

THE PROCESS OF GOD'S COMMUNICATION TO MAN

Part 3



Let me begin by trying to illustrate what happens when we have a lack of Bible study. In two words, **people starve!**

The vista from the top of Sulphur Mountain, just outside the town of Banff, is one of the most picturesque in the Canadian Rockies. A gondola takes you to the top of the mountain where you stand looking at peak after peak, stretching off into the distance in a virtual sea of mountains. When the sun is shining, and the snow is glistening, it is a breathtaking scene.



On top of the mountain is a tea house, as well as a herd of about 30 mountain sheep who have become very tame and taken to begging handouts from tourists. They love anything salty, and that is the problem. Those sheep are actually starving to death on a diet of peanuts, potato chips, popcorn, hamburger, licorice, and even salty plastic bags. As a result, the herd has been neglecting its normal grass diet; the animals are losing weight, and the females no longer produce enough high-quality milk to nourish their lambs. One of the park wardens has said, "Sheep develop a taste for this kind of junk. It is pathetic to see, but there is really very little we can do about it. I wish people would realize their 'kindness' amounts to cruelty." The sheep have actually become "junk-food junkies."

I think you get the connection between the sheep and our subject. Not only four-legged sheep have this nutritional problem. Many of God's spiritual sheep are addicted to junk food, the kind that produces spiritual malnourishment. They have become "spiritual junk-food junkies." Junk food is fascinating stuff. The problem is not that it tastes bad. It nearly always tastes *good*. Nor does junk food immediately destroy us. The problem is, it has little or no nutritional value, and spoils our appetites. So it is with spiritual junk food, which spoils our appetite for God's solid food and addicts us to what is only superficially satisfying. "The result is spiritual starvation in our own lives and danger to the lives of those who depend upon us." (Gary Inrig, *Hearts of Iron, Feet of Clay*, Moody Press, 1979, pp. 266-267.)

The input many Christians are receiving from the media and their reading is only superficially satisfying, with little or no nutritional value. It does taste good, at least sometimes. It won't immediately destroy us. But it is ultimately leading to spiritual starvation and spoils our appetites. Even some Bible study is so erratic and superficial it is insufficient to provide the nutrition needed.



On the other hand, if Bible study is done right, it will not only taste good, but will

deliver people from their addiction to junk food! The Bible doesn't give us a formal description, at least in any one place, about what is involved in studying its pages, but it does give us one picture that offers a pretty good idea of what is involved! The attitude and actions needed for a quality and nutritious Bible study can be capsulized by a vocation alluded to/described in Scripture—that of a miner (Proverbs 2).



This passage in Proverbs gives us a picture of the process involved in mining the truth of Scripture. As miners, we must have the persistence and dedication of those who dig under the earth for ore or metal (Acts 17:10-11; 2 Tim. 2:15). Our responsibility is to search the Scriptures for insight and wisdom (Acts 17:10-11). A good student of Scripture won't be satisfied with superficial observations or the work of others. For example, if we say we are not being fed enough on Sundays or in our small groups to make it through the week, then we give testimony of our inability to feed ourselves and our own immaturity.

We are called to seek the valuable material of the Word with all diligence (2 Tim. 2:15). Spiritual treasures we mine ourselves should bring us all that is necessary to meet our own spiritual needs. Proverbs 2 says we are to look for understanding as if we were looking for silver (vv. 1-11). This is very helpful counsel, and provides us with a good biblical basis for the study of Scriptures. There are conditions, however. Notice the "ifs" all the way through. (*Circle or underline them in your Bible.*)

"My son if you will receive my sayings, if you will treasure my commandments within you, if you will make your ear attentive to wisdom, incline your heart to understanding, or if you cry for discernment and lift your voice for understanding, if you seek her as silver, if you search for her as for hidden treasures. . ."

There are six "if" statements in this passage. What will happen if we fulfill all these conditions as a good silver miner? "Then you will discern the fear of the Lord and then you will discover the knowledge of God" (v. 5). What a promise! We can't enjoy the treasure of the fifth verse if don't work through the first four. If you want to know the fear of the Lord and discover the knowledge of the living God, you have to roll up your sleeves, dig in, and mine for silver

I don't know how much physical digging you have done, but maybe enough to know that it doesn't take very long to put blisters on your hands, even with gloves. Before long, in fact before an hour's over, you are just about ready to give up the whole process. Digging is hard work, and we should know studying the Scriptures for silver is not any easier. In fact, it can get harder at times and in certain seasons. Even if you have been studying the Scriptures for 20 years, I can promise you that Bible study will be very difficult at times and you will wonder if there is anything in its pages. Or there will be times when the section you are studying will only yield its treasure when you study hard and long.!

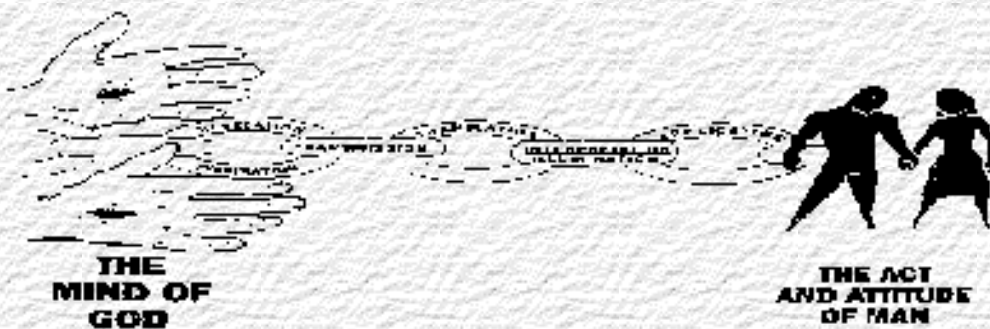
You will be tempted at that point with the thought that the Word is dry and unyielding of any new treasure, that you have mined all there is and maybe another book, newspaper, magazine or media source would be more enjoyable to look at! Junk food will look good to you, or fools' gold and silver will be a great attraction. My advice? Keep mining; there is treasure ahead! Of course, sometimes we open the Scriptures and there before us is a nugget we haven't looked for, and just what we needed. Don't you love those times? Other times we return to old mining spots, reexamine what we have found before, rejoice in the truth and the treasure of those familiar truths. (That's okay!)

