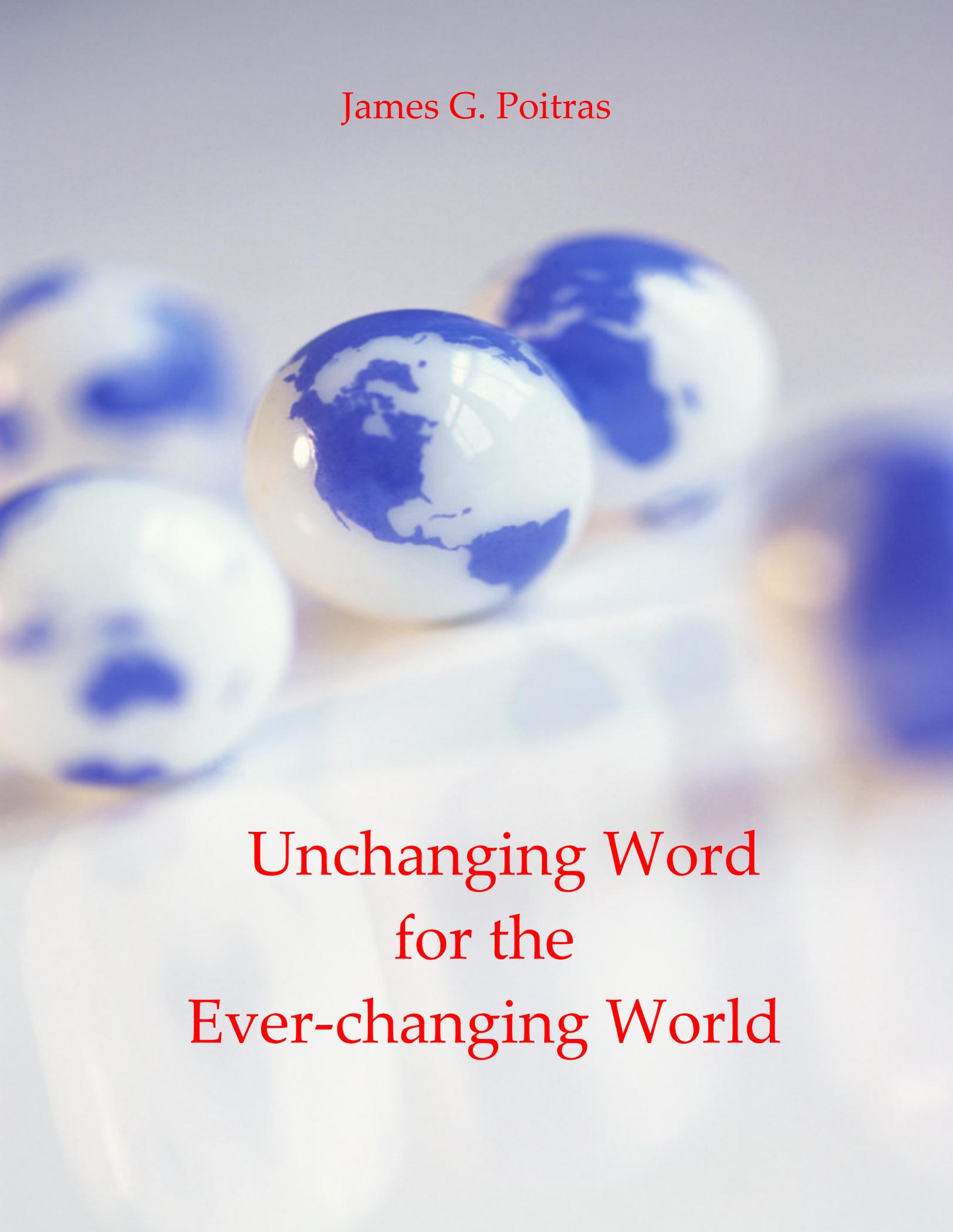


James G. Poitras



Unchanging Word
for the
Ever-changing World

A Word from the Author

I have grabbed this opportunity to talk to you, because we will be making a transition from “I” and “me” to “we” in a few pages. The lessons found in this manual are designed for you to teach to others. To make this easier, I will not be using the “first person” in the lessons.

As you glance through the pages, you may be surprised to know that I do not enjoy history! Arnold Cook probably had me in mind when he advised, “Those who live in the past are blind in one eye. Those who never consult the past are blind in both eyes.” I am an enjoy-the-present, don’t-mess-me-up-with-reality, let-me-help-make-a-better-future kind of guy. I find it ironic that the Book of Acts, the history of the first century church, is my favorite New Testament book. I am fascinated with its twenty-eight chapters that provide thirty-three years of history. I find myself striving to walk as the early church walked—in the power of the Spirit. I struggle to preach with boldness and desire to see God at work in my ministry.

Acts compels me to take the gospel to the ends of the earth. I cannot get away from its message. It calls me to be an effective Christian witness, to walk in holiness, looking for the Lord’s soon return, and desiring to turn the world upside down with truth that changes lives.

I want to be victorious, to overcome obstacles, and run the race that is set before me. Like the men and women in the early church, I will not retreat into compromise or be lulled to sleep by a world calling me into tolerance. I will not conform to this world but seek to be transformed into the image of God.

I must admit, I come short of my expectations and occasionally fall flat on my face. Acts encourages me to get up, brush myself off, and try again. The ninety-five people introduced in Acts encourage me to press on. They provide role models of what I ought to, and can, be. Sixty-two of my friends are never mentioned elsewhere in the New Testament. Collectively, they teach me that God has a team consumed with a passion for reaching the world. Individually, they caution me not to be afraid of standing alone and that I can make a difference. Acts has spoken hundreds of lessons to my soul, and I have felt the tug of the Spirit to write so that others may learn.

I will consult the past, but will skip living in it, choosing to face the challenges and opportunities God has given us today. As much as I love Acts, I really would not want to exchange places with Stephen, or be let down in a basket like Paul, or even knocked down on the road to Damascus. I prefer to write lessons from my corner at home, instead of a prison cell, or nestled in the belly of a ship destined for shipwreck. I will skip walking miles delivering a letter to the new Christians, and stick with the convenience of sending e-mail. I will pass when it comes to messy, time-consuming inkwells and stick with the modern convenience of my trusty laptop.

I will learn from history (even if I do not like the subject), but I am thrilled to live in the finest hour ever. We cannot live in yesteryear and have no promise of tomorrow. God continues to move all over our world, and miracles are happening that cast a shadow on the events of Acts.

Nona Freeman once said, "The Word of God is a time-proven irrefutable fact. Whatever God has done through the ages, He can do it again, and more, much more, than our finite minds can comprehend."

Acts is not only a book of the past, but I am convinced it is *God's Training Manual for Today's Church*. The contents of Acts will motivate believers to evangelize, receive understanding of the apostles' doctrine, and to share it with others with supernatural power. It provides further truth for any serious seeker.

The first day of the twentieth century marked the birth of the modern Pentecostal movement. That evening Agnes Ozman received the baptism of the Holy Spirit. A few days later, Charles Parham, his wife, and twelve of his students received their personal Pentecost. Parham had been leading a small group of students into a study of the Acts of Apostles. They started out studying Acts, but ended up living it. The doctrine of the first church was restored as a step was made toward the Book of Acts.

Throughout the last century, the Pentecostal movement has exploded. Never has a group grown more rapidly than the Pentecostal/Charismatic movement. As we wade ankle-deep into the twenty-first century, God's army continues to sweep across the globe undaunted by worldliness and modernistic thinking, still burning with the fire ignited at Pentecost. I applaud the Pentecostal movement of the past and look forward to greater things from God and His church.

The manual you hold in your hands is dedicated to sharing the principles of *Unchanging Word for the Changing World*. They are designed to enlighten your way with the unchanging truths of Acts. A variety of subjects have been chosen in hopes of better equipping men and women for the task ahead. I make no excuse for the simplicity of the lessons. They have been written specifically for my friends in developing nations, but are applicable to growing Christians everywhere.

Feel free to bring others along for the walk, ride, or race. You get to choose the pace. Let's get moving! Are you ready? Open to the first lesson and begin *Unchanging Word for the Changing World*.

Destination Unknown

“For as I passed by, and beheld your devotions, I found an altar with this inscription, TO THE UNKNOWN GOD. Whom therefore ye ignorantly worship, him declare I unto you” (Acts 17:23).

Do you know where you are going?

A man named Huxley, having finished another series of public attacks against Christians, was in a hurry to catch a train that would take him to the next city. He left the hotel, jumped into the taxi, settled back, and closed his eyes to rest for a couple of minutes.

He assumed the driver had been told the destination by the hotel doorman so when he got in all he said was, “Hurry...I’m almost late...Drive fast!”

The taxi rushed through the streets of the city. Before long the man glanced out the window and frowned as he realized they were going west away from the sun, not toward it. Leaning forward the man shouted, “Do you know where you are going?”

Without looking back the driver yelled, “No, your honor, but I am going fast!”

This story humorously depicts the situation many people find themselves in; going nowhere, fast, and not realizing it. Peter exhorted in Acts 2:40, “Save yourselves from this untoward generation.” We need to save ourselves from a generation that is going nowhere.

In Athens there were more idols than all the rest of Greece put together. It was estimated that there were more than 30,000 statues in Athens. Here they were seekers of any new doctrine that would come their way. They treated religion like they would a market where they could pick up what they wanted. These people conformed instead of being transformed. They had no burden for souls and played the part of a modern day Pharisee. They sought pleasure only. They were superstitious and religious but still did not know God.

In many countries there is a church on every corner. People use religious terms in their everyday speech. Signboards and bumper stickers on cars proclaim a knowledge and form of godliness but deny the power thereof (2 Timothy 3:5).

While others are looking for some new thing, we need to return to the original. There are those who are sincerely seeking for salvation and we must tell them the truth of Acts 2:38. Their destination must be clear!

A story is told of a terrible storm that was raging across the eastern part of the United States, making the progress of the train difficult. Among the passengers was a woman with a child,

who was concerned lest she get off at the wrong station. A gentleman, seeing her anxiety, said: "Do not worry, I know the road well, and I will tell you when you come to your station."

In due course the train stopped at the station before the one at which the woman wanted to get off.

"The next station will be yours," said the gentleman.

As they went on, in a few minutes the train stopped.

"Now is your turn, Madam. Get out quickly!"

The woman took up the child and thanking the man, she left the train. At the next stop, the brakeman called out the name of the station where the woman had wished to get off.

"You have already stopped at this station," called the man to the brakeman.

"No sir," he replied, "something was wrong with the engine, and we stopped for a few moments to repair it!"

"Oh, no" cried the other man, "I put that woman off in the storm when the train stopped between stations."

As they went back they found the lady dead (frozen to death in the storm) with the child lifeless in her arms. It was the mistake of wrong directions being given.

Still more terrible is the result of misdirecting souls. We must preach the original salvation message given to Peter in Acts 2:38:

"Then Peter said unto them, Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ, for the remission of sins, and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Ghost."

Paul would have understood the situation at Athens for he had also suffered from misguided direction and devotion. He had persecuted the church, held coats while Stephen was stoned, and locked up church members in prison. One day his direction changed while moving fast on the Road to Damascus. The Lord was able to catch his attention by blinding him! His destination became known.

Ready to Receive

“And a certain Jew named Apollos, born at Alexandria, an eloquent man, and mighty in the scriptures, came to Ephesus. This man was instructed in the way of the Lord; and being fervent in the spirit, he spake and taught diligently the things of the Lord, knowing only the baptism of John” (Acts 18:24-25).

Apollos preached what he knew and walked in the light he had received; yet his message and understanding were incomplete. Aquila and Priscilla found him serious about serving and obeying God, and they provided him with a complete understanding of truth. This was done in an attitude of love, not condemnation.

“Like many preachers what Apollos said was quite true. What he left out demonstrated his inadequate understanding of Christian truth.” (*Holman New Testament Commentary—Acts*; General Editor—Max Anders, Author—Kenneth O. Gangel)

“Apollos, a wonderful Bible teacher and preacher, had just arrived in Ephesus from Alexandria in Egypt. While he was in Egypt, someone had told him about John the Baptist and what John had said about Jesus, but that is all he knew. He had never heard the rest of the story! So he was preaching boldly and enthusiastically in the synagogue . . . Priscilla and Aquila were there and heard him—and it was a powerful sermon. Afterwards they met with him and explained . . .” (Acts 18:24-25, *LB*).

