

The Inspiration of Scripture

Selected Scriptures

90-156

As you know, we are doing a little series on studying the Bible, how to get the most out of God's Word. And I'm happy to say to you that in August a book will be released entitled *How to Get the Most Out of God's Word*, which will have some of what I'm saying to you and a whole lot more. It will be a sort of a trade-sized paperback book. I'm really excited about it because, obviously, I have such a passion for the Word of God. And through the years I have written a number of books and articles and things about the Bible, and this book pulls together the best of everything and kind of updates it all and gets it all together. Again, the title is *How to Get the Most Out of God's Word*. And as I was...I've been reading through it and editing it, and I probably was...Patricia was probably wondering how I could have such an experience of joy over something I wrote myself. But I kept saying to her, you know, "This stuff is really potent, this is really good."

And the issue was I wrote it so long ago I had forgotten that I had said all these things. So that book will sum up a lot of this that we're sharing with you. We are so blessed to have so many new folks in our church, so many new in the faith. Last Sunday night we had 80 some people welcomed into the right hand of fellowship this month, into the church family, and many new in Christ. And we are so anxious to lay a foundation of confidence in the Word of God. I've said to preachers throughout my ministry that when your people consciously submit to the authority of the Word of God, then you can open it anywhere and they will submit to its truth. To understand what you have in having the Word of God is so foundational.

So, in this little series on how to study the Bible, we've tried to lay the foundation of what the Scripture is so that you would be compelled to that study, and then we'll get into the details of how to do that, starting tonight. By way of some introduction and continually laying some sort of foundational thoughts to the actual expression of how we study the Bible, which, as I said, we'll begin tonight, let me remind you that the Bible is the most powerful book in existence, the most powerful piece of literature ever penned. According to Hebrews 4:12, it is alive and powerful, sharper than any two-edged sword. And it has the capability to pierce into the very soul of man and dissect man and reveal his own nature and his own character and his own sinfulness, his own longings, be they for sin or for God. It can literally tear you to pieces. It cuts deep. It is a powerful and living tool that God uses to expose the heart and the truth about us to ourselves.

But not only does the Bible tear you to pieces, it puts you together again. According to 1 Peter chapter 1, the apostle Peter reminds us that we have a living and abiding Word of God that is an imperishable truth upon which God builds a foundation of eternal life and glory. So while the Word has the power to cut and to tear and to shred our confidences and to reveal the truth about the inner recesses of our hearts, it also has the power to put us back together again. According to 1 John 1:4, John said, "These things I write unto you that your joy may be full." The Bible also is the source of consummate joy, built on perfect peace and hope for time and eternity. This is *the* most powerful

book in existence. And that because in order to accomplish these living things, it must be not the word of men, but the word of the living God. And that is exactly what it is.

That's why Psalm 138:2 says, God has exalted the Word to the very level of His own name. It is impossible to separate the glory of the Word from God Himself because this is indeed His own Word. The Bible is not the word of men; it is the word of God. And I want to talk about that a little this morning because if you're going to be a student of Scripture, it will be largely predicated on your confidence in the Scripture, and your understanding of what it is you're dealing with. The Bible is revealed truth. In it God speaks.

I want you to turn to several scriptures to understand this. First of all, Hebrews chapter 1, Hebrews chapter 1. This is going to more like a classroom lecture than a normal message that we would normally or regularly give to you on a Sunday, but I think it's very, very important. I'm going to take the role of the teacher if I can this morning. But in Hebrews chapter 1 verses 1 and 2, we have a good summation of the idea of revelation that is truth revealed. "God – " it says – "has spoken – " literally – "long ago to the fathers by the prophets in many portions and in many ways. In these last days He has spoken to us in His Son." And we'll stop at that point. Here we come across the reality that God has spoken. That sums up the matter of revelation. God has spoken. That is He has revealed Himself, He has disclosed Himself. God has revealed truth for man.

How did He do it? He did it to the fathers, that is to the fathers meaning the men who were the leaders of Israel and even before them, of course, to the fathers known as the patriarchs in the Pentateuch, the book of Genesis primarily. God spoke long ago to those fathers of the nation Israel. He spoke by the prophets. That's just a generic term meaning the Scripture writers, or those who spoke for God, those who were God's spokesmen. It is a term that includes prophets, the technical term for those who are called prophets in the Old Testament. It also includes kings like David and Solomon. It would include priests like Samuel and others who were used by God to speak.

Prophet used here then in a sort of a non-technical generic sense of one who speaks for God. God spoke through human speakers and writers, meaning, of course, the writers of Scripture. He spoke, it says, in many portions, *polumerōs*. It's a word that means segments. It has to do with the fact that God spoke...and he's referring here to the Old Testament...and He spoke clearly using human instruments as the writers, and He did it in many portions. There are 39 specific portions in the Old Testament, if we call those books portions, 39 books. The Bible has 66, the New Testament has 27, and the Old has 39. So He spoke in many portions.

