

THE WAY TO HUMAN FREEDOM
Study 10
ON THE WAY
IN THE GOOD OF THE WORD

We are now commencing the part of our series that will deal with all the different areas of a redeemed person's life and calling in Christ, and the *outworking* of these in the power of the Spirit. The next fifteen studies will be a kind of 'vocational celebration' of all we have seen thus far—everything regarding the riches of the Father's redeeming grace to us in the Son, given without limit!

a people on the way

From now on the title of each study will begin with the words, 'On the Way ...'. This declares the very nature of our life and calling in the Lord. As the redeemed children of God we are on the way to a great and glorious Goal, to which we have been headed from the moment of our regeneration.

Our Lord Jesus Christ—the En-fleshed and Glorified Eternal Son—has accomplished our salvation; is reigning over all things with His Father; is bringing us into His ongoing prophetic, priestly and kingly action among the nations of the world; and is leading us towards the Day when He will wholly bring us into the enjoyment of what is already ours—His own eternal inheritance!

Everything we have is in this One, at His Father's right hand. And every element of our life and calling, in Him, has to do with that Final Day to come. Nothing in this present life is the goal of our existence—only *that* Day. ALL WE DO, EVERY MOMENT OF EVERY *PRESENT* DAY, IS DONE AS THOSE WHO ARE 'ON THE WAY'!!!

a people of the word

Study 9 proclaimed 'the basics of life on the way to final freedom'. There we saw our need to above all else, continually maintain a *full assurance of the grace of God*—understanding that only in this can we actually, in the present, 'reign in life' in Christ. And it was shown that such full assurance of *grace* can only, be enjoyed by a continual focus upon *the word of God* that proclaims it.

And so as we begin this new phase of our series, it is most appropriate that we come immediately, to a substantial statement regarding the *nature* of the word of God and our *reception* of it. Here it will be seen that TO EFFECTIVELY AND FRUITFULLY MOVE ALONG 'THE WAY' TO OUR GOAL, WE MUST PROCEED—AT EVERY POINT—'IN THE GOOD OF THE WORD'!!!

remaining fully assured of the GRACE we have received, having:

- * ***great delight in God & in His call to become like His Son in every way—for His pleasure, glory & praise***
- * ***great delight in God's word & in His call to meditate upon it day & night***

Not only will each of the studies now commence with the title, 'On the way ...', but they will also have a key concept beginning, as above, with the words:

'remaining fully assured of the GRACE we have received, having:
***great delight in God & in His call to ...'**

The shape of the calling will differ according to the subject; but each study will flow out of these first-stated realities. As already said, the rest of the series will be dealing with enjoyment of the gift of *life in Christ* and the various expressions of *vocation* this brings us into—all preceded by a glad, and *persistently recalled*, assurance of the grace that has been abundantly bestowed upon us.

Just as the spiritual battle we are engaged in is *relentless*, so must the grace we have received be *persistently and fully recalled*, if we are to 'reign in life' in spite of the onslaughts of the world, the flesh and the devil. THOSE FIRST WORDS OF EACH STUDY, 'REMAINING FULLY ASSURED', ARE SO IMPORTANT!!!

the joy that characterizes the way of the redeemed

The whole sweep of Studies 1–9 has shown how the first key concept of Study 2 can be the experience of a regenerate person, every day. Assured of the lavishly given grace of God in Christ, each one, by the indwelling Spirit, may possess that ‘inner spring of great delight in God’ that Jesus promised (John 4:14)—His own joy, that no one is able to take away (John 15:11; 17:13; 16:22).

delight that is primarily in God Himself

It has been previously shown that this great delight is not to be found primarily in people, situations or things, but in God Himself. All else changes, but He never does. The one, true Object of human delight is always the same, and so remains the ever-present guarantee of happiness for all, who truly look to Him. People, situations and things may, indeed, bring sorrow; but the Holy One, Himself—and all He has called us to in His En-fleshed and Glorified Eternal Son—is the unending Source of primary delight for His redeemed children!

delight in both God & His word

Unlike the rest of the studies to come, this one has a second key concept. It speaks not only of joy in God Himself, but also of great delight in *His word*. These two concepts, of course, are quite inseparable, for God cannot be separated from His word. To delight in Him is to, at once, delight in all that expresses His heart, mind and will towards His creation.

Such delight is understandably, the experience of a regenerate person. How entirely natural it is for the Father’s forgiven, cleansed, justified, sanctified, Spirit-enlivened, hope-enlarged children, to delight in every word He speaks to them—and to wholeheartedly take every opportunity to hear His voice!

With the conscience released from its terrors, and the Holy Spirit stirring within, the old *aversion* to divine communication seen in Study 3 may, now, be no more. Instead of a dark attitude of unbelief—or, a joyless ‘loyalty to the truth’—THERE MAY NOW BE A FREE AND HAPPY SPIRIT BEFORE OUR MAKER; PRAYERFULLY EAGER TO RECEIVE LIFE-GIVING ‘LIGHT FROM ABOVE’!!!

It will be seen as we proceed through this study, that a merely dull and dutiful engagement with the word of God, truly is, out of the question for all who are redeemed in Christ.

In Study 9 we saw that Father loves to speak directly into the hearts of His children—assuring, strengthening and refreshing them, and enlarging their capacity to be with Him in His glorious purpose. The sure word of God is His good provision to keep the redeemed strong, alive and fruitful in Christ. They know in their depths that it is by His word that they live. Their hearts confirm to them that it is, indeed, one of the two great *essentials*, for maintaining the blessedness of true freedom and fullness in the Son!

God enlightens His children, primarily, upon the basis of His written word, the Bible. In this, however, our delight is not in a book, but a Person—the Blessed One, who loves to speak to us through what the written word reveals. A bit further on we’ll talk about the authority of the Bible and how it has come to us.

delight in meditating on the word

The second key concept spoke of ‘great delight in God’s word and in *meditation* upon it’. To ‘meditate’ is to give our total attention to something—seeking to grasp every detail—with a view to understanding what it means for us personally. This truly is, a key to living each day ‘in the good of the word’.

Meditation has to do with a heart that seeks after God Himself. A child of God must never be content to merely gather ‘biblical information’. We will see that the Scriptures were given for a far more wonderful purpose than that.

When it comes to the word of God, keen-spirited meditation is entered into *because of* the dynamic nature of the word itself—and the enormous pleasures it holds for every person who lovingly gives their attention to it!

Meditation is something everyone does. The question is whether or not it is upon God’s word. We have seen that because of the Fall, people’s ‘thinking became futile and their foolish hearts were darkened’ (Romans 1:21). The godless meditate, but upon the ‘false words’ that abound in a fallen world. They use their mental energies to contemplate their idols. Tragically, such meditation only keeps their minds in darkness and their thinking senseless—lacking any truly human value.

How merciful and gracious God has been to His regenerate children—enabling us to give our mental energies to keen and happy contemplation of His word! More will be seen of this amazing gift later, as we consider the deep and intimate work of the Spirit—who has come to bring us into life-changing revelation of the heart, mind and will of the Father.

a people graciously commanded to meditation

Every good and functional gift from our Creator and Redeemer has a command attached to it. He wants us to be sure not to miss out on any of its personal joys and vocational fruits! This is no less the case with the command to careful and persistent meditation on God's word. We are being urged to enjoy the pleasures of this supreme gift.

As Israel was about to enter the land of promise, the LORD knew they would need to clearly grasp their calling to 'live by the word' He had given them. Apart from this they could not experience the blessing—and fulfill the grand vocation—that was before them. So He said to Joshua as the people's leader and example:

Joshua 1:8

"Do not let this Book of the Law depart from your mouth; meditate on it day and night, so that you may be careful to do everything written in it. Then you will [make your way prosperous and will have good success]."

'Day and night meditation' on divine revelation—with a view to wholehearted response to it—is always essential for enjoyment of true human prosperity and authentic achievement.

James went straight to the heart of the matter of personal response, with this particular word to communities of struggling, scattered believers:

James 1:22–25

"Do not merely listen to the word, and deceive yourselves. Do what it says. Those who listen to the word but do not do what it says are like people who look at their faces in a mirror and after looking at themselves, go away and immediately forget what they look like. But those who look intently into the perfect law that gives freedom, and continue to do this, not forgetting what they have heard, but doing it—they will be blessed in what they do.

The revealed way of our Maker is so essential to our being, that to merely glance at it in a casual manner is unthinkable. When God's word comes, great love and esteem for what is before our 'inner-eyes', should naturally, cause us to look persistently and intently into every word—for it brings liberating sight of our grand calling as His image.

Indeed, as those who are in Christ, when we see the revealed nature of the image of God in the Scriptures, it is as if we are looking at ourselves in a mirror! It is not surprising then, that we should 'look intently', and 'continue to do this'. And such focused meditation is always with a view to *personal application*—happily pursued action in accordance with what has been seen.

After Paul had given Timothy three images of a servant of Christ who is strong in grace, he said:

2 Timothy 2:7

"Reflect on what I am saying, for the Lord will give you insight into all this."

Reflection upon the apostolic word in the Lord's presence is always sure to bring the wisdom we need!

Then there's the apostle's heartfelt appeal to the saints at Philippi:

Philippians 4:8

"Finally, brothers and sisters, whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable—if anything is excellent or praiseworthy—think about such things."

True meditation has much to do with daily mental discipline. To meditate is not just the act of a few insightful and even, glorious, minutes. It is—throughout our days and nights—a persistent turning of the mind to what is 'excellent and worthy of praise' in Christ.

hearts that know the joys of meditating on the word

We must begin here, by saying that central to all truly joyous and effective meditation upon God's word, is the focus of our hearts and minds upon the glorious things He has done in both creation and redemption—and all that He has promised to yet do! Apart from relentlessly returning to delight in the wonder of these things, we have no basis for glad meditation upon the various expressions of our own vocational privilege and responsibility.

It is in revelation of the Father's divine Being, and His past, present and future action, that a *human* being made in His likeness finds their *deep wellspring of personal happiness*—and is then enabled to authentically act, in the fulfillment of their calling as the image of God.

Psalms 111:2

Great are the works of the LORD; they are pondered by all who delight in them.

The human mind needs to be focused upon things grand enough, to *thrill* hearts that have been created to share in the blessedness of the Creator Himself! It is the 'great works of the LORD' that are to be pondered on and delighted in, in this way.

Psalm 119:27

I will meditate on Your wonders.

Meditation on those mighty works of God that bring, wonder to our soul!

Psalm 119:148

My eyes stay open through the watches of the night, that I may meditate on Your promises.

Here the emphasis is upon those things God has pledged Himself to do in the future. Even throughout long night hours, the saints may find their hearts stayed upon these 'very great and precious promises'. Meditation during such times of wakefulness can, of course, particularly occur during seasons of great personal trial. Then, how settling, enlivening and sustaining are these grand realities! In addition to focus upon the *works* of God, the Psalms give joyous witness to the place of meditation upon His *commands* as well.

Psalm 119:15–16

I meditate on Your precepts and consider Your ways. I delight in Your decrees; I will not neglect Your word.

Psalm 119:48

I reach out for Your commands, which I love, that I may meditate on Your decrees.

The ways, commands and decrees of their Creator, Redeemer and King are the *delight* of the happily sanctified people of God. These are reached out for and lovingly contemplated, that none of them may be neglected.

Those who are 'righteous'—rightly related to their Maker as they trust in His grace towards them—find that His *way* is their constant preoccupation.

Psalm 1:2–3

Their delight is in the law of the Lord, and on His law they meditate day and night. They are like trees planted by streams of water, which yield their fruit in season and whose leaves do not wither. Whatever they do prospers.

What blessing there is in this world for those who meditate day and night upon the way of the One who loves them, and has called them into his purpose!

Divine blessing, of course, is usually not experienced apart from many difficulties—those often arising on account of the wickedness that prevails where His word is not honoured. But the joys of meditating upon God's word are known in the midst of these.

Psalm 119:23-24

Though rulers sit together and slander me, Your servant will meditate on Your decrees. Your statutes are my delight; they are my counselors.

Even where powerful people seek to destructively afflict, the LORD'S servants exercise 'no-matter-what meditation'—because His ways are like delightful counselors in the midst of it all!

Psalm 119:54

Your decrees are the theme of my song wherever I lodge.

Regardless of the circumstance we find ourselves in, the word of God may, indeed, be a song in our hearts!

Yes, God's word is such that it may, very naturally, become an object of *great delight* to a regenerate soul. And it surely is a fact, that the more we *experience* of this word, the more we are *inwardly drawn* to seek after its alluring pleasures!

the incredible nature of the word of God

Let's look now then, at some aspects of the nature of this divine word that is able to capture the affections of the saints—a word that is, in its essential character, truly incredible.

a word of supreme value

In Study 1 we spoke of the promises of God being 'incredible and priceless' gifts from Him. And so they are. No price tag attached to these awesome assurances could be too great!

2 Peter 1:4

He has given us His very great and precious promises.

Psalm 119:162

I rejoice in Your promise like one who finds great [treasure].

But not only are the *promises* of God of supreme value; His *commands* are equally so. They are the priceless communications of His, own, way. Through them He calls us into the enjoyment of truly being what we were created to be—like *Him!*

Psalms 119:14

I rejoice in following Your statutes as one rejoices in great riches.

Psalms 119:72

The law from Your mouth is more precious to me than thousands of pieces of silver and gold.

For every redeemed child of God, His word—rightly valued—becomes, to them, a treasure of indescribable worth!

a word that is the unchanging truth

What a delight it is to know that the word God speaks to His children actually, is, the truth—things as they really are!

Isaiah 45:19

I, the LORD, speak the truth; I declare what is right.

Anyone who attempts to move through life without cherishing such a declaration, can never enjoy the human freedom and fullness they were made for. We cannot do without the clearly declared word of our Maker.

John 17:17

[Jesus prayed:] "Father, Your word is truth."

A simple statement—but one of the most significant utterances that could ever come from human lips! All that the En-fleshed Son enjoyed and accomplished was on the basis of His Father's word. As it had been from eternity, so also here among us, that word was part of the fabric of His Being, and His constant delight. Every moment, its unchanging truth was His supreme confidence—the spring of divine wisdom that He embodied before our eyes.

a word that transcends time and culture

Speaking what He had heard from His Father (John 3:32; 8:26; 14:24), Jesus could say:

Mark 13:31

"Heaven and earth will pass away but My words will never pass away."

In this He was simply affirming what the Scriptures have constantly proclaimed.

Psalms 111:7–8

All [the LORD'S] precepts are trustworthy. They are steadfast for ever and ever.

Isaiah 40:6–8

All people are like grass, and all their glory is like the flowers of the field. The grass withers and the flowers fall, because the breath of the LORD blows on them. Surely the people are grass. The grass withers and the flowers fall, but the word of our God endures forever.

In Study 1 we saw that human thoughts and ideas may certainly be brilliant. But like those who form them, they come and go. It is only God's word that endures as the unchanging truth.

Psalms 119:89–90

Your word, O LORD, is eternal; it stands firm in the heavens. Your faithfulness continues through all generations.

Again in Study 1, regarding this statement that the Creator's word 'stands firm in the heavens', that word was said to be *untouchable*—one that may be ignored or perverted on the earth, but which ever remains as it is in the heavens!

It was seen also in reference to the declaration of His faithfulness continuing 'through all generations', that it matters little how vastly things may change in our human cultures and societies. Humanity is still structured to be the image of God, and its Creator's word remains the one true source of wisdom for living in His world—relevant, to the highest degree. It is like the needle of a compass—always pointing north, no matter how confused the direction of any particular generation!

In a future revision of this study it will be seen that although the Bible was written at certain times and within particular cultures, there *are* clear 'principles of interpretation' that enable us to discern what is God's timeless and trans-cultural word to us today.

a word that is absolutely trustworthy— & to be honoured by all

In His desire to impart the truth to His children, the Father reveals Himself as the Faithful One. As receivers of His word, they may have the same supreme confidence that the Son displayed among us.

During the Old Testament period, the LORD'S people trusted in the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. Throughout those centuries of redemptive history He had proved Himself to be entirely worthy of that trust. The One to whom we look today, is one and the same: 'the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ'.

1 Samuel 15:29

[He] does not lie or change His mind.

Romans 3:4

Let God be true and every [human being] a liar. As it is written: "So that You may be proved right when You speak and prevail when You judge."

Regardless of how brilliantly or forcefully the world marshals its opposition to the truth, it is, no match for the word of God. His redeemed family may know that His every utterance will be proved right, His every judgment will prevail, and every hostile assertion of rebellious human beings will be seen for what it really is—a lie.

Study 1 declared the faithfulness of God to be one of His unsearchably great perfections. Perfection is, indeed, the very essence of His revealed way and word!

Psalms 18:30

As for God, His way is perfect; the word of the Lord is flawless.

Psalms 12:6

The words of the Lord are flawless, like silver refined in a furnace of clay, purified seven times.

As said already, God cannot be separated from His word. Both are rightly the Objects of absolute trust and unreserved honour and praise.

Psalms 138:2

You have exalted above all things Your name and Your word.

Psalms 119:164

[LORD,] seven times a day I praise You for Your righteous laws.

Psalms 119:74

I have put my hope in Your word.

a word that accomplishes all that it declares

Whatever the Faithful One speaks regarding His purpose will surely come to pass.

Isaiah 55:10–11

As the rain and the snow come down from heaven, and does not return to it without watering the earth and making it bud and flourish, so that it yields seed for the sower and bread for the eater, so is My word that goes out from My mouth: It will not return to Me empty, but will accomplish what I desire and achieve the purpose for which I sent it.

It is impossible that the word of God should go out from His mouth and *not* establish His will on the earth!

Matthew 5:18

[Jesus said,] "I tell you the truth, until heaven and earth disappear, not the smallest letter, not the least stroke of a pen, will by any means disappear from the law until everything is accomplished."

All that the Old Testament prefigured of the purpose of God in Christ, either has already been, or will finally be, fulfilled. The New Testament gives thrilling testimony to this.

Luke 1:1

Many have undertaken to draw up an account of the things that have been fulfilled among us.

The Gospel writer, Luke, knew that he and others were not merely giving an account of the Life and Ministry of Jesus, but of how all this was a fulfillment of what had been promised.

Titus 1:2–3

[God], who does not lie, promised ... and at His appointed season He brought [the fulfillment of] His word to light.

God's promises are, indeed, 'very great and precious'. What they secure for His people is both incredible and priceless in their eyes. And they may *know* that there is not one of these that ever has failed, or ever will fail, to be fulfilled!

After experiencing the events of the Exodus, Mount Sinai, the wilderness wanderings, and then occupation of the land of Canaan, Joshua could emphatically say:

Joshua 21:45

"Not one of all the LORD'S good promises ... failed; every one was fulfilled."

Psalms 119:140

Your promises have been thoroughly tested, and Your servant loves them.

Both the biblical record of the great Story of Redemption and the personal experience of the saints, makes, the Faithful One's promises and proclamations to be, without doubt, a source of great delight!

a word which called the creation into being—& that calls the elect into life

The whole of creation is the magnificent product of our Maker's mighty word!

2 Peter 3:5

By God's word the heavens existed and the earth was formed.

Psalm 148:5

At His command they were created.

Romans 4:17

[He is the] God who ... calls into being things that are not.

His commanding word brings into existence what never was before! And, as was seen in Study 7, it is this same word that has *brought to life* each regenerate person in Christ.

James 1:18

He chose to give us birth through the word of truth.

1 Peter 1:23

You have been born again, not of perishable seed, but of imperishable through the living and enduring word of God.

The divine word is like life-bearing seed, sovereignly implanted in the human heart.

a word that keeps the redeemed alive in the life they have received

God's dynamic word not only regenerates us, but also sustains us in the *life* of a true humanity in Christ.

John 6:63

[Jesus said], "The words I have spoken to you are spirit and they are life."

The origin of all that the En-fleshed Son said when He was among us was not 'human flesh'. His words came directly from His Father, bringing spiritual life to all who received them.

Matthew 4:4

[He answered the devil with the words], "It is written: 'People do not live on bread alone, but on every word that comes from the mouth of God.' "

The Righteous One in our midst knew that as with His own humanity, ours too, needed to constantly be *fed* by the wisdom that is 'from above'. Long ago righteous Job also understood the same thing, saying:

Job 23:12

"I have treasured the words of His mouth more than my daily bread."

Proverbs 18:4

—*contrasting human & divine utterance*

The words of the mouth are deep waters, but the fountain of wisdom is a bubbling brook.

The great mass of humanly inspired communications heard around us day by day, arises out the murky depths of fallen-human passion. The complex nature of such utterances, is not to be compared with the sparkling simplicity and life-giving vitality of divine wisdom!

Jeremiah 15:16

When Your words came, I ate them; they were my joy and my heart's delight, for I bear Your name, O LORD God Almighty.

The word of God, savoured by those who know they belong to Him, brings enormous pleasure—particularly, as it effects a conscious participation in the will of their Redeemer.

Psalm 119:103

How sweet are Your words to my taste, sweeter than honey to my mouth!

Psalm 19:7-11

The law of the Lord is perfect, reviving the soul. The statutes of the Lord are trustworthy, making wise the simple. The precepts of the Lord are right, giving joy to the heart. The commands of the Lord are radiant, giving light to the eyes. The fear of the Lord is pure, enduring forever. The ordinances of the Lord are sure and altogether righteous. They are more precious than gold, than much pure gold; they are sweeter than honey, than honey from the honeycomb. By them your servant is warned; in keeping them there is great reward.

The apostle Paul's confidence regarding the Thessalonian believers was due, greatly, to their God-given welcome of the word that had come to them. He knew that by the energizing activity of that word within them, they would be kept upon the way of life, and in increasing enjoyment of their heritage in Christ. So he exclaimed:

1 Thessalonians 2:13

“[We] thank God continually because, when [you received the word of God, which you heard from us, you accepted it not as a human word, but as it actually is, the word of God, which is at work in you who believe.”

It is an unchanging principle, that the Father’s regenerate children can only experience ongoing personal vitality and transformation, as His word finds powerful entrance into their hearts by the Holy Spirit.

a word that keeps the redeemed in the way & will of God

As we progress through this study on the word of God, its power to keep us living in accordance with His way, will, become increasingly evident.

Psalms 119:105

Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path.

It is not the role of human beings to determine their own path in life (Jeremiah 10:23). We don’t, actually, have the ability to truly do so. But by His word, our Maker lightens up the way before us according to His good will and purpose!

Psalms 119:9

How can those who are young keep their way pure? By living according to your word.

In Study 4 we saw that the greatest trauma a person can know, is to defile their conscience by living against their holy calling to be the image of God. For those who are young in years to set themselves upon a path of personal dysfunctionality and inner torment, is greatly tragic. But whether we are old or young, the reality is that we may all keep our way pure, through living each day by the word of the One who loves us!

receiving the word with a rich vocational agenda

Having been given ‘new birth into a living hope’, and into ‘an inheritance that can never perish, spoil or fade’ (1 Peter 1:3–4), the saints may daily respond to the word of God with a glad and sharply focused purpose: to become all they were regenerated to be, in Christ. They may respond wholeheartedly to the apostle Paul’s exhortation given to believers in Rome:

Romans 12:2:

“[Brothers and sisters] be transformed by the renewing of your mind.”

As the redeemed, we have the *promise* of an ultimate glorious conformity to the likeness of the Son, and the *call* to enjoy the blessedness of that even now. This may certainly be to us the most delightful and desirable prospect imaginable; and, of course—as Study 9 has declared—with one supreme purpose in view: THAT OUR SANCTIFIED HUMANITY IN CHRIST, MAY MORE AND MORE BRING PLEASURE, GLORY AND PRAISE TO THE FATHER!!! This is the goal of all biblical meditation.

It will be very apparent as we move through this study, that to lack such a rich vocational agenda in approaching God’s word would, leave us falling far short of the grand calling we have received.

the Scriptures—the written word

As mentioned earlier, the word of God today comes to us primarily, upon the basis of His *written* word, the Bible. The word ‘bible’ simply means ‘book’. The Bible—made up of 66 documents—is ‘the Book’ God has given us for our instruction in His will and way. As we know, the Bible is also called the Scriptures—that is, ‘the Writings’. Down through the centuries our Creator and Redeemer has decisively spoken to and acted among His people, and has wonderfully preserved for us an authoritative record of this communication and action.

the LORD’S open proclamation of His will through His Spirit-anointed servants

Throughout the Story of Redemption, God has, ‘at many times and in various ways’ (Hebrews 1:1), raised up those through whom He would speak directly into human situations. It has always been His desire to openly make known His will and way to humankind.

Isaiah 45:19

[The LORD says], “I have not spoken in secret.”

Amos 3:7

Surely the Sovereign LORD does nothing without revealing His plan to His servants the prophets.

Throughout the Old Testament period, God never acted in the midst of Israel’s history without first announcing His intention. Anointed by the Spirit, His servants the prophets became His mouthpieces,

by whom His people, and the surrounding nations, became *active participants* in the great 'Drama of Redemption' being working out in their midst—responding *faithfully* or reacting *unfaithfully* to His word. In this, it is clear that the prophets were far more than mere social or political commentators.

2 Peter 1:20–21

Above all, you must understand that no prophecy of Scripture came about by the prophet's own interpretation of things. For prophecy never had its origin in the human will, but prophets, though human, spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit.

In their speaking, the prophets were the voice of God to His people and those round about. Borne along by the Spirit, they proclaimed what was given to them—often unaware of the full implications of their words.

Their arrival on the scene was never at their own initiative. They were divinely called to their task. Jeremiah gave clear testimony to this reality.

Jeremiah 1:4, 8

The word of the LORD came to me, saying, "Before I formed you in the womb I knew you, before you were born I set you apart; I appointed you as a prophet to the nations." ... Then the LORD reached out His hand and touched my mouth and said to me, "Now, I have put My words in your mouth. See, today I appoint you over nations and kingdoms to uproot and tear down, to destroy and overthrow, to build and to plant."

Set apart for their role before birth, God's word was placed in the prophets' mouths at the appointed time—and what they spoke in His very name, precipitated mighty acts of both judgment and salvation!

the LORD'S purpose to preserve His proclaimed & enacted word in written form

As stated above, it was always the Sovereign One's intention to provide a written record of His divine speech and action among us. Such a provision had to be made, for, it is only through revelation of His words and works within history that we may understand and know Him. An accurate deposit of these was essential for the benefit of succeeding generations.

Jeremiah 30:2

This is the word that came to Jeremiah from the LORD: ... "Write in a book all the words I have spoken to you."

