Grace to You :: *Unleashing God's Truth, One Verse at a Time*

What Does the Bible Mean by What It Says?, Part 1
Scripture: Selected Scriptures
Code: 1366

For this morning, we're continuing our series that we'd begun several weeks ago in dealing with the charismatic movement. And we're going to be approaching it this morning from a little bit different angle perhaps than the remainder of the series, in that we're going to be dealing with a technical question somewhat, rather than specifically a Biblical text, although we will cover several passages. I would say, initially, that we're thankful to God for the much good that is done as our brothers and sisters in Christ are sharing the Gospel and winning others and so forth, and we're not disparaging that for a moment. But only trying in the light of the Word of God to evaluate the movement so that we can get a clear understanding of what is good and what is not so good to be able to make a proper judgment. So we've entitled the message and the series, "What's Wrong in the Charismatic Movement?"

I was watching Channel 40 one night this week, and the well-known Christian personality, Dave Wilkerson, whom God has blessed in many ways and has had a wonderful ministry in the streets of New York, made an interesting statement. He was being interviewed, and this is what he said, "There are some serious things wrong in the charismatic movement." Thought that was interesting coming from one who would have to be considered a leader in that movement. He went on to emphasize his tremendous concern and to discuss some of the things that he saw that were wrong in the movement, and I agreed with all of them. In fact, all of the ones he mentioned were a part of my list that we'll be covering in weeks to come. But I didn't feel that he went far enough, and it was interesting that he stopped after mentioning a few things, and then said that he wanted to tell them about a revelation he had just received from Christ.

And I thought, "Well, isn't it interesting that he could see some of the superficial elements that are wrong, but he doesn't yet understand the heart of the issue, which is adding revelation to Scripture." That's what we've talked about the last two weeks. He stopped and said that he had received the revelation from God that New York City would go bankrupt, that the Midwest would have a killing drought, and that California would realize a terrible earthquake such as we've never known before, that churches and homes would be destroyed and Christianity would have to exist apart from the way we know it now. And he said that everybody should get rid of all their debts and get rid of all their credit cards and become flexible and mobile, so that when the churches and the homes are destroyed, we can take Christianity out to the streets and so forth. And all of this is what Jesus had told him. And he went on to say that the Lord had told him other things, and the person who was interviewing said, "Well, what about storing up food? Did the Lord tell you that?" And he said, "No, the

Lord has told that to some of my friends, but the Lord has not given me a revelation on that yet."

And I thought it was so interesting because here is a man who is perceiving some wrong things in the movement, but doesn't perceive the most wrong thing, which is God continually giving supposed revelations; and so we no longer know where Scripture ends and somebody's ideas begin. And he was telling them that those things he received from God were just as binding as anything in the Bible.

Now, we spent the last two weeks discussing the issue of revelation, and we said that the first thing wrong in the charismatic movement deals with the issue of revelation. They must face the fact that the Bible is complete, and they cannot continue to add supposed revelation to Scripture without resultant chaos.

Now, that brings us to the second thing we want to deal with today, and that is the issue of interpretation. The issue of interpretation, and as I studied this this week, I don't think before this week I really understood the ramifications. But I'm concluding this week from my study that this is just about as essential as point number one, the issue of interpretation. And I say that on this basis, what good does it do if we agree that this is the revelation of God, and there isn't any more, and then set about to misinterpret it? The result will be the same. We will miss God's truth. It doesn't make any sense to add to Scripture, and it doesn't make any more sense to say, "This is all," and then go ahead and misinterpret it, and make it say what it never was intended to say.

And, as I mentioned to you last week, the cults, all of the cults that have been sprung from off of a Christian base, wind up adding to Scripture. It's the Bible plus the writings of so-and-so, but they also were guilty of misinterpreting the Scripture. I pulled a file out of my file drawer this week, and I looked through all the material I've collected through the years on the cults. And I was amazed to find that all of them listing their doctrines, which we disagree with, have in parenthesis underneath them the Scriptures in the Bible that they say defend those wrong doctrines. People have used the Bible to prove anything and everything. The Bible can be twisted around to say whatever anybody wants it to say. You know, the old one about "Judas went out and hanged himself. Go thou and do likewise and what thou doest, do quickly." That's all in the Bible, but it just shouldn't come together like that.

You can prove anything if you just misinterpret the Bible. People have defended polygamy on the basis of the Bible. People have said, "Well, because the plagues in the Old Testament were judgments of God, we ought to avoid all sanitation in order to allow God to have the right to bring plagues, because that's the way historically He brings judgment." Yeah, you can defend just about any kind of crazy thing if you put the wrong verse in the wrong place in the wrong context and attach it with other things that don't make any more sense than that either when they're put together in a combination that is not fair to the totality of Scripture.

So we must allow for the fact that the issue of interpretation has to be faced. The cults, the Roman Catholic Church, the liberals, they've all been guilty of misinterpreting the Bible. Now, I'm not offering myself or Grace Church or any other human being as infallible, but I am saying all of us at least have to make a commitment to try the best we can in the energy of the Holy Spirit and using our minds and our hearts and our intense desire and strong commitment to do the best we can do to interpret the Bible the way God intends it to be done.

Now, there are some basic principles for interpreting the Bible, and they come under the name hermeneutics. Somebody might say, "Herman who?" Well, hermeneutics. That is a simple word, really. It comes from a Greek word, *hermeneu* and *hermeneu* means to give the meaning, to give the meaning. How many times in the New Testament have you read the statement, which being interpreted is such as, say,Matthew 1:23, "His name shall be called Immanuel, which being interpreted is God with us." That is the word *hermeneu*, and what it means is simply this, the meaning of Immanuel, which means God with us.

