

First Principles of Bible Study

By Harold Camping

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Introduction

The deep and constant concern of the child of God who dearly loves his Lord is to know and to do the will of God. He recognizes that the Bible is the source book of Truth. It is the only authority that discloses the will of God for his life. But the Bible is often difficult to understand.

How can I, as a student of the Word, reach into the treasures of truth that comprise the Bible? So many verses seem irrelevant; so many seem impossible to understand. Not only that, learned theologians frequently come to great differences of opinion concerning what the Bible teaches. How can I determine which teacher, which preacher, which theologian is leading me correctly? Must I be limited to blindly following a teacher I trust, knowing full well he is only a fallible human and therefore subject to error?

And what about the problem that arises from there being so many different translations of the Bible? How can I know which ones are trustworthy? Do I dare trust paraphrases, which seem to make the Bible so much easier to understand?

This booklet has been written to answer such questions and set forth a few basic principles we should keep in mind as we study the Bible. May it be that we might have a fresh appreciation of the wonderful Word that God has given to us. This Word is the Bible.

Chapter 1

Biblical Interpretation

The science of biblical interpretation is called hermeneutics. Many learned and scholarly books have been written regarding the principles of hermeneutics. Every believer should be concerned about the subject, because it relates to the process by which we can derive spiritual truth from the Scriptures. It is our desire that by means of this study the earnest student of the Scriptures might understand more clearly a few basic principles that must be kept in view for proper biblical interpretation. These principles are taken from the Bible. The Bible itself requires that we keep these in mind. They are as follows, and will be examined more carefully as we proceed in our study:

1. We must remember that the Bible, in its entirety, is the Holy Word of God.

Every word, every phrase is God-breathed. "Holy men of God spake as they were moved by the Holy Ghost [Spirit]" (II Peter 1:21). It is imperative that we remember that the Old Testament is just as holy and important and uniquely the Word of God as the New Testament.

The Bible is not just any book. It has no peer. God moved holy men of old to write as He guided them. Thus, the Bible in its original autographs (that is, in the original document which was written) is exactly the message that God intended for man. Each book, each paragraph, each sentence, each word, as well as each letter of each word is exactly as God intended it to be. The inquisitive student of the Bible who desires to know the truth must, therefore, approach the Bible with holy awe. This is God's message to man.

Because the Bible is God's book, only God can open the student's eyes to see the truths set forth in its pages. Sometimes those truths are very clearly seen. Sometimes they are revealed only by the most diligent searching of the Bible. But sometimes they remain hidden, regardless of the desire of the student to know everything God has revealed in the Bible. Because God reveals truth, the student must go very humbly to the Scriptures. Moreover, he must beseech the Lord that truth might be revealed to him, for it is God, the Holy Spirit, who leads us into truth, through the Bible. Furthermore, the student who wishes to know the truths of the Bible must approach the Bible with an earnest desire to be obedient to the precepts and rules set forth in the Scriptures. In all matters of doctrine and practice he should be ready to be obedient to anything and everything he reads in the Bible.

2. The Bible is its own interpreter.

We compare spiritual things with spiritual (I Corinthians 2). To understand a word or a phrase or concept in any part of the Bible, we must see how that same word or phrase or concept is used everywhere else in the Bible. Thus the Bible becomes its own dictionary; it becomes its own commentary. While such diligent comparison requires much work on the part of the student of the Bible, it is the only sure way to come to a true understanding of the biblical message. A concordance such as *Young's Analytical Concordance* or *Strong's Exhaustive Concordance* helps immeasurably in this respect, because it shows where words used in the original languages are found in our English *King James* Bible.

Because the Bible is its own interpreter, the student must leave no stone unturned in becoming acquainted with the Bible. There is no short-cut. He must spend much time reading the Bible. To try to learn its truths in greater and greater detail without being exposed to all that God has written in the Bible is foolishness. The Bible must be read and re-read. Moreover, any conclusion the student of the Word comes to from his reading of a particular verse or passage must be tested for its validity by checking that conclusion against anything and everything the Bible offers concerning the subject in question. Only when the conclusion is found to be in harmony with all that the Bible teaches can the student know that he is on the path of truth.

3. Additionally, as we allow God's Word to guide us in formulating principles of Bible interpretation, we find that the Bible provides different levels of meaning.

When we study a verse in the Bible, we must remember that while it may have only one level of meaning, it may also have as many as three.

The first level is historical. It is true that when Jesus taught using parables, He was not describing events that took place in history. But with a few exceptions, such as these parables, we must understand that the Bible gives us an exquisitely accurate account of events and conversations which actually did occur in history.

The second level of meaning frequently found in the Bible concerns moral and spiritual teachings. When a particular historical event is viewed in the light of the commandments of God as they are found throughout the Scriptures, we may look upon this event as an example of an application of God's laws.

The third level of meaning is related to the Gospel of salvation. This is the dominant and most important message of the Bible. The whole Bible is, in fact, the Gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ. The Bible reveals God's wonderful message of salvation.

We see, therefore, that there are at least three basic principles that must be kept in mind as we study the Bible. These may be summarized as follows:

1. The Bible alone and in its entirety is the Word of God.
2. The Bible is its own interpreter.
3. The Bible normally displays more than one level of meaning or significance.

Our purpose in this study is to look at these three principles in greater detail. By thoroughly understanding them we will be better prepared to receive from the Bible the rich and wonderful truths that are hidden within it.

The Bible Alone and in Its Entirety is the Word of God

The first principle we wish to examine in greater detail is that the Bible alone and in its entirety is the Word of God. In examining this principle let us ask the question: "What is the true Gospel?" As we answer this question we will be able to see that the Bible alone and in its entirety is the Word of God. It alone and in its entirety is the Gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ.

What is the true Gospel? Surely no evangelical believer needs to struggle for an answer to this question. The true Gospel has everything to do with the Lord Jesus Christ. If we recognize Him as Lord and Savior, we have the true Gospel. The Bible declares in I John 4:2-3 that:

Every spirit that confesseth that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh is of God: And every spirit that confesseth not that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh is not of God: and this is that spirit of antichrist, . . .

Moreover, doesn't God say through the apostle Paul in I Corinthians 15:1-4:

Moreover, brethren, I declare unto you the gospel . . . how that Christ died for our sins according to the scriptures; And that he was buried, and that he rose again the third day. . . ?

Doesn't it follow then, that anyone who holds these truths must be a follower of the Gospel and is to be

accepted as a brother in Christ? Must not we recognize as followers of the true Gospel any church or denomination which is ready to make these principles a part of its statement of faith?

Unfortunately, the question is not quite that simple. What are we to do with the fact that Satan and the demons admit very candidly that all these things are true of Christ? For instance, the demon in Mark 1:24 declared of Jesus in the flesh: "I know thee who thou art, the Holy One of God." And in Luke 4:41 God informs us:

And devils also came out of many, crying out, and saying, Thou art Christ the Son of God. And he rebuking them suffered them not to speak: for they knew that he was Christ.

Surely these devils are not saved, neither are they to become saved: and yet, in their declaration, they apparently satisfy the criteria set forth in I John 4:2-3 for those who are of the Spirit of God. Furthermore, Jesus speaks of false prophets in Matthew 7:15-23. In verses 22-23 He says of them:

Many will say to me in that day, Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in thy name? and in thy name have cast out devils? and in thy name done many wonderful works? And then will I profess unto them, I never knew you: depart from me, ye that work iniquity.

These false prophets also appear to satisfy the criteria set forth in I John 4:2-3. We can see, therefore, that although someone may use the name of Christ, doing his work in the name of Christ, and thus appearing to identify with the Christ of the Bible, he is not necessarily a follower of the true Gospel of Jesus Christ.

This line of thinking leaves us in a shambles. How are we to recognize the true Gospel if we can't trust those who preach Christ and who do their work in the name of Christ? Does this mean that we can't trust anyone at all?

You see, the question, "What is the true Gospel?" is not as easy to answer as we may have thought. But we must find an answer to this question! How dreadful it would be if we were following a false prophet who is bringing a false gospel, while we were trusting that it was the true Gospel. We could end up in hell while being altogether confident that we were saved, because we had placed implicit confidence in something other than the true Gospel. We must therefore find an answer to this question concerning the nature of the true Gospel.

In seeking for an answer to this most important question, we might also ask the questions, "How do we know about Christ? Where do we learn of Him?" Immediately and correctly the answer one would give is, "Of course, we learn about Christ from the Bible. It, as the Word of God, is our source of information concerning Jesus and the salvation He offers." How true this answer is! The Bible is the only authority by which we can know what to believe concerning Christ. This principle is clearly set forth in the Bible itself. Remember, we read about the nature of the Gospel in I Corinthians 15:1-4. Let's look again at verses 3 and 4:

For I delivered unto you first of all that which I also received how that Christ died for our sins according to the scriptures; And that he was buried, and that he rose again the third day according to the scriptures:

Notice the emphasis on the phrase "according to the scriptures." God is declaring that the Bible is the authority under which the Gospel is set forth. In Luke 24:13-48 Jesus is discussing His resurrection with the two disciples on the road to Emmaus. Significantly, He indicates to them that the authority for His actions is the Scriptures. In verses 44-46 we read:

And he said unto them, These are the words which I spake unto you, while I was yet with you, that all things must be fulfilled, which were written in the law of Moses, and in the prophets, and in the psalms, concerning me. Then opened he their understanding, that they might understand the scriptures, And said unto them, Thus it is written, and thus it behoved Christ to suffer, and to rise from the dead the third day:

This principle of the ultimate authority of the scriptures can also be seen in the temptation of Christ by Satan. Again and again, as Satan tempts Jesus, our Savior replies, "it is written" (Luke 4:4,8,10). We thus see that the Bible is the authority that tells us about the Gospel. It is the source book of truth. Whatever knowledge we have concerning Christ or God's plan of salvation must be firmly based on the Bible.

Is All of The Bible The Word of God?

Having established the principle that **the Bible is the authority which sets forth the Gospel of salvation**, we must ask ourselves the next obvious question: "How much of the Bible must we trust in order to know that we are following the true Gospel?" Restating the question in a more specific way, we

might ask: "Based on what we read in I Corinthians 15:1-4 and I John 4:2-3, if we believe Christ has come in the flesh and trust in His death and resurrection, can we be sure we are following the true Gospel? Can we have the true Gospel regardless of what we believe concerning such matters as creation, the end of the world, hell, predestination, etc.?"

The answer to these questions is found in II Timothy 3:16. There we read:

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

By this statement God is indicating that the whole Bible is the Word of God. Therefore, it gives us, in its entirety, information concerning the Gospel. **The whole Bible is the Word of God.** It, in its entirety, is the revelation of God's will for man. Therefore, every doctrine taught in it is an essential part of the revelation of the Gospel.

Thus, the Old Testament is just as important as the New Testament. When Jesus declared in Luke 24:46 or in Luke 4:4, "it is written," He was using that part of the Bible that we today call the Old Testament as His authority. When God states in II Timothy 3:16 that "All scripture is given by inspiration . . . and is profitable for doctrine . . ." He is speaking especially of the Old Testament because it was the only Bible available to the church at that time.

The great importance of the Old Testament to the New Testament church is further underscored by the language of I Peter 1:10-12.

Of which salvation the prophets have enquired and searched diligently, who prophesied of the grace that should come you: Searching what, or what manner of time the Spirit of Christ which was in them did signify, when it testified beforehand the sufferings of Christ, and the glory that should follow. Unto whom it was revealed, that not unto themselves, but unto us they did minister the things, which are now reported unto you by them that have preached the gospel unto you with the Holy Ghost sent down from heaven; which things the angels desire to look into.

In this significant statement, God is emphasizing and underscoring the principle that **the Old Testament was written to be fully as important to us today as it was to Old Testament Israel.** Note in verse 12 the words: "not unto themselves," (meaning, the Old Testament believers) "but unto us they did minister . . ." (that is, to believers even in this present day). Truly, we must read and study the Old Testament as carefully as the New Testament. We have learned from verses like II Timothy 3:16 and I Peter 1:10-12 that the whole Bible is the Word of God. We therefore must not countenance the idea that we are to follow only the New Testament. Every word in the entire Bible is the Word of God.

The Bible Is To Be Obeyed?

Because the Bible is God's revelation, it is to be obeyed. God emphasizes this principle in I John 2:3-4, where we read:

And hereby we do know that we know him, if we keep his commandments. He that saith, I know him, and keepeth not his commandments, is a liar, and the truth is not in him.

The Bible is the law book or rule book that sets forth the commandments which are to be obeyed. This is the reason that the devils can believe and acknowledge that Jesus is the Christ who has come in the flesh, and yet still be subject to eternal damnation. They are correct concerning the doctrines of Christ but by no means are they ready to be obedient to anything and everything that is in the Bible.

In I John 4:2 we read: "Every spirit that confesseth that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh is of God: . . ." The key word of I John 4:2 that must be clearly understood is the word "confess." We commonly use this word in the sense of simple open admission of a truth, but the Bible's use implies not only admission of the truth in question, but also implies identification with that truth. Therefore, only a child of God, a person born of the Holy Spirit, in actuality confesses the truths of I John 4:2-3, for only he is ready and willing to be altogether obedient to everything contained in the Gospel.

Remember, when we looked at the false prophets of Matthew 7:15-23, we saw that even though they claimed to identify very closely with the Christ of the Bible, they were still unsaved. In that context (v. 24) Jesus declared:

Not every one that saith unto me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven; but he that doeth the will of my Father which is in heaven.

Notice the emphasis on doing "the will of My Father". These false prophets did not do the will of God, and

therefore, we know their Gospel could not be trusted. God is teaching that the true Gospel is intimately associated with obedience to the Bible, for the Bible is the record of God's will. We may therefore set forth firmly and safely, two principles:

1. The whole Bible is the Word of God. It is the ultimate authority which sets forth the Word of God.
2. A follower of the true Gospel is ready to be obedient to anything and everything in the Bible. It is the authority to which we are to submit.

God summarizes these principles in Revelation 22:19 where He warns:

And if any man shall take away from the words of the book of this prophecy, God shall take away his part out of the book of life, and out of the holy city, and from the things which are written in this book.

Is the Bible Alone the Word of God?

But now we must face another question: "Is the Bible alone the Word of God? Doesn't the Holy Spirit lead men to truth by means other than the Bible? For example, isn't it possible for God the Holy Spirit to speak to me in a dream or by means of a vision?"

As we examine this very critical question, we surely must be guided by the biblical account of the experiences of the early New Testament church. Their Bible was the part of our Bible which we now call the Old Testament. From time to time individuals received additional revelations of the will of God by such means as dreams or visions or angel visitations. For instance, Peter received a vision concerning the proclamation of the Gospel to the Roman centurion, Cornelius. By being obedient to this vision Peter, effectively added to the written Word the information given in the vision. In other words, the vision provided him with a more complete knowledge of the will of God.

Likewise, the Apostle and the Apostle John received information by means of visions. These visions, too, provided additional help in knowing the will of God. Interestingly, in the church at Corinth there were those who received additional information regarding the will of God by means of a phenomenon called "tongues." Those who received the gift of tongues spoke in an unknown language "mysteries" in the spirit (I Corinthians 14:2). What they received from God could have been in the form of a praise, a prayer, or an additional revelation. When this happened in the assembly, they were commanded to seek interpretation of the message from God. Thus the whole congregation could be edified. They were edified because this information was an additional declaration of the will of God that could be considered to be an addition to the written Word. The combination of the written Word and the Word received in the "tongue" gave them more complete knowledge of the will of God, to which they were to be obedient.

Therefore, the question that faces us is: "Can it still be possible today that God is supplying additional revelations of His will by such means as tongues, visions, or dreams?" We must find an answer to our question in the Bible. We have seen that, while the Bible was being written, additions were being made to it as holy men spoke being moved of the Holy Spirit (cf., II Peter 1:21). But then God completed the written Word. And when He came to the last chapter of the last book of the Bible, He declared in Revelation 22:18:

For I testify unto every man that heareth the words of the prophecy of this book, If any man shall add unto these things, God shall add unto him the plagues that are written in this book.

With this declaration God effectively ended the possibility of any further revelation from Himself. With the completion of the New Testament we have been given a much more extensive revelation than that enjoyed by the church at Corinth, for with the writing of the book of Revelation we have the whole New Testament, as well as the Old Testament. But to this Old and New Testament there is to be nothing added. Never again would God give divine information by means of a dream, a vision, a tongue, or an angel visitation. God had given the complete account of His will.

Thus we may set forth another principle concerning the nature of the true Gospel: **The Bible alone is the authority under which the Gospel stands.** The true Gospel is circumscribed by the Bible. There is no other source of divinely articulated or verbalized truth.

