

Chapter 8 – Be Not Deceived

"The fear of the LORD *is* the beginning of knowledge" (Prv 1:7).

A Different Kind of Repentance?

"Repentance" usually brings to mind the idea of giving up misdeeds that are linked to particular sins, and this sort of change *is* necessary. Those who become followers of Jesus have a different standard of behavior than they previously had. However, it is important to note "repentance" is also required when it comes to truth.

A person obviously has to stop resisting the truth in order to receive the truth, yet few think of this in terms of "repentance." Still, scripture talks about "repentance to the acknowledging of the truth" (2 Tm 2:25). So we need to think in those terms if we want to train ourselves to think and speak biblically.

It turns out "repentance to the acknowledging of the truth" is a gift from God. Paul told Timothy how proper instruction might bring about this change in people who "oppose themselves." We learn this from an admonition found in 2 Timothy 2:24-25:

"The servant of the Lord must not strive; but be gentle unto all *men*, apt to teach, patient, in meekness **instructing those that oppose themselves; if God peradventure will give them repentance to the acknowledging of the truth.**"

What does it mean for people to "oppose themselves?" The phrase makes perfect sense, and it identifies the real problem. No one says they want to believe a lie; they tell themselves they want the truth. Thus when people resist the truth, they are opposing what they *claim* they want. The same thing occurs when a person holds contradictory beliefs, for people who believe mutually exclusive ideas are engaged in thinking which opposes itself. The people whom Elijah rebuked for worshipping both the LORD and Baal had relied on this sort of thinking. The practice of self-contradictory thinking was also rebuked by Jesus when he condemned those religious leaders who claimed to respect God's word even while they refused to submit to its authority (Mt 23:15, Mk 7:6-13, et al.).

Earlier we considered the deception in the church in Laodicea and the New Testament has many other examples of faulty thinking both in the church and outside of it. Those "who changed the truth of God into a lie" are at one end of the spectrum and you can read about them in Romans 1:21-26. In the church, the most striking instance of halting "between two opinions" is probably the one rebuked by Paul and Sosthenes in 1 Corinthians 15:12-13:

"If Christ be preached that he rose from the dead, how say some among you that there is no resurrection of the dead? But if there be no resurrection of the dead, then is Christ not risen."

As this points out, belief in a Christ who "rose from the dead" is not compatible with the idea of "no resurrection of the dead." Those ideas contradict each other, so they cannot both be true. The problem was the willingness of the Corinthians to tolerate error. Their method of assessing truth on biblical issues was flawed because it led them to assume it was reasonable to take an '*agree to disagree*' approach on matters of truth (i.e., they tolerated mutually exclusive ideas and they claimed to respect the truth at the same time). Those who said they followed Jesus had sacrificed the truth for the sake of inclusiveness. However, respect is not shown for the truth when contradictory ideas are considered to be equally valid.

Jesus said, "To this end was I born, and for this cause came I into the world, that I should bear witness unto the truth. Every one that is of the truth heareth my voice" (Fourth gospel 18:37). The link between Jesus and the truth is unbreakable, so Jesus cannot be honored when truth and falsehood are treated as equals!

Followers of Jesus need to respect the truth. 1 Corinthians 15:12-58 made this point to the Corinthians. Those who "oppose themselves" are being unreasonable, so they need to repent of this way of thinking (just as Naaman the leper had to repent of his unreasonable mindset before he could get the blessing of God [as was shown in the earlier discussion of 2 Kings 5:9-14]). The Corinthians were rebuked for not being reasonable, because one cannot respect Jesus who "rose from the dead" and also respect those who say there is "no resurrection of the dead," for this *disrespects* the truth and the authority of scripture.

Divided Loyalties

Is there ever a good reason to reject truth? If not, then no one who respects God's word should ever turn a blind eye to facts in scripture that challenge their view on an issue. Still, some who say they believe scripture are able to come up with high-sounding excuses when they want to resist biblical correction. The religious leaders of Jesus' day did this, and people today still do this. Nevertheless, such behavior certainly does not evidence a love of the truth.

In Hebrews this was said three times: "Today if ye will hear his voice, harden not your hearts" (Heb 3:7-8 & 15, 4:7). Also Jesus said, "My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me" (Fourth gospel 10:27). Since "all scripture *is* given by inspiration of God" (2 Tm 3:16) and Jesus spoke the words of God (Fourth gospel 8:28, et al.), those who desire to follow Jesus need to go where the biblical evidence leads.

Can man's response justify God?

"All the people that heard *him* [John the Baptist], and the publicans, **justified God**, being baptized with the baptism of John. But the Pharisees and lawyers rejected the counsel of God against themselves, being not baptized of him" (Lk 7:29-30).

Thus, a right response to the authority of God results in God being "justified." It does so because, in order to receive correction, we must admit we were wrong and submit to God's standard of what is right and true. Conversely, those who will not submit to God's word always find a way to convince themselves they were justified in doing so.

Luke 7:29-30 contrasts two responses to God's authority. When John spoke the word of God, some submitted to its authority and others "rejected the counsel of God." Notice the education the scholars and religious experts had received did not lead them to receive correction! For them to admit they needed correction would call into question the training which led them to be deceived and the beliefs of those who held the same view. This is why our prior training or group affiliations may lead us to resist correction, as can allegiances we may have to a pastor, group, or set of beliefs.

Loyalty can be a good quality. Yet, loyalty to a teacher or group could create a prejudice against the truth if the teacher or group promotes an idea which is not taught by God's word. It is natural for people to associate with those who think like them. However, if we get our cues on what to believe from the people we follow or associate with, then we are not taking our cues from the word of God.

Important? Who Says So?

Some people think resisting the authority of God's word on matters they consider to be little issues is no big deal. Actually it is a big deal because those who do so are, in effect, saying the word of God only has authority when they say it does. If people can give themselves permission to ignore any point in God's word, then they are not under its authority; rather they have usurped authority over it.

People can always come up with an excuse for ignoring something in God's word: *'it is a minor issue,' 'this issue is not worth dividing over,'* etc. Nevertheless, those who say an issue is minor or unimportant in order to justify their resistance to truth are doing the same thing the religious leaders did when they justified their resistance to Jesus and John the Baptist (cf. Lk 7:28-35).

Scripture does teach some matters are more important than others. For example, Jesus discussed "the first and great commandment" (Mt 22:38) and he went on to say, "And the second *is* like unto it" (Mt 22:39). So, we know one came ahead of the other. The difference is this; scripture gets to make this call, not us.

Jesus once said, "Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! for ye pay tithe of mint and anise and cumin, and have omitted the **weightier matters** of the law, judgment, mercy, and faith: these ought ye to have done, and not to leave the other undone" (Mt 23:23). Jesus and the scholars did not weigh things the same way. Those leaders claimed to value the law, yet in their opinion, "judgment, mercy, and faith" were not as important as the "tithe." If they had said, *'those are minor issues, the tithe is the main thing'* would this have made it so? No, because the opinions of men are not the measure of what issues are "weightier."

"Judgment, mercy, and faith" did not suddenly become the "weightier *matters* of the law" when Jesus rebuked the scribes and Pharisees on this issue. Scripture already established this fact. However, Jesus did confront them about their practice of letting their own opinion be the measure of truth. Even if a person correctly identifies the more important issues, it is wrong to ignore lesser issues – for in regard to the less weighty matters Jesus said, "these ought ye to have done."

People are fooling themselves if they claim to respect God's word on issues they deem to be '*essential*' or '*major*' while they ignore what it says on matters they deem to be '*secondary*' or '*minor*.' The experts in Jesus' day misjudged him because their judgment was based on their own opinion and not God's word (Mt 12:2 & 10, et al.). Men today who decide what is important or not important based on their own opinion are making the same mistake.