So hermeneutics is the science of telling what the Bible means by what it says, and really that's basically what my responsibility is. The job of the teacher is to tell you what the Bible means by what it says. That's clearly what we are to do and, in fact, that's simply interpreting the Bible. We have a Supreme Court in our country who have the problem of interpreting the Constitution, and it isn't easy. All documents of any significance must be interpreted, and the Bible is no different. It demands careful interpretation, so that we do not in any way distort what God intended to say. And it always bothers me when I hear a charismatic person, and there are people, incidentally, who are guilty of misinterpreting the Bible in all areas of Christianity, not just the charismatic. But I think it's come to the fore in that area, and I'll explain why in a minute.

But I've heard many charismatic people and other people say, "Well, I think this verse means so and so." Well, that doesn't really matter what you think. Or they'll say, "Well, to me, this means – " and my response to that is, "Well, if you weren't alive, what would it mean?" Because it has to mean something in and of itself apart from you. You see, the neo-orthodox and liberal view of Scripture is, "Well, to me, this says." And what's happened in the charismatic movement with everybody saying what this verse means to them, and "I think this one means this and Jesus told me it means that," is basically we've reduced Christianity to a neo-orthodox thing that says if the Scripture speaks to you, it's the Word of God, and whatever it says is okay.

It doesn't matter what it says to you. It doesn't matter what it means to you. What matters is what does it mean, and what does it say apart from you? It is objective truth, not defined experientially. What does the Bible say if you don't exist? You know, what does the Bible say if you don't have a problem you're looking for a solution for? What does the Bible say in these verses apart from my superimposing anything on them?

Now, let me take you to 2 Timothy chapter 2, and let's discuss a little bit about the basics of hermeneutics. Now, this is going to help you with your Bible study, so I want you to get a hold of this. This is one of the most basic courses that any Bible teacher or Bible student needs, an understanding of hermeneutics or the science; or the principle or the art, if you will, even, because it's even an art as well as a science, of getting the meaning of the Bible.

Second Timothy 2:14. Now, here Paul speaks to Timothy, who is a teacher of the Scripture. And he calls him a workman, basically carrying along the same theme that he began in the 2nd chapter of 2 Timothy, where he goes through those first eight verses or so describing the teacher of the Word in many different ways. But he carries on this concept of the teacher as a workman, and he makes four basic points about the kind of work the teacher is to do. Number one, in verse 14, "The teacher is to avoid useless arguments with heretics. Of these things put them in remembrance, charging them before the Lord that they strive not or dispute not or argue not about words to no profit to the subverting of the hearers." In other words, you do not want to get into a debate with heretics in front of the church, in front of the believing community. That only confuses the issue. Avoid useless disputing with heretics.

I remember when I was going to finish a doctorate and went to a certain seminary, and they said, "Well, what do you want to major in?" And I said, "Well, I want to major in Bible, New Testament," and they said, "Well, let's look at your transcript," and they looked at it and said, "Well, you can't get your degree right away, because you have too much Bible." I said, "How could you have too much Bible for a major in Bible and New Testament?" They said, "Well, you need a lot more philosophy. Your spectrum is too limited," and they gave me a list of 200 books to read, less than half of which were in English. And I gave them back the list and said, "I already know the truth. There's no sense in spending a couple of years finding out what's wrong. I don't want to involve myself in useless disputation, because that does not edify me," and I think it's like the little foxes that spoil the vines.

I often warn young men who go off to seminary to be sure they choose their seminary very carefully. A seminary should be a reinforcement of what you believe, it should not be a war in which you fight to come out with some remnants of your faith; and so we are to avoid useless disputing. In 1 Timothy 6, he said essentially the same thing, talking in verse 4, he said, "He's proud, knowing nothing, but doting about questions and disputes of words, of which comes envy, strife, railing, and evil suspicion, perverse disputing of men of corrupt minds, destitute of the truth." There's no sense in just getting into hassles with heretics. There's no sense in those kinds of confrontations, because all they do is undermine.

And what he's saying here, and I want you to get this, what he's saying here is there is a right interpretation, and that right interpretation makes futile disputing and wrangling about debating over what other interpretations there might be. In other words, the Bible is not something which is to be

determined by a group discussion. It is to be determined by diligent, careful study of the basic elements revealing the basic meaning, and it is not something that you argue over. It isn't ten people saying, "Well, I think it means this." "Well, I think it means this." "Well, I think it means this." It does mean something, and God has given us the wherewithal to find out what it means. There's no sense in just arguing about the meaning of the Bible, debating about it, and the implication of such a statement is that it isn't something that's up for argument, because it's clear. There is a one meaning to that which God says.

Second principle that He tells the workman who works in the Word, and this is very important, be diligent to find that interpretation. Be diligent to find that. In contrast to a useless kind of dialogue, the servant of God, the teacher, must give diligence to the quality of his work, that he may be *dokimos*, approved by God. And if he doesn't do that, then he'll have every reason to be ashamed, won't he? He should be ashamed of anything that is less than accurately giving the meaning of the Scripture. We must be accurate, and anything less is a shame to us and is not approved of God. There is one meaning. We are to apply ourselves to know that one meaning with tremendous commitment and diligence. And, people, it isn't a matter of saying, "Well, I was reading this the other day in the kitchen and, you know, the Lord showed me that it means – " and down they go, and you know well it doesn't mean anything like that. That goes on. I hear that so often. People say, "Well, this verse means to me, well, you know, I – ."

