

FROM THE AUTHOR OF LIVING SKILLFULLY AND FACING DEPRESSION

A FRESH LOOK AT PENTECOST

IN LIGHT OF PRESENT DAY CONFUSION

DR. WILLIAM J. FINNIGAN

**A FRESH LOOK AT
PENTECOST**
IN LIGHT OF
PRESENT-DAY CONFUSION

By
William J. Finnigan

SAMPLE PAGES

A Fresh Look at Pentecost in Light of Present Day Confusion

© William J. Finnigan, D. Min.

September 2021

Printed in the United States of America

ISBN: 978-1-7371005-6-0

Unless otherwise indicated, Bible quotations are taken from **The Holy Bible, Authorized King James Version**, 2003, Thomas Nelson, Inc., all rights reserved. This **Holy Bible** may be quoted or reprinted without prior written permission with the following qualifications: Up to and including 1,000 verses may be quoted in printed form as long as the verses quoted amount to less than 50 percent of a complete book of the **Bible** and make up less than 50 percent of the total work in which they are quoted. All **KJV** quotations must conform accurately to the **KJV** text.

Formatting, Editing and Publishing Assistance By:

The Old Paths Publications, Inc.

Cleveland, Ga 30528

www.theoldpathspublications.com

email: TOP@theoldpathspublications.com

SAMPLE PAGES

DEDICATION

To my Beloved brother in Christ, Robert (Bob) Quesenbury, I dedicate this book. You taught me from our college days how to love God's Word and walk with Him. In many times of trouble, you have wisely used your wealth of Scriptural knowledge and godly hymns to minister special "healing" to me. Thank you for being such a faithful, loving friend and fellow servant. I honor you

SAMPLE PAGES

PREFACE

Jesus said,

“...Upon this rock I will built my church; and the gates of Hell shall not prevail against it.” (Matt. 16:18)

The Psalmist exclaims (prophetically):

“Behold, how good and how pleasant it is for brethren to dwell together in unity... for there the Lord commanded the blessing, even life for evermore.” (Psa. 133:1, 3)

The Apostle Paul exhorts:

With all lowliness and meekness, with longsuffering, forbearing one another in love; Endeavouring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. There is one body, and one Spirit, even as ye are called in one hope of your calling; One Lord, one faith, one baptism, One God and Father of all, who is above all, and through all, and in you all. (Eph. 4:2-6)

Those who have been reconciled to God through Christ the Redeemer have also been joined to each other in unity. We are “one body,” having “one Spirit” and “one baptism.” That is a biblical fact, whether we’ll have it or not. It is amazing to me the number of “separated brethren” there are who are “separated” for the wrong reasons. Separation from the world is one thing, but separation from true believers is another.

The same Devil that “unifies” the ungodly, divides the godly. Wesley and Whitefield, of Great Awakening fame (1730s), often “argued” over certain Scriptures, agreeing to

disagree; but that didn't dampen their love for God, for each other, for the brethren, and for lost souls. Some today are looking for a "denominational revival" in order to promote their own group or bias agenda; but Christ is "building His Church," His Body of true believers, regardless of their denominational "name tag."

The next "awakening" may come in the midst of political persecution, where true saints will be brought together in "revived" spiritual love (Gal. 5:22&23). People of different theological persuasions will find themselves fellowshiping together around the Lord Jesus Christ Himself and His infallible Word (the Bible). This scenario is presently a reality in some communist countries where souls are being saved in spite of the Bible being outlawed. Thankfully, the Word is not bound!

False teaching and confusion have progressively "eaten away" at the core of true Christian unity. For instance, the so-called "full gospel" or the Charismatic teaching of a "second baptism (blessing)" evidenced by "tongues-speaking" has greatly fractured Christ's Body; the enemy has cleverly used it to divide believers between the "haves" and the "have nots." Then there's a "hyper-charismatic" teaching called the "prosperity gospel" with its spurious emphasis on a sure "promise" of "health and wealth" to those who "have faith." I challenge these teachings in light of the Scriptures. In addition, the age-old teaching of "replacement theology," (i.e. Israel's being replaced by the Church) is also Biblically explored.