A Substitute Authority

Teaching the word of God faithfully is not done by urging people to put confidence in men. Citing the beliefs of some scholar or group as a way to convince others to adopt a particular belief or viewpoint is not a method that is in line with counsel of God's word.

When we are taught to rely on the beliefs of a man or group, we are wrongly taught **how** to judge what is true. If a man argues, '*you should believe 'x' is true because it is what so-and-so believes,*' is he leading people to trust in the authority of God's word? No. However if he says, '*so-and-so has presented biblical evidence that can prove 'x' is true,*' then he properly acknowledges the work being referenced while he also upholds the authority of God's word.

The issue is what authority is cited and how is the data to be viewed. Should people assume the Bible says what the experts say it says, or should every belief be subject to biblical scrutiny (no matter who said it or how many people believe it)? Anyone can make mistakes, so focusing on scripture keeps us under the authority of God's word.

Choosing Your Measure of Truth

"When ye received the word of God which ye heard of us, ye received *it* not as the word of men, but as it is in truth, the word of God, which effectually worketh also in you that believe" (1 Th 2:13). This was written to the brethren in Thessalonica, and earlier we noted the distinction between the word of men and the word of God that is highlighted in this verse. Focusing on this distinction, and being diligent not to let the teachings of men substitute for the authority of God's word, is the key to a better Bible study method.

The practice of regarding God's word as the sole measure of truth on biblical issues was modeled in the case studies. You saw the results. If those results are superior, then relying on the teachings of men is shown to be an inferior method (just as scripture always said), and every teaching must be put to the test of scripture. An effort to subject everything to biblical scrutiny cannot guarantee we will always do so accurately. Still, it upholds scripture as the test of truth and it will keep our pursuit of knowledge grounded in "the fear of the LORD" (Prv 1:7). A scale measures weight, not length. Likewise, the method we use to

assess truth on biblical issues must be appropriate to the task. If we rely on the teachings of men to tell us what is true, then we are using a method of assessing truth which is not up to the task.

Study "as to the Lord"

- "Whatsoever ye do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus" (Col 3:17);
- "Whatsoever ye do, do it heartily, as to the Lord, and not unto men" (Col 3:23).

What would happen if we applied the admonition of those verses to the study of God's word? It would remind us our approach to scripture should please the Lord.

The traditions of men promise a shortcut to the truth and some say we should give tradition '*the benefit of the doubt*,' but Jesus never encouraged this, nor did his apostles. Instead, they pointed people to the scriptures, and in doing so they showed us the proper method of contending for biblical truth. They never said tradition should be given the benefit of the doubt, neither did they pretend the traditions of men were a good starting point.

If all the truths in God's word have already been discovered by men who are smarter than we are, then why read the Bible? If the scholars can tell us what is true, why not just read them? After all, if we read scripture we might misunderstand it, but if we follow the experts then it will insure we know the truth, right? No! This sort of thinking was promoted by the scholars in Jesus' day and Jesus rebuked them for doing so, most notably in Matthew 15:14 where he described them "blind leaders of the blind." In the verse he went on to say, "if the blind lead the blind, both shall fall into the ditch" (Mt 15:14), so the followers of blind leaders will end up in the same place as the ones they have chosen to follow. Note *they put themselves in that situation* by their choice of who they follow. Is there any hope for them? Yes. It occurs when truth reveals something is amiss. It is the moment when they "fall into the ditch" and the experience, while not pleasant, does call attention to a problem.

God's Wake-up Call

If we have a "fall into the ditch" moment, we should thank God for the wake-up call. For example, if a preacher says, '*Jesus will return on April 1st*,' what of those who assume this is true because they put confidence in that man? If April 2nd arrives and Jesus has not come, then it is their "fall into the ditch" moment. The facts prove they were deceived. The question is, how will they respond to the evidence?

When truth confronts those who have been deceived, some will find a reason to ignore the truth (*'it does not matter,' 'it's a minor issue,'* etc.) and continue on down the road of error. Others will acknowledge they were deceived, but if they think it is all about one issue (such as date setting in the foregoing example), then they failed to realize their method of assessing truth on biblical issues is what has to change. They will go on practicing the blind following the blind method even if they start following a different man or group. What they need to do is repent of the practice of putting confidence in man. Being confronted with evidence that shows we have been deceived is never going to boost our ego. It does, however, give us an opportunity to grow.

When corrected, we should ponder what caused us to be deceived on that issue. This takes more effort, but if we change our method and lessen the likelihood of deception, then the effort is worthwhile. Furthermore, "Whatsoever ye do, do it heartily, as to the Lord" (Col 3:23) urges us to go the extra mile, and this surely applies to the work we do as we seek to grow in grace and in the knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

Proper Attribution

This book is not saying it is wrong to ever quote the words of a man, for scripture tells us to give "honor to whom honor" is due (cf. Rom 13:7). It would be wrong *not* to give proper attribution to a person when their research has opened our eyes to something in God's word. Moreover, if we then share those insights with

others, we need to be honest and credit person 'x' or book 'y' for teaching us those things. Crediting a resource that provides biblical insights is good because:

- (A) scripture indicates it is the right thing to do (Lu 6:31, et al.),
- (B) it lets others know where they can get more details on the subject, and
- (C) those with whom we share the material can give it further scrutiny, since it is always possible for us to miss something.

If identifying the person or book which teaches us an insight is the right thing to do, then what is the problem with quoting the teachings of men? Scripture is the measure that distinguishes a good method from a bad one. Consider a time when Jesus was confronted by some of the scholars of his day; "The Pharisees and scribes asked him, Why walk not thy disciples according to the tradition of the elders?" (Mk 7:5). What standard did they use to judge the disciples of Jesus? What authority did those scholars cite? It was not God's word, it was "the tradition of the elders!" The teachings of men had replaced the word of God as their measure of right and wrong.

Mark 7:6-7 tells us how Jesus responded to their use of that standard:

"He answered and said unto them, Well hath Esaias prophesied of you hypocrites, as it is written, This people honoreth me with *their* lips, but their heart is far from me. Howbeit in vain do they worship me, teaching *for* doctrines the commandments of men."

He identified the bait and switch of those religious leaders. They said they stood for the truth of God, when they were actually "teaching *for* doctrines the commandments of men" (Mk 7:7).

"The commandments of men" were taught as "doctrines" by those religious leaders. They were promoting a substitute authority over (or in addition to) God's word, and *their desire to cling to their traditions is what led them to do so*. We know this because Jesus identified their self-interested motive when he told them:

- (A) "Laying aside the commandment of God, ye hold the tradition of men" (Mk 7:8); and,
- (B) "ye reject the commandment of God, **that ye may keep your own tradition**" (Mk 7:9).

Their regard for the authority of men is what led them to trample on the word of God! They had to choose one or the other, since "No man can serve two masters" (Mt 6:24). They judged right and wrong by their substitute measure, and this led Jesus to say they were "making the word of God of none effect" – "through" their "tradition" (Mk 7:13).

When the teachings of men have become our measure of what is true and right, then we are doing the same thing they did and we make God's word ineffective in the same way.

Quoting Men While Honoring God

Clearly, there is no problem with saying, Isaiah said 'x' or Job said 'y'; it was done in scripture. This tells others where a particular teaching can be found. In the same way, crediting a person or book that has helped us to see the truth is not a problem. The problem comes when non-Bible sources are cited as if they are authoritative, because this encourages people to put confidence in those sources.