Within those books, those 39 books we could call portions, there are portions as well. Those books break down and contain various and sundry portions, sections, paragraphs, etc. He did this over a lengthy period of time through numerous human prophets or writers. But all of it was God speaking. He also spoke, it says in verse 1, in many ways, in many ways. What did He use to convey these words to those who would write it down? Well, visions. You know, of course, that there were a number of visions. Even Moses had a vision of God in a burning bush in the wilderness. The vision of Isaiah is well known to us. The visions of Ezekiel are well known to us. There are numerous other visions that came to the prophets. In fact, often the prophets write speaking of their writings as visions, the vision of the Lord came to the prophet So-and-so and he wrote.

And then there were direct words from God by way of moving in the human mind and giving truth to the writer who first preached it so he could say he spoke it prophetically and then later wrote it down.

God spoke to the writers of Scripture through parables, through types, through symbols, through ceremonies, through what we call theophanies or appearances of God as the angel of the Lord, or even visible appearances of God such as in the burning bush. He spoke occasionally through an audible voice, thundering out from heaven in an audible way so as to be heard clearly and distinctly and specifically. So in many ways, in many segments, through many different human writers, God spoke. That's what that verse is saying.

And this is recorded then, this revelation of God, in the Old Testament. Men were used to write down this revelation from God which God Himself revealed, men who were then enlightened and energized by the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit then energizing them, we have in the Old Testament not a collection of the best of human wisdom. This is not the best musings of religious ancient men. This is the very voice and word of God. Then God spoke also, verse 2 says, in these last days. And that signifies the time of Messiah. The last days are the time when Messiah comes. Messiah came, born in Bethlehem, initiating the last days. And in the last days He has spoken to us in His Son. God revealed Himself in Jesus Christ. And the record about Jesus Christ was then written down.

Four writers were chosen, Matthew, Mark, Luke and John, to write down the inspired record of the revelation of God in Jesus Christ that we know as the four gospels. And then the writer Luke was inspired by the Spirit of God to follow the record, after the life of Jesus Christ, in the book of Acts and show the early years of the church. And then came the writers of the epistles: Peter, James, John, Jude, Paul. They wrote those epistles which basically are explanatory and define the meaning and the significance of the coming of God in Christ and His redemptive work. And then the Scripture closes with Revelation which is the promise of the return of Christ in coming glory.

The New Testament, 27 segments, through varying authors, wrote down the revelation of God, particularly that came in and around the person of Jesus Christ. So you have the revelation of God in the inspired writers in segments called the Old Testament; you have the revelation of God through inspired writers and segments called the New Testament; 27 books and 39 equal the 66 books of Scripture. This is the revelation of God. It is the result, singularly the result, of God's self-disclosure. God has spoken. When you pick up a Bible you are reading the word of God.

Now the process God used to put down this revelation is called inspiration. Inspiration is a word that defines a process. It defines a means. And we can understand something of this means...and by the way, it is a supernatural means. It is not natural. We might say, "Well somebody wrote a beautiful song, they really were inspired." Or you wrote a beautiful letter to someone, it was really very inspired, or you gave a speech and it was very inspired. We're talking about a human level of excellence that's very different than what we're referring to here. When we talk about inspiration in a biblical sense we're talking about a technical way in which God uses a supernatural miraculous process to reveal His own word.

Turn to 2 Peter for a good look at what this process is. Second Peter chapter 1, and by God's goodness He has disclosed to us this...this process of inspiration in the text of the New Testament so we can understand it. Verses 20 and 21, 2 Peter 1:20 and 21. "But know this first of all that no prophecy of Scripture is a matter of one's own interpretation, for no prophecy was ever made by an act of human will, but men moved by the Holy Spirit spoke from God." Now these two verses are just loaded with significance with regard to this matter of inspiration. The key word here is the word "moved" in verse 21. "Moved," carried along, borne along. It's a word that is used in secular Greek sources to refer to something floating down stream like a leaf. They were literally carried along by the

Holy Spirit.

The writers of Scripture, the men who wrote the Scripture...and by the way, there are no female writers of Scripture. All 66 books are written by men. So the Spirit of God moved these men along so that they actually spoke from God borne along by the Holy Spirit. Let's look a little further into this text. Verse 21, "No prophecy was ever made by an act of human will." Back to verse 20, "Know this first, no prophecy of Scripture is a matter of one's own interpretation." Now there are two immediate disclaimers and both of them say Scripture doesn't come from any human source. It is a miraculous book, authored by God through the Holy Spirit moving human writers to write exactly what God wanted said.

No prophecy of Scripture...that refers to all of it...no place in Scripture...it's not talking about prophecy in a predictive sense. Prophecy means to speak forth. No message from God, no speaking forth of God contained in Scripture, nothing from God contained in Scripture is a matter of...look at that phrase...a matter of one's own interpretation. Now this needs a little bit of explanation. I really never have liked the translation "interpretation" here because the Greek term is *epilusis*. If you know anything about the Greek language, *luō* is the word to loose, and this is a compound of loose. It's the idea of unleashing something. It's the idea of unloosing something. No Scripture is of any human unleashing and it's speaking of origin. It's speaking of source.

