



THE PRIORITY OF HUMBLE OBEDIENCE & FERVENT PRAYER

A word-centered, convictional ministry must drive all that we do as followers of Jesus (Ephesians 4:11-16). After all, Jesus believed that loving Him looked like keeping His commandments (John 14:15). But in order to keep Christ's commandments out of love for Him, we must rightly know the Word (2 Timothy 2:15) — which necessitates having the right tools to do word-work.

However, before we can learn the tools to rightly understand the all-sufficient Words of Life, we must have a posture of humble obedience and radical dependence before the God of the Word. All of the right tools without the right heart posture will produce the following dangers:

DANGER #1: KNOWING WITHOUT DOING: *the tendency of the flesh will always be to know something intellectually but not submit to that thing practically by faith.*

James 1:23-25 — For if anyone is a hearer of the word and not a doer, he is like a man who looks intently at his natural face in a mirror. For he looks at himself and goes away and at once forgets what he was like. But the one who looks into the perfect law, the law of liberty, and perseveres, being no hearer who forgets but a doer who acts, he will be blessed in his doing.

DANGER #2: ACADEMICALLY APPROACHING GOD: *it is easy to think that we are maturing spiritually simply because we know more about the God of the Bible.*

1 Corinthians 8:1 — Now concerning food offered to idols: we know that “all of us possess knowledge.” This “knowledge” puffs up, but love builds up.

James 2:19 — You believe that God is one; you do well. Even the demons believe —and shudder!

DANGER #3: RELIGIOUS PERFORMANCE VS. HEART RELIGION: *religious duty and performance can become a cover up for a carnal heart.*

Isaiah 1:12-17 — When you come to appear before me, who has required of you this trampling of my courts? Bring no more vain offerings; incense is an abomination to me. New moon and Sabbath and the calling of convocations— I cannot endure iniquity and solemn assembly. Your new moons and your appointed feasts my soul hates; they have become a burden to me; I am weary of bearing them. When you spread out your hands, I will hide my eyes from you; even though you make many prayers, I will not listen; your hands are full of blood. Wash yourselves; make yourselves clean; remove the evil of your deeds from before my eyes; cease to do evil, learn to do good; seek justice, correct oppression; bring justice to the fatherless, plead the widow's cause.

DANGER #4: ABUSING THE GOSPEL OF GRACE: *we can celebrate a gospel of grace to the excuse of sinful and carnal choices because after all, we are forgiven.*



Romans 6:1-2 — What shall we say then? Are we to continue in sin that grace may abound? By no means! How can we who died to sin still live in it?

DANGER #5: SPIRITUALLY SERVING BUT NOT OBEYING: *claiming to be “serving God” in one area while actively disobeying God in another.*

Matthew 7:23-25 — Not everyone who says to me, Lord, Lord, will enter the kingdom of heaven, but the one who does the will of my Father who is in heaven. On that day many will say to me, Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name, and cast out demons in your name, and do many mighty works in your name? And then will I declare to them, I never knew you; depart from me, you workers of lawlessness.

DANGER #6: IMPORTING YOUR BIAS: *reading into the Bible what you are already convinced is truth.*

We often assume that we know what a verse says based on our culture or background. Instead of discerning and wrestling with certain passages, we assume we know them already.

Matthew 18:19 — Again I say to you, if two of you agree on earth about anything they ask, it will be done for them by my Father in heaven.

VS.

Romans 12:2 — Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that by testing you may discern what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect.

TABLE DISCUSSION: What danger(s) has been true in your Christian life? How did they show up in your life?

PRINCIPLE #1: to rightly understand the Word, you must remain in humble dependence on the Spirit as you labor in the Word.

A. IT IS ONLY THROUGH THE INDWELLING OF THE HOLY SPIRIT THAT THE WORD OF GOD CAN BE RIGHTLY UNDERSTOOD.

Throughout the teaching ministry of Jesus, He told his followers that the Spirit would come, take up residence within them. The Holy Spirit would then *guide them into all truth.*

John 14:26 — But the Helper, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, he will teach you all things and bring to your remembrance all that I have said to you.



John 16:13-14 — When the Spirit of truth comes, he will guide you into all the truth, for he will not speak on his own authority, but whatever he hears he will speak, and he will declare to you the things that are to come. He will glorify me, for he will take what is mine and declare it to you.

This promise came true on the day of Pentecost and the immediate result was the proclamation of God's truth:

Acts 2:11 — both Jews and proselytes, Cretans and Arabians—we hear them telling in our own tongues the mighty works of God.