Exodus 17:14

The LORD said to Moses, "Write this on a scroll as something to be remembered."

Psalms 111:4

He has caused His wonders to be remembered; the LORD is gracious and compassionate.

What great kindness and wisdom our Redeemer has shown, in causing the revelation of His glory among us to be preserved in writing!

the Scriptures—a fully human and fully divine record

We have seen that the prophets 'though human, spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit' (2 Peter 1:21). We are also told that all Scripture is 'God-breathed' (2 Timothy 3:16).

The Holy One sovereignly *breathed out* His word into the Scriptures through no less than 40 different writers, over a period of around 1500 years. Breathed upon by the Spirit in this way, these human authors were mightily enabled to perform their tasks.

That the writers of Scripture were 'carried along by the Holy Spirit' does not mean that their personalities were by-passed in the process. Far from it! The kind of people they were, and their different backgrounds and situations, certainly influenced the way they spoke and wrote. But in this, they were vessels specially prepared for their task from birth—the Divine Author filtering through each of them exactly what He wanted to say.

Jesus, as the En-fleshed Eternal Son—the Living Word—was, by nature, both fully divine and fully human. His divinity was not diminished by His humanity, and neither was His humanity diminished by His divinity. In the same way, the Scriptures—the written word—are, by nature, a fully divine and fully human record of essential revelation to us all.

The Scriptures then, come to us in a thoroughly human way, but with the stamp of full divine authority upon every part. Because of such a wise provision, humankind has had, and today has, the possibility of *perfectly recalling* the transforming revelation of their Redeemer's glory!

the Scriptures—given by the Spirit of Christ & speaking of Him

Although the Eternal Son had not yet been en-fleshed among us when the Old Testament prophets operated, the Spirit by whom they spoke is—in the New Testament—referred to as 'the Spirit of Christ'. That is, it was the same Spirit who has now been sent in His name. The 'Pre-incarnate Son'

was, by the Spirit, witnessing within the prophets to what He would be, and ultimately accomplish, in His incarnate state.

1 Peter 1:10–11

Concerning this salvation, the prophets, who spoke of the grace that was to come to you, searched diligently and with greatest care, trying to find out the time and circumstances to which the Spirit of Christ in them was pointing when He predicted the sufferings of Christ and the glories that would follow.

Having been en-fleshed, the Son recognized, by the Spirit, the Old Testament's incessant witness to Himself.

John 5:39–40

[Jesus said,] "The Scriptures ... testify about Me."

Luke 24:27

And beginning with Moses and all the Prophets [Jesus] explained to them what was said in all the Scriptures concerning Himself.

After celebrating the Passover with His disciples in the upper room, Christ spoke of the Father's provision for ongoing revelation. The Spirit would be sent in His name to establish the 'apostolic word'—which would be prophetically proclaimed by His people, and ultimately recorded in the New Testament Scriptures. He said:

John 14:24–26

"These words you hear are not My own; they belong to the Father who sent Me. All this I have spoken while still with you. But the Counsellor, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in My name, will teach you all things and will remind you of everything I have said to you."

John 16:12–15

[He said] "I have much more to say to you, more than you can now bear. But when He, the Spirit of truth, comes, He will guide you into all the truth. He will not speak on His own. He will speak only what He hears, and He will tell you what is yet to come. He will glorify Me because it is from Me that He will receive what He will make known to you. All that belongs to the Father is Mine. That is why I said the Spirit will receive from Me what He will make known to you."

Just as the Spirit intimately and powerfully facilitated the Old Testament record, so He would also cause the New Testament Scriptures to dynamically arise, out of those early years of the Christian church's prophetic life.

The apostle John clearly defined the nature of prophetic revelation within the era of the new covenant, as he declared,

Revelation 19:10

"The testimony of Jesus is the spirit of prophecy."

Every element of New Testament prophetic teaching and proclamation has always been the direct testimony of Jesus Himself: His own testimony to who He is, what He has done, is doing and will continue to do by the Spirit—ever one with His Father in word and deed!

the New Testament writings—from the hand of authorized apostolic witnesses

The New Testament apostles and prophets (Ephesians 3:5) were chosen and authorized to give testimony to what they had seen and heard. John delighted to give expression to this glorious privilege, saying:

1 John 1:1–4

"That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked at and our hands have touched—this we proclaim concerning the word of life. The life appeared; we have seen it and testify to it, and we proclaim to you the eternal life which was [face to face] with the Father and has appeared to us."

The apostle Peter, referring to his participation in the event of the Transfiguration, gave a similar testimony:

2 Peter 1:16–18

"We did not follow cleverly invented stories when we told you about the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, but we were eye-witnesses of His majesty. For He received honour and glory from God the Father [at His baptism] when the voice came from the Majestic Glory, saying, "This is My Son, whom I love; with Him I am well pleased." We ourselves heard this voice that came from [the magnificent glory] when we were with Him on the sacred mountain."

Paul, though himself not part of the original Twelve, also gave bold testimony to His apostolic authorization—as one personally commissioned by Christ to give witness to all that had been revealed to him.

Galatians 1:1

Paul, an apostle—sent not with a human commission nor by human authority, but by Jesus Christ and God the Father, who raised Him from the dead.

Acts 26:16

[The Lord Jesus said to me,] “I have appeared to you to appoint you as a servant and as a witness of what you have seen and will see of Me.”

Galatians 1:11–12, 15

I want you to know, brothers and sisters, that the gospel I preached is not of human origin. I did not receive it from any human source, nor was I taught it; rather, I received it by revelation from Jesus Christ ... When God, who set me apart from birth and called me by His grace, was pleased to reveal His Son in me so that I might preach Him among the Gentiles, I did not consult any human being.

Ephesians 3:4–5

In reading this, then, you will be able to understand my insight into the mystery of Christ, which was not made known to people in other generations as it has now been revealed by the Spirit to God's holy apostles and prophets.

Writing to the Thessalonian believers, Paul unashamedly testified to the divine authority with which he wrote, saying:

1 Thessalonians 4:8

“Therefore anyone who rejects this instruction does not reject mere human beings but God.”

Peter, gave his own testimony to Paul's apostolic authority and scriptural authorship, saying:

2 Peter 3:15–16

“Our dear brother Paul also wrote to you with the wisdom God gave him. He writes in the same way in all His letters, speaking in them of these matters. His letters contain some things that are hard to understand, which ignorant and unstable people distort, as they do the other Scriptures, to their own destruction.”

The Lord, at times, communicated extremely profound things through the mind of His brilliant servant; and, unfortunately, some—devoid of the Spirit—distorted such truths through their lack of understanding. But in it all, there was, in fact, nothing that could not be received by Spirit-enlivened people, who would listen with an open heart. He, himself, said:

2 Corinthians 1:13

“We do not write to you anything that you cannot read or understand.”

The Spirit-given apostolic word does indeed, in places, reveal deep truths regarding God's divine Being and action—things that declare His unsearchable greatness and glory as the Holy One. At such points it may be a word that is very different to our usual way of thinking, but it is never, actually, complicated. It can be read and understood. Of course, none of it can truly be grasped except by faith, in a spirit of creaturely humility.

Apart from Paul, God raised up other New Testament writers who were not members of the original Twelve, yet were specially borne along by the Spirit for their particular task.

Luke, a member of Paul's apostolic team and a careful investigator of eyewitnesses, was moved to produce his 'orderly' Gospel account to confirm the 'certainty' of what believers had been taught (Luke 1:1–4). Mark, Peter's nephew and later a valued co-worker of Paul (2 Timothy 4:11), was led to write *his* Gospel account drawing, it seems, from Peter's intimate experiences and understanding. James and Jude, were, physical brothers of Jesus and clearly part of the prophetic movement within the early church. And the unnamed writer of 'Hebrews' was also an apostolically recognized prophet, who 'spoke from God'—adding his unique contribution to those of the other New Testament authors.

God's word to us in the whole of the Scriptures

We have seen that our Creator has sovereignly provided a humanly written, divine revelation of His speech and action within history—encompassing the grand, unfolding Story of His redeeming love. Now, it must be understood that within this enthralling record, there is nothing that is not a significant word of God to us. The whole Bible is, truly, a comprehensive provision for the enlightenment and liberation of humankind!

Paul left no room for doubt as to his own absolute regard for the entire body of Old Testament revelation. To his young co-worker Timothy he wrote:

2 Timothy 3:15–17

“[From] infancy you have known the Holy Scriptures, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus. All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, so that God's servant may be thoroughly equipped for every good work.”

His affirmation is that *all Scripture* is God-breathed and savingly useful. The apostle was keen to stimulate this same confidence among the Roman believers also. He said,

Romans 15:4

“Everything that was written in the past was written to teach us, so that through endurance and the encouragement of the Scriptures we might have hope.”

‘*Everything* that was written’ may contribute to the endurance, encouragement and hope of the saints—including things like the judgments that came upon rebellious Israel at Mount Sinai. Paul urged the Corinthians to understand this, saying:

1 Corinthians 10:11

“These things happened to them as examples and were written down as warnings for us, on whom the culmination of the ages has come.”

‘Last days, post-Pentecost believers’, stand at the end of the successive ages of history, awaiting the Lord’s Appearing. And for them, during this critical season, all that has been thus far revealed at various points of the Story of Redemption is *divinely instructive*.

Yes, the whole of the Scriptures is God’s word to us—even, what may be called the ‘less inspirational’ parts (for instance, the lists in the book of Numbers). Although it is certainly true that some sections don’t have the same immediate appeal, they were nevertheless, given for a purpose. These all contribute to the ‘big picture’ that needs to be seen. For example, in a large painting hung on a wall there are some things that don’t stand out like others; but that doesn’t mean they are not a necessary part of the whole.

revelation of all we need to know

The Bible doesn’t, necessarily, tell us all we would *like* to know. Its purpose is not to satisfy our every curiosity! There are some matters that are simply not needful for our understanding in this age.

Deuteronomy 29:29

The secret things belong to the LORD our God, but the things revealed belong to us and to our children forever, that we may follow all the words of this law.

Moses urged Israel to leave the ‘secret things’ with the LORD, and to wholeheartedly respond to what had been revealed—the things that enable us to live truly according to His way, at any moment of history.

Everything that a human being needs for ‘life and godliness’ (2 Peter 1:1–2) has been provided in ‘the things revealed’—all of which, in either the Old or New Testament, find their focus in Christ. These ‘belong’ to the redeemed children of God, and are to be their treasured possession.

1 Corinthians 13:12

Now we see but a poor reflection as in a mirror; then we shall see face to face. Now I know in part; then I shall know fully, even as I am fully known.

Compared to the revelation that will come to us at Jesus’ Appearing, what we see now is ‘but a poor reflection’—as in an ancient mirror of polished metal. In the End, though, we will *know fully*.

This ultimate knowledge, however, will be ‘relational’ rather than merely ‘cerebral’¹. Even now, revelation is given not to fill our brains with ideas, but our hearts with knowledge of the Holy One! And yes, IN THE AGE TO COME WE WILL *INTIMATELY KNOW HIM, TO THE SAME DEGREE AS WE ARE NOW, KNOWN BY HIM!!!*

Until that Day, all that is needful for us to be *with Him in His will* has been revealed within the Scriptures. In these present days we may happily listen for His voice—and live in the good of what He says!

the need for humility & a happily obedient spirit—keeping to what has been revealed

In later studies it will be seen that God still speaks and acts in a direct way through His anointed servants. But this will always be a word and activity that is in line with what has been established in the Scriptures. We are to speak and act in His name only upon the foundation of what has already been revealed. Anything else would indicate a tragic presence of fallen-human pride and passion—seeking to establish our own independent wisdom, in order to fulfill self-interested agendas.

¹ As already mentioned when speaking of the nature of ‘the Trinity’ in Study 6.

Israel was not to go beyond the limits of, or to diminish in any way, what had been revealed to them; and this principle clearly applies to the humility and responsiveness required of the people of God in all ages.

Deuteronomy 4:2

Do not add to what I command you and do not subtract from it, but keep the commands of the LORD your God that I give you.

Proverbs 30:5–6

Every word of God is flawless ... Do not add to His words, or He will rebuke you and prove you a liar.

Fallen-human pride and passion will always, ultimately, be shown for what it is. Our Maker will rightly see to that.

Jude was deeply disturbed by the presence of certain arrogant individuals within some Christian communities. These were claiming to have received revelation that would justify their pursuit of ungodly desires. So, as a faithful servant of the Lord he earnestly spoke into the situation, saying:

Jude 3

“I felt compelled to write and urge you to contend for the faith that was once for all entrusted to the saints.”

God’s set apart people have been enlightened by His revealed word that they may live according to His way. Whenever that word is added to or taken from in their midst, they must contend—wrestle and struggle—for its re-establishment as the one, exclusive basis for life in Christ.

Isaiah 8:20

To the law and to the testimony! If they do not speak according to this word, they have no light of dawn.

“Back to the given word!” Isaiah says. To move from this is like returning to the pre-dawn darkness of an unregenerate life.

2 John 9

Anyone who runs ahead and does not continue in the teaching of Christ does not have God; whoever continues in the teaching has both the Father and the Son.

How dangerous it is to go beyond the apostolic revelation of Christ. To add to it is, in fact, to leave it behind! To move on from God’s word is to have moved on from *Him*—a calamitous consequence of fallen-human pride and passion. How much better to humbly and happily continue in what has been given, in the blessedness of true communion with the Father and the Son!

Any desire to gain life by conforming to ‘the world’, immediately causes a tendency to add to or subtract from the Scriptures—questioning their authority by whether or not they line up with present theological, philosophical, psychological or sociological trends. It must, of course, be the other way round. The authority of *these* is to be judged by whether or not *they* line up with the Scriptures!

It is God’s written word that is the final authority for all we believe, say and do. Delighting in Him and His revealed truth—with a joyous spirit of reverent awe—brings His own sure promise of life.

Isaiah 66:3

These are the ones I look on with favour; those who are humble and contrite in spirit, and who tremble at My word.

Joyous, awestruck humility in the face of divine revelation is an absolute necessity—foundational, to an experience of true human freedom and fullness!

the false words are never far away

As we look at this whole matter of delight in God and His word, it is of great importance to consider now the horrible, ever-present possibility of false teaching.

In Christ, we no longer belong to ‘the dominion of darkness’. However, the world, the flesh and the devil are always close at hand—and relentlessly contesting the word that has come to the sanctified children of God.

the false words all have their source in the evil one

Jesus decisively exposed the origin of all ungodly desire, the deception it brings and the error that spews forth from it. He said to the error-disseminating Pharisees who were deaf to His word:

John 8:43–44

“Why is My language not clear to you? Because you are unable to hear what I say. You belong to your father the devil, and you want to carry out your father’s desires ... [There] is no

truth in him. When he lies, he speaks his native language, for he is a liar and the father of lies.”

The devil, in His proud and bitter hostility to God and His truth, is ‘the father of lies’. We could comically say that his native language is ‘deceiver-eeze’!

Desiring to ‘be as the Most High God’ and receive the worship of humankind, Satan incessantly distorts the truth of his Maker. As pointed out in Study 5, all he ever does is take what the Creator has said, or established within the creation, and pervert it. He never says or does anything original—only counterfeits the real thing. He creates nothing—only vandalizes what has come from the Creator. He and the demonic powers he commands truly are *terrorists* within God’s good world—and dissemination of humanly disintegrating ‘false words’ is their primary weapon of hatred.

In Studies 3 & 5 we saw the ‘deceptive one’s’ initial assault upon the divine image (Genesis 3:1–5). This involved a direct attack upon the authority of God’s word (a doubt-inciting question); an accusation against God Himself (denying His truthfulness, goodness and generosity); and the false promise of a new mental and moral capacity (a heady vision of personal and vocational transformation). The shocking result was, in effect, a *de-formation* of humankind into the likeness of their deceiver! Fallen-human history has, literally, been *littered* with the tragic consequences of that first vicious deception.

And for the redeemed, to this very day the assault continues with all its subtlety and malignity. The evil one never ceases his crafty operations, with strong and hateful desire against the Father’s sanctified children. His goal? Always to, bring them into spiritual and moral harm—to the dishonour of their Creator and Redeemer.

The apostle Paul was very much aware of the relentless spiritual battle that the saints are engaged in. And with a heart full of holy concern for the welfare of believers at Corinth he wrote:

2 Corinthians 11:3–4, 13–15

“I am afraid that just as Eve was deceived by the serpent's cunning, your minds may somehow be led astray from your sincere and pure devotion to Christ. For if someone comes to you and preaches a Jesus other than the Jesus we preached, or if you receive a different spirit from the one you received, or a different gospel from the one you accepted, you put up with it easily enough ... For such persons are false apostles, deceitful workers, masquerading as apostles of Christ. And no wonder, for Satan himself masquerades as an angel of light. It is not surprising, then, if his servants masquerade as servants of righteousness.”

How ‘the prince of darkness’ loves to come to humankind as their ‘light-bearer’—to pervert, with great cunning, the pure devotion of Christ’s people.

Paul knew that one of the devil’s prime approaches is to intrude into the redeemed community a *false and ruinous word*, promoting a Jesus, a spiritual experience, or a gospel, that contradicts the *apostolic word* already received—and this, by the subtle deception of false teachers who ‘masquerade as servants of righteousness’.

The ‘righteousness’ into which these false teachers call their disciples is, of course, always related to that age-old pursuit of idolatrous and self-serving passion: the *godless* stimulation of *sensory experience*, possession of *material things* and elevation of *personal status*. To continually raise-up teachings that serve such inner-drives, is the ancient deceiver’s wretched and never-ending quest!

there were false teachers during the Ministry of Jesus

When the En-fleshed Word came among us, He entered a situation where error—and its deadening affects—was being endlessly promoted by the religious authorities.

Mention was made above of the Pharisees, who operated according to the instruction of ‘the Scribes’ (‘the teachers of the law’). We spoke also in Study 6 of the proud and disdainful Sadducees. The Jewish leadership in Jesus’ day was made up of these powerful groups, who exercised an oppressive legal control over the life of the people.

In their religious zeal these leaders were fiercely committed to studying and applying the Scriptures. But there was, in reality, no room in their hearts for the word of God (John 8:37). Their intense reverence for the Scriptures amounted to a mere ‘bibliolatry’—an idolatrous and futile ‘worship of the book’, rather than the One whose glory it revealed! They had, virtually, reduced the written word to ‘a book of rules’—which were laboriously extended by implication, and grimly practiced by ‘the faithful’.

To the degree that the Scribes and Pharisees rightly taught ‘the law of Moses’, their role was legitimate. Even some of the scribal additions may have had some value (Matthew 23:23). But being quick to harshly lay heavy burdens upon others they were, also, to say the least, slow, to help them bear their loads. What is more, in their own practice of what they taught they were usually inconsistent,

showy and hypocritical (Matthew 23:1–7). Accordingly, these ‘instructors of the people’ often came under Jesus’ strong condemnation.

On one such occasion He said to them:

Mark 7:7–8

"Isaiah was right when he prophesied about you hypocrites; as it is written: 'They worship Me in vain; their teachings are merely human rules'. You have let go of the commands of God and are holding on to human traditions."

Another time, when Jesus ‘broke the rules’ and tasted the leaders’ aggressive displeasure, He said to them:

John 5:39

"You diligently study the Scriptures because you think that by them you possess eternal life. These are the Scriptures that testify about Me, yet you refuse to come to Me to have life."

For all their labours, they remained ignorant of the true nature of God’s word. They didn’t understand that the written revelation of the LORD’S unfolding redemptive purpose was, actually, centered in the One who now stood before them. He was, Himself, an embodiment of the eternal life they sought to gain through their efforts! They neither possessed that life themselves, nor recognized its glorious presence in their midst. The life-giving Sonship that is at the heart of the creation—and is the central theme of the Scriptures—tragically, held no attraction for them. As teachers, they knew nothing of ‘the word of life’!

During His final week in Jerusalem, Jesus responded to the Sadducees who were attempting to trap Him with a trick question regarding the ‘after life’—which they didn’t believe in. He said:

Matthew 22:29

"You are in error because you do not know the Scriptures or the power of God."

In their case they only accepted the authority of the Pentateuch (the first five books). But Jesus showed that even from the book of Exodus they had ample evidence of life beyond the grave (Matthew 22:31–32). Their teaching not only reflected ignorance of the Scriptures, but also their own corrupt personal passion: an all-consuming pursuit of power and privilege in *this life*. In that, they knew nothing of *eternal hope* and the *present transforming power* of the grace of God within them—and sadly, neither would those they taught.

For this reason, when at one time the disciples were lamenting the fact that they had forgotten to bring enough bread, Jesus said:

Matthew 16:6

"Be careful ... Be on your guard against the yeast of the Pharisees and Sadducees."

At first the disciples thought He was talking about the yeast in physical bread. But Jesus referred them back to His multiplication of five loaves to feed five thousand—a sign of the life-giving bread of His word, that He would ultimately multiply among all peoples! Eventually they understood that He was speaking against ‘the *teaching* of the Pharisees and Sadducees’ (v.12).

To have neglected to bring bread to nourish their bodies was one thing. But to be without the life-giving bread of His word was quite another! That’s why they needed to show great care regarding the presence of false teaching around them. For—like the slow but sure spread of yeast in dough—it would soon pervade their thinking, if they remained unguarded.

Jesus knew that when it came to the fallen-human appetite, there is something strangely enticing about ‘rules’—a kind of ego feeding love-hate attraction. But He had something much better in mind for them than ‘rule-obedience’. Someday soon, they would be liberated by the Spirit into a joyous ‘grace-obedience’ to the will of His Father! Such would be the fruit of the word of life, as opposed to the death-dealing word of the false teachers.

false teachers were present in the OT

Study 5 showed that Israel—set apart to God and His purpose—experienced the intrusion of false proclamation among them again and again. Tragically, all this arose from within the nation itself. The heralds of false teaching consistently used the ‘language of the covenant’ but, actually, spoke against the way of the LORD. Through Jeremiah He declared His mind, saying:

Jeremiah 23:21

"I did not send these prophets, yet they have run with their message; I did not speak to them, yet they have prophesied. But if they had stood in My council, they would have proclaimed My words to My people and would have turned them from their evil ways and from their evil deeds."

Self appointed prophets, *running* with a message they had not received from the LORD—the product of their own darkened minds! (Jeremiah 14:14; 23:36). How different things would have been if these people had ‘stood in His council’ (Jeremiah 23:18, 22)—if they had listened to His voice, and risen to their privilege of being with Him in His ‘holy governance’ of His people!

The LORD continued:

Jeremiah 23:28, 31–32

“What has straw to do with grain? ... I am against the prophets who wag their own tongues and yet declare, “The LORD declares.” ... [They] lead My people astray with their reckless lies, yet I did not send or appoint them. They do not benefit these people in the least.”

They were ‘reckless tongue-waggers’—high-powered, self-sent individuals, who brought no benefit to the LORD’S sanctified community. Their ‘ministry’ was as effective as sowing straw instead of grain!

Through Isaiah, the Divine Lover’s grief was painfully evident, as He lamented:

Isaiah 3:12

“O My people, your guides lead you astray; they turn you from the path.”

The horrible outcome of false teaching within Israel was that the LORD’S inheritance—His ‘treasured possession’—was deceived and living against His way!

Once again, we may underline the polluted inner-source of all false proclamation—whether within Israel or anywhere else:

Isaiah 32:6

Their hearts are bent on evil: They practice ungodliness and spread error concerning the LORD.

The ungodly are ever pressed within themselves to ‘spread the error’ that justifies their own, rebellion against the Holy One. It is so plainly evident, that purveyors of falsehood are always those whose thinking is driven by God-refusing desire.

false teachers are among us today— & will be until the End

It is an absolute fact, that Satan—and the non-truth world-system he presides over—will produce a constant stream of false prophets and teachers who bring a word that is not God’s. These deceptive talkers are, certainly, active in our day, and will be until the close of our present dark age.

Intrusive falsehood will continue to be powerfully presented—with all of the *vocational passion* that a frustrated and desperate rebellious-humanity can muster! And it will continue to be very appealing to the fallen-human appetite.

The Lord Jesus consistently warned of the deceptive influences that would lay in wait for His people. Just as those under the old covenant were continually assaulted by false words, so will those embraced by the new. He said:

Matthew 7:15–16, 21–23

“Watch out for false prophets. They come to you in sheep’s clothing, but inwardly they are ferocious wolves. By their fruit you will recognize them ... A good tree cannot bear bad fruit, and a bad tree cannot bear good fruit ...

“Not everyone who says to me ‘Lord, Lord,’ will enter the kingdom of heaven, but only those who do the will of My Father in heaven. Many will say to Me on that Day, ‘Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in Your name, and in Your name drive out demons and perform many miracles?’ Then I will say to them plainly, ‘I never knew you. Away from Me you evildoers!’ ”

The thing about false prophets is that they often appear at first, to be very ‘flock-like’—those who belong to the Good Shepherd. But they are under it all, vicious devourers.

Jesus warned that although a person’s speaking and acting may be impressive at certain levels—even extremely powerful and miraculous—this, by no means, gives proof of their authenticity. He showed, furthermore, that the sure sign of a *false* prophet is the fruit they bear—words and deeds that are clearly the product of ungodly desire.

The lives of false teachers don’t yield the richly abundant fruits of grace outlined in Study 9: one primary delight and three primary desires. They are ‘lovers of themselves’ (2 Timothy 3:2, 5); unconcerned for the honour of God; pursuers of sensory experience, material things and personal status; and see other people as a means to their own ‘glorious’ ends. Bearers of ‘false words’ will also be bearers of such ‘bad fruit’. They have, in fact, never belonged to One they seem to proclaim—even though they may earnestly believe that they do represent Him. The one they have embraced, however, is a ‘god’ or a ‘Jesus’ seen through the eyes of a fallen-human agenda. They will ultimately hear the One they have, in fact, refused say, “I never knew you. Away from Me you evildoers!”

The sad reality is that a great number of people will be taken in by, these persuasive servants of the evil one. Jesus again gave warning, saying:

Matthew 24:11, 24–25

“Many false prophets will appear and deceive many people ... False Christs and false prophets will appear and perform great signs and miracles to deceive even the elect—if that were possible. See, I have told you ahead of time.”

Yes, even the elect, may be seduced by them—at least for a while. So impressive are their exploits!

