jesus, and is divided up into:

- Gospels – accounts of Jesus life and ministry
- Acts – a history of the early church
- Letters - written to Christ followers to teach & guide
- Revelation – prophetic insights into the future

In short, it is said that the Old Testament **prepares** us for Christ; the Gospels **present** Him to us; and the letters and Revelation **praise** Him for what He has accomplished.

Chapter 2

Get The Most From The Word

Acts 17:10-12

Then the brethren immediately sent Paul and Silas away by night to Berea. When they arrived, they went into the synagogue of the Jews. These were more fair-minded than those in Thessalonica, in that they received the word with all readiness, and searched the Scriptures daily to find out whether these things were so.

o get (and give) the most in your relationship with God understand that the ‘medium of exchange’ in the relationship is His word. He speaks to us through it, and we respond to Him through it also.

T Jesus showed us the importance of God’s word when we see that He grew up learning the Word (Luke 2:41-46). If He needed to grow in his humanity through the Word, how much more do we?

He used the Word to resist temptation (Luke 4:1-13). He countered the devil’s temptations by: ‘It is written’. Then in His witness, He relied on the Word (Luke 4:16-19), and even revealed His true nature to His disciples by means of the written Word (Luke 24:13-32).

He was totally reliant on the Word and the direction of the Holy Spirit in all that He did. Likewise you grow spiritually, resist the enemy, witness to the world and discover who you are in Christ through the Word!

It is therefore your responsibility to ‘absorb’ the B-I-B-L-E into the core of your life by:

B - Being convinced of its truth

I - Investigating it for yourself

B - Burrowing deep to extract its spiritual gems

L - Living out its commands

E - Expressing it verbally to others in witness.

The outcome of this process of assimilation involves exalting God, edifying your fellow believers, and evangelizing those that have not yet received Jesus as Lord and Savior. God wants your faith to be contagious, not closeted behind the closed doors of some private faith. Saving faith involves confessing Jesus as Lord before your fellow man (Romans 10:9-10). This does not mean that you have to become a loud street corner evangelist, but it does mean that you are to be a witness to your faith wherever and whenever God calls you to be his spokesperson.

To be full of His truth (the Bible or Word) is your starting point.

Some Spiritual Tips

#1 Recognize that truth is only found when you study the whole of God’s Word. Make the effort to hear, read, and study the whole counsel of God’s Word. Taking hold of small pieces of the Word sure helps, but when you receive the whole counsel, then you establish your whole life on solid ground. Be careful not to take just the pieces that seem to just fit you right. Be open to all that God has for you.

Acts 20:27-28

For I have not shunned to declare to you the whole counsel of God.

Psalm 119:160

The entirety of Your word is truth,...

Obviously this takes time. You cannot expect to get an understanding of all of God's Word (will) in a week, but if you make it your life time quest, then God will honor your commitment and give you what you need each step of the way.

#2 Realize that all truth is found in balance. You will read scripture that focuses on repentance for example, then come across passages that emphasize God's mercy, then judgment, and so on. All these seemingly different aspects of God's person, nature and will are held in tension or balance; much like the planets, earth, moon and sun are held in balance by gravity.

For example, Jesus did not pass sentence on, but mercifully forgave the woman caught in adultery. He was entitled under the Mosaic Law to stone her, but through His love and mercy empowered her to go her way and sin no more.

John 8:11

Jesus said to her, "Neither do I condemn you; go and sin no more."

A lot of people don't appreciate that the Old Testament should be interpreted in the light of the New Testament. The New Testament is a **better** covenant or contract that God made with mankind. Jesus is now the go between or mediator between man and God, and He stands surety for the better promises. So why continue to emphasize some of the judgmental aspects of the Old Testament where God had to deal with people without the advantage of the cleansing and empowering blood of Jesus. His blood is more powerful and deep reaching than the blood of bulls and goats!

Hebrews 8:6-8

He has obtained a more excellent ministry, inasmuch as He is also Mediator of a better covenant, which was established on better promises.

For if that first covenant had been faultless, then no place would have been sought for a second.

In short, get to know God first through the New Covenant (Testament) and the letters written to the church, then get the background and examples you need from the Old Testament to 'fill in the gaps' (1 Corinthians 10:11).

#3 Request the help of the Holy Spirit of Truth.

1 Corinthians 2:10-13

God has revealed them to us through His Spirit. For the Spirit searches all things, yes, the deep things of God. For what man knows the things of a man except the spirit of the man which is in him? Even so no one knows the things of God except the Spirit of God. Now we have received, not

the spirit of the world, but the Spirit who is from God, that we might know the things that have been freely given to us by God.

God wants you to know His will for your life and has given you His Holy Spirit to help you. On your own you can't see what God is saying, but when you ask Him in prayer He will show you. God wants you to know what He has already done, and promised in Christ. He is not holding anything back, and lets us know His will in every situation through His Word. He 'quickens' it to our hearts by the Holy Spirit, and your responsibility is to ask for insight and wisdom. Sometimes, you don't get what you need simply because you have not asked.

As you have seen in chapter one, we must personalize the prayer of revelation for ourselves. Let's look at it again.

Ephesians 1:16-19

...making mention of you in my prayers: that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give to you the spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of Him, the eyes of your understanding being enlightened; that you may know what is the hope of His calling, what are the riches of the glory of His inheritance in the saints, and what is the exceeding greatness of His power toward us who believe, according to the working of His mighty power ...

Personalize this prayer for yourself and ask God to fill **you** with His wisdom and understanding as **you** study His word. Revelation is when you 'see' things that you have not seen before. God will open your understanding to what He is really saying at any one time in your life.

The Holy Spirit will also focus on the centrality of Jesus Christ. Who Jesus is, and what He has done for us stands at the pinnacle of God's revelation to us. The Old Testament **prepares** us for Christ, the Gospels **present** Him to us, and the New Testament letters and Revelation **promote** Christ's work in us.

#4 Recognize that God uses scripture in four main ways to equip you for everything he wants you to do, and make you more like Christ.

First, He will simply teach you what you need to know; second bring reproof or discipline where you might need it. Third, God may need to correct you when you err or make a mistake. He is simply pointing out your mistakes, not judging you. Like a father helps a young son get his swing right in sports, God will correct you where what you are doing is simply incorrect. Then fourth, He will also instruct you in His ways. He will show you the how to's of living and walking uprightly before Him. Don't allow the enemy to condemn you, but allow God to convince you. Condemnation and conviction are different. Learn the difference.

Learn to recognize in which area He is concentrating at any one time. He will not always be rebuking or disciplining you, nor will He inspire you to do something without showing you how to go about fulfilling His will. He will give you the steps to follow through with practical application.

2 Timothy 3:16-17

All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness,

How to Hear From The Lord

God speaks to you primarily through His Word. In order to be sure that you are hearing His voice accurately, follow these simple steps.

Surrender or consecrate your desires to God's plan. Be at peace and drop your own agenda. Let God be God and speak what He wants to. Don't approach Him with your ideas foremost. Let go of what you are trying to make happen, and let Him communicate His ideas about your situation.

Screen everything through **scripture**. He will never 'lead' you contrary to His Word. He is honor bound to uphold His Word. That is why it is imperative that you get to know His Word so that the internal impressions you get, can be checked out against what God has shown you in His word.

