

How To Study The Bible

A Guide To Aid Your Understanding of God's Word

WORD
AND SWORD
Edition

By Steven F. Deaton

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CHAPTER 1

Will To Do His Will

Jesus said, “If anyone wills to do His will, he shall know concerning the doctrine, whether it is from God or whether I speak on My own authority” (John 7:17). He stated this in the midst of a dispute about the authenticity of His teaching, since He had “never studied” under the Babbis (John 7:15). Some said “He is good” others “He deceives the people” (John 7:12).

As Jesus continued to teach, He issued this admonition, “Do not judge according to appearance, but judge with righteous judgment” (John 7:24). Because Jesus was not from the religiously elite and brought strange things to their ears, many of the Jews had the tendency to reject Him without a fair hearing or due consideration. In this condition, the Jews were hopelessly lost.

The same is true for us today. We can have eyes and ears, but not see or hear.

And in them the prophecy of Isaiah is fulfilled, which says: “Hearing you will hear and shall not understand, And seeing you will see and not perceive; For the hearts of this people have grown dull. Their ears are hard of hearing, And their eyes they have closed, Lest they should see with their eyes and hear with their

ears, Lest they should understand with their hearts and turn, So that I should heal them” (Matthew 13:14, 15).

Lay Aside The Tradition and Doctrines of Men

For a person to understand the Bible when studying it, he or she must have a heart ready and willing to receive the doctrine of Christ. They Jews of the first century did not have this heart. By long standing traditions and doctrines of men, they held a warped view of Christ and His Kingdom. They believed it would be physical, not spiritual (Luke 17:20, 21). Hence, when the Lord came, they turned away, because He taught about a “Kingdom not of this world” (John 18:36).

What does this mean for us? It means we must set aside all preconceived notions and all traditions of men, and “receive with meekness the implanted word which is able to save [our] souls” (James 1:21). If we hold to the traditions of our great, great grandmother, to the opposition of God’s will, we will be no better than the Jews. We may draw near to the Lord with our lips, but our heart will be far from Him (Matthew 15:7-9).

Ask, Seek, Knock

One with a willing heart will know the truth. Jesus said,

Ask, and it will be given to you; seek, and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you. For everyone who asks receives, and he who seeks finds, and to him who knocks it will be opened. (Matthew 7:7, 8)

Many people fear that if they do study the Bible, they will not be able to understand it. This is sometimes fostered by preachers who willfully or unwittingly impress people with the idea that only “clergy” can understand the Word. This is counter to everything the Lord and His apostles taught. Jesus said to ask, seek, and knock, and we would

receive, find and have the door opened for us. So, if we are diligent about finding the truth, we can!

The apostle Paul said the things he wrote should be read and would be understood (Ephesians 3:3, 4). In fact, he said, “you may understand my knowledge in the mystery of Christ.” We can understand what the apostle understood. That may shock you, but that is exactly what he said. If you think about it, it makes sense.

God revealed the Bible as it is and made man as he is (1 Corinthians 2:10-13; Genesis 1:26, 27). Therefore, if we cannot understand the Word of God, it is not God’s fault. However, we know God wants “all men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth” (1 Timothy 2:4). Therefore, Jesus sent the Holy Spirit to guide the apostles into all truth and told them to teach it to every creature (John 16:13; Mark 16:15). So, we know the Bible was made for every “creature,” that is, for every person.

Cornelius’ Example

The Roman Centurion, Cornelius, had a will to do God’s will. He was “a devout man and one who feared God” (Acts 10:2). As an answer to his prayer, God sent Peter to teach him God’s will (Acts 10:3-43). We will not have an angel appear to us today, nor will we have Peter come to our house. However, in God’s providence, He opens doors of opportunity for us to learn of Him. This booklet is one way He has done it for you. Keep praying like Cornelius did, God will answer.