Characteristics of Apollos

- An educated (learned) man. Academic knowledge is not enough.
- Eloquent in speech.
- Mighty in the Scripture. He was dynamic in his preaching. He was well acquainted with the Old Testament law and the prophets. Note that the New Testament never records any other preacher as “mighty in the Scriptures.”
- Instructed in the way of the Lord.
- Fervent in spirit. He had the zeal and desire to spread the truth. He was on fire for God. *The Jamieson, Fausset, and Brown Commentary* says, “He burned to impart to others the truth he had himself received.”
- Taught diligently the things of the Lord. He was a hard worker.

- Well versed in Scripture. However, his message and understanding was incomplete.
- A bold man.

He needed the rest of the story.

“It is possible for a man to teach accurately what he knows; and it is possible that another, who possesses more information on the subject than the former, may teach him more accurately, or give him a larger portion of knowledge. Apollos knew the baptism of John . . . As far as he knew, he taught accurately. Aquila and Priscilla were acquainted with the whole doctrine of the Gospel . . . and in this they instructed Apollos.” (*Adam Clarke’s Commentary*, Electronic Database)

Apollos, mighty in the Scriptures, possessed a humble, teachable spirit and was not ashamed to receive instruction from an ordinary couple—even from a woman. With so many abilities, Apollos could have easily been proud, but he was willing to learn and better himself to become more effective in the ministry. Aquilla and Priscilla’s explanation affected both his salvation and his ministry.

Pride, self-righteousness, and a “who are you to tell me” attitude keep many from accepting the truth, teaching, or correction. Apollos was humble, possessed a teachable spirit, and a “yes, this is what I’m looking for” attitude.

Being position-oriented keeps some people from advancing in the things of God. Apollos was more concerned about his standing with God, than his position with man.

Adam Clarke also said, “It is disgraceful to a man to be ignorant, when he may acquire wisdom; but it is no disgrace to acquire wisdom from the meanest person or thing.”

Apollos “was glad to receive instructions from them, to be shown by them his defects and mistakes . . . Apollos . . . did not rest in the knowledge he had attained, nor thought he understood Christianity as well as any man . . . but was willing to have it expounded to him more perfectly. Those that know much should covet to know more, and what they know to know it better, pressing forward towards perfection.” (*Matthew Henry’s Commentary on the Whole Bible: New Modern Edition*, Electronic Database)

Truth requires a heart that is willing to receive. Apollos was both receptive and teachable. He was not intimidated or proud. Apollos could have concluded that he did not need any more teaching. However, he had a teachable spirit.

Characteristics of Teachable People

“He was able to receive what Aquilla and Priscilla had to say. It is crucial to underline this strongly . . . Our religious listeners will be given a new perception of the fact that whatever they know or however faithful they have been, there always is more to learn. The sure sign of spiritual maturity is the undefensive willingness to grow . . . After swaying the crowd, the mighty Apollos was willing to listen to two tentmakers!” (Lloyd Ogilvie in *The Communicator’s Commentary*)

Teachable people—

- Are humble.
- Are open for correction.
- Add value to themselves and others.
- Are success-oriented.
- Are willing to improve.
- Realize they are not perfect.
- Recognize when something is missing (and will not be satisfied until they find it).
- Look at what they have and where they are coming from. If what they have is true, and what is to be added is more truth, they do not throw away the foundation. They add to it.
- Hunger and thirst after righteousness.

If you want to learn, you can learn from anybody. Apollos did not look at Aquilla and Priscilla as being below him in educational level. He saw truth and seized it gladly.

What Is Truth?

“And as he thus spake for himself, Festus said with a loud voice, Paul, thou art beside thyself; much learning doth make thee mad. But he said, I am not mad, most noble Festus; but speak forth the words of truth and soberness”

(Acts 26:24-25).

Paul was committed to preaching the truth. Throughout the Book of Acts the gospel is preached and truth explained. “The importance of the book of Acts is in its preservation of the main doctrinal themes presented in apostolic preaching” (*New Testament Introduction* by Donald Guthrie as quoted in the *MacArthur New Testament Commentary*).

“And ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free”

(John 8:32).

Long ago a man asked, “What is truth?” (John 18:38). This question has been repeated countless times throughout history.

The world is full of religions. Among these are a multitude of opinions. Which one is correct? Which one teaches truth? The wise teacher admonished, “Buy the truth, and sell it not” (Proverbs 23:23). How do we find truth in the maze of the religions available? Truth can be found in the Holy Bible, the written Word of God. *The Word of God is the measurement of truth.* Jesus prayed, “Sanctify them through thy truth: thy word is truth” (John 17:17). The “God of truth” wrote the Bible (Isaiah 65:16; Psalm 31:5). In fact, Jesus is “the way, the truth, and the life” (John 14:6).

God’s truth is passed from generation to generation. It is being passed to you. Like David, a man after God’s own heart (1 Samuel 13:14), we believe that “thou desirest truth in the inward parts” (Psalms 51:6).

The Holy Spirit is given to lead and guide us in truth. “Howbeit when he, 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 shew you things to come” (John 16:13).

The Bible explains, “For we dare not make ourselves of the number, or compare ourselves with some that commend themselves: but they measuring themselves by themselves, and comparing themselves among themselves, are not wise” (2 Corinthians 10:12). It is dangerous to measure ourselves against what others believe, or what our church says. We need to measure ourselves against the Word. We cannot put confidence in tradition for the Bible warns, “Making the word of God of none effect through your tradition, which ye have delivered: and many such like

things do ye" (Mark 7:13). It has been said, "What is popular is not always right; what is right is not always popular."

Carlton L. Coon, Sr. in his Bible study series *Take Root* states, "What men are taught determines what they believe. What they believe determines what they do. What they do determines their destiny."

Ed Cole once said, "A person's beliefs hold the greatest potential for good or harm in life." What we believe about our salvation matters much when we consider our future destiny. We need to adjust to the truth of God's Word. If someone says something that is wrong, and then a thousand people say that it is correct, it is still wrong.

How then can we measure ourselves? Right, with the Bible! The Bible states clearly that we must "study to shew ourselves approved unto God" (2 Timothy 2:15). Why must we study? So that we can "rightly divide the word of TRUTH." E. Stewart in his study, "Truth Never Changes" tells us that this Scripture implies that the Word can be wrongly divided.

"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" (2 Peter 1:20-21).

Stewart says, "In 2 Peter 3:16 we find Peter writing about actual people who misapply or distort the scriptures to their own destruction." These are people who are "unlearned and unstable" who "wrest" (means distort, twist the nature or meaning of, divert to an improper use; misapply) the "scriptures, unto their own destruction." He further advises, "We should conform our lives to the Bible instead of conforming the Bible to our lives."

Let us continue to, "Search the scriptures; for in them ye think ye have eternal life: and they are they which testify of me" (John 5:39).

The Bible is the inspired, infallible Word of God. All doctrine must be based upon and be in harmony with the Word of God. The Bible is not just partially inspired; it is totally inspired. All Scripture is inspired. The Bible is also inerrant. This means that as the Holy Ghost moved on men (2 Peter 1:20-21), all of the limitations and shortcomings of the writers were overcome, and they were able to write without mistakes. The Bible can be trusted in all matters of faith.

"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" (2 Timothy 3:16-17).

The word, "inspiration" in this Scripture comes from a Greek word that literally means, "God-breathed."

- 📖 "For the word of God is quick, and powerful, and sharper than any twoedged sword, piercing even to the dividing asunder of soul and spirit, and of the joints and marrow, and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart" (Hebrews 4:12).
- 📖 "Thus saith the LORD, Stand ye in the ways, and see, and ask for the old paths, where is the good way, and walk therein, and ye shall find rest for your souls. But they said, We will not walk therein" (Jeremiah 6:16).
- 📖 "This book of the law shall not depart out of thy mouth; but thou shalt meditate therein day and night, that thou mayest observe to do according to all that is written therein: for then thou shalt make thy way prosperous, and then thou shalt have good success" (Joshua 1:8).

Jerry Vines and Jim Shaddix in their book, *Power in the Pulpit*, suggest that there are many benefits to the Word of God. This list includes:

- 📖 Prosperity and success for those who obey the Word (Joshua 1:8).
- 📖 Converts the soul, makes wise the simple, gives joy to the heart, and enlightens the eyes (Psalms 19:7-11).
- 📖 The Word is everlasting, true, righteous, invaluable, and sweet. It provides warning and reward.
- 📖 The Word cleanses and helps us avoid sin (Psalms 119:9-11).
- 📖 Provides guidance and direction (Psalms 119:105).
- 📖 The Word is truth (John 17:17).
- 📖 It results in faith (Romans 10:17).
- 📖 The Scriptures give wisdom, teaching about what is right, rebuke when in the wrong, correction for those who have erred, and instruction on how to live righteously. All of these help us to become mature (2 Timothy 3:14-17).
- 📖 The Word is alive, sharp, penetrating, and detects our thoughts and intents (Hebrews 4:12).
- 📖 It provides spiritual nourishment (2 Peter 2:2).

Truth or Tradition

“Then Peter said unto them, Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins, and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Ghost” (Acts 2:38).

In history there was a great man named Aristotle. He taught that heavier objects fall faster than lighter ones. Because he was one of the greatest thinkers of his time, people believed him. After two thousand years of people believing this, another man named Galileo called for learned men to come to the base of a high tower. He then climbed to the top and pushed off a five kilo and a one kilo weight at the same time. Much to the surprise of everyone who had gathered, both objects fell at the same time. The power of belief in man’s wisdom was so strong that the learned people refused to believe what they had seen. They denied Galileo’s experiment and insisted Aristotle was correct. The tradition of what they had been taught would not allow for them to accept the truth; even when they had seen it; and admit that they were incorrect. They persisted to believe an inaccurate teaching. This story was related in a book called, *Strong Men in Tough Times*, by Ed Cole. He stated, “A person’s beliefs hold the greatest potential for good or harm in life.”

This same man related a story that has been repeated in several other books on various subjects. It is an old story about a ship’s captain who one night saw what looked like a light of another ship heading toward him. He had the signalman blink to the other ship, “Change your course ten degrees south.”

The reply, “Change your course ten degrees north.”

Again a response, “I am a captain and I say change your course south.”

To that the reply came, “I am a seaman first class. Change your course north.”

The captain was angry and signaled back, “I say change your course south. I’m on a battleship.”

The reply came back, “Change your course north. I’m in a lighthouse.”

What we believe about our salvation matters when we consider our future destiny. We must adjust to the truth of God’s Word. If someone says something is wrong, and then a thousand people say it is correct, it is still wrong.

We cannot be like the boy who reacted stubbornly to his mother.

One day the mother told the son to sit down and he refused. She again insisted he sit down and he insisted on refusing. She demanded he sit down and forced him. The boy retorted, "Mother even though you see me sitting down, in my spirit I am still standing up!"

This brings us to the point of this lesson.

What are the correct words to be used for Water Baptism?

As we look at churches that practice baptism by immersion we realize there are two varying formulas used. Many use the words of Jesus in Matthew 28:19. Others use the words recorded in Acts 2:38 as contained in the first sermon preached in the New Testament Church. Because of these two different formulas there is confusion in the minds of many as to which should be used.

We do not see anyone in the New Testament baptized using the triune formula.

Matthew 28:19 is considered to be the Great Commission. Luke also records the Great Commission in Luke 24:45-47. "Remission of sins should be preached in His name among all nations."

In history the triune formula was not used by the early church. It started in 325 A. D. at the Council of Nicea.

No record of the Trinitarian formula can be found in the Book of Acts, neither in any of the Epistles. No where in the New Testament was there an example of someone being baptized using this formula.

It is important that we are baptized in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ because, "Neither is there salvation in any other: for there is none other name under Heaven given among men, whereby we must be saved" (Acts 4:12).

Peter was given the keys to the kingdom by Jesus in Matthew 16:19 and used these keys to open the door to salvation in Acts 2:38.

Jesus Himself in Matthew 28:19 commanded we baptize in a name. We are aware that "Jesus" is the only saving name. The Apostles did not disobey or fail because we know all Scripture is inspired by God. Jesus is the highest name known to mankind (Philippians 2:9-11).

Everything we do in word or deed should be done in the name of Jesus (Colossians 3:17). Jesus died for us and we are His bride; therefore we must take on the family name (Ephesians 3:14-15).

