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

What It Takes to Study God's Word
Scripture: Selected Scriptures
Code: 90-155

As you know from this morning, if you were here, we began this morning a series on how to get the most out of the Bible, how to study the Bible. And we're going to continue that series tonight, give you little bits and pieces as we go along over the next three Sundays, both in the morning and in the evening. We'll try to make each a sort of an independent separate message, and yet they will blend and overlap a little bit as we go along.

I really believe that personally the ministry that I carry on here in this church in the pulpit is not just to teach you what the Bible says, not just to preach the gospel to you, to preach the Word of God to you, but to stimulate you to personal study of the Scripture. And if I have failed to do that in great measure, I have failed to do what I ought to have done. If you have just enjoyed the sermon, if you had just walked away and said, "Well, I'll reconnect with the Word of God next week when I listen again," then you have not responded in personal diligence and somehow I have failed to accomplish what ought to have been accomplished in your life.

The goal of preaching certainly is to make the Word of God clear and to proclaim the truth and teach the truth to you. But it also at the same time should stimulate you to want to take up the sword for yourself, take advantage of the tremendous opportunity you do have to come to grips with the great truth of Scripture.

A verse to begin that supports that thought is 2 Timothy 2:15, "Be diligent to present yourself approved to God as a workman who does not need to be ashamed, handling accurately the Word of truth." There is a statement made to a young pastor by the name of Timothy. He is told that he must be responsible to with diligence present himself approved to God. How can he do that? By being a workman who doesn't need to be ashamed. How can he accomplish that? By handling accurately the Word of truth. It is essential that he as a minister of God's Word handle it carefully, proclaim it accurately.

But it's not just the minister who is responsible to study the Word of God, not just the minister to discern its truths. In the book of Acts there is a great testimony given with regard to a group of people, they're called the Bereans, that because they lived in a town called Berea. And when the Apostle Paul went there, he preached the truth to them. It says in verse 11 of Acts 17, "These were more noble minded than those in Thessalonica for they received the Word with great eagerness, examining the Scriptures daily to see whether these things were so."

Here were a group of people who are called noble because they did essentially what Joshua 1:8 says, they meditated day and night on the Word of God in order that they might discern its truth and against that truth measure the preacher. They are noble because they diligently searched the Scriptures and they did it daily with great eagerness in order that they might discern who was speaking the truth.

Studying the Word of God is something that demands diligence. It is a craft that calls for craftsmanship. But it begins with basic knowledge. Like anything else, any apprentice at a new job or a new trade, starts with the knowledge of the basics and certainly as students of the Bible that's where we have to start. We start with knowing the content of Scripture. And that calls for a faithful and careful and consistent reading of God's Word. I would suggest to you that if you're going to be a student of the Bible, as we said this morning, it will all begin with a high view of Scripture. We tried to help you with that this morning. And then it will move to the second aspect of being effective in Bible study and that is basic knowledge of the text. You have to know what it says, to begin with. That becomes a matter of reading the Scripture.

I confess to you that I'm not a particularly good reader of Scripture and that's because I have such a highly developed sense of curiosity, I guess. I find it very difficult to read Scripture very long before my curiosity gets the best of me and I have to stop and find out what it means. But in your early years of beginning to study the Word of God, you have to resist some of that curiosity or else you'll get so bogged down you'll never get through the basic content. It is important to read the Scripture so that you come to grips with what it says. Then you can begin to search out what it means by what it says. But everything begins with a knowledge of Scripture.

Go back with me to Proverbs chapter 1...Proverbs chapter 1. In verse 20 we read this, "Wisdom shouts in the street. She lifts her voice in the square. At the head of the noisy streets she cries out. At the entrance of the gates in the city she utters her sayings." Now the idea here is that divine wisdom is available. It is not hidden, it is not stashed in a cave somewhere, it's not buried in the ground, it's not hidden behind some mysterious codes. It doesn't take somebody who knows the secret to unlock it. It is rather public domain, if you will. It is in the street. It is in the square. It cries out in the noisiness of life at the entrance of the gates of the city which is the busiest place in town...there wisdom is made available. And what the writer of Proverbs is saying is it is available. "So, how long, O naive ones, will you love simplicity?" In other words, are you going to spurn the availability of divine wisdom? "And, scoffers, how long will you delight in your scoffing? And how long will you fools hate knowledge?" And then there is reproof. "Turn at my reproof. Behold, I will pour out My Spirit on you and I'll make My words known to you."

There is no real reason to be ignorant about the truth of Scripture because it is available, it is not hidden. It is not for those who know some secret code. It is not for those who can unlock some cryptic

mysteries. It is readily available for everybody in the street. And God even promises that He'll assist in the process, pouring out His Spirit so that His words can be known. Then comes, of course, the judgment, "Because I called and you refused, I stretched out My hand and no one paid attention. You neglected all My counsel, didn't want My reproof. I'll laugh at your calamity, mock when your dread comes, when your dread comes like a storm."