Conclusion

The Bible is light. It illuminates the hearts and souls of men. It discerns our thoughts and intents (Hebrews 4:12). We must be willing to approach it so our sins and weaknesses may be exposed (John 3:19-21). In this way we will know the truth that sets us free (John 8:32). If you are unwilling to do His will, then all the Bible study in the world will be of no help. Therefore, be resolved to do His will.

CHAPTER 2

Rightly Divide The Word of Truth

Paul said, “Be diligent to present yourself approved to God, a worker who does not need to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth” (2 Timothy 2:15). The American Standard version says, “handling aright the word of truth.” There were those who misused and abused the word; they did not handle it right (2 Timothy 2:14-18). Such men are not approved by God, but only those who handle it with great care, because, after all, it is a sharp sword (Hebrews 4:12).

Most people understand the Bible is broken down into two major sections; the Old Testament and the New Testament. The Old Testament books go from Genesis to Malachi. The New includes everything from Matthew to Revelation. Some want to dispute this division, saying the New does not start until Acts. However, Jesus said, “The law and the prophets were until John. Since that time the kingdom of God has been preached, and everyone is pressing into it” (Luke 16:16). The “law and the prophets” are the Old Testament. [Note: Jesus also included the Psalms in the Old Testament or Law as seen in Luke 24:44.] John’s labors are recorded in the early chapters of Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John (i.e. Mark 1:1-11). Therefore, the Bible itself recognizes a major division between the Old and New Testaments. We should too.

Subdivisions Of The Old and New Testament

The Old Testament can be broken down into five subdivisions.

Genesis - Deuteronomy: Law

Joshua - Esther: History

Job - Song of Solomon: Wisdom

Isaiah - Ezekiel: Major Prophets

Daniel - Malachi: Minor Prophets

The law covers from the Creation to the end of Moses' life. It revealed the development of God's plan to redeem man, especially through Abraham and his descendents (Genesis 12:1-3). The history of Israel is the longest section of the Old Testament. It covers Israel's entrance into Canaan, the establishment of a united kingdom, then its division into north and south, then eventual conquering and captivity of both Israel (the northern kingdom) and Judah (the southern kingdom), and their return to the Promised Land.

Wisdom literature is not chronological, but does mostly fit in the lives of David and Solomon, during the time of the united kingdom. The prophets, both major and minor, lived and labored during the time of the divided kingdom, the exile, and return of Israel.

The New Testament may be divided as follows.

Matthew - John: Gospel Accounts

Acts: History of the Early Church

Romans - Jude: Epistles

Revelation: Prophecy

Many people are familiar with the four accounts of the life of Jesus, known as the gospels. They really reveal only one gospel in four different, but harmonious, accounts of the life of Christ. Matthew, Mark, and Luke are considered “synoptic gospels” as they are most alike. John both compliments and supplements the other three.

Acts records the history of the church from its establishment to its spread throughout the ancient world. The epistles (letters) were mainly written by Paul, but also contain writings from Peter, John, and others. They focus on daily living and refutation of false doctrine. Revelation stands alone in the fascinating New Testament book because of its highly symbolic language. Simply put, however, it conveyed a message of hope and encouragement to persecuted Christians in the first century, namely, Jesus will be victorious (Revelation 17:14).

The Importance of Knowing The Divisions

Not knowing the divisions and subdivisions can cause confusion. If we try to put Abraham under the Law of Moses, we will question his faithfulness to God. If we think Isaiah lived in the time of Noah, we will not understand his message. Therefore, we need to know the divisions and their applications.

The one most people have trouble with is understanding the Old Testament was replaced by the New. This may seem obvious in theory, but it is a hurdle in practice. The Jews of the first century had this trouble, and understandably so. They grew up living under the Law of Moses and it was hard to adjust to a new system.

