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SERIES TWO

MODULE 1

STUDY 2

APPROACHING

GOD'S WORD

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# APPROACHING GOD'S WORD

This teaching will help you discern, in some areas, between good and evil, that which is of God and that which is false teaching. We know that in the world there is much incorrect teaching and philosophy based on unproven theory, "gut feelings" and emotional responses. Therefore we need to be thoroughly grounded in God's Word in order to distinguish right from wrong, and not to be led astray by what someone thinks or feels in relation to truth, especially regarding spiritual and moral matters.

*Background Reading: Galatians 1:1-12*

Let's begin by turning to the Gospel of John:

***JOHN 1:1 In the beginning (speaks of creation) was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.***

***JOHN 1:14 And the Word was made flesh (this was the Incarnation - God became man, a man called Jesus), and dwelt among us, (and we beheld His glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father,) full of grace and truth (as "flesh," proclaimed His Humanity, "Grace and Truth" His Deity : E.S.B.).***

**There is one true triune God**, eternally co-existent in three persons Who constitute the Holy Trinity: God the Father, God the Word and God the Holy Spirit. These three dwell together in perfect unity, forming one heavenly government called God, and each of the three Divine persons we recognize to be God. Each member of the Holy Trinity expresses the Divine Nature, and all are equally holy, just, righteous and loving.

God has three major attributes which distinguish Him from His creation. He is:

**Omnipresent** - present everywhere at the same time.

**Omnipotent** - all powerful - He is unlimited or infinite in power.

**Omniscient** - all knowing - He is unlimited in knowledge and knows all things, including that which will take place in the future.

**God had no beginning and will have no end.** This is hard for the human mind to comprehend. Before anything else existed, He was. The early Old Testament name for God was simply “*I Am that I Am,*” which, in the Hebrew language, is “*Eheyeh asher Eheyeh*” (Exodus 3:14). This term means “the Eternal, the One Who has always been and always will be, the Ever-Present and Living One.” In other words, this Name expresses God’s never changing and eternal existence.

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***“ . . . There is one true triune God,  
eternally co-existent in three persons  
Who constitute the Holy Trinity: God  
the Father, God the Word and  
God the Holy Spirit. . . ”***

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**We as Christians have the Holy Spirit dwelling within us** (1 Corinthians 3:16). It is the Holy Spirit Who brings the essence of the Father and the Son to dwell with us.

***JOHN 14:23 Jesus answered and said unto him, “If a man love Me, he will keep My words: and My Father will love him, and We will come unto him (all through the Holy Spirit), and make Our abode with him” (Jesus explained that His manifestation of Himself was to the heart; it was inward and spiritual, so that the heart would consciously enjoy His abiding in it : E.S.B.).***

***1 JOHN 4:15*** ***Whosoever shall confess that Jesus is the Son of God (the confession John speaks of here is a lifetime confession, and represents the sustained attitude of the heart : E.S.B.), God dwells in him, and he in God.***

**However, there are numerous churches** and religions which do not preach that Jesus is God the Word (the second member of the Trinity) come in the flesh, the Creator of all. There are many religions which do not believe that Jesus is God, as clearly evidenced in the scriptures:

***COLOSSIANS 1:16*** ***For by Him were all things created, that are in heaven, and that are in earth, visible (seen) and invisible (unseen), whether they be thrones, or dominions, or principalities, or powers: all things were created by Him, and for Him:***

***COLOSSIANS 1:17*** ***And He is before all things (He pre-existed all things), and by Him all things consist (hold together). (Proverbs 8:22-31)***

***HEBREWS 1:2*** ***(God) Has in these last days (the Church Age) spoken unto us by His Son (Jesus Christ), Whom He has appointed heir of all things, by Whom also He made the worlds;***

***HEBREWS 1:3*** ***Who being the brightness of His glory (the radiance of God's Glory), and the express image of His person (the exact reproduction), and upholding all things by the Word of His power (carries the meaning of Jesus not only sustaining the weight of the universe, but also maintaining its coherence and carrying on its development), when He had by Himself purged our sins (which He did at the Cross, dealing with sin regarding its cause, its power, and its guilt), sat down on the Right Hand of the Majesty on high (speaks of the Finished Work of***

*Christ, and that the Sacrifice was accepted by the Father); (E.S.B.)*

There are also some people who say, “Yes, we believe Jesus is God.” And many of these may even say, “Jesus is the way,” often leading people to believe they are saved and their churches are of God. However if we take a closer look at their doctrine, it could reveal that they also believe that we will all be gods one day or that Jesus developed into a god, or that Jesus is one of many gods, all of which deny His Divine identity as God the Word. Therefore we must be wary of false teachers and doctrines. Jesus Himself forewarned us about false teachers:

***MATTHEW 24:4 And Jesus answered and said unto them, “Take heed that no man deceive you.***

***MATTHEW 24:5 For many shall come in My Name, saying, ‘I am Christ;’ and shall deceive many.”***

***LUKE 21:8 And He (Jesus) said, “Take heed that you be not deceived: for many shall come in My Name, saying, “I am Christ;” and the time draws near (for the Rapture): go you not therefore after them (do not follow them).”***

The Apostle Paul gave further warnings, both to Timothy and the Galatian churches:

***1 TIMOTHY 4:1 Now the Spirit speaks expressly (explicitly), that in the latter times (the period in which we now live) some shall depart from the faith, giving heed to seducing (deceiving) spirits, and doctrines of devils (doctrines inspired by demons but taught by man).***

***GALATIANS 1:7 . . . but there be some that trouble you (cause confusion), and would pervert the Gospel of Christ (by false teaching).***

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***“ . . .if we take a closer look at their doctrine, it could reveal that they believe . . . that Jesus developed into a god, or that Jesus is one of many gods, all of which deny His Divine identity as God the Word. . . ”***

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***GALATIANS 1:8*** *But though we (Paul and his associates), or an Angel from Heaven, Preach any other Gospel unto you than that which we have preached unto you (Jesus Christ and Him Crucified), let him be accursed (eternally condemned; the Holy Spirit speaks this through Paul, making this very serious). (E.S.B.)*

***2 TIMOTHY 4:3*** *For the time will come when they (men) will not endure sound doctrine; but after their own lusts shall they heap to themselves teachers (who will teach them not truth but what they want to hear), having itching ears (ears itching to hear comfortable words);*

***2 TIMOTHY 4:4*** *And they shall turn away their ears from the truth, and shall be turned unto fables (and thus darkness).*

**Because they lack the knowledge** of God’s Word in their hearts, many people are deceived by cults which teach false doctrines. Unfortunately sometimes Christians are also led astray by these cults and as a result, forfeit their salvation. Therefore we need to study the Word of God, so that we can recognize these false teachers and their false doctrines, not only for our own sakes, but also for the sake of our fellow man. We need to remember that the gift of salvation is precious beyond measure and the truth of the Gospel is the only light given to illuminate the



way to life in this spiritually dead and darkened world. Therefore we need to allow the Word of God to direct us and light our pathway, hungering for the Law of God as the Psalmist did:

***PSALM 119:72 The law of Your mouth is better unto me than thousands of (pieces of) gold and silver (the Word is of more value than all the money in the world).***

***PSALM 119:105 Your Word is a lamp unto my feet, and a light unto my path.***

***PSALM 119:165 Great peace have they who love Your law: and nothing shall offend them (cause them to stumble).***

***PSALM 19:7 The law of the Lord is perfect, converting the soul: the testimony of the Lord is sure, making wise the simple.***

***PSALM 19:8 The statutes of the Lord are right, rejoicing the heart: the commandment of the Lord is pure, enlightening the eyes.***

***PSALM 19:9 The fear of the Lord is clean, enduring for ever: the judgements of the Lord are true and righteous altogether.***

***PSALM 19:10 More to be desired are they than gold, yea, than much fine gold: sweeter also than honey and the honeycomb.***

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***“. . .the truth of the Gospel is the only light given to illuminate the way to life in this spiritually dead and darkened world. . .”***

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## COMMON WORLDLY ERROR

**In the world of the unsaved**, who have only their own natural thinking to light the pathway before them, we find commonly held misconceptions which relate to salvation and religion. Such misconceptions can be proven as such by a simple reading of scripture:

***JOHN 14:6 Jesus said unto him, "I am the way, the truth, and the life: no man comes unto (God) the Father, but by Me (by Who He is, and by what He has done)."***

Nevertheless, man, thinking with an unrenewed mind, will grasp such falsehoods as a form of security for eternal life.