Be **sensitive** to a beckoning **signal**. For example, The prophet Elijah saw a cloud on the horizon, and this showed him that what he was praying for was beginning to happen (1 Kings 18:44).

Substantiate or check out what you 'hear' with other trustworthy, mature believers gifted by God to teach and instruct you, and who have your best interests at heart. They will be able to give you an angle on things that perhaps you are not yet open to. You wage spiritual warfare and succeed when you receive the counsel of trusted godly advisors (Proverbs 11:14).

Start out only at God's timing. Your faith must be followed by corresponding actions. God always moves according to a timetable. Do not presume that just because you have heard from the Lord on a matter that you should pick up the phone and start doing stuff. Wait on His timing to step out on what you now know to do. In this way the knowledge you have gleaned becomes experiential and 'heart knowledge', and not just historical, factual, mere 'head knowledge.' Truth is always pertinent to your situation, not generic. The Word must apply to you in particular, not merely in general.

For example, Jesus said to "go into all the world" (Mark 16:15). This is generic to all believers. But specifically pertinent to you might be that He wants you to go on this or that short-term mission trip to this or that land this or that summer. Or even to go down the street and share the gospel with a particular person. The Holy Spirit is going to 'quicken' or make alive a specific portion of scripture to you and also give you direction as to how and when to apply it in your life.

How to Have a Meaningful Time with God

You may have a heart for the things of God, but simply do not have a meaningful time with the Lord on a regular basis. As you follow the simple steps outlined below, things will change and you will establish helpful **habits** that will facilitate your devotion. Remember, the highway to nowhere is paved with good intentions, so follow through is essential.

First, answer the why question: **why have a special time with God?** God created you to have fellowship with Him. He is deeply interested in you and loves to share His life with you. Both you and God benefit from a meaningful relationship. He gets the opportunity to enjoy and interact with you, and you get the opportunity to learn from Him. You are also strengthened and grow in what you are called to do. In addition, God will direct and comfort you as you enjoy the delight of fellowshiping with your maker.

Second, **deal with the time issue.** Settle it in your heart that you have the same twenty-four hours as anyone else in a day. It's all about choosing to prioritize your time with God. If you value something enough you will make time for it! Jesus was very busy, but He still made sure He had His time alone with God. To grow in your relationship with God you have to meet regularly with Him in a meaningful time of devotion.

Remember **how** you approach God is very important. It's a matter of the heart. Come before Him with thankfulness, praise and adoration in your heart. It pleases Him to have His children relate to Him according to His love for us. Be expectant, anticipating that He will speak to you through the scripture and into your heart by His Spirit. Be alert and focused. Falling asleep on God is not going to help Him or you. Be willing to obey what you learn. Otherwise why bother reading His Word.

Consider the following tips on how to have a meaningful time with God.

Select a Specific Time

The best time is when you are at your best, alert and rested. Don't try to serve God with your leftovers. Throughout the Bible and church history, the people who started their day hearing from God, were the most productive and fulfilled. As pioneer missionary Hudson Taylor said, "You don't tune up the instruments after the concert is over."

Some people make time for the Lord first thing in their day, and also last thing. Be consistent and make an appointment with God like you do with anyone else.

Start with perhaps a few minutes and build up as you learn to derive the most value out of your time. Don't watch the clock and be mechanical about your relationship with God. Approach your time with Him in faith that you are pleasing to Him, not merely 'paying your dues'. That misses the whole point. Quality, not quantity, is what you are aiming at.

Then be open to hear His voice throughout the day as you go your way. He will often bring things to light as you go about your business. Having a special time is not about shutting God out for the rest of your day. After all, He lives in you, and goes where you go.

Choose a Special Place

Abraham had a regular place to meet with God (Genesis 19:27), so did Moses. Jesus often prayed in the Garden of Gethsemane (Luke 22:39), and then withdrew into the wilderness for fellowship with His heavenly Father. Christians throughout history have recognized the value of a defined time and place to formally meet with God. Of course the beauty of The Holy Spirit living in our spirits, is that we can fellowship with Him informally all through the day, yet still set aside a special place to totally focus on God. Be comfortable, use good lighting, and be in a place where you can pray out loud without disturbing others, or they you! (Switch off cell phones, get away from the computer etc.)

Follow a Simple Plan

When you aim at nothing you are certain to hit it. Keep your plan simple. Get used to practicing the following elements in your plan.

Ready yourself. Wait quietly for a few minutes while you focus your thoughts on God. Your relationship with the Lord ought not to be casual, but properly conducted with respect for the proper protocol He expects. He wants you to come before Him prepared to listen, and with the right heart attitude.

Ecclesiastes 5:1-2

Walk prudently when you go to the house of God; and draw near to hear rather than to give the sacrifice of fools, for they do not know that they do evil.

Do not be rash with your mouth,

And let not your heart utter anything hastily before God.

For God is in heaven, and you on earth;

Therefore let your words be few.

Enter His presence with singing, thanksgiving, praise and worship on your lips (Psalm 100:1-4). This is all part of enriching your relationship with Him, and actually putting into practice what He wants.

Read your Bible. Start with a chapter a day from the Old Testament, the Psalms, Proverbs, and the New Testament. After you have established a regular discipline, build up to more as you feel impressed by the Lord to do so. Remember to keep feeding on the letters written to New Testament believers. That is where you will discover most about who you are in Christ.

Reference other related scriptures. (Deuteronomy 19:15). As you spend more time in the Word, you begin to see the connections between different scriptures. It becomes easier to properly interpret scripture when seen in the light of other scripture that speaks to the same topic. It is like seeing the same thing from different angles to get the full picture.

Reflect on what you have read. What it actually means and how it applies to you. This comes through studying passages with the help of a study Bible, and commentaries that seasoned men and women of God have provided in books, tapes and CD's. Various Bible tools like concordances, dictionaries, Bible encyclopedias are also very useful for cross-referencing. This all has to do with properly **interpreting** what you have read.

Follow the **guidelines** the Bible gives for proper interpretation. Always interpret scripture in the light of other scripture. When you read a passage, look for how it connects with other scripture you have read. As you get to know other scripture, it will cast further light on what you are now reading. The Bible does not contradict itself. It only appears to in some passages, and only when you have not yet made yourself familiar with what other relevant scripture has to say on the subject.

Look for the **context** of a passage. Where any particular scripture is found, and how it fits into what the author was intending to say, is very important. Don't take an isolated section and base all your understanding on what you think it says. The surrounding verses, chapters, the book itself, and even the whole Bible, give you clues as to what the passage means. Work from the passage outwards to the whole

Bible, and then from what you know about the whole Bible back to the passage you are studying. Always interpret obscure passages in the light of more clear and dominant passages.

Most of the Bible should be taken literally. Only where a passage is clearly shown to be symbolic and figurative, should you start looking for 'hidden' meaning.

Three Keys to Get the Most From Your Bible

#1 Observation – what the Bible is actually saying. Ask the following questions to establish the facts as they are: what, when, where, why, how and by whom and for whom? For example, take a book of the Bible and discover the following: Setting – when and where was the book written? Purpose – Why was it written? Context – what is the whole book about? Form – How or in what form was it written? (Letter, history, poetry, biography, prophecy...)