The book of Hebrews was written to help with this problem. Hebrews is an extended argument that the Old Testament was replaced by the New. One way the writer illustrates this is with the priesthood of Christ. Priests under the Law had to be from the tribe of Levi. Jesus, however, was from the tribe of Judah. Yet, in the New Testament He is our High Priest (Hebrews 3:1; 6:19, 20). So, there was a change in priesthood, which necessitated a change in law (Hebrews 7:12-14).

As a result, we understand the Old Testament is no longer binding on us. It does not bind the Levitical priesthood on Christ, nor does it bind other commandments on us. We are not obligated to rest on the Sabbath or circumcise our sons or keep the Feast of Pentecost - or any other feast days (Colossians 2:16, 17).

Paul contrasted the Old with the New in 2 Corinthians 3:3-11. Read those verses and note the different terms applied to each.

Old	New
Tablets of Stone	Tablets of Flesh
Letter	Spirit
Kills	Gives Life
Ministry of Death	Ministry of the Spirit
Ministry of Condemnation	Ministry of Righteousness
Glorious	Excels in Glory
Was passing away	Remains

How can you abide by one system that kills and another that gives life?

Caution!

The Old Testament is not binding, but that does not mean it can be discarded. As Paul said, it was written for our learning (Romans 15:4). The examples of men and women in the Old Testament teach us how God deals with mankind. We know He gives commands and expects us to obey them. If we do not obey, then there are

consequences. For instance, God rejected Cain's sacrifice because he did not offer it according to God's command (Genesis 4:2-5; Hebrews 11:4).

We also learn that obedience to God's commands brings blessings. Naaman the leper was cleansed when he submitted to the Lord's command (2 Kings 5:1-14). The same basic principle is true in the New Testament: obedience brings blessings, disobedience brings condemnation (Matthew 7:24-27; Romans 2:5-11; 2 Thessalonians 2:6-10).

Some people worry that if the Old Testament is not binding, then the Ten Commandments are not in force. A careful study of the New Testament will reveal that nine of the ten commandments are part of the new law. The only one missing is the command to remember the Sabbath. Rather, we are now commanded to gather on the first day of the week, Sunday, and worship God (1 Corinthians 16:1, 2; Acts 20:7). Thus, God's moral law is still intact.

The Division and Application of the New Testament

As noted above, the New Testament has four basic sections: (1) Matthew - John; (2) Acts; (3) Romans - Jude; (4) Revelation. The first section was written for the purpose of creating faith within men. John said of his gospel account, "...these things are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God..." (John 20:31). The birth, life, death, and resurrection of Christ are all detailed so that we "may know the certainty" of the things written (Luke 1:1-4).

Acts gives us a detailed account of the beginning of Christianity. It started on the day of Pentecost and continued to spread from Jerusalem, to Judea, to Samaria, and to the far reaches of the Roman empire, just as Jesus said (Acts 1:8). We see example after example of the conversion of both Jew and Gentile (Acts 2:36-41; 8:5-12, 26-39; 18:8). Acts also records the persecution of Christians, like the apostles in Jerusalem (Acts 5:22-42), and Paul in Philippi (Acts 16:16-24).

The letters of Paul, Peter, John, etc. (Romans to Jude), were written to various churches or individuals to encourage, inform, or rebuke them - or all three. For instance, Paul chastised the Corinthians for their carnal mindedness (1 Corinthians 3:1-4). He also educated them about the resurrection (in response to false teaching) and encouraged them to persevere (1 Corinthians 15:1-58; 16:13). The letters had primary application to those who originally received them, but also apply to us; and by God's providence have been preserved for us (1 Peter 1:22-25; 2 Peter 1:12-15).

Again, Revelation is an amazing book. It was written to the seven churches of Asia (Revelation 1:4). Hence, it had primary application to members of those churches who lived in the first century. John noted that the things he wrote about would "shortly take place" (Revelation 1:1). They would soon undergo very difficult times and question whether or not the cause of Christ would survive (Revelation 2:10). The message to them was, yet it will survive under the leadership of the Lord (Revelation 19:11-21).

