

CHAPTER ONE

THE AUTHORITY AND SUPREMACY OF GOD'S WORD

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Scripture Memory Passage: 2 Ti 3:16

“All Scripture is inspired by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training in righteousness”

“Because of the combination of human and supernatural qualities which enter into the Bible, a similarity may be observed between the Bible as the written Word and the Lord Jesus Christ as the living Word. They are both supernatural in origin, presenting an inscrutable and perfect blending of that which is divine and that which is human. They both exercise a transforming power over those who believe, and are alike allowed of God to be set at naught and rejected by those who do not believe. The untainted, undiminished divine perfections are embodied in each. The revelations which they disclose are at once as simple as the mental capacity of a child, and as complex as the infinite treasures of divine wisdom and knowledge, as enduring as the God whom they reveal.”

-Lewis Sperry Chafer; Major Bible Themes; p.15; Zondervan Press

Chapter One

The Authority of God's Word—Bible Study

THE WORD OF GOD

The phrase "God said" occurs over 570 times in the Bible; "says the Lord," over 490 times; "Word of the Lord," over 253 times, "the Lord spoke," over 130 times, while the phrase "Word of God" appears over 45 times. These are just a few of the phrases that give the authority of God to His Holy Word. How do the following passages emphasize the fact that the Bible is indeed the Word of God?

First, read the Passage. Then below it, answer the question, "How does this passage emphasize the fact that the Bible is indeed the Word of God?"

1 Thes 2:13 And for this reason, we also constantly thank God that when you received from us the word of God's message, you accepted it not as the word of men, but for what it really is, the word of God, which also performs its work in you who believe.

1 Thes 4:8 Consequently, he who rejects this is not rejecting man but the God who gives His Holy Spirit to you.

Ps 119:4 Thou hast ordained Thy precepts, That we should keep them diligently.

Ps 119:13–16 With my lips I have told of All the ordinances of Thy mouth. I have rejoiced in the way of Thy testimonies, as much as in all riches. I will meditate on Thy precepts, and regard Thy ways. I shall delight in Thy statutes; I shall not forget Thy word.

Is 1:10 Hear the word of the Lord, You rulers of Sodom; Give ear to the instruction of our God, You people of Gomorrah.

INSPIRED BY GOD

The term inspired means literally “God breathed.” It is as if we can feel the very breath of God as He speaks to us from His Word. How does each of the following passages support the claim that the Word of God is indeed inspired by God?

First, read the passage. Then, below it, answer the question, “How do each of the following passages support the claim that the Word of God is indeed inspired by God?”

2 Tim 3:16 All Scripture is inspired by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training in righteousness;

1 Thes 2:13 And for this reason we also constantly thank God that when you received from us the word of God's message, you accepted it not as the word of men, but for what it really is, the word of God, which also performs its work in you who believe.

1 Thes 4:2,8 For you know what commandments we gave you by the authority of the Lord Jesus. Consequently, he who rejects this is not rejecting man but the God who gives His Holy Spirit to you.

1 Jn 4:6 We are from God; he who knows God listens to us; he who is not from God does not listen to us. By this we know the spirit of truth and the spirit of error.

THE PROCESS OF INSPIRATION

According to the following passages, how did the inspiration process take place?

2 Pet 1:20, 21 **But know this first of all, that no prophecy of Scripture is a matter of one's own interpretation, for no prophecy was ever made by an act of human will, but men moved by the Holy Spirit spoke from God.**

2 Sam 23:2 The Spirit of the Lord spoke by me, and His word was on my tongue.

1 Chron 28:19 **All this, said David, the Lord made me understand in writing by His hand upon me, all the details of this pattern.**

THE OLD TESTAMENT IS THE WORD OF GOD

Many people feel that the Old Testament is a collection of stories and traditions, passed down over the ages and then collected into a single volume. That it is not "inspired" in the true sense of the word. How do these passages speak to the inspiration of the Old Testament?

Exo 31:18 **And when He had finished speaking with him upon Mount Sinai, He gave Moses the two tablets of the testimony, tablets of stone, written by the finger of God.**

Exo 32:16 **And the tablets were God's work, and the writing was God's writing engraved on the tablets.**

Exo 34:1 **Now the Lord said to Moses, "Cut out for yourself two stone tablets like the former ones, and I will write on the tablets the words that were on the former tablets which you shattered".**

1 Kings 2:3 **And keep the charge of the Lord your God, to walk in His ways, to keep His statutes, His commandments, His ordinances, and His testimonies, according to what is written in the law of Moses, that you may succeed in all that you do and wherever you turn.**

Lk 24:27 **And** beginning with Moses and with all the prophets, **He explained to them the things concerning Himself** in all the Scriptures.

Acts 7:53 **You who received the law** as ordained by angels, **and yet did not keep it.**

Rom 15:4 **For whatever was** written in earlier times was written for our instruction, **that through perseverance and the encouragement of the Scriptures we might have hope.**

Gal 3:19 **Why the Law then? It was added because of transgressions,** having been ordained through angels **by the agency of a mediator, until the seed should come to whom the promise had been made.**

Heb 9:8 The Holy Spirit is signifying this, **that the way into the holy place has not yet been disclosed, while the outer tabernacle is still standing.**

2 Pet 3:15,16 **And regard the patience of our Lord to be salvation; just as also our beloved brother Paul,** according to the wisdom given him, wrote to you, **as also in all his letters, speaking in them of these things, in which are some things hard to understand, which the untaught and unstable distort, as they do also** the rest of the Scriptures, to their own destruction.

PAUL'S LETTERS INSPIRED BY GOD

Still others accept the words of Christ as authoritative, but feel that Paul corrupted the true teachings of Christ and, in his zeal, added to them his own prejudices and fanaticisms. They also hold that Paul was a zealot, a woman hater, a legalist and that his teachings should not be held in the same light as the words of Christ. How do the following passages speak to the inspiration of the letters of Paul in the New Testament?

Acts 22:14 And he said, "The God of our fathers has appointed you **to know His will, and to see the Righteous One, and to hear an utterance from His mouth.**"

I Cor 14: 37, 38 If anyone thinks he is a prophet or spiritual, let him recognize that **the things, which I write to you, are the Lord's commandment.** But if anyone does not recognize this, he is not recognized.

I Cor15:3, 4 For I delivered to you as of first importance **what I also received, that Christ died** for our sins **according to the Scriptures,** and that He was buried, **and that He was raised** on the third day **according to the Scriptures.**

Gal 1:12 **For I neither received it from man, nor was I taught it, but I received it through a revelation of Jesus Christ.**

Gal 1:15–17 **But when He who had set me apart, even from my mother's womb, and called me through His grace, was pleased to reveal His Son in me,** that I might preach Him among the Gentiles, I did not immediately consult with flesh and blood, nor did I go up to Jerusalem to those who were apostles before me; but I went away to Arabia, and returned once more to Damascus.

Gal 2:2 And it was **because of a revelation that I went up;** and I submitted to them the gospel which I preach among the Gentiles, but I did so in private to those who were of reputation, for fear that I might be running, or had run, in vain.

Eph 3:3, 4 That **by revelation there was made known to me the mystery,** as I wrote before in brief. And by referring to this, when you read you can understand my insight into the mystery of Christ.

1 Thes 2:13 And for this reason we also constantly thank God that when **you received from us the word of God's message,** you accepted it not as the word of men, **but for what it really is, the word of God,** which also performs its work in you who believe.

1 Thes 4:2, 8 For you know what commandments we gave you by the **authority of the Lord Jesus**. Consequently, **he who rejects this is not rejecting man but the God who gives His Holy Spirit to you**.

2 Pet 3:15–17 As also **in all his letters**, speaking in them of these things, in which are some things hard to understand, which the untaught and unstable distort, as they do also the **rest of the Scriptures**, to their own destruction. You therefore, beloved, knowing this beforehand, be on your guard lest, being carried away by the error of unprincipled men, you fall from your own steadfastness.

THE WORD OF GOD IS EQUAL IN ITS REVELATION: FATHER, SON AND HOLY SPIRIT

There are some who would say that the Word of God is interpreted by the Words of Christ. Others insist that the Word's of God the Father supercedes all other Scripture. Still others say the Words of the Holy Spirit are the true statements of authority. The classic reformation statement of faith states that the Word of God is interpreted by the Word of God. This means that all Scripture is of equal authority in the Bible. How do the following passages speak to this?

2 Tim 3:16 All Scripture is inspired by God and **profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training in righteousness**.

Eph 6:17 **And take the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit**, which is the word of God.

1 Thes 2:13 **And for this reason we also constantly thank God that when you received from us the word of God's message, you accepted it not as the word of men, but for what it really is, the word of God, which also performs its work in you who believe**.

2 Tim 2:9 **For which I suffer hardship even to imprisonment as a criminal; but the word of God is not imprisoned**.

Heb 4:12 **For the word of God is living and active and sharper than any two-edged sword, and piercing as far as the division of soul and spirit, of both joints and marrow, and able to judge the thoughts and intentions of the heart.**

1 Pt 1:23 **For you have been born again, not of seed that is perishable but imperishable, that is, through the living and abiding word of God.**

1 Jn 1:4 **I have written to you, fathers, because you know Him who has been from the beginning. I have written to you, young men, because you are strong, and the word of God abides in you, and you have overcome the evil one.**

ETERNAL NATURE OF GOD'S WORD:

One of the commonly held misconceptions about the Word of God is that, although it may have been initially inspired by God, over the years changes and errors were introduced into it. It has become corrupted. How do the following passages address the unchangeable, eternal aspect of the Word of God?

Ps 33:11 The counsel of the Lord stands forever, the plans of His heart from Generation to Generation.

Ps 102:18 This will be written for the Generation to come; that a people yet to be created may praise the Lord.

Ps 105:8 He has remembered His covenant forever, the word which He commanded to a thousand Generations.

Ps 117:2 For His loving kindness is great toward us, and the truth of the Lord is everlasting. Praise the Lord!

Ps 119:89,152 **Forever, O Lord, Thy word is settled in heaven. Of old I have known from Thy testimonies, That Thou hast founded them forever.**

Mt 5:18 **For truly I say to you, until heaven and earth pass away, not the smallest letter or stroke shall pass away from the Law, until all is accomplished.**

Mt 24:35 **Heaven and earth will pass away, but My words shall not pass away.**

Mk 13:31 **Heaven and earth will pass away, but My words will not pass away.**

Lk 16:17 But it is easier for heaven and earth to pass away than for one stroke of a letter of the Law to fail.

Lk 21:33 **Heaven and earth will pass away, but My words will not pass away.**

1 Pet 1:24, 25 **For "All flesh is like grass, And all its glory like the flower of grass. The grass withers, And the flower falls off, But the word of the Lord abides forever." And this is the word which was preached to you.**

2 Jn 2 **For the sake of** the truth, which abides in us and will be with us forever.

THE WORD OF GOD IS INERRANT:

This means that the Word of God is without error, inerrant. Not only do we have the inspired Word of God as passed down to us by the Holy Spirit, but also that which is given to us is true. It is without error in theology, science, or history.

Ps 12:6 The words of the Lord are pure words, **as silver tried in a furnace on the earth, refined seven times.**

Ps 18:30 **As for God, His way is blameless;** the word of the Lord is tried; **He is a shield to all who take refuge in Him.**

Ps 19: 7–9 The law of the Lord is perfect, **restoring the soul;** the testimony of the Lord is sure, **making wise the simple.** The precepts of the Lord are right, **rejoicing the heart;** The commandment of the Lord is pure, **enlightening the eyes.** **The fear of the Lord is clean, enduring forever;** The judgments of the Lord are true; they are righteous altogether.

- 1.
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Ps 33:4 For the word of the Lord is upright, **and all His work is done in faithfulness.**

Ps 111:7 **The works of His hands are truth and justice;** all His precepts are sure.

THE WORD OF GOD IS DYNAMIC:

Finally, the Word of God is dynamic. As such, it is unique from any other piece of literature. It is a document that can and should be read and reread, memorized and meditated upon, studied and restudied. Why is this so? How do the following passages reveal the Word of God as a living and dynamic document that demands such attention?

Job 23:12 I have not departed from the command of His lips; **I have treasured the words of His mouth more than my necessary food.**

Ps 105:19 Until the time that his word came to pass, **the word of the Lord tested him.**

Is 55:11 So shall My word be which goes forth from My mouth; it shall not return to Me empty, **without accomplishing what I desire, and without succeeding in the matter for which I sent it.**

Jer 15:16 **Thy words were found and I ate them,** and Thy words became for me a joy and the delight of my heart; for I have been called by Thy name, O Lord God of hosts.

Joel 2:11 And the Lord utters His voice before His army; surely His camp is very great, **for strong is he who carries out His word.** The day of the Lord is indeed great and very awesome, and who can endure it?

Jn 17:17 **Sanctify them in the truth;** Thy word is truth.

Eph 6:17 **And take the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God.**

1 Tm 4:6 In pointing out these things to the brethren, you will be a good servant of Christ Jesus, constantly **nourished on the words of the faith and of the sound doctrine** which you have been following.

2 Tm 2:9 For which I suffer hardship even to imprisonment as a criminal; **but the word of God is not imprisoned.**

Heb 4:12 For the **word of God is living and active** and sharper than any two-edged sword, and piercing as far as the division of soul and spirit, of both joints and marrow, and **able to judge the thoughts and intentions of the heart.**

Heb 11:3 By faith we understand that **the worlds were prepared by the word of God**, so that what is seen was not made out of things which are visible.

Chapter One The Authority and Supremacy of The Word Of God—Lecture

“Yes, but doesn't he believe in spanking?”

Comment made to a missionary supervisor by a member of his staff team while discussing whether or not my seminar should be presented in their country.

INTRODUCTION

I have found my introductions to the Family Discipleship Seminar evolving over the years. It began as a “How To” Workshop. In 1981, when Eleanor and I first began to give this seminar, I found my audience of young evangelical parents fully convinced of the biblical concepts of training and discipline (spanking). My introduction was merely a short history on how I came to use the methods being taught, my learning experience, and those from whom I learned. The biblical principles involved and the biblical means of accomplishing them, I could assume, were already mastered by my young audience, since they were widely accepted, taught and disseminated in evangelical homes and churches. In short, young evangelical couples wanted to know how to spank and discipline their children. The seminar at this stage was simply a methods class.

Slowly, however I noticed a change, especially in the question and answer sessions. By the late 1980's and early 1990's, I found I could no longer assume an understanding of the basic biblical principles involved. When these were clearly taught, I found a willing audience in these young evangelical parents. There was no doubt in their minds concerning the authority of Scriptures. I could not, however, assume knowledge of Scripture in this area. As a result, I had to add an introductory session devoted completely to an

overview of the Scripture relating to discipline and training and establishing these firmly as biblical truths. I was continually amazed to see the shocked look on these young couples faces as they studied the Word and will of God for the first time in this area. Their faces seemed to say, “This is in the Bible?” Yet, even though shocked at times, or surprised, they were more than willing to submit to the Word of God. Thus a new chapter was born in the life of this seminar.