I was watching a little bit on the Discovery Channel of a program that sometimes is a curious program to me on mysteries. And they have a particularly segment called, "Thy Mysteries of the Bible." And they were talking about the mystery of the book of Revelation last night. And whatever mystery is in the book of the Revelation, they confounded into a hopeless confusion and they did it by interviewing all kinds of quote/unquote scholars from liberal universities who were trying to explain the significance of Revelation and were utterly unable to do it. And one watching that would conclude that these mysteries are so profound and so confusing and so esoteric and so fantastic and so symbolic that no person, not even the most erudite person at the highest level of religious training in a university could ever sort them out. Nothing could be further from the truth. In fact, they all ignored the basic introduction to the book of Revelation which says straight forward these words, "Blessed is he who reads and those who hear the words of the prophecy," indicating that anybody who wants to can read it and hear it, meaning with understanding. It is available, this knowledge of God through His Word. It is not secretive, it is not hidden. And those who refuse to come to its straight-forward truths and be taught by the Spirit will be judged by the God who has made Himself so clear that according to Romans 1, "All men are without...what?...excuse."

In Hosea chapter 4 we read this, "Listen to the Word of the Lord, O sons of Israel, for the Lord has a case against the inhabitants of the land because there is no faithfulness or kindness, or knowledge of God. They're swearing, deception, murder, stealing and adultery." Sound familiar? "They employed violence so that bloodshed follows bloodshed. Therefore the land mourns and everyone who lives in it languishes, along with the beasts of the field and the birds of the sky and also the fish of the sea disappear. Yet let no one find fault and let none offer reproof for your people are like those who contend with the priests. So you will stumble today and the prophet also will stumble with you by night, and I will destroy your mother, My people are destroyed for lack of knowledge." You mean it isn't there? Next statement, "Because you have rejected knowledge." You have forgotten or ignored the law of your God so I will reject you and I'll forget your children. Again, God judges those who turn their back on an available revelation that He has made plain and made clear.

The knowledge of the Word of God is where everything begins. That knowledge is available to the one who desires it and who comes to the truth of Scripture.

Now we are not called only to know it, but obviously we are called to know it and put it into practice through obedience. Listen to what it says in James 1:21, "Receive the Word implanted which is able to save your souls but prove yourselves doers of the Word and not merely hearers." So the idea is

that we are to put the Word of God into practice in our lives. That will, as we saw in Joshua 1:8, make our way prosperous and lead us to good success, in order to put it into practice we have to understand it. In order to understand it we have to know its content...we go back to the fact then that we must read the Scripture so that we can absorb what it says and then begin to work on what it means by what it says.

The Bible contains over 250 passages in the Old Testament and about 55 passages in the New Testament that require us to be obedient to everything that is commanded in Scripture. In fact you remember when Jesus gave the great commission in Matthew 28 verses 19 and 20 He said that you're to go into all the world, you're to make disciples and teach them to obey all things whatsoever I have commanded you. This is clearly the injunction of Scripture over and over. In fact, in Deuteronomy 5:29 we read this, "O that there were such an heart in them that they would fear Me and keep all My commandments always that it might be well with them and with their children forever." Or in Luke 11:28, "Blessed, or happy, are they that hear the Word of God and keep it, or obey it." John 14:15, "If you love Me, keep My commandments." First John 5:3, "For this is the love of God that we keep His commandments." In John 8 Jesus said, "He who is of God hears God's Word." We...we remember that from this morning's message, verse 47. The Apostle Paul said, "I joyfully concur with the law of God in the inner man." You remember the psalmist said his delight was in the law of the Lord and in His law he meditated day and night. And remember Psalm 19 where David said, "The Word of God is more desirable than gold and sweeter than honey." The psalmist in Psalm 40 verse 8 said, "I delight to do Thy will, O God, Thy law is in my heart."

So, we have then this desire to do the will of God, plant it in us as believers. It is predicated on knowing the will of God which calls for us to understand what it says and then to be able to interpret what it says and apply what it means by what it says. The Lord revealed to His prophet Isaiah, as we continue to sort of build this foundation, the Lord revealed to His prophet Isaiah the magnificent nature of His being and the importance of His judgment. And God clearly stated that each person must listen to everything that God says. And I repeated...I repeat tonight what I read you this morning from Isaiah 55 in its full representation in verses 9 to 11 because it's so important. "For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are My ways higher than your ways, My thoughts than your thoughts. As the rain comes down and snow from heaven and returns not thither but waters the earth and makes it bring forth and bud that it may give seed to the sower and bread to the eater...there's that hydrological cycle I mentioned to you...so shall My Word be that goes forth out of My mouth. It shall not return unto Me void but it shall accomplish that which I please and it shall prosper in the thing where unto I sent it." Here again God reveals to the prophet that His Word when received and applied produces the ends which God intends.