#2 Interpretation – the actual meaning of the passage as you have seen above. Here you can ask these further questions: What is the meaning of individual words? (Use your concordance and Bible dictionaries as tools here - see Chapter Seven entitled 'Resources'). What did the passage mean to its original readers? What is the main point, and sub points? If written to meet a particular need at that time, what is the original principle to consider?

#3 Application - how the passage applies to you in today's culture and world. What is it that the Lord wants you to put into practice in your daily walk? Ask these questions to discover how to put what you have read into practice: What is the equivalent situation today? Is there an example to follow, a warning, or even a promise? Does it lead to prayer and or praise? What area of your life is the passage encouraging you to change?

Then follow up with these practices:

Remember what you have read. Memorize some portion of scripture that really spoke to your heart as you read it. Build it into your heart, otherwise it could be 'stolen' from you by the enemy who tries to steer you away from what God is trying to establish. Go over it again and again, till it takes root deep down in your spirit.

Record your impressions and what you feel the Lord is saying to you. Keep a journal. It helps you remember and apply what you have learned. Remember, if you don't use it you lose it! Journaling helps you focus your thoughts in a meaningful way.

Request in prayer what you need for the day. God will show you what you need through His Word. Something will stand out to you, and that is what He wants you to pray about and obey. Be sure to base your prayers on the relevant promise that goes with what you are dealing with. For example, if you need to forgive someone, then ask God to strengthen you to release the love and forgiveness He has placed deep down in your heart by the Holy Spirit. He has promised to help you do what you need to do. He will help you do it despite the feelings of hurt and rejection.

Be Flexible

Be flexible in your plan. Allow the Holy Spirit to focus on any area that He wants to. He may want you to read more than usual, or pray more than you do. In this way your time with God is not static, but relevant. After all, you are having a meeting with God who knows you inside and out.

Avoid being mechanical and artificial. Those so called dry spells where it seems as if you are getting nowhere in your relationship with God, have to be dealt with in faith. Press on knowing that God is aware that you have an enemy in your flesh, and that Satan will try his best to get you off track and discourage you.

It usually takes at least three to six weeks of practicing your devotions to establish a meaningful time with the Lord. I remember as a new born Christian going through a thirty day new believers follow up booklet with Bible reading every day. Today I can't tell you what I learned, but I developed a habit of getting before God to allow Him to pour Himself into me. Stick it out and get past the 'six week barrier', you'll be glad you did.

Practical Wisdom

Realize too that it is not common to have some monumental 'mountain top' spiritual experiences every time you open your Bible or pray. Be consistent and committed to your time with God. Oak trees grow big and strong over time, not in a blazing moment with flashes of lightning!

Keep physically fit, and be sure to get adequate sleep and rest. God commands us **not** to work 24/7. Fatigue is an enemy to your walk with God. Watch out for emotional and physical fatigue, as it will affect your spiritual well-being.

If you miss a day, don't get into condemnation or a guilt trip, you don't please God by your works anyway. Faith that simply trusts Him is what pleases His heart.

The Workman and His Tools

2 Timothy 2:15

Be diligent to present yourself approved to God, a worker who does not need to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth.

If you are going to 'work with the Word' you need to have 'tools'. Every workman, whether he be a carpenter or electrician has tools to make things happen. With growing in your relationship with God you need to have some basic tools to help you understand and apply what you are studying in the Bible.

Get yourself a 'study Bible' where an outline with other study notes is given for each book of the Bible. God put each book in the Bible for a purpose, and there is something for everyone in each book. But it has to be 'mined' out' you can't just skim over it and get the benefit. That's where the tools come into play.

There are also Bible software programs that have different Bible versions on them, with all sorts of supplementary books that give different insights from different angles on what you are reading. For

example, Bible Geography with maps, timelines, character studies, dictionaries all can help you understand what the original writers were actually saying, and also how it all applies in our modern day.

As mentioned before, use a concordance to cross-reference other scripture on the same subject. Some shortened concordances are found at the back of some study Bibles, but I recommend that you get yourself a full length concordance and Bible dictionary from your local Christian bookseller or off the internet. (See Chapter Seven).

Chapter 3

The Letter and Spirit of the Word

The Two Trees in the Garden of Eden

God has always intended for mankind to relate to or encounter Him first hand through the tree of life. He still requires that we live by what 'proceeds' out of His mouth, speaking of His Word. He spoke, and His Word is recorded for us in the Bible. Yet today He desires to speak a 'now word' applicable to our unique circumstances. This now word or 'Rhema' as it is called in the original Greek, is energized by the Holy Spirit to our spirit man, and serves as God speaking to us right now.

Through history our adversary, the devil, has sought to corrupt and poison our relationship with God (and one another) through what we may call a 'religious spirit'.

Acts 14:2

But the unbelieving Jews stirred up the Gentiles and poisoned their minds against the brethren.

This spirit is not only hypocritical, but envious, unprincipled and opportunistic too (Matthew 23:14-15 / Acts 13:44-46 / Acts 18:11-12). It operates in people who seem outwardly righteous, but inwardly are insecure, evil, lovers of men's praise and money (John 11:45-48 / John 12:9-11 / John 12:42-43 / Luke 16:14). In Jesus time they were called 'Scribes and Pharisees,' men learned in the letter of the scripture but not the spirit. They were zealous in their religious pursuits and practice, supposedly correct, but lacking in compassion. They enjoyed public recognition, and were into 'titles' but not 'towels' of service. They were studious but 'stuck up' knowing the Word of God but not the God of the Word in a personal saving way.

Saul, before he encountered the love of God and was renamed Paul, was a Pharisee of Pharisees who legalistically interpreted and practiced the Law. His understanding of God was not pure and simple, but a poisoned ritualistic one.

Only when he repented and put his trust in Jesus instead of his own religious efforts did he begin eating from the truly sustaining 'tree of life.' Up till then, he had fed only from the 'tree of the knowledge of good and evil' and as a consequence produced only bad fruit.

Identifying Religiosity in Your Own Life

The following chart will hopefully help you identify religiosity in your life, or at least contrast the difference between a spiritual person and a religious one.

Religious person (Tree of good and evil)	Spiritual person (Tree of life)
Knows only about God	Knows Him personally
Unchanged in nature	Change of heart
Knowledge promotes pride	Knowledge promotes love

No power to change	Power to change.
Emphasizes doing	Emphasizes being
Letter of the law	Spirit of life.
Focus on mind and intellect	Focus on heart attitudes
Upholds systems of religion	Personal relationship

Make a conscious choice to examine your relationship with God to ensure that you guard against becoming religious in a dead formalistic way.

2 Corinthians 11:2-3

But I fear, lest somehow, as the serpent deceived Eve by his craftiness, so your minds may be corrupted from the simplicity that is in Christ.

When I first received Jesus, I had a vision of people entering through gates into the ‘city of salvation’ (like an ancient walled city). Immediately inside the walls were many stalls with people soliciting the newcomers to ‘sign up’ for their particular brand of Christian endeavor. The newcomers were overwhelmed by the business of it all, and drawn away from really entering in and focusing on Jesus who was much further in than the stalls. I encourage you to focus on Jesus and Jesus alone, and do not allow any endeavor to take the place of your devotion to Christ.

Colossians 2:8

Beware lest anyone cheat you through philosophy and empty deceit, according to the tradition of men, according to the basic principles of the world, and not according to Christ.