Citing non-Bible sources and naming proponents of an idea is a tactic some people use to sell an idea to others. This is not the same thing as merely identifying a resource that provides insight on some issue. Most teachers promote ideas they believe are true, and they do so by quoting men who agree with them. (If they quote an opposing view, they will emphasize what is wrong with it.) People make a mistake when they think an idea is true because it is what their preacher and his sources believe. The opinions of men are not the measure of truth on biblical issues. "Forever, O LORD, thy word is settled in heaven" (Ps 119:89) and "O LORD: give me understanding according to thy word" (Ps 119:169) are just two of many passages that let us know God's word is the measure of truth.

If we say our beliefs are biblical, then this claim makes scripture the judge of our beliefs. When a person's beliefs are contrary to scripture on any issue, then scripture is not their authority on that issue.

The Antidote for Error

Paul gave Timothy this warning regarding deception, "Evil men and seducers shall wax worse and worse, deceiving, and being deceived" (2 Tm 3:13). Then he added this:

"But continue thou in the things which thou hast learned and hast been assured of, knowing of whom thou hast learned them; And that from a child thou hast known the holy scriptures, which are able to make thee wise unto salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus" (2 Tm 3:14-15).

Would Timothy have thought the words "knowing of whom thou hast learned them" referred to some human teacher? Should we assume this referred to Timothy's mother or grandmother because earlier in the letter Paul wrote, "I call to remembrance the unfeigned faith that is in thee, which dwelt first in thy grandmother Lois, and thy mother Eunice" (2 Tm 1:5)? Lois, Eunice and Paul all taught Timothy. However, if Timothy had received that teaching "not as the word of men, but as it is in truth, the word of God" (as the Thessalonians had done (cf. 1 Th 2:13)), then he learned those things from God. Jesus cited this prophecy, "they shall be all taught of God" (Fourth gospel 6:45) and if those words refer to people who rightly receive "the word of God," then this would surely include Timothy.

Paul told Timothy, "the holy scriptures" had the ability to make him "wise unto salvation" (2 Tm 3:15) and this fits with the results described in 1 Thessalonians 2:13 ("effectually worketh also in you that believe"). Those who faithfully delivered God's word to Timothy played a role, but what made him "wise unto salvation" was "the holy scriptures." Moreover, that result is linked to the source of scripture by this verse: "All scripture *is* given by inspiration of God" (2 Tm 3:16).

Timothy was told:

"Preach the word; be instant in season, out of season; reprove, rebuke, exhort with all longsuffering and doctrine. For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine; but after their own lusts shall they heap to themselves teachers, having itching ears; and they shall turn away *their* ears from the truth, and shall be turned unto fables" (2 Tm 4:2-4).

Truth is the antidote for error. Paul told Timothy to "preach the word" consistently, because if people "will not endure sound doctrine," then at some point they will turn away from the soundness of scripture until they repent.

The phrase "the time will come" let Timothy know his audience would not always be open to the truth. At an individual level this is the point when people turn a blind eye to evidence and begin resisting truth because it makes them feel uncomfortable. They no longer welcome the reproof and rebuke that comes with "sound doctrine." Instead, they listen to men who make them feel justified while they "turn away *their* ears from the truth." This way they can do what they desire while they salve their conscience by pretending their teachers give them a reason to ignore the truth.

"A fool despiseth his father's instruction: but he that regardeth reproof is prudent" (Prv 15:5). We need to invite God's instruction, not resist it. Yet, "Today if ye will hear his voice, harden not your hearts" (Heb 3:7-8 & 15, 4:7) was a warning to the "holy brethren" (Heb 3:1). This lets us know the "holy brethren" may be tempted to resist the "doctrine," "reproof," "correction," and "instruction in righteousness" (2 Tm 3:16) that comes from God's word – and there is no reason to believe the followers of Jesus in our day are immune from this temptation. On the contrary, this temptation may be even greater in the Internet age.

Today, people can easily find teachers who will tell them what they want to hear. Now people can "turn away *their* ears from the truth" and "be turned unto fables" in only a few clicks. The joke says, '*it must be true because it was on the Internet.*' However, when people think something must be true if a famous preacher said it or because they read it in a book (or in the notes of men that are added to the words of

scripture in many Bibles), then they are making the same mistake; i.e., they are putting confidence in a source that is not always reliable.

Taught by God?

Jesus once said, "I thank thee, O Father, Lord of heaven and earth, because thou hast hid these things from the wise and prudent, and hast revealed them unto babes" (Mt 11:25, Lk 10:21). Unless God did this only back then, we cannot assume being "wise and prudent" makes a man or group of men more likely to have the truth. So, it would be a mistake to assume "wise and prudent" men understand God's word, or to think it is a good idea to trust "wise and prudent" men to tell us how we should go about learning what is taught by God in scripture.

We learn best when God is teaching us! While this may sound strange to us, the brethren in Ephesus may have reacted the same way when they first read the words: "If so be that ye have heard him [God], and have been taught by him" (Eph 4:21). [References to "God" in verses 18 and 24 confirm the word "him" in verse 21 refers to God.] The verse goes on to say, "as the truth is in Jesus," so this is *what* they learned. Nevertheless, the one who did the teaching was also identified – they had "**heard him [God]**" and "**been taught by him.**" Moreover, since those words were written "to the faithful in Christ Jesus" (Eph 1:1), they are surely still relevant for the followers of Jesus today.

If God's word teaches you something, then who taught you? Since God is the source of scripture, if you have been taught by God's word, then you have been taught by God. This ties into a prophecy that was quoted by Jesus: "It is written in the prophets, And they shall be all taught of God" (Fourth gospel 6:45). In that passage he went on to explain those words and he made this clear – "taught of God" did not refer to being taught *about* God, rather, they meant being taught **by** God.

"Be Renewed"

Right after Ephesians 4:21 is a description of the response that ought to result from being taught by God:

"That ye put off concerning the former conversation the old man, which is corrupt according to the deceitful lusts; And be renewed in the spirit of your mind; And that ye put on the new man, which after God is created in righteousness and true holiness" (Eph 4:22-24).

How can one "be renewed" in accord with the foregoing admonition? In the letter to the Ephesians it also says, Christ "loved the church, and gave himself for it; that he might sanctify and cleanse it with **the washing of water by the word**" (Eph 5:26).

Unless the teachings of men can substitute for "the word" and have the same "washing" effect, then there is the problem. The cleansing effect of the word of God will be undermined or made void every time the teachings of men are promoted as a substitute authority. Another work of "the word" was noted when the brethren were told the Father had begotten them "with the word of truth" (Jas 1:18), or as 1 Peter 1:23 put it, "Being born again, not of corruptible seed, but of incorruptible, by the word of God, which liveth and abideth for ever." If we want the results "the word of truth" is said to produce, then we dare not assume the teachings of men can serve as a stand-in for "the word of God."

"Thy Word is Truth"

Not everyone has a Bible or the ability to read, let alone access to the Internet which lets people utilize a wide array of free Bible study tools. Those of us who have those things need to thank God for them, and one way we can show our gratitude is to make a diligent effort to let scripture be a lamp to our feet and a light to our path. Today the words "Unto whomsoever much is given, of him shall be much required" (Lk 12:48) must be weighed in light of the unique resources available to us in this age.

Once when Jesus prayed for his followers, he asked the Father to "Sanctify them **through thy truth**: thy word is truth" (Fourth gospel 17:17). In the prayer he also said: "Neither pray I for these alone, but for them also

which shall believe on me through their word" (Fourth gospel 17:20). "Thy word is truth" identifies a sure measure on biblical issues and we need to respect this standard because the "truth" that comes via God's word is what changes (i.e., sanctifies) the followers of Jesus.

Men will raise other measures of truth, such as when "the chief priests and Pharisees" raised this question about Jesus: "Have any of the rulers or of the Pharisees believed on him?" (Fourth gospel 7:48) Implicit in their question is the idea that the beliefs of the religious leaders are the measure of what is true. It also implies only a fool would disagree with all of those highly intelligent men. No one wants to be the target of ridicule, so such questions are used to bully people into falling in line and lead them to conform their views to the beliefs of other men.