**The first such common error** is the belief that if one's good works outweigh one's bad, then this will be sufficient to earn one a place in heaven. One famous film star who died recently was quoted as saying "I think I have done enough to get there (heaven)." Sadly this was reported just before his death. Josh McDowell speaks about this belief as follows:

***"Don't my good works count for anything? Will not God accept me if I've lived a good life?"***

*In the early sixties, a song came out by J. Frank Wilson and the Cavaliers, entitled "The Last Kiss." The song is about a couple out on a date who get into a car accident. The girl dies in her boyfriend's arms. He mourns her death singing:*

*"Oh, where, oh where, can my baby be, The Lord took her away from me, She's gone to heaven so I got to be good, So I can see my baby when I leave this world."*

*This song sums up the attitude of a lot of people. They think if they can live a good life, if the good works they do outweigh the bad, then they will have earned their way to heaven.*

*Unfortunately, the Bible does not allow anyone to earn his way to heaven. The Scriptures teach that good works have nothing to do with one entering into a right relationship with*

*God. This relationship is nothing we can earn, because God has done everything for us.*

*“Not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to his mercy he saved us” (Titus 3:5, KJV).*

*“For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God: Not of works, lest any man should boast” (Ephesians 2:8, 9, KJV).*

*“But without faith it is impossible to please him” (Hebrews 11:6, KJV).*

*“This is the work of God, that ye believe on him whom he hath sent” (John 6:29, KJV).*

*If our eternal salvation was on the basis of works and we could earn it successfully, then God would be our debtor: He would owe us something (Romans 4:1–3). The Bible teaches that God owes no man anything, and our own righteousness is as filthy rags (Isaiah 64:6).*

*The simple reason is that God has a perfect standard, and all of us have sinned and come short of this mark (Romans 3:23). We like to compare ourselves to others, and thus we feel that we are not so bad after all. But God compares us to Jesus Christ, and next to Him we cannot help but fall far short, all of us without exception.*

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***“. . .The simple reason is that God has a perfect standard, and all of us have sinned and come short of this mark. . .”***

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*This can be illustrated by the following example. Out in Southern California, there is an island off the coast called Catalina, twenty-six miles from the pier at Newport Beach. Suppose that one day three men are standing on the end of the pier.*

*One is an alcoholic, grubby, sick, living in the streets. The second is the average American, and the third a fine, upstanding, pillar-of-the-community person.*

*All of a sudden, the alcoholic leaps off the edge of the pier five feet out into the water. The other two yell, "What are you trying to do?" The man in the water yells back, "I'm jumping to Catalina!"*

*The second man, the average man on the street, says, "Watch me. I can do better than that!" He proceeds to jump, landing ten feet out, twice as far as the alcoholic. The third man, very moral, upright, outstanding person that he is, laughs disdainfully at the two men in the water.*

*He moves back about fifty yards, takes a running leap and lands twenty feet out, twice as far as Mr. Average, and four times as far as Mr. Alcoholic.*

*The Coast Guard fishes them out of the water and asks what they are doing, to which they all reply, "We are jumping to Catalina," and Mr. Average boasts of his beating Mr. Alcoholic, and Mr. Great boasts of his accomplishment in beating both of them.*

*The Coast Guard officer could only shake his head and exclaim, "You fools! You are all still twenty-six miles short of your mark."*

*Although modern man considers himself better than - or at least as good as - others, he is still far from the target God has set for us. It is impossible for anyone to jump from the pier to Catalina, and it is impossible for anyone to reach heaven by his own deeds and apart from Jesus Christ. As Jesus Himself puts it, "No man cometh unto the Father, but by Me" (John 14:6, KJV)."*

<sup>1</sup> (underlines added)

**The second common error** is that all roads lead to Rome - in other words, all religions, if followed, will guide one to the same destination, which is heaven.

## **DON'T ALL RELIGIONS BASICALLY TEACH THE SAME THING?**

*"Many people wonder why we make such a fuss about Jesus Christ and Christianity, since they believe all religions are*

*basically the same. They assume that all faiths are all talking about the same thing, but are putting it in a different way.*

*One man once gave this illustration. He said, "Suppose you take 10 men and blindfold them, and lead them over to an elephant. You now let each of them touch a different part of the elephant - tail, trunk, etc. - without telling them what they are touching. You then lead them back inside, take off their blindfolds and tell them to describe what they touched." The man then asked, "Would their descriptions agree?" The answer of course is no.*

*The man then made this observation: even though these ten men touched the same thing, they did not agree because each touched a different part or, if you please, experienced it from a different angle. He went on to conclude, "Isn't it the same in the area of religion?"*

*Aren't all the different religious groups - Christians, Moslems, Mormons, Buddhists, etc. - experiencing the same God, yet explaining it in different ways? Thus can't they all be true, but with each giving a different emphasis?"*

*The problem with this illustration is identifying the elephant with God. You are assuming that all these people are experiencing the same God, when in fact this is not true. Christianity and Islam cannot both be true at the same time. Neither can Mormonism and Buddhism both be correct simultaneously, nor can Christian Science and Roman Catholicism.*

*All religions cannot be true at the same time, because they teach many things completely opposite from one another. They all may be wrong, but certainly they all cannot be right, for the claims of one will exclude the other.*

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***“. . .All religions cannot be true at the same time, because they teach many things completely opposite from one another. . .”***

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*As to matters of salvation and the person of Jesus Christ, only historic Christianity recognizes Him as the eternal God becoming a man who died for the sins of the world and arose again the third day. Salvation is obtained only by putting one's trust in this Jesus.*

*The Jesus of Islam was not the Son of God who died for the sins of the world; neither is the Jesus of Mormonism or Christian Science the same Jesus as revealed in the Bible.*

*Salvation is not by grace and through faith in these religions, but it is a matter of works. It can then be observed that we are dealing with different religious ideas that are not compatible with one another.*

*Even though many religions seem to be the same on the surface, the closer one gets to the central teachings the more apparent the differences become. It is totally incorrect to say that all religions are the same.*

*The God of the Christians is not the same God as that of the Mormons, Moslems, or Christian Scientists. If the God of the Bible is the only true God, then the other gods are non-existent and should not be worshiped.”<sup>2</sup>*

(underlines added)

**A further error** is that Islam and Christianity, the world's largest monotheistic religions, are compatible.

## **IS ISLAM COMPATIBLE WITH CHRISTIANITY?**

*“As with all world religions, there are tremendous differences between biblical Christianity and Islam. A close examination of the two faiths will find their beliefs to be incompatible.*

*Mohammed claimed that the revelations given him by God were infallible, thus making the Quran the standard by which the other Scriptures are to be tested. However, the mere claim to revelations is meaningless unless backed up by some kind of adequate evidence.*

*The evidence for the inspiration and historical reliability of the Bible is overwhelming, while evidence for the infallibility of the Quran is lacking.*

*Mohammed also asserted that the Gospel portrait of Jesus is incorrect, while the proper view was revealed to him by God. The Moslem thus believes the report in the Quran of the life of Jesus, rather than the New Testament account. The Jesus who is revealed in the Quran is not the same Jesus who is portrayed in the Gospels. Both accounts cannot be true at the same time.*

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***“. . .Even though many religions seem to be the same on the surface, the closer one gets to the central teachings the more apparent the differences become. . .”***

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*In any event, the teachings of Christianity and Islam cannot be reconciled. The Quran is in direct conflict with the Scriptures on the character of Jesus Christ. “Jesus Christ, the son of Mary, was no more than an apostle of God” (Sura 19:92).*

*Furthermore, the Quran states that Jesus is a prophet only to the nation Israel, while Mohammed is the last and greatest prophet to the whole world.*

*Contrast that with the biblical view of Jesus Christ, “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God” (John 1:1, KJV), “He who has seen me has seen the Father” (John 14:9, RSV), “You are the Christ, the Son of the living God” (Matthew 16:16, MLVB), “And He is the radiance of His glory and the exact representation of His nature, and upholds all things by the word of His power. When He had made purification of sins, He sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high” (Hebrews 1:3, NASB).*

*The Quran, speaking of the death of Christ, states, “They neither killed nor crucified him; it had only the appearance of it.”*

*The New Testament, however, makes the mode of Jesus’ death very clear: “And when they were come to the place, which is*

called Calvary, there they crucified him” (Luke 23:33, KJV), “and when Jesus had cried with a loud voice, he said, Father, into Thy hands I commend my spirit: and having said thus, he gave up the ghost” (Luke 23:46, KJV).

The Bible teaches that Jesus was the virgin-born Son of Mary, God in human flesh. “And the angel said to her, ‘Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favor with God. And behold, you will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you shall call his name Jesus’” (Luke 1:30, 31, RSV); “And the angel answered and said to her, The Holy Spirit will come upon you and the power of the Most High will overshadow you; therefore that holy Offspring will be called the Son of God’ ” (Luke 1:35, MLVB).