“The admonition of Paul in 1 Ti 2:12, that ‘women should not teach or exercise authority over men’ was written to an age and period where women were completely out of control, both in the culture and in the church. This is no longer the case in the modern evangelical church. Women, both in society and in the church, are educated and trained from an early age how to handle leadership roles and, as a result, this passage does not apply to our ministry situation.”

Director of Para-church organization explaining to me why certain policies were changing concerning women staff in the ministry.

“We of course hold the Word of God to be true and without question in all cases of doctrine. The Word of God was written, however, as a spiritual book and never meant to be taken as a precise guide to either science or history. Thus when we come across a passage such as this in Joshua 10:12 & 13 where the sun is commanded to “stand still” we need not take it as scientific fact. Perhaps it seemed like the sun stood still or perhaps it was an especially long day, or perhaps so much got done that it was as if the sun had stood still. Whatever the psychological explanation, we cannot expect the primitive scientific minds of early Israelites who passed this story down Generation after Generation to understand it. We need not make the Word of God into a history or science book. This, of course, includes the science of psychology when it comes to child raising. Leave it to what it does best, religion.”

Pastor of large evangelical church

Then, as I moved into the middle and late 1990's, another shift began to occur in my audience of young evangelical parents. Suddenly, the Word of God on an issue was not necessarily enough. Phrases like "cultural relevance," "my personal experience," and "psychological studies" began to be used with equal authority as the verses I was sharing from the Word of God. My audience was more than willing to consider the verses I shared from the Word of God, but they were not about to accept them as the final word on this subject. The Bible was not necessarily the final authority in their lives, as the Word and will of God for them personally. It was not a matter of interpretation, but rather of their authority in this area. Thus, I found myself adding a new introduction to the seminar, which did not relate to the issue directly—The Authority and Supremacy of The Word Of God In the Area Of Family Discipleship.

In a short 20 years, my audience has gone from knowing the principles and accepting them, to not knowing them but accepting them when taught, to not knowing them and questioning their authority and value to their lives, when confronted by them. Thus was born the present opening chapter—The Authority and Supremacy of the Word of God.

The cultural relevance of the entire Word of God is at the heart of the battle for the minds and souls of young evangelicals today. I am sure that each of the first three comments seemed benign in terms of their effect on the evangelical community, even if you disagreed with them. Whether a woman teaches men in a meeting or supervises them in a Christian organization, or whether we believe that the sun actually stood still, or whether we follow the injunction concerning the use of the "rod" in disciplining children, doesn't seem particularly earth-shaking an issue for the casual observer to want to divide over. The issue at hand in each, though, is not the issue that first shows itself on the surface. The true issue is not the social role of women in the church, the laws of physics, or the psychology of spanking. The central issue in each illustration is the Authority of Scripture as the Word of God. In the last case, where the very heart of Christian doctrine is ripped from the message of the Gospel, the exact same logic is used in determining what to accept as relevant in Scripture. Where the first three stopped, my Methodist friend just kept right on going. It is the same argument, the same logic and the same use of Scripture. Who is to say his subjection of Scripture to culture is any less out of line than the others? I am sure none of

"I asked my pastor and he said that the book of Proverbs is not doctrine but truisms and that I do not have to spank my child to love him."

A young professional who had heard me speak once before, registered for the conference and drove 50 miles just to stand up and say this at the first question and answer time in the seminar, and then left.

"But these Scriptures were written in a very violent time when little was known of the modern science and psychology of child raising. Surely you are not expecting us to apply them in this modern era?"

Young Evangelical Professional at seminar question and answer time.

"I am very excited about my Easter Sermon. I have completely rid it of the violence usually associated with this story. Of course, when Christianity first emerged, it was a violent world. The Jews had blood sacrifices, the Romans had blood sacrifices, and the Greeks had blood sacrifices. Everything that was anything had a blood sacrifice. The early Christians thus took to emphasizing the crucifixion of Jesus to help make the message of Christianity culturally relevant. We live in a different age now and this initial emphasis, though good, is now so culturally irrelevant as to be counter productive. I am redoing my Easter sermon to rid it of all references to blood so as to make it relevant to the modern congregation."

Methodist minister commenting to me on his Easter Sermon plans at a meeting of the Association of University Ministers

the first three would agree with the Methodist minister, but by what authority? The very arguments used to assert their stand, are used to assert his. The very reasons they would give to me to justify their stand, he would repeat to them in justifying his. The earth-shaking issue that should cause divisions and stirrings within the Body of Christ is the issue of the Authority of Scripture as the inspired, inerrant, infallible Word of God. If this is accepted, all other issues fall into place.

Now if in each of the first three situations, the participants had said something like, “*I know that in (biblical reference) that the Word of God says _____, but it is also true that the principle found in this verse is further developed in the following passages, and because of the weight of these other passages, I believe...*” In this case there is room for discussion, for growth. We begin to search out the entire mind of God from the entire Scriptural revelation. We are not arguing culture, science or psychology; we are seeking out the mind of God from the Word of God. In this case, there is room for gray area. Godly men differ as to their understanding and application of the Word of God due to their own finiteness and sin. Solomon, the wisest man in the Bible, states in Proverbs 10:19, “When there are many words, transgression is unavoidable, but he who restrains his lips is wise.” The Apostle Paul teaches us in I Corinthians 13:12, “For now we see in a mirror dimly, but then face to face; now I know in part, but then I shall know fully just as I also have been fully known.” As long as the Scripture is being referred to in integrity and in authority, then pursue patience, study and prayer for the sake of unity. But once the door has been opened to the subjection of Scripture to any other authority than Scripture itself, then man and man alone decides the counsels of God. This must always be an unacceptable position and on this high ground, the Authority of Scripture as the inerrant, infallible Word of God, we take our stand and, if necessary, divide.

This is why it is so important for us to address the issue of the authority of the Word of God. Not only must we substantiate the Bible's overriding authority on the subject of disciplining children, but its authority over all we believe. It is one of the foundation stones of our Faith, and one of the uncompromising convictions of the Christian.

I. The Nature Of The Word Of God

I would not be too hard on the young immature Christian who made the above statement. He was sincere, just sincerely wrong. I should know, because it was me, in my junior year of high school, shortly after I became a Christian. The Church staff member I said this to set me straight in short order, but as I think back on it he did so out of force of argument and personality, not by helping me see the truth for myself from the Word of God. As time passed, I began to find out for myself what the Word of God actually claims about itself and to my wonder; the Word of God makes some remarkable claims concerning its authority. If these things are true, which I firmly believe with all my heart, then we *truly do* have the Word of God.

“God’s Word is inspired. I believe that, but many things are inspired. A composer is inspired to write a great piece of music, an author is inspired to produce a great novel, and a minister is even inspired to write a great sermon. Inspiration is inspiration, so what is the big deal?”

A. THE WORD OF GOD

There is no doubt that the Word of God claims to be just that, the Word Of God. A quick look at few phrases in the Word of God confirms this beyond any doubt. In reference to itself, the Word of God uses the phrase "The Word of God" 47 times. In addition to this, on twelve different occasions the phrase "God spoke" is used. In referring to itself, the Word of God uses the phrase, "the Lord said" 231 times and employs the sister term "the Lord spoke" another 233 times. The phrase, "Word of the Lord" occurs over 253 times, while the phrase "Thus says the Lord" occurs 416 times in the Holy Word of God. The phrase "God said" occurs 570 times in the Bible. I believe the most significant figure, though, is the use of the Word of God in referring to itself as "The Word of the Lord." The question should be rightfully asked, "Does the Word of God really view itself as the Word of the Lord or is it just recording instances of God's Word intermixed with that of man?" This question is completely laid to rest by the fact that the Word of God employs this phrase, "The Word of The Lord" when speaking of itself over two hundred and fifty three times. The Word of God clearly presents itself as just that, "The Word of God." We may decide we do not believe this but we cannot decide that the claim is not made.

"In hundreds of passages, the Bible declares or assumes itself to be the Word of God. Because of the combination of human and supernatural qualities, which enter into the Bible, a similarity may be observed between the Bible as the written Word and the Lord Jesus Christ as the living Word. They are both supernatural in origin, presenting an inscrutable and perfect blending of that which is divine and that which is human. They both exercise a transforming power over those who believe, and are alike allowed of God to be set at naught and rejected by those who do not believe. The untainted, undiminished divine perfections are embodied in each. The revelations which they disclose are at once as simple as the mental capacity of a child, and as complex as the infinite treasures of divine wisdom and knowledge, as enduring as the God whom they reveal."

Major Bible Themes, Chafer/Walvoord, Zondervan Press; pp. 11,15

B. INSPIRED

But what does this mean, "The Word of God?" First, and foremost, it means that God's Word is inspired, God-breathed. 1 Ti 3:16 states, "All Scripture is inspired by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training in righteousness." There are three key words here. The first is "all." The Word of God is claiming that every single word contained in it is inspired by God. The second is "Scripture." This claim is not made of individual books, statements or phrases within the Scripture, but speaks to it en toto. Lastly, we have the term "inspired." This literally means "God-breathed." This means that the Word of God is just that, the very Word of God. It is as if in reading you could feel the breath of the living, speaking God against your face. It is first and last given to us as the Word of God with men as the instruments, but the Word of God nevertheless. What was the dynamic of this inspiration? The Word of God itself gives us a little peek into its own inspirational process in II Pt 1:21 where it states, "for no prophecy was ever made by an act of human will, but men moved by the Holy Spirit spoke from God." Note that the giving of Scriptures was not a matter of human will. This is key. The will of man was not pivotal, but rather the Will Of God. The Word of God is the Will of God. The Holy Spirit, moving men,

"It is as if you can feel the breath of God against your face."

J. Dwight Pentecost, to Campus Crusade For Christ Training Institute

"The Scriptures in their original writings are the inerrant Word of God"

Lewis Sperry Chafer, Systematic Theology, Vol. VI, p. 29

allowed God to speak through them, not vice versa. It was not men moving to speak the Word of God in each of their unique ways. It was God moving men in a variety of unique ways to record His Words. Unique, yes, but always His Words, not man's.

C. INERRANT

As such, the Word of God is without error. It is as true and pure and perfect as the Word of God is and must be. In Psalm 119:140 the Word of God says, "Thy word is very pure, Therefore Thy servant loves it." God's Word is pure, without blemish, without error. This is again stated in Psalm 12:6, "The words of the Lord are pure words; As silver tried in a furnace on the earth, refined seven times." God has watched over His Word, He has tried it; He has allowed no blemish to enter in. The argument is often made that over a period of thousands of years, errors or changes surely must have entered into the Word of God. To that I quote the ancient Japanese proverb, "Hogawashee."

First, although much has been made of these supposed changes and they have been even supposedly codified and numbered, e.g. Text A, B, C on so on, no comparative texts with these changes have ever been found. That's right. Even though we have literally thousands and thousands of manuscripts and texts dating back thousands of years, there is no Text A which states one thing, and Text B which states another. Modern liberal critics refuse to accept the fact of the integrity of the Scripture. An astounding event has occurred in the last twenty years. Every book of the Old Testament but Esther has been translated from the Qum Ran texts, which predate the birth of Christ by over 500 years and not one difference has been found from the Bible you hold in your hand today. 2,500 years of historically proven inerrancy. As a result critics of the Word of God are forced to simply make up these supposed texts in their minds and try to pass it off as proof.

But this is nothing compared with what the Word of God says of itself. It never claimed that the teachings of the Word of God were compiled by men who collected and codified traditions passed down to them. Rather, the Bible states clearly that they were given by God to man. Moses did not compile the history of Israel. It was given him by God in written form. And so it was down through the ages, "men, moved by the Holy Spirit, spoke from God." There was no compilation; there was only divine revelation. This revelation was given by God, in inerrant form, and has been preserved by God in inerrant form.

D. ETERNAL

Of course it can be argued that the Word of God was given in pure divine, inerrant form, but over the years the changes were made. Again, keep in mind that this argument is made without any scientific method employed. It would be as if I said, "Sure the preamble to the Constitution was originally a good document but over the last two hundred or so years it has been changed many times. In fact we do not know for sure what the original preamble said!"

"Heaven and earth will pass away, but My words will not pass away."

Jesus Christ, Lk 21:33

"Do we have copies dating from the earliest history of our country?"

"Yes."

"Do we have copies interspersed throughout time since then?"

"Yes."

“Do any of these show evidence of change or deviation over a period of time?”

“No.”

“Then why, for the love of Mike, do you keep rambling on about these changes without any tangible proof of their existence?”

The same line of thought can be used for the Scriptures...

“Do we have copies dating from the earliest history of the Word of God?”

“Yes.”

“Do we have copies interspersed throughout time since then, covering a time span of thousands of years?”

“Yes.”

“Do any of these show evidence of change or deviation over that period of time?”

“No.”

“Then why, for the love of Mike, do you keep rambling on about these changes without any tangible proof of their existence?”

“Because if we admit that there is no change then we have to admit that it is the Word of God, and then we will have to obey and we don't want to. So there!”

Throughout the Word of God, the claim of the eternal nature of the Word of God is made. It says in 1 Pt 1:24, 25, *"All flesh is like grass, And all its glory like the flower of grass. The grass withers, And the flower falls off, But the word of the Lord abides forever. And this is the word which was preached to you."* Jesus Christ Himself stated in Mt 5:18 *"For truly I say to you, until heaven and earth pass away, not the smallest letter or stroke shall pass away from the Law, until all is accomplished."* Again in Mt 24:35 *"Heaven and earth will pass away, but My words shall not pass away."*

God has committed Himself to personally watch over His Word. The Word of God could no more change than He could. If the Word of God is changed or lost, then God has changed or lost. God's Word carries with it the mark, the guarantee of God for its divine preservation. It can no more change or fail than can God. Do you really want to go round and round on this, or do you want to get on with it so we can talk about child raising? Let's just accept that the Word of God is divinely eternal and without change and leave it at that, okay?

E. WITHOUT CONTRADICTION

It goes without saying that if the Word of God is the inspired, inerrant, eternal Word of God, that it is without contradiction. Nevertheless, some will say, “But what about all the contradictions in the Word of God?” Never mind that when asked to point them out you get an offended stare at the very nerve to ask such a question. In addition to this, the Word of God makes it clear that it is the Word of God and, as such, is without contradiction. In James 1:17–18, God says, *"Every good thing bestowed and every perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of lights, with whom there is no variation, or shifting shadow. In the exercise of His will He brought us forth by the word of truth, so that we might be, as it were, the first fruits among His creatures."* With God, there are no contradictions, no variation, and no shifting shadow. This means that if there seems to be a contradiction in the Word of God, the problem is with man, not with God's Holy Word.

