



BELIEVERS CHAPEL

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The Sermons of S. Lewis Johnson

Systematic Theology

“The Teaching Ministry of the Holy Spirit”

TRANSCRIPT

[Prayer] Father, we thank Thee for the privilege of the study of the Scriptures. And, again, tonight, we turn with anticipation to Thy word, for we know that it is the word of God. Guide and direct us, to the end that Jesus Christ may be honored and glorified.

We pray. In His name. Amen.

[Message] Our subject tonight is The Holy Spirit's Work of Teaching Believers. And so will you turn with me to John, chapter 16, verses 12 through 15. John, chapter 16, verses 12 through 15. In this topic, which we have chosen for tonight, we have the most important ingredient for the answer to the question, “How can I understand the Bible?” For many years, as most of you know, I've been associated with Dallas Theological Seminary and graduates of Dallas Theological Seminary often have it said of them, “What ever else you may say about a graduate of that seminary, you can say this, they do know their Bibles.”

And I think the secret to that remark, which is not necessarily true of every graduate we've ever had, but the secret of it is that many of them are taught by the spirit of God. It is not so much what they get in the classroom, though that is tremendously

important, it is that most of the men who come have been born again, they have received the Holy Spirit as the indwelling presence of God, and since it is he who has written the Bible, he is best able to explain it, and through the teaching ministry of the Holy Spirit they have come to understand spiritual things. That really is the secret to understanding the Bible; to be taught of the Holy Spirit.

There are many things that may help us. There are, perhaps, some methods that we can learn that will be some help to us but ultimately, to study the Bible and to get something out of it is the work of the Holy Spirit in the heart of a believer. And I am persuaded, myself, that the reason that most of us don’t get anything out of the Bible is not because we have not been taught the right methodology. It is because, as a rule, we are not rightly related to the Holy Spirit.

There are three great passages on the Spirit’s teaching ministry, and we shall consider them in something of a logical order. But, before we do, let me remind you that we are studying that aspect of the Spirit’s ministry, which has to do with believers. And so, consequently, we discussed the regenerating ministry of the Holy Spirit first. That ministry is the ministry of the Spirit by which he imparts to us spiritual life.

Now, that takes place in our experience, when we believe on the Lord, Jesus Christ. We saw that it was the work of the Spirit to impart life and, logically, that life resulted from the imparting work of the Holy Spirit and that faith resulted from that. But, in our practical experience, these things take place instantaneously. We are regenerated by the Spirit.

And we discussed his baptizing ministry, and that is the ministry of the Spirit by which he places us in the body of Christ, the church. And when a person believes in Jesus Christ, he is baptized by the Holy Spirit into the body of Christ. We pointed out it was really Jesus Christ who did it, but he did it by means of the Spirit. And so, we speak of it as the baptizing ministry of the Spirit. It is really the baptizing ministry of Jesus Christ.

And then after the regenerating and baptizing ministry of the Spirit, last time we discussed the indwelling ministry of the Holy Spirit. That is his ministry by which he comes to permanently indwell us and to consummate and realize in our experience, forever, the union that takes place when we believe and at which time we are baptized into the body. So, we are regenerated, we are baptized, we are indwelt by the Holy Spirit.

Now, tonight, we are going to study his teaching ministry; the ministry by which he imparts to us spiritual understanding. We will, then, discuss his ministry of gifting us with spiritual gifts. We will spend several times on this because included in this will be the study of the gift of tongues, which is such a live issue today. We will also discuss the Spirit’s sanctifying ministry by which he enables us to grow in our Christian experience. And finally, his ministry of filling we will discuss.

So these are the ministries of the Holy Spirit to believers, and we are tonight to discuss the teaching ministry of the Holy Spirit.

Now, after this brief introduction, I want you to turn with me to the first part of our study, which is the prophetic passage, the teacher and the teaching promised. John, chapter 16, verses 12 through 15. Now, will you listen as I read these verses, beginning with the 12th verse? Remember the context. Our Lord is in the Upper Room Discourse, instructing his Disciples in the light of his absence in the present age. And he has just announced to them that the Spirit will come. He will reprove the world of sin, of righteousness and of judgment. But, he also has a ministry to believers. And that is what we are to read about now, particularly, the 12th verse.

“I have yet many things to say unto you, but ye cannot bear them now. Howbeit when the spirit of truth is come; he will guide you into all truth, for he shall not speak of himself, but whatsoever he shall hear, that shall he speak. And he will show you things to come. He shall glorify me for he shall receive of mine and shall show it unto you. All

things that the Father hath are mine; therefore, said I that he shall take of mine and shall show it unto you.”

So we are beginning now with the ministry of the Lord in the view of his absence. And I want you to notice first of all that our Lord alludes to the disciple’s limitation in the 12th verse. He says, “I have many things to say unto you, but you cannot bear them now.” The many things that Jesus has to say unto them are things that are found for us in the remainder of the New Testament. And so, in a sense, this statement of our Lord is a pre-authentication of the remainder of the New Testament. It is, in effect, our Lord saying, what I have told you in my teaching ministry is not sufficient to thoroughly equip you for the life that you must live while I am gone. But I have lots of things to say. But, you do not at the present time have the power to carry them out. That’s the meaning of that expression, “bear.” I would think, from this, that that means that our Lord understands that they cannot do anything if they do not have the power of the Holy Spirit. Now, that is what we read throughout the Bible and we should not be surprised that our Lord should say the same thing. As we read in Zechariah, “It is not by might, nor by power, but by my Spirit, saith the Lord that things are accomplished.” That means that we can never do anything for God in the power of the human flesh; that the things that please God are the things that are done in the power of the Holy Spirit.