Conclusion

Rightly dividing the Word of God goes a long way in helping us to understand it as we study through it. If we try to go back to the Old Testament, when we live under the New, it does nothing but cause confusion and that confusion brings frustration and discouragement. So, keep in mind that while we can learn from the Old Testament, it is not binding on us. We live in the "Christian age,"* the time in which Christ rules and reigns at the right hand of God; when we are subject to Him (Hebrews 1:1-3).

*Note: Chronologically, Bible history may be divided into three ages.

Patriarchal: Adam to Moses

Mosaical: Moses to Christ

Christian/Gospel: Christ to Judgment

CHAPTER 3

It Is Written Again

When Jesus was tempted by Satan, He defeated him by answering with the word of God (Matthew 4:1-10). The devil tried to use Scripture to lure Jesus into sin when he quoted Psalm 91:11, 12:

If You are the Son of God, throw Yourself down. For it is written: “He shall give His angels charge over you,” and, “In their hands they shall bear you up, Lest you dash your foot against a stone” (Matthew 4:6).

Jesus replied with additional Scripture. He said, “It is written again. ‘You shall not tempt the Lord your God’” (Matthew 4:7; cf. Deuteronomy 6:16). In other words, what Satan quoted was not the only thing said about the matter. He quoted truth, but misapplied it.

This illustrates the importance of considering all the Bible says on a point before drawing a firm conclusion. We also know that context must be respected or we will not understand or properly apply what is said. Therefore, we will study the importance of comprehensive and contextual study.

Consider All Points On A Subject

We need to avoid falling into the devil's trap of taking only one or two passages on a subject and holding to them as the final word when there is more to be said. What Jesus pointed out from Deuteronomy modified the passage from Psalm 91: A New Testament illustration is the subject of circumcision.

Paul said he refused to allow Titus to be circumcised (Galatians 2:1-3). Yet, on another occasion, Paul took Timothy and circumcised him (Acts 16:1-3). If we just look at Galatians 2, we may think no man should be circumcised. If we focus only on Acts 16, we may think all men must be circumcised. However, when we consider both, we know a man may be circumcised, but it is not required. The reason Paul refused to allow Titus to be circumcised is because some were trying to bind it as a matter of doctrine - to be pleasing to God. In another place, Paul said, "For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision nor uncircumcision avails anything, but a new creation" (Galatians 6:15).

Some may wonder how they will find all the passages that address a particular subject. After all, who has the entire Bible memorized? One of the best and most basic ways to find passages on a certain subject is to use a Bible app or exhaustive concordance. With Bible apps it is as simple as entering your keywords or phrase and seeing a list of passages where those are found. Many have features where you can see the definition of the original word, maybe included in the app or available for purchase.

Let's apply this to another issue with which some folks struggle, New Testament baptism. Is it sprinkling, pouring, or immersion? Or, is it any of the three? If we apply the principle of considering all passages pertaining to the mode (form) of baptism, the answer is readily apparent.

Begin in Matthew and look for passages that contain baptism, baptize, baptized, etc. As you go through these, notice the ones that have information relating to the mode of baptism. You will find Matthew 3:6 says that John baptized people in the river Jordan.

After Jesus was baptized by John, it says He “came up immediately from the water” (Matthew 3:16). As you go on, you will come to John 3:23 where it mentions John “baptizing in Aenon near Salim, because there was much water there.” In Acts 8:38 “both Philip and the Eunuch went down into the water, and he baptized him.” Thus far, you know that baptism involved much water with people getting into and out of it, which would seem to point to baptism as an immersion. Even so, go a little further and notice definitive evidence.

Paul said the Romans were “buried with Him through baptism into death” (Romans 6:4). He told the Colossians they had been “buried with Him in baptism” (Colossians 2:12). So, an obvious question to ask is, what is burial? It is not sprinkling a little dirt or even pouring a cup or bucket over someone. Burial is a full encasement; the body is surrounded by dirt or rock or whatever the substance is into which it is laid to rest. Thus, the mode or form of baptism in the New Testament is immersion. We easily come to that conclusion by considering all the passages that relate to that issue.