F. AUTHORITATIVE

If man would relate to God's Word as intended, as the Word of God, then all these so-called problems would take care of themselves. God says of His Word in Heb 4:12, *"For the word of God is living and active and sharper than any two-edged sword, and piercing as far as the division of soul and spirit, of both joints and marrow, and able to judge the thoughts and intentions of the heart."* As you can see, the Word of God is dynamic. It is a living instrument, and a spiritual document. It is meant to get a hold of our lives. It is not meant to be judged by us, rather, it judges man. It is the authority, not man. It passes judgment, not man. It defines truth, what is and is not from God. It is the Word of God. We must submit to its authority as we would to God's authority. It is His Word and His Will. If you were in the place of Moses in Exodus 33:11, and God were speaking to you "face to face," would you interrupt Him? Would you question Him? Would you try to interject worldly authorities, customs or cultures? Well, God's Word, the Bible, is just that. It is God speaking to you, face to face. What is your response when God speaks to you from His Word? God's Word is, above all, the final authority in the lives of all men.

"My conscience is captive to the Word of God"

Martin Luther

"God said it, I believe it, that settles it."

Dawson Trotman

G. SPIRITUAL FOOD

The Word of God is not like other books, to be read one time and set aside. Nor is it to be studied until the information is mastered, before going on to other works. Rather, it is our spiritual food. Just as we never grow out of eating physical food, so we never grow out of eating our spiritual food—the Word of God. 1 Ti 4:6 speaks of our being, *"constantly nourished on the words of the faith and of the sound doctrine which you have been following."* In Jeremiah 15:16, *"Thy words were found and I ate them, And Thy words became for me a joy and the delight of my heart; For I have been called by Thy name, O Lord God of hosts."*

"In pointing out these things to the brethren, you will be a good servant of Christ Jesus, constantly nourished on the words of the faith and of the sound doctrine which you have been following."

The Apostle Paul, 1 Tim 4:6

As you approach this study, let me encourage you to approach the Word of God as spiritual food. Stop and meditate upon the passages. Memorize key passages. Make them your own. What is God saying about Discipleship and the Family? What does the Word of God say about spanking, about raising children, about the role of the father in the home? Accept God's Word for what it is. Study it, and then embrace it as the Word and Will of God. Be as the Bereans in Acts 17:11 *"Now these were more noble-minded than those in Thessalonica, for they received the word with great eagerness, examining the Scriptures daily, to see whether these things were so."* Embrace the Word of God as the spiritual food of your Christian life. As a disciple, feed daily upon it. As you master these concepts, accept the Word of God eagerly as you would a banquet laid before you by the Lord.

II. Basic Questions We Ask Ourselves When Reading the Word of God

As we read the Word of God, we will be spared a lot of grief if we will just ask ourselves a few simple questions. In fact, I have come to believe that if man would just ask these five simple questions when approaching the Word of God, much of the division and misunderstanding that now exists in the body of Christ could be avoided.

A. DOCTRINE VS. HISTORICAL REVELATION / NARRATIVE

The first question we should ask ourselves when reading the Scripture is, "Is this passage doctrine or historical revelation, in nature?" Reflect on the preceding quotes, both are experientially based. We live in an age of experience. Experience is everything. To many, experience is truth. What these men are saying is that they want the same experiences that they see men in the Bible having. Unfortunately, doctrine, not experience, is universalized in the Scripture. The fact is that many times the experiences men have in the Bible are unique to them. When reading a passage, first we must ask ourselves, "Is the passage we are reading a doctrinal passage or is it a historical revelation?" In other words, "Is God telling me and everyone else to experience this for themselves, or is He simply telling us what someone else has experienced?"

By "doctrinal passage," I mean Scripture which speaks to you as if God were preaching a sermon right at you. It is pure truth being taught by God. It is universally applicable, transcending both time and culture. It is for all times, for all peoples, for all places. It is for the Rawandan tribal leader in his mud hut, as well as the corporate executive in his office overlooking the skyline of New York City. It is doctrine. Jn 14 is an example. In this passage, in verse 15, Jesus teaches, *"If you love Me, you will keep My commandments."* Anybody, from a semiliterate Jewish fisherman in AD 30 to an executive in a London financial institution, can relate to and is expected to apply this verse. It is the Word of God speaking directly to man as if God were looking you in the face and telling you something.

This is contrasted with "historical revelation." If we say that doctrine is like listening to a sermon by God, then historical revelation is like watching God's television set. I refrain from using the term story or Bible story because that carries a juvenile connotation, as well as an unstated implication that it may not be true. Rather, I use the term historical revelation, which carries the weight of historical truth with it, yet defines it as a revelation of an event rather than a direct teaching or sermon from God to the reader. It is the historical revelation by God of events which transpired and which He has decided to reveal to us.

"What we want to do is experience the same miracles and power as the Old Testament Prophets and the Apostles of the early church experienced!"

TV Minister

"I want a New Testament Church, a church like the one in the book of Acts."

Pastor at Church Planting Conference

Though absolutely true, these revelations are not universally applicable. When Moses parted the Red Sea in Exodus, this event most certainly happened. That does not mean however, that if we were to travel to Egypt, on the power of that passage, we could expect to part the Red Sea. It was a historical event recorded by God, but not a doctrinal teaching meant to be universally obeyed. In contrast, the passage in Jn 14:15 is universally true, both for the disciples in Jerusalem during the time of Christ, and for us today wherever we may live. In fact, if I were to travel to Jerusalem, I could preach Jn 14:15 with the same confidence that Jesus did 2,000 years ago, and expect it to be understood and obeyed.

This distinction is true even in the face of recurring historical themes in the Scriptures. A good example of this is the theme in the Scriptures of power over water. In Genesis, the Spirit of the Lord moves upon the face of the water; Moses parts the Red Sea; Joshua, his disciple, parts the Jordan; we find Elijah parting the Jordan, and when Elisha receives a double portion of the Spirit, he, too, parts the Jordan. The storms of the sea are miraculously quelled when Jonah is pitched overboard at his own request. In the New Testament, Christ walks on the water and his disciple Peter, by faith walks on the water as well. Not only this, but at His command, the storm at sea is quelled and the water becomes like glass.

One could look at this theme of historical events and shared experiences and say, "Look, a theme throughout Scripture, which goes from Genesis to the time of Christ, which forms a golden thread throughout the Word of God, clearly points to the fact that if you are truly a man of faith, truly spirit-filled, truly a disciple of Christ, then you will have power over water as well." But you would be wrong in saying so. These passages tell us specifically what God did in certain historical situations. They are inspired accounts of events which actually happened. They are historical revelation, narrative in nature. God is telling us what He did in this particular case, and in no way universalizes it for all times and for all people. There are many other historical revelation / narrative themes of a historical nature that we could develop, such as raising the dead; power over the weather; calling down fire from heaven, or manifestations of the Holy Spirit. All of these though developed throughout both the Old and New Testaments as miraculous events experienced by men through the ages, cannot be universalized as a doctrinal teaching that should be experienced by all Christians.

In our times the most common mistake which is made in universalizing a historical revelation / narrative theme, comes in the use of historical passages dealing with either miracles or the Holy Spirit. You can no more universalize these biblical historical revelation / narrative passages, than you can Moses parting the Red Sea, Elisha raising the dead, or Christ stilling the storm. In child raising, we are fortunate that almost all the passages dealing with this issue are doctrinal in nature. Nevertheless, as you read the Word of God, ask yourself, "Is this a doctrinal passage speaking to all men, in all cultures, for all times or is this a historical revelation of an event which God chose to record to illustrate what He was doing at this particular point in time?"

B. NEW COVENANT VS. OLD COVENANT

The second question we want to ask ourselves when reading the Word of God is, “Is this a New Covenant or Old Covenant passage?” The term “covenant” occurs nearly 300 times in the Scriptures, so it is obviously a term that warrants our attention.

In Heb 8: 6–8, 13 the Word of God states, *“But now He has obtained a more excellent ministry, by as much as He is also the mediator of a better covenant, which has been enacted on better promises. For if that first covenant had been faultless, there would have been no occasion sought for a second. For finding fault with them, He says, “Behold, days are coming, says the Lord, When I will effect a new covenant With the house of Israel and with the house of Judah; When He said, “A new covenant,” He has made the first obsolete. But whatever is becoming obsolete and growing old is ready to disappear.”*

With the coming of Christ, God instituted a New Covenant—the Covenant of Grace. This both fulfilled and replaced the Old Covenant of the Law made with the Jews. Much of the Old Covenant was symbolic of the work of Christ and the Holy Spirit under the New Covenant. They were pictures meant to prepare the readers and observers for the coming Messiah. When Jesus came and fulfilled these symbols or pictures, they were no longer needed. Not all of the Old Testament though was Covenant symbolism. A great deal of it still stands for us today and requires our strict attention. The question then is, how do we know what made it through into the New Covenant and what did not? The answer is found in three ways: First, anything that was a picture of Christ did not make it through. Second, anything that Christ fulfilled did not make it through. Finally, anything that the New Covenant negates did not make it through. We do not have time to do an exhaustive list at this stage, as I am sure you want to get into raising your little darlings and so, I will offer you three examples and then leave it to you for further study.

“Why don’t we do animal sacrifices?” The answer is found in Hebrews, chapter nine. A careful reading brings us to the conclusion that the whole temple scene— sacrifices, priests, temple, the whole shebang, was a picture of the death, burial and resurrection of Christ for salvation. Once this had occurred, there was no need for the picture, as it was fulfilled in Christ and it was done away with.

“Why don’t we fast and pray, covering ourselves with sack cloth and ashes?” According to Christ in Mt 6:16–18 when we fast we are supposed to dress and look like any other Joe on the street so that people will not even know we are fasting. Thus, on the command of Christ, sackcloth and ashes are left behind, while fasting makes it in to the New Covenant.

“What about the Sabbath—am I in sin if I don’t go to church on Sunday?” Actually you are asking two questions here. First you should understand that the Sabbath is on Saturday, not Sunday. If you were to keep the Sabbath you would need to go to church on

The same God who says “Thou shalt not kill” and “Thou shalt not commit adultery” in the same list of commands says, “Remember the Sabbath day and keep it holy.” The Sabbath is Saturday and I say to you that if you are not keeping the Sabbath day then you are guilty of breaking one of the Ten Commandments of God and stand guilty and judged by His Holy Word.

Seventh Day Adventist minister

“Of course we cannot have ashtrays in the fellowship hall for our outreach events. I don’t care if non-Christians do smoke, even Jesus Himself cleansed the Temple of God and we should do the same.”

Music Minister in church board discussion on how to accommodate non-Christians during outreach fellowships.

Saturday like groups such as the Seventh Day Adventists. Secondly, you should understand that in Colossians 2:16–17, the Holy Spirit does away with the observance of special days, festivals etc. under the Law *and* includes the Sabbath in this list. This is replaced with Heb 10:24, where we are enjoined, “*not to neglect to meet together as is the habit of some...*” Thus the Sabbath Saturday observance is replaced by faithfulness to your particular Church’s meeting times.

Many harsh injunctions placed undeservedly upon the backs of conscientious Christians would be lifted if the teachers in the church would pay more attention to this issue of Old vs. New Covenant teachings.

It is important to keep in mind that we are talking here about Old Covenant and New Covenant and **not** Old Testament and New Testament. In Is 53:6, we have a New Covenant teaching—the substitutionary death of Christ—in the Old Testament. In Lk 3, we have the teachings of the last Old Covenant prophet as he seeks to prepare the way for the New Covenant of Christ. This is a subject that must be pursued by the Christian. The question, “Is this an Old Covenant Passage or a New Covenant Passage?” is not just splitting theological hairs. It is a very crucial issue in studying the Scriptures. It requires a careful reading of the Word of God and a familiarity with the whole Word of God. That is why it is so important to have a daily reading program where you are reading through the entire Word of God on a regular basis.

C. PARABLES AND SYMBOLS

The third question we should ask ourselves when reading the Word of God, or hearing it taught to us by others, is “Is this passage one which employs the use of parables or symbols?” It is important to understand that in the Scripture, many symbols are used. We may have an opinion of what these symbols refer to, but if they are not explained then we must remember that we are only sharing our opinion. In Luke, chapter eight, when Jesus presents the parable of the Sower, He is for the most part not understood. Later, He explains this parable to the disciples and after revealing the meaning of the parable He goes on to teach, (Lk 8:10) *“To you it has been granted to know the mysteries of the kingdom of God, but to the rest it is in parables, in order that seeing they may not see, and hearing they may not understand.”* We must realize that if God does not explain a parable or symbol, then God does not explain it, and many are not. In Mk 4:3–33, Jesus presents the parable of the mustard seed without explanation. We are then left with no explanation. We may make conjectures, but they will be only that—our best guess. Again in Mk 4:13–20, the parable of the Sower is explained. From this explanation we are told in verse 14 that *“The Sower sows the Word.”* Thus we can speak with confidence that in the parable the seed represents the Word of God. But what about the vessel that the sower carries the seed in? What about the hand that holds the seed? What about the seed being sown? What does its sailing through the air represent? The Bible is silent and we should therefore be very careful about developing any type of teaching on these subjects in light of this silence. Many parables are given without explanation of the meaning or the terms. We can give them our best guess, but a best guess should never be taught with the same force as something that is explained by Scripture. Our best guess should never be put on equal footing with the revealed Word of God’s explanation of a parable. In fact, preferable to our best guess would be the statement, “The Bible doesn’t say, so quite

“In Mt 13:31 we are given the parable of the Mustard Seed which is a picture of what can happen to the Church if it is allowed to become a grotesque aberration of its original purpose.”

Bible Church Pastor

frankly there is really no way of knowing. Now we know how the disciples felt and why they were continually asking Christ to explain these parables to them.”

D. PROPHETIC AND/OR HIDDEN

The fourth key question we should ask ourselves when reading the Word of God or hearing it preached is, “Does this passage pertain to prophetic or hidden truths?” The Word of God clearly states that there are some things we just don’t know. It bothers people a great deal to read something in the Word of God and not be able to know what it says. It does not bother God at all when this happens. This is especially true of prophetic Scripture. In II Pt 1:20 God says, “*But know this first of all, that no prophecy of Scripture is a matter of one’s own interpretation,*” I don’t know what could be much clearer.

A good rule of thumb is that if God does not interpret the prophecy, then you will not be able to. To help us see the danger of taking it upon ourselves to interpret prophecy without the aid of divine interpretation from the Scripture, it is often good to look at just how difficult interpretation of prophecy is for the finite mind of man.

In Jeremiah 31:15, the prophet Jeremiah states, “*Thus says the Lord, ‘A voice is heard in Ramah, Lamentation and bitter weeping. Rachel is weeping for her children; She*

refuses to be comforted for her children, because they are no more.’” Now I would like you to interpret this prophecy for me. Be truthful! If you were a Jewish student of the Bible, reading this passage 100 years before the coming of Christ, would you read this passage and say, “Oh yeah, it is perfectly clear, a Messiah is going to be born of a virgin in Bethlehem, wise men will come looking for him, alerting the Jewish king to his whereabouts so that he can kill him. His parents will be warned by an angel to flee to Egypt, and then King Herod will order all the baby boys under the age of two to be killed. No problem, it is perfectly obvious.” I can safely say, that from reading the Jeremiah passage, no one, not even the greatest scholar in the world, would have been able to predict that it applied to the above scenario found in Mt 2:13–23.