This ever-present danger that the Lord spoke of was definitely fulfilled within the early Christian communities. Paul constantly battled against the intrusion of false teaching within the churches he cared for. He had also received revelation from the Lord regarding the nature of these unwelcome influences—and boldly declared:

1 Timothy 4:1–2

“The Spirit clearly says that in later times some will abandon the faith and follow deceiving spirits and things taught by demons. Such things come through hypocritical liars, whose consciences have been seared as with a hot iron.”

There will be those who, although initially attracted to the gospel, will—incited by demonic powers—‘abandon the faith’ in favour of devilishly inspired notions. Those who initiate these things among the churches may wear a mask of orthodoxy—appearing to hold to the established word—but behind their pretense is a harmful intention to deceive. Such people have so long suppressed the truth, that their consciences have lost all sensitivity to the way of God. Wholeheartedly believing their own lie, the danger of their presence is extremely great.

In Paul’s experience the activity of false teachers was far from uncommon, and usually devastating in its effects. To his co-worker Titus he had to gravely say:

Titus 1:10–11

“There are many rebellious people, mere talkers and deceivers ... [They] are ruining whole households by teaching things they ought not to teach—and that for the sake of dishonest gain.

Ruinous talkers, with an eye for personal advantage—and, disturbingly, *many* of them!

Further assessing the nature of these people the apostle continued:

Titus 1:15–16

“To the pure, all things are pure, but to those who are corrupted and do not believe, nothing is pure. In fact, both their minds and consciences are corrupted. They claim to know God, but by their actions they deny Him. They are detestable, disobedient and unfit for doing anything good.”

The false teachers Paul had in mind, had lost their capacity to think clearly with regard to the creation. They were sensitive to impurity where there was none, and insensitive where it was plainly present. The problem was again, centred in a conscience that had been rendered dysfunctional. Very religious, but manifestly godless, they had no capacity to operate truly within God’s world—let alone within His sanctified community.

Paul highlighted to Timothy a characteristic of all who move from the truth, saying:

1 Timothy 6:3–5

“Anyone who teaches [falsely] and does not agree to the sound instruction of our Lord Jesus Christ and to godly teaching, is conceited and understands nothing.”

Every departure from the given ‘healthful word’ of the apostles is, clearly, the result of fallen-human *conceit*. In this there is no ‘fear of the Lord’, which is, itself, ‘the beginning of wisdom’ (Proverbs 9:10; Psalm 111:10). It is true, that, those who show proud disregard for divine revelation do, actually, ‘understand nothing’.

Paul exposes the *personal situation* of false teachers by declaring:

2 Timothy 3:6–8, 13

“They are the kind who worm their way into homes and gain control over weak-willed women. [They are those] who are loaded down with sins and are swayed by all kinds of evil desires, always learning but never able to acknowledge the truth ... These people oppose the truth—people of depraved minds, who, as far as the faith is concerned, are rejected ... [Such] evildoers and imposters will go from bad to worse, deceiving and being deceived.”

Living always under the burden of unresolved sin, and led on by all manner of passions, false teachers can never arrive at the truth—though they keep filling their minds with ideas! They, clearly, have a desperate need to dominate vulnerable people, and cunningly position themselves towards that end. In all this, they have no place at all within the redeemed community. Spiritually, they are set upon a

downward course. The more they deceive, the more they, themselves, fall into ever-deepening deception!

The apostle Peter brought his own word of warning, saying:

2 Peter 2:1–3, 10, 12, 15, 17–18

“[There] will be false teachers among you. They will secretly introduce destructive heresies, even denying the Sovereign Lord who bought them ... Many will follow their shameful ways and will bring the way of truth into disrepute. In their greed these teachers will exploit you with stories they have made up ... Bold and arrogant ... these people blaspheme in matters they do not understand ... They have left the straight way and wandered off ... They mouth empty, boastful words and, by appealing to the lustful desires of the [flesh], they entice people who are just escaping from those who live in error ... These people are springs without water.”

Once more, the false teachers are exposed as those who craftily intrude their disintegrating word into redeemed communities—disregarding the liberating work of their Redeemer!

In their ignorance, and with boastful self-confidence, they show no due respect for divine revelation. Full of proud, empty talk and—as always—appealing to fallen-human passion, they are a great peril to young believers. For all their enticing promises, they bring nothing that will satisfy the deepest need of anyone. Tragically though, many will join them in a life lived against the way of God.

Then, we have the earnest appeal of Jude:

Jude 4, 11–13, 16–19

“Certain persons ... have secretly slipped in among you. They are godless people, who change the grace of our God into license for immorality and deny Jesus Christ our only Sovereign and Lord ... They have taken the way of Cain ... They are clouds without rain, blown along by the wind; autumn trees without fruit and uprooted—twice dead. They are wild waves of the sea, foaming up their shame ... These people are grumblers and faultfinders; they follow their own evil desires; they boast about themselves and flatter others for their own advantage ... [Dearly loved] friends, remember what the apostles of our Lord Jesus Christ foretold. They said to you, ‘In the last times there will be scoffers who will follow their own ungodly desires.’ These are the people who divide you, who follow mere natural instincts and do not have the Spirit.”

With their own passions being supreme in their affections they are Like Cain, seeing the purpose and way of God as irrelevant and to be scornfully set aside. They are rainless clouds; fruitless trees; a wild, raging sea, shameful in all they do. Knowing nothing of the Spirit, they pervert the grace of God—making it a license for sin. They are boastful, critical and manipulative, the trademark of their work always being *division*. Having crept into the midst of the Father’s dearly loved household, they are a polluting, ruinous and disintegrating presence.

Finally, we see that John too, was careful to enlighten his readers, writing:

1 John 4:1, 4–5

“[Dearly loved] friends ... many false prophets have gone out into the world ... They are from the world and therefore speak from the viewpoint of the world, and the world listens to them. We are from God, and whoever knows God listen to us; but whoever is not from God does not listen to us. This is how we recognise the Spirit of truth and the spirit of falsehood.

The evil one has sent out his prophets. Recognition of their teaching is a simple matter: what they say is not in line with apostolic revelation. It is always the case that those who belong to ‘the world’ are not interested in being limited to the ‘given word’—but delight in proclaiming what makes sense to worldly minds.

false teachers have great condemnation awaiting them

The offspring and servants of that ‘ancient intruding serpent’, the devil—who, promote falsehood and corruption—will incur great judgment on the Final Day. As with every unrepentant human rebel, their misery will be in direct proportion to their willful violation of the truth they were created for.

The following scriptures speak for themselves:

Isaiah 5:20–21

Woe to those who call evil good and good evil, who put darkness for light and light for darkness, who put bitter for sweet and sweet for bitter. Woe to those who are wise in their own eyes and clever in their own sight.

Jude 4, 11–13

[Their] condemnation was written about long ago ... Woe to them! ... [They are] wandering stars, for whom the blackest darkness has been reserved forever.

2 Peter 2:3, 12–13

Their condemnation has long been hanging over them, and their [ruin] has not been sleeping ... They are like unreasoning animals, creatures of instinct, born only to be caught and destroyed ... They will be paid back for the harm they have done.

2 Corinthians 11:15b

Their end will be what their actions deserve.

For Paul, the most corrupt thing any person could ever do, would be to pervert the gospel of Christ—that word, which reveals the glory of the grace of God and promotes His honour and praise in His world! And so the apostle rightly declares:

Galatians 1:8–9

“Even if we or an angel from heaven should preach a gospel other than the one we preached to you, let that person be eternally condemned! As we have already said, so now I say again: If anybody is preaching to you a gospel other than what you accepted, let that person be eternally condemned!”

Speaking of the false teachers in His own day, our Lord said:

Matthew 15:13

“Every plant that My heavenly Father has not planted will be pulled up by the roots.”

There will be those planted and ‘flourishing’ among the people of God, who are not ‘a planting of the LORD’ (Isaiah 61:3)—bearing a word that is not apostolic. A terrible uprooting awaits all such intruders of false words—who are ‘devil-planted’ pretenders in the midst of the saints (Matthew 13:39).

John, having faithfully recorded the testimony of Jesus to the churches in ‘the Revelation’, solemnly says:

Revelation 22:18–19

“I warn everyone who hears the words of the prophecy of this book: If any one of you adds anything to them, God will add to you the plagues described in this book. And if any one of you takes words away from this book of prophecy, God will take away from you your share in the tree of life and in the holy city, which are described in this book.”

As was stated previously, addition to, or subtraction from, the revealed word of God always arises from fallen-human pride and passion; that is, from exalting human thinking above divine wisdom, in order to have things operating according to a human agenda. Those who dare to act with such blatant disregard for the Holy One and His word, will, find themselves to be inheritors of cursing rather than blessing—in both time and eternity. Ultimately, the possession they imagined to have been theirs, will be taken out of their hands.

In this world, false words and the corrupt actions that accompany them have *abounded*, and will continue to—tragically causing ‘little ones’ in the faith to stumble. “Such things must come,” Jesus said, “but woe to the person through whom they come!” (Matthew 18:7).

We must be on guard against deception —alert & given to God & His word

The history of God’s people is sadly one of receiving rich and abundant revelation and enjoying its glorious fruits among them—but then, falling prey to deception and the barrenness it brings. The Scriptures constantly urge us to stand against this powerful and persistent tendency.

relentless action of the arch-deceiver—the devil

The approaches of the evil one are so subtle and deceptive—such as, raising-up brilliant, colourful and persuasive personalities, creating the most alluring and fascinating enticements, and engineering situations of acute vulnerability. From the time of the first couple to this very day, such assaults upon the image of God—particularly the redeemed—have been, and will continue to be, relentless.

Satan’s beguiling power is so great that Paul was *shocked* by the sudden about face of the Galatian believers—after they’d received such abundant revelation! (Galatians 3:1–5). He could only say to them:

Galatians 1:6–7

“I am astonished that you are so quickly deserting the one who called you by the grace of Christ and are turning to a different gospel—which is really no gospel at all. Evidently some people are throwing you into confusion and are trying to pervert the gospel of Christ.”

A community thrown into confusion—a sure sign of devilish activity!

our need for constant vigilance

Because of Satan's relentless activity, great subtlety and deceptive power, unwavering watchfulness is required if his strategies are to be unsuccessful. To diminish this need in any way is to be placed in a position of grave spiritual danger.

By the time Paul was concluding his third major missionary journey, his experiences of the devil's assaults caused him to make an earnest appeal to the assembled elders of the church in Ephesus, saying:

Acts 20:29–32

"I know that after I leave, savage wolves will come in among you and not spare the flock. Even from among your own number some will arise and distort the truth in order to draw disciples away after them. So be on your guard! Remember that for three years I never stopped warning each of you night and day with tears. Now I commit you to God and to the word of His grace, which can build you up and give you an inheritance among all those who are sanctified."

Already, we have heard of Jesus' warning about those who come in sheep's clothing, but inwardly are ferocious wolves. Paul knew that this was precisely what would happen in the idolatrous city of Ephesus. The evil one would not leave the work of grace in that place uncontested!

Deceptive, disciple-hungry people from among their own number would be raised up, and so, focused watchfulness by the elders was absolutely essential. This community of sanctified children of God could only be protected, as the soul strengthening 'word of grace' was *guarded* among them.

When that church was first formed, many burned their collections of dangerous godless literature—in all, valued at 50,000 days wages! (Acts 19:19–20). That same determined and decisive spirit was now needed if the community's spiritual health was to be maintained. And today—with the many powerful forms of media all around, seeking to intrude their godless message into our minds—a similar spirit is, surely, required.

Paul said to the Colossian believers:

Colossians 2:8

"See to it that no one takes you captive through hollow and deceptive philosophy, which depends on human tradition and the elemental spiritual forces of this world rather than on Christ."

'Hollow and deceptive' is, indeed, a fitting way to describe so many of the philosophical and theological traditions that are all around us—empty, false and Christless words that are the product of dark spiritual forces. At least some measure of captivity to these is an ever-present possibility, wherever there is undisciplined and unguarded thinking.

The writer of Hebrews made a solemn appeal to his new covenant readers, saying:

Hebrews 2:1

"We must pay more careful attention, therefore, to what we have heard, so that we do not drift away."

Here an extremely important principle may be observed: The degree to which we are not *carefully attentive* to the word of God, is the degree to which we will *drift away* from it. The world, the flesh and the devil will see to that! Such is the evil one's crafty work: a slow, almost imperceptible drift; until finally, the word of life has no *real place* in the heart—displaced, by the 'other words' that have subtly been introduced!

Peter, urged vigilance and discernment in the face of false teaching. He said:

2 Peter 3:17–18

"[Dearly loved friends] be on your guard so that you may not be carried away by the error of the lawless and fall from your [own stability]. But grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. To Him be glory both now and for ever!"

How easily we may be *carried away* and *brought down* by lawless words that stimulate our passions! But on guard, and given to the apostolic word, there will be growth towards human maturity—that will forever put a song of worship in our hearts to our Lord and Saviour!

listening to the 'Inner-Witness'

John encouraged believers not to mindlessly give 'believing acceptance' to just, anyone, who might speak convincingly with authority and passion; but rather, to depend upon the indwelling Spirit. He said:

1 John 2:20, 26–27

“You have an anointing from the Holy One, and all of you know the truth. ... I am writing these things to you about those who are trying to lead you astray. As for you, the anointing you received from Him remains in you, and you do not need anyone to teach you. But as His anointing teaches you about all things and as that anointing is real, not counterfeit—just as it has taught you, remain in Him.”

When it comes to being on guard against ‘worldly-wise’ teachers, there is a persistent divine-provision that has been made: the inner witness of the Holy Spirit. Because of this ‘anointing’ every sanctified child of God, actually, knows the truth! They may not know the truth ‘propositionally’—that is, having knowledge of all the facts and ideas that express it—but they do know it deeply within themselves. In being set apart to the Father and His purpose, the Spirit brings to them an authentic inner-witness to the truth of Christ. They have a kind of built-in ‘spiritual truth-detector’!

This inner-witness is also, on the other hand, something of a ‘spiritual lie-detector’. So then, whenever we listen to a teacher, we should take seriously any ‘inner-disturbance’ that comes. If this happens it must always be: “Back to ‘the apostle’s doctrine’—back to Christ, as He really is!”

Of course, such inner-alarm is not always an infallible guide. It may simply be a normal reaction due to hearing something different to what we’ve previously accepted. Today, we are, in fact, *all* influenced by particular theological cultures, flavours and systems—which although derived from the Scriptures, *do* have their own emphasis. This reality must be understood, and not blindly disregarded.

The principle is sound, however: If something doesn’t seem to be right, there’s every chance that it isn’t! The only safe thing to do is to be fully and joyously assured of the grace of God (that is, filled with the Spirit)² and go back to the Scriptures—looking at the disturbing matter in terms of the ‘big picture’: a Genesis to Revelation perspective, rather than isolated passages or verses. The question must always be, “How does this fit in with ‘the Great Story of God’?”

In addition, it must also be realized that there is room for *variety of opinion* within a faithful adherence to the ‘essential truths’ of Christ and His gospel. It is to these *essential* things that the Spirit, primarily, gives His ‘inner-witness’.

decisive refusal of whatever is not truly apostolic

Paul, once again, provides clear direction—this time to his co-worker Titus, in relation to certain false notions circulating around the churches. Here, he simply says:

Titus 3:9

“Avoid foolish controversies ... for these are unprofitable and useless.”

Things like embellished Old Testament stories had become fascinating to some, and were being used to promote wrong understanding. Titus was to ‘rebuke sharply’ those who taught such things (1:13). To get caught up in these things himself, in any way, would distract from his task of faithfully teaching the ‘given word’.

To Timothy he had to say:

2 Timothy 2:16

“Avoid godless chatter, because those who indulge in it will become more and more ungodly.”

Paul regarded the false teachings that were present in Ephesus as mere ‘godless chatter’. Even though Christian terminology was used, these ideas were, in fact, dangerous and would spread like ‘gangrene’ (v.17)—bringing progressive spiritual decay to any who gave their minds to them. Timothy was not to entertain these things in any way.

Moses knew, of Israel’s need to reject false instruction and said to the people:

Deuteronomy 13:1–3

“If a prophet, or one who foretells by dreams, appears among you and announces to you a miraculous sign or wonder, and if the sign or wonder takes place, and the prophet says, “Let us follow other gods ... and let us worship them,” you must not listen to the words of that prophet or dreamer. The LORD your God is testing you to find out whether you love Him with all your heart and with all your soul.

The evil one is very capable of giving dreams and working signs and wonders to suit his cause. The LORD would allow him to do such things as a test of Israel’s faithfulness. So, they must be careful not to give attention to miracle-working prophets, whose word would rob the LORD of His people’s affections. The same divine testing takes place today among His saints. Faith tested is faith strengthened (James 1:3), as choices to love God and His word are made in the face of deception.

² Our next two studies will deal with how this assurance may be maintained, in the midst of our own personal complexities.

Isaiah too, directed the ears of Israel to the Holy One, rather than deceptive words. Requiring them to return to the *given word*, he said:

Isaiah 8:19

“When someone tells you to consult mediums and spiritists, who whisper and mutter, should not a people enquire of their God?”

As we saw earlier on, they were to flee to the ‘the law and the testimony’! (v. 20). Anything else would be great folly and wickedness. Besides, why would they not earnestly seek His word? There, the will of their Redeemer was made known: provision of forgiveness, the worship they were made for, light for their path and blessing instead of cursing. Nothing of this would be gained from the ‘whisperers’ and ‘mutterers’!

To the Romans Paul wrote:

Romans 16:16–17

“Watch out for those who cause divisions and put obstacles in your way that are contrary to the teaching you have learned. Keep away from them.

Whatever is contrary to apostolic teaching is, in effect, an *obstacle* in the way of the saints. It will keep them from making progress towards of the goal of conformity to Christ. The divisive speakers of such falsehood must be avoided.

Referring to the Scribes and Pharisees, Jesus said:

Matthew 15:14

“Leave them; they are blind guides. If the blind lead the blind, both will fall into a pit.”

These sightless leaders had no capacity to direct anyone—except into a pit of error and human dysfunctionality! “Leave them,” Jesus said.

Later, John spoke with the same directness, saying:

2 John 10–11

“If anyone comes to you and does not bring [the teaching of Christ], do not take them into your house or welcome them. Anyone who welcomes them shares in their wicked work.

The ‘welcome’ mentioned here, had to do with receiving traveling teachers into one’s home while they were operating in a particular area. This kind of extended hospitality given to peddlers of a false word, would amount to participation in their wickedness. A generous spirit is never appropriate in the face of deception.

Then finally, Proverbs brings a wise word concerning this whole matter, simply stating:

Proverbs 18:17

“The first to present a case seems right, till another comes forward and asks questions.”

If there is one thing that is absolutely essential in the face of false teaching, it is questions! Ideas that are brilliantly, colourfully and persuasively presented may seem so right—until the questions come: “who, what, why, where, when, how?” All teachers must be able to demonstrate that their teaching has a legitimate place within the Great Story of God—and it should always be, in fact, proclaimed within that very Story!

focused on the plumb-line—the strong, transforming word of His grace

Just as a builder may find the true vertical line of a structure by suspending a weight from a string, so we also may discern the true line of things *spiritually*, through use of a God-given ‘plumb-line’ established in the Scriptures—that is, the *word* which reveals the dynamic and liberating grace of God in Christ! Whatever doesn’t line up with this word is not a legitimate expression of apostolic teaching.

The word of God’s grace is one which gloriously declares all that He has done, is doing and has promised to do, to bring His redeemed children into their inheritance in His Son—finally on the Last Day, but also, progressively into the enjoyment of it, even now! It is the word that has already been proclaimed in Study 8: the *lavish* provision of a new human liberty, identity, security, capacity and destiny—all, in that En-fleshed, Righteous, Sin-Bearing, Risen, Ascended, Glorified and Reigning Eternal Son!

This word of grace has its own transforming power. It is a divinely and generously given word of both *promise* and *command*—one that *liberates* desperate sinners into a glad participation in the way of God. In it there is nothing harsh or oppressive. On the contrary, it calls a person into joyous re-humanization in Christ—that is, into fulfillment of their high human calling.

It can be said that if teaching comes that is *only* ‘don’t do that’, or ‘do this’, it is *not* in line with the true apostolic word. Then again, neither is teaching rightly aligned if it is *only*: “*God* has done *this!*” The true word of grace is never either one or the other, but *both*. It is, always, first and foremost: “*God* has done, is doing and will do *this* in Christ!” Then: “*Therefore*, by the Spirit, you *may* now *cease* to do

what is unrighteous, and *may do* what is righteous; and because you now *may*, you *must*—for it is what you have been *set apart* to and *called* to in Christ!" 'Not doing' or 'doing' will *never* bring salvation. Both, however, are the *glorious expression* of salvation freely received—and without them there is no true knowledge of the grace of God! Any proclamation that does not come in this way, and bear these fruits, may well be—at least in principle—false teaching.³

The writer of Hebrews encouraged his readers to not be diverted from the reality of God's grace towards them, saying:

"Do not be carried away by all kinds of strange teachings. It is good for our hearts to be strengthened by grace."

For them, the temptation was to become caught up in 'strange teachings' that were circulating at the time. These promoted Jewish ritualistic practices centred on the eating of certain foods—teaching heavily weighted with a 'don't do'/'do' emphasis (v.9b; Colossians 2:16–17). Such things would never strengthen their hearts to fulfill their holy calling. Only the liberating word of grace would do that. True food for the soul!

Peter also, encouraging his readers to take hold of the given word, said:

1 Peter 5:12

"This is the true grace of God. Stand fast in it."

In the midst of the many trials they were facing, their primary need was God's 'true grace'—full of glorious eternal promise, which opened them up to life-giving vocational command. Only this would keep them 'strong, firm and steadfast' to the end (1 Peter 5:10).

Yes, the redeemed must assess all teaching according to that God-given plumb-line: the apostolic word, which declares the sustaining and transforming grace of God in Christ.

aware of a further danger

It is, of course, appropriate not only to personally *avoid* false teaching, but also, at times, to *confront* it. This matter of confronting 'heresy' (seriously wrong doctrine) relates to a future study that deals with the role of 'shepherds of the flock'. It may be helpful, though, to include it here as we speak of the dangers of false doctrine. Why? Because in becoming sensitive to *this* danger we may also fall into another—an unfortunate attitude that can develop from *concern* over what others believe and teach.

Writing to Timothy, Paul said that his command to suppress false teaching was with a view to the promotion of *love* among God's people, rather than controversy (1 Timothy 1:3–7). Clearly, however, it would be most inappropriate if those responsible for dealing with falsehood were, them-selves, to be devoid of love in doing so! Great vigilance is, indeed, required for the maintenance of right doctrine—but in the process, so is maintenance of personal security in the Lord and a generous and gracious spirit!

Jealousy for the truth of God's word, rightly, creates a fiery concern for the honour of His name and the good of His people. However, we are told that where false teaching is detected, those concerned must be 'gently instructed' (2 Timothy 2:24–26). The ever-suspicious and ungracious spirit of a 'heresy-hunter' is never helpful. Such an attitude merely results in self-obsessed harassment of others—regardless of how carefully it is disguised with opening-lines like, "I am saying this in love" etc. Secure in the grace of God, our resistance to plain error is, no doubt, to be firm. But it is never to be 'jumpy' and without affectionate regard for the erring person. And in all this—as previously mentioned—a distinction must be made between what is essential to the truth of the gospel and what is not. A lot of heresy hunting is, actually, more about defense of one's own theological culture, than an urgent protection of the faith.

Of course where false teaching is willfully and arrogantly persisted in to the serious harm of others, continued goodwill does, finally, become impossible—as it did for our Lord, and each of the apostles throughout their ministries.

It may be added here that sometimes our personal disturbance over the opinion of another, simply has to do with what could be called a 'barking dog' reaction. To explain: when dogs have had an unpleasant previous experience, they tend to immediately start barking whenever it threatens to be repeated. The same can be the case with us. If we have, in the past, been the victim of an oppressive 'theological encounter'—and have not adequately dealt with the offense of it—when someone else appears on the scene with the same ('wretched') view, the dog in us starts barking! We have an irrational reaction to a situation that need not have become an issue.

³ Soon, we will have a study which deals with how we may 'not do' and 'do' in a spirit of freedom—without being oppressed by a sense of 'having to perform'.

Further on in the series, we will see how important it is to be discerning of—and deal with in the gospel—such irrational and habitual patterns within ourselves. It will be shown how decisive self-examination, and immediate response to the grace and call of God, is the way to increasingly enjoy relational liberty in Christ—in this case, *freedom to love* in spite of painful, past theological experiences!

* * * * *

Having dealt with our two key concepts and themes related to them, we have now come to the body of our study. Here we are to first of all, look at what the Scriptures themselves teach us about the way the Holy Spirit brings the word of God to us.

This will be done by filling out the apostle Paul's definitive statement quoted earlier:

2 Timothy 3:16–17

“All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, so that the servant of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work.”

These two verses certainly give us the very best and most comprehensive statement we have, of the Scriptures' great usefulness in enabling the saints to fulfill their, holy calling.

So let's look at each of these transforming functions of God's written word, one at a time, and the Spirit's intimate activity in ministering them to us.

remaining fully assured of the GRACE we have received,
& so, eagerly receiving the Holy Spirit's ministry of:

- teaching

(revelation of the truth)

—*opening our minds to receive 'the wisdom that is from above'; bringing the joy of new or fresh understanding*

We have seen that with the liberation of our conscience in regeneration, our hearts and minds have been opened to receive the word of God with a rich vocational agenda: to know the truth that will conform us to the likeness of the Son, for the Father's pleasure, glory and praise!

Now, we will see just how the *Holy Spirit* is presently at work to fulfill this grand priority—firstly, through His work as the Teacher-Of-The-Word in the name of Jesus. In this, we will be exposed to the wonder of having Him with us and within us every moment of every day, facilitating the ongoing teaching / discipling ministry of the Son towards us. For all who are assured of the lavishly outpoured grace of God in Christ, the Spirit's ongoing ministry is one that is, indeed, to be eagerly received. It is, in fact, the ongoing action of God's great grace towards us!

enlightenment—a merciful fruit of regeneration

How awful if we had been left in the darkness of our own hostility to the truth! It surely is the mercy of God that has delivered us from a willful and miserable ignorance of Him and His way—revealing to us the riches of His wisdom in both creation and redemption.

a redeemed people created, kept dynamic & finally, consummated by revelation

Divine revelation is absolutely central to any transforming experience of the grace of God in Christ. Without it we are, at best, left merely with 'christian ideas' and the cultural language and behaviours that these promote.

