

Seeking the Truth

A Study of Authority

Part II

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Read With Understanding

In the previous series on authority, we studied how to establish authority using the Bible to teach us interpretation principles. We also studied how we should approach areas of disagreement with our brethren. I hope one thing is obvious: the need for each individual Christian to study the truth for himself.

We must remember that false doctrines will arise and flourish (2 Peter 2:1-3). We cannot always trust the preacher to correct error; sometimes preachers introduce error (2 Timothy 3:1-9; 4:2-4). Though elders are supposed to protect the church from error, sometimes they lead others astray (Acts 20:28-31).

The remedy for error, whether from false teachers inside or outside of the church, remains the same—the truth. Some will believe a lie because they do not love the truth but enjoy unrighteousness, 2 Thessalonians 2:10-12. Paul warned Timothy about false teachers and told him to hold to the truth of the scriptures, 2 Timothy 3:13-17. In order to follow false teachers, one must turn away from the truth, 2 Timothy 4:4. Although some elders will introduce false doctrines, God will save those who follow His word, Acts 20:32.

Truth is the antidote to error. Antidote that remains in the bottle is useless if we are poisoned. We must ingest the antidote so it can combat the poison. Likewise, if we do not

ingest God's word, we will not be able to combat error.

How do we learn the truth and make it part of our lives? We must read and meditate on God's word daily. Not only will God's word insulate us from error, it will enrich our lives for we will grow in our knowledge of God, learn how to live better lives, become better spouses, parents, and children, and strengthen hope.

We should follow the advice of Paul to Timothy regarding study. Paul told the young preacher Timothy to "give attention to reading, exhortation, and doctrine," 1 Timothy 4:13.

We must spend time **reading** the Bible to learn the stories and to become familiar with the overall Bible message. Reading helps us learn the narrative and see how the whole Bible story fits together. Reading is especially important for new Christians. Often we will find something in our reading that will turn into a more in depth study.

Exhortation is encouragement. We can encourage others with the encouragement we receive from God's word, 2 Corinthians 1:4. We should spend time reading passages that encourage us to continue in what is good. We can read about Bible characters that did not give up even in the midst of terrible opposition or suffering. We can also read about bad examples and avoid the decisions they

made. The encouragement that the epistle writers gave to individuals and churches can motivate us to live righteously. The writers encouraged them to remain faithful and to be busy about God's work. Of course, reading about our Savior is exhorting for it reminds us about His wonderful love, profound teaching, and eternal promises. When God's word exhorts you, use it to exhort others.

Doctrine means the teaching that we must follow. Doctrine only comes from God's word, 2 Timothy 3:16. It requires more study and mental effort than simple reading or reading for exhortation. We must consider what the entire Bible says about a particular issue—both directly and in principle—and draw valid conclusions. We must know why we do the things we do in personal service and public worship. Remember, we cannot leave this study to the preacher or the elders. We must know the truth so we can discern error.

In addition to the methods of determining authority from the first series of lessons, there are some additional principles offered here to help us read wisely and learn doctrine as taught in God's word:

1. Pray to God for wisdom, James 1:5.
2. Be diligent, not lazy, 2 Timothy 2:15.
3. Be patient; some things are difficult to understand and might require a lot of time to learn, 2 Peter 3:16.
4. Be logical. God's word does not oppose logic but embraces it, Acts 26:25.
5. Use common sense. Jesus spoke to the people in their common language not some hidden code. We can understand His word, Ephesians 5:17; 1 John 5:20.
6. Keep it simple. Since the Bible was written for the common person, do not look for hidden messages or other mystical meaning. Look for the plain and simple message.
7. Read in context. Words and sentences have meaning within a broader context. Do not try to force a word or passage to mean something the author did not intend. Look at surrounding passages for understanding.
8. Read in historical and cultural context. The Bible events occurred in history so look at the historical and cultural setting and what impact it might have on interpretation.
9. Handle illustrations and idioms wisely. Sometimes writers use figures of speech, metaphors, and similes to illustrate points. Do not make too much of symbols or apply them in ways in which the author did not intend.
10. Let scripture interpret scripture. This is probably the most important reminder. Use clear passages to illuminate confusing passages. You will find that the more scriptures you learn, the easier it is to understand unfamiliar passages.

Questions for Lesson 14

1. List some hindrances to good Bible study and suggested remedies.

2. Why do you think some Christians are reluctant to study issues related to their faith? How would you address that reluctance with them?

3. Why are the lives of great men and women from the Bible encouraging? How can we teach those characters to younger people?

4. Do you think most Christians study issues of doctrine for themselves? Explain your answer.

5. What suggestions would you give for developing better study habits?

6. What does “let scripture interpret scripture” mean?

Individual Action versus Church Action

Some problems that develop within the religious world result from a failure to understand the distinction between the church and the individual in relationship to God's work. This failure will cause us to transfer some individual responsibilities to the church. We can do many things as individuals that God has not commanded the church to do. When we do this, we burden the church with work that takes it away from its primary responsibility of teaching the lost and edifying the members.

What is the church? The church is simply a body of believers called by the gospel and sanctified by God, Acts 2:47. We sometimes use the terms universal and local church to distinguish the two ways that the New Testament uses the word church. We do not find the designations "universal church" and "local church" in the scriptures but the concept exists in the New Testament.

The local church is a church that meets in a particular locality. The church in Jerusalem (Acts 11:22), the seven churches of Asia from Revelation 2 and 3 are biblical examples of this use. The universal church comprises all believers in Christ. Hebrews 12:22-23 addresses "the general assembly of the firstborn whose names are listed in heaven." In a general sense, Jesus died for the church to purify it, Ephesians 5:25-27. In the Catholic system (chapter 2), and

other religious organizations, the universal church is made up of many local churches. In the New Testament, the universal church is comprised of people, not churches, 1 Corinthians 12:20-27. This distinction is important when we consider the differences between the universal and local church. It is in this local sense that we will consider the church in this lesson.

Sometimes people say, "The church is the people and the people are the church." This is true in the sense that the church is not a building but is comprised of individuals, 1 Corinthians 2:18. The strength of the local church depends on the strength of its members, 1 Timothy 3:5. If the individual members are weak in knowledge, unconcerned about the lost, and carnally minded, that local church will be ineffective.

However, the above statement is false in the sense that the Bible makes a distinction between the individual and the church. The church acts as a collectivity, 1 Corinthians 12:14. Even within this collectivity, there are things that individuals can do that the church cannot. An example of this is the care of widows in 1 Timothy 5:3-16. The church could provide regular financial support for certain widows, but not all widows. The primary responsibility for the widows first rests with the children and grandchildren. They cannot shift their responsibility

Individual Action versus Church Action

to the church for that would burden the church and violate God's law. An individual could financially support a widow under 60 years old, who was not hospitable or a good worker, but the church cannot. Paul closed with the admonition not to burden the church. We cannot give the church a responsibility that is ours individually.

Some want to take an individual responsibility of the parents to provide entertainment for their children and shift it to the church. The church has no authority to manage such worldly matters and shift its money and time from the spiritual growth of its members and rescuing sinners from the world.