Islam teaches that Jesus was born miraculously from Mary but they do not believe in the biblical virgin birth. They believe that, as Adam was created from the earth, Jesus was created by God in the womb of Mary. They say He is not a god or the Son of God. Although this would be a miraculous conception, it is not the same as the biblical virgin birth.

Islam also teaches salvation by works: “They whose balances shall be heavy shall be blest. But they whose balances shall be light, they shall lose their soul, abiding in hell forever” (Sura 13:102–140). Thus if the scale tips in favor of good works, the Moslem will reach paradise, but if this be not the case then he will be banished to hell.

The Bible teaches a salvation by grace through faith and not of works. “For by grace you have been saved through faith; and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God; not as a result of works, that no one should boast” (Ephesians 2:8, 9, NASB), “Not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to his mercy he saved us” (Titus 3:5, KJV).

A major problem with accepting Mohammed’s account is that his testimony is 600 years after the events occurred, while the New Testament contains eyewitness or firsthand testimony of the life and ministry of Jesus Christ. Jesus made the distinction very clear, “This is the work of God, that you believe in him whom he has sent” (John 6:29, RSV).” <sup>3</sup>

(underlines added)



## DISCERNING TRUTH

*Background Reading: Luke 6:43-44*

**If a person is open to the Spirit of Truth** (the Holy Spirit - our Teacher), the greatest sign to show that a teaching is of God will be God's convicting power on the Word of truth when it is spoken in wisdom and faith. As the Spirit bears witness with our spirit (Romans 8:16) that the words being spoken are from God, if truly open to this truth, we will experience an inner conviction. It is this inner witness (the knowing within) that will tell us whether a teaching is of God or not (again, that is if we are open to the Spirit of God). However, many may be unable to correctly perceive this leading. For this reason they need to be protected from the enemy and themselves through submitting to God-given leadership - their shepherds (pastors and teachers) within the Body.

God's purpose in shepherding His people doctrinally is revealed in His exhortation to Timothy:

***2 TIMOTHY 4:2 Herald and preach the Word! Keep your sense of urgency (stand by, be at hand and ready, whether the opportunity seems to be favorable or unfavorable, whether it is convenient or inconvenient, whether it be welcome or unwelcome, you as preacher of the Word are to show people in what way their lives are wrong) and convince them, rebuking and correcting, warning and urging and encouraging them, being unflinching and inexhaustible in patience and teaching. (Amp.)***

Another version reads:

***2 TIMOTHY 4:2 Preach the Word (refers to the whole body of revealed Truth, which means the entirety of the Word of God); be instant in season, out of season (presents the idea of the Preacher holding himself in constant readiness to proclaim the Word);***

*reprove* (the Preacher is to deal with sin, both in the lives of his unsaved hearers and in those of the Saints to whom he Ministers, and he is to do so in no uncertain tones and terms), *rebuke* (a suggestion in some cases of impending penalty), *exhort with all longsuffering and Doctrine*. (This tells us that the “reproving” and the “rebuking” must be done with gentleness . . . ) (E.S.B.)

Many become shipwrecked in their faith because they never put down roots, but move from church to church, thinking they are qualified to act as their own pastors. This goes against the teaching of scripture which states that God gave the offices of the Five Fold Ministry (Apostles, Prophets, Evangelists, Pastors and Teachers) to the Church for the express purpose of “ . . . the perfecting of the Saints, . . . the work of the ministry, . . . the edifying of the Body of Christ” (Ephesians 4:11-12).

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***“ . . . Many become shipwrecked in their faith because they never put down roots, but move from church to church, thinking they are qualified to act as their own pastors. . . ”***

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**In fact part of God’s prescribed order** for our Christian life is to become committed to a local church and to submit to those whom God has placed in authority over us in this place. There are shepherds and there are sheep - and the sheep are ill-equipped to shepherd themselves. Therefore we find specific instruction in God’s Word to:

***HEBREWS 13:17 Obey them who have the rule over you, and submit yourselves (to them in the Lord): for they watch for your souls (have a responsibility for your spiritual welfare), as they who must give account***

*(to the Lord), that they may do it with joy, and not with grief: for that is unprofitable for you.*

This is not an authority which is to be exercised in a dictatorial way, for all things need to be taken to the Lord in prayer. While the shepherd must give account, each person is still responsible for their own spiritual walk. The key in all this is humility, and a heart's desire to please the Father:

*1 PETER 5:5 Likewise, you younger, submit yourselves unto the elder. Yes, all of you be subject one to another, and be clothed with humility: for God resists the proud, and gives grace to the humble. (Proverbs 3:34)*

*1 PETER 5:6 Humble yourselves therefore under the mighty hand of God, that He may exalt you in due time (proclaims the route to the Blessings of God : E.S.B.)*

**The first sign** which shows that a teaching is of God is that it will line up with His Word - His principles. Then if it does, it must also be a balanced message, in context, and applicable for today. Indeed there are many hermeneutical rules which govern the interpretation of scripture. Biblical hermeneutics is the science of interpretation of scripture.

Note that we will not know if a teaching is correct by how much emotional response we have to it, or by how "comfortable" we feel. Both of these indicators can be based purely on the senses, and the senses are not able to accurately or objectively discern spiritual truth.

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*“. . .The first sign which shows that a teaching is of God is that it will line up with His Word - His principles. . .”*

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When God's teachings are received and acted upon in faith, His power will be released to back up His Word of truth. And there will be signs and wonders which accompany and confirm the preaching of the message of truth.

***ROMANS 1:16 For I am not ashamed of the Gospel of Christ: for it is the power of God unto salvation (of spirit, soul and body) to every one who believes . . .***

***MARK 16:20 And they (the early Church) went forth, and preached every where, the Lord working with them, and confirming the Word with signs (and wonders) following. Amen.***

These signs will include lives transformed at an experiential level to express the fruit of the Spirit.

***GALATIANS 5:22 But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, faith,***

***GALATIANS 5:23 Meekness, temperance: against such there is no law. (This fruit can only develop when Christians are led and empowered by the Spirit.)***

***GALATIANS 5:24 And they who are Christ's have crucified the flesh with the affections and lusts.***

***GALATIANS 5:25 If we live in the Spirit (speaks of salvation), let us also walk in the Spirit (speaks of ongoing sanctification, i.e. living our life on a daily basis according to the graces and energies of the Divine Nature).***

We cannot, however, rely on the numbers of people being saved and healed alone to tell us whether a certain teaching is truth or not. This is because people have wills and can reject the truth, thus choosing not to receive of God's teachings through His chosen vessels. By doing so, such people remain in bondage

because of their unbelief or rebellion. Therefore we cannot rely on signs alone to establish the authenticity of a teacher or teaching.

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***“. . . We cannot, however, rely on the numbers of people being saved and healed alone to tell us whether a certain teaching is truth or not. . . ”***

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**Indeed the power of the Gospel** is only realized when people receive, believe and act on God’s Word in faith - for until truth is believed and acted upon, it will remain merely empty or dead words. But when it is appropriated according to the conditions of God’s Word, it is transformed into the living word which can release the power of God unto salvation of spirit, soul and body.

**We can see an example** of people rejecting God’s teachings when Jesus, the greatest teacher of all, returned to Nazareth, His home town.

***MARK 6:1 And He went out from thence (Capernium), and came into His own country (hometown - Nazareth); and His Disciples follow (accompanied) Him.***

***MARK 6:2 And when the Sabbath day was come, He began to teach in the synagogue: and many hearing Him were astonished, saying, “From whence has this man these things? and what wisdom is this which is given unto Him, that even such mighty works (miracles) are wrought by His hands? (They did not question the wisdom or the works, but rather His right to do such things. In their thoughts, He wasn’t worthy!) (E.S.B.)***

***MARK 6:3 Is not this the carpenter, the Son of Mary, the brother of James, and Joses, and of Juda, and***

*Simon? and are not His sisters here with us? ” And they were offended at Him (disapproved of Him).*

*MARK 6:4 But Jesus said unto them, “A Prophet is not without honour (proper deference and reverence), but in his own country, and among his own kin, and in his own house (probably meaning His brothers and sisters).”*

*MARK 6:5 And He could there do no mighty work, save that He laid His hands upon a few sick folk, and healed them.*

*MARK 6:6 And He marvelled (was amazed) because of their unbelief . . .*

Even though God had performed many mighty miracles and wonders through Jesus’ ministry, people still rejected Jesus and His teachings, and the same still happens today to God’s ministers. Therefore a lack of signs and wonders does not necessarily mean that a teaching or a ministry is not of God.