We, therefore, may combine the foregoing principles into one statement: **The Bible alone and its entirety is the Word of God.** The true Gospel is completely identified with and has as its authority the Bible alone and in its entirety.

Some might argue, "But Revelation 22:18 speaks of 'this book'. This book must refer to the book of Revelation. Therefore, this verse is not ending further additions to the Bible. Rather, it is limiting further

expansion only of the book of Revelation."

A bit of reflection will show the failure of this line of reasoning. Even if we assume that the phrase "this book" refers only to the book of Revelation, we will see that in fact it must relate to the whole Bible. The Bible is one cohesive whole. A verse or a chapter added to or taken from the book of Revelation is added to or taken from the whole Bible. This is because the book of Revelation is an integral part of the whole Bible. Moreover, in Revelation 22:7-9 we read:

Behold, I come quickly: Blessed is he that keepeth the sayings of the prophecy of this book. And I John saw these things, and heard them. And when I had heard and seen, I fell down to worship before the feet of the angel which shewed me these things. Then saith he unto me, See thou do it not: for I am thy fellowservant, and of thy brethern the prophets, and of them which keep the sayings of this book: worship God.

In these verses God speaks of those who "keep the sayings of this book." A bit of reflection will make clear to us that we cannot keep the sayings of any part of the Bible unless we understand the meanings of those sayings. And we can not understand the meaning of any part of the Bible unless we view the verses in question in the light of the whole Bible. Thus, to "keep the sayings of this book" must mean to become involved with the teachings of the whole Bible. Therefore the term "this book" must include the whole bible.

What about Direct Quotations from the Bible Coming to Us?

Others will insist, "But the information I received in a vision or a tongue was a direct quotation from the Bible. Therefore it was not an addition to the Bible."

But this argument can also be shown to be invalid. For example, in Acts 2:17-21 the Apostle Peter, under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, quotes from Joel 2:28-32. Could we then remove Acts 2:17-21 from the Bible because it really is not an addition to the Word of God, inasmuch as it is a duplication of that which was already set forth in the Word of God? Immediately we sense that we cannot do this. Acts 2:17-21 is just as important a part of the Word of God as is Joel 2:28-32. The fact is, many verses or phrases and even whole chapters in the Bible are duplicates of others in the Bible, but each one is an important part of the Word of God.

By the same token, if someone believes he has received a direct revelation from God in which only the Bible is quoted, he would be attempting to add to the Word of God. He would therefore be guilty of violating the command given in Revelation 22:18.

What About Praying in a Tongue?

One observation commonly raised by those who are interested in tongues is that, when they pray in tongues, they cannot possibly be adding to the Scriptures. They fail to realize that there are many prayers in the Bible. Extensive prayers by David, Solomon, and Ezra are found on the pages of the Bible. As these men prayed, they were being guided by the Holy Spirit to say the words that have been written in the Bible, the Word of God. While they were praying to God, God was using them to write the Word of God. Likewise, if someone were claiming to pray today in a tongue which was actively inspired by the Holy Spirit so that God was guiding them in what they were praying, then this prayer would be just as certainly the Word of God as were the prayers recorded in the Bible.

Therefore, anyone who claims to pray in a tongue is adding to the Word of God just as certainly as someone who receives a revelation from God in a tongue or in a dream, or in a vision is adding to the Word of God. The principle set forth in Revelation 22:18-19 will be violated by anyone who attempts to pray in a tongue.

In Revelation 22:18-19 we have before us a very clear statement by which we can know whether or not we are following the true Gospel. The true Gospel is circumscribed by the Bible. If anyone has a gospel that starts with the Bible but then wishes to add to it whatever he believes to be divine truth from other sources, such as dreams or visions, he is following a gospel other than the true Gospel.

The Authority Which is Regarded as Divine Establishes the Kind of Gospel Being Offered

What is the divine authority that structures and determines the nature of the true Gospel? The Bible. When we read any verse in the Bible, we interpret it by focusing the whole Bible upon it. We are to interpret Scripture by Scripture, or as I Corinthians 2:13 puts it, by "comparing spiritual things with spiritual."

However, if one believes that the Bible is the Word of God, but also believes that some other book is to be

considered divine revelation, then that authority is an authority wider than the Bible alone. Likewise, if someone believes the Bible is the Word of God, but also believes that a dream, vision or tongue is a revelation from God, then the authority of this person's "gospel" is wider than the Bible. He will therefore interpret any verse in the Bible, not only according to the rest of the Bible, but also in light of the dream, vision, or information received by such a means.

Reaching this, we can begin to understand why gospels other than the true Gospel will differ in so many points of doctrine from those actually based on the Bible. The doctrines we hold are always products of the authority under which we have placed ourselves.

The judge who tries a case by the law of the United States will come to a different conclusion than the judge who tries the same case using the law of Canada plus the law of the United States as his authority. The second judge has a wider and therefore different authority than the first.

Likewise, if I receive a vision which I believe has come from God and that vision is related to a particular doctrine, it should be very apparent that I will regard the information offered in that vision as being the latest, clearest, and most important information concerning that doctrine. This would be true regardless of what the Bible offers concerning that doctrine. Even though it may disagree to some extent with what the Bible offers, I will see this vision as a truth that modifies what the Bible has been teaching. I will be following the same principle or interpretation as that which applies in the case of the New Testament modifying truths set forth in the Old Testament. Thus, my conclusion concerning the doctrine in question will be heavily influenced by my vision.

It should now be apparent how critically important it is that we know what our authority is. If it is less than the whole Bible or more than the whole Bible, we will no longer have the true Gospel, which alone is the Gospel of salvation.

Every Religion Has an Authority

We must keep very clearly in mind that each and every religion or gospel is under an authority which its followers believe to be the Word of God. The Muslim religion, for example, looks upon the writings of Mohammed as being of divine origin. These writings, therefore, are for them the final authority in all matters of doctrine and practice in that religion. Likewise, those who hold the Mormon gospel believe that the Bible is the Word of God; but they also are convinced that the writings of Joseph Smith, as set forth in the Book of Mormon, are divine. Consequently, the authority that structures and determines that particular gospel is the combination of the Bible plus the Book of Mormon.

We are living in a day when many believe that God is still bringing revelation by such means as dreams or visions or voices or tongues. Those who are interested in these kinds of activities have an authority that structures and determines their particular gospel. Their divine authority is a combination of the Bible plus those messages which they believe are from God. Thus, this gospel, too, is structured and determined by what it considers to be its divine source of truth.

From these examples, we can see that those who hold that the Bible alone and in its entirety is the Word of God have a different gospel than those who believe the Bible is the Word of God but who also believe God is still bringing revelations today. The latest revelations in such a gospel always have the greatest impact upon its doctrines. For example, in connection with the true Gospel, we do not dare to understand the Old Testament unless we carefully study the New Testament. The New Testament interprets the Old Testament. It, for example, shows us that the ceremonial laws have been completed in Christ, and therefore we are not to observe the Old Testament Sabbaths or the Old Testament Passover. It shows us that God's decree that adultery is sin has been strengthened to include even thoughts of lust. The later revelation shines more light on the older revelation and is the final word.

Likewise, those who believe that God is still bringing revelation today place very great weight on the content of these later revelations. For them these later revelations are the last word and influence their view of the Bible, which they also believe is part of the revelation of God. Consequently, they will understand many biblical passages quite differently from those who believe the Bible alone and in its entirety is the Word of God.

The true Gospel has as its authority the Bible alone and in its entirety. There is no other divine source. There can be no later addition to the Word of God. Thus it would be quite clear that the true Gospel, which has as its authority the Bible alone and in its entirety, is entirely different from any gospel which has included in its divine authority revelations which may have come after the Bible was completed. While these other gospels may use the ideas and phrases and words from the true Gospel, they are false

because they have a different authority than the true Gospel. Many different gospels employ terms such as "the blood of Jesus," "the cross," "the resurrection," "heaven," "hell," "Holy Spirit," etc., but the use of these biblical words in no way guarantees that the true Gospel is being taught. Only by following the Gospel which has its authority circumscribed by the Bible do we know that we have the true Gospel.

Does the Bible Contain The Word of God?

Some theologians declare that the Bible **contains** the Word of God. This statement implies that parts of the Bible are not the Word of God. Effectively, they make themselves or their churches the ultimate authority, for they are the ones deciding which parts of the Bible are the Word of God. Rather than being subject to the Word of God, they are ruling over the Word of God. Moreover, they have arrived at a narrower authority than the whole Word of God. How important it is that we recognize that the whole Bible is the Word of God!

Early in this study we raised the question, "What is the true Gospel?" We have seen that the true Gospel is circumscribed by the Bible. It is based on the principle that the Bible alone and in its entirety is the Word of God. The Bible itself is the complete written presentation of the Gospel.

But this conclusion has ominous implications for many different congregations and denominations; it has enormous consequences for today's evangelical community. The importance of this conclusion is seen by the warning of Revelation 22:18-19. There God declares that anyone who widens the authority by "adding to the words of this book" is subject to the plagues written in "this book." The plagues relate to God's wrath being visited on those who are subject to hell. Thus God is saying that those who add to the words of this book are still subject to eternal damnation. They are therefore still unsaved. They do not understand the true Gospel of salvation.

By the same token, anyone who narrows the authority upon which his gospel is based, so that he believes that only parts of the Bible are the Word of God, is warned by Revelation 22:19 that he, too, is still subject to eternal damnation. Specifically, God declares, "God shall take away his part out of the book of life, and out of the holy city..." How important it is, therefore, that we recognize what constitutes the true Gospel.

God restates this same warning in slightly different language in Galatians 1:8-9. There God declares through the Apostle Paul:

But though we, or an angel from heaven, preach any other gospel unto you than that which we have preached unto you, let him be accursed. As we said before, so say I now again, if any man preach any other gospel unto you than that ye have received, let him be accursed.

The double warning of the curse surely indicates the certainty of that curse! It underscores and emphasizes the utter seriousness of being sure we are following the true Gospel, for to be under the curse of God is to be subject to hell.

Incidentally, it should be emphasized that I might be a person who theoretically accepts divine truth as coming only from the Bible; yet in actuality I look upon certain doctrines or practices of my church or denomination as being inviolate. That is, I insist on holding a doctrine regardless of what the Bible indicates. In such a case, effectively, I have placed that doctrine on a level of authority equal with the Bible itself. Thus I have inadvertently widened the authority of the Bible. For this reason, in regard to this doctrine I could never come to agreement with those who more carefully practice the principle that the Bible alone is the ultimate authority.

Authority of the Bible is Narrowed by Some Who Claim the Whole Bible is Not God's Word

Likewise, there are those who narrow the authority of the Bible by insisting that certain passages of the Bible apply only to the historical situation in which they are originally found. For example, they conclude that we are not to pay attention to 1 Corinthians 14:34, which teaches that women are not to speak in the congregational worship service. They argue that this verse is speaking to a problem unique to the culture of that day and, therefore, is not applicable to the believers of today. They conclude that it is not applicable because we belong to an entirely different culture than the one that existed at the same time of the church of Corinth.

But let us examine this conclusion. If the statement of 1 Corinthians 14:34 is applicable only to the culture of that day, then likewise the statement of Jesus' conversation with Nicodemus that is found in John 3 has no application for us today. This would be so because Nicodemus was an Old Testament Jew, and none of us are Old Testament Jews. Then, too, the Old Testament would have no application for us today

because it was addressed to ancient Israel or such nations as Babylon. They certainly were entirely different cultures than those we have today! Moreover, the book of Romans would have no application for us because it was written to the church at Rome almost 2,000 years ago. Likewise, Philipians, Colossians, and all the New Testament epistles would have no application for us. Moreover, all Jesus' teachings must also be set aside in view of the fact that He was addressing individuals who were part of an entirely different culture than ours today.

I hope we are beginning to get the picture. Such a conclusion, which allows us to set aside certain passages because they seem to be intimately associated with a cultural problem of long ago and therefore have no application to our lives today, effectively destroys the authority of the Bible. It is a direct violation of II Timothy 3:16:

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

Furthermore, this conclusion has narrowed the authority of the Bible so that no longer is the whole Bible the Word of God for today. The fact is, God placed these accounts into the Scriptures so that principles would be laid down for the Church throughout its entire history. Therefore, 1 Corinthians 14:34 is just as applicable to churches today as it was in the days of the church at Corinth.

The real question at issue is whether we are ready to be **obedient** to the Bible. If we are not prepared to be obedient, we can destroy the authority of the Bible by such stratagems as deciding a passage has meaning only for the culture of the day in which it was written. We must never lose sight of the fact that the whole Bible is the Word of God and is therefore to be obeyed!

This principle underscores the importance of constant Bible study for all who teach or preach God's Word. We should clearly know the biblical basis for each and every doctrine we teach. Moreover, if we find that a doctrine does not have adequate biblical authority, or that there are passages in the Bible that appear contrary to the doctrine we are teaching, it is imperative that we resolve these differences before continuing to teach that doctrine. We who believe we have been called to teach or preach have taken upon ourselves a very grave responsibility to be as accurate as possible in the Word of God. Small wonder, then, that God declares in James 3:1 "My brethren, be not many masters (teachers), knowing that we shall receive the greater condemnation."

The seriousness of being a teacher of the Word of God cannot be emphasized or underscored enough. Any teacher or preacher of the Word of God should search the Word unceasingly so that what he declares to his congregation or his class will be as true and trustworthy as possible. Moreover, he is to be ready to correct his doctrine any time he finds it to be contrary to the Word of God.

May our Lord give all who love Him and wish to be obedient to Him the wisdom and humility to submit altogether to the authority of the Bible.

Thus far in our study we have discovered that the Bible alone and in its entirety is the verbalized, articulated Word of God. Now we should look at another principle that we must keep in mind as we investigate the general subject of Bible interpretation. That principle is that we are to interpret the Bible by the Bible.

Chapter 2

The Bible Is Its Own Interpreter

A second principle we shall now examine is the truth that the Bible is its own interpreter. This truth is of great consequence, for it underscores the method by which we are to examine each verse of the Holy Scriptures.

When two Bible teachers disagree on a doctrine, frequently one will declare, "Well, he has his opinion, his interpretation, and I have mine. Therefore we don't see this verse in the same way."

If this teacher's statement is correct, we can do almost anything we wish with the Bible. We become free to look at the Bible and make our own personal judgments as to what God means by each verse. Unfortunately, this is the thinking that underlies the writing of paraphrased Bibles. This also is the thinking that has influenced some of the newer translations of the Bible.

Such a procedure makes **man** the ultimate judge, the final authority. It effectively declares that God has written a number of words and phrases which together we call the Bible, but which depend upon our responsibility as a teacher to decide what God really means. Thus the reader has the final say as to what is truth. This kind of "anything goes" thinking has spawned cults and the false gospels which prevail so greatly in the world today. By interpreting verses according to preconceived ideas, the teacher tries to show that his gospel is Bible-based.

This condition prevails in many of our churches and congregations today. One of the most puzzling phenomena currently facing the church is the fact that the theologians of various denominations remain so far apart in their understanding of so many doctrines supposedly related to or derived from the Bible. A result of this is that Lutherans remain Lutheran from generation to generation, Baptists remain Baptists, Presbyterians remain Presbyterian, Methodists remain Methodist, etc.

One of the basic reasons for the existence of different denominations is that there are different conclusions held by each denomination concerning certain doctrines. For example, some denominations hold the premillennial view from generation to generation. On the other hand, other denominations hold the postmillennial view from generation to generation. And still others hold the amillennial view through the generations. We must realize that there can be only one true account of the return of Christ, so at least two of the foregoing views must be altogether wrong and unbiblical. The return of Christ and the end of the world simply can not take place in three different ways.

The same problem exists with many other doctrines. For instance, there are widespread differences amongst many denominations in relationship to such important teachings as the nature and character of salvation, and the meaning of baptism. One would certainly think that, as diligent students of the Scriptures who earnestly love the Lord continue to search the Bible, they would come closer and closer to each other as they all come closer to the fulness of the truth. If this were the actual condition in each denomination, gradually all the denominations would begin to agree more and more. Yet year follows year, and there is no rapprochement of any kind. The Baptist still remains a Baptist, the Lutheran a Lutheran, the Presbyterian a Presbyterian, etc.

This phenomenon is a result of the fact that the Bible is not fully relied upon as the source of absolute truth. The Bible is often treated merely like one of the various disciplines and philosophies of the secular world. One can understand the proliferation of different schools of thought in the secular world, because in such disciplines as music, art, or philosophy there is no such thing as absolute truth. Each discipline is allowed to exist independently of the others and is accepted just as it stands.