Some reason that if a thing is good for the individual to do, it is good for the church to do. Though the church is comprised of individuals, they have different duties and responsibilities. The church has no authority to decide where I will work, how to discipline my children, when and where I will go on vacation, or other personal matters. We would be offended if the church intruded into our personal affairs in this way. We should likewise be offended when people want to intrude into the work of the church and introduce unauthorized practices. An individual can start a business, invest his money in any venture for profit but the church is limited in the way it can use its money.

The difference in the way the church and the individual can use their money is evident in Acts 5:1-4. When Ananias and Sapphira sold their land, they kept back part of the proceeds and gave the rest to the apostles to help their needy brethren. Their intentions, for the most part, were good. Peter does not fault them for keeping part of the money; he condemned them for lying to God. Peter told them that when they had the land it was in their control. When they sold the land, the money was still under their control. Only when they gave the money to the apostles did it leave their realm of control and come under the oversight of the church.

Some will try to take individual commands and apply them to the church. For example, in James 2:17 we read, "Pure and undefiled religion before God and the Father is this: to visit orphans and widows in their trouble, and to keep oneself unspotted from the world." This is clearly an individual command, particularly the final admonition to keep oneself pure. The first part of the sentence, regarding the widows and orphans, also applies to the individual. As we have already studied, the church has the authority to care for some widows but not all widows. The individual, however, is not limited in the care he can show to the needy.

When studying the commandments of God, remember the distinction between what the church can do and what you can do. Do not confuse them.

Questions for Lesson 15

1. What are the some similarities between the universal church and the local church?
2. What are the some differences between the universal church and the local church?
3. Give some examples of local churches in the scripture.
4. If the church is people, not a building, why is the universal church not made up of churches?
5. Are there unsaved people in the universal church? Explain.
6. Are there unsaved people in the local church? Explain.
7. What is a burden? How can we burden the church?
8. What is the primary responsibility of the church? Explain with scriptures.

Non-Biblical Authority

Hierarchical Authority

In lesson 2, we studied the change from autonomous, independent churches to a large international organization that is the Roman Catholic Church. Many religious groups are organized along similar hierarchical structures in which the control of an entire religious body is in the hands of a few people or, in most cases, one person. Often the ruling group and the head of the religious body claim a special relationship with God (Vicar, apostle, etc.) not enjoyed by the members of the church. Some even claim special power to intercede on behalf of the people before God. Many claim to communicate directly with God, receiving revelations from Him to manage the church. Since so many people claim to speak with and for God, yet teach different things, we should evaluate their claims from the Scriptures.

In Ephesians 4:11-16, Paul lists the roles that God gave some men in the church to strengthen it. Jesus appointed His apostles to be witnesses to carry the gospel message in to the world. However, no one can qualify as an apostle today (Acts 1:21-22; 2 Corinthians 12:12). We have no need for modern apostles for the work of the apostles continues through God's word. Of course, unscrupulous men will usurp this office (2 Cor. 11:12-15).

Going back to Ephesians 4, Paul said that the church is like a body but

there is only one head who directs and rules the body, Christ (Ephesians 4:15; 5:23). The Bible has given no man the position of "Christ on Earth" (Vicar). Jesus rules His kingdom from His heavenly throne (Acts 2:36).

If God intended a governing body to rule over the whole church, where are the offices (and their qualifications) and the governmental structure in the Bible? The Bible lists the qualifications for the leaders of the local churches, the elders, in 1 Timothy 3:1-7 and Titus 1:5-9. It also describes their work and the local limit of their authority in Titus 1:9-10, 1 Timothy 5:17, and 1 Peter 5:1-4. God gave no broader hierarchical structure for the church though many existed within the Jewish and Roman governments at the time of Christ. There is no Bible authority for earthly rulers in the church higher than the local eldership.

Creeds

Many religious bodies codified their beliefs into creed books. Some are in question and answer format (catechism) whereas others are formal declarations of belief (confession of faith). The churches of a particular denomination are administered by the creed. The religious leaders—sometimes members as well—must often affirm allegiance to the creed.

A primary problem with creeds is their human origin and divisive nature. Since different religious

groups have different creeds, a prerequisite to unity is to remove the creeds. The early church did not have a creed book; they only followed God's word. Benjamin Franklin, the restoration preacher, had this to say about creeds:

"If a creed contains more than the Bible, it contains too much, and whatever it contains more than the Bible is objectionable, and it is rejected because it contains too much. If a creed contains less than the Bible it contains too little, and wherein it contains less than the Bible, it is wrong, and the creed is rejected because it contains too little. If a creed differs from the Bible, it is wrong where it differs from the Bible, and is to be rejected because it differs from the Bible. If a creed is like the Bible, it is useless, for, in that case, the Bible will certainly do as well as a creed like the Bible. There is no other ground a man can take... 'What, then, is to be done with all the creeds?' says a man. Do with the whole of them as some of the preachers have done with the Bible—pronounce them 'a dead letter,' There can be no general union [of Christians] till they are abolished...As long as a single one of them is in force anywhere, schism will exist." (The Gospel Preacher, Vol 1. Benjamin Franklin. Delight, Arkansas: Gospel Light Publishing. 319-320.)

Traditions

Jesus rebuked the Jews for raising their traditions to the level of Law and even supplanting the Law with their traditions, Matthew 15:1-9. In that instance, it was not wrong to wash hands before eating, but the Jewish leaders made it an ordinance; part of the law. These traditions, as requirements of obedience, constituted vain worship, Matthew 15:19.

The apostles encouraged the believers to follow the traditions they delivered, 2 Thessalonians 2:15; 3:6. The apostles had the authority to do this (Matthew 18:18) and their traditions, which had the force of law, were preserved in their writings. It is wrong, however, to require obedience to the traditions of uninspired men.

Sometimes, matters of convenience can become traditions. When one attempts to change "the way we have always done it," we must make sure that the objections are scriptural. One church used to cover the Lord's Supper plates with a sheet before service to keep flies off the emblems. When the church moved into a new building, the fly problem was gone so they did not need the sheet. However, some objected to removing it, feeling that the Lord's Supper should be covered and the cover removed in their ceremonious tradition. They were inadvertently adding another emblem to the Lord's Supper by requiring the cover.

We must make sure that our expediencies do not become law for us. When someone suggests a change, we must first ask if it is a change in God's order or man's tradition. Never change the first; do not fear changing the latter.

Questions for Lesson 16

1. Besides scriptural reasons, what dangers exist when churches unite under a central authority?
2. What member of the church has a special relationship to God that the other members do not have?
3. Are deacons in a leadership role over the congregation? Explain.
4. Why are creed books divisive?
5. What are some traditions that we might incorrectly treat as law?
6. If we can change a man-made tradition, are there any practical reasons why we should not change it? (example: time of service, order of worship)

Direct Holy Spirit Communication

Some people will look at the religious confusion of the world and claim that one must have the direct action of the Holy Spirit to give them understanding of God's word. They believe that either through feeling or some special thought the Holy Spirit communicates the Father's will to them. Although this idea has its appeal, it is fraught with many difficulties.

There are many who claim that the Holy Spirit moves them in interpretation yet they teach and practice different things. The Mormon Church cites the *burning bosom*—a feeling of intense goodness—as the Holy Spirit's verification of the Book of Mormon. Charismatic believers seek worship that arouses their emotions as a sign of the Holy Spirit's approval. These two groups would oppose the claims of the other yet both offer the feeling of the Holy Spirit as validation for their beliefs. By what standard or

reason could one person who claims the testimony of the Holy Spirit oppose another religious person who also claims the Holy Spirit's approval?