I submit that the majority of erroneous teachings that have invaded the Church are due to a faulty understanding of Pentecost. This pertains to charismatics and non-charismatics alike; whether we're addressing "wild-fire" or "no fire!" The dispensing of the Holy Spirit on that Day

PREFACE

fulfilled and “reformed” forever God’s program of the ages. The Acts of the Holy Spirit portray His coming to dwell in the bodies of believing Jews and Gentiles alike; and by His “baptism of the Spirit” (1 Cor. 12:13) one unified Body of Christ was established. Now we need a new-breed of Spirit-filled preachers who love God and the brethren, while they accurately and compassionately proclaim the whole counsel of God!.

I invite you to join me as we explore this glorious subject of Pentecost. I pray that some of the age-old misconceptions that have unduly divided true believers for centuries might be reevaluated Scripturally; and that the Spirit of Pentecost would be pleased to revive and biblically unify His Church; in turn, may this spark a profound spiritual awakening in our country prior to His Second Coming! Even so, come, Lord Jesus!

WJF

SAMPLE PAGES

TABLE OF CONTENTS

DEDICATION	5
PREFACE	7
TABLE OF CONTENTS	11
INTRODUCTION	15
Personal Confession and Burden	15
Understanding Pentecost.....	16
CHAPTER 1.....	19
VISION OF TRUE UNITY.....	19
No Axe to Grind.....	19
What Does the Bible Say?.....	20
CHAPTER 2.....	21
THE PROBLEM OF MISINTERPRETATION OF SCRIPTURES.....	21
To Whom is God Speaking?	21
Israel is Not the Church.....	23
Is it Faith or Presumption?	24
Understanding God’s Timing and Purpose	25
CHAPTER 3.....	27
PRINCIPLES OF INTERPRETATION ESSENTIAL	27
All Scripture Written <i>for</i> Us, but Not <i>to</i> Us	27
Rightly Dividing the Word of Truth	28
Believer’s Connection with Inspiration	30
Rules of Interpretation.....	33
CHAPTER 4.....	37
UNDERSTANDING GOD’S PROGRESSIVE REVELATION.....	37
Quality vs Quantity	37
Word Meanings and Doctrine	38
CHAPTER 5.....	41
THE EFFECTS OF SPIRITUAL AWAKENINGS.....	41
The Great Awakening	42
Experience Begins to Override Sound Doctrine	43
Gifts Used to Fuel Ecumenical Apostasy.....	43
CHAPTER 6.....	47
PENTECOST AND MY PERSONAL JOURNEY	47
Encounter with the Holy Spirit	47
Are “Filling” and “Fullness” the Same?	49
Mysterious Work of the Spirit in Regeneration	51
CHAPTER 7.....	53

THE “FULL GOSPEL”	53
Hungry for God’s Best.....	53
Why “Full Gospel”?.....	54
Distinguishing Sin from Sickness	55
Paul’s “Thorn”	57
Jesus’ Miracles Comfort John in Prison	58
Healing Used to Authenticate Christ’s Forgiveness	59
Lesson from a Paralyzed Man.....	60
“Playing God” Heresy.....	61
CHAPTER 8	63
WHAT REALLY HAPPENED AT PENTECOST?	63
Pentecost—Jews Only (No Gentiles).....	64
Jewish Evangelists?	65
Zacharias’ Prophecy.....	66
Paul’s Conversion	67
“Jew First”	68
Jesus’ Earthly Ministry Totally Under the Law.....	70
Holy Spirit Evangelistic Campaign	71
Oswald Chambers’ Profound Observation:	73
CHAPTER 9	75
THE MYSTERY OF THE CHURCH (BODY OF CHRIST)	75
The Believer’s Body—God’s Sanctuary	75
Believer and the Temple of God	76
Disciples’ Pre-Pentecost Ignorance	77
Power of the Empty Tomb.....	78
The Spirit Dispels Ignorance	79
The Spirit’s Regenerating Work in the Old Testament	81
CHAPTER 10	83
SIGNIFICANCE OF CHRIST’S ASCENSION	83
Hear Matthew Henry’s comment.....	83
Sin Removed.....	84
Christ’s Full and Eternal Atonement	86
CHAPTER 11	89
LIVING ON THE RIGHT SIDE OF THE CROSS	89
Mary Magdalene’s Unique Confrontation	89
Heavenly Invasion of Christ into Believers	90
CHAPTER 12	95
THE ECONOMY OF GRACE	95