This is just one of many, many prophecies which are quoted in the book of Matthew. Look a few of them up, and you will give up the job of prophetic sleuth and stick to the biblical revelation of the Holy Spirit. This brings us to an important point: many times God is completely satisfied with limiting us by what the Word of God does not say or does not explain. It does not bother God a bit to have certain things revealed and certain things hidden. Dt 29:29 states, “*The secret things belong to the Lord our God, but the things revealed belong to us and to our sons forever...*” There are secret things, and this list includes but is not limited to, what God did before creation; why He creates; why He loves; the early days of Jesus; much of the life of Jesus

“Eighty-Eight Reasons Why Christ Will Return in 1988.”

Popular book making the evangelical circuit in 1987 and 1988.

“*On the basis of the prophetic writings of Scripture, I can assure you with all confidence that Christ will not only come in our life time, but before that, the Great Tribulation. There are then only two kinds of Christians, those who are prepared to pass through it and meet their Savior and those who are not.*”

Popular Collegiate Conference Speaker

“*God gave this promise to Dawson Trotman that He would bless him and multiply him and it is important for all Navigators to be good stewards of the promises of God to this great man.*”

National Navigator Leader at staff conference

“*The problem with the Navigators today is that they have forgotten the promises that God gave to Dawson Trotman*”

Navigator Missionary

and the disciples; the meaning of most prophetic Scripture concerning His return, and much more is simply not revealed. It is secret. If it doesn't bother God, it shouldn't bother us. You only look foolish trying to do something the Holy Spirit has decided not to do, so give it a rest.

E. DEVOTIONAL VS. UNIVERSAL

Word of God saying in this passage to all men throughout all ages? The other though is devotional. What is God seeking to say to you at this particular place in time?

Sometimes God will speak uniquely to us through His Word, even though this passage has little to do with the direct situation you are in. I remember in 1975, I was struggling with whether or not to join the Navigator Staff team. In my quiet time I read Is 60:20–22 and knew that God was speaking to me about my decision. I have fallen back upon that passage many times throughout my career. God spoke devotionally to me and you will never convince me that He did not.

This introduces a new issue. Do I teach this as a universal experience? NO. Would I exposit this verse from the pulpit as a promise for fruitful ministry? NO. Would I teach this passage in seminary as a key passage to study when considering the call of God? NO. God spoke devotionally *to me*. This was neither a doctrinal or historical revelation / narrative, nor a prophetic or symbolic passage concerning the call to the ministry. Therefore, it must, like my call, remain a deeply personal experience. I may share it but I may not universalize it. Neither the passage nor the experience of God speaking devotionally from the passage can be universalized.

As we look at Scripture concerning Family Discipleship, we will range throughout the Word of God. No doubt you have heard many opinions on many verses. It is important as you read the Word of God on this subject to be continually asking yourself these strategic questions, "Doctrine or historical revelation?" "New Covenant or Old Covenant?" "Are these symbols, parables and prophetic statements interpreted by the Word of God, or is this just a man's opinion?" "Is what is being shared a universal truth which applies to me, or simply a devotional thought which God has impressed upon an individual?" "Is this a secret thing or a thing revealed?"

"When my pastor shares something I think that we should respond to it as if it was the Word of God. He is God's man, in God's place and he is giving us God's Word, we should accept it without question."

Church member at business meeting discussing budget for the new building program.

Lastly, when reading or being taught the Word of God it is important to ask yourself the question, "Is the application being made a personal devotional thought or a universal application for all people and all times?" What about historical revelation passages? What about Old Covenant passages? What about unexplained symbols, parables and prophecy? Are they of any value to us? The answer is a resounding yes! First, they help us to see the mind and work of God throughout the ages. Beyond this, though, there are two approaches to Scripture. One is universal. What is the "Chapter and Verse, please..." Early in my Christian life, when I read a Christian book, I read it just like it was the Word of God. It was only later, under the guidance of my Navigator team leader in college, that I began viewing all writings as subject to the Word of God. I began thinking of them critically in the light of the Word of God. I was taught to always ask, when a dogmatic statement was made, "Chapter and Verse, please." The verse that was drummed into my head was Acts 17:11. "Now these were more noble-minded than those in Thessalonica, for they received the word with great eagerness, examining the Scriptures daily, to see whether these things were so." Over and over, it was reinforced to me that if Paul wanted his words checked with Scripture, then this was to be true of all men. This simple phrase saved me from many errors and extremes in my future walk with God and ministry, "Chapter and Verse, please."

The Author

It is important to be thinkers when it comes to God's Word. As you read this book or any book, think about what is being said. Think about what the Word of God says. Think about the types of Scripture being used. Above all, think, "What is God saying about Family Discipleship?"

III. Basic Rules to Follow When Interpreting the Word of God

Dawson Trotman, the founder of the Navigators, probably did more than any other modern man to take the authority of the Word of God out of the staid halls of Bible Colleges and Seminaries and put it into the trained hands of laymen. His concepts of ministry, personal discipleship, disciple making and lay ministers equipping others for the spread of the Kingdom of God revolutionized the modern evangelical church, its Sunday Schools and its whole approach to personal Bible Study and devotional life. Dawson was unrelenting in his zeal for studying God's Word; for Scripture Memory, for Daily Quiet Time, and especially quality personal Bible Study. In my college days at the University of Texas, the simple rules of Bible Study would be taught and mastered by all good Navigators. I present them to you as follows since these rules have served me well over the last 25 years.

God says it, I believe it, that settles it."

Dawson Trotman

A. THE RULE OF LANGUAGE

One of the first things I was taught as a young student in my Navigator Bible Study was that whether you liked the meaning of a word or not, it was the word being used and you had to define it, understand it, master it and then to live with it. In all my early Bible studies, we were expected to have the definitions of key words from two secular sources, from a Bible Dictionary and from and Greek and Hebrew Dictionary. God used the language and picked the word. Thus, we were taught that words were important and could not be suppressed based on personal prejudice.

"That's not what the word 'Grace' means. The word 'Grace' means 'a willingness to respond in obedience to the commands of God as opposed to the self works of your former life.' Thus, the injunction in Eph 2:8-9, 'saved by Grace and not by works...' means saved by obeying God not by obeying the ordinances contrived by man. It does not mean to be saved apart from works, but by the works of God. A simple understanding of the definition of the word 'Grace' clears up the misunderstandings surrounding this verse."

Pastor of Independent Bible Church to men's Bible study group.

The value for me came out in two ways early in my Christian life. First, were the words, "elect" and "predestined." Being a good Baptist, I hated both words and just skipped over them when reading the Word of God and came up with my own definitions of these terms to avoid thinking of them. It was in a college Navigator Bible Study that I was forced to deal with the terms, come to an understanding of their meaning, and accept the Word of God in this area. It was difficult to give up my self-made definitions of these words but it was the right and best thing to do.

It was later in my evangelism experience that I came across groups such as The Mormons, The Jehovah Witnesses, The Local Church, to name a few, who wrote their own Greek reference works and Bible Dictionaries and, in doing so, changed freely the meaning of both English and Greek definitions of words to suit their personal theologies. If I had not been willing to submit my own biases to the rule of language I would not have been able to minister with authority and compassion to those I came across in

movements such as these. As it was, I was able to share my own testimony in this area and how I repented, and then to share with them the danger of this area. All of us must be willing to submit to the meanings of the words that God chose to use in the Word of God.

Words have meaning. This is a very important concept. The meaning of a word is not subject to our feelings. A word has a definition. To understand a word, we must understand its meaning. It is not up to us to brainstorm over the meaning of a word. The definition

already exists. It is up to us to learn the definition. Words have meaning. God initiates His communication with man in Genesis with Words. He uses specific words that have specific meaning and expects man to receive them as such and communicate back with Him in the same way. The words of God to Adam had very specific meaning.

Satan deceived Eve by obscuring the meaning of specific words of God. Satan's ploy is still the same; to get us away from the meaning of the Word of God into a discussion of concepts and contextualization, "Has God said...?" is still his most successful tool against the Christian. Thus we often find the statement, "Well that is your interpretation... but has God really said this? Maybe He is saying...." It is very important for us not to confuse the right of interpretation with that of definition. We should always try to interpret God's Word to the best of our ability, when it is not clearly understood. But, in so doing, we are not free to define what words mean.

Interpretation is subject to definition. Before we are free to ask, "What is your interpretation of this verse?" we must first ask, "What are the definitions of the key words in this verse?" The interpretation of a verse can neither add to nor take away from the definition of the key words in the verse. Words have meaning. The meaning of the word is found in its definition. Therefore, definition precedes interpretation and interpretation is subject to definition. Words have meaning.

Words have specific definitions. We cannot redefine adultery as having a love affair with another woman, thereby freeing ourselves to be sexually promiscuous as long as we do not "love" her. The injunction, "You shall not commit adultery" means a married man may not have sexual intimacy with another woman. A man is not free to say, "Well, that is your interpretation of that verse. What I feel it means is that you should not love another woman. If you are on a business trip and are experiencing natural physical urges, it is all right to relieve those urges with the use of an escort service as long as it does not mean anything, as long as your heart is not unfaithful."

That statement goes beyond interpretation to definition. We are not free to redefine the word adultery to suit our needs. We are subject to the word and its definition. Adultery means any type of sexual intimacy with a woman other than your wife, and it is sin. In

"Hell is so hard to understand and so troubling, when I come across it in the Word of God I just skip over it. I figure it is the absence of God, you know, being really lonely, and besides, I don't really think God will keep people there forever. Can you really imagine it going on for a million years without God letting them out? I just don't like to think about it."

Comment in Bible study

"The word 'rod' does not have to connote spanking a child. The rod was also a shepherd's tool to Gently guide the sheep where they are meant to go. A good shepherd would never beat his little lambs and we should not beat our children. The Bible says, 'Thy rod and Thy staff they comfort me' in the Shepherd's Psalm. Any application by us of the word 'rod' must be in the context of gently comforting and directing our children like little lambs of God."

Parent in question-and-answer time during seminar.

most of my discussions with people concerning Family Discipleship, what the Word of God has to say about the role of the wife in the home, the use of the rod in disciplining and the role of the father in the spiritual leadership of the family, in most discussions, where the word interpretation is used, the word definition is the real issue. When we say that the word “rod” in the phrase “you shall beat him with the rod and deliver his soul from Sheol” can be interpreted as “time out,” we are dealing with the definitions, not interpretation. If the word "rod" has a definition, which it does, we are not free to interpret it outside of the definition of the word. Words have meaning, and interpretation both follows and is subject to definition. The words here have specific meaning and we are not free to redefine these words.

Definition subjugates us to the Word of God, while interpretation subjugates the word of God to man. Definition lends itself to specific truth, while interpretation lends itself to generalized truth. Definition emphasizes the Word of God, while interpretation emphasizes generalized concepts and applications of man.

“Sure that’s your interpretation of the Word of God, that’s not my interpretation. You have your reality and I have mine. I just don’t happen to read the Word of God like you do. I feel it is a much broader book and leaves open the possibility of all good people going to heaven whether they are Christians or not. I mean after all, doesn’t Jesus say, ‘Let the little children come unto me?’”

Unitarian Pastor

This is especially true when discussing issues of Family Discipleship. I find many couples who, when faced with the Word of God as it pertains to spanking, or the roles of the husband and wife in the home, or the father's role in the spiritual training of children, prefer to either not think about the passages or to redefine the terms. It is important, therefore, before we get into this study, to all agree that if the Word of God says something, we will all agree that that is what the Word of God says.

B. THE RULE OF FIRST MEANING

The rule of first meaning is very important. This rule states that the first clear meaning of the passage is the one that takes precedence over our own feelings of propriety. Thus we cannot take the passage where Jesus tells His disciples to “Let the little children come unto me” and, because of our own distaste for the exclusive claims of Christ concerning salvation, interpret this passage which is talking about children coming to Him to mean instead that all religions are of equal value. Similarly, we cannot take a passage where Jesus is assuring His disciples that even though the masses are believing in Him, there are plenty of room for everybody, to mean that all religions are equal. Especially since, in the same paragraph, He makes the exact opposite claim. Again, because of distaste on our part for spanking, we cannot reinterpret the clear

“I don’t ‘spank.’ I don’t feel like the verses that talk about the ‘rod’ are really talking about the rod, I think they are talking about the principle of correcting a child. My daughter, when corrected, will always cry, so I don’t have to use the rod. The issue is crying and repenting, not the rod. The verse in Prv 13:24 which says, ‘He who spares his rod hates his son, But he who loves him disciplines him diligently,’ is really talking about the principle of discipline. Where we read ‘rod,’ it is perfectly acceptable to read ‘discipline of any form’ and the verse can be read as ‘He who spares discipline of what ever kind is best for his son, hates his son.’ ”

Missionary discussing my Family Discipleship Seminar during coffee break.

On the wall of the high school English class was a poster of clouds and on each cloud was a different castle. The castles were all of differing styles and designs, each one unique. On each castle was a different religious symbol. On one the Christian cross, on another the Islamic crescent, on another the Jewish Star of David and so on. Underneath was the quote, “In my Fathers house there are many mansions.” with the inscription JESUS.

meaning of a passage to mean something else. After the first meaning rule is applied, it is perfectly acceptable to look “deeper” for additional principles or devotional thoughts, but these do not supplant the first-meaning rule. What the Word of God says, it means. Remember: we are to be judged by the Word of God, the Word of God is not to be judged by us.

C. THE RULE OF THE CLEAR VS. THE OBSCURE

The rule of the clear versus the obscure is simple. We understand that which is obscure in the Word of God by interpreting it according to that which is clear. We don't take the fifty or so verses on a subject that are perfectly clear and cast them aside because of one verse that we think maybe says something else. We are not free to interpret a difficult passage in such a way as to contradict clear teachings found in other passages in the Word of God.

God has said in Dt 29:29 that “the secret things belong to God but the things revealed belong to man and all his generations.” There are secret things that we just do not understand. Many times we are left with what a passage doesn't mean, not what it does.

Take the passage on angels and entertaining them unaware. From this passage we know that when we do it, we will be “unaware”; thus, the first meaning rule means we will not know it. That brings into question the whole angel quest.

Then we box this in with verses speaking of stewardship, discretion, financial responsibility, responsibility to home and family, and although we may never understand the full implications of this verse, we can limit what we do not understand with what we do. The same can be said to the doctor concerning the life of Hosea. Are we to throw out the abundance of clear injunctions of marriage, purity, and Christian oneness on the basis of God's difficult instructions to one man? I don't think so. We may never fully understand what God is saying to Hosea. The first meaning rule lends no clarity. We genuinely do not understand; thus, we guide our thoughts with what we do know in terms of what the Word of God clearly teaches on an area. The clear vs. obscure rule does not allow us to brainstorm about a Bible verse as if our thoughts were equal to God's. It requires us to go to the Word of God to understand the Word of God.