But when we deal with the Bible, we are dealing with absolute truth. Therefore, anything that is taught, any doctrine that is held, that is not in agreement with truth is false. In short, any doctrine not in agreement with absolute truth is a lie. If any teacher or pastor declares to his congregation, "Thus saith the Lord," when the Lord has not said that, he is mouthing doctrines that are out of man's mind rather than God's. We immediately sense how reprehensible and awful this is.

So, if well meaning, learned, God-loving theologians are earnestly, seriously teaching three entirely different answers to the same question, we are forced to conclude that someone is teaching that which is false. Since no child of God wants to preach lies, this becomes an exceedingly serious matter; and it is a matter that will not go away by itself.

Unfortunately, there is tremendous evidence that these differences in understanding of Bible doctrine exist today. What is the problem? I believe we can both understand the problem and find its solution.

The problem is that theologians and pastors are taught to come to the Bible from the perspective of the already established theological position of the church or denomination to which they belong. That is, if someone is a Baptist, then he is taught to come to the Bible with Baptist presuppositions. If someone is a Lutheran, he comes to the Bible with Lutheran presuppositions. If he is Reformed, he comes with a Reformed perspective. Such theological presuppositions govern the way the Bible student interprets and understands the Bible.

Since each denomination believes that its presuppositions correctly reflect Bible truth, the teachers and pastors in that denomination cling tenaciously to them. Similarly, they are convinced that perspectives from other denominations are most likely incorrect and therefore are not to be considered or followed. This is so even though they readily acknowledge that each denomination has a right to exist. Only because they believe their own denominations' presuppositions are the most accurate do they remain with them. The consequence, therefore, is that the Baptist remains a Baptist, the Lutheran remains a Lutheran, etc., etc. I am afraid that most theologians come to the Bible in much the same way that students come to such social sciences as art, music, and philosophy.

For example, there exist many schools of philosophy. There are the Eleatic school of philosophy, the Ionian school of philosophy, Byzantine philosophy, Arabic philosophy, and Western philosophy, just to name a few. Each has its original thinkers, and each has its faithful followers. Each has some truth in it. Ordinarily, followers of one school of philosophy are ready to accept the rightful existence of and potential contribution of another school. Moreover, no one would be ready to conclude that the philosophy he follows is absolute truth. He just follows a particular school of philosophy because he believes that it is more acceptable than any other.

Most theologians approach the Bible in much the same way. They do not regard the Bible as the law book of absolute truth. It is only a book that is to be viewed from their denominations' school of thinking. They effectively contend that there exist various schools of thought (denominational presuppositions) relating to how we are to interpret the Bible. The school of thought we follow will heavily influence the conclusions we derive from the Bible. And the feeling is that we are being honest as long as we remain faithful to our particular denominational presuppositions.

Likewise, it is believed that theologians of other denominations are being faithful to the Word as long as they remain faithful to their denominations' presuppositions. In this way, the study of the Bible is looked upon as an activity similar to the study of various social sciences.

But, may the Bible be treated like a social science? Isn't it the book of absolute truth? Only when a student has come to realize it as the absolute truth has he really understood the Bible. Moreover, if he has not come to that realization, in essence he is still teaching less than the truth – that is, he is teaching falsehoods.

That the Bible teaches absolute truth should be easily recognized by all theologians. Isn't it true that the conclusion that all men are sinners is absolute truth? Isn't this also the case in regard to such conclusions as: the certainty of the death, burial and resurrection of Jesus; the facts that God created the world, that Christ will come to judge the world, that there will be a New Heaven and New Earth, and that salvation is possible only through the atoning work of Jesus Christ?

All of these teachings are absolute truth. And they are taken from the Bible which is the book of absolute truth. Therefore, it is incumbent upon the pastor and the teacher to study the Bible until he has found absolute truth in regard to each aspect of the Gospel. Only then can he be sure he is not teaching a lie. Indeed the Bible is wholly unrelated to the social sciences, and cannot be studied in the same manner.

It must be approached very analytically, as we would approach an engineering or a law book. But even the engineering or law book cannot begin to approach the level of truth that the Bible presents. It has no peer. We must recognize that it is absolutely true in all of its aspects. We are to carefully, prayerfully, diligently search out the truth. As we do so, God Himself will lead us into the truth.

Now we can see what the church has done. Inadvertently, by approaching the Bible as any social science is approached, the church has placed itself above the Bible. I am aware that theologians within these churches would vigorously deny this assertion. They would maintain that the Bible is altogether infallible and inerrant and is the only authority on which they lean and structure doctrine.

While this claim might be made confidently, the sad fact is that in practice it is altogether negated because only too frequently each theologian comes to the Bible with his denomination's presuppositions. With this approach the Bible is no longer the ultimate authority: the denominational presuppositions have become the ultimate authority.

Of course, the argument will be made that each presupposition is derived from the Bible, and therefore the Bible is in actuality the ultimate authority. The fact is, however, that, in practice, the presupposition is never questioned by most theologians. It stands inviolate, as belonging to that denomination, and must never be tampered with. Actually, if we are to find truth, the presuppositions themselves have to be examined and critiqued just as vigorously as any other doctrine that we claim to have received from the Bible.

The solution to this problem, I believe, is that we must go to the Bible with no prejudices or presuppositions whatsoever. We must let the Bible alone guide us into truth. We must recognize that we as humans have feet of clay. We have sin-tainted minds. Our minds are exceedingly finite as compared with the infinite mind of God. Truly we must hold the position: "...let God be true and every man a liar..." (Romans 3:4).

It could be argued that even these preliminary statements of solution and principles of Bible interpretation as set forth in this study are in themselves presuppositions with which we view the Bible. But the question at issue is "Where do these statements come from?" Are they the teachings of the Bible? Are they something that can be clearly demonstrated as originating from the pages of Holy Writ, or are they just

someone's theory? If they cannot be shown to be actually derived from the Bible, they should be corrected, because no presupposition should stand if it is not in complete harmony with the Bible.

I do believe that amongst the various denominations there is the common agreement that the Bible is true, that the Bible is the infallible Word of God, and that it is the only rule for doctrine and for practice. I believe there is also general agreement that we cannot trust our minds, but that we must put every thought under the searchlight of the Word of God. At least this is what the Bible clearly teaches.

If theologians would come to the Bible with no more than these common presuppositions, humbly letting the Bible lead them into truth, then, there would be more and more agreement amongst those who are children of God regardless of denominational background. This is so simply because truth is truth. An incorrect doctrine can never agree with the Scriptures. A stubborn holding to wrong doctrine in the face of the light of the Scriptures is, I believe, the most serious problem facing the church today.

Indeed, if we are truly a child of God, at the moment of salvation we receive our resurrected souls in which we never wish to sin again. Thus, even though our unsaved bodies still lust after sin, there is constantly within us an earnest desire to do the will of God. And as we read and study the Bible we learn more and more how we can live in accord with God's will. Because we have this intense desire to do God's will, we also become greatly troubled whenever we discover we have been holding wrong doctrine. That is, as we read or study the Bible, if we run across a verse that appears to contradict a doctrine we hold, we will become greatly concerned. Our new nature (our resurrected soul), has an intense desire to be true to God's Word. Therefore, this concern will not disappear until we have carefully reexamined this doctrine to the point that we are comfortable with all that the Bible teaches concerning it.

Of course, the tragic other-side-of-the-coin is that if we persist in a sinful practice after reading statements in the Bible that show that practice to be sinful, then we should rightly begin to wonder whether or not we are really saved. Likewise, if we continue holding and teaching wrong doctrine after reading Scripture that suggests it is wrong, then we must ask the logical and fair question, "How can I really be a child of God and blatantly continue holding wrong doctrine?" The seriousness of such a question cannot be overestimated.

It may be that, as we humbly approach the Bible, letting God lead us into truth, we may find that a doctrine or a whole series of doctrines taught by our church as denominational presuppositions are indeed true to the Word of God. Then we can be assured that the church fathers who first presented these doctrines have done their work very well. The Holy Spirit has indeed enlightened their hearts and minds to truth.

If I may give a personal note, I was brought up in a church that is Reformed in doctrine. While I had heard about the so-called "five points of Calvinism", I had never been taught well enough so that I could go to the Bible to prove any of these five points that concern themselves with the doctrines of grace. The fact is, I can recall reading learned essays on these doctrines in my younger days in some of our church papers, and being very confused by what I read.

However, in my role as host of the *Open Forum* program where people ask me questions concerning the Bible "live" on the air, I have had to face the whole question of the nature of salvation with great zeal. When I was finally able to ferret out all the biblical teachings concerning the nature of salvation, to my utter delight I found that the five points of Calvinism were in agreement with everything that I had found in my independent studies of the Scriptures. The Reformers of old had done their work very well and very accurately.

On the other hand, in my personal experience I have also found that other historical statements of the church are not as biblical. For example, today we have the confessions like the Heidelberg Catechism, the Canons of Dort, the Belgic Confession and the Westminster Confession. While I have a very high regard for these confessions of the church (because in many cases they have been hammered out in the crucible of a church facing apostasy or heresy, and because in the main they can be tested and found to be quite accurate insofar as the Scriptures are concerned), nevertheless, there are statements in some of them which I believe can be shown to be incorrect insofar as the Bible is concerned.

But do we dare to disagree with the confessions? We **must** dare to disagree if we can show from the Scriptures that the confession is incorrect! Otherwise the confession becomes an authority higher than the Bible itself.

As long as we are talking about confessions, I think it is appropriate to make this statement: The confessions have served the church exceedingly well in that they have provided stability at times when theologians might have become careless in their study of the Scriptures. They can give a church a lot of security. On the other hand, they can also do a great disservice to the church if the confession is looked upon as being inviolate. We must realize that the confession is the work of man, not the work of God. Only

the Bible is the work of God. I am tremendously pleased with Article VII of the Belgic Confession, which reads:

~ THE SUFFICIENCY OF THE HOLY SCRIPTURES TO BE THE ONLY RULE OF FAITH ~

We believe that those Holy Scriptures fully contain the will of God, and that whatsoever man ought to believe unto salvation is sufficiently taught therein. For since the whole manner of worship which God requires of us is written in them at large, it is unlawful for any one, though an apostle, to teach otherwise than we are now taught in the Holy Scriptures: "nay, though it were an angel from heaven," as the apostle Paul says. For since it is forbidden to "add unto or take away anything from the Word of God," it does thereby evidently appear that the doctrine thereof is most perfect and complete in all respects.

Neither may we consider any writings of men, however holy these men have been, of equal value with those divine Scriptures, nor ought we to consider custom, or the great multitude, or antiquity, or succession of times and persons, or councils, decrees or statutes, as of equal value with the truth of God, since the truth is above all; "for all men are of themselves liars, and more vain than vanity itself." Therefore we reject with all our hearts whatsoever does not agree with this infallible rule, as the apostles have taught us, saying, "Prove the spirits, whether they are of God." Likewise: "If any one cometh unto you, and bringeth not this teaching, receive him not into your house."

This article of the Belgic Confession accurately sets forth the biblical principle that nothing can stand above the Bible. It reminds us that accurate dealing with the Bible is of phenomenal importance. And this matter of the importance of the Bible being the ultimate authority cannot be swept under the rug. It cannot be answered, "That is your opinion. I have my opinion." The issue is whether we are going to be true prophets of God or false prophets.

The prophets of Baal on Mount Carmel were utterly convinced that they had truth as they cut themselves and cried to their god to burn the sacrifice on the altar. But all their zeal and their sincerity and their conviction could not change the fact that they were false prophets. The prophets and the Pharisees of Jesus' day, together with Saul of Tarsus, were utterly convinced that they had truth as they did everything possible to stop the spread of the Gospel as taught by this Rabbi, Jesus. Certainly no one could fault them for their zeal and sincerity or their conviction. But they were false prophets, and only the true followers of Jesus were the true prophets.

If we are going to be true prophets in our day, it is imperative that we humble ourselves and approach the Bible with the recognition that only God is true, and every man is a liar. That is, we all have within us the possibility of self-deception. Even after we are saved, we still have sin-stained minds. No one on this side of the grave is going to know truth perfectly. Therefore, at times even the most careful teacher will be in error. Each and every time that we teach in error we are actually teaching a lie. For that reason, every teacher has to come humbly to the Lord asking forgiveness for that which has been taught which was not true. We all see through a glass darkly.

But, the teaching of doctrine is analogous to living out our Christian life. As we saw earlier, as we study the Bible, if we find sin in our lives, the earnest desire of our lives is to turn away from that sin. So we ask the Lord's forgiveness, and we ask Him to strengthen us as we turn away from that sin. The life of the believer is one of constant learning as he increasingly discovers how to live a more holy life before God. Even so, each teacher, each pastor should be continually learning doctrine. He can never say there is nothing more to learn. If he has stopped learning, he may as well be dead. And just as we repent of sinful practices when we discover them in our lives so too, as we continue our study of the Bible, if we discover that a doctrine that we have held and taught is not biblical, we should ask the Lord's forgiveness, and we should turn away from that unbiblical teaching.

Obviously, this is much easier said than done. When we repent of unbiblical practices, we usually have the approbation of our congregation, and this serves as encouragement to take this new path. However, when we discover that a denominational presupposition is not as biblical as it should be, or should we discover that a doctrine we have held is unbiblical, in turning away from this we risk the wrath of our colleagues as well as the wrath of our entire denomination. We may even look like a heretic in their eyes because we no longer hold to this or that denominational presupposition or doctrine. The consequence of this can be that

we are actually driven out of our denomination.

This dire consequence seems strict and unwarranted, but that is how monolithic denominations are in what they believe. Truly, it is only God's grace working in one's life that enables him to courageously face the consequences of coming closer to truth. I can't help but comment on the fact that churches, to a high degree, have figured out how to have a very comfortable existence. Everything is agreeable. Everything is happy. This makes me wonder why Jesus said in Matthew 5:10-12:

Blessed are they which are persecuted for righteousness' sake: for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.
Blessed are ye, when men shall revile you, and persecute you, and shall say all manner of evil against you falsely, for my sake. Rejoice, and be exceeding glad: for great is your reward in heaven: for so persecuted they the prophets which were before you.

Did Jesus have in mind only the kind of persecution that occurs in a Communist country? Was He thinking only of dreadful bloodlettings by political authorities?

Amazingly, the persecution spoken of in the Bible, as the prophets were killed, or as the Christians of the New Testament were brought into Jerusalem to be cast into prison, was persecution by the church leaders. The Bible anticipates that it is the leaders of the church who will be the first to denounce those who make a stand for the truth. Because people do not change, because today they do not want the truth any more than they have at any other time in history, we should also expect that, if we hold to the truth, we will experience persecution. Of course, in our land physical bloodletting is not fashionable, but certainly it is permissible to scandalize, to vilify, or to speak badly of those who hold to truth.

The other side of the coin is, if all appears beautiful and complacent and secure, then we can rightly wonder "Do we really have the truth?" Remember, Jesus said, "Woe unto you, when all men shall speak well of you!" (Luke 6:26).

This is not to suggest that we should willingly seek persecution. It is only to remind us of the sad fact that persecution is reasonably normative for the true believer. And surely, when a pastor discovers that a cherished doctrine of his church is not as biblical as it should be, he can expect some kind of persecution as he begins to preach more faithfully in accordance with the Word of God.

Again, I cannot help but comment at this time upon a very significant agreement that is developing in our day between denominations which historically have been quite adamant in their "go-it-alone" understanding of many of the cardinal doctrines of the Bible. That growing unity is centered around doctrines that can be shown to be quite unbiblical. Increasingly, unity is being found in connection with doctrines such as divorce and remarriage after divorce, the right of women to rule and speak within the congregation, birth control, and the responsibility of the church to physically feed and clothe the hungry masses of the world. Additionally in our day, doctrines that favor miraculous healing and additional revelation are finding increasing approval across all denominational lines.

This is an amazing phenomenon in view of the fact that this latter day unity is based on principles that can be shown to be contrary to the Bible. I cannot help but wonder whether this is the end product of a church age in which the churches have become careless with the Bible because of their presuppositions. When bringing judgment, God first of all blinds theologians so that they begin to rewrite the rules of the Bible. Then, as a final judgment on the church prior to Judgment Day, He will allow the churches to be overcome by these false gospels that hold that there is more to divine revelation than the Bible alone.

But we have wandered way beyond the scope of our study, and now we should return to the questions at issue: How are we to understand the Bible? How are we to interpret the difficult passages of the Bible? God gives us the answer concerning this matter in I Corinthians 2:13:

Which things also we speak, not in the words which man's wisdom teacheth, but which the Holy Ghost teacheth; comparing spiritual things with spiritual.