Let me remind you, however, there is still more gold in "them thar" hills. There are fantastic veins of silver to be discovered and applied to our lives. Don't miss them!

This verse (Prov. 2:4) says we will need to "seek her [the commands, the wisdom, the understanding, the insight of the Bible's pages] as silver." But notice, beyond the treasure we receive, the reason for this search in Prov. 2:6. The most important reason of all is that as we seek this wisdom, we discover it is the Lord Himself who gives it to us! "From his mouth comes knowledge and understanding."

God waits for us, and He's the Source of all we find! He has those packages of knowledge and understanding put together and waits for our digging, so He can give us these already wrapped, ready-to-be-opened treasures. What a sorrowful moment it would be if we got a peek into heaven and saw those packages ready for delivery, but never called for. I have many unwrapped packages waiting for me, as do you!

With this summary picture in mind, let's return to our series with a review of the big picture of the Bible—especially how God chose to communicate with man. Remember, by studying God's communication with man, we hope to have an understanding of how the Bible came to us, and how we should respond to it. In parts one and two, we saw the process of God's communication as a chain that stretches from the mind of God, to the act and attitudes of man.



Thus far we have seen:

- **Revelation**—Inspiration: a circular process of receiving and recording the Word of God without any error
- **Transmission**: copying as accurately as possible, the original Hebrew and Greek manuscripts and their copies
- **Translation**: seeking the most accurate rendering of the original language manuscripts into our own

language

- **Illumination** and **Interpretation**: finding what the author meant by what he said; and by the Spirit, putting the meaning into contemporary expressions
- **Application**: using our varied gifts to make the Word of God relevant to man so that behavioral change results

Let's concentrate this time on

Illumination and Interpretation

An overview

Obviously, translation is not all we need to fully comprehend the meaning of what God is saying to us. In the first three links of this chain, we have been dependent on the commitment and skill of others for those parts of the process. With the next two links we will take a more active role, but will still be supervised and illuminated by the Holy Spirit and are, therefore, partners with the Holy Spirit. **Interpretation** is my part of the link; **illumination** is God's part. They are circular and overlap each other.



Illumination

Let's focus on illumination for a moment, and how it relates to the study of Scripture. We just saw in Proverbs 2 that Bible study can be hard work. It could even seem dependent on human effort for treasure to be found. But are we in the study of Scripture by ourselves? No, illumination is the other side of interpretation. It is the Holy Spirit's part in the interpretation process.

It is important to pray for guidance from the Holy Spirit for several reasons.

He is the author. II Pet. 1:20-21—"Above all, you must understand that no prophecy of Scripture came about by the prophet's own interpretation 21] For prophecy never had its origin in the will of man, but men spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit."

He has come to teach & remind us as we pray for His help. Jn. 14:25-26— 25] "All this I have spoken while still with you. 26] But the Counselor, 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." This means we are not alone when we endeavor to come to the meaning and application of a passage. (We don't dig for Scripture alone!) The illumination of the Holy Spirit enlightens our understanding and enables us to comprehend what we are studying/digging for.

According to John 16:12-13, the Holy Spirit is present to guide us to all truth. 12] "I have much more to say to you, more than you can now bear. 13] But when he, the Spirit of truth, comes, he will guide you into all 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."

That leads to a controversial question: does the illumination of the Spirit imply there are new truths to be discovered outside the Scripture, i.e., truth that has never been revealed? Many people believe that prophecies

or even other writings may reveal to us spiritual truth that has not been revealed or known in Scripture. Evangelical Christians don't believe that the Scripture teaches this! The Spirit's ministry is to enlighten our understanding of the truth that God has *already given* to us in His Word. All the truth that God wants us to know for our spiritual lives has already been revealed to us in the Scripture! Therefore, there will be no new discoveries or revelation of truth. The Holy Spirit is present to teach and enlighten the Word of God to us! Earl Radmacher has said:

"The Spirit is not given to make Bible study needless, but to make it effective. The Spirit and the Word go hand in hand. The Spirit of God without the Word of God is mute. He has nothing to say. The Word of God apart from the Spirit of God is useless. It has no power to act. Or to put it another way, the Word of God apart from the Spirit of God leads to mechanism, and the Spirit of God apart from the Word of God leads to fanaticism."

So how does our relationship with the Holy Spirit play itself out practically as we are studying the Scripture? How and when should we pray for His help in our study of the Scripture?

- Pray for His help at the beginning of our study.
- Pray for His guidance as we study.
- Pray for His understanding when we come to a difficult passage and cannot understand what it means—Ps. 119:18.
- Pray for the Holy Spirit's assistance when we are preparing to share our study with others.
- Pray after we have finished sharing that the Holy Spirit will remind our hearers of His Word.

What must we be careful about when we ask the Holy Spirit to be our helper and guide? It is important to maintain victory over sin, for this is a source of grief to the Holy Spirit and will quench His ministry in our lives (Eph. 4:30; 1 Thess. 5:19; Psalm 66:18-19; Prov. 28:9,13).

If the Holy Spirit is an integral part of our correctly understanding Scripture, can only a Christian come to the meaning of Scripture? In that an unbeliever exercises discipline in allowing Scripture to interpret itself, it is possible that he could make some interpretation of Scripture (this is especially true when it relates to initial salvation). Beyond coming to Christ, however, an unbeliever's interpretations will have limited value, because he/she will be incapable of understanding the implications and application of the Bible to life—1 Cor. 2:14; Matt.16:21; Mark 14:1-2.