**However, we can state categorically** that if a teaching does not line up with God’s Word, we need to reject it, no matter what so-called “signs” may accompany it (2 Corinthians 11:13-15). Thus to know if a teaching is correct and in context, we must know the principles contained within God’s Word. Otherwise we could be deceived by wrong teaching and succumb to confusion and error. We need proper doctrinal filters to work through the doctrines of the Bible. In other words, scripture will not contradict itself, and will always harmonize. As we understand basic doctrines, we can use these as a filter by which other doctrine can be tested, and if true, then digested. As scripture itself tells us, we must be built up, doctrine upon doctrine, “*For precept must be upon precept, precept upon precept; line upon line, line upon line; here a little, and there a little*” (Isaiah 28:10). In this way we can progress gradually from the milk of the Word to the meat of the Word:

**HEBREWS 5:13** *For every one who uses milk (doesn't refer to new Christians but those who have had opportunity to grow in the Word and haven't done so) is unskilful in the Word of righteousness: for he is (still) a babe.*

**HEBREWS 5:14** *But strong meat (of the Word) belongs to them who are of full age (mature in the Lord), even those who by reason of use have their senses exercised to discern both (distinguish between) good and evil.*

**EPHESIANS 4:14** *That we henceforth be no more children (immature Christians), tossed to and fro, and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the sleight of men (unscrupulous teachers of falsehood), and cunning craftiness, whereby they lie in wait to deceive (by deliberate scheming)*

Remember that the foundation of all doctrine is the Cross. Therefore anything, meaning any doctrine which is not based on Calvary - on the Cross (the Atonement) - will be false and will bring nothing but error and distraction of one kind or another.

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***“. . . We need proper doctrinal filters to work through the doctrines of the Bible. In other words, scripture will not contradict itself, and will always harmonize. . .”***

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**We are responsible** for our own personal growth in the Lord. We are responsible for what we do with what we hear. God has commanded us to seek Him and His truth with all we have, and He promises that if we do, we will find both. To do anything less than this is to deny ourselves God's fellowship and love, and this may bring bondage into our lives and even cause others to remain

in darkness (through a lack of discipleship and Christian witness on our part).

**God will protect new Christians** in their initial growth in a limited way as long as they follow Him wholeheartedly. Just as parents care for their children and protect them from harm when they can, God does the same. However the degree of help, protection and provision that God gives will depend on the individual's willingness to allow Him to do so. And we need also to allow God to direct us in regard to the church we attend and the ministry we sit under, for in these matters we are also responsible before God. We should allow these things to be of God's choosing, not ours - for in relation to God we are but babes, and it is He Who knows both us and the future. So leave the future in His hands, by allowing Him to lead in all these areas.

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***“. . . We need to allow God to direct us in regard to the church we attend and the ministry we sit under, for in these matters we are also responsible before God. . . ”***

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## **APPROACHING GOD'S WORD**

*Background Reading: Matthew 7:7-11*

**God's Word has the answer to every problem** we will ever face, for it leads us into all truth. Indeed He is sufficient in every situation. But we need to seek Him and His Word with a sincere and honest heart, really desiring to know the truth. We also need to rid ourselves of our biased attitudes and preconceived ideas in order to clearly understand what God is saying.

**Firstly we need to separate ourselves**, through true repentance, from all sin - for we are a holy people unto God, set aside for His use and His purposes. As we seek His Word diligently, His truths will be revealed to us and written on our hearts. Then as we act on it, the implanted word will produce the salvation of our souls (minds) at a conditional level.



***JAMES 1:21 Wherefore (Christians) lay apart all filthiness (refers to moral impurity: E.S.B.) and superfluity of naughtiness (increased evil to which moral impurity will lead . . . : E.S.B.), and receive with meekness (seek, find and embrace) the engrafted Word, which is able to save your souls (minds: Romans 12:2).***

Some people would say, however, “I thought my soul was already saved.” This is where we need to take note of the context in which the scripture was written. First of all, the Book of James was written to Christians and so this scripture is not referring to the salvation of the spirit. When people are regenerated (born again), their spirits are saved. The soul (mind), however, is not saved (conditionally) at this point and that is why God commands us to renew our minds (Romans 12:2). Our souls (minds) are saved (renewed) by receiving God’s Word into our hearts and acting upon it in faith. In this way we begin to think as God thinks, and to harmonize the desires of our soul and spirit.

**Yes - positionally we are saved**, but our condition does not always match our position. Ongoing daily sanctification is needed in order for our condition on an experiential level to match our position of righteousness. This takes place as we renew our minds and act on that renewal. The grace of God is needed to bring such righteous fruit into existence at an experiential level on a daily basis. How do we receive this grace needed for the daily journey of faith? First we must take up our cross, and yield to the Holy Spirit Who then energizes our human nature with the energies of His Divine Nature. The empowerment of the Divine Nature will give us that which we need to run the race strong, and complete life’s most important journey.

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***“ . . .Ongoing daily sanctification is needed in order for our condition on an experiential level to match our position of righteousness. . . ”***

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**The only way** we can allow the Spirit of God to implant His Word in our hearts is by us submitting to it with all meekness. Then we need to keep it alive in our hearts by continually watering it through meditating and acting upon it. James goes on to say:

***JAMES 1:22 . . . be ye doers of the Word, and not hearers only, deceiving your own selves.***

***JAMES 1:23 For if any be a hearer of the Word, and not a doer (one who listens to the Word but does not obey it), he is like unto a man beholding his natural face in a glass (mirror):***

***JAMES 1:24 For he behold himself, and goes his way (which is not God's way), and straightway forgets what manner of man he was. (An evaluation of ourselves is necessary. However, it is God Alone Who knows the heart which the Word of God, properly presented, reveals.) (E.S.B.)***

Therefore we should not only study the Word of God, we must remember to do what it says. For instance, we need to be yielding to the Holy Spirit, believing the old man to be dead, and also reckoning that we have been raised with Christ in newness of life, making us partakers of the Divine Nature.

**The Divine Nature** gives us both the desire and the power to do God's will, through us yielding to the Holy Spirit. How is this possible? Our will is the trigger that gives permission for the Lord's grace to work through us as we yield to Him. We are then given holy desire and empowerment through the Divine Nature to live in the will of God. This is how our character can be changed and spiritual maturity developed in our lives. We need to take the Word of God and act on it with commitment and a holy desire, once again this being birthed in God's grace as we yield to Him and flow with Him.

To use a natural example, if someone asked us how many freckles we had on our face, most of us would say, “I don’t know.” We would probably have looked in the mirror this morning but we would not have purposed to count how many freckles we had. To know how many freckles we have we would need to deliberately count them.

**We need to approach God’s Word with this kind of intensity.** We need to purpose in our hearts to really look into it, desiring to be able to believe and reckon it to our account. If we approach God with this attitude, He gives us a promise:

***JAMES 1:25 But whoso looks into the perfect Law of Liberty (defines the whole body of revealed truth concerning the Word of God), and continues therein (there must be a continuous abiding in the Word), he being not a forgetful hearer, but a doer of the work, this man shall be blessed in his deed. (Obeying the Word of God brings great Blessing . . .) (E.S.B.)***

We cannot afford to merely browse through the Word to see what God has for us today. Neither can we afford to pick and choose, saying, “I won’t have any of that, but I’ll have some of this.” God does not work this way. We need to be open to receive all He has for us by purposing in our hearts to live in “*the fear of the Lord*” which, the scriptures tell us, is “*the beginning of wisdom*” (Proverbs 9:10).

We can define “*the fear of the Lord*” as “reverencing God unto obedience” and this means of course “reverencing God’s Word of truth unto obedience.” Remember that the Word tells us that to love God is to keep His commands (John 14:21; 1 John 5:3). So the proof of our love for God will be whether we obey what He says.

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***“ . . . Our will is the trigger that gives permission for the Lord’s grace to work through us as we yield to Him. . . ”***

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**If we have the will, He has the power.** He wants to give to us, but only through the Divine Nature can our character be developed to become more Christlike. Yes, so that we can love instead of hate, so that we won't respond to persecution with anger or to weakness with intolerance. We can be changed and become a different person - but only as we yield every area of our life to the Holy Spirit and lay down our life in His service.

**Reverencing God's Word of truth** unto obedience produces victory and so salvation, first of spirit, then soul and body. Indeed the Word of God is life to all those who seek it and act upon it with a diligent and sincere heart.

***PROVERBS 4:20 My son, attend to my words (this equates to the Word of God); incline your ear unto my sayings.***

***PROVERBS 4:21 Let them not depart from your eyes (read the Word daily); keep them in the midst of your heart (digest the Word so that it becomes a part of you).***

***PROVERBS 4:22 For they are life unto those who find them, and health to all their flesh (what God says is life and health).***

So when we look into the Word of God, we need to come with the attitude of wanting to know everything we can, spoonful by spoonful, precept upon precept, knowledge added to knowledge.