Avoid religious sounding prayers. Worship God from your heart and realize that truth is a person, not a set of concepts or creed. Do not be like the Jews who had been waiting for the promised Messiah according to the scriptures, and yet when He came He did not fit into their religious ‘box’. Today in the church world, we study the scriptures, yet often when Jesus comes to us by His Spirit, we do not recognize Him because of our religious conditioning. Seek Him and keep the personal reality of Jesus foremost in your devotion.

Chapter 4

The Ways of God Explained

Psalm 103:7

*He made known His ways to Moses,
His acts to the children of Israel.*

Introduction

When I was in high school I always wanted to know how the particular math problem I was grappling with fitted into the 'big picture'. I never had the reasons behind the operations explained to me, at least that I remember, and consequently my understanding was limited. Do you feel that way with the things that happen to you as a Christian? Where do all the dealings of God fit in? Where is all this leading?

In this chapter we examine some of the ways of God with a view to learning how to cooperate with Him in what He is trying to do in our lives in a particular season. If we do not recognize what He is trying to do at any particular time, we may be found resisting His purposes in ignorance and miss out on His ultimate blessings and purpose. God is the God of purpose, working all that He does according to a strategy and timetable. The secret is to learn what He is doing at any particular time, and not tire ourselves trying to get Him to fit into and bless what we are doing!

The Call, the Fall and the Recall!

Mankind was called to rule and reign on the earth as God's under regent, having dominion over the creation. (Genesis 1:26) However when Adam yielded to temptation, mankind fell and so the great recall to dominion status was set in motion by God to restore us back to our rightful and intended position in Him. This process has lasted at least 6000 years and will see its final outworking when Christ returns and the final 'wrap up' to this episode of human history occurs. What God is doing on the micro-scale in our individual lives fits into His grand macro-scheme of restoring mankind back to under rulership on this planet under His loving guidance and governorship (Acts 3:21). In case you are not convinced about the call to rule and reign check out the word in Matthew 16:19 / Psalm 8:6-8 / Psalm 115:16 and Romans 5:17. They all point to the fact that God has called us to rule and reign. The question becomes then, over what or whom, when and how?

Unfortunately, we see all around us the perversion of this mandate and so are largely confused if our minds are not yet renewed to God's will as revealed in His word. When God's purposes are not understood, abuse is inevitable. People try to dominate one another all the time, instead of serving one another. We are to have dominion over sin, selfish appetites and the devil, but never over one another.

Christ came amongst other things to teach us to serve rather than manipulate and dominate. It is in serving that we learn the key to ruling and reigning. All things belong to God to whom we have to give an account. There is going to be an end to all things where God will judge everything we have done according to His measurements and not ours. Once again life is not trying to get God to fit into our scheme of things but rather discovering where we fit into His scheme of things. His invitation to become like Him

in service ought to be taken seriously as it has consequences both now and forever. If we serve ourselves then the benefit is short-lived. If we serve God, the rewards are eternal.

Remember God builds from small to large. If we show ourselves faithful to serve in small things like money, then the reward is large. As a wise master teacher, God will not graduate us to the next level before we master the level we are on. He is not into statistics, rather in producing Christ likeness in His subjects.

All that happens to us fits into the framework of producing conformity to the image of Christ. Of course, we have to qualify by our love for Him. All things do not work out for those that do not love God and are therefore not actively subject to His dealings and purposes. We cannot expect difficult circumstances to work out when we are not cooperating with God according to His plans and purposes.

Romans 8:28-29

And we know that all things work together for good to those who love God, to those who are the called according to His purpose.

For whom He foreknew, He also predestined to be conformed to the image of His Son, that He might be the firstborn among many brethren.

Four Key Elements

In the process of restoring us back to a place under His rule God uses a training and preparation time that involves four key elements:

- Relationship building
- Character building through testing
- Gifting and empowerment
- Production and reproduction.

At any one point in time, God may be focusing on one or more of these aspects. Our responses to the dealings of God will either help or hinder the fulfillment of our destiny. God expects us to respond in faith to His friendly disposition towards us. It is His custom to be merciful to us (Psalm 119:132). We must also remain committed to His essential goodness if we are to avoid questioning Him when we come under pressure. His goodness leads to our repentance (Romans 2:4).

God begins with relationship building. He invites us into a deeper and deeper relationship with Him. First of all we have to accept Christ as savior and Lord. Then through continuing fellowship we grow in our experiential knowledge of Him. This takes place in regular study of the word, prayer and worship, whilst joining together with other Christians in common kingdom endeavor.

God is ever speaking to us to 'come up hither' to where He is. When in His presence we partake of His nature, and are transformed as we gaze on Him. We are thus empowered to go back 'out' and serve our fellow man in need. It is in going 'out' into the world with its needs that character must be built into us. Being properly related to God through Christ is no guarantee that we will manifest His nature at all times especially when under pressure. It is in times of testing that we have our faith refined and proved genuine. It takes both the pressure of the convicting Word and challenging circumstances to stamp His image on our hearts.

We need to discern whether we ourselves or the devil have generated a particular adverse circumstantial storm. In both these cases we are called upon to do something about it. Either repent or take authority over the enemy in the name of Jesus. If we don't, we can languish under a heavy burden. However if we are in place of proving, that is, in God's overall training program, we have to discern what it's all about and learn the lesson and pass the test. If we fight it, we could be blowing bubbles into a proverbial thunderstorm and making no progress.

Working in Us to Work Through Us

Before God can work **through** us He has to work **in** us. That is why He develops relationship through both nurturing and feeding as well as allowing us to get into situations where this relationship will be tested. In circumstances like these we may feel that God is far, but if we are to learn to stand in faith and be faithful to His purposes, we have to learn not to trust in feelings and what we can see in the natural realm. The God-kind of faith does not rely on circumstance to chart its course. It relies only on the Word of God. The Word working in our lives will bring about the necessary change that will open our capacity for God to deposit more of His ability to function according to His purposes.

Character enables us to 'contain' God's gifting for proper use. His gifts are like weapons that can either damage the enemy or us. Character will ensure that the power of God is always properly directed at the enemy. God's nature and gifting is imparted to us through relationship. (2 Peter 1:2-4 / 2 Corinthians 3:18). His gifts are given without repentance. He doesn't take them away from us the moment we slip up. However, the fact that we get to keep the gifts is no guarantee that we won't misuse them.

Take being filled with the Spirit for example. A person trusts God and is filled with the Spirit and begins to enjoy the newfound power in the gifts of the Holy Spirit. In the course of time he yields to some form of pride in the use of his gifts and hurts others in the process. Does God take the gift away? No. However pride lands the individual in trouble with his fellow members and God is presented with an opportunity to build Christ likeness into his character. If the individual responds to the dealings of God positively, submitting to the discipline, he will partake more of God's nature as he seeks God to be free him from the issue at hand. This process will equip the individual to produce good fruit that will be much sweeter having learnt the painful lesson on the way.

Zeal can often be misplaced. The zeal we have to use our gifts and talents to change others, ought first to be directed on ourselves. When we are changed first, then we can reach out and touch others and give them such as we have. In this way we **impart life** and not legalistic formula. Knowledge gained from our own experience has a greater capacity for changing others than mere intellectual assent. When God wants to impact our public ministry, He impacts our private life-or at least gives us the opportunity to put it into practice at home before we try to make it happen in public.