Consider Context

Another problem that many people encounter is taking things out of context. Televangelists are famous for doing this. They will quote passages about giving and sacrifice and make it mean you must sacrifice and give them your paycheck.

If we take passages out of context, we can justify telling people to kill themselves:

- Judas hanged himself (Matthew 27:25).
- Jesus said, “Go and do likewise” (Luke 10:37).

The two passages have nothing to do with each other, but if misused can lead to unbiblical and terrible consequences.

The way to counteract taking things out of context is simply to read the context. Most misunderstandings can be corrected by reading a few verses before or after the passage under consideration. Reading the entire chapter, surrounding chapters, or even the entire book, will also answer many questions.

Judas killed himself in deep grief over betraying the Lord (Matthew 27:1-10). If we also consider other passages on the subject, we know he was doomed to perdition for his actions (John 17:12; Acts 1:25).

In Luke 10:37 there is an entirely different and unrelated event. Jesus just finished telling the parable of the good Samaritan (Luke 10:25-36). Thus, in application, He told the one before Him to “go and do likewise.” Context matters.

Context, Narrow and Broad

A specific issue that comes up in some religions is marriage; is it good or bad? Some say celibacy is superior to marriage and will quote Paul in an attempt to prove it. Paul, an unmarried man, said, “For I wish that all men were even as I myself” (1 Corinthians 7:7).

When the entire chapter is read, it is obvious Paul does not say celibacy is a “higher call” than marriage. Notice he is answering specific questions that the Corinthians asked (1 Corinthians 7:1). He said it is okay to marry; it will even help guard against the sin of fornication (1 Corinthians 7:2-5). Also, Paul wrote in light of “the present distress” (1 Corinthians 7:26). The Corinthians were facing persecution. If a man were married, he would be concerned about the treatment of his wife and any children they had. Hence, he might compromise the faith to spare his family. This is why Paul said he wished others were unmarried.

As we broaden the context to the Bible, that is, consider all that is written about marriage, we learn that God made marriage for man’s benefit (Genesis 2:18-24). The

wise man said that a man “who finds a wife finds a good thing, And obtains favor from the LORD” (Proverbs 18:22). We also know that one who is a church leader, whether a bishop or deacon, must be married (1 Timothy 3:2, 5, 12). Context, narrow and broad, matters.

Conclusion

Rarely is there just one passage that addresses a particular subject. Rather, there is usually an abundance of information in God’s word that will give us a complete picture of an issue. Satan tries to hide this from us. He wants us to have a particular understanding or, more precisely, misunderstanding. However, if we take into account other passages, like the Lord did, we will overcome Satan’s scheming.

CHAPTER 4

Study Aids

Sometimes we all need a little help, and seek it. People get advice on how to start a business, take the SAT, or fix a car. For this help, they may talk to someone who knows a lot about it or buy a book on the subject. This booklet is one aid you can use in your study of the Bible, but there are many other resources available to you.

One of the best things you can do in studying the Bible is to obtain a variety of translations. When you have multiple translations, you can read a book, chapter, or verse in each one to get a better understanding. You will want to investigate whether or not the translation is “word-for-word” or what is known as “thought” translation.

The “word-for-word” translations seek to take the Bible from the original languages and translate every word into our language. The “thought” versions simply try to convey the meaning of the passage. Some may think the latter is a great idea, but beware - these type of translations are always tainted with the prejudices and preconceptions of the translators.

With a “word-for-word” translation, you are the one who derives meaning from a passage. Some good “word-for-word” translations are the New King James Version

(NKJV), New American Standard Bible (NASB), and the English Standard Version (ESV).

Note: No version is without its weaknesses and some are better than others in translating the original words into equivalent (or close to) English words.

Listed below are some suggested Bible study aids. You are CAUTIONED to use them with care because they are products of men, not God.

Bible Apps

[OliveTree](#)

- Feature-packed, with plenty of add-ons and my personal favorite installed on all my devices.

[Accordance](#)

- Feature-packed

[Logos](#)

- Multiple packages available

Reference Works

Expository Dictionary of New Testament Words by W.E. Vine

- Defines original meaning of Greek words used in the New Testament

Strong's Exhaustive Concordance of the Bible

- Gives an A to Z list of Bible words and the passages where they are found

The International Bible Encyclopedia (4 Volumes)

- Articles on Bible topics from A to Z

Zondervan Pictorial Encyclopedia of the Bible (5 volumes)

- Articles on Bible topics from A to Z

Unger's Bible Dictionary

- Defines words

A Bible Atlas

- Helps orient Bible events in geographical terms

Commentaries

The Fourfold Gospel by J.W. McGarvey

- Blends Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John and gives a commentary on the events of Jesus' life

Original Commentary on Acts by J.W. McGarvey

- Good commentary on Acts. An easy read.

Truth Commentaries (various authors)

- Variety of Bible books, mostly New Testament. Packed with information and explanation.

Commentary on Romans by R.L. Whiteside

- Good, short commentary. Explains difficult passages well.

Revelation: An Introduction and Commentary by Homer Hailey

- Good commentary on a fascinating book. Sensible explanations of the various visions.

A Commentary on the Minor Prophets by Homer Hailey

- Good material. Easy to read.

The Pulpit Commentary (23 volumes on the whole Bible)

- Originally published in the 1800s. Fairly good material by various men.

General Works

Old Testament History by Alfred Edersheim

- Excellent resource and easy to read.

The Life and Times of the Messiah by Alfred Edersheim

- Information packed about first-century life.

The Heart of Hebrew History by H.I. Hester

- Great work to aid understanding of ancient Israel.

* Some of the materials above can be purchased at most religious book stores. To see an updated list of recommended sellers, go to ImplantedWord.com/resources

Web Sites

ImplantedWord.com

- Bible-based videos, podcast, audio, and articles by me

WordandSword.com

- Website with multiple years of a Bible study TV program

TruthMagazine.com

- Monthly periodical with Bible-based articles

ApologeticsPress.org

- Evidences, creation, science materials

AnswersInGenesis.org

- Evidences, creation, science materials

AppianMedia.org

- Bible-based education videos

CHAPTER 5

Suggested Bible-Study Program

To aid you in your study of the Bible, a suggested program, or schedule, follows. You may wish to adjust it for your circumstances or personal likes. However, the most important point of this is to get on a regular schedule of Bible study. Be systematic about it, not haphazard. If you randomly open your Bible on Tuesday and read a few pages, then on Thursday randomly open it again and read in a different place, you will benefit some, but not much. In fact, this may lead to confusion and bewilderment. So, follow a program for maximum benefit and impact.

Starting Out

Read the gospel of Mark; one chapter per day. Immediately after reading the chapter, write down a phrase that sums up its contents - maybe even one keyword. Pick out key verses, words, or phrases used in the chapter and write them down. Write a short paragraph or two about the message, events, or lessons - or make a personal application from the text.

Bonus: choose a verse to memorize; preferably one that captures the meaning of the chapter. By doing this you will etch on your mind the lesson or meaning of the passage.

Tip: Use a dedicated notebook for this. Don't mix it with any other note-taking activities or journaling. Keep it solely for recording your daily reading and lessons learned.

You may be tempted to read more than one chapter per day. If you do, that is fine, but it is best if you will stop after each chapter and write down the things noted above. You may run out of time or forget what a chapter said. If you will pause and meditate on what you just read, without having too much to consider, you will benefit more.

Tip: reread the chapter multiple times and/or in other translations. If you read it in another translation, we recommend you go back to your main translation and read it again.