This is equally true in pursuing the mind of God in the area of Family Discipleship. If we read a passage that says, “He who spares his rod hates his son but he who disciplines him diligently loves him.” We must be willing to ask ourselves what the passage means according to the rule of the clear vs. the obscure? What is the first meaning of this passage? What is it clearly saying?

“I once tried reading the Bible through, but there were so many things I didn't understand that I just quit.”

Businessman in our first one-on-one discipleship time.

“I am on an angel hunt. If anyone asks me for anything I always give it to them and then try to figure out if they are angels or not. After all the Word of God says we might be ministering to angels ‘unaware’.”

University Student in Bible Study

“If we are just to marry Christians then why did God have Hosea marry a prostitute?”

Christian Doctor contemplating his second marriage.

D. THE RULE OF SUBJECTION

By the rule of subjection we mean that God's Word is authoritative and absolute. It is not subject to any authority other than itself. It reigns supreme over any personal experience. The Word of God says in Heb 4:12, *"For the word of God is living and active and sharper than any two-edged sword, and piercing as far as the division of soul and spirit, of both joints and marrow, and able to judge the thoughts and intentions of the heart."* This last phrase, *"and able to judge the thoughts and intentions of the heart."* is a key rule of Scripture. When reading the Word of God, the Word of God judges us—we do not judge it. The Word of God judges our thoughts, we do not judge its thoughts; the Word of God judges our intentions, we do not judge its intentions; the Word of God judges our heart, we do not judge the heart of the Word of God. This must be nailed down.

1. MAN'S EXPERIENCE IS SUBJECTED TO SCRIPTURE

I don't know how many times I have heard this said, "I don't know what the Word of God says, but I know what I experienced!" I used to keep track, for the sake of illustrations, of the different situations in which this statement was made to justify disobedience to the Word of God, but my file became so thick I simply abandoned it. This is the supreme biblical-interpretation law of the land whenever an action needs to be justified. Be it the Holy Spirit, spanking, principles of financial management, rejection of Scripture memory, rejection of personal evangelism, or personal purity. For some reason, Christians seem to think that their personal experience justifies just about any teaching or action under the sun.

The only statement that comes even as close to "I don't know what the Word of God says, but I know what I experienced." in terms of authority in the modern evangelical movement is its sister statement which is basically the same thing only in the negative—"I tried it but it doesn't work!"

Again, for some reason, the whole of Christendom seems to think that the truths in the Word of God are meant to be tested by man before they can be fully accepted. The truths of Scripture are like items on a buffet table. We sample this and that, rejecting one and accepting the other based on how they affect us. By our experience, the Word of God is proved to be worthy or unworthy of our consideration. Our experience defines the applicability of the Word of God to our particular circumstances.

"I don't know what the Word of God says, but I know what I experienced!"

Woman in Doctrine of the Holy Spirit study

"I don't know what the Word of God says, but I know what I experienced!"

Man explaining extramarital affair that led to divorce and a second and much happier marriage.

"I don't know what the Word of God says, but I know what I experienced!"

Businessman I was witnessing to on plane explaining to me his conversion to Mormonism.

"I don't know what the Word of God says, but I know what I experienced!"

Christian businessman who has rejected religious training for his children based on his own experience in a strict parochial school and subsequent rebellion as a teen.

"I don't know what the Word of God says, but I know what I experienced!"

Campus minister explaining his rejection of the biblical injunctions on the rod in child raising for those of modern psychology.

In 2 Cor 5:7 the Word of God states, “for we walk by faith, not by sight...” This means that...

1. If we experience it as being true, but the Word of God says it is false, then we deem it to be false.
2. If we experience it as being false, but the Word of God says it is true, then we deem it to be true.
3. Our decisions in life are not based on personal experience, but on the authority of God's Word that is subject to no other authority.

As such, we submit our life's experience to the Word of God and then evaluate it as good or bad, as from God or not from God, as righteous or sinful, as worthy of consideration or unworthy by what the Word of God says and not by what we experience.

In this value system, if we experience or perceive yes, yet God's Word says no, then we deem no to be true. If we experience or perceive no, and God's Word says yes, then we deem yes to be true. In other words, if Christ says yes, He is returning soon, yet we perceive that He is not returning soon, and then we reject our framework of perception and experience and accept God's Word as true. God has said yes, He is coming quickly, and we deem that to be true.

By contrast, if God says no, “you shall not commit adultery,” yet we experience the desire for an adulterous relationship as good, as something that can be done without sacrificing our position in society or the Church, as something that will by our perception, improve our life, we still do not do this thing. We regard it as sin. God has said no, and even though we perceive it as having been beneficial for others, even though we may have experienced it as beneficial, we reject both perception and experience and cling to God's Holy Word. We subject all values and all experiences to the Word of God.

This is very important as it concerns the biblical principles of Family Discipleship. In the evangelical community you will come across a thousand and one horror stories which supposedly substantiate the rejection of certain biblical teachings on discipline on the basis of the narrator's first-, second-, and often, third-hand experience. “If you follow the Word of God strictly in this area, you sure are going to be sorry because...” and then the historical revelation begins as they relate to you the well-worn horror stories of rebellious preachers' kids, wayward missionary children, impish deacon daughters, the Sunday school teacher whose child was seen at the after-game beer bust, and the list goes on.

We, as parents, have to accept the authority of the Word of God in our lives in terms of obedience to God and accept equally that our children must also choose whether or not to obey both God and us. Our children's decisions in this area do not determine ours. We must obey God in the area of what the Word of God says about Family Discipleship whether or not our children choose to. A child's behavior no more validates the Word of God than it validates your role as parents. A parent is judged by the Word of God, on his or her submission to the Word of God. Results do not validate doctrine.

My parents were both alcoholics and all three children went in to full-time Christian service. Were you to adapt a methodological approach to Family Discipleship, you would

“I tried it but it doesn't work!”

Woman concerning Scripture memory

“I tried it but it doesn't work!”

Businessman concerning personal evangelism

“I tried it but it doesn't work!”

Pastor's wife concerning prayer

“I tried it but it doesn't work!”

Staff wife concerning spanking

conclude that being a drop-dead drunk, abusive, negligent nonresident parent, and hosting drunken parties on a regular basis was the key to insuring your children grew up to be strong Christian leaders in the Church. Similarly I have friends who did everything right but when their children became old enough to make decisions for themselves some chose to rebel and not follow God. Will you say then that if you want to have rebellious children bring them up in the church, and if you want to have spiritual children bring them up with drunks?

All things are subject to the Word of God in child raising. No one's experience supersedes it, not mine, not yours and not the person who warns you against following the Word of God on any area based on experiences—and that includes biblical principles of Family Discipleship.

If our experience or perception creates in us a prejudice against the strict application of the Word of God to our lives and families, we subject ourselves to the Word of God and not vice versa.

2. CULTURE IS SUBJECT TO SCRIPTURE

Each of these statements has been made to the author at one time or another. Each is equally false. The problem with subjecting Scripture to culture is that it opens up a Pandora's box of doctrinal heresy. The well-meaning ministers who made the first three statements were doing so on the basis of a strong doctrinal belief in the blood sacrifice of Jesus for the remission of sins. They could pass any inquiry on the Reformation doctrines of faith. They were just embarrassed at some of the social injunctions of Scripture and could see no harm in adjusting them to make them more palatable to their congregations or ministries. What they did not realize is that the same appeal to culture that can set aside the role of women in the home and church, or the injunction concerning the physical discipline of children,

can just as easily be used to set aside the blood of Christ from Scripture. There is no basic difference in the first three arguments from the last. All four appeal to culture as the defining point of Scripture. What in the first generation is a simple deviation from Scripture, quickly degenerates in the next two or three spiritual generations. Where the first had a strong feeling of biblical authority and just wanted to make some adjustments, the subsequent generations will come up, not making adjustments on the basis of strong biblical authority, but rather with a worldview that Scripture is subject to culture. If so in one area, why not another?

It is true that the Bible says that wives are to be subject to their husbands, but that was another era, another time. Nowadays women are educated and can function on their own. They do not, and should not live in subjection to their husbands.

It is true that the Bible says that women should not teach or exercise authority over men, but that was in another time and era. Women back then were not educated; they were illiterate and protected from the world. The Bible was justified in its prohibition. But we live in another age now. Women are the intellectual and social equals of men and should be able to teach and hold positions of authority in the church.

It is true that the Bible says that we should beat our children with the rod. But that was a different time, a more primitive time, a violent time. People did not know better. The science in all fields, not just psychology, but medicine, astronomy, in all fields was extremely limited and people did the best they could. Today, in our modern culture, we have many insights into science that our forefathers did not have. One of these areas is the psychology of child raising. We have learned that in a more progressive, civilized culture, it is just not necessary to beat children.

People often make the mistake of viewing culture as neutral. This is not true. Culture is made up of the sum total of the people or group, which it encompasses. The Bible says in Rom 3:12 "All have turned aside, together they have become useless; there is none who does good, there is not even one." Astronomy is the study of stars; this is morally neutral. Geology is the study of rocks; this is morally neutral. Chemistry is the study of the elements; this is morally neutral. Culture, however, is made up not of elements, but rather of people. It exists only on the basis of the beliefs and actions of people, who are fallen and sinful. It is not morally neutral, but depraved.

Remember, the Bible makes three important claims about itself:

1. It is eternal. It transcends both time and culture: 1 Pt 1:25, "*But the word of the Lord abides forever. And this is the word which was preached to you.*"
2. It is authoritative. We do not judge the Word of God; the Word of God judges our thoughts and intentions: Heb 4:12, "*For the word of God is living and active and sharper than any two-edged sword, and piercing as far as the division of soul and spirit, of both joints and marrow, and able to judge the thoughts and intentions of the heart.*"
3. It is of value in all areas of life, being inspired in every area, including science and history: 2 Ti 3:16, "*All Scripture is inspired by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training in righteousness...*"

It is true that the Bible says that Jesus' blood paid for our sins. But that was a different time, a more primitive and violent time. People were used to blood. The Romans practiced public animal sacrifice; the Greeks did the same; the Jews were all too familiar with the practice. Public executions of men, bloody events from the Temple to the market place were common. Today, however, modern man in his modern culture cannot relate to blood. Food in the market is prepared blood-free and given to us in a sanitized form. Public executions are banned and the executions themselves are bloodless. Animal sacrifice is unheard of and there is no public butchering of animals. We live in a bloodless culture and as a result the blood of Christ is no longer relevant.

As such, the Word of God has total authority over Scripture. It transcends both time and culture. It is equally applicable to the semi-literate Hebrew fisherman and the business executive in New York City, to the tribal herdsman in Yemen and the Ph.D. in psychology at Cambridge, to the subsistence farmer in Guatemala and the anthropologist at Yale or Harvard. When there is conflict, culture is wrong, Scripture is right. Culture bows to Scripture as its authority and is redeemed by Scripture.

3. FEELINGS ARE SUBJECT TO SCRIPTURE

Our feelings are subject to Scripture. When our feelings collide with Scripture then our feelings are judged to be wrong, not the Word of God. The way we can tell if feelings are right or not is to subject them to the harsh light of Scripture. If we

I don't know... I just can't accept it. It grates against all my emotions. How could a loving God send anyone to Hell?

It grates against all my emotions. How could a loving God command that women, children and even animals be slaughtered in His name?

I don't know; I just can't accept it; it grates against all my emotions. How can I spank my child? It just doesn't feel right.

read a passage and it feels like God is in the wrong on an area, then that is an area of repentance and submission in our lives. The Word of God says clearly in Heb 4:12, "For the word of God is living and active and sharper than any two-edged sword, and piercing as far as the division of soul and spirit, of both joints and marrow, and able to judge the thoughts and intentions of the heart." The Word of God judges our feelings and not vice

versa. When we question God, it is important that this question should be informative in nature and not one which questions His moral integrity and will. The question “Why” can be an act of submission or rebellion, depending on how it is asked. It can be a request for further information to insure more complete submission or it can be a response of rebellion, bringing into question the moral fiber of the authority. Our feelings are subject to the Word of God. When they are in conflict with the Word of God, they are wrong and the Word of God is right.

4. MINISTRY SUCCESS IS SUBJECT TO SCRIPTURE (MINISTRY SUCCESS AND THE JUSTIFICATION OF SCRIPTURE)

I call this the Samson principle. In Samson we had a man of terrible character performing great works of God. We praise God for working through Samson, but we submit his lifestyle to the Word of God for scrutiny before emulating it.

It is true that a rebellious adult child does not invalidate the scriptural injunctions of the family. It is also true that a successful ministry does not free us from obedience to any passage of Scripture. I always respond with pity towards adults who, as children, chose to rebel against their scriptural upbringing. What opportunities and joys were lost by this fateful decision? I must confess, though, that I tend to respond with more anger than pity toward successful ministers who choose to neglect their responsibility toward their children and family for the glory of the ministry. What chance did these kids have? Of all kids, theirs should have had the brightest future and yet now they are angry and resentful at both God and man. They of all people have reason for resentment, if indeed any do.

An elderly missionary friend of mine recounts an experience he had. One of the great Bible teachers and ministers of his generation had died. There was a beautiful funeral with the masses in attendance. Later, missing the man's three boys, he returned to the gravesite, where they were urinating on his grave, thinking no one was around. They recounted in tears the neglect, the anger, the abuse and the fear that terrorized their home and family while this great man was alive. They felt nothing but relief. A successful ministry does not justify a lifestyle. It does not justify doctrines of the Holy Spirit, and it does not justify principles of family discipleship. Only the Word of God does, and it is our only authority.

In the same vein, I have known men who gave themselves to their jobs or ministries, neglecting both wife and

“No one ever thought of questioning his life or his ministry methods. I mean, he had one of the most successful community ministries in the U.S. Who would think of arguing with that kind of success?”

Supervisor explaining why a staff member was able to go so long in marital infidelity and financial mismanagement without being caught.

“He had one of the greatest teaching ministries going. No one ever questioned his family. Sure there were indications, but God was blessing his ministry so greatly. How could a man with a ministry like that possibly be out of God's will? It was only later that we realized all of the biblical principles in his life that were being overlooked or violated for the sake of the ministry.”

Missionary staff supervisor explaining why a missionary on his team was allowed to get to the point where his child attempted suicide and his wife left him

“It is often necessary for us as ministers to lay our families on the altar for the ministry.”

National leader and speaker to young staff

children. The wife remained faithful and the children, though out of control in their early years, turned to God later in life. These men justify their actions by the fact that they have loving wives and children who love God and are active in the faith. They will give an account to God on the basis of their conformity to the Word of God as fathers and husbands, not their wives and children's conformity to the Word of God despite their neglect. They will give an account to God for their own actions.

