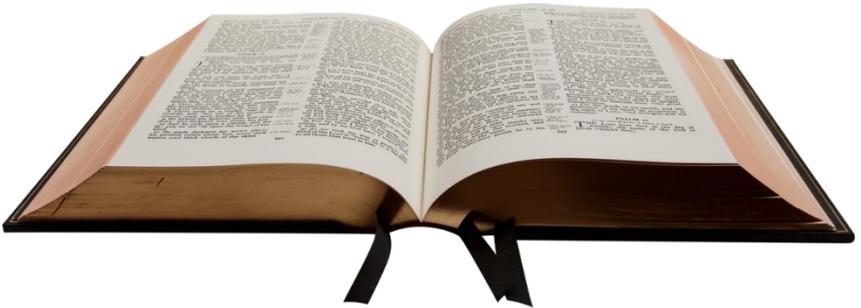


How Do You Read?



An Introduction to the Biblical Principles of
Interpretation

Daniel Bernhardt

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1st Edition, April 2019

2nd Edition, July 2021



Printed and distributed by
MARANATHA MEDIA and QUE TE CONOZCAN

www.maranathamedia.com

Cover Image: pixabay.com; user: mmi9

KJV used, unless otherwise stated

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Introduction

One of the most poignant critiques that is made of Christianity is lack of unity, particularly when it comes to its teachings. Yet almost every Christian denomination says their beliefs are founded on the Bible, so why such differences in understanding? How is it possible that some who declare to be guided by the Holy Writ believe that the Sabbath is on Saturday, while others believe it's on Sunday, and even some others think it's every day? It is not only the day of worship; there are differences in almost every doctrinal point in Christianity. Where do all these variations come from? There are various reasons, but fundamentally these differences exist because not all Christians build on the same system of interpretation, in spite of using the very same writings. It seems that when we read our Bible we filter it through a preconceived worldview, interpreting it through our own assumptions of meaning. Can such a problem be overcome?

Any casual observer of the religious world can see this gamut of differences. The soul that thirsts asks: where is the truth? If we accept the Bible as the Word of God, we do not need to deceive ourselves as Pilate¹ did. The Scriptures are not a postmodern manifesto. It makes a systematic claim to the Word of God being truth², that the person of Jesus is the truth³, and that the Bible explains why our world is the way it is and what God's plans are for it.⁴ There *is* a place where we can know the truth. Let's repeat this concept and believe it: we *can* know the truth.

“The path of the just is as the shining light, that shines more and more unto the perfect day”⁵. This verse tells us that there is a

¹ John 8:³⁸

² John 17:¹⁷

³ John 14:⁶

⁴ Isaiah 46:⁹

⁵ Proverbs 4:¹⁸

process involved in which there is a progressing or increasing of light⁶, until the day is perfect. By our experience we know that life is a constant process of learning, and properly lived, can be improved upon and understood better. The Scriptures declare:

Proverbs 23:23 Buy the truth, and sell it not; Also wisdom, and instruction, and understanding.

When we are told that we should “buy the truth”, it is pointing out to us that we should give up something. This could also be another reason why there are so many differences when it comes to beliefs in the Christian world – we have not gotten rid of something that we need to get rid of. In the midst of such Babel (confusion)⁷, how can we know what is important and what is superfluous?

All over, we can hear the claim: “Here is Christ⁸!” But we hear in the Scripture the call:

Revelation 18:4 And I heard another voice from heaven, saying, “Come out of her, my people, That ye be not partakers of her sins, And that ye receive not of her plagues.”

Scripture shows us that God is calling His people to come out of Babylon, out of confusion. Confusion causes us to be partakers of the sins of Babylon; this is what it means to be in Babylon. Even if we are sincere, if we are in confusion we will be partakers of her sins. God calls His people to know the truth, to the point where it can be said of them: “In their mouth no guile was found”⁹.

It is God’s call, and therefore it *is* possible, for each one of us to come out of Babylon. It is God’s promise to deliver us from this

⁶ Psalms 119:105

⁷ Genesis 11:9

⁸ Matthew 24:23

⁹ Revelation 14:5

state. God wants to take us to the point where we know the truth. He wants us to know Jesus, to have Jesus,¹⁰ because He is the truth.

But there are so many different beliefs, and apparently all of them come from the Bible, so how can we know which is true? And how can I know the truth when I myself find apparent contradictions in the Bible?

It is here that the principles, or rules, of interpretation become relevant. *How* we read the Bible makes all the difference. It is interesting that Paul advises us to rightly divide the Word of truth¹¹ – this means that we are in danger of dividing it *wrongly*. How is the Word of truth properly handled then? To answer these questions, we need to enter into what is known as hermeneutics or exegesis. Let’s read the following verses:

Luke 10:²⁵ And, behold, a certain lawyer stood up, and tempted him, saying, “Master, what shall I do to inherit eternal life?” ²⁶He said unto him, “What is written in the law? **how readest thou?**”

In reading, we notice the following: What is the question about? It’s about how to inherit eternal life, a topic of critical importance. Jesus’s answer is directly connected to reading and understanding the Scriptures¹², as well as the process of knowing God and Jesus¹³.

Secondly, who is asking? A certain lawyer - an expert in hermeneutics! He should know about this, shouldn’t he?

Thirdly, why was the question asked? It was asked with the intention of tempting Jesus. The lawyer already had the answer; he thought he knew it. He didn’t approach Jesus to learn, but to test Him.

¹⁰ John 3:¹⁶; Galatians 4:⁶

¹¹ 2 Timothy 2:¹⁵

¹² John 5:³⁹

¹³ John 17:³

And lastly, how did Jesus answer? He basically answered with two questions. He directed the lawyer to the Scriptures when he asked: “What is written in the law?” And then He directed the question to the reader of the Scriptures, when He asked: “How readest thou?” Jesus doesn’t make any reference to the best-known scholars of the day. Rather, He establishes the authority of the Bible. And then, He asks the reader, “How do you read?” – as in “how do you interpret what you are reading?”

So how do we read? When we go to Jesus, and when we go the Scriptures, why do we go? What is the intent of the heart? How do we rightly divide the Word of truth? On these we will dwell next. We will list what is understood to be the fundamental principles of interpretation.

But before digging in, we need to clarify a couple of points. First, the following list of rules of interpretation is not a fully developed research methodology. Not all the rules of interpretation are included in this list. Yet any system of Bible interpretation must include, as its core element, the rules that will be developed here. Lastly, the list presented here is no novelty of my own devising. The principles are presented in the Bible itself, and they are a summarized version of William Miller’s rules of interpretation, as the author of this booklet understands them.

First rule

All Scripture is inspired of God. As children of God, we are to accept all that His Word declares. We are not to pick and choose which truths we would rather adhere to and which ones we'd rather ignore. All the Bible is truth. It is not the totality of the truth, because not every truth is revealed, but the totality of the Bible is truth. Let's review some verses that make this point clear:

2 Timothy 3:15-17

¹⁵ And that from a child thou hast known the holy scriptures, which are able to make thee wise unto salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus. ¹⁶ All scripture *is* given by inspiration of God, and *is* profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness: ¹⁷ That the man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works.

The Scriptures are able to make us wise unto salvation. Salvation from what? Salvation of our souls¹⁴ from fire everlasting¹⁵. This salvation is the object and end result of faith, which is in Jesus Christ. All Scripture is given by inspiration of God. All means *all*. There is nothing in the Scriptures that is left out.

What are the Scriptures for? They are given to us in order that the man of God may be sanctified and made perfect¹⁶ - to fully prepare man unto all good works, to the point in which there is no good work that the man of God cannot do. Notice the connection between the words *all* (in reference to Scripture) and *perfect* (in reference to works).

¹⁴ 1 Peter 1:9

¹⁵ Matthew 25:41; Revelation 20:9; Jude 6-7

¹⁶ John 17:17; Matthew 5:43-48

Matthew 4:4 and Matthew 5:17-18

⁴ But he answered and said, "It is written, 'Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God.'"

What Jesus says in His trial in the desert contains invaluable information on how and why to use the Scriptures. The tempter went to a very hungry Jesus and asked Him to use His divine powers as the Son of God to turn stones into bread. Jesus' answer is clear: Physical food isn't enough; we also need spiritual food. Man must also live by every word that proceeds out of the mouth of God, including those that declared him to be the Son of God¹⁷. Not one word must be lost.¹⁸

¹⁷ Think not that I am come to destroy the law, or the prophets: I am not come to destroy, but to fulfil. ¹⁸ For verily I say unto you, Till heaven and earth pass, one jot or one tittle shall in no wise pass from the law, till all be fulfilled.

Christ's words here are clear: Nothing, not even a letter, will be done away with. Rather, Jesus fulfills it all. Jesus' understanding of the law is wider than what we might first think. Even though the law referred to was in many cases the Pentateuch (the first five books of the Bible), we can see that Jesus' understanding of the law expanded to *all* the Scriptures. For instance Jesus said "that the word might be fulfilled that is written in their law, 'They hated me without a cause.'¹⁹ Jesus quoted a psalm and referred to it as law. The nation was instructed by the law (including the Psalms²⁰ and

¹⁷ Matthew 3:16

¹⁸ John 6:12

¹⁹ John 15:25

²⁰ Psalms 110:1; Psalms 89:4

the Prophets²¹) that Christ abides forever²². Therefore of the whole Old Testament not one jot nor tittle shall in no way pass away. The question could be asked, why is this so? We read as follows:

Psalms 12:6 The words of the Lord are pure words: As silver tried in a furnace of earth, purified seven times.