In the genitive case, the usage indicates source. So Peter is actually saying, "Scripture does not come from any human source." It isn't a question of some men having intimacy with God and some people knowing God and watching God work and having historical acquaintance with the operation of God, having a high level of human genius and a high level of religious sensitivity, writing down their best understandings of God. It is not that. It isn't the worst of men and it isn't the best of men writing down their musings about God. No prophecy of Scripture, no message in Scripture anywhere is as to its source human, none.

And then in verse 21 he further strengthens the point by repeating it. "No prophecy was ever made by an act of human will." That is a very remarkable statement. Nobody ever said, no matter how noble they might have been or how godly they might have been, "I think I'll write Scripture." No one has ever said that and done that. Some may have said it, but they didn't do it because it's impossible. No prophecy was ever made by an act of the human will. You can't produce Scripture from the human will. You can't produce Scripture by any private origin. Rather, men moved by the Holy Spirit spoke from God. It doesn't come from man. No prophecy was ever borne along by human will...same verb. But it was moved, borne along...same verb...by the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit selected the author and the Holy Spirit gave the message to the author so that what he wrote down was exactly the Word of God, inerrant and infallible. They spoke from God, writing exactly what God wanted said. That's inspiration.

Now turn to another scripture, 2 Timothy. We could spend a lot of time on that text, and have in the past. But for now just to put you in touch with these very formidable claims so that you understand the character of inspiration, 2 Timothy 3:16 and 17. "All Scripture is inspired by God." That's where we get that word "inspiration." Now this is *pasa graphē theopneustos*. The word *theopneustos* is God breathed. It's translated inspired here. It means God breathed.

If you didn't have any air you couldn't speak. If you couldn't bring out air you couldn't vibrate your vocal chords, you couldn't make any sound, couldn't form your words. What this is saying is God

breathed out Scripture. God spoke it. It is the very breath of God. And not just in the sense of breath but in the sense of blowing out breath in a way that goes past the vocal chords, vibrates the vocal chords, past the mouth which forms the enunciation. And God produced exactly what He wanted said. God spoke it.

In psalm 33 you have a good comparative text for this, Psalm 33:6. "By the word of the Lord the heavens were made," and here's his synonym, "By the breath of His mouth all their host." Here you have a statement, the word of the Lord, and a parallel statement, the breath of His mouth. The breath of His mouth is the word of the Lord. It was by the breath of His mouth, which is the word of the Lord, that everything was created. God spoke it into existence. So God breathed means God spoken, God said, God stated. Scripture then is God speaking. That is why Romans 3:2 calls Scripture the oracles of God, the oracles of God. God is the author of what the Bible says.

Everything in the Bible comes from God; it is not a human book. All Scripture and every Scripture is God breathed. It comes past His vocal chords, if you will, in the supernatural sense, and it conveys to us precisely what He wanted to say. Every word of God is pure, Scripture says. Scripture cannot be broken, John 10:35. Scripture will come to pass though heaven and earth will fail because it is the living and abiding and eternal word right out of the mouth of God Himself.

The church readily recognized this very early on. They knew which books were God breathed, as the saints in the Old Testament knew which books were God breathed. There were a lot of religious books written in antiquity. When the time of the Old Testament writing was going on, there were other books being written. There were books written that you know show up in the apocrypha, don't they, and in the intertestamental book section of a Catholic Bible, for example. Those books are not included in the biblical canon.

How did they know the difference? There were very, very distinct ways they knew what was biblical. One, they knew that it needed to be written by one of God's true spokesman, a prophet of God in the case of the Old Testament, an Apostle of God or an associate with the Apostles in the New Testament. They knew it had to have therefore apostolic authorship or apostolic affirmation. In the Old Testament they were prophets of God, spokesmen for God who wrote those books. Everyone knew who they were. They were also affirmed by their internal content. It was clear that they were consistent with everything else in the Scripture. They had a supernatural element to them. They had the miraculous element to them. They exalted the greatness of God and condemned the sinfulness of man which is what God tends to do, not false writers and false teachers.

It was very clear to them what the canonical books...they're called canonical from the word canon which was the word for a standard. They are the standard books of revelation. Church councils recognized in the fourth century, officially, the canon of the New Testament. But, unofficially, the church had always known what belonged in the text and what did not. It was easy to recognize. Was it written by an apostle in the case of the New Testament or an associate of an apostle? Did it have that air of supernatural character? Did it have that exaltation of God and Christ? And did it have that...that condemnation of iniquity? Was it consistent with all other New Testament writings? And was it affirmed by the apostles themselves?

The church...to put it in illustration form...the church did not give us the New Testament canon, any more than Isaac Newton gave us the law of gravity. The law of gravity existed before Isaac Newton identified it. The canon existed before the church identified it. It was God who gave us gravity. It was

God who gave us Scripture. We recognized it. The church recognized it. And God then is the author of everything that Scripture says. There is nothing in Scripture that God did not Himself write. And the church has universally affirmed that. As the Old Testament of 39 books has been universally affirmed through the ages, so has the New Testament. There is really no equivocation on that point. We have the living and abiding word of God.