In the hymn book of the Psalms, Psalm 138:2 the psalmist says, "I will worship toward Thy holy temple, or Thy holy place, and praise Thy name for Thy loving kindness and for Thy truth for Thou hast magnified Thy Word equal to Thy name."

There's no greater testimony to the importance of Scripture than Psalm 119. And you ought to familiarize yourself with Psalm 119. One of the wonderful things about the study Bible is that it's going to break down Psalm 119 into all its components, it's a long Psalm of 176 verses and every verse is about the Scripture except the very last one which is a response. But 175 verses about the Scripture all broken down so that you can come to grips with what the Scripture really claims for itself. But in nearly every one of those 176 verses there is an emphasis on the necessity of knowing the Word and obeying it.

Turn with me to Psalm 119, and obviously we can't read all 176 verses, but I want to pinpoint some of the verses that need to be highlighted which emphasize this call to the Word of God. Psalm 119 verse 16, "I shall delight in Thy statutes, I shall not forget Thy Word." And here is the psalmist expressing his love for the Word and his delight in obeying it. Verse 24, "Thy testimonies also are my delight, they are my counselors." Verse 35, "Make me walk in the path of Thy commandments for I delight in it." Verse 47, "And I shall delight in Thy commandments which I love." Verse 48, "And I shall lift up my hands to Thy commandments," that is I'll do them, put them into practice, "which I love and I will meditate on Thy statutes." And over to verse 72, "The law of Thy mouth is better to me than thousands of gold and silver pieces." Down to verse 92, "If Thy law had not been my delight, then I would have perished in my affliction."

And then verse 97 down to 104, "O how I love Thy law. It is my meditation all the day. Thy commandments make we wiser than my enemies for they are ever mine. I have more insight than all my teachers for Thy testimonies are all my meditation. I understand more than the aged because I have observed Thy precepts. I have restrained my feet from every evil way that I may keep Thy Word. I have not turned aside from Thine ordinances for Thou Thyself has taught me. How sweet are Thy words to my taste, yes sweeter than honey to my mouth. From Thy precepts I get understanding, therefore I hate every false way."

Delighting in the Word and because you delight in it you learn it and when you learn it you apply it, it effects every area of life. It makes you wiser than your enemies, your teachers, the aged of every society. It helps you turn aside from sin and discerns for you so that you can avoid every false way. Verse 105, "Thy Word is a lamp to my feet, a light to my path." Verse 111, "I have inherited Thy testimonies forever, for they are the joy of my heart." Verse 113, "I hate those who are double minded but I love Thy law." Verse 127, "Therefore I love Thy commandments above gold, yes above fine gold."

Skipping down to verse 159, "Consider how I love Thy precepts. Revive me, O Lord, according to Thy loving kindness." And then just several to close out, verse 161, "Princes persecute me without cause, but my heart stands in awe of Thy words," 167, "My soul keeps Thy testimonies and I love them exceedingly." Verse 174, "I long for Thy salvation, O Lord, and Thy law is my delight."

Here you have the attitude that has to be brought to bear upon the Scripture. That's what we were talking about this morning. When you understand what you have in your hand and when you treasure this more than gold and when you consider it sweeter than honey, when you delight in it, you will then begin to read its truth. And that's where all effective Bible study begins. Blessed are those, says the psalmist, who keep the testimony of God and seek Him with their whole heart. And how shall a young man cleanse his ways? By taking heed thereto according to Thy Word. David said, "With my whole heart I sought Thee. O let me not wander from Thy commandments." And so it goes. We begin with a commitment to know the Word of God.

I can suggest to you a simple plan that you might follow. In the study Bible I have a Bible reading plan that will get you through the Bible in a year, and many of you do that already. But let me suggest to you something that I've used through the years that's been of real help to me. It's a way to begin to absorb scriptural data at the maximum kind of level that will help you come to grips with what the Bible actually says, which is where you have to start. There's no shortcut to this but there is a way that you can get after it.

Read through the Old Testament at whatever pace you feel comfortable with. Just read through it. Take a chunk of chapters on a daily basis and just read them and when you're done go back and read them again, and just read through the Old Testament in its sort of chronological order.

But when it comes to the New Testament which really gives us the unfolding of the mysteries hidden from those in the past which unfolds the full meaning of the Old Testament, the New Covenant document, you need to read it more repetitiously. And what I have suggested and what worked in my own life early on as I began to come to grips with the need to know the Scripture was to read repetitiously. And here's a little formula that I followed and found very beneficial. I first discovered it in an old book on how to study the Bible by James M. Grey who was a past president of The Moody Bible Institute many, many years ago. Kind of refining off of that process, here's what worked for me.