"Foolish and unlearned questions avoid, knowing that they do gender strifes" (2 Tm 2:23). In order to obey this counsel we must be able to tell what questions qualify as "foolish and unlearned." Does this describe, for example, the question, "Have any of the rulers or of the Pharisees believed on him?" If so, then such questions should not intimidate us or be answered, for they promote a false view that must be rejected.

Titus 3:9 says "avoid foolish questions" for "they are unprofitable and vain." As has been shown, the opinions of men about the importance of the tithe led men to disrespect scripture's own standard as to how one could determine what the "weightier" issues were. In addition, we saw how the religious leaders cited their beliefs as the measure of truth and how they pulled a bait and switch by "teaching for doctrines the commandments of men" (Mt 15:9, Mk 7:7). This can also be done through questions that seed false implications. (A crafty question, like a false statement, can lead one to be deceived and we see this in the question which was posed by "the serpent" to "the woman"(Gen 3:1).)

Wise? By What Standard?

Jesus said, "whosoever heareth these sayings of mine, and doeth them, I will liken him unto a wise man, which built his house upon a rock" (Mt 7:24). Thus, we must define godly wisdom in terms of hearing and doing the words of Jesus.

1 Corinthians 3:20 says, "The Lord knoweth the thoughts of the wise, that they are vain." Obviously, this is not referring to people like the "wise man, which built his house upon a rock." By what standard do we define the word "wise?" "The wisdom of this world is foolishness with God" (1 Cor 3:19), so what some people consider to be "wisdom" is the exact opposite in God's eyes. If we want to employ godly wisdom, we need to use the right measure when making judgments.

After Jesus said the "wise man" built "upon a rock," he talked about those who are "foolish" – "every one that heareth these sayings of mine, and doeth them not, shall be likened unto a foolish man, which built his house upon the sand" (Mt 7:26). The "foolish man" *thinks* what he is doing is fine, but this is because he is using a wrong measure. "The way of a fool *is* right in his own eyes: but he that hearkeneth unto counsel *is* wise" (Prv 12:15). Thus, foolish thinking is self-justifying.

Isaiah 5:21 says, "Woe unto *them that are* wise in their own eyes, and prudent in their own sight!" This kind of self-affirming, peer-reviewed thinking was practiced by all of the various groups of religious experts in Jesus' day. The intellectual standard of this world is based on men "measuring themselves by themselves, and comparing themselves among themselves," but scripture tells us those who use this method "are not wise" (2 Cor 10:12). We are "not wise" to be judging our beliefs by measuring them according to the beliefs of others.

Since "The fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom" (Ps 111:10, Prv 9:10), "The fear of the LORD is the beginning of knowledge" (Prv 1:7), and "The fear of the LORD *tendeth* to life" (Prv 19:23), we need to let scripture be our measure of "wisdom," not the teachings of men.

Focus on the Reward

"God is not unrighteous to forget your work and labor of love, which ye have shewed toward his name" is the amazing encouragement we find in Hebrews 6:10. This was not written to a specific individual, but to the "beloved" (Heb 6:9), and the striking thing to realize is how this lines up with the principle of rewards that is emphasized in scripture.

Never forget: "He that cometh to God must believe *that* he is, and that he is a rewarder of them that diligently seek him" (Heb 11:6). It is easy to see why a man cannot come to God unless he believes God "is." But the other condition is not often considered; to come to God a man must believe God is "a rewarder of them that diligently seek him." So, focusing on this reward is of utmost importance!

What made Moses different? It was a proper esteem for the rewards of God – "Esteeming the reproach of Christ greater riches than the treasures in Egypt: for he [Moses] had respect unto the recompense of the reward" (Heb 11:26). The earthly "treasures in Egypt" were not the only game in town. Moses saw the "greater riches" that came with "the recompense of the reward" and he, rightly, valued this more.

Jesus talked about treasure more than once. In this passage he emphasized the importance of where a person's treasure is located:

"Lay not up for yourselves treasures upon earth, **where** moth and rust doth corrupt, and **where** thieves break through and steal: But lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, **where** neither moth nor rust doth corrupt, and **where** thieves do not break through nor steal: For **where** your treasure is, there will your heart be also" (Mt 6:19-21).

Moses "had respect unto the recompense of the reward," so this is where his treasure was. Those who come to God "must believe *that* he [God] is, and that he is a rewarder of them that diligently seek him" (Heb 11:6). Even Jesus looked forward to a reward: "Jesus the author and finisher of *our* faith; who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross" (Heb 12:2). Those words give us a look into the mind of Jesus and his regard for the reward. Jesus "endured the cross" **because** he esteemed "the joy that was set before him," and this is the type of mindset his followers should also seek to have (cf. Phi 2:5).

The Secret to Success

"By humility *and* the fear of the LORD *are* riches, and honor, and life" (Prv 22:4). There you go! Still, two things are true:

- (A) scripture is "profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness" (2 Tm 3:16), but to obtain those profits we must submit to the authority of God's word, and
- (B) those who only see "riches, and honor, and life" in terms of this world's wisdom have not yet let "the fear of the LORD" be the deciding factor in determining their measure of truth.

The ultimate manifestation of "humility" and "the fear of the LORD" was Jesus. Did he attain "riches, and honor, and life?" What scripture says about the resurrection and the life to come teaches us how to answer this. The LORD said, "let him that glorieth glory in this, that he understandeth and knoweth me" (Jer 9:24). But all the time and effort spent on teaching people the world's measure of wisdom is not what leads people to the knowledge this verse is talking about. Just as with the word "wisdom," we must let scripture's use of words teach us how to rightly understand its use of the words, "riches," "honor," "life," etc.

"The fear of the LORD" should lead one to treat the word of God more diligently than those who want others to tell them what the Bible says (so they do not have to read it). Scripture lets us know being taught about God is not the same as being taught by God, so it makes sense for us to spend as much time as we can in God's word. Many people like to say, '*the gospel is the most important thing.*' Yet, if the gospel is not taught "according to the scriptures" (1 Cor 15:3-4), then the gospel **of** scripture is not being taught! This holds true for teaching on prayer, worship, and all other biblical issues. The diligent study of God's word can produce much fruit if "the fear of the LORD" is our starting point and it is what determines how we approach the word of God.

Looking Back and Going Forward

For your consideration, here is a review of some key points that were made earlier. It is hoped this will help as you go forward in applying a better Bible study method in your ongoing study of God's word:

- If we conform to God's word, we are better off. So, we should strive to accurately reflect the word of God when we speak and think on biblical issues. Our method of assessing truth needs to conform to the whole counsel of God if it is going to consistently produce results that honor God.
- The counsel of scripture can make us less likely to fall prey to false assumptions. If we improve our Bible study method, then we will reap the benefits from that point onward.
- Naaman changed and gave heed to the words of truth which he had initially ignored (cf. 2 Kgs 5:9-14). In the same way, we are obliged to change when a belief of ours is found to be contrary to God's word. If scripture is inspired by God, then it is unreasonable to hold onto a belief when scripture proves that belief is not biblical.
- A method of assessing truth which leads someone to accept a false view in one area, will most likely have the same effect when it comes to other Bible passages.
- Psalm 138:2 says this about the LORD, "thou has magnified thy word above all thy name." Therefore, we need to reject beliefs which are contrary to scripture if we want to honor the word of the LORD.
- Religious groups and teachers often urge people to rely on the teachings of men. Conversely, Jesus spent a lot of time refuting ideas that were believed and promoted by those who put confidence in man, and other writers of scripture also did likewise in their day. When an idea is supposed to be biblical but people have to use non-Bible sources to justify the idea, then it makes sense for us to be cautious.
- Teachers sometimes quote the belief of some man or group and act as if this proves the belief is true. But if God's word is the measure of truth on biblical issues, then the opinions of men cannot substitute for this standard on any issue.
- **Can men convey the meaning of scripture better than the words of scripture itself?** If not, then the word of God needs to be our measure of truth, not the traditions of men.