For memory work, write the verse down on a 3 x 5 card. Carry it in your pocket, purse, or briefcase. Put it in your car or on your desk; wherever it is convenient and easy to see and access throughout the day. Simple writing out the verse by hand will help impress it in your memory.

Tip: memorize only a few words at a time and put them together as you go through the verse or verses.

Moving Ahead

After you finish Mark, go on to Acts then to Philippians, Ephesians, or Colossians. Mark gives the life of Christ and preparation for the Kingdom. Acts records the fulfillment of the great commission in the establishment and growth of the Kingdom (Church). The epistles show the practical struggles and wonderful triumphs of first century Christians.

Further, it is suggested you make an appointment for yourself to study. Mark it on a calendar or planner or set a reminder on your phone. Block out time to read and

meditate when you are less likely to be interrupted. Doing this will help you mentally commit and make it more likely to get it done.

Conclusion

Finally, be patient and give it time. “By your patience possess your souls” (Luke 21:29). The more you study God’s word, the more you will understand it. You will reap what you sow (Galatians 6:7-9). However, as with any crop, you will reap later than you sow. So, stick to it; it will be worth it.

ADDENDUM

What Must I Do To Be Saved?

If you are reading this guide, you are interested in matters pertaining to your soul. You want a closer and better relationship with God, as well as more confidence and peace in your daily life. The first thing you must ask yourself is, “Am I saved?” The answer to that question is informed by “What must I do to be saved according to the Bible?”

If you have not done what the Bible says you must do to be saved, then you are not saved. If you have, then you are. It is really that simple.

Caution: most all preachers and the religious groups with which they are associated do NOT teach the gospel plan of salvation.

Many people are told all you need to do to be saved is believe in Jesus and say the “sinner’s prayer,” and God will make you His child. Belief is necessary to salvation, but the Lord requires more than belief. Study the following paragraphs, read the Scriptures cited, and consider what the Bible says is necessary to salvation and whether or not you are saved.

You Must Hear The Word of God

God chose to spread the gospel through “earthen vessels,” that is, men (2 Corinthians 4:7). The apostles were appointed by Jesus to preach the gospel to every creature (Mark 16:15). Thus, God uses words to convict and convert men. He does not mysteriously zap them or whisper something in their ear late at night.

The book of Acts provides abundant evidence that God uses the gospel to save men (cf. Romans 1:16). Peter told the crowd on Pentecost to “heed my words” (Acts 2:14). He then urged them to “hear these words” (Acts 2:22). He also “testified and exhorted” them with “many other words” (Acts 2:40). Thus, about three thousand were saved that day.

Saul of Tarsus, later the apostle Paul, saw Jesus on the road to Damascus (Acts 9:1-5). He asked Jesus what he must do. Jesus told him to go into the city and it would be “told” him what he must do (Acts 9:6). In other words, he needed to hear the Word of the gospel. If there ever was a case of salvation by vision or miraculous experience, this would have been it. However, even one who saw the resurrected Lord had to hear and heed the gospel like everyone else, including you.

You Must Believe In Jesus Christ

Jesus said if you do not believe in Him, you will die in your sins (John 8:24). This belief, or faith, comes by hearing the word of God (Romans 10:17). Again, we turn back to Pentecost.

Peter gave three proofs of Jesus’ Messiahship. He pointed out Jesus performed miracles; a fact that showed God’s approval and His power (Acts 2:22). He quoted Old Testament prophecies about the Christ and showed how they were fulfilled in Jesus (Acts 2:23-31). By the way, these prophecies were made 400 or more years before Jesus’ birth. Hence, they could not have been altered by the apostles to fit His life and death. Finally, Peter simply pointed out that he and the other apostles had seen the resurrected Jesus (Acts 2:32; cf. Romans 1:4). All this evidence pointed to one fact, Jesus is “both

Lord and Christ” (Acts 2:36). Being convicted of this is necessary to salvation (John 20:30, 31).