Take a book of the Bible and read it repetitiously for 30 days. And here's how I did it. I took the book of 1 John, 1 John has five chapters and I read 1 John every day for 30 days, just simply read it in the same version 30 times in a row. In fact I became so enthralled by it that I actually broke the pattern on the first book and read it ninety days in a row. But at the end of 30 days I knew what was in 1 John just because of the repetitious reading. In fact, I began to visualize my Bible and if anybody asked me to this day what it says in 1 John 1 or 2 or 3 or 4 or 5 I'm pretty familiar with that because of repetition. That's how your mind retains things. In fact if somebody says, "Where in the Bible does it say,`If we confess our sins He is faithful and just,'" that's easy, 1 John chapter 1 left hand page, right hand column halfway down. You know, you begin to visualize your Bible because of the familiarity of the text as you go over it and over it and over it.

Now at the same time I wrote a one-sentence summary of each chapter and just over the period of 30 days memorized what that chapter was about so that I was locking into my mind an understanding of the chapters and familiarity with the text itself. Well at the end of 90 days I had a fair understanding of what was in 1 John. I didn't yet fully understand all of it. I hadn't gone into the depth of studying it all, but I was familiar with it. And it elevated an awful lot of questions in my mind.

Then wanting to stay within the framework of John, I went to the gospel of John. Now the gospel of John has 21 chapters and that's too much to swallow in one month, so I divided it into three sections of seven. Using seven is about the maximum number of chapters you want to work with. I read through the first seven chapters of John's gospel for 30 days, a second chapter, a second seven for 30, and a third for seven for 30, so in 90 days I had gone through the gospel of John and in the process wrote out a simple little summary of each chapter, each of the 21 chapters. Well, at the end of those 90 days of reading seven, seven and seven, I understood what was in John. And to this day I can still visualize that and that's been many, many years ago, probably nearly 30 years ago and I remember that the wedding at Cana was in John 2 and that the woman at the well in Samaria is in John 4, and that Jesus encountering His brothers and their lack of faith in John 7, and the feeding of the 5,000 in John 6, and John 10 is the shepherd chapter, and John 15 is the vine chapter, and the highly priestly prayer is in 17 and so it goes and so it goes. Jesus in the garden is in 18. Just pure familiarity.

I also began to realize that some of the things I didn't understand in the epistle of John were explained in the gospel of John. And that the best interpreter of Scripture is Scripture itself. And I learned that very early and that's why when I teach you the Word of God, I explain the Scripture with the Scripture, don't I? Because that's the way I learned the Scripture.

And then after that I went back to Philippians and took Philippians which is a brief book of four chapters, read it 30 days in a row and was familiar with what was there. Then I went back to the gospel of Matthew and took 28 chapters, broke them into four sections of seven...seven for 30, seven for 30, seven for 30 and in four months I had a grasp on the book of Matthew. Now at that pace at about seven chapters at a time going from a shorter book to a longer one, in two and a half years you will have done the New Testament. Now you're going to read the Bible for the next two and a half years, I hope. How about reading it so that you produce familiarity? And that calls for repetition. That calls for repetition. And in that process in two and a half years you will have learned that there are parts of the Bible that connect very obviously and you will cease to be a total concordance cripple. You know what I mean. You can't remember where anything is, and so you go chasing through that inadequate concordance in the back of your Bible that never has the verse you're looking for because you will have absorbed that.

Now you can't do that with the whole of the Old Testament. Much of that narrative flow you just read as narrative and its intent and its full rich meaning gets explained so wonderfully in the New Testament. But you need to be familiar with the New. Get yourself on that kind of a reading plan and you will be amazed and astounded to find out what a Bible scholar you'll become in that two and a half years as you begin to connect the Scripture with itself. And again this reaffirms the idea that we have been conveying to you all day today, and that is that there's a single author. While there were many who wrote on behalf of God under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, God Himself is the author and with one author always speaking infallible and inerrant truth, there is complete continuity. And that is what theologians called *analogia scriptura*. That is to say the Scripture is analogous to itself. That is there is no contradiction. There are apparent difficulties which our finite minds cannot grasp, like the trinity and like the paralleling of human volition and divine election. There are those kinds of issues that we cannot resolve because the limitations of the human mind. But there are no contradictions because of the singular author being God Himself.

I found that that exercise of reading the Bible in that fashion in just a period of two and a half years or so gave me a tremendous familiarity with the content of Scripture. And that became the foundation upon which to build an understanding of that content. And many of the questions thatI had early on in my Christian experience were answered not by reading commentaries or studying theology books, but just by absorbing the very text of Scripture itself.

I'll tell you something else. I continue to read Scripture all the time and as I continue to read it all the time I continue to be amazed at what is disclosed in it. There is a basic understanding of Scripture that the Bible defines as the milk of the Word, 1 Corinthians chapter 3. There are not certain milk doctrines and certain meat doctrines. In other words, certain lighter things and heavier things. Milk and meat does not describe different truths, it describes the depth of truth. There is a milk level of understanding and then there is a meat level of understanding. And you go from the milk down to the real steak as you plunge into Scripture and begin to see the profound depth that is there. But you start with an understanding of the Scripture itself. And then from there you begin to ask yourself, "Okay, I know what it says, what does it mean by what it says? Let's go from the milk to the meat." And we need to get into that and we will when we talk about the process of discovering the meaning of Scripture. We're going to do that. We're going to do that next Lord's day and I'm going to show you in particular how I go about determining the meaning of Scripture.