God is not the author of confusion, but of peace, 1 Corinthians 14:33. The word inspired by the Spirit emphasized the one mind (1 Corinthians 1:10), one body (Ephesians 1:4), one faith (Ephesians 1:5), and one hope (Ephesians 1:4). The unity of the church results from unity in the Spirit of God. The Father revealed His message to us through the Holy Spirit. An often used chart (reproduced below), developed by James W. Adams, shows that many actions in the conviction and conversion of the sinner attributed to the Holy Spirit, are also attributed to the Spirit inspired Bible (Ferrell Jenkins. The Finger of God. Temple Terrace, Florida: Florida College Bookstore, 1984. 16.).

Spirit	Action	Word of God
John 3:5, 6, 8	Born Begotten	1 Peter 1:23-25; 1 Corinthians 4:15; James 1:18
John 6:63	Makes Alive (quicken)	Psalms 119:50, 93
Titus 3:5	Saved	James 1:21
Romans 15:13	Power of	Romans 1:16
1 Corinthians 6:11	Sanctified by	John 17:17
1 Corinthians 6:11	Washed by	Ephesians 5:26

Emotions and the Spirit

When we consider the claims of those who rely on the Holy Spirit testimony, their appeal is often made to emotions. However, nothing in the New Testament tells us this. Some say that good feelings show God's approval, yet self-satisfaction and self-justification will produce the same emotional feedback. Where did New Testament writers ever tell believers to *feel* something to know it was true? In the book of Acts, none of the believers were asked how they felt but were told to listen to words of truth and reason (Acts 17:2, 17; 19:8; 26:25; 1 Peter 3:15). Some seek feelings as a cheap substitute for faith based on God's word; a shortcut to diligent study. Others are bored and consider the emotional frenzy excitement for an otherwise dull spiritual life. Before one relies too heavily on the emotional appeal, he should remember that even (and especially) non-Christian religions often rely heavily on emotional excitement and frenzy as a sign of their god's presence. Could a seducing spirit (1 Timothy 4:1-2) lead someone who claims to follow the Holy Spirit? By what standard would they know if it was a seducing spirit or not? We must appeal to something outside of ourselves; an objective standard.

Consider also the claims of the television evangelists who claim to have great power and gifts of prophecy and knowledge by the Holy Spirit. Again, they contradict in their teaching so someone must be wrong. Many of these "inspired" men have been guilty of fraud and deceit yet they and their believers claimed that the Holy Spirit was at work in them. Even the Corinthian church was rich in spiritual gifts but Paul condemned them for being carnally minded and divisive. Their feelings—if there were any, the Bible does not say—of Holy Spirit influence were no indication that they pleased God, in fact, they were disobedient.

Origin of Direct Holy Spirit Influence

The concept of Holy Spirit guidance is rooted in the Calvinistic doctrine of depravity. Calvin supposed that men were born completely in sin and unable to seek God unless God individually acted upon the man's heart—God had to give man faith directly. Ferrell Jenkins quotes J. Oliver Buswell from A Systematic Theology of the Christian Religion, Vol. III: "The point is that the heathen do not know that they do not know the Lord until God Himself operates on their hearts by the convicting power of the Holy Spirit (p. 139)" (Jenkins 15). However, the Bible teaches that we are not born in sin (Matthew 19:14; Ezekiel 18), that we sin when we depart from God's will (Romans 3:12, 23), and that we must obey the gospel in order to be saved (Mark 16:15-16; Romans 10:14-17; 2 Thessalonians 2:14). The duty to accept or reject the gospel is in our hands, not God's hands.

I wonder why some who believe that the Holy Spirit must act in a direct way

on an individual will evangelize others. In the Calvinistic doctrine, the right approach would be to sit back and let the Spirit convert them and lead them to the right religious group. Consider the words of H. Leo Boles:

“If the Holy Spirit operates in a direct way, independent of truth, why does he not operate on all God wants all to be saved? Why does he not send the Holy Spirit and convert all? What will such a claim be made by a poor, ignorant, superstitious person and not be made by a more intelligent person? The theory of the direct operation of the Holy Spirit has the Spirit operating quicker on a superstitious person than a more thoughtful and intelligent person. Why do we not find conversion where the truth is not known? Among heathen where Christ is not known, where the gospel is not preached, we never hear of a conversion. Some missionaries must carry the truth of the gospel before heathens are converted. Neither do we find the Holy Spirit leading anyone where the truth of the gospel is not known.” (H. Leo Boles. The Holy Spirit: His Personality, Nature, Works. Nashville: Gospel Advocate Company, 1942. 239.).

However, Jesus told His apostles to go out and teach the world obey what they learned from Him, Matthew 28:19-20. The foundation of the believer's faith is God's word, inspired by the Holy Spirit, 1 Corinthians 2:13; Romans 10:17. Boles later wrote,

“To be guided by the New Testament is to be guided by the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit leads all the same way; he does not lead one man into one church and another into another church; he leads all into the church of our Lord. The Holy Spirit does not lead one Christian one way and lead another still another way. What the New Testament says to one it says to everyone” (Boles 241).

Paul shows us how this works in Ephesians 3:1-18: The Spirit inspired him, he wrote the message, and when they read the message, they would have a full understanding of what the Holy Spirit revealed to him. In all of scripture, we have God's will for us revealed plainly.

Questions for Lesson 17

1. By what standard or reason could one person who claims the testimony of the Holy Spirit oppose another religious person who also claims the Holy Spirit's approval?

2. Where did New Testament writers ever tell believers to feel something to know if it was true?

3. Could a seducing spirit (1 Timothy 4:1-2) lead someone who claims to follow the Holy Spirit? By what standard would one know if it were a seducing spirit or not?

4. Do Christians believe the Holy Spirit is the word of God? Explain.

5. List some sins that the Spirit-filled Corinthian Christians were committing.

6. Why do you think some link emotions to the Holy Spirit?

Personal Feelings and Interpretation

“The Bible means different things to different people,” we often hear. Some adopt this approach because they believe it is unkind to tell someone that their beliefs are wrong. Others feel like no one can understand the Bible and since many Biblical scholars have different opinions about what a passage means, then it must mean different things to each reader. In addition to being unscriptural, those who adopt such an approach fail to see the dangerous implications of the statement.

The Bible tells us that we can understand it, Ephesians 5:17. God did not give us the Bible in a mysterious code that some may interpret different ways. The Bible was written in the language of the common person. The English translations we use are easy to read and comprehend. The Bible often uses everyday objects like seed, fishing, and the body to illustrate spiritual concepts. We cannot blame misunderstanding on the text itself for we can understand it.

If we say the Bible means different things to different people, ultimately we must say that the Bible means nothing. If each reader can interpret the Bible differently, then the message is irrelevant for there would be no inherent truth—no objective standard—by which we could shape our lives and worship. Instead, the Bible becomes like clay that we can

mold into whatever shape pleases us. The Bible then becomes no different from any other book. If this view is true, the Bible cannot be authoritative for no two people will understand the law correctly. Of course, Paul’s admonition in Ephesians 5:17 opposes this.

