

Cut it Straight!

or
Rightly Dividing the Word of Truth



by David B. Ahlgren

Cut it Straight!

*Be diligent to present yourself approved to God,
a worker who does not need to be ashamed,
rightly dividing the word of truth.*

(2 Timothy 2:15)

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Cut it Straight!

(Rightly Dividing the Word of Truth)

Doctrines of Men, or God?

How we Learn

— & —

How we Grow

David B. Ahlgren

For this reason we also thank God without ceasing, because when you received the word of God which you heard from us, you welcomed it not as the word of men, but as it is in truth, the word of God, which also effectively works in you who believe.

(1 Thessalonians 2:13)

For the word of the Lord is right, and all His work is done in truth.

(Psalm 33:4)

Dedicated to all those who desire to know and grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ.

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FORWARD

This book was driven by a growing need to address the attitude of many who do not seem to think that God's word is absolute, nor that His character is not up to speculation. Some elevate human wisdom (philosophy) above the examples, commands, and principles God laid out for us, preferring to constantly push the mantras of "*what if*" and "*don't bother others who believe differently*" over studying the Bible to show themselves approved to God and valiant for the truth.

(2 Timothy 2:15) Be diligent to present yourself approved to God, a worker who does not need to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth.

God's word tells us to apply ourselves to know what He told us, to run after that knowledge to handle it correctly in order to follow and live acceptably for Him. This necessitates that we wholeheartedly and continuously seek the answers and guidelines of truth found in the Scriptures. If we do not, if we are lazy or put this as a low priority, we will be ashamed when we see our Lord face to face. His word the source and sustenance of our life itself.

Here we will look at what it means to rightly divide or accurately understand the Bible's truth to know God and make Him known, to put His word above mere tradition and philosophy, to learn and teach with sound understanding and equally valid application of what we are to live by.

Our adversary led us astray with "has God indeed (really) said," in order to lessen the authority of God's word and good will for us. We must not yield to this deception from our own thinking, or from others, but instead cut His word straight to know and follow the truth that has set us free.

David B. Ahlgren - December 2017

CHAPTER 1 - DOCTRINES OF MEN OR WORD OF GOD?

LACK OF KNOWLEDGE

(Hosea 4:6) My people are destroyed for lack of knowledge. Because you have rejected knowledge, I also will reject you from being priest for Me; because you have forgotten the law of your God, I also will forget your children.

God's people still perish for of lack of knowledge, in the sense of not pursuing study to be mature and equipped. Many don't actually reject knowledge, but lose sight of their calling and God's grace that offers so much more depth in knowing Him. What is most important for us, what is vital, is that we do not echo the cultural attitude to put relationship so prominently in our sight, that we forget that the truth and understanding from His word gives color to the black and white of mere facts. We find who God is, what He has done, and what we are to do all by seeking it out where He put it for us to find. Our relationship with God in Christ is based on His work as His word shows us, for even our faith comes by hearing that word (Romans 10:17). This is why a lack of knowledge of the Holy will only stunt our spiritual growth, and is one of the main causes of how people begin to accept the doctrines of man in the place of God's. We must aim to become men and women of His word – diligent to find out if what we hear is correct as we search the Scriptures.

(2 Peter 3:16) as also in all his epistles, speaking in them of these things, in which are some things hard to understand, which untaught and unstable people twist to their own destruction, as they do also the rest of the Scriptures.

Some things in the Scriptures are straightforward, but others are more difficult and take time to for many of us to fully comprehend and appreciate. Christ has appointed and gifted

many in His body to teach or preach the word to both impart the essentials, as well as to delve into the deeper and more complicated issues such as God's sovereignty, election, predestination, and the end times. This should not keep us from searching as we stick to the basic things easy to grasp, for we must wrestle with God in prayer and study, while looking to others who have gone before to see what they discovered as well. Of course, some things that are especially difficult to grasp may very well take a good part of a lifetime of building on what we know and where we are to fully understand. This is why we are to be lifetime learners of His word, not expecting immediate full knowledge, which can tempt us to look to the wrong sources for answers. Whatever is not found in God's word and cannot be validated by sound exegetical principle or statement will only lead us back to the teachings of man.

SOURCE OF EQUIPPING

(1 Thessalonians 2:13) For this reason we also thank God without ceasing, because when you received the word of God which you heard from us, you welcomed it not as the word of men, but as it is in truth, the word of God, which also effectively works in you who believe.

Who teaches us, who do we learn from? This passage in Thessalonians reflects the source of their truth was from God's word. These people heard Paul and the others teach from that word, and did not see it as a philosophy or ideology, but as the very utterances of God. They knew that His word alone is what can be enduringly effective in giving spiritual comprehension and direction to live by. Do we listen to godly men who teach us what God says, reading the text and giving the understanding in context of the whole counsel of God, or do we choose to listen to clever stories constructed from the culture around us in feigned relevance? Do we listen eagerly, but verify before trusting what we hear if we are not certain God has said

it (Acts 17:11)? The source that equips us to minister the gospel is the gospel found in the Bible, so this is where we should be driven for the answers above all else.

For those of us called to teach or preach, this passage shows that the passion behind conveying truth must be for God's work in those who hear, and we must be eternally grateful for the growth of the hearers and recipients of His grace from that word. It is His word by His Spirit that impacts the hearts and souls of the hearers and readers, effective and effectual in changing lives to conform them to the image of Christ. God's work done in His way will also never lack His supply of wisdom in our studies to give the meaning to the Scriptures we exposit to others in spoken or written word. We rely on His grace and Spirit to open the meaning so that we can convey His truth to ourselves and others.

(2 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 source of sound teaching, correction, keeping us walking in step with the Spirit, and instruction on how to live before God and man is found in all of the Scriptures. Studying to rightly understand what God has said is the only way we can be taught to live as we ought in God's eyes, and therefore become what our sanctification by God's will has intended. These are words breathed out by God, and their authority should then motivate us to not ignore, explain away, or believe it is not a problem to disobey what we are told. Though we do not approach our study in merely an academic fashion, as we rely on the Spirit to show us what we study, our minds also require academic discipline to understand the words we read. Only then we can cut it straight.

PRIVATE INTERPRETATION?

(2 Peter 1:20) Knowing this first, that no prophecy of the Scripture is of any private interpretation.

Since all things have been given in His word for us to understand, why don't some give up their reliance on private interpretation of Scripture? There are many who claim new visions and understanding that contradict the Scriptures, as well as the cloud of faithful witnesses to the truth through the ages. If something seems to be contrary to Scripture because someone uses their own understanding to derive meaning, then remember that God's word is the ultimate truth and interprets itself – anyone who expounds on the truth must align with it in context, principle, and with clear reference to where the interpretation comes from. This is why the witness of many who adhere to sound exegetical hermeneutics, the multitude of counselors as Proverbs 11:14, 15:22, and 24:6 show us, is the safe avenue to sound interpretation. When the majority listen to the doctrines of men, and the prevailing teaching of the time overcomes them, even listening to the minority or individual voice may lead us astray. Of course, there are some exceptions to this, as when Rome went so far astray with the teachings of men that the minority of Reformation voices had to give the correct interpretations to set us back on course. But they did so to align their interpretations with the Bible again, not with their own personal understanding.

There is a prevalent trend in society to put the individual's ideas as the preeminent standard of truth, which is another way of allowing our personal interpretation of what God says to match our own preferences and comfort. If our bedrock is not the Scriptures, but our own slant on what we want them to say, what we change or add to those words to fit our understanding instead of digging to find His meaning, then we end up building on shifting sand. The solution is to go always to "what *did* God say?" instead of our hypothetical "what *if*" and "I don't see it

that way” statements when confronted with the truth before us. The Bible interprets itself in context, and only by His Spirit living in us can we grasp the truth, as we put aside our personal desires of how the Bible should be interpreted to fit our personal worldview. It is *God’s* world and creation, and so *His* worldview is the only one we should be concerned with, not one of our own creation.

WHY DOCTRINE REALLY MATTERS

(Psalms 119:160) The entirety of Your word is truth, and every one of Your righteous judgments endures forever.

How do we learn God’s Word, and how do we then grow to be more like Jesus Christ? Do we frame our thoughts and actions on the doctrines of men or on the Word of God? If we believe His word, then we agree that it is all the truth that there is for us to know, that God is right and righteous, and that what He says and how He works are eternal. It is all we require for life and godliness.

Some will say that discipleship, following Jesus, is only loving God and loving people, and that knowing facts about God is not what is needed, just relationships. Though the two great commandments concerning love for God and man are crucial, they are both mutually founded on knowing God’s word. An unbalanced focus on relationships in this way misses the obvious truth that our feelings alone do not create *biblical, godly* ones. Without the facts in the word where we find knowledge of God, we have no basis or meaning of a true relationship. Reading the biblical narrative in the epistles makes this very clear. It is only when the following of relationship is left out that knowledge is empty. We therefore need to know and be filled with the height and depth and width of the knowledge of God by His word to know that true relationship (Ephesians Chapter 1 is a good place to begin).

Unfortunately, many wolves come into the church in the guise of emphasizing relationship without really knowing who God is, so who or how we follow may not be what God intends if we listen to the and don't base our relationships on God's word. If we fail to follow and learn from Jesus as the disciples did, we risk not hearing and not following our Master's voice. This is why relationship without the conversation is one sided. We listen to Him (converse) through the word and prayer, not our feelings alone. If we do not seek to hear what God says in all areas of life and godliness, we can fall into the trap of non-confrontation, where everyone should just get along without disagreement. The problem often becomes that the lack of disagreement is a result of not encouraging and exhorting each other as we meet, and then we fail to grow in the grace and knowledge of Jesus Christ. A conflict-free good time usually is just not in alignment with God's word and will.

Compromises with the totality of God's character and lessening the absolute authority of His word lead to desiring comfort with no confrontations as the standard, which ignores communication with Him by His Spirit from the word. One must sharpen another in challenging fellowship based on the word of God, which then leads us to biblical relationships. Agreement then becomes based on following what God has told us, and that takes disagreement until resolution by understanding what God says on the matter.

Sound doctrine *matters* for our relationship with Christ, in our conformity in holiness to His image (sanctification), and in our testimony to others. We must be zealous and diligent in pleasing God by seeking to know Him more – not to be saved again, nor to earn more grace, but to do and be what and who we are called to be. We are His fellow workers, and so must not bring shame to ourselves or the hope we cling to and offer to others, by not rightly dividing this word of all truth. The direction of our life is fueled by the measure of applying ourselves to pursuing the upward call of God in Christ by the

faith His word reveals. We should be zealous to apply our time and effort, while relying on God-given understanding, to know Him and make Him known in spirit and in truth. Then we are also able to speak truth in love to for right relationships with each other as well.