Our function is to develop and maintain a consistent ministry to the Lord, one another and to the lost. This has to be nurtured against opposition and difficulty, as this is a fallen world we live in. We have to gain dominion over our own flesh first, before we can seriously expect others to gain it over theirs. The principle: 'you reproduce after your own kind' is God's idea (Genesis 1). He is endeavoring to develop a Christ like character in our lives first, so that our witness consistently brings glory to Him.

Christ and Israel as Examples

At the tender age of twelve, God had already established an **enduring relationship** with His son Jesus as a caring and providing Father. He then **developed character** in Him as Jesus (in His humanity) learnt to submit to the imperfect authority of Mary and Joseph. The **empowerment** of the Holy Spirit later followed as God released Jesus into **fruitful ministry**, but not before he was tempted by the enemy in the wilderness. He then set about establishing a **relationship** with His own disciples, later developing **character** in them, **empowering** them for service and then releasing them to go into all the world to **reproduce** after their own kind.

Of course there were some bumpy moments in that process, what with the disciples' misunderstandings, doubts, betrayal and confusion at times. Jesus patience, love and commitment ensured that the purposes of God were ultimately fulfilled. All things did work out for Jesus! This can happen for us too, if we submit to His dealings and yield to the training that is needed to bring us to a place of great fruitfulness.

The invitation remains firm: be like me! But there's much water that has to flow under the bridge before we can walk in the authority we are called to. 'Between the **call** and the **commission** comes the **college** of life.'

The history of Israel as they were led out of Egypt provides us with another example of this pattern. God first reestablished a **covenant relationship** with His people teaching them to see Him as a caring provider as they marched towards the Promised Land. The manna, water from the rock, cloud by day, fire by night, all proved His love for them. The problem arose when they came under pressure to possess the land. They failed to meet the **character test** as they refused to move forward on the Word only. Instead they yielded to doubt and questioned God's intentions saying that He had brought them this far only to kill them! Far from it. God remained committed to training up His covenant people to fulfill their destiny. They were called to rule and reign over their own fleshly appetites, doubts, fears and inadequacies and were supposed to go straight into the land of promise killing giants all the way. Instead the first generation only knew His miraculous **works**, but not His **ways**!

Conclusion

Understanding of the ways of God through His Word equips us to cooperate with God in the seasons He has established for growth. Let us have our hearts set on the goodness of God as we face the challenge to serve Him in this generation.

Chapter 5

Becoming Stable Through the Word

Ephesians 4:14-15

...that we should no longer be children, tossed to and fro and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the trickery of men, in the cunning craftiness of deceitful plotting, 15 but, speaking the truth in love, may grow up in all things into Him who is the head--Christ

Before you can walk in the fullness of your calling any tendency to swing from one extreme to another in both doctrine and practice must be overcome. The individual or church that is 'tossed to and fro' in sideways movement of imbalance does not experience much forward motion.

When we examine the 'winds' of false and carnal doctrine blowing from one extreme to another, we see that any truth taken to an extreme becomes error.

For example, where the sovereignty of God is majored on to the exclusion of man's faithful response – a form of fatalism develops: 'Whatever will be, will be!' Or where the judgment and severity of God is taught to the exclusion of His kindness, an unspiritual fear of God is instilled in people who become paralyzed in their faith, not knowing whether the wrath of God is about to be poured out on them at any second or not. Balance can only come through the whole counsel of the Word.

God wants His children exposed to a positive faith-filled environment that encourages healthy spiritual growth. Sound, wholesome doctrine and practice will produce after its own kind. However many new believers grow up in churches where people are puffed up, selfish, spiritually barren, divided and insecure. Satan takes advantage of the lack of revelation knowledge in such circumstances and the people of God are tossed to and fro by winds of doctrine that seem to be good, have an appearance of value, but in the end do not 'deliver the goods'. Satan is a master of disguise. He is the 'great pretender' who:

2 Corinthians 11:14

Transforms himself into an angel of light.

He uses:

1 Corinthians 7:4

...persuasive (enticing) words...

and gets unsuspecting souls to yield to his deception. They then give heed to what Peter describes as:

2 Peter 1:16

...cunningly devised fables.

'Cunning' is a word used to describe craftiness and trickery. In the case of people who are false teachers and apostles, the word of God is skillfully misused for their own ends and not the Lord's.

Paul contrasts his ministry as a true apostle where he was not

2 Corinthians 4:2

...Walking in craftiness nor handling (adulterating) the word of God deceitfully...

Today, we need to be aware of men and women of impure motives who subtly corrupt the pure Word of God. Fables or fictitious teachings have enough scripture sprinkled in them to convince the unsuspecting of their so-called biblical foundation, yet ultimately are devoid of life giving truth. Truth must be 'rightly divided' discerned and tested.

The sure test of ministry is fruit – both personal and public.

Matthew 7:15-16

Beware of false prophets who come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly they are ravenous wolves. You will know them by their fruits.

The outward may appear innocent, but the fruit is always bad in the end because the roots are not planted in the inner graces of the Holy Spirit. Much of Christian doctrine can be learned by human effort, but there is no substitute for the fruit of the Spirit: the love, joy, peace, long-suffering, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control that is produced by those that are 'abiding in the vine'. (Galatians 5: 22-23, John 15:7.) Jesus is the vine, and we are the branches and only by abiding in Him can we produce lasting fruit. The false prophet or apostle does not abide in truth and this sooner or later comes out in their practice – the fruit of their 'ministry'. It is God's responsibility to examine and judge the hearts of men, it is ours to examine and judge the fruit.

Furthermore, we must heed the warnings of the Word of God or face being drawn away, enticed by our own lusts and even worse, demonically inspired doctrines:

1 Timothy 4:1-2

Now the Spirit expressly says that in the latter times some will depart from the faith, giving heed to deceiving spirits and doctrines of demons, speaking lies in hypocrisy...

This is referring to those that have departed from the faith, that is, Christians who at one time were solid in the faith but have now become liars! A lie is intended to convey the appearance of truth. These liars do not care because their consciences are seared or desensitized to the truth. The line between truth and error is now so close that they cross over it without any concern. Only those who remain faithful to the Lord during times of general backsliding and lukewarmness in the church will be the ones who like the sons of Zadok:

Ezekiel 44:23

...shall teach My people the difference between the holy and the unholy, and cause them to discern between the unclean and the clean.

To the carnal or flesh ruled Christian, whose senses are untrained, the difference between the holy and the unholy is not obvious. It has to be discerned! In verse twenty one of the above Ezekiel passage, the priests were not to drink wine. This was in obedience to the law recorded earlier in Leviticus 8:10-11 where Aaron and his sons were instructed in this area of priestly responsibility. The instructions were given because intoxication by definition makes the mind 'light and heady'. The priests of God could

not be given to strong drink that would give the body a feeling of well being, but in fact impair its ability to react and accurately discern reality.

The 'wine' of this world system intoxicates many undiscerning and untaught Christians. Their spiritual senses are dulled to what the Spirit of God is saying by a preoccupation with the cares of this world and what it has to offer. The doctrines they hear 'tickle their ears' – and do not penetrate the heart. They are light, fluffy, heady and full of air, much like the froth on the top of a milkshake with plenty of bubbles, sugar, and spice.