The confusion comes when man interprets the message incorrectly. Peter acknowledged that some of Paul’s writings were hard to understand though not impossible, 2 Peter 3:15-18. In fact, Peter said that by growing in the knowledge of God we could recognize and avoid the error of those who twist the truth.

The Bible exhorts believers to “be of the same mind,” 1 Corinthians 1:10. Worldly approaches to the Bible lead to division, 1 Corinthians 10:11-13; 3:3-4. Taking a view that is concerned with physical concerns more than spiritual needs will lead us astray, 1 Corinthians 2:14; 1 Timothy 1:5-7; 6:20-21. This carnal/spiritual conflict will cause religious division. Paul recognized that such an approach leads to arguments over scripture, 1 Timothy 6:3-5; 2 Timothy 3:1-9.

Some will quote “no Scripture is of private interpretation” (2 Peter 1:20) to prove that one cannot understand the Bible.. However, Peter really says, “no prophecy of Scripture is of private interpretation.” Peter wrote that the prophetic word was made more sure because they saw it fulfilled in Jesus

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and the church. Most translations make a marginal note that interpretation can also be translated origin. Prophecy did not come by human wisdom or analysis, but God gave the prophets the message, v.21. This verse has nothing to do with an individual interpretation of Scripture.

Some will acknowledge what the Scripture says but feel that they do not have to obey it or that it really does not matter what they do. Jeremiah 17:9 warns of the danger of relying on one's feelings; they can be deceitful. How can a man decide what God does or does not want? Even David, a man after God's own heart, was rebuked for presuming to do something for God in service to Him that He did not command. In 2 Samuel 7:1-7, David wanted to build a wonderful temple for God and the prophet Nathan told him to do it "for the Lord is with you." But God rebuked Nathan and told him to tell David that He did not ask for a temple to be built and prohibited David from doing so! David and Nathan had a good idea but they acted presumptuously; only God knew what He wanted. When we set aside God's will for worship for our own desires, we also act presumptuously.

I studied with a religious group once that told me to pray about what they were teaching; if I had good feelings, what they said was true. I pointed out an inherent flaw in their approach: I have often had good feelings about bad things and bad feelings about good things. I can remember when I have had to tell a good friend and member of the church that some friends saw her buying alcohol and were talking about it. It was good and right for me to talk with her about the bad example she had set, but I had bad feelings of nervousness and sorrow that I had to confront her. I also had a good feeling when I told off a person that was really being a jerk, but I realized later that I handled the situation incorrectly. Though I felt good about it at the time, I did the wrong thing. Our basis for evaluating truth must lie outside of ourselves, James 1:23-25; 1 Thessalonians 5:21.

Many things seem good to us but do not please God, Proverbs 14:12. It is presumptuous for us to put what we want to do above what God has commanded. Paul wrote that there were many things he thought he ought to do for God, but he was wrong, Acts 26:9; 1 Timothy 1:12-13. Jesus warned of religious people who would be lost for disobedience, Matthew 7:21-23. They did what seemed to be wonderful things, but they did not please God. We must not think that just because we are religious God will be pleased. God wants obedience to His law, not our desires

Personal Feelings and Interpretation

Questions for Lesson 18

1. Do you think a person who appeals primarily to his personal feelings would have more or less Bible knowledge. Explain.
2. How can the view, “The Bible means different things to different people,” affect unity within the local church?
3. To say that we all *can* understand the Bible mean that we all understand it to the same extent at the same time? Explain.
4. What are some obstacles to understanding God’s word?
5. List some inherent dangers in relying on one’s feelings to determine truth.
6. How would you answer someone who says that the Bible means different things to different people?

Law of Love

Some who see the religious confusion prevalent in the world do not want to find unity in God's word, but try to dismiss the differences as irrelevant. Some appeal to a "law of love." The basic premise is that there is a greater law of love or higher principle that overrules specific laws. Though this might seem good in theory, in practice—and scripturally—this approach has many problems.

The first problem is the arbitrary nature of guiding oneself by this approach. Who decides which laws to set aside? Some would supplant nearly every command in the word of God. If a law is inconvenient or does not seem important to us, we can ignore it saying that we do not see the greater principle behind the law.

Imagine a society that approached civil laws in that way. If you do not know why the speed limit for a particular road is so slow you could ignore it. However, road conditions or the nature of the typical traffic pattern might have determined the speed limit. Regardless of whether you agree with the official judgment, you would break the law by speeding. Of course, someone might note that if you were taking your child to the hospital in an emergency you could break the speed limit, therefore showing the greater law of love that overrules the traffic law. This view fails to realize that when you speed your child to the hospital you are still breaking the law

and subject to the penalties of the law. However, if a police officer pulled you over for speeding in such a scenario, he would probably not ticket you and, instead, help you reach the hospital safely. Law of love proponents fail to realize that the police officer, by the nature of his position, has the authority to be lenient with the law of the land in extenuating circumstances. God has given no man the right to set aside His law.

Secondly, this method subjects God's laws to man's wisdom. This is a foolish path to tread, Proverbs 14:12, Isaiah 55:8-11. We cannot enter the mind of God and understand why He commanded the things that He did, 1 Corinthians 4:2-16. God did not reveal Himself exhaustively to us (He did not tell us everything about Himself and His will) but He told us what we need to know for our life on earth and preparation for eternity, 2 Peter 1:3. Job tried to question God about the things that happened to him and God rebuked him for trying to enter into His area of judgment, Job 40:7-14. Those who promote the law of love do the exact same thing: if they do not understand the principle behind God's word, they set aside the law. Would we annul God's judgment?

Finally, this approach ignores the "tough love" characteristics of God's law. We must endure adversity in order to become stronger. There are some commands that might be easier

to set aside or deem insignificant. We might have to make some sacrifices to fulfill God's law in the way that He commanded, yet in doing so we subject our will to the Father's will. Some things we endure, though we do not understand now, make us stronger, 1 Peter 1:6-9; 2 Corinthians 4:16-18. Those who embrace the law of love will set aside God's law in difficult circumstances failing to realize that enduring the difficulty is exactly what the person needs to do. Jesus loved the rich young ruler yet His command was very difficult, Mark 10:17-22.

Those who support the law of love argue that Jesus practiced it in regard to the Sabbath. Under the Old Law, the Jews could not work on the Sabbath day, Exodus 20:8-11. A man was even stoned to death for gathering sticks on the Sabbath, Numbers 15:32-36. However, by Jesus' day the Jews had made many laws in addition to God's revealed law. For example, the Jews could not travel more than a mile on the Sabbath. Jesus healed some sick people and ate in the grain fields on the Sabbath with His disciples; the Jewish leaders rebuked them, Matthew 12:1-14. Jesus did not violate the law of the Sabbath but their Sabbath traditions. Jesus points out that the priests must work on the Sabbath (note: if He violated the Sabbath then so did the priests!) but are not condemned.

He also recalled the incident in 1 Samuel 21:2-6 in which David and his men were allowed to eat the showbread that only the priests could eat, Leviticus 24:5-9. Note that David did not take the showbread but the priest offered it as long as the men were undefiled. Jesus does not disapprove of this incident and quotes Hosea saying that God desired mercy, not sacrifice. Ahimilech the priest showed mercy to David and his men on this one instance in opposition to the law regarding the showbread. However, this did not provide a precedent for violation in the future. Consider Uzzah who, wanting to steady the ark so that it did not fall off a cart, was struck by an angry God for touching the ark, 2 Samuel 6:6. If we break God's laws out of good intentions, we are treading on dangerous, and presumptuous, ground.