There is another thing about this text that we should not pass by without noticing, and that is that our Lord indicates from this that the things that he taught the disciples were not a complete revelation of the mind of God. Now, that may seem strange to us because we have often people saying to us, “well, what we need to do is go back to the Gospels.” This is a common statement by liberal theologians who do not like the theology of the Apostle Paul. But, they like to think that the theology of Paul is a confusion of the things that Jesus taught. And as I’ve said to you many times, they even like to say they do not like the “mystifications” of the professional theologian, Paul. But

they want to go back to the simple teaching of Jesus. But, when we go back to the simple teaching of Jesus, he tells us that he has many things to say unto us but in the time of his incarnation, men cannot bear them. The reason for that is they do not have the Holy Spirit. And since they do not have the Holy Spirit, they cannot understand them and since they do not have the Holy Spirit they cannot carry out those things.

Now, in the 13th verse, our Lord tells us directly what this teaching is. It is going to be about the truth.

“Howbeit, when the spirit of truth is come; he will guide you into all truth, for he shall not speak from himself, but whatsoever he shall hear, that shall he speak. And he will show you things to come.”

Now, what does our Lord mean by guide? When he, “the spirit of truth is come; he will guide you into all truth.” He is referring about to this present age; when he the spirit of truth is come, for, remember, he came on the Day of Pentecost. We live in that age. And it is the duty then of the Holy Spirit in this age to guide us into all truth. What does it mean to be “guided” by the Holy Spirit? Well, I think, this we can say immediately that the word guide suggests that our knowledge of the truth is a gradual appropriation of the truth. To be guided into something is, ordinarily, not an experience that is momentary or instantaneous. It suggests that there is time needed or that this guidance is gradual. And it is not surprising then that we read in the New Testament that we are to “grow” in grace and in the knowledge of our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. So the fact that Jesus said that he will “guide” you into all truth, suggests that we are not going to learn all of the truth of the Bible at once. Now, that should prevent us, in the early stages of our Christian experience, from being discouraged because we do not know as much about the Bible as someone else, after all, to learn the truths of the word of God takes

time. And further, since the Spirit is the teacher, the pace at which we develop is really in his sovereign good pleasure.

I would think, also, that this means that if we are to be guided into the truth, we are to understand that we must cooperate with the Holy Spirit. He will guide you. It’s impossible to guide if you don’t get any cooperation. So implicit in this is a recognition of the fact that there must be a cooperation on the part of each one of us as the Spirit teaches us.

Now, that cooperation, of course, is ultimately the work of God too. But, it is something that we should concern ourselves with. And I would think that one of the things that we should pray about constantly is not only that the Holy Spirit would teach us the truth, further, but that, also, we would be cooperative when the Spirit does reveal the truth to us.

One other thing, I think, that is stressed by this statement of our Lord is that since it is the work of the Spirit throughout this entire dispensation to guide us in the truth; I would think that that would indicate that we should not expect that his teaching ministry should ever end as long as we are on the earth. In other words, we should expect a gradual unfolding of the truth of God, which should not be complete at anytime throughout this age in which we live; for, if he is to do this work throughout the age, it would imply that it would never be completed.

Now, there are two ways in which he guides us: of course he guides us individually. And I don’t know about you, but I think that the testimony of most Christians is that they have not learned everything that they could learn about God’s word. His guidance in our life and this guidance into the truth is something that persists and continues and we never realize all of the truth.

I can only speak for myself, I’ve studied the Bible now pretty diligently for thirty years, and I do not feel that I know everything in the Bible. In fact, at times, I wonder at how I can understand so little about it having applied myself to it for thirty years. And

when I look around and listen to the interpretations and the expressions about the Bible that I hear from others, I’m convinced that they don’t know everything about it either. And you’ve probably had that same experience too.

Now, of course, there is also a sense in which the spirit guides the “whole church.” And we should, therefore, not expect all of the revelation of the Holy Spirit on the word, his illuminating ministry, to be complete at any particular time throughout the Christian age.

Now, the history of the Christian church is, as I’ve tried to point out when we first began this history of the doctrine of the Spirit, that in the early stages of the Christian church, after the time of our Lord’s Cross, the Spirit began to unfold certain teachings. For example, the early church was concerned, primarily, about the godhead, the deity of Jesus Christ, the relationship of the persons of the Trinity to one another. And those questions of the deity of Jesus Christ were settled at the Councils of Nicea, and the Council of Chalcedon. Then, later on, there was discussion about the Holy Spirit and so on down through the years, various aspects of the Biblical teaching have come under discussion and study by the church and often, controversy. And then, the Holy Spirit seemed to teach the whole of the church the truth on those points.