Revelation is, indeed, the most urgent need that *any* human being has, and continues to be so for all of the Father's regenerate and sanctified children. There may be many needs among the Lord's people at any time in history; but supreme above them all—and at the heart of each one—is the indispensable requirement of the Holy Spirit's immediate and direct revelatory ministry.

Before regeneration we lived by physical sight. But for those born of the Spirit a new realm has been entered into. Physical sight still brings its pleasures, but the regenerate child of God knows—and can only ever know—what is uniquely of Christ, by the *spiritual sight* that comes through faith in the revealed word of God (2 Corinthians 5:7).

As we've seen, we *live* by every word that comes from the mouth of our Maker (Matthew 4:4)—that word which brings *sight* of His invisible kingdom. Each day of their life a child of God must *see* something! There is no 'accumulated knowledge' that is of any value. 'The faith' is something that must be *daily revealed* to the heart by the Holy Spirit. There is no other way to participate in the righteousness, peace and joy of the kingdom of God.

The revelation that *creates* us as God's people, is what *keeps* us *dynamic* in Christ (alive and moving forward), and will finally, be the means by which our holy calling is *consummated* on the Last Day—when we will know as we are fully known (1 Corinthians 13:13). WHAT IS SEEN ON THAT FINAL DAY WILL ENTIRELY TRANSFORM OUR HUMANITY IN A MOMENT—FOREVER!!!

When Jesus was physically among us, He delighted to see the beginnings of the new era of revelation in which we are living today. As His disciples began to understand the things of the kingdom, He said:

Matthew 11:25–26

“I praise You, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, because You have hidden these things from the wise and learned, and revealed them to little children. Yes, Father, for this was Your good pleasure.”

What great mercy it *is* for us to have our minds enlightened. To be enabled—by the Spirit—to gladly receive ‘all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge’ that are in Christ (Colossians 2:3).

the gift of repentance—the beginning of a new mind

In Study 7 it was said that when anyone comes to repentance, the deepest revolution the human spirit can know takes place—there is a complete change of mind towards God and His truth. Whereas once a person desired to live *against* Him, His word and His way, they now want to live *for* Him, *according to* His word and way. The truth is no longer resisted, but wholeheartedly embraced; no more suppressed, but delighted in as the way of life itself! This powerful mental reversal is, in fact, the *first flush*, the *initial surge*, of a whole new mind.

1 Corinthians 2:14, 16

The person without the Spirit does not accept the things that come from the Spirit of God but considers them foolishness, and cannot understand them because they are discerned only through the Spirit ... But we have the mind of Christ.

The new mind that comes to those who have received the Spirit, is nothing less than the mind of Christ Himself! It is the heritage of a child of God to have their thinking increasingly renewed and enriched by His word—until it is wholly aligned with the wisdom of the Indwelling-Redeeming-Son!

the Regenerator's ongoing enlightening work—in Jesus' name

Before our Lord went to the Cross and rose from the dead, He told His disciples that He would ask the Father to give them the gift of the Spirit—who would continue His discipling work towards them, stirring their hearts and enlightening their minds. He said:

John 14:16, 26

“I will ask the Father, and He will give you another Advocate to help you and be with you forever—the Spirit of truth ... The Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in My name, will teach you all things and remind you of everything I have said to you.”

This One, the Spirit of truth, was to be ‘another Advocate’. Until then, Jesus had been the Supreme Advocate among them, day by day speaking to them on behalf of His Father—helping them to understand the great mysteries of the kingdom (Matthew 13:11). But now the Spirit would join Him in this role—daily bringing the Father's truth to their hearts and minds, and reminding them of what they'd already been taught.

Again He said:

John 15:26

“When the Advocate comes, whom I will send to you from the Father—the Spirit of truth who goes out from the Father—He will testify about Me.”

Jesus would send the Spirit to give witness to the Father's truth: that glorious redemptive-purpose centred in, Himself—the Son.

And again:

John 16:13–14

“When He, the Spirit of truth, comes, He will guide you into all the truth. He will not speak on His own; He will speak only what He hears, and He will tell you what is to come. He will glorify Me because it is from Me that He will receive what He will make known to you.”

Having received the Spirit, Christ's people will be guided by Him ‘into all the truth’. Not into ‘all truth’, but all ‘*the* truth’ concerning the Father's purpose for His entire creation, in the Son. Everything the Spirit reveals of the Father's will and way, will come from the Son—Himself, the Word of His Father.

John later gave testimony to this reality operating among the Lord's Spirit-indwelt people, saying:

1 John 2:20

“You have an anointing from the Holy One, and all of you know the truth.”

The Holy Spirit delights to make known to us the truth of who the Father and the Son are, what They have done, are doing and will do; what is true about us—once in Adam and now in Christ—and what we are called to; and what is true about the world and God’s purpose for it. That is, all of the grand things we have been seeing in the previous studies, and much more! By the Spirit’s Ministry, we may have the ongoing joy of new, or fresh, understanding in relation to God, our-selves, others and the world around us!

It must be said, however, that what is happening in our reception of God’s word is much more than the grasping of *information*—or, even a *glad* understanding of *grand ideas*. It is rather, a matter of being given divine *revelation*! The gaining of information, and understanding of ideas, may be merely a *mental* exercise. Receiving revelation certainly involves the use of our minds, but it is also very much a *relational* matter. What is truly ‘revelational’ is also, immediately, ‘relational’. God’s desire is to *speak* to us, and in so doing, to bring us into a *free-spirited relationship* with Him, and others. The mere comprehension of biblical facts and ideas will never be personally transforming.

The Spirit, actually, desires to teach us at all times. He brings to our minds what has been taught previously, refreshing us in what we know or adding to our understanding. And as always, this is so that we may continually be in the enjoyment of God’s Presence, and be able to do His will.

Jesus declared what would be the outcome of the Spirit’s teaching and the disciples’ ongoing response to it:

John 8:31–32

“You will know the truth, and the truth will set you free.”

This is the goal of all the Spirit’s communications—freedom in the Son to fulfill our high human calling!

post-Resurrection foretastes of the Spirit’s future work

After the Resurrection the disciples experienced something of what would continue to be the case for all who are in Christ, with the Spirit stirring within them in His name. They said:

Luke 24:32

“Were not our hearts burning within us while He talked with us ... and opened the Scriptures to us?”

Luke 24:45

He opened their minds so they could understand the Scriptures.

By the Spirit, Christ is ever-wanting to open the minds of His people to what the Scriptures have recorded of divine speech and action, throughout redemption’s great Story!

the Father’s rich revelatory agenda

During the Old Covenant era, it was God’s delight as Israel’s Redeemer to enlighten His people—even though they so often strayed from what was made known. Amos was full of zeal to remind them of the incredible privilege they were given, declaring:

Amos 4:13

“[He is the One] who reveals His thoughts to [human beings].”

He loves to make known His mind to those He has called into vocational partnership with Himself. Anything less would be unthinkable for the image of God.

Proverbs 2:10

Wisdom will enter your heart, and knowledge will be pleasant to your soul.

The Spirit’s enlightening work has, certainly, brought enormous pleasure to the souls of the redeemed! Now, however, within the New Covenant age, the treasures of divine revelation are even richer—and more thrilling to the soul.

1 Corinthians 2:9–12

As it is written: “No eye has seen, no ear has heard, no mind has conceived what God has prepared for those who love Him”—but God has revealed it to us by His Spirit. The Spirit searches all things, even the deep things of God. For who knows the thoughts of another human being except that person’s own spirit within? In the same way no one knows the thoughts of God except the Spirit of God. We have not received the spirit of the world, but the Spirit who is from God, that we may understand what God has freely given us.

What the Spirit makes known today to the Father’s loved ones in Christ, has never, entered into the fallen-human imagination. There are depths of His heart, mind and will that He yearns to reveal to His children, and the Spirit’s delight is to communicate these. What He brings has nothing to do with ‘the wisdom of the world’. His constant pleasure is to assure His saints of all they have freely received in Christ—the opposite of what the world is declaring every day!

Paul's prayer for the Ephesian believers tells us much in this regard.

Ephesians 3:18 [NASB]

[I pray that you] may be able to comprehend with all the saints what is the breadth and length and height and depth, and to know the love of Christ which surpasses knowledge.

The earlier context of Ephesians 3 (verses 7 & 8) shows what the 'breadth, length, height and depth' refers to—the boundless and unsearchable riches of God's grace to us in His Son. Paul's prayer is that, by the Spirit, the Father's set-apart ones may, together, enjoy a 'full ability' to mentally 'grasp hold of' the vast dimensions of this grace—and in that to, somehow, experience in their deepest parts a knowledge of the love of Christ that is beyond imagining!

Then there is Paul's *great confidence* in the Spirit's work, expressed as he wrote to the Lord's people in Rome.

Romans 16:25–27

Now to Him who is able to establish you in accordance with my gospel, the message I proclaim about Jesus Christ, in keeping with the revelation of the mystery hidden for long ages past, but now revealed and made known through the prophetic writings by the command of the eternal God, so that all the [nations] might come to [the obedience of faith]—to the only wise God be glory forever through Jesus Christ!

Here is the great historical goal of the Father's revelatory activity: that everything foreshadowed in the Old Testament Scriptures, fulfilled in Christ and now proclaimed by His people, may bring *all nations* to obey the command to believe—and forever worship Him for the wonders of His wisdom!

the people of God—always under instruction

In Study 1 we saw that there is no legalism in God, or in His written word, the Bible. His law—or 'torah'—was not *legal legislation* but rather, *instruction in His way*. In it He was giving them revelation of 'the way of life'—a rich gift to them as His people. Although He certainly required their obedience, His law was never to be seen merely as 'a heavy legal obligation' imposed upon them.

In redemptive history, whenever the Redeemer has acted on behalf of His people, He has then continually taught and instructed them on the basis of what He has done. Revelation of His grace is invariably with a view to the redeemed being conformed to His way—that they may know the blessedness of relational intimacy and vocational partnership with Him.

Isaiah 2:3

He will teach us His ways, so that we may walk in His paths.

Understanding of His ways is given exclusively, with a view to His people living according to them. In the enjoyment of His grace this is, in fact, all they desire.

Daniel 2:21–22

He gives wisdom to the wise and knowledge to the discerning. He reveals deep and hidden things.

To those whom He has given wisdom and discernment, He delights to give more! The Redeemer is relentless in His intention to reveal His glory through His instructed and enlightened servants.

Psalms 25:14

The LORD confides in those who fear Him; He makes His covenant known to them.

All who have been given a spirit of reverent awe in the presence of the Holy One receive, otherwise, hidden communications of His unfailing love and faithfulness towards them. He has great pleasure in bringing each one into the happiness of an intimate covenant relationship with Himself.

Psalms 16:7

I will praise the LORD, who counsels me; even at night my heart instructs me.

Yes, the objects of God's grace are the focus of His attention day and night. Divine revelation is never far from them. He is an ever-present Counsellor and Instructor, worthy of their praise!

Isaiah 50:4

He wakens me morning by morning, wakens my ear to listen like one being taught.

Every new day for the redeemed is one in which revelation may abound. Sanctified ears awakened to hear! The Teacher is always taking the initiative in the lives of the taught.

Proverbs 2:6

The LORD gives wisdom and from His mouth come knowledge and understanding.

The world will declare that wisdom, knowledge and understanding, may be derived from the human heart itself, and be heard from God-refusing human lips. But it is only from the mouth of our Maker that these things come. And *come* they surely do, to His treasured-covenant-people!

1 Samuel 3:21

The LORD ... revealed Himself to Samuel through His word.

Again, we are not speaking merely of 'information' when referring to our Redeemers communications. In them all—as with Samuel—His purpose is to bring revelation of *Himself*.

Psalms 119:130

The unfolding of Your words gives light; it gives understanding to the simple.

Words are just words, unless they are unfolded to us by the Holy Spirit. Then there is light from above, to give rich understanding to every truehearted, seeking soul.

The Instructor of His people knows that it is only by the light of His word, that they will be sustained in the vocational battles they find themselves engaged in.

1 John 2:14

You are strong, and the word of God lives in you, and you have overcome the evil one.

Ah, here is, indeed, a grand fruit of incessant divine instruction: God's word living in His people, making them to be strong—those who have overcome that dark and deceptive opponent of His kingdom and righteousness, the devil.

the drive within a regenerate heart for continued enlightenment

Having tasted the quickening goodness of God's word, the redeemed naturally desire to know more and more of its revelatory pleasures. Sight of light from above, becomes a cheerful quest within their daily lives.

As His regenerate children, we are all entirely dependent upon the Father for the life-bearing revelation we love to receive—and it truly is, what He delights to supply to every eager seeker!

an inner drive to know our Redeemer & His way

A firm principle within the Father's family is that, the more His children receive revelation of His wisdom and His way, the more intimately they are able to *relate* to Him.

Exodus 33:13

[Moses said to the LORD,] "Teach me Your ways so I may know You."

Psalms 86:11

Teach me Your way, O LORD, that I may rely on Your faithfulness; give me an undivided heart, that I may fear Your name.

To be taught His way and be given an undivided heart in regard to it is a priceless gift. It opens us up to all the humanly dignifying dimensions of relationship with the One who has called us to Himself.

Psalms 119:135

Make Your face shine upon Your servant and teach me Your decrees.

To be taught by God is to receive great favour—His face shining upon the soul!

Knowing this to be the constant need of the saints at Ephesus, Paul was keen to tell them of his persistent prayer on their behalf, saying:

Ephesians 1:17

"I keep asking that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the glorious Father, may give you the Spirit of wisdom and revelation, so that you may [know Him fully]."

Ephesians goes on to show that divine revelation not only enables us to relate more intimately to the Father, it also actually, expands our capacity to *live truly* in His world, in the name of the Son. Again, we are reminded of those two things that are basic to a fulfillment of our high human calling: *relational intimacy* and *vocational partnership* with our Maker.

seeking light for functional living

To operate according to the way of God is the only truly *functional* way to live. And to pray for enlightenment regarding His way is one of the most practical things we can ever do.

Psalms 119:64

The earth is filled with Your [unfailing] love O LORD; teach me Your decrees.

We live in a magnificently functional creation. In His joyous covenant love, God has set up the whole earth to operate in line with His way. The more we know of that way, the more functionally and 'creationally' we are able to live in His world. That is, the more we may operate 'according to design'—in grand vocational partnership with a faithful Creator.

Psalms 119:73

Your hands formed me and made me; give me understanding to learn Your commands.

Psalms 119:125

I am Your servant; give me discernment that I may understand Your statutes.

Psalms 119:68

[LORD], You are good, and what You do is good; teach me Your decrees.

How right it is to seek the functional commands of an utterly good and purposeful Father-Creator-King!

Psalms 119:34

Give me understanding, and I will keep Your law and obey it with all my heart.

Psalms 119:144

Your statutes are forever right; give me understanding that I may live.

Wholehearted obedience to what God has revealed as functionally good, is the difference between merely existing and actually *living!* The way of life has always been 'the way of righteousness'—what is right, according to our created nature as the image of God.

Psalms 119:18-20

Open my eyes that I may see wonderful things in Your law. I am a stranger on earth; do not hide Your commands from me. My soul is consumed with longing for Your law at all times.

The way of this world is so alien to the way of our Maker. And so, although the earth is our God-given home, we are, in a very real sense, *strangers* upon it—desiring sight of His paths. Knowing that our hearts are so prone to conform to the ever-pressing false and dysfunctional ways around us, it is right that our cry be for deliverance from these!

Psalms 25:4-5

Show me your ways, O LORD, teach me Your paths; guide me in Your truth and teach me, for You are God my Saviour, and my hope is in You all day long.

The redeemed children, creatures and servants of their Redeeming Father, Creator and King, know precisely where to look for the functional fulfillment of their humanity: to the One who desires to speak to them much more than they desire to hear—shedding the light of His word into their hearts!

the saints strongly encouraged to go on seeking the revealed wisdom of the word

We have been speaking of wisdom 'from above'. In describing the events of the Fall in Study 5, it was stated that, biblically, there are only two kinds of wisdom: that which is from God (from above), and that which is from the devil (from below). James 3:15 declares that what is from below is 'earthly unspiritual and demonic'.

The wisdom from above is revelation from *God* that brings us into His own understanding of things, and then—as we've been saying—into a personal participation with Him in His way. In the Scriptures, it is this wisdom that we are urged to diligently seek after, and practically pursue in our daily lives.

Proverbs 18:15

The heart of the discerning acquires knowledge; the ears of the wise seek it out.

The regenerate human heart has, indeed, been made wise and discerning. That is, it has been given understanding that all true 'life-knowledge' is from above. Every redeemed child of God must decisively operate upon this basis, doing all they can to seek out and acquire what will, alone, enable them to live truly in Christ. Their ears are not to be open to the folly of fallen-human chatter—only to their Maker's words of life.

Proverbs 19:8

Those who get wisdom love their own souls; those who cherish understanding prosper.

Every day we hear the world's proclamation of formulas for 'self-love' and 'human prosperity'. But, let it be emphasized again, the Lord's people must be deaf to these delusions. *True* self-love and human prosperity, are known exclusively, by those who cherish—and do all they can to possess—the wisdom and understanding of the Holy One.

Hosea 4:6, 14

My people are destroyed from lack of knowledge ... a people without understanding will come to ruin!

As we continue through this first of fifteen studies that fill out the vocational nature of our life in Christ, the indispensability of receiving knowledge and understanding must be solidly established in our minds. How tragic it is when God's indescribably privileged people become, in effect, 'vocational zeros' because of dullness to the wisdom of their Redeemer!

It is so important to see that the revelatory blessing promised to the saints is, indeed, very great. The Father desires to bestow so much upon His elect and sanctified children—a privilege that they alone have received!

Jesus said:

Matthew 13:11–12, 14–16

“The knowledge of the secrets of the kingdom of heaven has been given to you, but not to them. Those who have will be given more, and they will have an abundance. Those who do not have, even what they have will be taken away from them ...

In them is fulfilled the prophecy of Isaiah: ‘You will ever be hearing but never understanding; you will ever be seeing but never perceiving. For this peoples’ heart has become calloused; they hardly hear with their ears, and they have closed their eyes. Otherwise they might see with their eyes, hear with their ears, understand with their hearts and turn, and I would heal them.’

“But blessed are your eyes because they see, and your ears because they hear.”

The saints have been given the supreme happiness of seeing what cannot be seen and hearing what cannot be heard—the secrets of the way of their King! And the more gladly they receive and wholeheartedly respond, the more abundantly they will be supplied.

However, in the King’s wisdom, those who despise His word—insisting on pursuit of the wisdom from below—will lose whatever they had to begin with, and be left to their folly. These truly are chilling thoughts.

urged to appreciate the desirable outcomes of divine wisdom

Without doubt, to operate according to the revealed wisdom of our King is the most functional, productive and life enhancing way to live—no matter what our personal circumstances may be!

Ecclesiastes 7:19

Wisdom makes one person more powerful than ten rulers in a city.

God’s wisdom is certainly powerful in its social effects. The accumulated worldly wisdom of ten rulers pooling their insights for a city’s government, will not bring, the perception of one truehearted child of God—dynamically evidenced in practical daily living.

Ecclesiastes 9:16

Wisdom is better than strength.

Superb physical, material or organizational resources are God-given gifts. But such things, of themselves, are not to be compared with divine wisdom and what it, alone, may achieve.

Ecclesiastes 8:1

Wisdom brightens the face and changes its hard appearance.

There is nothing like the personal joy and confidence that comes from operating in life, in the simplicity of the way of God!

urged to keep the foundational things of the faith in sharp focus

Our great need is not always to hear something new—just what is true!

If it’s only about having our thinking stimulated theologically, then our approach to God’s word will be sadly deficient. Whether what we hear is old or new, if it is *true*, it may bring us *freshly* into free-spirited relationship with God and others—to His glory and praise! This, as we’ve been saying, is the point of all divine instruction.

2 Peter 1:12–13

I will always remind you of these things, even though you know them and are firmly established in the truth you now have. I think it right to refresh your memory as long as I live in the tent of this body.

While Peter remained, he was determined to act as a good, wise and faithful shepherd in the Lord’s name. He knew that with all the noisy and desperate demands of the world, the flesh and the devil, the central, life-giving realities of the faith can soon, fade into the background of our minds. Memory refreshment is absolutely essential for us all!

2 Peter 3:1

I have written both of [my letters] as reminders to stimulate you to wholesome thinking.

The apostle was aware that there was nothing in either of his letters that was new to the readers. But he also understood, that the very nature of these things would serve to arouse them to thinking that is wholesome and untainted—keeping them living in the way of the Lord.

Paul was no different in his approach.

Philippians 3:1

It is no trouble for me to write the same things to you again, and it is a safeguard for you.

To be continually refreshed in the basic elements of God's grace towards us, and the calling we have received, enables us to prevail in the relentless spiritual battle we are engaged in.

Romans 15:15

I myself am convinced, my brothers and sisters, that you yourselves are ... complete in knowledge and competent to instruct one another. I have written to you quite boldly on some points, as if to remind you of them again, because of the grace God gave me to be a minister of Christ.

To the most mature in the Lord, the same principle applies. All are in need of continued, sharply focused exposure to the foundational things of the grace and call of God.

urged to maintain an expectant & teachable spirit

Our attitude to God as we come to the Scriptures—or to listen to the proclamation of His word—is very important. There should always be a desire and expectation that He will speak to us, so that we can better enjoy His presence and do His will. Dullness or indifference to the word of God is a dreadful thing.

Jeremiah 33:3

Call to me and I will answer you and tell you great and unsearchable things that you do not know.

Jeremiah was urged by the LORD to call upon Him for revelation with a spirit of eager expectancy. Today, all whom God has called to Himself, may, *call upon Him* in the same way. Revelation from the Father is, truly, the heritage of His sanctified children.

Together with a spirit of eager expectation, is our need to maintain *prayerful humility* when the word is being brought to us in some way. A *teachable spirit* is indispensable if we are to make progress in enjoyment of God's word.

Proverbs 1:5

Let the wise listen and add to their learning.

Proverbs 9:9

Instruct the wise and they will be wiser still; teach the righteous and they will add to their learning.

Proverbs 19:27

Stop listening to instruction ... and you will stray from the words of knowledge.

There are, really, only two options: grow in our knowledge of the things of God, or begin to stray from them (Hebrews 2:1). A teachable spirit is the key to gaining the one and avoiding the other.

In Study 1 we saw that God never has been, or ever will be, in need of counsel or advice. But He is the only one in that situation! We all need to continually receive from Him (often through His people) what is essential for us to remain in His wisdom—and the 'life, righteousness, freedom and rest' it brings (Study 2 outline).

urged to consider the question of true value

The possession of material wealth brings its own pleasures, but such 'purchasing power' is extremely limited when it comes to what is of supreme value.

Proverbs 1:19

[Wisdom declares]: "My fruit is better than fine gold; what I yield surpasses choice silver."

The accumulation of gold and silver is not to be compared with the life-giving fruit that wisdom produces in our lives!

Proverbs 16:16

How much better to get wisdom than gold, to choose understanding rather than silver!

Proverbs 17:16

Of what use is money in the hands of fools, since they have no desire to get wisdom?

To have wealth in our hands but not God's wisdom in our hearts is, in fact, to have nothing to live by!

Proverbs 4:7

Get wisdom. Though it cost you all you have, get understanding.

urged to consider the outcomes of a good spiritual appetite

'Belly pleasures' abound within God's good creation. But there are enduring 'pleasures for the soul' that come only from His eagerly ingested wise instruction.

Isaiah 55:2

Why spend money on what does not satisfy? Listen, listen to me, and eat what is good, and your soul will delight in the richest of fare.

Proverbs 24:13

—*a spiritual 'sweet-tooth'!*

Eat honey, my son, for it is good; honey from the comb is sweet to your taste. Know also that wisdom is sweet to your soul; if you find it, there is a future hope for you, and your hope will not be cut off.

To have our spiritual taste buds delighted by the sweetness of divine wisdom, secures for us the grand future the Father has prepared for His children—guaranteeing it, by stimulating an engagement with Him in His way.

Proverbs 15:14

The discerning heart seeks knowledge, but the mouth of a fool feeds on folly.

The folly of this world's wisdom is all around us—intrusive, seductively alluring and insistently demanding our attention and allegiance. We have been told that this wisdom and understanding 'from below' is earthly, unspiritual and demonic. How awful if the sanctified people of God were to mindlessly and un-discerningly feed on such foolishness—which is so detrimental to their spiritual life and, in its effects, so dishonouring to their Maker!

The apostle Peter also addressed the matter of appetite and its outcomes when writing to some scattered communities of troubled saints, saying:

1 Peter 2:2–3

"Like newborn babies, crave pure, spiritual milk, so that by it you may grow up in your salvation, now that you have tasted that the Lord is good."

When times are tough we may be tempted to 'run to the wrong cupboard' to find comfort—either from physical food or some other form of personal nourishment. But the regenerate children of God are to not be diverted from the powerful drive that has been born within them, to seek after the pleasures and comforts of what they have already tasted 'from above'. Like newly born infants they are to 'crave' it. Only then will they know its life-giving outcomes!

urged to invest emotional energy in the direction of the wise

There are many pleasures to be enjoyed through relating to those who have attractive personalities. But the Scriptures warn us of our need to exercise discernment when it comes to relational pursuits.

Proverbs 13:20

Whoever walks with the wise grows wise, but a companion of fools suffers harm.

Proverbs 12:26

The righteous are cautious in friendship, but the way of the wicked leads them astray.

Our closest and most intimate friendships are ideally found in those whose hearts are given to the wisdom of their Creator.

Proverbs 14:7

Stay away from the foolish, for you will not find knowledge on their lips.

The various expressions of media and entertainment promoted in our world are very often full of folly. We would do well to 'stay away' from much of it, if our minds are to be kept fresh in the wisdom of the Lord.

Ecclesiastes 9:17

The quiet words of the wise are more to be heeded than the shouts of a ruler of fools.

Loud godless personalities who are idolized by the masses, usually have very little to say that is worthy of godly interest. The 'quiet words of the wise' are of far greater value.

* * * * *

The Holy Spirit surely does, have so much to make known to us of the truth we have been regenerated to enjoy! But this is not the end of the story when it comes to that grand agenda we've received: being conformed to the likeness of the Son.