(Matthew 7:24-25) ²⁴“Therefore whoever hears these sayings of Mine, and does them, I will liken him to a wise man who built his house on the rock: ²⁵and the rain descended, the floods came, and the winds blew and beat on that house; and it did not fall, for it was founded on the rock.

Without sound doctrine, our house is built on sand and not the Rock, the living Word of God. Christ and His written word are our foundation, and the buildings of our lives need to be constructed of sound materials. By applying ourselves to identifying and selecting the right materials we can build to withstand the wind and floods of life. Jesus told us we must not just listen, but *hear* what He told us - if we are wise.

(1 Corinthians 3:9-11) ⁹For we are God's fellow workers; you are God's field, you are God's building. ¹⁰According to the grace of God which was given to me, as a wise master builder I have laid the foundation, and another builds on it. But let each one take heed how he builds on it. ¹¹For no other foundation can anyone lay than that which is laid, which is Jesus Christ.

As wise builders on our faith, we need correct understanding of God's word and reliance on God - ultimately using that doctrine to build our hearts and minds with the things that matter for eternity. If we ignore sound understanding or view it as only partially necessary, our lives will be only partially constructed as a result. The word of God and a sound grasp of all it contains are His blueprint for us to follow.

CHAPTER 2 - CLIMATE OF ANTI-INTELLECTUALISM

PHILOSOPHY AND EMPTY DECEIT

(Colossians 2:4-8) ⁴Now this I say lest anyone should deceive you with persuasive words. ⁵For though I am absent in the flesh, yet I am with you in spirit, rejoicing to see your good order and the steadfastness of your faith in Christ. ⁶As you therefore have received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk in Him, ⁷rooted and built up in Him and established in the faith, as you have been taught, abounding in it with thanksgiving. ⁸Beware lest anyone cheat you through philosophy and empty deceit, according to the tradition of men, according to the basic principles of the world, and not according to Christ.

(Mark 7:7) And in vain they worship Me, teaching as doctrines the commandments of men.'

Philosophy and empty (worthless, false, carnal) deceit is often quickly accepted by those who do not dig into the Scriptures to know what God has said, and so live by these instead of according to Christ, as we have learned from Him. The only antidote to this spiritual and mental poison is found in rightly dividing, or cutting straight, the words God gave us. An apt analogy is how bank workers have been trained; they are put into a room full of money to handle, view, and become so familiar with the real that the counterfeit immediately stands out when they encounter it. We should likewise be as familiar with the Scriptures, that when we hear or read anything contrary, it will sound the alarm that the thief is attempting to deceive us with philosophy and reason contrary to truth. Though some lies are obvious, yet others can be much subtler as they change the meaning or application just so in order to allow us to believe what looks good on paper, but was not minted in the riches of God's word.

The principles of the world include: accepting what is good for immediate satisfaction, what makes us prosperous or healthy, what makes us feel good about ourselves or justifies our sin, and what just keeps us blissfully ignorant of eternal realities. From this passage in Colossians, we see the plea for standing against mere persuasion to listen to what is contrary to sound doctrine, by remembering the source of our faith and living by that which came from the truth of His word. We are taught by God and through others who are taught by Him to found our faith on Him in deep thankfulness. This is why we must warn others and ourselves of the deception that cheats us out of the riches only found in Christ. It is sheer vanity, empty striving and grasping after wind, to teach or listen to the commands of men that are opposed to God according to His word. We cannot worship in spirit and in truth if we lay the foundation of our understanding of God and His work on anything other than all He has given to us in Scripture to frame existence around.

(Ephesians 4:17-21) ¹⁷This I say, therefore, and testify in the Lord, that you should no longer walk as the rest of the Gentiles walk, in the futility of their mind, ¹⁸having their understanding darkened, being alienated from the life of God, because of the ignorance that is in them, because of the blindness of their heart; ¹⁹who, being past feeling, have given themselves over to lewdness, to work all uncleanness with greediness. ²⁰But you have not so learned Christ, ²¹if indeed you have heard Him and have been taught by Him, as the truth is in Jesus:

We cannot afford to live our lives in mental futility, accepting the contrary ideologies and shifting hypothetical sands of this world's present darkness. The world lives apart from God in blind ignorance and hardened hearts, unwilling to trust and believe God in Christ. This must not be so among the redeemed, for we have been conveyed into the kingdom of light and given sight by His word and Spirit in us. How can we be

again entangled in those futile pursuits of thinking and reasoning which contradict and even belittle God's truth? We once were blind, but now we see! We do not live by our feelings, but by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God. This is how we learned who Christ is and how we are to think and live, what frames our lives as His new creations. Therefore, we are either taught by Him, by His truth, or we will listen to the world that offers only a temporary and prideful version of peace.

Consider this verse concerning the doctrines of men:

(Colossians 2:22) which all concern things which perish with the using — according to the commandments and doctrines of men?

Notice how the doctrines of man only can offer what does not last, what falls apart when we attempt to live by those ideas and philosophies. If we but look around us every day, we can quickly identify those who walk away from the same truth which we all hear. Why should we choose to labor for what does not last eternally, when we have all we need for life and godliness available to us? Therefore, we need to study to show ourselves approved to God, not ashamed when we fall - as we get up every time by His mercy and grace, and keep our eye on the goal of being present before His face forever.

(1 Timothy 4:1) Now the Spirit expressly says that in latter times some will depart from the faith, giving heed to deceiving spirits and doctrines of demons,

The world only offers the lies that led to our fall in Eden, the most heinous being, "has God really said?" To not wander off with the world means we must seek out what God really has said to avoid being swayed by those questioning all that the Scriptures plainly reveal to us. Not only does our own flesh deceive us, but the devil and his demons are also set on leading us astray with the same lies. Additionally, those in the sway of

this fallen world and its transitory ruler are actively misleading us. But the word of God lives with power to show us truth, cutting to discern the thoughts and intents of each heart. Since God has indeed said everything we require in His word, we must seek sound doctrine to live straight - with an accurate understanding of the whole counsel of God.

ACCOUNTABILITY

(James 3:1-2) ¹My brethren, let not many of you become teachers, knowing that we shall receive a stricter judgment. ²For we all stumble in many things. If anyone does not stumble in word, he is a perfect man, able also to bridle the whole body.

Accountability is at the heart of teaching God's word, for what we tell others God has said must be that and nothing more or less. It is sobering to stop and consider what this responsibility means, especially knowing we are all so far from being infallible. In addition, God gives understanding by gifts in calling as elders and teachers, and we cannot shirk from such a call if it is His will for us. Humility in knowing we rely on Him for accuracy and ability to understand and convey His truth will keep us from the pride of man's doctrine. All we know and understand is a gift, as is the grace which imparts it to us. Thus, absolute perfection is not the requirement, but a pursuit of the accurate study and teaching of that which is true should motivate us to use our words and gifts to glorify Him.

This accountability then is what keeps us in His word, whether we teach, preach, or simply speak to each other. What fills our heart will come out in our speech, so we all are accountable to know what God says in order to build up and challenge each other, whenever and wherever we meet (Hebrews 10:24-25). We need to cut it straight in order to help each other grow as a body into our head, Jesus Christ. It is not an option only for those in "ministry," but for all who are Christ's. It is an

honor to be accountable, not a deterrent to know better so that we can avoid being held accountable.

(Luke 1:4) that you may know the certainty of those things in which you were instructed.

The Bible was written to assure us, that we may know the things we claim to believe. Because we have certainty in sound doctrine we derive from Scripture, we are accountable in how we live and communicate these truths. To attempt to avoid accountability by remaining ignorant of these truths will not negate our accountability, and will only hinder us in following our Lord making us miserable in the process.

(1 John 5:13) These things I have written to you who believe in the name of the Son of God, that you may know that you have eternal life, and that you may continue to believe in the name of the Son of God.

We have the Scriptures to assure us of our calling and election, our salvation, in Christ. They hold us accountable for telling others to have that assurance as well. This is why we need not present the gospel with every facet and nuance, but if we do not rightly understand it, we will give an uncertain sound to others, one that keeps us from being rightly-tuned instruments used to bear witness of the truth. Understanding and accountability are good and desirable if we are to witness to the person and work of Jesus Christ – and necessary.

(1 Timothy 3:14-15) ¹⁴These things I write to you, though I hope to come to you shortly; ¹⁵but if I am delayed, I write so that you may know how you ought to conduct yourself in the house of God, which is the church of the living God, the pillar and ground of the truth.

The Scriptures assure us of how we can please God, by instructing us how to live together as a church. We are

accountable to use the gifts and callings given by God in His body, the church, and cannot remain distant or uninvolved. To do this, we must understand that we are accountable to both know and live out our part in the church. Paul made this clear to Timothy by telling him that is why he was telling him these things. This passage is also for our instruction, not for Timothy's alone.

The epistles of the New Testament were inspired by God to spell out the meaning of the Old Testament, as well as to explain the words and works of Jesus when He taught the disciples. To know and follow Him as disciples, we need to sit under their teaching God provided in letters to the churches in the beginning, as well as for us, until His return. We do not have Jesus physically present to speak to us as with them, nor the unique inspiration given to Paul as one born out of time, so we need to spend our lives in His word to understand rightly all that He wants us to know. We are accountable to seek out the answers and instructions in the Scriptures how to live, and so are accountable to do this with all diligence according to sound interpretation principles as led by His Spirit to grasp.

IF I ONLY HAD A BRAIN

(1 Corinthians 2:12) Now we have received, not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit who is from God, that we might know the things that have been freely given to us by God.

Some choose to just say, "We can't know everything, so we just don't know anything." They imagine that they do not have the right to judge others who name the name of Christ, but neglect to practice spiritual due diligence to test the spirits and to correct error. These think we "box in God" by speaking of any absolutes on His character or actions. What the real issues are include: judging the *ideas* of others, not the people, and the fallacious idea that not being able to know everything should

preclude seeking to know *anything*. This is dodging our accountability by inaction or refusal to side with God by His word. Like the Israelites on Mount Carmel and the priests of Baal, we must choose whose side we are on. There can be no neutrality with God; we can only agree with all He says, or disbelieve and disobey. This is why we seek out the answers to God's say on all matters, and not to avoid taking sides, which actually just becomes taking the world's side. Like the scarecrow in the Wizard of Oz, we would like to lament, "If I only had a brain," only to finally realize God has given us one – we just need to use it to search for the answers. But it is not our reason, it is God-given understanding that gives the meaning when we so obey to diligently seek the answers.

As we use the faculties God gave us, we are reminded not to strive about unprofitable words which only ruin the hearers, but are instead to diligently submit to God's work in us to cut straight His word. There is no profit in dismissing what we do not know as if nobody can ever know it. All we need for life is in His word, but we need to dig into it to bring forth the hidden treasured answers to our understanding to live by. This means that we must take the time to study God's word and wrestle in it with Him for accurate and actionable knowledge.