And even those of us who are here at Grace and at many evangelical churches not in the charismatic movement can fall prey to that when we get into Bible study, which becomes a pooling of ignorance where everybody says, "Well, I think it means this." "Well, I think it means this." And nobody really knows what it means. That isn't the way to study the Bible. The discussion might come at the point of application, but not at the point of interpretation. There you need somebody who's applied some diligence, and it's wonderful if everybody's been diligent. Then the pooling of all those diligent resources can come up with richness; and so it must be then that we must be diligent. That it's hard work. That it's struggle. That it's just plain sweat to come to the meaning of the Word of God, and not this haphazard, ad lib, flippant, freewheeling, it-means-to-me thing that we hear so much today.

And there's a third principle. The first one is there is one meaning. The second one is be diligent to find it, and, thirdly, be accurate. He says, "Rightly dividing the Word." Literally, in the Greek, he says, "Cutting it straight," and this is interesting. Paul is no doubt referring to his tent making trade; and when he would make a tent, he obviously, either in his mind or in some forms that he carried with him, he had patterns by which he would build a tent or make a tent. He would have to cut all of the pieces to put them together to fit. Since we know tents in those days were made out of the skins of animals, it would be a patchwork kind of tent, and every little bit and piece would have to be properly cut and fit together so that the final product was what it ought to be. And he was simply saying, "If you don't cut the pieces right, then the whole doesn't fit together," you see? And if you don't deal with each Scripture accurately, then it won't fit together in the whole, and you're going to come up with a

problem. Cut it straight. Be precise and careful and straightforward and accurate, so that everything fits the thing that God designs for His Word.

You must deal fairly and carefully and with integrity when you interpret the Bible, and this is where I call upon charismatic teachers and preachers to begin to do this, because they don't do this in so many cases. They are not treating the Word of God carefully and accurately and precisely, but there is a shoddy, sloppiness; and, of course, this is like a pet peeve to me. I just react so strongly, because I say, "God has given us this Book, and He has something to say, and how ludicrous it is to foul it up by a lack of diligence." Believe me, in just preparing messages in the Word of God, I could spend my whole life doing nothing but studying. That's the kind of thing this Book demands.

Be accurate, and the opposite of this is the tragedy that's indicated in 2 Corinthians chapter 2 verse 17, where Paul says, "We are not like so many who corrupt the Word of God, who corrupt the Word of God. We are sincere. We speak from God. In the sight of God speak we in Christ." Paul says, "Listen, I'll tell you one thing. When I get up there to speak, I cut it straight, because I know God is watching. God is listening. Christ is there, and I'm preparing to glorify Him, to be *dokimon* of Him, approved."

Frankly, people, I've told you this before. I don't prepare my message so you'll like them, although I'm glad when you enjoy them and respond. I don't prepare them for any other thing than ultimately to know that God would be pleased, and God would approve, because this is His sacred Word. And Paul says, "Because of this, I cut it straight." But he says, "That's not the way with so many who corrupt the Word of God," and he uses the Greek word *kaplos*, and *kaplos* basically means a huckster, a conman, a corrupter, a cheater, a charlatan, somebody dealing deceitfully, somebody making merchandise out of the Word of God.

In other words, there are some people who twist the Word of God, who adulterate the Word of God to get their point across. The cults are hucksters of the Word of God. They corrupt the Word of God. There are people who will, because they have an end in mind, because they have an objective in mind, and they want to get people to buy their objective, they twist the Scripture. I've seen this a lot of times and maybe you have too, in building programs where a church will set about to build and, in order to convince the people that God is in it, they'll take some verses out of the Old Testament about the building of the temple. Or if they want to make sure everybody gives 10 percent, they'll use Malachi 3 to make sure you give your 10 percent, and Malachi 3 isn't talking about giving to the church at all. The church didn't even exist in Malachi 3. He's talking about paying your taxes to the treasury in Israel.

But, you see, it's so easy sometimes to take the Word of God and to kind of turn it a little bit to say what you want it to say. And then you're really selling cheap glass as if it was diamonds. You're conning people using the Bible. It's so tempting to do that. Believe me, people, because so many times you want to say something, and you know the verse doesn't say that, but if you wiggle a little bit

around and twist it a little bit, you can get it to say that, and then it becomes more intimidating to the people.

Paul says, that's huckstering; that's falsifying. It's so easy to do that. Conning people to buy a false interpretation. Look at 2 Peter 3:16. Now here you have a similar word, because Peter is talking about the letters of Paul, the epistles of Paul. We looked at this in another context last week. He says, talking about Paul, "In all his epistles is speaking things that are hard to be understood." Then he says this, "Which they that are unlearned and unstable." Notice those two things that define the people. They are unlearned and unstable, wrest or twist or turn or screw, literally, *streblousin*. They twist it. They turn it. They screw it. "As they do the other Scriptures to their own destruction." There are some people who take the Scripture. Oh, they use the Scripture, but they twist it, and they turn it, and they do that in order to huckster it, to con people into believing this is what God is saying. Every cult you ever saw goes around quoting Scripture, right? They all do it. Every charlatan who wants to foist on Christianity some false doctrine will find verses, twisted and turned, in order to make his point.

Listen, as I said before, you can con people from the Bible by twisting it. And this thing is condemned, it says, to their own destruction. Be careful of those people, he says in 17. "You know these things. Beware lest you being led away with the error of the wicked, fall from your own steadfastness." Watch out. The Mormons, the Jehovah's Witnesses, the Christian Science, the Roman Catholic Church, Armstrongism, the Rosicrucians, and I notice they're on television now. The Unitarians and every other sect around uses the Bible, all interpreted wrongly.