The words of the Lord are pure words, tried as true.

Deuteronomy 29:29

²⁹ The secret *things belong* unto the LORD our God: but those *things which are revealed belong* unto us and to our children for ever, that *we* may do all the words of this law.

Not all is revealed in the Scriptures. There are things which remain secret unto our God. The revelation of God has a specific purpose, which is that we may do all the words of “this law” – that man be perfect, fully prepared for every good work.

Conclusions

In conclusion, the Scriptures in their entirety, even the jot and the tittle, were inspired by God. This means that there is nothing that we can afford to ignore. I am not saying that God dictated the Bible word by word, for while the union of the divine with the human agent is a mystery, it is safe to affirm what the Scriptures declare. We can confidently say that every word of God is pure, has its purpose, and must be included when studying them.

²¹ Isaiah 9:7

²² John 12:34

Second rule

We cannot add or remove words from Scripture, nor add our own concepts to the Word of God. Everything should be accepted, just as it comes. Let's see a few verses for this rule:

Deuteronomy 4:2 and Revelation 22:18-19

²Ye shall not add unto the word which I command you, neither shall ye diminish ought from it, that ye may keep the commandments of the Lord your God which I command you.

The commandment is clear: Don't add or subtract from the Word. What is interesting is the reason why God gives us this instruction – it is to keep the commandments of God. What a reason! Naturally, all who would like to be part of the generation that keeps the commandments of God and the prophets²³ (to them whom the testimony of Jesus belongs) must pay attention to this instruction.

¹⁸For I testify unto every man that heareth the words of the prophecy of this book, If any man shall add unto these things, 'God shall add unto him the plagues that are written in this book:' ¹⁹And if any man shall take away from the words of the book of this prophecy, 'God shall take away his part out of the book of life, and out of the holy city, and *from* the things which are written in this book.'

This verse declares the terrifying consequences of altering the Word of God. Even in this our faith is tested. Do we believe this Word?

²³ Revelation 12:17; Revelation 14:12

Deuteronomy 12:29-32

³⁰ Take heed to thyself that thou be not snared by following them, after that they be destroyed from before thee; and that thou inquire not after their gods, saying, 'How did these nations serve their gods? even so will I do likewise.' ³¹ Thou shalt not do so unto the LORD thy God: for every abomination to the LORD, which he hateth, have they done unto their gods; for even their sons and their daughters they have burnt in the fire to their gods. ³² **What thing soever I command you, observe to do it: thou shalt not add thereto, nor diminish from it.**

The context is warning us to not go after the gods and religions of the neighboring nations; we should not have other gods except the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob²⁴. This is because when we look at the actions of the neighboring nations, we see that the image of the gods that they behold and worship is reflected in those nations (exemplified by their sacrificing their children in fire) - an image which God abhors. Ignoring or adding to His revelation means risking having another god - a god that will give us his own image according to the likeness of our natural, wicked heart²⁵.

Proverbs 30:5-6

Let us look first at the context for the idea that “every word of God is pure”:

Proverbs 30:⁴Who hath ascended up into heaven, or descended? Who hath gathered the wind in his fists? Who hath bound the waters in a garment? Who hath established all the ends of the earth? **What is his name, and what is his son's name, if thou canst tell?** ⁵ Every word of God *is pure*:

²⁴ Luke 13:²⁸

²⁵ Jeremiah 17:⁹

He *is* a shield unto them that put their trust in him. ⁶ Add thou not unto his words, Lest he reprove thee, and thou be found a liar.

In order to know God and His Son's name, we must accept every word of God – that is the connection made in the verse. In order to gain answers to the questions asked above, we shouldn't add unto His words.

Proverbs 30:4 also tells us that the Word of God is pure and a shield unto them that put their trust in Him. If any part of the body protrudes out of the shield, that part will not be protected. God Himself, with his own body, blocks the attack of the enemy. This has been proved literal in Calvary²⁶. God is a shield to all those that receive all His words, trusting in Him. As it says in another place:

Psalms 18:³⁰ *As for God, his way is perfect: The word of the LORD is tried: He is a **buckler** to all those that trust in him.*

Not my way, but God's way, is perfect.

Psalms 91:4 *He shall cover thee with his feathers, And under his wings shalt thou trust: His truth shall be thy shield and buckler.*

Let's see a real-life example of how this works:

Matthew 4:³ *And when the tempter came to him, he said, "If thou be the Son of God, command that these stones be made bread."*

⁴ *But he answered and said, "It is written, 'Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God.'"*

⁵ *Then the devil taketh him up into the holy city, and setteth him on a pinnacle of the temple, ⁶ And saith unto him, "If thou be the Son of God, cast thyself down: for it is written,*

²⁶ Isaiah 53:⁴⁻⁶

'He shall give his angels charge concerning thee: and in *their* hands they shall bear thee up, lest at any time thou dash thy foot against a stone.'"

⁷Jesus said unto him, "It is written again, 'Thou shalt not tempt the Lord thy God.'"

⁸Again, the devil taketh him up into an exceeding high mountain, and sheweth him all the kingdoms of the world, and the glory of them; ⁹And saith unto him, "All these things will I give thee, if thou wilt fall down and worship me."

¹⁰Then saith Jesus unto him, "Get thee hence, Satan: for it is written, 'Thou shalt worship the Lord thy God, and him only shalt thou serve.'"

¹¹Then the devil leaveth him, and, behold, angels came and ministered unto him.

Notice how simple is the faith of Jesus: it's as that of a child. "It is written" is what Jesus mostly says. He uses the Word of God, from a position of trust, to shield Himself behind it. The attacks are not now against us anymore, but against Him.

Conclusions

In conclusion, to stand firm in the day of the battle of the Lord, we shall not add from our own words, nor diminish from the Word of God. Everything shall be taken, with nothing to be added, and nothing to be removed. If we do this, God Himself and His Word will be a shield to us.

Third rule

The Scriptures cannot be broken. We cannot affirm nor believe something that it is in contradiction with the Scriptures. Let's read this in the following verses:

John 10:35

³⁵ If he called them gods, unto whom the word of God came,
and the scripture cannot be broken;

Here the context is the Jews have surrounded Jesus and demand He plainly and openly declare if He is the Messiah. Jesus tells them that He has already answered the question, and that they didn't believe Him. He declares that his sheep would know as they are given to Him by His Father, indirectly stating that they don't know God. Then He states that He and His Father are one – and after this the listeners want to stone Him, because being a man, He makes himself God. Jesus states that their law, which they were so jealous in upholding, calls gods those to “whom the Word of God came”. And if that is the case, how could they accuse Him of blasphemy when He declared Himself to be the Son of God?

Now, when Jesus mentions the law, He adds the comment that we are interested in, serving as a clarification regarding the law: Their law, declares Jesus, cannot be broken, and by that declaration, it becomes Jesus' law as well. He is telling them that if the Scriptures, their law, affirm this, given that the Scriptures cannot be broken, He cannot be a blasphemer by declaring to be the Son of God. Jesus teaches that we cannot affirm or declare something that goes contrary to the Bible. To do so is to do violence to, to break, or to crucify the Word of God.

Isaiah 8:19-20

¹⁹ And when they shall say unto you, Seek unto them that have familiar spirits, And unto wizards that peep, and that mutter: Should not a people seek unto their God? For the living to the dead? ²⁰ To the law and to the testimony: If they speak not according to this word, *It is because there is no light in them.*

In order to know if we are dealing with enchanters, wizards or directly with spiritual beings that pretend to be the living dead, the law and the testimony will be the standard that will measure every declaration. “Testimony” is a reference to the testimony of Jesus²⁷, that is the Spirit of Prophecy, or the messages of the prophets of God. If their teaching does not measure up to “the law and the prophets”, then they have “no light in them.” Speaking against the Scriptures puts us in darkness. Only the Word of God can bring light and order in our world, to the point of making it “very good”²⁸.

Matthew 4:8-11

⁸ Again, the devil taketh him up into an exceeding high mountain, and sheweth him all the kingdoms of the world, and the glory of them; ⁹ And saith unto him, “All these things will I give thee, if thou wilt fall down and worship me.”

¹⁰ Then saith Jesus unto him, “Get thee hence, Satan: for it is written, ‘Thou shalt worship the Lord thy God, and him only shalt thou serve.’”

¹¹ Then the devil leaveth him, and, behold, angels came and ministered unto him.

²⁷ Revelation 19:¹⁰

²⁸ Genesis 1:³¹

The tempter takes Jesus to an exceeding high mountain, where he shows him all the glory – and not the misery – of all the kingdoms of this world. The very reason of Christ’s mission is appealed to. It appears the lost inheritance²⁹ is offered to Jesus in exchange for Jesus falling down and worshipping Satan. To this offer Jesus responds by ordering him to leave, since the Scriptures declare that we should only worship and serve the Lord our God.