You do not put obedience on the altar for God. This may seem absurd but it is a frequently taught doctrine at pastor and staff conference. Time and again we, as ministers, are exhorted to put obedience to God on the altar. To bring this point home I often take pastors and staff to 1 Ti 3:1-7, in which the biblical standards of leadership are laid out in the Bible. I then present the staff with the following scenarios:

A pastor says to you, "I know verse 2 states that a pastor should be the *'husband of one wife'* but there are so many needy women in my church, I just had to put this on the altar for God." What would you say?

"I know verse 3 says that a pastor should not be *'addicted to wine'* but there are just so many pressures in the ministry I had to put this on the altar for God." What would you say?

"I know verse 3 says a pastor should be *'free from the love of money'* but there are just so many opportunities for the use of money in the ministry that I had to put this on the altar for God?" What would you say?

"I had just been asked to join the team as a staff supervisor. It was a great compliment. I was a little anxious, as it would require me to be on the road and away from home about 25% of the time. At the first meeting the team of supervisors met for prayer. These men were all ten to twenty years older than I was. The first began to share the grief he was experiencing in his family. Tears rolled down his cheeks as he shared how the years of neglect of family for the ministry were now bearing fruit. The next man began to share along the same vein. Tears formed in his eyes also and rolled down his cheeks. One by one, each man went around and shared the same story of years of placing the family on the altar for God and how it was now bearing fruit in their marriages and in their families. At the end of the prayer time I handed in my resignation as a staff supervisor and went home to my wife and children. The man who took my place now has the same testimony as the others."

The Author

"I know verse 4 and 5 says, *'He must be one who manages his own household well, keeping his children under control with all dignity (but if a man does not know how to manage his own household, how will he take care of the church of God?)'* but there are just so many needs. God's call was so compelling. The ministry I was called to required such sacrifice, that I had to put this on the altar for God." What would you say?

In God's eyes none of these designs is acceptable. You do not put obedience on the altar. You put self on the altar for the sake of obedience, not vice versa. You do not sacrifice others, you sacrifice yourself. "John, there are great needs on the mission field, so I am going to sell your car and give the money to foreign missions!" I don't think so. "Honey, there are so many needs in the ministry. I am going to have you and the kids make the sacrifice for my ministry." I don't think so.

You, as the minister, sacrifice. You sacrifice your ego. You sacrifice the praise. You sacrifice the organizational standing. You place *yourself* on the altar and obey God. If, in the context of obeying God, you can have the ministry size, the organizational standing, the praise, that is well and good. It is from God. If not, you die to this and place yourself on the altar and fulfill your responsibility to God in the area of the family. You *obey* God. You do not put obedience to God on the altar.

Pastor, staff person, executive of Christian organization, missionary, you could have chosen to remain celibate. You could have chosen to give yourself totally to the

ministry—unencumbered by wife and children—but you did not do that. If you had, your wife no doubt would have married some fine Christian gentleman who considered both her and the children a blessing and would have been committed to fulfilling the biblical injunctions to the family in obedience to God. But you asked her to marry you. You gave her children to bear. Now, God looks to you to fulfill your responsibility for these designs that you made. You do not go to God and say, “Here, you can have them back, I put them on the altar.” No, that is an area of obedience that God requires of you. You do not put obedience on the altar.

5. MIRACLES ARE SUBJECT TO SCRIPTURE (MIRACLES AND THE JUSTIFICATION OF SCRIPTURE)

I call this the Moses Principle. Moses did great signs and wonders, but the Pharaoh was deceived because he fixed his mind on these and not the Word of God. Thus, he did not believe Moses or obey God when his magicians were able to do the same thing. Moses was a man of

miracles, but what made him a man of God was not the miracles, but the fact that he both taught and obeyed the Word of God. Miracles were purely secondary. They occur throughout the Bible. Sometimes miracles are performed by God, sometimes by Satan, sometimes by angels, sometimes by demons, some times by men of God, and sometimes by servants of the devil. We will want to subject all miracles to the Word of God, not blindly accredit them to God. When a miracle happens, all you can say is that a miracle has happened. It is later, as the Word of God is applied, that the miracle is truly understood.

The simple rule of thumb here is to remember that if a miracle or spiritual occurrence takes place, that is all that can be said about it. A miracle or spiritual occurrence has taken place. All else is subject to the Word of God.

It is true that great prophets such as Moses did miracles such as turning a rod into a snake and it is equally true that the pagan Egyptian priests did the exact same miracles. It is true that in Acts 2:22, the ministry of Jesus is described as one characterized by “signs and wonders” and that in Acts 5:12 the ministry of the Apostles is characterized by the same “signs and wonders,” yet it is equally true that in 2 Thes 2:9, the anti Christ will be characterized by “signs and wonders,” and that in Mk 13:22 “signs and wonders” will lead many astray from the gospel of Christ. Keep in mind that two things were said about John the Baptist in the Scriptures; first, he was the greatest prophet ever to live; second, he did no miracles.

In fact Jesus Christ Himself rebukes the desire for “signs and wonders.” In Jn 4:48, Jesus condemns the people's dependence on signs and wonders saying, “*Unless you people see signs and wonders, you simply will not believe.*” Going even further in Lk 11:29 in speaking of the desire to see signs as authoritative indication of the work of God, Jesus says, “*This Generation is a wicked Generation; it seeks for a sign, and yet no sign shall be given to it but the sign of Jonah.*”

“Don’t try to tell me this is not from God. I saw him heal her with my own eyes.”

Pastor in discussion with me on the doctrinal improprieties of a visiting evangelist.

“Don’t try to tell me this is not from God. I saw him heal her with my own eyes.”

Indian student in discussion of the spiritual value of Hinduism vs. Christianity in defense of his Hindu Holy Man.

The Word of God is clear. It alone is the authoritative Word of God. Signs and wonders are just that, signs and wonders. This is true whether the miracles are events, such as healings or holistic, such as success in growing a church, starting a television ministry or leading an evangelistic campaign. They do not validate or invalidate the teaching accompanying them. The Word of God does this. A man's ability to do miracles or to maintain a miraculous ministry does not mean his philosophy of child raising and his teachings on Family Discipleship are from God. The Word of God is the test and the rule. The simple request of "Chapter and Verse, please" and then a thoughtful consideration of the Word of God will tell you all you need to know concerning the man and his teachings. Miracles and miraculous ministries, in and of themselves, are not conclusive. Only the Word of God is conclusive.

6. PRAISE IS SUBJECT TO SCRIPTURE (PRAISE AND SCRIPTURE)

I call this the David Principle. David wrote wonderful Psalms of Praise and gave us the most praise-filled book of the Bible. Yet, his life was also characterized

by adultery, murder, and failure to order his family, discipline his children and raise them by scriptural guidelines. True, David was a man of praise and a man after God's own heart, but we will want to subject his family values to the Word of God before emulating them.

Spirit of God: every spirit that confesses that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is from God;" and as a result any one who confesses Christ is deemed of God and his teachings of God. The problem with this is that the first passage is dealing with the testing of faith not praise, and the latter passage is talking about the confession of Christ as the Messiah in terms of personal salvation and discipleship, not just the mere words.

We know this because words to God always come cheap from both men and demons. Consider the following praises and confessions, their origins and whether you would like to submit unreservedly to the teachings of those from which they emerge.

Mt 7:22-23 *"Many will say to Me on that day, 'Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in Your name, and in Your name cast out demons, and in Your name perform many miracles?' And then I will declare to them, 'I never knew you; depart from Me, you who practice lawlessness.'"*

"Of course it is from God. He praises God, he gives God the credit, it could not be of Satan and be able to do that could he?"
Christian businessman in discussion of pastor with questionable doctrinal teachings concerning Christ and the Word of God.

The Word of God says in 1 Pt 1:7 "that the proof of your faith, being more precious than gold which is perishable, even though tested by fire, may be found to result in praise and glory and honor at the revelation of Jesus Christ;" This verse is often used to argue that if a man is praising God then that is the proof of his faith. That he is of God or he could not praise Him. Again, in 1 Jn 4:2 the Word of God says, "By this you know the "Whenever I go to spank my son he begins singing praise songs he has learned at church. I know that no one of Satan can sing praise songs and rejoice that the Holy Spirit is doing the work in his life, so I don't have to spank him. You don't want me to interrupt his praise songs to spank him do you? I figure he is in a state of grace at that point."

Mother excitedly explains to me during question and answer session of the seminar her joy in not having to spank her child because of the Holy Spirit's intervention.

Mk 1:23, 24 "And just then there was in their synagogue a man with an unclean spirit; and he cried out, saying, 'What do we have to do with You, **Jesus of Nazareth?** Have You come to destroy us? **I know who You are—the Holy One of God!**'"

Mk 3:11 "And whenever the unclean spirits beheld Him, they would fall down before Him and cry out, saying, '**You are the Son of God!**'"

Mk 5:7,8 "And crying out with a loud voice, he said, 'What do I have to do with You, **Jesus, Son of the Most High God?** I implore You by God, do not torment me!' For He had been saying to him, 'Come out of the man, you unclean spirit!'"

Acts 16:16,17 "And it happened that as we were going to the place of prayer, a certain slave-girl having a spirit of divination met us, who was bringing her masters much profit by fortune telling. Following after Paul and us, she kept crying out, saying, '**These men are bond-servants of the Most High God, who are proclaiming to you the way of salvation.**'"

As you can see all sorts of miracles, wonders and confessions of faith can be made not just from carnal Christians and non-Christians, but also from the demons themselves. A praise service or the words "praise God" do not justify everything that is taught prior to the confession or following it. Instead, every teaching, every theology, every philosophy, every act must be subject to the Word of God.

7. GIFTS ARE SUBJECT TO SCRIPTURE (GIFTS AND SCRIPTURE)

I call this the Corinthian Principle. The Church at Corinth was a highly gifted church: tongues, miracles—all the big ones in the world's eyes were there. Yet a careful reading of the church and family life of the Church at Corinth shows it to be bankrupt in terms of God's design. I praise God for the gifts of the Holy Spirit manifested by the Church at Corinth, but you will not want to shape your family values by what you see in this Church. You will want to scrutinize them carefully by the Word of God.

A gift of the Holy Spirit is by nature a gift. It is not given on the basis of merit. Otherwise it would be called a reward of the Holy Spirit. The Scriptures are replete with gifted men of bankrupt families. Neither their gifts nor their callings freed them from the scriptural injunctions concerning the family, nor did they free them from the tragic results of ignoring these injunctions.

Gn 34:5 "Now Jacob heard that [Shechem] had defiled Dinah, his daughter; but his sons were with his livestock in the field, so Jacob kept silent until they came in."

Gn 34:25 "Now it came about on the third day, when they were in pain, that two of Jacob's sons, Simeon and Levi, Dinah's brothers, each took his sword and came upon the city unawares, and killed every male."

Gn 34:30 "Then Jacob said to Simeon and Levi, 'You have brought trouble on me, by making me odious among the inhabitants of the land, among the Canaanites and the

"Their church manifests all the gifts of the Holy Spirit. I don't see even half of them at work in yours. That in itself is all I need to see to tell me who is right and wrong on this issue."

Campus minister discussing a principle of ministry.

"I don't care what they teach, if they can heal my son, that's all I care about".

Mother and fellow teacher, discussing the doctrinal teachings of a traveling evangelist

Perizzites; and my men being few in number, they will gather together against me and attack me and I shall be destroyed, I and my household."

Gn 34:31 *"But they said, 'Should he treat our sister as a harlot?'*

1 Sm 2:12 *"Now the sons of Eli were worthless men; they did not know the Lord."*

1 Sm 2:25 *"If one man sins against another, God will mediate for him; but if a man sins against the Lord, who can intercede for him? But they would not listen to the voice of their father, for the Lord desired to put them to death."*

1 Sm 3:13 *"For I have told him that I am about to judge his house forever for the iniquity which he knew, because his sons brought a curse on themselves and he did not rebuke them."*

1 Sm 8:3 *"His sons, however, did not walk in his ways, but turned aside after dishonest gain and took bribes and perverted justice."*

1 Sm 8:4 *"Then all the elders of Israel gathered together and came to Samuel at Ramah."*

1 Sm 8:5 *"And they said to him, 'Behold, you have grown old, and your sons do not walk in your ways. Now appoint a king for us to judge us like all the nations.'"*

2 Sm 13:20 *"Then Absalom her brother said to her, 'Has Amnon your brother been with you? But now keep silent, my sister, he is your brother; do not take this matter to heart.' So Tamar remained and was desolate in her brother Absalom's house."*

2 Sm 13:21 *"Now when King David heard of all these matters, he was very angry."*

2 Sm 13:22 *"But Absalom did not speak to Amnon either good or bad; for Absalom hated Amnon because he had violated his sister Tamar."*

Men with gifts are gifted men but their lives and family values must still be scrutinized by the Word of God not by their gifts. The Word of God is supreme over any gift. This is especially true since spiritual deception is most easily accomplished in the spiritual realm, one in which we are least at home. When a man is justifying his family on the basis of his gifts and callings, always, always, always ask, "Chapter and verse, please."

E. THE RULE OF THE TOTAL MIND/ REVELATION OF GOD

This rule is a new one, brought on by the proliferation of Bible study programs via computer. It is easy for us to think we have the whole mind of God on a topic if we have a printout in front of us with all verses involved. Unfortunately, for this method at least, the Bible is not written topically. There are doctrinal concepts at play that must also be mastered. The concepts of Grace, Mercy, Sufficiency of Christ, Faith, and Works all come into play. As with the above illustration, the student can easily fall into error. He must be willing to spend the time to master the subject from the Word of God, rather than give it a cursory approach based on a few

"I wanted to find out what God has to say about the issue of baptism and how it relates to salvation. I punched in 'Baptist, baptism, baptize and baptized' in my computer and printed out all the verses. I feel like I now can say with confidence that baptism and salvation are inseparably linked."

Businessman sharing with me his revelations from Bible study by computer.

basic words. The computer sheet is a starting point, but it cannot be separated from a lifetime commitment of study, reading and mastering the total mind of God on a subject.

To find out what the Bible says on child raising, you will have to do more than look up all the verses that have the words “child, children, son or daughter” in them. In an age of instant information, it is important for us to be willing to give both time and effort to mastering a subject from the Scriptures.

F. RULES OF STATED AUTHORITY

1. STATED TRUTH VS. IMPLIED TRUTH

In our understanding of Scripture it is important not to speak with authority where the Bible does not, even though the implication seems to be there. An example of this is the truth found in I Jn 4:16 where the Word of God states, “*And we have come to know and have believed the love which God has for us. God is love, and the one who abides in love abides in God, and God abides in him.*” In this passage, the phrase “*God is love*” can be found. This is true; however, it does not mean, “*love is God.*” This second statement is not presented by Scripture and therefore cannot be concluded, even if it seems to be implied by the Word of God.

Another example of this is found in Eph 5:22 where the Word of God states, “*Wives, be subject to your own husbands, as to the Lord.*” During my college days, many zealous young men took this one step beyond the stated Scripture. They deduced that since wives were to be subject to their husbands, then women in the ministry should be subject to men. The Bible however does not say this. Simply because you feel it is implied, does not give you the authority to state it as biblical truth.