Christians do not have a sin problem so much as a yielding problem, a receiving problem - for Christ rose from the dead and defeated Satan, sin and the sin nature. The biggest problem in a Christian's life is usually the reflection he sees in the mirror. We are delivered from hell at salvation. But we also need to be delivered from self - self-interest, self-promotion, self-desire etc. etc., and this is the focus and work of ongoing sanctification.

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***“ . . . We can be changed and become a different person - but only as we yield every area of our life to the Holy Spirit and lay down our life in His service. . . ”***

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**It is impossible to know** all that God knows and we will never know it all. But God promises that He will give us what we need when it is needed, as we fulfill the conditions and journey with Him. Whatever is needed God will provide. For example, if you ask the Father for bread, will He give you a stone? Of course not. God will give you bread, if that is what is needed. However, when you come to God to ask Him for the bread, you must believe and trust that He will give it to you because He said He would (Matthew 7:7-11). This is because faith is heaven's currency (Hebrews 11:6).

Initially, in a Christian's early faith-walk, God's hand of grace seems at times, in certain areas, abundantly available to assist them. If they trust, God will do for them what they are not yet able to do for themselves. Then as we grow, God expects more from us. This is why scripture tells us that “ . . . *unto whomsoever much is given, of him shall be much required . . .* ” (Luke 12:48).

**As a child grows and matures**, more is required and expected of that child. Similarly, the longer we are Christians, the more God requires of us - for He wants us to eventually walk by faith in every area of our lives and be vessels fit for our Master's use (2 Timothy 2:20-21).

**It should be our desire** as Christians to serve God by knowing His will through first studying His Word. Remember that it took the Blood of Jesus to prove this Word to us. Therefore we should not leave it on the book shelf. Instead, let us reverence the Word of God, and move forward without any hesitation to seek the Lord's will and to serve Him so as to be living witnesses of His love throughout the earth. This will happen as we have ongoing fellowship with our Heavenly Father and believe and reckon to our account that which is written in God's Word of deliverance, protection and provision.

## THE WORD IS ALIVE AND LIVING

The Word will correctly analyze our thoughts and the intents of our heart to the point of judging our heart.

***HEBREWS 4:12 For the Word of God is quick (living) and active (powerful), and sharper than any two-edged sword (capable of probing the human psyche), piercing even to the dividing asunder (division) of soul and spirit, and of the joints and marrow (in every facet of man, the Word shows us what we should be and do), and is a discerner (judges, analyzes) the thoughts and intentions (motives) of the heart.***

The result will be that our hearts are penetrated, laid bare and exposed by the Word of God, to show us whether our thoughts and intentions are good or evil. Proverbs tells us in relation to this:

***PROVERBS 23:7 . . . as he (a man) thinks in his heart, so is he . . .***

“*As he thinks in his heart, so is he*” means that man’s accepted thinking becomes part of him, and where that leads depends on the power behind the accepted words (beliefs, ideas or philosophies). Some words (thoughts, beliefs) have little power, some have a dark power and others have a liberating power, being words of Divine truth, which when digested, can set us free.

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***“. . .The sword of the Spirit, wielded properly in the hands of the Saint, can do massive damage to the Kingdom of Darkness. . .”***

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**Note:** As a person one cannot be greater or less, good or bad, above and beyond the thoughts and intents (motives) of one's heart. So what determines who or what a person belongs to, and the amount of darkness and light in that person's life, will be the thoughts and intents of their heart. It is this alone, not our education or social status, that will determine who we are as individuals - in other words our character. To change our thinking and intentions is to change our character through this process. To gain more of God and to thus draw closer to Him is to develop our character so that we become more Christlike through being a partaker of the Divine Nature at an experiential level. To drift away from the Lord or to deliberately reject His will in our lives (through willful rebellion) is to partake of increased darkness, with the result that we will become less like Him. In this instance we would be partaking of, to a greater degree, the evil nature of which Satan is the father. It is therefore possible to develop or deteriorate in terms of character, and thus to become, by degree, either more Christlike or more like "the father of lies."

**It is the Word of God** which is the foundation of all truth and wisdom. The Word can analyze the thoughts and intents of the heart, laying them bare in its light. However it does not stop there. After the self-centred delusions of man are exposed for what they are, God then takes man to the answer for all his woes. The answer is contained in the Word but always passes through the message of the Cross. Indeed every blessing, even truth itself, must journey through Calvary if it is to become real and life changing.

God's Word contrasts His thoughts with our thoughts (Isaiah 55:8-9). This analysis is done so that we can judge by the power of the Holy Spirit. It is His work to reveal truth to us and empower our hearts with it. Concerning the Word of God, any teaching done without the involvement of the true Teacher, the Holy Spirit, will be futile and fruitless. Normally people who fall into this trap are religious people. They seek knowledge for knowledge's sake, this being their motivation - rather than seeking knowledge for the purpose of developing their relationship with Christ and serving the Father to a fuller extent. Our foundation

must always be the Cross - our identification with Christ in His death and Resurrection - with everything good proceeding from it. People who study the Word intellectually will gain nothing of any spiritual value, let alone spiritual empowerment. Indeed pride can often be the result. We must study to bring out the proper meaning of scripture, and to seek to apply the truths we find to our lives (James 1:22-25). Otherwise at best we will “*wrest*” (distort) the scriptures, or even add to them or take away from them, perish the thought (Deuteronomy 12:32; Proverbs 30:5-6; Revelation 22:18-19) !!!

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***“. . .Our foundation must always be the Cross - our identification with Christ in His death and Resurrection - with everything good proceeding from it. . .”***

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**The Word reveals truth** to the hearer, and brings Light into darkened areas of the mind when it is embraced. It is the Word, Divine truth, which has the power to liberate the mind - because it is God speaking, and bringing conviction to the hearer. Such is the Word’s power that when it is accepted, darkness will be dispelled and eradicated. Therefore the Word tells us:

***JOHN 8:32 And you shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free.***

**Sin not dealt with by the Blood of the Lamb** will frustrate the grace of God. This grace can be likened, metaphorically, to Light which is needed to deliver man from the darkness that sin has brought to man’s mind. But with holy Light also comes Divine power that would enable the repentant to walk in the Light of God’s Word. The one who sins (saved or unsaved) must come to the Cross to repent and digest the truth of the Gospel. Then the Light of God’s truth will set them free.



## UNDERSTANDING GOD'S WORD

*Background Reading: Ephesians 1:17-18*

**Do not be disappointed when studying God's Word** if you cannot, at first, fully understand all that you study. In fact your spirit needs to be educated and trained in spiritual matters, just as your body has been trained in physical skills - and this takes time.

Also just because a person reads the Word of God does not necessarily mean that his or her spirit will become educated. Understanding is required before this process can take place. A person could sit down and read a great deal of scientific material, for instance, but it would not necessarily mean that this person would understand what he or she was reading.

You too can read the Bible and not understand what you are reading. This is one reason the Lord has provided the Church with Teachers (Ephesians 4:11-12), so that His people can gain a clear understanding of the whole Word of God.

Also, spiritual matters cannot be fully understood from our natural reasoning alone (unrenewed mind), for God's Word is spiritually understood as revelation knowledge by the heart (spirit) of a man.

***1 CORINTHIANS 2:14*** *But the natural man (natural thinking man) receives not the things of the Spirit of God: for they are foolishness unto him: neither can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned (understood).*

***ISAIAH 28:10*** *For precept must be upon precept, precept upon precept; line upon line, line upon line; here a little, and there a little*

This is why we need to continually meditate on God's Word, to give the Holy Spirit (our true Teacher) the opportunity to reveal

His truths to us, little by little. In this way we can grow in knowledge, faith and wisdom.

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***“ . . .Spiritual matters cannot be fully understood from our natural reasoning alone (unrenewed mind), for God’s Word is spiritually understood as revelation knowledge by the heart (spirit) of a man. . . ”***

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We have taken from Dake’s Annotated Bible the following reference entitled as follows:

### **TWENTY PROOFS THE BIBLE IS INSPIRED**

“1. Its wonderful unity. Over 40 authors wrote 66 books in different lands and over a period of 1800 years.

Many never saw the writings of the others and yet there is no contradiction between any two of them. Collect any group of books by any other 40 men on any subject and see if they agree.

2. Its superiority to other books in its origin, formation, doctrines, principles, claims, moral tone, histories, prophecies, revelation, literature, present redemption and eternal benefits, and its general contents.

3. Its influence in the world. It has blessed millions in every generation, made the highest civilizations, and given man the highest hope and destiny.

4. The character and greatness of those who accept it. The wisest, most godly, and honest of men acknowledge it as God’s Word. Only infidels and the ungodly reject it.

5. Man could not have written it if he would, and would not have written it if he could. No critic of Scripture has ever been able to improve or disprove it.