I do not expect that we shall ever, as long as we are living in this age, I do not think we shall ever have need to go back and revise the decisions of the Councils at Nicea and Chalcedon. I do not think those decisions were inspired. It’s entirely possible that a little phrase here or there we might wish to modify. But, the general opinion of the church when it reached its decision there has prevailed for fifteen hundred years, and I expect it to continue to prevail, for the Spirit taught us about the deity of Jesus Christ.

Now, in the present day, we are studying things that have to do with the Holy Spirit and his ministry of gifts, and particularly, the doctrine of eschatology which we hope to study next fall, the Lord willing.

Now, the church is wrestling with these things. It is discussing them. It is seeking to arrive at what is the mind of the Holy Spirit on the topics. So we see that the Spirit has been teaching the whole of the church and the whole of Christian truth is not yet clear to all of the church, and he teaches us individually.

Now, I think that means that if we go to the Bible, we have the perfect right to expect that the Holy Spirit should reveal to us fresh truth. Now, when I go to the Bible, I expect the Holy Spirit to reveal to me fresh aspects of the truth of God. If I can see the truth in a new and fresher light and a more accurate light, well, I am helped by that and I hope that others are helped by it too. And so, we should expect when we go to the bible to find something fresh about the doctrines of the word of God. There is no reason for us to think that all the light that has ever been given on the word of God has been given now. It’s just the opposite. I think we have a great deal to expect. It should be an incentive to us. And, also, I expect that the whole of the church shall learn some things too.

Now, one other point we want to make before we pass on in verse 13, we read here: “Howbeit, when the spirit of truth is come, he will guide you into all truth.” Now, if you just read that one word “into,” you would expect that to mean that he will guide us into all the truth. That is, that we should understand all the truth. The Greek preposition in some of the manuscripts is the preposition “eis” which means into. But, at this point, the manuscripts differ. And probably, the better manuscripts and the application of textual criticism would lead us to believe that the proper preposition here, that our Lord gave, which John wrote, is the preposition *ein*.

Now, the Greek preposition *ein* means what our English word “in” means. For example, if I were to say, “My eyesight’s not very good. Golden, would you guide me ‘into’ the auditorium?” Well, then he would bring me through the door and I would come ‘into’ the auditorium and I would be here. And I would have arrived. But, if I should say to him, “Now, Golden, I would like for you to guide me in the auditorium?” Then, of

course, I would expect to be here and he would be guiding me around within this auditorium. Now, that is the force of the Greek preposition *ein*, which is, I think, genuine at this point. So, what our Lord is saying about the Spirit is not that he would guide us into all truth so that we would arrive in the present time. But, he would guide us within the sphere of the whole of the truth. In other words, there is no aspect of the truth that is forbidden to us, but that the Holy Spirit will guide us within it. And I think that is what he had in mind.

Now, we also read here, “and he shall you things to come.” What are ‘things to come’? Well, almost everyone reads this, unfortunately, from the standpoint of 1971, or whatever their particular place in time may be. And so, they think of things to come as prophecy. He will give us prophetic truth; he will show you things to come. But, remember, when did our Lord utter this? Well, he uttered it in the Upper Room Discourse, did he not? What truth was future from the time of the Upper Room Discourse? Well, the truth that is encompassed in our books of the Acts -- as a matter of fact, the remainder of the life and ministry of our Lord, as found in the latter chapters of the gospels, plus the Book of Acts, plus the epistles, plus the Revelation.

And so, we do not have then a promise on our Lord’s part that he, the Holy Spirit, will give us simply prophetic truth. But, he will give us prophetic truth, plus the Epistolary truth, plus the historical truth of the Acts, and plus, of course, the truth of the last days of our Lord’s earthly ministry. So he will “show you things to come.” That, I say, is an authentication, a pre-authentication, of what we have in the remainder of the New Testament. It is Jesus’ way of saying, what I taught you disciples is not sufficient to guide you and direct you and minister to you throughout your earthly life. You need more than that.

Now, he explains the teaching in verses 14 and 15. He says “He shall glorify me for he shall receive of mine and shall show it unto you.” What is the essence of the teaching of the Holy Spirit? Well, I think it is very simply expressed right there, isn’t it?

“He shall glorify me.” If you wanted one little handy formula by which you could test all teaching of the Bible, and test it as to its scriptural essence, what should it do? Well, it should glorify Jesus Christ. In other words, the kind of teaching that causes me to respond in worship of Jesus Christ is essentially the teaching of the Holy Spirit. The kind of teaching that causes me to say “My, isn’t the preacher great.” There’s an element of man in that. That’s bad. The kind of teaching that makes me say, “My goodness, that movement that that man has identified with is surely a great movement.” That teaching is not purely scriptural. In other words, it is the teaching that glorifies Christ that is in its essence the teaching of the Holy Spirit.

So any kind of teaching that glorifies a man, any kind of teaching that glorifies a movement, any kind of teaching that glorifies even the Holy Spirit is contrary to the Holy Spirit, for he glorifies Christ. That is very important, therefore, it would seem to me even from this text itself you can judge the general scriptural character of movements in Christianity. If everybody is going around talking about the spiritual gifts and everybody is seeking the spiritual gifts and everybody is glorifying the Holy Spirit, then you can say there’s something missing in that teaching. It’s not glorifying Christ! It’s glorifying something else. So “He shall glorify me.”