Jesus’ answer was again: “It is written”. The offer is refused because it is against the clear testimony of the Word of God. In this story we learn from Jesus that even if someone offers us the fulfilment of the very reason and mission of our existence in this world (assuming that we know it), it cannot be accepted if it violates the Scriptures. The end doesn’t justify breaking the law and the prophets. The mission doesn’t permit us to crucify the Word of God.

Conclusions

In conclusion, we learn that the Bible tells us that we cannot contradict it, break it, nor go against it in any or all of its parts.

²⁹ Psalms 2:8; Isaiah 52:3

Fourth rule

No Word of God is of any private interpretation. This means that Scripture explains Scripture. If I want to understand a verse, I must compare it with other verses to gain understanding. I cannot use what I believe, what I like, or what I would like. I cannot use what my culture dictates or what experts affirm. This does not mean that we don't listen to other men explain Scripture; on the contrary, we listen to verify that they are using Scripture to explain Scripture. To put it differently, the guiding principle is "Sola Scriptura". History shows that there are terrible consequences to abandoning this principle. There is the human tendency to put on our shoulders the heavy responsibility of interpretation, but there is no need for that. We can admit that we don't know and we don't understand. The Bible explains itself. The Scripture is its own interpreter. One verse explains another, and another these first two, until the Scriptures transform themselves into an infinite, interconnected, self-explaining, living Word. Let's review some verses that show this:

2 Peter 1:19-21

¹⁹ We have also a more sure word of prophecy; whereunto ye do well that ye take heed, as unto a light that shineth in a dark place, until the day dawn, and the day star arise in your hearts: ²⁰ Knowing this first, that **no prophecy of the scripture is of any private interpretation.** ²¹ For the prophecy came not in old time by the will of man: but holy men of God spake *as they were* moved by the Holy Ghost.

The prophetic Word, in order to be a light unto our path³⁰, demands that we need to understand something first: that the interpretation of the messages from God does not rest on any man. The verse

³⁰ Psalms 119:¹⁰⁵

explains why this is so. No Scripture is of personal interpretation for the reason that it didn't come by the will of man, but rather, that the holy men of God spoke as they were moved by the Holy Ghost. What doesn't come from man is not in man's realm to interpret. As the prophecy is not of human origin, its interpretation does not rest on any man either.

Paul tells us in 1 Corinthians 2:1-16 that when he went to the Corinthians, he didn't go with the excellency and wisdom of human speech, but that his preaching was in the Spirit and of power. However, Paul is quick to make crystal clear that the words that he spoke were words of wisdom - wisdom not of this world, but sourced from God himself. The revelation of the deep things of God is being taught to us by His Spirit, comparing spiritual things with spiritual, that is, comparing the Word of God with the Word of God, until the building³¹ of God is complete.

Isaiah 28: 9-10

⁹Whom shall he teach knowledge? And whom shall he make to understand doctrine? *Them that are weaned from the milk, And drawn from the breasts.* ¹⁰For precept *must be* upon precept, precept upon precept; Line upon line, line upon line; Here a little, *and* there a little:

This verse states who will learn knowledge and understand doctrine: it is those who receive the Word of God as precept upon precept, line upon line, line upon line, here a little, there a little. "Line upon line" refers to the Word of God in its context; the Word of God will be understood within the natural flow of the discourse. "Here a little, there a little" refers to letting God define the terms; God defines the extension of what He says in one place by what He says at another place and time. "Precept upon precept" refers to our

³¹ Matthew 7:24; 1 Peter 1:4-5

receiving it as instruction, as a commandment of God in the light of His character³² that is to be followed. Understanding doctrine and having knowledge will then be received when we give to God the honor that is due, when He is above all things in our life, when we let Him define and expand on His teachings, hearing the discourse and line of reasoning He presents.

Matthew 4:6-7

⁶ And [Satan] saith unto him, "If thou be the Son of God, cast thyself down: for it is written, 'He shall give his angels charge concerning thee: and in *their* hands they shall bear thee up, lest at any time thou dash thy foot against a stone.'"

⁷ Jesus said unto him, "It is written again, 'Thou shalt not tempt the Lord thy God.'"

Noticing that Jesus shields Himself behind the Word of God by declaring that man shall live by every word of it, now Satan intends to trap Christ by the Word. Satan presents to Jesus a promise from the Scriptures, portraying that promise as unlimited, independently of what the remaining Scriptures say and what the one claiming the promise does.

To put it differently, Satan demands from Jesus, since He believes in the Bible, to prove His belief by testing one of the promises, which no one denies, but it is taken as if the rest of the Scriptures don't exist. However, Jesus replies "It is written again". "Again" here indicates that the promise is not denied as false but is accepted; yet something else needs to be added: other Scriptures which are the Word of God as much as the promise quoted.

In other words, the Bible doesn't end with the promise mentioned. More words of God must be added to it. In this way the verse quoted by Jesus delimits and interprets the reach of the promise. God will send His angels to protect us, but at the same time that

³² 2 Corinthians 4:6

promise is not an unlimited promise to every time and circumstance; it is subject to other conditions being met as revealed in the Scriptures, such as in this particular case, that God should not be tempted. What Satan was trying to do was for Jesus to tempt God, for Jesus to force God's protecting hand.

Thus every biblical assertion cannot be taken in isolation, but rather it must be subjected to the rest of the Scriptures in order to understand its meaning and reach.

Two examples

A natural consequence of this rule of interpretation is that the Bible is always understood in a literal sense, and only when the Scriptures provide an explanation of a symbol or figure is it to be applied. That is, the Scriptures are interpreted literally, and spiritually when the corresponding application is found in the Scriptures. Here are two examples in which we will use this principle of interpretation and see that it is necessary for an improved understanding.

Proverbs 27:17

¹⁷Iron sharpeneth iron; So a man sharpeneth the countenance of his friend.

If you had a chance to visit a meat shop, you might have seen how the butcher frictions iron against iron to sharpen the blade. This makes the cut of the knife more efficient. This can be taken to the point when the edge is so sharp that there is little to no effort needed in order to reach the joints and the marrow. We find this concept here:

Ecclesiastes 10:¹⁰ If the iron be blunt, and he do not whet the edge, then must he put to more strength: but wisdom is profitable to direct.

There is another element introduced in using a knife for cutting, and that is wisdom. When there is wisdom the cut can be directed in a way which is more efficient, therefore less force is needed. Regarding iron, we also read the following.

Numbers 35: ¹⁶ And if he smite him with an instrument of iron, so that he die, he *is* a murderer: the murderer shall surely be put to death.

The Scriptures call a knife or a sword, or any object made out of iron that can be used to kill a man, an instrument of iron. And now we read an application made by the apostle Paul:

Hebrews 4: ¹² For the word of God *is* quick, and powerful, and sharper than any twoedged sword, piercing even to the dividing asunder of soul and spirit, and of the joints and marrow, and *is* a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart.

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

Let's read the verse that we are analyzing again:

Proverbs 27: ¹⁷ Iron sharpeneth iron; So a man sharpeneth the countenance of his friend.

We see that naturally out of the text comes the literal understanding of two pieces of iron rubbing against each other to sharpen the blade. However, we find in the Scriptures that the Word of God is called a sword. We read that the Word of God is a double-edged sword, and that the sword of the Spirit is the Word of God. Thus we find an additional meaning coming out of the text. Iron sharpens iron. Sword sharpens sword. The Word of God sharpens the Word of God. Verse sharpens verse, making its meaning deeper, its definition more exact, and its declaration more precise. Christ's response to how Satan used a Bible verse to tempt Him is an example of this.

The verse continues, “so a man sharpeneth the countenance of his friend”. This is how, through comradery, friends mutually sharpen each other in the use of the Word of God with the Word of God. This is because friends are those who challenge you, who help you to see what you cannot see, who in love show you how to be a better person, and those who respectfully can test your understanding and show you your errors. Not in vain does the Scriptures declare:

Ecclesiastes 12: ¹¹ The words of wise men *are* like goads; yea, their collected words are like nails driven home; given by one Shepherd. (AFV)

Proverbs 27: ⁶ Faithful *are* the wounds of a friend; But the kisses of an enemy *are* deceitful.

It is the exchange among friends that refines the persons and ideas, that new visions be presented and different understandings be shared. In some, the Word of God is very sharp; while in others, because of lack of exercise, it becomes blunted and rusty. And so it is with people: they are increased as a blessing to others based on their sharpness, ability and willingness to be sharpened. This becomes then another reason why we should assemble³³ together. But there is one Shepherd, the Word of God, who is sharp to the point of discerning the heart. As the verse says:

Hebrews 4: ¹² For the word of God *is* quick, and powerful, and sharper than any twoedged sword, piercing even to the dividing asunder of soul and spirit, and of the joints and marrow, and *is* a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart. ¹³ Neither is there any creature that is not manifest in his sight: but all things *are* naked and opened unto the eyes of him with whom we have to do.

³³ Hebrews 10:25

Only as we are sharpened by Wisdom, in his Spirit, by the Word of God, shall we be able to stand in the day of His coming³⁴.

Isaiah 7:14-15

¹⁴ Therefore the Lord himself shall give you a sign; Behold, a virgin shall conceive, and bear a son, And shall call his name Immanuel. ¹⁵ Butter and honey shall he eat, That he may know to refuse the evil, and choose the good.