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Progressive Dispensationalism	96
Abraham and Grace.....	97
The Apostle of Grace	98
CHAPTER 13.....	101
THE UNIQUE WORK OF THE HOLY SPIRIT IN ACTS	101
Present-Day Application of the Spirit's Power.....	102
John Wesley's Experience.....	103
Pentecost Includes All True Believers.....	104
CHAPTER 14.....	105
WHAT IS THE EVIDENCE OF THE SPIRIT'S FULLNESS?	105
Gifts Versus Fruit.....	105
Love Fulfills the Law	106
CHAPTER 15.....	109
GRACE IS NOT LAWLESSNESS	109
Christ My Righteousness	110
A New Law Introduced.....	110
Wright Brother's Discovery	111
The Law Fulfilled In Us.....	112
"Better" Covenant.....	113
CHAPTER 16.....	115
PRAYER AND PENTECOST	115
Use of Scriptural Prayers	117
Intercession Illustrated	119
CHAPTER 17.....	121
PRAYER AND SPIRITUAL WARFARE	121
The Sword of the Spirit.....	121
Effective Prayer for Others	123
CHAPTER 18.....	125
RECEIVING GOD'S FULLNESS	125
Sold-Out Attitude.....	125
Taking the Spirit's Power by Faith	128
CONCLUSION	131
Plea for Biblical Harmony	131
Can America be "Revived"?	133
ABOUT THE AUTHOR	137

SAMPLE PAGES

INTRODUCTION

Personal Confession and Burden

If there's been any controversy that has profoundly divided the true Christian Church, it is the question and understanding of what really happened on the Day of Pentecost. This subject is basic to a correct understanding of how the Church began and the subsequent teachings and practices taking us to the present day. To say that there have been divisions, confusion, and even militant misunderstanding, is an understatement.

Theological controversies like God's Sovereignty vs. man's free will, and the theories regarding Eschatology (study of last-day events) continue to warrant great interest, and rightly so; but the proper understanding and application of Pentecost is also of vital importance in the lives of believers today. In my opinion, the controversy that surrounds this subject must be further explored Biblically, especially as it relates to the Body of Christ.

Let it be said that the thrust of this book is geared toward genuine, Bible-believing, regenerated Christians, who have already settled on the Cardinal Truths of Scripture. We are not discussing here the fundamental teachings of the Lord Jesus Christ, embraced by every true believer; e.g. Christ's virgin birth, His deity (the God-Man); His Blood atonement (death) for sinners on the Cross; His bodily resurrection from the tomb; His ascension to Heaven; His Second Coming in Glory, etc. These are teachings (doctrines) subscribed by all true believers in Christ. In fact, Paul speaks of "forbearing one another in love; endeavoring to *keep the unity of the Spirit* in the bond of peace; there is one body, and one Spirit...one Lord, one faith, *one baptism*; one God and Father of all..." (Eph.4:2-6; italics mine)

Notice that he exhorts us to “*keep* the unity of the Spirit which He (the Spirit) has already made. We cannot keep something we don’t have. This truth of “one Body” has somehow been “lost in the shuffle” as evidenced by those who gloat in our differences rather than our unity. There *is* a valid, Biblical ecumenism based on the aforementioned Fundamentals of the Faith. I think we’re apt to experience the reality of this unity anew if the forces of Hell around the world continue to mount against true Christianity.