The false church is portrayed in Revelations 17:4 as the 'woman arrayed in purple and scarlet and adorned with gold, precious stones and pearls.' This imagery describes outward wealth and value. In her hand is a 'cup full of the abominations and the filthiness of her fornications' (verse 4). She is an impure fornicator who, against the will of God, unfaithfully engages in illicit relationships.

This 'church' is 'made drunk with the wine of her fornication (Revelations 17:2), their senses dulled where they no longer discern between that which is truly of God and that which is not.

Paul instructs spirit-filled believers **not** to be:

Ephesians 5:18-19

...drunk with wine in which is dissipation; but be filled with the Spirit, speaking to one another in psalms, hymns and spiritual songs singing and making melody in your heart to the Lord..

In his letter to the Colossians he instructs believers to
Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly in all...

Colossians 3:16

...wisdom, teaching and admonishing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing with grace in your hearts to the Lord.

The Word of God is the key! If the Word of God is in us, then a spirit-filled outworking will result. It will be music filled teaching and admonition. This is a dimension that many have yet to explore and enjoy. Much 'teaching' is mixed with a corrupting dose of lifeless and dry tradition and religiosity. It does not produce the goods. In Spirit-filled gatherings, the Spirit of God can and does teach through music-filled utterances where the gift of prophecy functions to bring forth the life of God in refreshing ways. The 'song of the Lord' not only encourages and inspires but also teaches! God knows that one of the best ways to communicate and remember truth is to put it to music!

In contrast to this glorious state however, many yield to the flesh in the areas of food and drink and remain bound in a state of worldly intoxication.

Proverbs 23:20-21

*Do not mix with winebibbers,
Or with gluttonous eaters of meat;
For the drunkard and the glutton will come to poverty,
And drowsiness will clothe a man with rags.*

There is both a natural and a spiritual application:

Proverbs 23:29-35

*Who has woe?
Who has sorrow?
Who has contentions?
Who has complaints?
Who has wounds without cause?
Who has redness of eyes?
Those who linger long at the wine,
Those who go in search of mixed wine.
Do not look on the wine when it is red,
When it sparkles in the cup,
When it swirls around smoothly;
At the last it bites like a serpent.
And stings like a viper.*

*Your eyes will see strange things,
And your heart will utter perverse things,
Yes, you will be like the one who lies down in the midst of the sea,
Or like one who lies at the top of the mast, saying:
'They have struck me, but I was not hurt;
They have beaten me, but I did not feel it.
When shall I awake, that I may seek another drink?'*

The intoxicating effects of what the world has to offer: status, prestige, power and influence – acts much like wine. One's ability or sensitivity to discern and hear what God is saying through His Word is affected. Strange 'revelations' will be seen. Perverse or twisted things are spoken out of the abundance of hearts not in tune with the Spirit of God through the Word. After a while, these doctrines will not satisfy and new and more outrageous 'revelations' will be sought after. Finally they 'bite' like a serpent or 'sting' like a viper. Doctrine that is a product of such indulgence is dangerous.

Paul warns Christians not be 'desensitized' like the gentile or non-covenant people, who are 'past feeling':

Ephesians 4:17-19

...no longer walk as the rest of the gentiles walk, in the futility of their mind, having their understanding darkened, being alienated from the life of God, because of the blindness of their heart; who, being past feeling, have given themselves over to lewdness, to work all uncleanness with greediness.

When sensitivity to the things of God is lost, sensuality and uncleanness develops, and Satan takes advantage of the environment of ignorance and naiveté.

Isaiah 5:13

*Therefore my people have gone into captivity
Because they have no knowledge;*

*Their honorable men are famished,
And their multitude dried up with thirst.*

Jesus taught that the word of God is made of no effect through the traditions of men (Mark 7:13). The Pharisees had come to Him asking why it was that His disciples did not live their lives according to the traditions of the elders. Jesus observed that to accept men's traditions you had to reject the commandments of God! They were mutually exclusive.

Mark 7:9

All too well you reject the commandment of God, that you may keep your tradition.

Today, we cannot respond hold to empty tradition with an attitude of, 'this is the way we have always believed in our church or denomination and we are not about to change!' Tradition invalidates the word of God and in such situations the 'blind continue to lead the blind.' Those trapped in the system remain poor, sick, feeble, and depressed.

True spiritual well being is hidden behind a veil of traditional success.

Revelation 3:17-18

Because you say, 'I am rich, have become wealthy, and have need of nothing ' – and do not know that you are wretched, miserable, poor, blind, and naked – I counsel you to buy from Me gold refined in the fire, that you may be rich; and white garments, that you may be clothed, that the shame of your nakedness may not be revealed; and anoint your eyes with eye salve, that you may see.

We must be sober minded in our assessments and guard the body from being lulled into a state of self-satisfied pride.

Paul commanded Timothy to:

2 Timothy 4:2-3

Preach the word! Be ready in season and out of season. Convince, rebuke, exhort, with all long-suffering and teaching. For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine, but according to their own desires, because they have itching ears, they will heap up for themselves teachers; and they will turn their ears away from the truth, and be turned aside to fables.

Those times, as well as our own, were 'perilous' because...

2 Timothy 3:2-5

Men will be lovers of themselves, lovers of money, boastful, proud, blasphemers, disobedient to parents, unthankful, unholy, unloving, unforgiving... lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God, having a form of Godliness but denying its power.

Their godliness is in 'form' or outward show only. They may go to church; sing hymns every Sunday, yet the power of God is totally absent as they 'deny' God through a lack of inner holiness! Their

confession may be correct – but their lifestyle blasphemes the Lord's name. For many it will be like in the times of Jeremiah:

Jeremiah 5:30-31

*An astonishing and horrible thing
Has been committed in the land;
The prophets prophesy falsely,
And the priests rule by their own power
And my people love to have it so.
But what will you do in the end?*

The astonishing thing is that these people loved deception rather than truth. Today it seems as if many prefer a religious treadmill to the spirit-led life of freedom in Christ. Leadership is the critical issue here. The body of Christ will not rise above the level of its leadership. If the leaders are bound in empty tradition, their followers will also be. Scripture gives a list of things to look for and carefully follow in leadership:

2 Timothy 3:10

...doctrine, manner of life, purpose, faith, long-suffering, love, perseverance, persecutions, afflictions...

Many Christians are impressed by only level one – the doctrine. They love to hear an entertaining (but not too challenging) word taught. The other matters like long-suffering; persecution and affliction are for another age or continent it seems. Only when we embrace the whole will of God, can we comprehend His power. His power is multiplied in and through us we gain an experiential knowledge of God in the tests and trials of real life.

2 Peter 1:2-4

Grace and peace be multiplied to you in the knowledge of God and of Jesus our Lord, as His divine power has given to us all things that pertain to life and to godliness, through the knowledge of Him who called us by His glory and virtue, by which have been given to us exceedingly great and precious promises that through these you may be partakers of the divine nature, having escaped the corruption that is in the world through lust.

Peter (who wrote this passage in the Bible), had learnt that the word was to be applied to every aspect of life, and most importantly that we escape the corrupting influence of the world. Our stability comes when we partake of God's nature. He is the stable one and the more we become like Him the more stable we become.