"Be Not Deceived"

As was noted earlier, the words "be not deceived" appear in several verses. "Be not deceived; God is not mocked: for whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap" (Gal 6:7) is likely the most well-known of those. [Notice how this idea parallels what Jesus said in Mark 4:24, "with what measure ye mete, it shall be measured to you."] Consider the difference it would make if we kept Galatians 6:7 in mind when we choose whether to:

- (A) trust in the LORD and prove all things, or
- (B) put confidence in man and lean on our own understanding.

The passage in Galatians 6 goes on to say:

"he that soweth to his flesh shall of the flesh reap corruption; but he that soweth to the Spirit shall of the Spirit reap life everlasting. And let us not be weary in well-doing: for in due season we shall reap, if we faint not. As we have therefore opportunity, let us do good unto all *men*, especially unto them who are of the household of faith" (Gal 6:8-10).

The words "especially unto them who are of the household of faith" put a special emphasis on doing good to members of "the household of faith." Therefore, let us consider how this applies in light of the truth God's word has revealed in this study.

The human body was used to teach believers how to view their ties to one another: "Ye are the body of Christ, and members in particular" (1 Cor 12:27, cf. Rom 12:4-5, 1 Cor 12:12-26). Just as the parts of our body work

together for the good of the whole, believers must consider how the things they do can impact the health of the body of Christ.

If the Bible study method modeled in this book opened your eyes to truth, then you are obliged to "do good" to "the household of faith" by using this method in your own study of God's word. Then others in the body of Christ benefit from the fruits of your labor, when you share both the method and the insights God teaches you as you continue to search the scriptures.

Be Diligent

Note five verses:

"For ever, O LORD, thy word is settled in heaven" (Ps 119:89);

"The entrance of thy words giveth light; it giveth understanding unto the simple" (Ps 119:130);

"Thy word *is* very pure" (Ps 119:140);

"Thy word *is* true *from* the beginning" (Ps 119:160);

"LORD: give me understanding according to thy word" (Ps 119:169).

Verses such as these should fuel our desire to be taught by, and learn from, the word of God. If we are going to let other men tell us what to think on biblical issues, then our understanding will not be according to God's word, but based on what others say about God's word.

When scripture does not teach an idea and yet men teach that idea *as if it were biblical*, there is a huge flaw in their Bible study method. In order to believe an idea is biblical when that idea is contrary to the facts in scripture, a person must be basing their belief on something other than scripture.

Many religious groups routinely teach people to base their beliefs on something other than scripture [see A Better Bible Study Method, Book One for more on this]. Although religious teachers and groups may not *intend* to mislead people, they nevertheless do so whenever they teach people to put confidence in men contrary to the counsel of scripture.

Is it ever wrong to subject our own understanding to biblical scrutiny (or to do the same with every teaching of men)? If not, then we should do so all the time, on every issue!

We are admonished to be vigilant and loyal to the truth of scripture in verses like, "prove all things; hold fast that which is good" (1 Th 5:21), "blessed is that man that maketh the LORD his trust, and respecteth not the proud, nor such as turn aside to lies" (Ps 40:4), and "let God be true, but every man a liar" (Rom 3:4).

Does all of this mean we should avoid teachers, not attend church, turn off Bible teaching programs on the radio, not use commentaries, etc.? No, and this study has not suggested doing any of those things (and anyone who says otherwise is falsely characterizing this work). However, it certainly does mean we should stop following after men and make "the LORD" our trust instead.

People do not need a degree in order to read the Bible or to use a concordance to see how a word was used in scripture. However, if one is going to benefit from biblical correction, then diligence and a willingness to let God's word transform our minds is vital.

Our judgment needs to be consistent with the word of God because the facts in scripture constitute evidence. The other things said herein are merely a discussion of those facts. This book proposed various conclusions based on the evidence and one must subject these ideas to biblical scrutiny to see if they are true, just as we must do whenever we want to determine what is true on any biblical issue.

Contradiction is a warning sign, for it lets us know something is amiss. If something we see in scripture seems contrary to an idea which we have believed, then the word of God is calling us to take another look at our basis for that belief. Of course, we might find out we had merely misconstrued one or more verses and there really is no contradiction. However, being corrected either way would contribute to our growth.

2 Peter 3:18 urges believers to "grow in grace, and *in* the knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ." This change does not happen apart from truth.

Those who love the truth should never be intimidated or impressed by men who cite other men in order to justify their teaching because Proverbs 29:25 says, "The fear of man bringeth a snare: but **whoso putteth his trust in the LORD shall be safe.**"

Those who "trust in the LORD" will "be safe," not those who trust in the teachings of men. This is why we need to be diligent to distinguish between those two different sources of information and, hopefully, this book will provoke people to get in the habit of doing so.

Let God's Word Change You

Consider what was said about "the LORD" in Psalm 138:2, "thou hast magnified thy word above all thy name," in light of what was said by "the LORD" in 1 Samuel 2:30, "**them that honor me I will honor.**" What does this tell us about how we should treat scripture? It tells us if we want "the LORD" to honor us, then we should first honor him, and since "the LORD" wants his word to be magnified, we should realize we honor "the LORD" when we exercise a high regard for his word.

In addressing the "beloved brethren" who had been begotten "with the word of truth" (Jas 1:16 & 18), James said, "be ye doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving your own selves" (Jas 1:22). There are at least three things we can learn from this warning:

- (A) it is possible for the "brethren" to deceive *themselves*,
- (B) just because people initially hear and respond to "the word of truth" does not mean they will continue to do so, and
- (C) when people hear the word of God and do not act in accord with what it says, they cause themselves to be deceived.

So, what will we do when God's word challenges us?

Acts 18:24-25 introduces Apollos. He was "mighty in the scriptures," "instructed in the way of the Lord," and "he spake and taught diligently the things of the Lord." Still, even though he was a teacher who was "mighty in the scriptures," it turns out he also needed to be taught.

We have a blind spot when there is something we are not aware of, and this was the case with Apollos. Like anyone in this condition, he was not aware of his ignorance. Scripture tells us he knew "only the baptism of John" (Acts 18:25). This changed when Aquila and Priscilla "took him unto them, and expounded unto him the way of God more perfectly" (Acts 18:26). Aquila and Priscilla are never said to be "mighty in the scriptures" and, yet, Apollos was willing to receive instruction from them. Thereafter, he conformed his teaching to the truth and he went on to tell others what he had learned (cf. Acts 18:27-28).

"The Truth"

Apollos "spake and taught diligently the things of the Lord," yet he was humble enough to accept correction. His willingness to change after he learned the truth is a good example for anyone who wants to honor Jesus. This is because Jesus linked himself to the very idea of "truth" when he said:

"To this end was I born, and for this cause came I into the world, that I should bear witness unto the truth. Every one that is of the truth heareth my voice" (Fourth gospel 18:37).

Moreover, something else Jesus said indicates those who love him will love "the truth," for he said, "I am the way, the truth, and the life" (Fourth gospel 14:6). As was noted earlier, since Jesus identified himself with

"the truth," the way people respond to "the truth" says something about the way they would respond to him.