Mormons, for example, teach that the Garden of Eden was in Missouri. And you laugh at that, because it's so shocking. You say, "Why do they teach that?" I really don't know why they teach it other than the fact that they want to have the beginning of everything connected, perhaps, with Joseph Smith and Moroni and so forth. But whatever the reason, and I really don't know what it is, it's rather clear thatGenesis 2:14says the Garden of Eden was by the Tigris and the Euphrates in Assyria. And they say, "Well, that's just allegory. It's really in Missouri. That's just your interpretation," they say.

You know something? I kind of react negatively when people say, "Oh, that's your interpretation." If ever I get to the place where I start giving you my interpretation, let me know, will ya? Because I'm finished. Oh, I may be wrong once in a while. That's right. I'm not infallible by any means. But God help me, I'm not interesting in giving you my interpretation of anything, and the thing that bothers me so much is whatever happened to the recognition of people in Christianity who are God-given teachers to the body?

Now we've got this thing where everybody who wants to tells us what every verse means any old way they want, and when somebody comes along who spends his whole life studying and tell them what it means, they say, "That's your opinion." There's a total loss of the credibility of a teacher in the

plethora of everybody doing his own thing with the Bible, and I believe neo-orthodoxy, the neo-orthodox mentality that whatever the Bible says to you is what it means, has contributed to the modern day charismatic movement. And it's even gone beyond that into the churches, even in evangelical circles.

The Mormons, for example, claim inRevelation 14:6that the everlasting Gospel, which the angel flying through heaven is carrying, proclaiming, the everlasting Gospel is the Book of Mormon. And we'll say to them, "It's not the Book of Mormon. We can show you what the everlasting Gospel is. There are some principles of interpretation that show us that the everlasting Gospel is God judges sin and rewards righteousness." And they say, "That's your interpretation." Mormons teach that the two sticks in Ezekiel 37, which refer to Judah and Israel, are really the Bible and the Book of Mormon. We show them by principles of interpretation that it can't be those two things. It's got to be Israel and Judah, and they say, "That's your interpretation."

They'll teach something that they want to teach, even though it goes against some other passage. In other words, you havePsalm 49:7, which says, "None of them can by any means redeem his brother nor give to God a ransom for him, for the redemption of their soul is precious and ceases forever." "Nobody can by any means redeem his brother," it says in Psalm 49, but they take1 Corinthians 15:29and say they can be baptized and redeem their brother. And then when we say, "Well, it doesn't work," they say, "That's your interpretation."

It isn't just our interpretation. There are some principles by which the Bible is to be interpreted, and the reason they got into so much trouble is they don't have the right principles. So many preachers and so many teachers and so many Christians are sloppy and less than diligent in handling the Word of God. They don't cut it straight, and you know what happens? This glorious, marvelous revelation of God gets misinterpreted, misapplied, misrepresented, and ultimately misunderstood. And it's a tragic thing, and, people, we have to be careful about that.

And today we've got so many books being written, and so many of them just wrongly interpret the Bible. Be careful. The one I hate the worst is "Jesus showed me what this verse means," and then they go on to give the wrong meaning. I've heard that so many times from charismatic people giving testimonies. "Jesus showed me what this means." It's not our opinion. If we interpret the Bible rightly, it's not our opinion. It's the result of principles of study, principles the Word of God teaches that are proper in approaching the Word of God. We'll cover some of those in more detail next time.

So we're still in 2 Timothy, believe it or not. Paul says, "There are some principles for Bible interpretation." Now watch. Number one, there's one interpretation. You don't need to wrangle with heretics. Number two, be diligent to find it. Number three, cut it straight so it fits with everything else. And fourth, don't be influenced by false doctrine. Once you've determined that, don't give it away. Verse 16, "And then shun profane and vane babbling. They'll increase unto more ungodliness, and

their word will eat as does a gangrene of whom are Hymenaeus and Philetus, who concerning the truth have erred, saying the resurrection is past already, and they're overthrowing the faith of some."

You say, "What happened to these guys?" They had the truth, yeah, and they opened their minds to falsehood, and they begin little by little to give away the true interpretation. Once the Bible is rightly interpreted and we've made that commitment to truth, there's no sense in exposing ourselves to false doctrine, because it begins to eat away like a gangrene.

Now, if you will realize there's one interpretation, and if you will be diligent to find it, and if you will cut it straight so it fits together with the totality of Scripture, and if you'll stay away from false doctrine, the result will be in verse 20. "In a great house, there are not only vessels of gold and silver, but wood and earth, and some to honor and some to dishonor. If a man therefore purge himself from these, he shall be a vessel unto honor, sanctified and fit for the Master's use, and prepared unto every good work."

Listen, the useful minister, the minister fit for God's purposes, the minister who bears fruit in God's field is the minister who cuts it straight, who deals truthfully with the Word of God, who does not associate himself with false teachers so that he gets undermined, who does not give way to sloppy interpretation or exegesis. Then he's useful. You've got to deal with the Word of God rightly.

Let me take you to the Old Testament, back to Nehemiah chapter 8. I want to show you this is not a new principle. Nehemiah 8, Nehemiah 8 and verse 1, and here's a great revival in the history of Israel as Nehemiah is preparing to build the wall. And it says in 8:1, "And all the people gathered themselves together as one man into the street that was before the Water Gate; and they spoke unto Ezra the scribe - " now listen, " - to bring the Book of the Law, which the Lord had commanded to Israel."