(2 Corinthians 10:3-5) ³For though we walk in the flesh, we do not war according to the flesh. ⁴For the weapons of our warfare are not carnal but mighty in God for pulling down strongholds, ⁵casting down arguments and every high thing that exalts itself against the knowledge of God, bringing every thought into captivity to the obedience of Christ,

The perceived wisdom of man fights with fallen human tactics and methods, aligned with our adversary; we have God's weapon in His word to face the battle, piercing into the arguments and prideful knowledge opposed to the truth. All that the world offers in its doctrine sees God's word as foolish

and beneath their wisdom, but God's word has the power to defeat and imprison those thoughts, in order to obey Christ in the end. We received the Spirit of God to know the things of God, therefore, He leads us to pursue the things of God by the Spirit of God in us – including by our regenerated intellect and reason. Our minds must be as full as our hearts with the Scriptures, or we will be deceived and ineffective for His work.

(Hebrews 4:12) For the word of God is living and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing even to the division of soul and spirit, and of joints and marrow, and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart.

The word is alive and powerful, coming from the mouth and mind of God to show us who we are, what we believe, and why we do what we do. These things are not found in philosophy or reason, but only through the revealed word of God, written for us in the Bible. True wisdom looks for answers there and is never content to remain ignorant. From the creation of the universe and mankind to the final judgment and remaking of this world, His word demonstrates its power to work. Like a sword, it cuts deep into our hearts and minds to show where our attachments and strengths lie. It exposes our thoughts and affections in how they move, and it then reveals our motives. We take up this sword not only to do battle with the enemy, but also to defeat every high thing that exalts itself against the knowledge of God within our fallen nature (and in others as well). His word then brings all thoughts into captive obedience to Christ. What wisdom of man's philosophy can do this? Since the philosophy of man is so powerless, we dare not substitute it for the real wisdom of God found in the Scriptures. We must therefore use the brain He gave us, as we are led by His Spirit to find the answers and the guidance for all things in the mind of Christ according to sound principles of interpretation.

CHAPTER 3 - GOD'S DESIRE FOR US (EPHESIANS)

UNDERSTANDING – KNOWING HIM

(Ephesians 1:13-14) ¹³In Him you also trusted, after you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation; in whom also, having believed, you were sealed with the Holy Spirit of promise, ¹⁴who is the guarantee of our inheritance until the redemption of the purchased possession, to the praise of His glory.

Our calling is based on *knowing* Christ, not just knowing facts *about* Him. Our faith began with hearing the word of truth (Romans 10:17), by which we had our eyes opened to trust Him. That good news from our regeneration out of God-given faith in turn led to God sealing us with His spiritual signet ring, His very presence in us to mark us as His forever. As His, we have been stamped with His Spirit to show that we belong to Him, but this also means He is living in us to enable us to know Him more each day, until we redeem that inheritance for an eternal presence with Him. This calling to know Him is our greatest praise of His glory. Note again that our knowing God is through His word – both to saving faith, and for daily living. Therefore, our aim should now be to take up His word as often as possible to cut it straight so we can grow and walk straight.

Think of it – God so desires us that He calls us, gives us sight, changes us, and then guarantees we will be with Him forever, even though we deserve nothing but our just due of the wrath of judgment. This grace in which we stand is the greatest proof of His loving desire for us in spite of ourselves. The depths of the how and why of His desire is found only as we plumb the height and width and depth of His word; therefore, we should be driven deep into it from the first word of Genesis to the final phrase of Revelation, eager and hungry to know Him and grow in our deepening desire in return for Him. Why should we settle for anything less than discovering as much about our Savior and all He has done for us when it is right before our eyes?

(Ephesians 1:15-17) ¹⁵Therefore I also, after I heard of your faith in the Lord Jesus and your love for all the saints, ¹⁶do not cease to give thanks for you, making mention of you in my prayers: ¹⁷that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give to you the spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of Him,

Here we see wisdom and His will revealed in His word by the Holy Spirit Himself. This should be our prayer, not only for others, but also for ourselves, to know Him and His will more each passing day. Our earnest prayer for each other should be for increased faith and love with thanksgiving for each other and God's work in us all. Our spiritual understanding of His word must be revealed to our inner man by God, though we must also realize that He works through others communicating His word faithfully to us. All these things are to *know* our Lord Jesus Christ, however, not merely to learn facts *about* Him.

KNOWING HIS CALLING

(Ephesians 1:18-21) ¹⁸the eyes of your understanding being enlightened; that you may know what is the hope of His calling, what are the riches of the glory of His inheritance in the saints, ¹⁹and what is the exceeding greatness of His power toward us who believe, according to the working of His mighty power ²⁰which He worked in Christ when He raised Him from the dead and seated Him at His right hand in the heavenly places, ²¹far above all principality and power and might and dominion, and every name that is named, not only in this age but also in that which is to come.

Knowing God's calling of us is key to our understanding. Our prayers must therefore always ask for our eyes to be open to the truths of His word, to know the doctrine of God that gives us hope in our struggles with sin, and with the daily assault on

our minds by the world, our sinful selves, and the devil's lies. What God promised in Christ is more real than any philosophical system of man because it is backed by the very words from the mind of God. These are true riches - what we long for and to obtain when we die. Just stop and consider the great power of almighty God who works through trust in the One who demonstrates the truth of the gospel by His word, and by the resurrection, an impossible life from death. Christ defeated all powers and authorities on earth and in heaven, now and forever. We are so much more than mere conquerors in Him. Knowing this calling of God is then critical in understanding the entirety of Scripture, and it should drive our interpretation and application of all we find there.

Not only is God's calling the key to our understanding, but our understanding in turn gives us deeper insight into that calling, so we can more fully grasp the hope we have in Christ Himself through the Scriptures. In order to know Christ and to make Him known, it is essential to be on the receiving end of this prayer in Ephesians. Enlightened understanding of our calling comes by His Spirit giving insight through His word, so this is where we must constantly and consistently go to know. Therefore, for both our own understanding and teaching others, sound interpretation of the Bible is critical to build upon.

(2 Timothy 1:13) Hold fast the pattern of sound words which you have heard from me, in faith and love which are in Christ Jesus.

The holy calling which we have received must result in our embracing the sound words of God as Paul wrote to Timothy. Timothy heard them directly from the mouth and pen of Paul, who received those words as breathed out by God to him. So we now read them for our own edification and instruction by the written words for Spirit-enabled understanding. By faith and love for Christ we seek to know and grow in Him.

KNOWING MATURITY

(Ephesians 4:11-13) ¹¹And He Himself gave some to be apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, and some pastors and teachers, ¹²for the equipping of the saints for the work of ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ, ¹³till we all come to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to a perfect man, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ;

The gifts and offices of the church are given by God in Christ to build us up by His word, in order to know Him as best we can, and to do this with each other. His word is the basis for bearing witness of the gospel and to build us all up to know Jesus - to become mature in Him and conformed to His righteousness in which we stand. We become more like Christ as we reflect what we know of Him in the Scriptures, and then we use the gifts and callings given to accomplish these things. It is His calling to shepherd and to teach the word so we can all grow towards what we have been called to in our sanctification, and not our own desires for an occupation. Therefore, we who are in these callings must be even more diligent to cut straight the word of God to build according to the Great Architect's plans.

(Ephesians 4:14-16) ¹⁴that we should no longer be children, tossed to and fro and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the trickery of men, in the cunning craftiness of deceitful plotting, ¹⁵but, speaking the truth in love, may grow up in all things into Him who is the head—Christ— ¹⁶from whom the whole body, joined and knit together by what every joint supplies, according to the effective working by which every part does its share, causes growth of the body for the edifying of itself in love.

We must therefore avoid spurious teachings of men over the solid truths of the Bible as validated by others according to the truths God has already given. We do not allow ourselves to be tricked by rationalizations and philosophical side trails that keep us from the truth plainly given in Christ. Most of the assaults on the word of God are “new” ideas that challenge what we already know, such as the “new perspective on Paul” that has derailed some lately. To be immersed in Scripture means that we will find it easier to identify the tricks and plots to deceive us with these varied numerous teachings, which are all too prevalent. If we are studying to be approved workers of God, then we will not be tossed about in the row boat of man’s teachings, but stand firm on the battleship of faith that drives steady through any storm.

Here we are commanded to speak truth, but with love, to grow in all things as Christ’s body, the true ‘catholic’ or universal church of the elect. This is how and why we work together in building each other up with gifts and abilities which God gives, in order to be effective and grow - in love. Let us each do our own part by continuing in the Bible. When we find His words each day, let us eat them and savor what we find as the joy and rejoicing of our entire being (Jeremiah 15:16), because we were called out by His love.

CHAPTER 4 - TRUTH MATTERS

PHILOSOPHY OF MEN

(1 Thessalonians 2:13) For this reason we also thank God without ceasing, because when you received the word of God which you heard from us, you welcomed it not as the word of men, but as it is in truth, the word of God, which also effectively works in you who believe.

Why should we not trust unbiblical philosophy? Here it is told that what is praiseworthy to God is our welcoming of God's word as His, not man's interpretation, and surely not as man's words alone. The truth is found in God alone, and anything man says that agrees with that has been said already by God. But the things that do not agree with the Bible simply have no eternally good effect on us. When we hear or read what men of God have to say and it aligns with the Scriptures, then we can welcome that truth and be changed for God's glory by it. However, when we read or hear contrary to the commands, principles, examples, and events breathed out by God through men into the books of the Bible, we should not receive those things, let alone live by them. True wisdom is sourced only from above.

As we have looked at previously, the philosophy or 'wisdom' of man's studies that are in conflict with the Bible are driven by pride of self, and deceit of the adversary. The only wisdom that changes us for good is from above, for God does not change or turn back on what He has said (James 1:16-18). Good comes to us from God alone as the truth is in and through Him alone. The philosophy of man is his deceitful heart and its imaginations of the 'what if' and the refusal of God's absolutes. These all are simply mechanisms of attempting to justify and convince ourselves that we know better than our Maker. We who are His have the wisdom of God, the sure foundation of truth, which is effective to convert the soul *and* to build upon.

(1 Corinthians 1:20-21) ²⁰Where is the wise? Where is the scribe? Where is the disputer of this age? Has not God made foolish the wisdom of this world? ²¹For since, in the wisdom of God, the world through wisdom did not know God, it pleased God through the foolishness of the message preached to save those who believe.