But before we get there, there's something I have to talk about tonight and it's a very important thing. This morning I talked about the major prerequisite to effective Bible study and that is your view of Scripture, right? Tonight I added to that another prerequisite to Bible study and that is that you know what it says. You have to hold it high and learn what it says. There are no shortcuts. There are no shortcuts. And listen, folks, spiritual maturity is related to the application of truth, is it not? Spiritual blessing isn't something you get zapped with while you're just wandering through a revival tent. It doesn't happen that way. It's not something that's going to happen to you because a sermon was a

real zinger and captivated you. You may have a momentary working of God in your heart, but spiritual maturity and spiritual growth is the long-haul process of the application of divine truth in your life. It calls for meditating on it day and night. It calls for observing to do everything that is in it. And then you begin to make your way prosperous and have good success. It doesn't happen in short spurts. It doesn't happen with ecstatic event. True spiritual development, true spiritual growth is just like human growth, it is a process fed by nourishment. And that nourishment is the Word of God. Jesus said, "Sanctify them by Thy truth, Thy Word is truth." Sanctification doesn't happen in a stadium, at a big rally. Sanctification doesn't happen at a camp somewhere where somebody gave a message that grabbed your heart. Sanctification is a long-haul process by which someone is matured into Christ's likeness through the intake and the living out of the understanding of divine truth. So we must learn then what the Scripture says and then we can begin to make a deeper effort to understand what it means by what it says. And that puts it into the fabric of our life and allows us to begin to live it out.

But before we get into that, how we do that specifically, let me talk about something else.

We've laid down this foundation preliminarily, we must have a high view of Scripture, we must knows its content. Now beyond that I want to give you some understanding of the requirements for determining the meaning of Scripture...some requirements for determining the meaning of Scripture.

May I suggest to you that even unbelievers may have a certain interest in the Bible? I am always amazed why liberal theologians who deny its inspiration want to become professors of religion or professors of theology, but they do. They have some kind of interest in Scripture. It is also possible for an unregenerate, unconverted, unsanctified person to read and understand some of the basic content of the Bible, right? They can read that Jesus died on a cross. They can read that He rose again. They can read that He promised to return. They can return that He did miracles. They can read that an axe head floated. They can read that the Lord parted the Red Sea and the children of Israel crossed under the leadership of Moses and Pharaoh's army was drowned. They can read that.

But in order to comprehend its meaning with full spiritual implications, there are some requirements...there are some requirements. First requirement, one must be a Christian...one must be a Christian. Don't ever trust the interpretive skills of a non-Christian. I don't care whether they are a liberal theologian, or whether they are a cult, whether you're talking to somebody at the University of Chicago in the theology department who doesn't believe that God authored the Bible, but it's merely a high-level of human inspiration, or whether you're talking to an elder from the Mormon church, you cannot trust their interpretation of Scripture. They can read it like you can read it. They can know what it says and sadly many times they know what it says better than Christians do who aren't nearly as faithful to read what it says. It is always sad when some Jehovah's Witness comes to your door and knows where things are in the Bible when you don't. But you cannot trust their interpretation.

I'll show you why. Turn to 1 Corinthians chapter 2...1 Corinthians chapter 2. Verse 6, this is a very, very important portion of Scripture, verse 6, "Yet we do speak wisdom among those who are mature." He means there those who are in Christ who are believers. "Wisdom, however, not of this age, nor of the rulers or leaders of this age who are passing away." We have a wisdom, we have a knowledge and an understanding of the depth of Scripture that they do not. It is the wisdom that is called in verse 7 God's wisdom spoken in a mystery, that means something hidden. The hidden wisdom which God predestined before the ages to our glory, the wisdom which none of the rulers of this age has understood, for had they understood it they would not have...what?...crucified the Lord of glory. He's talking about religious people.

I'll tell you something else. If the rulers of this age and the educators of this age and the philosophers and the psychologists and the wise men of this age understood true wisdom, they would not reject the Lord of glory who was crucified. They do not have wisdom. You remember Jeremiah 8:9, the verse I read you this morning, "You have rejected My Word so what kind of wisdom do you have?" And the point is even stronger in verse 9 as he reaches back into the Old Testament and quotes out of Isknow why they don't know the meaning of God's wisdom? Why they can't get beyond what the Bible says to what it means? You know why? Because it is not available purely to empirical study. Eye can't see it and ear can't hear it. It is not purely a physical thing. It cannot be apprehended by empirical study. It can't be understood objectively by any kind of application of human logic or reason or intellect. Furthermore, verse 9 says, it has not entered the heart of man. Man can't understand the wisdom of God externally through objective research, and he can't understand it internally through subjective wisdom. He can't know it on the outside, and he can't know it on the inside. He can't know it. The only ones who can know it, according to the end of verse 9, are those who...what?...who love God...who love God.