What honors God? Ignoring the truth scripture presents on any issue is not the way to do so. However, exercising a consistent regard for the truth does do so, because God's word "is truth," as Jesus noted when he spoke these words to the Father regarding his disciples: "Sanctify them through thy truth: thy word is truth" (Fourth gospel 17:17). In the same passage, Jesus also said these words to the Father: "this is life eternal, that they might know thee the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom thou hast sent" (Fourth gospel 17:3). So, respect for the truth is of the utmost importance because eternal life is rooted in truth.

[Not knowing the truth is different than turning a blind eye to it. In the first instance a person is acting in ignorance, but in the latter instance one is kicking against the truth. Resistance to the truth is linked to the hardening of the heart, so this is a risky behavior that scripture surely does discourage. Ignorance can be overcome by truth. But in order for this to occur when it comes to biblical issues one must submit to the authority of God (and this means they must be willing to repent if the testimony of scripture would require them to do so).]

Man's Ways vs. God's Way

Seminaries and teachers often promote the idea that spending time reading the opinions of men is the best way to find out what the Bible has to say. The results in the case studies prove, however, those who want to be taught by God will do better if they focus on the evidence in God's word. The opinions of men are not always wrong, so people can sometimes learn by reading or hearing what others say about a verse or issue. Still, the Bible says, "*It is better to trust in the LORD than to put confidence in man*" (Ps 118:8). So, perhaps the time spent studying the traditions of men would yield better results if it was spent on the study of God's word instead.

Men can be deceived. If men are convinced something is true when it is not true, the things they write or say will promote their false view. They do not intend to deceive others, yet this is what will happen if people trust what they have said or written on that issue. This is why encouraging people to let the opinions of men serve as their measure of truth on biblical issues is dangerous. It trains people to judge the word of God by the teachings of men, when people ought to be doing just the opposite.

Teachers will often attach impressive labels to the non-Bible sources they quote in order to get other people to trust in those sources also. For example, if a teacher says, '*world class Bible scholars believe 'x' is true*,' their audience will usually fall in line and assume 'x' is true and will tend to assume there is no reason to put the idea to the test of scripture. However, urging people to esteem the teachings of men is contrary to the counsel found in verses such as, "let God be true, but every man a liar" (Rom 3:4). In any case, the biblical counsel against putting confidence in men makes no exception for men who are called '*experts*' or '*world class scholars*.'

Unfortunately, some read the admonition, "prove all things" (1 Th 5:21), and assume the best way to do this is to cite the teachings of men on whatever issue is in question. But when the teachings of men are put on a pedestal, then one is acting contrary to the counsel of scripture. We can believe what the Bible says or we can base our belief on what *others say the Bible says*. The problem with the latter method is men can be wrong, and those who let the teachings of men serve as the foundation of beliefs are building on a foundation of shifting sand.

"The Pillar and Ground of the Truth"

The aim of this book is not to tell people what is true on various issues. Rather, it is to show how trusting in God's word to teach us produces better results than letting the beliefs of others define our own beliefs. The results of the case studies show this and the same point is made whenever scripture proves a teaching of men is not biblical.

Like any discussion of biblical issues, what this book says on an issue might be right or it might be wrong. How can one know if what is said is right? Put it to the test. By letting the word of God be the measure of truth on biblical issues, a person can know if an idea in this book or some other book (or even one's own beliefs) are in accord with God's word. This is why the goal has been to encourage the reader to hold to scripture as the measure by which they will assess the truth of every teaching on every biblical issue.

Men who quote other men (*who quoted yet other men*) as their means of convincing people to accept this or that biblical belief are using an unbiblical method. It would be better if Bible teachers used a method that follows the counsel in God's word and rejects the world's method of training people to rely on the opinions of others. If we are going to honor God consistently, then his word needs to be the foundation of our beliefs. If the beliefs of others and teachings in non-Bible sources serve as the basis of our beliefs, then the results will be very different.

1 Timothy 3:15 speaks of "the house of God, which is the church of the living God, the pillar and ground of the truth." Some will carelessly restate this and say, *'the church is the pillar and ground of the truth.'* But what happens when people edit God's word like this?

Three entities appear in the verse, "the house of God," "the church," and "the living God." The restated version lifts "the church" out of the middle and ties it to the clause at the end of the statement. So instead of God being "the pillar and ground of the truth," in the edited version "the church" becomes the reference point for the truth. However, this was not the idea Paul was communicating, and we can confirm this by looking at other passages of scripture.

When the church strays from the standard of God's word it runs into trouble and this is made abundantly clear in the Book of Revelation. Read the letters to "the seven churches" and notice how this point is repeatedly made in a series of stern rebukes (cf. Rv 1:4, 11 & 20, 2:1-3:22).

Also, those who *'look to the church to tell them what the truth is'* are not honoring God, for they are failing to heed a directive repeated seven times in the Book of Revelation – "He that hath an ear, let him **hear what the Spirit saith** unto the churches" (Rv 2:7, 11, 17 & 29, 3:6, 13 & 22). It does not say to hear what is said *by* the church. Rather, it directs the one who has "an ear" to hear what is said **to** the churches [plural, not singular] **by** the Spirit (and this upholds the inspired word of God as the measure of truth).

Those who are members of the church can be deceived. Verses like, "O foolish Galatians, who hath bewitched you" (Gal 3:1), and the rebuke to the church in Corinth (1Co 15:12), and the letter sent to the angel of the church of the Laodiceans (Rev 3:14-22), make this clear. Therefore, what is said by those in the church cannot be the measure of truth!

Acting as if what is said by those in the church *is* the measure of truth puts the words of men above God's word – since the measure of truth in such instances is not what God has said, but *what men say about* what God has said. These are two very different standards. In one, the source of truth is God. In the other, the conclusions drawn about the word of God by a man or group of men are serving as a substitute source of truth.

By What Standard?

How should we go about determining what is true on biblical matters? This question was raised at the beginning of this book and has been raised throughout this work. By what standard should people judge when they want to separate truth from error?

Many assume the way to know what is true on a biblical issue is to see where men agree on the issue. However, men make mistakes, and can be deceived. So it is unreasonable to think their shared view on a given issue must be correct because they agree with each other.

When you hear or read statements involving biblical issues, pause to ask yourself questions like:

- (A) Does the statement reflect what is actually said in scripture?
- (B) Would it apply to Jesus and the writers of scripture?

The words "prove all things" (1 Th 5:21) urge an evidence-based method of assessing truth, and this also indicates we should be willing to put our own beliefs to the test.

By what standard can a person know if they are rightly understanding the words in a passage of scripture? Since the words of scripture are inspired by God, our understanding of the words of scripture ought to be shaped by how those words were used by the writers of scripture (and the Case of God's Gift showed how this works).

When we discuss biblical issues our goal should not be to get others to agree with us (because we could be mistaken). But if we focus on what scripture says, then God's living and active word can lead others and/or us to take a fresh look at the issue. It also invites others to put our statements to the test, and if we have strayed from scripture, then they can call our attention to the evidence we have missed so we can be corrected.

Honor God

"The LORD" said, "them that honor me I will honor" (1 Sa 2:30), and those who honor God's word might have the honor of being corrected by it.

When our eyes are opened to a truth showing we have been mistaken on an issue, we need to thank God and figure out what went wrong with our method of assessing truth in that instance.

Jesus said, "Suppose ye that I am come to give peace on earth? I tell you, Nay; but rather **division**" (Lu 12:51), so the consensus of opinion was not going to unite around the truth he presented, and it is wrong to assume "division" is always a bad thing. Moreover, since Jesus caused division, we should not be surprised to see God's word having the same effect in our day.

If we quote scripture to show where men have been deceived and we are accused of '*causing division*' for doing so, does the accusation prove we have done anything wrong? No. Often this charge is raised merely to cut-off discussion, change the subject, and dissuade others from giving the question serious consideration. But if such tactics can lead us to set aside or suppress a truth that is presented in scripture, then we are letting peer pressure turn us away from honoring God.