Now, some other things you need to understand about the inspiration of the Scripture. Paul does not say in 2 Timothy...and it's very important to note that...that the writers were inspired. He says all Scripture is inspired. And you want to understand that. The writers were not inspired. The Scriptures were. We talk today about an inspired person, inspired to some great achievement or some great literary accomplishment, whatever it might be, and some great scientific accomplishment. That's not what we're talking about. The Bible doesn't know anything about inspired men. It only knows about inspired words. You understand that? That's very important.

You say, "What do you mean by that?" I mean by that that Paul wrote some things that weren't inspired. It was not Paul that was inspired; it was Scripture that was inspired. And when Paul wrote Scripture, Scripture was inspired. When Paul wrote something else, it was not inspired. Remember now, we've been studying 2 Corinthians before we took our little break; we're going to get back to it in August. And in 2 Corinthians I've told you repeatedly that Paul wrote to the Corinthians, 1 Corinthians and 2 Corinthians, the two inspired books in the New Testament. But there is a letter that he wrote to them before 1 Corinthians and a letter between 1 and 2 Corinthians which do not appear in the Scripture because they were not inspired.

Paul is not just generally inspired. No Bible writer is. No Bible writer is. Isaiah was not an inspired writer as such; neither was David or Paul or John or anybody else. Only when they wrote Scripture were they inspired, or, literally, were they the vehicle through whom God breathed out His word. Scripture is the word of God. It is not the word of inspired men. The writers wrote down the inspired word. So God breathed into them the very words that He wanted them to write. And by some miraculous supernatural, indescribable means, they wrote down exactly what God wanted said, which isn't difficult if you're God. He can certainly accomplish that. The actual process can't be described, it is miraculous. It can't be defined, it is supernatural.

Some have suggested that it was a high level of human achievement. Not so. Some have said, "Well, they were...they were writers like Shakespeare and they had this tremendous religious genius. And so at the high level of religious human genius they achieved great literary writings because they were so marked in the special genius of writing." That's not true, absolutely not true. The Scripture could never be the result of a high level of human achievement for a number of reasons.

First of all, there were only about two writers of Scripture who were notable as writers apart from Scripture. The only people we know about, who made contributions on a regular basis as writers, would be David and Solomon. The rest of them were an assortment of shepherds and fishermen and herdsmen and who knows what; leaders from here and there, sort of obstinate blockhead apostles, who going through the whole time of the life of Jesus Christ understood very little of it and then had to write everything about it. They were not known as literary men. They were not great writers. They were not educated. Not at all.

Furthermore, human genius couldn't produce Jesus Christ. You can't come up with a personality like Jesus Christ. The personality, the character, the person of Jesus surpasses impurity, love,

righteousness, power, perfection, wisdom, truth, anything ever found in human thinking. Where in the world would literary men find a model for such a person? And why would they write a book that condemned men? They couldn't invent a Jesus. When man at the highest level of his achievement writes, he writes about himself and tends to exalt himself, not condemn himself. They couldn't produce the Scriptures. And that's why they claim that God wrote it. They claim that God spoke to them. They claim they were writing the word of God.

And it's amazing that they not only claim it directly...and I'll mention that in a moment...but four thousand times in the Bible it claims that this is the word of God, four thousand times. And that means four thousand times the writers affirm that they were writing the word of God. But apart from those specifics, it has always fascinated me that there is in the Bible a certain air of infallibility that common men might find very difficult to live with.

For example, if you decided you wanted to pass off something you wrote as divine revelation and you were just the average nobody, you might sort of be pressed to try to convince people that they ought to accept what you're saying as being directly from God. So you might want to say somewhere in your writing, "Well, you know, I know this is hard for you to believe since I don't have any education and since I'm not a very prominent person, but I'm writing the revelation of God and you just need to know that." There's none of that. There's no, "Well I know this seems impossible for you to accept this because you know who I am and I'm just this humble guy, and you can't figure out how in the world this could ever be coming from me. But I'm just telling you, folks, this is really coming from me and it's the word of God." There's none of that, absolutely none of it.

There's no attempt to justify this process of inspiration. There's no attempt to sort of make people believe that this is really happening. There's no self-consciousness. The writers are utterly unconscious of themselves. There never is any kind of defense of themselves as the sources of revelation. The only time a writer ever defends himself, like Paul does, is to defend the viability of his ministry. Nearly four thousand times they say they're writing the word of God and yet nobody ever sort of chuckles and says, "I know you're finding this hard to accept." There's no self-consciousness.

Even though most of them had no education in a formal way, no extensive training and were in no earthly position to do any such writing and were not particularly profound and are not known for writing anything else, with the exception of Solomon who wrote so many proverbs they aren't all in the Bible by any means, and David, who was a song writer and must have written many, many, many songs. And yet you have someone like Moses, who is not known as a writer of anything, in the Pentateuch six hundred and eighty times he claims that he's writing the word of God and is never self-conscious about it.