When it comes to wisdom of man, it misses the mark at the very beginning, in that it cannot truly fathom the gospel. The unwise philosophies of man may argue against the truth, but fall ever short of understanding the simplicity of the gospel and its power to transform both soul and mind. He clearly tells us that the foolishness of God is wiser than men in verse 20, which means that we are less than foolish if we neglect living by the Scriptures, and instead substitute what our reasoning would like to hear in the place of truth. Why? The answer is in verse 29, “that no flesh should glory in His presence.”

(1 Corinthians 2:1-5) ¹And I, brethren, when I came to you, did not come with excellence of speech or of wisdom declaring to you the testimony of God. ²For I determined not to know anything among you except Jesus Christ and Him crucified. ³I was with you in weakness, in fear, and in much trembling. ⁴And my speech and my preaching were not with persuasive words of human wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power, ⁵that your faith should not be in the wisdom of men but in the power of God.

Paul was given understanding that philosophy cannot attain to; he spoke here of how it was not of educated speeches and reasoning with man’s wisdom, but in what God had said and done in Christ that mattered. He spoke and gave us the example to speak God’s wisdom and not man’s. To rightly divide the word of truth, we must do the same, knowing our own weakness by using persuasive words outside of the Scriptures. His word alone has the power to expose us and

change us, and so we point to God having this power, not our philosophic wisdom or grand arguments of the ‘what if’ and the ‘but I think’ that we hear too often. Our faith cannot rest in the self-proclaimed wisdom of those who do not rest in the absolutes of Scripture. Our speculation and reason are worthless apart from a firm foundation on truth, which needs to be sought out by us from the Bible, and then illuminated by God’s Spirit within us for understanding. We must not have any other trust than that of His wisdom, or we will find ourselves building on sand instead of truly solid bedrock.

(1 Corinthians 3:18-21a) ¹⁸Let no one deceive himself. If anyone among you seems to be wise in this age, let him become a fool that he may become wise. ¹⁹For the wisdom of this world is foolishness with God. For it is written, “He catches the wise in their own craftiness”; ²⁰and again, “The Lord knows the thoughts of the wise, that they are futile.” ²¹Therefore let no one boast in men.

How do we avoid being unwise? By choosing the wisdom of God. If we seek wisdom in our own rationalizing or desires that conflict with what His wisdom tells us, we only deceive ourselves with our futile cleverness. To be truly wise means to become foolish to the world’s standards of philosophy, and to instead boast in God alone. Our pride often will tempt us to trust in own reasoning, but we only end up arguing against God and misleading others in our vain pursuits. Because of this, it is vital to study to show ourselves approved to God by cutting His word straight to know what God says is wise, and what is true and beneficial for all. This wisdom does not seek clever ways to offer alternatives to what God says when His word is heard, nor to defend not knowing or judging what is right and wrong, while refusing to dig deeper into the Scriptures for the real answers. We do *judge*, we do *discern*, what is right and do *not* side with unwise ideas that contradict the clear teaching of God’s word. Contradictions should alert us and alarm us to the

dangers of ‘has God indeed said’ when we know what God HAS indeed said.

FOUNDATION OF HIS WORD

The sure foundation to build on is not the shifting sands of man, but the solid rock of Christ and His word, which is perfect and proven (Psalm 18:30). Since it is in God and His word that we trust and build upon, it is essential to know what He *actually* said and what He means to cut it straight. Therefore, what we turn away from is equally important. How we study and communicate this word to others then becomes of utmost importance so we can live by every word proceeding from Him. We must daily feed on His word more than bread alone.

(2 Corinthians 4:2) But we have renounced the hidden things of shame, not walking in craftiness nor handling the word of God deceitfully, but by manifestation of the truth commending ourselves to every man's conscience in the sight of God.

The measure we build upon is the truth of His word as illuminated in our spiritual understanding by His Spirit. It is the power of God to salvation, and that which continues to transform us. It is the source of faith and all we need to live by. This is the reason we have to renounce our ways which introduce any trickery to communicate God's word. We do not deceive others to believe nor find intricate methods to communicate truth, but instead show the truth plainly and without our stories or philosophy to force an assent to the truth. The foundation of the Scriptures is powerful enough for God to change lives without our complicating methods. God's word used by His Spirit changes hearts and grows lives.

(2 Corinthians 6:3-4,7) ³We give no offense in anything, that our ministry may not be blamed. ⁴But in all things we commend ourselves as ministers of God: ... ⁷by the word of truth, by the power of God, by

the armor of righteousness on the right hand and on the left,

We minister the truth by the word of truth, in His power and not with offensive behavior, but by speaking truth in love. This of course means that we must take the time to read and study His truth for the answers to offer, instead of offending with unfounded arguments from good intentions alone. If we are servants of God ministering truth to others, we must trust God's power and working through His word, which we dig into for spiritual and intellectual understanding and wisdom.

(Jeremiah 15:16) Your words were found, and I ate them, And Your word was to me the joy and rejoicing of my heart; For I am called by Your name, O Lord God of hosts.

Jeremiah understood the essential value of God's word as he sought out and devoured the Scriptures. He found all that God had said, both comforting and convicting, to be the real joy in living. Why? Because all God says is for life and godliness (2 Peter 1:3), and the Scriptures reveal God's calling and acceptance. We should be so driven to know all God has done and all He wants us to do in response, to please Him by searching out the answers of His wisdom each and every day of our lives. We need to cultivate this hunger for His word over the ideas and ways of this world that are opposed to Him.

(Job 23:12) I have not departed from the commandment of His lips; I have treasured the words of His mouth More than my necessary food.

Job also knew of God's testing to put on display what was in Job's heart. This is why Job strived to not leave God's wisdom behind, but value it more than even eating to survive! Do we wake up each morning with the strong desire to put His word first, before we forage for breakfast, or do we put it off and hope to find time later? If we do not purposefully *make* the time by setting the schedule of our resolve's habit, we will often not find

any time as the busy day marches on. It is difficult to depart from His commands if we regularly endeavor to have them fresh in our thoughts and affections through the discipline of good habits.

THE MIND OF CHRIST

Truth matters because we know that it is what is on the mind of God in Christ. To know this truth, to rightly discern and understand it as found in the Scriptures, means that we have to speak it as His wisdom in place of our own contrived wisdom, which only puff us up as it fails to build up others.

(1 Corinthians 2:13-16) ¹³These things we also speak, not in words which man's wisdom teaches but which the Holy Spirit teaches, comparing spiritual things with spiritual. ¹⁴But the natural man does not receive the things of the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him; nor can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned. ¹⁵But he who is spiritual judges all things, yet he himself is rightly judged by no one. ¹⁶For "who has known the mind of the Lord that he may instruct Him?" But we have the mind of Christ.

To understand and to teach requires regeneration first. Without God's Spirit living in us, we cannot understand to rightly cut the word of truth. But for us who have been made anew, we are able to seek out and find the understanding He gives, as we work out our salvation with fear and trembling – knowing, of course, that it is God Himself who first works in us to want to pursue Him, and who gives the ability to do (Philippians 2:12-13). We have been given the mind of Christ!

Knowing these things, we learn His word by means of the effectual working of His Spirit in us, as we compare the spiritual things in the Bible with other spiritual things in the Bible; we learn in context, but also supernaturally within that context. The philosophical thinking of man views the Scriptures as

foolish, but we are aware of their immeasurable value because we know the Author. This is how we discern right from wrong, God's work from our own – as regenerated ones, we now can read and think from His perspective.

We know what God knows and desires only as well as our approach in reading and studying the Scriptures. The ability to understand comes from the mind of Christ, which is His presence in us, but our responsibility that allows this to happen is worked out by our synergistic obedience in applying ourselves diligently to the word of God. We do not instruct God; He teaches us. Since this is true, we cannot afford to see things through the lenses of human wisdom and feelings, but in the accurate handling of the Bible to interpret all God has recorded for us. We will look at this later in this book in the area of solid interpretation by exegesis (discovering and taking the meaning out of Scripture) and not by eisegesis (reading meaning into it by our preconceived or extra-biblical notions).

(Psalms 119:18) Open my eyes, that I may see
Wondrous things from Your law.

To know the mind of Christ, we start by asking God for the understanding, expecting His faithful answer to give us vision into the things He has written down for us. We trust Him to show us what is in the Scriptures by His very presence within us. The Psalmist captured the desire of our innermost being here in the 119th Psalm that is focused on His word.

(Luke 24:45) And He opened their understanding, that
they might comprehend the Scriptures.

When Jesus told the disciples about how the Scriptures spoke of Him, the very next thing He did was to give them understanding to know the meaning of all the prophecies, commands, and narratives that were in God's mind, that they might know these things also. The New Testament bears record of the things revealed to them for us, including Paul who was

not present at this time. This is the most important lesson for us in understanding the Bible – that God Himself must give us the understanding by opening the eyes of our hearts to see and know the meaning of all we hear, read, and study. Sheer academics apart from His working will never reveal what is in and on His mind; only He can tell and show us these things.

(Ecclesiastes 10:10) If the ax is dull, and one does not sharpen the edge, then he must use more strength; but wisdom brings success.

Do we try to study and understand the Scriptures in our own strength, using a dull ax in our study of God's word? Even if we swing these methods harder in attempts to succeed, they fall short without the wisdom to first sharpen them. His Spirit guides our swing as we wisely apply His grinding wheel to our minds and lives according to the Bible. We cease hacking with the dull ax of our own works and ignorance of doctrine, allowing the wise grace of His word to give us the transforming edge, seeking sound scriptural principles to guide our approach as we trust His work in us.

This all ties into the principle of Philippians 2:13, *for it is God who works in you both to will and to do for His good pleasure.* This passage assures us of God's work in us to sanctify and mature us in all things, so that we can do what is pleasing to Him. This includes understanding His word first of all, or we have no measure of what we are doing, and if it is what He wills for us. The word of God is the absolute basis and measure to guide us into all things by the understanding of it as we apply ourselves to study and His approval. Because He opens our eyes, we follow closely and observe all, realizing that God must give us the desire to do so, the ability to understand and obey, and our part in working out our salvation (Philippians 2:12) according to these two principles in verse 13. For a more in-depth look at this passage and its implications for our spiritual growth, I refer you to my previous book, *The Chosen's Choice*.

CHAPTER 5 - FOR OUR EXAMPLE

JESUS'S WORDS AND DEEDS

(John 14:23-24) ²³Jesus answered and said to him, "If anyone loves Me, he will keep My word; and My Father will love him, and We will come to him and make Our home with him. ²⁴He who does not love Me does not keep My words; and the word which you hear is not Mine but the Father's who sent Me.