Verse 10 explains why. "For to us God revealed them through the Spirit." Let me tell you something, folks. There's only one way to understand the meaning of Scripture and that is to be taught by the Spirit of God. I don't expect a liberal theologian to come up with a right answer. I don't expect a cultist to come up with the right answer. I expect them to come up with the wrong answer because they do not have the external objective criteria to discern the mysteries of the truth of revelation, they do not have the internal subjective criteria to discern the truth of God's wisdom, therefore it is not available to them but to us God revealed them through the Spirit. Isn't that amazing? To us. "For the Spirit searches all things, even the depths of God." To understand the wisdom of God, redemptive wisdom which unfolds in the Scripture, to understand all of the greatness of God's revelation is not possible for mankind unaided by the Holy Spirit.

And he gives an illustration of that in verse 11. "For who among men knows the thoughts of a man except the spirit of the man which is in it." It's just a little analogy. There's only one component in the human being that understands the thoughts of a man and that's the spirit that's in man. In other

words, it's your internal self that understands your mind. Your hand doesn't understand your mind. Your foot doesn't understand your mind. Your nose doesn't understand your mind. Your ear doesn't, your eye doesn't. It's that internal part of you that understands your thought process. "Even so the thoughts of God no one knows except the Spirit of God." No part of the physical creation can know the mind of God, only the Spirit of God. That's his little analogy.

"Now we have received not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit who is from God that we might know the things freely given to us by God." Isn't this amazing? And we're not many noble and not many mighty, but we know what the world doesn't know. In fact, we know the things freely given to us by God which things also we speak, not in words taught by human wisdom, but in those taught by the Spirit who combines spiritual thoughts with spiritual words.

I'm not surprised that people in the world think we're a little odd, a little weird, a little spacey, we speak a language they don't understand. They don't understand it at all. And they look at us and wonder with our limited intellectual abilities how in the world we understand it. How is it that we know things they don't know? How is it that we can comprehend things they can't comprehend?

I was talking to a Jewish man the other day and had the opportunity to give him my book, "The Power of Integrity." He said, "Well this is very helpful to me because," he said, "I'm having a big problem in my life, I'm trying to study ethics, I'm trying to sort out ethics." Brilliant man, CEO of a major conglomerate, entertainment conglomerate in Hollywood, a man of very immense influence and a very, very bright and very gracious man. But a man who was concerned to understand ethics. I said, "Here they are, here's a book on integrity and somebody you'll enjoy reading about, a man named Daniel, an uncompromising Jewish man of biblical times."

And, you know, here we are with so little in terms of the world and yet we know what they just can't understand. Why? Verse 14, and this is probably the key, "A natural man," that is a man unconverted, without the aid of the Holy Spirit, "does not accept the things of the Spirit of God. It isn't that he just doesn't accept them. They are what to him? Foolishness. He can't understand them. He cannot comprehend them because they are spiritually appraised. That's why you have to remember, folks, when you go out to present the gospel to an unconverted person, unless the Holy Spirit awakens the heart, it's useless, it's hopeless because they can't understand it. You're not in a battle, you're not in an intellectual battle trying to have a heavier weight of argument so you can swing the pendulum over in their mind. This is not some human enterprise you're engaged in. They're hopeless. They're dead in trespasses and sin and they have no faculty to comprehend spiritual reality. In fact, their assessment of it is that it's foolishness because things like this are spiritually appraised. But he who is spiritual as opposed to being natural, which is unconverted, spiritual as being converted, born again, those who are spiritual who have that new mind, the mind of Christ who have a new nature appraise all things, and yet he himself is appraised by no man. Boy, that's marvelous, isn't it? They can't even make an accurate judgment on us. The world can't accurately judge us. We can accurately judge

them because we know God's wisdom, they have no way to appraise us. They can't figure us out anymore than they can figure out what we believe, for who can ever know the mind of the Lord, but we have the mind of Christ. Isn't that tremendous?

Beloved, you have no hope of ever understanding the Bible unless you have been born again, unless you have a new faculty aided by the Spirit of God. It isn't just the Spirit of God, it's the Spirit of God working through your mind. It's the Spirit of God giving you the mind of Christ so that you can think in a way that you could never think apart from Him. Scripture writers sent forth the truth in divine words. Unaided, natural, unconverted people can read those words and they can basically read what they say, but they cannot understand what they mean. The truth then is available only to those who are illumined by the Holy Spirit.

Martin Luther once wrote, "Man is like a pillar of salt, he's like Lot's wife, he's like a log, he's like a stone, he's like a lifeless statue which uses neither eyes nor mouth, neither sense nor heart until he is regenerated and converted by the Holy Spirit."