Now, number one, the first thing in a revival is to bring the Book. Don't ever forget it. That's where it begins. Get the Word of God, but notice what follows. Go over to verse 7. "Also Jeshua, Bani, Sherebiah, Jamin, Akkub, Shabbethai, Hodiah, Maaseiah, Kelita, Azariah, Jozabad, Hanan, Pelaiah, the Levites" - watch – "caused the people to understand the law." Now notice, it wasn't, "Well, now here's the Book. Everybody go ahead and read it and see what it says to you." No, somebody got up and explained what it said, and they're even named. Official scribes or teachers and the priests. Verse 8, "So they read in the book, in the law of God, distinctly" - and watch – "and gave the sense and caused them to understand the reading." You see?

Even back then, there had to be teachers. There had to be those who could explain the meaning of the Word of God. It means something. It doesn't just mean something to you. It means something objective that God has said. It's got to be done right.

First Timothy chapter 4 again, I want to show you something. Paul's again writing to Timothy, telling him how to teach, how to be an effective teacher, and there's a basic thing he's going to have to commit himself to do. First Timothy 4:13, "Until I come - " from now on, Timothy, till you see me again, here is the principle. Ready? " - give attendance or attention to reading, to exhortation, to doctrine." Now, summing up those three terms, he says this, "Read the text, explain the text, and apply the text."

Doctrine, you see, is the explanation of the meaning. Exhortation is the application. Now, many people who read it and apply it, never bother to explain it. They have some whimsical adlib, spontaneous explanation. I actually know of preachers who just find a section of the Bible and just get up and just go wandering through the verses, freewheeling, off-the-cuff kind of explanation. You think that's a fair way to treat the Word of God? You know what happens? The ones who succeed at that have good imaginations and usually a good sense of humor. They're funny and terrific imagination, and they can hold an audience like a comedian could or like an interesting speaker, but they don't interpret the Word of God. They don't cut it straight. They certainly don't give themselves to reading it, to explaining it, and applying it. They usually sell their personality bouncing off of it.

Now, I would hasten to add, beloved, that there are some passages that we have trouble explaining because we just don't have all the information, and good men will disagree. And once in a while, we'll find ourselves changing our opinions on certain things as we get more knowledge and more insight, as we mature, and that's fine. People say to me, "You know what you said in your tape six years ago? Well, you said another thing this last time," and I say, "Wonderful, I'm growing. I'm growing. I'm learning." Sure, but you have to come to the Word of God with a commitment to find out what God meant by what it says.

Now what happens in the charismatic movement when people say, "Well, this means to me - " "Well, what the Lord is saying to me in this verse - " that is nothing but neo-orthodoxy. That is the same view of Scripture, essentially, that the liberal has. Whatever zaps you, whatever hits you becomes God's Word to you, and that's a scary view of Scripture.

Now, there's a negative side. We've given you four basic positive principles that Paul gave to Timothy about interpreting the Word of God, and that is there's one interpretation, be diligent, be accurate, cut it straight, and don't let false doctrine change your opinion once you've come to that. But there are some negative things, and I think we're going to have an interesting time. I want to show you these. Now you follow along. Watch this.

Things to avoid in interpreting the Bible. Number one, first of all, we have to avoid seeking a result at the price of the proper interpretation. We have to avoid seeking a result at the price of the proper interpretation. It's always a temptation to take Scripture out of context to get your desired response.

Sometimes an issue will exist in the church, some issue, and I'll be studying a text, and I'll say, "Now, how can I get this issue into this text?" You know, your mind just wants to do that. Boy, I could really just let them all have it, and it would just be right here where we are, see. Because if there's an issue in the church, you don't want to get up to say, "Now, I want to talk to all of you people, arg, arg," that are doing it, see, because that's a little too direct. See, you need to be a lot more sneaky, and you need to say, "Well, the Lord just brought us to this text," and so you're very often tempted to just kind of worm it in where it doesn't belong.

Now you have to resist that because you never want to use Scripture for your own ends. You want to deal objectively with it. Subjectivity doesn't come to the Scripture. You want to deal objectively, basically, with the Scripture, so that you simply say what God wants to say.

Give you an illustration. I read this week, one teacher wanted to convince people that the primary issue in life was to be concerned about human beings, okay? That's a good thing. I mean we ought to be concerned about human beings. And then in order to support his point, he used the story of the Tower of Babel and I thought, "That's interesting. I'll read on." This is what he said, "In building the Tower of Babel, their efforts were frustrated. The thing failed, because they put material things first and humans last. As the tower grew, it took a hod carrier many hours to carry a load of bricks to the bricklayers working at the top. If a man fell off the tower on the way down, no one paid any attention. It was only a workman who was lost, but if he fell on the way up, they mourned because he also lost the bricks. This is why God confused their language. They failed to give priority to human beings."

And I said, "Mercy, mercy, enough. I can't take anymore." Where does he get all that? Pure imagination. The message of the Tower of Babel is not people are more important than bricks. The message of Babel is that God is more important than idols. People are more important than bricks, I agree with that, but that's not what that's trying to teach. You see what happens? You can make anything do anything. You can come up with good theology or bad theology. The good theology there is people are more important than bricks. The bad is you ignored the main lesson, which is God is more important than any idol.

I never cease to be amazed at how people misinterpret the Bible for their own ends. You know, it's very easy to think up a really good sermon that you want to preach, then find verses that'll support it, and you just take them out of context, make them say whatever you want them to say.