Jesus gave us the example of keeping His word as seen in how He loves the Father and obeys His commands. In John chapter 15, Jesus tells the disciples that obedience to His word makes us His friends and keeps us abiding in His love. Because we love Him then, how can we not know and pursue knowing His word? The example of Jesus living by the word of God over the need for food, when tempted by Satan in the wilderness over 40 days, demonstrates that love for God means turning from our own desires, even of life itself if that were at stake.

(John 14:31) But that the world may know that I love the Father, and as the Father gave Me commandment, so I do. Arise, let us go from here.

The examples Jesus gave showed Himself obeying the Father so that we would follow those examples in our own obedience. Here in John, He tells us that such obedience shows love, and that must be our motivation to cutting His word straight – so that we can honor and glorify God rightly, which is how we love Him in word and deed. We must walk out what we learn!

(Romans 8:3-4) ³For what the law could not do in that it was weak through the flesh, God did by sending His own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh, on account of sin: He condemned sin in the flesh, ⁴that the righteous requirement of the law might be fulfilled in us who do

not walk according to the flesh but according to the Spirit.

We are saved to be holy, which means our thoughts and actions align with what God requires to be pleasing to Him. This is what we are called out to from our salvation to the maturation of sanctification, and so we live (walk) by the guidance of His Spirit by the examples Jesus gave as He walked among us, and as the writers of the New Testament remind us. To not walk in the ways of the flesh means that we do not use fallen human wisdom to guide us, but God's infallible word. This is how we fulfill His righteous requirement, to live in ways that please Him.

(John 10:27) My sheep hear My voice, and I know them, and they follow Me.

Throughout the gospels we see Jesus fulfilling the Law, God's word and will, so that we could believe who He is, but also for us to imitate Him, and to trust His work of obedience to live by. Paul even told us to imitate him as he imitates Christ. We are to imitate Christ to be examples to others as well. As His sheep, we must listen carefully to the Scriptures to know what to do, then follow Jesus as He shows us how to do those things, hearing the Shepherd's voice with obedience.

(John 5:46-47) ⁴⁶For if you believed Moses, you would believe Me; for he wrote about Me. ⁴⁷But if you do not believe his writings, how will you believe My words?"

We must believe the whole counsel of God – the Old Testament as well as the New – as Jesus aptly said here; we cannot believe what He told us if we don't know the full counsel of His word. The only way to do this, to know what to believe in context of God's will and plan, is to study *all* of the Bible, not just our favorite areas. This is a key concept to guide our understanding as we rightly divide the word of truth.

APOSTLES' TEACHING AND ACTIONS

Sincerity is the example of the apostolic teaching, and their personal examples of following, preaching, and teaching the *words of life*, as the gospel is called in Acts. Paul wrote much about this, so let us look at 1 Thessalonians to begin with.

(1 Thessalonians 2:4-6) ⁴But as we have been approved by God to be entrusted with the gospel, even so we speak, not as pleasing men, but God who tests our hearts. ⁵For neither at any time did we use flattering words, as you know, nor a cloak for covetousness—God is witness. ⁶Nor did we seek glory from men, either from you or from others, when we might have made demands as apostles of Christ.

Here Paul reminded the Thessalonians of the apostles' motivation and actions in speaking God's word. They first acknowledged that it was God who gave the word, and that they then spoke it to please God under His scrutiny. Their authority came from God, but so did their accountability to Him. This is why they did not try to flatter or please others, but they cut the word straight and spoke it straight. They also strived to be open and transparent with the Scriptures and the gospel message, not for dishonest gain nor for adoration of their skill of study or in delivery, but for the glory of God alone. They did not demand anything from others - not adulation, payment, or any credit for what belongs solely to God. Such is our example in ministering His word to others.

Acts also records how the apostles spoke God's word, warning of false teachers and self-proclaimed prophets who spoke contrary to the Scriptures, and how they valued God's word of the gospel above even their own lives. This challenges to us to grow in the knowledge of God by His word and Spirit so that we might be fearless in conflicts because of that word we hold to (2 Corinthians 7:5).

(Acts 20:27) For I have not shunned to declare to you the whole counsel of God.

Paul served the Lord with humility in trials (Acts 20:19), holding nothing back from the word he taught (vs. 20), and did not value his own life over the word of God preached and taught to as many as possible (vs. 24). He viewed life as a race, and wanted to reach the finish line with joy, for what was given to him, he in turn gave to others to tell of God's grace in Christ. Remember that Paul was a well-learned Pharisee as well as an inspired author of Scripture. God's word was essential for him to know in order to tell others, and so it is for us as well to know accurately in order to tell widely.

(1 Corinthians 11:1) Imitate me, just as I also imitate Christ.

Paul pleaded with the Corinthian church to imitate Christ in him as he himself gave the example. We consider Hebrews 13:7 which says, "Remember those who rule over you, who have spoken the word of God to you, whose faith follow, considering the outcome of their conduct" by following godly leaders put over us because they are called to shepherd us. This means we imitate the good that is according to sound scriptural principles and the results which fit the biblical descriptions, and do not imitate the other conduct that does not align with it.

(2 Timothy 3:16) ¹⁶All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness, ¹⁷that the man of God may be complete, thoroughly equipped for every good work.

Paul made it clear by his example and teaching to Timothy that the sound doctrine of God's word (which was the Old Testament when he wrote this) was what was needed. We need this word for teaching us to know God and His will for us, we need it to show us where we go wrong and how to get back to

doing what is right, and we need it to teach us about the righteousness imputed in Christ, along with the righteousness that we are to walk out in our daily living. Most of all, we need His word to mature us and equip us to do His work.

(1 Corinthians 4:16-17) ¹⁶Therefore I urge you, imitate me. ¹⁷For this reason I have sent Timothy to you, who is my beloved and faithful son in the Lord, who will remind you of my ways in Christ, as I teach everywhere in every church.

Paul urged the Corinthian church to listen to his student and co-laborer Timothy for further instruction of God's word and Paul's living of it as an example, which shows us how important it is to teach sound doctrine of God and the application of living of it to others in order to do the same. This is discipleship, which is based on the word and our resulting example lived in conformity to Christ and in our affection for Him.

The letters which Paul wrote were inspired by God as Scripture, and we can see how these are authoritative for us as well, even though primarily written as letters to the church at Corinth at that time. Paul spoke of his ways, yet those ways were *in Christ* – they were God's words given to instruct us as well as them. Since we are to carry on as the church to teach others, we need to know these ways in Christ for ourselves in order to preach the gospel, and then instruct those who God regenerates. Therefore, we must follow the examples in the Scriptures to know what God said, to rightly divide or grasp this word of truth as they did. We will then be beloved of God and faithful to His word and work.

CHAPTER 6 – AUTHORITY AND EXEGESIS

AUTHORITY OF SCRIPTURE

It is written. Throughout the Bible God clearly shows that His word is our highest authority, that there is no written authority higher than Scripture. It rules us to live accordingly in willing, joyful obedience.

(Matthew 4:4) But He answered and said, “It is written, ‘Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God.’”

Jesus immediately quotes Deuteronomy 8:3 when tempted by Satan to satisfy His hunger. In the next temptation (vs. 6), the tempter wrongly interpreted Psalm 91:11-12, with the wrong application to jump and let the Father’s angels protect Jesus. Jesus simply went back to Scripture, which provided context from Deuteronomy 6:16 that we are not to tempt the Lord. He provided the example of rightly cutting the word of God, and demonstrated the authority of the word by stating, “it is written” as the reason to listen.

(Matthew 5:17-18) ¹⁷“Do not think that I came to destroy the Law or the Prophets. I did not come to destroy but to fulfill. ¹⁸For assuredly, I say to you, till heaven and earth pass away, one jot or one tittle will by no means pass from the law till all is fulfilled.”

Jesus made it very clear here in Matthew that the Scriptures are unchangeable and authoritative. He did not come to replace what God had already told us by the mouths and pens of the prophets, or in the Law of Moses, but He came to fulfill these things, to demonstrate the truth of God’s real intent for us all, as seen in how He filled the Scriptures with these truths in the Old Testament. Jesus is the very Word of God come to us as a man (John 1), and is the Lord with authority and power over all

of creation; His spoken word as written is the authoritative means we refer to in order to understand and obey Him.

(Psalm 119:89) Forever, O Lord, Your word is settled in heaven.

The Psalmist acknowledged that God's word is a settled and established fact. It is not to be questioned, doubted, or denied, but is eternal truth, applicable to all people everywhere and in all times throughout history. This must therefore be our attitude and approach in studying the Bible – one which views these truths as self-evident from the mouth of God Himself, the final unchangeable Word.

(Isaiah 40:8) “The grass withers, the flower fades, But the word of our God stands forever.”

Isaiah understood that the Scriptures are God's eternal truths which can never lose importance or validity. In 1 Peter 1:25, we see this truth repeated for us as the eternal word of the gospel that brings us rebirth and eternal hope. It is this incorruptible and eternal truth which we study in order to cut rightly for understanding, and so this effort must be seen as vital, and sobering in our approach, that we might know it well to live a godly life and witness.

(1 Thessalonians 2:13) For this reason we also thank God without ceasing, because when you received the word of God which you heard from us, you welcomed it not as the word of men, but as it is in truth, the word of God, which also effectively works in you who believe.

This passage in Thessalonians shows Paul's thanks for those followers of Christ, but also reveals much about his understanding of God's word. We see the word is truth, not merely words of fallible men. Furthermore, we see this word is effective to work in the hearts and lives of those who have God-

given faith to follow Him. This all reveals that the Bible is living and powerful, able to change us in sanctifying reality.

EXEGESIS OF SCRIPTURE

To properly glean the intended meaning out of Scripture without adding our preconceptions or personal interpretation, it is essential to follow sound principles of *hermeneutics* (the methods or principles of Biblical interpretation). These principles hold true no matter which approach or type of study we are engaged in, such as topical, character, chronological, book, or word study, and will guide us in all our efforts toward sound doctrine and application.

We have looked at the first principle which is the assumption that the Bible is authoritative. This is the *sola scriptura* idea of the Reformation which states that the Bible is the ultimate authoritative source over tradition alone. Other assumptions include how Scripture interprets itself, that the primary aim of interpretation is to find the author's intended meaning, and that the language of the Bible itself can communicate spiritual truth. Used together, these allow God to speak clearly to us by His Spirit.

We then follow these four steps, according to the ground rules of interpretation:

1. OBSERVATION, or "What do I see?" Get the facts first, as a detective begins his work to uncover the truth.
2. INTERPRETATION, "What does it mean?" This is sound interpretation by good hermeneutics, based on exegetical principles.
3. CORRELATION, "How does this relate to the rest of what the Bible says?" Everything the Bible says on a particular subject does matter, in order to accurately understand and cut the word straight.

4. APPLICATION, “What does it mean, how should I think and live?” His word demands a response; that response needs to be nothing less than obedience to the revealed word of God. As Walt Henrichsen wisely quoted, ‘Observation and interpretation without application is spiritual abortion.’