In this statement God is rejecting the idea that we can interpret the Scripture in order to make it agree with whatever we hold in our own minds or in our denomination's thinking. Our thinking, our opinion, our ideas are of no value. Only the Bible, which is the source book of spiritual truths, can guide us to a solution, to a true understanding of the verse in question. And God Himself, in the person of the Holy Spirit, will lead us into truth as we humbly look to Him for guidance (John 16:13). The sword of the Spirit, as He leads us into truth, is the Word of God which we call the Bible. We must come to an understanding of any part of the Bible by searching the rest of the Scriptures for help in our understanding of that part of the Bible.

True, some verses seem to be easily understood, but there are so many that are very difficult, yes, even seemingly contrary to other verses. Even those verses which seem so easily understood, how can we be sure that we understand them correctly?

For example, when we read Matthew 25:31, surely God is speaking of a time when all nations will literally stand before Him. At that time all those who have done such good works as feeding the hungry, clothing the naked, and visiting the sick will go into heaven to be eternally with the Lord Jesus Christ. Certainly, it seems, this passage is teaching that our salvation is based on our good works. As a matter of fact, this passage has become a convincing proof passage for those who wish to believe that their good works make at least a contribution towards their salvation.

However, those who have read more widely and more carefully in the Bible immediately become uneasy with the conclusions of our last paragraph. They argue, "But doesn't the Bible say that we are saved by grace and not by works?" And indeed, they are correct. Salvation is by grace alone. Our works are only the proof, or evidence, or result of God's saving power within our lives. But how do we know that salvation is by grace and not by works?

How do we know that, whatever Matthew 25:31-46 is teaching, it is not teaching that our good works are the basis of, or ground for, our salvation? We know this because many other verses in the Bible emphasize and teach very clearly that salvation is altogether of grace. Ephesians 2:8-10 is just one passage among many that teaches that salvation is altogether of grace. There we read:

For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God: Not of works, lest any man should boast. For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works, which God hath before ordained that we should walk in them.

Many theologians today subscribe to the hermeneutical principle that if the verse in question makes common sense as it is read, then we are to seek no other sense. In other words, if the verse appears to be very straightforward and very clear, and if a conclusion as to what it is teaching can be immediately found, then you can be quite sure you are on safe ground in teaching this forthright conclusion. But this hermeneutical principle is itself biblically invalid. *Every conclusion, regardless of how solid it appears, must be tested by the rest of the Bible to determine whether it is in harmony with the rest of the Bible.*

How Are We to Understand Isaiah 2:4?

Let's look, for example, at a verse such as Isaiah 2:4 which declares:

And he shall judge among the nations, and shall rebuke many people: and they shall beat their swords into plowshares and their spears into pruninghooks: nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war any more.

Certainly it seems that this verse is teaching that there will be a future time on this present earth when universal peace will prevail, when warfare between nations will have come to an end. The believer holding the pre-millennial view sees this as occurring during a future 1,000 year reign of Christ when He is supposed to rule from Jerusalem. The postmillennial believer does not see Christ Himself returning to this earth to reign. Rather, he sees a future golden age wherein the Christian Gospel will have become so all pervasive throughout the world that the nations will actually cease from warfare. In either case, this conclusion of a future time when war will come to an end seems to harmonize well with other conclusions concerning future events. Thus it would be easy to conclude that this verse that speaks of a cessation of warfare is very clear and easy to understand.

But is it really so easy to understand? In Matthew 24:6-8 God speaks of wars and rumors of wars as the beginning of sorrows. He then goes on to describe the final tribulation period as the last event before Christ's return and Judgment Day. Thus no possibility is offered in these verses for a time of political peace on this earth. Moreover, the heart of man is desperately wicked, as we are informed in Jeremiah 17:9. Because of this sad fact we are told in James 4:1-2:

From whence come wars and fightings among you? come they not hence, even of your lusts that war in your members? Ye lust, and have not: ye kill, and desire to have, and cannot obtain: ye fight and war, yet ye have not, because ye ask not.

Truly the Bible does not allow the conclusion that universal peace will come upon this present earth at some future time. That is an impossible idea in the face of the corrupt nature of mankind.

But what then does Isaiah 2:4 teach? The answer may be found by looking at other passages in the Bible that speak of peace. For example, we read in Isaiah 40:1-2:

Comfort ye, comfort ye my people, saith your God. Speak ye comfortably to Jerusalem, and cry unto her, that her warfare is accomplished, that her iniquity is pardoned for she hath received of the Lord's hand double for all her sins.

In this revealing passage God shows us that the cessation of war God has in view is not between political nations. Rather it is between, on the one hand, the dominion of Satan to which we belong before we are saved, and on the other hand, the kingdom of God which we have entered into when we became saved. Christ came as the Prince of Peace. Before we were saved, as slaves of Satan we were at war with God. After we became saved, we were at peace with God. Isaiah 2:4 is thus speaking of the coming of the Messiah to bring spiritual peace to this world. All of us who have believed on Him have come into this peace. Before we were saved we were a nation at war with the nation which is the kingdom of God. Now that we are saved we have become a part of the kingdom of God and, therefore, are at peace with God. We now have become servants of God, caring for the spiritual needs of this world. This is the import of the language describing believers as using henceforth plowshares and pruninghooks.

This understanding of Isaiah 2:4 is now in agreement with all else the Bible teaches. But such an understanding could come only after realizing that even those verses which were apparently quite clear must be examined in the light of the rest of the Bible before we are ready to be satisfied with our understanding of that verse.

We thus see that the hermeneutical principle that declares, "If the verse in question makes common sense as it is read, then seek no other sense," violates a fundamental scriptural principle. *Regardless of how clear a verse may appear to be, the doctrinal conclusion we derive from that verse should not be taught as Gospel truth until it has been checked against anything and everything else in the Bible that might relate to that conclusion.*

Theologians frequently fall into a snare because they unwittingly violate the principle that they must always check their conclusions concerning one part of the Bible with the rest of the Bible. That is, they study a particular verse or passage and come to a conclusion without taking the time to see if it will harmonize with everything else the Bible teaches concerning the subject at hand.

The fact is, the very structure of theological study often fosters unbiblical conclusions. One theologian is an expert in Greek, another in Hebrew, one in the Old Testament, another in the New Testament. One is considered to have his expertise in the doctrines of Christ, another in the doctrines of the Holy Spirit, and still another in the doctrine of the end times. Even theological courses are set up on various subjects so that there is a course in soteriology (the doctrine of salvation), another in Christology (the doctrine of Christ), and still another in eschatology (the doctrine of the last things), etc.

While this structuring of theological truth does not necessarily need to result in wrong conclusions, frequently it does. For example, it is entirely possible for a theological professor to find many verses that deal directly with the nature and purpose of the church so that by carefully studying these a theologian can become an expert in ecclesiology (the doctrine of the church). And the conclusions he may come to and teach others may appear altogether biblical as he views them in the light of the verses that speak about the church. He may have an earnest desire to be as faithful to the Bible as possible. No one would dare fault his integrity as he teaches all that he has learned from the Bible, as he teaches concerning the church.

But the fact is, if he has not tested his conclusions to discover if they are in complete harmony with all the Bible teaches concerning the nature of salvation, concerning the nation of Israel, concerning the end time, concerning the Holy Spirit and for that matter concerning everything else the Bible teaches, the likelihood is that some of his conclusions concerning the church will be invalid.

He could have done theologically what a designer of a building has done who designs some of the beams within the building to carry certain stresses and forces but fails to check the foundation design to see if it is capable of carrying those same stresses and forces. This kind of practice would soon result in the failure of the building. Any designer knows that he must carefully design each part of the structure to make sure that each and every beam, each and every bolt, will be able to sustain the stresses and forces that are put upon the building. Only then will the building be safe.

Likewise, any conclusion we arrive at based on our understanding of a particular verse or verses must be tested for their scriptural integrity by everything else in the Bible that relates to these verses. We must look to the Bible itself to interpret Scripture. For example, we cannot look at Matthew 25:31-46 and understand it unless we examine it in the light of anything and everything else the Bible teaches regarding the subject matter found in these verses. Only then can we know that these verses are a parable teaching spiritual truth directly related to salvation. This method of interpretation is precisely what the Bible tells us to do, as I Corinthians 2:13 declares:

Which things also we speak, not in the words which man's wisdom teacheth, but which the Holy Ghost teacheth; comparing spiritual things with spiritual.

Since God is Spirit, since salvation is God's spiritual program whereby we who are spiritually dead are reconciled to God and become spiritually alive, and since God's Word is the Sword of the Spirit, we must realize that to compare spiritual things with spiritual is to compare one part of the Bible with anything and everything else in the Bible. Thus we find that we are quite correct in our conclusion that we are to interpret the Bible with the Bible. We are to compare each and every thing in the Bible with anything and everything else in the Bible that may relate to the verse or word being studied. Only after we have examined the word, phrase, or verse in question in the light of the rest of the Bible (so that we know we are in agreement with the whole Bible) are we ready to teach the meaning of the verse or word in question.

This does mean that the student of the Bible must increasingly become an expert in the whole Bible. It means that he must unceasingly study every aspect of Bible truth. This is a lifelong endeavor that requires constant diligence and perseverance. It also means that there will be times when it will be necessary to set aside previously held conclusions that will not stand the scrutiny of the whole Bible. This requires much grace and humility of spirit. This is altogether necessary if truth will be served.

The Bible is its own Dictionary

If we continue to study every aspect of the whole Bible we will discover that the Bible is its own dictionary. If we wish to know the meaning of a word used in the Bible, we do not go to a dictionary of modern Greek or Hebrew (the original languages of the Bible). To do so would be quite useless. The meaning of words has changed to such a degree during the two thousand years since the Bible was written that it would be a wonder if any of the words used in the Bible had the same meaning today.

But when we find all of the verses in the Bible in which the word in question is found in the original language, we can see how it is used in all of these verses. Based on this information, we can begin to discern its meaning and thus know how it is used in the verse in question.

Thus in attempting to discover the meaning of any verse, it is necessary to do a study of the words and concepts in the verse to see how they are used throughout the Bible. By this means we bring the whole Bible to bear on the verse in question.

Occasionally we will find a word in the original Hebrew or Greek which is used only once in the entire Bible. In this case, it cannot be compared with its use in other parts of the Bible. However, we can be sure that the context in which this word is found will convey a truth which is found in other places in the Bible. Therefore, from the Bible we can know the parameters prescribing how we are to understand the word in question.

The usage of biblical words in the ancient secular writings can be of some help in beginning to find the meaning of the biblical word in question. But the secular record may never be considered as trustworthy as the Bible itself. Therefore, the Bible's usage of the word in question must be the final authority in determining its meaning.

Only very infrequently is it impossible to determine the meaning of a Hebrew or Greek word. It is then best to leave it in its original Hebrew or Greek, trusting that at some future date God may open the eyes of some Bible student to understand its meaning and purpose as used in the text.

The Bible is its own Grammar Book

Moreover, the Bible is its own grammar book. The careful student may begin to understand the tenses, moods, and voices in the Hebrew and Greek, the original languages of the Bible, by studying these languages in the ancient secular accounts. It is indeed conventional for the Bible student to go to a Hebrew-English or a Greek-English dictionary for this purpose. But no conclusion based on the secular evidence can stand until it is subjected to the scrutiny of the Bible itself.

Ideally, the rules of grammar and the meaning of words should be derived entirely from the Bible itself. This is so because the Bible alone must stand as the final authority in all matters about which it speaks. This must include not only the concepts, ideas, and truths set forth on its pages, but also the very form in which these concepts and truths are presented. The Bible would be less than the Word of God if this were not so, for the grammar and the words themselves are the means by which Bible truth is set forth.

Thus, the serious Bible student should be relentless in his study of the Bible. Only as the Bible becomes increasingly a part of his life will he be able to draw closer and closer to the rich storehouse of truths, which is the Bible.

Another peril the Bible teacher faces is that he may be impressed with the fact that a great many theologians agree on a particular doctrine. It is very easy simply to trust that the judgment of so many theologians must be accurate. Unfortunately, however, theologians frequently build on what other theologians have said rather than checking the Scriptures to make sure that previous theologians have been accurate. Wonderfully, God has given us His Word so that any conclusion, regardless of how widely held it may be, can be analyzed and checked against the Scriptures.

When Elijah stood on Mount Carmel, he stood alone against hundreds of other prophets who were in agreement on their theological thinking. But Elijah was right and they were wrong. Consensus is never in itself a basis for truth.

We are beginning to see, therefore, that the Bible is the revelation of God's will to man. God Himself is the author. Indeed, God used human authors. They spoke out of their own experience, training, environment, culture, and personality. But because they were used of God to help produce the Bible, what they penned--right down to the individual word and letter of the word--was the precise word God desired to use as the revelation of His divine will. Therefore, whether Paul or Jesus or Jeremiah or an unnamed scribe spoke or wrote, what was written was God's Word.

But, before we are going to know the truth taught by any verse or phrase in the Bible, we must test the conclusion to which we have come against the rest of the Bible. Again, only when we find that the conclusion to which we have come is in harmony with everything else the Bible teaches, can we be sure that we are on the path of truth.

Red Letter Editions of the Bible

Today we are besieged with Bibles that are called "Red Letter Editions" of the Bible. In these, all of the words Jesus spoke are printed in red, whereas the rest of the Bible is printed in black letters.

Whatever the purpose of the publishing houses in printing these Red Letter Bibles, the impact upon the reader is quite devastating. As he reads, he cannot help but think that somehow the words Jesus spoke are more important than those found in the rest of the Bible. After all, they are especially emphasized and underscored by appearing in red, and are consequently set off from the rest of the Bible. Thus, the reader unconsciously adopts a principle that the Bible has two levels of authority. The first and most important authority is set forth in the words that Jesus spoke. The second level of authority is set forth throughout the rest of the Bible.

This conclusion, unfortunately, is contrary to the Bible and effectively undermines the authority of the Bible. We must remember that the Bible itself declares that all Scripture is given by inspiration of God. Therefore, a word spoken by Paul or Isaiah or any of the other men of God used to pen the Holy Scriptures under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit has equal authority to a word spoken by the Lord Jesus Christ. Therefore, it is wise to use only Bibles that have all of the words in black.

The Bible Is One Truth

Because God is the author, there is a marvelous oneness and cohesiveness throughout the Bible that makes it a joy to study and contemplate. Words and phrases used in one book are to be studied in the light of words and phrases used everywhere else in the Bible.

Thus, for example, the meaning of the Greek word *kamno* used by the Holy Spirit in James 5:15 is to be interpreted in light of its use in two other New Testament passages, Hebrews 12:3 and Revelation 2:3. In both Hebrews 12:3, where the word *kamno* is translated "wearied," and Revelation 2:3, where *kamno* is translated "faint," the context clearly indicates that this word is related to spiritual weariness. No suggestion is offered that it relates to physical illness. Thus, by this use in the clearer passages, one can discover its meaning in the more obscure passage, James 5:15.

The fact is, when we read James 5:15 carefully, we discover that three blessings have been experienced by the one who has been subject to *kamno*, all of which relate to salvation: (1) he has become saved; (2) he has been raised up; and (3) his sins have been forgiven. All three of these phrases relate altogether to salvation. While James 5:14 employs the Greek word *astheneo*, which is translated "sick" in our Bible, we find by the use of the word *astheneo* in other places in the Bible that this can refer to any kind of spiritual or physical illness. But because God used the word *kamno* in verse 15 in place of *astheneo*, we know that physical healing is not what is in view in this passage; rather, the focus is on salvation.

Interpreting Scripture with Scripture Helps Us to Understand Matthew 12:36

The statement in Matthew 12:36 can easily be misunderstood if we do not understand the principle of comparing Scripture with Scripture. In Matthew 12:36 Jesus lays down the principle that "every idle word that men shall speak, they shall give account thereof in the day of judgment." Does this mean that even believers are to give an account before God? By looking at the word "judgment" in light of everything else the Bible offers, we can know that believers do not come into judgment. Let us see why this is so.

The Greek word used in Matthew 12:36 and translated "judgment" in the *King James Bible* is the word *krisis*. We find this same word used in John 5:24, where Christ declares, "He that heareth My Word and believeth on Him that sent Me, hath everlasting life, and shall not come into condemnation; but is passed from death into life." The word translated "condemnation" is the word *krisis*, the identical word used in Matthew 12.