Emmanuel shall eat butter and honey so that He may know to refuse evil and choose good. Will eating butter and honey help us to refuse evil and choose good? Let's read a few other verses about honey and eating:

Psalms 119:¹⁰³ How sweet are thy words unto my taste! *Yea, sweeter* than honey to my mouth!

Jeremiah 15: ¹⁶ Thy words were found, and I did eat them; and thy word was unto me the joy and rejoicing of mine heart: for I am called by thy name, O LORD God of hosts.

Revelation 10: ⁹ And I went unto the angel, and said unto him, "Give me the little book." And he said unto me, "Take *it*, and eat it up; and it shall make thy belly bitter, but it shall be in thy mouth sweet as honey."

The words of God are sweet as honey. If we receive and assimilate them in our life, they are as if we eat them. Regarding butter we read:

Proverbs 30:³³ Surely the churning of milk bringeth forth butter,

Butter is the byproduct of churning milk. It is the churning of milk that produces butter. Now we read the following:

³⁴ Revelation 6:¹⁵⁻¹⁷

Hebrews 5: ¹¹Of whom we have many things to say, and hard to be uttered, seeing ye are dull of hearing. ¹²For when for the time ye ought to be teachers, ye have need that one teach you again which *be* the first principles of the oracles of God; and are become such as have need of milk, and not of strong meat. ¹³For every one that useth milk *is* unskilful in the word of righteousness: for he is a babe. ¹⁴But strong meat belongeth to them that are of full age, *even* those who by reason of use have their senses exercised to discern both good and evil.

Milk is the first principle of the oracles of God. Meat is for those who are more mature, having advanced past the foundational principles of the Word of God. Meat is for those who have their senses exercised to discern good and evil. It is when we churn milk that we get meat or butter. It is the churning, the Word of God churned with the Word of God, here a little, there a little – that will give us the butter or meat. The verse in Isaiah declares that Emmanuel would eat honey and butter, that he may know to refuse evil and choose good. As confirmed by Paul, the strong meat belongs to those who, by reason of its use or exercise, are able to discern both good and evil.

An additional concept

To everything mentioned before, some Scripture needs to be added in order to have a more complete picture. We read as follows:

1 John 2:20 ²⁰But ye have an unction from the Holy One, and ye know all things. ... ²⁷But the anointing which ye have received of him abideth in you, and ye need not that any man teach you: but as the same anointing teacheth you of all things, and is truth, and is no lie, and even as it hath taught you, ye shall abide in him.

The Holy one of Israel is Jesus³⁵. The disciples of Jesus will receive an unction from Him. It is this unction that teaches all things, even to the point that we do not need someone to teach us if the unction abides in us. What do we receive from Jesus that will teach us all things?

John 15:²⁶ But when the Comforter is come, whom I will send unto you from the Father, *even* the Spirit of truth, which proceedeth from the Father, he shall testify of me:

John 14:²⁶ But the Comforter, *which is* the Holy Ghost, whom the Father will send in my name, he shall teach you all things, and bring all things to your remembrance, whatsoever I have said unto you.

The unction that the disciples receive is the Comforter, or the Holy Spirit. It is this very same unction (that is, the Holy Spirit) that teaches all things, and one of His main instruments He uses is the Word of God³⁶.

Conclusions

We receive the Scriptures through the Holy Spirit, which uses the Scriptures to interpret the Scriptures for us. The Bible demands that we define, delimit and clarify the reach of the Scriptures in light of what the Scriptures teach. As it is written:

Psalms 36: ⁹For with thee *is* the fountain of life: In thy light shall we see light.

In His light and example, and in the light of the Scriptures, we receive even more light. In the light of the Word of God, we are enlightened.

³⁵ Acts 2:^{25,27}

³⁶ Ephesians 6:¹⁷

Fifth rule

Our hearts should be willing. For the Word of God to take root and be fulfilled in our lives, bringing fruit in due time, the soil of our hearts should be willing and ready. The Bible student prepares his heart as the gardener prepares his soil and is anxiously waiting for the seed and the rain. The human will is needed. Let's see a few verses on this:

Matthew 13:3-9

³ And he spake many things unto them in parables, saying, "Behold, a sower went forth to sow; ⁴ And when he sowed, some *seeds* fell by the way side, and the fowls came and devoured them up: ⁵ Some fell upon stony places, where they had not much earth: and forthwith they sprung up, because they had no deepness of earth: ⁶ And when the sun was up, they were scorched; and because they had no root, they withered away. ⁷ And some fell among thorns; and the thorns sprung up, and choked them: ⁸ But other fell into good ground, and brought forth fruit, some an hundredfold, some sixtyfold, some thirtyfold.

Let's define some terms:

Matthew 13:¹⁸ Hear ye therefore the parable of the sower. ¹⁹ When any one heareth the word of the kingdom, and understandeth *it* not, then cometh the wicked *one*, and catcheth away that which was sown in his heart. This is he which received seed by the way side.

It is even clearer in this next verse:

Mark 4:¹³ And he said unto them, "Know ye not this parable? and how then will ye know all parables? ¹⁴ The sower soweth the word."

The seed is the Word of the Kingdom of God; the seed is the Word of God. The most important issue here is the hearer's attitude. His eternal destiny hangs on how he receives the Word of the divine Teacher. Now we read the following:

Matthew 13:¹⁹“When any one heareth the word of the kingdom, and understandeth *it not*, then cometh the wicked *one*, and catcheth away that which was sown in his heart. This is he which received seed by the way side. ²⁰ But he that received the seed into stony places, the same is he that heareth the word, and anon with joy receiveth it; ²¹ Yet hath he not root in himself, but dureth for a while: for when tribulation or persecution ariseth because of the word, by and by he is offended. ²² He also that received seed among the thorns is he that heareth the word; and the care of this world, and the deceitfulness of riches, choke the word, and he becometh unfruitful. ²³ But he that received seed into the good ground is he that heareth the word, and understandeth *it*; which also beareth fruit, and bringeth forth, some an hundredfold, some sixty, some thirty.”

What is the condition of the heart that makes the Word of God effective? There are three clear steps: hearing the Word, understanding the Word, and then bearing fruit. What are the conditions of the heart that make the Word of God ineffective? Firstly, anyone who hears the Word of God and does not understand it. Secondly, anyone who hears the Word of God but stumbles because tribulation or persecution arises because of the Word, and he is offended. And lastly, anyone who hears the Word of God but the cares of this world and the deceitfulness of riches makes him unfruitful. The verses above describe the conditions of the heart that would prevent the Word from fulfilling the destiny for which it was sent, which was to bear fruit.

Let's read the following verses regarding understanding the word:

Daniel 10:⁸ Therefore I was left alone, and saw this great vision, and there remained no strength in me: for my comeliness was turned in me into corruption, and I retained no strength. ⁹ Yet heard I the voice of his words: and when I heard the voice of his words, then was I in a deep sleep on my face, and my face toward the ground. ¹⁰ And, behold, a hand touched me, which set me upon my knees and *upon* the palms of my hands.

¹¹ And he said unto me, "O Daniel, a man greatly beloved, understand the words that I speak unto thee, and stand upright: for unto thee am I now sent." And when he had spoken this word unto me, I stood trembling. ¹² Then said he unto me, "Fear not, Daniel: for from the first day that thou didst set thine heart to understand, and to chasten thyself before thy God, thy words were heard, and I am come for thy words. ¹³ But the prince of the kingdom of Persia withstood me one and twenty days: but, lo, Michael, one of the chief princes, came to help me; and I remained there with the kings of Persia."

Daniel received words³⁷ in revelation and he understood the vision. Daniel, probably as a consequence of that vision and/or due to the feast season, mourned for three full weeks. As part of that, during this time he had a special and light diet. Once that time was fulfilled, and the feast of the unleavened bread had already ended³⁸ (a symbol of the bread or Word that comes down from heaven³⁹), Daniel received another vision in which an angel spoke to him, his words are important to understand the revelation process. Daniel is recognized as someone who is greatly beloved in heaven. This must

³⁷ The word translated as "a thing" in verse one is דָבָר which means word; matter, affair; thing, something; word of God.

³⁸ In verse 4 says that on the 24th day of the first month he received additional heavenly instruction.

³⁹ John 6:^{32-35, 63}, Deuteronomy 32:¹⁻³

not be understood as favoritism, since God is no respecter of persons⁴⁰. Daniel was greatly beloved because he let God love him⁴¹. We notice that a pattern repeats here. John the apostle was also greatly beloved⁴². The prophetic revelation is given to those who have accepted in a greater measure the agape of God. Those who in Peter's ladder⁴³ are closest to God are the ones who are privileged to behold the prophetic scenario and understand it.

What prepared the way for Daniel's words to be heard in the heavenly courts and an angel be sent to explain what would happen to God's people all the way to the end? Two very important things. First of all, he made the conscious decision to put his heart in understanding. He didn't choose to be indifferent to the revelation; on the contrary! He wished to know and understand the Word and the will of God. And secondly, he chastened himself before God. He recognized his errors and that of his nation, and he glorified God. These two conditions are part of the key to receiving and understanding the revelation of the Word of God. Now, the story doesn't end here. There was someone who was opposed to Daniel receiving the revelation. The will of heaven was for Daniel to receive the revelation from the very first day, but this is what the Scriptures reveal:

Daniel 10:13 "But the prince of the kingdom of Persia withstood me one and twenty days: but, lo, Michael, one of the chief princes, came to help me; and I remained there with the kings of Persia. ..." ²⁰ Then said he, "Knowest thou wherefore I come unto thee? and now will I return to fight with the prince of Persia: and when I am gone forth, lo, the prince of Grecia shall come."