Right now persecuted saints under the “boot” of Communism and/or Islam are not debating the “mode of baptism,” for instance; but are seeking consolation with fellow believers who love Jesus and are “washed in the Blood of the Lamb!” They know that if they don’t hang together, they’ll hang separately. That doesn’t mean that all believers are to sing in unison doctrinally, but rather sing in harmony as members of the Body of Christ. You remember how Jesus rebuked the disciples when they displayed their haughty, exclusivist attitude toward a fellow preacher who wasn’t part of the “group.” (cf. Lk. 9:46f) Certainly they were the elites (“the greatest”) and how could that “independent” guy possibly be serving the Lord. But Jesus said: “Forbid him not; for he that is not against us is for us.” God still has His humble, unrecognized servants planted around the world.

Understanding Pentecost

Our consideration centers on an event in Biblical history which has fostered debate, controversy and division for centuries among choice leaders of the Church. Pentecost was a Hebrew feast day recorded in Acts 2:1f, meaning 50 days past the celebration of Christ’s Passion or Crucifixion.

What was this celebration about? What kind of people were there? What was the purpose and results? How is it to be interpreted and/or applied by God’s people today? (e.g. rules of

interpretation & context). What actually happened on that day? Must we go back to Pentecost again today? Could there be an even greater and progressive work in the believer's life now because of the provisions of Pentecost? These are valid questions that must be addressed in the context of this Biblical event.

It's been heart-rending to witness the ongoing, almost combative division in the Body of Christ over this issue. Extremes exist everywhere. Not to put all the blame on him, but Satan has done a masterful work of deception and confusion in the Church. (cf. Eph. 6:10f. etc.) Godly people have lined up on opposite sides, ready to fight to the death in propagating and/or defending their "biblical" position on the "gifts and power" of the Holy Spirit. Yet, the Spirit comes as a Comforter (Dove), not to divide God's children, but to unify us! The Holy Spirit didn't come to be "argued about," but to reveal Christ in a way otherwise impossible. My mentor, Dr. James A. Stewart, a missionary/evangelist of a generation past, used to say that "the Holy Ghost is too precious to be argued over."

SAMPLE PAGES

CHAPTER 1

VISION OF TRUE UNITY

Could it be that God's saints who have bickered over the so-called "Pentecostal experience," may have done so out of ignorance and/or misinterpretation of Scripture? Has the "unity" of the Body of Christ (Eph. 4:1-7) been unduly hindered and rendered dysfunctional over truths that should have had the opposite effect? Or is it just a matter of whether one "believes in the gifts" or not? Is the whole thrust of "Pentecostal power" centered on "speaking in tongues" and/or "physical healing"? On the other hand, can I have the power of the Holy Spirit in my life, without embracing the so-called "baptism of the Spirit," as explained in Pentecostal and/or Charismatic circles? We need to take a hard look at these all-important and relative issues. The health and effectiveness of the Church of the Living God is at stake here; especially in light of the moral, political, and religious corruption that we face, while awaiting the "glorious appearing of the Great God and our Saviour, Jesus Christ!" (Titus 2:13)

No Axe to Grind

This is not a book about "taking sides" or proving a "point" at any cost. Nor is it an attempt to simply refute century-old denominational and theological traditions. I'm not even arguing for or against the so-called "Cessation" position (ceasing of certain gifts) or the "Continuance" (present validity of all gifts) position. While some proclaim the so-called "Full Gospel," others despise the term; yet could it be that there may be a "fuller Gospel" that goes beyond the event that happened at Pentecost? (Acts 2:1ff) Is it possible that we've been ignorant of a greater, progressive work of the Spirit since Pentecost?

Moreover, this will not be a footnoted, technical thesis to foster a bias, "finger-pointing" agenda; rather it is a fresh look at the

Scriptures, hopefully in context, attempting to address a critical and overdue problem in the true Church of Christ. This work is the result of a deep burden to clarify some colossal misinterpretations and confusion which, I believe, have been perpetrated and motivated by Satan. True believers have been unduly divided for too long!

What Does the Bible Say?

Having contemplated this subject of the true meaning of Pentecost for many decades, I humbly submit my findings. Like the proverbial sports referee, I must live with the reality that my “judgment calls” will please some, and upset others. The main issue is: “What does the Scripture teach?” What is God saying to us, and are we “rightly dividing (allocating) the Word of Truth?”

CHAPTER 2

THE PROBLEM OF MISINTERPRETATION OF THE SCRIPTURES

How much teaching today is based on a clear understanding of Biblical interpretation? “Interpretation” is defined as the power of explaining; to mediate understanding of a text between two parties. There are rules of interpretation that must be following in order to rightly represent and explain the author’s meaning. While the entire Bible is written *for* us, it is not necessarily written *to* us. We may be guilty of “reading someone else’s mail;” i.e. forcing the passage to apply directly to us, when it was specifically for someone else. The local post office may receive a truckload of mail, but it’s not for everyone in the community. It has to be sorted out and then delivered to the designated parties; i.e. the name on the envelope needs to match the recipient.

To Whom is God Speaking?

For instance, when God gave Moses the land of Canaan it was a literal territory to establish an earthly nation (Israel) under His (God’s) direct rule (theocracy). The New Testament Church has no such earthly possession, such as “a land flowing with milk and honey;” rather we are a heavenly people possessed with spiritual provision (cf. Eph. 1:3; Col. 3:1f). It’s true that Christians own houses and lands on earth, but their “conversation [citizenship] is in Heaven.” (cf. Phil. 3:20).

So-called “prosperity teachers” constantly focus on Deut. 28 to “prove” God’s promise of ongoing (guaranteed) “health and wealth” to the faithful Christian. It’s true that the Lord promised abundant, tangible “blessings” upon Israel if they obeyed His law; but likewise, the “curses” of God’s judgment upon the

disobedient are also listed in the same passage. This cannot be ignored.

If the Mosaic Covenant is for today's saints, then we're in big trouble. We can't have it both ways; preaching the blessings, without warning of the impending curses is dishonest and erroneous. This was given specifically to Israel in an earthly covenant relationship with God. To "interpret" this as pertaining to the New Testament Church is "wrongly" dividing the Word of Truth. Are there legitimate applications for us today? Yes, by all means; but the Church is not Israel, and we are "reading their mail" (O.T.), which was sent directly to them. We are under the New Covenant, where all the types and shadows of Christ's redemption have been fulfilled. We are a body of called-out believers, blessed with "all spiritual blessings in the heavenlies." (Eph.1:3) Plus the fact, "There is therefore *now* no condemnation to them which are in Christ Jesus..." (Rom. 8:1) Hebrews makes it clear that the Mosaic system was "good", but Christ and His completed work is "better." (cf. Heb. 7:22-28) Amen!

Surely, the opening of the Red Sea (Ex. 14) is a beautiful picture of God's salvation and delivering power to us, but that event stands alone as a historic event; there's no way for us to return to that scene and expect God to literally part that Sea again. Rather, that glorious event displayed God's sovereign power and purpose in bringing deliverance to Israel in preparation for their establishment as a theocracy. We must reiterate that the Old Testament is a Jewish Book, featuring God's chosen, earthly people. Their laws, sacrifices, feast days, etc. all have meaning and application to the Church today, but were given exclusively to Israel, not to New Testament saints; however, there's definitely a progressive revelation here, from Moses to Jesus. The same God that gave Moses the Law (Exodus 20) to govern a nation was the same God who

eventually gave Himself to fulfill that Law and to satisfy its (the Law's) Judgment upon sin.

By the same token, a New Testament believer would be hard pressed to cite the Passover celebration of Exodus 12 as the basis of his salvation. While that spotless lamb's blood was shed and applied to the Israelite's doorpost, it was unique to his redemption and forgiveness. This was repeated every year. They were saved "by faith", according to God's revelation, but the animal's blood could not "take away sin". (cf. John 1:29) Significantly, the Passover became a type of the future, completed work of the Passover Lamb on the Cross. The writer of Hebrews explains how Christ's sacrifice superseded the blood of "bulls and goats;" instead, "by His own blood He entered in **once** into the holy place, having obtained eternal redemption for us (Heb. 9:12; emphasis mine)." The Passover is completely fulfilled in Jesus Christ, and we cannot look back. We now have the Substance, rather than the "shadow!" They are not the same. To confuse these two elements is to misinterpret Scripture.

Israel is Not the Church

The same God who gave Moses the Law (Ex.20ff), was the same God who gave the Apostle Paul the Gospel of Grace (cf. 1Cor. 15:1-4). As mentioned above, the "law was given to Moses, but grace and truth came by Jesus Christ (John. 1:17). This does not mean that "grace and truth" contradicted the Law, but was rather a progression of God's revelation and fulfillment of the Old Testament legal system. That "progression," however, does not infer or conclude that the Church "replaces" Israel, who still has a future in God's economy (cf. Rom. 11:1-2). Spiritual Israel is blinded in this dispensation with the exception of a remnant of Jews who continue to believe in Jesus as the Messiah. When, as a nation, they rejected Jesus the Christ (Messiah), God opened the door of Salvation to the Gentiles (primarily through Paul; e.g. Acts 9ff). The unchanging,

almighty God continues to move among men as He chooses, dispensing (ministering) His Sovereign and eternal plan.

Is it Faith or Presumption?

Moreover, the idea, held by some “faith” teachers, that we can take any promise of Scripture and indiscriminately “name it and claim it” is presumptuous, at best; e.g. Joshua’s promised collapse of Jericho by walking around the city for seven days does not give the church credence today to “claim” a city for Christ by “prayer walking” or some such strategy. Neither the context nor God’s purpose warrants such action. Jericho’s literal, demise under God’s judgment is a far cry from any literal attempt of “winning” a city for Christ! I can understand one’s sincerity in such an attempt, but it’s Biblically misguided.

Certainly there’s a legitimate spiritual *application* here for exercising prayerful intercession for a city; but individuals still need to be confronted with the saving Gospel of Christ! (e.g. 1 Cor.15:2-4; Rom. 10:9&10)) This is not a “name it, claim it” situation; no more than those preachers who boldly “declared” the immediate termination of a recent Viral pandemic! Their failure was a display of foolish arrogance and deception; but such “false prophesies” and other erroneous “tactics” are prevalent in “Word of Faith” circles.

In these last days, we must get back to basics, as Paul reminds us in 2 Timothy 4:2-5:

Preach the word; be instant in season, out of season; reprove, rebuke, exhort with all longsuffering and doctrine. For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine; but after their own lusts shall they heap to themselves teachers, having itching ears; And they shall turn away their ears from the truth, and shall be turned unto fables. But watch thou in all things, *endure afflictions, do the work of an*

evangelist, make full proof of thy ministry.
(emphasis mine)

Yes, it still pleases God “by the foolishness of preaching to save them that believe” (1 Cor.1:21).

In the same vein, we’re told that Pentecost insures that every believer can “claim” spiritual and physical “prosperity.” The inference is that a “poor” and/or “sick” Christian is lacking faith. This “prosperity gospel” teaches that a Spirit-filled believer has “authority by faith” to “name and claim” every blessing in the Book! That is like “ordering” God by just “ringing the bell” and expecting Him to come running like some “heavenly bell-hop.” What kind of arrogance is this? The truth is that it is **God** who “rings the bell” and *we* “come running!” Certainly the Lord wants His children to prosper, but it may have little to do with the material realm; it (prosperity) is always connected to the Word and our obedience. (cf.Ps.1:3; Josh. 1:8; Matt. 6:33)

Faith takes God at His Word, like those in the Roll-call of Faith (cf. Heb. 11), with no thought of manipulating His “promises” for selfish or prideful gain. In fact, this same passage speaks not only of those who “through faith subdued kingdoms... (and) stopped the mouths of lions,” but other saints that were “stoned...sawn asunder, being destitute, afflicted and tormented.” (cf. Heb. 11:33-38) If this “health and wealth” gospel is true, it will work in places like Ethiopia, but it doesn’t. The true Gospel of God’s redeeming Grace will work *anywhere* in the world! Amen.

Understanding God’s Timing and Purpose

There’s a sense in which we can’t even go back to the Cross. That was a once-and-for all event in History. When Jesus cried: “It is finished,” all that was necessary to pay for sin’s redemption was completed, never to be repeated again. (Heb. 10) When a sinner “goes to the Cross” to be saved from sin,

Christ doesn't reenact the Cross-work per se; instead, the Holy Spirit *applies* that finished, saving work to the sinner's believing heart.

Let's be clear, God is able to perform or repeat any miracle He chooses. As mentioned above, some "stopped the mouths of lions," like Daniel of old; yet, many saints since have been thrown to the lions with no seeming divine intervention. Why? In context, God decided to "deliver" Daniel from the lion's den to fulfill His purposes in Babylon. For whatever reason, that hasn't been the case for other believers. That doesn't mean that Daniel had more "faith" than those who didn't escape from the "lion's jaw."

Likewise in Acts 12, King Herod killed the Apostle James with the sword, trying to gain the favor of the Jews (vs. 2&3); yet Herod's attempt to destroy Peter failed when God delivered him from the inner prison, "secured" by two soldiers (vs.6). Yes, the Angel of the Lord led Peter out to freedom, while a group of believers were praying at Mary's house (vs. 12f). Why did God spare Peter and not James? Certainly it had nothing to do with James' lack of faith or the Lord's inability to rescue him; rather it had everything to do with God's ongoing purpose for Peter, who prepared the way, among other things, for Paul's ministry of the Gospel of Grace (e.g. Cornelius' conversion in Acts. 10).

I recently heard an analogy which helps to sum up the problem; we have arbitrarily taken Scriptures out of their context and mixed them together in a "theological blender," hoping for doctrinal clarity. Instead, the "ingredients" have proved to be incompatible, not "mixing" properly. The resultant product has been anything but spiritually "smooth" and palatable. Needless to say, this process has resulted in utter confusion and false interpretation.

CHAPTER 3

PRINCIPLES OF INTERPRETATION ESSENTIAL

Proper interpretation (understanding) of the Bible in its context is critical. Just like any other book, the author has a subject and audience in mind. How much more did God reveal His plan and purpose for particular people in a particular circumstance? For instance, the O.T. prophecies of Messiah were given primarily to Israel, not to the Gentiles (non-Jews); however, when they (Jews) rejected Him the door of grace was opened to Gentiles. John says, “He came unto *his own* [Israel], and his own received him not. But to as many as received him, to them gave he power to become the sons of God...” (John 1:11-12; emphasis mine)

All Scripture Written *for* Us, but Not *to* Us

Preachers galore are confusing *interpretation* with *application*. There is basically only one interpretation of any passage of Scripture in its context, but there can be many proper applications. Every passage of Scripture has a setting, purpose, etc.; there are specific people and unique circumstances involved, preventing that Scripture from being directly applied universally and at all times. For instance, the Bible is basically a Jewish book, written exclusively to and by Jews. (Luke was a Greek, but probably became a Hellenic Jew) The Old Testament primarily focuses on God’s dealings with Israel, with some exceptions (e.g. Jonah and Nineveh). After the Gospels, the main thrust of the New Testament is the Gospel of Grace toward the gentiles, with corresponding exceptions of Jewish converts to Christ. So we must conclude that while the Bible is definitely written **for** us, it is not all written **to** us.