We are to be buried with Him in baptism (Colossians 2:8-12). We are washed in the name of the Lord Jesus (1 Corinthians 6:11).

We do not refute the words of Matthew 28:19, but we are trying to show how the command was interpreted and obeyed by the Apostles.

We are not trying to minimize the sincere religious experience of those who have been baptized in the titles. Rather we want you to be like the sincere believers of Ephesus, who upon hearing the truth were rebaptized "in the name of the Lord Jesus" (Acts 19:3-5).

We cannot follow the traditions of men; making the Word of God of none effect (Mark 7:13). It is possible, like Jesus said to hold to "the tradition of the elders" (Mark 7:3). All doctrine must be clearly based on Scripture for it is the only measure of truth.

Pilate asked, "What is truth?" Jesus kept silent. However for those who truly seek truth, He said "Sanctify them through thy truth: thy word is truth" (John 17:17).

For those who obey the truth, the Bible gives us a great promise. "And ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free" (John 8:32).

Dropping Tradition; Accepting Truth

*"These were more noble than those in Thessalonica, in that they received the word with all readiness of mind, and searched the scriptures daily, whether those things were so"
(Acts 17:11).*

That sounds like every pastor's dream congregation. These people—

- Were noble.
- Received the truth quickly.
- Searched the Scriptures daily.

Sorry to say, not every one is like the people just described. Some want to stay with man-made traditions that they have received. However, not all traditions are bad. The apostle Paul passed biblically based traditions on to the churches where he ministered. These traditions were based on truth found in the Word of God. They were not just the opinions of men. The Word of God, not tradition, is the final test of truth. Traditions should not be given doctrinal status. Tradition is not bad unless it conflicts with the Word of God.

"Therefore, brethren, stand fast, and hold the traditions which ye have been taught, whether by word, or our epistle" (2 Thessalonians 2:15).

Many people pick and choose what they want to accept, believe, and obey from the Word of God. If they could, they would rip pages out of God's Word. They think, "Holiness? I don't need that!" They may say, "Baptism in Jesus' name doesn't fit well with my traditions. I won't take that." "Baptism of the Holy Ghost? I really don't think that is for us today." Men's rejection of certain parts of the Bible does not change God's Word.

"For what if some did not believe? shall their unbelief make the faith of God without effect? God forbid: yea, let God be true, but every man a liar; as it is written" (Romans 3:3-4).

Our attitude should be, "They don't want it. I want it. I'll take it."

The Day the Sacred Stone Was Dropped

A story is told from Japan of a man who inherited a sacred stone from his father. His father had received the stone from his father and his father before him. The sacred stone had been in the family for many years. It was kept in a place of honor and highly valued. Even though the man did not really understand the reason for the stone, he believed in the tradition.

One day the man was taking a trip across the ocean in a boat. A storm arose. The boat began to toss and then sink. The man had several belongings with him and had to choose which he would try to save. He chose the sacred stone. However, as soon as he entered the water, he began to sink. He could not swim hard enough to get his head above the water. He sank deeper and deeper and knew he was about to drown. A decision had to be made. He thought, "Do I hold onto the stone and die, or do I let go and live?" He quickly concluded that living was more important than the sacred stone. The man dropped the stone into the deep and quickly swam to the surface. As he broke through the surface, he breathed in deeply and knew that he had made the right choice. Life is more important than a tradition that will only weigh you down and finally bring death. We must be careful that we never hold traditions more sacred than the Word of God.

"Let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which doth so easily beset us, and let us run with patience the race that is set before us" (Hebrews 12:1).

Is there anything in my life that I hold as sacred that the Bible tells me to drop and walk away from?

South Africa has the world's largest man-made hole. Here a man named Cecil Rhodes (who funded the Rhodes Scholarships) began to make his riches. Miners dug there and were able to find diamonds. Soon many miners rushed there and were digging as deeply as they could. They did not realize the largest diamonds were found near the surface. That is a lot like the Bible. As we dig deeply into God's Word, we can find spiritual treasures. However, the most valuable diamonds are found right on the surface of God's Word. His truth is not hidden so deeply that it is difficult to find. Truth is easy to find and easy for anyone to understand. It only requires a careful search at the surface of God's Word.

Much confusion exists over what it takes for a man to be saved. Many ask, "What must I do to be saved?" (Acts 16:30). This is a simple question to answer. It is not necessarily answered by tradition, nor by digging deeply into the Word, as if difficult to find. It is right there on the surface, easy for all to find, see, believe, and obey. This question was answered the day the New Testament Church was established.

Question Asked on the Day of Pentecost

"Men and brethren, what shall we do?" (Acts 2:37).

The Answer Given

"Then Peter said unto them, Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins, and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Ghost" (Acts 2:38).

If someone in your church were to ask this same question, would he receive the same answer?

The Apostle Peter went on to say, "For the promise is unto you, and to your children, and to all that are afar off, even as many as the Lord our God shall call" (Acts 2:39).

Are you called by God? All those that the Lord calls are entitled to the promise given above. If you do not obey Acts 2:38, you are saying that you have not been "called" by God.

Some feel baptism is not important. It was important in the Book of Acts. In Acts 16 a badly beaten preacher named Paul believed it was so important that he baptized the jailer in the middle of the night. It could not wait until morning. (Today baptismal classes are taught for weeks and sometimes months. Pastors announce baptismal services few and far between. Prolonged baptismal classes or prolonging baptism is not scriptural.)

Baptism must have been important if Paul with wounds on his back was willing to baptize the jailer. Can you imagine the physical pain Paul suffered? Some would likely have said, "Can't it wait until I feel better? I've just been beaten for the cause of Christ."

- Baptism must have been important for God to take Philip from a great revival in Samaria and send him down a lonely road to the Ethiopian eunuch (Acts 8).
- It was important enough for God to send a man named Ananias to a street called Straight to baptize Saul (Acts 9).
- God also sent an angel to Cornelius and a vision to Peter to prompt him to go and baptize Cornelius. (Acts 10) Peter risked getting into trouble with church authorities over baptizing Gentiles.

Some argue over the method used in baptism. Biblically it was done by immersion in the name of Jesus. In fact, the Bible says:

"Neither is there salvation in any other: for there is none other name under heaven given among men, whereby we must be saved" (Acts 4:12).

O Taste and See That the Lord Is Good!

Perhaps, you have not been taught any type of Christian tradition. Maybe you have not been searching for answers to, "What must I do to be saved?" You may have even had bad experiences with churches and so-called Christians. This final story is for you.

A farmer had an orchard of orange trees. His friend came to visit one day, and the farmer offered him one of his oranges to refresh him. The farmer was surprised when his friend refused to eat one of his oranges. This had happened on one other occasion, and it provoked the farmer to ask, "Why don't you ever want to eat one of my oranges?"

His friend hesitantly responded, "I really don't like your oranges."

The farmer asked, "What is wrong with my oranges?"

The friend answered, "They are very bitter!"

The farmer looked at him with a puzzled look and asked, "When have you eaten one?"

He responded, "One day I picked one of your oranges, at the edge of the orchard, close to the road. I found it to be very unpleasant."

The farmer roared in laughter. He explained, "The trees that I planted at the edge of the orchard are indeed bitter. I did this on purpose to discourage the children from stealing the oranges. However, the trees in the middle of the orchard are very good and produce a very sweet fruit. You just needed to come into the orchard, pick an orange, eat and enjoy."

Many times a person on the edge of accepting the truth of Christianity and God's Word experiences bitter things like guilt, conviction, and condemnation (blame). But, when he moves on into the midst of the church, he finds that the closer he gets to God, the more pleasant and sweet the Christian life becomes.

"O taste and see that the Lord is good: blessed is the man that trusteth in him" (Psalms 34:8).

Truth is being revealed to you. Will you drop tradition to accept truth? Will you obey the treasures of salvation revealed on the surface of God's Word? Will you taste and see that the Lord is good? The choice is yours.

One More Story

In 1900 a hurricane ravaged Galveston Island. Only one old bridge connected the island to the mainland. It served as the evacuation route for thousands. The coming hurricane was spotted, and advance warning was given. There were no visible signs of the storm so the residents of the island decided to do nothing. Six thousand people were killed when the storm hit, and Galveston was destroyed. "Today a strong concrete sea wall stands as a barrier against such disaster, but also as a reminder that a century ago, thousands of people heard a message of warning and chose not to respond." (Adapted from *A Man After God's Heart* by Luis Palau.)

Almost, Later, or Altogether

“King Agrippa, believest thou the prophets? I know that thou believest.

Then Agrippa said unto Paul, Almost thou persuadest me to be a Christian.

And Paul said, I would to God, that not only thou, but also all that hear me this day, were both almost, and altogether such as I am, except these bonds”

Acts 26:27-29.

That’s Not For Me

A pastor was troubled by one of the Deacons in his church. This man was lazy and refused to live correctly. The pastor, hoping that the Word of God would bring about a change in the deacon, preached a sermon designed with him in mind. As the deacon left the church, he commented to the pastor, “Pastor, you really told them today!”

One Sunday only a few members showed up at church. As usual, the deacon was present. The pastor thought, “I’ve really got him today!” and proceeded to preach a message with the deacon in mind. As the deacon left, he said, “Oh, pastor, you really told them today!” The pastor couldn’t believe it.

Finally it happened. It rained so hard that no one showed up for church, except the deacon. The pastor was so excited. Today the deacon would know that the message was for him and he would hopefully respond accordingly. The pastor began preaching with great enthusiasm. He preached against all of the shortcomings of the deacon. As the deacon left the church that day, he said to the pastor, “Oh, pastor! If they had been here, you would have really told them today.” Many times people allow the preaching (of the gospel) to go over their heads and hit their neighbor instead. Our response is, “This is for someone else. It is not for me!”

Don’t Call Me! I’ll Call You!

“And as he reasoned of righteousness, temperance, and judgement to come, Felix trembled, and answered, Go thy way for this time; when I have a convenient season, I will call for thee” (Acts 24:25).

Felix neglected the truth that Paul had given him and procrastinated (put it off until a later time). He was shocked by the penetrating power of the gospel, but when he saw the price of the commitment, he put it off. He wanted Paul to go away and leave him alone. We call his response the “don't call me, I will call you” response. People like this neglect and put off a response until it is a more convenient time. That time never comes! Neglect can be fatal. Some

say, "I will not make a decision right now. I will decide later." Without realizing it they have actually made a decision.

"How shall we escape, if we neglect so great salvation..." (Hebrews 2:3).

Preach For An Immediate Response

We don't need to be afraid to preach the gospel and press people for a decision. Their salvation is extremely important. It is a matter of life or death.

"...Behold, NOW is the accepted time; behold, NOW is the day of salvation." (2 Cor 6:2)

Almost Persuaded Is Not Persuaded!

Agrippa claimed to be "almost" persuaded. Some other words or phrases for "almost" are "nearly, not quite, just about, on the edge of, close to." However, "almost" is not good enough.

We must be both "almost and altogether" (Acts 26:28-29) persuaded just like Paul. "To almost become a Christian is to remain a sinner."

Almost

To almost be clean is to be dirty.

To almost believe is to doubt.

To almost tell the truth is to lie.

To almost win is to lose.

To almost be right is to be wrong.

To almost be straight is to be crooked.

To almost be saved is to be lost.

Just Let Me Keep My Traditions

Many people, when they hear the truth, decide to stay with their traditional religions and even defend them. (See Mark 7:3-9; 13.) They remind us of the story in Jeremiah 36.

"Now the king sat in the winter house in the ninth month: and there was a fire on the hearth burning before him. And it came to pass, that when Jehudi had read three or four leaves, he cut it with the penknife, and cast it into the fire that was on the hearth, until all the roll was consumed in the fire that was on the hearth. Yet they were not afraid..." (Jeremiah 36:22-24).

Some people do basically the same thing. They cast away the portions of the Word of God that they want to neglect, or reject and fail to live according to what the Bible says. They don't even seem to be afraid of accepting part of the Word of God, while rejecting part. A much better response would be to become like Apollos (Acts 18) and the disciples at Ephesus (Acts 19). These people acknowledged and obeyed the further truth for serious seekers.

Blinded

Others seem to not even comprehend what is being preached. Because of their being blinded, they never seem to understand or respond to the gospel. How can this be? Satan has blinded them.

"In whom the god of this world hath blinded the minds of them which believe not, lest the light of the glorious gospel of Christ, who is the image of God, should shine unto them" (2 Corinthians 4:4).