Then as Paul instructs the Corinthian believers to think and act in a truly spiritual manner, listen to the central role the Holy Spirit plays in understanding the Word that God has freely given:

1 Corinthians 2:10-13 — these things God has revealed to us *through the Spirit*. For the Spirit searches everything, even the depths of God. For who knows a person's thoughts except the spirit of that person, which is in him? So also no one comprehends the thoughts of God except the Spirit of God. Now we have received not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit who is from God, *that we might understand* the things freely given us by God. And we impart this in words not taught by human wisdom but taught by the Spirit, interpreting spiritual truths to those who are spiritual.

Apart from the indwelling Holy Spirit, the Word of God is foolishness. It is a work called **illumination** — when the Spirit of God opens your eyes (spiritually speaking) to understand what has been written in the Scriptures.

Ephesians 1:17-18 — that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give you the Spirit of wisdom and of revelation in the knowledge of him, having the eyes of your hearts enlightened, that you may know what is the hope to which he has called you, what are the riches of his glorious inheritance in the saints.

Notice the close connection between the being filled with/by the Spirit and the Word of Christ dwelling in you richly. It is as if they are one and the same – to be filled with one is to be indwelt by the other.

Ephesians 5:18 — And do not get drunk with wine, for that is debauchery, but be filled with the Spirit,

Colossians 3:16 — Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly, teaching and admonishing one another in all wisdom, singing psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, with thankfulness in your hearts to God.

Be encouraged — any true comprehension of the Word is a work of the Spirit of Truth that guides us into all Truth! Even though we must labor diligently in the Word, we cannot take credit for understanding the Word — which produces humble dependence!



B. IT IS ONLY THROUGH EARNEST PRAYER (I.E. HUMBLE DEPENDENCE) THAT THE WORD CAN BE RIGHTLY UNDERSTOOD

The indwelling and illuminating work of the Spirit of God, does not negate the necessity of earnest prayer. Laboring in the Word must begin, end, and be laced throughout with intercession. Even the psalmist David cried out:

Psalm 119:18 — Open my eyes, that I may behold wondrous things out of your law.

All of the diligent effort and right tools to mine the Word of God, will not result in comprehending the spiritual nature and spiritual purpose of the Word. You might achieve becoming a Biblical scholar but you will not get to the heart of God apart from continuing in prayer.

Paul's plea for the Christian community in Ephesus was clear:

Ephesians 1:16-17 — I do not cease to give thanks for you, remembering you in my prayers, that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give you the Spirit of wisdom and of revelation in the knowledge of him.

Did you hear it — *may give you the Spirit of wisdom and of revelation in the knowledge of Him*. Where has God revealed Christ? In the Word! What does Paul pray for? That the Christian community would experience or know the Spirit — who is and gives wisdom and knowledge.

Don't overestimate your ability in the flesh to comprehend God. You may come to some intellectual knowledge of the Word, but you will miss the heart of God without earnest prayer.

TABLE DISCUSSION: What could it practically look like for you to remain earnest in prayer as you study the Word of God?

PRINCIPLE #2: To rightly understand the Word, you must live in humble submission to the Word by faith.

A. BEFORE YOU BECAME A CHRISTIAN, THE WORD OF GOD WAS FOOLISHNESS TO YOU — YOU HAD NO INTEREST IN IT SPIRITUALLY SPEAKING

1 Corinthians 1:18 — For the word of the cross is folly to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God.



1 Corinthians 2:14 — The natural person does not accept the things of the Spirit of God, for they are folly to him, and he is not able to understand them because they are spiritually discerned.

Simply put, before you submitted to the gospel (i.e. repentance & faith), you could not understand the Word of God — *it was foolishness to you*. But now that you have humbly submitted to the gospel by faith — the Word of God has become to you the *living and active* book that it is.

B. NOW THAT YOU ARE A CHRISTIAN — THE WORD OF GOD IS LIFE GIVING & LIFE SHAPING

Because the Spirit of God has taken up residence with you — the Word of God is seen for what it truly is:

Hebrews 4:12 — For the word of God is living and active, sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing to the division of soul and of spirit, of joints and of marrow, and discerning the thoughts and intentions of the heart.

Now — the Word of God confronts, convicts, encourages, exhorts, and directs you. It is in every way, it is the Book that reads you. And yet, it is entirely possible to be convicted by the Word without submitting to the Word:

James 1:22-25 — But be doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving yourselves. For if anyone is a hearer of the word and not a doer, he is like a man who looks intently at his natural face in a mirror. For he looks at himself and goes away and at once forgets what he was like. But the one who looks into the perfect law, the law of liberty, and perseveres, being no hearer who forgets but a doer who acts, he will be blessed in his doing.