It's like the guy who preached on women shouldn't have hair on top of their head, you know. His text was, "Topknot Come Down." He took it from Matthew 24, where it says, "Let those on the housetop not come down." Well, that's a gross illustration, but that's the point I'm trying to make. You know, but what happens is, if you think that the ministry is simply the attaining of a success goal and getting a response out of people, then you'll do whatever works.

I was reading an article this week that in the February 4th, 1977, *Christianity Today*, called “The Perils of Persuasive Preaching” by A. Duane Lifton who teaches at Dallas Seminary. And the article was very interesting, because he pointed out the fact that there are basically five elements in a behavioral change: attention, comprehension, yielding, retention, and action. In other words, if you want to get people to change their behavior, first you get their attention. Then you get their comprehension so they understand what you’re saying. Then you get them to yield to that, and then to retain it, and then to change their action; and that’s that sequence, the five steps. “And historically - ” Lifton says in the article, “ - preachers have always been taught that number three is where we’re going. We want to get people to yield. We want to get people to respond. We want to get people to make a change.” And so you know what happens? That becomes the motive. That becomes the direction, and so what happens is you do anything that gets response. So you get emotional and 15 tear-jerking stories and Lifton points out you get some quasi-sanctified Hollywood holiness personalities in, and do their thing, get everybody emotionally stirred up, and you sing 48 verses of the closing hymn, and you try to break the back of everybody till they’re on the ground, and so forth, and get them to make a response.

And, you know, we’re told that when you go to evangelize, boy, the thing you want to do is get a commitment, get a commitment, get a commitment. Why, you don’t sell somebody something and walk away without getting them to sign. Boy, get them to sign. And we zero in on the yielding thing, and that becomes the objective and, consequently, sometimes the truth is adulterated in the Word of God to reach the objective. And Lifton’s point in the article is we are not to go to the third step of yielding. We are to stop at the second step of comprehension, and let the Holy Spirit bring the yielding, and I agree 100 percent.

My job is to get your attention and tell you what the Bible means, and when you have comprehended it, the Spirit of God’s got something He can bring about conviction with. And I’m convinced that a lot of people are responding to stuff they don’t even know what they’re responding to. He quotes from Frederick Marcuse who wrote a book on hypnotism, and I’m not going to read you the quote, but he says that Marcuse basically proved that, simply by being persuasive enough and powerful enough, you can get anybody to do anything. And what he says essentially is he took an atheist, a vocal, admitted atheist, and made him religious in three sessions by the power of persuasion. You could do anything to people. You can get them to commit – Pied Piper marched them all off the end of the pier. You can do anything. You can get people to do anything and we have to be careful in the power of persuasion.

Psychologist James McConnell says, “The time has come when if you give me any normal human being and a couple of weeks, I can change his behavior from what it is now to whatever you want it to be if it’s physically possible. I can’t make him fly by flapping his wings, but I can turn him from a Christian into a communist and vice versa.” The power of persuasion.

You get people charged up enough emotionally, use Bible verses that are just twisted enough to kind of play on their emotions, and if you get a justified, if you get a response, then you tend to justify it. Lifton says, “All this suggested through the use of certain techniques it is possible to get results, even where the Holy Spirit is not active.” That’s right.

Paul, of course, denied this. He says, “My sermons, my speeches were not the persuasive speech of men’s words and eloquence and so forth, but in the power of God.” If we just would tell people what the Bible means by what it says, and we’ll never do that until we are not willing to sacrifice the truth and integrity of the Word of God to get a reaction. Let the reaction come in response to the truth.

So it’s sad to become result-oriented. It’s sad to be using Scripture, turning it to get the thing you want accomplished, even though it adulterates that Bible. Like wanting to make sure you have enough money for the budget by trying to teach the people to tithe when the Bible doesn’t teach that. Greatest thing that a teacher could ever do for you is not force you to yield to something, but help you to understand something clearly so that the Spirit of God can produce the yielding on the basis of truth.

A second thing to avoid is not only avoid using the Bible to get a response, but the second thing is to avoid is a lack of study. Good, accurate Bible study is hard work. It’s a lot like digging a ditch. You just bend your back and do it until it’s done. It’s work. It isn’t easy, and I suppose that maybe because I work hard at it – actually, you know, I could spend my entire life and do nothing but that and still feel inadequate. That’s how much study this Book demands, and when I hear somebody get up on the 700 Club and open up and say, “You know, I was reading this verse the other day in the kitchen, and you know what I said to me?” I just go, “Whoo.” And they say, “It said sssssss.” And they give the wrong interpretation, and somebody said, “Oh, the Lord. Did the Lord give you that? Oh, the Lord gave me this.”

The Bible is to be studied. Now, I believe the Spirit of God will illuminate the Word of God in your life, but the reason God has given teachers to the church is because it takes those kind of people who can make that commitment. Why do you think He says, “Double honor for those who labor in the Word and doctrine?” It’s work. They’re the ones who are to be doubly honored in the church, because they’re the key to the whole thing. And we have to be careful. And when we sit around in our Bible studies, we don’t just pool our ignorance, and “I think this,” and “I think that.” Well, somebody ought to be there who knows basically what that means, or somebody ought to find out. Get a commentary or talk to a teacher who knows.

You know what I notice so much in the charismatic movement and also broader than that is that there are not any experts anymore. Nobody seems to recognize really fine Biblical interpreters. Now, because we’ve eliminated that, and we’ve got a free for all, anybody is entitled to say anything about any verse or any passage. That’s sad, because, frankly, beloved, and I’m not putting myself in that

category, because I learn at the feet of better men than I, but I'll tell you something. You just can't compare the so-called whimsical interpretation of every Christian with that of learned men who have the skills and the tools to tell us what the Word of God means by what it says. It's a big difference.