6. Good men must have written it. It condemns all sin and records the sins and faults of its writers as well as others. This,

evil men would not do. Even good men would not do it unless inspired to do so to help others.

7. All man's present and eternal needs are met by the Bible. Redemption and promised benefits have been given to all who believed in all generations and this will always be so.

8. Its preservation through the ages. Whole kingdoms and religions have sought in vain to destroy it. It is still victor and indestructible.

9. The heavenly and eternal character of its contents proves it to be of God.

10. The response of the soul to it. The Bible fits the soul as a key to a lock.

11. Its infinite depths and lofty ideals. It is universal in its appeal, reasonable in its teachings, reliable in its promises, durable in its conflicts, everlasting in its usefulness, new and modern in its statements, indispensable to human civilization, indisputable in its authority, interesting in its histories, colorful in its biographies, accurate in its prophecies, individual in its messages, far reaching in its vision, complete in its laws, comprehensive in its knowledge, infinite in its detail, unselfish in its purpose, simple in its application, just in its demands, righteous in its judgements, clear in its application, and masterful in its wisdom.

12. Fulfilled prophecy. About 3,300 verses of prophecy have been fulfilled, predictions made hundreds and even thousands of years before their fulfillment. Not one detail has failed yet. About 2,908 verses are being fulfilled, or will yet be fulfilled.

13. Miracles. Hundreds are recorded in Scripture, and many happen daily among those who pray and claim Bible promises.

14. Its perfection. It is scientifically and historically correct. No one man has ever found the Bible at fault in any of its many hundreds of statements on history, astronomy, botany, geology, or any other branch of learning.

15. Its adaptability. It is always up to date on any subject. It fits the lives of all people of all ages and all lands.

16. Its spiritual and moral power. It meets perfectly every spiritual and moral need of man.

17. Its doctrines. They surpass all human principles in relationship, religion, culture, etc. (1 Corinthians 2:14)

18. Claims of the Bible itself. Over 3,800 times Bible writers claim God spoke what they wrote. The Bible itself claims to be the Word of God.

19. Secular history. Many pagan as well as Jewish and Christian writers confirm the facts of the Bible, quoting it as being genuine, authentic, and inspired of God.

20. Its inexhaustible proofs. It would take many volumes to deal fully with the many thousands of facts which confirm the Bible to be the Word of God. The book must be divine. If one will use it properly it will confirm itself to him as the inspired Word of God.”<sup>4</sup>

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**“ . . .Over 40 authors wrote 66 books in different lands and over a period of 1800 years. Many never saw the writings of the others and yet there is no contradiction between any two of them. . . ”**

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## THE IMPORTANCE OF MEDITATING ON GOD’S WORD

*Background Reading: Psalm 1:1-3*

**Studying and meditating on the Word of God** are both vital to a person’s growth in the Lord. We must first study the Word in order to gain an understanding of God’s promises and righteous standards. Then as we meditate upon the Word, and accept it wholeheartedly, it will be deposited into our hearts as revelation (heart) knowledge - as of course we open up to the Holy Spirit. (And we meditate upon God’s Word by considering it thoughtfully or thinking deeply upon it.)

We need to read and meditate on the Word of God daily in order to know and keep God’s principles alive and active within

our minds and hearts. This needs to be a continual process, as the Book of Joshua tells us:

***JOSHUA 1:8 This Book of the Law (God's Word) shall not depart out of your mouth (speak about the Word all the time); but you shall meditate therein day and night (think about the Word all the time), that you may observe (be watchful) to do (act) according to all that is written therein: (and this is the promise) for then you shall make your way prosperous, and then you shall have good success.***

Then when a particular situation or trial arises, we will know how the Lord wants us to deal with it - according to the logos Word. The test will be whether we apply the Word we have learned to that situation or circumstance which has presented itself, trusting also in Christ's finished work at Calvary, with us in Him partaking of the Divine Nature in "newness of life." Our reliance must always be on the Lord, for He tells us in His Word, "without Me you can do nothing" (John 15:5), nothing, that is, of any eternal value. Only by His grace at work in our lives can real change be made, and character developed. Then the glory for any good thing goes to Him, "the Author and Finisher of our faith" (Hebrews 12:2).

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***“. . .The test will be whether we apply the Word we have learned to that situation or circumstance which has presented itself. . .”***

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**If we lack the spiritual fruits** of love, joy, peace, strength, etc., in any area of our lives, we need to seek so that we may find and embrace His truths, for this means we are lacking that which is rightfully ours. We can know this because God's Word says that we have spiritual prosperity, love, joy, peace, inner strength,

etc. Indeed all our needs are met in Christ Jesus as we meet the conditions set out in His Word, and rely on His grace.

***PHILIPPIANS 4:19 But my God shall supply all your need according to His riches in glory by Christ Jesus.***

To bring us to this position of reliance, however, we need to be fellowshiping with God and studying His Word, seeking the face of the Creator to do His will rather than His hands to obtain a blessing. In this we will be learning of Him and His ways and also discovering that all our needs are met in Christ. Throughout the Word there are promises which say we are healed, we have prosperity, we have peace and the power of God, through Jesus Christ, to meet the need. However, if we do not take the time to discover that these promises exist and then to embrace them for ourselves, they will not become a reality in our lives.

**Just mentally acknowledging** that the promises of God are real is only the first step. We then need to seek out the conditions and fulfill them in order for the promises to be manifested in our lives. Indeed, we may be thinking or acting wrongly in some areas, and not be aware of it. In either case, we will be preventing God from blessing us. Studying God's Word, however, and fellowshiping with Him will help us discover, with the help of the Holy Spirit, areas in our lives which need to be changed. Through these means, the Lord is able to speak to us, and reveal Himself to us. Then by His grace and the power of His Spirit, as we seek the Lord's will, we can be changed.

However, as we have said, let us not just seek the Word in regard to the promises of the Covenant. Let us seek fellowship with the Giver of the Covenant Himself, so that we may draw water from the deep wells of our salvation.

## THE RESULTS OF STAGNATION

*Background Reading: Mark 4:3-19*

**Due to the Fall of man**, there seems to have been a genetic deterioration which has affected not only man's physical body, but also, to some extent, man's memory (his ability to recall information).

There is a saying which states, "What you don't use you will lose." When we were at school, for example, we learned the various maths formulas of the day. However because most of us would not have applied them in our daily lives, we will have forgotten them simply through a lack of usage.

The same applies to the Word of God. We need to continually meditate on it and observe to do what it says, in the Lord's strength not ours, so that we will not lose what we have learned.

**If we are not observing to do all**, then we will, at some point, lose ground and slip backwards in our faith-walk. And "observing to do all" simply means that on a day to day basis, we are going to do all the Lord has told us to do, which is really going to allow the Holy Spirit to lead us and empower us. We need, in fact, to journey daily with the Holy Spirit, relying on His graces to grow in character into the likeness of Christ. Amen.

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***“. . . We need, in fact, to journey daily  
with the Holy Spirit, relying on His  
graces to grow in character into  
the likeness of Christ. . . ”***

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In extreme cases, if people become stagnant and do not move on in God, life's current will eventually push them onto the rocks and their ship will either rot or be broken, depending on the life they have led.

Because the enemy is always waiting for us to relax a little in regard to our faith so that he can attack us, we simply cannot

afford to become complacent or lazy in our commitment to the Lord (1 Peter 5:8). There is an old saying which may have some merit - "If you are in the same position today as you were yesterday, then you are a backslider." This means that our spiritual growth needs to be ongoing and progressive - so we should always be stretching ahead towards victory in Christ. Therefore:

***HEBREWS 12:1*** *Wherefore seeing we also are compassed about with so great a cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every weight (all that hinders), and the sin which does so easily beset (entangles) us, and let us run with patience (perseverance) the race that is set before us (the only "weight" God will allow in the running of this race is our taking up and bearing the Cross, and doing so constantly [Luke 9:23-24]: E.S.B.)*

And as Paul encourages his readers to strive spiritually, with holy ambition:

***PHILIPPIANS 3:13*** *Brethren, I count not myself to have apprehended (attained complete Christlikeness): but this one thing I do, forgetting those things which are behind, reaching forth unto those things which are before (God's will on a daily basis),*

***PHILIPPIANS 3:14*** *I press toward the mark (the holy standard by which we must live) for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus (God's will for one's life which is to be an imitator of Christ).*

**It is sound advice** never to follow a parked vehicle because a parked vehicle is going nowhere. The same could be said in regard to a "parked pastor" or a "parked church." We need to be able to spiritually swim in the river of truth so we can progress towards the goal that God has set before us. It is very hard, however, to swim in only a few inches of water. Therefore we need to wade out into the deeper waters of truth with the help of a God-fearing, Holy-Spirit-led pastor and church that are moving



forward in God's will. A point to remember in all this is that we must not rely on our own strength to swim in this river. Rather we must believe for God to strengthen us and give us the ability to do so. This is only possible as we become humble and submit ourselves to the mighty hand of God. Then He can lift us up and empower us to do His will (James 4:10; 1 Peter 5:6; Philippians 2:13; 2 Peter 1:4).