Thus we are assured that those who have placed their trust in Christ do not give an account before the Judgment Throne. If we should expand this thought further, we would see that the reason we do not come into judgment is that Christ has become sin for those who have placed their trust in Him, and He has already been judged for those sins. Therefore, believers can not be judged again for the sins that have already been taken care of by our Savior. Effectively, the believers have already stood before the judgment throne of God to answer for their sins. They did so in the person of Jesus Christ, who as their substitute was laden with their sins, was found guilty of those sins, and was punished for those sins. Thus the demands of the law of God set forth in 2 Corinthians 5:10 have been met by Christ on behalf of all who believe on Him. This verse declares:

For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ; that every one may receive the things done in his body, according to that he hath done, whether it be good or bad.

These are just a few of the great number of examples that could be offered, indicating that we must examine words carefully in the light of their use throughout the whole Bible to discover their true meaning. Since God is the author of the Bible, we can expect that every word found in the Bible in the original language has been carefully selected by God regardless of whether Luke, Jeremiah, or Moses was the human author. Because we know that God is infallible in all that He does, we can place implicit trust in the Bible.

The Bible Is Infallible

One must understand, of course, that only the original autographs are to be considered absolutely infallible. They, in the Hebrew, Greek, and sometimes Aramaic, as originally penned, are the articulation of the perfect will of God.

Wonderfully, the ancient scribes who made copies of the originals for later generations had a deep sensitivity to the holiness and uniqueness of the Word of God. Thus, even after hundreds of years, copies were such faithful reproductions of the original manuscripts that one can still consider these copies to be virtually infallible.

Usually the earlier in time the original was copied, the more faithful the copy is. Wonderfully, God has provided access to some very ancient copies, some of which, in the case of the Old Testament, were made even prior to the appearance of the New Testament writings. Thus, translators have a superbly accurate Bible from which to work.

The task of the translator is to translate as faithfully as possible. Because languages are not exactly parallel in structure or in meanings of individual words, it is an exacting and difficult job to be as absolutely true to the original as possible. This, however, is the task of the translator.

Actually, most words in the Bible do have fairly exact equivalents in the language into which they are to be translated. Most phrases in the original texts lend themselves to rather accurate translation without dropping or adding additional words. To the credit of the King James and American Standard translators, in these versions words which were added to help work out the English translation were italicized. Thus the reader is warned that the italicized word was not itself actually found in the original.

Wonderfully, Bibles are available in most of the major languages of the world. These Bibles are so well translated that we may consider them to be almost as infallible as the original texts. Moreover, because Hebrew and Greek texts are available for study and comparison, students of the Word can again examine the original language to check the translators' faithfulness. Excellent concordances such as *Young's Analytical Concordance* and *Strong's Exhaustive Concordance* assist even the non-Greek and non-Hebrew students to study God's use of individual words as found in the original languages. Our Lord has certainly

blessed us! So much, then, for a brief summary of what the Bible is and how it is to be translated. But now another question must be raised. Isn't the Bible hard to read? Isn't a paraphrase that rewrites difficult phrases into simple English a real help in understanding the Bible? Let us examine these questions dealing with paraphrasing.

To Paraphrase or Not to Paraphrase

Many claim that among the most valuable tools for effective evangelism available today are the paraphrased editions of the Bible. This conclusion is held by many who believe they can testify to its validity by giving examples of this one or that one who became a Christian after first reading a paraphrased edition.

But is this conclusion truly valid? Has God indeed guided men in our day to develop these more readable Bibles so that His work of saving people might be greatly assisted in these closing days of the earth's existence? Or is it possible that, ultimately, the paraphrases, instead of being a wonderful blessing, will rather prove to be such a sin that God's wrath will be poured out on the church for its audacious use of such books? These questions must be examined carefully and candidly, for we are currently being besieged by paraphrased editions of the Bible.

God, of course, is infinitely wise. He could very readily have written the Bible so that it would be so simply worded that no one could misunderstand it, or possibly gain the wrong meaning. But God did not intend to write the Bible so that it was always easily understood. It is true that some verses do indeed provide readily understood truth. But many verses which at first blush appear easily understandable, are actually very difficult to grasp in their full meaning. The Bible declares in Proverbs 25:2: "It is the glory of God to conceal a thing: but the honour of kings is to search out a matter." And in Proverbs 1:5-6 God informs us:

A wise man will hear, and will increase learning; and a man of understanding shall attain unto wise counsels: To understand a proverb, and the interpretation; the words of the wise, and their dark sayings.

These statements warn us that all in the Bible may not be as clear as we would sometimes like to think. We are being advised in these verses that we have to search out the truth. The Bible points to such difficulties as Jesus declares in Mark 4:11-12 (ASV 1901):

And he said unto them, Unto you is given the mystery of the kingdom of God: but unto them that are without, all things are done in parables: That seeing they may see, and not perceive; and hearing they may hear, and not understand; lest haply they should turn again, and it should be forgiven them.

He adds in Mark 4:34: "And without a parable spake he not unto them: but privately to his own disciples he expounded all things" (ASV 1901).

This difficulty of understanding the Word is highlighted by the many different teachings found in the evangelical community concerning such important subjects as God's sovereignty, election and predestination, the total depravity of man, particular atonement versus free will, the security of believers, baptism, the Lord's Supper, the final tribulation, the return of Christ, rewards, etc. Indeed we could begin to wonder whether anyone can really find truth from the Bible.

One must realize that the Word of God is to be accepted first of all by faith, not because one understands it. God's command given to Abraham to sacrifice his son Isaac made no sense whatsoever. To kill his son would contravene every promise God had made to Abraham. But Abraham obeyed by blind faith. Likewise, the Bible is to be accepted by faith. Only then will it be the living Word that leads to salvation. Only then will it be the Sword of the Spirit which He will use to lead into all truth. As we humbly trust the Word of God, the Holy Spirit will slowly lead us to truth by His Word.

Returning to the matter of paraphrased editions, one senses the following attitude. The scribe has been given a message by the King. He is mandated to give this message to the populace. But this scribe listens to the King's message and realizes it is very difficult to understand. He reasons that a much better conveyance of truth would be accomplished if the message were in simpler language. So after receiving the message from the King, he rewrites it in his own words to give to the populace. He utterly fails to realize that the King, in his perfect wisdom, gave him the message exactly as he did because he had a precise purpose in using each word.

One immediately senses the audacity, the temerity, the arrogance of this scribe. He is not delivering the King's message at all. Moreover, he has made himself more authoritative and wiser than the King.

I am afraid this is precisely what the translators of the paraphrases, as well as those who use them, have done. They utterly fail to be sensitive to the nature and character of the Word they are communicating.

They have lost their awareness of the holiness of God's Word. They have forgotten that the work of saving people is God's work. Evangelists don't sell the Gospel; they don't snare people into salvation; they don't save people. Rather, the Christian is to witness faithfully from God's Word as He has given it. It is God who applies His Word to the hearts of those who are being saved. As the witness brings the Word, there is a clear line of demarcation between the Bible and the preaching. The Bible is infallible; the preaching may be open to question.

The fact that someone might become convicted of sin by reading a paraphrase offers no rationale for its use whatsoever. God spoke beautiful truth in the Bible through cursed Balaam (Numbers 23-24) and through wicked Caiaphas (John 11:49-52). He even utilized a donkey to convey His Word (Numbers 22:28-30). But this did not excuse or cover the sins of these men. So too, today God can use any statement at all that approximates His Word to get His work of salvation accomplished. But this does not excuse the sins of those who, having lost their sensitivity for the holiness of God's Word, have in its place substituted the work of man. Moreover, God's elective decrees show that the one who was saved while reading a paraphrase would equally and even more certainly have been saved while reading the Bible.

But are not paraphrases helpful in some way? For example, can they not render a useful service when they are used as a commentary? Unfortunately, our minds are not dependable. Even though we may realize the paraphrased edition is not the Bible, subconsciously we will still accept its statements as being the Bible. But it is not the Bible. The paraphraser rewrites a phrase in his own words according to what he believes is a logical and proper interpretation. If his understanding of the phrase is biblical, he will isolate one particular truth God intended to be found in the original phrase. By rewriting it, however, the full depth of meaning God had intended to make available in the phrase is set aside. In other words, the Bible has been emptied of much of its content. Moreover, if the paraphraser interprets wrongly as he rewrites, he has set forth as biblical truth that which is a lie. And because it is in a format purporting to be the Bible, the reader accepts a falsehood as truth. He thus clutters his mind with information which at best is only a part of the whole truth and at worst is altogether false. What Christian would dare to become a part of this kind of activity? The only faithful and safe way to go is to reject paraphrases without delay.

Unfortunately, the act of rewriting the Bible into simple English (or any other language) will be seen by few today as sin. Few read the Bible extensively or intensively. Few are ready to be obedient to what the Word declares. We are living in the days prophesied by our Lord in Hosea 4:6:

My people are destroyed for lack of knowledge: because thou hast rejected knowledge, I will also reject thee, that thou shalt be no priest to me: seeing thou hast forgotten the law of thy God, I also will forget thy children.

God's wrath will surely be visited upon us for this sin.

But now we should seek other principles which must be kept in mind as we study the Bible. Thus far in our study of Bible interpretation we have seen that the Bible alone and in its entirety is the Word of God. Second, we have seen that we must interpret the Scriptures by the Scriptures. Careful study of the words and phrases as they are used elsewhere in the Bible must be made. This will include not only their usage in an individual sentence but also their usage in the context in which that sentence is found. The more familiar the student is with the whole Bible, the more he will be helped in his study.

The student must recognize, of course, that the Bible is God's Word. It is the Holy Spirit who leads into truth. Therefore, as he diligently studies the Bible, he must be praying that God will open his spiritual eyes to the truths hidden within the Word. Only then will he begin to grow in grace as he studies the Bible. We should now look at a third principle that must be kept in mind as we study the Bible. That principle is that the Bible ordinarily has more than one level of meaning. Let us look at this principle more closely as we continue our study.

Chapter 3

The Bible Has More than One Level of Meaning

Thus far in our study, in brief fashion, we have discovered two very important principles we must keep in mind as we study the Bible. These are:

1. The Bible alone and in its entirety is the Word of God.
2. We are to interpret Scripture with Scripture.

Only as we keep these principles in mind are we going to find truth from the Bible.

But now we want to look at a third principle that is of very great importance if we are to realize most fully the spiritual riches hidden within the Bible. In Chapter 1 the principle was set forth that the Bible ordinarily has more than one level of meaning. We saw that there are:

1. The historical setting
2. The moral or spiritual teaching
3. The salvation account

We will now examine these three levels in greater detail, beginning with the historical setting.

The Bible is Absolutely Accurate in Its Record of Historical Events

Many people have the notion that because the Bible is the revelation of God's Word concerning salvation, it is therefore not necessarily trustworthy or accurate when it speaks in the area of history or science or any other field of learning. We immediately sense the wrongness of this idea. Since the Bible is a revelation from God Himself as He spoke through holy men of old, we know that whatever He has given us must be true and dependable.

A favorite target of attack in this area concerns the creation of the earth. The Bible declares that God created the universe in six days. If we search the Bible, we will find this statement abundantly supported, with no encouragement for the theory that more than six 24-hour days were required.

Modern science has concluded that the world is billions of years old. But how valid is this conclusion? We must remember that scientists who are arriving at conclusions concerning the origins of the universe are dealing with exceedingly scarce evidence. Moreover, since no present day scientist was living back then, and since the written record goes back only about five thousand years, the modern day scientist must view the available evidence, as meager as it might be, in the light of certain assumptions he is forced to make. Obviously, the conclusions at which he arrives will be no more accurate than the assumptions or "educated guesses" on which he has based his view of the limited evidence available to him. Obviously then, it is impossible for the conclusions of the scientists to be even a tiny fraction as accurate as the majestic statement of the Bible describing God's act of creating the heavens and the earth.

The Bible also records the occurrence of a flood that destroyed everything having the breath of life from off the face of the earth. This flood also covered the highest mountain (Genesis 6 to 9). If we suggest that this might have been a localized flood of some kind, we are denying the authority of the Scriptures.

The Bible says that in Peleg's day the earth was divided (Genesis 10). This historical statement is abundantly seen in the scientific evidence indicating that at one time this earth consisted of one huge continent which subsequently broke up into the smaller continents that exist today.

Unless the Bible itself shows us that an account of an event or conversation is to be understood as being non-historical, we can depend absolutely on the fact that every conversation, every historical incident recorded in the Bible actually did take place. Because the archeological evidence may not show the existence of a particular nation named in the Bible, or because the incident may appear unusual, we nevertheless have no right whatsoever to suggest that what the Bible has recorded is anything but authoritative.

When the Bible speaks, for example, of the nation of Israel passing through the Red Sea so that the "waters were a wall unto them on their right hand, and on their left" (Exodus 14:22), we would be denying the truth of God to suggest that anything but a miracle occurred. Obviously God altered the normal physical laws in order that these waters might stand as a wall. When the Bible speaks of a prophet by the name of Jonah being cast into the sea and being swallowed by a fish, we are repudiating God Himself to suggest that this was not a true historical event that occurred about 800 years before Christ. When the Bible speaks of the bodily resurrection of the Lord Jesus Christ, we can be assured that this event actually occurred in history.

Because the Bible is impeccably accurate in whatever facts God gives us concerning past historical events, being the facts He wants to bring to our attention, we can rest assured that the Bible is also equally accurate when it speaks about the future events which concern this world and its inhabitants. The future physical return of Lord Jesus Christ in glory, the rapture of the believers on the last day to go to be with Him, the destruction of this present universe by fire, the creation of New Heavens and a New Earth as

the eternal dwelling place for born-again believers, and the removal of the unsaved into a place called Hell, where they will suffer eternally as payment for their sins, are all to be understood as future historical events that are certain and sure to take place, just as the past historical events recorded in the Bible actually took place.

It might be emphasized that a denial of the historical accuracy of the Bible as it speaks to such questions as creation and the flood will also lead to serious questions regarding such events as the destruction of this world by fire and the removal of the unsaved into eternal damnation. God warns concerning this in II Peter 3:3-7,10,13:

Knowing this first, that there shall come in the last days scoffers, walking after their own lusts. And saying, Where is the promise of His coming? for since the fathers fell asleep, all things continue as they were from the beginning of the creation. For this they willingly are ignorant of, that by the word of God the heavens were of old, and the earth standing out of the water and in the water: Whereby the world that then was, being overflowed with water, perished: But the heavens and the earth, which are now, by the same word kept in store, reserved into fire against the day of judgment and perdition of ungodly men....

But the day of the Lord will come as a thief in the night; in the which the heavens shall pass away with great noise, and the elements shall melt with fervent heat, the earth also and the works that are therein shall be burned up....

Nevertheless we, according to His promise, look for new heavens and a new earth, wherein dwelleth righteousness.

God's purpose in writing the Bible was not to give us a book on history or science. In revealing His salvation plan to us, however, God did so within an historical context. That is, God's plan comes to fruition in history. Therefore, when God selects certain historical events or conversations as the context through which the salvation program will shine, we can be absolutely certain that those historical events and conversations which have been chosen to be recorded are altogether accurate and trustworthy. We see, therefore, that the Bible is a book that is absolutely dependable in its presentation of historical facts.

But the Bible is much more than an account of historical events. It also has a second level of meaning which is concerned with teaching moral and spiritual values. Let us now examine this characteristic of the Bible.

The Bible Teaches Moral and Spiritual Values

We read in II Timothy 3:16, "All scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness:...." The Bible therefore is the account wherein God sets forth the moral and spiritual principles and guidelines that man ought to live by, that man might know the more abundant life. God, in His condescending love and mercy, has given us a revelation in written form whereby the human race, which was created in His image, can live most happily and effectively in this world.

Only the believer in Christ, who received his eternal resurrected soul (also called "spirit") at the moment of his salvation, will have an ongoing desire to be obedient to God. He will carefully listen to the admonitions and exhortations of the Bible because he loves God who is doing the admonishing. In fact, when he sins, the believer will be deeply troubled because within his own personality he will feel violated. Even though in his body he still lusts after sin, in his soul wherein he has been born from above, he never wants to sin again. Moreover, God Himself in the Person of the Holy Spirit indwells him. Indeed, he has become a child of God and the Holy Spirit will soon bring him under conviction if he does not confess and turn from that sin.

This process is sometimes called "growing in grace" or growing in "sanctification." It is the experience of every child of God. It is the process whereby he will be doing good works. That is, he will be doing works pleasing to God. These works are never a cause or basis for salvation. Rather, they are an expected result of our salvation. Ephesians 2:8-10 sets forth this principle so beautifully:

For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God: Not of works, lest any man should boast. For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works, which God hath before ordained that we should walk in them.