Those That Quickly Received the Gospel

The Book of Acts is full of examples of people who quickly, gladly, received the Word of God; believed it and responded in obedience.

Peter's First Sermon Brings Great Response

"Now when they heard this, they were pricked in their heart, and said unto Peter and to the rest of the apostles, Men and brethren, what shall we do?" (Acts 2:37).
(This is one of the important questions in Acts.)

"Then Peter said unto them, Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins, and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Ghost" (Acts 2:38).

"Then they that gladly received his word were baptized: and the same day there were added unto them about three thousand souls" (Acts 2:41).

Even Religious Leaders Accept Truth

"...And a great company of the priests were obedient to the faith" (Acts 6:7).

Deacon Preaches; Samaria Responds

“And the people with one accord gave heed unto those things which Philip spake...” (Acts 8:6).

Preaching the Gospel to a Congregation of One

“...The eunuch said, See, here is water; what doth hinder me to be baptized?” (Acts 8:36).

Surprise... Gentiles Get Saved

“While Peter yet spake these words, the Holy Ghost fell on all them which heard the word” (Acts 10:44).

**People Respond to Gospel
Before Preachers Chased out of Town**

“...And so spake, that a great multitude, both of the Jews and also of the Greeks believed” (Acts 14:1).

Business Woman Has Open Heart

“And a certain woman named Lydia, a seller of purple...which worshipped God, heard us, whose heart the Lord opened...” (Acts 16:14).

Jailer Has Earth Shaking Experience Business Woman Has Open Heart

“...Sirs, what must I do to be saved?” (Acts 16:30).

(Another of the important questions found in the Book of Acts. It is the most important question of all time.) See Acts 16:33.

**People Respond to Gospel
Before Preachers Chased Out of Town Again**

“And some of them believed, and consorted with Paul and Silas; and of the devout Greeks a great multitude, and of the chief women not a few.” (Acts 17:4)

Every Pastor’s Dream Congregation:

“These were more noble than those in Thessalonica, in that they received the word with all readiness of mind, and searched the scriptures daily, whether those things were so” (Acts 17:11).

Even Believers Believe Again

“When they heard this, they were baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus. And when Paul had laid his hands upon them, the Holy Ghost came upon them; and they spake with tongues, and prophesied”(Acts 19:5-6).

Believing to the Saving of the Soul

(Hebrews 10:39)

“...Sirs, what must I do to be saved?”

And they said, Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved, and thy house.

...and was baptized, he and all his, straightway. And when he had brought them into his house, he set meat before them, and rejoiced, believing in God with all his house”

(Acts 16: 30-31; 33-34.)

“Repeat after me, ‘I accept the Lord Jesus Christ as my personal Savior.’ Now, there you have it, you are now saved.” How often have you heard this said? How often have you said it yourself? This thinking expresses, “only believe and you will be saved.” There are several problems with this type of thinking.

Accepting Jesus or Jesus Accepting

First of all, like A. W. Tozer once said, it requires that Jesus would “stand hat-in-hand awaiting our verdict on Him, instead of kneeling with troubled hearts awaiting his verdict on us.” The picture here depicts Jesus standing before you, the judge, having looked at all the evidence, and waiting (and hoping) that you will give the verdict, “I believe. I accept.” Man is like that; he always wants to be in control. Yes, we have been given the freedom to make our own decisions, but it is God who is in control. Jesus said, “Ye have not chosen me, but I have chosen you...” (John 15:16). He later said, “...but I have chosen you out of the world...” (John 15:19). It is God who will judge us. Paul said that the Lord is the “Righteous Judge” (2 Timothy 4:8). “...The Lord shall judge his people. It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God” (Hebrews 10:30-31).

“And as it is appointed unto men once to die, but after this the judgement” (Hebrews 9:27).

A missionary was trying to translate the Bible into one of the local dialects. He was working on the Book of John and was confused on how to translate the word “believe.” He asked a national working with him on the translation team. They finally came up with the solution. The word that was given meant “the heat in my heart.” This “heat in your heart” will cause you to do something. The word “believe” in many cases in the Bible is an action word (verb). It is speaking about action.

In James 2 we find an entire chapter on faith (believing) producing action (works). James reveals that true faith is evidenced by obeying the Word of God (James 1); by action (James 2); and by words (James 3). James 2:19 reveals a surprise believer.

“Thou believest that there is one God; thou doest well: the devils also believe, and tremble.”

Do you think that the devils’ believing will make salvation for them? The devils will not be saved and will be cast into the lake of fire. (Revelation 20:10) However, the devils believe more than some of us. They are doing as much as some churches say it takes to get saved. They just believe.

The devil knows that we like to have everything “the easy way” so he would like us to believe part of the truth and leave the rest. Daniel Mena in his tract, “There is More to Being Saved than Easy Believism” states that a “half-truth is more dangerous than an outright lie. Only the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth will save a man or woman from sin.” He later counsels, “Eternity is too long to be wrong!”

E. L. Cole in his book, *Strong Men In Tough Times*, states “a person’s beliefs hold the greatest potential for good or harm in life. What is believed about God holds the potential for death or life everlasting.” He admonishes us that “...we must be taught not only to believe but to believe right...belief is the basis for conduct, character and destiny. Wrong conduct is based on wrong believing.” This is because believing produces action. A person who steals believes that he will not get caught. A person who always involves himself in fornication believes that he will not get AIDS.

To “believe” is to commit ourselves to Jesus Christ, considering that he is worthy of our trust and can be counted on to keep his promises. John said, “But these are written, that ye might believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God; and that believing ye might have life through his name” (John 20:31). This Scripture comes immediately following Doubting Thomas meeting with Jesus Christ. Jesus tells him, “...be not faithless, but believing” (John 20:27). Thomas responded, “My Lord and my God” (John 20:28).

When we believe, we entrust and commit ourselves totally to Jesus Christ. It involves a total commitment on our part. “...For I know whom I have believed, and am persuaded that he is able to keep that which I have committed unto him against that day” (2 Timothy 1:12).

“If you are what you have always been, you are not a Christian. A Christian is a new creation.”

Simon the Sorcerer “believed” and was even baptized in Jesus name (Acts 8:13, 16).

“Then Simon himself believed also: and when he was baptized, he continued with Philip, and wondered, beholding the miracles and signs which were done” (Acts 8:13).

Do you think that Simon was saved? He started out believing, was baptized in Jesus name but then started looking, wondering, and beholding the miracles instead of putting his trust and confidence in the God of miracles.

“...For thy heart is not right in the sight of God. Repent therefore of this thy wickedness, and pray God, if perhaps the thought of thine heart may be forgiven thee. For I perceive that thou art in the gall of bitterness, and in the bond of iniquity” (Acts 8:21-23).

When we read the whole story we see that Peter and John came down and prayed for the Samaritans to receive the Holy Ghost. There was at least one in the group who didn't receive it; Simon the Sorcerer. He offered money to receive the power to lay hands on people to receive the Holy Ghost.

Why didn't Simon receive the Holy Ghost? The baptism of the Holy Ghost cannot be given to someone who still follows sinful ways. The Holy Ghost is given to those who turn from sin and wickedness.

Peter's Analysis of the Situation

1. “...Thy money perish with thee” (Acts 8:20). Is someone that is perishing saved?
2. “Thou hast neither part nor lot in this matter...” (Acts 8:21). Why not? Because, a person living in sin and wickedness cannot receive the Holy Ghost.
3. “...Thy heart is not right in the sight of God” (Acts 8:21). Is someone whose heart is not right with God saved?
4. “Repent therefore of this thy wickedness...” (Acts 8:22). Is someone that is wicked saved?
5. “For I perceive that thou art in the gall of bitterness, and in the bond of iniquity”(Acts 8:23). Is someone in the bondage of iniquity saved?

Simon was not right in his heart, and had not totally committed his life to Jesus. Therefore, God rejected him. God accepts those that fear him and work righteousness (Acts 10:35). Simon believed, but we do not have a record that he believed to the saving of his soul.

“Therefore if any man be in Christ, he is a new creature: old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new” (2 Corinthians 5:17).

Believing Requires Action

“But when they believed Philip preaching the things concerning the kingdom of God, and the name of Jesus Christ, they were baptized, both men and women” (Acts 8:12).

In the Bible there was a definite course of action that was followed when someone believed. Let us take a closer look at this course of action. It is here that we will understand God’s plan for man.

Personal Action Plan for Believers

- Hearing the Gospel.
- Accepting and having faith that Jesus is the Savior.
- Accepting that I am a sinner; hopeless without help.
- Repenting of my evil ways. Turning toward God and away from sin.
- Being baptized in the name of Jesus Christ.
- Receiving the baptism of the Holy Ghost.
- Continually obeying God’s commandments and Word. I become a “Doer” of the Word.

Believing through...
Hearing the Gospel.

“For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ: for it is the power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth...” (Romans 1:16).

“He that believeth on me, as the scripture hath said...” (John 7:38).

“...And they believed the scripture, and the word which Jesus had said.... Many believed in his name...” (John 2:22-23).

“...Should hear the word of the gospel, and believe. And God, which knoweth the hearts, bare them witness, giving them the Holy Ghost, even as he did unto us...But we believe that through the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ we shall be saved, even as they” (Acts 15:7-8; 11).

“But be ye doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving your own selves” (James 1:22).

Believing through...
Accepting that Jesus is the Savior.

“The same came for a witness, to bear witness of the Light, that all men through him might believe” (John 1:7).

“For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life” (John 3:16). In John 3:15-18, words with the root word “believe” are used five different times. Prior to these verses you will note that Jesus instructed Nicodemus concerning the necessary action of entering the kingdom of God. “...Except a man be born of water and of the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God” (John 3:5).

“Jesus said unto her, I am the resurrection, and the life: he that believeth in me, though he were dead, yet shall he live” (John 11:25).

“...if ye believe not that I am he, ye shall die in your sins” (John 8:24).

“But without faith it is impossible to please him: for he that cometh to God must believe that he is, and that he is a rewarder of them that diligently seek him” (Hebrews 11:6).

Here we see that we not only believe in God, but diligently seek him.

“...Through his name whosoever believeth in him shall receive remission of sins” (Acts 10:43).

It is so important that we believe correctly about Jesus Christ. If we believe wrongly, we reject Him. To reject Jesus Christ is to reject “Truth” itself (John 14:6).

Believing by...
Accepting that I am a sinner.

“For all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God” (Romans 3:23).

“For the wages of sin is death; but the gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord” (Romans 6:23).

“Behold, I was shapen in iniquity, and in sin did my mother conceive me” (Psalm 51:5).

Believing by...
Repenting of my evil ways.

If we believe that Jesus is the Savior and we are a sinner, we will turn from sin towards God. The initial message of both Jesus Christ and John the Baptist was simple; "Repent" (Matthew 3:2; 4:17). Jesus also said, "...Except ye repent, ye shall all likewise perish" (Luke 13:3).

The disciples were instructed to preach repentance. "And that repentance and remission of sins should be preached in his name among all nations, beginning at Jerusalem" (Luke 24:47).

The Apostles obeyed this command in the Book of Acts. "And the times of this ignorance God winked at; but now commandeth all men every where to repent" (Acts 17:30).

"Repent ye therefore, and be converted, that your sins may be blotted out, when the times of refreshing shall come from the presence of the Lord; and he shall send Jesus Christ, which before was preached unto you" (Acts 3:19-20).

"And how I kept back nothing...and have taught you...repentance toward God, and faith toward our Lord Jesus Christ" (Acts 20:20-21).

Believing by...
Being baptized in the name of Jesus.

"He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved..." (Mark 16:16).

"But when they believed Philip preaching the things concerning the kingdom of God, and the name of Jesus Christ, they were baptized, both men and women" (Acts 8:12). (Did you notice what happened WHEN they believed?)

"And Crispus, the chief ruler of the synagogue, believed on the Lord with all his house; and many of the Corinthians hearing believed, and were baptized" (Acts 18:8). By the way, did you notice what happened when they believed?

The devout man, Cornelius (and others) received the Holy Ghost and immediately commanded to be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ by the Apostle Peter (Acts 10:47-48).

The Philippian jailer believed and was immediately baptized (Acts 16:31,33).

Paul explained to the believers at Ephesus that the Holy Ghost was promised to them that believe in the name of the Lord Jesus.

"When they heard this, they were baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus" (Acts 19:5).