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***“. . . We need to wade out into the deeper waters of truth with the help of a God-fearing, Holy-Spirit-led pastor and church that are moving forward in God's will. . . ”***

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**If people stagnate in their Christian walk**, the devil and his agents will not give them priority, for such Christians can do him very little harm. The enemy will concentrate his efforts on those who are doing damage to his Kingdom. You see with little effort the enemy will be able to take the Word out of the hearts of stagnant Christians, and whatever heart-knowledge they had will be reduced to mere intellectual knowledge (Mark 4:25). He will then simply be able to attack and destroy them at his leisure, whether directly or indirectly - for it is Satan's nature to kill, steal and destroy (John 10:10). And because such people are not renewing their minds, and are not taking ground by gaining empowerment through the Divine Nature, the enemy's task is made easy.

**However if Christians move on in Christ**, they become more of a target for the enemy and should prepare themselves for his attacks. Indeed the Word of God tells us that if we live a Godly life in Christ, we will be persecuted (2 Timothy 3:12). This persecution can come in the form of words spoken against us, even by members of our own family (Luke 12:51-53). We should always remember, however, that we do not fight, in a spiritual sense, against flesh and blood (Ephesians 6:12), but against

spiritual forces of wickedness, and that God is bigger, stronger and mightier than Satan and all his plans. As we walk by faith in God's Word, yielding to the Holy Spirit, no weapon of the enemy will prosper against us (Isaiah 54:17). We will then be living under God's canopy of protection with Jesus fighting the enemy on our behalf (as we allow Him to do so).

Paul says in Philippians 2:12-13:

***PHILIPPIANS 2:12*** *Wherefore, my beloved, as you have always obeyed, not as in my presence only, but now much more in my absence, work out your own salvation (growing towards maturity in Christ) with fear and trembling (this involves the process of ongoing sanctification).*

***PHILIPPIANS 2:13*** *For it is God Who works in you (through Divine enablement) both to will and to do of His good pleasure (to not only desire God's will but also to do it).*

Wuest comments on these verses as follows:

“ “Wherefore,” goes back to 1:27 where Paul's presence and absence are referred to as in this verse. In 1:27 we have Paul's exhortation to the Philippian saints to conduct themselves as citizens of heaven should. Then the apostle singles out one of the obligations of a citizen of heaven, that of living in harmony and unity with his fellow-saints. In 2:1-4, he gives four reasons which in themselves are enablements, why they should live in unity together, and further develops the theme of Christian unity. In 2:5, he tells them that such unity is one of the constituent elements in the mind of Christ, and in 2:6-8, he shows how Christ Jesus exhibited the basic quality of unity, namely, humility and self-abnegation in His incarnation and vicarious death on the Cross, which act on His part was recognized by God the Father in that He exalted His Son as the Man Christ Jesus, placing Him in the place of highest honor in the universe.

Now, in 2:12, 13, the apostle exhorts these saints to make the humility and self-abnegation exhibited by the Lord Jesus, a fact in their own lives. He calls them, “my beloved ones,” the word being plural in the Greek. The distinctive word here for “love” refers to the love that God is, to the love produced in the heart by the Holy Spirit, a love that impels one to sacrifice one’s self for the benefit of others. This is the heavenly love with which the great apostle loved the Philippians. He commends them for their constant obedience. Then he exhorts them to work out their own salvation. Let us be clear first of all as to what this exhortation does not mean. It does not mean to work for one’s salvation, and for two reasons; first, Paul was writing to those who were already saved, and second, salvation is not a work of man for God, but a work of God for man, a work that was accomplished at the Cross. Neither does it mean to work out an inworked salvation. The idea of working out an inworked salvation is merely a play upon the English words “work out,” and has no support from the Greek.

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***“. . .The Philippians are exhorted to carry their salvation to its ultimate conclusion, namely, Christlikeness - victory over sin and the living of a life pleasing to the Lord Jesus. . .”***

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The words “work out” are the translation of a Greek word which means “to carry out to the goal, to carry to its ultimate conclusion.” We say, “The student worked out a problem in arithmetic.” That is, he carried the problem to its ultimate conclusion. This is the way it is used here. The Philippians are exhorted to carry their salvation to its ultimate conclusion, namely, Christlikeness. The salvation spoken of here is not justification, but sanctification, victory over sin and the living of a life pleasing to the Lord Jesus. They are to see to it that they make progress in their Christian lives. They are to do this with fear and trembling. This is not a slavish terror; but a wholesome caution. “This fear is self-distrust; it is tenderness of conscience; it is

vigilance against temptation; it is the fear which inspiration opposes to high-mindedness in the admonition, 'be not high-minded but fear.' It is taking heed lest we fall; it is a constant apprehension of the deceitfulness of the heart, and of the insidiousness and power of inward corruption. It is the caution and circumspection which timidly shrinks from whatever would offend and dishonor God and the Saviour" (Vincent, quoting Wardlaw On Proverbs). This is human responsibility.

In verse thirteen we have divine enablement. The saints are to carry their salvation which God has given them and which thus belongs to them, to its ultimate goal, always remembering and depending upon the fact that it is God who is working in them both to will and to do of His good pleasure. The word "worketh" in the Greek means "to energize, to work effectively." Our words "energy" and "energize" come from it. The words "to will" are the translation of a Greek word meaning "to desire," and refer to a desire that comes from one's emotions rather than from one's reason. It is this desire to do the good pleasure of God that is produced by divine energy in the heart of the saint as he definitely subjects himself to the Holy Spirit's ministry. It is God the Holy Spirit who energizes the saint, making him not only willing, but actively desirous of doing God's sweet will. But He does not merely leave the saint with the desire to do His will. He provides the necessary power to do it. This we have in the words "to do." The Greek construction implies habit, the habitual doing of God's will.

In verse twelve, we have human responsibility, in verse thirteen, divine enablement, a perfect balance which must be kept if the Christian life is to be lived at its best. It is not a "let go and let God" affair. It is a "take hold with God" business. It is a mutual co-operation with the Holy Spirit in an interest and an activity in the things of God. The saint must not merely rest in the Holy Spirit for victory over sin and the production of a holy life. He must in addition to this dependence upon the Spirit, say a positive NO to sin and exert himself to the doing of the right. Here we have that incomprehensible and mysterious interaction between the free will of man and the sovereign grace of God.

TRANSLATION: *Wherefore, my beloved ones, as ye have always obeyed, not as in my presence only, but now much more in my absence, carry to its ultimate conclusion your own salvation with fear and trembling, for God is the One who is constantly putting forth His power in you, both in the form of the constant activity of (your) being desirous of and the constant activity of (your) putting into operation His good pleasure.*" <sup>5</sup>

(underlines added)

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***“. . . It is not a “let go and let God”  
affair. It is a “take hold with God”  
business. . .”***

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## **KNOWLEDGE ALONE IS USELESS**

*Background Reading: 2 Peter 1:4-8*

**There are many Christians** who have an intellectual knowledge of God’s laws and principles of victory and blessing. They may even understand the mechanics of how these laws operate. But while they seem to know a lot about the Word of God, they are unable to receive the promises of God. For example, many Christians may know that healing is available through Jesus. However, many are unable to personally appropriate the healing promises for themselves.

Intellectual knowledge alone of God’s Word will achieve nothing spiritually and be of very little use physically. It is only revelation knowledge - knowledge revealed to our hearts by the Holy Spirit - which will enable us to appropriate the promises. Once Christians have revelation knowledge of God’s Word in any area, there are two further elements needed to make this knowledge fruitful.

**1. We need the wisdom of God** to know how to correctly apply the knowledge we have.

**2. We then need to act in faith** according to the knowledge and wisdom we have received, with the Divine Nature energizing our human nature.

So we need revelation knowledge and the wisdom of God to apply it - we then need to act on it in faith. In this way the scriptures can become a reality in our lives, and we can receive the promises of God.

***2 CORINTHIANS 1:20 For all the promises of God in Him (Christ) are yes, and in Him Amen (are sure), unto the glory of God by us (as we allow God's graces to work in us).***

Therefore:

***HEBREWS 6:12 That you be not slothful (lazy and sluggish towards the things of the Lord), but followers of them who through faith and patience inherit the promises.***

**God's laws of blessing and protection** are set in place for the benefit of all mankind. It is up to each one of us to seek out and discover what is needed so that we may walk in the victory which God's laws promise.

