

*Bible Studies on the  
Power of God's Word*

Volume 1

*Pathway to Truth*

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# ***Bible Studies on the Power of God's Word, Volume 1: Pathway to Truth***

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**Table of Contents**

Introduction.....1  
The Word Endures Forever.....3  
The Word is Inspired.....5  
Some Things That Scripture Does.....10  
Being Doers of the Word.....15  
The Power Behind the Word.....18  
The Divine Perspective on the Work to be Done.....22  
The Importance of Wisdom.....24  
Praying for Wisdom and Understanding.....27  
The Holy Spirit Teaches Us.....33  
The Role of Christ in Learning.....37  
The Role of Faith in Learning.....40  
Preparing to Learn.....45  
Confession and Learning.....48  
Be Renewed, to Prepare for Action.....58  
Hearing the Word.....61  
Study Prompts Growth and Maturity.....65  
Study Diligently.....69  
Conclusion.....75  
Endnotes.....77

## Introduction

**God is Evident.** Creation declares the existence of God. Rom. 1:19-20 gives us the following concerning evidence for God that requires great effort to ignore:

...since what may be known about God is plain to them, because God has made it plain to them. For since the creation of the world God's invisible qualities—His eternal power and divine nature—have been clearly seen, being understood from what has been made, so that men are without excuse.

The reality of God's existence is so undeniable that one has to exhibit crass arrogance or willful ignorance not to see it. But many have agendas and penchants that allow only for self-pleasure or self-righteousness, so that they are like those described in Rom. 1:21, of whom it is said, "...their thinking became futile and their foolish hearts were darkened". These are characterized by the "godlessness and wickedness of men who suppress the truth by their wickedness" (Rom. 1:18). These are the foolish ones who reject God.

These men disdain truth and cheerfully embrace Satan's lie...which is that they can exist without God in a world where they assume their holdings are sufficient "gods" to sustain them forever. So it is little wonder that they have no need for God's Word, which—as it applies to them—is the gospel. To such people, God's Word is literature, or fables and myths, or a collection of ancient tales and legends about fictitious characters.

But we see God...and we see Christ...and we see God's Word, and we embrace it as truth. Its truth brought us to faith in Christ so that we are saved forever, and now it teaches us to live so that we can glorify God while we are still on the earth. God is not only evident...He is real. And our whole pattern of life and our hope for the future is hinged on His being there...and here.

**The Bible.** The Bible complements what we see in nature, providing us with language that explains our existence and clarifies our purpose. Without this explanation, even though we see the evidence for God in creation, we might guess incorrectly about His reality and claim to see divinity in fabrications of our own imaginations. We might end up worshipping sun-gods, or cows, or volcanoes. God in His grace gave us a written description of Himself and His plan, so that we can know exactly how to proceed as we search for ways to get closer to the one true God.

Everything we need to know about God and what He requires is contained in the Bible. Without the written Word today, we would not know about God's ways...how we can live forever...or how we can live now.

The Bible is *true*, *all true*, and if some parts are *not true*, then *which parts*? It is true in its entirety. The Bible is inspired, and it is our source of knowledge about God; if not, it is just another book from the minds of men, having nothing credible to do with creation or eternity, and offering little more than a few topics for academic discussion.

But we accept the Bible as true, so why would we ever need to look elsewhere to find out about God? And why would we not make our understanding of the truths in the Bible the center and foundation of everything we think and do? It is our criterion for living. Its place in our lives and hearts and minds must be at the hub of our existence, because it is the source for all spiritual understanding. As Prov. 4:13 says, regarding instruction, “Guard it well, for it is your life.”

**What We Want to Know About the Bible.** In this study we want to see aspects of the Bible that relate to our daily walk with Christ in the person of His Holy Spirit. We want to know the power of the Word, and how we can live in that power every day. We will not concern ourselves with the canonization of the books in the Bible, as these receive ample treatment in other studies elsewhere. Our focus is on the content of truth in the Book we have in our hand right now, and the difference it can make in our faith and practice, as we look inside its pages to see the true story of a Creator Who happens to love us.

Here is what we will examine in this series (Volume 1):

1. The inspiration and endurance of the Word.
2. What the Word accomplishes for us
3. Application of the Word.
4. The source of the Word's power, and the effects of that power.
5. The acquisition of wisdom.
6. The role of the Holy Spirit as our teacher.
7. The important role of Christ in our learning.
8. The relationship of faith and knowledge.
9. Making preparations to learn.
10. Removal of roadblocks to learning.
11. Being renewed by learning.
12. “Listening” to the Word.
13. The role of the Word in growth.
14. The Word as the center of life.

By the time we are through with this series of studies, you will know the place and value of God's Word, and will be prepared to board the “Maturity Express”, which takes you to all points spiritual. Without the Word, your train will never leave the station; so don't stop now, unless you prefer to go nowhere.

For manageability and convenience, this series is broken into two volumes. The two taken together comprise one strong study on the value of the Scripture, and the processes that help us master it.

## **The Word Endures Forever**

**The Permanence of God's Word.** God is not a bunch of words. He is a Person. The words of the Bible are *not* God, but they are sanctified, or “made holy” by God. His Word is an *expression* of His deity, though it is not literally a divine Being. Through His Word we acquire pieces of God's character and grace in the form of spiritual knowledge. Apart from this knowledge, we will not “know” God, or be able to become like His Son.

God is eternal. And He is immutable...or forever unchanging. His Word, as an extension of Himself, shares this quality. God's truth is eternal. We see confirmation for this in many scriptures. For example, Is. 40:8 says, “The grass withers and the flowers fall, but the word of our God stands forever.” This is echoed in 1 Pet 1:25, which says, “...but the word of the Lord stands forever.” And Ps. 119:89 concludes, “Your word, O Lord, is eternal; it stands firm in the heavens.” Jesus Himself said, “Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will never pass away.”

This is real permanence, which means we can sink our teeth into it. We can rely on each word that God has spoken, and we can embrace His promises with great confidence. If the Word says it, it is true, and it will always be the same.

**Tempted by the Temps.** There are many “temps” that want to take the place of Scripture as ways for us to be sustained in life. Here are a few of them:

- Emotions. Emotional conditions are fleeting and fluctuating. They are not reliable as criteria for determining truth, or for living. Emotions are powerful and compelling, but they are NOT constant, and they will fade or re-emerge quickly, providing no stability or solid foundation on which to base our thoughts and behavior. Emotions **do not last**.
- Wealth. When people are successful and prosperous, they tend to think that they are somehow insulated against pain, misfortune, and even death, because “all the bases are covered”. But wealth offers false security, and has **no lasting value**. (cf., Prov. 23:5).
- Possessions. Having in our hands all the trappings of permanence...possessing things that reflect what others may see as valuable...might surround us with a fortification of “stuff”, but these will not last forever. “Things” begin to rot and deteriorate the day they are made or acquired. They are **temporary** (cf., Luke 12:15).
- Health. Some people believe they will live forever and grow old in great strength, never falling victim to the maladies of age. Even young people tend to believe they are impervious to serious accidents or illness. But good health comes and goes among the human race, and it is a state that is **subject to change**.
- Position. When positions of authority or influence are achieved, it is likely that a feeling of “untouchability” will evolve. But authority is only as permanent as those who will accept it from the person in charge, and will exist only as long as God permits. It **can be**

**taken away** instantly. Even with binding contracts for life, or the “divine right of kings”, there are no guarantees that positions will be sustained (cf., Dan. 4:31-32).

Contrast these ostensible “bastions” of human security with the Word of God. These are unreliable, shaky, and temporary, while the Word goes on forever, having the constancy of the God Who inspired it.

**Meet the Author.** The Word has great power, and we will look at many aspects of this power in this series. But the power of the Word is vested in the Person Who spoke it. Knowledge of the Word, as much as we properly emphasize it, has no worth or impact apart from the Person Who shares it with us. The power, life, and meaning of teachings in the Word originate and reside in the Speaker of Truth, which makes the Word useful to the degree that it acquaints us with Him.

As believers, our relationship with the Holy Spirit is our greatest point of interest, because that is where we get everything we need—to be all that God requires. What we get from the Word is not just a stronger connection with inspired language or vocabulary, but a deeper relationship with God, as the words we learn give a clear image of the God we serve. The **image** is what we want from the words, not just a string of sentences and paragraphs. The **mind** of the Author of Scripture is where we want to go, and words from the Bible can take us there. So, it is not just the words themselves that matter to us...it is the **God of Truth** that the words present.

We will study “truth” in some detail, and we will examine the relationship between the Word and the Holy Spirit, as we proceed through this series. What we want to establish at this point is that *the Word comes from God*, which gives it the greatest *power* possible. And by the same token that the Word gets its power from God, it also gets its *durability* from Him. God is eternal and unchanging, and so His Word will endure forever.

## **The Word is Inspired**

**We Know Only What God Reveals.** Deut. 29:29 sets this up for us, saying, “The secret things belong to the Lord our God, but the things revealed belong to us and to our children forever, that we may follow all the words of this law.” We know what God reveals, and nothing more...and—if we are diligent in study—nothing less.

The revelation of God is often misunderstood and misapplied, even by the most sincere believers and scholars. Why? Remember the flesh? Remember Satan? Remember the systems of knowledge advanced by the “world”? Since we all have prideful, egotistical sin natures, and plenty of deceivers all around us, it is little wonder that we *humans* would practice *humanity* in thought and practice, and misunderstand what God has revealed.

To find the truth, we must search for it, prayerfully and carefully inching forward as we plumb the depths of God’s Word, constantly looking for ways to please the Creator, Writer, and Director of truth and all things. Certainly, the truth is not always easy to grasp. Peter himself said Paul’s writings were complex and difficult to understand (2 Pet. 3:16b). Rom. 11:33a cites the depth of God’s Word, proclaiming this: “Oh, the depth of the riches of the wisdom and knowledge of God!”

In addition, God has only revealed *some* things, and from what has been given, we only understand part of it. But we can know “enough”, and it is crucial that we always learn “more”. Look back at Deut. 29:29 above. This verse tells us that what has been revealed is OURS, and we can “follow all the words of this law”. What we *need to know* has been made available, and IF WE WANT IT, we will access it and follow it in our lives.

Maturity comes from learning, and learning is expanded by maturity, which means that knowledge and faith are interactively and mutually supportive in our growth process. Understanding and growth are progressive and cumulative, so it is no surprise that we encounter confusion along the early tracks of our growth.

Jn. 20:9 makes it clear that the disciples, even though they had been with Jesus Christ Himself for several years, did not yet understand many things. In this verse, their misunderstanding of the meaning of the empty tomb is evident: “They still did not understand from Scripture that Jesus had to rise from the dead.” This is probably due to the *progressive nature of revelation*, rather than their volition or maturity, but the analogy still works: Our growth is linked with our understanding of truth.

**The Inspiration of Scripture.** We want to establish first that all Scripture is “inspired” by God, and then we will see what that means. 2 Pet. 1:20-21 states that Scripture is inspired by God, saying the following:

Above all, you must understand that no prophecy of Scripture came about by the prophet’s own interpretation. For prophecy never had its origin in the will of man, but men spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit.



The reality of inspiration is further established in 2 Tim. 3:16-17, which says this:

All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, so that the man of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work.

Right away, we see that the Word is “God-breathed”. The Word is FROM GOD, and it is the place where we can learn WHAT HE THINKS.

**God Used People to Communicate His Word.** 1 Cor. 2:12-13 describes how the actual words that Paul wrote were taught by the Holy Spirit. Here is what this passage says:

We have not received the spirit of the world but the Spirit who is from God, that we may understand what God has freely given us. This is what we speak not in words taught by human wisdom but in words taught by the Spirit, expressing spiritual truths in spiritual words.

The Spirit did not write the words Himself, and did not dictate the sentences to the writers; He *revealed* the truth, and then *supervised* the choice of words with a kind of divine throat-clearing that directed Paul and others in their writing. If Paul picked the wrong word to convey a truth, he heard a still, small “Ahem”, and Paul responded, “Amen”, to show he understood, and continued to write. Specific words *do* matter, as they are selectively approved by God, so our studies can reach the level of specific *definitions of words* that frame God's truths.

J. Hampton Keathley, III, made a statement (paraphrased here) that “revelation” is vertical communication from God to prophets and apostles. “Inspiration” is the oversight of horizontally transmitting that revelation to others. (Endnote 1) Writers of Scripture were allowed to “speak from God”, as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit. This is what we saw in 2 Pet. 1:20-21 above, which indicated that the “prophecy of Scripture” did not come from the prophet, but from God. Adding verse 19, we repeat this passage here for additional consideration and application:

And we have the word of the prophets made more certain, and you will do well to pay attention to it, as to a light shining in a dark place, until the day dawns and the morning star rises in your hearts. Above all, you must understand that no prophecy of Scripture came about by the prophet's own interpretation. For prophecy never had its origin in the will of man, but men spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit.

The “words” of the Old Testament prophets had been confirmed, and these words were now being complemented by new revelation...and transmitted under the authority of inspiration. Scripture came from the will of God (revelation), as the prophets were “carried along by the Holy Spirit” (inspiration).

Peter confirmed that Paul's words were inspired by God. We see this in 2 Pet. 3:15-16, where Peter said this:

Bear in mind that our Lord's patience means salvation, just as our dear brother Paul also wrote you with the wisdom that God gave *him*. He writes the same way in all his letters,

speaking in them of these matters. His letters contain some things that are hard to understand, which ignorant and unstable people distort, as they do **the other Scriptures**, to their own destruction. (emphasis mine)

Peter was referring to Paul's writing as "Scripture", accepting that Paul's letters were inspired by God. He concluded that those who were distorting Paul's writings were actually distorting *Scripture*. The "ignorant" refers to the *immature*, and the "unstable" to those who were double-minded, or *out of fellowship*. Such "distortion" will take place only in regard to *divine truth*, based on negative spiritual conditions in the heart.

Peter also indicated that he was an eyewitness to the ministry of Christ...His life, death, burial, and resurrection. In 2 Pet. 1:16, Peter said, "We did not follow cleverly invented stories when we told you about the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, but we were eyewitnesses of his majesty." Peter's faith had the added confirmation of his own first-hand experience with Jesus Christ. Many, of course, saw and still did not believe, but Peter was not one of them.

**The Word is Complete.** The Word is complete, as is. There is no need to add to what it says. There is only a need to understand what we have been given from what we have in our hands. Matt. 5:18 says, "I tell you the truth, until heaven and earth disappear, not the smallest letter, not the least stroke of a pen, will by any means disappear from the Law until everything is accomplished." Nothing is to be taken away...nothing is to be added...this is what we must understand about the completed canon of Scripture.

Rev. 22:18-19 tells us that no one can add anything to, or take anything away from, the book of Revelation without severe consequences. Here is what this passage says:

I warn everyone who hears the words of the prophecy of this book: If anyone adds anything to them, God will add to him the plagues described in this book. And if any takes words away from this book of prophecy, God will take away from him his share in the tree of life and in the holy city, which are described in this book.

Plagues in this life and loss of reward in the next await those who tamper with the writings in the book of Revelation. So does this apply to the rest of the Bible? You be the judge. Revelation is argued as the last book written. It is the "caboose" on the train. You can only add to the train by adding to the caboose, which means that if you add to or take away from any part of the Scripture, you are violating the rule regarding Revelation. The book is closed. We must take *extreme care* that NOTHING we hear from any source other than the Word is accepted as "God's truth".

**The Holy Spirit No Longer "Reveals", But He Does "Teach".** We are introducing the topic of the Holy-Spirit-as-teacher here, and will give it more thorough treatment later in this study. God "elucidates", for sure; He makes the true content of His Word clear to qualified believers. So, He sheds light on the inspired Word, but get this: *No new revelation* is now forthcoming. If revelation were still being given, we would have a dynamic book, rather than a static one, in the sense that it would still be growing. New revelation would become new Scripture. But the Word is not expanding, and we need not look for new things to be revealed.

Even though the Holy Spirit is installed permanently in every believer at the time of salvation, and even though one of His primary ministries within us is to “teach” us, there is *no new knowledge* given that is not already in the Word of God. For the believer who is seeking knowledge of God, and who searches for it in the Word, and who, incidentally, is in fellowship and praying for wisdom in faith, that believer will be taught by the Holy Spirit. But the teaching will derive content from the Word, and not from some inner “revelation” or “inspiration” on the part of any individual believer, his teachers, or his Christian brothers.

In 1 Cor. 2:1-16, Paul said that his message rested on the power of the Holy Spirit, rather than his own wisdom or that of others. At the same time, he indicated that the Holy Spirit had revealed things to him, and that the role of the Spirit in teaching believers is central. Unbelievers...and believers out of fellowship...will not understand the Word, because the Spirit will not have access to the hearts of these people. But when spiritual conditions are right, the Holy Spirit is ready to instruct and make clear what the Word says. As stated, we will have more to say about the role of the Holy Spirit, as teacher, later on.

**Modern-day Prophets.** The question we have already answered is this: Is the Word of God completed? The answer is yes. Given this reality, the next question follows: Is more needed? Obviously, the answer is no, with the exception that we need the spiritually-dynamic ministry of other believers and the teaching ministry of the Holy Spirit to help us understand what the Bible says. We need clarification and clear analysis of the meanings of the writings, but we don't need more writing.

So, then, what about ministers today who claim to be “prophets” or “apostles”, declaring they are in possession of special knowledge from God? I am not firm or completely clear on this issue, as some are (whose views I respect). For them, it is assumed that such prophets are categorically invalid. Maybe they are. I still can't say for sure. The only thing I can say for certain is that their only purpose would be to illustrate or confirm teachings that already exist in Scripture; *they have no authority to claim new revelation* from God.

The veracity of claimants to new knowledge may be challenged best by examining *closely* the nuances of their proclamations, since any departure from truth may be *disguised* as truth, and even sound good to the uninitiated. Exposing “false prophets” will depend on a constant comparison of what they say with what Scripture says, as the Word sheds light on any lies or deception.

The best idea in regard to modern prophets is to build a strong Scriptural base FIRST, before giving any ear to them. Any departure from the clear Word of God by a prophet must be discarded, and the “prophet”, so departing...must be soundly avoided.

Prophecy in the first century was used to bring attention and content to the Word. Since the Word is now complete, the nature of prophecy, even if it is still operating in some small, Word-focused way, will have changed, so that it is no longer a voice of “inspiration” or “revelation”. I am not a “cessationist”, as such (believing *all* “spiritual” gifts have ceased)...but I might be considered a “changist”, wherein I see the role of “prophet” so changed in purpose and

place that it is rendered almost pointless, except to serve the insatiably curious. I see such little variance between pastor-teacher and prophet today, that a comparison between the two can only *make a distinction...without a difference*. Clearly, the most reliable plan is to stay with the *completed* Word of God, and to dig deeper into that document, rather than looking for new insights from other sources.

## Some Things That Scripture Does

**The Word Has Purpose.** The Word has purpose, as we see in Is 55:10-11, which says this:

As the rain and the snow come down from heaven, and do not return to it without watering the earth and making it bud and flourish, so that it yields seed for the eater, so is my word that goes out from my mouth: It will not return to me empty, but will accomplish what I desire and achieve the purpose for which I sent it.

Rain water falls to the earth as precipitation, and then returns to the atmosphere as evaporation. But in the meantime, it performs life-sustaining tasks on earth. Similarly, as the Word is given from heaven and processes through the hearts of men, it imparts spiritual life to willing recipients, first as salvation, and then as spiritual living. And the outcome is the production of righteousness, which returns to God as glory and honor, thus accomplishing His purpose in giving us His Word.

One of the best descriptions of the source and function of the Word is found in 2 Tim. 3:16-17, in which we see the following:

All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, so that the man of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work.

This passage sees the role of the Word in specific functions facilitating our preparation to do the will of God. Here is what the Word will do for us, according to this passage, and what our response should be in regard to each of these functions:

1. **Teach.** The Word provides instruction and knowledge, which—when accompanied by faith—bring understanding and wisdom. Our role regarding this function is to *learn*.
2. **Rebuke.** The Word of God is used by the Holy Spirit to “convict” us of sin, in anticipation that we will give our transgressions to God so He can forgive us. If we hold on to our sins, “rebuke” becomes a precursor to discipline. Our response to rebuke is *acknowledging the truth* as we receive the pronouncement of our erroneous patterns.
3. **Correct.** The Word “sets us straight”, and gives us an opportunity to respond to “rebuke” by changing our minds about our sins. Our role in response to correction is *confession*.
4. **Train in righteousness.** This training from the Word involves knowing and practicing the techniques of the grace system: confession, prayer, study, and tests/trials. These increase our faith so we can walk in the Spirit and witness the production of righteousness in our lives. Our response to training is *faith*.