The Apostle Paul (Saul) became a believer on the road to Damascus when he had a blinding encounter with the Lord. Yet, Ananias said, "And now why tarriest thou? Arise, and be baptized, and wash away thy sins, calling on the name of the Lord" (Acts 22:16). It is at water baptism in the name of Jesus Christ that we call on the name of the Lord Jesus.

Believing by...
Receiving the baptism of the
Holy Ghost.

"...If any man thirst, let him come unto me, and drink. He that believeth on me, as the scripture hath said, out of his belly shall flow rivers of living water. (But this spake he of the Spirit, which they that believe on him should receive: for the Holy Ghost was not yet given; because that Jesus was not yet glorified)" (John 7:37-39).

"Who shall tell thee words, whereby thou and all thy house shall be saved. And as I began to speak, the Holy Ghost fell on them, as on us at the beginning. Forasmuch then as God gave them the like gift as he did unto us, who believed on the Lord Jesus Christ..." (Acts 11:14-15; 17).

"...Have ye received the Holy Ghost since ye believed?..." (Acts 19:2). The literal translation of this question reads, "Having believed, did you receive the Holy Spirit?"

"ETERNITY Is Too Long To Be Wrong" -Daniel Mena

It is a fearful thing to walk down a dark passage way and to find that there is no door at the end.

Jesus said, "I am the door..." (John 10:9).

Only One Way

“And the same time there arose no small stir about that way” (Acts 19:23).

A Japanese proverb states that many roads lead up Mount Fuji and all reach the top. This is a way of expressing that all religions have the same results. Many feel they are free to pick their own paths to heaven. Some world religions promote the concept that all doctrinal routes eventually lead to the same God. God allows us the right to choose, but the direction chosen either leads toward God or away from Him.

“Enter ye in at the strait gate: for wide is the gate, and broad is the way, that leadeth to destruction, and many there be which go in thereat: Because strait is the gate, and narrow is the way, which leadeth unto life, and few there be that find it” (Matthew 7:13-14).

“Strive to enter in at the strait gate: for many, I say unto you, will seek to enter in, and shall not be able” (Luke 13:24).

How many times have you heard someone say, “We are all worshipping the same God anyway”?

The early church knew the way, went the way, and led others in the way. “The Way” was one of the earliest names given to the Christian church.

In a world of many choices, people find it difficult to understand that there is only one way.

Paul and the One Way Road

Paul persecuted “The Way” until his roadside encounter with the Lord.

“And desired of him letters to Damascus to the synagogues, that if he found any of this way, whether they were men or women, he might bring them bound unto Jerusalem” (Acts 9:2).

“And I persecuted this way unto the death, binding and delivering into prisons both men and women” (Acts 22:4).

Paul eventually followed “The Way.”

“But this I confess unto thee, that after the way which they call heresy, so worship I the God of my fathers, believing all things which are written in the law and in the prophets” (Acts 24:14).

Paul was called upon to defend himself. He knew Felix was familiar with "The Way." Having knowledge about truth is not the same as embracing it. It is possible to know what the Bible teaches, but not do what it commands. Each person is responsible for the truth he hears.

The *Life Application Bible Commentary (Acts)* suggests three reasons people reject Jesus as the only way.

1. **They are satisfied with their own way.** Like people in a smoke-filled building because they doubt there is a fire, they insist on finding their own way out.
2. **They deny their lostness.** The people in the smoke-filled building insist on debating whether there is a fire.
3. **They believe that there are several valid ways to get to heaven.** They reluctantly agree that there may be a fire in the smoke-filled building, but they think that one escape route is as good as any other. Jesus is the only way to the Father. Some may argue that the way is too narrow. However, it is wide enough for anyone and everyone to enter.

The fly that refuses to heed advice follows the corpse to the grave.
(African Proverb)

Howard Hendricks in *Color Outside the Lines* gives an excellent illustration of what can happen to those who refuse to heed advice. A boat made its way toward its destination. On board were 1,358 people enjoying an afternoon outing. Thirty minutes after leaving the shore, a fire broke out. People started shouting, fearing their lives would be lost. Although the ship was close to shore, the captain steadily kept his course. No one knows why he did not return to land for help. Some say he did not understand the severity of what was taking place. Others say he thought the crew could take care of the situation. He refused to pay attention to the fire alarms, the screaming people, or the smoke and flames. The tragedy resulted in the loss of over a thousand lives. Investigations revealed the crew was unskillful and inspectors had been bribed. Fire buckets had been filled with garbage, and life vests had rotted.

We have been warned of impending fire in hell. We cannot be saved on our own. Salvation through Jesus Christ has provided a way of escape. Shall we heed the Savior's call?

"How shall we escape, if we neglect so great salvation; which at the first began to be spoken by the Lord, and was confirmed unto us by them that heard him" (Hebrews 2:3).

- God sees sin.
- God sees the sinner.
- God judges sin and sinners.
- He provides only one way of escape (salvation).

“Instead of worrying about how limited it sounds to have only one way, we should be saying,
“Thank you, God, for providing a sure way to get to you!”
(Acts Commentary)

“Jesus saith unto him, I am the way, the truth, and the life: no man cometh unto the Father, but by me” (John 14:6).

Jesus is:

- The Way
- The Truth
- The Life

Faith in Jesus and obedience to His commands is the only way to heaven. Obedience leads us upward to heaven. Disobedience leads us downward to hell.

There is no other way to heaven besides Jesus Christ. He is the truth, and we should obey His teachings. He alone provides eternal life.

Man would prefer to choose his own path to heaven. Many try to do that, but it leads to a dead-end street. There are no options. Jesus Christ is the only way.

“To him give all the prophets witness, that through his name whosoever believeth in him shall receive remission of sins” (Acts 10:43).

Peter confronted the religious leaders with this undeniable fact—

“Neither is there salvation in any other: for there is none other name under heaven given among men, whereby we must be saved” (Acts 4:12).

His clear voice echoes through centuries and can still be heard. Jesus Christ is the only way to salvation.

“One Lord, one faith, one baptism” (Ephesians 4:5).

The Bible is very clear that there are only two kinds of people (both in life and in death). (See Romans 3:9-31; 6.) They are:

- Saved
- Lost

Jesus tells us people will be judged because they have not believed on “the name of the only begotten Son of God” (John 3:18).

Only those who call on the name will be saved (Romans 10:13-15). Peter’s Pentecost message contained these words, “Whosoever shall call on the name of the Lord shall be saved” (Acts 2:21).

How do we call on the name of the Lord? Peter further explained, “Then Peter said unto them, Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins, and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Ghost” (Acts 2:38).

Through baptism in Jesus’ name, we call on the name of the Lord.

“Which sometime were disobedient, when once the longsuffering of God waited in the days of Noah, while the ark was a preparing, wherein few, that is, eight souls were saved by water. The like figure whereunto even baptism doth also now save us (not the putting away of the filth of the flesh, but the answer of a good conscience toward God,) by the resurrection of Jesus Christ” (1 Peter 3:20-21).

Noah lived in a sin-filled world. God instructed him to build an ark. He was about to destroy the world by a flood. Noah followed each instruction in detail. He preached and invited people to repent, warning them of the soon coming judgment. They mocked him and thought he was crazy. Up until then, rain had never fallen. Our world is similar. People do not take the soon coming of the Lord seriously. (See 2 Peter 3:4, 9-10; Matthew 24:37-39.)

There was only one door into the ark. Noah and his family entered the ark along with the animals. We have an ark of safety. Jesus Christ is the door.

<p>“I am the door: by me if any man enter in, he shall be saved” (John 10:9).</p>

“Grace be to you and peace from God the Father, and from our Lord Jesus Christ, Who gave himself for our sins, that he might deliver us from this present evil world, according to the will of God and our Father: To whom be glory for ever and ever. Amen” (Galatians 1:3-5).

Further Truth for Serious Seekers

“These were more noble than those in Thessalonica, in that they received the word with all readiness of mind, and searched the scriptures daily, whether those things were so” (Acts 17:11).

A mistake often made when witnessing to people from various denominational backgrounds is the failure to recognize that God has been at work in their lives. They may possess a basic relationship with God already. At times, our arrogant declaration of truth has a negative effect on people. One person referred to this as the "We got it all, and you have nothing!" attitude.

Ed Silviso in *Prayer Evangelism* says, “Preaching the truth without love is like giving someone a good kiss when you have bad breath. No matter how good your kiss is, all the recipient will remember is your bad breath! This is what happens when, in anger or disgust, we tell the lost how terrible and depraved their lives are and how they are surely going to hell. Even though this may be true, our negative approach blocks and distorts the...message...”

We need to be longsuffering when dealing with people because we do not want them to perish (Acts 17:30). Care should be taken to be sensitive to the feelings of others while presenting the truth. As long as growth is seen, and truth has not been rejected, we should continue witnessing. There still is hope.

Training is needed to determine where people are in their spiritual development and sensitivity to present information at appropriate levels of understanding.

“The fruit of the righteous is a tree of life; and he that winneth souls is wise” (Proverbs 11:30).

“Tolerance” is one of the prevailing attitudes in the world today. Everyone wants to do his or her own thing. There is political tolerance; tolerance of sexual orientation; and tolerance of different ways of thinking. There is also religious tolerance that says, “It doesn’t matter which religion you follow. We are all worshipping the same God.” The cry seems to be, “Accept me as I am!” In witnessing it is good to accept people as they are, but we cannot leave them there to perish. We should be always mindful that we are trying to pull others up to our level of spiritual understanding, rather than being pulled down to their lack of understanding.

Throughout the Book of Acts, the apostles encountered people with various levels of spiritual understanding and development. What did they do? Did they say, “It doesn’t matter. We all serve the same God. You believe what you believe, and I’ll just believe what I believe”?

They identified the person’s spiritual development and “began at the same scripture, and preached unto him Jesus” (Acts 8:35).

Apollos

“And he began to speak boldly in the synagogue: whom when Aquilla and Priscilla had heard, they took him unto them, and expounded unto him the way of God more perfectly” (Acts 18:26).

Apollos—

- Was an eloquent man.
- Was mighty in the Scriptures.
- Was instructed in the way of the Lord.
- Was fervent in the Spirit.
- Taught diligently the things of the Lord.
- Spoke boldly in the synagogue.

That sounds like a good candidate for the church, if not the ministry. BUT there was one problem. He knew only the baptism of John. Therefore, Aquilla and Priscilla “expounded unto him the way of God more perfectly” (Acts 18:26). They were able to recognize Apollos’ relationship with God and spiritual development, and they knew that they had more to offer him. Apollos possessed an admirable quality. He was open to further truth for serious seeker.

Cornelius

Cornelius, a centurion of the Italian band looks like a man any pastor would want in his church. Cornelius—

- Was a devout man.
- Feared God with his entire house.
- Gave MUCH money to the people.
- Prayed to God always.
- Saw visions.
- Was a just man.
- Had a good report among all the nations of the Jews.
- Saw an angel.
- Fasted.

Cornelius would be a welcome prospect in almost any church. But, Cornelius was apparently not saved. He even wanted to worship Peter. He was interested in further truth for serious seekers. He was told to send for Peter, “Who shall tell thee words, whereby thou and all thy house shall be saved” (Acts 11:14). Peter came to preach to Cornelius and his household. While

he was preaching, the Holy Ghost was poured out on them. They spoke with tongues, and Peter commanded them to be baptized in the name of the Lord (Acts 10:44-48).

Cornelius and Apollos both possessed a seeking heart. They lived in the light (the understanding) that they had, and God gave them more truth and understanding. God honors a seeking, willing heart.

“And ye shall seek me, and find me, when ye shall search for me with all your heart. And I will be found of you, saith the LORD” (Jeremiah 29:13-14).

Lydia

One day Paul spoke at a ladies’ prayer meeting by the riverside (Acts 16). Lydia, a seller of purple, was there. Lydia—

- Was praying.
- Worshipped God.
- Had an open heart.

Thank the Lord for an “open heart.” She listened to what Paul had to say and was immediately baptized.

Disciples at Ephesus

In Acts 19 we find “certain disciples.” Paul asked them, “Have ye received the Holy Ghost since ye believed?”

These disciples of John had not heard that the baptism of the Holy Ghost that John preached had come. Because they were “serious seekers,” they were willing to receive “further truth.” They were baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus (Acts 19:5) and received the Holy Ghost.

Many other examples could be given of people in the Book of Acts who desired further truth. They obeyed the instruction of John 5:39, “Search the scriptures; for in them ye think ye have eternal life: and they are they which testify of me.”