Chapter 6

The New Creation and The Mind

piritual stability and discernment are connected. If we do not discern things as they truly are, we can be tossed to and fro. This chapter focuses on the importance of recognizing all that God did at the new birth.

The new birth was not just a 'remodeling job', but in fact a 'heart transplant' where God took out the stony heart and put within us a new heart – something that was not there before!

Ezekiel 36:26

I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit within you; I will take the heart of stone out of your flesh and give you a heart of flesh.

The 'new creation' referred to in 2 Corinthians 5:17 is not a patched up old model, but something completely fresh and new.

2 Corinthians 5:17

Therefore if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; old things have passed away; behold, all things have become new.

The regeneration and renewing of the Holy Spirit recorded in Titus 3:5 involved a change in nature. We were 're-gened' and 'born' again. This was not some virtual reality experience but a genuine heart change.

However, as every Christian who has been born again for longer than a week knows, it takes a while for the mind to catch up and understand what really transpired in the deep recesses of the heart. Unfortunately some people never seem to catch up this side of heaven and live defeated lives far below the potential that exists for them as a child of God. They never enjoy the transformation that takes place through mind renewal where the 'outer man' becomes conformed to the inner spirit man.

Romans 12:1-2

I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that you present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God, which is your reasonable service. And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what is that good and acceptable and perfect will of God.

The believer is responsible to present his own body for sacrificial service where our obedience is not 'dead' or 'robotic' but volunteered. God is not a puppeteer manipulating us with a set of strings! No, He expects us to willingly respond to Him and creatively apply His Word to the specifics of our unique lives.

Our crooked thinking has to be 'straightened' out by the word. When we think in line with our inner man (spirit) – which the Holy Spirit indwells – we begin to grow towards spiritual maturity. When the spirit and the renewed mind work together, the 'flesh' has to line up. As a result we will 'walk in the spirit' and the deeds of the flesh will not be fulfilled.

Galatians 5:16

Walk in the Spirit, and you shall not fulfill the lusts of the flesh.

We must focus on walking in the spirit – yielding to the Holy Spirit anointing within. The flesh has to be crucified, but this only happens when we sow to the spirit first.

We must understand that the process of transformation involves both the soul and the spirit. In the human body, the soul is to the spirit what the bone is to the marrow:

Hebrews 4:13

For the word of God is living and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing even to the division of soul and spirit, and of joints and marrow...

The marrow is the substance inside a bone that is a life source for the blood, which in turn, is the life source for all flesh (Leviticus 17:11).

The soul (the mind, emotions and will of man) is like a 'sheath' to the spirit man. If the soul is not renewed or 'saved' it will 'block' the life flow of God from the spirit to the outer world. Unrenewed thought processes contrary to the Word act as 'strongholds' against the Word of God producing results.

The Tabernacle Moses built in the wilderness gives us added insight to this process. The tabernacle had an inner and outer court: which speaks of the inner and outer man. The 'Holy Place' and the 'Holy of Holies' were two partitions within the inner court: in turn contained within the outer court. This speaks of the inner man with the 'heart' of man made up of both spirit and soul: the holy of holies and holy place! The innermost Holy of Holies was the place where God resided.

The outer court represents the flesh or tangible body of a man, which houses the 'heart' or inner man. The Spirit of God resides within the spirit of the born again man, within his innermost part. That is where God speaks to us. However, because our minds (the soulish part) are often not renewed to His thoughts and ways, we do not recognize the voice of God all that clearly all the time. It is only the Word of God that is able to pierce right down into this area and bring a distinction between the unrenewed soul and the spirit. Transformation begins when the word of God gains entrance to our inner man and changes us from the inside out (Psalm 119:130).

When God communicates with man it is 'Spirit' to 'spirit' and always in line with His written word. When we say: 'The Lord spoke to me...' and it turns out not to be so, it is clear that the unrenewed mind was involved in vain imaginations – a product of the soul! The soul or mind portion of the inner man has to be 'programmed' with the word before we can accurately distinguish between the voice of the Lord and that of our own imagination.

Paul was constantly praying that born-again believers would get a revelation of what had already happened to them. He labored in prayer, time and time again for 'Christ to be formed...' in them (Galatians 4:19). Notice this time it was not for Christ to be **birthed** in them, but **formed** in them. Their thinking (their soulish realm) was to come into line with the 'mind of Christ' now resident in their spirit man through the new birth!

1 Corinthians 2:16

But we have the mind of Christ.

We may have the mind of Christ but when we yield to the flesh, we short-circuit God's wisdom and are carnally or fleshly minded.

Paul categorized the Corinthian brethren as carnal or like babes. They may have been born again into the same spiritual family of God, but were carnal, fleshly, and thus childish. Their thinking was immature and so they acted that way.

1 Corinthians 3:1

And I brethren, could not speak to you as to spiritual people, but as to carnal as to babes in Christ.

They were operating in the power and gifts of the Holy Spirit, but were unbalanced and unstable in the area of holiness. Their minds were not renewed to the connection between purity and power and as a consequence there were problems in the church that Paul had to address.

In turning again to the life of Peter we see him in the early years of his spiritual growth being spiritually minded at one moment and then fleshly or carnal the next. He accurately hears the voice of God in his spirit, then becomes 'double-minded' and yields to the unrenewed part of his thinking not yet programmed or renewed by the truth. This double-mindedness was to make him largely:

James 1:8

...unstable in all his ways.

Peter was tossed to and fro like a reed in the wind. Without knowing it, his mind was at times set on the things of the flesh, and the next moment he was back in the spirit. Peter often spoke and did things that he thought was right in his own eyes. ('Eyes' speak of our mental understanding.)

This was until he was filled with the Spirit and the Word gained increasing entrance into his soul or thinking. Through time a radical change took place as the Holy Spirit renewed Peter's way of thinking.

When the Word of God gains entrance to our inner man, it sits as a 'judge' over the thoughts, intentions and motivations of our hearts. It acts like a mirror showing us who we really are. (James 1:23-27) We remain unchanged and self-deceived if we do not alter our thinking to line up with the Word.

Chapter 7

Resources

Simple Guide for Bible Interpretation

"If the literal sense,
Makes good sense,
Seek no other sense,
Lest you end up with non-sense!"

Principles of Interpretation

How many times have you heard someone say regarding the Bible, "Everyone has their own interpretation" or "That's your interpretation, not mine." Little do they realize that such comments are in direct conflict with what the Bible says about itself.

Above all, you must understand that no prophecy of Scripture came about by the prophet's own interpretation.

2 Peter 1:20-21

...knowing this first, that no prophecy of Scripture is of any private interpretation, 21 for prophecy never came by the will of man, but holy men of God spoke as they were moved by the Holy Spirit.

What most people do not realize is that over the past 2500 years, specialists in the 'science of meanings' have developed eight basic rules of grammatical interpretation, which provide a standard set of rules for consistent interpretation of literature. They apply equally to legislative and theological language. They are the basis of all critical analysis and are used by interpretive scholars. When properly used, they insure that the reader will always derive the precise meaning intended by the original writer.

Eight Rules for Interpreting What is Actually Written

1. The Rule of Definition: Words have definite meanings which are to be taken in their literal or idiomatic force, and the grammatical setting. Meaning is not to be determined by each individual interpreter. The interpreter should conscientiously abide by the plain meaning of the words.

