

---

# COMMENDED TO THE WORD

## Perspectives on Bible Reading

by Daniel A. Brown, PhD

I wish I could say that I had come to the understandings and realizations concerning God's word that are contained in the following pages by the time I graduated from high school. I wish I could say they had become part of my Christian experience before I finished my undergraduate work in college. I wish it had been so, because then I wouldn't have labored so long or struggled quite so hard in my walk with the Lord.

And I truly wish that I could say that at least now I understand fully, or realize completely, what God has shown me about His word. But from many past experiences, I thought I had finally learned some particular aspect of God's way, only to discover that what I learned was actually how little I really knew. I have come to understand that *"if anyone supposes he knows anything (that is, perceives it in its completeness), he has not yet known as he ought to know"* (1 Corinthians 8:2).

So, I'm still learning. That truth is perhaps the most fundamental concept with which I am learning to approach God's word. I may study, read and memorize the scriptures, but I will not, until Jesus comes, ever fully and completely know the truth contained in even one verse.

Because God's ways are not our ways, nor are His words like our words, we are incapable of ever completely understanding and knowing them. This isn't to say that we cannot increase in wisdom, or begin to understand His words, because we have been given *"the mind of Christ"* (1 Corinthians 2:16) and *"the Holy Spirit of promise"* (Ephesians 1:13). The point is that the riches of God's word will never be exhausted, or will anyone ever come to the place where they no longer learn more from the Bible.

Walking with God and learning of Him is a process as eternal, as unending as He is Himself. While it is true that this process is embarked upon the exact instant we come to know Him through Jesus, the goal of our life and its deepest desire becomes a constant echo of David's prayer:

*“Make me know Your ways, O Lord; teach me Your paths. Lead me in Your truth and teach me, for You are the God of my salvation; for you I wait all the day.” ~Psalm 25:4-5*

Once we are reintroduced to the Father, through Jesus—and come to fully grasp who He is—we begin to learn of His character, His ways and His eternal truth. That’s what the Scriptures are all about, telling us the things of God, revealing His divine nature and showing forth His plans of glory.

*—Someone can come to know God personally without reading the Bible, but cannot know what God is like without reading the word of God—*

Someone can come to know God personally through Jesus without actually reading the Bible, but that person cannot come to know a great deal about what God is like in His dealings with man, or how He has provided for the restoration of man’s soul, or even the surpassing riches of His glory, without reading the word. God sent His Word, Jesus, to reveal Himself to the world, for Jesus is “*the radiance of His glory and the exact representation of His nature*” (Hebrews 1:3). The Father is in Him, so seeing Jesus shows us the Father; what He is like, what He says and what He does.

Only Jesus can restore our lost relationship with the Father, and though He sits at the right hand of the Father, He is ever-present to bring us to God. Before He left this Earth, He said He would not leave us alone, but would give us a Helper who would lead us in truth. And the Holy Spirit does indeed teach us of the Father and the Son. Perhaps the greatest single tool He uses is the word of God. Jesus the Word reveals God’s nature and His ways; the written word does likewise.

Thus, Jesus the Word continues His revelation process to me through Scripture. By opening myself more and more to the word, I open myself to the Word, transforming me from glory to glory.

But for years I didn’t see the connection, and I would read the Bible with an attitude of “show me the Father.” Like Philip, I failed to understand that what I was hearing and reading was the Father. The word had been so long with me, and yet I had not come to recognize that God Himself was abiding in the word and speaking to me.

## **WHAT I NEEDED TO UNLEARN**

Then one day, I experienced one of those instantaneous bits of revelation, which seem to somehow make sense out of numerous unrelated circumstances and instances. That revelation has been changing my perspective, and my life, ever since. And the whole thing was contained in what many of us would consider an obscure verse, almost taken out of context in the way the Holy Spirit applied it to my understanding:

*“And now I commend you to God and to the word of His grace, which is able to build you up and give you the inheritance among all those who are sanctified.” ~Acts 20:32*

This verse took all the assorted truths I had ever learned about the word and grouped them together in such a way that I finally saw the word itself, and not simply, some of its attributes or effects. For years, I had been taught that the word was alive—that it never returned void; that it was the sword of the Spirit; that it converted the soul, made the simple wise and rejoiced the heart; that it was the power of salvation; and that it was truth. Suddenly, I caught a glimpse for the first time, of the word itself as something precious of the Lord’s heart in why He gave the word to me.