Some also quote Matthew 23:23-24 in which Jesus condemned the hypocritical Jewish leaders for tithing mint and cumin and neglecting love and mercy. Proponents of the law of love stress that Jesus was more concerned with love and mercy than with the tithe. However, this view fails to consider the whole passage. Jesus did not condemn them for tithing the smallest of spices; in fact, He said they should have done this. He condemned them for focusing on the tithe and neglecting the important laws of love and mercy. If anything, this passage stresses the need to be diligent about the "small" laws of God and the important principles.

What did Jesus say in regard to law and love? He said, "If you love Me, keep

My commandments,” John 14:15. In John 14:21, He said, “He who has My commandments and keeps them, it is he who loves Me.” In Luke 6:46, Jesus wondered, “But why do you call Me ‘Lord, Lord,’ and not do the things which I say?” He condemned those who would call Him Lord and disobey Him in Matthew 7:21: “‘Not everyone who says to Me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ shall enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of My Father in heaven.” Jesus stressed obedience to the law as well as mercy and love.

The apostle John wrote, “God is love,” 1 John 4:8. God is the one who revealed Himself through the gospel of the New Testament. It was sent by a God who loved us so much that He gave His Son to die for us. It was taught by one who loved us so much that He lived as one of us. It was exemplified in the death of one who, out of love, died for us so He could cleanse us and adopt us. It was delivered by a Spirit of love to the apostles who revealed the will of God to us. Love, mercy, truth, and justice were foremost in God’s revelation. We already follow a law of love. We must not doubt God’s love when we encounter difficulty following His law. He is a good Father and He knows what is best for us. We must be filled with love and trust and obey His law knowing it is for our good.

We do not have to understand all of the reasons and principles behind God’s laws. We must know and trust that all of God’s commands are for our good, Psalm 119:65-68, 101-105.

Questions for Lesson 19

1. What do you think are some difficult commands that one might invoke a “law of love” to set aside?
2. Why does the “law of love” not bring about the unity that some desire?
3. Did Jesus exercise a “law of love” with the thief on the cross? Explain your answer. Matthew 27:44; Luke 23:39-43.
4. How does the parent-child relationship help us understand our relationship to God and His commands?
5. What does “the priests violate the Sabbath” mean?
6. Can we neglect the “weightier matters” of Christ’s law? Explain.
7. Are *law* and *love* opposed to one another? Explain.

Ignorance

A danger that the church faces in every generation is ignorance of God's will. We do not have in mind the young person or new Christian who is just learning the word of God. Rather, the problem is with those who are older who by virtue of time and experience should have increased in the knowledge of God's word. The Hebrew writer rebukes his audience for not knowing some of the basic principles of the doctrine of Christ though, by then, they should have been teachers, Hebrews 5:11-14. Note that he said they had become dull of hearing. These were not enemies of God, but were His children yet God's word no longer energized them. Becoming dull of hearing, they became unequipped to teach—they did not know enough basic things teachers should know.

God will not accept ignorance as an excuse for disobeying Him. He lamented that His people perished because of ignorance, Hosea 4:6. God has blessed us with so many opportunities to learn more of His word and to teach it to others. We have Bibles available in our language that are easy to understand. We have Bible classes, including special classes outside of the regular study time, taught by able teachers. God has blessed us with many knowledgeable teachers who can help us understand difficult passages in an individual study and numerous books by good

authors that can give us some insight and help in our personal study. Only laziness or negligence will keep us from our duty and privilege to know God's word.

When we remain ignorant of God's word, we risk two possible dangers: liberalism and ultra-conservatism.

We can adopt liberal ideas of worship and personal living if we do not know what God requires. If we just guess at what we think God wants and how He will judge us (which only becomes a reflection of what we feel we should do and use ourselves as God's standard of judgment) we will essentially be following our own will, not God's will. We will invoke God's name and give some attention to His word but for practical guidance, we will rely on our own wisdom, 1 Corinthians 2:1-5; Proverbs 14:12.

The other danger is ultra-conservatism, that is, we will be against things that God has not forbidden based on what we have always heard or what some great teacher has said. Some think that ultra-conservatism is not a problem but Jesus' rebuke of the Pharisees tells us that it is. By ultra-conservatism, we do not mean a desire to do only what God, but instead an attitude of enforcing self will as God's will. We can misapply what passages we do know because we have not studied the context of the passage but used *proof text* approach—find a passage that

seems to say what you want to believe though it might not exactly fit—or have lazily borrowed someone else's proof text. It is easy to get a concordance and find passages that seem to say what we think God wants us to do and try to force them to apply; but we do so at our own peril. Peter warned about those who twist the scriptures, that these *untaught* and *unstable* people do so to their own destruction, 2 Peter 3:16. Certainly, the liberal reader will have to answer to God for having such a loose view of the scripture, yet the ultra-conservative must answer for binding where God has not bound.

Israel's rebellious and weak tendencies were rooted in their ignorance, Judges 2:10-11. Their parents had not effectively taught them God's will nor did they seek the Lord on their own. The prophets rebuked the people for ignoring the precious word of God, Hosea 8:12. Jeremiah compared them to people who forsook a fountain that would continue to give living waters, for broken cisterns that would not hold rain water, Jeremiah 2:13. In forgetting God's message, they were forgetting Him, Jeremiah 2:32. The word of God was a reproach to them, Jeremiah 6:10, and so they did not know the wise way to live, Jeremiah 4:22. We often quote Jeremiah 10:23 to show that man is insufficient to direct His own steps. When we remain willfully ignorant of God's word, are we not directing our own steps?

Consider these conclusions from Lesson 4:

1. If the Bible is the word of God then it would be timeless in its application and would need to be read and obeyed by all men. Men would eagerly study it because it reveals the message and mind of our Creator. To snub it or treat it like common books would be to treat God in a like manner. If it is the word of God, we should seek to know for ourselves all we can know of the message.

2. If the Bible is not the word of God, then it is untrustworthy, unreliable, without authority, and the hopes and promises contained in its pages are vain and worthless. It would have no more value than any other book, in fact, it would be worse because it claims to be the word of God and commands submission to its precepts.

If we accept conclusion number one, then our lives must reflect it. We must love the truth for it is the truth. It is God's message to us; why would we ignore it? It contains all things for life and godliness, 2 Peter 1:3, so if we want to understand this life and eternal life, we must study it. It thoroughly equips us for every good work, 2 Timothy 3:16-17. If we want to do every good work we must know what to do; that knowledge comes through study. If we want God's approval, we must know and apply His word, 2 Timothy 2:15; Hebrews 11:6/Romans 10:17. Let us not be ignorant of God's will but wise in what is good, Romans 16:19.

Questions for Lesson 20

1. List some attitudes and habits that lead to ignorance in mature Christians and suggested remedies.
2. Why do you think the text says that it is a *privilege* to study God's word?
3. How could ultra-conservatism be considered a danger?
4. Explain how to properly use a *proof text*.
5. How was Old Testament Israel affected by its willful ignorance of God's will?
6. Do you think ignorance of God's will might reflect a lack of trust in His word? Explain.