Bereans

The Bereans mentioned in our Key Scripture are models for all. They wanted all that God had prepared for them. They did not just accept what was being said to them, but they examined it carefully in light of the Scriptures. They received the word with all readiness of mind and then

searched the Scriptures to see if what they had heard was correct. Once they were sure that it was true, they believed. They accepted further truth for serious seekers.

“Now the Bereans were of more noble character than the Thessalonians, for they received the message with great eagerness and examined the Scriptures every day to see if what Paul said was true” (Acts 17:11 *NIV*).

Ready to Share

*“And he began to speak boldly in the synagogue: whom when Aquila and Priscilla had heard, they took him unto them, and expounded unto him the way of God more perfectly”
(Acts 18:26).*

Aquila and Priscilla quickly realized Apollos’s message was incomplete. Because of their sensitivity, Apollos accepted truth, became an outstanding preacher of the gospel, and was greatly used in Corinth.

“They invited him to their home and explained to him the way of God more adequately” (Acts 18:26, *NIV*).

“They took him aside and explained to him the way of God more accurately” (Acts 18:26, *NKJV*).

Several Bible translations (*NKJV, NASB, NASB Updated*) say, “They took him aside.” The *NIV* declares, “They invited him to their home.” Clearly, they took him to a private place, away from where he would be embarrassed, and explained the way of God more adequately and accurately to him.

Aquila and Priscilla were willing to invest time in Apollos. His success was not a threat to them. They were willing to rescue him with truth, rather than throw him a short rope while he floated at a far distance.

Andrew Fox in *The Apprentice Leader* says, “If a man was drowning twenty feet away from your boat and you threw him a fifteen foot rope, an observer might say that you went more than half way to saving the man! But if he drowned what was achieved?”

Aquila and Priscilla did not:

- Compromise the truth.
- Condemn Apollos to hell.
- Humiliate him publicly.
- Put down his relationship with God.

They were not intimidated by Apollos’s long list of qualifications.

They:

- Were ready to give a fuller explanation of the way to God.
- Looked for opportunities to share the truth.
- Were sensitive to the correct timing and place to reveal truth to Apollos.
- Understood what it meant to serve and fear the Lord; so they persuaded others. (See 2 Corinthians 5:11.)

Let us look at some reasons why Aquila and Priscilla were not intimidated (and why intimidation exists). Through this study, we will learn that we have no reason to be panic-stricken when witnessing.

- They knew the truth and its power to set people free (John 8:32).
- Shyness was replaced with boldness (Acts 4:20, 29).
- They did not compare themselves with Apollos. When we compare ourselves with others, we become concerned with social rank, talents, educational level, speaking ability, or popularity. This produces a lack of confidence, fear, and intimidation. God has not given us a spirit of fear and intimidation. (See 2 Timothy 1:7.)

“Such confidence as this is ours through Christ before God. Not that we are competent in ourselves to claim anything for ourselves, but our competence comes from God” (2 Corinthians 3:4-5, *NIV*).

“We do not dare to classify or compare ourselves with some who commend themselves. When they measure themselves by themselves and compare themselves with themselves, they are not wise. We, however, will not boast beyond proper limits, but will confine our boasting to the field God has assigned to us, a field that reaches even to you” (2 Corinthians 10:12-13, *NIV*).

- People become intimidated when they are concerned about their own glory, and what people say about them (Luke 6:26). They long for the praises of men and want to be accepted by others. We should be more anxious about giving glory to God, preferring and caring for others (Romans 12:10), and being accepted in God’s sight (Romans 4:20-22). Our goal is not popularity, but obedience to the voice and will of God.

“Am I now trying to win the approval of men, or of God? Or am I trying to please men? If I were still trying to please men, I would not be a servant of Christ” (Galatians 1:10, *NIV*).

- The intimidated look inward at themselves, outward to others, and decide, “I cannot do it.” This conclusion was reached by ten of the twelve spies sent into the Promised Land (Numbers 13:31).

We must look upward to God (Hebrews 12:2; Numbers 13:30). He is able (Ephesians 3:20).

- People become intimidated when they have a low image of who they are in Christ (Numbers 12:31).

Apollos possessed a teachable spirit and was receptive to truth, but that was not enough. Aquila and Priscilla had to step forward, ready to share.

Doctrine Matters

“And they continued stedfastly in the apostles’ doctrine and fellowship, and in breaking of bread, and in prayers” (Acts 2:42).

A mother remarked to her small son, “This Sunday we get to start new Sunday school lessons on doctrine.”

The boy replied, “Doctrine! Yuk! It sounds like something for adults—not for kids.”

When the pastor announces a series or message on doctrine a number of things go through the minds of some of the members. Boring. Snoring. Doctrine—bad-tasting medicine. (Ever notice that the worst tasting medicine is usually the medicine that is best for you?) Some people hope they can use it as an excuse to visit in-laws or to stay home from church and wash clothes or clean house. But the study of doctrine is important. It does not have to be mind-numbing. The verdict of whether the teaching is boring or interesting depends on the lips of the speaker and the heart of the hearer.

Preachers and teachers can present doctrine and theology in simple, practical ways. Do not put your people to sleep.

Do not attempt to teach or preach above the heads (or above the understanding) of your people. Some think that proves superior intelligence.

James Denney said, “The man who shoots above the target does not thereby prove that he has superior ammunition. He simply proves that he is not an accurate shot.”

Paul said, “Seeing then that we have such hope, we use great plainness of speech” (2 Corinthians 3:12).

Some like doctrine—new doctrine. They are like the people of Athens who said, “May we know what this new doctrine, whereof thou speakest, is?” (Acts 17:19).

“For all the Athenians and strangers which were there spent their time in nothing else, but either to tell, or to hear some new thing” (Acts 17:21).

The preacher in Ecclesiastes said, “There is no new thing under the sun” (Ecclesiastes 1:3).

Every new doctrine that man manufactures tends to be the rebirth of some ancient heresy.

Paul advised Timothy, "Take heed unto thyself, and unto the doctrine; continue in them: for in doing this thou shalt both save thyself, and them that hear thee" (1 Timothy 4:16).

What is doctrine?

"Doctrine" is defined as "teaching." What a church teaches is considered to be their doctrine.

The apostle's doctrine was the teaching of the apostles.

"And they continued stedfastly in the apostles' doctrine" (Acts 2:42).

They continued teaching and preaching doctrine until it spread throughout Jerusalem.

"Saying, Did not we straitly command you that ye should not teach in this name? and, behold, ye have filled Jerusalem with your doctrine, and intend to bring this man's blood upon us" (Acts 5:28).

Later the rulers of one city lamented, crying this testimony, "These that have turned the world upside down are come hither also" (Acts 17:6).

Every activity of the church can basically be divided into one of two categories.

Evangelism	Gospel or Good News.	Getting people saved.
Edification	Doctrine.	Keeping people saved.

Where does doctrine come from?

Doctrine is derived from the Word of God. The word "doctrine" is mentioned fifty-six times throughout its pages.

"All scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness" (2 Timothy 3:16).

Someone has explained this verse as follows:

Doctrine	What is right?
Reproof	What is not right?
Correction	How to get right?
Instruction	How to stay right?

Why study doctrine?

There is safety in knowing what you believe. What you believe is of eternal significance. When you know what you believe, you will not fall into the pit of false doctrine. Your convictions and beliefs will protect and direct you. The knowledge of what is right will quickly uncover what is wrong.

“Finally, my brethren, rejoice in the Lord. To write the same things to you, to me indeed is not grievous, but for you it is safe” (Philippians 3:1).

Doctrines become roots in our lives. They provide us with a strong anchor. No one wants to be a tree without roots, or a house built on the sand.

People, churches, and organizations can drift from the truth. One man made a remark to a friend that a Christian college was now teaching all the branches of learning.

His young friend responded, “Yes, it now has all of the branches and none of the roots.”

It is possible to teach and preach things that are only branches of the tree—non-essential but what people like to hear. It is imperative to preach on subjects that are roots and anchors of Christianity.

“If ye continue in the faith grounded and settled, and be not moved away from the hope of the gospel, which ye have heard, and which was preached to every creature which is under heaven; whereof I Paul am made a minister” (Colossians 1:23).

Doctrine helps find God’s way and illuminates His plan and will for man.

A study of doctrine should answer:

- What is truth?
- What do I believe?
- Why do I believe this?
- What difference does it make?
- How do I explain this to others?

Paul had these instructions for the young preachers he trained:

- “As I besought thee to abide still at Ephesus, when I went into Macedonia, that thou mightest charge some that they teach no other doctrine” (1 Timothy 1:3).
- “Till I come, give attendance to reading, to exhortation, to doctrine” (1 Timothy 4:13).

- “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” (2 Timothy 4:3).
- “Holding fast the faithful word as he hath been taught, that he may be able by sound doctrine both to exhort and to convince the gainsayers” (Titus 1:9).
- “But speak thou the things which become sound doctrine” (Titus 2:1).

Why is doctrine important?

Richard Davis in *Bible Doctrine: Foundation of the Church* comments on the importance of doctrine: “It’s as important as water to fish, giving them a channel in which they may navigate and live and find sustenance. It is as important as an engine to an automobile, enabling it to be operative and useful. It is as important as a map to a person who is lost, enabling him to find his way.”

Phillips Brooks in *Yale Lectures on Preaching* says this concerning doctrinal preaching.

“No preaching ever had any strong power that was not the preaching of doctrine. The preachers that have moved and held men have always preached doctrine...Preach doctrine, preach all the doctrine you know, and learn forever more and more; but preach it always, not that men may believe it, but that men may be saved by believing it.”

Andrew Blackwood (as quoted in *Biblical Preaching for Today’s World* by Lloyd M. Perry) said, “In the past every evangelistic movement blessed of God has come largely through preaching doctrine.”

Do you want to make an impact on the world? Do you want to be prepared for heaven? Doctrine matters!

Kevin J. Conner in *The Foundations of Christian Doctrine* was helpful in the formation of this lesson. He says believers need to know:

- “WHO they believe.
- WHAT they believe, and
- WHY they believe it.”

He further explains that all religions are founded on doctrines and that the “teachings received, believed, obeyed, and continually practiced determine:

1. Character—what we are.
2. Behavior—what we do.
3. Destiny—where we go.

Strong character is determined by strong beliefs, and clearly defined doctrine makes for clear cut convictions.”

According to Conner all doctrine proceeds from three sources: God, man, and Satan. A close look at Matthew 16:13-23 will illustrate this point.

- **God:** (Matthew 16:16-17). See also Proverbs 4:2; Hebrews 6:1; Titus 2:10; Matthew 7:28.
- **Man:** (Matthew 16:13-14). See also Matthew 15:9; Hebrews 13:9; Colossians 2:8.
- **Satan:** (Matthew 16:21-23). See also 1 Timothy 4:1-3

A Look at Three Generations

“Save yourselves from this generation that has gone astray!” (Acts 2:40, NLT).

Bruce Wilkinson teaches on “The Three Chairs,” representing a three-generation principle. This concept is expanded in his book, *First Hand Faith*, and has deep implications for Christians. Wilkinson believes these generational insights from Scripture are universal truths. They exist for all time and all people. His teachings serve as the basis for this lesson and a strong warning against becoming a generation that has gone astray.

It is possible for dynamic churches to shift from godliness to godlessness, from vibrant faith to empty faith. When a church moves toward the first generation, it is called a red-hot, on fire for God, revival church. But as a church moves into the third generation, it becomes a liberal lukewarm, cold church. Worse yet—*Ichabod*—“the glory of the Lord has departed” could be written over its door.

First Generation **The Life of Joshua** *Commitment*

- They knew God.
- They had first-hand faith.
- They had the works of God in their midst and saw tremendous miracles.
- They knew what they believed and understood why they believed it.
- They served God.
- They did what was right in God’s eyes.

“Now therefore fear the LORD, and serve him in sincerity and in truth: and put away the gods which your fathers served on the other side of the flood, and in Egypt; and serve ye the LORD. And if it seem evil unto you to serve the LORD, choose you this day whom ye will serve; whether the gods which your fathers served that were on the other side of the flood, or the gods of the Amorites, in whose land ye dwell: but as for me and my house, we will serve the LORD” (Joshua 24:14-15).

Second Generation **The Elders that Outlived Joshua** *Compromise*

- They knew about God.
- They had second-hand faith.