.The need to be a believer is summed up in 1 Cor. 2:14: "The man without the Spirit does not accept the things that come from the Spirit of God for they are foolishness to him, and he cannot understand them because they are spiritually discerned." In essence, in order to grasp spiritual truth, we must have spiritual receptiveness. Natural man does not have the capacity to receive spiritual truth, because his attitude is contrary to it: "The man without the Spirit does not accept the things that come from the Spirit of God..." His aptitude for it is nil, as well; "...he cannot understand..."

The unbeliever's appreciation for spiritual truth is also lacking: ". . .they are foolishness to him." Only the person who has had a spiritual birth has the attitude, aptitude, and appreciation for spiritual truth. Thank God for His Spirit, for He gives us what we need to find the truth. Our challenge is to learn to be sensitive to and listen to Him as we study.

Interpretation

Dr. Radmacher expresses the next needed link this way: "Interpretation is finding out what the author meant by what he said and putting that meaning into contemporary equivalent expression." Interpretation involves the art and science of seeking to determine, as accurately as possible, what the writer meant by what he said. We call this particular discipline "**hermeneutics**." It is a science because it is guided by principles or rules arranged into an orderly system of approach, but also classified as an art, because it requires skill and sensitivity to complete.

Why do we need interpretation? Consider the following example to answer that question.

"Hey, Jim, let's invite several of our friends over to my house this Wednesday night for Bible study." The night comes and everyone is present and reasonably excited. A passage of Scripture is assigned as the concentration for the evening. After prayer and careful reading of the text, the leader asks the question: "What does that mean to us today"? So the people begin to share. On one verse, however, there are several disagreements. How do they resolve the situation? One way is to try to arrive at a "consensus." If that can't be arrived at, then the statement that resolves the conflict is: "Well, you have your interpretation and I have mine."



Does that sound familiar? This is a very popular way to study the Bible in homes around the world. No one can deny a great deal of benefit does come from such gatherings, but the situation could be improved measurably. This is especially true when a high percentage of people have a "creative" way of reading between the lines to find what they believe is the deeper meaning of Scripture. Of equal concern are those who resist any study, and insist on having a word from God in order to interpret what the Bible is saying to them.

What is the answer to our guesses about interpretation of any given passage? Are there some objective principles which will guide us in our accurate understanding of the text? Thankfully, there are some very sound principles that can help us.

Interpretation is a process that applies certain hermeneutical principles to a given text, which in turn enables us to understand exactly the intention of the writer. That meaning is then put into clear, contemporary expressions, so it can be applied to our lives. This will not be easy.

Two principles of interpretation that should help us guard against misinterpretation are the following:

Study the Bible inductively—interpret the narrower context before the wider.

The narrower

A passage must first be understood from its immediate surroundings (context) before it's studied in the light of broader application to the Bible as a whole. Start with the smallest unit and move to the largest (chapter, etc.). A frequent error is to interpret a phrase without seeing it in the light of the verses and paragraph in which it is found. Another is to interpret a phrase by Paul on the basis of its use in John. We must realize that each biblical writer, like each of us, used language differently. In fact, most of us use words differently than we did 10 to 15 years ago.

The wider

This includes the paragraphs, sections, and chapters surrounding your passage. The narrow context must then be related to the rest of Scripture, the book, and the Testament context. The widest context is the social, historical, and geographical setting of the passage being studied. Thus, no *part* of Scripture can be interpreted in a way that will contradict the teaching of the *whole* of Scripture or its setting.

Concordance messages/studies that trace one word through Scripture, for example, are often inaccurate because they don't take into account the verses surrounding that word. The summary of this rule is: Scripture interprets Scripture. Not only do we have the Holy Spirit to help us mine and interpret the Scriptures, we have the Scriptures themselves.

"Scripture interprets Scripture has been called a circle. The whole of Scripture can be learned by interpreting its part by part. No man's attention span is so great that he can ingest the whole of Scripture at once. Yet no part can stand in isolation to the whole (or its historical and cultural context). So the interpreter must go from part to whole and from whole to part."—Hermeneutics by Bernard Ramm, Baker Book House, Grand Rapids, MI., 1981, p. 24.

I call the process from part to whole and whole to part "the telescope/microscope balance." We need the close view as well as the big picture, for they balance each other out.

"It is crucial to interpret a phrase first by its use in its own immediate context, then by its use in the broader sphere of the major section of the work, then by its use in the book as a whole (check cross-references). Next, one may check the corpus of works by the same author. Only after that would one check the concept throughout the testament and then in the Bible as a whole"—Handbook for Bible Study, Grant R. Osborne and Stephen B. Woodward, Baker Book House, 1979, p. 154.

One of the most familiar traits of a sect or cult is that it takes an incidental passage of Scripture out of context and builds on it to form one of the cult's "pillars of truth." Let's view a few examples of what happens when we ignore the context, and how understanding it can enrich our interpretation. [See the appendix insert](#) for your own study:

The second umbrella principle is:

Important truths are not hidden—look for the simplest interpretation.

This principle is sometimes called the **principle of literal interpretation**. The definition most often quoted is one by Bernard Ramm.

"The literal interpretation as applied to any document is that view which adapts as the sense of a sentence, the meaning of that sentence in usual, or ordinary, or normal conversation or writing"—Ramm, *ibid.*, pp. 3-28.

Two factors are involved in this principle:

The normal sense

This definition as it is applied to any document means that the interpretation will place its emphasis upon the natural, usual, ordinary, normal, proper and obvious meaning of words as they are used in that language. The literal method makes the assumption the writer is using his own language in a normal manner.