I like to see this illustrated in the Bible and, of course, in the New Testament the place in which it is especially illustrated in the great chapter on the Holy Spirit. If you were to talk to people who are used to the little clichés that we use in theological seminaries and Bible schools and colleges, and you were to hear someone ask the question, “What’s the chapter on the Holy Spirit?” Everybody would answer, “Well, the chapter on the Holy Spirit is Romans, chapter 8.” That’s the great chapter in which we have more taught about the Spirit than in any other place of the New Testament, except this Upper Room Discourse. And do you remember how it begins? Well, it begins, “There is, therefore, now no condemnation to them which are in Christ Jesus.” And do you remember how it concludes? Well, it concludes with a great expression of praise in

token of the facts of the things that Jesus Christ has done; and Paul concludes the great chapter on the Holy Spirit by saying.

“For I am persuaded, that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature, shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord.”

And so the great chapter on the Holy Spirit begins with Jesus Christ and ends with Jesus Christ. Well, I’m inclined to believe that is a great chapter on the Holy Spirit because any chapter that glorifies Jesus Christ is a chapter in which the Holy Spirit finds a great deal of delight.

Remember, in the Old Testament, when Abraham sought to get a bride for Isaac, his son. And do you remember that there was an unnamed servant that he commissioned to go after Isaac’s bride. That servant is never given a name in that 24th chapter of Genesis, because, you see, he is an illustration of the unnamed person of the Trinity. The Holy Spirit is called the Holy Spirit. He doesn’t really have a name. It’s something of a title. The Holy Spirit. He’s the unnamed servant of God. And remember, when the servant finally came to Bethuel and he saw Rebekah and he was invited in and he sat down in order to have fellowship with them. And what did he do? Well, if you will remember, the thing that the servant did was to glorify Isaac to Bethuel and to Rebekah particularly. He talked about his master. He talked about how great he was and how Abraham, his father, had given all things into his hands. In other words, he glorified Isaac before Rebekah. And Rebekah was attracted to Isaac by the work of the unnamed servant who glorified his master’s son.

Now, that’s the work of the Holy Spirit today; that’s precisely what he does. He glorifies the work of God’s Son, in order to attract me to the Savior, Jesus Christ. So, “He

shall glorify me.” Now, that’s the prophetic passage in which Jesus tells us that a teacher is promised who will guide us “within all truth.”

Let’s move on now to Roman II - The historical passage; the teacher received. And I’m only going to point to a couple of things in 1 John, chapter 2. They have to do, primarily, with the fact, writing from the vantage point of 95 AD, the Spirit had been given.

Now, the apostle of love, John, warns of antichrists and outlines safeguards against error in 1 John, 2:18 through 27. Now, there are two safeguards against error. The first safeguard is the word. Now, notice verse 21, “I have not written unto you because ye know not the truth, but because ye know it, and that no lie is of the truth.” Verse 24, “Let that therefore abide in you, which ye have heard from the beginning. If that which ye have heard from the beginning shall remain in you, ye also shall continue in the Son, and in the Father.” In other words, that which they have heard from the beginning is the word of God, that abides in them then they shall abide in the Son and in the Father. This is the objective criterion for the test of all doctrine, the word of God. It’s the exterior test of the inner light. It is the thing by which we test everything in the claims of men and the claims of movements. We ask ourselves, “Is it in the Bible?”

As I’ve often said to you, there is no valid Christian experience which is not wedded to the words of the Bible. In other words, if you cannot find in the Bible justification for a Christian experience or an experience, then you should doubt that it is a Christian experience. Every Christian experience should find its justification, its validity in the Scriptures. That is the objective test of truth. So if you ever come to me and I hope you get the attitude and idea that no one should come to you and ask you to have some experience which cannot be attested by the word of God. That is the objective criterion of Christian experience.

Now, to understand the Bible, to understand the word of God, it is necessary for us to not only be subject to the teaching ministry of the Holy Spirit, but we have to engage in interpretation.

Now, there are two sides to the understanding of the Bible. One is the human side, which is interpretation. Men interpret the bible. And then there is the divine side and that is illumination. It is the Holy Spirit of God who illuminates our minds concerning the Scripture.

Now, we want to talk for just a moment here about this, the human side, interpretation. Some of you are looking. Is that unclear? You see human interpretation and divine illumination.

Now, I want to say a word about interpretation because to understand the Bible we must interpret. That means that we must know something about grammar. We must know something about the background of the Bible, its history, its culture. As a matter of fact, I have put a diagram here, which is, partially, I guess I should really take the blame for it. It’s my diagram. Now, this is not the Christian pyramid as it is here. I’m going to make it Christian in just a moment. But to understand the Bible from the human standpoint, we have to engage in grammatical interpretation. After all, the Bible is written in phrases, sentences, clauses, paragraphs, sections, segments, and we have to read it just like we read the newspaper or we read any other book. And we have to interpret it grammatically. Therefore, we have to know what is the subject of a sentence. What is the verb? What is the object? We have to know what modifiers are and so on. One of the best tools for understanding the Bible is to know a little about the English language.