The purpose for these functions, as seen above, is to enable us to mature (“be thoroughly equipped”), so we will produce righteousness (“every good work”).

**Some Specific Things that Scripture Does.** Please take time to read Ps. 19:7-11, which gives some specific provisions that Scripture offers to the serious disciple. These benefits are representative of the types of things God's Word can do for us. Other functions of the Word will be given along the way throughout this study, but here are the provisions we see in Ps. 19:7-11:

1. Revives the soul.
2. Makes the simple wise.
3. Gives joy to the heart.
4. Gives light to the eyes.
5. Warns us.
6. Gives rewards for following the Word.

We see immediately that the Word strengthens us spiritually and gives us understanding and direction so that we can live with meaning.

**The Bible Criticizes Us.** Heb. 4:12 says the following:

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

Sometimes, we get it backwards, it seems. We want our thoughts and attitudes to be primary...the final judges of all things. But this verse says Scripture is primary, *judging us*, and is the *determiner* of the value and cogency of our thoughts and plans. Any time we think or plan, the *source* for direction and correction is the Bible.

**The Word is a Lamp.** The Word is a "light" that helps us see our sins coming, so we can avoid them; it enables us to identify the sins we commit, so we can confess them; and it illuminates our decision-making, so we can see our choices clearly. These are illustrated in the following:

- Pr. 6:23-24: "For these commands are a lamp, this teaching is a light, and the corrections of discipline are the way to life, keeping you from the immoral woman, from the smooth tongue of the wayward wife."
- Ps. 119:105: "Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light for my path."
- Ps. 119:130: "The unfolding of your words gives light; it gives understanding to the simple."

**The Word Helps us Avoid Sin.** As we just suggested, knowing the Word helps us avoid sin. This assistance is highlighted in the following verses:

- Ps. 119:9-11: "How can a young man keep his way pure? By living according to your word. I seek you with all my heart; do not let me stray from your commands. I have

hidden your word in my heart that I might not sin against you.” The Word helps us avoid immorality.

- Phil. 2:15-16a: “...so that you may become blameless and pure, children of God without fault in a crooked and depraved generation, in which you shine like stars in the universe as you hold on to the word of life....” When we cling to the Word, we learn to deal with sin and show the light of Christ to the world.
- Ps. 119:165: “Great peace have they who love your law, and nothing can make them stumble.” Knowledge and understanding will help us keep our spiritual balance.

The Word empowers us to resist sin. Believing the Word and practicing the techniques God has given us for accessing His power enables us to live cleaner lives. But this is the result of God’s provision, and does not come from self-effort.

And since we mentioned it, self-effort is always of the flesh and cannot please God. If we really think that self-improvement is something we can induce, then maybe we need to generate more zeal and enthusiasm for it, and increase our determination to crank out better behavior. Unfortunately, *this won't work*, because the harder we try, the more our flesh will be involved, and NOTHING good can come from the flesh, regardless of how it looks on the outside. As enticing as self-produced goodness may be to some, those of you who have been studying faithfully know very well that we *can't* do it, and that we must rely on *grace resources* to fight sin and produce righteousness. These resources come to us because, for starters, *spiritual knowledge works* in our lives.

**Knowledge Works.** Here are several passages that indicate the powerful job that knowledge can do:

- Col. 3:10: ...and have put on the new self, which is being renewed in knowledge in the image of its Creator.
- Phil. 1:9-11a: And this is my prayer: that your love may abound more and more in knowledge and depth of insight, so that you may be able to discern what is best and may be pure and blameless until the day of Christ, filled with the fruit of righteousness that comes through Jesus Christ....
- Rom. 15:14: I myself am convinced, my brothers, that you yourselves are full of goodness, complete in knowledge and competent to instruct one another.
- Is. 33:6: He will be the sure foundation for your times, a rich store of salvation and wisdom and knowledge.
- Pr. 3:13-14: “Blessed is the man who finds wisdom, the man who gains understanding, for she is more profitable than silver and yields better returns than gold.”
- Col. 1:9-12: For this reason, since the day we heard about you, we have not stopped praying for you and asking God to fill you with the knowledge of his will through all

spiritual wisdom and understanding. And we pray this in order that you may live a life worthy of the Lord and may please him in every way: bearing fruit in every good work, growing in the knowledge of God.

Any questions? God's Word is effective to prepare us, to equip us, to strengthen us, and to make us wise. But we have to *know* it! How can we ignore it, as though somehow we are going to acquire His truths by just talking about them, or wondering what they mean, without focusing pointedly on what the Word SAYS?

We interject here a footnote in regard to “knowledge”, as seen in the passages above. In these passages, “knowledge” is synonymous with “understanding”. In other places, and this is our usage in this study, knowledge refers to information that has been received in the mind, but not processed into the heart. This distinguishes it from understanding. The graduating categories of information that we have identified from the Word are these: knowledge, understanding, and wisdom. Other terms, such as insight, discernment, meditations, doctrines, teachings, instruction, thoughts, words, and so on, are also used in the mix with knowledge, understanding, and wisdom. Context and usage will determine the meanings of each of these terms, as they appear in Scripture.

**Other Functions of the Word.** Here is a short list of additional things that the Word does (and we will see even more, later):

- **Notifies us when we step away from God.** “But if I say, ‘I will not mention him [meaning God] or speak any more in his name,’ his word is in my heart like a fire, a fire shut up in my bones. I am weary of holding it in; indeed, I cannot.” (Jer. 20:9)
- **Directs our steps, because we can't direct them ourselves.** “I know, O Lord, that a man's life is not his own; it is not for man to direct his steps.” (Jer. 10:23)
- **Convicts unbelievers of the need to believe in Christ.** “I am not ashamed of the gospel, because it is the power of God for the salvation of everyone who believes: first for the Jew, then for the Gentile.” (Rom. 1:16)
- **Serves as a belt of truth,** which bind us to the Word as part of the armor with which we engage the principalities and powers of evil that want to destroy us. “Stand firm then, with the belt of truth buckled around your waist...” (Eph. 6:14a)
- **Fortifies against sin.** Here is yet another instance of the Word delivering us from sin: “It will save you also from the adulteress, from the wayward wife with her seductive words.” (Pr. 2:16)
- **Nourishes us,** first with milk, then—as we grow—with solid food. “We have much to say about this, but it is hard to explain because you are slow to learn. In fact, though by this time you ought to be teachers, you need someone to teach you the elementary truths of God's word all over again. You need milk, not solid food! Anyone who lives on milk,



being still an infant, is not acquainted with the teaching about righteousness. But solid food is for the mature....” (Heb. 5:11-14a)

**The Word is a Weapon.** The Word is a weapon, wielded by the Holy Spirit. We already have the Spirit within us, so when we add Scripture and faith, assuming fellowship through confession, we are sitting on weaponry beyond anything “nuclear”. Here are some verses citing the existence and usage of this weapon:

- Eph. 6:17—“Take the helmet of salvation and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God.” The Word of God is the weapon wielded by the Holy Spirit to fight off evil and blaze a trail of victory for us.
- Heb. 4:12—“For the word of God is living and active. Sharper than any double-edged sword, it penetrates even to dividing soul and spirit, joints and marrow; it judges the thoughts and attitudes of the heart.” In the hands of the Holy Spirit within us, the Word becomes a sharp sword, cutting to the heart of truth, and carving away layers of concealment that obscure sin within us. Truth exposes our sins, so they can be dealt with. (cf. Heb. 4:13)
- Matt. 4:4—“Jesus answered, ‘It is written: Man does not live on bread alone, but on every word that comes from the mouth of God’.” Notice that Christ answered Satan with Scripture, and not with debater’s technique. Not only do we “live” on the Word, but it is our defense against Satan’s attacks and temptations. The more of the Word that we have stored in our souls, the better equipped we will be to withstand *all* attacks...from the devil, the world, and our own sinful nature.

We will see many other functions of the Word as we proceed through these studies. Its resources are deep and powerful...endless and unstoppable.

## **Being Doers of the Word**

**Follow the Word to Build up Love for God.** One of the things we are told to do is to *love God*. When we are in fellowship, we will have love for God in our hearts. But to stay in fellowship, we must apply all the techniques we have been given to walk in the Spirit and in the truth. These include confession, prayer, study, and trust...with training. And to use these techniques, we must know them well, and believe them.

1 Jn. 5:3 says, "This is love for God: to obey his commands. And his commands are not burdensome...." When we follow God's Word and use the techniques it specifies, we will exhibit love, because the Holy Spirit will be in control.

The result of obeying the Word, then, is *fellowship*. This leads to greater love. When a proper spiritual condition exists, which can only be achieved through Biblical means, our love for God will flourish.

**Following the Word to Fight the Battles.** 1 Tim. 1:18b-19 says, "...so that by following them [prophecies] you may fight the good fight, holding on to faith and a good conscience." Here we see two main pillars at work to enable us to "fight the good fight". These are 1) faith for sustained spirituality, and 2) confession for cleanliness. These equip us for the battles, not because we ourselves actually become stronger, but because our connection with the Holy Spirit is strengthened and maintained to enable us to fight *in His power*.

**Following the Word to be Built Up.** Any of the pillars of the grace system will become part of our lives *only* through the Word of God. Acts 20:32 gives us this: "Now I commit you to God and to the word of his grace, which can build you up and give you an inheritance among all those who are sanctified." Paul was saying these things to the elders of the church at Ephesus, at a time when he was leaving them, announcing to them that they would never see his face again. This is his parting shot to them: He commits them to God and to God's Word of grace, which can build them up and "give them an inheritance", along with other believers who are "sanctified". We need to dig into this treasure chest a little more deeply.

The "word of grace" means the "message of grace", which includes the "grace techniques" that God has given us. By accepting the "message", we can adopt the techniques, and by using the techniques, we can be strengthened ("be built up") and learn how to maintain the filling of the Spirit ("receive the inheritance").

From earlier studies, you may recall that one use of the term "inherit" means to "obtain and possess", which is what happens with cleansing and control of the Spirit when we confess. (See *Sin and Mercy*, "One View of Inheriting the Kingdom", for a complete discussion on "inheriting the kingdom".) So we see it all now...study and believe the Word, in a state of cleanliness, and you will be built up for greater living and increased opportunity for service in the power of the Holy Spirit.

**Applying What you Learn.** Phil. 4:9 says, “Whatever you have learned or received or heard from me, or seen in me—put it into practice. And the God of peace will be with you.” Paul is saying that the things we learn from the Word must be applied and practiced in order for the “God of peace” to be “with” us. In *Living by God's Standards*, “Peace as Fruit of the Spirit”, we provided treatment of the concept of “peace” as an outcome of fellowship, and concluded that any time we see “peace”, we look for a connection with the control of the Holy Spirit.

Putting the Word “into practice” means to DO what it says. The Word is explicit regarding our need for cleanliness, prayer, knowledge of the Word, and a growing faith, giving specific guidelines and procedures for satisfying the requirements for these and other commands. By using these techniques, we are OBEYING and APPLYING Scripture. It is pointless to give mere mental assent to these procedures if we do not follow them.

James 1:22 confirmed the need for application of what we learn from the Word, when he said, “Do not merely listen to the word, and so deceive yourselves. Do what it says.” The steps for doing this are simple, as follows:

1. Listen to the Word (study...more on this later).
2. Believe what you hear (mix faith with truth).
3. Follow the steps given in what you have heard and believed (use the techniques you learn).

Once again, we hearken back to a previous study in *Living in God's Plan*, “Staying on the Good Track”, where we see a discussion that comments on this verse (James 1:22), and on verses 23-25. We will see a paragraph from that discussion, but first we quote verses 23-25:

Anyone who listens to the word but does not do what it says is like a man who looks at his face in a mirror and, after looking at himself, goes away and immediately forgets what he looks like. But the man who looks intently into the perfect law that gives freedom, and continues to do this, not forgetting what he has heard, but doing it—he will be blessed in what he does.

And here is the paragraph discussing James 1:22-25, taken from the *Plan* study:

The Bible is like a *mirror* that shows us our sins, so we can deal with them in the way God has prescribed (i.e., confession). But when we have not studied or have not believed the instructions of the Bible, we *forget what we look like*, and think we're okay, thus having no need to confess our sins. We say, “Best I know, I'm alright.” But when we *apply* God's Word by believing it and following it, we will see that we are *not* okay, and we will confess, and then pray, and then learn more, which we will apply more, and—by this—we will move closer to God. The Word will become part of us, and by applying it, we will walk in the Spirit and walk by faith and walk in His truth. That's “doing” the Word...and it is much more than just hearing it.

By hearing, believing and applying God's Word, we become “doers” of the Word.

**Use it or Lose It.** Teachings about learning and applying truth carry with them an interesting twist that seems to parallel natural human learning. As human learners, we forget much of what we learn because new learning overshadows what we know, and the old learning fades. Forgetting, it is said, is an “active” process.

Forgetting is certainly a part of our intellectual functioning, and is—it seems—a condition that applies to our spiritual learning as well. Knowledge, even *scriptural understanding*, can fade over time. The major difference between intellectual information and scriptural truth is that the acquisition and retention of truth has a spiritual component, requiring faith and fellowship. The converse is also true: lack of faith and carnality affect our ability to comprehend and retain truth.

Knowledge also “atrophies” through the absence of “updates” to rejuvenate former learning. This works for spiritual knowledge, the same it does for academic concepts. When we don’t refresh our learning by repeating it or making application of it in some way, the information tends to become disconnected and eventually lost.

This is why Peter saw fit to say,

I will always remind you of these things, even though you know them and are firmly established in the truth you now have. I think it is right to refresh your memory as long as I live in the tent of this body. (2 Pet. 1:12-13)

He adds to this declaration by saying, in v. 15, “And I will make every effort to see that after my departure you will always be able to remember these things.” So remembering Scripture has the same requirement for repetition and reminders that any human learning does. This means that we can never stop studying the scriptures, even if we “know them and are firmly established in the truth” (v. 12). We will progress to “meatier” doctrines as we grow in knowledge and faith, but we must also keep the “milk” fresh.

We see an illustration and enlargement of this principle in Mark 4:25-26, which says this:

“Consider carefully what you hear,” he [Jesus] continued. “With the measure you use, it will be measured to you—and even more. Whoever has will be given more; whoever does not have, even what he has will be taken from him.”

“Consider” means to focus and think about what you learn. And the amount you receive and accept is the amount you will “process” (the amount that is “measured” to you). You will increase your understanding, because the information will be cycled into your heart for application. **Then you can use it.** Furthermore, whoever is in possession of truth, because they have learned it and believed it, will receive even *more* truth. Learning increases capacity for *more* learning. On the other hand, the believer who has little understanding of the Word, and/or *does not continue to update, believe, and use what he has*, will lose it.

But there’s more. Not only does “forgetting” take place to diminish our scriptural inventory, Mark 4:15 tells us that Satan is standing by to snatch learning away from us. This is another “active” process of losing insight, knowledge, and discernment. Any spiritual slippage will

increase Satan's influence in this regard, and accelerate loss of spiritual perspective. This is a scene where the lights are going dim, and the path is becoming increasingly obscured.

In summary, if we receive additional teaching, and accept it by faith, and then put what we learn to use, we will get more. On the other hand, if we refuse to study, or reject what we learn, or do not apply the teachings within our daily lives, **WE WILL LOSE THE KNOWLEDGE WE HAVE ACQUIRED**. Fortunately, God seems to allow us to recover quickly when we return to our studies, enabling us to build rapidly on things we learned previously...but in the meantime, we are unsophisticated, uninformed, and unequipped. Return to the Word! Turn...and learn...to discern.

## **The Power Behind the Word**

**Witness the Power.** The Word is powerful...alive and effective. We see the application of this power in a number of places. The thing that must be established immediately, however, is that the Word has no power independent of the Speaker of the Word, Who is the Holy Spirit.

Sometimes, however, the Word is presented as having a power of its own. We believe that such expressions must be understood in the light of the rest of Scripture, which instructs that all power comes from God Himself...even the power of His words. An example of the power of the Word is seen in James 1:18, which says, "He chose to give us birth through the word of truth, that we might be a kind of first fruits of all he created." The Word is seen here as an agent in the process of salvation. We are born "through the Word". We see this again in 1 Pet. 1:23, which says, "For you have been born again, not of perishable seed, but of imperishable, through the living and enduring word of God."

When God speaks, the thing He commands is brought to pass. This is the result of His sovereignty and omnipotence, which enable Him to create, destroy, or change any reality or condition He chooses. We probably need to distinguish the Word, or the Bible, from God's "words". God obviously expresses many things that are not recorded in the Bible, but they are still His statements...or His words. Some things are "unspeakable", as per 2 Cor. 12:4. When God commands a thing to happen through His divine language, it occurs exactly as He has stated it. The Bible, which is also an expression of God, is that portion of all that God says that He chooses to *reveal* to us. And whether we are talking about God's "words" or His "Word", power is evident and present in *both*.

When a king speaks, His words have power. This is stated in Eccl. 8:4, which says, "Since a king's word is supreme, who can say to him, 'What are you doing?'" His word is beyond dispute or remonstrance. It is final. So it is with God's Word; it carries with it all the force of the Almighty God. But we will restate that the words themselves do not do the work or express the power *independent of God*...the work can only be done according to the power and authority of the One Who utters them.

Our topic in this series is focused on the *Word that God has spoken to us* as it is recorded in the Bible. We have already established that the Word gets its power from the Holy Spirit, Who—after He speaks truth for our benefit—stands by that truth. God is immutable, and His truth stands forever...meaning that God puts His power where His Word is. When He speaks it, divine muscle is fully committed behind it.

The result of this is that we need not distinguish between God's power and God's Word; whatever power God has, is invested in His words, and the difference is invisible to us. This means that—as far as we are concerned—the function of the Word is so closely linked with the ministry of the Holy Spirit that they are inseparable, though not synonymous. This is why we need to get close to God's truths, because when we do, we will be getting closer to God.

We must be clear: There is no “mystical” or “mysterious” quality within the “words” of the Bible. They are just language. The difference with these words is that they *disclose the power* behind them, which is the Holy Spirit, Who has the potency of *truth* in His hands. **Learning the Word infuses the power of God**, and believing the Word has the effect of believing God. When we believe the Word, the power is released.

**The Truth/Power Crossover.** We see numerous cases of the Holy Spirit’s connection with the truth that He gives. Here are several examples of this crossover between His power and His declarations:

- In 1 Cor. 2:4-5, Paul acknowledged that his message came through the power of the Holy Spirit. This passage says, “My message and my preaching were not with wise and persuasive words, but with a demonstration of the Spirit’s power, so that your faith might not rest on men’s wisdom, but on God’s power.”
- In 1 Thess. 1:5a, we see the power of the Holy Spirit in the gospel that Paul was proclaiming. This verse says, “...because our gospel came to you not simply with words, but also with power, with the Holy Spirit and with deep conviction.”
- Rom. 4:20-21 cites Abraham getting strength through God’s power, as expressed in God’s words. These verses give us this: “Yet he [Abraham] did not waver through unbelief regarding the promise of God, but was strengthened in his faith and gave glory to God, being fully persuaded that God had power to do what he had promised.”
- In 2 Pet. 1:3-4, we see God as the *source* of power, which is administered through knowledge of His Word. This passage says, “His divine power has given us everything we need for life and godliness through our knowledge of him who called us by his own glory and goodness. Through these he has given us his very great and precious promises, so that through them you may participate in the divine nature and escape the corruption in the world caused by evil desires.”
- Phil. 1:9-11, says, “And this is my prayer: that your love may abound more and more in knowledge and depth of insight, so that you may be able to discern what is best and may be pure and blameless until the day of Christ, filled with the fruit of righteousness that comes through Jesus Christ.” Paul is encouraging the Philippians to grow through fellowship (seen as “love” by “staying pure”) and study (“knowledge and depth of insight” to “discern what is best”), thus accessing the fruitful power of the Holy Spirit (“filled with the fruit of righteousness”).