- They did not have the works of God, but they had seen and heard about them.
- They knew what they believed, but did not understand why they believed it. They were not committed to it and wanted to try other things.
- They served the God of their fathers, but lacked a personal relationship.

“And the people served the LORD all the days of Joshua, and all the days of the elders that outlived Joshua, who had seen all the great works of the LORD, that he did for Israel” (Judges 2:7). (See also see Joshua 24:31.)

Arnold Cook said, “The second generation holds its convictions less fervently than pioneers...With each succeeding generation, isolation from the world becomes more difficult.”

Curtis Young in the *Apostolic World Report* (August-September 2001) wrote, “History is replete with evidence that people and churches change. Sometimes those changes remove the heart and soul of the church so that the church is actually dead even though the social machinery continues to operate. The church in Sardis is a good example. Sardis existed on past glory, while claiming to be alive. The verdict of God was that it was dead.” (See Revelation 3:1.)

He continues, “It is possible to predict the future of a movement by its direction. Many are therefore concerned because they see men of influence who appear to be moving or drifting toward compromise where the Oneness of God is a non-issue, and where matters of holiness and separation are dismissed as bondage...To lose any part of the Apostolic message or any of its distinguishing characteristics would be the ultimate compromise. The greater tragedy for the church is not death but compromise. In fact, death is preferable to compromise. But we do not have to chose between a dead church and a compromising church...Instead of giving heed to the voice of compromise that beckons us...let us follow the admonition of the scripture which tells us to, ‘earnestly contend for the faith which was once delivered unto the saints’” (Jude 3).

The second generation failed. They knew the landmarks were there, but had forgotten their purpose.

Third Generation

The Generation that Did Not Know

Confusion

- They did not know God. (Wilkinson calls this the “Conflict” or “Chaos” generation.)
- They did not know the works and wonders of God.
- They had no faith—a faithless, godless generation.
- They grew up in an environment where the people had moved away from God.
- They did not know what to believe.
- They did evil in the sight of the Lord.
- They served other gods.

Why do you think there arose a generation that did not know the Lord? Parents never instilled truth in them or worse, never told them.

Albert Outler (as quoted in *Evangelism for a Changing World*) said, "It is as if, once upon a time, an earlier generation understood it all and then forgot to tell their children—who never asked."

"And also all that generation were gathered unto their fathers: and there arose another generation after them, which knew not the LORD, nor yet the works which he had done for Israel" (Judges 2:10).

"(For in those days Israel had no king, so everyone did whatever he wanted to-whatever seemed right in his own eyes)" (Judges 17:6, *TLB*).

Richard Wilke in his book *And Are We Yet Alive?* said, "Our sickness is more serious than we first suspected. We are in trouble, you and I...We thought we were just drifting, like a sailboat on a dreamy day. Instead we are wasting away...Once we were a...revival...fired by the Spirit, running the race set before us like a sprinter trying to win the prize...Now we are tired, listless, fueled only by the nostalgia of former days, walking with a droop, eyes on the ground, discouraged, putting one foot ahead of the other like a tired old man who remembers, but who can no longer perform."

Let these words never be written about us and the churches we represent.

"(Wherefore I was grieved with that generation, and said, They do alway err in their heart; and they have not known my ways. So I swear in my wrath, They shall not enter into my rest.) Take heed, brethren, lest there be in any of you an evil heart of unbelief, in departing from the living God. But exhort one another daily, while it is called To day; lest any of you be hardened through the deceitfulness of sin" (Hebrews 3:10-13).

Where Do You Stand?

Which generation are you a part of? Are you closer to God today than you were last year?

Compare where your church was five or ten years ago to where it is today. Are you moving toward commitment, compromise, or worst of all, confusion?

"As for me and my house, we will serve the LORD" (Joshua 24:15).

I have chosen whom I am going to serve. Have you? I am going to be committed.

"I know thy works: behold, I have set before thee an open door, and no man can shut it: for thou hast a little strength, and hast kept my word, and hast not denied my name" (Revelation 3:8).

The following was found among a young African pastor's papers after he was martyred for the cause of Christ.

"I am part of the fellowship of the unashamed. I have Holy Spirit power. The die has been cast. I have stepped over the line. The decision has been made. I am a disciple of His and I won't look back, let up, slow down, back away, or be still.

"My past is redeemed. My present makes sense. My future is secure. I am done and finished with low living, sight walking, small planning, smooth knees, colorless dreams, tamed visions, mundane talking, cheap living, and dwarfed goals.

"I no longer need preeminence, prosperity, position, promotions, plaudits, or popularity. I don't have to be right, or first, tops, recognized, praised, or rewarded. I live by faith, lean on His presence, walk by patience, lift by prayer, and labor by Holy Spirit power.

"My face is set. My gait is fast. My goal is heaven. My road may be narrow, my way rough, my companions few, but my guide is reliable and my mission is clear.

"I will not be bought, compromised, detoured, lured away, turned back, deluded or delayed.

"I will not flinch in the face of sacrifice or hesitate in the presence of the adversary. I will not negotiate at the table of the enemy, ponder at the pool of popularity, or meander in the maze of mediocrity.

"I won't give up, shut up, or let up until I have stayed up, stored up, prayed up, paid up, and preached up for the cause of Christ.

"I am a disciple of Jesus. I must give until I drop, preach until all know, and work until He comes. And when He does come for His own, He'll have no problem recognizing me. My colors will be clear!"

"Only be careful, and watch yourselves closely so that you do not forget the things your eyes have seen or let them slip from your heart as long as you live. Teach them to your children and to their children after them" (Deuteronomy 4:9, *NIV*).

Contenders of the Faith

“For I know this, that after my departing shall grievous wolves enter in among you, not sparing the flock. Also of your own selves shall men arise, speaking perverse things, to draw away disciples after them. Therefore watch, and remember, that by the space of three years I ceased not to warn every one night and day with tears” (Acts 20:29-31).

Men of God invest time, prayers, fasting, tears, preaching and teaching into people in order to build the church. One of their greatest fears is that after they have given their lives for the gospel the fruit of their labors will be spoiled; that wolves will creep in and run away with the sheep. These wolves are influenced by their selfish desires of obtaining riches and making a name for themselves. They “pervert” the gospel message. Some stray from the fundamental and foundational Bible doctrines and lean toward humanistic ideas, manmade teachings, modernistic and materialistic thinking, and become more like a social club than a church.

As you look at the Epistles that the Apostle Paul wrote, you will find that they did stray from the teachings they had received.

The wise man, Solomon, admonishes us to “buy the truth and sell it not” (Proverbs 23:23). In another lesson we have already mentioned that the kingdom of heaven is like a treasure that is hid in a field. When a man finds it he sells all that he has and buys it. It is also like a merchant who will sell all that he has in order to purchase the “one pearl of great price” (Matthew 13:44-46).

The truth that we have received is an inheritance that is passed from generation to generation. We should be forever thankful that we have found the truth; possess it carefully; spread it liberally; and “..earnestly contend for the faith which was once delivered unto the saints” (Jude 3). In Jude, the writer (considered to be the half brother of Jesus Christ) continues to warn us that we should “...put you in remembrance, though ye once knew this, how that the Lord, having saved the people out of the land of Egypt, afterward destroyed them that believed not” (Jude 5).

The Book of Jude was written to warn the church about false teachers, ungodly influences, and admonish them to be “contenders of the faith.”

We need to be like the man who was drowning in the ocean. A ship passing by threw out the lifeline to him; he grabbed it and was pulled into the ship (the place of safety). Once on the vessel the ship’s crew encouraged him to let go of the lifeline. He continued to grasp tightly the rope and refused to let it go.

The captain pleaded, “You are now safe. Let go of the rope.” The man persistently refused.

Again he pleaded, this time trying to loosen the man's grip on the rope. The man fought back adamantly and said, "I will not let it go. When I grabbed onto this rope I grabbed it for life."

You and I were also sinking in sin (Psalm 40:2) and were brought by the Great Rescuer, Jesus Christ, into the ship. How can we let go of the lifeline now? We must remain in the ship in order to be saved (Acts 27:31).

In Hebrews 2:1-3, we are warned against drifting away from the faith. As believers allowing the gospel to slip away from us we find ourselves drifting downstream and having no anchor (Hebrews 6:19) to hold us secure. We have, through neglect, let go of the lifeline.

"Therefore we ought to give the more earnest heed to the things which we have heard, lest at any time we should let them slip. How shall we escape if we neglect so great salvation..." (Hebrews 2:1,3).

"If ye continue in the faith grounded and settled, and be not moved away from the hope of the gospel, which ye have heard, and which was preached to every creature which is under heaven; whereof I Paul am made a minister" (Colossians 1:23).

"I marvel that ye are so soon removed from him that called you into the grace of Christ unto another gospel: ...and would pervert the gospel of Christ. But though we, or an angel from heaven, preach any other gospel unto you than that which we have preached unto you, let him be accursed" (Galatians 1:6-9). He felt so strongly about the last statement that it is repeated again. "As we said before, so say I now again, If any man preach any other gospel unto you than that ye have received, let him be accursed" (Galatians 1:9).

The Book of Deuteronomy includes the farewell messages of Moses to the people of God. They had come to the end of wandering in the wilderness and were about to pass into the Promised Land. Numbers records their wandering in the wilderness for over thirty-nine years and Deuteronomy records just one month of time. This book was to be read to the people every seven years (Deuteronomy 31:10-13). Throughout the book of Deuteronomy, the people are admonished to "remember and forget not." This book is often quoted in the New Testament and was also the book that Jesus quoted from when He was tempted. The word "forget" is mentioned nine times in the book of Deuteronomy. Another eight times we are told to "take heed." Fifty two times we are ordered to "possess" the land. In Luke 17:32, we are told to "remember Lot's wife." She was grabbed by grace but still not saved. She was escorted by angels out of Sodom and Gomorrah but still looked back. Remember, "...no man, having put his hand to the plough, and looking back, is fit for the kingdom of God" (Luke 9:62). We must rather "press toward the mark" (Phil. 3:14). We must do what the early church did. "They continued stedfastly in the apostles' doctrine..." (Acts 2:42).

Unchanging Word for the Ever-changing World

James G. Poitras

“Ye shall not add unto the word which I command you, neither shall ye diminish aught from it, that ye may keep the commandments of the Lord your God which I command you” (Deuteronomy 4:2).

- Read also Revelation 22:18-19.

“Only take heed to thyself, and keep thy soul diligently, lest thou forget the things which thine eyes have seen, and lest they depart from thy heart all the days of thy life: but teach them thy sons, and thy sons’ sons” (Deuteronomy 4:9).

“Take heed unto yourselves, lest ye forget...” (Deuteronomy 4:23).

Just a Thought:

Consider the postage stamp.

Its usefulness consists in the ability to stick to one thing till it gets there.

(Josh Billings)

Keep Believing In What You Know Is True! Stick to it! You’re going to make it!

Preventing Truth Decay

“And they continued steadfastly in the apostles’ doctrine” (Acts 2:42).

“Take heed unto thyself, and unto the doctrine; continue in them: for in doing this thou shalt both save thyself, and them that hear thee” (1 Timothy 4:16).

“Teach no other doctrine” (1 Timothy 1:3).

One of the distinguishing characteristics of the early church was their allegiance to the apostle’s doctrine. They believed and aggressively spread it everywhere. They were steadfast—unwavering, unswerving, unfaltering, and resolute in preaching the truth delivered to them (Jude 3).

The Apostle Paul, early in church history, warned against foreseeable truth decay. “Decay” refers to slowly but surely losing original form, quality, value, or strength.

“And now beware! Be sure that you feed and shepherd God’s flock-his church, purchased with his blood-for the Holy Spirit is holding you responsible as overseers. I know full well that after I leave you, false teachers, like vicious wolves, will appear among you, not sparing the flock. Some of you yourselves will distort the truth in order to draw a following” (Acts 20:28-30, *TLB*).

Preachers with truth decay have one goal in mind. They distort truth to get a following. Their crooked, distorted preaching eats away like cancer and spreads like gangrene. Preaching in error misses the mark, swerves from truth, and undermines faith (2 Timothy 2:16-18). Gangrene poisons the entire body. Circulation ceases. Life stops. False doctrine is fatal.

“For we are not, like so many, [like hucksters making a trade of] peddling God’s Word [shortchanging and adulterating the divine message]; but like [men] of sincerity and the purest motive, as [commissioned and sent] by God, we speak [His message] in Christ (the Messiah), in the [very] sight and presence of God” (2 Corinthians 2:17, *AMP*).