By implication, and perhaps even by direct teaching, I had come to believe that God’s word makes no suggestions. What was meant by this phrase, which was quite popular while I was in college, was that God’s word didn’t really offer advice; it told us exactly what to do and what not to do. This put me, and many like myself, in the somewhat difficult spot of attempting to determine precisely what every verse was commanding. For us, there were not ten commandments, nor even the multiple hundreds of the Law, but multiplied thousands of the Law, the prophets, the psalms, the gospels, the epistles and the revelations. So intent did we become on the laws and commands that we lost sight of the Word’s (Lord’s) intent.

I knew vaguely that why I was reading the word was to find out what I was supposed to do and what I was supposed to believe. So there were times when I almost dreaded reading for fear of coming upon some verse that would point out yet another area in need of change in my life. I read because I was expected to read—both by my peers and by my own understanding of the word and its relationship to my Christian life.

## **PERSPECTIVES ON INTERPRETING SCRIPTURE**

God abounds in loving-kindness and mercy, and He desires to instruct the sinner in the way he ought to go. The ways of the Lord are loving-kindness and truth and will be experienced by those who treasure His word in their hearts. He has secret, intimate counsel for those who regard Him and walk in integrity and uprightness (Psalm 25).

God’s word is meant to be a protective guardian which trains and builds us up in the things of God. The word increases our maturity and gives us spiritual girth. It edifies and emboldens us by providing not only a stable foundation, but also a structural framework onto which the Lord superimposes us as new creations.

*“And now I commend you to God and to the word of His grace, which is able to build you up and to give you the inheritance among all those who are sanctified.” ~Acts 20:32*

God's word outlines, details and explains our full inheritance; it is a collection of those magnificent and precious promises by which we inherit the divine nature and the many, many things freely given to us by God. The word is the agent by which our inheritance is bestowed upon us and brought forth into our daily experience. We become sharers in the lot of eternity which is divided up and given to us in bite-size morsels called verses (2 Peter 1:2-3).

All that is true of Jesus is true of the Scriptures. As the full revelation of God's character, Jesus is the final Word of life. Yet His coming does not invalidate or put aside the written word; He fulfills it. Thus, the gentle, life-giving wisdom of Jesus is to be found in the Bible, though it is only a shadow of the "good things" we can now understand in the person of Jesus (John 1).

### **FIVE NAMES FOR SCRIPTURE (FROM *PSALM 119*)**

**Testimonies**—Statements regarding what is true and how everything is viewed by God and is God's. If we believe His testimonies our ultimate evaluations, and our behavior in life, will correspond to His.

**Precepts**—Messages from God providing us with instructions or directions about what should be done in any given situation. Precepts take care of or take charge of us by guiding us in God's ways for dealing with what we encounter in life. If we follow the precepts, we will stay on course.

**Statutes**—Appointments with God, particular times and places or attitudes of heart and mind that correspond directly with where God is. Statutes are like a direct phone line: whenever we pick them up and listen, we are assured that God will be present. By keeping His statutes, we keep from missing God and drifting out of touch.

**Commandments**—Directives issued by God, in order to inform us of what needs to be done to do things properly and to ensure that things will remain in proper functioning order. They tell us, in a metaphorical sense, what tools we need and what steps we should follow to assemble a bike so that it will come out looking and working like a bike.

**Judgments**—Divinely established sentences and laws that govern the workings of the spiritual world, much like the laws of physics govern the natural world. Judgments, like the law of gravity, enable us to predict certain consequences of our actions and thoughts. God judges or decrees, for instance, that the meek shall inherit the earth (Psalm 37:11; Matthew 5:5).