You Must Repent of Your Sins

Repentance is essential to salvation. Jesus told the apostles to preach “repentance and remission of sins in His name to all nations” (Luke 24:47). God commands all men everywhere to repent (Acts 17:30, 31).

To repent is to change your mind. It comes about because of godly sorrow and bears the fruit of a changed life (2 Corinthians 7:8-10; Luke 3:8-14). When you are sorry about living in rebellion to God, you have godly sorrow. Being upset because sin has caused you trouble in life, loss of money or health, really is not godly sorrow.

You must realize and acknowledge that you have transgressed the will of God and be determined to do better. This change of mind will then lead you to live differently. You will no longer go along with the world in sinful things (1 Peter 4:3, 4).

You Must Confess Your Faith

Some have believed in Jesus, but were unwilling to confess Him because of their love for men (John 12:42, 43). Paul said this means they serve men, not Christ (Galatians 1:10). If we will not confess Jesus before men, He will not confess us before the Father (Luke 12:8, 9). Your faith needs to lead you to speak (2 Corinthians 4:13).

Paul said confession is made unto salvation (Romans 10:9, 10). An example of this is given in Acts 8. The Ethiopian wanted to know what stopped him from being baptized (Acts 8:36). Philip told him he needed to believe, at which point the Ethiopian confessed his belief (Acts 8:37). Based on this confession, he was baptized (Acts 8:38).

You Must Be Baptized

Jesus said men must believe and be baptized to be saved (Mark 16:16). Sometimes people object by saying, “Jesus said non-belief is the cause of condemnation. He did not say, ‘and is not baptized.’”

We ask them to consider this: If you were told to “Believe and be baptized to receive a new Mercedes Benz; if you do not believe you will receive nothing.” what would you do? You and everyone else who heard it and wanted a new Mercedes would line up to be baptized with zero excuses or attempts to explain why you did not need to be baptized. So, why not do just what the Lord said, believe and be baptized for salvation - something worth more than all the Mercedes Benzs in the world!

Further, Peter said to be baptized for the remission of sin (Acts 2:38). Ananias told Paul to “arise and be baptized, and wash away your sins, calling on the name of the Lord” (Acts 22:16). The reason for all these commands is because salvation is in Christ and the way to get “in” Him is through baptism (Galatians 3:26, 27; Romans 6:3, 4).

You Must Remain Faithful

Faithfulness to the Lord is something we may tend to forget. Peter said to make your “call and election sure” (2 Peter 1:10). He warned that turning back to the world will leave you worse off than if you had never served Christ (2 Peter 2:18-22). Paul said to take heed lest you fall (1 Corinthians 10:12).

Consider also the parable of the sower (Luke 8:5-8, 11-15). In it there is the seed sown on the rock that springs up but then withers away (Luke 8:6, 13). There is also the seed sown among the thorns and weeds that begins to grow, but is choked out (Luke 8:7, 14). Both of these illustrate that one can hear and heed the gospel, but then fall away. Thus, it is imperative to stay on the right track.

When we say you must remain faithful, we do not mean if you ever sin you are eternally doomed. Rather, as the Bible teaches, you must repent and confess your sin, seeking God's forgiveness (1 John 1:7-2:1). Simon the Sorcerer sinned and was told to repent and pray for forgiveness (Acts 8:18-24). Everyone will stumble and fall from time to time. The key is to turn back to the Lord and redouble your diligence in serving Him.

Conclusion

God desires all men to be saved, including you (1 Timothy 2:3, 4). HE sent His Son to die on the cross to make this happen (John 1:29). Thus, God has done His part. It is up to us to do our part - humbly obey His commands to hear, believe, repent, confess, be baptized, and live faithfully (cf. Hebrews 5:9; Romans 6:16, 17). By so doing, you will have the hope of heaven burning in your heart.

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