But, that’s not all; we should have a grasp of the history of the background of the particular passage that we are studying. So we must know the meaning of historical terms. If, for example, in the Book of Acts, I read about a Centurion, I ought to know what a centurion is. Now, you won’t find what a centurion is by going down and asking the police department here. They won’t know. We have to use a dictionary. And so we

must know about Centurions and Tribunes and Lichtors and Politarchs and etc., you know. Then there must be rhetorical interpretation. We must learn to distinguish in character history from prophecy and apocalypse from poetry. There are certain things that will help us as we read such types of literature. That’s not nearly so important as these first two, but it is important.

Fourth, we must be able to explain, we must be able to logically reason. If we do not have the ability to reason at all logically, we’ll have a difficult time with the Bible because there is a great deal of logic in the Bible. The Bible uses such simple logical devices as syllogisms, for example. Do you know what a syllogism is? Well, go home and look it up and you will find you understand the Bible a great deal better if you are able to think logically. Now, I didn’t mean to confuse you by that, but the Bible does contain syllogisms; fortunately, not so much of them.

Then there is analogical interpretation. And that, of course, is interpretation by reference to parallel passages. If we are in doubt about the meaning of a passage in Paul’s Epistle to the Romans, and we know he has written something about that subject elsewhere, we are justified after we’ve investigated that passage to go to the other passage and see if that throws light on this one because we assume that the writer of any work of literature is consistent with himself.

And then, we are interested in the interpretations that other men have made: Ecclesiastical interpretation. That is, I am interested in what the Christian church has thought about the Bible down through the years. If, for example, in the 20th Century, I keep coming up with new interpretations that no one else has ever come up with down through the centuries, I should begin to doubt my interpretations because what I am making is the monstrous claim that the Holy Spirit has taught only me down through the centuries.

Now, I should expect every now and then I should come up with something fresh. But, if I keep coming up with something unique and different from everybody else, well

then watch out. That kind of teacher is, ordinarily, one that is over-mastered by pride in his own egotism. We should be subject to what the Holy Spirit has taught others. It seems to me, often, that those who talk the most about listening to the Holy Spirit for their teaching care the least about what the Holy Spirit has taught others down through the years.

And, finally, we should seek to systematize, systematic interpretation. We should seek to systematize the things that we have learned from the word. But, as you can see, this is entirely human, grammatical interpretation, historical, rhetorical, logical, analogical, ecclesiastical, systematic.

To make this Christian, we should remember that the one who really teaches us (That’s not doing a very good job, is it?) The one who teaches us is the Holy Spirit. And pervading all of our study of the Bible there must be spiritual interpretation. That is, we must remember that it is the Holy Spirit who illuminates us as we study the word of God. To really truly interpret the word, there must be the human application of interpretation of the text, but there has to be from the divine standpoint, the illumination of the Holy Spirit if we are to understand the word of God. This pervades all of this, so that, all of our historical interpretation should be guided by the Spirit, all of our grammatical interpretation and so on.

Now, I have stressed this because it is important for us, when we go to the Bible, to remember it is the word of God that is the test. By the way, one book that will help you more than almost anything else at this point is a Bible dictionary. And if you don’t have a Bible dictionary, you should have some Bible dictionary like, “The New Bible Dictionary.” It’s a good one to have. You’ll find the answer to a lot of your questions.

Now, the second thing that John speaks of here is the Spirit of God, verse 20 and verse 27. Let’s look at verse 20: “But ye have an unction from the Holy One.” Who is the Holy One? Well, the Holy One is Jesus Christ. What is, then, the ‘unction’? Well, who is the person that the Lord, Jesus Christ has given? Well, the Holy Spirit is the one whom

the Lord, Jesus Christ, has given. Remember, he said, “I will pray the Father, and he will give you another Comforter.” Later, he speaks about the “spirit whom I will send unto you.” So, the Spirit is the one who has been given by the Lord. He is the anointing.

Verse 27, “But the anointing which ye have received of him abideth in you, and ye need not that any man teach you: but as the same anointing teacheth you of all things, and is truth, and is no lie, and even as it hath taught you, ye shall abide in him.” So, the anointing.

Now, if the word of God is the objective criterion of the truth of Scripture; the Holy Spirit, then, is the subjective criterion. Possession of him means a potential knowledge of all the truth. If we go to the Bible only, then we have a book that is a dead letter. If we rely on the Holy Spirit alone, then we fall into fanaticism and speculation. To understand the Bible, we engage in the human work of interpretation; watching the grammar, the history, the culture and other things. And at the same time, we also listen to the voice of the Holy Spirit who takes the word of God and makes it vital and real to us.

Now, why do we not all have the knowledge of the truth? Why is it, for example, that good men differ in their interpretation of Scripture? Why is it that we may listen to a great teacher of the Bible and he will tell us a certain text means one thing and then a few weeks later we listen to another great teacher of the word of God, and he will tell us the same text means something else? Why is that? People are troubled by that, you know. How often have people asked me that question, why? Well, there are two reasons for it. Number one, the human side. It is a fact that some people do not do their homework in the matter of interpretation. They do not sufficiently look at the grammatical, the historical, the rhetorical, the logical, the analogical, the ecclesiastical, and the systematical side of interpretation of Scripture. They have not done their homework well. They might even, for example, not notice such a simple thing as the subject or object of a sentence; or its modifiers. They might overlook the historical background of a passage. And then, of course, the second thing is that, as we shall see, the Spirit’s

teaching is illumination is contingent upon our spiritual condition. And consequently, the Holy Spirit may be able to teach one a truth, which he may not be able to teach another.