The one sense

Closely entwined with the normal sense is the one sense. This means that when a person has something to say, the expression he uses to convey those thoughts has one meaning. We should continue to emphasize what the 16th-century reformers affirmed. They called it perspicuity: the way of salvation plainly set forth so that the simplest believer may read and understand it for himself. Salvation is plainly available, so that everyone can come to Jesus and find life —John 20:31; 2 Tim. 3:15. Martin Luther's assertion that the Bible meant what it said was a tremendous step forward for interpretation.

If we don't remember that important truths are not hidden and we should look for the simplest interpretation, we have the problem of the allegorical method. This method teaches that beneath the obvious meaning of Scripture there lies a hidden, symbolic meaning. It has been practiced in many ways since the medieval period. At one point in church history, in fact, some thought Scripture had four meanings: the literal, the moral, the allegorical, and the anagogical. Interpretation was launched on a sea of subjectivity that led to some weird ports.

The literal sense of Scripture was defined as the plain and evident meaning. The moral sense was that which instructed men how to behave. The allegorical sense revealed the content of faith. The anagogical sense expressed future hope. Thus passages which mentioned Jerusalem, for example, were capable of four different meanings. The literal sense referred to the capital of Judea and the central sanctuary of the nation. The moral sense of Jerusalem was the soul of man (the "central sanctuary" of man). The allegorical meaning of Jerusalem was the soul of man (the center of the Christian community).

You can see why this one sense rule is needed! When a person has something to say, the expression he uses to convey those thoughts has one meaning. The implications are very important in Bible study—being able to stay away from fools' gold and concentrate on the precious stones of Scripture. We will be kept from majoring on the minors if we adhere to this rule.

This means that major doctrinal truths of our faith are plainly seen in Scripture and often repeated throughout the Bible. The important truths are not hidden in obscure passages or in figures of speech.

"Most people look for complex explanations. This is especially true of those who tend to allegorize Scripture or make fanciful and imaginative reconstructions of simple biblical texts. However, these seldom reflect the actual meaning intended by the writer. And, while this approach may entertain and provoke the audience, its danger is that there are no controls to ensure that the truth is being taught. Spiritualizing a text does not necessarily lead to spiritual truth" —Grant R. Osborne and Stephen B. Woodward, *Handbook for Bible Study*, Baker Book House, 1979, p. 155.

God is not trying to hide His truth from all but the wisest and the most diligent seeker. His purpose is to reveal, not conceal. The implicit, then, is to be interpreted by the explicit. That which is assumed to be implied in Scripture is to be interpreted in the light of passages that are fully developed and formulated.

In summary, we are to **interpret the obscure in the light of the clear**. R.C. Sproul says: "The basic rule is the rule of care. Careful reading of what the text is actually saying will save us from much confusion and distortion. No great knowledge of logic is necessary, just the simple application of common sense"—*Knowing Scripture*, R.C. Sproul, I.V.P., Downers Grove, IL, 1977, pp. 78-79.

Here's an example:

I have read many references to the fact that angels are sexless. Where does the Bible say that angels are sexless? The passage used to support this teaching is Mark 12:15, where Jesus explains that in heaven there will be no marrying or giving in marriage, but that we will be like the angels. That implies that angels do not

marry, but it does not imply they are sexless. It is possible the angels could remain unmarried for other reasons than that they are sexless. We can't build a teaching on a possible implication, especially if the rest of Scripture does not confirm it.

Obviously this is not to say that the study of the text is unimportant. There are riches to be acquired for the diligent student, that will elaborate on and enhance the major teachings of the Scripture. Just keep everything in the light of the context. The passage *can't* be saying something the author did not intend. He had one meaning and one sense behind what he said.

[On to Part 4](#), where we'll see the importance of application.

Small Group and Personal Reflection Questions

1. When your Bible study is dry, hard and seemingly unproductive, how can the words of Prov. 2:1-5 be an encouragement/challenge to you? Share a little silver you have mined from the Scripture, e.g., a favorite verse or section of Scripture that continues to bring you wonderful treasures.
2. When you begin your study of Scripture, how do you relate to the Holy Spirit? If you are not pleased with your answer, how should you be relating to Him? Give Scriptures to bolster your answer.

Interpretation Section

Answer as many of the following questions as you have time

1. One of the principles of interpretation is: interpret the narrow context before the wider. How does the parable of Matt. 18:12-14 relate to the wider context of Matt. 18:15-20 and vice versa? How might Matt. 18:23-35 relate to Matt. 18:12-22? Think of what might have sparked Peter's question in 18:21. What does this whole section, Matthew 18:12-35, say to you about God and His church?
2. John 3:5 has caused a lot of controversy. Some have seen this verse as proof that a person must be baptized in water before they can be saved. Jesus answered, "I tell you the truth, no one can enter the kingdom of God unless he is born of water and the Spirit." The principle of interpretation is that important truths are not hidden; look for the simple interpretation. Look at the context of John 3:5. What precedes and follows this verse? What is the simple explanation of what the water in verse 5 represents?
3. The context of Mark 12:25 is that Jesus is explaining what heaven will be like. He says there will be no marrying or giving in marriage, but we will be like the angels. (Read the verse in context.) Some have used this reference to say that angels are sexless, but is that what this verse is saying? Looking for the simplest interpretation, what do you think this passage is saying about angels and us?
4. The traditional interpretation of the Song of Songs/Solomon is that it is a picture of the relationship that exists between Christ and the church, His bride. Do you agree? How would the principle of the normal sense and the one sense impact the traditional approach to the Song of Songs? If you changed your interpretation from the traditional view, what value does the Song of Song have to the church/individuals today?