Science, History, and the Bible

When watching one of the cable channels such as The History Channel or The Discovery Channel, one can see stories that attempt to investigate the Bible from a scientific or historical perspective. While one can learn a good amount of information from some shows, many serve to create doubt in the accuracy of the Bible record. Many historians and scientists, especially those who produce such shows, have a bias against the miraculous events of the Bible and the idea of a God-inspired revelation. What should the Christian do when faced with apparent disagreement between the Bible and scientific or historical records? Should we ignore the Bible and listen to the scientists or should we ignore the scientists and listen to the Bible?

Science

When comparing the Bible and science, one should be impressed with the scientific accuracy of the Bible. There are facts revealed in the scripture for which the science behind them was unknown for thousands of years. For example, myths and legends taught that the earth rested on the backs of animals or on the shoulder of Atlas. However, in the book of Job we read that God hung the earth upon nothing, Job 26:7. Job also noted that the earth turned, though the rotation of the Earth was unknown at the time, Job 38:14. In the New Testament, Paul said that God made all men from one blood, Acts 17:26.

Though many thought that the races were distinct species, our recent knowledge of blood has confirmed that all races have one blood.

One of the most impressive examples of the Bible accurate record of scientific facts before men discovered the truth is the example of Matthew Fontaine Maury, the father of Oceanography. Maury was a student of the Bible and the sea. Upon hearing a passage in the Psalm 8 about “paths of the seas,” he determined to find the paths. Within a few years he charted the principal sea paths, or lanes, still used today, DeHoff Why We Believe the Bible, page 53.

Psalm 102:26 and Hebrews 1:10-11 speaks of the Earth becoming old and wearing out. Since the late 1800’s we have begun to understand the laws of thermodynamics. These laws state that since energy cannot be created or destroyed, but that energy is decreasing, eventually the universe would run down, or run out of energy.

History

Historical opponents have often opposed the Biblical record only to realize that it was, in fact, correct. The Bible recorded individuals, political titles, and even whole nations before historians and archaeologists were able to discover them. For a long time the Hittite nation was considered a myth for we only had a Biblical

record of their existence. However, modern archaeologists have discovered a vast wealth of information about the Hittite Empire. In the New Testament, many doubted Luke's record of the census at the time of Jesus' birth. However, archaeological discoveries proved that the Romans conducted a regular census for tax purposes (Evidence That Demands A Verdict. Josh McDowell. Campus Crusade for Christ, San Bernadino, CA: 1972. 73.). Sir William Ramsey wanted to prove that the book of Acts was historically incorrect. However, after detailed archaeological investigation he determined that it was, in fact, extremely trustworthy and that Luke was a "historian of the first rank," Evidence 73. Luke used political titles properly such as calling Publius "the first man of the island," and calling the civil authorities of Thessalonica *politarchs*, Acts 17:3. Though historians doubted the accuracy of these titles, recent archaeological evidence confirmed that Luke was correct, Evidence 75.

Why do many scientists and historians oppose the Bible? Much of the difference comes not from research or facts, but from the philosophy or worldview of the scientists. If one does not believe that miracles could occur, then one must explain away historical eyewitness testimony of miracles such as we read about in the Bible. If one does not believe in a God who created the universe, then one must find another explanation for how all came into being. The problem is not with the facts of the Bible but rather prejudice against the Bible. In comparison to other ancient texts, linguists have repeatedly proven the Bible's accuracy. The textual support for the accuracy of the Bible is without peer. Many theologians, influenced by the German liberal schools, believed that there were no miracles and that belief in Jesus did not depend upon miracles. If we take away the miracles, we do not have Jesus. The miracles are an integral part of the Biblical record.

When we consider historical and scientific conflict with the Biblical record, we must remember that both are recent disciplines. Both scientists and historians have learned much, yet there is much more to learn. Today's cherished theories can be abandoned tomorrow if conflicting research or discoveries contradict them. Historians and scientists have been proven wrong by the Bible enough that one should give the Bible the benefit of the doubt, not recent popular theories.

We cannot ignore the discoveries of science and history but we must remember that both rely on human interpretation. The facts do not say anything; scholars use the facts to develop theories. Historians, especially, rely on not only their interpretation of historic events but, because they often use eyewitness accounts, depend on the interpretation of the people who recorded their observations. We cannot relive historical events so we must rely on documents that might be biased.

For example, consider the fact of the Civil War. Southerners, with a knowing grin, call it the “war of Northern aggression” whereas Northerners refer to it as “the war to preserve the Union.” Battlefield observers can describe the same events but, based on their prejudice, physical point of view, and other background knowledge, give accounts that seem to conflict. Historians who were not alive during the events must then read these biased accounts and interpret the events to give their interpretation of the events. At best, they reach “a truth” of what happened but not “the truth.” We can know what happened and theorize on why an event happened; but both will be subject to our interpretation.

We must be careful not to force Biblical interpretation on scientific observations. The Catholic Church opposed Galileo, who was scientifically accurate, based on misinterpretation of the Biblical account. We must remember that the Bible is neither a history nor a scientific book. It is a book to develop faith and teach us how to please God in worship and everyday life. When the Bible speaks about historical and scientific matters, it speaks correctly though the current conclusions may oppose it.

Questions for Lesson 21

1. Why do you think some people trust historians and scientists over the Bible?

2. Could a person who did not believe in miracles ever provide accurate analysis of an event that included a miracle? Explain.

3. How could the Bible accurately depict things that were unknown to science for hundreds or thousands of years?

4. History is more art than science. Why do you think some people value the interpretations of historians more than the historical record of the Bible?

5. How do you think further historical and scientific research will affect our understanding of the Bible? Do you think it will contradict or prove the Bible wrong? Explain your answer.

Building Biblical Arguments

We have studied how to read the Bible and use it to establish authority for our worship and daily living. Now we need to know how to put what we have learned into practice. In this lesson we will work through some scriptures to look at Biblical arguments for some of our practices. Of course, we can use the material for completing this lesson in teaching others.

Example 1: Baptism

If we wanted to know more about the practice of baptism, we should consider all that the New Testament says about baptism and draw our conclusions from what we read. Extra-biblical resources, such as word studies and Greek dictionaries, can help but we must remember that those whom we desire to teach may be confused, or even suspicious, if we must appeal to an ancient language for our modern practice. Proper use of such works can help us develop a background understanding for our personal knowledge, but when teaching others, we should stick to the scriptures.

If someone did not believe that baptism was immersion, we would not have to go to the Greek, but can use the context of scripture to support our point. What do the following passages indicate about sprinkling, pouring, and immersion?

Matthew 3:6	
Mark 1:9-10	
John 3:23	
Acts 8:38	
Romans 6:4	

In this example we have only defined baptism. We have answered, “What is the act of baptism?” Other questions need to be answered from these and other verses such as:

- Who can be baptized? (just anyone? Infants?)
- Is baptism necessary for salvation? Why or why not?
- What does baptism do?
- Are there any prerequisites or follow up requirements?

Example 2: What does Baptism accomplish?

Some might argue that we do not have to be baptized in order to be saved. Fill in the chart below showing what is accomplished by baptism.