2. The Rule of Usage: Words and phrases have usages which are affected by cultural, traditional, national, social considerations. Authors write to a specific audience in the usual custom and vernacular of that audience. Interpreters are not to insert their own notions upon the literature, but rather to seek understanding of the usage that existed when the literature was written.

3. The Rule of Context: The meaning of a word, phrase, sentence, or paragraph must be derived from the context. Many words and phrases derive their meaning and force from the connection in which it stands. Therefore there must be a careful consideration of that which comes before and after.

4. The Rule of Historical Background: The historical background, including the manner and customs of the day enables the interpreter to understand what circumstances and events influenced the thinking of the author. The writing was for real people, in real situations, in the real world. The interpreter must pay close attention to these facts as they cast light on the understanding of the literature.

5. The Rule of Logic: Interpretation involves logical reasoning with the help of the Holy Spirit. Literature should be interpreted by a rigid application of the laws of language and grammatical analysis.

6. The Rule of Precedent: Precedent is something previously done or said that serves as a guide for future rule or example. Words and phrases which have a known usage should be interpreted in that historical and grammatical context.

7. The Rule of Unity: Documents are written as a whole. Interpretation of any of its parts, must be done with consideration to consistency with the whole.

8. The Rule of Inference: Inference is a fact reasonably implied from another fact. It is a logical consequence, a conclusion drawn from a given fact or premise, a conclusion drawn from evidence. Interpretive conclusions, regarding things not specifically stated, are allowable if they are logically consistent with the other rules of interpretation.

Six Things to Beware of in Bible Interpretation

1. Beware of... Fanciful, complex, unique, novel interpretations which were not available to the hearers or readers of the day.

2. Beware of... Eisegesis: An interpretation that expresses the interpreter's own previously formed ideas, bias, or the like, rather than the actual meaning of the text.

3. Beware of... Basing an entire doctrine or concept on one passage alone.

4. Beware of... Not interpreting a text literally, as much as possible. The only exception is when the meaning is obviously allegorical, metaphorical or figurative.

5. Beware of... Any new insight or interpretation that is not consistent with the rest of scripture.

6. Beware of ... Interpreting scripture in the light of your experiences versus interpreting your experience in the light of scripture.

One of the 'wiles' of the enemy is that he wants to lock you into what circumstances are telling you versus what the word is telling you (Ephesians 6:11).

Example 1: Getting saved. If you give your life to Jesus and get saved, you may start with a good feeling, then later something happens and you no longer 'feel' saved. You are now thinking that you need to get saved again, rededicate etc...

Example 2: Praying for the sick. If you pray for someone and they do not "get healed", you may be tempted to arrive at the conclusion that healing is not for everyone.

The solution is to put the promises and clear statements from the Word first place in your thinking, and subject your experiences and feelings to these higher realities.

2 Corinthians 5:7

For we walk by faith , not by sight.

What we experience is subject to change, whereas the Word of God is not subject to change. It is eternal.

Isaiah 40:8

*The grass withers, the flower fades,
But the word of our God stands forever.*

How to Interpret Parables

Jesus often taught in parables. A **parable** is a story from everyday life that usually teaches one main spiritual point.

We interpret them properly by picturing the story in our minds as if we lived in Jesus' day, finding the one main point, and not giving undue meaning to all the details. The difference between allegory and parable is important to understand. An allegory is a totally made-up story. Even the details of an allegory may be significant. 'Pilgrim's Progress' by Bunyan is the classic example of allegory in which even minute details refer to other things. But a parable is a story taken from everyday life. In a parable the speaker may not treat the details as important. They may be given to help the reader picture the situation more clearly.

The standard procedure for interpreting parables is to find the one main point and to view the details of the story simply as illustrations, but not as the direct teaching of the parable.

Although a few parables have multiple story elements, most parables teach only one main point. The parable of the sower (Matthew 13:3-23), is part allegory because the sower, seed, ground, birds, sun, and weeds all stand for something else. In this case, Jesus, the Word, Jesus' audience, satan, persecution, and the cares of the world.

God will Use scripture to Speak to You In Four Ways

2 Timothy 3:16-17

All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for **doctrine**, for **reproof**, for **correction**, for **instruction** in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, thoroughly equipped for every good work.

#1 To simply **show or teach** you something: doctrine or teaching.

#2 To **reprove or rebuke** you when you have knowingly done wrong or inappropriate.

#3 To **correct** something in your life that is simply wrong or out of place. No moral fault implied.

#4 To **instruct** you how to live your life correctly.

Learn to recognize how God is speaking to you in any season of time. Don't think that he will always be rebuking you for where you have gone wrong, and so on.

Tools to Help You Understand the Bible

Here are a number of useful study tools you may want to use as you grow in the Word.

- **Concordance:** Alphabetical list of words in the Bible for easy reference to applicable passage.
Eg. Strong's Exhaustive Concordance
- **Dictionaries:** Expands on both Hebrew and Greek words.
Eg. Vine's Expository Dictionary.
- **Bible Dictionaries:** Combine info like word meanings, maps, archaeology, doctrine, commentary.
Eg. The Illustrated Bible Dictionary: Tyndale
- **Bible Atlas / Maps:** Give helpful geographical meaning to certain texts. For example in Luke 2:42 Jesus and his family '**went up** to Jerusalem.' (Higher altitude.)
Eg. Oxford Bible Atlas
- **Manners & Customs:** Explain how people lived in Bible times. Used to bridge Cultural / Historical 'gaps' from our time to theirs.
Eg. F H White: Manners & Customs of Bible Lands.
- **Commentaries:** The comments on scripture that a theologian has interpreted the Bible to mean.
Eg. Matthew Henry

- **Bible Computer Software:**

For purchase:

PC Study Bible: www.biblesoft.com

Quick Verse: www.quickverse.com

Logos: www.logos.com

Free online:

www.BibleGateway.com

www.E-Sword.net

If you have never accepted Jesus as your Lord

God has made it possible for you to get into right relationship with Him.

He sent His Son Jesus into the world to live, die and rise again from the dead so that you could be forgiven of your sins, live a life that pleases Him, and joined to Him forever in heaven when you die.

God expects you to **acknowledge** your need for His forgiveness, **believe** that He raised Jesus from the dead, and be prepared to **confess** Jesus as Lord before witnesses in the world you live in.

Accept His free gift of eternal life today. Turn away from your sinful past, wholeheartedly put your trust in Him today. Pray this prayer out loud from your heart, you will be giving your life back to him, and He will love, protect and provide for you all the days of your life.

Dear God in heaven,

I accept that I need your forgiveness for my sin.

I repent and acknowledge that I cannot save myself.

I believe that you raised your only begotten son Jesus from the dead.

I ask you to come into my heart right now and be my Lord.

I confess you Jesus as the Lord (master) of my life.

I promise to serve you all my days.

Thank you for saving me. I am now your child, accepted into your family.

In Jesus name I pray, Amen.

Signed: _____ Date: _____

Friend,

Now that you have prayed this prayer, get into a good Bible believing church that focuses on Jesus and His word, read your Bible starting with the gospel of John in the New Testament, and tell someone that you have accepted Jesus as Your Lord. Pray to your new heavenly father every day, and look to God to help you in every area of your life.

God bless you.