A third example can be found in Heb 1:14, where the Word of God states concerning angels, “*Are they not all ministering spirits, sent out to render service for the sake of those who will inherit salvation?*” It is true that angels serve as ministering spirits—it is not true that we should pray to angels to care for us and for our loved ones. This second conclusion cannot be made simply by implication; it must be made by stated revelation.

I have encountered each of these situations in the course of my ministry. In each case the individual or individuals involved were shocked that I would question the authority of their implications as not equal to that of Scripture. Our own conclusions, our own opinions, are not the same as stated revelation. It is very important to let the Word of God begin and end exactly where it begins and ends. It does so for a divine purpose. To take it further always entails some error or problem that we, in our finite minds, cannot at the time fathom, but God in His infinite wisdom has discerned and therefore not stated. Remember the difference between your word and God’s Word *is* the difference between your word and God’s Word.

2. TRUTH BY STATEMENT VS. OMISSION

In a similar vein, the fact that the Bible does not speak to an issue does not mean that God has forbidden it, or that the event did not occur. The Bible is silent on many historical issues. One reason for this is given in Jn 21:25 where the Word of God states, “*And there are also many other things which Jesus did, which if they were written in detail, I suppose that even the world*

“Since musical instruments are not mentioned by Christ, nor found to be used in the book of Acts, nor mentioned in any teaching of the Apostles in the New Testament, we reject them for use in the Church.”

Church of Christ Minister

itself would not contain the books which were written." The reason being the sheer crushing volume of the weight of information.

If every detail of information was given us, can you imagine how lost we would be in our search to know God? In His infinite wisdom and according to His divine will and perfect plan, God has given us exactly the amount of information needed for us to know Him, and to be equipped for every good work. Now after this last statement, a good Navigator would say, "Where does the Bible say that?" To which a good Navigator would respond, "In Jn 20:31, the Word of God states, *'but these have been written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God; and that believing you may have life in His name.'* And from this we know that the Word of God is written that we might know Him. In 2 Ti 3:17, the Word of God says concerning itself, *'that the man of God may be adequate, equipped for every good work.'* And from this we know that it was given to equip us for every good work."

In the creation account, Adam and Eve were commanded "Then God said, 'Behold, I have given you every plant yielding seed that is on the surface of all the earth, and every tree which has fruit yielding seed; it shall be food for you; and to every beast of the earth and to every bird of the sky and to every thing that moves on the earth which has life, I have given every green plant for food'; and it was so." (Gn 1:29-30)

You will notice that no mention is made of eating animals. From this we may surmise that it was never intended for man to eat animals and that vegetarianism is the original plan of God for mankind."

University student as to why vegetarianism is the higher dietary plane

In the first example, it is true that musical instruments are not mentioned in the New Testament. This does not mean they were not used, nor does it mean they are forbidden. Christian books are not mentioned in the New Testament. Sunday Schools and Educational wings on churches are not mentioned. Sunday school manuals are not mentioned, to name but a few. Simply because these things are not stated does not mean they were not used or were forbidden. It is true that you cannot command them, but it is equally true that you cannot forbid them.

"Neither the teachings of Christ nor those of the New Testament advocate the Rod. Therefore, spanking or any form of corporal punishment is not something Christians need feel bound to use in raising their children."

Mother explaining her personal view during coffee break of Family Discipleship Seminar

This is true of the second example as well. We cannot say that since eating meat was not mentioned in the days of Adam, that Adam did not eat meat. We must not fall into the humanist view of a hierarchy of life: microscopic, plant, insect, and animal. There are two classifications of life: human, and all other. To kill and eat a microbe, to kill a plant, to kill an insect or to kill an animal are all the same in God's eyes. The Word of God specifically states in Mk 7:19 concerning Christ's statements about food, *"Thus He declared all foods clean."*

In the last example the author will readily admit that the rod is not mentioned in the disciplining of children in the New Testament. I will go on to point out that any time in the New Testament that discipline is explained, it is explained in the context of physical or corporal discipline. Also, there are no examples of the day-to-day workings of the Christian family life given in the New Testament. If we were to use this line of logic we would not just throw out the baby with the bath water, but brother, sister, Mom and Dad as well.

It is very important for us, when reading Christian books, when listening to sermons, when drawing our own conclusions to think, "Does the Bible really say that, or am I just concluding it?"

3. TRUTH: EXPOSITION VS. DECLARATION

This last area is closely related to the other two. We must differentiate between exposition of Scripture and declaration of truth. In exposition of Scripture, the verse is given and then it is restated and developed. In declaration of truth, a statement is simply made without reference to Scripture. A good Navigator, a good disciple, will always have his antennae up and be thinking, where in the Bible does it say that? If given a chance to ask, he will always ask for the chapter and verse. Those not forthcoming, he will remain tentative in his acceptance until the statement is firmly grounded in Scripture.

"Chapter and verse please..."

The response to any good Navigator when a spiritual truth or opinion is presented.

G. THE RULES OF LIMITATIONS

Man chafes against any form of limitation, especially spiritual limitations. He does not like to think that there is anything that he cannot know or understand given the time and opportunity. I am always amazed when I share Christ with non-Christians that they have such strong feelings about a God in whom they do not believe. I don't know how many times I have shared Christ with a non-Christian and he has responded, "A loving God will not send anyone to Hell!" Hey, wait a minute. You don't believe in God. You don't believe in the Bible. You don't believe in heaven or hell, but here you are giving me a theological lesson on the doctrines of the eternity and the nature and character of God. I have seen the same thing with evangelicals. A parent who explains away a wealth of Scripture on the basis of culture or psychology will then quote from the same book or portion of Scripture to defend their view. Hey, wait a minute. I thought this wasn't reliable. I thought this wasn't culturally applicable. Now, here we are quoting it. Man simply hates not to be able to speak with authority on a subject, even when he professes disbelief. He will still turn around and preach from that which he has originally denied.

"A loving God will not send anyone to Hell!"

Non-Christian explaining this to me for the zillionth time.

It is important to reconcile ourselves to certain limitations in the Word. If God is silent we must be silent. If God has revealed himself, then we must be consistent in our acceptance of the entire revelation of God. Both the non-Christian and the Christian parent must humble themselves before the Word of God. If it speaks, they must listen. If it is silent, they too must be silent. The Bible reveals several areas of silence.

"But the Bible says "Do not provoke your children, that they may not lose heart!"

A parent, after rejecting the authority of Scripture in the area of spanking, quoting Scripture to defend his position for not spanking.

1. SECRET THINGS

There are certain secret things that we simply are not know. Examples of these include: what God did before creation; why God created; the early years of Jesus; the family lives of the Apostles. All these and more are silent. Much harm can be done in the area of Family Discipleship to bring in tradition, myth and conjecture as to the Old Testaments saints, Jesus' or the Apostle's family experience. Where the Word of God is silent, so too we must be silent.

"The secret things belong to the Lord our God, but the things revealed belong to us and to our sons forever."

Dt 29:29

2. HIDDEN THINGS

There are certain things that are higher things, that though revealed, we simply do not understand. Unexplained prophecies, symbols, and parables are all good examples of this. It is fine to ask God why He did something, or said something, but if He is silent in His Word we must learn to say, "God does not say. This is what I think, but God does not say. We just don't really know."

"For My thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways My ways," declares the Lord. For as the heavens are higher than the earth, So are My ways higher than your ways, And My thoughts than your thoughts."
Is 55:8-9

3. THINGS WE ARE TOO SINFUL TO COMPREHEND

These two questions, though worded the exact same way, have opposite unspoken meanings. It happens all the time. In asking God "Why" or "What," it is always important to ask in the right way. One type of why is an accusation against character, sovereignty and will. The same question, asked with a little different tone and inflection is a humble request for information in order to more fully

Spoken: "Why would a loving God have us spank our children?"

Unspoken: (It is hard for me to understand why a God of love would have us spank our children since we, as His earthly representatives, are to picture Him. Are there any other Scriptures or principles that I am missing in my understanding of this?)

Spoken: "Why would a loving God have us spank our children!"

Unspoken: (It is hard for me to understand how a God of love would have us spank our children since we as His earthly representatives are to represent Him. How can He be a loving God and require this of us?)

obey. We must be sure that all our questions are of the latter nature. We must always keep in mind when approaching the Word of God, that we as sinful beings have a moral system and intuition light years away from God's. It is God who defines both sin and righteousness. If it does not seem clear to us, it is our place to make the adjustment to bring our value system in line with God's. From the passages below, it is clear that God is always right and when there is a question of will, we are always wrong.

Dn 9:7,14 "Righteousness belongs to Thee, O Lord, but to us open shame,... Therefore, the Lord has kept the calamity in store and brought it on us; for the Lord our God is righteous with respect to all His deeds which He has done, but we have not obeyed His voice."

Neh 9:33 "However, Thou art just in all that has come upon us; For Thou hast dealt faithfully, but we have acted wickedly."

Rom 9:14 & 20 "What shall we say then? There is no injustice with God, is there? May it never be! On the contrary, who are you, O man, who answers back to God? The thing molded will not say to the molder, 'Why did you make me like this?'" will it?"

There are some things that we are just too sinful to comprehend. We have to accept them as just and right simply because God did them or said them, without reliance upon our own flawed value system.

4. EXTRA BIBLICAL REVELATION

There is a new fad sweeping Evangelical circles and it is called is called by many names, “after-death experiences”, “word of wisdom,” “visions,” “dreams,” and some forms of “tongues,” but what they all actually are can be summed up in one simple phrase: “Extra-biblical revelation.”

The Bible is clear in Rv 22:18–19 when it states, “I testify to everyone who hears the words of the prophecy of this book: if anyone adds to them, God shall add to him the plagues which are written in this book; and if anyone takes away from the words of the book of this prophecy, God shall take away his part from the tree of life and from the holy city, which are written in this book.” This closes revelation until the return of Christ. The Bible is a finished product, and nothing more will be added or taken away.

What is meant by “Extra-biblical revelation” is three-fold:

First, it applies to any new information concerning spiritual things, be it heaven, hell, the nature of God or any other spiritual issue or teaching not found in the Bible.

This would include: visions in which Jesus is visually seen; after-death experiences where information about Heaven or Hell which is not contained in the Bible is gleaned or seen; information about the passage into Heaven or Hell which is not in the Bible; or any spiritual truth or teaching which is *not a direct quote of Scripture*. All this is extra or new information not found in the Bible. If from God, we would need to add this to our Bibles as new revelation. The person with this knowledge would have superior spiritual insight and information, as opposed to those people who only had the Bible.

“I was at a meeting of the Gideons and a man stood up and related how he had died and then been brought back to life. He had seen heaven and was able to tell us what it looked like. He saw Jesus, the streets, the mountains, people he knew who had died, his grandmother rocking in her favorite chair and even his little baby who had died a year before. He was the happiest little baby in the entire world. It was wonderful...”

Christian lawyer relating a recent testimony service at the Gideon camp meeting.

“I don’t see what you are making such a stink over. All he was doing was sharing an experience. How do we know he did not in fact go to heaven? The few things that came out in his testimony that are not in the Bible are of no consequence. I doubt seriously if anyone was listening as closely as you were. Chances are they went right past the whole congregation.”

Pastor in discussion with me after this same man gave his testimony in our church at the invitation of the above lawyer.

“If we are going to stay the same age we are now when we die and go to heaven then I don’t want to go there. I thought we were going to get perfect bodies; I don’t want to be stuck for eternity in some old decrepit body. Or what if I die tonight and have to be 14 for eternity? I can’t stand to think about it.”

The teenage daughter of a deacon in the church where the lawyer’s guest recounted his story. She has refused to go to church or youth meetings since that occurrence.

“I have a vision from God to share with you. I had this vision last night. It entailed you, your wife and your family. In it I saw Jesus. He was in heaven. It was all so glorious. I could not sleep and I have come right now to talk with you about it. I believe He has a special message just for you.”

Wife of staff supervisor to a young staff man at a mission’s conference.

“I have never been more confused or fearful than after I heard that so-called vision. I wish I had never listened to that woman.”

The young staff man in counseling

Second, this term applies to any statement made directly by God The Father, God The Son or God The Holy Spirit. The definition of inspiration is found in 2 Pt 1:21 *“for no prophecy was ever made by an act of human will, but men moved by the Holy Spirit spoke from God.”* Thus, a dream, vision or after-death experience where God talks to them or they overhear a conversation God is carrying on, or any statement that begins with a variation of “God said” is extra-biblical. As such, we reject it. In either case you would need to write it down and staple it in your Bible.

Thirdly, this term would include: any after-death experiences where Jesus or God spoke; any ecstatic speaking in tongues where the person was not doing the speaking, but rather the Holy Spirit speaking through him; any word of wisdom or knowledge that begins, “I have a word from God for you...” or “God says...” any prophetic utterance at the movement of the Holy Spirit which is a revelation from God concerning events. All of these would be new revelation. They would be words from God and need to be added to the Scripture. They would render the one possessing them with superior knowledge of the mind and working of God to those who simply rely upon the Scripture.

Needless to say, this is completely unacceptable. We do not say that these people do not have experiences. We do hold to the scriptural doctrine of the closed nature of the Bible. No new information will be added and none will be taken away. To do either is sin. It is important to ask, when presented with any spiritual truth, “Chapter and Verse please.”

IV. CONCLUSION: WHEN GODLY MEN DIFFER

It is important for us to remember that when men differ on issues of spiritual truth, it is not a reflection on God, but on man. It does not bring into question the authority of God’s Word, but highlights the sinfulness of man. Even when following these rules, differences will occur. It is important, though, to make sure in our own hearts that these differences are truly differences in interpreting what the Word of God says and not differences based on a misuse of the Word of God. In other words, differences about what the Word of God says, and not differences about what we want the Word of God to say.

Once that has been arrived at, it is perfectly all right to agree to disagree. Tread lightly, knowing that Godly men differ. Accept the fact that there is a degree of error in all of our thinking, and give respect and honor to others, even though we disagree with them. This does not mean for the sake of “getting along,” we do not use the rules of biblical interpretation and do not recognize it when others are not using the rules of interpretation and are misusing the Word of God. It simply means that we recognize that Godly men differ on some issues. Sometimes because of sin, sometimes because of God’s silence, and sometimes because the issue is just not that important to God.

