

# **All of God's Word for Christians Today?**

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## **All of God's Word for Christians Today?**

How much of the Bible is for modern man? Is the New Testament only valid for Christians? Can God's Word be "dissected" so each individual is free to choose what portion he will obey? How much of God's Word is for us today? This article will answer these questions and make God's Word plain on this most important subject!

When God first instructed Adam, truth was being revealed. While Adam's capacity to absorb knowledge was vast, it is clear there was much which was impossible to be humanly discerned. This had to be divinely revealed (Gen. 2:16–17).

It was not long before Adam, along with Eve, repudiated divine revelation. Under the sway of Satan, they rejected truth and chose the path of human reason (Gen. 3:1–6). The consequences, of course, were disastrous (Gen. 3:17–19).

### **Man's Historical Record**

This has been man's record ever since.

Of the ancients Paul said, "For the wrath of God is [being] revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who hold [suppress or hold down] the truth in unrighteousness; Because that which may be known of God is manifest in them, for God hath shewed it unto them. . . . Because that, when they knew God, they glorified him not as God, neither were thankful; but became vain in their imaginations [futile in their speculations], and their foolish heart was darkened. Professing themselves to be wise, they became fools. . . . And even as they did not like to retain God in their knowledge, God gave them over to a reprobate mind, to do those things which are not convenient [becoming]" (Rom. 1:18–19, 21–22, 28).

Notice carefully: Truth is being suppressed (v. 18) because men, following in the footsteps of the ancients, reject God in spite of the fact He was once known (vv. 19, 21). Man, influenced by human reason (v. 21), refuses to retain God in his knowledge (v. 28). The rest of the chapter shows the results of rejecting divine revelation!

### **Man in Spiritual Darkness**

Mankind, as a whole, has always rejected God's revelation. It is the minority of the earth's population which embraces what is called Christianity. Those who do, find

themselves facing hundreds of differing viewpoints, ideas and concepts in the name of "the denomination of your choice." Chaos reigns. But it did not start that way!

## **Man Not Left in Ignorance**

Man was not left by himself to discern spiritual truth. From Adam to the 20th century, God has made His will known (Heb. 1:1, 2; Psa. 100:5). That will of God is recorded in the Bible (II Tim. 3:16). However, doubting the veracity of God's Word is not the problem for most "Christians." It is the understanding of what is said. Today, the simplest principles required to understand the Bible have been rejected by those who ought to know better. And thousands who were once enlightened to Bible truth have gone off into despicable error!

## **Most Obvious Violation**

One of the most obvious impediments to Bible understanding is resorting to private interpretation. Here vast portions of God's Word are ignored, shelved, repudiated or "guessed at" in order to substantiate preconceived ideas. Or reject established doctrine. Or justify private lifestyles. As Peter said, ". . . they that are unlearned and unstable wrest [Paul's epistles], as they do also the other scriptures, unto their own destruction" (II Pet. 3:16). This is because men insist on their own "private interpretation" of God's Word. That is why Peter wrote, ". . . no prophecy of the scripture is of any private interpretation" (II Pet. 1:20).

## **Principles of Understanding**

"All scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness" (II Tim. 3:16). Herein lies the first key to Bible understanding. What is clearly stated is that all Scripture was not only inspired, but also given for a purpose. The above text was inspired and written approximately 40 years before the New Testament was canonized. The only Scripture here referred to as "profitable for doctrine" was the Old Testament.

Jesus said, ". . . Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God" (Matt. 4:4). That "every word" which Jesus referred to was the Old Testament. Jesus made it plain that complete Bible understanding can be given only through a complete acceptance of all the Old Testament (Isa. 28:9–10) as well as the New.

There is no contradiction between the Old and New Testaments (John 10:35). Those portions of the Old not applicable for Christians today are made plain in the New Testament

(Heb. 9:9–10; Dan. 9:27). It is by a careful examination of all texts on a given subject that the truth concerning any one doctrine can be fully understood. This is why the Bible tells us, "Study to shew thyself approved unto God . . ." (II Tim. 2:15).

There is yet one absolute requirement which must be considered. Without its application, the principles of Bible understanding would be of little value. But first, let us note some of the subterfuges utilized by men which cloud Bible understanding.