⁴⁰ Romans 2:11

⁴¹ 1 John 3:1; 1 John 4:19; Romans 5:5

⁴² John 21:20

⁴³ 2 Peter 1:5-7

The angel tried for Daniel to have the understanding from the very first day, but the prince of Persia would not let him. The angel fought against the prince of Persia, and for twenty-one days couldn't prevail. Who is this prince of Persia? In John 14:30 and Matthew 4:8-9 we have the identity of the prince of Persia. He is the prince of this world, the one that controls the kingdoms of this world. The prince of the kingdoms of this world is the Devil, and as such, he has the power to give them up, as when he offered them up to Jesus in the desert. Now, the reference to Persia is due to the fact that Daniel was under Persia's jurisdiction, as it is mentioned in the book of Daniel. As the prince of Persia, the devil had control of that domain, and for twenty-one days he impeded and fought against the angel that was bringing the understanding.

We are then introduced to Michael⁴⁴, one of the chief princes, and only after twenty-one days did Michael come to help this angel prevail. Besides God, Michael is the only other one that can prevail against the Devil. Michael prevails against the prince of this world. We notice that the mourning period of twenty-one days matches the time that the angel was fighting against the prince of Persia. We wonder, what would have happened if Daniel had ceased to pray, to seek understanding, and to mourn and chasten himself before the twenty-one days were ended? It appears to be clear that Daniel's persistence is what enabled Michael to intervene in the kingdom of Persia. His insistence to understand triggers, in the first place, an angel to be sent to give him understanding, and twenty-one days later, after Michael's intervention, this angel could give him the understanding that God wanted him to have.

The perseverance before the throne of grace is also found in two other stories: the first one when Jacob wrestled with the angel⁴⁵, and the second one in the unjust judge⁴⁶. These three stories reveal

⁴⁴ Michael means "who is like God?"

⁴⁵ Genesis 32:²²⁻³⁰

⁴⁶ Luke 18:¹⁻⁸

the deep desire of a heart that is influenced by God. This depth is revealed in the parable of the pearl of great price⁴⁷. How precious is the truth to us? How precious is the person of Jesus to us? How much do we value the gift of heaven?

The second condition in which the Word would not yield fruit is when the Word, when accepted as it comes, generates conflict, persecution and offences. And the third condition under which the Word does not yield fruit is when the cares of this world and the search for a comfortable life in this world make the Word unfruitful.

We could be in a situation in which accepting the Word of God might not be popular, and to live by it might imply opposing the majority. It could mean going in opposite ways from our family; it could also mean having a different standing than our religious community. If we look at the history of God's people through the ages, these circumstances were the norm rather than the exception. In fact, this is what the Bible says:

2 Timothy 3: ¹² Yea, and all that will live godly in Christ Jesus shall suffer persecution. ¹³ But evil men and seducers shall wax worse and worse, deceiving, and being deceived.

Note how persecution is connected with deception, that is, with the teaching of lies instead of truth, and evil men being deceived and deceiving. To deceive and to be deceived is in close connection with men being evil.

Matthew 10: ²¹ And the brother shall deliver up the brother to death, and the father the child: and the children shall rise up against *their* parents, and cause them to be put to death. ... ²⁴ The disciple is not above *his* master, nor the servant above his lord. ²⁵ It is enough for the disciple that he be as his master, and the servant as his lord. If they have called the

⁴⁷ Matthew 13:⁴⁵⁻⁴⁶

master of the house Beelzebub, how much more *shall they call* them of his household?

Christ Himself warns His disciples that the disciple will not be above his master. But the Bible continues:

Mark 10: ²⁹ And Jesus answered and said, "Verily I say unto you, There is no man that hath left house, or brethren, or sisters, or father, or mother, or wife, or children, or lands, for my sake, and the gospel's, ³⁰ But he shall receive an hundredfold now in this time, houses, and brethren, and sisters, and mothers, and children, and lands, with persecutions; and in the world to come eternal life."

Those who know their God know that He is a gentleman, and that He will fulfill His Word better than what His disciples can imagine. But naturally the flesh holds onto the visible, instead of the invisible⁴⁸. When faced with the prospects of affliction, of being taken out of the church books and having one's reputation tarnished, the faith of many is shaken. Sometimes even the fact that one works for a religious institution can be barrier to study, if one's study leads in a direction that goes against the traditions of that institution. This affects not only friendships and family, but also causes work relationships and the job itself to be in jeopardy. And this is how the Word of God is fulfilled, not because God wants it to be so. The Word of God loses its efficiency in many people in the face of persecution, affliction and the loss of temporal prosperity. What many won't pay attention to is the many subtle ways in which one can actually drown the Word of God. We need to learn of Christ, and be willing to leave our ambitions, desires and self on the altar so that the Word of God may yield its peaceable fruit. How must the soil be in those who are to receive the Word of God? How are we to receive Christ, the seed⁴⁹?

⁴⁸ Hebrews 11:²⁴⁻²⁷

⁴⁹ 1 John 3:⁹

Luke 8: ¹⁵ But that on the good ground are they, which in an honest and good heart, having heard the word, keep *it*, and bring forth fruit with patience.

The good ground is an honest and good heart, and then, having heard the Word, to keep it and bring forth fruit with patience. Who is the one with an honest and good heart? All those who sincerely want to do the will of God, because it says:

John 7: ¹⁷ If any man will do his will, he shall know of the doctrine, whether it be of God, or *whether* I speak of myself.

In other words, in order to know doctrine, it is necessary to have the desire to do the will of God. Then truth shall be known. They who wants to do the will of God, and give themselves up to follow the convictions of the Holy Spirit, is of an honest and good heart. They will hear the Word of God as if speaking personally to them, and as such they will treasure it, and keep it always present.

Mark 10:15

¹⁵ "Verily I say unto you, Whosoever shall not receive the kingdom of God as a little child, he shall not enter therein."

Jesus says that in order to receive the kingdom of God, we should receive it as a little child. What is the kingdom of God? We find it explained here:

Mark 4: ²⁶ And he said, "So is the kingdom of God, as if a man should cast seed into the ground;" ... ³⁰ And he said, "Whereunto shall we liken the kingdom of God? or with what comparison shall we compare it? ³¹ *It is* like a grain of mustard seed, which, when it is sown in the earth, is less than all the seeds that be in the earth:"

When Jesus speaks of receiving the kingdom, He speaks of receiving the seed or the Word of God.

Matthew 11:²⁵ At that time Jesus answered and said, "I thank thee, O Father, Lord of heaven and earth, because thou hast hid these things from the wise and prudent, and hast revealed them unto babes."

What is it about little children that allows them to receive the kingdom of God? First of all, a little child is gullible, usually believing everything that he is told and acting on that belief until he learns that people can lie to him. Additionally, a little child is curious and longs for understanding. It is well known that there is an age during which children never stop asking *why* questions. The world is before them and they explore everything. Their brains are like a sponge. And this is how adults should be, in order to receive the seed.

In addition, we read the following verses:

Luke 10:²¹ In that hour Jesus rejoiced in spirit, and said, "I thank thee, O Father, Lord of heaven and earth, that thou hast hid these things from the wise and prudent, and hast revealed them unto babes: even so, Father; for so it seemed good in thy sight. ²²All things are delivered to me of my Father: and no man knoweth who the Son is, but the Father; and who the Father is, but the Son, and *he* to whom the Son will reveal *him*."

Jesus sent the seventy by two to the cities, and at their return, Jesus rejoiced. What the disciples went through in that missionary trip was a testimony to Christ's mission, a testimony that declared the words of Jesus to be true and confirmed Jesus' identity as the Messiah of this world.

Jesus then glorifies His Father. Why does He do that? He does it because the Father hid these things from the wise and prudent, but He revealed them unto babes. Jesus there, without delay, declares what revelation it is that the babes receive: His identity and mission. Jesus says, "all things are delivered unto me of my

Father". Jesus declares Himself to be the Intercessor of the world. There was nothing left that was not delivered into the hands of the Son. When Jesus came, the men of the earth (the wise, the prudent) were incapable, in their own wisdom, to see the Son of God in His humble bearing. Only the babes, those who in simplicity of spirit listened, believed and followed, could discern the glory of the character of the Son.

Jesus then declares that no one knows the Son, except the Father, and that no one knows the Father, save the Son and those to whom the Son will reveal. Jesus declares Himself to be the Father's Revelator. The knowledge of the Father and who He is comes from Jesus, who gives it to who He wants. We can know the Father if we fix our eyes upon Jesus, because He said:

John 14: ⁸Philip saith unto him, "Lord, shew us the Father, and it sufficeth us."

⁹Jesus saith unto him, "Have I been so long time with you, and yet hast thou not known me, Philip? he that hath seen me hath seen the Father; and how sayest thou *then*, Shew us the Father? ¹⁰Believest thou not that I am in the Father, and the Father in me? the words that I speak unto you I speak not of myself: but the Father that dwelleth in me, he doeth the works."