With Proverbs 2:1-5 as an encouragement to you, share a little silver you have mined from the Scripture, e.g.,

Appendix

What Can Happen If We Ignore The Context?

1. "A little child shall lead them . . ." Is. 11:6. What is the standard interpretation of this phrase? What does the context tell us?
2. "The Lord watch between you and me . . ." Gen. 31:49 (KJV). What is the standard interpretation of this phrase? What does the context tell us?
3. "No eye has seen, nor ear heard, no mind has conceived what God has prepared for those who love Him"—1 Cor. 2:9. What is the common interpretation of this phrase? What does the context tell us about when this will take place?
4. "For when two or three are gathered in my name, there I am with them"—Matt. 18:20. What's the standard interpretation of this phrase? What does the context tell us? Note: Reason or cause is introduced by the word "for."
5. "Again, I tell you that if two of you on earth agree about anything you ask for, it will be done for you by my father in heaven"—Matt. 18:19. What's the standard application of this verse? What does the context tell us? What clues do "again" and "two of you" give us? Where does the context of verses 19 and 20 begin? What can we learn about the whole process listed in verses 15-17, if we see verses 18-20 as part of the same context?

HOME

"Those who hope in the LORD
will renew their strength. They
will soar on wings like
eagles..."—Is. 40:31



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EXPOSITORY PREACHING

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Being *riveted* to Scripture while being *relevant* to our times is the needed balance of expository preaching—i.e., it is essential we learn to accurately exposit the culture and the Scripture and bring the two together in applicable preaching. This seminar will focus on a number of key ingredients central to the expository process which lead to pertinent steps of implementation in people's lives.

Seminar Members: Registration is voluntary, but it will be an encouragement to know who is interested in taking these sessions and where you are located.

Included are the following online sessions:

[Session One: The Introduction to Expository Preaching.](#)

Here we will attempt to answer several questions: What are the ingredients of expository preaching? What is a definition of expository preaching? What are its advantages, goals, difficulties? We'll talk about what expository preaching is *not*. We will conclude with practical suggestions. **Here Now!**

Future sessions will focus on how to begin expository preaching and/or to sharpen our skills.

[Session Two: The Preparation and Process of Expository Messages](#)

The main focus will be the 15-step process of preparing an expository message that is true to the text, and leads to specific steps of application. This session will include a discussion of the tools needed, and necessary commitments to expository preaching. We will conclude with some practical ideas on how to develop a balanced preaching schedule, and how to evaluate whether we are preaching too often. **Here Now!**

Session Three: The Personal Touch of Expository Preaching

Several expository styles and approaches will be viewed and compared, e.g., those of Ray Stedman, Charles Swindoll, John Stott, Jerry Cook. Examples of individual sermons, a whole series on a book, and individual topics will be viewed and evaluated. **Coming**

[Session Four: The Principles of Interpretation](#)

To conduct proper exegesis of a passage, we have to get in touch with some basic rules of interpretation. We are certainly not saying only scholars can understand the Bible; we should continue to emphasize what the 16th-century reformers affirmed (they called it perspicuity)—the way of salvation plainly set forth so that the simplest believer may read and understand it for himself. Yet the Word of God is rich in revelation too. Therefore, if we are to enter more deeply into God's Word, we must understand some

basic rules. The history of the church also confirms the need for such a code to guide our interpretation. For instance, Paul warned the Corinthians against a false approach which corrupts the Word of God (2 Cor. 2:17), and commanded Timothy to handle Scripture accurately (2 Tim. 2:15). A number of resources will be used for this session. **Here Now!**

[Session Five: A Potpourri of Expository Questions and Tests](#)

The following are some of the questions that will be asked and answered in this session: How can I do topical studies accurately? How do we respond to finicky spiritual tastes? Should we teach others to evaluate our and others' messages biblically? How long into the future should I plan my preaching?

[Sessions Six to Nine: The Process of God's Communication to Man](#)

[Part One](#): The Process Revealed; Inspiration

[Part Two](#): Transmission, Translation

[Part Three](#): Illumination, Interpretation

[Part Four](#): Application

All Four Sessions Here Now! These four sessions will focus on how God has chosen to communicate truth to people. All have a dual use:

- for the pastor/teacher/leader a review of some important information
- presented, along with overheads, as in teaching a series to a local congregation

These sessions will help pastors/leaders to help their audiences/churches answer a lot of questions believers and nonbelievers ask: How do you know the Bible is God's Word? Isn't the Bible full of errors? How can we trust that what was originally God's Word hasn't been altered over the years with all the changes and translations that have been made? We will conclude with a lesson that gives an overview of the inductive process. Unlike the expository focus of this seminar, it is presented in a topical fashion.

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THE PROCESS OF GOD'S COMMUNICATION TO MAN

Part 4



As we return to tackle the fourth session in our series and review the big picture of how God chose to communicate with man, we will be reminded again how the Bible came to us, and how we should respond to it.

In parts [one](#), [two](#), and [three](#), we saw the process of God's communication as a chain that stretches from the mind of God, to the act and attitudes of man. Thus far we have seen revelation; inspiration (a circular process of receiving and recording the Word of God without any error); transmission (the copying as accurately as possible, the original Hebrew and Greek manuscripts and their copies); translation (seeking the most accurate rendering of the original language manuscripts into our own language); and illumination and interpretation (finding what the author meant by what he said; and by the Spirit, putting the meaning into contemporary expressions).

We have now come to the final link in the chain—**Application**. We asked the question at the beginning of our series, "How can we get from the mind of God to the acts and attitude of man?" This gap can now finally be crossed by this final connection. The whole purpose of interpretation and illumination is not only for our understanding; it's also so that we can be changed to reflect God's intention for us and that ultimately we would impact others.

Three principles are helpful for us in understanding application.

Application always follows interpretation.