Exegesis looks at general, grammatical, historical, and theological principles of interpretation in a holistic approach, one that does not violate one principle over another, and which applies these properly. Study aids such as Bible Dictionaries, Original language dictionaries (Lexicons), Bible Encyclopedias, Commentaries, Concordances, Maps, and Study Bible notes are all helpful to bring out the accurate meaning of Scripture from God’s intended meaning, as we rely on Him and leverage biblical principles for accurate understanding.

The basic overarching principles of hermeneutics, of correct and sound biblical interpretation, are then as follows:

1. Scripture Interprets Scripture
2. Context Interprets Scripture
3. Intent Interprets Scripture
4. The Clear Interprets the Obscure

Let us examine these principles and how they can be applied.

First of all, the Bible is its own source of interpretation; whether described in more or less detail in different places, or where other biblical writers interpret related passages, the answers and methods are found within the Bible itself. If we believe that God has spoken all we need for life and godliness (2 Peter 1:3), and that He is the ultimate authority as the sovereign Lord, then what He said in the Bible is enough to understand all that is there, (though others may have gone before us along this path, whom we can learn from). God as the author tells us what He meant, and how to know that is what He said, so we can understand it rightly.

Secondly, context explains the meaning we should aim to discover in our study to cut straight and rightly discern the meaning God intended – immediate, nearby, and throughout the whole counsel of the Old and New Testaments. Often parallel passages address the same or related ideas or doctrines, and some writers quote or reference what others have said. In addition, we need the immediate context of a word, or verse, or passage, in relation to the whole book and the entirety of the Bible. Complete biblical context gives meaning to what we read, which is especially helpful when seeking understanding of difficult, seemingly out of place, or contradictory verses.

Third, the intent shows God has an intended meaning for all we read, and it is up to us to discover what that meaning is. Therefore, each Scripture has *one* correct interpretation, though each may have many correct *applications* in life. This is important to consider; otherwise, we will end up with uncertainty, or with private interpretations, which are not what God really said.

Finally, remember that clear or explicit statements will give meaning to the obscure and implicit things we encounter in studying the word of God. God cannot lie (Numbers 23:19, Titus 1:2), so no single verse of Scripture should ever be thought to contradict the overall message. As we find obscure verses, which even may appear to be contradictions, remember to look for the clear verses on that doctrine to assist in correctly interpreting them to resolve any perceived conflict. God's character is unchangeable, as are His words to us, so this is how we look to define these essential teachings.

A great reference for practical and Biblical details and descriptions on solid areas of good hermeneutics is the out-of-print *Un'derstand' A straightforward approach to interpreting the Bible*, by Walter Henrichsen (1976, NavPress, ISBN 0-89109-423-7). I have been given permission by the copyright holder to include the list of these rules of interpretation below.

Walter had put together what I believe to be the best and most comprehensive list of these practical principles in one place, so I list them here for you to consider further. If you can find a copy of the book, it is well worth the effort to acquire it and dig in deeper.

General principles are universal and based on Scripture itself, and include these basic rules for sound interpretation:

1. Authority of Scripture; work from the assumption that the Bible is authoritative.
2. The Bible interprets itself; Scripture best explains Scripture. This is the principle of exegesis.
3. God's Spirit is essential for understanding; saving faith and the Holy Spirit are necessary for us to understand and properly interpret the Scriptures.
4. Interpret personal experience in the light of Scripture, and not Scripture in the light of personal experience.
5. Church history is important, but not decisive
6. Biblical Examples are authoritative only when supported by a Biblical command.
7. The primary purpose of understanding the Bible is to change our lives, not merely to increase our knowledge.
8. Each Christian has the right and responsibility to investigate and interpret the Word of God for himself, as Acts 17:11 reminds us.
9. Church history is important, but not decisive in the interpretation of Scripture. The church does not determine what the Bible teaches; the Bible determines what the church teaches.
10. The Promises of God throughout the Bible are available to the Holy Spirit for the believers of every generation. But be aware that there are general promises for all, and specific promises, only for specific people at a specific time.

Grammatical principles (grammar of the original texts, not of various Bible translations) address how to understand the words, sentences, idioms, and other structures of the text:

1. Scripture has only one meaning, but may have many applications.
2. Scripture should be taken literally by its meaning, and in context.
3. Interpret words in harmony with their meaning in the times of the author. Ask, how were the words used then, and what is the root meaning? Eliminate personal bias of words as used in our own time.
4. Interpret a word in relation its sentence and context.
5. Look at the larger context – Interpret a passage in harmony with its context: beyond just the immediate context, in the light of the containing paragraph, book, and the entire Bible. This includes the cultural and historical settings.
6. When an inanimate object is used to describe a living being, the statement may be considered as figurative, not literal speech.
7. If an expression is out of character with the thing being described, consider the statement to be figurative speech.
8. The principal parts and figures of a parable represent certain realities. Consider only these principal parts and figures when drawing conclusions. For parables, know that the main parts and characters represent realities to be considered for conclusions for application, knowing there is one interpretation of the parable, even when there may be multiple applications of that one meaning.
9. Interpret the words of the prophets in their usual, literal, and historic sense, unless the context or manner in which they are fulfilled clearly indicates they have a symbolic meaning. Their fulfillment may be in installments, each progressively being fulfilled as a

pledge of what is to follow (this is called progressive revelation). We can see this in the prophecies of the Messiah, leading up to the birth of Christ.

Historical principles are those concerning the background, the context of culture, economics, and political climate when the Scriptures were written that shape the way things are said, and often give depth or clarity to our understanding.

1. Since Scripture originated in a historical context, it can be understood only in the light of biblical history. Therefore, ask these questions:
 - To whom was the book or letter written?
 - Consider the writer's own background
 - What was happening that led to the message, or in other words, what was the experience or occasion that gave rise to the message?
 - Who are the main characters?
2. Consider that God's revelation in the Scriptures is progressive, and both the Old and New Testaments are essential, and related parts of the whole. God's character and work of redemption do not change, but the revealed understanding of these does progress along the way.
3. Historical events only become symbols of spiritual truth if the Scriptures themselves so designate them (such as in symbols, types, allegories, similes, or metaphors).
4. The inspired Scriptures are finalized in history, not to be added to with new revelations, as if any addition could be authoritative like scripture (Second Peter 1:20).

Theological principles are those broad doctrinal rules which are formed by all related Scriptures that teach about a given subject to form doctrines. Some principles include:

1. You cannot understand the Bible theologically until you can understand it grammatically. This means that you must understand what the passage says, before you can expect to understand what it means.
2. A doctrine cannot be seen as biblical, until it sums up and includes all the Scriptures that have something to say about that doctrine. We must take the time and effort, as we use deductive reasoning through inductive study, of all scripture, to understand our doctrinal convictions.
3. Apparent contradictions must be both accepted as biblical when both are in Scripture, knowing they resolve in to a higher unity (examples include the doctrines of the trinity, the dual nature of Christ (the hypostatic union), the origin and existence of evil, and the sovereign election of God with the responsibility of man). To the degree that the Scriptures speak with clarity, you may speak with clarity. When the Scriptures are silent, you must remain silent, and not speculate in unfruitful ways. Where the Bible teaches what appears to be two “conflicting” doctrines, you must follow its example, and hold to both, keeping each in a perfect balance with the other until resolved, if possible.
4. The clear (explicit) is to be accepted over the vague (implicit).
5. A teaching implied in Scripture may be considered, when a comparison of related passages supports it. Deductive reasoning is valid here when kept in line with this approach, but this requires time and effort in applying the general, grammatical, and historical principles, guided by the indwelling Holy Spirit. This means that we must be certain that our deductions are truly implied in the Scriptures we derive them from, in their context, and that we investigate and compare related passages on the subject, which is the greater context. Failure to do these things results in unbiblical conclusions.

These clear rules of interpretation, when consistently and holistically leveraged in your efforts to cut straight the word of God, will lead you to good exegesis and resulting application of what God indeed has said. They will ensure that you do not easily add your private interpretation, help you to identify bad teaching you may hear, and additionally can keep you from teaching others anything that adds to or takes away from the Word of God. We are called to rightly discern all God said in the Bible for our own growth, as well as to make a good defense of the hope that is found within us. We need to offer the truth of the gospel and the true nature and character of God, as well as make disciples who know and follow to serve Him well. To do these things it is essential to know the truth in order to live it out by applying it in our own lives before discipling others.

(Colossians 1:28-29) ²⁸Him we preach, warning every man and teaching every man in all wisdom, that we may present every man perfect in Christ Jesus. ²⁹To this end I also labor, striving according to His working which works in me mightily.

We cannot rightly warn and teach with wisdom we ourselves lack, and our striving to present everyone mature in Christ will not be effective without a firm foundation. We must also remember Paul's admonition to Timothy, "*Remind them of these things, charging them before the Lord not to strive about words to no profit, to the ruin of the hearers (2 Timothy 2:14).*" The way we do not strive against the wind is to cut it straight, correctly understanding by Scripture's own authority, with God's Holy Spirit giving the understanding in our efforts. Hermeneutics is more than just an intellectual endeavor, for God commands us to use our mind in synergy with His work in us. Furthermore, this is how we "shun profane and vain babblings" of error, by knowing who we know and are known by, through knowing His word with God-given understanding.

CHAPTER 7 - BIBLICAL TEACHING

WOLVES AND SHEPHERDS

(2 Peter 2:1-3) ¹But there were also false prophets among the people, even as there will be false teachers among you, who will secretly bring in destructive heresies, even denying the Lord who bought them, and bring on themselves swift destruction. ²And many will follow their destructive ways, because of whom the way of truth will be blasphemed. ³By covetousness they will exploit you with deceptive words; for a long time their judgment has not been idle, and their destruction does not slumber.

False proclamations are often passed off as truth. Bad teaching which does not align with good hermeneutics is *heresy*, a choice that does not match up with the truth. It is divisive because it pulls people from the true to that which is false, which is a lie. Wolves come in among or even from within the sheep with the intent of leading the sheep astray, while true shepherds are always aware of how vital it is to cut the word straight, and to teach it to others. Shepherds must study God's word *diligently* to be able to interpret and teach it *correctly*!

Here in 2 Peter we observe how these heretically divisive teachers come in under the radar, secretly introducing bad doctrine until the sheep begin to bleat along in unison with them. In the end, this only leads to the destruction of judgment on those who willingly do this, as they deny the Lord Jesus Christ who paid the price to set us free in truth. These only speak evil of the truth and call evil good in the process, desiring acclaim for themselves, as they exploit the sheep with deceptive words and philosophic rationalizations. This highlights why our correct understanding of doctrine is *essential* to both a healthy Christian walk and ministry.