The prophetic books have one thousand, three hundred and seven such claims, the history books four hundred and eighteen, the poetic books nearly two hundred such claims, and yet there's no self-consciousness about that. They were just writing the word of God the way God gave it to them. New Testament writers affirm the Old Testament as God's word. In fact, three hundred and twenty times New Testament writers quote the Old Testament as God's word. One thousand times they allude to it as God's word in a clear and definite reference to some Old Testament passage. So thirteen hundred times New Testament writers affirm the Old Testament, and they do it in the law, the Pentateuch. They do it in the history books. They do it in the minor prophets, the major prophets, and the holy writings, Psalms, Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, Song of Solomon and so forth.

In other words, they affirm every section of Old Testament Scripture as being the word of God in unself-conscious ways. And then they in the New Testament go on to write what they write with that same utter absence of self-consciousness. Paul, reading the law of God, the Old Testament, said the law is holy, just and good. He affirms the holiness, the perfection of God's law, the Old Testament. Jude quotes Peter as Scripture. Peter quotes Paul as Scripture. And John quotes himself as Scripture. John just finished writing the letters to the churches; he says let the churches hear what the Spirit says. John knew he was writing what the Spirit was saying, not what he was saying. The Bible is not some high level of human genius.

Now others have suggested that what you really have in inspiration is God reveals concepts. I don't know why people have to come up with things like this, but they do. And God reveals concepts and the writers could pick any words they wanted. The Bible does not support that. Furthermore, how can you convey concepts without words? I'm not sure I know how to do that. But the idea is that God conveyed some spiritual ideas but not verbal inspiration, not inerrancy and not infallibility. That's not how it is.

When God called Moses at the burning bush and Moses was fumbling around and didn't believe, you know, that he had the eloquence to represent God. And God said I want you to be My spokesman, I want you to speak for Me, Exodus chapter 4, and Moses said, "But I, I, I, I, I have a speech impediment." And this is what God said to him. "Go and I will be with your mind and teach you what to think." Is that what He said? No, that's not what He said. He said, "Go and I'll be with your mouth and I'll teach you what to say exactly."

Samuel...the word of Jehovah was precious in those days. There was no frequent vision. In other words, it was rare to hear God speak. There was a rarity of Scripture in that time. Samuel did not yet know Jehovah, neither was the word of the Lord revealed unto him. So there was a time of silence. This is recorded in 1 Samuel 3. Then, all of a sudden, God broke the silence and He called for Samuel. You'll remember three times He called him and Samuel said this, "Speak for Your servant hears." Speak for Your servant hears.

Isaiah says, "I heard the voice of the Lord saying, 'Whom shall I send and who will go for us?' And then I said, 'Here am I, send me.'" And immediately it says in Isaiah 6, "And God said go and tell this people –" da da da da da da, and God outlined exactly what He wanted to say verbatim. Jeremiah wrote, "The word of Jehovah came to me saying, 'Before I formed thee in the belly I knew thee.'" In other words, its explicit statement.

The word of the Lord came to him and he just quotes it exactly. "I sanctify thee, I have appointed thee a prophet to the nations. Whatsoever I command thee thou shalt speak, behold I have put My words in thy mouth," Jeremiah 1:4 to 9. Chapter 5 verse 14, "I will make My words in thy mouth fire." You open your mouth, fire comes out, the people are going to be like kindling, he says, and the word of judgment is going to burn them up. Chapter 15, "Thy words were found and I did eat them, Thy words were unto me a joy and rejoicing in my heart." In fact, in chapter 15 verse 19, Jeremiah said, "God is as my mouth."

In Ezekiel, He said to Ezekiel in chapter 2, "I send thee to the children of Israel all My words that I shall speak unto thee, receive in thy heart and hear with thine ears and go and speak to them." That's how it was. God spoke and they spoke and they spoke what God told them to speak. There was Amos. He wasn't even a prophet. He says in chapter 7 of his prophecy, "I was no prophet, I

wasn't even a prophet's son. I was a herdsman and a dresser of sycamore trees." He was a farmer. "And Jehovah took me from following the flock and Jehovah said to me, 'Go, prophesy unto My people Israel.'" No training, didn't know what he was going to say, no preparation. You just go and you tell them exactly what I tell you to tell them.

The apostle Paul was told by Ananias...after he was blinded on the road to Damascus and was called into the ministry, he was told that he would be a witness for the Lord. In response to that he tells the Galatians in chapter 1, "What I preach –" he said – "I didn't receive from flesh and blood." It came directly from the Lord. "The Lord called me, separated me from my mother's womb, called me through His grace, revealed His Son in me and I'm preaching and I never conferred with flesh and blood." Taught by God.

John, "I was in the Spirit on the Lord's day –" in Revelation 1 – "I heard behind me a great voice saying, 'Write in a book.'" God told him exactly what to write. Even Jesus Christ, the Word made flesh...this is marvelous...received His message from God. Isaiah said of Him, "Jehovah hath made my mouth like a sharp sword. The Lord Jehovah has given me the tongue of them that are taught that I may know how to sustain with words him that is weary. He wakeneth morning by morning, he wakeneth mine ear to hear as they that are taught.