**Conclusion.** We *learn the Word* to find ways to *access the power*. TRUTH IMPLANTED BECOMES POWER IMPARTED. The Word is the “sword of the Spirit” (Eph. 6:17). This “weapon” is within us, just as the Holy Spirit is within us. As we acquire the knowledge of God, this weapon becomes more formidable against all sin and failure, because divine wisdom translates into spiritual power.

*Bible Basics on the Power of God's Word: Pathway to Truth (Volume 1)*

When we know and use the techniques God has provided, including confessing our sins, praying consistently, and believing in God and His Word as we study, train, and grow, we will increasingly plug into His infinite power, which will release His love and righteousness through us. This system is staggeringly simple and numbingly beautiful. God's plan is so symmetrical and brilliant, it brings joy to us just learning about it. We can only give praise and thanksgiving for His Word, as we witness in Col. 3:16:

Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly as you teach and admonish one another with all wisdom, and as you sing psalms, hymns and spiritual songs with gratitude in your hearts to God.

In regard to God's Word, as with so many products of God's "surpassing grace" (2 Cor. 9:14), we can only say, with Paul, "Thanks be to God for his indescribable gift!" (2 Cor. 9:15)



## **The Divine Perspective on the Work to be Done**

**God Wants Fellowship with Us.** James 4:5 says this: “Or do you think Scripture says without reason that the spirit he caused to live in us envies intensely!” The Spirit is vigilant toward us, watching closely the nuances in our spirituality, always scanning for a connection with us. He does this because He wants to “fellowship” with us...commune with us, relate to us in peace and harmony, and control us, so He can produce His righteousness in our lives. He doesn't just “sort of” want us to be clean...and opened up to Him in faith...He wants it *intensely*. He *longs* for us to move closer to Him.

But God doesn't “force” Himself on us. He wants it to be our choice to follow His Word, as we live the Christian life, the same way it was our choice to believe in Him at salvation. The next verse in James 4 (verse 6a) says, “But he gives us more grace.” This means He patiently and lovingly (albeit with increasingly stringent discipline) WAITS for us to decide in His favor. Of course, we know *He knows* the outcome and has planned around all our choices, but His plan includes *allowance* for us to choose, even if we choose against Him. Always, however, He *wants* us to choose fellowship with Him.

This comfortable, intimate association that God wants with us is not surrounded by music and fireworks, as *psyche* and *soma* (mind and body) may be oblivious to the presence or loss of fellowship. We may move into fellowship and back out again without feeling a thing. But we believe what the Word says, and accept that His Word is accurate when it tells us that confession cleanses us, and that purity qualifies us for His input (filling) and output (righteousness). The control of the Spirit is linked with *faith*, *not feeling*. It occurs because we have followed the Word to bring it about, which is all the verification we need that it is happening.

Our job is to respond to God's desire to spend quality time with us by following the steps He gives us for drawing near to Him. In James 4:8-10 we see an extension of the passage we presented above. Continuing James' thoughts on fellowship, we see specific pointers on how to restore it, as follows:

Come near to God and he will come near to you. Wash your hands, you sinners, and purify your hearts, you double-minded. Grieve, mourn and wail. Change your laughter to mourning and your joy to gloom. Humble yourselves before the Lord, and he will lift you up.

Note the sincere sorrow for sins that have been committed, and the humility involved in recognizing one's own sinfulness. As we have seen so many times, honest repentance (washing our hands) gets us cleaned up and presentable for fellowship with God. This is how we “get closer” to Him. The Word is clear about this procedure, and we must follow it in order to prepare for service to Him. This is what the Spirit wants...*intensely*!

**God is the One Who Works.** Fellowship qualifies us for God's service, not because *we ourselves* become more capable, but because it opens us up to His ability to do His own work.

He lets us participate, because that is part of His “grace plan”...to produce righteousness *through* us. We are the “instruments”, by which He produces His good. 2 Tim. 2:21 says the following:

If a man cleanses himself from the latter [i.e., from “ignoble purposes”, as shown in the previous verse], he will be an instrument for noble purposes, made holy [sanctified or cleansed], useful to the Master and prepared to do any good work.

How much clearer could it be? When we are clean, God, makes us holy, equips us for good work, and uses us for His noble purposes. But notice that we are *instruments*, not *master craftsmen*. The one who cleanses us, and then uses us to do the work, is God. The “cleansing” part of this is what we see in 1 Th. 5:23-24, which says this:

May God himself, the God of peace, sanctify you through and through. May your whole spirit, soul and body be kept blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. The one who calls you is faithful and he will do it.

Our purity comes through the atoning work of Christ on the cross. As those who are already saved forever, we can be routinely cleansed by Him—through confession to the Father.

Then, because of the holiness, or sanctification, or cleansing that we receive, followed by an abiding and growing faith (cf., Rom. 4:20-21; Eph. 3:12), we will be able to share in the power and competence of God. 2 Cor. 3:4-6 confirms this, as follows:

Such confidence as this is ours through Christ before God. Not that we are competent in ourselves to claim anything for ourselves, but our competence comes from God. He has made us competent as ministers of a new covenant—not of the letter but of the Spirit; for the letter kills, but the Spirit gives life.

We must keep it simple: The issue is for us to walk by faith and in the Spirit to cause God's righteousness to be produced. You see, the same way that the soil produces plants from seeds “without our efforts”, faith in and use of the techniques God has given us will produce His fruit, a bountiful harvest of His labor, without our “works”. And what will we be doing, while all this work is being done? Resting. God works; we rest. (cf., Mark 4:24-26)

Heb. 4:9-10 solidifies the concept of “resting”, saying, “There remains, then, a Sabbath-rest for the people of God [an option for BELIEVERS ONLY]; for anyone who enters God's rest also rests from his own work, just as God did from his.” And what will prevent our rest? The answer to this question is seen in Heb. 3:17-19, as follows:

And with whom was he angry for forty years? Was it not with those who sinned, whose bodies fell in the desert? And to whom did God swear that they would never enter his rest if not to those who disobeyed? So we see that they were not able to enter, because of their unbelief.

What displeases God and keeps us out of God's rest...thus preventing our entry into that place of fellowship and the filling of the Spirit? **Sin and unbelief.** And what will get us into His rest? **Confession and faith.**

## The Importance of Wisdom

**Knowledge and Wisdom.** Herman Hesse, a German novelist in the early 20<sup>th</sup> Century, had one of his characters say, in the novel *Siddhartha*, “Knowledge can be communicated, but not wisdom.” Whatever Hesse intended, this happens to be true in regard to learning the Word of God. We can accumulate knowledge in truck-loads...but that does not mean we are acquiring wisdom. Even knowledge of the truth, if untreated or unrefined, will not be useful. To be useful, knowledge must be enriched.

“Knowledge” is found in the Bible, but it does not become “wisdom” until we *understand* it as truth by **believing it as we learn it**. When we *accept* the truths of God’s Word, they process into our hearts, from which point we can apply them and follow them. (See *Walking in the Spirit*, “The Internal Make-up of Man”.)

Wisdom is the total set of spiritual knowledge that has been *incorporated* into our hearts as understanding, which then operates from within our inner selves as divine viewpoint. Wisdom is what we seek, and what we ask for to increase strength, maturity, and productivity. Wisdom, of course, *functions by means of the Holy Spirit* to add *power to potential*, and to make His truth a *reality in practice*.

**God Gives us Wisdom Through His Word.** Job 38:36 shows the Lord asking Job this question: “Who endowed the heart with wisdom or gave understanding to the mind?” The question is rhetorical...the obvious answer is God. Understanding and wisdom come from Him. Understanding and wisdom, by the way, are used interchangeably, but noting differences between them will help us distinguish nuances to help us visualize the process of learning, from the time it is received until it is applied. The difference is one of degrees of refinement and work-readiness. We will see that wisdom is understanding that is ready to be applied.

Wisdom and understanding are important, because they are the media for knowing and applying all the techniques God has given us. We see their worth in the following words that Solomon gave to his sons:

When I was a boy in my father’s [David’s] house, still tender, and an only child of my mother [Bathsheba], he taught me and said, “Lay hold of my words with all your heart; keep my commands and you will live. Get wisdom, get understanding; do not forget my words or swerve from them. Do not forsake wisdom, and she will protect you; love her, and she will watch over you. Wisdom is supreme; therefore get wisdom. Though it cost all you have, get understanding. Esteem her, and she will exalt you; embrace her, and she will honor you. She will set a garland of grace on your head and present you with a crown of splendor.” (Pr. 4:3-9)

Pause and allow these words to sink in. The central place of wisdom cannot be denied, and the opportunity for acquiring it is unprecedented, because we are in the Church Age. We have today what David and Solomon did not have: the completed Word of God...a plenary library of spiritual knowledge and wisdom.

**Choosing Wisdom.** When we become wise, because we have chosen (wisely) to gather understanding from the Word, we recognize that *all we have is choice*. We have no inherent heavenly power apart from the power of God, and we will have that only if we *choose it* by learning about it; that means receiving, updating, believing, processing, and applying the Word. When we do this, wisdom will build up, and this accumulation of wisdom will lead to greater access to the power of the Holy Spirit, Who is the source for all fruitfulness and goodness.

**Acquiring Wisdom.** To acquire wisdom, we must first *want* it. To further elucidate this principle, we quote next a paragraph from *Maturity*, as seen in a chapter titled, “Knowledge and Wisdom”. Here is what this paragraph says:

Prov. 1:5 says, “A wise man will hear, and will increase learning. . . .” Notice that a wise man “will hear”, meaning a wise man is WILLING to hear. The choice is yours. If you want it, you will get it. “The heart of the discerning acquires knowledge; the ears of the wise seek it out” (Prov. 18:15). You will SEEK it when you WANT it. You will FIND it when you SEEK it. And to help in your search, you should always ASK for it, saying with the psalmist, “I am your servant; give me discernment that I may understand your statutes” (Ps. 119:125). Scripture is our spiritual bread and butter, our entrée, our vitamins, our Omega-3, and all else that we need to be sustained in our Christian walk. We must want it. We must learn it. It’s our life-line.

When we want it, we will go after it. We will reach for it and grab hold of it, because we value it. And God wants us to have it. Wisdom is waiting.

Col. 1:9-11a spotlights the importance of acquiring wisdom, and cites the benefits it brings to us when we get it, as follows:

For this reason, since the day we heard about you, we have not stopped praying for you and asking God to fill you with the knowledge of his will through all spiritual wisdom and understanding. And we pray this in order that you may live a life worthy of the Lord and may please him in every way: bearing fruit in every good work, growing in the knowledge of God, being strengthened with all power according to his glorious might so that you may have great endurance and patience. . . .

Wisdom gives us strength and increases fruit in our lives, because the Word of God gives us ways to maintain a stronger connection with the all-powerful Spirit of God.

A passage in Ephesians tells us to “wake up” and “rise from the dead”, which means we should “get into fellowship and stay there” (Eph. 5:8-14). In the verses that follow this passage, we see the call for us to embellish the *return to fellowship* with *increased wisdom*, which will be accompanied by the teaching and enabling ministry of the Holy Spirit. This is what we see in Eph. 5:15-18:

Be very careful, then, how you live—not as unwise but as wise, making the most of every opportunity, because the days are evil. Therefore do not be foolish, but understand what the Lord’s will is. Do not get drunk on wine, which leads to debauchery. Instead, be filled with the Spirit.

“Living in wisdom” is the opposite of “being foolish”, or living as “unwise”. In wisdom we will find the will of the Lord, and His techniques will bring us to the infusion of the power for living: the control of the Holy Spirit. Just as it is when we drink alcohol, *that which fills us controls us*, which is why we are commanded to “be filled with the Spirit”. Wisdom shows us how this is done.

When we study, and believe what we study, we will be equipped to apply wisdom and follow all the techniques we have learned in the past, including those that are in the background, such as fear of the Lord, acknowledging God, being still, waiting on the Lord, thanksgiving, and God-consciousness. (Please re-read *Getting Closer to God* and *Maturity* for a thorough review of these and other essential elements of spiritual knowledge.) To these we will add the main pillars of our Christian walk: confession of sins, prayer, learning while believing, and exercising a growing faith through study and training. When we combine ALL the techniques God has given us, and make them part of our spiritual repertoire, we will come into possession of a dynamic system of wisdom.

**Who Rejects Wisdom?** Prov. 18:2 gives us a description of the type of person who rejects God's teachings. This verse says, “A fool finds no pleasure in understanding but delights in airing his own opinions.” A person who is not seeking true wisdom is a fool, whose mind is locked away in the dungeon of his own arrogance. He does not want to see the light of day or the truth...he only cares about his own opinion. He does not search Scripture for truth, or—if he searches at all—he does so only to confirm his prefabricated views.

The person who wants wisdom must approach God's Word with humility and a passion for getting closer to God through His truth. Those who are not seeking true wisdom only want to broadcast their own notions, and you can spot them from a hundred yards...they talk more than they listen. Gifted teachers of the Word will spend much more time studying and “listening” to the Word than they do teaching...probably eight hours of study for every one hour of teaching.

The outlook for those who shun wisdom is bleak, as we see in Prov. 10:21 (NET), which says, “The teaching of the righteous feeds many, but fools die for lack of wisdom.” They will die, either spiritually, in that they will not be kept spiritually active by the control of the Spirit; or—at some point—they will die the “sin unto death”, in which case God pulls them out of life through physical death. The counter for this outcome is a return to Scripture through repentance for sins, prayers for wisdom, and focused attention on the contents of the Word...wherein the righteous feed.

## Praying for Wisdom and Understanding

**Getting Ready to Pray for Wisdom and Understanding.** Before we can pray properly or effectively, we must make sure the conditions are right. This involves several things. First of all, we **must be in fellowship**. James 5:13b says, “The prayer of a righteous man is powerful and effective.” This means a believer must be *clean and in fellowship* to pray effectively. Eph. 6:18a tells us, “Pray in the Spirit on all occasions with all kinds of prayers and requests.” This, of course, means to pray when we are in fellowship and controlled by the Spirit.

There are other scriptures that call for us to pray with sins removed and/or abiding in a condition of being filled with the Spirit. 1 Tim. 2:8 says, “Therefore, I desire the men to pray in every place, lifting up holy hands without wrath and doubting.” (Endnote 2) Notice the three conditions specified: 1) “holy hands” indicate a condition of sanctification through washing, 2) the absence of wrath shows that *wrath is absent, so love is present*, a sign that fellowship exists (the result of “holy hands”), and 3) “no doubting” makes it clear that faith is operational. When these are all true, our prayers will be heard.

Jude 1:20 admonishes, “Build yourselves up in your most holy faith and pray in the Holy Spirit.” Faith that is “holy” is faith that functions when fellowship exists, so that we can pray in communion with the Holy Spirit.

Fellowship, then, is the first condition for effective prayer. The second condition is that we **must believe** that God is listening, that He cares, that He knows best, that His will is going to be done, and that He will “work everything” for our good. In James 1:5-6, we see an invitation for us to pray for wisdom...with a caveat regarding faith...as follows:

If any of you lacks wisdom, he should ask God, who gives generously to all without finding fault, and it will be given to him. But when he asks, he must believe and not doubt, because he who doubts is like a wave of the sea, blown and tossed by the wind. That man should not think he will receive anything from the Lord; he is a double-minded man, unstable in all he does.

If faith is not working when we pray for wisdom, *we will not get what we pray for*. When we ask for anything, faith must be present. This presupposes other conditions, such as our being in fellowship, and having a sufficient set of knowledge and maturity to understand the processes and reasons for trusting in the Receiver of our prayers.

Prov. 1:27-29 adds a third condition to the requirements of fellowship and faith as a precursor to prayer, inserting the need for us to **“love God’s knowledge”**, while—incidentally—we are expressing “fear” toward God (meaning reverence, awe, and trust). Here is what this passage says:

...when calamity overtakes you like a storm, when disaster sweeps over you like a whirlwind, when distress and trouble overwhelm you. Then they will call to me but I

will not answer; they will look for me but will not find me. Since they hated knowledge and did not choose to fear the lord.

If we love God's knowledge, we will **spend time in God's Word**. But, if we will not listen to Him, He will not listen to us. This is depicted in Prov. 28:9, which says, "If anyone turns a deaf ear to the law [for us, this is refusal to study the Word], even his prayers are detestable." Zech. 7:13 is even more specific, saying, "'When I called, they did not listen; so when they called, I would not listen,' says the Lord Almighty." Listening is attending to faithful study of the Word of God, so that we can hear it, learn it, believe it, and apply it.

If we have neglected our studies, we must change that pattern, and commit to consistent intake of God's Word, as David did in Ps. 119:59: "I have considered my ways and have turned my steps to your statutes."

The conclusion is clear. If we are going to ask for discernment, we must be sure that our prayers are going to be heard; we must be certain we are "firing on all cylinders", meaning that we are in fellowship, believing God and His Word, and "loving God's knowledge".

**Asking for Wisdom.** Before we are through, we will see many examples of prayers for wisdom and understanding. One example is seen in Ps. 119:25-26, which says this:

I recounted my ways [confessed] and you answered me; teach me your decrees. Let me understand the teaching of your precepts; then I will meditate on your wonders.

This prayer is echoed by another example in the same chapter, verses 124-125, which we see here: "Deal with your servant according to your love and teach me your decrees. I am your servant; give discernment that I may understand your statutes." Then once again, in verse 18, we see this: "Open my eyes that I may see wonderful things in your law." Prayer opens up truth for us. This is why we must always begin study with confession and prayer, whether it is personal, small-group, large-group, or some other setting..

Prov. 2:1-11 instructs us to pray for understanding, and shows the difference this will make in our studies of the Word. This passage is somewhat lengthy, but it is worth the time it takes to peruse it. Here is what it says:

My son, if you accept my words and store up my commands within you, turning your ear to wisdom and applying your heart to understanding, and if you call out for insight and cry aloud for understanding, and if you look for it as for silver and search for it as for hidden treasure, then you will understand the fear of the LORD and find the knowledge of God. For the LORD gives wisdom, and from his mouth come knowledge and understanding. He holds victory in store for the upright, he is a shield to those whose walk is blameless, for he guards the course of the just and protects the way of his faithful ones. Then you will understand what is right and just and fair—every good path. For wisdom will enter your heart, and knowledge will be pleasant to your soul. Discretion will protect you, and understanding will guard you.

What a beautiful expression regarding the privilege of “calling out” for understanding, and the benefits we derive from our time in His Word. This passage says that those who stay in fellowship, pray for wisdom, search for understanding as for hidden treasure, and accept the teachings of the Word, will see *instruction* do the following:

1. Infuse wisdom, knowledge, insight, and understanding (for those who seek it).
2. Give victory for the upright (those in fellowship).
3. Provide a shield for those whose walk is blameless (those walking in the Spirit).
4. Guard the course of the just (those who have confessed and been forgiven ).
5. Protect the pathway of the “faithful ones” (those who study and trust).
6. Offer further protection through discretion (for those who apply truth).
7. Guard by means of understanding (for those who believe truth).

We must not neglect this important step in our preparation to learn: We must *ask for wisdom*. This is what Solomon did, as recorded in 2 Chron. 1:10-12, which illustrates *how to ask* for wisdom, and shows *what can happen* when we do, as follows:

“Give me wisdom and knowledge, that I may lead this people, for who is able to govern this great people of yours?” God said to Solomon, “Since this is your heart’s desire and you have not asked for wealth, riches or honor, nor for the death of your enemies, and since you have not asked for a long life but for wisdom and knowledge to govern my people over whom I have made you king, therefore wisdom and knowledge will be given you. And I will also give you wealth, riches and honor, such as no king who was before you ever had and none after you will have.”

Solomon’s humble spirit and honest prayer for wisdom generated great results. This is a good model for our approach to praying for wisdom. We come to Almighty God in search of answers, because 1) we don’t have them, and 2) we know He offers them in His Word. Understanding of the answers in His Word will come then, if we are prepared to pray for it...in faith.