In order to receive maximum value from God's Word as it sets forth the guidelines for our life, three principles must always be kept in view:

1. The Bible is the final authority.
2. The Bible must be read with a view to being obedient to what is found therein.
3. The Bible itself interprets and explains the rules which God has laid down.

As we read the Bible, we discover many rules for man's conduct. For example, the Bible says that we should seek the kingdom of God and His righteousness. It declares we are not to commit adultery. It emphasizes that we are to be holy just as our heavenly Father is holy. These rules of conduct are found throughout the Bible so that the whole Bible becomes the standard which God has established for the well-being of mankind.

To encourage us and help us avoid the consequences of living in violation of these rules, the Bible records hundreds of historical situations which can be examined in the light of these rules to discover the blessings that come with obedience and the curse that comes with disobedience. Thus we have the accounts of individuals such as Joseph and Daniel and the blessings that came into their lives as they obeyed God; and we have the accounts of Israel and Judah, who came under God's judgment because of disobedience. Therefore, God declares in I Corinthians 10:11:

Now all these things happened unto them for ensamples; and they are written for our admonition, upon whom the ends of the world are come.

But all this information will be valueless to us unless we recognize that the Bible is the Word of God. There is no higher authority which abrogates, invalidates or explains the biblical statement. It is altogether trustworthy and dependable.

More than that, we must also look upon the examples and the declarations of the Bible with a view to being obedient to them. We can know in our hearts that the Bible is authoritative, that it is the Word of God. Only by surrendering to all we find in the Bible will we really begin to see the implications and ultimate values of the truths that are set forth. This is because the Bible is more than just a rule book. It is the living Word of God. As we humbly and obediently approach it as the Word of God, it becomes the Sword of the Spirit as God Himself applies that Word to our lives. We will never be able to interpret the Bible properly, we will never see the riches of the Word of God, unless we come to it with an earnest desire to be obedient to anything and everything we find therein.

Because the Bible is the complete written revelation of God to man, it is its own interpreter. We will understand it only as we compare Scripture with Scripture. We looked at this principle in greater detail in our last chapter. It is a principle that becomes very important if we are to correctly understand the moral and spiritual truths of the Bible.

For example, when God declares, "Thou shalt not kill," we cannot know fully what He means unless we examine everything else in the Bible that relates to the matter of killing. Only then can we be sure that God does not mean that we may not kill animals. Indeed, there are even times when the Bible insists that human life must be taken.

Thus, it is imperative that the whole Bible be read. Only by careful investigation of the entire Bible can we understand most clearly the moral and spiritual laws which God has set forth.

It must be added, of course, that when we as unsaved sinners go to the Bible ready to be obedient to all we find there, we will discover that we do not measure up to the standards God has set forth. This should serve to bring us to our knees, crying out for deliverance from our sins through the Lord Jesus Christ, who has been presented to us in the Bible in a marvelous fashion as the Redeemer. To whatever extent man lives in conformity to the laws of the Bible, he will enjoy to some degree the blessings of God, but he will never know the highest blessing and happiness, that of eternal life, until he has become obedient to the command to believe on the Lord Jesus Christ.

Thus far we have seen that not only is the Bible impeccably accurate as it speaks historically, but through the historical events recorded, as well as through the direct commands set forth in the Scriptures, God gives to us moral and spiritual values and precepts whereby man is to live.

The Bible is the Gospel of Grace

There is a third level of meaning that persistently shines through all of the Scriptures. It is the fact that the Bible is the presentation of the Gospel of grace. Without question this is the most important purpose of the Bible. The Bible was written so that mankind might know of their need of a Savior. God declared in John 20:31 concerning the signs which Jesus did:

But these are written, that ye might believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God; and that believing ye

might have life through his name.

It is through God's salvation program that He tells mankind about our terrible predicament. He discloses to us that without Christ we are condemned to eternal damnation because of our sins. But wonderfully, God also shows us the marvelous escape that He has provided through the Lord Jesus Christ.

The presentation of the Gospel message is given to us in two basic ways: (1) by means of statements speaking directly to the question of salvation, and (2) by means of historical events and phrases which are actually types or figures of God's salvation program. In our study we will examine these two methods of Gospel presentation.

God Speaks Directly to the Matter of Salvation

Almost from the very beginning of the Bible, statements are made that speak directly to the question of salvation. For example, in Genesis 3:15 God declares that there would be enmity between Satan and the woman, and between his seed and her seed, so that Satan's head would be bruised. This points to the enmity that exists between the kingdom of Satan on the one hand and the kingdom of Christ on the other. Christ is the seed of the woman who, by going to the Cross, would vanquish Satan.

In Genesis, God gives additional insight concerning His salvation program as He declares that the scepter would not depart from Judah. By means of this language, the Bible shows that a King would come from Judah. This King would be intimately related to salvation.

Step by step, God gives more and more information concerning His salvation program. In Psalm 103, for example, He speaks of Himself as the Savior who "forgiveth all thine iniquities" and "redeemeth thy life from destruction." In Isaiah 53 God becomes even more specific as He describes the coming Savior as One who would become a Man of Sorrows upon whom God would lay our sins.

However, it is in the New Testament that the proclamation of the salvation program comes to its most complete revelation. The first four books of the New Testament clearly present the Lord Jesus Christ to us as our Savior. Remember John the Baptist's introduction of Him as he declared, "Behold the Lamb of God who taketh away the sin of the world." Remember, too, such a beautiful and specific promise as John 3:16 where God promises, "For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life." God continues His revelation of His Gospel program in the epistles. There, under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, the Apostle Paul and others wrote to various churches, revealing in clear detail the grand, wonderful declaration of salvation.

Thus the whole Bible is a book that presents the glorious Gospel of salvation through the Lord Jesus Christ. Anyone who reads it with a humble attitude and realizes that this is the Word of God has the needed information to convict him of his sin. By this Word, God will draw him into the kingdom of Christ.

The Gospel of Grace Is Frequently Hidden

While the Bible makes many statements that bear directly on the glorious message of salvation, this message is not always immediately apparent. Sometimes it is hidden within the biblical language. We must realize that the message of salvation is the most important message of the Bible. We would expect, therefore, that it would shine clearly through on every page of the Bible.

Earlier in our study we saw that the Bible can be trusted implicitly even when it speaks from the historical standpoint. We also discovered that frequently the Bible sets forth moral and spiritual values, which are to be observed by the human race in order to assure happiness on this earth. But the major presentation of the Bible is the Gospel of God's grace as revealed through the Lord Jesus Christ, our Savior. As we have just discovered, it is this level of meaning which frequently can be found in very clear language.

But we are going to find that very frequently the message of salvation can also be found hidden within the historical conversations and incidents recorded within the Bible. The hidden aspects of this third level of meaning are what must be looked at in addition to the first level of meaning, the historical aspects, and the second level of meaning, the moral and spiritual teachings. Frequently we find recorded in the Bible historical events, words, phrases, and concepts which in themselves do not appear to speak to the message of salvation. Nevertheless, because we know that the Bible is the Word of God, and we know that the intent of the Bible is to bring men face to face with their need of a Savior, we realize that God did not put anything in the Bible incidentally or coincidentally or casually. We sense very quickly that it wasn't God's purpose to write the Bible simply to give us a history lesson, even though every event recorded in the Bible is perfect in its historical accuracy.

We also sense that God did not write the Bible simply to give us moral and spiritual lessons so that mankind might live more comfortably upon this earth, even though those moral and spiritual lessons are seen throughout the Scriptures. Indeed the great predicament facing mankind is that he is going to hell because of his sins. This is a major facet of the most important message of the Bible.

Wonderfully, the rest of the message is the truth that by believing in Christ we can escape this most terrible predicament. The problem we face, however, is that so much of the Bible appears on the surface to have no direct relationship to God's salvation plan. As we have already noted, there is ample evidence in the Bible that its central purpose is to bring God's salvation plan to the attention of the human race. Is it possible that only those direct statements that speak clearly to the message of salvation are to be considered relevant in relation to the salvation message? Are we to consider the balance of the Bible to be simply the historical framework, the historical milieu in which the Gospel message is cast?

The Bible provides answers to these questions, and this is what we want to develop as we go on in this study. We should note that God carefully guides us in our understanding of the Scriptures as to how to handle the words, phrases, and concepts which at first blush appear to have no direct relationship to God's salvation program.

The Ceremonial Laws Pointed to Aspects of God's Salvation Program

Let us look first at the record of the ceremonial laws. These are one major way God has hidden the salvation message. For example, in the Old Testament God instituted the Passover Feast. This was first observed at the time that Israel went out of Egypt, when the angel of death killed the firstborn in the homes that did not have the lamb's blood placed on the door post. The blood of that lamb provided salvation from physical death for the firstborn of that home. The Bible teaches very clearly that that historical event was a picture of the salvation which is provided through Jesus Christ. He is our Passover. He is the Lamb which was slain so that we would not come into eternal damnation.

Besides the observance of feast days which anticipated the coming of the Lord Jesus Christ, the ceremonial laws also included offerings, sacrifices, food laws, planting laws, and a whole host of regulations which the Bible presents as types or figures or representations of spiritual truths which relate to some aspect of the salvation message. We see, therefore, that by means of the ceremonial laws God has hidden the salvation message within the Scriptures. As we begin to understand the spiritual meaning of each aspect of the ceremonial laws, our understanding of the salvation message is enhanced.

But now let us look at another biblical means of understanding the salvation message. When Christ was on earth He declared from time to time that He was about to speak a parable. He then proceeded to give the parable, concluding His presentation with the spiritual meaning. By means of these parables Christ was presenting an earthly story with a heavenly meaning.

The fact is, these parables paralleled the ceremonial observances of the Old Testament, which themselves were earthly observances with a heavenly meaning. The ceremonial laws, therefore, were actually historical parables. That is, they were actual earthly experiences of the Israelites, each pointing to a heavenly or spiritual meaning relating to some aspect of salvation. In addition to the ceremonial laws and the parables, God also used a third method to teach heavenly lessons by means of earthly events. This was by the use of historical events. God shows us very carefully in the Scriptures that certain historical events were recorded in the Bible so that we might understand through them spiritual truth relating to salvation.

For example, in Genesis we read of Abraham bearing Ishmael by Hagar and the subsequent expulsion of Hagar and Ishmael from the home of Abraham and Sarah. In Galatians 4, God calls attention to this historical event in order to teach the spiritual truth that we either have a salvation that leads to spiritual bondage (typified by Hagar and Ishmael), or a salvation program that leads to spiritual freedom (typified by Sarah and Isaac). It isn't our purpose in this present study to develop this particular truth, but you can read about it in Genesis 21:9-14 and Galatians 4:21-31.

Likewise, in Malachi 4 God calls attention to the coming of Elijah, and in Matthew 11:11-14 our Lord shows us that the Elijah He was referring to was actually John the Baptist. Therefore, God is indicating that Elijah typified John the Baptist.

By means of these very pertinent biblical illustrations we should be able to see that God Himself teaches that the message of salvation is greatly expanded throughout the Scriptures, far beyond such clear declarations of salvation as those found in John 3:16, Isaiah 53, and the epistles.

But now we must face a very serious question. When God clearly indicates that He is speaking in

parables, or when He clearly indicates that this or that historical event or person is a type of some aspect of the salvation message, or when He indicates that the ceremonial law is pointing to the Lord Jesus Christ, we know that we are on very safe ground in developing spiritual salvation truth from these specific accounts of the Scriptures. But do we dare to go beyond this and surmise that other historical events and personalities and concepts might also have spiritual dimension to them? In other words, are they also types and figures of some aspect of the salvation proclamation?

Let the Bible guide us to an answer on this. In Mark 4 God informs us that "without a parable spake He not unto them..." The usage of parables was a common teaching method of the Lord Jesus. Indeed, when we study the four Gospels, we find that sometimes Jesus made a point of indicating that He was speaking in a parable. He did this, for example, in presenting the parable of the sower in Luke 8. But many other times He made statements without especially emphasizing that these were parables. Repeatedly He would say "The Kingdom of Heaven is..." and then proceed to give a story. When we look at such a statement, we know that it was a parable even though Jesus did not specifically call it that.

Another example is the story He told of the rich man and Lazarus in Luke 16. It isn't pointed out as being a parable in the Bible. Yet, when we study it carefully, we discover that it must be a parable. If it were merely an historical event, it would be full of contradictions. For example, we're told that the rich man dies and is buried, and yet in the next few verses we find that in hell he is described as having both eyes and a tongue. However, when his body was buried, he was buried with his eyes and tongue. How then did his eyes and tongue get into Hell?

Likewise, there are many other such contradictions in this story if we assume it was an actual historical event. But once we begin looking at it as a parable (an earthly story with a heavenly meaning), then all these contradictions disappear. Through this story, we begin to realize that Christ is not giving us a chronological outline of what happens when we die. Rather, He is bringing out some very important spiritual concepts concerning what happens when someone dies without Christ.

From these examples we see that there are additional statements in the Bible that definitely show us that God does not necessarily tell us in a specific way that the passage in question is a parable or is meant to indicate spiritual truth relating to salvation.

As we have seen, God has given pertinent examples of the Bible's teaching methods by specifically indicating that either a parable is in view or that a historical event is actually pointing to spiritual truth. These examples show us the path we ought to follow. They direct us to see that this is God's teaching method. And it is up to us to apply this teaching method to our continuing study of the Bible.

But do we really have additional biblical validation to proceed in this fashion? Can we really search for the salvation message in passages that appear to be historical in nature only? We might approach these questions in this way: in John 20, Jesus speaks of the miracles He did, and then He declares in verse 31:

But these are written, that ye might believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God; and that believing ye might have life through his name.

Notice that Jesus is specifying that these miracles were done in order that through the record of them we might come to salvation. But when Jesus actually performed these miracles, they were in themselves just historical events that appeared unrelated to the salvation program.

The healing of a sick man in itself has nothing to do with the salvation program. But, based on the principle set forth in John 20:31, Christ is insisting that He performed this miracle in order that we might know about salvation. In view of the fact that the Bible declares that without a parable Jesus did not speak to them (Mark 4:34), we can see that these miracles were actually historical parables. They are earthly stories, that is, actual historical events with a heavenly or spiritual meaning, in the same way that the parable of the sower is an earthly story with a heavenly meaning. This conclusion agrees altogether with the principle set forth in Mark 4:34, that "without a parable spake He not unto them..."

But a question still persists. True, Jesus did miracles and now we can see that they can be regarded as historical parables; but what about the Old Testament? We have looked at the Lord Jesus Christ, seeing that He always taught with parables. We know from Scripture that this was His teaching method. But we have a whole Bible filled with records of historical events, phrases, and concepts. What about all these? As we seek for an answer to this question, let me draw our attention to I Peter 1:11 where we read that the Spirit of Christ spoke through the Old Testament prophets.

Searching what, or what manner of time the Spirit of Christ which was in them did signify, when it testified beforehand the sufferings of Christ, and the glory that should follow.

In other words, this verse is saying that the Old Testament is just as much the Word of Christ as is the New Testament. We aren't surprised at this because John 1 openly declares that Christ is the Word.

While Jesus spoke very directly when He was on earth, He also spoke very directly throughout the whole Bible because He is the very Word of God. Thus the declaration of Mark 4:34 that "without a parable spake He not unto them" in truth applies to the whole Bible. To reinforce this God declares, for example, in Psalm 78:1-3:

Give ear, O my people, to my law: incline your ears to the words of my mouth. I will open my mouth in a parable: I will utter dark sayings of old: Which we have heard and known, and our fathers have told us.

And in Proverbs 1:5-6 God furthermore informs us:

A wise man will hear, and will increase learning; and a man of understanding shall attain unto wise counsels: To understand a proverb, and the interpretation; the words of the wise, and their dark sayings.

These sayings are parallel to what we have read concerning Jesus' teaching method being the usage of parables, so that we can now begin to understand somewhat of how God has presented truth to us in the Bible.

On every page of the entire Bible God declares to us the Gospel of salvation. At times the presentation of the salvation message is very clear. But at other times (and this is very frequent) God has hidden the salvation message within the record of the historical events and concepts presented in the Scriptures. God teaches through the usage of parables. Thus we must understand that even the historical events are effectively historical parables.

We must remember that God had at His command literally millions of historical events and concepts which He could have chosen to write about. But out of all that He could have written, these particular events are written that we might know that Jesus is the Christ, and that through Him we might have salvation.

To assist us in understanding God's teaching method, the Bible gives us examples. For instance, at times Jesus would say, "This is a parable." At times the Bible actually declares that a particular historical event has deeper spiritual meaning. But we must remember that these are only examples. God is intimating that in similar fashion we are to attempt to find the salvation message in all the Scriptures.