Acts 2:38	
Acts 22:16	
1 Corinthians 6:11	
Galatians 3:27	
Romans 6:3-4	
John 3:5	
Mark 16:16	
Romans 6:17-18	
1 Corinthians 12:13	

1. Do these verses indicate that one must be baptized in order to accomplish something? Explain.
2. Could one logically conclude, after reading the passages above, that baptism is optional? Explain.
3. Could one logically conclude, after reading the passages above, that if one is not baptized, that they cannot accomplish the things listed above? Explain.

Example 3: The Lord's Supper

Texts: Matthew 26:26-27; Mark 14:22-25; Luke 22:19-20; Acts 20:7; 1 Corinthians 11:17-34

Read the texts above and answer these questions:

1. What is unleavened bread? Give verses with your answer.
2. What does the unleavened bread represent? Give verses with your answer.
3. What is the fruit of the vine. Give verses with your answer.
4. What does the fruit of the vine represent? Give verses with your answer.
5. Are we limited to only the fruit of the vine and unleavened bread? Explain.
6. What verses explain the need for the church to observe the Lord's Supper together?
7. List some guidelines regarding for observing the Lord's Supper from the passages above.
8. When must we eat the Lord's supper? Explain with Bible verses.
9. Who should eat the Lord's supper? Give verses with your answer.
10. List some questions that are not answered by the above verses but that we must decide regarding the Lord's Supper. How do we answer these questions?

Case Study: Church Music

Texts: 2 Samuel 6:5, 21; 1 Chronicles 15:16, 28; Psalm 33:1-3; Psalm 150; Matthew 26:30; Ephesians 5:19; Colossians 3:16; Revelation 5:8, 14:2

Read the texts above and answer these questions:

1. Describe the music used in Old Testament worship.
2. Did musical instruments exist in the time of the New Testament. Explain.

Answer the next five questions from Ephesians 5:19 and Colossians 3:16

3. What is the goal of music in worship?
4. What are the three types of songs? How are they different?
5. Is vocal or instrumental music specified? Explain.
6. Is there anything in these verse that would oppose the use of solo singers or special choirs? Explain.
7. What does it mean to “make melody?” Where must one “make melody?”

A Look at Singing

If we agree that singing is authorized, what is included in the command?

Item	Included?	Explain
Sing from memory	Yes No	
Sing psalms from the Bible	Yes No	
Song leader	Yes No	
Leaderless singing	Yes No	
Tuning fork or pitch pipe	Yes No	
Four part harmony	Yes No	
Patriotic songs	Yes No	

What choices regarding church music are left to us?

Arguing for Instruments

How would you answer the following arguments for the instrument based on your study in this lesson? Give scriptures with your answer.

1. An instrument is an aid to help keep pitch, like a pitch pipe, and tempo, like a song leader.
2. We are to sing psalms and David played instruments with psalms.
3. There are instruments in the Old Testament and in heaven in the book of Revelation. Why not in the church which is in between these periods?
4. We deny those who have a gift of playing to praise the Lord in that way.

Lesson

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Case Study: Conversions

Fill in the chart below, found in Charles Goodall's book, The Same Hour of the Night, with an "X" to show what occurs in each conversion account.

	Belief	Repentance	Confession	Baptism
Pentecost Acts 2:38				
Samaritans				
Ethiopian Eunuch				
Saul				
Cornelius				
Lydia				
Philippian Jailer				
	John 8:24 Hebrews 11:6	Luke 13:5 Acts 17:30	Romans 10:9-10	Galatians 3:27 Mark 16:16

1. Define belief from the verses above.
2. Define confession from the verses above.
3. Define repentance from the verses above.
4. Does the fact that baptism occurs in all of the accounts tell us anything about its importance? Explain.

Conversion Questions

1. The households of Lydia and the Philippian jailer were baptized; therefore, infants must be baptized. Is this true or not? Explain your answer.

2. Must we baptize someone who is mentally challenged and cannot believe? Explain your answer.

3. Fill in the blanks from Mark 16:16:

He that _____ and is _____ shall be saved.

He that does not believe shall be _____.

He that is not baptized shall be _____. Explain.

4. What does the Bible teach about the ability to lose one's salvation?
1 Peter 4:1-6; Hebrews 2:1-3; Hebrews 10:26-39; 1 Corinthians 9:27

Case Study: Can A Christian Serve in the Military?

Texts: Romans 13:1-7; Matthew 5:9, 38-48; Luke 3:14; James 3:18; Philippians 1:12-13; Acts 10:1-4; Philippians 3:20

Read the texts above and answer these questions:

1. What did Jesus teach about peace and the Christian?
2. What did Jesus teach about our attitude towards and treatment of our enemies?
3. Were soldiers, such as those who came to John the Baptist or Cornelius, told to quit being soldiers in order to please God? What might this mean?
4. Can a Christian serve in the military in a non-combat role? Is there a difference between the person who supplies bullets and guns and the person who uses the bullets and guns? Explain.
5. Can a Christian object to serving in the military for scriptural reasons but favor a military conflict?

Case Study: Christians in the Military

6. Is it right to let others defend our freedoms, particularly the freedom to worship and evangelize others, while objecting to serving in the conflict?

7. Since the government is established by God, is it right for the Christian to serve in the military of that government to fulfill His will?

8. Should the issue of a Christian serving in the military be a matter of fellowship? Why or why not?

9. Would it be wrong to enlist in the military if I think that it might be wrong to do so? Explain.

Some issues are not as clear as we would like them to be. We must study the scriptures to know why we believe what we believe. We must understand that on some issues, we may come to different conclusions than others have reached. Let us resolve to respect one another, continue to study together, and, if it is a matter of conscience, treat others honorably.

Case Study: Moral Issues

Jack is an occasional smoker and has been for years. His Bible class teacher said that he should not smoke because the body is the temple of the Lord (1 Corinthians 6:19-20; Romans 12:1). However, Jack knows that his teacher eats a lot of food that is bad for him, does not exercise, and drinks lots of caffeine.

1. Is Jack's Bible class teacher using the above scriptures correctly? Explain your answer.
2. Is it wrong for Jack to smoke? Why or why not (give scriptures)?

Sandy does not think it is right to go to the casinos and waste a lot of money at the slot machines or card tables. However, she thinks that a little gambling is fine. Occasionally, she will buy a lottery ticket or make small bets on sports. Her friend, who is also a Christian, told her that gambling is wrong because it is not the proper way to earn money according to the scripture.

1. Do you think Sandy's friend has a valid Biblical argument? Explain.
2. What Biblical arguments would you use for or against gambling?
3. Isn't the stock market a gamble?

Addendum

Problems with Greek Word Studies

A problem that contributes to our misunderstanding of the Bible and disagreements with one another is misuse of the ancient languages in which the Bible was written: Hebrew, Aramaic, and Greek. Usually, Greek is the most misused since most students can grasp basic Greek much easier than Hebrew or Aramaic. Additionally, there are many Greek language resources—lexicons, dictionaries, and word studies—available to the average student.

However, the availability of Greek resources may be the source of the problem. Those who know little Greek may often boast that they can still do a word study. As Phil Roberts said in a lecture at Florida College, linguists would argue that only someone with intimate knowledge of the Greek should do a word study. A true word study considers the use of the word in both the Bible and extra-biblical literature as well as its varied uses. Yet the origin of the word is of little use in determining what a word means in a specific context.