Here is the Messiah speaking in prophecy saying I will speak only what God speaks through Me. And Jesus said that. "The words which Thou gavest Me –" John 17:8 – "I have given them." That's just what Jesus did. Only what God spoke did He repeat. So when you're talking about the Bible you're not talking about some general ideas from God. You're talking about every word of God is pure. Not just floating ideas. You can't convey ideas without words. You might as well talk about a tune without notes, or a sun without light, or a sum without figures, or geology without rocks, or anthropology without men, or melody without music as to talk about thoughts without words.

Now to show you how profound this miracle was, turn to 1 Peter chapter 1 for a moment, 1 Peter chapter 1. We have to hurry. Wow. First Peter chapter 1 verses 10 and 11, "As to this salvation –" Now salvation is the theme of the Bible from front to back and, certainly, the theme of the Old Testament. As God promises the coming Savior, the one who will bruise the serpent's head, the ruler that shall come between the feet of Jacob, the one who will be Shiloh, the prince that is to come, the Messiah, the final Lamb pictured by all the sacrifices. The redemption in the Messiah to come is the theme of the Old Testament, so salvation is the main subject. So as to this salvation, verse 10, 1 Peter 1:10 – "The prophets who prophesied of the grace that would come to you made careful search and inquiry, seeking to know what person or time the Spirit of God within them was indicating as He predicted the suffering of Christ in the glories to follow."

That's a fascinating statement. You know what it says? It says the Old Testament writers studied what they wrote to figure out what it meant. Now if you're an author and you don't know what you mean by what you write, you're in trouble. Whenever you write, you write until you understand clearly what you're trying to convey and you believe it's clear enough for everybody else to understand. You work very hard. There is no virtue in being hard to understand. There is no virtue in writing things that aren't clear. There's no virtue in preaching things that aren't clear. In fact, I always tell young preachers it's very easy to be hard to understand. That's right, very easy to be hard to understand.

Sometimes you hear people say, "You know, it was just too deep for me." Well that's remotely possible. More likely the reason you didn't understand was because the speaker didn't either. It's

very easy to be hard to understand; all it requires is that you don't know what you're talking about. And I'll promise you this for sure. If you don't know what you're talking about, neither will anybody else. It's very hard to be crystal clear, because to be crystal clear you have to be crystal clear about what you're saying. And that's the challenge.

Well, here were men under the inspiration of the word of God who wrote things they didn't even understand. That shows you the supernatural and miraculous character of inspiration. And they would write it and then study it to try to figure out what it meant. And there was a distancing from them and their writings as God was using them as vehicles. Now other critics say, "Well the Bible...the Bible is the word of God in the spiritual area, but not in those other areas like geology and history and science and things like that. It really messes up there."

The critics love this stuff. They just love it. They like to take places in the Bible, and in the new study Bible every place where they've done this, every place where there is an apparent contradiction, we've written a section to answer that. And there are lucid answers to all of those issues. But here's a typical one. They say, "Well the Bible is only right spiritually, it's not right historically and other things." And they use...one of them uses an illustration in Numbers 11:31 and 32, I don't have time to turn to it; I'll tell you the story.

In Numbers 11:31 and 32 the children of Israel in the wilderness of Sinai...they don't have any food so God provides food, remember? And a wind blows one day and just blows quail in there, just blows these quail in. And they just start gathering quail. And the quail are...they're ubiquitous. I mean, they're everywhere. In fact, the person who gathers the least gets like eleven bushels of them. And quail is a little guy. We have them in our backyard every morning. They're just little guys. They're just all over the place and they're very compliant, they just kind of fly in and that's that. And they've got them all collected there. God's providing this wonderful food for them.

Well it says in Numbers 11:31 and 32 that they were, that they were two cubits high. And so the critic laughed at this and said, "You know, this is ridiculous. Well, let's take two cubits might be approaching four feet. Four feet deep in quail?" And it talks about a day's journey to one side of the camp and a day's journey to the other side of the camp, and so you've got miles and miles of four-foot-deep quail. And this critic said that, he figured out, would be nineteen trillion, five hundred and thirty-eight billion, four hundred and sixty-eight million, three hundred and six thousand, six hundred and seventy-two quail. [laughter] He says, "See the folly of the Bible. I mean, this is absolute absurdity."

But what he didn't understand was the Hebrew word when it talks about them being four-foot high doesn't mean they were four-foot deep. It meant they were flying at that elevation which would be the perfect elevation to just, you know – [laughter] – "just pick them out of the air. God blew them in from the Nile Valley and he had them flying at the right altitude. Didn't even have to bend over or jump up. The Bible is...listen...written by a God who is omniscient, and He knows as much about quail as He does about spiritual things, right? Not any difference. So the Word of the Lord, the Word of God is just that. You've got to have that understanding in order to have the compassion and passion for the truth in order to want to know it to want to make it a part of your life.