Ignoring this hermeneutic principle has been the source of much confusion and erroneous teaching in the Church. It was Miles

Coverdale, the English puritan scholar, who printed the first complete English translation of the Bible in 1535. He was a mighty preacher and renowned student who left us with the following bed-rock principle for interpreting the Bible:

It shall greatly help you to understand Scripture if you mark not only what is spoken or written, but ask of whom and to whom, with what words, at what time, where, to what intent, with what circumstances, considering what goes before and what comes after. (emphasis mine)

Rightly Dividing the Word of Truth

Foundational Examples:

Paul's admonition: 2 Timothy 2:15: "Study to shew thyself approved unto God, a workman that needeth not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth

2 Timothy 3:16, 17:

All scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness: That the man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works.

Peter's instruction: 2 Peter 1:20, 21:

Knowing this first, that no prophecy of the scripture is of any private interpretation. For the prophecy came not in old time by the will of man; but holy men of God spake as they were moved by the Holy Ghost.

2Pet 3:15, 16:

And account that the longsuffering of our Lord is salvation; even as *our beloved brother Paul* also according to the wisdom given unto him *hath written unto you. As also in all his epistles, speaking in them of these things; in which are some things hard to be understood*, which they that are unlearned and unstable wrest, as they do also the other scriptures,, unto their own destruction. (emphasis mine)

Significantly, Peter here corroborates with and commends Paul's epistles to his flock, admitting that some things were "hard to be understood." He (Peter) readily acknowledges that Paul's letters would wisely confront and rectify those (Judaizers?) who were "wresting" or perverting Scripture. The word "wrest," according to Vincent, is used only here to depict a torture rack, where the limbs are twisted and dislocated. This could refer to Paul's solemn warning to those not preaching the Gospel of Grace (cf. Gal. 1:6-9). Remember that Peter and Paul were now on "the same page" regarding salvation in Christ alone by faith alone (plus nothing). Cf. Acts 15:5-11); however, I submit that Peter did not fully understand the "mystery of the church" as did Paul.

In this day of compromise and relevancy, we must never forget that God *has* spoken through His Eternal Word. We must never judge His Word by what we think or feel; but rather we must judge what we think and feel by His Word! How lightly we treat the Word these days, almost as though we're dealing with an ordinary book written by mere men. Certainly God used the instrumentality of human authors to pen His Word, but these were "holy men" on a unique mission, being "moved by the Holy Ghost." They wrote infallibly through the Infallible Spirit to give us the Infallible Scriptures! In some inexplicable way, under the Holy Spirit's control, the written words of these

chosen men became the words of God. Through their instrumentality God gave all that He wanted us to know; namely the Bible, His **Manual** given to His creation.

Someone has written a brief but powerful challenge to humanity regarding the uniqueness of the Bible; it's entitled "The Word of God."

This book contains the mind of God, the state of man, the way of Salvation, the doom of sinners, and the happiness of believers. Its doctrines are holy, its precepts are binding, its histories are true, and its decisions are immutable.

Read it to be wise, believe it to be safe, and practice it to be holy. It contains light to direct you, food to support you, and comfort to cheer you. It is the traveler's map, the pilgrim's staff, the pilot's compass, the soldier's sword, and the Christian's charter.

Here paradise is restored, Heaven opened, and the gates of Hell disclosed. Christ is its grand Object; our good is its design, and the glory of God its end.

It should fill the memory, rule the heart, and guide the feet. Read it slowly frequently, and prayerfully. It is given to you in life, and will be opened in the judgment, and will be remembered forever. It involves the highest responsibility, will reward the greatest labor, and will condemn all who trifle with its sacred contents.

-----Unknown

Believer's Connection with Inspiration

Remember, "**All** Scripture is given by inspiration of God..." (lit. "God-breathed") Just as He "breathed ...the breath of life" into the first man, Adam (Gen. 2:7), so God "breathed spiritual life" into the Scriptures. That's why, unlike any other book, the Bible is **alive**, and able to impart eternal life to those who