TABLE DISCUSSION: When did the Word of God go from lifeless to life-giving for you? Briefly describe the before & after.

C. THE OBVIOUS DIFFERENCE BETWEEN INTELLECTUAL PURSUIT & HUMBLE SUBMISSION

When someone understands the Word without humbly submitting to the Word (i.e. doing), the conscience becomes seared over time. The heart becomes hard. And no matter how much you study or read the Word, you will be unable to rightly understand it. Similar to Israel in the days of Isaiah:

Isaiah 29:11-14 — And the vision of all this has become to you like the words of a book that is sealed. When men give it to one who can read, saying, “Read this,” he says, “I cannot, for it is sealed.” And when they give the book to one who cannot read, saying, “Read this,” he says, “I cannot read.” And the Lord said: “Because this people draw near with their mouth and honor me with their lips, while their hearts are far from me, and their fear of me is a commandment taught by men. therefore, behold, I will again do wonderful



things with this people, with wonder upon wonder; and the wisdom of their wise men shall perish, and the discernment of their discerning men shall be hidden.

It seems to be somewhat common sense — our approach to the Bible should be one of reverent, humble submission by faith. However, the devil is crafty and the flesh is sneaky — there seems to always be a subtle creep towards knowing without doing.

In God's strange providence — humble submission to the Word is actually how we come to grow in understanding the Word. Notice how trust, obedience, and humility are all interconnected in a famous proverb:

Proverbs 3:5-7 — Trust in the Lord with all your heart, and do not lean on your own understanding. In all your ways acknowledge him, and he will make straight your paths. Be not wise in your own eyes; fear the Lord, and turn away from evil.

Far too often — Christians want to know the will of God (objective or subjective), without actually humbly submitting to the Word by faith. This will only lead to hard-hearted hypocrisy in the name of religion.

Just like growing in other skills in God's created world — knowing is only the first step. The more we put into practice what we know, the more we come to know, put into practice, etc.

James 1:21 — Therefore put away all filthiness and rampant wickedness and receive with meekness the implanted word, which is able to save your souls.

Did you hear it? Putting away all carnality precedes receiving the Word. And grammatically — meekness is connected to humility (i.e. humble obedience). In other words — to receive the implanted Word, you must put away all that is contrary to the Word. You cannot have one without the other.

D. STUDY — DO — TEACH — THE BIBLICAL PATTERN FOR UNDERSTANDING THE WORD OF GOD

The Bible provides us with wonderful *case studies* for all of life. Ezra approaches the written Word of God with mental diligence that is coupled with humble submission.

Ezra 7:10 — For Ezra had set his heart to study the Law of the Lord, and to do it and to teach his statutes and rules in Israel.

Ezra set his heart to study — it is crucial that one rightly studies the Word of God. A simplistic use of the Bible will always lead to heretical doctrine and heretical practice. We must not use dependence on the Spirit of God for laziness in the Word.



2 Timothy 2:15 — Do your best to present yourself to God as one approved, a worker who has no need to be ashamed, rightly handling the word of truth.

Essential to being approved by God...not being ashamed — is rightly or carefully handling the Word.

Ezra set his heart to...do — as the Word is studied carefully, it is imperative to notice the submitted posture of the heart (i.e. — to do or obey). The right study of Scripture is always meant to produce active conformity to the God of the Word by faith.

Jesus also understood the priority of knowing & doing — for it was not adequate to hear (i.e. comprehend) without doing:

Matthew 7:24-26 — Everyone then who hears these words of mine and does them will be like a wise man who built his house on the rock. And the rain fell, and the floods came, and the winds blew and beat on that house, but it did not fall, because it had been founded on the rock. And everyone who hears these words of mine and does not do them will be like a foolish man who built his house on the sand.

Ezra set his heart to...teach — once the Word is studied and submitted to by faith, there is an immediate inertia to make disciples — to equip others with this all sufficient, all good Word. But without studying and doing, teaching would be at best an academic exercise and at worst hypocritical religion.

CONCLUSION: In order to develop an exegetical theology for all of life & ministry — the Word of God must be humbly submitted to and the Spirit must be earnestly depended on.

SMALL GROUP DISCUSSION:

#1: Why are we tempted to intellectualize the Word of God without humbly submitting to the Word of God? How can that make us feel good about ourselves?

#2: In your own experience — how has humble submission helped you actually understand the Word better?

#3: What does it mean to live humbly submitted to the Word & fervent in prayer about the Word in our day to day lives?