God has given teachers to the church. Why do you think Ephesians 4 says, "He's given apostles, prophets, evangelists, and teaching pastors for the perfecting of the saints"? Well, that's the whole point. The saints can't come to maturity unless there are capable people. That doesn't contradict1 John 2:27about all of us having an anointing so that we do not need to be taught of men. All that's saying is we don't need human wisdom. We have God's wisdom from His Holy Spirit through His appointed teachers. There are teachers in the church. Read 1 Corinthians 12. And there is a tremendous commitment to be good, to be accurate.

One pastor, charismatic pastor said, "I read no commentaries or no books. I go right to the Bible, and God shows me the truth." And he based it onJohn 14:26, "The Spirit will lead you into all truth and bring all things to your remembrance." You see the point? That was spoken to whom? The writers of the New Testament. That's not for every Christian to claim. If he walks up in the pulpit and says, "God gives me the message," I would venture to say that at least 50 percent of the time, he is not going to get the message that God has in that text, and probably more like 75 percent of it. That sounds spiritual, but it's kind of a veiled egoism, I'm afraid.

A charismatic woman on the radio was asked by an interviewer how she got her sermons up. She said, "I didn't get them up. I got them down. God delivers them to me." Well, I'm greatly concerned about these people. I'm greatly concerned about the ad lib approach to Christianity. I'm greatly concerned about pastors and leaders who are so busy running around and all of the Christian gigs that are going on around the country, they don't bother to study the Word of God. And then they stand up in a pulpit and tell people this is what God is saying when, in fact, it isn't what God is saying in that passage at all.

A letter was received by Robert Sealy, who's a friend of mine, and Robert had written this to a young man who joined the charismatic movement; and this is the letter Robert got back. "The greatest experience in love I have ever had was at the foot of the cross as the blood of Jesus Christ poured out over me." This is the young man writing him back. The young man's been in the movement. "He filled me with His Spirit. He brought me across the veil into the city of Jerusalem, into the Holy of Holies." There's that kind of ethereal spiritualizing. "There I beheld myself in Him and He in me. I received the baptism of the Spirit by fire and, from this, His love dwells in me. From this I have communion daily."

Now listen to the next paragraph. "I do not feel the need for study of the Scriptures, for I know Jesus as He has revealed Himself to me within, and as He dwells in me, there is the Word. I go to Scripture. I am familiar with Scripture, and Scripture is vital and necessary, but – " and he underlines all this, " -

neither central nor crucial, for I have Him. Rather He has me. Scriptures are a secondary source. Through the baptism of the Holy Spirit, the Word in me is primary. I say this as a living experience out of what He has given me to say."

In other words, this young man is saying, "Since I've had the baptism of the Spirit, I have the living Word in me, and it comes out of me, and it is primary, and the Bible is secondary, and so I don't need to study it." You agree with that? That's pretty fearful, isn't it? But, you see, that's from a charismatic young man. That's exactly what I'm saying, people, is going on. Everybody's saying, "What I feel, what I think, what I sense, my interpretation." And you have a disaster.

Whenever I hear a preacher who gets up and says that, "God has given me this," I wonder if he could speak on some things in the Bible like that. Would like to challenge him sometime to give a study of Sethur, Moab, Maher-shalal-hash-baz, Calno, Carchemish, Josheb-basshebeth the Tahkemonite without any study. Or maybe he would like to give a discussion of the doctrine of the imago, the kenosis, and the Hypostatic Union. All vital, essentials in the Christian faith. Don't tell me you can cut straight the Word of God without study. You can't. It can't be done, and a failure to study diligently and cut straight on the doctrine has resulted in the misinterpretations of the Word of God that are running wildfire through the charismatic movement.

I hear so many verses misinterpreted that it grieves my spirit, and you know what it leads to? It leads to a third thing to avoid, and that's what I call spiritualizing or allegorizing. What happens is that people then just begin to take their imagination to the Bible, and instead of really interpreting it, since they don't know what it really means anyway, they just use it as like a parable or an allegory or a spiritual story, and they bounce off of it to teach spiritual truth. They, you know, it's just like somebody said, "Remember, it's not what you get out of the Scripture. It's what you read into it." And that's basically what they're doing. They're just reading into the Bible.

For example, I remember the first sermon I ever preached. It was awful! Oh, it was terrible. My text was, "And the angel rolled away the stone." What a great message on the resurrection. I didn't preach on the resurrection. I preached on rolling away stones in your life. The stone of doubt, the stone of despair. I mean that is not the message of "the angel rolled the stone away." Rolling away stones in your life. What I should've done was study to find out what was going on when the angel rolled the stone away and taught on the resurrection.

One time I got onto my dad years ago when he preached a sermon on Acts 27, "And they cast out four anchors and wished for the day," and he preached on casting out anchors, and he said, "The anchor of faith and the anchor of hope," and so forth. And I said, "You know why they threw those anchors out? Just to hold the ship. That's it." He laughs about that now. I told him I got my sermon on the stones from his sermon on the anchors.