The promises are, however, not meant to be the most important aspect of our lives. Rather, the prosperity to be most valued is the journey along the way which enriches one's soul. While certainly healing of the body is needed, the journey to that place of healing can often provide a far greater blessing as our relationship with the Lord is strengthened and deepened. Through the journey we can work out our weaknesses, discover the mind of God on many things, pray, laugh and cry. We can also develop a deep gratitude for God - His love, mercy and grace.

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***“ . . . While certainly healing of the body is needed, the journey to that place of healing can often provide a far greater blessing as our relationship with the Lord is strengthened and deepened. . . ”***

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We must progress in faith's journey, working out our own salvation not in our strength but in the strength of the Holy Spirit Who dwells within us. Again, Kenneth Wuest explains it as follows:

### **WORKING OUT YOUR OWN SALVATION**

*“Before attempting to explain this passage (Philippians 2:12-13), we must be clear as to what it does not teach. There is no idea here of an unsaved person doing good works to earn salvation, and for two reasons, first, because those addressed were already saved, and second, because the Bible is clear in its teaching that “not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to his mercy he saved us” (Titus 3:5). Again, the passage does not mean that a Christian should work out an inworked salvation. There is no such idea in the Greek.*

*The English translation is good, if one uses the words “work out” as one does when referring to the working out of a problem in mathematics, that is, carrying it to its ultimate goal or conclusion. The Greek word here means just this.*

*The words “your own salvation,” are to be taken in their context. The working out of the Philippians' salvation was affected in some way by the presence of Paul with them and his absence from them. When Paul was with them, his teaching instructed them, his example inspired them, his encouragement urged them on in their growth in grace. Now in his absence they were thrown upon their own initiative. They must learn to paddle their own canoe. Thus Paul sets before them their human*

responsibility in their growth in grace, for sanctification is in the apostle's mind. They have their justification. Their glorification will be theirs in eternity. Their growth in Christlikeness is the salvation concerning which Paul is speaking. Thus, the saints are exhorted to carry their growth in grace to its ultimate goal, Christlikeness. I John 3:2 speaks of the saint's future conformation to the image of Christ, and (3:3) says, "And every man that hath this hope set on him purifieth himself even as he is pure."

*The salvation spoken of in verse twelve is defined for us in verse thirteen, namely, the definite act of willing to do God's good pleasure and the doing of it. That is the saint's responsibility from the human standpoint. But the saint is not left without resources with which to do both, for God the Holy Spirit indwelling him produces in him both the willingness and the power to do His will. The saint avails himself of both of these by fulfilling the requirements laid down by our Lord in John 7:37, 38, namely, a thirst or desire for the fullness of the Spirit, and a trust in the Lord Jesus for that fullness ..... In verse twelve we have human responsibility, and in verse thirteen, divine enablement." <sup>6</sup>*

(underlines added)

## LIGHT EXPOSES DARKNESS

*Background Reading: 1 John 1:5-7*

**The truth is Light** and when allowed to shine in a person's life, this Light will expose and dispose of darkness (bondage). But darkness will only be expelled in the areas in which this spiritual Light is allowed to shine. This will take yieldedness to God's will, not ours. Note too that God's spiritual Light is a part of His essence, His presence. It is not just light as we perceive a lighted room. Spiritual Light provides the power to bring change and to deliver those in the bondage of ignorance and the darkness of deception.



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***“ . . . God’s spiritual Light is a part of His essence, His presence – and provides the power to bring change and to deliver those in the bondage of ignorance and the darkness of deception. . . ”***

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Christians will continue to have areas of spiritual darkness in their lives until they allow the Light of God’s Word to enter every area. To use a natural illustration, when we turn on a light in a darkened room, all darkness leaves as the light shines. Then when the light is switched off, the darkness returns. So too in the spiritual realm, when we allow God’s truth (His Light) to shine in an area of our lives, the darkness in that area has to leave. As we have said, this will only take place as we yield to the Holy Spirit, laying down our thinking and desires in order to embrace His thinking and desires. Jesus said:

***JOHN 12:46 “I am come a Light into the world, that whosoever believes on Me (and My Word) should (will) not abide in darkness (for Christians this relates to the areas in which they believe).”***

***JOHN 12:35 Then Jesus said unto them, “Yet a little while is the Light with you. Walk while you have the Light, lest darkness come upon you: for he who walks in darkness knows not where he goes.***

***JOHN 12:36 While you have Light (Jesus Himself is the Light), believe in the Light (make Christ the central focus of your life and living: E.S.B.), that you may be the children of Light . . . . . ”***

***JOHN 3:21 But he who does truth (lives by the truth) comes to the Light, that his deeds may be made manifest (clearly revealed), that they are wrought in God (performed in dependence on Him). (Note that***

*one who lives according to the truth does not fear, hate or shun the Light but comes willingly to the Light: (John 3:19-20)*

**As we allow truth to enter our hearts** through meditating on the Word of God and fellowshiping with our Father, we are allowing soul-enriching Light into our lives. We not only need the written Word, we also need to know the Author of that Word, for it is by and through Him that all truth, and hence all Light, comes. When Light is allowed to shine, the darkness has to depart - for darkness cannot enter a lighted room and darkness cannot return where Light continues to shine. So let us be truth-centred and focused on God's Word. Let us allow the Holy Spirit to gently reveal His truths to us as we seek to live in the Light. Let us then embrace that which is revealed so that we can become one with the Lord in these areas of truth revealed.

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***“ . . . As we allow truth to enter our hearts through meditating on the Word of God and fellowshiping with our Father, we are allowing soul-enriching Light into our lives. . . ”***

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When the Light enters an area of our lives, our eyes are opened. We can then see clearly in that area for the darkness has been removed.

***JOHN 8:12 . . . I am the Light of the world (He is the Light of the World, because He is the Source of its Life): he who follows Me shall not walk in darkness, but shall have the Light of Life (in effect, says that all who do not follow Jesus, walk in darkness). (E.S.B.)***

**Jesus thus identifies Himself** as the Source of spiritual Light, for without God and His presence, the world is in darkness, in the bondage of sin and spiritual death. The Light of God is in Jesus.

We who are in Jesus are in this Holy Light also, having been spiritually cleansed of the darkness in our spirit. We then need the truths of God's Word so that our minds can be renewed and other areas of darkness removed from our lives - as we allow the Light to enter.

***PSALM 119:105 Your Word (Oh Lord) is a lamp unto my feet, and a light unto my path (showing me the way I should go).***

Scripture tells us if we are ignorant of truth, we are walking in darkness and are not aware of where we are going. We need the Light of truth shining in every area of our lives so we can be vessels of Light which radiate God's love to the world.

***MATTHEW 5:14 You are the light of the world (Christians are to reflect the light that comes from Christ). A city that is set on an hill cannot be hid (we are not to hide that light but to show it forth - true light, in fact, will not be hidden).***

***MATTHEW 5:16 Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works (of faith - your living witness, true faith will produce works of righteousness: James 2:17-20), and glorify your Father Who is in heaven (works led and empowered by the Holy Spirit will bring glory to God; other works glorify man and are not what is being referred to here: 1 Corinthians 3:12-13).***

**Above all things let us therefore seek the Giver of this Light**, and let us then journey with Him and no other. This is how our relationship is meant to develop. But be aware that He also dwells with other Believers, and at times He speaks to us not only in the quiet of the night, but through other faith-filled Christians. This is one reason why the Word tells us not to forsake fellowshiping with others in the Lord:

***HEBREWS 10:25 Not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as the manner of some is (it is important that Believers assemble together, however the meeting might be conducted: E.S.B.); but exhorting one another (encouraging and lifting one another up in the faith): and so much the more, as you see the day (of the Rapture) approaching.***

Therefore we can fellowship with God by ourselves or with others, and as we do so, we can allow His Light and His presence to shine through and give us both comfort and direction.

May you have the victory in Christ!

For further information or teaching material to help you grow in the Christian faith, please visit:

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## NOTES

- 1 McDowell, J., Answers To Tough Questions: Skeptics ask about the Christian faith.
- 2 McDowell, J., Answers To Tough Questions: Skeptics ask about the Christian faith.
- 3 McDowell, J., Answers To Tough Questions: Skeptics ask about the Christian faith.
- 4 Dake F.J., Dake's Annotated Reference Bible, pg.241 of the New Testament.
- 5 Wuest K.S., Word Studies From The Greek New Testament, Philippians 2:12,13.
- 6 Wuest K.S., Word Studies From The Greek New Testament, Wuest's Golden Nuggets From The Greek New Testament, pg. 69.

*"We have a vision  
to see people living  
in abundant life  
by the power of God  
through Jesus Christ"*



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