I am aware that many pastors have been taught in their seminaries that we should never look for deeper spiritual meaning unless the Bible expressly indicates that we may do so. However, without realizing it, these pastors to some degree inevitably find that God's teaching method employs the usage of parables far beyond what He expressly has declared to be parables.

For example, many do not hesitate to acknowledge that New Testament statements such as "the Kingdom of Heaven is..." are parabolic statements, even though the Bible itself does not expressly call them parables. Neither do they hesitate to look at Boaz in the story of Ruth as a figure of Christ, the Redeemer. This is so even though nowhere in the Bible is there a declaration that Boaz is to be considered as a figure of Christ.

They may also see in Joseph, who became prime minister of Egypt, many reasons for considering him to be a type of the Lord Jesus Christ. They do this even though nowhere in the Bible is Joseph expressly declared to be a type or figure of our Savior. Likewise, they may see in the leprosy of Naaman the Syrian a figure or type of sin, etc. Without realizing it, these pastors are moving in the direction of correct biblical interpretation. But if Boaz is a representation of Christ, then we must also decide who Ruth and Naomi represent, and who or what is represented by the other kinsmen, the cities, and all the other historical elements contained in the written account. If Joseph is a figure of the Lord Jesus Christ, what about all the other elements that are interwoven in the historical account of Joseph as recorded in the Old Testament? What do they represent in Scripture?

Indeed the answer to such questions must be the pursuit of each beof each believer as he attempts to unravel the salvation story from these historical events. Indeed, we can begin to see that whenever we find a statement of the Bible that at face value has no direct bearing on salvation teaching, we should look for a deeper spiritual meaning that relates to salvation. Many times we may not be able to discover what the salvation teaching is, but that does not mean that it is not hidden within the account of the historical event. I truly believe that throughout the Bible we will find numerous historical conversations, events, and personalities that were actually types or figures pointing to the Lord Jesus Christ or to some other aspect of God's salvation program.

These historical personalities and events are like parables. Millions and millions of conversations and historical events could have been incorporated in the Bible account that were not. God specifically chose the ones that are written in the Bible because they are related to and teach some aspect of His salvation

program.

We must realize, of course, that many passages do not easily reveal the wealth of truth hidden within them. The diligent student of the Bible may spend many hours with one verse or passage suspecting that there is deeper spiritual meaning hidden within it but still not discovering what it might be. This is God's way of keeping us very humble as we study the Bible. Many times we will have to admit that we do not know the full teaching of a particular passage. But perhaps another student at another time will receive the insights we sought in that difficult passage. But like the Bereans, the child of God will continue to search the Scriptures in order to find the nuggets of truth God in His grace might reveal to him.

The Bible is God's message of salvation to the human race. The golden thread that runs through every page of the Bible is the wonderful declaration that there is a way of escape from damnation. God has selected each conversation and historical event recorded in the Bible for the purpose of setting forth some aspect of this marvelous redemption plan. But many times, the message of salvation is hidden deeply within the biblical language. It is the task and joy of the believer to search out this message.

Generally speaking, if a Bible statement relates directly to some aspect of the message of salvation, most likely there is no deeper spiritual meaning to be sought. For example, when the Bible speaks directly of salvation, the spiritual rule in the church, the obedience of believers to Christ, the return of Christ, or Judgment Day etc., we are not to look for deeper meaning. These subjects are in themselves the basic message of the Bible.

But when the Bible gives us information like Abraham seeking a wife for Isaac, or David fleeing from Saul, or Jesus healing the sick, or the shipwreck of the Apostle Paul, we can be certain that such messages were included in the Bible for the purpose of teaching us about some aspect of salvation. We can discover this by regarding these accounts as historical parables--earthly stories with a hidden spiritual or heavenly meaning.

The more diligently we study the Bible to understand the fundamental doctrines of God's salvation plan, the better equipped we will become to search out the deeper spiritual meanings hidden within the historical events.

Wonderfully, we will find a beautiful harmony existing between the deeper spiritual meaning of a passage on the one hand and the message of salvation on the other. This will appear in the measure that our interpretation harmonizes with the truth of the Gospel message.

Unfortunately, many theologians and pastors have inadequate knowledge of the message of salvation. Thus they have extreme difficulty in finding the heavenly meaning hidden within the earthly stories. Consequently many of them ridicule the principle that God has hidden the salvation message within the historical statements. Such criticism, however, does not invalidate the principle that the salvation message can be found in the deeper spiritual meaning of an event.

But isn't it dangerous to attempt to discover deeper spiritual meaning within the Bible? Won't this lead to all kinds of fanciful interpretations? Wouldn't it be far better to leave this whole idea alone and cease from any attempt to find the Gospel declaration on every page of the Scriptures?

These are serious questions. Indeed, we never want to read anything into the Scriptures which God never put there Himself. That is why it is so important to remember, as we seek out this third level of meaning within the biblical account, that three rules must always be kept clearly in mind:

1. The spiritual meaning must relate to the Gospel of salvation. Salvation is the message of the Bible. It won't work to look at a historical account and try to identify it with certain political nations or some contemporary phenomenon taking place in the world. The spiritual meaning always relates to the Gospel program. We can see this both in the parables of Jesus and in the Old Testament presentation of the ceremonial laws.

While many theologians realize that the 10 horns of the dragon of Revelation 13 or Revelation 17 must represent something, they have decided that they represent the 10 nations of the European Common Market. Are they on the right path in their understanding?

We can know immediately that their conclusion is quite erroneous. Political nations of Europe and the economic factors in our world have nothing to do with salvation. If nations are involved in God's salvation plan, there are only two nations that can be in view. On the one hand there is the nation that is called the kingdom of God, and on the other hand there is the kingdom of Satan, which includes all of the political nations of the world.

Since we know that the 10 horns of the dragon in Revelation 13 and 17 cannot be referring to the kingdom of Christ, they must be referring to the dominion of Satan. The number ten spiritually signifies

completeness. So in this instance it signifies the completeness of Satan's rule in the world just prior to Judgment Day. Once this is understood, all of the biblical passages concerning the ten horns can be harmonized.

2. *To identify words or concepts found within a historical situation with spiritual truth, we must have biblical validation.* For example, we frequently find the words "stone" or "rock" in the Bible. Due to the fact that in many verses a stone or rock is identified with the Lord Jesus Christ, we can attempt to make this application in a historical situation. Likewise, we have seen in the Bible that a "sower" can be identified with one who brings the Gospel, and "seed" can be identified with the Word of God.

3. If we have good reason to believe we see this third level of meaning within a particular historical statement, such that it can apply spiritually to the Gospel, *the conclusions we derive from our analysis of that historical situation must be in agreement with everything else the Bible teaches concerning the nature of salvation.* If, in our analysis, we have come to a conclusion contrary to the teaching of the rest of the Bible concerning salvation, we immediately would know that we have not correctly understood the spiritual meaning of the passage in question. I believe if the above three rules are observed carefully, we will be on safe ground as we study the Bible to discover its deeper spiritual meaning.

But questions like these still must be faced: Aren't we running grave risks in attempting to spiritualize the statements of the Bible? Haven't there been those who have done this and who have ended up with wrong teachings altogether concerning the message of salvation? These are fair questions. We must be exceedingly careful in how we deal with the Holy Scriptures. They are the Word of God and are never to be considered the mere playthings of men.

Many have expressed the fear that "spiritualizing" the Bible will lead people away from the true Gospel. But this can happen only when we violate the three rules outlined above. If these rules are followed strictly, there is no way in which the understanding of the Gospel of salvation can be changed into something other than what the Bible teaches. Moreover, as we have already noted, we must realize that not a single theologian or Bible teacher or preacher living today does not look for the deeper spiritual meaning whenever he is able to do so.

Anyone, for example, who attempts to analyze the ceremonial laws in order to understand the character of the coming Messiah and His salvation program is doing this very thing. Anyone who suggests that Joseph (who was sold by his brothers into Egypt and who eventually become the prime minister of Egypt and saved his family from starvation) was a great type of Christ has begun to find the deeper spiritual meaning within the historical context. I really do not think that anyone can biblically fault the idea that we are to look for the deeper spiritual meaning within the historical context. There are those who say they accept the Bible literally as it stands and thus would not dare to spiritualize (that is, look for a deeper spiritual meaning relating to salvation). But, as we have already seen, they actually do spiritualize when it is convenient.

It is my belief that we have no other choice but to examine every passage of the Bible to discover a deeper spiritual truth. This requires long hours of exceedingly diligent work because God has written the Bible in such a way that we are encouraged to search the Scriptures. We receive our wonderful reward, however, when we find that a particular historical account unfolds into a dramatic and beautiful picture of salvation.

Sometimes we find this third, spiritual level of meaning set forth clearly in passages such as Isaiah 53, the Gospel of John, or the Epistles. Sometimes it is hidden within parables, such as those set forth by our Lord in Matthew 13. Sometimes we find it hidden in the ceremonial laws of the Old Testament. And other times it is buried more deeply in the historical accounts of the events and conversations of the Bible. We must remember that these historical events were chosen by God for inclusion within the Bible because of the deeper spiritual truths concerning salvation which are hidden within them.

Clearly, the dominant message of the Bible is salvation. But sometimes we find that the biblical writing appears to be awkward. That is, the record of the earthly story appears to be awkward when in fact this particular language is actually necessary in order to reveal the beautiful truth of the heavenly meaning.

For example, we read in Deuteronomy 34 that God buried Moses and no one ever discovered his sepulcher. But no one else in the entire Bible was treated in this peculiar fashion. And we are puzzled by the fact that, because Moses struck the rock when God had commanded him to speak to it, he would not be permitted to enter into the land of Canaan. Doesn't this seem like a very cruel punishment for such a faithful leader as Moses? But both of these events can be clearly understood once we grasp the fact that in these passages God is presenting Moses as a figure or representative of the Law.

On the other hand, the land of Canaan is a picture of salvation. Joshua, who led the children of Israel into

the land of Canaan, is presented as a figure of the Lord Jesus Christ, who brings us into salvation. The Law ends when salvation begins. Even as Moses, who typified the Law in this context, died without entering into the Promised Land, so the keeping of the Law can not bring us into salvation. The end of the Law (the death of Moses) was handled altogether by God in Christ. This is pictured by the fact that God buried Moses (a figure of the law).

Likewise, the account of Moses striking the rock (so that water came forth to satisfy the thirst of the Israelites) can be understood if we see Moses as a figure of the Law. The rock is a figure of Christ. The water is the Gospel that flows from Christ. Because Moses (the Law) struck the rock (that is, the Law brought judgment on Christ), therefore, water (the Gospel of salvation) could flow from the rock (from Christ) to satisfy the thirst (the spiritual thirst) of those who drank the water.

Another example concerns Ruth and Orpah, the daughters-in-law of Naomi. They said to Naomi in Ruth 1:10, "surely we will return with thee unto thy people." In the historical context they ordinarily would not have used the word "return," because this word implies that they had been there before. However, God used this word because in this story these two women are a picture of the human race. They began with God in the Garden of Eden and through the Lord Jesus Christ, returned to God.

An awareness of the principle that within the historical record God has hidden deep spiritual truths concerning the nature of salvation should cause a translator of the Bible to be exceedingly careful about the words he uses. He should never substitute a word used in the original with some other word that appears to him to be more convenient or salutary. For example, in the original language God frequently used the word "blood" in phrases such as "the shedding of blood." But some translations have actually substituted the word "death" for the phrase "shedding of blood." While shedding of blood does emphasize death, nevertheless the word "blood" has implications beyond the word "death," and therefore no translator should make this kind of a substitution.

We should expect throughout the Bible to find numerous historical conversations, events, and personalities that are types or figures pointing to the Lord Jesus Christ or some aspect of the salvation program. In other words, we should look at these historical personalities and events as we would look at parables. Since the Bible's historical events were chosen by God to hide within them deeper spiritual truths concerning salvation, it is quite understandable that the biblical account frequently seems awkward. But through this awkwardness, God provides the message of salvation.

God's Salvation Program

Since historical events are actually types or shadows of God's salvation program, these historical events are in effect historical parables. Let us continue our study by actually examining a few historical personalities and events that have hidden within them this third level of meaning which relates to the Gospel of salvation.

Some of the events and personalities which point to Christ and the salvation message are very obvious. Moses, who in some parts of the Bible is presented as a figure of the Law ("Moses and the prophets"), is also presented in other places as a figure of our Saviour. When he led the children of Israel out of Egypt, he was shown to be a type of Christ, who leads us out of the bondage of sin into the security of salvation. In Deuteronomy 18:15 Moses, under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, declared, "The LORD thy God will raise up unto thee a Prophet from the midst of thee, of thy brethren, like unto me; unto Him ye shall hearken." That Prophet was the Lord Jesus Christ, who was "like unto" or typified by Moses. David is another type of Christ. Both as shepherd and as king, he was a figure of Christ, who is the Good Shepherd, as well as the King who rules over the Kingdom we enter when we are saved.

Similarly, when David penned the words of Psalm 69, he was speaking of his own personal experiences, but by the inspiration of the Holy Spirit he was anticipating the sufferings of Christ, who spiritually and to a much greater degree, would go through the same experiences.

Joshua, who led the children of Israel out of the wilderness and into the land of Canaan, is another type of the Lord Jesus Christ. This is shown to us particularly in Hebrews 4. Canaan was the land of physical rest for the nation of Israel who were those who followed Joshua. Just so, citizenship in heaven (salvation) is the land of spiritual rest for those who follow the Lord Jesus Christ. Even the name Joshua (Hebrew) is identical to the name Jesus (Greek) in the New Testament.

The nation of Israel is frequently presented to us in the Bible as a type of those who were to believe in the Lord Jesus Christ. This is clearly seen in the language of Galatians 3 where God declares in verse 7, "Know ye therefore that they which are of faith, the same are the children of Abraham," and again, in

verse 29, "And if ye be Christ's, then are ye Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the promise." Israel in the flesh, also called national Israel, is the physical seed of Abraham. But in Galatians 3 God is indicating that the eternal Israel consists of those who are in Christ, regardless of their nationality in the flesh.

The list of types and shadows displayed throughout the Old Testament is a very long one. Egypt, for example, is presented as a figure of being in bondage to sin, the way we are before we are saved. The passage of Israel through the Red Sea under the leadership of Moses is a beautiful picture of the redemption that is provided for us through the Lord Jesus Christ.

The wilderness sojourn of Israel is a dramatic picture of the sojourn of believers in the wilderness of this world as they travel towards the completion of salvation the return of Christ on the last day. The entrance of Israel into the land of Canaan is a marvelous picture of our entrance into the fulness of salvation when we receive our resurrected bodies on the last day.

In the New Testament God continues to provide numerous types and figures that appeared throughout history which pointed to aspects of the salvation program. The Bible declares in John 20:30-31:

And many other signs truly did Jesus in the presence of His disciples, which are not written in this book:

But these are written, that ye might believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God;....

Here God is declaring that certain miracles were recorded in the Bible in order that we might believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God. They provide us with insights into the nature of salvation. Jesus' healing of the blind is a good example. This information conveyed the fact that, even as Jesus brought physical eyesight to the physically blind, so He came to give spiritual eyesight to the spiritually blind.

The Gospel in the Raising of Lazarus

One of the most significant and marvelous miracles Jesus did was to raise Lazarus from the dead. In this miracle, recorded for us in John 11, the Bible tells us that Jesus stood outside the tomb of Lazarus and "cried with a loud voice, Lazarus, come forth." Lazarus, who had been dead for four days, whose body had no will or life of its own, mysteriously, marvelously, incomprehensibly responded to the command to come forth to physical life.

In like manner, Jesus commands us to be saved, to come forth into spiritual, eternal life. When we are unsaved, we are as spiritually dead as Lazarus was physically dead. And, as Lazarus had no will or capability of his own to respond to the command of Jesus, so we have no desire or will within our lost souls to respond to His command to be saved. The Bible teaches us in Romans 3:11 that "...there is none that seeketh after God." Ephesians 2:1 indicates that we "...were dead in trespasses and sins." So how can a spiritual corpse respond to the Gospel call? Mysteriously, marvelously, and incomprehensibly, there are those who hear the Gospel and do respond, who do believe. Even as Lazarus was raised from physical death, so we are "risen with Christ" (Colossians 3:1). In Christ we have been raised from spiritual death into spiritual life.

The Gospel in the Book of Ruth

The Book of Ruth gives us an accurate record of events as they happened in history. However, the book itself is written in the genre of a parable in which God gives us insights concerning the marvelous salvation provided through the Lord Jesus Christ.