Although wonderfully regenerate we, nevertheless, also remain fallen. To have been given revelation of the truth does not, of itself, guarantee our conformity to it. And so we need now to look at the next element of the Spirit's renewing work within us.

remaining fully assured of the GRACE we have received,
& so, eagerly receiving the Holy Spirit's ministry of:

- rebuke

(revelation of error)

—mercifully bringing humble acknowledgment of sin

In His love for us, and in His jealousy for the Father's pleasure, glory and praise, the Spirit's work is not only to bring the truth *to* us, but also to bring us *into* the truth. His holy preoccupation is to fulfill the desire that He, Himself, has placed in our hearts—to be like the Son in every detail of our lives.

This incredible purpose of the Father for His elect was established before time, set in motion at our new birth, and will be constantly worked towards us until the Final Day!

Romans 8:29

Those whom God foreknew He also predestined to be conformed to the image of His Son.

Philippians 1:6

He who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the Day of Christ Jesus.

While we still have breath, the Spirit will never give up on this amazing project—facilitating the Father's glorious redemptive intention regarding us. He is, in fact, deeply grieved when we resist His efforts to *work out* the gifts of righteousness and holiness received in Christ.

Ephesians 4:30

Do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, with whom you were sealed for the Day of Redemption.

He does love us strongly, and every moment, is seeking to facilitate the blessedness of the Son within our lives, rather than the judgments and disciplines that will otherwise, ultimately, be part of His task. We will see here that His ministry to us of rebuke, truly is the ongoing action of the grace of God toward us in Christ—to be eagerly received!

the intrusive nature of the flesh

Although commanded to not grieve the Spirit, this is so often the sad and shocking situation that exists among the Lord's dear people. Our sinful passions can quickly come into play—aided by the pressure of the world and the power of the devil.

The LORD had to inform Ezekiel that Israel had become unresponsive to His word—the people's hearts clearly dominated by desires foreign to their calling.

Ezekiel 33:31–32

My people come to you, as they usually do, and sit before you to hear your words, but they do not put them into practice ... Indeed, to them you are nothing more than one who sings love songs with a beautiful voice and plays an instrument well, for they hear your words but do not put them into practice.

We too can very easily become lovers of good preaching and teaching, but not actually be true hearers and doers of the word of God. Happy listeners—but with hearts crowded with affections that are contrary to God's will. Such is the intrusive and deceptive nature of the flesh.

Having proclaimed the LORD'S restoring word to idolatrous Israel, Hosea—by the Spirit, jealous for God's name—made one final declaration:

Hosea 14:9

“Who are wise? They will realize these things. Who are discerning? They will understand them. The ways of the LORD are right; the righteous walk in them, but the rebellious stumble in them.”

Whenever our hearts are inflamed with God-refusing and idolatrous desires (for sensory experience, material things and personal status), our capacity to discern and respond to the wonders of God's grace and the grandeur of the calling we've received, is greatly diminished. Our hearts are rebellious—even if 'quietly'—and instead of joyously walking in our Redeemer's ways, we find ourselves foolishly stumbling in them.

Yes, the intrusive nature of the flesh can, very quickly, be all too evident in our lives.

the Spirit of Truth is also the Revealer of Error

So then, having made God's will known to us as our Teacher, the Holy Spirit then operates to show where we are lacking in relation to that. As well as unveiling the truth of the word, He also exposes our

failure to live truly in the light of it. He is for us both the Teacher of the Truth and the Revealer of Error—the Faithful Facilitator of Divine Rebuke.

rebuke as a warning signal from above

The Spirit's rebukes are, indeed, very often a warning signal, saying: "You have left the path here; this is not the way of the truth, but of futility; it is displeasing and dishonoring to your Creator—and so not the way of blessing but of cursing."

Back in the early days of fallen-human history, Cain received one such warning signal from the LORD.

Genesis 4:6–7

The LORD said to Cain, "Why are you angry?" Why is your face downcast? If you do what is right, will you not be accepted? But if you do not do what is right, sin is crouching at your door; it desires to have you, but you must rule over it."

Cain was living against the truth of the word he had received and guilt had inflamed his heart with anger towards the LORD and Abel. He was miserable, and at a crossroad: needing to decide for the grace-embracing-righteousness that would restore him to God and his brother; or, opt to guiltily and self-righteously go the way of sin, which was ready to master him. The signal was clear, and a choice was to be made.

When such a word comes, like Cain we are called to decisively exercise our will in a godly way—to *work out* by the Spirit, what He is zealously endeavouring to *work within*. The situation is always acute—bristling with dire consequences for the unrepentant rebel.

rebuke's mandatory companion—the fear of the LORD

The Father's sanctified children are totally secure in His grace, and when rebuked are the objects of His yearning and tender love. But the arresting word that comes to them is not to be taken lightly. Divine rebuke is always to be received in the fear of the LORD—a spirit of reverent awe in His holy presence.

Proverbs 1:7

The fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom, but fools despise wisdom and instruction.

When God brings the wisdom of His word to us by way of rebuke, only a response of wholesome, godly fear will guarantee His blessing—that is, enjoyment of wise and functional living, in fellowship with Him. To disregard Him and His word is the deepest folly into which we may fall—the beginning of a futile and dysfunctional future.

The first chapter of the Book of Proverbs portrays wisdom as a person—a gloriously virtuous woman, whose constant counsel is indispensable to every human being. But she will not share her treasures and their outcomes with those who despise her. She says:

Proverbs 1:28–31

"They will call to me but I will not answer; they will look for me but will not find me, since they hated knowledge and did not choose to fear the LORD. Since they would not accept my advice and spurned my rebuke, they will eat the fruit of their ways and be filled with the fruit of their schemes."

In Study 4 we saw how God, in 'the wrath of His love', gives rebels up to the personally deadening, despair-producing fruits of their choice. But we have seen that this does not, at all, have to be the way things are for us!

Proverbs 14:27

The fear of the LORD is a fountain of life, turning a person from the snares of death.

The way ahead is, as always, to acknowledge that wisdom does not reside within our-selves, but in the Holy One, who delights to impart it to us.

Proverbs 3:7

Do not be wise in your own eyes; fear the LORD and shun evil.

Always the call is to be lovers of His grace, obedient to His way and glad receivers of His wisdom—those created and now equipped, to be His image and likeness in His world.

There, are or course, many 'wise sayings' in the world that communicate 'common sense' for living. But wisdom that is not lodged in a heart that fears God, will never bring, the 'holy sense' required for expression of a true humanity.

the dynamic nature of divine rebuke

The word of our Redeemer is never passive: the mere communication of thoughts and ideas. It is direct speech of the Holy One to His creatures—manifesting His glory to them, and powerfully

confronting them with the realities of their created nature and high calling. And this is very much the case when it comes to the matter of rebuke.

Hebrews 4:12

The word of God is living and active. Sharper than any double-edged sword, it penetrates even to dividing soul and spirit, joints and marrow; it judges the thoughts and attitudes of the heart.

Jeremiah 23:29

“Is not My word like fire,” declares the LORD, “and like a hammer that breaks a rock in pieces?”

God’s word of rebuke is like a razor-sharp sword that penetrates into our deepest parts; like a purifying fire ablaze within us; and like a crushing hammer falling upon us—able to shatter every idolatrous mental image. It is His vehicle of verbal judgment, exercised to put an end to what is vile and offensive to Him, and demeaning of our-selves as His sanctified children. It can be very painful—even devastating. But it is, however, a judgment that brings *healing*—swift and sweet, when received truly.

rebuke to be seen as merciful intervention

Rebuke is never something to be avoided. Whether coming as a direct word from the Spirit, or by Him through the Scriptures or another person, it is always to be welcomed as God’s merciful *intervention* in our lives. It is never an *intrusion*.

The only ‘intrusion’ into our personal environment is any inclination towards what does not promote the pleasure, glory and praise of God! For the godly, the intervening hand of their Redeemer eradicating such things is, indeed, a welcome prospect.

Psalms 94:12–13

Blessed are those You discipline, LORD, those you teach from Your law; You grant them relief from days of trouble.

To stray from the way of God is, in fact, to be traveling into ‘days of trouble’. A crisis of intervention is surely required to avert such a needless destination.

Proverbs 3:11–12

My son do not despise the LORD’S discipline, and do not resent His rebuke, because the LORD disciplines those He loves, as a father the son he delights in.

The Father’s rebukes are the fruit of His tenderhearted mercy towards His sanctified children. They reflect His yearning desire to fulfill His every glorious purpose for us!

God has given us the ‘wisdom writings’ in the Bible, to quicken our senses and make us alive to the folly of living against His revealed will and way.

Ecclesiastes 12:11

The words of the wise are like goads, their collected sayings like firmly embedded nails—given by one Shepherd.

In Study 4 we saw that goads were sharp spikes fitted to an ox cart—or to the end of a hand-held pole—to discourage an ox from kicking back against the driver. Here in Ecclesiastes the reference is to a long pointed or spiked stick used for prodding cattle and other animals, such as sheep. Such an implement would serve as an effective tool in the hand of a shepherd, to keep his flock from harm and direct them into his provision for them.

Books like Proverbs and Ecclesiastes could be called ‘the restraining and prodding goads of God’—‘firmly embedded nails’ inserted into the Scriptures by the one true Shepherd of our souls!

How we need to heed wisdom’s urgent cry:

Proverbs 1:23

Repent at my rebuke! Then I will pour out my thoughts to you, I will make known to you my teachings.

To decisively change our minds regarding a wayward inclination, guarantees an outpouring of divine wisdom and instruction—wholly restoring us to the way of God! His merciful, intervening work of rebuke achieves its life-giving purpose within those who are ‘lovers of wisdom’.

Proverbs 17:10

A rebuke impresses a discerning person more than a hundred lashes a fool.

It is true, that one confronting word from above has a greater impact upon the heart of a fearer of God, than the repeated calamities experienced by a God-refusing rebel. What a gift it is for the Father’s regenerate children to be given a capacity to hear and heed His voice!

Proverbs 25:12

Like an earring of gold or an ornament of fine gold is the rebuke of a wise judge to a listening ear.

When our Redeemer raises-up a person of godly discernment to bring us a word of rebuke, it is to be seen as something of great value—a prize to be possessed, and frequently ‘gazed’ upon.

Ecclesiastes 4:13

Better a poor but wise youth than an old but foolish king who no longer knows how to heed a warning.

To in the past have had a ‘listening ear’—experiencing the great value of God-given warning signals—but then to have become deaf to such counsel, is tragic. To be young and poor but adorned with wisdom is, without doubt, far superior to being old and privileged but foolish—one, no longer able to recognize the priceless nature of divine confrontation!

Those whose hearts delight in the grace of God, rather than in confirmation of their own self-righteous pursuits, are not *crushed* when someone speaks a strong word to them—even though it is painful to receive.

Psalms 141:5

Let a righteous man strike me—that is a kindness; let him rebuke me—that is oil on my head. My head will not refuse it.

Grace endowed lovers of wisdom see compassion and honour in a godly rebuke. They know that in the pain it brings, there is great gain from the One whose pleasure, glory and praise they pursue.

Proverbs 9:8

Rebuke the wise and they will love you.

The great dignity, privilege and esteem that the Father has lavished upon His sanctified children in Christ, keeps them personally secure in His presence. Because of this, the bearers of His arresting words of rebuke may be dearly regarded and esteemed—fondly remembered in days to come, as agents of His tender care and the progress of His glorious purpose.

Of course, those who bring a rebuke may not always ‘get it right’. Sometimes, they may even speak out of a personally threatened and self-securing ‘reactionary spirit’. But as *hearers* who are, themselves, secure in the Father’s love—righteous in His Son, kept by His sovereign hand and destined for eternal blessedness—we may, nevertheless, have affection for a deliverer of ill-conceived rebuke.

If we are not sure that a person’s confronting word is a valid one, the cry of David’s heart is to be our immediate recourse:

Psalms 139:23–24

Search me, O God, and know my heart; test me and know my anxious thoughts. See if there is any offensive way in me, and lead me in the everlasting way.

Even those who come to us as an enemy—being, self-justifying students of our sins—are to be regarded as a friend. They may have more good for us than kinder folk who ‘accept us as we are’. The Spirit is certainly not beyond using their assaults for our benefit.

It is such a fitting thing to keenly co-operate with the Holy Spirit in that desire He has placed in our hearts: to be conformed to the likeness of the Son. In this supreme endeavour, may we not leave one stone unturned in searching out the presence of any, offensive way within ourselves—knowing our enormous capacity for self-deception. May we never resist the work of the Spirit (Acts 7:51)—that great Facilitator of the Father’s sanctifying word to us!

Hebrews 3:7

The Holy Spirit says, “Today, if you hear His voice, do not harden your hearts.”

Yes, in His great love for us, the Spirit of Truth, who is also the Revealer of Error, desires to give us eyes to see the existence of any inner-corruption—any intrusive passion producing its own bitter fruit, contrary to His own.

The Spirit is truly the Great Intervener, ministering to us the mercy of the Father—exposing impurity and creating conviction, whenever and however it is required. In this, HE BRINGS US INTO HUMBLE ACKNOWLEDGEMENT OF SIN—THAT, INDISPENSABLE PLACE OF REALITY WITH WHICH ALL SINNERS NEED TO BE VERY FAMILIAR!!!

But as needful as such a place is, we are, never left there. Always, the Spirit is leading us on into the glorious fruitfulness to which we have been called in the Son. So now we are ready to address the next element of His renewing work towards us.

remaining fully assured of the GRACE we have received,
& so, eagerly receiving the Holy Spirit's ministry of:

- correction

(restoration to the truth)

—*bringing glad adjustment to thinking & behaviour*

In the Scriptures rebuke and correction are very closely related. We may see them as being two sides of the one coin. Both have to do with the Father's redeeming love for His sanctified children, and His insistence that they be all He has called them to be.

As we've seen, in rebuke the emphasis lies mainly in speech that arrests and confronts. The Holy Spirit's burden is, "No, not that." In correction, the burden of the Spirit is, "Come back to the right way"—that is, the way of true relationship to the Redeemer and all others. Actually, the Greek word translated 'correction' in 2 Timothy 3:16 is used of 'resetting a broken bone'. The Spirit's ministry to us of correction then, surely is the ongoing action of God's grace towards us in Christ—to be eagerly received!

the Revealer of Error is also Restorer to the Truth

Rebuke having accomplished its purpose, the Spirit immediately presses on to the goal: *restoration* of the Father's sanctified child to the truth that has been refused. He is the Facilitator of Divine Correction—bringing the saints back to the place of personal and vocational functionality.

Ecclesiastes 3:3

[There is] a time to tear down and a time to build.

Here we have a clear statement of our Redeemers two-sided approach to His morally and vocationally fragile people—so changeable in their affections and loyalties. The one approach could be seen as negative and, the other, positive. Both, however, are the operation of His yearning love towards this treasured possession.

There is certainly a time for the 'tearing down' of inclinations and actions that are foreign to our Maker's way. But with Him, all demolition is with a view to life-giving construction!

God never merely rebukes; He also *corrects*. He doesn't ever say, "That's the wrong way", without also saying, "This is the right way." The goal of correction is to bring us back onto the path of the truth, and so into blessing.

This is precisely what we saw in the previous section:

Proverbs 1:23

Repent at my rebuke! Then I will pour out my thoughts to you, I will make known to you my teachings.

Having received the merciful word of rebuke—and been assured again of forgiveness—the Spirit then delights to give us revelation of the way ahead. And, at that point, we are able to *respond* to the correction He gives—gladly adjusting our thinking and behaviour to the way of Christ.

The freshness of spirit and clarity of mind that repentance produces, truly does, bring us back to a good place. Being brought to humble acknowledgment of our sin, we are also, assured of God's grace, *restored* to that joyous spirit of reverent awe, child-like trust, grateful affection and wholehearted obedience, to which we have been called—knowing again, the happiness of loving His will and His way, and seeking His pleasure!

Psalms 119:59-60

I have considered my ways and have turned my steps to Your statutes. I will hasten and not delay to obey Your commands.

the miracle of a rebellious spirit subdued— & relationship restored

Understanding the powerful thrust of the fallen-human heart's guilt-charged hostility towards God, it surely is a great miracle that its, often, violent and stormy rebellion may be subdued, by His merciful intervention!

Isaiah 29:23–24

They will stand in awe of [the Holy One] ... Those who are wayward in spirit will gain understanding; those who complain will accept instruction.

When the God of all grace reveals His glory, exposes sin and restores to sweet-spirited obedience, His people again know the blessedness of standing in awe of Him—the Holy One. Wayward, complaining creatures are given ears to hear again their Creator's words of life!

Jeremiah 24:7

I will give them a heart to know Me, that I am the LORD. They will be My people, and I will be their God, for they will return to Me with all their heart.

Even in their waywardness, the sanctified people of God are those who are destined to be the 'returning ones'. By the mercy of His disciplines and the outpouring of His grace, He *enables* them to return to Him with all their heart. The result of His outgoing word and action towards them is always, that they will truly be His people in His world, and know Him as their God!

the sheer folly of refusing divine correction when it is clearly set before us

The Scriptures go to great lengths in warning of the possibility that, at any time—in spite of merciful divine intervention—the saints may find themselves doing what is unthinkable: refusing to respond when the way ahead is freshly set before them.

Foolish, self-exalting and prideful rebellion, is always lurking somewhere in the fallen-human heart, ready to leap into prominence. In light of this, although God's people are, together, ever destined to be the 'returning ones', they may individually, at any point, find themselves far from His way and His blessing—their souls in great danger. How foolish—and very wrong—it is to even consider for a moment, persisting in our own way when the path of truth is graciously opened up to us!

Proverbs 14:8

The wisdom of the prudent is to give thought to their ways.

By His word, God has clearly spelt out the consequences of refusing His instruction. The wise are careful to exercise good judgment in avoiding these. 'Giving thought to our ways' in the presence of our Maker is a true mark of divinely given wisdom.

the plain facts of the matter

The Book of Proverbs provides striking mental images that contrast the attitude and outcomes of the wise and the foolish—particularly in regard to their response, or reaction, to rebuke and correction.

Proverbs 21:29

The wicked put up a bold front, but the upright give thought to their ways.

Yes, in the face of divine rebuke and correction, those who are rightly related to God do, give thought to their ways. But those who wickedly refuse their Creator's presence, boldly resist, the intervention that comes and the restoration they could know. In their assertive attempts to justify their folly, they drown out any confronting or correcting word.

Proverbs 14:16

The wise fear the LORD and shun evil, but a fool is hot headed and yet feels secure.

Those who are foolishly rebellious against the way of God are caught in their own guilt-charged, angry reactions to the truth. They know nothing of the restful wisdom that comes from fear of the LORD. Behind their self-confident sense of security is an ever-present turbulent spirit.

Proverbs 12:15

The way of fools seems right to them, but the wise listen to advice.

Godly counsel is greatly appreciated by those who love their Maker's wisdom. On the other hand, the foolish are entirely confident concerning their own, passion-driven path—ignoring, any urging towards a different direction.

Proverbs 18:2

Fools show no pleasure in understanding, but delight in airing their own opinions.

The wisdom of God's way is simply not attractive to those who boast of their own passion-born, 'brilliant thinking'.

Proverbs 10:8

The wise in heart accept commands, but a chattering fool comes to ruin.

With all of their personal confidence, the fact remains that the godless face a bleak future. Knowing nothing of a wise, obedient spirit in the face of God's word, they 'chatter on' whenever confronted with His way. The principle here is clear: the tongue tends to move faster when the heart is fresh out of wisdom! Scorning obedience to a creational path, the foolish rebel sprints on towards ultimate disaster.

Proverbs 26:12

Do you see people who are wise in their own eyes? There is more hope for a fool than them.

It is a fact that obvious fools, actually, have a brighter future than those who claim to be 'the wise ones' while spurning their Maker's word. None are more shattered by disappointment, than those who have imagined themselves to be the fountain of all wisdom!

Proverbs 13:18

Whoever disregards discipline comes to poverty and shame, but whoever heeds correction is honoured.

The outcome for 'restored sinners' is one of great respect. The future, however, holds neither prosperity nor dignity for those who won't be restrained and redirected.

Proverbs 15:32

Those who disregard discipline despise themselves, but those who heed correction gain understanding.

Unlike the 'happily enlightened', who have turned to their Creator's way, resisters of divine restraint and redirection are, in fact, 'self-haters'. Although they claim a noble self-love, they are willfully pursuing a course of personal harm.

Proverbs 13:19

A longing fulfilled is sweet to the soul, but fools detest turning from evil.

The sweet pleasure of true, vocational fruitfulness is unknown to passion-possessed followers of their own godless path. They cannot entertain the thought of renouncing their ways.

Proverbs 26:11

As a dog returns to its vomit, so fools repeat their folly.

It is, truly abhorrent when repentance is reversed and correction refused. Yes, a person who turns away from foolishness, but then reverts again to it, is like someone who puts back in their mouth what they've vomited on the ground!

Proverbs 10:17

Whoever heeds discipline shows the way to life, but whoever ignores correction leads others astray.

We never, of course, stand alone in our responses and reactions in life. These will either help or hinder others. This is, indeed, a weighty thing to consider. Everyone who bears the image of God will, ultimately, have to give an account for the way they have exercised their moral stewardship in His world.

Proverbs 15:10

Whoever heeds life-giving correction will be at home among the wise.

Further to the already stated rich outcomes for the godly, and the contrasting unwelcome one's faced by the wicked, those who wisely respond to the Restorer have this lovely benefit in life: the blessing of being part of a 'wisdom-loving community'!

Proverbs 3:7-8

[Fear] the LORD and shun evil. This will bring health to your body and nourishment to your bones.

Finally then, there is this very welcome fact: those who refuse all that is against the way and will of their faithful Creator, have, actually, chosen to set themselves upon a good and functional path to personal wellbeing.

The Loving Spirit—the Revealer of Error and also, Restorer to the Truth—truly does, delight to bring the children of God to that happy place of alignment again, to the way of the Indwelling Son!

remaining fully assured of the GRACE we have received,
& so, eagerly receiving the Holy Spirit's ministry of:

- training in righteousness

(the ongoing process of teaching, rebuke & correction)
—*bringing progressive conformity to the truth*

Human righteousness is about *relational intimacy* and *vocational partnership* with our Redeemer-Father-Creator-King. This is what He yearns for us all to enjoy to the greatest possible degree! And it is through His word that He is *training* His sanctified-ones towards this end.

The word 'training' used in 2 Timothy 3:16 is one that refers to the whole process of educating, instructing and disciplining a child. God is taking us, His children, through a long-term process of training, education, instruction and discipline. How? Through, His ongoing work of teaching, rebuke

and correction. In this way He is progressively bringing us into conformity to the truth—that is, into *righteousness*: what is right, according to both our created nature and His word.

Conformity to the truth is, of course, conformity to the Son; and this—as we’ve been seeing—is the great, eternal purpose of the Father for His elect children. All of His speaking to them and acting towards them is with a view to that glorious end!

the righteousness of God revealed in His creation —the grand central theme of redemption

In Study 9 we traced the theme of rest and peace throughout the first eight studies and within the Redemptive Story of the Bible. There we saw that rest and peace were very much related to the righteousness of God—into which He calls His people by His grace. It will be helpful now to trace the theme of righteousness, itself, through those first eight studies.

the righteousness of The God Who Is

We have seen that the Righteous One always does what is right according to His nature as Father, Creator and King. We’ve seen also that His unceasing actions of righteousness are a magnificent revelation of His divine Being as the Holy One, showing Him to be entirely ‘separate from’, ‘different to’ and ‘other than’ anyone, who is less than God—and *anything*, that is not a true and perfect revelation of divine Fatherhood, Creatorhood and Kingship. There’s nothing *in* Him or expressed *by* Him that is less than divine perfection—and everything, that is the absolute fullness of it!

God’s righteousness always has to do with *relational action* rather than mere *legal obligation*, that He places either upon Himself or others. He operates freely in love, out of His own divine blessedness—and acts towards His people to enable them to participate with Him in this. That’s why He reveals the wonders of His grace and commands them into the happiness of His way.

As He rules over His creation as King, His every righteous act is by nature, truly awesome: enormously significant in the light of His great purpose of love—and breathtakingly wonderful!

divine righteousness bestowed—the high human calling

Humankind created as the image of God, is to participate in the revelation of His righteousness on the earth—a human representation of the divine glory.

Each person is to be holy as their Maker is holy, entirely ‘separate from’, ‘different to’ and ‘other than’ anything, that is less than a true and perfect representation of the image of God—always expressing what is *right*, according to their nature as a child, creature and servant of their Father, Creator and King; and in this, reflecting the glorious righteousness of the Holy One Himself.

Nothing less than this very righteousness of God will express the magnificence for which a human being was created—and fulfill the high calling bestowed upon them!

The righteousness that is the goal of God’s redemptive action towards us is summarized by the two great commandments that the En-fleshed, Eternal Son affirmed. These, as we saw in Study 2, are the essence of our ‘high human calling’.

Mark 12:30–31

[Jesus said, “The most important commandment is this:] ‘Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength.’ The second is this: ‘Love your neighbour as yourself.’ There is no commandment greater than these.”

Joyous worship of God with our entire being is the primary expression of true human vocation, and loving all others as if they were us, is the immediate and indispensable, ‘commanded fruit’ of this.

As we’ve been saying, the whole purpose of our series is to spell out the personal and vocational implications of this two-fold calling—and the glorious provision of grace that has been given to enable us to fulfill it! The goal of the series is a simple one: a life of righteousness in Christ—nothing more, nothing less.

divine righteousness refused—the great human tragedy

Study 3 brought the shocking proclamation of the nature of our human fallen-ness. Rebellious and living under a dark shadow of intolerable guilt, humankind has despised the righteousness of God, sensing only its condemnation. Hostile to our Maker, we have sought to have our own righteousness apart from Him, and have found ourselves lifelessly, and restlessly enslaved to *unrighteousness*. The high calling bestowed upon us is treated with disdain, and fellowship with the Father exchanged for a stubborn and wild pursuit of false objects of worship.

Determined to live independently of our Creator, we have found ourselves to be servants of the evil one—intruding what is vile and corrupt into the ‘good creation’. All that an unregenerate, fallen human

being is (even the most 'moral' of us) is polluted by a God-refusing, self-exalting, self-righteousness—which, itself, amounts to the worst moral evil.

the impact of divine righteousness upon human rebellion—the 'no-win dilemma'

God always does what is right according to His nature as Father, Creator and King. This means that in His jealous burning against moral evil, He—in His holy wrath—brings righteous judgment upon His rebel creatures.