The best that an unconverted man can do is chew the bark of Scripture, but he'll never get to the wood. And that's why it is so foolish to expose yourself to someone teaching the Word of God who doesn't have the Holy Spirit. What folly that is. Of course they'll come up with the wrong interpretation.

There's a second necessary component. In fact there are a few more that I'll have to continue next week. But I'm going to give you a second one and we've already sort of begun to speak about this, let's just call it desire...desire. Turn to 1 Peter chapter 2, if you are going to study the Word of God you have to desire it. There's an old story about Socrates, whether it's true or not, who knows? But Socrates was the reigning philosopher and sage of his time and he was the envy of every young would-be student who wanted to be a pupil of Socrates. The story goes that some young man came down to Socrates who used to teach by the sea in a grove and this young man came and in a private moment said to the brilliant Socrates, "Sir, I would like you to be my teacher. Will you teach me?" Socrates is reported to have replied to him, "Follow me." And he turned and walked down the sand toward the seashore, continued walking into the water, continued walking, continued walking until they were both about mouth deep in the sea, as it was sort of surging up and down across their lips. He turned around and looked to the young man who by now was wondering what in the world kind of lesson this was. Put both hands upon his head and shoved him under and held him there. Wanting to exercise great respect for his teacher, the young man tried his best quietly to remain below the surface and hold his breath.

It became rather impossible after a few moments, however, and he began to fight and press and then he began to flail. And Socrates being a strong man held him there and held him there and held him there. And according to the story somewhere between a minute and two minutes which is a long time and finally let the flailing man go. And he burst out of the water and spewed out salt water all over the

place and yelled at Socrates, "What in the world are you doing?" or something to that effect. To which he is said to have replied, "When you want to know as badly as you want to breathe, I'll be your teacher." Made the point.

There's something to be said for that. Real diligent Bible study is done by people who want to know desperately. There is a certain level of desperation. And Peter deals with that. Look at 1 Peter...1 Peter 2 verse 1, "Therefore putting aside all malice and all guile and hypocrisy and envy and all slander, like newborn babes long for the pure milk of the Word that by it you may grow in respect to salvation if you've tasted the kindness of the Lord." Now the heart of this passage is one statement. "Like newborn babes long for the pure milk of the Word." Here he's not talking about milk and meat as he was in 1 Corinthians 3, he's giving a simple analogy and here it is. You need to have the same kind of desire for the Word that a baby has for milk. That's a great analogy, isn't it? When you bring a baby into your home, a newborn baby, that's really all they care about and they notify you and they notify you relentlessly when it's time for that milk. You care what color the curtains are in their nice little room that you fixed up, you care what color their little booties are and that stuff you put on them and you care about putting a curl in their hair and a little ribbon or whatever, you care about buying them a little set of pajamas with footballs, if it's a boy, you care about all that stuff. All they care about is milk, give them the milk, deal with the consequences and give them some more. Life is very, very simple. That is the simplicity which Peter has in his mind as he draws the analogy in writing to these believers scattered throughout Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, Bithynia who are the elect of God. In the midst of difficult times and even persecution he calls upon them to have a hunger, to have an appetite, to have a singular focus that desires the Scripture like a newborn baby desires milk.

What should feed that desire? Several things. First of all, if they remember the Word was the source of their life. See the first word in verse 1, "therefore," that takes you back. Back to what? Back to verse 23, "You were born again not of the seed which is perishable but imperishable, that is to the living and abiding Word of God." You were born again by the Word of God. The point being the Word of God made the most profound impact on your life ever, the most profound impact on your life possible. And if the Word of God is that powerful to have that kind of impact on your life, then you ought to long for it. Remember the Word is your life source. If it so dramatically changed your life at the beginning, remember what it will do if you continue to desire it.

Secondly, eliminate your sin. Remember the Word was the source of your conversion. Secondly, eliminate your sin, verse 1, "Putting aside all evil." Malice is kakia in the Greek, it simply means general evil. Put aside all evil. And he gives some illustrations, some examples like deceit. The word "guile" is dolos in the Greek, it's the word used for fish hook which is very deceptive if you're a fish, obviously. Put aside hypocrisy, put aside envy, put aside katalalia, lalalalia, it's an onomatopoetic word, it sounds like what it means, slandering, speaking about somebody behind their back. Put aside those kinds of things. Get rid of the evil in your life and then desire the Word.

What drives this desire? A remembrance of the power of the Word of God as demonstrated in your salvation and an elimination of your sin. As long as there is sin in your life it's going to clog up that desire, it's going to convolute that desire, it's going to mess with the purity of that focus, it's going to draw you away from the Word of God. As somebody wrote in their Bible long ago, "Either this book will keep you from sin, or sin will keep you from this book."