The cursed Moabitish woman, Ruth, represents all who by nature are under the curse of sin, but who respond to the Gospel. Boaz, the kinsman-redeemer who bought Ruth and married her, is a beautiful picture of the Lord Jesus Christ, who purchased us so that we might become His bride. Orpah, Ruth's sister-in-law who decided to stay in Moab, typifies those who hear the Gospel and are attracted to it, but who finally decide to stay with their old lives rather than follow the Lord Jesus Christ.

Naomi represents national Israel. During a famine, she and her family left Bethlehem to live for a while in the land of Moab. As a result, her husband and her sons died, leaving her a widow. In similar fashion, national Israel repeatedly turned away from God, and as a final result was cut off from being the wife of God. But wonderfully, even as a seed was raised up for the family of Naomi through the marriage of Boaz and Ruth, so Christ, our Redeemer, came forth from the race of Israel. To point us to this similarity, the son born to Boaz and Ruth was also called a kinsman-redeemer (Ruth 4:14). He, too, was a figure of Christ.

Nehemiah, the Cupbearer of the King

Another example of an Old Testament historical parable which teaches the Gospel is the record of Nehemiah. Nehemiah, who was the cupbearer of King Artaxerxes, went to Jerusalem to rebuild the wall. He is a dramatic picture of the Lord Jesus Christ. Even as the cupbearer would die if the king's cup was poisoned, so Christ died as the result of drinking the cup of God's wrath in order to save the sinners who were to become children of the King. And, even as Nehemiah's work was to build the wall of Jerusalem, so Christ's work at the cross builds the Holy City, the New Jerusalem, which is made up of all who believe in Christ.

Abram, a Figure of Christ

In Genesis 12 we have the interesting account of Abram going to Egypt because of a famine in the land. While there, Pharaoh thought that Sarai was Abram's sister, and thus took her into his house. This historical event is a picture of the marriage between Christ (typified by Abram) and His people (typified by Sarai). Sarai was not only the half sister of Abram; she was also his wife. Similarly, we who believe in Christ are called His brothers as well as His bride. The world of sin, which is represented by Egypt, desires to have the bride of Christ (Sarai). Even as Abram feared Pharaoh would kill him in order to obtain Sarai, we find that Satan wanted Christ killed, thinking that in so doing he could have the bride of Christ. When we begin to sense the numerous way, both including and besides historical parables, by which God presents the Gospel in the Old Testament, we begin to understand what God means when He declares in Hebrews 4:2 that the Gospel was preached to Old Testament Israel as well as to us.

We and the Thieves on the Cross

God also used historical parables in the New Testament account. We read, for example, of the two thieves who were crucified with Christ. Both of them at first reviled Jesus. But, finally, one came to believe in Him. The other continued to revile Him until he died.

This is a significant picture of the Gospel as it is preached to all mankind. We are all like the two thieves in that we are by nature in complete rebellion against God. Therefore, left to ourselves, we revile Him and refuse to turn to our Christ. The fact is that most of the human race lives and dies in this kind of rebellion, just like the thief who died in unbelief.

But there are some who hear the Word and respond to it. They become born-again believers. They are represented by the thief who finally submitted to the authority of Christ when he pleaded, "Remember me when Thou comest into Thy Kingdom." In gracious compassion, Christ declared, "Today thou shalt be with me in Paradise." It is interesting to remember that the thief who responded to Christ actually brought the Gospel to the other thief. That is, he declared in Luke 23:40:

Dost not thou fear God, seeing thou art in the same condemnation? And we indeed justly; for we receive the due reward of our deed: but this man hath done nothing amiss.

This is a picture of believers who, immediately upon becoming born again, have an earnest desire to share the Gospel with others.

Put Coals of Fire on Your Enemies

One last illustration will be helpful. In Romans 12:20 we read:

Therefore, if thine enemy hunger, feed him; if he thirst, give him drink: for in so doing thou shalt heap coals of fire on his head.

We begin to understand this verse as we remember that the Bible consistently teaches that there are two kingdoms in this world which are at enmity with each other. The one is the kingdom of Satan; the other is the kingdom of God, headed up by the Lord Jesus Christ. In the biblical sense, every unsaved person is an enemy of every born-again believer. God's admonition to us is to love our enemies.

In Romans 12:20 He says that we are to feed our enemy and give him drink. The food is the wonderful Word of God, the Bread of Life. Likewise, the water is the Gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ. Thus, those who hunger and thirst after righteousness shall be filled. In the Old Testament, if anyone touched the altar where the coals were, he became ceremonially cleansed. Remember how Isaiah (in Isaiah 6) became cleansed when the coals of fire from the altar touched his lips? That's how it is when we present the Gospel to someone who becomes saved. We effectively have touched that individual with coals of fire from the altar and made his or her spiritually clean. The phrase "on his head" signifies that this cleansing encompasses the whole being of the person. May these illustrations encourage us all to re-examine the

Bible, searching for such beautiful presentations of the Gospel.

Don't Plow with an Ox and an Ass Yoked Together

Now that we have discovered that the Bible has frequently three levels of meaning to be gleaned from a passage, let us look at an example. Let us carefully study it in the light of the rest of the Bible to determine whether the three levels of meaning can be found within it. We are going to examine a very short statement found in the Bible, keeping in mind all that we have learned from this study so far.

The procedure we will follow is the same that we would follow if we were studying a much longer, more complicated passage. It is to be hoped that this very short study will give us all encouragement to look carefully at all other Bible statements as we attempt to discover the riches of truth found in them. The passage we will study is found in Deuteronomy 22:10 where we read, "Thou shalt not plow with an ox and ass together." How many levels of meaning can we find to relate to this verse? First of all, we know that it was a command that required obedience by ancient Israel. They were literally not to plow with an ox and a donkey yoked together. If they did so, they were rebelling against God. Whether they could see the rationality of the command or not, they were to be obedient to it. It was a command therefore that had a historical level of meaning.

But what about the next level of meaning that we have studied? Is it a command that is teaching moral or spiritual truth? In all likelihood it does teach moral and spiritual truth perhaps in the sense that it is teaching that it would be cruelty to harness a small donkey to a large ox. But the command prohibits the harnessing of any ass with any ox (even a large donkey to a small ox so that they might be of equal size).

Looking a little deeper, we do find this verse to definitely have a second level of meaning that relates to moral and spiritual conduct. In the Old Testament an ox was one of the clean animals. On the other hand, the ass or the donkey was an unclean animal. The clean animals typified those people who were to become clean through the blood of the Lord Jesus Christ. The unclean animals typified those who were of the world and would remain in rebellion against God. In II Corinthians 6:14 God set forth the command, "Be ye not unequally yoked together with unbelievers..." In Luke 16:13 Jesus laid down the same principle with the words:

No servant can serve two masters: for either he will hate the one, and love the other; or else he will hold to the one, and despise the other. Ye cannot serve God and mammon.

In Galatians 6:14 the Bible also declares:

But God forbid that I should glory, save in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, by whom the world is crucified unto me, and I unto the world.

Thus we see that this principle is an integral part of the Bible message. This is a moral principle that applies to the entire human race and which every believer will attempt to obey as he grows in sanctification. It can be seen very easily that it is the same principle set forth in Deuteronomy 22:10, where the Israelites were not to plow with an ox and an ass together. Thus we see that this verse has not only a first level of meaning which is historical, but also a second level of meaning which is moral or spiritual. But does it also have a third level of meaning, that is, a meaning related to the Gospel of salvation? If it does, we know that it must relate to the essential nature of salvation. So let us examine this question a bit.

In the Bible oxen were frequently offered as burnt offerings or as blood sacrifices. Therefore, oxen, like sheep, often typified and pointed to the Lord Jesus Christ who represented a burnt offering by shedding His blood for our sins. Could the ox in Deuteronomy 22:10 be a reference to our Lord? If so, what about the ass? It was never offered as a burnt offering. In fact, nothing in the Bible suggests that it represents our Lord. But we find that the ass does typify someone. It typifies people who need salvation. In Exodus 34:20 we read:

But the firstling of an ass thou shalt redeem with a lamb: and if thou redeem him not, then shalt thou break his neck. All the first born of thy sons thou shalt redeem. And none shall appear before me empty.

Notice in this passage that the ass was to be redeemed by a lamb. A lamb represents Christ as well as the believer who is redeemed by Christ. Therefore the ass can be seen to represent the unbeliever. Please take note that the ass which was not redeemed was to have its neck broken. That is, it was to be killed. This is a picture of everyone who is unsaved. If we are not redeemed by the Lamb of God, Jesus, we must face death, eternal death in hell.

Thus, we have found scriptural validation to believe that the ox represents Christ and the ass represents the one who needs salvation. But why are they not to be yoked together? After all, in one sense we are yoked to Christ as Matthew 11:29-30 teaches. There Christ declared:

Take my yoke upon you, and learn of me; for I am meek and lowly in heart: and ye shall find rest unto your souls. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light.

We are yoked to Him in the sense that we are "in Christ." We have become spiritually identified with Him, who is our substitute, the payment for our sins. But with respect to the work required for our salvation, we are not yoked with Him as though we were working with Him to accomplish our salvation. Christ, and Christ alone, has done all the work. In no way can we contribute anything at all to our salvation. In no sense has God done all that He could do and now the rest is up to us. We are saved by grace and by grace alone. Our work can contribute absolutely nothing to our salvation.

That is the spiritual meaning behind the command that prohibits the yoking together of an ox and an ass. It was an historical parable pointing to the truth that we are saved by Christ's work alone and not in any sense by our own. Our own work could never contribute anything to our salvation! Thus we see that this very cryptic verse of Deuteronomy 22:10 opens up a wealth of teaching as we carefully look for the three levels of meaning which we have learned might be found within it. Think of what a rich mine of information the Bible becomes, as we carefully study each verse of the Bible this way.

Conclusion

In this study we have seen that the Bible alone and in its entirety is the Word of God. It is the Gospel of Jesus Christ. Anyone who does not follow this principle will be following a gospel other than the true Gospel. He will be under a different authority than that related to the true Gospel. Thus, his doctrinal conclusions will be in error and he will not be relating to the salvation that can lead to eternal life.

Secondly, we discovered that the Bible is its own interpreter. In the measure that we are able to view a particular verse of Scripture or a particular doctrine in the light of the whole Bible, we will be on the path to accurate interpretation of the Bible.

Thirdly, we found that the Bible frequently has three levels of meaning. The first is historical; the second is moral or spiritual; and the third is that which relates to the very essence of the Gospel of salvation. For this reason the translator of the Bible must be exceedingly careful lest in his desire to make the historical or moral teaching of a verse more plain, he obscures or removes the spiritual, Gospel meaning. In relationship to the third level of meaning, we saw that any spiritual meaning found within the passage under study must be in agreement with the following three principles:

1. The deeper spiritual meaning must relate to the Gospel of salvation.
2. The spiritual identification of elements within the parable or historical account must have biblical validation.
3. The spiritual conclusion must be in total agreement with anything and everything else in the Bible that clearly relates to the nature of salvation.

Finally, since the Bible is the ultimate authority, it is to be obeyed. We are to read it with a view to being obedient to anything and everything we find within its pages. Once we understand the nature of the biblical writings, we will begin to find rich and wonderful Truth hidden within its pages. May it be the experience of each of us to learn from the Bible, such a wonderful repository of Truth.

Background Information

Family Radio

The following information was copied from the Family Radio Web site:

The Ministry of Family Radio

Broadcasting Christ-centered programs to the United States & around the world!

Committed to the Person and Work of Jesus Christ

Family Radio is committed to the Person and salvation work of Jesus Christ as revealed in God's divine Word, the Bible. We are a nonprofit, nondenominational, educational organization dedicated to obeying our Lord's command to preach the Gospel to every creature (Mark 16:15). Family Radio programs include no commercial advertisements. Air time for other Christian broadcasters on Family Radio is free of charge. The ministry relies solely upon God working through listeners for the financial support of day-to-day operations. We as a ministry desire to be entirely faithful to God's divine, infallible Word, the Bible. Every effort is made to accurately present the Gospel of the Bible. In purpose and belief, we stand out from other radio and TV ministries in our faithful reliance on the Bible as the ONLY infallible authority.

First Broadcast in 1959

Family Radio was organized in 1958 under our official name, Family Stations, Inc., and began to broadcast February 4, 1959, over KEAR FM in San Francisco. Since then, God has enabled the ministry to purchase a number of powerful AM and FM stations and several smaller educational facilities and translators around the country. Our domestic broadcasts reach metropolitan areas such as Birmingham, Charleston, Chicago, Cleveland, Jacksonville, Los Angeles, Milwaukee, New York, Omaha, Philadelphia, Sacramento, Salt Lake City, San Diego, San Francisco, Seattle, and Washington, D.C.

International Broadcasts

An important addition came in 1973 with the purchase of an international short-wave station, which we called WYFR, in Scituate, Massachusetts. With the use of many transmitters and antennas, the Gospel is proclaimed in ten languages from thy WYFR facility, now located in Okeechobee, Florida. In 1982, our international outreach was expanded to India and the Far East with the use of powerful transmitters in Taiwan. Family Radio has become a worldwide ministry; our broadcasts now span the globe so "That all the people of the earth may know that the Lord is God, and that there is none else" (1 Kings 8:60).

A Diversified Outreach

In addition to the broadcasts, Family Radio offers Bible-based pamphlets and tracts to teach and exhort and other diverse means of spreading the Gospel, including the following.

Family Radio School of the Bible

Primarily a correspondence school, Family Radio School of the Bible courses are designed to help laymen and professionals to minister in the church, on the job, and at home through the study of various subjects and certificate and degree programs. The school operates on the principle of Matthew 10:8, "freely ye have received, freely give." In accordance with this principle, the FRSB does not charge tuition; it is dependent upon the generosity of students and friends.

Missionary Tours

Family Radio sponsors "Missionary Tours" which provide opportunities for staff members and listeners (at their own expense) to help spread the Gospel through tract distribution. Our ambassadors for Christ have visited cities in North America, South America, Europe, Asia, Africa, and Australia (every continent except Antarctica).

On the Internet

Our Christ-centered programs are now available worldwide, 24 hours a day, seven days a week, on the Internet. Access to the Internet may be via computer or television (with the proper equipment). In addition to the programs on the Internet, Bible studies such as "The Glorious Garden of Eden" and "The Seventy Weeks of Daniel 9" are on our Home Page. Downloadable books include "What God Hath Joined Together" and "God's Magnificent Salvation Plan." The Internet also has our program guide, short-wave schedule, and The Bible. Tell your friends and family that they can find Family Radio on the Internet at: <http://www.familyradio.com>

Supporting Family Radio

If you believe God would have you financially support Family Radio you can send your tax-deductible gift to:

Family Radio

Oakland, CA 94621 USA

Or use our "Secure Internet Check Form!"

End of Web site information.

For biblically based answers to your questions, you can listen to the *Open Forum* on Family Radio stations in many locations in the USA on Monday through Friday evenings at 8:30-10:00 p.m. Eastern Time (5:30-7:00 p.m. Pacific Time) or call 800-322-5385 (from within the USA and Canada) or 408-741-0219 (from outside the USA and Canada) during the program to ask a question or make a comment. You can also listen to live broadcasts on Family Radio's Web site at <http://www.familyradio.com/> during those hours. There are also recordings of past programs available on this Web site.

The Open Forum is translated from English into nine other languages and broadcast by short-wave radio around the world. You can also listen to prerecorded short-wave broadcasts on the Web site. Write to Family Radio at the above address to obtain a short-wave broadcasting schedule for your area or call these numbers:

Toll Free: 800-543-1495 (from within the USA and Canada)

Toll Call: 501-568-6200 (from outside the USA and Canada)

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This book was reformatted from material downloaded from the Family Radio Web site. This was done by two Family Radio listeners who have grown in the knowledge of their Lord and Savior over the years (with help from the questions and answers about the Bible as heard on the *Open Forum* program and other Family Radio materials) and who desire the same for others.

Martin E. Lee

1072 S. DeAnza Blvd #372

San Jose, CA 95129 USA

Phone: 408 741-5342

Email: MLee@USStepper.com

Gerald D. Mittelstadt

2850 Sagittarius Drive

Reno, NV 89509 USA

Phone: 775 786-1665

Email: gdmitt@prodigy.net

Published by:

Good Message Foundation

1072 S. De Anza Blvd #532 / San Jose, California 95129 USA

Phone: (408) 741-0219 FAX: (775) 305-3953

Web Site: GoodMessage.org Email: Info@GoodMessage.org

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