“Always tread lightly when Godly men differ.”
Irma Warr

“It really bothers me that sometimes, John, I feel like when I share something with you that you don’t agree with, that you listen to what I say, consider the Scripture, and then the best we can come to is to agree to disagree.”
Staff Supervisor to author

V. Summary

- I. The Bible is God's Word, it is the literal Word of God
 - A. Inspired—God Breathed
 - B. Inerrant—without error
 - C. Eternal—God has sovereignly watched over and shepherded it throughout the ages
 - D. Without Contradiction—it is pure and tried by God before delivery to man
 - E. Authoritative—God's Word judges man, man does not judge God's Word
 - F. Spiritual Food—man needs continual nourishment from the whole Word of God, not a simple one-time reading or surface knowledge of the Scripture
- II. There are basic questions we must ask when reading a passage or studying the Bible.
 - A. Doctrine vs. Historical revelation
 - B. New Covenant vs. Old Covenant
 - C. Parables and Symbols, are they explained or not explained
 - D. Prophetic and Hidden things, are they explained or not explained
 - E. A Universal Truth or a Devotional Thought
 - F. Chapter and Verse Please
- III. Basic Rules of Interpreting the Bible
 - A. Rule of Language—The meanings of words in the Bible cannot be avoided or changed to fit our biases; we must come to terms with the meaning of the terms employed by the Holy Spirit.
 - B. Rule of First Meaning—The obvious meaning, rather than inferred or symbolic meanings, is always embraced unless the passage is presented as symbol, parable or prophecy.
 - C. Rule of Clear vs. Obscure—We do not abandon the clear for the obscure. We are sometimes left to tell what the verse does not mean on the basis of the clear, without ever fully understanding what it does mean.
 - D. Rule of Subjugation—All experiences, events and authorities are subject to the authority of the Scripture.
 1. That if we experience it as being true, but the Word of God says it is false, then we deem it to be false.
 2. That if we experience it as being false, but the Word of God says it is true, then we deem it to be true.
 4. That our decisions in life are not based on majority rule or personal experience, but on the authority of God's Word that is subject to no other authority.
 5. Neither experiences, ministry success, miracles, praise nor gifts substantiate the Word of God. Only the Word of God substantiates itself.
 6. Culture is not neutral. Culture is fallen and sinful. When there is conflict, culture is seen to be wrong. Scripture is seen to be right. Culture bows to Scripture as its authority, and is redeemed by Scripture.

7. Our feelings are subject to the Word of God. When they are in conflict with the Word of God, then they are seen to be wrong and the Word of God is judged to be right.
8. As a result, all aspects of life and ministry are subject to Scripture
 - a. Experience is subject to Scripture
 - b. Culture is subject to Scripture
 - c. Feelings are subject to Scripture
 - d. Ministry success is subject to Scripture (Ministry success and the justification of Scripture)
 - e. Miracles are subject to Scripture (Miracles and the justification of Scripture)
 - f. Praise is subject to Scripture (Praise and Scripture)
 - g. Gifts are subject to Scripture (Gifts and Scripture)
- E. Rule of the Total Mind of God—To understand a biblical principal we must seek to find out what the Bible says on it from the entire Word of God, not simply a set group of Scripture or single passage.
- F. Rule of Stated Authority
- G. Rules of Limitations
 1. Secret things—that which God has chosen not to reveal
 2. Higher Things—revelation that is unexplained
 3. Things We Are Too Sinful To Understand—clear revelation that we cannot understand in terms of God's motives or thinking.
 4. Extra-biblical revelation—spiritual experiences that yield knowledge or truths not presented in the Bible are always rejected.

Chapter ONE

Post-Study Projects

Scripture Memory Verse—1 Pt 1:24–25

All flesh is like grass, And all its glory like the flower of grass. The grass withers, And the flower falls off, But the word of the Lord abides forever. "And this is the word which was preached to you.

Last week's verse—I Ti 3:16 "All Scripture is inspired by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training in righteousness..."

QUIET TIMES ALONE WITH GOD

JEREMIAH 15:16

THEME: THE AUTHORITY OF GOD'S WORD

PASSAGE FOR MEDITATION: 1 THES 2:13

How does this passage relate to the theme?

When I reflect on this passage, does it primarily convict, encourage or challenge me? Explain why:

How will I apply this passage to my life in the coming week, and is there anything I can do today to make this passage a part of my Christian life?

PASSAGE FOR MEDITATION: 1 THES 4:8

How does this passage relate to the theme?

When I reflect on this passage, does it primarily convict, encourage or challenge me? Explain why:

How will I apply this passage to my life in the coming week, and is there anything I can do today to make this passage a part of my Christian life?

PASSAGE FOR MEDITATION: 2 TM 3:16

How does this passage relate to the theme?

When I reflect on this passage, does it primarily convict, encourage or challenge me? Explain why:

How will I apply this passage to my life in the coming week, and is there anything I can do today to make this passage a part of my Christian life?

QUIET TIMES ALONE WITH GOD

JEREMIAH 15:16

THEME: THE AUTHORITY OF GOD'S WORD

PASSAGE FOR MEDITATION: 2 Pt 1:20,21

How does this passage relate to the theme?

When I reflect on this passage, does it primarily convict, encourage or challenge me? Explain why:

How will I apply this passage to my life in the coming week, and is there anything I can do today to make this passage a part of my Christian life?

PASSAGE FOR MEDITATION: Mt 24:35

How does this passage relate to the theme?

When I reflect on this passage, does it primarily convict, encourage or challenge me? Explain why:

How will I apply this passage to my life in the coming week, and is there anything I can do today to make this passage a part of my Christian life?

PASSAGE FOR MEDITATION: 1 Pt 1:24, 25

How does this passage relate to the theme?

When I reflect on this passage, does it primarily convict, encourage or challenge me? Explain why:

How will I apply this passage to my life in the coming week, and is there anything I can do today to make this passage a part of my Christian life?

I. There are basic questions we must ask when reading a passage or studying the Bible. The following passages are listed in biblical order. As you read the following passages and/or thoughts, place the letter next to the passage to indicate the type of scriptural response that you would give in interpreting it.

(Some passages may need to use more than one letter).

- | | |
|----------------------------------|--|
| A. Narrative | G. Old Covenant—in New Testament |
| B. Doctrine | H. Parables and Symbols—explained |
| C. Historical revelation | I. Parables and Symbols—not explained |
| D. New Covenant—in New Testament | J. Prophetic and Hidden things—explained |
| E. New Covenant—in Old Testament | K. Prophetic and Hidden things—not explained |
| F. Old Covenant—in Old Covenant | |

_____ Lv 3:1 *Now if his offering is a sacrifice of peace offerings, if he is going to offer out of the herd, whether male or female, he shall offer it without defect before the Lord.*

_____ Is 53:6 *All of us like sheep have gone astray, Each of us has turned to his own way; But the Lord has caused the iniquity of us all To fall on Him.*

_____ Mt 2:17–18 *Then that which was spoken through Jeremiah the prophet was fulfilled, saying, “A voice was heard in Ramah, weeping and great mourning, Rachel weeping for her children; and she refused to be comforted, because they were no more.”*

_____ Mt 13:36–37 *Then He left the multitudes, and went into the house. And His disciples came to Him, saying, “Explain to us the parable of the tares of the field.” And He answered and said, “The one who sows the good seed is the Son of Man...”*

_____ Mk 13:4–5, 32 *“Tell us, when will these things be, and what will be the sign when all these things are going to be fulfilled?” And Jesus began to say to them, “See to it that no one misleads you... But of that day or hour no one knows, not even the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but the Father alone.”*

_____ Lk 11:13 *“If you then, being evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more shall your heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to those who ask Him?”*

_____ Lk 13:18–19 *Therefore He was saying, “What is the kingdom of God like, and to what shall I compare it? It is like a mustard seed, which a man took and threw into his own garden; and it grew and became a tree; and the birds of the air nested in its branches.”*

_____ Acts 19:6 *And when Paul had laid his hands upon them, the Holy Spirit came on them, and they began speaking with tongues and prophesying.*

_____ 1 Cor 3:16 *Do you not know that you are a temple of God, and that the Spirit of God dwells in you?*

_____ Eph 1:13–14 *In Him, you also, after listening to the message of truth, the gospel of your salvation—having also believed, you were sealed in Him with the Holy Spirit of promise, who is given as a pledge of our inheritance, with a view to the redemption of God's own possession, to the praise of His glory...*

II. Below are listed a series of statements, each with a supporting Bible verse. As you reflect once more on the list in the above section, how would you respond to each? Remember, respond from the study list, not from your own devotional thoughts.

We are to build churches worthy of the kingdom of God and the tithe is how we are to support such churches. Does not the Bible itself say in Malachi 3:10, "Bring the whole tithe into the storehouse, so that there may be food in My house, and test Me now in this," says the Lord of hosts, "if I will not open for you the windows of heaven, and pour out for you a blessing until it overflows."?

Response:

In the Bible Moses parted the Red Sea, Joshua parted the Jordan, Elijah parted the Jordan, Elisha parted the Jordan, Jesus walked on water, and then Peter walked on water. If we are truly spiritual, if we have faith, then we will have power over water.

Response:

Acts 2:2–4 states "And suddenly there came from heaven a noise like a violent, rushing wind, and it filled the whole house where they were sitting. And there appeared to them tongues as of fire distributing themselves, and they rested on each one of them. And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak with other tongues, as the Spirit was giving them utterance." All true disciples who want to be used by God will have this same Pentecostal experience.

Response:

In Leviticus 11:4–8 the Bible states, "Nevertheless, you are not to eat of these, among those which chew the cud, or among those which divide the hoof: the camel, for though it chews cud, it does not divide the hoof, it is unclean to you. Likewise, the rock badger, for though it chews cud, it does not divide the hoof, it is unclean to you; the rabbit also, for though it chews cud, it does not divide the hoof, it is unclean to you; and the pig, for though it divides the hoof, thus making a split hoof, it does not chew cud, it is unclean to you. You shall not eat of their flesh nor touch their carcasses; they are unclean to you." Which is why, as Christians we should not eat pork.

Response:

III. Below are listed the basic Rules of Interpreting the Bible. As you review them, consider the statements listed below and then answer on the basis of one of the rules of interpretation. Remember, respond from the study list, not from your own devotional thoughts.

A. **Rule of Language**—The definitions of words in the Bible cannot be avoided or changed to fit our biases. We must come to terms with the definitions of the terms employed by the Holy Spirit.

B. **Rule of First Meaning**—The obvious meaning, rather than inferred or symbolic meaning is always embraced, unless the passage is presented as symbol, parable or prophecy.

C. **Rule of Clear vs. Obscure**—We do not abandon the clear for the obscure. We are sometimes left to tell what the verse does not mean on the basis of the clear, without ever fully understanding what it does mean.

It is true that the Bible says in Proverbs 13:24 “He who spares his rod hates his son, But he who loves him disciplines him diligently.” But the meaning of rod here is symbolic for discipline. This can be inferred as a time out, it can be withdrawal of privileges. The word “rod” here means “discipline.”

Response:

The Bible says in Genesis 33:13,14 “But he said to him, “My lord knows that the children are frail and that the flocks and herds which are nursing are a care to me. And if they are driven hard one day, all the flocks will die. “Please let my lord pass on before his servant; and I will proceed at my leisure, according to the pace of the cattle that are before me and according to the pace of the children, until I come to my lord at Seir.” Here the Bible teaches that children are frail, they need special care and should not be spanked.

Response:

Although the Bible says in Proverbs 23:13,14 “Do not hold back discipline from the child, Although you beat him with the rod, he will not die. You shall beat him with the rod, And deliver his soul from Sheol.” Now the definition of “beat” does not mean to hit, but rather to threaten and the definition of the word “rod” does not mean a stick but rather any form of discipline. Thus when you threaten your child, when you use creative forms of discipline, you help to mold their spiritual character. It does not mean to literally hit your child with a stick.

Response:

Another rule of biblical interpretation is the Rule Of Subjugation, review these rules, read the illustration given below and then answer them in light of the rules. Remember, respond from the study list, not from your own devotional thoughts.

- D. Rule of Subjugation—All experiences, events and authorities are subject to the authority of the Scripture.*
- 1. That if we experience it as being true, but the Word of God says it is false, then we deem it to be false.*
 - 2. That if we experience it as being false, but the Word of God says it is true, then we deem it to be true.*
 - 3. That our decisions in life are not based on majority rule or personal experience, but on the authority of God's Word, which is subject to no other authority.*
 - 4. Neither experiences, ministry success, miracles, praise or gifts substantiates the Word of God. Only the Word of God substantiates itself.*
 - 5. Culture is not neutral. Culture is fallen and sinful. When there is conflict, culture is seen to be wrong, and Scripture is seen to be right. Culture bows to Scripture as its authority and is redeemed by Scripture.*
 - 6. Our feelings are subject to the Word of God. When they are in conflict with the Word of God, then they are seen to be wrong and the Word of God is judged to be right.*
 - 7. As a result, all aspects of life and ministry are subject to Scripture*
 - a. Experience is subject to Scripture*
 - b. Culture is subject to Scripture*
 - c. Feelings are subject to Scripture*
 - d. Ministry success is subject to Scripture (Ministry success and the justification of Scripture)*
 - e. Miracles are subject to Scripture (Miracles and the justification of Scripture)*
 - f. Praise is subject to Scripture (Praise and Scripture)*
 - g. Gifts are subject to Scripture (Gifts and Scripture)*

I started out spanking my child but it just did not work. What did work was positive reinforcement. If my child does not want to obey, when I spank him he cries and throws a temper tantrum, but when I promise him candy or something else, he obeys. The key is to just find out what he wants. I feel really bad when I spank my child. God loves us and wants us to be happy. He wants my child to be happy. Something that makes us both feel this bad cannot possibly be God's will. All these verses on spanking are from another time, another culture. In the Old Testament it was a time of violence, they did not have the luxury of knowing then what we do today about the psychology of the child. Our culture is just not one in which spanking works. Besides, I have the gift of mercy and spanking contradicts my spiritual gifts.

Response:

Below are listed the last three rules of biblical interpretation. Read the statement below and then answer in regard to these two rules of interpretation. Remember, respond from the study list, not from your own devotional thoughts.

E. Rule of the Total Mind of God—To understand a biblical principal we must seek to find out what the Bible says on it from the entire Word of God, not simply a set group of Scripture or single passage.

F. Rule of Stated Authority

G. Rules of Limitations

- 1. Secret things—that which God has chosen not to reveal*
- 2. Higher Things—revelation that is unexplained*
- 3. Things We Are Too Sinful To Understand—clear revelation that we cannot understand in terms of God's motives or thinking.*
- 4. Extra-biblical revelation—spiritual experiences that yield knowledge or truths not presented in the Bible are always rejected.*

The Bible says in Titus 2:4 “that they may encourage the young women to love their husbands, to love their children,” So you see, we are to love our children, not spank them. Besides, show me one place in the Bible where a child was spanked. Show me where Joseph, Daniel, Samuel, David, Solomon, John the Baptist, or any of the disciples were spanked. As I was praying about this, Jesus appeared to me and said, “Blessed are the children, love them and deal gently with them, I will correct them, lo I will guide them, let them not feel the rod of wrath or the tongue of sorrow.” You can do whatever you want, but I am going to do what Jesus has told me to do. If God wanted us to spank our children, then why did He not give us examples in the book of Acts of children being spanked? Acts is the Acts of the Apostles, if the Apostles don't spank them, neither will I.

Response: