

## **The Sure Word of Truth**

One thing is certain – we live in uncertain times. As people look for truth and spiritual guidance too often they seek answers to their questions from their fellowman and dependence upon man for spiritual guidance and truth will often lead to error. The Catholic priest, the Jewish Rabbi, the Protestant preacher, all say they speak for God - yet they all teach different things! How can that be? As a matter of fact, the Bible warns us that some ministers will even be the agents of Satan!

**II Corinthians 11:14,15** *“And no marvel; for Satan himself is transformed into an angel of light. Therefore it is no great thing if his ministers also be transformed as the ministers of righteousness; whose end shall be according to their works.*

This being the case, how can we know what the *real truth* is? How can we keep from being deceived?

Jesus, praying to God the Father, said: *“Sanctify them through your word; thy word is truth.”* (John 17:17)

God’s Word is found in the Bible and God’s Word is the truth. The Bible is still the standard of truth even in today’s world. It is the only constant, unchanging guide we have to help us navigate the uncertain times in which we live. However, just having the Bible or even just reading the Bible isn’t enough. We need to know how to correctly interpret it and understand it.

Here are some important facts about the Bible:

- \* The Bible is not one book, but 66 books in one binding.
- \* Over 40 different men wrote the Bible over a period of 1500 years.
- \* These men came from different backgrounds, different levels of education and different cultures.

- \* Each Bible writer wrote in his native language, Aramaic, Hebrew or Greek.
- \* The Bible is not the thoughts and ideas of these individual men, nor is it a “word for word” dictation from God. But the Bible itself tells us: *“For the prophecy came not in old time by the will of men: but holy men of God spake as they were moved by the Holy Ghost.”* (II Peter 1:21)

Below are ten helpful principles we must follow if we want to correctly understand the Bible and correctly apply it to our lives.

**1. Before studying the Bible always first ask for the guidance of the Holy Spirit.**

**John 14:26** – *“But the Comforter, which is the Holy Ghost, whom the Father will send in my name, he shall teach you all things, and bring all things to your remembrance, whatsoever I have said unto you.”*

**2. Approach Bible study with humility, an open mind, seeking to learn, never with preconceived ideas or pride of opinion.**

**Matthew 18:3,4** – *“Verily I say unto you, Except ye be converted, and become as little children, ye shall not enter into the kingdom of heaven. Whosoever therefore shall humble himself as this little child, the same is greatest in the kingdom of heaven.*

**3. Consider all scripture on a subject before drawing any conclusions on that subject.**

We can use the baptism of Jesus as a good example for how to look at the “whole picture” scripture paints for us. We begin with a passage in the book of Luke -

**Luke 3:19-23** - *“But Herod the tetrarch, being reprov'd by him for Herodias his brother Philip's wife, and for all the evils which Herod had done, Added yet this above all, that he shut up John in prison. Now when all the people were baptized, it came to pass, that Jesus also being baptized, and praying, the heaven was opened, And the Holy Ghost descended in a bodily shape like a*

*dove upon him, and a voice came from heaven, which said, Thou art my beloved Son; in thee I am well pleased. And Jesus himself began to be about thirty years of age,”*

These verses tell us that Jesus was baptized at 30 years of age. But they do not tell us who baptized Jesus, or where. So we look at another account of this event in the book of Mark -

**Mark 1:9,10.** - *“And it came to pass in those days, that Jesus came from Nazareth of Galilee, and was baptized of John in Jordan. And straightway coming up out of the water, he saw the heavens opened, and the Spirit like a dove descending upon him: <sup>11</sup> And there came a voice from heaven, saying, Thou art my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased.”*

This text has given us more detail; it tells us Jesus was baptized by John the Baptist in the Jordan River. Then reading another passage relating to this subject in the book of Acts we learn even more about Jesus baptism -

**Acts 10:37,38** - *“That word, I say, ye know, which was published throughout all Judaea, and began from Galilee, after the baptism which John preached; How God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Ghost and with power: who went about doing good, and healing all that were oppressed of the devil; for God was with him.”*

Here we learn that Jesus' baptism signified His anointing by God with the Holy Spirit prior to His going forth on His mission of ministry.

By looking at everything the Bible has to say on a subject we better know the truth about that subject. Remember, never say, *“The Bible says”* until you've looked at everything the Bible says!

#### **4. Consider the context**

The *“context”* is the main subject that is found within a particular passage. The interpretation of a verse within that passage must relate to that subject, or *“context.”* Look for the context in the following passage.

**Romans 14:1 – 7** – *“Him that is weak in the faith receive ye, but not to doubtful disputations. For one believeth that he may eat all things: another, who is weak, eateth herbs. Let not him that eateth despise him that eateth not; and let not him which eateth not judge him that eateth: for God hath received him. Who art thou that judgest another man’s servant? to his own master he standeth or falleth. Yea, he shall be holden up: for God is able to make him stand. One man esteemeth one day above another: another esteemeth every day alike. Let every man be fully persuaded in his own mind. He that regardeth the day, regardeth it unto the Lord; and he that regardeth not the day, to the Lord he doth not regard it. He that eateth, eateth to the Lord, for he giveth God thanks; and he that eateth not, to the Lord he eateth not, and giveth God thanks. For none of us liveth to himself, and no man dieth to himself. For whether we live, we live unto the Lord; and whether we die, we die unto the Lord: whether we live therefore, or die, we are the Lord’s. For to this end Christ both died, and rose, and revived, that he might be Lord both of the dead and living. But why dost thou judge thy brother? or why dost thou set at nought thy brother? for we shall all stand before the judgment seat of Christ. For it is written, As I live, saith the Lord, every knee shall bow to me, and every tongue shall confess to God. So then every one of us shall give account of himself to God. Let us not therefore judge one another any more: but judge this rather, that no man put a stumblingblock or an occasion to fall in his brother’s way.”*

What are the words used most often in this passage? The words “eat” or “eateth,” and “judge” or “judgment.” That means the “context” or subject of this passage is judging others. We must be careful that we do not take one or more verses out of “context” and use them to teach something unintended by that “context.” That is being unfaithful to the truth of the Word.

## **5. Consider the cultural setting and time in which the scripture was originally written.**

The “*cultural setting*” is the culture, customs, or way of life, of the people the writer of scripture was speaking directly to at the time he wrote. Once this is understood, then we can identify and apply the key principle as it applies to our own culture and age. Note the following example.

**I Corinthians 11:5,6** – *“But every woman that prayeth or prophesieth with her head uncovered dishonoureth her head: for that is even all one as if she were shaven. For if the woman be not covered, let her also be shorn: but if it be a shame for a woman to be shorn or shaven, let her be covered.”*

The Greek word translated “covered” is the word for “a veil hanging down.” In Bible times in that part of the world, it was disgraceful for a woman, especially a married woman, to be seen in public without a veil. This was seen as shameful to her husband which is her “head.” ( *“For the husband is the head of the wife, even as Christ is the head of the church:”* - Eph. 5:23).

We can apply this principle to our modern society. Today women do not wear veils in most parts of the world, but yet they can dress in sexually provocative ways that can bring shame to them in the eyes of society, their husbands if they are married, and to Christ if they claim to be Christians.

## **6. The principle of interpretation of figurative speech or symbolism.**

How do we know when a passage is to be understood literally or figuratively in the Bible? The rule is this: If it makes good sense as it stands – then it can be understood as literal. However, if it doesn’t, then it must be taken figuratively or as a symbol. Here are some examples.

**Matthew 5:29** – *“And if thy right eye offend thee, pluck it out, and cast it from thee: for it is profitable for thee that one of thy members should perish, and not that thy whole body should be cast into hell.”*

Logic tells us we need to take this figuratively. Jesus would not have us literally poke our eye out! But note the next verse.

**Revelation 13:1** - *“And I stood upon the sand of the sea, and saw a beast rise up out of the sea, having seven heads and ten horns, and upon his horns ten crowns, and upon his heads the name of blasphemy.”*

We know a creature as described here does not exist; therefore it must be a symbol. To understand the meaning of this symbol we must let the Bible interpret itself. For this we need a concordance such as Strong's Exhaustive Concordance. We look up all the places the Bible mentions a "beast" until we find one that explains the symbol. In this case we find that in the book of Daniel.

**Daniel 7:23** - *"Thus he said, The fourth beast shall be the fourth kingdom upon earth, which shall be diverse from all kingdoms"*

Now we understand that in Bible prophecy, a beast is a symbol for an aggressive kingdom or a political power.

In the original languages of the Bible, the same as in modern English, some words have more than one meaning. Note the following examples of the word "day."

**Genesis 1:5** - *"And God called the light day, and the darkness he called night. And the evening and the morning were the first day."*

In this example, a day is a literal 24-hour period.

**Ecclesiastes 7:14** – *"In the day of prosperity be joyful, but in the day of adversity consider: God also hath set the one over against the other, to the end that man should find nothing after him."*

In this example, a day is an indefinite period of time. It could be a day, a week, or months.

**Numbers 14:34** *"After the number of the days in which ye searched the land, even forty days, each day for a year, shall ye bear your iniquities."*

In this final example it mentions "a day for a year." The use of a day for a year only applies in the setting of Bible prophecy which relates the foretelling of future events. (In this Bible study we will not study prophecy)

## **7. Learn to ask, "What does that mean?"**

When we read the Bible, or engage in conversations with other Christians, we will hear or read words and phrases we do not

understand – in some cases we may have heard them many times and maybe even used them ourselves.

For example, can you clearly explain the meaning of expressions heard in the church today like, *“It’s covered by the blood”*? Or can you explain the meaning of words like *“justification, sanctification, and propitiation?”*

Often, the problem is that no one wants to ask, *“What does that mean?”* Because a good Christian should know what all those words and phrases mean already, shouldn’t they?

Many of us don’t, so we should set aside our pride and ask – *“What does that mean?”* and diligently seek the answer.

## **8. Word Studies.**

Learning to do word studies, looking at the original Hebrew or Greek words used in scripture for their meaning is critical to Bible study. The exhaustive concordance with a good Hebrew and Greek dictionary is essential for this. This is especially true if you use the King James Version of the Bible. Some of the words used in translation of that version back in A.D. 1611 have completely changed their meaning or are no longer used. An example of a word no longer used is found in Philippians 1:22 *“But if I live in the flesh, this is the fruit of my labour: yet what I shall choose I wot not.”*

Few people know what “wot not” means. “Wot” is an old English word for “know.” He is saying “I know not.”

An example of a word that has changed in meaning is Luke 17:7 – *“But which of you, having a servant plowing or feeding cattle, will say unto him by and by, when he is come from the field, Go and sit down to meat?”*

The phrase *“by and by”* is translated from one Greek word “euthos” which means “immediately.” Today the expression *“by and by”* means just the opposite, it means later on. These are just a couple of simple examples that show the benefit of word studies.

## **9. Dealing with discrepancies in the Bible.**

One example of dealing with discrepancies is the four gospels, Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John. As you read through them you will find differences in details of the same events. Does that mean they were untruthful? No, the four gospels represent the life and teachings of Jesus through the eyes of four different men. It would be the same if four people were to witness an accident, they would most likely give four different views of the accident depending on how they saw it from where they were. That does not mean that any one of them were untruthful or that an accident didn't occur. It's the same with the different writers of the Bible. That's why we need to read and study all the Bible, so that we get all the evidence and not just bits and pieces.

The following are three steps that will help us better understand difficult passages, even those things which are perceived to be contradictions.

**First** - We need to be sure of what God is saying in the Word. Remember, the Bible was not originally written in English. Since we do not speak the original languages of the Bible, we need to take advantage of those study helps such as concordances, Hebrew and Greek dictionaries, and Bible commentaries. All these will help us discern what the original Bible writer wrote or intended to say.

Second – We apply reason and logic. The Lord said in Isaiah 1:18 *“Come let us reason together.”* The devil wants us to abandon logic and reason, because when that goes, truth goes with it and things don't have to make sense anymore. When we do that there is a void where the truth should be, and Satan will attempt to fill that void with deception.

**Third** - We listen to our conscience. Conscience is not about feelings. It is not the voice within that says, *“If it feels good do it.”* Conscience is that still small voice within that says, *“This is the way, walk ye in it.”* (Isaiah, 3:21) The Holy Spirit works through our conscience to guide us between right and wrong.

This is clearly seen in the story of the woman who had been caught in adultery and brought to Jesus. He told those men who brought her:

**John 8:8** - *“He that is without sin among you, let him first cast a stone at her. And again he stooped down, and wrote on the ground. And they which heard it, being convicted by their own conscience, went out one by one”*

Just as God gave people the ability to reason he also gave everyone a conscience to guide them.

Even unbelievers know it is wrong to steal, to kill, to lie, no one has to tell them that. As we study the Bible and apply reason to the Word, we also must listen to our conscience, especially when it says, *“This is right, or this is wrong.”*

Let’s apply these three principles to a specific passage of scripture to see how they work.

**II Samuel 24:1** says, *“And again the anger of the LORD was kindled against Israel, and he moved David against them to say, Go, number Israel and Judah.”*

**Verse 10 continues**, *“And David’s heart smote him after that he had numbered the people. And David said unto the LORD, I have sinned greatly in that I have done: and now, I beseech thee, O LORD, take away the iniquity of thy servant; for I have done very foolishly.”* Later (verse 12) it appears God punished David for this sin.

Following our formula, we examine the scripture for ourselves. We do our word studies and verify what the Word says. Next we apply reason. As we do, we find it doesn’t make sense. God would not move David to commit a sin because the Bible says *“God tempts no man with evil.”* (James 1:13)

Then we take the third step - we listen to our conscience, and our conscience tells us it is not right for God to move David to do something wrong and then punish him for it.

It becomes obvious we can’t stop here because there are too many problems with this text the way it reads. Only as we keep reading and studying will we find the truth of this issue. This requires patience. It may be weeks or months, but as we keep reading, we will come to another prophet’s account of the same story in the

book of I Chronicles. Chronicles was written about 400 years after the book of Samuel, and in retelling the story of David this Bible writer makes a startling modification.

**I Chronicles 21:1** says, *“And Satan stood up against Israel, and provoked David to number Israel.”*

Here we seem to have a contradiction. This verse says instead of David, that *“Satan moved David to number Israel.”* The prophet who wrote II Samuel did not lie, but probably was unaware of the existence of Satan in his day. This becomes clear in one of the oldest books of scripture, the book of Job, in which God gave Satan permission to test Job. Job obviously did not know about Satan and thought God was bringing all these bad things on him. Job said things like *“The Lord giveth and the Lord taketh away,”* when actually it was Satan who was the one taking away. Over time it became the characteristic of Jewish thought that what God did not prevent He caused. Since the writers of scripture were mostly Jews, that is reflected in all their writings. This will be discussed in greater detail in a later lesson.

In applying our formula with this verse, I Chronicles 21:1, we conclude – 1) This is the word of God – 2) it is logical – and 3) our conscience says this is right.

The good news is that we can learn from the discrepancies we find in the Bible rather than be confused and discouraged by them. But the main thing in Bible study is that we come to know the One the Bible testifies about. Speaking of the same scriptures Jesus said – *“These are they which testify of Me.”*

## **10. Study with persistence.**

A superficial reading of scripture will only result in a superficial understanding of scripture. We must study. It takes effort and time to correctly understand the scriptures.

**II Timothy 2:15** - *“Study to shew thyself approved unto God, a workman that needeth not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth.”*

**II Timothy 3:16** - *“All scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness.”*

We must study the Bible as a whole, to get the understanding we need. And don't forget the many tools to help us with this work. The concordance, the Hebrew and Greek dictionary, and Bible commentaries all will benefit our studies.

**Response Questions:**

1. Do you understand the importance of Bible study?  
Yes \_\_\_ No \_\_\_
2. Do you better understand the principles of Bible study?  
Yes \_\_\_ No \_\_\_
3. If you have not already, will you begin a persistent study the Bible?  
Yes \_\_\_ No \_\_\_

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