John Calvin said, "The Word of God is inexhaustible and applicable at all times, but there is a difference between explanation and application, and application must be consistent with explanation." That means I must never decide "what the Scripture means to me" until I first determine what the passage means. Application must be consistent with explanation. Therefore, application always follows interpretation, i.e., sermons, personal Bible study, or small group study. All of our application must be based on, and be consistent with, an explanation of the passage.

Here's a summary of all interpretive questions:

- What does it say?
- What does it mean?
- What does it say to me?

We must understand what the passage means first in the light of the original author and hearers, and then seek an application to our own lives. Interpretation is acquiring knowledge; application is putting that knowledge

into action.

Application may take many forms.

We should know there is only one interpretation of any passage, not multiple meanings or levels of meaning of what the authors wrote. They weren't confused as they were being driven along by the Holy Spirit. Look then for the one meaning in each passage. When it comes to application, however, there can be multiple applications of the interpretation. Most passages of Scripture will offer many options for the interpreter. The wonder of Scripture is that we will have one interpretation of a passage, but even in a service or small group, there will be many possible applications. (We'll give some assistance with these applications in a moment.)

Application of a passage must take place, or our understanding of the text will have little lasting value.

There is little spiritual value to us if we merely read and study the Scripture. The test of whether we have properly received the truth is if we obey it. For the Greeks of the New Testament era, the big thing was to hear; to listen to oratory, lectures, speeches, etc.; to be taught was the ultimate. For the Hebrew, however, knowing and doing was tied together. They didn't know something until they did it. Knowing was to lead to obedience.

The Jews didn't always get it either, however, even though they knew better. Jesus told the Sadducees, those who read the Scriptures more than anyone of his day: "You are in error because you do not know the Scriptures or the power of God"—Matt. 22:29. Why did He say this? It was shocking to all who heard it! Didn't the Sadducees spend their time studying Scripture?

The reason Jesus made this startling statement: "... you do not know the Scriptures..." is because they only read and studied the Scripture. They didn't obey all of it, only what pleased them and made them look good. We really don't know the Scriptures until we have put them into practice. Every time we come to the Scripture, therefore, we have a decision to make: Are we going to do what it says, or are we going to ignore/overlook what it says? Stated another way: are we going to only *act* like we know what Scripture says by merely listening? The result of these choices will be quite profound and dramatic.

The Need for Application

Let me show you from Scripture how important our application is. The results of becoming familiar with and yet failing to personally apply Scripture can be dangerous and/or disastrous to our Christian life—Matt. 7: 24-27; Luke 11:28; James 1:22-25. There are four reasons.

First, Bible study without application can be dangerous because knowledge without application puffs up-1 Cor. 8:1.

". . . .We know that we all possess knowledge. Knowledge puffs up, but love builds up." Many who study the Bible or have been around it all their lives, have an exaggerated/puffed up/inflated attitude about their spiritual state. They think their knowledge somehow is equal to spiritual health, but it isn't! (The King James gives you the feel for the word—"puffeth up...")



Second, Bible study without application can be dangerous because it can lead to deception—James 1:22-25.

"Do not merely listen to the word, and so deceive yourselves. Do what it says." How can merely listening to or reading the Word lead us to deception? The definition of "deceive" is "to reckon wrong, to draw a wrong conclusion by false reasoning." That means if we congratulate ourselves on merely being hearers of the Word, we have come to a false conclusion. Or if we think that merely listening to or reading the Word entitles us to some special favor from God, we are duped by faulty reasoning. The responsibility of those who hear, in fact, is far greater than those who never hear.

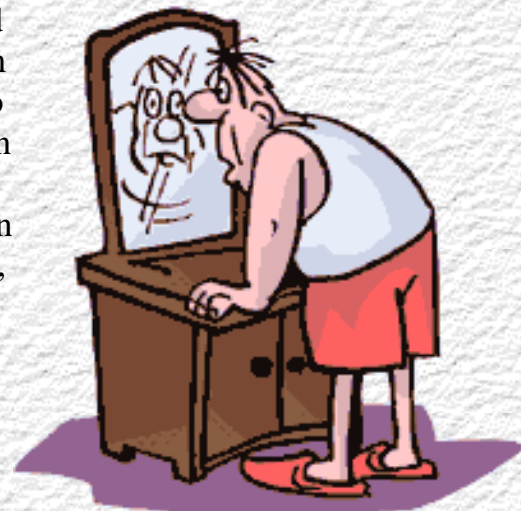
James 4:17 says, "Anyone, then, who knows the good he ought to do and doesn't do it, sins." It would be wrong to conclude that James is against listening to the Word, or that reading is unnecessary and unimportant. My job as a teacher of the Word is important, and likewise, your witness to people is important, even beautiful.

Rom 10:13—"Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved." 14] How, then, can they call on the one they have not believed in? And how can they believe in the one of whom they have not heard? And how can they hear without someone preaching to them? 15 And how can they preach unless they are sent? As it is written, "How beautiful are the feet of those who bring good news!" [Isaiah 52:7] People who witness, or share, and preach the Word have "beautiful feet." It's very important that the truth is proclaimed! If, however, we do little more than merely listen, we are just hearers and nothing more, and the result is we will be deceived.

This is really hard to grasp. How could listening to the Word deceive us? We might be deceived into thinking we have a relationship with God because we attend church, read the Bible, and go to Bible studies, for example. Or we could think if we know about religious things, we are somehow spiritual, even spiritually mature. But James is making it clear: knowing isn't enough. What then will keep us from deception with regard to the Word? James' answer is: "Do not merely listen to the word, and so deceive yourselves. Do what it says"—v. 22b.

Third, Bible study without application can be disastrous because we will forget what we don't apply to our lives—James 1:23-24.

James elaborates on the difference between a person who only listens, and the one who listens and obeys. He gives us an example of those who listen to the Word but don't do what it says in vv. 23-24. "Anyone who listens to the word but does not do what it says is like a man who looks at his face in a mirror 24] and, after looking at himself, goes away and immediately forgets what he looks like." When James talks about "looking at his face in the mirror," this is not referring to a hasty glance, as some have suggested, but to careful observation; thoughtful and attentive consideration (e.g., Luke 12:27). Jesus uses the same word when He invites us to consider/look at the lilies.



The person in James 1:23-24 looks at himself in the mirror of the Word, and has a very revealing picture of what he looks like (he studies himself and becomes very familiar with his features (Heb. 4:12-13). "For 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. 13] Nothing in all creation is hidden from God's sight. Everything is uncovered and laid bare before the eyes of him to whom we must give account."

Do you see what is revealed in the mirror of the Word? Isn't it amazing? The Word dissects the smallest and

most complicated areas of our inner lives, judging and revealing our thoughts and attitudes. The problem, as James 1:24 states, is that because the man in the mirror doesn't do what is called for, he goes away and forgets what the mirror of the Word has revealed. Remember, this is a person who listens to the Word attentively and at length, so he understands what he hears. His lack of response isn't because he failed to hear or understand what was in the Word.

We should ask ourselves if we are becoming forgetful about what we used to know in the Scripture. Have we noticed that we have to hear the same things from the Word of God over and over because we forget? Why? The answer is obvious. We're not responding to the Word when we hear it the first time, and thus we forget it. I hope the illustration of the man in the mirror will speak to us and cause us to be committed to hearing and doing what the Word says. Let me give you a few more examples

1. **During and after a church service**, what should be our response when the mirror of the Word reveals thoughts and attitudes in our soul and spirit that are not pleasing to God? A few verses earlier, in James 1:21, we find the answer: "Therefore, get rid of all moral filth and evil that is so prevalent and humbly accept the word planted in you, which can save you." (Put off, change your attitude, and put the Word in you.)
2. How about **after a personal Bible study**? One commentator says, "once we have looked at the Scripture, we have a choice: we can either deceive or bless ourselves. We deceive ourselves if we make the mistake of thinking that we have responded correctly to God's Word by only hearing and receiving it. We say, I spent 45 minutes reading my Bible, I can't even remember what it said. (But) What a great, uninterrupted time." What did we remember? Only that we had an uninterrupted time, but not what we studied. If we don't find an arena of application, we will forget what we study or hear!
3. How about **pastors**? I must make sure that I practice what I preach. I must hear and obey what I am preaching
4. What does this say to us about **Scripture memory for children**?

"Don't we sometimes give out rewards for children for memorizing Bible verses, or giving correct answers regardless of whether the children obeyed or even understood them? In doing this, I wonder if we begin to deceive them into equating knowledge with spiritual maturity. Scripture memory is wonderful, if it is memorized for the purpose of obedience. The purpose of Scripture is to make us mature, not make us smart"—James Vanderet.

Parents, don't be satisfied if your kids can mouth back to you a few simple answers to your Bible questions. It is imperative that children learn to hear and obey too. Otherwise, they will be deceived as to what spirituality is all about.

5. What should James 1:23-24 say to our **small groups, peer groups, scouts, etc.**? v. 24—"and, after looking at himself, goes away and immediately forgets what he looks like." Our groups should not only care for one another and study the Scripture; we must hold group members accountable to apply what is studied, or they too will forget what they have learned.

Do you get the idea? Then "just do it." The purpose of listening to the truth is so we can act on it; in fact, we gain knowledge that will last only by acting on it. A theoretical knowledge of Scripture is condemned, but if we do what the Scripture says, we will remember.

Fourth, Bible study without application can be dangerous because we build instability into our lives—Matt. 7:24-27.



"Therefore everyone who hears these words of mine and puts them into practice is like a wise man who built his house on the rock. 25] 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. 26] 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. 27] The rain came down, the streams rose, and the winds blew and beat against that house, and it fell with a great crash."

These are the last words of Jesus in the Sermon on the Mount. He is saying that each of us will have continuous tests/storms in our lives, and the way we weather them depends on how we apply the Scripture on a consistent basis.

The tests are those of obedience and of adversity.

The first test is the test of obedience. If we hear God's words and put them into practice, we are building our lives on solid rock. If we apply the Scripture, we are building our lives on the words of God and putting them into practice; we are building our lives on Christ Himself and His words—that has to be solid! This test prepares us for the second.

The second test is the test of adversity. 25] "The rain came down, the streams rose, and the winds blew and beat against that house..." We will all feel the storms of life, the winds of adversity. Floods will come to try us. We will be able to stand, however, if we have built our house on the rock of the application of our Lord's words. If we have heard and obeyed, then adversity only reveals our strength. Hard times reveal that the Lord is the foundation of our life.

Obedience or lack of obedience will cause profound results: instability or stability.

Stability: 25] 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.

Instability: 27] The rain came down, the streams rose, and the winds blew and beat against that house, and it fell with a great crash." The weather will test our foundations. (Do you hear the crash of some people's lives in verse 27?) This explains why in some of our lives adversity has not built us up, but has caused great destruction in our lives? We can look at this passage and forecast the spiritual weather; the flood and wind damage that will happen? What does this say to you personally about whether or not you have flood and weather insurance?



In summary, it is easy to see how dangerous and how much there is to lose by not hearing and obeying the Scripture. This should be of concern to us, for the vast majority of Americans have been deceived into thinking they are Christians and have a relationship with God because they attend church, read the Bible, and go to Bible studies. I have related to some pastors that there is too much teaching and too little application in their churches. Do you know what happens to a person who believes listening, attending and studying is enough? The long term result is that he eventually loses heart and finds it difficult even to listen and read the Scriptures anymore because there is no life, joy, or peace in just listening.

Life comes through doing what the Word of God says. Relationships are built with other believers and with our Lord that are extremely vital and meaningful, when we seek to apply the Scriptures to our lives. Some may have concluded there is not much to the Christian life, but what would happen if you began to study and

apply the Scripture consistently? You wouldn't be puffed up, deceived, forgetful, or unstable.

Are you convinced of the need? Are you ready for some help in applying Scripture? I'll make it quick and simple.

The Preparation Needed for Application

First, be prepared for the hard work ahead. It requires thinking, empathy, prayer and compassion. It requires knowledge of the text. It requires a knowledge of the world—what's going on out there—and it requires change, which we resist. It requires a fight with Satan. It requires creativity and a dependency on the Spirit.

Second, be prepared to pray for insight as you apply the passage, and state your willingness to obey. The steps involved in application of the Scripture begin with questions centered on the application of your study.

A Search For Personal Application

What does it mean to me?

The Theological Question focuses on the implication and application of doctrinal issues in the passage. Each passage usually teaches something about doctrine. What is being taught about:

- the nature of God
- man
- sin
- church
- salvation
- the Christian faith
- the universe

What difference will it make to the world, the church and my relationship to God? is an important question because, as we've already discussed, doctrine without application will be forgotten. Doctrine applied, however, will save us from false teachers and winds of doctrine—Eph. 4:14.

The Contemporary Question deals with the application of the text to our world today. How do we apply what this passage says to government, politics, economics, business, education, the institutional church, the values and goals of our society? What is the social application of the text, i.e., Matt. 5:38-42?

The Personal Question deals with the application of the text to our lives today. How do we apply what Paul and other writers of Scripture said to our personalities, needs, families, close friends, moral decisions, goals, etc.? This is the question of discipleship; "What am I going to do with what I've learned?"

How might I meditate on this passage even deeper? Use the **SPACEPETS** acrostic. This acrostic is a very useful aid to meditation and application. It asks: "Is there any . . ."

Sin to confess? Do I need to make any restitution?

Promise to claim? Is it a universal promise? Have I met the conditions?

Attitude to change? Am I willing to work on a negative attitude and begin building toward a positive one?

Command to obey? Am I willing to do it, no matter how I feel?

Example to follow? Is it a positive example for me to copy, or a negative one to avoid?

Prayer to pray? Is there anything I need to pray back to God?

Error to avoid? Is there any problem that I should be alert to, or beware of?

Truth to believe? What new things can I learn about God the Father, Jesus Christ, the Holy Spirit, or other biblical teachings?

Something to praise God for? Is there something here I can be thankful for?

Pray the verse or passage back to God, especially the commands being called for and the promises and principles you will claim. Put yourself into the passage. Identify with the characters and scene in a personal way.

Form principles from your interpretation. The dictionary defines a principle as a general or fundamental truth; a rule of conduct by which an individual directs his life or actions. In other words, a principle is a clear declaration sentence which is intended to serve as a guide for conduct or procedure. A principle has several features:

- It is an assertion or positive statement and not a negative one.
- It is a clear or incisive declaration expressed in a single, brief sentence, containing one essential idea.
- It is a truth which is always valid.
- It is an established rule which is basic for life and conduct.

The development of Scriptural principles means, therefore, that we transform the truths of the text into easily remembered statements that will help us retain what the text calls for. Monitor your principles with two guidelines: be as accurate as possible in reflecting the truth of the text (don't sacrifice truth to be clever); and test the principle out with other Scriptures. Principles can be used to capsulize whole paragraphs, chapters, and even whole books.

Application of any study we undertake should follow four criteria:

Is it personal?

Is it practical? It ought to be something we can **do**. Plan a definite course of action that you can take. Design a personal project which will encourage you to be a "doer of the Word." Finally, make your application as specific as possible.

Is it possible? It should be something we know we can accomplish.

Is it provable? It is good to give a time frame to work with so we can check up on our success.

An Example of Application Questions from I Thessalonians 4:9-12

1. Is God pleased with my love for other believers? Where do I need to grow specifically in my love for my family? My love for my fellow workers? What am I going to do this week to begin showing my love in a greater way? Who will I pray with and confess my plan to, so that I can be accountable? What kind of believers still bother me? Why do they? What Scriptures will help me? Do I need to be reconciled with someone? When will I do it?
2. What is my chief ambition? Is it pleasing to God? What Scriptures affirm my actions to please God? How devoted am I to spending quality time with God? Where? When? How?
3. How are my work ethics? Am I winning respect, or closing doors at work? Evidence? Am I dependable? Am I financially independent? What is my plan to be financially independent? When will I start?

It's good to get in the habit of jotting down the application of our studies. You could keep it in a file box or journal, so you could check up on yourself.

Conclusion

Let's seek to apply Matthew 15:1-15. Following is a brief example of how we could structure an application of a passage we've interpreted.

The personal question is: how do we apply what Jesus said to our own personalities, needs, families, etc.?

We must be aware of the yeast of the Pharisees. The effect of hypocrisy in my life and yours is horrendous. It blinds us and those who follow, i.e., friend, mate, child. It leads the guide and the follower into a pit.

This section sponsors a lot of questions:

- a. Are we blind?
- b. Are we leading others into a pit by our actions?
- c. Are we plants or weeds our heavenly Father will see are pulled up and thrown into the fire?
- d. Are we more focused on what we are doing than what we are deep inside?
- e. Are our spiritual rules and evaluations just made up?
- f. Are we trying to impose our superficiality on others?
- g. What does God think of our worship?
- h. Are we honoring God with our lips, but in reality, our hearts are far from Him?
- i. Are we acting?

This week, with these questions in mind I want you to read vv. 15-20 and examine your life in the light of what you see there.