**Other Examples of Praying for Wisdom.** We want to provide some classic instances of David, a spiritual warrior, praying for knowledge and understanding. Scriptures reflecting his search for understanding follow here:

- Ps. 119:33-34—“Teach me, O Lord, to follow your decrees; then I will keep them to the end. Give me understanding, and I will keep your law and obey it with all my heart.” When we pray for understanding while we are studying under the guiding instruction of the Holy Spirit, we should also express a commitment to apply what we learn.
- Ps. 25:4-5—“Show me your ways, O Lord, teach me your paths; guide me in your truth and teach me, for you are God my Savior, and my hope is in you all day long.” A



prayer for knowledge from the Word does not come out of nowhere...or else it will go nowhere. Our prayers will be effective only if we are in a state of *trusting Him* “all day long”.

- Ps. 27:11—“Teach me your way, O Lord; lead me in a straight path because of my oppressors.” The oppressors are not just attackers among our human counterparts; they include demonic beings who watch for every opportunity to distort or remove the truth we learn. Through prayer we fortify ourselves against such foes.
- Ps. 119:169—“May my cry come before you, O Lord; give me understanding according to your word.” When we receive instruction from the Lord, it is because the necessary conditions have been met, and the required techniques have been followed.
- Ps. 86:11a—“Teach me your way, O Lord, and I will walk in your truth....” When we are taught by the Holy Spirit, we will be equipped to live our lives by God’s standards through His provisions and procedures.
- Ps. 43:3—“Send forth your light and your truth, let them guide me; let them bring me to your holy mountain, to the place where you dwell.” For us, the place of God’s dwelling is within us, and to “go to His Most Holy Place”, we must apply the formula He gives us for getting nearer to Him.

We have seen here that, to get the effects we hope for when we pray for understanding, we must 1) pray in faith and fellowship, 2) believe the Word as we learn it, and 3) follow the instructions embedded in the knowledge we gain.

**Praying for the Wisdom of Others.** Sometimes, we want other believers who are especially on our minds or in our hearts to receive wisdom from God to strengthen them in their spiritual walks. There are some things we need to know about doing this, so that we will be aware of our limitations, as well as our opportunities.

A good example for the content of a prayer for others is found in Eph. 1:17-19 (NET), where Paul lets the Ephesians know what He is praying for concerning their learning. Here is what he said in this passage:

I pray that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give you spiritual wisdom and revelation in your growing knowledge of him—since the eyes of your heart have been enlightened—so that you may know what is the hope of his calling, what is the wealth of his glorious inheritance in the saints, and what is the incomparable greatness of his power toward us who believe, as displayed in the exercise of his immense strength.

Paul is praying that they would be “given spiritual knowledge and wisdom”, creating the contingency for them that they can “acquire wisdom”. He wants them to receive God’s knowledge, assuming that they are in fellowship and are walking by faith. Otherwise, they will not be qualified for teaching, so what is *offered* may not be *acquired*.

Notice that Paul does NOT pray that God would operate inside of them to *change their minds* about truth, or about God, or about the techniques for living, or about any other spiritual quality or condition. He simply asks God to **bring information to them**. This is all we can do, when it comes to praying for the “wisdom” of other believers, because *we cannot make their choices for them or do the “seeking” for them, and neither will God*. They must *seek* it themselves to be prepared for it. All God will do is make it available to them.

The idea that God does not tamper with our choices is well-covered in *Living in God's Plan*, especially in the chapter, “God Foreknows, Plans, and Controls Everything...Almost”. In this series it became clear that God allows us to make choices, and that His plan, devised in eternity past, operates around those choices to accomplish His will...without mechanistically directing what choices we make. This is why we cannot expect that our prayers for others will be fulfilled if it is asking for God to, for example, “make them receptive” to His truth. God does not flip their internal switches for them. It's up to them to become receptive to the truth. When they want it, and are prepared to receive it, God will get the teaching to them. That's all we can ask for. (NOTE: In regard to God “hardening the heart”, and so on, see the *Plan* study, cited above.)

One thing needs to be made clear about “freedom of choice”, and its frequently-referenced twin, “free will”. The point has been made in some circles that we don't have “free will”, because there are limitations as to what we can choose to do. For example, a person in prison can't *choose* to walk out and “free himself”. So he is not free to choose...the range of alternatives is limited. But it seems obvious that he still has CHOICE, especially as to what he thinks and believes.

Is there anyone who really thinks that, when we use the term “choice”, we mean that our choices can operate outside of natural and *a priori* parameters within our environment? It is obvious that we can't fly or live under water. But we can always “make choices”, within the fixed limits of the reality in which we are living. God simply DOES NOT MAKE OUR DECISIONS FOR US. When He made us, He decided to limit Himself, in that *He lets us choose*. If this is not true, then we are automatons, and cannot be held responsible for our choices. Period. He may make us *wish* we had chosen better, but we still...and always...*make our own choices*.

We should notice one more thing about Paul's prayer in Ephesians (Eph. 1:17-19, seen above). He suggested the types of things that could happen if the Ephesians would prepare and open themselves to God's wisdom. Here are some possible benefits that Paul predicted:

1. They will **know God** better.
2. Their hearts will **be enlightened**.
3. They will **know the hope of God's calling**...our salvation.
4. They will **understand their value** as God's inheritance.
5. They will **know God's power**.

6. They will see “**mighty strength**”, in the expression of God’s power.

**Conclusion.** We should be motivated, as a result of this study, to pray for wisdom and understanding. If we trust Him when we pray for knowledge, we can be sure that we will get it, as He has promised. But we must be reminded that all the techniques for spirituality must be met for us to be instructed by the Holy Spirit, so we must take care of *first things first*. Truth will be declared...when we are prepared. And we will build from that point, fulfilling Prov. 18:15, which says, “The heart of the discerning acquires knowledge; the ears of the wise seek it out.”

## **The Holy Spirit Teaches Us**

**The Holy Spirit is the Spirit of Truth and the Teacher of Truth.** In Jn. 16:12-13, Jesus told his disciples the Holy Spirit would be coming as a guide to truth: "I have much more to say to you, more than you can now bear. But when he, the Spirit of truth, comes, he will guide you into all truth." Here, the Spirit is called the "Spirit of truth", Who will guide us into truth...or instruct us in truth.

Jn. 15:26 confirms this role of the Holy Spirit, saying, "When the Counselor comes, whom I will send to you from the Father, the Spirit of truth who goes out from the Father, he will testify about me." The Holy Spirit is again referred to as the Spirit of truth, Who will teach. God Himself is the "God of truth", as we see in Is. 65:16.

So there is no question about the source of truth, and we are happy to see that this truth has a Teacher, prepared to deliver lessons to willing believers. 1 Jn. 5:6b gives us this: "And it is the Spirit who testifies, because the Spirit is the truth." The Spirit IS the truth...and testifies *about* the truth. The word "testifies" means "communicates". The Holy Spirit first communicated the truth to prophets and apostles, who recorded what they learned. This is how the Bible was developed. Now the Spirit imparts truth to us through *their* words, and through His filling, whereby He responds to our invitation for Him to make truth clear to us.

**The Holy Spirit as Our Instructor.** The Holy Spirit is our primary source of understanding. And certainly we have established the prerequisite for receiving His teaching ministry, which is our being in fellowship. When this is satisfied, and we are in a posture of faith toward Him and His Word, we will be in the seat of learning, and can receive His tutelage.

The role of the Holy Spirit as Teacher is essential, because there are always things about God's revelation that are mysterious and sometimes hard to grasp. The difficulty of many passages leaves the church at-large open to division. But get this: The hurdle of *interpreting Scripture correctly* is not the biggest reason for all the differences among churches. Some would say that variations in viewpoint occur as a natural outcome for differing styles of study, or upbringing, or philosophy about what the Word is and stands for, etc. This may be true to some degree.

But here's the rub: The great disparity and disagreement among "scholars" and "ministers" of Scripture is **mostly** due to their varying levels of spiritual connection with the Teacher. The difference has to rest with human teachers and learners, not with God...His truth is always the same, and it will be the same for everyone. The reason we don't all agree is that our humanity crosses over into our spirituality, leaving us with uneven levels of true insight and discernment.

To get the truth, we must prepare ourselves to receive instruction, the same as we must prepare ourselves to pray. This means that we must continually use all the techniques we have studied...the same ones spotlighted in the last chapter on "praying for wisdom". When our spiritual condition is right, we will be prepared to learn, and the Holy Spirit will be teaching us through the words of the Scripture.

The following sequence for learning seems to be one that is appropriate: 1) praying “in the Spirit” for wisdom, 2) studying by reading, listening to teachers, watching illustrations, etc., 3) prayerfully opening our hearts for clarification from the Holy Spirit as we contemplate what we have received, and 4) believing the truths in our new learning, so that it will process into our spirits. This sequence does not form a “checklist”; it is just the most likely pattern for a spiritual teaching/learning event.

There is no reason to assume that we can learn the truth apart from the teaching ministry of the Holy Spirit. For us to attempt a mastery of wisdom without His instruction is futile. We will simply wander off into tall weeds, and stay disoriented and confused. On the other hand, if the Spirit is engaged as our instructor, even though He will not “reveal” truth to us, He will certainly “clarify” it. Our part is to be open to truth (meaning that we are prepared to receive it)...as we search for it in His Word.

There are many passages that describe the teaching ministry of the Holy Spirit. Here are a few of them:

- 1 Cor. 2:13—“We have not received the spirit of the world but the Spirit who is from God, that we may understand what God has freely given us.” He not only revealed the truth to the writers of Scripture; he also teaches believers, so they can understand what has been written.
- Jn. 14:25-26—“All this I have spoken while still with you. But the Counselor, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, will teach you all things and will remind you of everything I have said to you.” This refers to teaching, as well as revelation. This is what the promised Spirit has been sent to do.
- 1 Cor. 2:14—“The man without the Spirit does not accept the things that come from the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him, and he cannot understand them, because they are spiritually discerned.” The “man without the Spirit” obviously characterizes unbelievers, but believers can be without the *ministry* of the Spirit, if they are out of fellowship. This verse was addressed to believers in Corinth. Some of them were “carnal”, meaning they did not have the filling and teaching ministry of the Spirit, so they “could not understand” the things that come *from the Spirit*, any more than unbelievers could. (cf., 1 Cor. 2:15-3:3) We must be plugged in to the Holy Spirit, or be in fellowship, to receive His teaching and learn God’s truths.

**The Content of the Holy Spirit’s Instruction.** Jn. 16:8-11 tells us about three areas of instruction that will be at the heart of the Holy Spirit’s curriculum. We will describe these after the following quote from the passage that introduces them:

When he [the Holy Spirit] comes, he will convict the world of guilt [the NIV alternative: he will expose the guilt of the world] in regard to sin and righteousness and judgment: in regard to sin, because men do not believe in me; in regard to righteousness, because I

am going to the Father, where you can see me no longer; and in regard to judgment, because the prince of this world now stands condemned.

The three primary areas of instruction provided by the Holy Spirit, and thus the things He most wants us to focus on, are these: 1) sin, because men do not believe in Christ, 2) righteousness, because Jesus is going to His Father (we'll explain), and 3) judgment, because Satan has been condemned (also to be explained). Obviously, these need some elaboration. Here is what these three areas seem to encompass, with distinctions noted between unbelievers and believers:

1. **Sin.** This area of testimony or teaching is given by the Holy Spirit to unbelievers, because they do not believe in Christ; and—in a different form—to believers, because they tend to walk in carnality and faith in the flesh, rather than in spirituality and faith in God and His Word.
  - a. Regarding unbelievers: The Holy Spirit confronts mankind with the truth of God's Word, which extols the divinity of God and the fallen humanity of mankind. Man has failed, and keeps on failing. God offers rescue for fallen man by grace, through faith, and the Holy Spirit shows that man's sin will not prevent his salvation; only unbelief in God by rejecting the person and work of His Son will do that. The gospel message is the medium of this "conviction" of sin.
  - b. Regarding believers: The Spirit uses His Word to illuminate sins on the part of each believer, so he can see them and confess them. This allows his sins to be forgiven, thus maintaining harmony between the believer and the Holy Spirit. The Spirit also wants to teach believers how to access His power daily through sustained faith, so sin can be dealt with.
2. **Righteousness.** Christ was on earth during His First Advent, and was present bodily to teach and guide His followers. Since He was "leaving" for heaven soon, He told His disciples that the Holy Spirit would be the new sheriff to administer "justice" and promote "righteousness", with applications that differ for unbelievers and believers.
  - a. Regarding unbelievers: The Holy Spirit wants those who have not accepted Christ as Savior to see that nothing they can ever do will merit a relationship with God. They must trust in Christ so they can be stamped forever with the certificate of His righteousness, thus making them acceptable for adoption into the family of God.
  - b. Regarding believers: Believers already have the righteousness of Jesus Christ credited to them *positionally*. But sin in their lives sullies their standing with God *in time*, so the Spirit wants to teach believers how to have their sins removed, thus cleansing them from all unrighteousness. When this is done, they can produce the righteousness of Christ through their daily behaviors and attitudes by living in the Spirit's power.
3. **Judgment.** Since this judgment is related to Satan, who is still loose, even though he is already condemned, it has reference to his future and final demise, along with all the

angels who fell with him. This judgment will also catch unbelieving humans in its sweep, and they face the same condemnation as Satan. Believers also have an interest in this topic, as we will see below.

- a. Regarding unbelievers: The Holy Spirit wants to use the gospel to communicate to unbelievers that they are all condemned, along with Satan and his crew. Their hope for avoiding this outcome can only be found in a change of mind about Christ, moving them from a state of unbelief...to one of faith.
- b. Regarding believers: Believers are reassured by knowing that all opposition toward truth and righteousness will ultimately be overthrown. Satan will be defeated fully and finally, and sent to a lake of fire, while those who have believed in Christ will spend eternity with God. This area of spiritual instruction also branches into lessons on confronting the advancement of the evil that Satan is promulgating on the world, and addresses ways for believers to deal with their sinful natures, as these natures tend to serve as his colleagues. The judgment that a believer is most interested in, as a practical matter, is “self-judgment”, or confession, which prevents God’s discipline and engages the full panoply of His great resources.

It is clear that the primary focus of the teaching of the Word and the Holy Spirit has to do with **sin**. The plan of God concerning mankind revolves around the presence of sin, from the rebellion of Satan, to the fall of man, to the sacrifice of Christ on the cross, to the problem of sin today, to the final judgment at the Great White Throne of God. Sin is the reason for man’s lost *relationship* with God (retained by those who do not believe), and it is the biggest obstacle to *fellowship* with God (for believers who do not confess).

The question arises: If the teaching of the Holy Spirit, and thus the Word of God, places so much emphasis on the way God has dealt with sin and the ways he has taught us to counter its impact, why does the confession of sins not get better coverage in the messages that pastors give to believers? It is virtually absent in most churches. Until this is corrected, churches may draw the crowds, but *they will not have the power of the Holy Spirit’s teaching*, and they will be WEAK, all the gloss and glitz notwithstanding!

Satan’s biggest lie today, proclaimed in many churches over and over, is that we have victory over sin in our *daily lives*, just because we are believers. Believing this travesty will prevent us from pursuing God’s techniques for processing and dealing with sin...our sin! When we think Satan is on the ropes in this current age, and that we have resources within our “saved selves” to combat him and his armies and all the evil that resides within us and around us, we are setting ourselves up as helpless lambs for the prowling lion Satan. Why are pastors leaving flocks of believers in this highly-vulnerable position? We must start asking questions...and looking for answers.

## **The Role of Christ in Learning**

**Jesus' Connection with the Truth.** We know that Jesus Christ is the center and source for all truth, and we must not neglect specific references that connect Him with the content of, and process for, our learning. His own life and ministry were inextricably tied with Scripture, as we see in Jn. 19:28, the verse preceding the report of His death. This verse says, "Later, knowing that all was now completed, and so that the Scripture would be fulfilled, Jesus said, 'I am thirsty.'" Then in verse 30, it ended with, "It is finished." Prophecy was fulfilled. This pattern of fulfillment of Scripture is seen again in verse 36, where Jesus' legs were not broken...an outcome that had been prophesied. This verse says, "These things happened so that the scripture would be fulfilled: 'Not one of his bones will be broken...'"

Christ knew Scripture *as God*, because it is His truth...and *as a man*, because he had studied it constantly. But His connection with truth goes even deeper than that. In Jn. 14:6a, Jesus said, "I am the way and the truth and the life." The implications of this passage are clear, in light of all the studies we have done. The "way" has a connection with salvation, and with God-directed living after salvation. The "truth" is related to the gospel, but also to instruction given by the Holy Spirit to believers. And "life" has to do with eternal life given at salvation, and the energizing life of the Spirit of Christ, Who enables believers to imitate Him as they follow the specifications of His Word.

When we accept Christ as Savior, and follow-up with study and living in His power as believers, we will fulfill our purpose, which is to glorify God. We will also fulfill Titus 2:13b-14, which says this:

...the glorious appearing of our great God and Savior, Jesus Christ, who gave himself for us to redeem us from all wickedness and to purify for himself a people that are his very own, eager to do what is good.

We see here two aspects in the ministry of Christ: The first is to "redeem us"; the other is to "purify for himself a people...eager to do what is good". "Being good" by being redeemed is one thing, which is what happens at salvation when we receive His righteousness. But after salvation "doing what is good" is another thing, having to do with our being "purified". We can see readily that our being purified, which creates "good" attitudes and behavior, is the result of cleansing, which takes place along the way through confession.

When we have been purified, then Jesus will be "with us in truth and in love" (2 Jn. 1:3). Once again, we see markers: The phrase "with us in truth" is the ministry of the Spirit of Christ as our tutor in the study of His Word...and "with us in love" denotes fellowship. This brings the life of Christ to us, through the truth of His Word and the power of His Spirit, right into the minute-by-minute grind of our daily lives. The truth that Christ *is* to us, and the truth that He *brings* to us, gives us access to the infinite resources of a loving Father.

Eph. 4:21-22a says, "Surely you heard of him and were taught in him in accordance with the truth that is in Jesus." When we are in fellowship with Him, and are taught the truths that come



from Him, we are burying roots in fertile soil that will bring great fruit. Col. 2:6-7 says it this way:

So then, just as you received Christ Jesus as Lord, continue to live in him, rooted and built up in him, strengthened in the faith as you were taught, and overflowing with thankfulness.

After we are saved, we are to “continue living in Him”, by being rooted, built up, and strengthened...in other words, by being taught. And the more we learn, the more we see Jesus and understand the ways of His Father, and experience the power of His Spirit. And the more gratitude we feel for the abundant grace of God that flows toward us through the work and ongoing ministry of Jesus Christ. John said it well: “Grace and truth came through Jesus Christ” (Jn 1:17).

**Verses on Knowledge as it Relates to Jesus Christ.** What follows is a set of verses that were cited in *Maturity*, in a chapter titled, “Knowledge and Wisdom”. These deal with Jesus and His truth. Here are the verses presented there, along with comments that were made about them:

- Christ is the source of grace and truth. “For the law was given through Moses; grace and truth came through Jesus Christ” (John 1:17).
- We are to grow in this grace and truth. “But grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ” (2 Pet. 3:18).
- Grace and peace will be increased if we acquire knowledge about God and Christ, and we will be fortified against sin, as we see in the following:

Grace and peace be yours in abundance through the knowledge of God and of Jesus our Lord. His divine power has given us everything we need for life and godliness through our knowledge of him who called us by his own glory and goodness. Through these he has given us his very great and precious promises, so that through them you may participate in the divine nature and escape the corruption in the world caused by evil desires (2 Pet. 1:2-4).

- Paul wanted the Colossians to have all the knowledge that is resident in Christ. “My purpose is that they may be encouraged in heart and united in love, so that they may have the full riches of complete understanding, in order that they may know the mystery of God, namely, Christ, in whom are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge” (Col. 2:2-3).
- The truth that Christ provides lodges inside of us and moves us toward wisdom. “Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly as you teach and admonish one another with all wisdom...” (Col. 3:16).
- Christ becomes “wisdom” for us. “It is because of him [God] that you are in Christ Jesus, who has become for us wisdom from God...” (1 Cor. 1:30).

- God shines the light of knowledge about Jesus into our hearts, and we can see this light within us as the face of Jesus. “God who said, ‘Let the light shine out of darkness’ made his light shine in our hearts to give us the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Christ” (2 Cor. 4:6).