And then, I think, there is another factor, which is related to that, and that may be that, occasionally, the Holy Spirit may not wish a person to know a certain truth at a certain time in his life, which he may wish the other to know. Now, let’s turn over to 1 Corinthians, chapter 3, where we have some of these things explained to us. 1 Corinthians, chapter 2, verse 6 through chapter 3, verse 4, is our great passage on the teaching received. This is the “pedagogical” passage. This explains how we come to know the truth. And here, Paul deals with the grounds upon which teaching is communicated. He, first of all, describes God’s wisdom in verses 6 through 12. In our outline, this is capital A - The description of God’s wisdom. Let me just read these verses quickly. We are familiar, I hope, with this passage. Verse 6, 1 Corinthians 2, Paul says.

“Howbeit we speak wisdom among them that are perfect: yet not the wisdom of this world, nor of the princes of this world, that come to naught: But we speak the wisdom of God in a mystery, even the hidden wisdom, which God ordained before the world unto our glory: Which none of the princes of this world knew: for had they known it, they would not have crucified the Lord of glory. But as it is written, Eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of man, the things which God hath prepared for them that love him. But God hath revealed them unto us by his Spirit: for the Spirit searcheth all things, yea, the deep things of God.”

Now, as you can see, what Paul is saying is simply this, you may think because I have downgraded human wisdom that in Christianity we do not think very much of wisdom. And I want to assure you that’s not true. We think a great deal of wisdom, but we think most of God’s wisdom and less of man’s wisdom. And further, Paul has said, “God’s wisdom is not understood as man’s wisdom is. The five senses are insufficient.

We cannot understand God’s wisdom from the eye, the ear, the nose, the mouth, the hand. God’s wisdom is understood by divine revelation.” That is why, my dear friend, that a scientist can never tell us anything about God with certainty because he is only looking at the effects of the work of God. And further, he is unable to put into his test tube god. God is infinite. He can only be understood by finite, sinful man through divine revelation. And because he can only be understood by divine revelation, no one, no scientist can tell us truths of God, except indirectly, as he has been pleased to reveal himself in his creation. So, the senses are insufficient.

I have often said, some of you in home Bible classes, that Laplace, the French astronomer once said, “I turned my instruments toward heaven and I’ve looked and I’ve found no evidence of God.” And President Sawyer said, after he heard the remark, “He might just as well have swept his kitchen and made the remark, because his instruments were totally incapable of discovering God.” God’s wisdom is divine wisdom. It is understood only by the Holy Spirit. It is not understood through the human senses. This text has often be used, verse 9, of heaven as it is written. “Eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of man, the things which God hath prepared for them that love him.” And so, we think of heaven then we shall understand those things. But the very next verse says, “But God hath revealed them unto us by his Spirit.”

So, these things that he is talking about are things that are ours, through the Spirit. And he explains “For what man knoweth the things of a man, save the spirit of man which is in him?” What he means by that is what man knows what’s going on in Lewis Johnson’s inner man except Lewis Johnson’s spirit? You don’t know what I’m thinking about you right now. I may be looking at you and saying “My, what a strange looking character you are.” And you may be looking at me and saying “what a strange remark for you to make.” No one knows what we think except, we ourselves. “For what man knoweth the things of a man, save the spirit of the man, the Greek text says, of the man which is in him.”

Now, by using that as an illustration, who can know the things of God? Well, only the Spirit of God. So, he says “Even so the things of God knoweth no man but the Spirit of God.” Then he says, and this is startling, “Now we have received, not the spirit of the world, but the spirit which is of God; that we might know the things that are freely given to us of God.” In other words, through the coming of the Holy Spirit we have, potentially, a teacher, being the spirit of God, who knows the deep things of God and is able to teach us. Do you know what that means? That means that if we do our homework about interpretation, through the Holy Spirit’s illumination, we can understand God’s word. And I’m persuaded that this is the greatest hindrance to the understanding of Scripture, the fact that we are not rightly related to the Holy Spirit.

Now, verse 13 tells us about the communication of it. We read “Which things also we speak, not in the words which man’s wisdom teacheth, but which the Holy Ghost teacheth; comparing spiritual things with spiritual.” Or, interpreting spiritual truths to those who possess the spirit. That’s the way that last clause should be rendered in my opinion. Interpreting spiritual truths to those who possess the Spirit. And so, what Paul is saying is that he is a teacher of the word who, through the Holy Spirit, brings spiritual truths to men who possess the Holy Spirit. In other words, he’s not trying to impress men with words of man’s wisdom. He’s seeking to bring to men the words of God, interpreting to men who possess the spirit, spiritual truths. That’s the work of teaching. That’s what Paul says he did. “Which things also we speak.”

Now, I’m sure the Corinthians would say, “But, Paul, we don’t understand everything.” Man doesn’t understand everything. So, he says, in verse 14, as he speaks about the perception of God’s wisdom, he will now talk to us about types of men.

P. T. Forsythe once said, “The truth we see depends upon the men we are.” Now, that is a truth that finds application in many ways. Wives? Ever sat down to look at a Cowboys’ game with your husband? Have you ever noticed that he sees things that you don’t see? Well, my wife hardly sees anything. [Laughter] She looks at that field, she

doesn’t see anything much. She doesn’t like to look at the field to start with. But, she doesn’t see anything. You must understand a little bit about what’s going on to really understand it when you see it. And so, the truth that we see depends, to some extent, to the men we are in almost every sphere but how tremendously true that is in the Biblical realm.

What we see in the Bible depends, ultimately, upon what we are, by God’s grace through the work of the Spirit. And Paul tells us there are four kinds of men. He says that there are first of all natural men. Now, he describes the natural man. He says “The natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God.” What is the natural man? Well, he’s a man who is incapable of receiving the truths of the spirit of God. Over in Jude, verse 19, we read, this is a very important text to understand who the natural man is. We read in this verse “These be they who separate themselves, sensual, [It’s the word translated here natural natural] having not the Spirit.” The natural man is the man who has not the Spirit.

Now, what does Paul say about the Spirit? Well, he says in Romans 8:9, he says “He that hath not the Spirit of Christ” is what? “None of his.” In other words, if we don’t have the Holy Spirit, we’re not Christians. We don’t belong to the Lord. We talked about that. So the natural man, then, is the man who does not have the Holy Spirit. He doesn’t belong to Jesus Christ. He’s the unsaved man. He doesn’t understand the things of the Spirit of God. In other words, the things of the spirit of God may be there, in plain view before his eyes, but he doesn’t understand them.

Have you ever been to Carlsbad Caverns? Well, you know that in the summertime, bats fly up from Mexico five to eight million strong. And during the summer months they reside in the caverns at Carlsbad. Late in the afternoon, you’ll hear this terrible noise of the beating of wings and these millions of bats will fly out, looking for water and food. Then they fly back in. Now, if you’ve been down in Carlsbad Caverns, or any caverns for that matter, you know that those caverns are made up of stalactites and

stalagmites. And if you look down there, and you see those things, in the dark, well you cannot even see them at all. If you go down Carlsbad Caverns and they turn out the light, well, that’s where I learned what it meant in the Bible when Jude speaks about “the blackness of darkness forever.”

That’s where I first got my understanding of what that must mean. You can put your hand before your face and you cannot see anything. It’s just pitch-black darkness down in those caverns. But those bats can fly in and out among those stalactites and stalagmites and never strike a one of them, because bats are equipped with a natural sonar. Now, they utter little sounds. And those sounds bounce off of the material within the cave, and they fly by those sounds. They do not see. They fly by those sounds and what they hear. Now, we know that because if you will take a bat and if you will tie his mouth so he cannot utter them, he’ll fly into those things. Now, we can hear a bat squeals of rage or pain, but we cannot hear the other because it’s on a wavelength that our ears cannot comprehend.

Now, the Bible is on a wavelength that the ears of the natural man cannot hear. “The natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God for they are foolishness unto him:” Now, that does not mean that he cannot understand the words of Scripture. He can understand the words of Scripture. As a matter of fact sometimes from the interpretation standpoint, men can do a better job than some Christians because they know a little more about English grammar. They may know a little more about Biblical history, the culture of the times. They won’t make certain mistakes that a Christian might make. But, the basic meaning of the text, the spiritual meaning of it, he cannot understand. He would be like a blind man who may be able to explain the theory of color more effectively than a little child. But, the little child really understands color better because he not only may comprehend something of its principles, but he has “seen” it. And so, he has entered into an experience of it. “The natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God.”

Now, Paul, I must hasten. Paul goes on to say “Neither can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned. In other words, by the Spirit. Verse 15 “But he that is spiritual judgeth all things, yet he himself is judged of no man.” That’s the second kind of man; he’s the spiritual man. As you can see, the spiritual man is a man who can examine or judge all things. That is, all of the things of the word of God are potentially his. Now, all teaching is subject to the Spirit’s sovereign pleasure. A spiritual man may not understand certain things for the simple reason that it’s not the spirit’s desire that he understand it at that time in his Christian experience. But, potentially, he is able to understand everything, the spiritual man.

Now, what is the spiritual man? Well, the spiritual man is the man who has the Holy Spirit and who has a measure of maturity. Now, I know that because in chapter 2, verse 6, it says: “Howbeit we speak wisdom among them that are perfect.” They are mature. That means that a baby cannot be spiritual. But, let’s go on to Paul’s words in chapter 3, verses 1 through 4 where we read of the third and fourth class of men, “And I, brethren.” Here, he applies his teaching to the Corinthians. “And I, brethren, could not speak unto you as unto spiritual, but as unto carnal, even as unto babes in Christ.”

Here is the third class of man; he is a carnal, weak man. Now, I want you to notice that this carnal man is a Christian. He says, “And I brethren.” He is a believer. “I could not speak unto you as unto spiritual.” In other I couldn’t, Corinthians, when I came to you to speak the gospel to you, I could not speak to you as unto ‘spiritual.’ I could only speak unto you after you received the Lord, Jesus Christ as your Savior as carnal. “Even as unto babes in Christ.” Now, that text proves that a spiritual man cannot be... Or is not a babe. A babe cannot be a spiritual man for he says: “I could not speak unto you as unto spiritual, but as unto carnal, even as unto babes in Christ.” He couldn’t say that if a babe could be spiritual. A babe in Christ may be spiritually minded, but he cannot be spiritual because that requires growth. So, the carnal weak. By the way, that Greek word there in most of the manuscripts is a word that means “fleshen.” That is, great stress on

the material of the flesh. So this is the third kind of man, the man who is carnal. The man who is weak. The man who is dominated by his flesh. He’s a babe. He’s in Christ. He has believed. But he is a babe.

You know, the best illustration of this is natural life. That’s why natural life is as it is. God desires that we learn things from our experience. Now, when a child is born, it’s a baby, isn’t it? Can a baby eat meat? No. When you’re child is born, you don’t take him down to Cattleman’s the first week or so, in order to give him a good start in life. No, it’s mother’s milk or a bottle and it’s milk, its milk, because they are weak. They are weak. They are fleshly. Now, there’s another thing about a babe. Babies are messes. Now, we expect them to be messes. We’re not upset when they have to wear diapers, are we? We don’t go around talking about our two months old child. “I’m just so apologetic because my little daughter needs diapers.” Now, of course, that’s part of their life. They’re messes. Now, Christians are just like that. Christians are born into the Christian life and they are babes and they’re messes. What they need is the milk of the word of God. And we expect them to do foolish things. Young Christians do foolish things. That’s why Paul said, “don’t appoint a novice an elder.” Don’t do that. Don’t give a man, when he’s just been converted, put him up on the platform and have him give the congregation a lesson in Bible doctrine. Can’t believe it. He’s a baby. He doesn’t know anything about it. Consequently, a baby is able to understand milk but don’t expect anything more than that. That’s the third class of man.

Paul goes on to say, “For,” verse 2 “I have fed you with milk, and not with meat; for hitherto ye were not able to bear it, neither yet now are ye able.” [After a time has passed] “For ye are still carnal; [but he uses a different word. This is a word that means, it’s related to the word “flesh” but it means “dominated by the disposition of the flesh.] “Ye are still carnal; for whereas there is among you envying, and strife, and divisions, are ye not carnal, and walk as men?” So here is a person, who can be called carnal, but it is a

carnality that is not a natural carnality, it is a willful carnality. They are envy, striving, there are divisions, they are carnal and they walk as men.

Now, what kind of a person is that? Well, that is a person who has been born but who has not grown. That is comparable to a retarded child in the physical life. Something’s the matter. They are tragedies, of course, in the physical life and everyone bleeds for a couple who has a retarded child. But, a retarded child is an unnatural thing. And when a person becomes a Christian, and persists in his babyhood that is a tragedy. What can he learn? Well, Paul says “For ye are yet carnal; for whereas there is among you envying, and strife, and divisions.” Well, I can’t give you anything but milk. You’re not able to bear meat.

Well, what then is the remedy for these situations? What’s the remedy of the natural man? Well, he needs to be born again. He needs to believe in Jesus Christ. What’s the remedy of the carnal, weak man, the babe in Christ? Well, he needs to grow. He needs to feed on the milk so that he may become strong and be able to take the meat. What’s the need of the carnal, willful man? Well, the need of that man is to confess his sins. What do you do when a person is unhealthy? When a person is sickly?

Well, you call a doctor hoping that the doctor will be able to help. This person needs restoration. He needs to confess his sin in order that he may be restored to fellowship and health and thus, grow. So, the natural man needs to be born again. The carnal, weak man needs his milk so that he may grow. The carnal, willful man, who can only take milk and not the meat, needs to confess his sin in order to be restored and then feed on the milk in order that he may understand the meat. What about the spiritual man? Well, the spiritual man has no limitations. He may feed on the meat of the word. And feeding on the meat of the word, grow and become strong and stronger and useful to God. What’s the milk of the word? Well, the simple little truths about Jesus Christ and his death for us? No. What’s the milk of the word? The Book of 1 Corinthians that’s the milk of the word. The doctrine of the resurrection, the doctrine of the wisdom of God,

the doctrine of saints going to war with one another, the doctrine of marriage and divorce, the doctrine of eating things sacrificed to idols, and so on. Those are the things that are the milk of the word. The Corinthians couldn’t take meat; they could only take milk. So, that book contains milk. And I dare say that most Christians today can really only take milk. For, many of them have difficulty with 1 Corinthians.

I’ve gone overtime but this is a very important topic, the teaching of the Holy Spirit. If you’re in this audience and you’re not converted, you’re a natural man; the Bible is nonsense to you because you need the Holy spirit. You need to be born again.

If you’re a Christian, but a babe, feed on the milk of the word. Grow strong. If you’re a Christian, and you have been drifting in sin, indifference, you need to confess your sin and be restored to fellowship and health and begin to feed on the word. If you’re a spiritual Christian, then you need to feed on the meat and become very useful to God.

Let’s bow in prayer.

[Prayer] Father, we thank Thee for this time together.

For Jesus’ sake. Amen.