Just how important is it to respect the authority of God's word from beginning to end? In Luke 16:17 Jesus said, "it is easier for heaven and earth to pass, than one tittle of the law to fail." A few verses later, we read where he ended his teaching on Lazarus and the rich man with the following words, "If they hear not Moses and the prophets, **neither will they be persuaded, though one rose from the dead**" (Lu 16:31). Do you realize the profound implication of this statement?

It lets us know the word of God spoken by "Moses and the prophets" carries the same import as the miracle of one rising from the dead! The reason for this is the authority and power of God is the source of both of those things, so here again scripture highlights the need for a consistent respect for the authority of God.

Drunkenness impairs a person's ability to judge their ability to drive. Similarly, false assumptions impair one's ability to judge their ability to discern what is true.

Those who rely on the teachings of men to be the test of what is true are operating under the influence of a false assumption. In spite of the counsel of scripture, they believe the way to learn biblical truth is to look to the opinions of men. However, they are relying on a method that is not reliable, as the case studies herein have shown.

If we change our method of assessing truth on biblical issues, then it will affect how we view biblical issues from that point on. In the same way, using an evidence-based Bible study method will lead us to see things in scripture which we overlooked or misconstrued when we trusted the teachings of men to tell us what to think on those issues.

When the evidence in God's word can prove we have been wrong on some point, we should not feel bad. Rather, we should be grateful for the correction and enjoy the opportunity to grow in knowledge.

Opinion vs. Evidence

Being persuaded by someone else's conclusions about the evidence is not the same as being persuaded by the evidence itself.

If you are discussing a biblical issue and someone says, '*Here is what I think/my opinion...*,' what should you do? When people tell you what they believe, you will know what they think, but you will not know why. The truth would be better served if we asked people to tell us about the biblical evidence that led them to hold their view. This allows us to weigh the evidence for ourselves and avoid falling into the trap of basing our beliefs on the beliefs of someone else. Whenever we are considering scriptural issues, asking questions like these can help us to focus on what the word of God actually says:

- Where does scripture say that?
- Can you show me that in the Bible?
- What in scripture would lead someone to hold that view?

Those of us who have the word of God have been given a great gift. With that, comes the responsibility to recognize the value of this gift.

Jesus said, "the kingdom of heaven is like unto treasure hid in a field; the which when a man hath found, he hideth, and for joy thereof goeth and selleth all that he hath, and buyeth that field" (Mt 13:44). If the truth communicated by God through scripture is truly a treasure, then how should we respond if God opens our eyes so we see a Bible truth that others had overlooked? Would the "joy" of this insight lead us to react in a way that showed we value the truth above all else? Well it might if we were diligent to heed these words, "Buy the truth, and sell *it* not; *also* wisdom, and instruction, and understanding" (Prv 23:23).

Jesus said, "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with **all** thy heart, and with **all** thy soul, and with **all** thy mind" (Mt 22:37), and this indicates a 100% commitment should be our goal. The Book of Hebrews rebuked those who were "dull of hearing" (Heb 5:11) and "unskillful in the word of righteousness" (Heb 5:13). Hebrews 5:14 then contrasts them with "those who **by reason of use** have their senses exercised to discern both good and evil" (Heb 5:14). In this verse mature followers of Jesus are identified as those who "have their senses exercised to discern both good and evil," and it says this came about "by reason of use."

The growth that comes from exercising discernment cannot happen when a person relies on other people to do their discerning for them. This is why the case studies offered you the opportunity to exercise your own ability to discern between right and wrong, truth and error. Lord willing, those who did the work now see how they can get better at exercising discernment when it comes to their study of God's word.

"The Word"

How important is a proper understanding of the word of God? "When any one heareth the word of the kingdom, and **understandeth it not**, then cometh the wicked one, and catcheth away that which was sown in his heart" (Mt 13:19). Those words indicate a right understanding is necessary for "the word" to take root in those who hear it!

We are told Christ "loved the church, and gave himself for it; that he might sanctify and cleanse it with the washing of water **by the word**" (Eph 5:25-26). Elsewhere, Jesus spoke these words to his disciples: "Now ye are **clean through the word** which I have spoken unto you" (Fourth gospel 15:3).

Exposure to "the word" should have cleansing effect and this aptly describes the change that happens when the evidence in scripture moves a person from error to truth on any issue.

Peter received this warning from heaven, "What God hath cleansed, *that* call not thou common" (Acts 10:15). If this expresses a principle applicable to any cleansing done by God, then we dare not disrespect the cleansing that is done by "the word."

If God's word exposes people to the truth on an issue and they ignore or trivialize that information in order to cling to their prior ways/views, then the words of Proverbs 26:11 would surely apply in such cases: "As a dog returneth to his vomit, so a fool returneth to his folly."

In addition to cleansing and correction, the word of God can result in other forms of change. Romans 10:17 says, "faith *cometh* by hearing, and hearing by the word of God." This describes a process of change where the end result of "faith" has its beginnings in "the word of God:"

- (A) "the word of God" leads to "hearing," and
- (B) that "hearing" subsequently goes on to bring about "faith."

Conversely, however, there is no reason to assume "faith" will result when God's word is disobeyed.

Moreover, the change that occurs when one is "born again" is linked to "the word." This was noted earlier when we considered this verse, "Being born again, not of corruptible seed, but of incorruptible, **by the word of God**" (1 Pt 1:23), and the words, "Of his own will begat he us **with the word of truth**" (Jas 1:18) are further confirmation of this truth. If "the word" is key to birth, growth, cleansing, and correction, then why would any follower of Jesus refuse to submit to the authority of God's word on any issue? Is anything worth the cost of ignoring the evidence in scripture and resisting correction on any issue? No.

Jesus said, "How can ye believe, which receive honor one of another, and seek not the honor that *cometh* from God only?" (Fourth gospel 5:44). Unless those words only applied in Jesus' day, we need to consider the principle they set forth. His words indicate the ability to believe is rooted in or tied to seeking the honor that comes "**from God only**." They had received honor from other men instead of seeking the honor that comes "from God only," and the verse indicates when this occurs it interferes with one's ability to "believe." Those who "**receive honor one of another**" pay a cost for doing so, and the cost is not worth it.

"Grace and Truth"

Since "grace and truth came by Jesus Christ" (Fourth gospel 1:17), both those attributes need to come together in the body of Christ in order for it to accurately represent Jesus. As this book has tried to show, those who uphold God's word as the standard of truth honor God by doing do. But we also need to exhibit grace when we share the truth with those who have been deceived, and we can do this by patiently and persistently directing people to the biblical evidence.

"Grace and truth" go together, so "grace" would not lead us to ignore or accommodate false beliefs in order to make others feel good about themselves. We can "hate every false way" (Ps 119:104 & 128) and still show "grace" to those who are deceived and/or promote falsehood. The way to do so is by "speaking the truth in love" (cf. Eph 4:15).

If you were deceived about something, would you want someone to point you to evidence showing this was the case, or would you want them to leave you in your deception to avoid hurting your feelings and your ego?

If we want people to share the truth with us when we are wrong, then the words "thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself" (Lv 19:18) tell us how we ought to deal with those who we know are in error.

"Be not deceived; God is not mocked: for whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap" (Gal 6:7). Here is the principle – what happens at the start of a process corresponds to the results that are produced. Moreover, the next verse then says, "For he that soweth to his flesh shall of the flesh reap corruption; but he that soweth to the Spirit shall of the Spirit reap life everlasting" (Gal 6:8). Therefore, those who desire to obtain "life everlasting" need to avoid sowing to the flesh because that will lead to the opposite result.