**A One-man Show.** The Christian life is a one-man show. The star is Jesus Christ and there is not room for two on the stage. He is the Man that lived and gave His life *for* us, and He is the God that lives, and gives His life *to* us. He is the author and finisher of our faith, the beginning and the end, the Alpha and Omega, and the bright and shining star. He is the union of God and man, and our Savior. And it is **His life** that is to be lived. This is why we confess, pray, **study**, endure, and trust...because of Him...and by Him.

## **The Role of Faith in Learning**

**The Timing of Faith in Learning.** Faith must be present 1) *before* any teaching takes place, which is made possible by the confession of sins; 2) *during* the teaching, by believing the Word being taught; and 3) *after* the teaching, by stepping into the next minute or hour or day with an attitude of God-consciousness and trust, whereby we apply what we have learned. Faith must be operational at each stage of learning and application. And, we can be sure that the glow of new learning, just like the glory that shone in Moses' face after he returned from the mountain, will fade rather quickly. We must constantly refresh our minds to keep scriptural knowledge current and fresh. The time for learning is all the time, and the time for faith regarding learning is *anytime we are being taught* (better yet...*all* the time!).

Faith has many connections with learning, as we shall see below, but we must establish the following right away: The time of our instruction by the Holy Spirit is *daily*. Acts 17:10-12 tells us about believers in Berea, and describes their ardent interest in the Word, as follows:

As soon as it was night, the brothers sent Paul and Silas away to Berea. On arriving there, they went to the Jewish synagogue. Now the Bereans were of more noble character than the Thessalonians, for they received the message with great eagerness and examined the Scriptures every day to see if what Paul said was true. Many of the Jews believed, as did also a number of prominent Greek women and many Greek men.

“Eagerness” is a matter of *volition*...or choosing something because one values it or desires it. These Bereans had an excitement about learning truth, because they *wanted* it. And this prompted them to listen intently to the teaching of the Word and to examine Scripture *every day* to see if the teaching matched what they saw. As a result, these believers were more “noble” than believers in other areas, and fruit was born from their lives, as suggested by the number of new converts they were winning over. Studying every day: This is the pattern for achieving nobility and bearing fruit.

**Faith Affects the Processing of Knowledge.** As we have stated before, we take in knowledge through the brain, which has a strong link with the mind. Once knowledge is in the mind, only the presence of “faith” *in the heart* will serve to beckon this knowledge from the mind *into the heart*...as understanding.

Knowledge enters the brain as facts and ideas, which is *translated* into spiritual understanding and wisdom, when it is “taught” by the Holy Spirit and “believed” by the learner. The believer does the believing, but the Holy Spirit is the one who does the processing. The Spirit takes knowledge that is accepted, converts it to understanding, and places it in the heart, where it accumulates as wisdom, ready to be applied. Knowledge has come all the way from conceptual information to spiritual understanding and wisdom to practical application. (We refer readers once again to *Walking in the Spirit*, the chapter titled, “The Internal Make-up of Man”.)

If the Spirit is not in control, meaning faith will not be functioning, the knowledge will not be converted to spiritual understanding and wisdom, and will sit as useless information in the brain

until it is forgotten. Knowledge must *reach the heart*, if it is going to have spiritual significance in our thoughts and demeanor as believers.

We must get this: **There is a crucial SPIRITUAL component to the learning and application of Scripture.** If the words of the Bible are not assimilated *spiritually*, they will not benefit the believer. If we are not in fellowship and walking by faith when we learn, the spiritual mechanism for processing knowledge will not be working.

Scriptures confirm that faith enables the processing of truth. 2 Tim. 3:7 provides the following: "...always learning but never able to acknowledge the truth." To really get the point of the truth, it must be acknowledged. This means seeing the truth *as truth*, and this will only happen when we *believe* it is truth. The people being considered in this passage were unable to believe the truth. For "knowledge" to have an effect, it must be *believed*. This applies to unbelievers in regard to the gospel, and believers in regard to instruction.

Regarding Jews in the desert, the writer of Hebrews said this: "...the message they heard was of no value to them, because those who heard did not combine it with faith" (Heb. 4:2b). They received the message, and no doubt understood it intellectually, but something was missing: FAITH. And because they did not believe the message, it did not process into their hearts, so they could not live by it and apply it.

What is the way, then, that Scripture is understood? Or what makes the difference between intellectual perception and spiritual understanding? The answer is "faith"...faith is the active ingredient in the learning formula. We see this in Heb. 11:3a, which says, "By faith we understand that the universe was formed at God's command..." Understanding comes through faith. We saw in Acts 17:10-12, cited above, a report on the Bereans, who "received the message with great eagerness", which means they *believed* it, and—as a result—truth processed into their hearts to make them "noble and fruitful".

But when faith is absent, we cannot see the truth. What's more, we can't even acknowledge the Lord, because our spiritual perception is disengaged. A clear example of this is seen in Luke 24:13-30. In this passage, two of the disciples were walking on a road leading to a town not far from Jerusalem. (This was right after the resurrection.) Jesus came up to them and walked with them, but they *did not recognize Him!* Jesus cited the reason they did not know Him...slowness to believe...saying this to them: "How foolish you are, and how slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have spoken! Did not the Christ have to suffer these things and then enter his glory?" But then He taught these two disciples from the Scripture about Himself, and at that point, they had to make a decision to believe Him, or to doubt what He said. They needed to accept what He was saying as *truth*.

Fortunately, these two disciples changed their faith posture from negative to positive, so they *could receive the words of Jesus as truth*, even though they still did not recognize Him. But because they believed His message, and because it became understanding and wisdom within them, they were able to apply it. Later, when they were with Jesus and the other disciples, they applied what they had learned to their experience, and their eyes were opened. They recognized Jesus.

How do we know they believed the message that Jesus had given them on the road? Lk. 24:32b shows them saying, “Were not our hearts burning within us while he talked with us on the road and opened the Scriptures to us?” If the words had not *burned* within their *hearts* when they received the message, they would not have been able to apply the message later. But because they *believed* it, it processed as *spiritual truth* and then they could *apply* what they *understood*.

Conclusion: Faith affects our ability to see the truth, process it, and apply it.

**Being Doers of the Word.** We have already done a chapter on this topic earlier in this series, but we want to establish a good hard link between *faith* and “doing” the Word. In the earlier study, the emphasis was spread around to all the “pillars”, featuring confession, prayer, study, and trust. In our current study, faith is spotlighted.

In James 1:22-25, quoted earlier in the chapter titled, “Being Doers of the Word”, we saw the importance of applying the truths that we learn. James tells us not to merely “listen” to the Word, but to “do what it says” (v. 22). But he prefaces this instruction with a command in verse 21: “...humbly accept the word planted in you...” Accepting the Word is a *prerequisite* for becoming a doer of the Word. To “accept” is to “believe it to the point that the truths learned are processed into the heart.” From there, the Word can be applied. Acceptance of truth precedes application of truth. Learn it, believe it, apply it: that is the sequence.

When this is our pattern, the Holy Spirit will deliver the truth to our hearts, because of our faith, and then He will use the tools and techniques which He designed, revealed, and now teaches...to enable us to *apply what we know*, while *He works what we apply*. The outcome is the production of His righteousness and the “fruit of the Spirit”. Quite honestly, the acquiring of understanding and its application never leaves the control of the Spirit, because none of this gets done without His empowerment through “fellowship and filling”.

Synopsis: Knowledge believed becomes understanding, which is expressed as wisdom through our thoughts and deeds. This is all performed in the power of the Holy Spirit, which is accessed and maintained through confession and faith. That’s the sum of it! But, even though this synopsis encapsulates much of what we need to know to live the Christian life, we will continue to search the Scriptures, because we want to know “the depth of the riches of the wisdom and knowledge of God!” (Rom. 11:33) And there’s always more.

**Scriptures Teaching Principles on the Place of Faith in the Learning Process.** There are so many scriptures that teach principles concerning the operation of faith in learning, and the impact of learning on faith, that we can only give some of them here. These are presented next, with scriptures and brief comments (Don’t skip! These are important!):

- Rom. 4:16a—“Therefore, the promise comes by faith, so that it may be by grace...”  
The promise that *comes by faith* is this: Faith will be credited as righteousness. This makes salvation, and production in the Christian life, the products of God’s grace, and not the outcome of self-styled attempts at righteousness. Grace, remember, flows from God to us...not from us to God. The “promise” that comes by faith is the “truth” of God’s Word. (We will have much more to say about promises later.)

- Incidentally, faith by itself is powerless. It is a commonly-held assumption in previous studies that faith is only as efficacious as its object. Faith in learning is only meaningful when it is expressed toward the Word, because the target for faith is then “alive and powerful”. Faith can sample and embrace every axiom or postulate or hypothesis known to man, but until faith is attached to TRUTH, it amounts to nothing.
- Is. 55:1-3 reads, in part—“Come, all you who are thirsty, come to the waters; and you who have no money, come, buy and eat! Listen, listen to me, and eat what is good, and your soul will delight in the richest of fare. Give ear and come to me; hear me, that your soul may live.” This is an invitation to truth, applied as the gospel for unbelievers and instruction for believers. “All” are invited to this table to “listen”, and to partake of the Word.
- Heb. 4:2b-3a—“...the message they heard was of no value to them, because those who heard did not combine it with faith. Now we who have believed enter that rest...” Jews in the desert did not enter God’s rest because they did not believe His promises. Faith in the Word is the way for believers to enter God’s rest, where we find protection and provision.
- 1 Thess. 2:13—“And we thank God continually because, when you received the word of God, which you heard from us, you accepted it not as the word of men, but as it actually is, the word of God, which is at work in you who believe.” When we process truth by faith, it does a “work” in us, and through us, in the hands of the Holy Spirit. This work *counts*.
- Rom. 10:17—“Consequently, faith comes from hearing the message, and the message is heard through the word of Christ.” Learning the Word incrementally, and mixing it with faith as we go, feeds us with spiritual nutrition, and causes our faith to grow.
- 2 Pet. 1:4b—“...he has given us his very great and precious promises, so that through them you may participate in the divine nature and escape the corruption in the world caused by evil desires.” By believing the promises, we actually feed on the divine nature of God in the form of His Word, which strengthens us for resistance against sin.
- Ps. 119:9—“How does a young man keep his way pure? By living according to your word.” When we go through the entire process of learning, believing, and applying Scripture, changes will occur in our behavior and output.
- 1 Pet. 2:2—“Like newborn babies, crave pure spiritual milk, so that by it you may grow up in your salvation...” We grow by consistent intake of the Word, starting with “pure milk”.
- 1 Pet. 3:18a—“But grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.” Maturity comes through participation in the “grace plan” of God, which is understood and applied through knowledge processed by faith.

- Eph. 4:11b-13a—“...and some to be pastors and teachers, to prepare God’s people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature...” God provides gifts to help believers learn His Word, so that faith can grow through knowledge and understanding.
- Jer. 9:23-24a—“Let not the wise man boast of his wisdom or the strong man boast of his strength or the rich man boast of his riches, but let him who boasts boast about this: that he understands and knows me, that I am the Lord...” Our *understanding* is a prize possession that we can believe in, treasure, and draw from, all the days of our lives. The point of all our learning and faith is to *know Him, that He is the Lord*. This is the punch line for all our training and growth.

**Conclusion.** It is impossible to talk about all the features of God’s revealed plan for man, without repeating the ones that are central to our lives as believers in the Lord Jesus Christ. Perhaps some points are over-repeated and others down-played, but it is our prayer that we will receive all that we need to know. It seems clear enough that the place of faith in our Christian lives, especially as it applies to the Word of God, cannot be repeated or emphasized enough.

We know what it is we must learn to believe...it is the Word of God. But we also know that we must believe what we learn, for what we learn to mean anything.

## Preparing to Learn

**Preparing Our Minds.** 1 Pet. 1:13a says, “Prepare your minds for action....” As we have learned through previous studies, “action” is this: 1) applying the Word in life, and 2) living life in the power of the Holy Spirit. But before we can “act”, our *minds* (ultimately, our hearts) must be prepared, or nothing worthwhile will happen. By the same token, preparation is required before we can actively *listen* to the teaching of God’s Word. To study, we must prepare ourselves.

The conditions that need to exist before we study, as we have seen already in this series, are these:

1. Sins confessed.
2. Prayer offered for wisdom and understanding.
3. Faith intact.
4. Eagerness to learn (volition of thirst and hunger for the Word).
5. Control of the Spirit to enable Him to teach us (which is true, if 1-4 are true).

When these conditions are fulfilled, we will learn...and *understand what we learn*...from Scripture.

**Dealing with Bias and False Information.** In addition to the five essential steps above, we should also be *open to new learning*. Bias and prejudice should not prevent us from seeing the truth in a lesson. Of course, as genuine seekers of truth, we should always *verify* new learning, by comparing it with what we see in Scripture. Then, once we build *reliable doctrines of truth*, we can use them to help us know when new teachings or concepts are valid. With greater understanding, we will be able to discern and interpret Scripture with increasing accuracy.

We must also take care not to allow human wisdom to be set up as a criterion for truth. Truth must always be based on what the Word says. Embracing human knowledge and traditions will tend to clutter, confuse, distort, and corrupt the truths we are trying to learn. This is why meeting the five conditions cited above is so important in our learning...it’s the only way we can counter the uncanny deceit and counterfeits of Satan.

Mark 7:6-13 gives a good example of the way that incorrect ideas interfere with our understanding of the truth. In this passage, Jesus said the following:

He replied, “Isaiah was right when he prophesied about you hypocrites; as it is written: ‘These people honor me with their lips, but their hearts are far from me. They worship me in vain; their teachings are but rules taught by men.’ You have let go of the commands of God and are holding on to the traditions of men.” And he said to them: “You have a fine way of setting aside the commands of God in order to observe your own traditions! For Moses said, ‘Honor your father and your mother’, and, ‘Anyone who curses his father or mother must be put to death’. But you say that if a man says to his



father or mother: 'Whatever help you might otherwise have received from me is Corban' (that is, a gift devoted to God), [i.e., giving to God was an excuse to withhold from parents or others in need] then you no longer let him do anything for his father or mother. Thus you nullify the word of God by your tradition that you have handed down. And you do many things like that."

Holding on to the traditions of men is a common error made by individual believers, and by many of the churches where they go to be fed. Given all the traditions that we inherit, and the inventive illusions that our imaginations create, the truth is easily upstaged by false ideas. And with the inundation of media, and the fast-paced, highly-materialistic, information-packed world we live in, it is no wonder that pastors and flock alike so easily accept as truth many things that are not taught in the Word...things that lead *away* from the truth, and do more harm than good.

Many concepts end up in the "critical mass" of societal knowledge, and these tend to become our primary basis for knowing and living. These must be "cast down", and not lead us into the fog of human viewpoint. (cf., 2 Co. 10:5a)

When we are truly prepared in our hearts to learn, the Holy Spirit will override *bias* and *false notions* with His truth. The biggest problem is not that false information swirls around us (and the world) with such fury. No, the problem is this: We do not use the spiritual devices that God offers to prepare us to perceive...and receive...the *truth*. We believe lies, because we are relying on ourselves to distinguish truth from error, rather than on the Holy Spirit. Our *confusion* is the product of our *condition*. This is why spiritual preparation must be done prior to study!

**Practical Aspects of Preparation.** Recommendations for preparing to learn have been presented by J. Hampton Keathley, III, (Endnote 3), and these will be mixed with our own, to form suggestions for what may be considered "practical" ways to prepare for learning. Here they are:

1. Quit talking and LISTEN. Careful and engaged listening requires spiritual preparation, of course, but it also calls for laser-beam focus on the task at hand, which is learning God's Word. Mark 4:9 says, "Then Jesus said, 'He who has ears to hear, let him hear.'" James 1:19b declares, "Everyone should be quick to listen, slow to speak..." Lk. 8:18 advises, "Therefore consider carefully how you listen."
2. Open your heart. Keathley said, "There needs to be a heart open to personal soul-searching examination for the purpose of seeing our motives, our sources of trust or the things we depend on for our security, i.e., the conditions of our lives as they really are. This needs to be done prior to personal study or a worship service in order to prepare our hearts for hearing God." (Endnote 4) In other words, calm yourself down, shake off the road dust, and take a few deep breaths, so you can shut out the world and concentrate on the Word. Tune daily cares out and tune God in!

3. Take a moment to confess, acknowledge God, pray for wisdom, forgive others, and give thanks before studying or “listening”. This will serve to open the lines for receiving the Word, and engage the Teacher of truth.
4. Be like the Bereans. They were eager to learn, and very engaged in the learning process, challenging each new concept by screening it against Scripture. To sit through a sermon or personal-study session by itself is not sufficient to prompt the growth we need. We must be immersed in the process of learning by reviewing, discussing, repeating, and analyzing the content of our learning...always looking to the Word to *answer its own questions*, and to the Holy Spirit to *clarify His own truths*. We must do what Paul told Timothy to do: “...devote yourself to the public reading of Scripture, to preaching and to teaching [for us this would be “learning”]...Be diligent in these matters; give yourself wholly to them, so that everyone may see your progress” (1 Tim. 4:13*b* and 15*a*).
5. Take care of physical practicalities. We can do certain common-sense things to help us get ready to learn. Keathley suggests the following (abridged and revised):
  - a. Remove distractions: noise, poor lighting, commotion, etc.
  - b. Get a good night's rest.
  - c. If you are a leader in a worship service, be prepared!
  - d. Eat properly, to sustain glucose and energy.
  - e. If the learning takes place in an assembly, come early to allow time to clear the cobwebs.
  - f. Go to the bathroom before you study. (Endnote 5)

If we do not prepare to learn, we may be going through perfunctory motions of religious custom, but we will not be acquiring the spiritual assets of truth that we need.

## Confession and Learning

**Confession Again?** Yes, confession! This may be the most “over-repeated” concept we have examined from Scripture, but it is assuredly the most important, even though it is highly neglected among pastors and believers everywhere. If we shuffled all the techniques God has given us like a deck of cards, and then started flipping through the deck a card at a time, we would keep flipping until we came to the one that reads, “Start Here!” At the bottom of that card, in fine, but readable, print, we would see this: “Confess your sins!” This is the first and most crucial thing we can do, *whatever else* we intend to do afterwards. If we do not take care of this FIRST, anything that follows will not matter. Confession is the master key.

This places a lot of weight on confession and cleanness, but it belongs there. After all, the Levite priests had to wash their hands and feet before they began service for God, and—like them—we cannot serve with dirty hands. We must confess in order to do *anything* effectively: pray, study, exercise our faith, and so on. Nothing meaningful can be accomplished if we are not clean.

We want to mention something parenthetically here, which is so obvious that it may be overlooked. In all our studies, we consistently equate “being pure”, or “obeying”, or “avoiding sin”, with *confession, followed by faith*. This is because the forces *behind* sin are much more powerful than we are. We can do one of two things: 1) deal with sin in God’s way and by His power, or 2) try to beat sin on our own. The unavoidable question is this: “Why would I try to do the impossible?” Most believers would *incorrectly* answer, “Because *I can*.” But we can’t. Call it pride, arrogance, self-trust, self-righteousness, or a lack of humility...faith in our own abilities to defeat sin will always be disappointing. We must use *grace techniques* if we ever hope to beat sin.

Removal of sin is always step one, because sin is the great impediment to fellowship and service. Gifted? Don’t try using it without confessing your sins. In love? Don’t make that call before you confess your sins. Want to witness to a lost person? Confess your sins. Making a business deal? Confess. Taking a test? Confess. Washing dishes? Confess. Whatever you do, CONFESS FIRST! Then pray, of course.

**Provisions of Grace.** God’s plan includes redemption through the sacrifice of His Son on the cross as our way of having the privilege of choosing salvation through faith. After that, His plan offers the opportunity for us to walk in fellowship with Him by confessing our sins. These are expressions of the mercy of God, as seen in His provisions for the forgiveness of sins.

So we see forgiveness of sins at the time of salvation, when we accept Christ as Savior. All past sins are obliterated at that time. After that we see forgiveness for believers throughout their Christian lives, every time they confess their sins. The first opportunity—salvation through faith—is for all eternity. The other—fellowship through confession—is temporary. Fellowship is temporary, because sin continues beyond salvation into the Christian life, and sin takes fellowship away. Only naming our sins will bring it back.