Now set that aside for a moment, and I want to close in the next few minutes with just a brief review of what I did last Sunday night for those of you who weren't there last Sunday night 'cause you're kind of getting intermittent stuff here when you miss the alternate messages. Last Sunday night...I

want to just close by telling you...we talked about the requirements for studying the Bible. I tried to give you a foundation to understand what you're dealing with, last Sunday morning and this morning, this immensely powerful living book of truth. Now that you understand what the Bible is, what does it take to be an effective student? Let me give you the little list we started last Sunday night; I'm just going to briefly give it to you.

Number one, you must be a Christian. You must be a Christian. You must be born again because 1 Corinthians 2:14 says the natural man understandeth not the things of God. They are foolishness to him because they're spiritually discerned and he is spiritually dead. Verse 16, he doesn't have the mind of Christ. You can take all the finest theological scholars and all the greatest minds in the field of religion and you can put them together and put a Bible in front of them and they'll misrepresent it. I don't care how smart they are, I don't care how many degrees they have, I don't care how much theology they've studied, you can see what they do to the Bible.

Just go to any secular theology department of any university or any seminary that is full of unbelievers and you will see anti-God, anti-Christ, anti-Bible stuff. Sometimes they bring them on television. They had a thing on PBS where they wanted to discuss the book of Genesis, so they brought in a bunch of unbelieving liberals to discuss Genesis, they all got it wrong. They all got it wrong. Why? Because they're natural men, they can't understand the things of God because they're spiritually discerned and they're spiritually dead.

And it...it deeply bothers them that the not many noble and the not many mighty common folk understand the Bible because we have anointing from God, namely the Holy Spirit who teaches us all things, right? And the Spirit is the discerner. "Who knows the things of a man but the spirit that is in the man," Paul says in that same chapter. "And who knows the things of God but the Spirit of God." The Bible is confounding to any human mind no matter how great that mind is. And it is as clear as it can be to any believer who will study it. It starts at that point, and we addressed that last Sunday night.

Second point we made, you cannot be a student of Scripture unless you have a strong desire. There's got to be a passion for it somewhere. You will never get into the deep riches of God's truth unless there's some motivation for that. And I would venture to say that the reason most Christians never study the things of God deeply is because they just aren't motivated to that; they're motivated to do something else. You need to pray that God would give us that desire that's recorded in 1 Peter 2:2, "Like newborn babes long for the pure milk of the word." You ought to desire the Word like a baby desires milk.

Do you understand a baby desires milk not because...not because they like the flavor? I think they like the flavor. But they have a built-in mechanism that triggers the reality that they have the need. They are dependent on it for the best that life has to offer, for health and well-being. The same thing is true as believers. If you want true spiritual well-being and true fulfillment, true joy and fulfillment in every area of your life as a Christian, it comes from the Word of God. You need to be motivated to long for that word like a baby longs for milk. Somewhere along the line that happened in my life and I thank God for giving me that tremendous drive, that tremendous longing to know the Scriptures, to pursue the truth of Scripture, a love for the Word, to proclaim it, to personalize it, to honor it, to fight for it. That's a tremendous blessing.

No one will ever achieve a knowledge of the Word apart from a desire to do so. It starts with that

passion of the heart. If you don't have it, you need to pray that God would give it to you. Read Proverbs 2. You want wisdom, cry for it. You want discernment, yell out in the street for it, pursue it like gold. Go after it like people go after things in the ground like gold and diamonds and precious jewels.

Job 28 says the same thing. He says I look and I see these men and they make mines and they go for gold and they go for jewels and diamonds and they sink shafts into the earth where no one has ever been and they overturn the earth. And they do all this for human riches. And then he asks the question down in verse 20, "But who finds wisdom?" And the answer comes, "Only God knows wisdom and God reveals it to those who know Him." Men in our world are very capable at digging up all kinds of precious things from a material side. But when it comes to the true wisdom they're void of it, aren't they? It only belongs to those who seek it, only those who know God and in His strength seek to know truth.

That takes me to a third point. If you're going to be a good Bible student you have to be diligent. It requires diligence. When I was a kid growing up they used to tell us, you know, read the Bible fifteen minutes a day and have your daily devotions. Daily devotions drove me nuts, basically because I didn't like reading the Bible and not understanding it and then putting it down. And then the next day reading something else I didn't understand then putting that down. I always wanted to know what it meant. Somewhere along the line there has to be a diligence, there has to be a hunger to search the Scriptures. They used the text of Acts 17. Acts 17 talks about the Bereans who were more noble than anybody else because they searched the Scriptures daily to see if these things were so. That's what it takes.

Be diligent to be a workman that approved of God, needing not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the Word. Be like those elders in 1 Timothy 5:17 who worked hard at the Word and doctrine, to labor to the point to sweat and exhaustion. Young guys that come to seminary often ask kind of funny questions. I remember one young seminary guy asked me one time, the first time he met me he said, "You know, I just was going to ask you what one book you get all your good material out of?" Well that's a typical question of a guy who doesn't...there is no such book. But anyway.

