

Introduction to the Bible

Lesson 1

One of the exceptional talents of mankind is the ability to communicate through writing. Written communication can become an enduring record of one's thoughts and desires, lasting centuries, even millennia, beyond one's lifetime. We can read the earliest stories written about ancient Babylonian and Greek heroes because someone wrote those stories on clay tablets and papyri thousands of years ago.

One of the great gifts of God to mankind is the written Word of God recorded and preserved by faithful worshippers of the true and living God. The sixty-six books of the Bible record actual historical events in which, among other things, the thoughts and intentions of God for mankind are communicated. God's thoughts are higher than man's (Isa 55:8-9) but are not totally beyond understanding; to begin to do so, one need only to hear the Word of God.

It is important to understand the following significant points concerning God's communication through His Word. First of all, God is the best communicator who has ever existed. Those who wrote the Word of God, "by the _____ of God" (2Ti 3:16), have chosen the right words, which correctly communicate God's thoughts in a way that man can understand what God intends to communicate. Translations are helpful for those who cannot read the original languages of the Bible; however, the original languages of the text of Scripture best communicate what God intends for man to understand.

Second, the directives of God's Word are not simply suggestions to help man have a more enjoyable life, a happier marriage, or a larger bank balance; the Word of God communicates His will for man's life. The essential counsel communicated throughout God's Word is that, to the same extent that someone complies with God's will in this present life, he will enjoy his life in the world to come. Peter says that the Word of God is the authority for "all things that pertain to _____ and godliness" (2Pe 1:3).

Third, John the Apostle warns that there will be dire consequences if a believer "adds to" or "_____ away" from the Word of God (specifically, the book of Revelation, Rev 22:18-19). Be aware that, no matter how famous or respected a teacher or pastor might be, or even how loving toward you and others, if he contradicts the Word of God or undermines its meaning, he is teaching error and his teaching will lead others astray. Certainly not everyone knows and understands Hebrew and Greek well enough to read the text in its original languages, but usually one can read or listen to a translation and recognize if a teacher is mishandling a text.

Some well-meaning believers deflect criticism by deferring to what a well-known pastor or scholar teaches. Such excuses will not be accepted when a believer stands for judgment before God the Son. Paul reminds Timothy to "be _____" because every believer is responsible for himself, for being approved by God, and for correctly understanding ("dividing") the Word of God (2Ti 2:15).

A common (often unintentional) mistake which many teachers make is to teach from a passage in God's Word which is directed toward believers but apply it to unbelievers. Most of the New Testament (and the Old Testament) is written to audiences of believers. Most of those in the intended audiences have already believed the gospel promise that God would send the Messiah and, thus, like Abraham, have been justified by faith (Gen 15:6; Rom 4). As expected, interpreting a passage directed toward believers but applying it instead to unbelievers leads to many errors.

One can begin to understand God's thoughts and intentions for mankind by hearing/reading the Word of God.

All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for proof, for restoration, for instruction in righteousness, that the man of God may be prepared, thoroughly equipped for every good work. – 2 Timothy 3:16-17*

Grace and peace be multiplied to you in the knowledge of God and of Jesus our Lord, as His divine power has given to us all things that pertain to life and godliness, through the knowledge of Him who called us by glory and virtue, by which have been given to us exceedingly great and precious promises. – 2 Peter 1:2-4*

For I testify to everyone who hears the words of the prophecy of this book: If anyone adds to these things, God will add to him the plagues that are written in this book; and if anyone takes away from the words of the book of this prophecy, God shall take away his part from the Book of Life, from the holy city, and from the things which are written in this book. – Revelation 22:18-19

Be diligent to present yourself approved unto God, a worker who does not need to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth. – 2 Timothy 2:15*

The essential counsel communicated throughout God's Word is that, to the same extent that someone complies with God's will in this present life, he will enjoy his life in the world to come.

Well did Isaiah prophesy of you hypocrites, as it is written:

This people honors Me with their lips, But their heart is far from Me. And in vain they worship Me, Teaching as doctrines the commandments of men.

For laying aside the commandment of God, you hold the tradition of men. – Mark 7:6-8

Beware lest any man spoil you through philosophy and vain deceit, after the tradition of men, after the rudiments of the world, and not after [the commandments of] Christ.

– Colossians 2:8

That which we have seen and heard we are reporting to you, in order that you also may be having fellowship with us; and indeed our fellowship is with the Father and with His Son Jesus Christ. And these things we are writing to you in order that your joy may be filled full.

– 1 John 1:3-4*

Write a list of the unfaithful and deceivers against whom Paul warns in 2 Timothy 3:1-5.

Another common mistake, which has happened repeatedly over the centuries, is that religious authorities often teach the traditions of men instead of teaching the doctrine of the Word of God. Jesus warns His audience of this mistake which, even in His day, was common among the Jewish leaders: “laying aside the _____ of God, you hold the _____ of men” (Mk 7:8; cf. Mt 15:3-6). This error of honoring human tradition over the Word of God is prevalent throughout Christianity today.

Believers make a major mistake when they assume that the theology and traditions taught by men are the same as the doctrine taught by the Scriptures. Paul warns that the _____, deceit, and tradition of men can spoil a strong, faithful disciple by turning him away from the teachings of Jesus Christ (Col 2:8). Paul warns even faithful Timothy that he needs to stay “strong in the grace that is in Christ Jesus and the things you have heard from me among many witnesses, commit these to faithful men who will be able to teach others also” (2Ti 2:1-2).

Just before Jesus ascends back to Heaven, He opens the understanding of the Apostles so that they can comprehend the Scriptures (Lk 24:45). The Apostle John reinforces the importance of following the doctrine of Jesus, which the Apostles taught (and recorded in the Scriptures). John says that disciples who follow the Apostles’ doctrine will continue to be in _____ with the Apostles, in _____ with God the Father, and in _____ with His Son Jesus Christ (1Jn 1:3). Equally important is that those who faithfully follow the Apostles’ doctrine will have their joy filled full when Jesus Christ returns (1Jn 1:4).

John also warns his followers that it is possible that others will deceive them: “Little children, let no one deceive you” (1Jn 3:7). Many types of deceivers are in the world. Jesus warns that false christs and false prophets will try to deceive God’s people (Mt 24:24). Paul warns Timothy, giving a list of unfaithful and deceivers (2Ti 3:1-5). John warns his followers again: “Many deceivers have gone out into the world who do not confess Jesus Christ as coming in the flesh. This is a deceiver and an antichrist. Look to yourselves, that we do not lose those things we worked for, but that we may receive a full reward” (2Jn 7-8).

All of these points emphasize the importance and authority of the Word of God. A disciple of Jesus Christ who desires to do God’s will should follow Jesus’ doctrine and commandments as they are written in God’s Word. No one on Earth has more authority than the Word of God. We must be careful not to repeat the mistake of Adam and Eve, who listened to someone else instead of obeying the words of God.

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1. How many books of the Bible are inspired by God?
 2. What are some common mistakes of Bible teachers?
 3. Which of these common mistakes often undermines the Word of God?
 4. Following what will keep a believer in fellowship with God?