Although the righteousness of God is, by nature, *relational*, willful violation of His law or way is such a horrendous thing, that it brings an unredeemed offender into the realm of divine condemnation—which immediately, has a *legal* dimension, attached to it. Divine calling and instruction refused, is *human evil*, which must taste the impact of *divine justice*.

His judgment is tempered by mercy; but it is, however, acute and relentless: 'the wrath of God remains on them' (John 3:36). Each one is, personally, given over to the consequences of their rebellion—caught in the 'no-win dilemma' of refusing God, and yet tasting the bitter futility of every alternative to Him.

When the redeemed choose—shockingly—to live in a rebellious way, they are, by the grace of God, not condemned. They still do, however, taste the wrath of God against their wicked behaviour, as—in His deep grief and displeasure—He gives them over to its consequences.

the righteousness of our Redeemer during history BCE

The righteousness of God in His redemptive mercy and grace was gloriously manifested throughout the Old Testament period. In His unfailing covenant love and faithfulness He progressively revealed His grand purpose. In this He chose various people to be key characters in the Story He was telling—by sheer grace, making them participants in the revelation of His righteousness.

Throughout the whole Narrative one theme prevailed in both promise and sign: the Righteous One would come, to reveal the righteousness of the Holy One among His covenant people, then among the nations—and ultimately, in the entire creation!

divine righteousness en-fleshed among us

The righteousness of God has always, been gloriously expressed within the *relational intimacy* and *vocational partnership* of the Triune Community of Love—that is, within the eternal life, which has ever been the essence of its blessedness.

Then with the En-fleshment of the Eternal Son, this righteousness was reflected before our very eyes. Every moment of His life among us, was a perfect revelation of that eternal Sonship He had always enjoyed, in which humankind was created to participate, and which the entire creation was brought into being to adorn. Everything we were created by nature to be, He was! And, of course, in Him there was nothing of the corruption that we have become.

He was the Word made flesh. He was the One who embodied everything that the written word revealed as the way of God. In our midst He was present as the Truly Instructed One, living and teaching the way of His Father. Throughout His days, although relentlessly tempted in every way as we are, He remained 'without sin' (Hebrews 4:15).

But the Redeemer's great revelatory purpose, was far more glorious than to merely parade before us what we were created to be—which would of itself only shame and condemn us. In word and deed, the En-fleshed Son made known the *grace* of His Father! And as we have seen, it was in the Cross, that the glory of this grace was revealed in its ultimate, most intimate and yet, terrifying form. There enshrouded in dreadful darkness, the light of the world gloriously shone—accomplishing the righteousness of His Redeeming Father, as He bore the sins of the world.

And so now in the gospel there is revealed 'the saving righteousness of God', which is embraced by faith, and is the basis for all ongoing, liberating faith within His Family (Romans 1:16–17).

the birth pains of regeneration—deeply disturbing conviction of unrighteousness

As the Father draws His elect to the Son—to put them to death and make them alive in Him—He mercifully enlightens their minds regarding both divine law and grace, and brings them under strong conviction. In the words of the Study 7 outline they experience: 'a mounting awareness of innate personal unrighteousness, and a deeply disturbing sense of total accountability to God.'

In this, a lifetime of imagined self-righteousness is exposed for what it is: a loathsome self-deception—greatly offensive to the Giver of Life. There is then only one thing to do: flee to the Crucified One!

the stunning nature of grace—righteousness imputed, imparted & promised

Having been brought to repentance and faith by the Father's great mercy, His grace is 'poured out abundantly' upon His elect. They are forever united with the Son, and know that in this, they themselves, have been crucified with Him—justly condemned and damned to death under the dreadful wrath of God. Their old unrighteous humanity in Adam has now met its rightful end. United with Christ through faith, they have died and been buried with Him—but have also been made alive with Him! He was 'delivered up for their trespasses and was made alive for their justification' (Romans 4:15). One with Him in His Resurrection, they have been made, forever, one with Him in His righteousness before the Father! That righteousness—the relational performance record of the Son—has been imputed / credited to them. They have now become 'the righteousness of God in Him' (2 Corinthians 5:21). This truly is redemption—restoration to the status of a true and glorious humanity as the image of God, in the Son!

But, of course, there is more! The Father's redemptive purpose is not just to restore His elect children to a righteous status before Him, but also to manifest that righteousness within them. He has sent the Spirit upon them in the name of the Son to, actually, bring each one into an *active participation* in the very righteousness they have received. This having been once and forever imputed / credited to them, it is the Father's gracious purpose that the Son's righteousness also be increasingly *imparted* to them! Yes, that they may be 'filled with the fruit of [the gift of] righteousness that comes through Jesus Christ to the glory and praise of God" (Philippians 1:11).

However, although it is a wonderful truth that *the Spirit* has come to indwell believers to reveal the Son in them, it is also a fact that *the flesh* still persistently asserts itself. Indwelling sin constantly rises-up to re-establish the life of Adam within the Father's sanctified children—and the world and the devil relentlessly play their part. The apostles expected that we would enjoy much of 'the fruit of righteousness', but—acutely aware of our present battle—they also called us to look to 'the hope of righteousness' to come! (Galatians 5:5).

Not only is the righteousness of Christ 100% *imputed* and progressively *imparted*; in the age to come it is also *promised*—guaranteed to be, imparted in totality. The *impartation* will then, be as complete as the *imputation* is today—100%, forever! As the Study 8 outline proclaims: 'The Father will give the ultimate freedom of an uncontested, visible and perfect participation in the Son's glorified humanity'.

And so that grand, central theme of redemption—the righteousness of God revealed in His creation—will, indeed, someday be gloriously fulfilled in the new heavens and earth—which will be forever, 'the home of righteousness'! (2 Peter 3:13).

But until that Day, the Father's great redemptive purpose is to—through His word—*train* His sanctified children in righteousness; through that ongoing process of teaching, rebuke and correction to progressively conform them to the likeness of His Son—revealing, even now, His righteousness among the nations of the earth!

What a grand divine agenda this is, and what a privilege the saints have, in being His dearly loved and treasured partners in its outworking. The Father is just as relentless in His action of fulfilling this goal, as the world, the flesh and the devil are in frustrating it. His is, of course, by contrast a *glorious* engagement—and its ultimate outcome absolutely sure!

As previously mentioned, this was Paul's happy assurance regarding the relatively young community of believers in Philippi.

Philippians 1:6

[I am] confident of this, that He who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the Day of Christ Jesus.

being brought to human maturity in Christ

The Scriptures often speak of this process of conformity to Christ as our being brought to *maturity*—growing out of spiritual infancy into adulthood. When we are born again, becoming the children of God, the Holy Spirit begins immediately to facilitate this process of development—the ongoing manifestation of the grace we have received.

In a future study, it will be seen how spiritual maturation is facilitated through the many difficult circumstances that we face, and, as God's word is grasped hold of, in the midst of these. Study 8 showed that the Father is, in fact, *purposefully at work* in every situation of our lives (Romans 8:28–29). Nothing good or bad touches us, which is not *perfect* in regard to the accomplishment of His goal. We have seen that every redeemed child of God may, every day, delight in such an incredible reality!

However, in our present study the focus is upon the training and maturing operations of the word itself, as the Spirit ministers it to us, and we ourselves respond.

lots of exercise & solid food—a developmental key

The writer to the Hebrews gave an excellent example of the maturing action of God's word. Seeing that those he was encouraging in the faith needed to move on from spiritual infancy, he said:

Hebrews 5:13–14

“Anyone who lives on milk, being still an infant, is not acquainted with the teaching about righteousness. But solid food is for the mature, who by constant use have [had their faculties trained] to distinguish good from evil.”

The word used for ‘trained’ here is different to the one in 2 Timothy 3:16. It is the word from which we derive our English noun ‘gymnasium’. Its use in this way speaks of an exercising of the mind as it is repeatedly exposed to the word of God. In such a training environment a person is continually taken through the process of teaching, rebuke and correction; and in that way, their mental faculties are being developed to distinguish between what is good and evil. That is, an ability is being formed to discern—in every situation—the difference between what is the functional way of righteousness in Christ, and what is dysfunctional and displeasing to God in the flesh.

The writer calls this word that is to develop our minds, ‘the teaching about righteousness’; and he identifies it as ‘solid food’—substantial ‘mind-food’ for the saints! *Mature* believers are those who have long fed upon this word, and been enthusiastically engaged in repeated exposure to its nourishing, developmental and maturing effects.

co-operation with God in the training & maturing process

By the Spirit and through the Son, our Heavenly Father is, all the time, taking the initiative in the training process. This, combined with *our* wholehearted co-operation, is what brings us to the personal stability and vocational fruitfulness that comes with maturity in Christ.

We are under *divine training!* But there is also the sense in which we—by our response and co-operation—are to *train ourselves* as well.

The young minister of the word, Timothy, received this direction from his mentor Paul:

1 Timothy 4:6–8

“[Being constantly] nourished on the words of the faith ... train yourself to be godly. For physical training is of some value, but godliness has value for all things, holding promise for both the present life and the life to come.”

Godliness is to be joyously related to God and given to Him and His will. The more we put ourselves in the place of being ‘nourished on the words of the faith’—the ‘teaching’ we’ve been speaking of—and the more we daily co-operate with the Spirit in His lovingly-eager rebukes and corrections, the more progress we will make in the gymnasium of the soul—ever stronger and resilient, in the blessedness of godly living!

Those who are engaged in various kinds of physical training, diligently discipline themselves to reach their earnestly desired goal. For some, this is a particular athletic achievement—for others, an improved health outcome. There is some value in such training. But athletic achievements come and go, and although improved health outcomes are beneficial, we do all ultimately degenerate physically and die. Physical training, though good and functional in many ways, actually, brings limited returns.

Training in godliness, on the other hand, has enormous value for the development of the most critical areas of our humanity: relational intimacy with God and vocational partnership with Him—both of which have glorious eternal dimensions attached to them! Training in godliness, indeed, holds promise ‘for both the present life and the life to come’.

Paul also strongly encouraged the Corinthian believers in a similar way. He was urging them to be like himself—striving for the prize of vocational fruitfulness that will endure into eternity. He said:

1 Corinthians 9:25

“Everyone who competes in the games goes into strict training. They do it to get a crown that will not last; but we do it to get a crown that will last forever.”

In their holy quest for spiritual maturity—and its eternal fruits—they were to exercise the kind of personal discipline that would produce it. Sadly, although they proudly claimed great spiritual attainment, Paul needed to confront them with the fact that their lives did not give evidence of that. There were limited signs of their co-operation with the Spirit's developmental operations towards them—even though they were a richly gifted community in many ways (1 Corinthians 1:4–6). In the Lord's name then, Paul gave them this sobering word of rebuke:

1 Corinthians 3:1–2

“Brothers and sisters, I could not address you as spiritual but as worldly—mere infants in Christ. I gave you milk, not solid food, for you were not yet ready for it. Indeed, you are still not

ready. You are still worldly. For since there is jealousy and quarrelling among you, are you not worldly?"

It is possible to be extremely gifted and enthusiastic, speaking 'the language of the kingdom of God', but knowing little of true righteousness, peace and joy in the Holy Spirit. We may have lots of 'knowledge', but sadly, be unable to truly receive, digest and live by, solid apostolic 'mind food'.

The key, is to find our boast only in Christ—ourselves crucified and made alive with Him—and to delight above all else in the gift of His own righteousness before the Father! It is upon this basis alone, that we may receive and respond to all other apostolic teaching, and wholeheartedly co-operate with the Spirit in the grand training process He is facilitating.

Paul also urged the Philippians to press on towards maturity in Christ, and not give way to a false sense of having 'arrived'—while still being dominated by 'selfish ambition and vain conceit' (Philippians 2:1–8; 3:14–16). He spelt out their personal responsibility in this way:

Philippians 2:12–13

"My [dearly loved] friends, as you have always obeyed—not only in my presence, but now much more in my absence—continue to work out your salvation with fear and trembling, for it is God who works in you to will and to act in order to fulfill His good purpose."

As we've been saying, at regeneration God began a glorious work within us, which by the Spirit He is relentlessly continuing. He is all the time 'energizing within us'—'willing and acting' for the accomplishment of His divine purpose. For this reason, we are to continue to 'work out' the salvation that He is working in—'with fear and trembling'. That is, we are to energetically co-operate with the Spirit, with a sense of awesome recognition of what is going on towards us and within us every day!

The Philippians were Paul's dearly loved friends in Christ. He had brought the gospel to them and they looked to him for support and encouragement. And although this was good and right, they needed to see that—whether he was present or not—their responsibility as regenerate people, was to wholeheartedly invest their personal energies towards the goal of conformity to Christ.

Peter's call to earnest co-operation with the Spirit's powerful in-working

In Study 8 we looked at the apostle Peter's teaching in the first chapter of his second letter, where he appealed to the Lord's people to persevere in the truth they'd received. Because what was said there relates very much to the matter before us now, it will be helpful to visit it again here.

Having spoken of the 'precious faith' we have received through 'the righteousness of our God and Saviour Jesus Christ', Peter began his letter with a proclamation of the Father's merciful and grace-filled action towards the regenerate:

2 Peter 1:3–4

"His divine power has given us everything we need for [life and godliness] through our knowledge of Him who called us by His own glory and goodness. Through these He has given us His very great and precious promises, so that through them you may participate in the divine nature, having escaped the corruption in the world caused by [passion]."

By God's regenerating power the saints have received all they need to fulfill their human vocation. Through His saving nature and action—His 'glory and goodness', by which they were called—they have also received 'very great and precious promises' (part of the rich teaching we have been referring to in this Study). And through these promises, they have made a *great escape* from the realm of passion and corruption—with a view to sharing in the freedom and vocational life of God Himself.

Because this is what has happened to the regenerate, a generous spirit of co-operation with their Redeemer is, naturally, required of them. Peter continued:

2 Peter 1:5–7

"For this very reason, make every effort to add to your faith goodness; and to goodness, knowledge; and to knowledge, self-control; and to self-control, perseverance; and to perseverance, godliness; and to godliness, [familial] affection; and to [familial] affection, love."

To 'add' here, is to 'co-operate with, by generously and lavishly supplying'.

'With all diligence' they must:

- Co-operate with God by generously supplying faith with, *goodness*—true and natural, *energetic* believing. The word here for 'goodness' speaks of the dynamic functional action of something according to its nature. For example: the goodness of a horse is to run, and the goodness of knife is to cut etc. The 'goodness of faith' then, is to wholeheartedly act upon what it believes.

- Co-operate with God by generously supplying goodness of faith with, *knowledge*—that is, knowledge of the truth that has been received. Functional, active and responsive faith, alone, enables us to enjoy a *rich understanding* of divinely revealed truth.
- Co-operate with God by generously supplying knowledge with, *self-control*—the exercise of *mental discipline* that holds on to the truth no matter what is happening.
- Co-operate with God by generously supplying self-control with, *perseverance*—continuing to hold on to the truth over the long haul; determined not to give in to relentless pressures and passions.
- Co-operate with God by generously supplying perseverance with, *godliness*—joyous fellowship with God and given-ness to His will.
- Co-operate with God by generously supplying godliness with, *familial affection*—a tender, loving regard for every brother and sister in the Lord, which naturally flows from joyous fellowship with the Father and the Son.
- Co-operate with God by generously supplying familial affection with, *love*—a participation in the endless, gracious, self-expending love of God Himself.

All this is clearly an example of how the people of God are to be actively involved in the process of training in righteousness. It spells out how we are, ideally, to respond to the *teaching* brought to us by the Spirit—the words of ‘the faith’. If this were the case there would be no need for any rebuke or correction!

Of course, where rebuke and correction *are* needed, the same response of energetic faith leading to love for others is required at every point. Rebuke and correction are always to restore us again to the path of knowing and holding obediently to the truth—and the righteousness it produces.

Peter goes on to say about faith leading to love:

2 Peter 1:8–9

“For if you possess these qualities in increasing measure, they will keep you from being ineffective and unproductive in your knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ. But if any of you do not have them, you are near-sighted and blind, and you have [deliberately] forgotten that you have been cleansed from your past sins.”

Those who diligently co-operate with the Spirit’s work within them, will, live functionally in their knowledge of the Lord. Having their faith always culminating in the action of love, they will be kept from ‘sluggish ineffectiveness’ and ‘personal unfruitfulness’.

To not have faith always culminating in love betrays three things:

- *Near-sightedness*—only seeing what is close at hand, having willfully lost sight of our glorious future hope in Christ.
- *Blindness*—being culpably unable to see the things of the unseen realm in the present.
- *Forgetfulness*—deliberate refusal to remember that old habitual patterns of sinful passion and personal corruption, have all been cleansed, and therefore ‘escaped from’.

This is where rebuke and correction come into play. These three states are totally inconsistent with the life of a regenerate believer, and having been *confronted* with their presence, *correction* is urgently required. Sharp focus upon the past, present and future realities of God’s grace must be diligently maintained, if we are to remain in the way of the truth.

Finally, Peter says:

2 Peter 1:10–11

“Therefore, my brothers and sisters, be all the more eager to make your calling and election sure. For if you do these things, you will never fall, and you will receive a rich welcome into the eternal kingdom of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.”

Zealous desire to have energetic, responsive faith culminating in love, is clear confirmation that a person has been called by God—one chosen to be His own. This brings assurance of ‘an abundant entrance’ into the eternal kingdom!

In his letter Peter spoke of the horrendous possibility of a person knowing ‘the way of righteousness’, but then turning their back on ‘the holy commandment’ (to love God and others) that was passed on to them (2:21). By contrast he spoke of those “who live holy and godly lives ... looking forward to a new heaven and a new earth, where righteousness dwells” (3:11, 13).

The apostle then concluded his letter with the words, “grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ” (3:18). This closing appeal, in many ways, sums up the essence of our life as God’s redeemed people. We could state Peter’s words in this way: “Each one of you *must keep on growing* in your *life-giving experience* of all has been *lavished* upon you in Christ—our Reigning Lord and Strong Deliverer!”

Some of us may look back on one or more powerful experiences of the Spirit, which brought extremely significant revelation and great personal renewal. But we must continue in the process of being trained in righteousness by the Spirit, if we are to be transformed into the likeness of the Son.

As the Father's regenerate children, who earnestly and generously go on co-operating with the Holy Spirit's powerful 'in-working', we may persevere in the truth and make progress towards our goal of human maturity in Christ.

the functional nature of spiritual adulthood & the tragedy of protracted infancy

It is, indeed, tragic when regenerate people don't grow in the Lord, and—after several years—are still not able to feed upon the 'solid food' of God's word. Infancy continued beyond its time is always very sad. How much more is this so in the Christian life—where everything has been provided to make that *not* the case!

We can hear the sorrowful tone of the writer to the Hebrews when he said:

Hebrews 5:12

“Though by this time you ought to be teachers, you need someone to teach you the elementary truths of God's word all over again. You need milk not solid food!”

These believers had been in Christ long enough to be those who, themselves, were now able to have partnership with the Spirit in teaching others. But they were not yet able to function in such a mature way within God's family, because they had not yet 'truly heard' the basic truths of the faith. They were, in fact, quickly moved away from delight in 'the word of grace'. We can be very religious, and even 'theological', and still be immature believers.

This is why the apostle Paul's all-consuming desire to preach the grace of God in Christ is so significant. Such co-workers with God are indispensable to the Father's maturing work among His sanctified children (2 Corinthians 6:1–2). Hear the strong, Spirit-given desire of this apostle's heart:

Colossians 1:28

“We proclaim Him, [confronting] and teaching everyone with all wisdom, so that we may present everyone fully mature in Christ.

But then hear of how he goes about this all-surpassing task he has received:

Colossians 1:29

“To this end I strenuously contend with all the energy Christ so powerfully works in me.”

Paul was one who both in his personal life in the Lord and in his ministry in Jesus name, generously co-operated with the Spirit—working out with all of his might what was being powerfully worked in him. In this, he 'contended' with the whole of his being—like a gladiator in the arena—as the Holy Spirit stirred mightily within him in the name of the Son.

Oh that the Lord would raise-up an army of 'Paul's' among His sanctified people! And oh, that we would so hear and respond to the word of God, that protracted infancy may be unknown among us in our day, and the functional nature of spiritual adulthood in Christ be attained by every born-again believer—for the Father's pleasure, glory and praise!

So there we have it. That great action of the Spirit in training us in righteousness—working out the ongoing processes of teaching, rebuke and correction, that we may be conformed to the truth we have received—the grace of God in Christ!

Now we are ready to come to the last major section of this study, in which we will be encouraged in the practical matter of exposing ourselves to the word.

having great delight in God & in the life-giving pleasures of His word—& enjoying exposure to the word with a view to meditation upon it, through:

- listening

(regularly hearing God's word taught & proclaimed)

—*expectantly participating in each event*

Through what we have seen so far in our series, it is no puzzle as to why we should have great delight in God and in the life-giving pleasures of His word! The nature of the word of God is, clearly, so incredible, and its actions towards us of teaching, rebuke, correction and training in righteousness without doubt, nothing less than life-giving in their affects.

The more we know of these operations of the word toward us and within us, the more we *desire* to know of them and the delights they bring! And thankfully, there is so much more before us to receive and enjoy even in this series.

the great dynamic of a proclaimed word

One of the most basic ways of receiving the good things of God's word is through *listening* to it being taught and proclaimed. The Lord delights to raise-up those whom He has gifted and appointed to speak it publicly and privately to us.

Verbal proclamation has always been a central means of communication among the people of God. It has, of course, been so in most expressions of human community. There is something incomparably *dynamic* about direct verbal communication from one human being to others—especially when people have come expecting to hear something of great significance to them, and often, of an urgent nature. This is particularly so when it is the word of God that is brought in the name of Jesus and in the power of the Holy Spirit.

Listening to the word being taught and proclaimed has, of course, been essential in situations where not everyone has had a copy of the Bible. That was the case in Old Testament times when the Scriptures were written on scrolls and not available to all. Nehemiah spoke of how the Levites read and explained the written word publicly:

Nehemiah 8:8

They read from the Book of the Law of God, making it clear and giving the meaning so that the people could understand what was being said.

In New Testament times it was the same. Few, had personal access to scrolls of the Old Testament Scriptures, and the New Testament documents were still being written and beginning to individually circulate. And so, preaching was the major way of receiving the word.

Except where there is governmental oppression, or translation work still in process, in most places today the Bible is freely available. But even so, verbal proclamation is still an extremely important way of being exposed to the word of God. The dynamic of both the verbal and non-verbal communication of one human being—filled with the Holy Spirit—declaring the word to other purposefully assembled people, is a wonderfully powerful thing!

The preaching of God's word is what we might call 'a means of grace'. It is a gift that the Holy Spirit gives to the saints for their encouragement, confrontation and restoration, so they may—in union with the Son—grow in relational intimacy and vocational partnership with the Father.

hungry hearts & listening ears

Something has happened to the hearts and the hearing of God's regenerate children! Where once the word of God was nothing to us, it is now the word of life. Where once it was a mere statement of religious ideas and propositions, it is now the truth that has set us free—and keeps us that way. It's no wonder then, that we have hearts that are hungry for the word and ears that are itching to hear it!

Throughout history, in every nation, fallen human beings have been listening for a word—hungry for what will at last bring a promise of life. We see intensity on the faces and in the eyes of those who are listening to some speaker, who claims to have the word we have all been waiting for. Looking, listening—hungry.

But as we saw in Study 3, the heart hunger and mental attention of fallen humanity is not, at all, naturally inclined towards the word of God—any *other* word than that! What is sought is a word that will enable us to fulfill our God-refusing passions. Every proud, fallen human heart is hard to the way of its Maker, and every ear willfully deaf to His voice. "Give us a word, but not the word of the Holy One—not a word that declares the wonders of His grace towards condemned sinners, and the noble vocation He calls them into!"

That we have been given hearts hungry for the word of God, and ears eager to hear it, is a glorious action of divine mercy—a *miracle* of divine regenerating power! This is so important for us to have in our minds as we reflect upon the practice of listening to God's word.

Cornelius—the miracle beginning

One of the most thrilling pictures in the New Testament of an initial, God-given, heart-hungry hearing of the word is in Acts 10. There we see the Gentile centurion Cornelius, assembled with his family and friends to hear the gospel for the first time. On behalf of the entire gathering he said:

Acts 10:33

"Now we are all here in the presence of God to listen to everything the Lord has commanded you to tell us."

Such anticipation and expectation! And, of course, what they heard was like music to their ears and infinitely satisfying to their souls. The grace of God was revealed to them in the power of the Holy Spirit, and life, at last, flooded into their being. A new life of godly hunger and hearing had begun!

There is, of course, no good reason why this same kind of eager and expectant spirit should not be present, whenever, the Lord's regenerate people assemble to hear His word proclaimed. This was certainly the case in the early days of the gospel's reception by God's elect.

the zealous listening of new believers

On the Day of Pentecost Peter's proclamation in the power of the Spirit was totally arresting, and the miracle of regeneration took place in the hearts of 3,000 men alone. As we saw in Study 6, that day a community of hungry hearers was born. They couldn't get enough of the word of life! Luke simply records:

Acts 2:42

They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching.

Literally, they 'continued steadfastly' in the teaching of the apostles. Every opportunity was taken to hear the word that thrilled their hearts—directing them into their Redeemer's hope-filled and life-giving way.

When Paul brought the gospel to Thessalonica there was great opposition within the city. For the safety of him and his companions, those who believed sent them away after two or three weeks. But while Paul was there the word was eagerly, devoured by them. Recalling those days to them later, Paul wrote:

1 Thessalonians 1:6

"In spite of severe suffering, you welcomed the [word] with the joy given by the Holy Spirit."

Their reception of the word brought 'severe suffering' into their lives—'much affliction' from the surrounding community. But this didn't dampen their enthusiasm for its pleasures. Having joyously welcomed it, the Lord's word actually 'rang out' from them into all the surrounding areas. They were alive in the worship that had filled their hearts, and were full of longing expectation for the Appearing of the Son (1 Thessalonians 1:8–10)—Spirit-given fruits of truly listening ears!

On another occasion Paul and his fellow travelers arrived at Troas in the province of Mysia, where they stayed for a week. Here, we see Paul's longing for the maturity of the Lord's people, and yet another example, of their eagerness to hear. Luke again reports:

Acts 20:7

"On the first day of the week we came together to break bread. Paul spoke to the people and, because he intended to leave the next day, kept on talking till midnight."