You know what, and I believe that. I believe that some of the posts in the tabernacle were just to hold the sides up. Some people believe that the central board of the back of the Holy of Holies is the indication of the doctrine of eternal security. Oh, man, it goes on and on. Listen, I heard a sermon on Lazarus where Lazarus is simply a picture of the church. And as Lazarus was raised from the dead, this speaks of the Rapture of the church. I call this Little Bo Peep preaching. You don't need the Bible. You just need a good imagination, and you can use anything. You could, "Little Bo Peep lost her sheep - " People are lost. All over the world, they're wandering as sheep without a shepherd. They're lost, " - and doesn't know where to find them." There are no human resources to find the sheep. "But they'll come home." You don't even need the Bible. You can use Little Bo Peep, Aesop's Fables, Mother Goose, anything. That isn't how you do with the Bible.

A young couple came with marital problems to talk to Jerry Mitchell. Set a counseling appointment up, and he began to talk with them. After about a half an hour, he said, "How did you ever get married? You're miles apart." "Oh," they said, "it was a sermon the pastor preached in our church." This is true. And he said, "Well, what was it?" "Well, he preached on Jericho." Jerry said, "On Jericho, what does that have to do?" "Well," he said that, "God's people claimed that city, marched around it seven times, and the walls fell down," and he said that, "If you believe God had given you a young girl, you should claim her and march around her seven times, and the walls of her heart would fall down; and so I did that, and we got married." And Jerry says, "That isn't true. You're not telling me the truth." "Oh, yes," he said, "and there are many others who got married, too, off the same sermon." And so, just to make sure, Jerry called the pastor, and he said, "Oh, yes," he said, "I did preach that." He said, "In fact, I preached many different subjects from that text."

Listen, the message of the walls of Jericho falling down has nothing to do with marching around a girl seven times and having the walls of her heart fall down; but, you see, that's the kind of stuff that goes on. You know, that's like the old allegorists used to say that when the Bible says, "Abraham, Abraham," it really is talking about the fact that Abraham will live forever, because what it's saying is, "Abraham, Abraham," see?

The Roman Catholic Church is built on that. They used to say that the journey of Abraham from Ur of the Chaldees to Haran was the imaginary trip of a stoic philosopher who leaves sensual understanding and arrives at the senses. The two pence given by the Good Samaritan to the innkeeper were the baptism and the Lord's Supper.

Pope Gregory the Great interpreted Job this way. He said, "The patriarch's three friends represent the heretics. His 7 sons are the 12 apostles. His 7,000 sheep are God's faithful people, and his 3,000 humpback camels are the Gentiles." And then they want to go to 1 Corinthians chapter 10 and say well, "The Bible says all these things have happened for examples." Yeah, but that's a terrible misinterpretation of that. What 10 is saying is, when Israel failed God in the wilderness, they died, and

the example is you fail God in obedience, then you might die, too. That's the lesson; not that humpback camels mean Gentiles.

Well-known charismatic preacher did a series on the Book of Nehemiah. He said, "Jerusalem's walls were in ruin, and that speaks of the broken down walls of the human personality, and Nehemiah is the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit comes to rebuild the walls of human personality." Then he goes on talking about all the little things. Everything means something. And, finally, when he gets to the king's pool, the king's pool means the baptism of the Spirit, and he goes from there to teach tongues. The story of Nehemiah has nothing to do with the Holy Spirit, the walls of human personality, the baptism of the Spirit, or tongues; but, if you're going to use it to do that, you see, then people think it's marvelous Bible teaching. It isn't. It's huckstering the Word of God to teach them what you want in a place where God never intended to say that. You can't do that with the Word of God and be fair.

Some of you may have read a book called *If I Perish, I Perish*, by Major Thomas, in which he discusses in that book the doctrine of the Holy Spirit. Listen, the Holy Spirit isn't even mentioned in Esther. It isn't even mentioned, but he's got the idea that Esther is the Spirit. Mordecai is the human sprit, and Haman is the flesh, and makes an allegory. See, that's not right. Let the Bible say what it wants to say, not what we decide to make it say.

Let me close with this. If you twist the Bible enough, you can come up with anything. Somebody said, "Why are fire engines red?" And the answer came, "Well, fire engines have 4 wheels and 8 men, and 4 and 8 make 12. There are 12 inches in a foot. A foot is a ruler. Queen Elizabeth is a ruler, and also one of the largest ships at sea. Seas have fish, and fish have fins. The Finns fought the Russians. The Russians are red. Fire trucks are always rushin', so fire trucks are red." So you can prove anything you want to prove, see. And I'm afraid that that's how some of the people in the charismatic movement and other wrong areas have come to their conclusions.

Our dear Lord Jesus, in the 24th chapter of Luke, was walking on the road to Emmaus with two of His disciples, and the Bible says that, I love this, beginning – let's listen to it. "Beginning from Moses and all the prophets, He interpreted to them in all the Scriptures the things concerning Himself." You know the word that is used for interpreted? It's the base word *heremeneu*. When Jesus taught the Scriptures, He interpreted them properly. He used *heremeneu*, hermeneutics. You can't ever do it any other way. Jesus is the perfect model of the Teacher who used the right principles, and anybody who doesn't is going to wind up adulterating the precious Word of God, and that's what we're seeing today.

Next week we'll talk about some of the passages that have fallen victim to this. Let's pray.

Thank You, Father, for Your Word, for the time of sharing we've had this morning. Help us to be fair with Scripture. Help us to love it and teach it, but to love it enough to teach it accurately, to study it, to

subject ourselves to good teachers, to good books, and to realize that, sure, we may change our views, because we may find more information. Sure, we may grow and see new light, but that the main issue is that at least we've applied ourselves with all the energy we have to know the truth. We want You to speak the way You want to speak, and thank You for speaking to us in the Book. In Jesus' name. Amen.

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