Another one that I've always remembered was, a young man said to me, "What is the –" and he was kind of starry-eyed, and I'm sure he expected some spiritual esoteric answer. He said, "What is the real key to great preaching?" I said, "Well, it's the ability to keep your rear end in the chair till you understand the text." Boy, he was shocked. Yeah, that's the real key. What separates great preaching from poor preaching is whether you know what you're talking about or not. Oratorical gifts aside, it's when you understand it. As we said earlier, it's when you really understand the Word of God, it's clear enough to make it clear to somebody else, that that's...that's great preaching. And what separates the great student of the Word of God from the mediocre one is effort, effort, just plain effort. No magic, just effort.

Let me give you a fourth prerequisite, if you're going to be a Bible student, holiness. Look at 1 Peter 2:1 again, 1 Peter 2:1, "Therefore putting aside all malice –" that's the word for evil, *kakia* – "all deceit –" or guile – "hypocrisy, envy, and all slander." Get rid of sin. Get rid of sin. One of the great realities in studying the Bible is that you're going to be taught by the Holy Spirit, but the Holy Spirit is not going to be able to fill you and teach you if there's sin in your life. Sin plugs up that whole pipeline, let me tell you.

That's why it's so absolutely crucial to understand James 1:21. James 1:21, essentially partners with 1 Peter 2:1, says this, "Putting aside all filthiness and all that remains of wickedness." All that remaining wickedness that's in you since your salvation, get rid of it, "And in humility receive the implanted word." That Word can't go to work in your life until you've dealt with sin, so the first thing you do as you approach the Word of God is confess your sin.

Sin is a barrier. Why? Because it clouds your mind. It cuts off the free working of the Spirit of God. I'll tell you something else, it pre...it creates presuppositions for your study of Scripture. Because if you're harboring sin in your life then you're most likely to twist the Scripture so it doesn't confront that.

You mess with the truth and the interpretation of Scripture to hide yourself. Or if you aren't willing to be honest about your own life and honest about your own heart, and if you're not willing to expose yourself to the Lord in an open and honest confession of sin, then you definitely will come across passages of Scripture that when they begin to pierce your heart you'll find another way to interpret. And then when you get into the pulpit to preach or when you get into a class to teach, or when you get to a place of discipling someone or leading your spouse or your children, you're going to hedge against the Word of God to protect your own sin.

You cannot be an effective student of the Word of God, an honest and effective student of the Word of God with sin in your life. That's why we so often say, when people fall away from the Word of God, fall away from interest in the Word of God, don't want to come to church, don't care about hearing the regular preaching and teaching of the Word of God, have no appetite for the truth, it's indicative of sin.

It's not just that sin; it's the sin that causes that sin of indifference toward truth. And usually it's a dead giveaway that truth penetrates and exposes something they don't want exposed. So one of the things that has to happen, if you're going to really deal with the Word of God and receive the engrafted Word in its fullness and its purity in the power of the Spirit and in clarity, is you're willing to give up everything or anything in your life that it touches on.

And then a fifth is obedience. Because in verse 22 of James 1, he says, "Now prove yourselves doers of the word and not merely hearers who delude themselves." You don't really believe what the Bible says unless you live it. Isn't that true? Is that fair enough? So a good student of the Bible learns and applies immediately, puts it into practice. It's not some ethereal thing, it's not some theoretical thing, it's a matter of life.

Well time is gone so I'll just give you the last one, number six, prayer, prayer. Ephesians 1 is a very powerful scripture. Ephesians 1:17, Paul prayed "that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ the Father of glory may give you a spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of Him." And he says in verse 18, "I pray that the eyes of your heart may be enlightened so that you may know what is the hope of His calling, what are the riches of the glory of His inheritance in the saints." Paul says I pray for you, I pray for you that God will give you wisdom, revelation, knowledge, enlightenment, understanding. Pray.

People ask me about prayer. I always say the times of most intense prayer for me are the times when I'm studying Scripture and I'm asking the Lord for clarity. I'm asking the Lord for wisdom, for

insight, for understanding, enlightenment, to understand His truth and how it applies in my own life as well as the church. You want to be a student of this miraculous supernatural book? It requires that you be born again, have a strong desire, be diligent, holy, obedient and prayerful. And all of those things are the work of the Spirit, aren't they? So we must come to the place where we walk in the Spirit, yield to Him, plead with Him to work these works in our life. Tonight we're going to get into how to actually study the Scripture, how to open it up and understand it. Let's pray.

Again, our Father, this morning our hearts have been so filled, filled with the time of worship, filled with the wonder of Your truth, and we're so grateful. We pray now that You'll confirm to our hearts all these things. Give us a great love for Your truth which is so life changing and produces joy and brings You glory, and we would know it and live it for Your glory and Your name. Amen.

Available online at: <http://www.gty.org>

COPYRIGHT (C) 2017 Grace to You

You may reproduce this Grace to You content for non-commercial purposes in accordance with Grace to You's Copyright Policy (<http://www.gty.org/connect/copyright>).