There had obviously been much teaching throughout those seven days. But their coming together to celebrate the Lord's Supper with a common meal on the last night, resulted in Paul talking till midnight! No one 'closed the meeting' at that point; the teaching stopped for a while because Paul had to go downstairs to heal a young man who had fallen from the window. We are told that he then went upstairs again and after 'talking until daylight', continued on to the next place!

There was Paul full of the love of Christ for His people, and them, ready and eager to snap up any opportunity for extended teaching and proclamation of the word. What an amazing gift it is to come together to hear the Lord speak through His servants on such occasions.

What we see in these different examples of zealous listening is a fulfillment of the wise command in the Book of Proverbs:

Proverbs 23:12

Apply your heart to instruction and your ears to words of knowledge.

When God's people were newly restored to the land of Israel after their exile, Ezra the priest read the Book of the Law of Moses to the whole assembly—'men and women and all who were able to understand'. He read it aloud from daybreak till noon—and 'all the people listened attentively'! (Ezra 8:1–3). These weren't all new believers. But they were, *freshly assured* of the LORD'S redeeming grace towards them—and so had hungry hearts and listening ears.

It would be great folly indeed, to not make every effort to receive our Creator-Redeemer's instruction and light to live by, whenever His word is being spoken.

being careful how we hear

To be assembled in the hearing of the word at any time is a holy event—never to be treated lightly by either the speaker or listener. Christ is present to communicate directly to the hearts of His people, in the name of His Father and by the power of the Spirit.

hearing the word with a spirit of expectation and anticipation

May we regularly be reminded of those words of Cornelius, when he and those with him were about to hear the proclamation of Peter: “Now we are all here in the presence of God to listen to everything the Lord has commanded you to tell us.” Let us always assemble with that same sense of holy expectation and anticipation: “The Lord, Himself, is about to speak to us!” To be dull and languid in spirit under the word is quite unthinkable.

It will be seen that the things we are looking at here, apply not only to times of listening to the word proclaimed, but also to the other kinds of exposure to be considered in this final part of our study. The matter of ‘true hearing’ is central to any authentic engagement with the word of God.

hearing the word obediently—ready to run in the way of life

An attitude of expectation and anticipation is also to be joined by a readiness of will—a desire to immediately respond to what the Spirit brings. The psalmist expresses this beautifully when he says:

Psalm 119:32

“I will run in the path of Your commands, for you have set my heart free.”

In the Scriptures, hearing and obeying are inseparable things. To not obey is to have refused to hear! True hearing is much more than receiving information. It is about a cry of the heart before God that says, “I delight to do Your will” (Psalm 40:8). This is one of the glorious fruits of God’s liberating grace within our hearts. There is no freedom like being free to run in the path of our Maker’s good commands!

Jesus declared the happiness that belongs to those who enjoy this freedom of spirit, when He said:

Luke 11:28

“Blessèd ... are those who hear the word of God and obey it.”

He, Himself, day after day knew this to be the way of life. He said of the Father’s word, “I know that His command is eternal life” (John 12:50). For Him, a joyous spirit of obedience was the blessèd way of His own eternal Sonship.

On the night before His death, having shown His disciples what was to be at the heart of their relational life together, He said:

John 13:17

“Now that you know these things, [blessèd are you] if you do them.”

He was saying, “Come on. Run in the path of My commands. It may seem just now to be contrary to all you have ever thought. But it truly is the way of life!”

Our Lord also expressed the functional nature of obedient hearing in the parable of the builders, saying:

Matthew 7:24–25

“Therefore everyone who hears these words of Mine and puts them into practice is like a wise man who built his house upon the rock. The rain came down, the streams rose, and the winds blew and beat against that house; yet it did not fall, because it had its foundation on the rock.”

The significance of obedient hearing of the word is so clear here. It provides a personal foundation that the storms of life cannot prevail against! To have an obedient spirit, ready to run in response, truly is the only wise way in which to come under the word of God.

the absurdity of listening to the word with no eagerness to respond

In the second part of Jesus’ parable of the builders, we are confronted with the tragic outcome of unresponsive listening to His spoken word. Jesus continued:

Matthew 7:26–27

“But everyone who hears these words of Mine and does not put them into practice is like a foolish man who built his house on sand. The rain came down, the streams rose, and the winds blew and beat against that house, and it fell with a great crash.”

There was nothing wrong with the building materials, just the builder. In utter foolishness he built upon sand rather than rock, and had no personal foundation to face the flood that came. Such is the absurdity of listening to the word without eager response to it.

Of course, there is a reason why we listen passively and disinterestedly to God’s word. It is because we are tuned into another word—a false one. Other promises of life have gripped our imagination. Our will is not engaged responsively toward the word of our Maker, because it is already set in the direction of another proclamation that has intruded into our mind, and captured our affections.

We might not be entirely disinterested in what we are hearing—even being in complete agreement with its truths. But it may still not be where our heart is. We are quite able to deceive ourselves into

thinking that having *appreciation* for what is said is an adequate response. But when we listen, merely, in that way, it's as if we are *above* the word, mentally recognizing its virtue—rather than being *under* the word, receiving it into our hearts as the very word of life, itself. Humility before God is an absolute pre-requisite for true hearing.

James 1:21–22

Humbly accept the word planted in you, which can save you. Do not merely listen to the word, and so deceive yourselves. Do what it says.

There is a great battle going on whenever the word is proclaimed—a battle for our mind. Because of the pressure of the world, the power of the devil and the passions of the flesh, a kind of self-deceiving passivity is always a dire possibility. We must, indeed, realize the absolute absurdity of giving way to such folly!

Close attention should be given to these words of our Lord:

Luke 8:18

“Consider carefully how you listen. Those who have will be given more; those who do not have, even what they think they have will be taken from them.”

What a tragic prospect is set before us here! The treasures of divinely revealed wisdom and understanding are so great and life-giving—enriching, our humanity as nothing else can. But these will never, be received by the casual hearer.

“Consider carefully how you listen,” Jesus says. To listen expectantly and obediently will bring the abundance of revelation that belongs to the sanctified children of God. There's always more, for the true hearer! But those who listen carelessly, will find that even what they thought they had will finally be beyond, their grasp. Things that once held some promise will become meaningless to them.

Hebrews 4:2

The message they heard was of no value to them, because those who heard it did not combine it with faith.

The experience of the people of Israel in the desert stands as a sobering example for all time. They heard the clear proclamation of the LORD, but their careless and unresponsive listening left them with no inheritance of what was promised. As always, the absence of true listening, indicated, an absence of true believing, and resulted in failure to receive.

wholeheartedly hearing whatever we can from every message

In a later study we will look at a speaker's responsibility in this area of teaching and proclamation—for them, to truly speak in the name of the Lord and in the power of the Spirit. Although that's not our focus here, experience does, however, sometimes show, that not all who speak do so in a way that naturally evokes the kind of response we've been describing. There may be a number of reasons for this.

A speaker may have:

- a lack of regard for the authority of the Scriptures
- a lack of personal understanding of the great themes of redemption
- a lack of personal liberation in the grace of God, and so a heavy emphasis upon obligation
- a lack of zeal for the name of the Lord, and so a reluctance to speak of obligation
- a lack of humility in God's presence
- a lack of the Holy Spirit's fire
- a lack of skill in public communication

The temptation when listening to one who has some deficiency in their approach, is to fall prey to a graceless, critical spirit; self-righteously measuring the speaker against our own 'impeccable theology', or our 'high spiritual standards'—which at such a time are, evidently, rather low! We must listen to all who speak, in a spirit of prayer and in the love of Christ for them. There is never a place to dishonour anyone in our hearts, even though there may be grief over any willful unfaithfulness on their part.

Actually, whatever is lacking in a speaker's teaching or proclamation, if they use one verse of Scripture we should be able to be blessed! It is all a matter of the way we choose to hear. We are not responsible for the delivery of the message; but we certainly are, responsible for the way we hear whatever the Lord is choosing to say on any occasion—regardless of what is not as it could be.

Proverbs has some wisdom for us that applies well to this matter:

Proverbs 27:7

The one who is full loathes honey, but to the hungry even what is bitter tastes sweet.

Full of our own superior notions, we may miss the sweetness that is present in a deficient preacher's message. But hungry for God, His word and His way, although what is served up on occasions may

not be the sweetest of fare, we may, nevertheless, be surprised at what pleasures are to be tasted—when the message is heard with the Lord’s own love for the messenger!

Yes, the key to wholehearted hearing on any occasion is to listen in a spirit of *worship* and *prayer*. As said above, not to place ourselves *over*, the word (or the speaker), but to be consciously, before God Himself—knowing that He loves to speak to His children, and will do so whenever they are listening. A spirit of worship and prayer is the perfect setting for reception of life-giving revelation, in any circumstance of life!

doing all we can to meditate later on what has been heard

We spoke in our outline of being exposed to the word with a view to *meditation* upon it. To do this, of course, we need to retain what is heard—particularly those specific things that the Spirit has impressed upon us.

It has been said that when it comes to retaining information, listening is the least effective means of input—only 5% remaining in our minds after twenty-four hours. This is significant, however, only if the objective is to do with information gathering. But the goal of listening to preaching is much more dynamic than that. Here, the purpose is reception of *revelation*—a different matter altogether!

The key to being able to meditate later upon what has come to us, has, much to do with how we listen in the first place. As said above, we are to hear attentively, expectantly and obediently, with a prayerful and worshipful spirit. When that is the case it may be surprising how much ‘goes in’ and remains. If it is only 5%, we can be sure that when the Spirit has been communicating to our deepest parts, that will be, pure gold for the soul!

Some find it helpful to take notes of what they are hearing—particularly those things that speak to the heart. As the old Chinese proverb says, “The palest ink is better than the most retentive memory.” What has been written can then later be meditated upon in the Lord’s presence.

It is always a great blessing to, after hearing the word, take the time to ‘turn it into prayer’. This can often be done to some degree if a speaker prays at the conclusion of their message. A well chosen song at that time can also, help us express our hearts in worship. Furthermore, a time of prayer with others afterwards may be of great value. But there is, really, no substitute for *personal* reflection upon what the Spirit has said to us. Prayerfully focusing upon what we’ve heard—with a view to our conformity to Christ—is to honour the gift of God’s word and the enormous privilege we have in receiving it.

The personally enriching fruits of prayerful meditation are of inexpressible value in the Spirit’s maturing work towards us. Let us, indeed, do all we can to reflect upon the treasures that are ours, as we hear the proclaimed word of God with hungry hearts and listening ears!

having great delight in God & in the life-giving pleasures of His word—& enjoying exposure to the word with a view to meditation upon it, through:

- reading

(making regular progress through the Scriptures)

—*prayerfully listening for God's voice*

It truly is a great blessing to be able to hear the word proclaimed on the basis of what is revealed in the Bible, and even to read materials that godly people have written, opening up its wealth to us. But for all the value of these, there is no substitute for reading the Bible itself, whenever that is possible. In fact, one of the major aims of this series is to enable us to do just that—with maximum capacity to recognize and receive what is there.

a bible-reading people

In the Scriptures alone, we have the sure, unchanging revelation of the whole purpose of God in creation and redemption. All we need for personal understanding and action in Christ, is there, recorded for us in written form! Many books have great value, but the Bible is ‘the Book’. Because of its incredible nature, and our constant need for divine revelation, we are, clearly, called to be a bible reading people.

Moses was given instruction regarding the responsibilities of kings who would later be appointed. Above all else—as the LORD’S ruling representative—each one was to be ‘a person under revelation’.

Deuteronomy 17:19

[A written copy of God's word] is to be with [the king], and he is to read it all the days of his life so that he may learn to revere the LORD his God and follow carefully all [His commands].

Israel was to be ruled by a king who 'all the days of his life' read what the LORD had given in writing at that time. In this way he would—by repeated exposure to what was revealed—learn reverence for the Holy One and be able to carefully follow His way.

Although the people of Israel didn't have personal copies of the written word, it was, nevertheless, taught to them verbally, in such a way that they could—if they would—remember it.

Today, however, things are very different. Apart from the situations mentioned previously, copies of the entire written word of God are available to all who desire one. Every bible owner, then, is able to, like Israel's king, 'read it all the days of their life'—but now also having the vast benefit of both Old and New Testament revelation!

Paul's testimony to just one of the New Testament letters, tells of the rich provision of revealed wisdom that has been provided for all who are in Christ. He said to the Ephesian believers:

Ephesians 3:4–5

"In reading this [letter] ... you will be able to understand ... [what has] been revealed by the Spirit to God's holy apostles and prophets."

Everything that the Holy Spirit made known to God's specially appointed and anointed servants, has now, been made available to us. How amazing is our privilege as the people of God today, to have the whole Bible in our hands—able to be read at any time!

the benefit of a set time each day

It is helpful to spend at least some time each day, prayerfully reading a section of God's word and meditating upon it. A habit like this puts us in a position to daily hear Him speak in a special way. There is also value in establishing such a practice as a kind of 'special appointment' with the Lord—at a particular time, and even in a particular place. Some call this their 'quiet time', others their 'devotional time' etc.

There is, indeed, something very wonderful and intimate about having a daily period of quiet reflection upon the written word of God, in His dear and holy presence. How much pleasure He must have in us coming to Him in this way—hearts hungry for His nourishing word, and ears open to hear His voice. He will not be inclined to have us go from that place without tenderly imparting something, from His own heart to ours!

Of course, it would be silly to turn such a 'pleasant discipline' into a 'legal obligation'. That would spoil it. As with any treasured relationship, we should do all we can to keep the appointment. But to feel remorsefully guilty because of a failure to do so would be foolish. The Lord will always be with us, regardless of any lack of discipline on our part. Nevertheless, faithfulness in this regard will surely bring its reward. The blessing of making the appointment is that we don't miss out on the appointment!

reading from cover to cover

One of our personal goals should be to systematically move through the whole of the Scriptures as often as possible. Although we naturally have our 'favourite parts' of the Bible, and delight to revisit them often, we must resist the temptation to do so at the expense of exposure to all that has been revealed. Regular and systematic coverage of the entire revelation provided for us is essential.

It is in fact wrong, to think that we may truly understand any particular portion of the Scriptures—even our favourite ones—without seeing it in the light of the rest. As said in the key concept section of this study, "God has given us His word in the whole of the Scriptures." Even 'the less inspirational parts' have their value in giving the 'big picture' we need. As the Bible is read again and again this becomes increasingly evident.

Actually, the more that the 'less easy to understand books' are read in the light of the whole of the Bible, the more their treasures can be unlocked to us. The Book of the Revelation is a good example of this. Written mostly in an, 'apocalyptic', visionary style of language, it can be a little confusing. But this book is full of allusions to other parts of the Scriptures, and when these are recognized, it all starts to make sense—and the riches begin to be revealed!

As he was about to write down what Jesus had shown to him in the Revelation, John declared:

Revelation 1:3

"Blessèd is the one who reads aloud the words of this prophecy, and blessèd are those who hear it and take to heart what is written in it."

Because the Revelation scroll would not be readily available to all, this prophecy was to be read aloud to the Lord's people—so important was its message for them. Those who knew the Old Testament well, would, immediately receive the impact of what was proclaimed. And in understanding it, they would have great happiness in 'taking it to heart'!

The apostle Paul was full of the wonders of New Testament revelation, but he coveted any opportunity to read the Old Testament Scriptures—so aware was he of their great profit. When in prison, he made this request of his young co-worker Timothy:

2 Timothy 4:13

"When you come, bring ... my scrolls [of the Scriptures], especially the [ones written on parchment]."

So then, we have great encouragement to read all that has been revealed to us in God's written word. To assist us in this there are daily bible reading plans available, which can be of help in reading through the whole of the Scriptures in a systematic way. Some enable a reader to move through the whole Bible in one year, others in two or three. There are also plans that are set out in 'chronological order'—enabling the Scriptures to be read in the historical sequence of events as they happened. Either way, some kind of plan is useful in a disciplined reading of the whole Bible.

When it comes to that particular 'devotional time' in the word mentioned before, some find it best to simply read until the Spirit speaks to their heart, then stop, and meditate on that. They would see their more extensive bible reading as happening at another time—continuing from the place where they stopped for meditation. In all of this, it is often advisable to 'start small' and progressively increase from there.

suggestions for meditation on the Bible

As we prayerfully read the Scriptures there are particular questions that are helpful to ask—while keeping in mind the general questions: who, what, why, where, when and how? And that, primarily, with view to specifically relating what is discovered to our lives personally.

These particular questions can assist in identifying what is meaningful to us in the passage being read.

We may ask, is there:

- a fact to affirm about who God the Father is, and what He has done, is doing, or will do?
- a fact to affirm about who the Son is, and what He has done, is doing or will do?
- a fact to affirm about who the Holy Spirit is, and what He has done, is doing or will do?

These first three questions are foundational to any true reading of the Scriptures. The primary enquiry in our mind when coming to each passage must be, "What is the action of God here?" Even though the text may be speaking about the action of people, our first task is to understand how, what God has done, is doing or has promised to do has *affected* the situation being described. Otherwise, we'll have no real basis for understanding the human action—and may be left with a merely moralistic, 'example following' personal application, that has little to do with joyous participation in the grace of God.

The 'action of God' question, therefore, must always precede these others as well. Is there:

- a fact to affirm about humanity, past, present or future?
- a fact to affirm about Satan, past, present or future?
- a fact to affirm about salvation, past, present or future?
- a promise to believe and be glad about?
- a command to obey?
- an example to follow?
- a warning to heed, or personal error to avoid?
- a sin to acknowledge and forsake?
- a habit to begin?
- a cause for wholehearted thanksgiving?
- something to specifically pray about?

In all these, keeping in mind those general questions: who, what, why, where, when and how?

We may wish to:

- record our thoughts and meditations in a journal.
- write our favourite verse/s on one side of a calling card sized piece of paper, with our main thought or action on the other—to take with us during the day for further meditation.

- think about someone with whom we could share what we have come to see.

These questions and suggestions at least give some guidelines for meditation on the Scriptures. But the essence of true meditation always flows from a heart that delights above all else in the God of all grace—and seeks His pleasure, glory and praise, through our own conformity to Christ and the human freedom and fullness of others in Him ('the basics of life' from Study 9).

We don't usually find it hard to meditate upon one who is the object of our deepest affections, and whose pleasure and honour is our greatest desire!

What an enormous privilege we have been given in being able to read the written word of God—all that He, in His wisdom, has seen to be needful for our human maturity in Christ. And what a gift it is, to be able at any time, to come in joyous humility before this One who loves to speak to His sanctified children—this One, who delights to relate intimately with them, by the Spirit who has come to them in the name His Son.

having great delight in God & in the life-giving pleasures of His word—& enjoying exposure to the word with a view to meditation upon it, through:

- studying

(giving specific attention to a bible passage, book or theme; with maximum personal exploration of the text)
—*reverently using our minds to gain divine wisdom*

We have spoken of the miracle of our being given hungry hearts and listening ears as the regenerate children of God—eager to hear His voice and be with Him in His will. Now we are to speak of yet another way that this great miracle is expressed in our approach to the word of God: our engagement in the discipline of *studying* the Bible.

the distinctive nature of biblical study

In our general reading of God's word, we desire to hear His voice and understand what He is saying to us, personally, from the text. The focus is mainly, upon intimate fellowship with God and receiving wisdom to live by, in the light of an *overall understanding* of the Scriptures.

Studying, the Bible is different to our general reading, in that it involves a more deliberate and extensive approach. As the heading suggests: giving *specific attention* to a bible passage, book or theme.

Like general reading, bible study involves asking questions of the text, but it is much more detailed in the observations it seeks to make. It also includes things like comparing Scripture with Scripture, writing down conclusions, identifying key words and themes, summarizing and paraphrasing passages, creating outlines of a book (or topical / biographical themes), and, of course, making applications relating to the fulfillment of our holy calling in Christ.

In a further revision of this study 'On The Way In The Good Of The Word', space will be given to not only speak of principles of interpretation—as mentioned in the key concept section—but also to look at some simple methods of studying a book of the Bible, doing a topical / thematic study, or a study on some biblical character. Again, a major aim of this series is to equip us to engage with God's word in such ways as effectively as possible.

There is so much to be gained from any diligent study of the Scriptures!

much more than developing 'biblical expertise'

In speaking of 'study' we are not moving into a merely mental or academic realm, as opposed to what we might call the 'devotional'. Basic to all true bible study is a deep cry of the heart for God Himself, His will and His way. In it there is no place for a desperate or compulsive quest to become a great exponent of all things biblical—for that, usually, has to do with our old self-exalting agenda. There is, however, a holy energy of heart, which cannot be content with anything less than all of the life-giving wisdom—and authentic humanity—that the Father has for us in His Son!

This appeal from Proverbs describes well the spirit of true bible study:

Proverbs 2:3–4

If you call out for insight and cry aloud for understanding, and if you look for it as for silver and search for it as for hidden treasure, then you will understand the fear of the LORD and find the knowledge of God.

‘Calling out’, ‘crying aloud’, ‘looking’, ‘searching as for hidden treasure’! And why? To know God, in all of the joyous and awesome wonder of His Holy Being—and to be with Him in the utter wisdom of His way.

Paul—a grace-smitten student of the wonders of the Holy One—could only cry out in contemplation of all he had come to see:

Romans 11:33

“Oh, the depth of the riches of the wisdom and knowledge of God!”

This brings us to an extremely important statement concerning the nature of bible study. It must be understood that the environment in which we examine the Scriptures is not to be one of mere theoretical or even, practical interest. It is by nature a spiritual exercise.

Although bible study certainly involves much thought and consideration, its environment is not primarily ‘the theological or historical laboratory’, where we *analyze*. It is before all else, ‘the holy sanctuary’, where we *worship!* True bible study always involves a prayerful spirit of communion with God, in which—along with all of the concentration of our mental powers—we look constantly to Him for wisdom, and listen for His voice.

Solomon warned his son about the trap of becoming a mere ‘book person’, saying:

Ecclesiastes 12:12

“Of making many books there is no end, and much study wearies the body.”

There is an approach to study that is a kind of desperate ‘book diligence’—draining our energies in doing whatever it takes to *make the grade as a person of knowledge*. But this is not the atmosphere in which a clear and free-spirited bible student operates.

In the very next verse, Solomon sums up what is to be the goal of every personal endeavour:

Ecclesiastes 12:13

“Now all has been heard; here is the conclusion of the matter: Fear God and keep His commandments, for this is the [wholeness] of every human being.”

Study of the bible is not about ‘study’ itself, or the accumulation of biblical knowledge. As alluded to above, that can be just another form of covetousness (Luke 12:15)—a, greediness, for theological or spiritual status. No, Solomon tells us that our primary pursuit in all things must be to know the Holy One, and be with Him in His way. We are to study the Bible above all else, to receive wisdom from Him towards that supreme end!

The fruit of such endeavour, Solomon says, is ‘human wholeness’—a life *integrated* in the joyous simplicity of communion with our Maker. A true student of the Bible often needs to ‘wrestle with the text’, but nevertheless, may go about the task with a song in their heart—a happy treasure hunter!

a secondary goal for bible study: functional maturity among the Lord’s people

We have seen how the apostles desired the maturity of the saints, and lamented any situation of protracted infancy. The grief of the writer to the Hebrews included sorrow over the condition of those who should, after their years in the Lord, have been teachers of others, but were still not able to fulfill such a needful function.

Earlier, when speaking of listening to the word proclaimed, mention was made of our Redeemer’s delight in raising-up those who are empowered to bring the word to others. Although equipment for such a task is not to be a primary motivation for studying the word, it is, nevertheless, an extremely significant secondary goal to have. Paul, in fact—in those foundational verses for this study—stated such equipment, to be an excellent outcome of the operation of the written word towards us:

2 Timothy 3:16–17

“All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, so that the servant of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work.”

One of the major ‘good works’ Paul had in mind regarding Timothy, of course, was his teaching ministry (4:2)—and particularly the instruction of faithful people who would also be able to teach others (2:2). The apostle urged his young co-worker on, regarding his personal equipment for this task, saying:

2 Timothy 2:15

“Do your best to present yourself to God as one approved, a worker who does not need to be ashamed and who correctly handles the word of truth.”

Timothy was to concentrate his mental and spiritual energies towards the goal of attaining a mature competence in handling—‘or ‘rightly dividing’—the word of truth. He needed to do all he could (literally,

‘work hard’) to be before God as one who had *passed the test*, as a faithful and effective servant of the word—not needing to be *ashamed* because of a lack of prayerful personal discipline in regard to it. The maturity of the Lord’s people was at stake!

When the Old Testament priest Ezra, had seen the need for the newly restored people of Israel to be instructed in the way of the LORD, he had responded faithfully to the need:

Ezra 7:10 [NASB]

Ezra had set his heart to study the law of the LORD and to practice it, and to teach His statutes and ordinances in Israel.

Ezra didn’t set his heart on being a ‘great theologian’. His motivation was three-fold: to *study* the word, *live* the word and *teach* the word. All three elements are required for functional maturity as a minister of the God’s word among His people!

some practical considerations

Matters of the heart are the central issue when it comes to bible study. But then—as will be seen in that further revision of this study—there is the value of understanding certain principles and procedures. However, as we bring this section on studying the Scriptures to a close, there are also some other practical things to consider at this point.

original investigation first

Our outline heading suggested that *original investigation*—‘maximum personal exploration of the text’—is an ideal to keep in mind when studying the Scriptures. This is not to discourage in any way the use of prepared ‘study aids’. These can be of great assistance in discerning what the Scriptures are saying. The point being made here is that we should do as much original work as we can, before using such tools.

Although the thoughts of others may be of great benefit, going to them too early in the piece may prevent us from receiving things that the Lord Himself wants to reveal. These, in fact, are often personally, the most valuable insights we gain!

Regarding reference tools for bible study, a *concordance*, which shows where a word is used elsewhere in the Scriptures, as well as a *bible dictionary*, are two basic volumes that are good to make use of, if possible. Also, a bible with ‘cross-references’ alongside the text is helpful—showing other verses elsewhere that say similar things.

having a plan

The old saying goes, “Fail to plan and you plan to fail.” This can certainly be the case with bible study. It is important to decide before the Lord what is to be studied—either, a bible book, topic or character. And then, once that’s settled, it’s usually best to set aside a particular time, or times, each week when this can happen. Because personal bible study is such a blessing, it is surely, a good thing to plan to succeed!