### **Old Testament of Historical Value Only?**

First is the idea that the Old Testament is historical in nature only. It has no merit in either moral or philosophical values. It has no prophetic significance. The Old Testament is viewed as the writings of an ancient race (the Jews) in search of their concept of God. While no divine inspiration was involved, some inspirational value can be derived from various portions (Psalms, Proverbs, etc.). Hence the Old Testament is disregarded as far as exerting any influence upon Bible understanding or for shaping doctrine. What is illogical about this concept is that there are 639 Old Testament quotes found in the New Testament (*The Bible Handbook*, by Joseph Angus, revised and in part rewritten by Samuel G. Green, p. 249). This is the equivalent of almost 40 chapters of 20 verses each! The inspired writers of the New Testament knew the value of the Old, and they knew it went far beyond historical significance. While the oracles of God were committed to the Jews (Rom. 1:16; Rom. 3:1, 2), their application far superseded any historical limitation (compare Isa. 6:9 with Matt. 13:14–15, and Isa. 29:10 with Rom. 11:8).

Nor were the Old Testament scriptures limited, in understanding, to a specific geographic area or to one nationality (compare Rev. 6:12–17 with Joel 2:31 and Isa. 34:4; Matt. 2:17–18 with Jer. 31:15; Acts 2:17–21 with Joel 2:28–32. Note also 1 Pet. 1:12, I Cor. 10:11, and Rom. 15:14).

### **Bible to Be "Dissected"?**

Next, how valid is the claim that any individual has the right to obey only those portions of the Scripture which best suit his needs? The justification for this concept is an interpretation of II Timothy 2:15, which reads as follows: "Study to shew thyself approved unto God, a workman that needeth not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth." Those who promote the theory of "dissecting" God's Word interpret the word "dividing" as "dissecting." Hence, "the enlightened" are accurately able to dissect the Word of Truth (to select those portions of God's Word which they feel should be obeyed).

But is this interpretation valid?

Let *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament*, by Arndt and Gingrich (p. 584), give the answer.

Of the Greek word *orthotomeo*, translated "dividing," we read: "found elsewhere independently of the New Testament only [meaning, it is found only one time in the New Testament, in II Tim. 2:15] Pr. 3:6; 11:5 [Septuagint] where it is used with *odous* and plainly means 'cut a path in a straight direction' or 'cut a road across country (that is forested or otherwise difficult to pass through) in a straight direction', so that the traveler may go directly to his destination. . . . Then *orthotomein ton loqon tes aletheias* would *perhaps* [emphasis mine] mean guide the word of truth along a straight path (like a road that goes straight to its goal), without being turned aside by wordy debates or impious talk II Tim. 2:15. For such other meanings as teach the word aright, expound it soundly, shape rightly, and preach fearlessly, see M-M. [J.H. Moulton and G. Milligan]."

Note: The Greek word *orthotomeo* is found once only in the New Testament, hardly enough to dogmatically state it means "dissect," and the authoritative source—*A Greek-English Lexicon*—says perhaps it means "guide the word of truth along a straight path." This is ample proof that to translate *orthotomeo* as "dissecting" is STRICTLY AN INTERPRETATION. Furthermore, the Septuagint shows the King James Version translators correctly rendered it "divide." The interpretation "dissect" violates what is said elsewhere in the Bible concerning interpretation and understanding! (See page 2 in this article, under subhead "Principles of Understanding.") The Bible nowhere gives the individual the right to decide which portions he will obey! Man is to live by *every* word of God (Matt. 4:4)! To reason that the Old Testament is of no value except historical, and that what was taught by Christ prior to His crucifixion applied to the Jews only (making Paul's writings alone carry any force in our lives), is fallacious reasoning! It is wresting the Scriptures to one's own destruction! (II Pet. 3:16).

### **A Dangerous Approach**

This dangerous approach to Bible understanding (dissecting God's Word) is contrary to Scripture. Recently, it was manifested in the change of the doctrine of divorce and remarriage, a change predicated on the basis of a single, ambiguous Greek word translated "bondage" in I Corinthians 7:15. This is hardly different from Martin Luther's rejection of the book of James as an "epistle of straw" because James disagreed with Martin Luther's concept of faith without works. And it varies little from the notion that the Church has the right to change doctrine as it sees fit, clearly a private interpretation of Matthew 16:19.

## **All Scripture Necessary**

What man must realize is that *all* Scripture must be carefully examined in order to ascertain truth. And that God's Word is eternal Truth—ever living! Jesus' promise that His disciples would be proclaiming that Truth to "the consummation of the age" (Matt. 28:19–20) is ample proof God's Word is "profitable" in modern times!