Thirdly, admit your need. Verse 2, "Like newborn babes long for the pure milk that by it you may grow in respect to salvation." Admit your need...be open and honest enough to cry out for it. I'm always saddened when I meet people who are in a place in the world where they can't seem to find a church, they can't seem to find a place where they can be fed the Word of God and they have such a crying heart longing for this. You people are so greatly blessed to have the supply if the longing is there. Acknowledge that need. Cry out as that baby does for milk.

Pursue growth is another thing. Remember the power of the Word in your salvation, put aside sin, admit your need for the Word, pursue growth that you may grow in respect to salvation. And the last little point to make is survey your blessings. Verse 3, "If you've tasted the kindness of the Lord." If you already know how good it is to know His Word and obey it. If you've already been blessed in obedience in the past, survey that and seek to obey in the future.

How do you know when somebody has this desire? How do you know when somebody really has a longing for the Word? First of all, they honor it...they honor it. They hold it high. They're like Job who said, "I've treasured the words of His mouth more than my necessary food." They're like Jeremiah who said, "Thy words were found and I did eat them and they were the joy and rejoicing of my heart." They're like the psalmist who said, "They're more valuable to me than gold and much fine gold, they're sweeter than honey from the honeycomb." When I find someone who honors the Word I am seeing desire.

And then a love for the Word, deep affection for its truth. That shows up in wanting to talk about the Word, wanting to teach the Word, wanting to hear the Word taught, wanting to read books that unfold its truth. Like we read in Psalm 119 over and over, oh how I love Thy law, I delight in Thy law, it is my joy, it is my rejoicing. People who have this desire honor the Word. They respect it. They exalt it. They obey it. They love it. They have a deep affection for its truths. They'd rather talk about that than anything. They'd rather pursue an understanding of sound doctrine than anything else.

They also fight for it. They're...they belong in Jude 3, they earnestly contend for the once-for-all-delivered faith. They'll go to war. They'll go to battle for its veracity. They'll go to battle against those who attack its truth. It's that precious to them.

When you honor the Word and when you love the Word, you will fight for it. Sometimes people will say, "Well you need to be more peacemaking, you need to be more conciliatory, you may need to be more loving. And perhaps if that's a personality trait, they're right. But when it comes to the Word of God, if you love it and honor it, you can't help but fight for it.

And then I would add, the people who desire the Word proclaim it, too...proclaim it. Don't tell me you have this longing for the Word, don't tell me it's sweeter to you than honey and more precious than gold if you don't proclaim it. Because whatever it is you love most you talk about. Is that not true? Whatever it is you love most you talk about. I see all these bumper stickers, "My kid was the honor student at Such-and- such a place." There must be a lot of kids who get to be that because it's on a lot of bumpers. Parents wanting to proclaim from the back bumper their love for this kid. I understand that. You see a lot more of those than you do a little bumper sticker saying, "My Savior is the Lord Jesus Christ." I understand the humanness of that. I understand when a young man falls in love and all he can talk about his girlfriend. I understand when a little kid in a Little League baseball game hits a homerun, that's the most important thing in his life, and probably in his father's life too for a while. I understand those aspects of life. But sometimes they do betray a really confused order of priorities, don't they?

The people who long for the Word like a baby longs for milk can't help but proclaim it, they can't be restrained, it just comes out. And then lastly they personalize it...they personalize it. They're not conformed to this world but they're being transformed by the Word. The Word dwells in them richly, Colossians 3. It takes up the fabric of their life, begins to shape them, shows up in how they live. You watch their life and you don't see some teeth-gritting, stern, veined-neck trying to gut their way through this obedience, there's a calmness, there's a sweetness, there's a naturalness. And you can catch them at any moment in their life and there's a consistency because the Word has taken over and shaped their personal character.

How do you know when you have a desire, a real desire? You'll honor the Word, you'll love it. It will be the source of war for you on occasion. It will be the topic of conversation most familiar on your lips as you proclaim it. And it will show up in your life even involuntarily. I always say, "When someone is spiritually mature they're involuntary responses are godly." They don't even have to think about it, it's so much a part of the fabric of their life.

Well, that's enough for tonight and there are three more prerequisites to add to those and we'll do that next time. Let's pray.

As you can tell, before we pray, it's hard for me to stop talking about this subject because it is such a passion of my own heart. And I can only hope, and you have to pray for me, that I'll be able to get everything I want to say into these next two Sundays.

Father, thank You for tonight. Thank You for these dear precious people who have come, come because they do hunger for Your Word, because they want to understand it, they want to know its truth, they want to live it. They want to make their way prosperous, have good success, they want the joy of obedience. They want to bring glory to Your name.

Thank You for those who by virtue of their salvation, conversion and new birth have the Spirit of God as their teacher. O God, may they have a strong desire like a newborn babe does for milk, a strong desire to know Your Word. So essential if they're to be diligent and study it as workman who need not be ashamed.

We thank You, Lord, for this great treasure. We thank You that we can understand it. You have made it clear. We want that understanding that we may live it and know the fullness of blessing and bring You honor in Your Son's name. Amen.

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