Often the best approach is to begin with simpler methods first, such as printed question and answer studies. Here, there is still original investigation in looking up bible references and writing answers in our own words. And then from there, more advanced forms such as self-guided bible book, topical and character studies can be pursued. Whatever approach is taken, remember to, above all else, ENJOY!!!

being part of a bible study group

There is great value in regularly gathering together with others who desire to study the Scriptures in the same way we have chosen. Usually, it is good to have done our work at home and then come together to share and discuss discoveries and practical insights. This can be a means of great encouragement and enrichment for all. Such groups provide valuable fellowship in the word and prayer—those two essentials for fruitful living in Christ.

Some prefer to use printed study materials when coming together with others. Whenever possible, though, it is still best to do some personal work in the Scriptures before hand. This is easily done with question and answer type studies. Of course, even if there is no original investigation or previous preparation, it is still a great blessing to be part of a group where the Bible is studied,.

The important thing is that in whatever way we are led, we diligently, exercise our minds to gain wisdom from the written word—that, in the Son and by the Spirit, we may grow in our relational intimacy and vocational partnership with the Father!

having great delight in God & in the life-giving pleasures of His word—& enjoying exposure to the word with a view to meditation upon it, through:

- memorizing

('hiding the word in our hearts' for instant recall at any time)
—*systematically learning & reviewing*

Scripture memorization is a discipline that can be a little daunting—some may feel a bit frightened or discouraged by the mere thought of it! Others treat the idea of engaging in it with a certain disdain—as if it were a little below their dignity as educated people.

Intentional memorization has, actually, been a very effective and enjoyable part of societies for thousands of years—richly sustaining community members in the core realities of their common life and culture. This has been, of course, particularly so in societies that are not literate but oral—learning by word of mouth rather than by what is written.

In our day there are high rates literacy in many parts of the world. Unfortunately, a number of the more literate societies have tended to see memorization as either an irrelevant or inferior form of learning—hence the disdain that is often expressed at its mention. But such an attitude does not fit well with either biblical revelation or the historical experiences of God's people—many of whom, have been extremely literate and well educated.

Memorizing verses, or portions—and even whole books—of God's written word is a discipline that has yielded great rewards. Those who have 'stored up' the word in their hearts in this way have found themselves, with unlimited opportunity to meditate upon it and enjoy its pleasures and powers—in all the many situations and circumstances of their lives!

**the divine command to fully possess the word
—that it may fully possess us**

To be 'possessed' by something may not at first sound all that attractive. But when we understand that as the sanctified children of God we have been 'set apart' to be His 'treasured possession', it gives a different perspective. We are the saints of God, called into the enjoyment of being *possessed* by Him—our glorious Creator and Redeemer!

There is no more functional or pleasure-giving way of life than for the human creature to be possessed by the divine Creator. And this is especially so, when we are in such dire need of His redemptive activity towards us and within us. To be possessed by the word is to be so influenced by it that it affects our thoughts and behaviour at every point of our lives—bringing us more and more into the human freedom and fullness for which we were created.

If we are to be fully *possessed* by God's word we must first of all fully *possess* it. In the Scriptures we are, in fact, commanded to do all we can to possess the word, in the most definite and personally accessible way we can. This, as we've seen, involves hearing, reading and studying, with a view to meditation. But it may also—with great affect—involve memorization.

Hearing the word brings a direct and immediate revelation, through the powerful media of a Spirit-enlivened and word-gripped proclaimer. Reading enables us to enjoy communion with God and direction in His way, in the context of gaining a general understanding of the whole of biblical revelation. Study of the Bible enables us to dig deeply into the text, to receive the rich treasures that such effort brings. Then, memorization of the Scriptures enables us to secure a 100% retention of the word we have received. Those who love to hear the voice of God and be with Him in His will, do well to joyously expose themselves to His word in each of these ways.

a word to be always in the mind & upon the heart

The following biblical statements, although applicable to hearing, reading and studying, are supremely relevant to the beautiful discipline of Scripture memory. We begin with Moses' command to Israel, as he proclaimed the word to them prior their entrance into the Promised Land. He insisted:

Deuteronomy 6:6, 8–9

“These commandments that I give you today are to be upon your hearts ... Tie them as symbols on your hands and bind them on your foreheads. Write them on the door-frames of your houses and on your gates.”

Here, of course, Moses was not speaking of literally writing out the commands and tying them on their hands, binding them on their foreheads, or fixing them to their door-frames and gates. What he meant

was that these things were to have such a place in their hearts—and be so much a part of their daily awareness—that every aspect of their thinking and behaviour would be governed, by them.

For a people—who like us all—were so in need of ongoing and direct redemptive activity within them, such ready availability of the word was absolutely essential. Later, Moses again emphasized this same thing, saying:

Deuteronomy 11:18

“Fix these words of Mine in your hearts and minds.”

They were to become a permanent fixture in every mind and heart—never given a chance to leave!

Regarding the things of *divine wisdom* that are from above, for functional *human living* upon the earth, Proverbs says:

Proverbs 7:3

Bind [the commands and teachings you have received] on your fingers; write them on the tablet of your heart.

The wisdom of God is so absolutely essential to our humanity, that it is to be as if, written on parchment and bound around our fingers—present, to be meditated upon at any time. Moreover, it is to be inscribed upon our very hearts, determining the nature of everything that we think, say or do.

Then finally, there are the words of Eliphaz, in the Book of Job. Though caught up in foolish thinking and debate at the time, he at least knew this much to be true regarding the need of Job:

Job 22:22

“Lay up His words in your heart.”

No matter how inadequate a person’s counsel may be, this will always be a wonderful piece of advice to give! Our greatest need is ever, to have access to the words of our Maker and Redeemer.

Although intentional Scripture memory is not the only way to have God’s word laid up in our hearts, it is certainly the most effective—in terms of having the word always available to us.

the great personal & relational value of a word permanently laid up within

Scripture memory is the perfect compliment to each of the other means of exposure to the word of God. Through it, the most significant things the Spirit says to us in hearing, reading and studying can, indeed, be *permanently hidden* in our hearts, ready to be meditated upon, delighted in and responded to, at any time of the day or night!

constantly being objects of the word’s dynamic activity

Again, Proverbs gives strong encouragement to *possess* the divine wisdom that has been given—this time spelling out a powerful personal outcome of doing so:

Proverbs 6:21-22

[The commands and teaching you have received, bind] always upon your heart; fasten them around your neck. When you walk they will guide you; when you sleep they will watch over you; when you awake they will speak to you.

The effects of securely binding divine wisdom upon the heart, and, as it were, firmly attaching it as a yoke around the neck, are truly dynamic. Its commands and teaching bring guidance during the hours of the day, silently overshadow our sleeping form through the night—awaiting the wakefulness of the morning—and then, they freshly speak to us as the new day begins!

The Old Testament saints could know this blessing as they diligently exposed themselves to the operations of the word. But how much more may this be so for us, in Christ. As we exercise the same diligence, the Spirit is at work within us incessantly imparting the mind of the Son Himself—in whom are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge! (Colossians 2:3).

enabled to overcome in the trials & testings of life

Before Israel embarked upon their difficult days of conflict in the land they were to possess, Moses, very much aware of how powerfully God had brought His word to the people, said to them:

Deuteronomy 30:14

“The word is very near you; it is in your mouth and in your heart so that you may obey it.”

This is the great need of the saints throughout all ages! A distant word will do us no good in midst of life’s battles. Only one that is in our mouths, ready to be uttered, and in our hearts, ready to be obediently responded to, will be of any real value. The world, the flesh and the devil will lose their conquering power only when the word is immediately available, in the moment of fierce testing.

As mentioned earlier in our study, the psalmist knew the way of overcoming in the face of temptation, declaring his confidence in the word he had deliberately embraced:

Psalm 119:11

“I have hidden Your word in my heart that I might not sin against You.”

And, of course, in Study 6 we saw the ultimate example of steadfast obedience in the face of testing. When Jesus, was tempted by Satan in the desert He overcame him by quoting three times from the Book of Deuteronomy. Alone, and without a written copy of the Scriptures, our Lord was able to speak the exact word required from what had been stored up in His memory (Luke 4:1–13).

We too, so often find ourselves in need of that same ‘sword of the Spirit’—the word of God—with which to come against the tempter (Ephesians 6:17). Pity help a child of God who has no sword in their hand when the evil one comes with the incredible force of his deceptive, soul-destroying power!

In the face of the devil’s crafty schemes and vicious assaults, so many down through the centuries have given testimony to the power of having the word laid up in their hearts. Those imprisoned for their faith under oppressive regimes, or facing other painfully testing circumstances without the written word available, have spoken of being wonderfully preserved and sustained by what they’d previously memorized.

producing the personal & relational fruitfulness to which we have been called

Looking back for a moment upon what we have covered thus far in our study, it is very clear that only by the indwelling word of God are we able to make progress in our high human calling; that is, to be conformed to the likeness of the Son—bearing the fruit of His righteousness (Philippians 1:11).

We’ve seen how the Holy Spirit is always at work to facilitate the Father’s redemptive purpose towards us, ever taking the initiative in speaking the word to our hearts. And we’ve been urged to generously *co-operate* with Him in this—as, by His enabling, we wholeheartedly *work out* what He is working in! And now, we’ve been describing how scripture memory is an extremely effective way of engaging in this kind of active co-operation.

And so, in the light of all that has been said, whenever the Spirit brings a life-changing promise or command from the word, surely, it is a wise thing, to immediately commit it memory. And then, to systematically and prayerfully meditate upon that word—until it consistently shapes the way we respond to the personal, relational and circumstantial crises of our lives! Such a decisive habit of life is one that produces like no other, the fruitfulness to which we are called.

In the parable of the sower and the seed, Jesus was describing an authentic response to the implanted word of God, when he explained:

Luke 8:15

“The seed [sown] on good soil stands for those with a noble and good heart, who hear the word, retain it, and by persevering produce a crop.”

Those who have ‘a noble and good heart’ are the regenerate children of God who—eagerly co-operating with the Holy Spirit—hear the word, do all they can to retain it, and persevere in their response to all that it reveals. They alone, bear the abundant personal and relational harvest that is to be enjoyed in Christ (Mark 4:20).

It’s not difficult to see how memorizing Gods word is an excellent means of ‘retaining’ it in our minds and meditating upon it in our hearts. These two together, provide the very best environment for persevering in fruit-bearing faith and obedience.

And then, we have Jesus’ promise regarding prayer, through effective retention of the word. He said:

John 15:7–8

“If you remain in Me and My words remain in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be done for you. This is to My Father’s glory that you bear much fruit.”

Remaining in the assurance of our union with Christ and having His word remain within us, is the key to entering into an intimate spirit of prayer—and receiving from the Father whatever He places upon our hearts to ask in His name!

Again, it is the indwelling word that produces the fruitfulness to which we are called—bringing pleasure, glory and praise to the Father. And once again the benefits of memorization are obvious, in its contribution to this hugely desirable outcome.

enabling the happiness of speaking God’s word to others

One of the blessings of having the word living within us for our own personal benefit, is that it is also, present to be expressed for the benefit of others as well. There is great joy in being able to minister the word in this way. The Holy Spirit, in fact, loves to provide us with such opportunities to speak in the name and love of our Lord!

Proverbs describes precisely, this capacity that is enjoyed by possessors of biblical words of wisdom:

Proverbs 22:18

It is pleasing when you keep them in your heart and have all of them ready on your lips.

To have a whole range of the Bible's wise, practical sayings enriching our own lives, and then being able to share their life-giving effects with others, truly is, a great pleasure to be enjoyed in Christ.

The following statements illustrate this happy privilege:

Proverbs 13:14

The teaching of the wise is a fountain of life.

Proverbs 10:21

The lips of the righteous nourish many.

Proverbs 16:23

The hearts of the wise guide their mouths, and their lips promote instruction.

Proverbs 15:23

A person finds joy in giving an apt reply—and how good is a timely word!

Such sharing of the indwelling word with others, of course, applies not only to the passing on of practical biblical wisdom for living, but also to imparting the great truths of the faith—things that have become a source of deep pleasure and personal strength within our own hearts.

This was the case with Timothy, as was seen earlier in the section on training (2 Timothy 2:1–2). It is significant to mention that Timothy's godly upbringing would have included memorization of portions of the Scriptures (2 Timothy 1:5; 3:14–15)—a deposit within him that would have contributed to his own enrichment in Christ, and surely, have served him well in ministering to others.

For Peter, on the Day Pentecost, his speaking out of the indwelling word had to do with proclamation of the gospel. He stood up before the crowd of people that had gathered, raised his voice and declared, "Listen carefully to what I say ... This is what was spoken by the prophet Joel ..." He then, quoted word perfectly, five verses from Joel chapter 2—without having to send someone to the temple to get the Joel Scroll! (Acts 2:14–21).

As with Timothy, Peter's childhood discipline of memorizing portions of the Scriptures, served him well on that day, enabling a substantial response to the Spirit's powerful operation within him—and he became a means of great blessing to his divinely aroused hearers.

The opportunities for the saints to speak out of the word hidden in their hearts are, quite endless. But how sad it is, when there is a person in deep need of hearing a word from God, but the one standing before them—with no bible at hand—finds there is nothing they can say. The Holy Spirit, of course—out of the general wisdom gained from God's word—so often gives utterance on such occasions. But those who diligently memorize and meditate on the Scriptures, may, prompted by the Spirit, be able to *lovingly quote* a direct, life-giving biblical word—avoiding the pain of being, otherwise, virtually speechless. Sometimes, a kind-hearted silence is most appropriate—but certainly, not always. What happiness it is, to have a word in season for a needy soul!

The testimony of Isaiah is a great encouragement in this regard, when he declares:

Isaiah 50:4

"The Sovereign LORD has given me an instructed tongue, to know the word that sustains the weary. He wakens me morning by morning, wakens my ear to listen like one being taught."

This truly is, a graphic picture of the privilege enjoyed by those, who day after day—in God's presence—are able to meditate upon His word laid-up in their hearts.

some practical matters relating to a lifestyle of scripture memorization

Some see the value of memorizing, have tried to do so, but found they just can't retain what they have learned. Others see the need, and haven't even tried. Their protest is, "I have such a terrible memory. It would be a hopeless waste of time and effort!"

What must be understood is that the human brain, actually, has a vast capacity to store and recall information—and we in fact, only use a tiny portion of this. There is no reason why most of us could not even learn entire books of the Bible, if that is how we felt led. Some may have to work a little harder than others at this; but appropriate effort—and development of the right skills—will always produce the desired results!

start small

One of the common problems experienced when seeking to memorize scripture, is that we rightly become enthused about the need for and value of it, but can also be a little over zealous in our initial attempts. Effective scripture memorization is a discipline and a skill that has to be learned—and as with all such things it is best to start small.

Often when the need to memorize is renewed after a significant lapse, we can tend to be driven by a regret-charged zeal to ‘make up for lost time’! That can be particularly the case if we have generally struggled with personal discipline and have a cloud of guilt hanging over us regarding it.

Proverbs tell us that this is the problem with ‘the sluggard’—the undisciplined person who has big guilt-driven plans, but never gets to carry them out.

Proverbs 26:15

Sluggards bury their hands in the dish and are too lazy to bring them back to their mouths.

When we try to ‘make up’ for past failure, we tend to fall into the trap of ‘over-achieving’. Like the sluggard, we may bury our hands into a dish of tasty scripture morsels, but—having attempted more than is appropriate—soon become discouraged at the prospect of continuing. The old enemy, ‘guilt-paralysis’, then once again wins the day—and we fall back into an undisciplined state.

Just one or two verses a week is a realistic way to begin this venture, which may then naturally—through the sheer pleasure of its attained benefits—develop into a greater volume.

One woman who came to know the Lord in her late forties, and began to memorize Scripture in her early fifties, started with two verses a week—and continued to do exactly that for the next 40 years! In her nineties she had the delightful benefit of 4,000 verses laid up in her heart. So it’s OK to start small and stay small. As always, the key is, ENJOY!!!

recognize that effective memorization requires a disciplined way of life

Regardless of the pleasures that scripture memory brings, it will always be a discipline that will require a personal cost to maintain. As with all disciplines it has to do with the creation of a habit—in this case a daily one.

The maintenance of any daily habit, simply involves making space for it within the hours available to us. When it comes to disciplined habits, the key always has to do with where our heart is: what we, actually, desire above all else will usually receive the first portion of our available time.

And of course, as with all habitual disciplines, regardless of the benefits gained, there are times when the mechanical exercise of memorization will be the last thing we feel like doing. Some other more immediately gratifying option will demand our attention. At that point the maintenance of this discipline will require a sheer exercise of our will—aided by recalling that laying up God’s word in our heart is one of the great means of fruitful living in Christ.

Daily disciplined habits are never left to chance. There is always a particular time (or times), and often a particular place (or places), for the operation of them.

the need for a systematic approach

One major cause of discouragement when memorizing scripture is the experience of having spent time learning verses, but then finding that later, they are not able, to be recalled. One immediate encouragement in this regard is that once a verse has been memorized, it is much easier to re-memorize later. It’s really, already there, just needing to be refreshed.

But the most encouraging thing to know is that if a *systematic approach* is followed, verses memorized will never be lost—always able to be recalled at any time. The key to this is the whole matter of ‘review’—systematically reviewing verses long enough for them to be permanently embedded within our memory.

Memorizing many verses is a relatively easy thing to do. But without consistent, systematic review, retaining them will usually prove difficult—and a beautiful discipline will have an unfortunate element of frustration enter into it.

A proven method of review is to daily recite each verse that has been memorized over the past six weeks. This is often called ‘current review’. For example, if two verses are being memorized each week, this will mean that twelve current review verses will be checked each day. If that process is faithfully followed, the discouraging experience of forgetting verses will be not, be a problem.

Current review can also include enjoyable moments—or minutes—of meditation. But we need not feel obligated to meditate on every occasion. The important thing is to make sure the review is done each day. There will be plenty of opportunity to meditate once the verse is thoroughly learned.

Those verses that have been memorized and reviewed daily for six weeks can then be moved from current review, into what may be called 'back review'. Then these are systematically recalled and meditated upon, at will, for the rest of our days—a most enjoyable practice!

Once the verses are in back review, they can be placed in topical order (that is, all the verses on the word, or prayer, or love etc. together), or in bible book order.

Back review is not just a matter of 'keeping' the verses. It is continuing to reap the great rewards of having God's word laid up in our hearts. Those things that He has said to us which may otherwise, fade into the background of our minds, are regularly able to be meditated upon with a view to achieving that supreme personal goal—conformity to the likeness of the Son!

Even if such a systematic pattern of review is not practiced as effectively as it could be, memorization of scripture—with the 'loss' of some verses—will still be a valuable personal discipline. The act of memorizing and meditating upon God's word, in whatever way it is done, stimulates prayerful fellowship with Him—a priceless benefit. If for no other reason than this, it is a discipline to be highly valued.

However, to be diligent in following a *systematic approach* to scripture memory will certainly bring all kinds of rich spiritual outcomes—particularly, when engaged in as a wonderful opportunity to joyously hear and respond to our Redeemer's voice!

the advantage of having a scripture memory partner

Sometimes daily disciplines can be maintained through the assistance of someone who will check on our progress, maybe, once a week. We might not want to 'advertise' the nature of our personal disciplines, but to have someone to provide regular accountability can be very helpful.

A report can be given to such a partner of how well we have managed the systematic process of memorization that week, and they can also hear us recite our current review verses (or just some of them chosen at random).

They may also check at random some scriptures from our back review as well. Any verses that are a bit 'rusty' can then be put back into current review for a week to be polished up. This can also be done, of course, during the normal process of back review.

initial memorization

One common way of memorizing has been to write the verse or verses to be learned on a small card that will fit comfortably in our hand. In this way it can be placed there at different times during the day and repeated in our mind or out loud. In our age of digital technology, of course, there will be all kinds of ways this can be done.

Rather than try to learn the whole verse at once, it is best to break it up into parts—repeating each one till it is in our mind, before moving on to the next. Some, who are musical, may find it practically and spiritually beneficial to *sing* the different parts as they learn them. Each to their own!

It can be very helpful when memorizing to actually meditate on the verse as we do so—writing down insights on the back of the card or elsewhere. This will not only help in learning the verse, but also be a great aid in maintaining a spirit of prayer throughout the day.

One very important thing to hold to in memorization is the principle of 'word perfection'. Whatever translation of the Bible is being memorized, make sure that it is learned word perfect. 'Near enough' is not good enough for decisive recall and effective meditation later.

scripture memory & the matter of status before God & others

There are a number of dangers to be aware of when memorizing scripture—or when being diligently engaged in any means of exposure to the word. The devil will love to pervert and sabotage these wonderful activities in whatever way he can.

seeking the pleasure of God

We are, indeed, to seek the pleasure of God in all that we do. And there is no greater personal pleasure than in sensing this to be the case.

It must, however, be clearly understood that we never have any more or less favour with God because we do or don't do, any of the disciplines that have been outlined in this study. They are simply functional ways of being consistently exposed to His word, and enjoying the benefits. The Father's love for His children is not dependent upon how disciplined they are. Thankfully!

If any discipline of the Christian life is robbing us of joy and vitality, it is certainly not operating in a functional way, and there is every chance that some foolish motivation has intruded. The supreme act of folly in this regard, is seeking to gain God's favour by works rather than by grace—performing 'duties' rather than responding to His love. Every discipline in Christ is to aid us in exalting in the joy of divine grace—never to lock us into slavish obligation to 'doing the right thing'.

Nothing, in fact, tempts us more readily to wrongly feel acceptable before God, than the performance of disciplined activities. The old religious ego rises up so quickly to, at last, have something, of ourselves, to 'feel good about' before God.

There is, of course, great authentic pleasure in an obedient and disciplined life in Christ. But our joy is primarily to be in the One who has liberated us into such action, rather than the action itself. As we've seen in previous studies, He is pleased above all else, with our happiness in His grace—and then, in the glad and obedient fruits it produces. Grace produced activity—however exacting—doesn't rob us of joy and vitality in God's presence. Even when our efforts are falteringly performed, we may know that our faith in His grace brings Him the greatest pleasure of all!

Any failure in personal discipline should, in fact, only drive us to the 'throne of grace', where we are refreshed and renewed in the perfect work of Christ, and our place in Him—sustained to joyously press on in the task at hand. Success, should, always have us delighting in the Father, that, by the Spirit, He has enabled us to participate in the pleasing ways of His Son.

Memorization of scripture may, indeed, bring pleasure to God—when it is pursued for the joy of having His very word in our heart!

delivered from seeking the praise of others

The temptation to do things to gain the recognition and praise of those around us is a very common one. Jesus spoke in a most disapproving way of the Pharisees' tendency to perform their duties in order 'to be seen by others' (Matthew 6:1–6). He lamented the fact that even the Pharisees who believed in Him 'loved human praise more than the praise of God' (John 12:43). The drive to elevate or maintain our personal status in the eyes of others is a powerful one, within us all.

It is not hard to see how the memorization of scripture can become a problem in this way—a means of displaying our 'personal spirituality'. We can become incessant 'scripture quoters'. The flesh says, "Why go to all the trouble of learning these verses if we don't let people know about it!" Of course, memorizing scripture doesn't necessarily indicate great spirituality at all. It is a sobering thing to remember that even a parrot can quote verses from the Bible!

As we've seen, scripture memory can be a means of great blessing, both to ourselves, and others. The only danger in engaging in such a fine discipline is that it may become something in and of itself—either a means of gaining divine approval, or achieving some kind of self-exalting end.

Apart from advertising our 'verse possession', other signs that we've succumbed to the danger referred to, are things like a competitive spirit ("how many verses do *you* know?") or humiliation, when an attempted quotation is frustrated by forgetfulness ("I can't believe I've forgotten that!"). We are to take the discipline seriously—but not ourselves! Another sign is that we are, in our hearts, proud of the fact that we memorize scripture and critical of others who don't.

We saw in Study 8, that whenever we are proud of anything that we are and do, and are critical of others who are not as we are and don't do what we do, we are clearly, not in the enjoyment of the grace of God. A boastful, self-righteous and superior spirit is a vile and ugly thing—a blatant denial of the grace that has been lavished upon us. Our status is to be found in Christ, not in any kind of exceptional spiritual performance. There is no greater personal status for any human being, than to be a sanctified child of the Father—a co-heir with the Son forever!

Simply put, having the scriptures in our hearts and on our lips must never become our personal 'claim to fame'—a device for elevating our personal standing in the eyes of others.

However, regardless of the danger of self-display through 'quotation abuse', sharing the word that has been laid up in our hearts with others is—as we've seen—a significant means of bringing blessing to them. We would not want to make a show of our scripture knowledge, but neither should we *repress* a desire to bless those around us. If the Holy Spirit moves us to share what is in our heart, we should obey His prompting—regardless of whether we may appear to be indulging in self-display. Pride will cause us to fear criticism, just as much as to seek praise—but love will say the word that needs to be heard!

As God's indwelling word keeps us happy in the assurance of His grace to us in Christ, we may be delivered from the danger of seeking the praise of others. But let us remember though, that we *are* engaged every day in a relentless battle—against the world, the flesh and the devil—in the midst of which we will, sadly, find ourselves having all kinds of mixed motivations in memorizing the word and

speaking it to others. This can be personally, grievous; and of course, the devil would be very keen to condemn us in our weakness, and suggest that we give up on memorizing scripture—for this, and any other reason. But there is never any valid cause for a forgiven sinner to stop doing what God's word itself, tells us is good for our soul!

CONCLUSION

We have seen the incredible nature of the word of God and His faithful recording of it for us in written form. And we have observed something of the fierce contesting of its authority and attempts to distort what it proclaims throughout history. We have seen also, our calling to eagerly receive the Holy Spirit's ministry of teaching, rebuke and correction—that we may be trained in righteousness!

And so that we may meditate day and night upon the word, we have been urged to make use of the every God-given means of exposure to it—to diligently listen to, read, study and memorize what has been provided for our human maturity.

Whether facing temptation or discouragement, being engaged in public proclamation or personal sharing with others, or just being daily enriched in the Lord, we have seen that to have God's word 'hidden in our hearts' is of enormous value. Like so many others down through the centuries, we may in this way, experience the joy of its revelatory pleasures and powers!

What an amazing gift the Holy Scriptures are! Through them—by His Spirit—the Living Word, Himself speaks to us, so that we may live each day in the good of what He says, for His Father's pleasure, glory and praise.

It has been of great significance for us to lay this foundation for the other studies that are to follow. We will progress towards the ultimate freedom and fullness to be ours in Christ, only on the basis of the dynamic activity of the word of God towards us and within us.

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[revised 1-9-11]