(2 Peter 3:17-18) ¹⁷You therefore, beloved, since you know this beforehand, beware lest you also fall from your own steadfastness, being led away with the error of the wicked; ¹⁸but grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. To Him be the glory both now and forever. Amen.

Because we have been warned by God in the Scriptures to be aware of false teachers and teaching, we must apply ourselves to rightly dividing His word of truth against all error we hear. We should not allow ourselves to be thrown off course in the race we run to the upward call in Christ, but be steadfast in the truth as we strive to discern it. God's grace in the knowledge of His truth will cause us to grow and glorify Him, as we seek to know both about Him and in relationship with Him through an accurate understanding of the Bible.

(Acts 20:27-31) ²⁷For I have not shunned to declare to you the whole counsel of God. ²⁸Therefore take heed to yourselves and to all the flock, among which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to shepherd the church of God which He purchased with His own blood. ²⁹For I know this, that after my departure savage wolves will come in among you, not sparing the flock. ³⁰Also from among yourselves men will rise up, speaking perverse things, to draw away the disciples after themselves. ³¹Therefore watch, and remember that for three years I did not cease to warn everyone night and day with tears.

Good shepherds, on the other hand, seek to care for the sheep by true guidance - to keep the flock from error and subsequent harm. As 1 Peter 5:3 reminds us, we are to be examples to the flock, not seeking glory for ourselves, nor under compulsion, nor for personal gain. This requires those leading others to be ever more diligent in personal study and application of His word to give the glory to God alone. Paul's departing message to the

elders in Acts chapter 20 demonstrates a shepherd's heart to tell them the truth in all aspects, holding nothing back for any unbiblical reason. He made this clear to remind them to live by the truth, so they would be able to discern those rising up with error in doctrine to mislead and scatter God's flock. The warning specifically identified that the deception would be vicious and sly, twisting truth to make followers of themselves by their heretical doctrines. By knowing and teaching others the truth as we study the word and cut it straight, we can defend the flock by being valiant for the truth.

DEFENSE AND OFFENSE

(1 Peter 3:15-16) ¹⁵But sanctify the Lord God in your hearts, and always be ready to give a defense to everyone who asks you a reason for the hope that is in you, with meekness and fear; ¹⁶having a good conscience, that when they defame you as evildoers, those who revile your good conduct in Christ may be ashamed.

To defend the truth, it essential to begin all study and ministry by setting God apart as the most important, and His word as the means to know and honor Him. Only then can we realize effective apologetics in answering the reason for our faith, and our calling in Christ. Study should never be a prideful pursuit but a humbling one with accountability; if we keep this mind, then we can have a good conscience before God and men, and stay the course by true conduct and true words. There is only shame in not pursuing the knowing and living of the truth, so we need to know the truth and live it rightly to honor God.

(1 Timothy 1:18-20) ¹⁸This charge I commit to you, son Timothy, according to the prophecies previously made concerning you, that by them you may wage the good warfare, ¹⁹having faith and a good conscience, which some having rejected, concerning the faith have

suffered shipwreck, ²⁰of whom are Hymenaeus and Alexander, whom I delivered to Satan that they may learn not to blaspheme.

Offensively, we fight the good fight based on the unchanging word of God. All faith comes by His word, and all of His word is needed to wield that sword of the Spirit in casting down arguments and proud imaginations of man that rise up, which are opposed to God (2 Corinthians 10:3-5). If we choose to walk away from this war, our ships of faith will run aground, and we will then need to get back into the vessel of truth and humility to return to the battle. We can only hope that those such as Hymenaeus and Alexander mentioned above had learned to speak rightly of God and His work in Jesus Christ. What we can do, is do our best to study His word to know sound doctrine, and then to live it well with the whole armor of God and the truth in hand. Our offense is found on the tip of the sword.

FIGHT THE GOOD FIGHT!

(1 Timothy 6:12) Fight the good fight of faith, lay hold on eternal life, to which you were also called and have confessed the good confession in the presence of many witnesses.

If we know the Scriptures, we should be on the offensive to know and teach what biblical faith is, jumping into the fray to grasp eternal life firmly, and then hold it out to others with bold assurance (Philippians 2:16). The truth of the gospel in all its depth and width and height is what we confess to others, but that will only be as true as the amount of understanding which we ourselves possess. This should motivate our study with accuracy of understanding and compassion on living it out as we fight this good fight for the souls of men and God's glory.

(2 Timothy 4:7) I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith.

Our epitaph should echo this verse in 2 Timothy, knowing as we are about to die that we have done all we could to run the race of life in Christ to His honor and glory. To do this, we must be equipped with the word of God and skilled in handling that sword for His Spirit to make it effective. We do not run or fight for our benefit or acceptance, but for the glory and honor of God alone in Christ alone. Paul tells us to wage spiritual war by remaining untangled from the world, which would include its philosophies and ways contrary to the Bible; this should motivate us in our teaching others, making sound disciples who in turn make others after their kind in a spiritual sense.

(2 Timothy 4:17-18) ¹⁷But the Lord stood with me and strengthened me, so that the message might be preached fully through me, and that all the Gentiles might hear. Also I was delivered out of the mouth of the lion. ¹⁸And the Lord will deliver me from every evil work and preserve me for His heavenly kingdom. To Him be glory forever and ever. Amen!

Paul's testimony and advice to Timothy was of God's faithfulness for enabling to teach and preach the truth to others in all he did. This was so that the word of God would be clear and straight in its communication to the hearers and readers of all God taught him. We find solace and encouragement in these things written for us as well, inspiring us to dig deep and taste the goodness and severity of God in His word, trusting in the promises and examples of His sovereign care and guidance for the eternal future of His kingdom without end.

Let us then pursue correct understanding and application of this treasure set before us and not just expect others to tell us everything it says. We are to be as scribes – *“Therefore every scribe instructed concerning the kingdom of heaven is like a*

householder who brings out of his treasure things new and old.” (Matthew 13:52). Though most of us are not academic professors or even teachers, we all are to know what we believe to minister to each other and to answer in the end for how we lived. We are each accountable before God to hear and to follow Him, and this means we need to be people of the Book. As scribes, we are to apply ourselves to dig up the riches of God’s word that we may see His glory and how we should then live to honor Him in obedience in light of His great grace in Christ. Though we can and should certainly learn from others whom are gifted as preachers and teachers, we each have the responsibility to read and study as well.

CHAPTER 8 – LOVE HIS WORD!

REFLECTIONS ON PSALM 119

Our love of the Scriptures drives our desire and efforts to cut it straight, and study further stimulates our desire for God's word to change us. This is often accomplished through our devotional (quiet) time in the morning, our reading and studying of the Bible, and our application in life to both ourselves and others as we have seen in this book. This chapter is a high-level look into Psalm 119, which addresses God's word in 22 paragraphs, 1 section for each letter of the Hebrew alphabet in order. Let us look at a main truth from each of these sections to see how King David expressed his love for that word, that we may stimulate our own spiritual affections.

ALEPH: VERSES 1-8

²Blessed are those who keep His testimonies, who seek Him with the whole heart!

Verse 2 of this Psalm talks of His word, and how we should seek Him through obeying with all of our heart. As we study the Scriptures, we seek to cut it straight for the express purpose of *doing* what He tells us, and that with every fiber of our being! So, we strive to know accurately to follow rightly.

BETH: VERSES 9-16

¹⁵I will meditate on Your precepts, and contemplate Your ways. ¹⁶I will delight myself in Your statutes; I will not forget Your word.

We often focus on verses 9 to 11 as a reason for Scripture memory, but the focus should be on taking time as we memorize, to dwell on and delight in what we find in His word.

We are to be doers, remembering God's intent and not just the mechanics. God's word is given to change us!

GIMEL: VERSES 17-24

¹⁸Open my eyes, that I may see Wondrous things from
Your law.

To understand the Scriptures, we must follow the example here to cry out to God to provide the insight to know what is on His mind. We are able to do this by His Spirit living and acting on our spirit from within, giving us the mind of Christ. This shows how wonderful His word is to us!

DALETH: VERSES 25-32

³²I will run the course of Your commandments,
For You shall enlarge my heart.

This verse shows that when we understand what God says, we should do it – even if our heart is not in it at first. As we follow in obedience, He will give us increasing desire to obey as a result. We do not wait until we feel right before obeying, but we do need to rightly discern what He says to follow as we ought.

HE: VERSES 33-40

³⁸Establish Your word to Your servant, who is devoted
to fearing You.

We cry to God to work His word into us, grounding us in it for the express purpose of a fearful awe of His holiness and greatness as our Lord. Through the Scriptures we see God high and lifted up, as Isaiah did, and so are moved from head knowledge to heart changes in His righteousness by grace. Previous verses in this section reveal knowing how knowing His

word drives us to keep it, with delight and singleness of purpose.

WAW: VERSES 41-48

⁴⁶I will speak of Your testimonies also before kings,
and will not be ashamed.

Understanding His word by reading and studying should well up within us to overflow as living springs to refresh others. There should be no shame in bearing witness to the truths of the gospel, but joy and delight in who God is and what He has done, in light of our sinful state apart from Him. Our salvation and freedom from due judgment should make us ready to answer all at all times.

ZAYIN: VERSES 49-56

⁵⁰This is my comfort in my affliction, for Your word has given me life.

His word brings comfort in our trouble, giving new life when we feel as if we are dying inside. No matter who mocks us when we suffer, we go back to the promises and character of God in the Scriptures to remind us of His care. His words are as songs in our hearts as we walk through this life, in darkness or light, in Christ.

HETH: VERSES 57-64

⁵⁹I thought about my ways, and turned my feet to Your testimonies. ⁶⁰I made haste, and did not delay to keep Your commandments.

As we meditate on God's word, we look at ourselves as in a mirror, so that we turn to follow what He tells us there. We

should repent immediately and resolve to do all He says as soon as we are aware of our need from the Scriptures we study. We seek His grace and thank Him as we obey with fear and trembling, learning from God as we are conformed to the image of Christ by His word and Spirit.

TETH: VERSES 65-72

⁶⁶Teach me good judgment and knowledge, for I believe Your commandments.

God teaches us to judge situations and choices rightly as we grow in knowledge from right understanding of His ways and commands. On our part, we need to believe and trust all that we find from His word, or from that which others teach us that is found in the Scriptures (Acts 17:11). Sometimes we need hard times to learn to trust Him more, but ultimately what we learn is the greatest treasure – such joy is found in His word to us!

YOD: VERSES 73-80

⁷³Your hands have made me and fashioned me; give me understanding, that I may learn Your commandments. ⁸⁰Let my heart be blameless regarding Your statutes, that I may not be ashamed.