By beholding the Son, we learn of the Father and know who the Father is. Jesus Himself tells us that His words are the very works of His Father. In the perfect man Jesus, the glorious characteristics of the Father are found⁵⁰, the fullness of the Godhead⁵¹ dwelling in Christ. Seeing Jesus is seeing the Father. Let's read one more verse that will confirm what we are concluding:

⁵⁰ 2 Corinthians 4:6

⁵¹ Colossians 2:9

Matthew 16: ¹³When Jesus came into the coasts of Caesarea Philippi, he asked his disciples, saying, “Whom do men say that I the Son of man am?”

¹⁴And they said, “Some *say that thou art* John the Baptist: some, Elias; and others, Jeremias, or one of the prophets.”

¹⁵He saith unto them, “But whom say ye that I am?”

¹⁶And Simon Peter answered and said, “Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God.”

¹⁷And Jesus answered and said unto him, “Blessed art thou, Simon Bar-jona: for flesh and blood hath not revealed *it* unto thee, but my Father which is in heaven.”

Who is Jesus? We saw before that the revelation of who Jesus is, the revelation of Jesus Christ, is given by the Father to babes. To Jesus’ question of who He is, it is Peter who answers, saying, “You are the Christ, the Son of the living God”. Jesus then declares Peter to be a blessed man, because he received that revelation from the Father who is in heaven.

An additional concept

Let’s continue reviewing how the revelation process occurs. How does the revelation of Jesus Christ come to the human being? How is that revelation given? To what we have already covered, we will add the following:

Malachi 2:⁷For the priest’s lips should keep knowledge, And they should seek the law at his mouth: For he *is* the messenger of the LORD of hosts.

Hebrews 13:⁷Remember them which have the rule over you, who have spoken unto you the word of God: whose faith follow, considering the end of *their* conversation. ... ¹⁷Obey them that have the rule over you, and submit yourselves: for

they watch for your souls, as they that must give account, that they may do it with joy, and not with grief: for that *is* unprofitable for you.

The priest or pastor should keep knowledge⁵². It is from the priest that we should learn the law. The priest is the messenger of the Lord, and we should remember him. Those who speak the Word of God unto us should rule, considering their conversation (conduct/behavior). We should earnestly pray for our pastors and spiritual leaders. It is here where the second temptation in the desert is presented⁵³. In the ministers' study of the Bible, some might ignore or not acknowledge that God reveals understanding to babes. They might come to believe that they are wise and prudent, ignoring the required conditions of the heart. They stop being like little children. They may be tempted to believe that their combined decision is inspired and authoritative, ignoring the rest of the revelation that shows that their authority comes and is based on the Scriptures alone. It is written "again," meaning multiples times, that in order to receive the Word, an honest and good heart is needed, which only the Lord can give⁵⁴, because a deceitful heart will lead astray. As it is written "again" ("again" means to add on and expand upon):

Psalms 23:1 The LORD *is* my shepherd; I shall not want.

The Lord wants to be my guide! He wants to have a direct personal relationship with me! As it is written "again":

John 6: 45 It is written in the prophets, 'And they shall be all taught of God. Every man therefore that hath heard, and hath learned of the Father, cometh unto me.'

James 1:5 If any of you lack wisdom, let him ask of God, that giveth to all *men* liberally, and upbraideth not; and it shall

⁵² Matthew 13:51-52

⁵³ Matthew 4:5-7

⁵⁴ Psalms 51:10; Jeremiah 17:9

be given him. ⁶But let him ask in faith, nothing wavering. For he that wavereth is like a wave of the sea driven with the wind and tossed.

What a precious truth! God wants to take us into an intimate personal relationship where each one of us can be learning at His feet. Let's receive the full Word of God, praying for our spiritual leaders, while looking for that personal relationship with the Lord.

Conclusions

For the Word of God to be understood, it needs a heart that is willing to receive it. The words need to be understood, not only heard. God is anxious to send understanding to those who ask for it. There might be spiritual obstacles, but eventually Jesus Christ will remove all impediments. Offenses, suffering, and the cares and riches of this world block the Word from bearing fruit. Only those who are as little children in spirit, who consider God as their Father and receive all His words as such, will receive the Word. By beholding the Son, we learn of the Father and know who the Father is. The revelation of Jesus Christ is given by the Father to babes. The message of the gospel, the message of the Father and the Son, would be received by all who would receive it as little children. The natural process of revelation is through the priest as a messenger of God: he should keep knowledge, and the law should be in his lips; but God desires as much as a Father to hold close personal communion with each of us, in which we can receive wisdom and understanding from Him.

Overall Conclusions

These are the basic five rules of interpretation. All Scriptures must be taken, without adding nor subtracting. The Scriptures cannot be contradicted, and must be explained using the Scriptures themselves, while praying for God to change our hearts and give us light.

There are a few points worth noting. The first one is that God, as the Creator of the human mind, is best suited to develop the best teaching tool for it. In that regard, the Scriptures are unsurpassable, since they were designed specifically for the human condition. We could learn from the teaching principles implied in the Bible in order to replicate it in all teaching areas.

One of the things that we see in the Bible is the principle of repetition and expansion. We see that in one part of the Bible a message is given, and then in another place the same message is given but from a different angle, and then it is repeated somewhere else in a different setting again. Another principle that we can clearly see in the Bible is the use of figures and illustrations. We covered a few earlier in this booklet. In repetition there is an expansion of content that helps to develop the topic in consideration. There are different examples of all of this, but we could briefly think of two: One of them is the gospel. There is not one book of the gospel, but four different books, each one with its own unique perspective, describing the events that were more relevant to each author. The stories repeat and amplify themselves in the gospels. The other example is the prophecies found in the book of Daniel. Everything started with Nebuchadnezzar's dream in chapter 2. Then the same sequence is presented in Daniel chapter 7, but from a different perspective, and further in the vision of Daniel 8 and 9, concluding with what is presented in the last chapters of the book. The later prophets also repeat and expand and make clearer that which earlier prophets had written.

As we move progressively through the Bible the frontiers of knowledge widen, covering more and more ground, and we are able to see more of it as if we were ascending. This leads us to the conviction that we cannot be safe if we use just one verse as evidence of something. The more passages that are included, the better will be the understanding obtained.

When we study the Scriptures, there will be times in which the available testimony will seem to be contradictory. It will seem impossible to uphold one verse without invalidating another one. Sometimes the apparent contradictions resolve themselves in the same context; sometimes they don't. Other times we will find that the contradictions dissolve when we look at the meaning of a word, especially in its original language. Sometimes they don't.

The failure and consequences of not incorporating two apparently contradictory concepts is well illustrated in history. Israel was waiting for the coming of the Messiah in glory. The hopes of the nation, the leaders and the people alike, were in the coming of the Messiah in His majesty. But the Bible also gives testimony of the suffering Messiah. The inability to add the full revelation of the Messiah to their beliefs brought the consequences that we all know in His rejection and crucifixion. Why did the people of God take this path? What were the circumstances that led them to completely ignore part of the truth? What role did the spiritual leaders play? Faced with such an event that brought so much frustration and spilt blood, shouldn't we be able to learn from our forefathers?

It wasn't lack of intellectual power; in these matters that it is never the problem. The answer is in the heart, in our human nature⁵⁵. This

⁵⁵ "Why did so many of the people of Jesus' day fail to see God's self-revelation in Jesus? Because they refused to subject themselves to the guidance of the Holy Spirit through the Scriptures, they misinterpreted God's message and crucified their Saviour. Their problem was not one of intellect. It was their closed hearts

story is a mirror which helps us understand why our nature tends to reject Biblical concepts that are in contradiction with other sometimes wonderful promises. This natural condition of the heart will always reveal itself unless held in check by the Spirit of God.

But we shouldn't be afraid of these contradictions. On the contrary, we should be looking for, searching out and holding contradictions dear. The apparent contradictions are signs that our understanding is imperfect; they are a promise of greater light. The Scriptures themselves will clear them away. Sometimes we tend to discuss and argue regarding two points of view, instead of letting the mind fuse them, through further scriptural study and prayer, into one with a deeper vision. It is in this situation that the bi-dimensional image gains in depth and granularity. Sometimes this inability to fuse the two images into one is the reason why the Scriptures are spiritualized. Spiritual meanings are given to statements that we cannot reconcile in their literal sense, when in reality it is in the fusion of the literal where the vision receives depth and richness.

The apparent contradictions are a door to knowledge. When these apparent contradictions are solved through the Scriptures, a new field of knowledge opens up to the student, while giving greater order to previous understanding. And as we explore, further closed doors will be found, waiting to be opened. We will also find contradictions that might be too high for us and that might first require several layers of understanding before they can be unlocked. When these contradictions are solved, especially as they refer to the character of God, they reveal the beauty and perfection of His character. Let us see some examples which will help us to understand the meaning of some passages in Scripture by using the rules of interpretation we have developed here.

that darkened their minds, resulting in eternal loss.” Seventh Day Adventist Believe, page 19.

An Example: “Call No Man your Father”

Matthew 23:⁹ And call no man your father upon the earth: for one is your Father, which is in heaven.

Is this instruction given by Christ applicable to our relationship with our earthly parents? Because the commandment says:

Exodus 20: ¹² Honour thy father and thy mother: that thy days may be long upon the land which the Lord thy God giveth thee.