Specifically, in this study, we want to see the place of confession in our *studying* and *learning* the Word of God. Confession does make a difference, so we will always “start there”.

**Humility and Pride Related to Confession.** A big problem we face as believers is our confusion about what our primary focus should be. The MAIN attitude we need to have is not compassion, or unselfishness, or helpfulness, but HUMILITY, CONTRITENESS, and SORROW. These *promote confession*. All the other good things (compassion, etc.) will follow as *effects* of fellowship, after confession has taken place. These effects include all the by-products of godly love.

The *absence* of humility, on the other hand, causes resistance to confession, because resistance is the result of PRIDE, SELF-TRUST, and TURNING OUR BACKS ON GOD. It is a time of disaster in the Christian life when these take over.

We see a clear call for humility and contriteness in Is. 66:2, which says, “Has not my hand made all these things, and so they came into being?” declares the Lord.” But then the great Creator and infinite God tells us what catches His divine eye, in verse 3: “This is the one I esteem: he who is humble and contrite in spirit, and trembles at my word.” God is limitless and timeless in His power and existence, but He looks with special concern toward the humble. This is because He is not looking for anything *from* us...He doesn't need it! He is looking for us to quietly accept what He offers *to* us...and we *do* need it. When we start to realize this, humility will be under construction.

There are many other references showing the place of humility in confession. Sometimes, it is even synonymous with confession.

Incidentally, notice another thing that is mentioned in Is. 66:2, which is this: God favors those who “tremble” at His Word. Trembling shows fear of the Lord, which is awe, reverence, surrender...in a word...faith. As we have seen, faith is essential for attaching truth to our hearts. We must add faith to confession and prayer as another condition for learning, but we must *begin* our acceptance of instructional grace by *confessing*. If we do not do this, we will be operating outside the loop of grace...by our own choice...because of our pride.

**Start Here.** We want to see examples of confession 1) to illustrate the importance of this technique, 2) to show its pervasiveness in Scripture, and 3) to provide information and inspiration regarding its application.

Zech. 3:3-5 provides a good example of “getting clean”, which signifies the removal of sin. Here is what this passage says:

Now Joshua was dressed in filthy clothes as he stood before the angel. The angel said to those who were standing before him, “Take off his filthy clothes.” Then he said to Joshua, “See, I have taken away your sin, and I will put rich garments on you.” Then I said, “Put a clean turban on his head” So they put a clean turban on his head and clothed him, while the angel of the Lord stood by.

Joshua was then “dressed in clean clothes”, with all sin taken away, and he was made ready for service. The subsequent verses tell about God’s assurance to Joshua that, if he *continued* in “purity”, or in keeping God’s commands, he would be qualified for leadership and service. Verse 7a says, “This is what the Lord Almighty says: ‘If you will walk in my ways and keep my requirements, then you will govern my house and have charge of my courts....’” When we are cleaned up, all our sins are removed so we are spiritually energized and equipped for service. Now all we need is perpetual training in God’s Word, and to *use* the techniques we have learned.

Another emphasis on the idea of being “cleansed” to stay in fellowship and bear fruit is seen in Jn. 15:2-4, as follows:

He cuts off every branch in me that bears no fruit, while every branch that does bear fruit he prunes [Greek: “cleans”] so that it will be even more fruitful. You are already clean because of the word I have spoken to you. Remain in me, and I will remain in you. No branch can bear fruit by itself; it must remain in the vine. Neither can you bear fruit unless you remain in me.

So the branch...the individual believer...cannot bear fruit by himself. He must remain “fruitfully attached” to the vine, and get sustenance from it. If the branch becomes separated from the vine’s life-giving flow, no fruit will be borne, so the branch will need to be pruned so that it can once again become healthy by drawing what it needs from the vine. The only way to bear fruit is to grow and function through the infusion of the vine’s enriching qualities. As believers, we cannot produce fruit by ourselves, and need to stay “clean”, so we can live in and by the power of the Spirit of Christ. He alone can produce His divine fruit of righteousness, love, joy, etc., through us.

Being clean, though, is not a process that takes place externally. The *outside* can be “dressed up” to look clean...this is the classic “cover-up”. *Being* clean does not mean just *acting* in ways that make it *look like* you are clean. Being clean is about being cleansed *inside* first. Cleaning the outside will not change the inside, whereas cleaning the inside will have the effect of cleaning the outside. Jesus made this clear in Matt. 23:25-27, which says this:

Woe to you, teachers of the law and Pharisees, you hypocrites! You clean the outside of the cup and dish, but inside they are full of greed and self-indulgence. Blind Pharisee! **First clean the inside of the cup and dish, and then the outside also will be clean.** Woe to you, teachers of the law and Pharisees, you hypocrites! You are like whitewashed tombs, which look beautiful on the outside but on the inside are full of dead men’s bones and everything unclean. (Emphasis mine.)

The application of this for unbelievers is to believe in Christ, since salvation is by faith and not by external deeds. For us, as believers, this is what we are to get from this: Clean the inside first! Confess first! If we don’t do this, we will not see the righteousness of God produced in our lives. And, of course, our self-produced righteousness is worthless, as we see in Is. 64:5-6, which says the following:

You [God] come to the help of those who gladly do right, who remember your ways. But when we continued to sin against them, you were angry. How then can we be saved? All of us have become like one who is unclean, and all our righteous acts are like filthy rags; we all shrivel up like a leaf and like the wind our sins sweep us away.

The question, “How can we be saved?” is rhetorical. The point it implies is that we cannot save ourselves, because we cannot “do right”. Even our best efforts are like filthy rags to God. This applies to unbelievers and believers alike. His standards are much higher than our humanity can hope to satisfy.

Unbelievers must *believe*...believers must *show humility*. Believers must come to Him with their sins held out for Him to see. He already sees them, of course...He just wants us to look at them and realize that we are helpless and hopeless to erase past errors or to prevent future ones. We are dependent on His mercy and forgiveness.

When God sees the humility and sorrow we have in our hearts—caused by our awareness of sin in our lives—He will forgive them and come to our aid so we can “remember” His ways, and “gladly do right”, which—to us—means to walk in the truth, and in His Spirit.

But the unclean cannot walk this way...in truth and in the Spirit. Is. 35:8 says, “And a highway will be there; it will be called the Way of Holiness. The unclean will not journey on it; it will be for those who walk in that Way; wicked fools will not go about on it.” “Holiness” equals sanctification...or cleanness. If we are going to walk the Way of Holiness, we must be clean. And that means we must be current in our confession, so God can “forgive us our sins and purify [cleanse] us from all unrighteousness” (1 Jn. 1:9b).

**Results of Confession.** 2 Cor. 7:8-11 gives an interesting discussion of “sorrow for sins” and the results of repentance toward wrongdoing. We will quote this passage and then discuss it:

Even if I caused you sorrow by my letter, I do not regret it. Though I did regret it—I see that my letter hurt you, but only for a little while— yet now I am happy, not because you were made sorry, but because your sorrow led you to repentance. For you became sorrowful as God intended and so were not harmed in any way by us. Godly sorrow brings repentance that leads to salvation and leaves no regret, but worldly sorrow brings death. See what this godly sorrow has produced in you: what earnestness, what eagerness to clear yourselves, what indignation, what alarm, what longing, what concern, what readiness to see justice done. At every point you have proved yourselves to be innocent in this matter.

When Paul says that the Corinthians were “sorrowful” in verse 8, it is not the same “sorrow” that Paul referred to in verse 7. In verse 7, he was talking about their legitimate concern for Paul’s suffering. But in verse 8, their sorrow was the result of their having received Paul’s scathing *First Epistle*, which was a spiritual slap across the face. They were repenting, because of “godly sorrow” (sorrow for sins) that the epistle had induced. They were confessing their sins, which is exactly the effect Paul wanted. And because they had repented, they also experienced *concern* for the adversities Paul was undergoing.

Notice in verse 11 the phrase, “what this godly sorrow has produced in you...” This introduces a list of effects from godly sorrow and repentance (or “change of mind” about one’s sins). Here is my assessment of the “products” of repentance based on godly sorrow:

1. Earnestness—sincere recognition of fault in one’s self.
2. Eagerness to clear yourselves—readiness to be cleansed.
3. Indignation—being incensed at the awareness of one’s own sins...self-disgust.
4. Alarm—awareness that sin opposes God, and that discipline will be imposed if forgiveness is not obtained.
5. Longing—intensely wanting to return to the comfort of fellowship.
6. Concern—sorrow for sins and wanting them not to be repeated.
7. Readiness for justice—made ready to face God’s justice, due to cleanliness.

Anytime we confess, we can expect these things to occur. Notice also the last part of verse 11, in which we see the *outcome* of their being cleansed, which is this: their status and behavior *changed*, so that they were now “innocent”. They were even concerned about Paul’s well-being (v. 7).

**Confession Leads to Learning.** Like all other aspects of the Christian life, when it comes to learning the Word, confession should come...wait for it...FIRST! 2 Tim. 2:25 shows Paul admonishing Timothy, saying, “Those who oppose him he [as their “teacher”] must gently instruct, in the hope that God will grant them [opponents] repentance leading them to a knowledge of the truth.” He is being told to instruct believers *out of fellowship*, which means that *the teaching of the truth has a role for carnal believers, just as the gospel has a place for unbelievers*. This instruction is—for believers—an invitation; it creates *awareness* of sin, which then prompts believers to confess. Brief synopsis: The Spirit “convicts” us of sin through the Word, which leads to repentance and, consequently, to greater understanding of the Word.

The next verse (2 Tim. 2:26) tells what is happening behind the scenes and expresses Paul’s hope that these opponents of the truth will “come to their senses, and escape the trap of the devil, who has taken them captive to do his will”. When a believer is taken captive by Satan...and the world...and the flesh, it is because sin has pulled that believer out of fellowship. Paul hopes Timothy can coax these carnal believers back, by having them repent. This will enable them to acquire “knowledge of the truth”. But while they are carnal, the teaching of the Holy Spirit will be absent, and truth for living will not be available. **The Bible can only be understood by believers in fellowship.**

There are many verses that demonstrate the place of fellowship or spirituality in learning. We will see several, beginning with 1 Cor. 2:6-15 and 3:1, which give a good run-down on the spiritual receptivity of righteous believers. The “righteous” are able to hear and understand the Word as they listen and/or study. We have cited and quoted all or parts of this passage repeatedly, because it gives a clear picture of the operation of the Holy Spirit in revealing and

teaching truth. The part we want to emphasize here is found in v. 11-14, which we will re-quote, as follows:

For who among men knows the thoughts of a man except the man's spirit within him? In the same way no one knows the thoughts of God except the Spirit of God. We have not received the spirit of the world but the Spirit who is from God, that we may understand what God has freely given us. This is what we speak, not in words taught us by human wisdom but in words taught by the Spirit, expressing spiritual truths in spiritual words. The man without the Spirit does not accept the things that come from the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him, and he cannot understand them, because they are spiritually discerned.

We have been given the Spirit of God so that we can understand God's grace and its provisions. But, even though we are the temple of the Holy Spirit, and He indwells us for as long as we live, this does not mean that He will always control us. We grieve the Holy Spirit, and quench His power within us, whenever we sin...which is often. When we sin, we cannot learn truth. Our spiritual "receivers" are just like an unbeliever's at that point...truth cannot be "accepted". Both an unbeliever and a carnal Christian are without the benefits of the Spirit's teaching, even though the believer does, at least, have the potential to receive this teaching, when he returns to fellowship.

1 Cor. 13:6 states this same truth in a different way, saying, "Love does not delight in evil but rejoices with the truth." Love is love...but it is also a symbol...for fellowship. We saw in *Sin and Mercy* that love, peace, joy, and other key words, are markers for fellowship. If this applies in this verse, as we believe it does, then this verse is saying that a believer in a "state of fellowship" finds no pleasure in evil, but rejoices in truth. When a believer is in fellowship, he will be filled with an eagerness to learn the Word. This is because of the prevailing leadership of the Holy Spirit within him.

James 1:21a says, "Put aside all filth and the evil that is so prevalent and humbly accept the word planted in you, which can save [deliver] you." Notice the sequence: 1) put aside sin, and 2) humbly accept the Word. By confessing and operating under the control of the Holy Spirit, we can process truth, which can, by the power of the Spirit, deliver us from temptation, evil, and a destructive pattern of unbelief. We can process, appropriate, and understand the Word, meaning we can believe...receive...and conceive...truth. Notice also that the first thing we do with truth—in fellowship—is to *believe* it.

1 Pet. 2:1-2 is another verse that we have seen many times throughout our studies, because it is such a clear statement regarding the nutritional value of truth. It is presented here to show that we must "rid ourselves of sin" so we can learn. This passage says the following:

Therefore, rid yourselves of all malice and all deceit, hypocrisy, envy, and slander of every kind. Like newborn babies, crave pure spiritual milk, so that by it you may grow up in your salvation.



To “rid ourselves of sin” is to confess our sins. That’s all we can do with them. We do not have the power to stop sin on our own...which is why we are spending so much time trying to figure out how to get closer to God, Who *can* stop it. Jesus Christ has already beaten sin, but we can only appropriate that victory when we give the reins to the Holy Spirit within us by confessing our sins. Once again, notice the sequence in this passage: 1) We confess our sins to get rid of them, and 2) we are seated at the feet of our Teacher, where we can acquire milk, followed by baby food, and so on, all the way up to “solid food”. By staying clean and feeding on His truth...we can “grow up” through the stages of maturity, and thrive in spiritual stability and service.

Finally, we see confession and forgiveness preceding learning in 1 Ki. 8:35-36a, which gives us this:

When the heavens are shut up and there is no rain because your people have sinned against you, and when they pray toward this place and confess your name and turn from their sin because you have afflicted them, then hear from heaven and forgive the sin of your servants, your people Israel. **Teach them the right way to live....** (Emphasis mine.)

When we “turn from sin” (a way of saying, “confess our sin”), we can expect to be taught by God how we should live. That’s what we’re looking for...*how to live*.

**The “Prayer for Wisdom” Related to Fellowship.** We have established in the past the importance of praying for wisdom. In this section we want to be reminded of this again, and add a new emphasis on the need for us to be in fellowship when we pray, so that our prayer for wisdom will be a “prayer of faith”. Praying for wisdom is a prerequisite for learning, and confession is the condition for making that plea count.

Ps. 119:25-27 is a prayer which indicates that confession has been done, and shows a petition for instruction from the Lord. Here is what this passage says:

I am laid low in the dust; preserve my life according to your word. I recounted my ways and you answered me; teach me your decrees. Let me understand the teaching of your precepts; then I will meditate on your wonders [NET translates “wonders” as “marvelous teachings”].

This prayer for understanding will be meaningful, because the psalmist has “recounted”, or “declared” his ways. When we admit our ways...i.e., sins...to God, He will “answer us” with forgiveness, so we will be qualified to receive His teaching. This prayer counts, because it is preceded by a declaration of sins to God.

Job 35:12-13 reports part of Elihu’s wonderful speech to Job, where he informs Job that, “He [God] does not answer when men cry out because of the arrogance of the wicked. Indeed, God does not listen to their empty plea; the Almighty pays no attention to it.” Arrogance is Satan’s big sin, and is an entry point for him to creep in and lure people into sin. We are easy prey, because we are creatures of ego and self-absorption. Pride is “natural” for us. And where pride is, there is sin; and where sin is, there is no fellowship; and where fellowship is absent, there is

no teaching or learning; and where there is no teaching, there will be no wisdom; and where wisdom is missing, pride rules. And God will not listen when pride is in evidence.

Arrogance is an example of the kinds of sins that will prevent God from hearing and answering prayers, so that we will be just like Job, about whom Elihu said, "Job opens his mouth with empty talk; without knowledge he multiplies words" (Job. 35:16). We may have a lot to say, but it will not come from a resource of wisdom and knowledge, because our prayers for wisdom have not been heard.

We have seen before James' call for us to pray for wisdom. He delivered a command from the Lord for anyone who does not yet have wisdom to ask for it...but when he asks, he must believe and not doubt, because he who doubts...should not think that he will receive anything from the Lord..." (James 1:5-7) To pray effectively, we must pray in faith, and the pre-condition for this is fellowship, and the prerequisite for fellowship is purity.

Purity, or being holy or sanctified or acceptable to God, does not come from our flawed selves; it does not come from the machinations and inventions of the flesh; it comes from God's grace. 2 Cor. 1:12 confirms this, saying the following:

Now this is our boast: Our conscience testifies that we have conducted ourselves in the world, and especially in our relations with you, in the holiness and sincerity that are from God. We have done so not according to worldly wisdom but according to God's grace.

Purity comes from God, and is not a product of "worldly wisdom". Having said that, we want to see the place of purity, as it relates to pre-prayer conditions, and—therefore—readiness for learning truth. The pre-prayer condition required *before asking for wisdom* is purity, as we see in Ps. 66:18, which says, "If I had cherished sin in my heart, the Lord would not have listened." Purity precedes meaningful prayer.

We see this again in Is. 59:1-3, which says this:

Surely the arm of the Lord is not too short to save, nor his ear too dull to hear. But your iniquities have separated you from your God; your sins have hidden his face from you, so that he will not hear. For your hands are stained with blood, your fingers with guilt. Your lips have spoken lies, and your tongue mutters wicked things.

Sin separates us from God so that He "will not hear" our prayers. This means a prayer for understanding and wisdom will not get an answer. The solution is one we know well. This solution is offered in this same passage, viz., Is. 59:12: "For our offenses are many in your sight, and our sins testify against us. Our offenses are ever with us, and we **acknowledge** our iniquities." (Emphasis mine.) By acknowledging our sins to God, they and their effects, are nullified...we are forgiven, and the sins are forgotten. THEN we can pray for wisdom in faith, and it will come.

Finally, we see in Jn. 15:7 the words of Jesus, "If you remain in me and my words remain in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be given you." We saw in the book, *Being Devoted to*

*Prayer*, that the prayer of a believer who is in fellowship and walking by faith, will pray the exact prayer that matches God's will. In other words, he will be praying "according to God's will".

That is why it is safe to say that—if we are in fellowship with Christ and have a growing faith—we WILL receive what we ask for, because what we ask for is PRECISELY what God wants to give us. So, step one in the whole wanting and asking and getting process is "confession". There will be other steps in our final spiritual refinement, but when we "remain in Him", we will be at the starting point for preparation to have all our (spiritually-refined) wishes realized, including the prayer for wisdom.

**Sundry Verses Linking Confession and Learning.** Here are some verses related to the link between fellowship and the Word (and the Word related to fellowship):

- Jn. 3:21—"But whoever lives by the truth comes into the light, so that it may be seen plainly that what he has done has been done through God." This truth was given in the transition between the period of the Law and that of Grace. But these words of Christ already show the need for us to live in the light to expose our sins to God for forgiveness. When this is done, it will be "seen plainly" that God is doing the work now, just as He did through His Son.
- Ps. 32:8—"I will instruct you and teach you in the way you should go; I will counsel you and watch over you." The verses preceding this verse reflect a clear confession, making this promise of instruction binding. Verse 5 says, explicitly, "Then I acknowledged my sin to you and did not cover up my iniquity. I said 'I will confess my transgressions to the Lord'—and you forgave the guilt of my sin."
- Heb. 4:12-13—"For the Word of God is living and active. Sharper than any double-edged sword, it penetrates even to dividing soul and spirit, joints and marrow; it judges the thoughts and attitudes of the heart. Nothing in all creation is hidden from God's sight. Everything is uncovered and laid bare before the eyes of him to whom we must give account." Giving account for the contents of the heart and life is tantamount to confession of our sins, which the Word brings to the light.

**Sundry Verses on Confession *per se*.** Here are some verses dealing with confession topically:

- Pr. 28:13—"He who conceals his sins does not prosper, but whoever confesses and renounces them finds mercy." Concealment of sins brings discipline; confession activates mercy.
- 1 Jn. 1:9—"If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness." This is a key verse connecting confession of our sins with forgiveness. The context for this verse clearly makes fellowship dependent on forgiveness (cf., 1 Jn. 1).