Because God made me in His image, I can find understanding from Him in His word – and to learn how to live to honor and please Him. The way to be right and pleasing to Him without shame is by knowing His word and then working out the doing of it.

KAPH: VERSES 81-88

⁸¹My soul faints for Your salvation, But I hope in Your word.

When overwhelmed or in doubt, we can rely on all God has promised and explained in the Scriptures to find hope. This hope does not disappoint, and is based on all that God has written down for us to discover for help in time of need. We discover life in Christ by the words of life, and the strength and desire to keep all He tells us by His indwelling Spirit.

LAMED: VERSES 89-96

⁸⁹Forever, O Lord, Your word is settled in heaven.
⁹⁰Your faithfulness endures to all generations; You established the earth, and it abides.

His word is eternal because God declared it to be settled by His mouth. Therefore, His faithfulness (that is His character) is also for all people over all time. We find security by trusting in the Scriptures of our unchanging Creator in the Bible's reliability and authority, the very words of our eternal God.

MEM: VERSES 97-104

¹⁰³How sweet are Your words to my taste, sweeter than honey to my mouth! ¹⁰⁴Through Your precepts I get understanding; therefore I hate every false way.

Our spirit and heart can rejoice in the sweetness of His word to us. The best we can taste is from His mouth found from the words recorded in the Scriptures! As we find understanding in our study in accordance with His work in us, we know the ways He hates to avoid them and to warn others. We seek truth for joy in pleasing Him.

NUN: VERSES 105-112

¹⁰⁵Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path.

A lamp is use to guide our steps, and a light goes before us to show us where we are going. His word gives direction and correction as we walk with Him, and it shows us the path ahead by illuminating what is coming up ahead in life. We find boundaries and a roadmap to follow by the word's commands, principles, and hope of life that continues beyond our death we anticipate down the road.

SAMEK: VERSES 113-120

¹¹⁴You are my hiding place and my shield; I hope in Your word.

In God's word, we find protection and intimacy. The hope these truths bring keep us from deceit, and the evil one set against us, because we are God's in Christ. We learn to tremble before the Almighty even as we warn others of the judgment on sin to come.

AYIN: VERSES 121-128

¹²⁷Therefore I love Your commandments more than gold, yes, than fine gold! ¹²⁸Therefore all Your precepts concerning all things I consider to be right; I hate every false way.

As we study to cut straight God's word, to rightly understand and apply it, we find all He has told us to do is more valuable than anything material we can possess or treasure, for all else turns to dust. Since His word tells us only right things to know

and do, we then find ourselves hating every false and misleading teaching. Truth matters.

PE: VERSES 129-136

¹³⁰The entrance of Your words gives light; it gives understanding to the simple. ¹³³Direct my steps by Your word, and let no iniquity have dominion over me.

The Scriptures illuminate our simple hearts and minds with understanding, as we search deep to drink at that well. When we pray for direction to choose what is right, His word is given meaning by His Spirit in us to avoid sin and its reign over us, as we put sinful habits and desires to death by that guidance. Light comes from letting His word dwell in us richly.

TSADDE: VERSES 137-144

¹³⁸Your testimonies, which You have commanded, are righteous and very faithful. ¹⁴⁰Your word is very pure; therefore Your servant loves it.

Scripture is what God commands, and is righteous, faithful, and pure. What is not to love about these attributes? Everything comes from God Himself to tell us about how to glorify Him. His word is to be ever trusted and is not wrong or tainted in any way, so we should set all our love on everything He says – and seek out the meaning to know what God desires for us to do.

QOPH: VERSES 145-152

¹⁴⁷I rise before the dawning of the morning, and cry for help; I hope in Your word. ¹⁴⁸My eyes are awake through the night watches, that I may meditate on Your word.

His word should be the first word, and His word the last word in our daily lives. The pattern here is to wake up and spend time in His word, and to go to bed thinking about what it says, means, and how to live by it until we fall asleep. Our lives must be governed by the Bible, with the principles and commands guiding our choices and desires. His word should *consume* us.

RESH: VERSES 153-160

¹⁵⁹Consider how I love Your precepts; revive me, O Lord, according to Your lovingkindness. ¹⁶⁰The entirety of Your word is truth, and every one of Your righteous judgments endures forever.

Loving God's word brings revitalization by His mercy and goodness to us, because it is all forever true and right.

SHIN: VERSES 161-168

¹⁶⁵Great peace have those who love Your law, and nothing causes them to stumble.

Awe and joy in the Scriptures bring God's infinite peace that passes our understanding. We do find what understanding we gain of His word gives us that peace, and keeps us from falling, if we are lifelong students and followers of all He has given us there.

TAU: VERSES 169-176

¹⁶⁹Let my cry come before You, O Lord; Give me understanding according to Your word.

This final section of Psalm 119 begins with a plea that God will hear us as we cry out for understanding – the knowledge and

wisdom that come from His word. He hears and delivers as in Psalm 22, brining such joy that causes our tongues to speak His praise, as the Scriptures leap from our hearts to glorify God, the One who saves and rescues the lost sheep, and that we do what He says in joyful and willing response.

SUMMARY

This is the joy which we find in God's word. If you take time to look further at Psalm 119 for the context of each verse in each section, and in its totality, it will move you to truly love His word in every jot and tittle. As you apply the principles of hermeneutics, expanding the context of every passage you read to include the entirety of the Bible, you will behold wondrous things from His word! *Love His word* as you cut it straight and understand the height, width, depth, and length of *Who* called us out by His love, in spirit and in truth, and *to what* He has called us.

WHAT DO WE DO WITH WHAT WE LEARN?

We have examined what Scripture teaches about cutting straight, rightly dividing, and accurately understanding the word of God. This began with where our doctrine, our teaching, comes from – is it from God, or from men’s reason and philosophy? This led us to consider the times we daily find ourselves in, where the prevailing wind in the church is often against intellectualism as an ungrounded feeling, and how God gave us a mind to use, and how He leads by His Spirit to truly seek to understand all that He told us in the Scriptures. Then we looked at how God’s desire for us is to deeply know Him, His calling, and our call to spiritual maturity – all through a correct understanding of the truth.

Because of these things, we looked at how essential truth is from the Bible as opposed to that of human reason, and the need for regeneration to have the mind of Christ for accurate understanding. The examples in Scripture and its authority demonstrate that solid biblical exegesis is crucial, how teaching that which is sound is our defense against wolves, and that the weaponry of our offense is wielded in the word of truth. This is how we grow in sanctification to fight the good fight for the glory and honor of God alone.

HOW DOES LOVE DRIVE THE TRUTH?

(1 Peter 1:22) Since you have purified your souls in obeying the truth through the Spirit in sincere love of the brethren, love one another fervently with a pure heart,

Love that is sincere comes from obedience to the truths of God as found in the Scriptures. These are the means of our sanctification and the methods we apply in our care for others.

A pure heart is cleansed by the washing of water by the word of God (Ephesians 5:26), and the clearer our understanding of that source, the more it will change our hearts and minds to conform to the image of Christ, “*He who is the blessed and only Potentate, the King of kings and Lord of lords*” (1 Timothy 6:15). Love of and for God should drive us to hunger for more of Him as revealed in His word to us.

(1 Peter 2:1-3) ¹Therefore, laying aside all malice, all deceit, hypocrisy, envy, and all evil speaking, ²as newborn babes, desire the pure milk of the word, that you may grow thereby, ³if indeed you have tasted that the Lord is gracious.

We choose to love in our learning from God and His servants, and by imparting His knowledge to others. This begins with saying ‘no’ to all that is contrary to God’s revealed will, replacing those things with what we find in His word of truth. Therefore, we should desire His word as the purest nourishment for spiritual growth, and hunger for God Himself in Christ Jesus as revealed in the Bible. We put off the old man and put on the new in our pursuit of the truth to do God’s will, our sanctification to be holy because and as He is.

WHAT IS THE DIRECTION OF MY LIFE?

These things should set the direction of our lives, based not on shifting sands of assumptions and reason, but on the solid rock of Jesus Christ according His absolutely reliable and certain word. To do this, we must cut it straight! That is title of this book, and the reason it was written.

Lord, help us to rightly divide your word of truth to do right as You say based on the truth you convey in the Scriptures - for love of You and for others you call out. Help us to understand the scriptures and your will contained therein rightly, that we may speak the truth in love, with the ultimate aim in all we do for the glory of God alone (*Soli Deo Gloria*). Amen! Selah.

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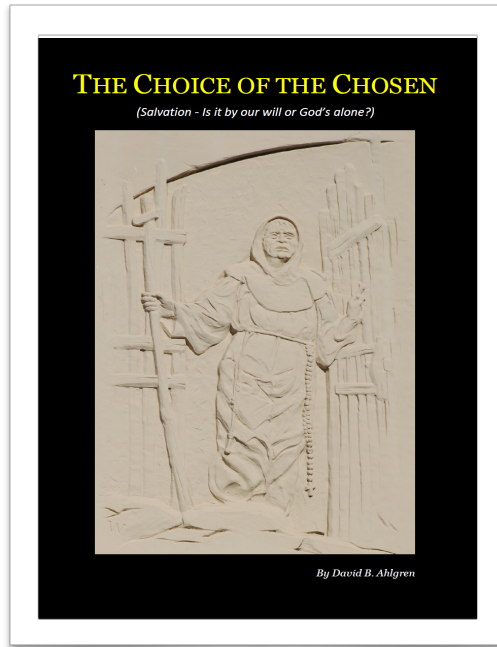
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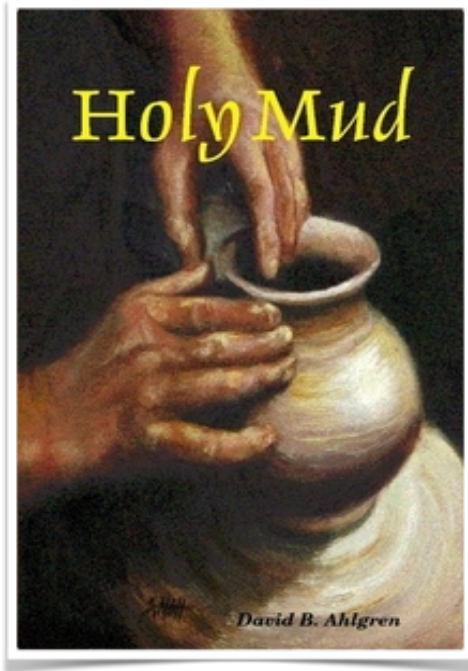
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Here we will look at what it means to rightly divide or accurately understand the Bible's truth to know God and make Him known, to put it above mere tradition and man's philosophy, to learn and teach with sound understanding and equally valid application of what we are to live by.



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