The commandment of God calls our earthly father “father”, and urges us to honor him because of this condition. Can’t we call our father in the flesh “father”? Is this the sense in which Jesus wanted to give this instruction?

It is a law of nature that each human being is born of a mother and has received life from a father. This is recognized by the commandment itself, by inviting us to honor our father and our mother. Therefore the first thing we might notice is that it is *against* the laws of nature to not be able to call someone “father”. But what did Jesus mean, then? Let’s read another verse:

Genesis 4:²¹ And his brother's name was Jubal: he was the father of all such as handle the harp and organ.

Here we see that the term “father” is used for all those who follow a certain practice. “Father” is the name of the source of a practice, conduct or behavior. Let’s see another example of this:

Matthew 5:⁴⁴ But I say unto you, Love your enemies, bless them that curse you, do good to them that hate you, and pray for them which despitefully use you, and persecute you; ⁴⁵**That ye may be the children of your Father** which is in heaven: for he maketh his sun to rise on the evil and on the good, and sendeth rain on the just and on the unjust.

Jesus here is teaching the spiritual meaning of “children” and “father”. To be someone’s children, it is necessary to do the works of this person, to have his conduct. And Jesus further reinforces this concept:

John 8:⁴¹ “Ye do the deeds of your father.”

Then said they to him, “We be not born of fornication; we have one Father, even God.”

⁴²Jesus said unto them, “**If God were your Father, ye would love me:** for I proceeded forth and came from God; neither came I of myself, but he sent me. ⁴³Why do ye not understand my speech? even because ye cannot hear my word.”

If the Pharisees really had God as their Father, they would have loved Christ. And Christ states here that because they don’t love Him, they cannot acknowledge themselves as children of God. Once more the concepts are repeated: we are children of whom we hear; we are children of him whose example we follow; and we are children of him whose actions we follow and do. Let’s read the verse in question once more:

Matthew 23:⁹ And call no man your father upon the earth: for one is your Father, which is in heaven.

We may call our earthly father, from whom we have received our physical life, “father”. Yet we are not to consider anyone a father on this earth. Why? Because there is only one Father, one source, one originator of everything⁵⁶. It is He whom we should hear, follow and imitate. His character ought to be our model. His words and actions, if we receive them, will transform us into His children.

Ephesians 5:1 Be ye therefore followers of God, as dear children;

⁵⁶ 1 Corinthians 8:6

Thus we can be made His children. This is possible by beholding Christ, by beholding the light of the face of Christ, who reveals us the fullness of God's character.

A Second Example: "In your Anger, do not Sin"

We've seen that we ought to behold our heavenly Father in the light of the life of Christ, and imitate and receive His character.

Colossians 3:⁵ Mortify therefore your members which are upon the earth; fornication, uncleanness, inordinate affection, evil concupiscence, and covetousness, which is idolatry: **6For which things' sake the wrath of God cometh on the children of disobedience:** ⁷In the which ye also walked some time, when ye lived in them. ⁸But now ye also **put off all these; anger, wrath,** malice, blasphemy, filthy communication out of your mouth.

Paul invites us to put to death earthly things in our life, among which is anger and wrath. However, right there in the same phrase we see that the wrath of God comes upon the children of disobedience. How can this be possible? Could it be that God calls us to not have anger or wrath, but that these are only reserved for Himself? In the light of what was considered previously, how can we then follow God? How can we become His children? We might also ask: How is God? How is God when He is angered? What does He do? Does He get angry like a human being does? Can the anger of man be compared to the anger or the wrath of God? Could it be that God suddenly explodes with anger and shouts and acts violently? That is how earthly men act, and that is what we are being asked to put aside. Is God's anger like man's anger? Let's keep reading the context of the same verse we have been considering:

Colossians 3:⁹Lie not one to another, seeing that ye have put off the old man with his deeds; ¹⁰And have put on the new

man, which is renewed in knowledge **after the image of him that created him**: ¹¹Where there is neither Greek nor Jew, circumcision nor uncircumcision, Barbarian, Scythian, bond nor free: but **Christ is all, and in all**.

The wrath of God comes upon the children of disobedience due to, among other things, the anger and wrath manifested by earthly man. However, the call is for the old man to be put to death, and for us to put on the new man, after the image of Christ. In other words, when Christ is all in all, when we put on Christ, we set aside among other things anger, wrath, malice, etc. Now, this is important, because this word “wrath” is the same word in the original Greek which is used for the wrath of God. Since Christ is the revelation of the Father Himself, the express image of His person⁵⁷, it is evident that the wrath of man is not the wrath of God, because the wrath of man will not be in us if Christ dwells in us.

James 1:¹⁶Do not err, my beloved brethren. ¹⁷Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, and cometh down from the Father of lights, with whom is no variableness, neither shadow of turning. ¹⁸Of his own will begat he us with the word of truth, that we should be a kind of firstfruits of his creatures. ¹⁹**Wherefore**, my beloved brethren, let every man be swift to hear, **slow to speak, slow to wrath**: ²⁰**For the wrath of man worketh not the righteousness of God.** ²¹Wherefore lay apart all filthiness and superfluity of naughtiness, and receive with meekness the engrafted word, which is able to save your souls.

“Every good gift and every perfect gift comes from our Father, with whom is no variableness, neither shadow of turning.” And for this reason we are urged to be swift to hear God’s voice, slow to speak, and slow to wrath. We should be slow to wrath because this does not come from God, since every good and perfect gift comes from

⁵⁷ Hebrews 1:3; Colossians 1:15

God. And James explains the reason for this: the wrath of man is not the righteousness of God. Evidently, unlike man's wrath, God's wrath does work the righteousness of God. And we ask ourselves, what is God's righteousness?

Psalm 119:¹⁷² My tongue shall speak of thy word: for **all thy commandments are righteousness.**

Isaiah 51:⁷ Harken unto me, ye that know righteousness, the people in whose heart is my law; ...

All of God's commandments are righteousness. God's law is God's righteousness. Now, the Ten Commandments, written on stone, are only a declaration of God's righteousness in human words, and having them in the heart is having God's righteousness. The Ten Commandments are a description of God's way of being, of His character and life. The law is spiritual⁵⁸, and agape love is the great principle or spirit which sustains it.⁵⁹ So then the commandment "thou shalt not kill" is spiritual, because the law is spiritual, designating not only the act itself, but also the thoughts and the heart of man. See how Christ Himself explains it:

Matthew 5:²¹ Ye have heard that it was said of them of old time, Thou shalt not kill; and whosoever shall kill shall be in danger of the judgment: ²²But I say unto you, That **whosoever is angry with his brother** without a cause shall be in danger of the judgment: and **whosoever shall say to his brother, Raca**, shall be in danger of the council: but **whosoever shall say, Thou fool**, shall be in danger of hell fire.

The spiritual meaning of the commandment "thou shalt not kill" includes wrath and anger against one's brethren. If I am angry against my brother, I am already guilty of judgment, I have already

⁵⁸ Romans 7:¹⁴

⁵⁹ Matthew 22:³⁶⁻⁴⁰, Romans 13:¹⁰, Galatians 5:¹⁴

transgressed the law. If I call him Raca or fool, I have already sinned. Christ was sent to this world to make manifest and to make known to us the righteousness of God⁶⁰. We, who in our carnal state do not know the life of God, receive Christ and the law in its spirit, that they might give us the perfect and complete reflection of the perfection of the character of God's life, of His life style.

2 Corinthians 5:21 For he hath made him to be sin for us, who knew no sin; **that we might be made the righteousness of God in him.**

In Christ we are made righteousness of God. When we abide in Christ and He abides in us, we receive the life of God through Christ. We receive His lifestyle. He writes in our hearts and in our minds the law of God in its spirit.

Romans 5:17 For if by one man's offence death reigned by one; much more they which receive abundance of grace and of **the gift of righteousness** shall reign in life by one, Jesus Christ.)

God's righteousness is in the gift of Christ's mind and character – His love and trust in His Father's will. So it's impossible for the wrath of God to be the wrath of man, because the wrath of man does not keep the commandments. It is impossible for carnal man to do this; he specifically breaks the commandment "thou shalt not kill" when he is angered against his brother, when he calls his neighbor Raca or fool. Christ, our older brother, and one who reflects the Father, was never angered, and never called any of His younger brethren⁶¹ fools or Raca. The wrath of God is without sin; it is such that it perfectly fulfills His whole law. And that is the only wrath that man may manifest:

⁶⁰ Romans 3:21; Psalm 40:9-10

⁶¹ Hebrews 2:11, 17

Ephesians 4:²⁶ **Be ye angry, and sin not:** let not the sun go down upon your wrath:

We are called to not have the anger of man. If there is anger, let it be without sin, let it be without calling others fools. Let it be the wrath of God. But how is this possible? Evidently we need to be able to define more clearly what God's wrath is.