Words have meaning. However, Bible students are often accustomed to thinking that Bible words have a real or true meaning that is somehow missing in the English text. Often a study of a Bible passage involves much time looking for the true meaning of the words in the text. This approach fails to recognize that words only have meaning within the larger structure of

the sentence, paragraph, or entire text.

Consider the word *hot*. What does it mean? Many probably thought of a temperature but others may have considered other meanings. What does the phrase *it is hot* mean? Again, we may have an idea that comes to mind but consider these sentences:

Do not touch that pot, *it is hot*.

I love that new song; *it is hot*.

I do not like that Mexican spice; *it is hot*.

Do not buy the television from that burglar; *it is hot*.

We do not know what *it is hot* means without a broader context. This should emphasize the folly of studying words in isolation. Words do not have meaning without context.

Etymology

Etymology, the study of word history, became popular in the late 1800's and in recent years, the focus of the real meaning of words is very popular. A far back as the Greeks, Stoic philosophers believed that if they went back in time far enough, the real meaning of a word would become evident. As J.P. Louw says, "If this method were correct, then everyone would need to know Greek in order to understand the true meaning of words." I'll go further and say that it means that we must know Greek in order to know what the Bible really

says. To demand that all Christians know Greek would be wrong.

Do you know the origins of every word that you use? We probably do not know the origin most words that we use in everyday conversation. Yet we expect that when the Greeks talked and wrote they knew the historical development of each word they used. In fact, language—any language—is dynamic and changing; we can instantly give a familiar word new meaning if we put it in a new context. Of course, we cannot do this haphazardly for we would confuse our audience. However, as we mature, we can adapt our language to a variety of circumstances.

One problem we face with etymology is the failure to take into account this adaptation within language. For example, If I say *I ran* out of milk so *I ran* to the store to buy some more, does anyone think that in an act of running my milk was emptied? It is doubtful that anyone would think that I ran to the store, they would know that I drove to the store. Yet the basic meaning of *run* is to move your legs faster than when you walk. We recognize this with the English language, but often do not see it in the Greek. We forget that “etymology is concerned with the history of a word, not its meaning in a specific context.” (Luow, 26. Emphasis mine-rfd)

Greek Word Study Problems

“Original” Meaning

Commentators can create meaning from word studies. Luow cites the example of the Greek word HUPEERETEES, used in 1 Corinthians 4:1 (Let a man so consider us, as servants of Christ and stewards of the mysteries of God.) in a chapter titled “Etymology. Barclay explained that the meaning was basically, a rower, from its etymology. R.C. Trench also cited this usage though, in the classical Greek, it was never used in this sense, it always mean a servant. However, J. B. Hoffman combined servant and rower to mean that the person was an “under rower,” and Trench said that it was the rower on the bottom deck of a Roman trireme. Other commentators took this to mean a servant of the lowest position. Yet, linguistic scholars note that there is little difference from this word, translated servant, and the word DIAKONOS, another word for servant. A little error can go a long way. (I do remember hearing a lesson on this very thing one time!)

Root Fallacy

An additional problem comes when one tries to find the original meaning of a compound word by breaking down its parts and considering the meaning of each. If you were to break down the compound words *horsefly* (horse + fly) and *butterfly* (butter + fly) and research those words you would not end up with what

we understand a horsefly and butterfly to be. This error, called a root fallacy, assumes that by looking at the origin of the word root, we can better understand the meaning. This does not work with English—a pineapple is neither an apple nor does it grow on a pine tree—and it will not work with the Greek.

Some will commit a root fallacy with 2 Corinthians 9:7: “God loves a cheerful giver.” They note that the Greek for cheerful is HILARON. From HILARON we get the English word *hilarious*. Therefore, “God loves a hilarious giver.” This was not Paul’s intention; we read our modern word *hilarious* into the first century word translated *cheerful*. Another popular root fallacy is to take Romans 1:16: “The gospel is the power of God unto salvation,” and deduce that since the Greek word translated *power* is DUNAMIS, from which we can get *dynamite*, that “the gospel is the dynamite of God.” Here, again, we read a modern word into an ancient context, erroneously I must add. (Note: D. A. Carson called this type of error semantic anachronism—putting words in the wrong time period)

Form and Meaning

Some try to find meaning by the form of the Greek word. A prime example of this, cited by Luow, is APOSTOLOS. Commentators will sometimes break down the word into the components *send* + *out* and conclude that an apostle is one who is “sent out.” While Jesus did send the apostles out to teach the word, the word is more closely related to AGGELOS, *a messenger*. The apostle is a messenger for Christ but, more than that, is his special messenger; an ambassador or representative (2 Corinthians 5:20). Though “sent out” may relate to the word *apostle*, it is not the dominant meaning. When you *understand* something, is there a sense in which you *stand under* the problem? There is nothing in the words *under* and *stand* that would convey this thought; yet some will break Greek words down this way.

Ancient Meaning

Sometimes commentators will find an ancient use of a word and then explain a later use of that word from that perspective. A common use is HARMARTIA, which is translated *sin*. How many times have we heard (and I have preached!) that this literally means “to miss the mark?” The poet Homer, who lived 800 years before Christ, regularly uses this word to describe one who missed a target when firing a missile weapon. However, this ancient meaning is not the real meaning of sin. If we consider all the passages where sin is used, we can come up with a better understanding of sin. In addition, one should study all of the words and phrases used for sin. This study will emphasize the disobedience to God’s law and the guilt incurred as a result. “A very important fact, always neglected when [sin] is explained...as ‘to miss the target,’ is that

among the oldest usages...it not only meant 'to miss a target,' but also 'to make a mistake, to be deprived of, to lose, to neglect.' Why is 'to miss a target' taken as the 'hidden meaning' but not one of the others?"

Is The Greek A Perfect Language?

Some have suggested that the Koine Greek (the Greek dialect used in the Bible) is extremely precise and so was a perfect language for the Bible. I believe this has become part of church folklore. I have a paper in my files by an unknown author who, in his comments about the Koine becoming a dead (unused) language, says,

"This was a protective device for translators of the New Testament. With the language static, it is easy to determine exactly what words in that period meant."

This is oversimplifying the case. Koine Greek was in use from about 300 B.C. to 500 A.D.—about 800 years—and was not limited to Biblical use. Every language has change even within the generation of the speakers of that language. Linguists are quick to point out that the Koine Greek is not an extremely precise language—no language is extremely precise.

Why Study This?

Some people might ask why we would spend a class period on this subject. We must be careful in our Bible study not to make the Bible say what it does not really say. We can do this by misusing Biblical language resources. Some will try to build a case on the meaning of a Greek word but, if that person is not intimately familiar with the language, its nuances, symbolism, idioms, and other characteristics of the language, the chance for error increases greatly.

We are blessed to have many wonderful translations of the Bible in our own language. If you read the section in a respectable Bible translation, you will often find that a large number of Hebrew and Greek scholars worked to translate it. They are experts in these languages and they check one another's work. The English Bibles we have reflect the message of the original language. We will not discover anything in the Greek or Hebrew that is not revealed in the English.

Reference Works

Studies in the Greek New Testament. Stanley E. Porter. Peter Lang: New York, 1996.

Semantics of New Testament Greek. J. P. Louw. Fortress Press: Philadelphia, 1982.