## **Bible Understanding Inspired**

It was the Jews to whom God committed His oracles (Rom. 3:1–2). Holy men inspired by the Spirit spoke God's words (II Pet. 1:21) which were recorded and preserved. The inspired New Testament writers likewise preserved God's inspired Word. It was Christ's purpose to magnify and expand the full spiritual intent of the Law of God (Isa. 42:21). The Sermon on the Mount is the summary of that intent. When the New Testament was canonized at the end of the first century, the preserved record was complete. But access to that record does not automatically convey truth. It is by the power of God's Spirit only—a direct miracle—that Bible understanding results! (John 14:16–17, 26; Luke 24:44–45; I Cor. 2:9–16). And that access always involves proclamation through chosen ministers (I Cor. 1:21). This is an absolute requirement for Bible understanding. Most important of all, Bible understanding comes to us in modern times in exactly the same way (John 6:44, 17:20).

## **Revelation Is Threefold**

Bible revelation is a threefold process. First, it involved inspiration given by the Spirit to holy men of God who recorded the Word. Second, it requires the inspiration of the Holy Spirit to the individual (for any generation) to open the mind to the meaning of that recorded Word (John 6:44, 14:26; Luke 24:45; I Cor. 2:12). And third, it requires recognition of faithful ministers who proclaim and expound that Truth to the called (Rom. 10:14–15). There is no other way! While Bible understanding requires thorough study (II Tim. 2:15), it does not come through intellect, superior intelligence or scholarship. In fact, if anything, it is these human applications which have actually clouded God's Truth and placed Christianity in hopeless confusion! If scholarship is the basis for revelation, the world should have long been knowledgeable in God's Truth. Yet, the world's renowned scholars and theologians are in total disagreement as to what constitutes the truth. No wonder the "educated" of this world say there is no specific religious truth except what each individual decides to be truth for himself!

## Truth at Time of the End

But God's Truth was to be extant at the time of the end (Dan. 12:4, 9). Jesus said His disciples would be proclaiming that truth even to "the consummation of the age" (Matt. 28:20). Truth is permanent. It does not change. What was truth in Jesus' day is truth today. Jesus said the gospel of the Kingdom would be proclaimed to all nations just before the end comes (Matt. 24:14). Therefore, it is for modern man!

One fact is absolutely certain. The Holy Spirit does not lead into error (John 14:16–17, 26). Either Christ kept His promise to reveal truth in modern times, or He is derelict! If what is now proclaimed truth (doctrinal changes) by the Worldwide Church of God is truth, then truth was not revealed during the past 40 years. If, however, truth was revealed in the past, then what is now called truth is gross error! It is one or the other. When we realize the Bible says Christ would be with His true disciples to the consummation of the age, then it is obvious the same rejection of God's revealed truth has again taken place in modern times!

## Apostasy Prophesied

Apostasy is exactly what the Bible said would take place! Apostasy was prophesied to occur in the time of the end! Read it: "Now we beseech you, brethren, by the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. . . . Let no man deceive you by any means: for that day shall not come, except there come a falling away [Greek: *apostasia*] first, and that man of sin be revealed . . ." (II Thess. 2:1, 3). This falling away was not to be a departure from a church organization. It is a departure from truth! An apostasy does not involve disassociation from a physical organization. It can mean only a departure from the true doctrine! It was to be so vast the majority of true believers would be led astray. Either II Peter 2:1–2 is relevant for us today, or the New Testament and the entire Bible are meaningless! If even one text of the Bible should fail, how can one trust any of God's Word? (John 10:35; Matt. 5:18). God's way of life was to be repudiated and besmirched by the very people who once proclaimed it! And "many" would follow their pernicious ways! We must face this fact—either the Church of God had the truth in the past or there is no such thing as truth! What is now proclaimed truth is a total departure from major doctrine. If we did not have the truth in the past, there can be no confidence we have it now, because the only authority for present doctrinal changes is "scholarship." (To understand what this involves, write for our articles *What Liberalism Has Done to the Church of God* and *Doctrinal Changes—How They Affect You!*).

## Many "Ruses"

When the Worldwide Church of God erroneously stated it was in error on major doctrines, Pandora's box was opened. The reasonings used to repudiate the truth are many. Many organizations now exist which broke from the Worldwide Church of God, and all but one have the same common goal. They are determined to repudiate the truth!

The approaches and ruses are endless. As explained earlier, we are told we have a right to "dissect" God's Word to suit ourselves. Thus we are free to choose what we feel is right for us to obey. We are told that Christ's teachings before His crucifixion do not apply to us. That was for the Jews of His day, hence the only portion of the Bible with which we need to be concerned is Paul's epistles.

Some tell us we need not obey anything in the New Testament which is not directly commanded. And since the Old Testament is not applicable for Christians, there's no need to tithe, no need to observe the Holy Days, no need to be persecuted or lose jobs for Sabbath observance.

Others believe "love" is the principal thing. All Old Testament law was the "schoolmaster" but now that we are New Testament Christians and "spiritually mature," we have no need for any law. We "obey" God from the heart.

Still others reason that the "New Covenant" does away with the necessity to obey the law. The New Covenant, "spirit of the law" approach makes physical obedience to any law of God obsolete.

Then there is the idea that in order to be righteous, we must live by the entirety of the Bible. This line of reasoning would have us believe we cannot keep the Holy Days without offering sacrifices. We cannot keep the Feast of Trumpets without blowing the shofar. We cannot keep the Feast of Tabernacles without building booths. We cannot keep Pentecost without waving the sheaf of the firstfruits. And we cannot keep the Day of Atonement without the goat ceremony. This reasoning assumes the only time Paul kept the Holy Days was when he went to Jerusalem. If such is true, one is hard pressed to account for his many years away from Jerusalem, among the Gentiles who practiced none of the requirements attached to temple worship and the sacrificial system. Further, many of the Gentile converts had been proselytes to Judaism, and the Acts, chapter fifteen, conference made it plain none of these ceremonial requirements were necessary for them.

Then there is the idea, briefly mentioned earlier, that truth does not come through divine revelation. It comes through scholarship.

All of these ideas are subtle attempts to justify rejection of Biblical truth—that Christians are to live by every word of God. Many of them are well-established Protestant ideas. Hebrews, chapter nine, makes plain that temple worship with its accompanying requirements is not necessary for Christians to observe. The fact that Gentile converts were not required to observe them is ample proof the abrogation of the sacrificial system does not alter required observance of God's Law and the Holy Days. It was the duty of the Levitical priests to offer sacrifices, to blow the shofar, to wave the firstfruits sheaf at Pentecost. It is an assumption that booths were made from branches in which to live during the Feast of Tabernacles (compare Lev. 23:40–43 and Neh. 8:15–17). These texts clearly imply branches were used as part of a ceremony, and that booths were simply huts sat in during portions of the day. This entire concept is pictured by residing in any temporary dwelling during the Feast of Tabernacles. But such reasonings mentioned above are not examples of conceptual thinking. Rather, they are subtle technicalities implemented to justify departure from revealed truth!

Obedience to God's commandments and the Holy Days is clearly shown, not only by Old Testament command but also by New Testament example. Those who champion Paul as the one who liberated them from observance of God's Law and the Holy Days should read Philippians 4:9, 1 Corinthians 11:1, Acts 17:2, Hebrews 4:9, Acts 18:21, Acts 20:16 and 1 Timothy 1:9–11.

### **Individual Responsibility**

In the final analysis, it is the individual who will answer to God for what he does (Rom. 14:4; Gal. 6:4–5). Many have been "locked into" an organization which departed from truth. But that does not absolve personal responsibility before God. Thousands have allowed apostasy to turn them from God's way of life though remaining in the organization. Others reason, there is no truth since the Worldwide Church of God has repudiated its doctrine. So there is no need to follow the Bible in anything. Still others are so disillusioned about any kind of religious organization, they refuse to commit themselves to anything, believing they can maintain their present convictions alone.

But do not forget, it was God who called and revealed His Truth to you through the power of His Holy Spirit (John 5:43–44). The Church was the organization God used at the time of our conversion. We did not come to that truth alone. But the Church is not God, and it does not have the powers of God. It is merely a tool comprised of fallible human beings, most of whom were prophesied to depart from revealed truth (II Thess. 2:3; II Pet. 2:1–2). Do not make the mistake of placing obedience to that Church above God or His Word. To do so is idolatry! (Ex. 20:3; Matt. 22:36–39). We must believe, adhere to and practice what God clearly gave to us at the time truth was still practiced and taught.

For a more complete understanding of when the truth was revealed, write for our article, *What Is the Faith Once Delivered?* We are to follow men only as they follow Christ (1 Cor. 11:1). When men depart from truth—from living by every word of God, expressed either by direct command or by example—we are to remain faithful to the truth. There is no other way acceptable to God! We are under no Scriptural obligation to remain within any organization which departs from God. Further, if one departs from an apostate Church, he cannot become a law unto himself, if he expects to gain eternal life.

God help you to obey Him and hold fast to His Truth. For a better understanding of what you should do regarding obedience to God's way of life and what to do about Christian fellowship, write for our article, *True Christian Fellowship Today*.