Man might imagine God's work and how He acts, but unless it is explained from the Scriptures and guided by the Spirit of God, man's thoughts are limited by his own reality and condition. God declares how far is man from God: As high as the heavens are from the earth, so much higher are the thoughts of God compared to those of man, and God's works compared to man's works.⁶²

Let's remember the importance of the principles of interpretation in order to gain light regarding any Biblical passage. When Christ came to earth, He did not discard the writings of the Old Testament, but instead, He uplifted them. He affirmed that He had not come to break the law, but to fulfill it in the spirit with which it was given. So we follow Christ by stating that the whole Word is valid. Secondly, we may not add any word or concept to it. Thirdly, we may not remove ideas or concepts that are in the Scriptures. Fourth, we should let the Bible interpret itself. The Bible itself explains and defines the terms and the topics we are studying. Fifth, we need to pray to God for His Spirit, that He might make His will known to us, and that we might understand the wrath of God.

Christ is the image of God. If we want to know God, we ought to behold Christ. And by beholding Christ, what do we see regarding wrath, fury or anger?

Mark 3:¹ And he entered again into the synagogue; and there was a man there which had a withered hand. ²And they watched him, whether he would heal him on the sabbath

⁶² Isaiah 55:⁸

day; that they might accuse him. ³And he saith unto the man which had the withered hand, "Stand forth."

⁴And he saith unto them, "Is it lawful to do good on the sabbath days, or to do evil? to save life, or to kill?" But they held their peace. ⁵And when he had **looked round about on them with anger, being grieved for the hardness of their hearts**, he saith unto the man, "Stretch forth thine hand." And he stretched it out: and his hand was restored whole as the other.

⁶And the Pharisees went forth, and straightway took counsel with the Herodians against him, how they might destroy him. ⁷But Jesus withdrew himself with his disciples to the sea: and a great multitude from Galilee followed him, and from Judaea,

Notice carefully what happened: Christ entered the synagogue and saw a sick man. He asked those who declared themselves to be followers of God, "Is it lawful to do good on the Sabbath day?" Is it lawful to heal, to give life? Yet no one responded, they would not answer Him. It was impossible for them to affirm that it was lawful to do good. Then Christ was angered. Here we have the word "anger", the same one we've seen in other texts we have quoted from the New Testament. But what do we notice? He looked at them and there was anger in Him. Why? Because He saw the hardness of their hearts; He could see and read each of their excuses to not come into the light.

We know that hardness of heart is caused by sin.⁶³ Christ is grieved. He is saddened, because He can see the end of the path that they have chosen. He is grieved, because they hardened their hearts to the impressions of the Holy Spirit, and this distances them from salvation. Christ is angered, not against His brethren, but because the sin in their lives is distancing them from the life of God which

⁶³ Hebrews 3:13

is offered through His Spirit. Christ is grieved for them upon seeing their hardened hearts.

And what does Jesus do with his anger? He withdraws; He goes to the sea. So we see that for Jesus the anger is against sin and what sin causes. This anger comes with pain and sadness for the hardness of the heart which is caused by the deception of sin. And this anger is grief because He has to withdraw when faced with this hardness of heart. His passion is stirred because by withdrawing, He will not be able to bless them. Christ does not impose Himself; He does not force anyone. When faced with resistance, He withdraws with a grieved heart.

On the other hand, what happens to men? Those whose hearts are hardened, when faced with the anger and grief of Christ, which was probably reflected in the look of His face and His tone of voice, they get together to kill Him. Here, in this short and simple sequence, we have the wrath of God manifested in the life of Christ. God offers salvation, but the hardness of the heart resists good. When faced with the hardness of the heart, God manifests His anger, which consists specifically in grief due to the hardening of the heart, and the withdrawing of His presence. When this happens, man wants to destroy Christ.

You might be asking now, but how do we find all of this in the Old Testament? How is God's wrath in the Old Testament? Due to space constraints, we will not consider all the instances, but only one which is mentioned as applicable to all circumstances.⁶⁴

Deuteronomy 31:¹⁶And the Lord said unto Moses, "Behold, thou shalt sleep with thy fathers; and this people will rise up, and go a whoring after the gods of the strangers of the land, whither they go to be among them, and will forsake me, and break my covenant which I have made with them.

⁶⁴ For further study on the wrath of God, please refer to "The Loving Wrath of God", "God's Strange Act" and "Agape", from maranathamedia.net

17Then my anger shall be kindled against them in that day, and I will forsake them, and I will hide my face from them, and they shall be devoured, and many evils and troubles shall befall them; so that they will say in that day, 'Are not these evils come upon us, because our God is not among us?' 18And I will surely hide my face in that day for all the evils which they shall have wrought, in that they are turned unto other gods."

Notice the sequence regarding what would happen to the people of Israel. The people would forsake God and go after false gods. The people would break God's covenant. Breaking God's covenant is the hardening of the heart, resisting the conviction of sin and the offer of forgiveness. Breaking the covenant is rejecting the voice of the Holy Spirit that calls us to accept Him. When this happens, the verse tells us that God's anger is kindled. And the process is clearly defined. When God's anger is kindled, He forsakes them and hides His face from them. This causes many of them to be devoured or destroyed, and for many evils and troubles to befall them. All of this happens because God is no longer among them.

The wrath of God, then, is manifested in that God abandons them, and turns them over to their own gods. God withdraws because they no longer want Him in their lives, and God respects their decision. By withdrawing, by leaving them, by moving away, He leaves them at their own mercy, and evil comes to them. Can we see this clearly in the life of Israel?

Judges 10:6And the children of Israel did evil again in the sight of the Lord, and served Baalim, and Ashtaroth, and the gods of Syria, and the gods of Zidon, and the gods of Moab, and the gods of the children of Ammon, and the gods of the Philistines, and forsook the Lord, and served not him. 7**And the anger of the Lord was hot against Israel, and he sold them into the hands of the Philistines,** and into the hands of the children of Ammon... 15And the children of Israel said

unto the Lord, “We have sinned: do thou unto us whatsoever seemeth good unto thee; deliver us only, we pray thee, this day.” ¹⁶**And they put away the strange gods from among them, and served the Lord: and his soul was grieved for the misery of Israel.**

Notice carefully what happened. The children of Israel did evil, God’s anger was hot, and He handed them over to their enemies – in this case the Philistines. Then the people cried out to God and acknowledged that they had distanced themselves from Him. The text says they put away the strange gods from among them and served the Lord. In the following chapter we are told of the liberation that God brought about through Jephthah. However, we highlight the fact that God was grieved and afflicted because of their situation. God is not indifferent to the situation through which His children, the creation of His hands, are going through. And it is here where we can begin to perceive the emotions God goes through when He finally has to leave man to his own devices.

Isaiah 22:⁴Therefore said I, ‘Look away from me; **I will weep bitterly**, labour not to comfort me, because of the spoiling of the daughter of my people.’

In the destruction that is coming upon Jerusalem, upon Judah, upon Israel, God says, “Look away from me, I will weep bitterly”. And He asks that they do not try to comfort Him for the destruction of the daughter of His people. The wrath of God is not a cause of happiness for Him, nor of satisfaction for giving the punishment that the guilty deserved. All the contrary; God’s wrath is heart full of sorrow and anguish, and with many bitter tears, God ends up withdrawing His protection by allowing His children to reap the evil consequences they have sown.

In these few verses, a concept regarding the wrath of God begins to be revealed to us. In order to be faithful to Scripture, these verses must be included in a study of this topic. Not doing so would mean mutilating or removing parts of Scripture. Contrary to the wrath of

man, God's wrath keeps the righteousness of God, or the commandments, in its spiritual sense. Equating God's wrath with man's wrath would mean ignoring the testimony of the texts we have cited, and it would be no less than contradicting and adding to the Word of God, which we have seen is strictly forbidden.

God's wrath, defined by the Scriptures themselves, is anger because of sin, and indignation because of what sin causes in man. It is pain, sadness and weeping for having to give in to man's demands and leave him to his own devices. Having to abandon the sinner causes God terrible heartache and indignation, but finally God allows him to choose his own destiny. The study of this word and of the instances in which anger or wrath are manifested throughout the Scriptures will consistently show us this concept, and any conclusion to which we arrive will have to, by necessity, not contradict the texts that we have considered in this brief study.

Conclusions:

To know truth, then, we should gather all Scripture statements - every single word about a topic. Every statement, declaration, belief and doctrine must be tested in light of all the verses and references to that topic in the Bible. Even more, it must be tested in the light of the whole Bible. The truth will be the position that does not contradict any declaration within the Bible along with the character manifested by the life of the Son of God as Son of Man. The truth will be in the position that does not break the Word of God, that affirms as truth the totality of the Scriptures. To follow in this practice is to position ourselves behind the shield of the Lord. The Bible is the end of every argument and dispute. If we were not to follow it, what would we do? Would we follow the teachings of any man instead⁶⁵? There are not too many options, are there?

It is then my belief that, following these simple rules of interpretation untiringly, we will be guided into the knowledge of Jesus. May God help us all.

⁶⁵ 1 Kings 13:14-24, 1 Peter 5:8

Christ tells us that the Word of God is truth. But there are so many different beliefs, and apparently all of them come from the Bible, so how can we know? And how can we know the truth when we find apparent contradictions in the Bible?

The Bible itself teach us how to solve these apparent problems, through clear instructions and parables. When we follow the Scriptures' advice on how to receive the Word of God, then how we read the Bible makes all the difference. Paul advises us to rightly divide the Word of truth – how can we do so?

To answer these questions, read in this booklet the basic Principles or Rules of Interpretation, stated as the Bible declares them.