- Ps. 51:1-3--“Have mercy on me, O God, according to your unfailing love; according to your great compassion blot out my transgressions. Wash away all my iniquity and cleanse me from my sin. For I know my transgressions, and my sin is always before me.” God’s love brings a plan of mercy to bear on our sins when we acknowledge them to Him.
- James 4:6 and 8—“But he gives us more grace. That is why Scripture says: ‘God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble.’ Come near to God and he will come near to you. Wash your hands, you sinners, and purify your hearts, you double-minded.” To come near to God we must be humble, wash our hands, and purify our hearts...all part of a single process: confession.

**Conclusion.** We confess before we study, both to open our eyes for study, and to open the prayer lines to God, so we can ask for His instruction as we learn. *Asking for clarity* is an ESSENTIAL ADDED STEP in the learning process...a requirement that goes beyond confession...something we *must do* before we crack the Book. Here is the procedure: 1) We must CONFESS BEFORE WE STUDY, 2) we must ASK for the learning to “process” into our hearts, and 3) we must “receive and believe” divine truth. The lesson will then be conducted in a way that we can understand it...and apply it.

Fellowship creates a pathway from the pages of the Bible, or the content of written studies, or the mouths of gifted teachers, to our hearts. Fellowship also engages the illuminating ministry of the Holy Spirit, Who provides understanding and stores it in our hearts, where He will use what we “know” to perform *His work* through our own thinking and doing.

## **Be Renewed, to Prepare for Action**

**Prepare Your Minds.** A command in 1 Peter 1:13 calls on us to do this: "...prepare your minds for action." This is our charge...to get the knowledge and training we need to equip us to ACT. Peter then assures us, in 2 Peter 1:3, that we have all we need to prepare for action, saying, "His divine power has given us everything we need for life and godliness through our knowledge of him who called us by his own glory and goodness." 1 Cor. 4:16b tells us, "...we have the mind of Christ." Our Father is ready to provide all we need, in order to accomplish His plan in our time...by His power...through these bodies and minds. Procedures for accessing His provisions are provided in His "training manual".

Paul was passionate that all the believers under his care should receive all the resources needed to prepare themselves for service. In Col. 2:2-4 he states the main purpose for his ministry, which is the preparation of the saints through 1) fellowship, 2) growth in knowledge and understanding, and 3) constancy of faith. This passage states the following:

My purpose is that they may be encouraged in heart and united in love, so that they may have the full riches of complete understanding, in order that they may know the mystery of God, namely, Christ, in whom are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge. I tell you this so that no one may deceive you by fine-sounding arguments.

To perform as Christians, we must *know* Jesus Christ, which means to know what the Bible gives us on ways to please Him and to walk in His power. This is NOT different from living by His Word, as His Spirit teaches us...or living in fellowship with Him...or operating under the control of His Spirit. Through fellowship and instruction, we come into possession of the "full riches of complete understanding", which prepares our minds and equips us for action in the strength of Jesus Christ, our Lord.

**Being Renewed.** Renewal is a process that lasts all our lives. It is not a one-time event, like salvation. The process for renewal takes place in our hearts, and is based on our understanding of God's ways, both through spiritual instruction and through prayerful perception of the meaning of events that God brings to us (also known as "tests" and "trials"...or *training*). Through our intake of information, false notions are displaced by truths, so that our minds become more focused on God, more trusting, more aware of His greatness (and our weakness), and more enthusiastic for the work of His Spirit.

Renewal is a process of change within us...resulting in our being reshaped. As we learn, we change. If we refuse to learn, we still change, but not for the better. The objective is to change for the good...to be *renewed* spiritually...to be *transformed* internally. The changes that go on inside will become visible alterations on the outside, as we adopt and practice God's techniques for loving and serving Him and His children.

1 Cor. 3:18 says, "And we, who with unveiled faces all contemplate [or reflect on] the Lord's glory, are being transformed into his likeness with ever-increasing glory, which comes from the Lord, who is the Spirit." As we learn to avail the ministry of the Spirit to counsel us, teach us,

comfort us, and empower us for service, we will be increasingly transformed in ways that make us look and act like Jesus Christ. We will be behaving in a way that does not come natural for us, but we don't want "natural" anyway...we want *supernatural*, through the One who enables us. It is conclusive: Through the renewal and transformation that God does in us...over time and by His methods...we take on the image of Christ (cf., Rom. 8:29).

Renewal is an ongoing process that goes on from day to day...regardless of external circumstances...as long as we confess, pray, study, trust, and train. 2 Cor. 4:16 confirms this in the following:

Therefore we do not lose heart. [Even] though outwardly we are wasting away, yet inwardly we are being renewed day by day. For our light and momentary troubles are achieving for us an eternal glory that far outweighs them all.

Our renewal can continue, even under difficult circumstances, so that we can be encouraged and look forward to continued growth...even when things look bleak. Our inner man can continue to get stronger, even if our bodies and the environment around us are deteriorating.

Rom. 12:2 recaps what we are saying, telling us to be transformed by renewing the content of our hearts. Here is what this verse says:

Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is—his good, pleasing and perfect will.

The part of this verse that jumps out at us is the charge to be "transformed by the renewing of your mind". When we consistently focus on God's truths, and walk in His Spirit, we can understand His principles for living, and apply them, so we will no longer be operating under the ideas and systems advanced by the world. Instead, we will have in view the will of God, which we will increasingly discern. This will enable us to know how to live in ways that *please Him*.

**The Outcome of Transformation.** When we go through the renewal process and enjoy the transformation that is taking place, we will see specific things change in our thinking. By *adopting* the divine thought patterns that we acquire through learning Scripture, we will *function* differently, because we will be *thinking* differently. A renewed mind translates into changed behavior. New thoughts prepare us for revised actions.

Phil. 4:8-9 gives us some specific descriptors for the content of a renewed mind, implying the actions that will emanate from it. This passage provides parameters for a mind that has been worked over, one that is employing all the strategies God makes available to help us. Here is what it says:

Finally, brothers, whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable—if anything is excellent or praiseworthy—think about such things. Whatever you have learned or received or heard from me, or seen in me—put it into practice. And the God of peace will be with you.

*Bible Basics on the Power of God's Word: Pathway to Truth (Volume 1)*

Learn, get new content, think in new ways, and then practice what you have learned. APPLY THE METHODS, and the content of your thoughts will become purer and more noble! God has shown us the way to get this new mind-set, which is by following His techniques of grace. It seems foolish for us to attempt to acquire a renewed mind in *our* shrimpy way, when the God we reference as our eternal Father...the cause and reason for our being...makes it so easy for us to get it *His* way. Without Him, the *old* ways will be *our* ways. With Him, we will find renewal to prepare us for action.

## Hearing the Word

**Hear His Voice.** Hearing is more than allowing certain vibrations to reach the ear. It is about determining meaning and relevance from among the sounds we hear. It is not hearing *per se* that has value; it is the *content* of what is heard. In the spiritual realm, messages swirl around us at furious rates, and the claim to ultimate truth is everywhere; so it is easy to get confused, as we try to sort through all the competing “sounds”. Somehow, we have to pick out the clear enunciation of truths from among all the noises that comprise the deception and lies of Satan, and the enticing philosophies and traditions of the world.

This means we must distinguish truths from a barrage of contaminated and flawed postulates that try to drown out divine communication. Scientists have determined that we can actually hear only one sound at a time. Following this analogy, if we are listening to God, we will not hear Satan; and if we are listening to Satan, we will not hear God. Because of the complexity of this process, our *personal* resources will be inadequate to enable us to distinguish what is “listen-worthy” and what is not. This is why we are given royal resources for determining truth, and why we must stay close to the Creator of all reality to determine which descriptions of that reality are accurate.

We are told to “listen to God”...to “hear His voice”. When God tells us to listen, He is asking us to pay attention to the true message *He* is giving, rather than the false ideas that contradict Him...and He offers to teach us, if we will just listen TO HIM. He is asking us to “receive” the truth. Then, as we have learned, we have the choice to “believe” the truth, so it can become part of our spiritual equipment.

**The Command to Listen.** We are commanded to listen...or to hear...this is the process for taking the truth from the mind of God and placing it into our minds, so that our thinking can become like His (or “renewed”, as per the previous chapter). We want to see here some ways that the terms “listen” and “hear” are used in Scripture. We must also understand that we are *required* to listen.

Heb. 3:7 says, “So, as the Holy Spirit says: ‘Today, if you hear his voice’....” Step one is “hearing”. Verse 12 adds step two, saying, “See to it, brothers, that none of you has a sinful, unbelieving heart that turns away from the living God.” When we *hear*, we must also *believe*. We are being instructed to avoid “unbelief”, and to move toward “greater belief”. (cf., Heb. 3:18-19; 4:1) The point is this: If we HEAR God’s voice *and* believe it, we will be moving *away from* rejection of God, and *toward* faith in Him. The process begins with hearing, and ends with faith, which, as we have seen, converts what we hear into understanding. But we certainly cannot skip step one.

Hearing may have a broader application than we have thought. In fact, hearing may ensconce and encapsulate the entire learning sequence, which includes listening (in whatever form), receiving, believing, understanding, and applying...in that order. Hearing can be seen as more



than just giving our attention to teaching...it actually seems to be a “start-to-finish” process of taking-in, accepting, and applying the truth of God’s Word.

It is interesting, the way hearing (seen as the perception of knowledge) and faith interact in a kind of inter-dependence. Faith processes the hearing and hearing strengthens faith. The circle is complete, and a symbiotic exchange has taken place. It’s all part of a building process, whereby we grow.

Deut. 18:15 uses the term “listen”, as part of advice for believers in a future “age”, which is to *listen* to Christ. This verse says, “The Lord your God will raise up for you a prophet like me from among your brothers. You must listen to him.” Though the immediate application of this prophesy anticipates a human prophet, the promise and precept in this verse also have a connection with Christ’s earthly ministry. The point is that we should *listen* to Him...to His *words*.

Look at an exhaustive concordance. Hearing and listening appear repeatedly in the Bible, and are routinely featured as being important. We will see many scriptures that will spotlight the effects of focused listening on the learning process.

Incidentally, we distinguish “hearing” and “listening” in science, but that seems unnecessary here, since the terms can be used interchangeably. Whether we hear OR listen, a reception of truth is implied; we *intake* information that we can then *believe* and *process*.

**Choosing to Listen (Hear).** Listening is a packaged process, with stages. Listening begins with receiving, followed by believing, which leads to understanding and wisdom, all consummated finally as application. But BEFORE listening begins, and AT EACH STAGE ALONG THE WAY, choice comes into play. Our choice at each juncture in the listening process must be to accept each piece by faith. And the pieces are these: the truth, the meaning of the truth, and the enabling power for application of the truth. Anywhere along this highway, a breakdown can occur, if faith runs out of gas.

Volition, or that part of us that arbitrates our personal decisions, is the essence of our free will. We decide, within the limits of our range of choices, and then we assume responsibility for our choices. We must make repeated and frequent decisions to hear the truth; otherwise, we will remain babies, straining to crawl across the precarious floors of Satan’s world.

Mark 4:9, presenting words that are repeated in v. 23, shows us volition at work: “He who has an ear to hear, let him hear.” Rev. 2:7 echoes this, saying, “He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches.” “Having an ear” means having positive volition, which is a distinct willingness to absorb God’s teachings.

Is. 55:1a says something similar, implying “choice”: “Come, all you who are thirsty, come to the waters....” We know that the “drinking” we will do at these waters is “hearing the Word”, because v. 3 says, “Give ear and come to me; hear me, that your soul may live.” But this water is for the “thirsty”...those who WANT it. If we do not want God, or to know more about Him, all we have to do is stay away from the flowing brooks of truth. The choice is ours.

Regarding choice and responsibility, Scripture is clear that we *do choose* and that we *have responsibility* for our choices. Choice begins before salvation, when we choose to believe in the risen Christ in order to be adopted as His brother. And it continues after we are saved, as—throughout all of our lives as believers—we repeatedly choose to accept the provisions of grace, or to shun them and go our own way. When we accept, we will be *responding to truth with faith*. Rom. 1:18-20 depicts *volition* at the base of all decisions regarding Christ. These decisions, as we have seen, range from believing in Him at salvation to living in Him after we are saved. Here is what this passage says::

The wrath of God is being revealed from heaven against all the godlessness and wickedness of men who suppress the truth by their wickedness, since what may be known about God is plain to them, because God has made it plain to them. For since the creation of the world God's invisible qualities—his eternal power and divine nature—have been clearly seen, being understood from what has been made, so that men are without excuse.

Men who are without God and who choose their own sinful pattern over life in Jesus Christ, “are without excuse”, because they have chosen to reject Him. The evidence is there, but they refuse to acknowledge it, because it might disrupt their schemes for living independently of God (about that much, they are correct!).

When we believe in Christ at salvation, and when we believe in the methods God has given us for living, and—as we will see later—when we rest on the promises of God as the foundation for all our spiritual understanding and application, we do so BY CHOICE. Remember Joshua's words, “...if serving the Lord seems undesirable to you, then choose for yourselves this day whom you will serve....” (Josh. 24:15)

When we serve God, by believing in Him and His Word, it is because we choose to do so. All of our Christian lives are based on consistently choosing in favor of God and His way. Every event, every idea, every feeling, every condition...is a chance to choose well. Just choose God...every time. Start by choosing to *listen* to Him.

**Principles on Listening.** Here are a few principles reflecting our findings in Scripture related to listening. These are guides for the practice and process of listening to the truth, with corresponding verses:

- Be quick to listen. James 1:19a—“My dear brothers, take note of this: Everyone should be quick to **listen**....”
- When we go near to God, or are in his “house”, we should listen to Him. Eccl. 5:1—“Guard your steps when you go to the house of God. Go near to **listen** [and learn], rather than to offer the sacrifice of fools, who do not know that they do wrong.”
- Being still and listening is more meaningful than “busyness”. Lk. 10:41-42 (These two verses appear in a passage showing Jesus' response to Martha's complaint that Mary was sitting around and listening and not doing enough “work”.)—“Martha, Martha,’ the

Lord answered, ‘you are worried and upset about many things, but only one thing is needed. Mary has chosen [notice that she had a choice] what is better and it will not be taken away from her’.” Verse 39 says Mary was “at the Lord’s feet, **listening** to what he said.”

- When we hear and accept God’s Word, it will perform a “work” in us. 1 Th. 2:13—“And we also thank God continually because, when you received the word of God, which you **heard** from us, you accepted it not as the word of men, but as it actually is, the word of God, which is at work in you who believe.”
- The ways we study, how often we study, our media for learning, our attitude toward divine instruction, and our spiritual state all play a part in determining the amount of benefit we derive from our time in the Word. Jesus said as much Himself...Lk. 8:17b-18a—“[There is] nothing concealed that will not be known or brought out into the open. Therefore consider carefully how you **listen**.” “How” reflects the *conditions* for learning.
- As we just saw, the concept of choosing our learning environment and instructional resources *with deliberation* is important. Mark adds that *what* we hear should also be selected with care. Mk. 4:23-24a—“If anyone has ears to hear, let him hear. Consider carefully what you **hear**.” “What” reflects the *content* for learning.

Listening requires choosing the conditions for learning...and the content we accept...carefully. We must choose to listen frequently, but also well. The quality of the time we spend is as important as the quantity of that time. More is not always better, but more of the “better” is the best. Get all the conditions right...then open the ears of your heart.

## Study Prompts Growth and Maturity

**The Process of Learning to Grow.** We grow through study and training. We study the Word, and God provides experiences that test us for training purposes. We see His “way” in the Word, and we see His “hand” in the things that happen. These are both designed to give us more understanding, which gives us greater faith. Greater faith means increased maturity, and this is our goal.

In this study we are primarily interested in learning the Word as a means for growth, and not the tests and trials that God uses to train us. Training as a contributor to our spiritual growth has been handled topically in several previous studies. These can be reviewed for more on the subject.

2 Pet. 3:18a commands us to “grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.” Grace is the provision of techniques that God has described in His Word. These show us how to stay clean (from sin), how to walk in His power, and how to draw on all the benefits He wants us to have. “Knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ” is an understanding of the character of God, which is expressed to us as grace. Growing in understanding and wisdom is equivalent to growing in grace. By increasing understanding and wisdom, we increase our faith, which enlarges our reliance on grace. Grace gives us the best life, and enables us to glorify God (2 Pet. 3:18b).

In Scripture, the most highly-featured way for us to grow is by learning. We have seen clearly that learning, received as knowledge, is refined and enriched *by faith*, which morphs it into understanding. Understanding is the building block for wisdom, which in turn equips the heart to put what was learned into practice. The most important “learning” we can receive is that which shows us how to LIVE CLOSER TO GOD...or that which helps us mature.

In Col. 1:28 (NET), Paul gives a mission statement: “We proclaim him by instructing and teaching all people with all wisdom so that we may present every person mature in Christ.” Paul teaches for the purpose of generating maturity among his readers. Teaching, received properly, leads ultimately to wisdom, and accumulated wisdom becomes maturity. In Col. 2:2 (NET) Paul restates his goal, and shows the trail to maturity, as follows:

My goal is that their hearts, having been knit together in love, may be encouraged, and that they may have all the riches that assurance brings in their understanding of the knowledge of the mystery of God, namely, Christ....

Being knit together in love has to do with their being in fellowship, which prepares them to learn and, as a result, they can be “encouraged” and get the “riches that assurance brings in their understanding”. This understanding comes through “knowledge of the mystery of God, namely, Christ”. Let’s restate this, for clarity. When we are in fellowship, we can get courage *and* grace provisions when faith causes knowledge of Christ to process into our hearts as understanding. The point is this: Learning plus faith leads to understanding and application, which leads to “all the riches” of grace.

Acts 20:32 gives a clear statement about the ability of the Word, coupled with the teaching ministry of the Holy Spirit, to build believers up. We saw this verse earlier in our discussion dealing with the place of confession in learning. Here we want to focus on the role of the Word in our growth. This verse says, "Now I commit you to God and to the word of his grace, which can build you up and give you an inheritance among all those who are sanctified." The "word of his grace" has the ability to "build you up", and it will, *if* you are learning and are among those who are in fellowship. The result will be greater maturity through the strengthening of your faith. The WORD can do that.

Deut. 4:8-10 was spoken to Israelites in the desert, but this passage can illustrate how truth works in our time. These verses say the following:

And what other nation is so great as to have such righteous decrees and laws as this body of laws I am setting before you today? Only be careful, and watch yourselves closely so that you do not forget the things your eyes have seen or let them slip from your heart as long as you live. Teach them to your children and to their children after them. Remember the day you stood before the LORD your God at Horeb, when he said to me, "Assemble the people before me to hear my words so that they may learn to revere me as long as they live in the land and may teach them to their children.

When these people "heard" the words, they learned to "revere" God, which is a way of saying they learned to "trust" Him. When they heard more, they learned more...and when they learned more, faith grew. The application to us is this: As we learn, faith will grow.

Rom. 15:4 gives another angle on learning as a way to grow. Training is also included in this passage. This verse says, "For everything that was written in the past was written to teach us, so that through endurance and the encouragement of the Scriptures we might have hope." The written Word is there to teach us...in the hands of our live-in Teacher...so that through training and the changes that Scripture brings, we can increase our faith (cited here as "hope", an expression of faith).

**The Results of Growth from Learning.** The outcomes of growth are numerous, and many of them have already been seen in previous books, in foregoing chapters in this book, and in this chapter. We will briefly review a few of them here. Growth induces such benefits as an improved mind, more maturity, greater faith, increased capacity for truth, the ability to serve, and resistance to false teachings.

Phil. 4:8-9 provides a complete list of the new contents of our minds, as we acquire the truths of Scripture that change our viewpoints from those that are fleshly and worldly to those that are spiritual and godly. The new pattern of thought will be "noble, right, pure, lovely, admirable, and praiseworthy" (v. 8)...as we "learn, receive, and hear" God's Word and apply it to our lives (v. 9). Receiving the truth gives us a new attitude.

We have seen already that faith is part of the *process* for growth (faith converts knowledge to understanding), and we see here that it is also a *product* of growth (greater understanding increases faith). Faith, then, is part of its own construction.

The building process is incremental, but inexorable, if we keep on learning. As we grow, we build understanding, starting with simple concepts, and then we move on to those that are more complex. We start small and build. But each time we learn, we grow.