Biblical Correction is a Test

Proverbs 3:12 says, "whom the LORD loveth he correcteth." Thus, we should not resent biblical correction, rather, it should encourage us. For example, many people read where Jesus said, "I have a baptism to be baptized with; and how am I straitened till it be accomplished" (Lu 12:50) and simply go on to the next verse. But if we let God's word teach us, then it can open our eyes to truths we would otherwise miss – and we might notice Jesus was referring to his future baptism!

Were you aware scripture required this additional baptism of Jesus? Ask most churchgoers about Jesus' baptism and chances are they will talk about the time when John the Baptist baptized Jesus in water and "the Spirit of God" descended upon him "like a dove" (Mt 3:13-16). What they ought to say is, "Which one?" People tend not to ask this because Jesus' baptism by John is usually presented as 'the' baptism of Jesus (as if it was the only one in scripture), which leads people to assume Jesus had only one baptism. Any teaching on Jesus' baptism that mentions only those things related to his baptism by John will tend to lead people to be blind to the teaching of scripture that proves **Jesus had to have more than one baptism**.

If you were operating under the false assumption that there was only one baptism of Jesus, then the moment Luke 12:50 opens your eyes to the truth, you should thank God for the correction. If you went on to search the scriptures on the topic of baptism, you might find where Jesus asked the sons of Zebedee about a future baptism; "Are ye able to drink of the cup that I shall drink of, and to be baptized with the baptism that I am baptized with?" (Mt 20:22) You might also notice Hebrews 6:2 speaks of "the doctrine of baptisms" – plural. Along with Luke 12:50, this could lead you to ask questions like:

- Has this baptism of Jesus already taken place (and if so, was it at his resurrection or on the cross or at some other time)?
- How many baptisms of Jesus are taught by scripture?
- If he had more than one baptism, would this also hold true for those who are the members of the body of Christ?

Did you think there was only one baptism of Jesus? If so, then change your method of assessing truth on biblical issues and use the method modeled in this book as you seek biblical correction on this matter.

Jesus said, "It is written in the prophets, And they shall be all taught of God" (Fourth gospel 6:45) (and when this was cited earlier it was noted that "**taught of God**" refers to being taught by God, not about God).

Likewise, in 1 John 2:27 we find these words written to those who had received the anointing of God, "ye need not that any man teach you," and it goes on to say, "the same anointing teacheth you of all things." We also find very similar language being used by Jesus when he told his disciples, "the Holy Ghost, whom the Father will send in my name, he shall teach you all things" (Fourth gospel 14:26).

"All scripture *is* given by inspiration of God" (2 Tm 3:16), so it follows that when we are taught by Luke 12:50 or any passage of scripture, then we have been taught by God.

God is not honored when we stubbornly hold on to beliefs which are contrary to God's word. Jesus said, "No man 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" (Mt 6:24). Interestingly, this parallels how people tend to react when

something in scripture does not fit with one of their beliefs: they hate falsehood and love the truth or they will cling to their own understanding and turn a blind eye to any evidence that challenges their view. One of those responses manifests a love of the truth and this is how we must respond if we want to honor God.

The Bible study method modeled herein works because it honors the authority of God, and it trusts God's word to teach us directly. It takes more diligence than letting teachers, commentaries, etc. tell us what others think and adopting their conclusions as our own, but it delivers better results, as the case studies have shown. One final example.

Many think a good tool to use when talking to unbelievers about God is Pascal's Wager, which is typically summed up something like this: *'one should bet on God because if God is not real you lose nothing, since you will have no regrets when you are dead, but if God is real, then you win'*. This argument can impress those who judge based on the wisdom of the world, but put it to the test of scripture and it fails. Paul said, "If in this life only we have hope in Christ, we are of all men most miserable" (1 Cor 15:19). That is not *'if we die believing a lie, we lose nothing'*. Rather, he argued if the promises of God are not true, then we are to be pitied, and we need to tell it like it is, just as he did.

How should we go about determining what is true on biblical matters? We should do so according to the scriptures, on any and every issue. Yet, some will not do so because they do not care to have their beliefs put to the test, and these closing remarks are addressed to them.

Tests were used in scripture to prove what was in a person's heart (Ex 16:4, Du 8:16, Ps 26:2, et al.) and, surely, it is a test for us whenever we must choose between truth and our views/beliefs/traditions.

Jesus warned, "When any one heareth the word of the kingdom, and understandeth it not, then cometh the wicked *one*, and catcheth away that which was sown in his heart" (Mt 13:19). Therefore, understanding is critical. Moments later he also said, "he that received seed into the good ground is he that heareth the word, and understandeth it; which also beareth fruit" (Mt 13:23). "The word" needs to be understood if it is going to bear "fruit"! Moreover, Paul's reprimand of those who teach while "understanding neither what they say, nor whereof they affirm" (1 Tm 1:7) likewise shows understanding is vital. Still, it is not enough.

If we know the truth, then we must obey it. "O foolish Galatians, who hath bewitched you, that ye should not obey the truth" (Gal 3:1), was a rebuke to those who did not "obey the truth." So, they knew the truth, but they did not conform their thoughts and deeds to that knowledge. Given that scripture says, "rebellion *is* as the sin of witchcraft, and stubbornness *is* as iniquity and idolatry" (1Sa 15:23), one can see why the word "bewitched" was linked with their disobedience to the truth.

God wants people "to come unto the knowledge of the truth" (1 Tm 2:4). However, the Bible tells of many who would not do so, such as those who "turn away *their* ears from the truth" (2 Tm 4:4) or who "believed on" Jesus (Fourth gospel 12:42), but would not acknowledge the truth because "they loved the praise of men more than the praise of God" (Fourth gospel 12:43). Did their response matter? If scripture challenges our view on some issue, does it make a difference how we respond?

Jesus said, "He that is of God heareth God's words" (Fourth gospel 8:47). We should keep this in mind whenever scripture says something that does not line up with our understanding of things, for those moments could be the kind of test Proverbs 17:3 was referring to when it said, "**the LORD trieth the hearts.**"

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Postscript

"*It is better to trust in the LORD than to put confidence in man*" (Ps 118:8).

"There is a way which seemeth right unto a man, but the end thereof *are* the ways of death" (Prv 14:12).

"Every way of a man *is* right in his own eyes" (Prv 21:2).

"Every word of God *is* pure: he *is* a shield unto them that put their trust in him. Add thou not unto his words, lest he reprove thee, and thou be found a liar" (Prv 30:5-6).

"Thou shalt not bear false witness" (Mt 19:18).

"Blessed is that man that maketh the LORD his trust, and respecteth not the proud, nor such as turn aside to lies" (Ps 40:4).

"He that trusteth in his own heart is a fool: but whoso walketh wisely, he shall be delivered" (Prv 28:26).

"The fear of the LORD *is* the beginning of knowledge: *but* fools despise wisdom and instruction" (Prv 1:7).

"Hear instruction, and be wise, and refuse it not" (Prv 8:33).

"The ear that heareth the reproof of life abideth among the wise. He that refuseth instruction despiseth his own soul: but he that heareth reproof getteth understanding" (Prv 15:31-32).

"Prove all things; hold fast that which is good" (1 Th 5:21).

"Judge not according to the appearance, but judge righteous judgment" (Fourth gospel 7:24).

"The heart of the righteous studieth to answer" (Prv 15:28).

"The heart of the prudent getteth knowledge; and the ear of the wise seeketh knowledge" (Prv 18:15).

"Trust in the LORD with all thine heart; and lean not unto thine own understanding. In all thy ways acknowledge him, and he shall direct thy paths" (Prv 3:5-6).

"He that is of God heareth God's words." (Fourth gospel 8:47).