Maturity itself is the primary goal of growth, and growth comes when we consistently feed on the nutrients of the Word. Heb. 6:1a tells us to KEEP GOING to KEEP GROWING! This verse says, "Therefore let us leave the elementary teachings about Christ and go on to maturity..." We can't just go on repeating first grade (viz., hearing the gospel over and over). We have to go on to teachings that apply to all aspects of our lives as believers. And this will move us toward *maturity*.

Prov. 9:9 suggests that the more we learn, the more capacity we will have for new truths. This verse says, "Instruct a wise man and he will be wiser still; teach a righteous man and he will add to his learning." The wise get wiser, if they keep learning. Notice also that such a wise man must also be "righteous", meaning "in fellowship". Even mature believers get out of fellowship, and they must confess to qualify for the teaching of the Holy Spirit...just like the rest of us. But when a mature believer gets back into fellowship, he is a learning juggernaut...a voracious consumer of new knowledge.

Another value of growth is seen in Eph. 4:11-15, which gives us the following:

It was he who gave some to be apostles, some to be prophets, some to be evangelists, and some to be pastors and teachers, to prepare God's people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ. Then we will no longer be infants, tossed back and forth by the waves, and blown here and there by every wind of teaching and by the cunning and craftiness of men in their deceitful scheming. Instead, speaking the truth in love, we will in all things grow up into him who is the Head, that is, Christ.

Gifts were given to "prepare God's people for service". For growing believers, the gift-of-interest is the gift of pastor-teacher, because this is the gift through which we get explanations of the Bible. When we are taught, we become "serviceable", because we grow as we learn. And because we acquire "the knowledge of the Son of God", we "become mature", and the "fullness of Christ" becomes our ultimate goal. The fullness of Christ is at the highest spiritual level, all the way up to the Divine Deity, which clearly shows that there is NO LIMIT to the level of maturity we can reach. We must not stop short, then, or get comfortable, because great service beckons...there is much to do. And miles to go before I sleep...

Also from this passage, we see that one of the greatest advantages of maturity is the ability to discern false teachings, and to recognize deceit. When we *know* the Word, we will spot messages that do not match its teachings. And when we follow God's techniques for living and learning, we will build an inventory of truths that will serve us well in evaluating new learning. We will know what to *reject*, and what to *believe*. We will no longer be "infants"...we can graduate right out of the crib, and be ready to blaze a trail of truth for the walk of maturity.

*Bible Basics on the Power of God's Word: Pathway to Truth (Volume 1)*

**NOTE:** All previous books contribute to the whole scope and value of truth, as it is related to maturity. But for a detailed discussion on the place and process of growth and maturity, see the book *Maturity*.

## Study Diligently

**Bible-Based Zeal.** We have emphasized over and over in all of our studies that we must maintain a study schedule that shows an enthusiasm for the Word. If we are interested in God, we will be interested in His Word. The Bible is the center of Christianity; it is the heart of God, a powerful testimony to creation and salvation, the essential expression of His divine nature, and the sole guide for Christian living. It should be the focal point for all schedules and routines for every believer. Without a daily feeding on the Word, we will not grow as God intends, and we will not achieve what He wants.

If the preceding paragraph seems familiar, it is probably because you read the book, *Being Devoted to Prayer*. At the beginning of the chapter, “Study, Growth, and Prayer”, you will find this paragraph. It seems a fitting opener for this chapter, which calls for us to study diligently.

**Hunger for the Word.** When we get hungry physically, we feel it, and we recognize that we need to eat. But when we become deficient spiritually—because we have not been feeding on the Word—our spiritual lack of strength *may show*, but the manifestations of Word-hunger can be subtle. So, as some dieticians recommend in regard to eating, which is “by the clock”, it is probably a good thing for us to plan Bible study on a regular schedule, to prevent spiritual hypoglycemia from setting in.

Study in a church will follow the church’s schedule, but self-directed study will work better if a consistent routine is structured for it. Many times, we may be hungry spiritually and not notice it in our bodies or emotions, but our spirit knows when the hunger pangs are beginning to gnaw. A reliable schedule for study will ensure that we sustain our spiritual energy.

**The Disciplined Disciple.** 2 Tim. 2:15 is a record of Paul’s reminder to Timothy, which can apply to believing “pedestrians”, as well as to pastor-teachers. This verse says, “Do your best to present yourself to God as one approved, a workman who does not need to be ashamed and who correctly handles the word of truth.” Paul was telling Timothy to do his best to study assiduously and faithfully, as one who “does not need to be ashamed” (i.e., stays in fellowship) and “correctly handles the word of truth” (i.e., hears, believes, and understands the truth, so he can teach it).

Paul said above, “Do your best...” There is a degree of self-motivation involved in setting and following a study schedule, but we must never go too far with the idea of “self-anything”. Fellowship, previous study, constant prayer, and God-conscious trust will precede such self-discipline. The Holy Spirit is our enabler, still, and His divine energy will be the resource most needed for our study plans to be successful. As we have said so many times, TAKE CARE OF FIRST THINGS FIRST, AND THE REST WILL FOLLOW.

Prov. 23:12 tells us to “Apply your heart to instruction and your ears to words of knowledge.” Listening, understanding, and applying Scripture are all in view in this verse. In a nutshell, this is what we are to do. We must **pay attention to the Word**, i.e., want it, seek it, think about it, absorb it, follow it, use it...this is “applying our hearts” to it. And it will have meaning and



application *in our hearts*, as its truths increasingly become the dominant themes of our thoughts and actions.

**Study Daily.** Learning the Word is not something we need to do only once or twice a week. It is something we should do every day. Heb. 3:8a says, “Today, if you hear his voice, do not harden your hearts....” Three conditions are noteworthy here: 1) The time reference for “hearing” is “today”, 2) “hear” is what we do when we listen, believe, and understand, and 3) the heart must not be “hardened”, or resistant, which means it must be prepared to receive the truth. We have been examining the *conditions* needed for us to be prepared to take in truth, but at this point we want to distinguish the significance of “today” as it relates to the frequency of our study.

Every day we are alive is “today”. This day is the day for us to hear the Word. Today is the time when we are to search for truth, or to review and refresh the truth we already have. It is a time to learn the practices specified in truth, so the truth will become our practice. It is time to hear it and believe it, in order to keep our faith strong and focused. If we ignore our studies, or do not incrementally believe and accept each “bite” of the Word as we receive it, *our faith will fade*. Our motto: TRUST...DON'T RUST. We must believe as we study to keep our spiritual equipment operating.

We saw earlier, in Acts 17:11, how the Bereans were eager to learn the Scripture; they wanted to think about it, and talk about it, and practice it...and they did this *daily*. This passage says, “...they received the message with great eagerness and examined the Scriptures every day.” So, their study schedule was “every day”. This is our example, and the suggested frequency for our study: EVERY DAY! It is not okay to take a vacation from studying the Word. It may seem innocuous to skip, but this will bring undesirable consequences (more on this in Vol. 2).

**Searching for Truth.** Prov. 2:1-6 tells us what happens when we search for truth in God's Word, as follows:

My son, if you accept my words and store up my commands within you, turning your ear to wisdom and applying your heart to understanding, and if you call out for insight and cry aloud for understanding, and if you look for it as for silver and search for it as for hidden treasure, then you will understand the fear of the Lord and find the knowledge of God. For the Lord gives wisdom, and from his mouth come knowledge and understanding.

The whole drill is contained in this passage, which delineates the following familiar components of the learning process:

1. Accept my words=believing what is taught.
2. Store up my commands within you=processing what you learn by faith.
3. Turn your ear to wisdom=preparing to learn.
4. Apply your hearts to understanding=wanting to learn.

5. Call out for insight and cry aloud for understanding=praying for wisdom.
6. Look for learning as for silver=choosing to search for the truth.
7. Then you will understand and find knowledge=completing the learning process.

This passage concludes that the Lord is the source of all wisdom. All knowledge, understanding, and wisdom come from Him...through His Word. This is what gives it value, and makes it worth the search.

Prov. 8:17 lets us know that—if we seek God *in fellowship*—we will find Him. This verse says, “I love those who love me, and those who seek me find me.” When we “love God” (because we are in fellowship, as we have seen many times), and “seek Him”, we will “find Him”. And where do we look for God? In Colorado? Well, sort of. Or in Destin? Maybe a little. But, literally, the only place where we will find God is *in His Word!* And if we go to His Word in search of Him, meaning in pursuit of *truths* about Him, we will find Him there.

But searching for truth is not a casual saunter through the park. It requires an Everest-climbing level of determination, based on passion for the truth. It demands unrelenting, undaunted, laser-beam focus on finding out **what we need to know** to become **who we're supposed to be**. If we *want* it, we will *search* for it.

In *Maturity*, the following challenge was given to spur enthusiasm for finding the truth. In the chapter “Knowledge and Wisdom”, the following is presented:

Do we want to find God? Do we want to be close to Him? If we *do* want to find Him, we will search for Him, and when we search, we need to know where to look. We will demonstrate in Scripture that Scripture itself is the place to search for God. It is almost as if we want to study a story book in which the main character of the book jumps off the pages and comes to life. Except the story of God is no fairy tale, and this book—the Bible—is no fantasy. It is the truest, least fictional story ever written, and we are in it. By studying the Bible, we not only find the way to find God, we also find the way to become our best selves, not *from* ourselves, but from Him.

God is there for us, if we want Him and seek Him.

2 Chron. 15:2*b* confirms the availability of God to the seeker, saying, “The Lord is with you when you are with him. If you seek him, he will be found by you, but if you forsake him, he will forsake you.” When we are in fellowship (or “with Him”) and search for God (“seek him”), we will find Him. It’s something we choose, because it’s something we want.

Furthermore, when we search, we must call out to Him...and we are told He will answer. In Jer. 33:3, He promises, “Call to me and I will answer you and tell you great and unsearchable things you do not know.” When we are open to Him, and looking for Him, calling out for His truth, He will “teach us things we do not know”. What a treasure hunt...for pearls of wisdom! (cf., Matt. 13:44-45)

The value of truth makes the search worthwhile. Some treasure hunters spend their whole lives searching for sunken or buried treasure. And they have no guarantee they will ever find anything. But we are guaranteed that—if we will prepare and search—we will find treasure. The value of that treasure can be seen in a number of scriptures. Here is a sample of them, with brief comments:

- Ps. 19:10—“They [laws, precepts, commands, ordinances, etc., cf., verses 1-9] are more precious than gold, than much pure gold....” Scripture is more valuable than any amount of gold.
- Ps. 119:72, 127—“The law from your mouth is more precious to me than thousands of pieces of silver and gold...Because I love your commands more than gold, more than pure gold....” Once again, words from God are worth more than gold...to the seeker.
- Prov. 8:10-11—“Choose my instruction instead of silver, knowledge rather than choice gold, for wisdom is more precious than rubies, and nothing you desire can compare with her.” Are we starting to get the picture of how *really* valuable God's knowledge is? Yet it can be ours if we “choose” it, and we will choose it, if we “desire” it. Do you really want God? Choose His instruction.

The value of knowledge from God is greater than that of gold, which means that it is worth whatever it costs, or whatever it takes, to get it. Prov. 4:7 says, “Wisdom is supreme; therefore get wisdom. Though it cost all you have, get understanding.”

**Pay Attention.** 2 Pet. 1:19a calls for us to notice Scripture, and then stay riveted to it, because it is light in a dark world. This passage says, “And we have the word of the prophets made more certain, and you will do well to pay attention to it, as to a light shining in a dark place....” Peter is telling us to stay focused on truth, or we will be unable to see where we are going. As we pick our way through life, our choices will never be clear or correct, if we refuse to accept the knowledge of Scripture. We need the light of the Word to illuminate our path.

We are told many times *in Scripture* the importance of digging out the truths that it contains. Regardless of what family, or friends, or anyone else says, the Word is our final authority...that is where we get the truth. In *Sin and Mercy*, in the chapter titled, “Other Spiritual Provisions to Help us Beat Sin”, we see the following injunction to study the Word:

When should we pay attention to Scripture? All the time! Learning and growing in the Word of God is not an occasional or casual thing. If you are going to get serious about being a productive Christian, the Word of God must be your life, and you must devote every minute of every day in close proximity to its teachings. To get the maximum life, you must get the ultimate truth...without stopping or slowing down.

When we live in the Word, we can “walk in the truth”. This is what we see in III Jn. 1:3, in which John praises his friend Gaius for his consistency in learning and applying the Word. This verse says, “It gave me great joy to have some brothers come and tell about your faithfulness to the truth and how you continue to walk in the truth.” In fact, John goes on to say that hearing

about believers walking in the truth gave him more joy than anything else. This shows how much importance he placed on listening and processing and practicing truth. Being “faithful” to the truth shows consistency in study; “walking in the truth” shows consistency in application. Do it all, and do it faithfully. For complete success, complete the process.

If we take a break, or stop studying altogether, our spiritual fiber will decay, and our spiritual strength will atrophy. Prov. 19:27 says, “Stop listening to instruction, my son, and you will stray from the words of knowledge.” When we do not spend meaningful time in study, we will “stray”, and that is where we get into trouble.

We must be like Ezra, who “devoted himself to the study and observance of the Law of the Lord...” (Ezra 7:10a) Ezra was committed to his studies, which qualified him to lead the people out of Babylon and back to Jerusalem. When we are faithful in our studies, our gifts will operate for the benefit of all, and God will be glorified.

Attention to Bible study is vital in our spiritual life, but—let’s face it—we don’t get much recognition from the world for studying the Word. In fact, we may look a little odd, or even “crazy” to outsiders. This happened to Paul, as described in Acts 26:24, which says, “At this point Festus interrupted Paul’s defense. ‘You are out of your mind, Paul!’ he shouted. ‘Your great learning is driving you insane.’” But we are learning that studying the Word is the “sanest” thing we can do.

Regardless of the kind of attention our study may bring from those who do not understand what we are doing, we must “pay attention to God’s Word”. Prov. 5:1-2 says it well: “My son, pay attention to my wisdom, listen well to my words of insight, that you may maintain discretion and your lips may preserve knowledge.” Pay attention to wisdom! That is our charge. As a result, we will be blessed, as we see in James 1:25, which says, “But the man who looks intently into the perfect law that gives freedom, and continues to do this, not forgetting what he has heard, but doing it—he will be blessed in what he does.”

**The Word is Life.** Prov. 4:20-22 tells us, once again, to “pay attention”, and then discloses why this is important. This passage says the following:

My son, pay attention to what I say; listen closely to my words. Do not let them out of your sight, keep them within your heart; for they are life to those who find them and health to a man’s whole body.

The Word is “life” for those who discover its truths, and it brings blessing to those who “listen closely”, meaning those who go through the entire process of hearing, believing, understanding, and applying truth.

Deut. 32:45-47 confirms Scripture’s centrality to life, saying this:

When Moses finished reciting all these words to all of Israel, he said to them, “Take to heart all the words I have solemnly declared to you this day, so that you may command your children to obey carefully all the words of this law. They are not just idle words for

you—they are your life. By them you will live long in the land you are crossing the Jordan to possess.

The words of God are not idle, or insignificant, or incidental, or optional...they are LIFE! This is why the study of the Word must get the highest priority among all we do. It makes a big difference in the quality of our lives, and the worth of our service. We must find that pathway which leads through the middle of truth, and walk in it, as we see in Deut. 6:6-9, which says this:

These commandments that I give you today are to be upon your hearts. Impress them on your children. Talk about them when you sit at home and when you walk along the road, when you lie down and when you get up. Tie them as symbols on your hands and bind them on your foreheads. Write them on the doorframes of your houses and on your gates.

We need more than concentrated study to walk in the truth...we need reminders. We should remind ourselves, and each other, of the truths we are learning, and surround ourselves with quotes and mnemonic triggers to help us remember the words. Our schedules are busy—sometimes maniacal—but the words of truth must never be far from our active memories. They must be kept convenient to help us through our routines, as well as our emergencies, and to keep us walking next to the Savior we are learning to adore.

## Conclusion

**Summary of Volume 1.** This concludes Volume 1 of *Bible Basics on Living in God's Word*. In this volume, we have seen that the Word of God is everlasting, because it is inspired by God... Whose person and character never changes. The revelation, inspiration, and instruction of Scripture are given by the Holy Spirit, Who indwells all believers, but only teaches believers in fellowship. We saw the things that Scripture does, such as teaching, rebuking, correcting, training in righteousness, and highlighting our sins.

We saw that the power of the "Word" is in the One Who spoke it...i.e., the power is in God. Truth has no inherent power apart from Him, and the power we receive from the Word actually comes from the Holy Spirit. The Word is a conduit for the procedures that allow us to partake in God's divine nature, enabling us to access the power of the Holy Spirit. As we do, God performs work and produces His fruit through us.

Wisdom is the final stage of refinement in the learning process, and the condition that equips us to apply truth to our experience. We must pray for this wisdom, so the Holy Spirit can teach us. As we are taught, faith converts knowledge into understanding and wisdom, so truth can be processed into the heart. From there, it can be applied.

Preparation for learning involves confession of sins, the filling of the Spirit, a posture of faith, and a thirst for the truth. When these conditions exist, and we spend time studying, renewal of our minds will prepare us to become activated as instruments of the Holy Spirit.

We also learned that, as we properly listen to the truth in the Word, we grow into maturity by the strengthening of our faith. As faith gets stronger, we learn even more, until we reach a high level of maturity. In order to achieve this, we must study faithfully and enthusiastically, so that we can absorb the nutrients needed to prompt our growth. If we do not grow, we will regress, and will eventually revert back to the stage of spiritual infancy.

Learning Scripture is central to all spirituality and spiritual production. Apart from knowledge of the Word, we will not know how to relate to our Great Creator and Father, or how to trust Him to do His work through us. God's Word is indispensable...it is more valuable than gold, and is our very life. Without the Word, we will not know God or properly relate to Him, and we will fumble clumsily along in a dark and dangerous world, wondering if we are, perhaps, alone.

**Looking Forward to Volume 2.** Volume 2 will include the following topics:

1. Feeding on the word.
2. Sanctification and truth.
3. A love for truth.
4. Benefits of following God's Word.
5. Accepting the Word to bear fruit.

*Bible Basics on the Power of God's Word: Pathway to Truth (Volume 1)*

6. The instructional value of worship.
7. The pastor/teacher role.
8. Choosing a place to grow.
9. Learning through training.
10. Studying without the heart being in it.
11. Blockages to truth.
12. Satan's opposition to truth.
13. Human knowledge vs. truth.
14. Knowledge vs. understanding.
15. Consequences for ignoring the Word.
16. Ways to conduct study.
17. The truth cycle.
18. The blessings that are promised in the Word.

## Endnotes

1. "Bibliology", an article by J. Hampton Keathley, III, p. 14, published in 1997. This article is published by Bible Studies Foundation, and is available at [www.bible.org](http://www.bible.org), under the author's name.
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3. *ABC's for Christian Growth: Laying the Foundation*, by J. Hampton Keathley, III, pp. 513-521. Biblical Studies Press, 1996-2002. This book is available at [www.bible.org](http://www.bible.org).
4. *ABC's for Christian Growth: Laying the Foundation*, p. 517.
5. *ABC's for Christian Growth: Laying the Foundation*, p. 520



## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

William D. Gibbs, III, spent 25 years in public service as an educator and curriculum designer. He served as teacher, principal, superintendent, and curriculum developer in the public school systems of Texas. He has now taken his skills in the area of learning-program development and is channeling them into service for Jesus Christ. Much of his career in education was spent developing programs for at-risk students. His work now is targeted toward at-risk Christians (or new ones). The same way that he built systems for filling in gaps and establishing solid foundations for student learning, he has built on the foundation of the Word to provide clear studies that facilitate Christian living and accelerate the growth and effectiveness of believers.

Gibbs began an intensive study of the Word in 2010, and initiated a practice at that time of recording his findings in writing. He has written ten books since then...and has now condensed them into a survey course: *Bible Basics for Living: Essential Foundations*. This course and the books which form the foundation for it (of which this is one) are the culmination of his experiences in life, his professional career, and—more recently—his studies in the Word.

He has been surprised to discover what the Bible REALLY says about living, and is sure that you will be surprised, as well, when you work through his studies. It must be said that the central player and point in this “work” is not the author, but God. If—and only if—God is in this writing, it will be helpful and beneficial to believers who read it, and God will be glorified by its dissemination.