What is a huckster? They are con artists or tricksters. Huckster-preachers use the Word of God as business. Whatever brings in finances becomes their latest rave of preaching. They look at the Gospel as a way to making a prosperous living. They say exactly what the crowd wants to hear.

Consider the man who mixes water with petrol, or dilutes wine with water, or a market woman who places the best fruit on top of the basket. There you have it—a huckster. Huckster-preachers mix their own ideas with the Word of God. They have corrupt minds and wholesale counterfeit faith. A preacher who deliberately forces the Word of God to say more than is meant, or mingles what is contaminated with what is uncontaminated has become a huckster, a

promoter of truth decay. It is dangerous to get someone to believe the Bible teaches something it doesn't. God's Word is pure. Keep it pure. Deliver it pure! We are guides, not misguides.

C. H. Spurgeon said, "And, oh, beloved, there is one thing that I dread above all others—lest I should ever handle the Word of God so as to persuade some of you that you are saved when you are not."

Huckster-preachers are popular today. However, they are wasting their time. Only truth transforms lives and prepares them for heaven. Distorted preaching sounds good but comes up short in eternity.

Steve Lawson provides this quote, "Noah's message from the steps going up to the Ark was not, "Something good is going to happen to you!" Amos was not confronted by a high priest of Israel for proclaiming, "Confession is possession!" Jeremiah was not put into the pit for preaching, "I'm O. K., you're O. K." Daniel was not put into the lion's den for telling people, "Possibility thinking will move mountains!" John the Baptist was not forced to preach in the wilderness and eventually beheaded because he preached, "Smile, God loves you!" The two prophets of the tribulation will not be killed for preaching, "God is in heaven and all is right with the world."

What do you do with a huckster-preacher? Tell him, "Shut up!" Refuse to listen to him. Advise him to sell insurance, used cars, or work in the market as a rewarding alternative. Paul said, "They must be silenced. By their wrong teaching, they have already turned whole families away from the truth. Such teachers only want your money. One of their own men, a prophet from Crete, has said about them, "The people of Crete are all liars; they are cruel animals and lazy gluttons" (Titus 1:11-12, *NLT*).

"Therefore seeing we have this ministry, as we have received mercy, we faint not; But have renounced the hidden things of dishonesty, not walking in craftiness, nor handling the word of God deceitfully; but by manifestation of the truth commending ourselves to every man's conscience in the sight of God" (2 Corinthians 4:1-2).

Truth-preaching has never been popular but it has eternal rewards. We have been given a trust—the Word and the saints of God. The phrase "handling deceitfully" originally meant "to catch with bait, to ensnare, to corrupt with error." Never spoil the treasure by corrupting it through distorting the Word of God. Set it forth plainly. Never aim to deceive or make a false impression. Start where the Bible starts. Stop where it stops. Avoid truth decay. It destroys spiritual well-being.

"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" (2 Timothy 4:3-4).

Some, having itching ears, will look for teachers who say what they want to hear, things that will suit their liking. They are looking for a preacher to rub, scratch or tickle their ears. They will turn away from listening to truth.

"A horrible and shocking thing has happened in this land — the prophets give false prophecies, and the priests rule with an iron hand. And worse yet, my people like it that way! But what will you do when the end comes?" (Jeremiah 5:30-31, *NLT*).

"They tell the prophets, "Shut up! We don't want any more of your reports." They say, "Don't tell us the truth. Tell us nice things. Tell us lies. Forget all this gloom. We have heard more than enough about your 'Holy One of Israel.' We are tired of listening to what he has to say. "This is the reply of the Holy One of Israel: "Because you despise what I tell you and trust instead in oppression and lies, calamity will come upon you suddenly. It will be like a bulging wall that bursts and falls. In an instant it will collapse and come crashing down. You will be smashed like a piece of pottery — shattered so completely that there won't be a piece left that is big enough to carry coals from a fireplace or a little water from the well" (Isaiah 30:10-14, *NLT*).

The bottom line is, "Truth is fallen in the street" (Isaiah 59:14).

Paul knew there would be truth decay. He looked in the future and saw a day when:

1. Errors enter the church.
2. People turn from truth.
3. They look for false teachers.
4. They substitute God's Word with fables and stories.

The time will come when they will not want to listen to sound doctrine. In such times what should the man of God do? Preach the Word. Preach it when it is convenient and inconvenient. Preach it when it is accepted and when it is rejected. Reprove, rebuke, exhort, and teach doctrine. Do not be tempted to preach the latest ear-tickler. Do it patiently, and keep doing it, whether it's in season or not.

"Preach the word; be instant in season, out of season; reprove, rebuke, exhort with all longsuffering and doctrine" (2 Timothy 4:2).

"That we henceforth be no more children, tossed to and fro, and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the sleight of men, and cunning craftiness, whereby they lie in wait to deceive; But speaking the truth in love, may grow up into him in all things, which is the head, even Christ" (Ephesians 4:14-15).

Avoid being tossed to and fro driven by the winds of false doctrine. There needs to be a firm route. False teachers cause people to be like a ship on a restless sea thrown about in the wind and waves, not having an anchor.

The “sleight of men” refers to trickery. The word used here refers to the game or gambling of chance. The player throws the dice in such a way that the good numbers appear. Salvation will never come by chance. We examine truth, accept it, and live by it. A bank teller doesn’t have to study every counterfeit bill in order to know what is counterfeit. He studies the genuine.

“And how I kept back nothing that was profitable unto you, but have shewed you, and have taught you publickly, and from house to house” (Acts 20:20).

Adrian Rogers said (as quoted in *Famine in the Land* by Steven Lawson), “It is better to be divided by truth than to be united in error. It is better to speak the truth that hurts and then heals, than falsehood that comforts and then kills. It is not love and it is not friendship if we fail to declare the whole counsel of God. It is better to be hated for telling truth than to be loved for telling a lie...It’s better to stand alone with the truth than to be wrong with a multitude.”

Paul said, “I have kept nothing back!” He did not disguise or hide the truth. He declared the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth. Why would a preacher hold back from declaring the whole counsel of God?

1. Fear of loss of reputation, financial support, or that the preaching will not be accepted.
2. Desire for popularity. Everyone wants to be liked and preach what people like.
3. People don’t like doctrine. The Word of God is like medicine. You may not enjoy the taste but it is good for you.
4. Sin in the life of a preacher, or failure to follow truth hinders preaching it. For example: Being in adultery makes it complicated to preach about immorality. Never being baptized in Jesus’ name makes it difficult to teach on that subject. A preacher must first be a partaker.
5. A preacher who does not have a love for, and a commitment to, truth will not diligently preach it.

How can truth be kept back from the people? People need a balanced diet, physically and spiritually. Spiritual nutrition can be withheld by not preaching a pertinent doctrine, avoiding it, giving it little importance, or making it difficult to comprehend.

“Speaking of this as he does in all of his letters. There are some things in those [epistles of Paul] that are difficult to understand, which the ignorant and unstable twist and misconstrue to their own utter destruction, just as [they distort and misinterpret] the rest of the Scriptures. Let me warn you therefore, beloved, that knowing these things beforehand, you should be on your

guard, lest you be carried away by the error of lawless and wicked [persons and] fall from your own [present] firm condition [your own steadfastness of mind]" (2 Peter 3:16-17, AMP).

To avoid misinterpretation we must learn how to provide correct interpretation. Stable principles of interpretation must be employed. The KJV mentions the word "wrest" in this passage which refers to an instrument of torture, the windlass. The windlass caused a victim to be rolled or stretched. It refers to applying parts of Scripture to a purpose it was never intended.

False preachers do this to their destruction. Their error destroys their soul and the souls of others. Never twist or torture the Scripture to make it speak what was never intended.

What do the Scriptures in this lesson teach? They show us the marked difference between crooked and straight preachers.

Crooked preachers:

- Miss the mark.
- Swerve from truth.
- Undermine faith.
- Answer useless questions.
- Corrupt God's Word.
- Make a trade peddling a weakened Word.
- Mix the impure with pure.
- Shortchange the message.
- Promote truth decay.
- Turn families away from the right way.
- Distort the Word.
- Handle God's Word deceitfully.
- Fly on the winds of every doctrine.

Straight Preachers:

- Preach the Word.
- Declare the whole counsel of God.
- Guard the truth.
- Teach doctrine.
- Continue in the apostle's doctrine.
- Speak truth in love.
- Keep nothing back.
- Charge others to teach no other doctrine.

There is a famine in the land (Amos 8:11). People are looking for truth. Can they count on you? Will you be a crooked preacher or a truth preacher? Reform is needed. The choice is yours; the end results are without comparison.

Steve Lawson in *Famine in the Land* said, "If a reformation is to come to the church, it must be preceded by a reformation of the pulpit. As the pulpit goes, so goes the church...Too many preachers today bear more resemblance to entertainers than expositors, stand-up comics rather than knee-shaking servants. God-fearing, awe-struck men in pulpits remain the need of the hour."

Is My Church Drifting?

“Take heed therefore unto yourselves, and to all the flock, over the which the Holy Ghost hath made you overseers, to feed the church of God, which he hath purchased with his own blood. For I know this, that after my departing shall grievous wolves enter in among you, not sparing the flock. Also of your own selves shall men arise, speaking perverse things, to draw away disciples after them. Therefore watch, and remember, that by the space of three years I ceased not to warn every one night and day with tears”

(Acts 20:28-31).

Ruth Rieder in *Covenant by Sacrifice* tells a story of two fishermen on the reservoir. Caught up in the excitement of the trip, the men neglected to put down the anchor as they reached their favorite fishing spot. Unmindful of the subtle undercurrent of the water, they began to fish. Hours quickly passed; suddenly one of the fishermen looked up. To his horror, the boat was drifting dangerously close to destruction. He shouted a warning to his partner, and they began rowing with all their might, seeking to escape the deadly rapids that lay just ahead. After a furious effort, they made it safely to shore. The fishermen were shocked that they drifted so far. It had happened without notice. The danger went undetected until it was almost too late.

The writer of Hebrews warns, “So we must listen very carefully to the truth we have heard, or we may drift away from it” (Hebrews 2:1, *NLT*).

The *King James Version* admonishes us to “give the more earnest heed to the things which we have heard, lest at any time we should let them slip” (Hebrews 2:1). It is as if the truth could slip out of our hands, and we could slip out of His grace.

John Trent, author of *Heart Shift*, and a professional counselor, tells of a plane trip where he sat beside a NASA petroleum engineer. He took advantage of the opportunity to ask the missile scientist, “How many degrees can a space rocket be off before it becomes a huge problem? Could it be two degrees off?”

The man pulled out his calculator and started punching in numbers. “To be two degrees off from when you blast off, and taking into consideration the time and distance traveled, you’ll miss not only your point of orbital entry, but you’ll miss the moon by 11,121 miles.”

Trent goes on to say, “Just be two degrees off from the right heart attitude, add in enough time and distance, and an entire church can end up miles from God’s heart.”

Just a two degree shift in doctrine and convictions can cause change for the worse, pulling the church away from God. And a two degree shift toward correct doctrine and appropriate

convictions can bring a church closer to God. “Even small shifts in a positive direction could move a person from ruin to renewal.”

“Drift” refers to something that has carelessly been permitted to become lost. It is another word for “shift.”

In his excellent book *Historical Drift*, Dr. Arnold L. Cook posed the question, “Must my church die?” His timely book teaches us how to detect, diagnose, and reverse the trends that churches have toward drifting from fundamental truth. This book has been a primary source used in writing this lesson.

Cook explained that the biblical word *drift* means “to let something slip away—can describe a ship, which drifts by the dock due to the carelessness of the mariner who failed to calculate carefully the wind or tide.”

“That we henceforth be no more children, tossed to and fro, and carried about with every wind of doctrine” (Ephesians 4:14).

When do churches begin to drift?

- 1. Churches drift when they fail to pass on the truth to successive generations.**
- 2. Churches drift when they move away from their foundational doctrines.**

The trend is for church denominations to drift (or move) away from their foundational doctrines over time. It does not have to be this way. Drifting can be prevented. It must be prevented.

John Wesley once said, “I am not afraid that the people called Methodists should ever cease to exist...But I am afraid lest they should only exist as a dead sect, having a form of religion without the power. And this undoubtedly will be the case, unless they hold fast both the doctrine, spirit, and discipline which they first set out.”

The *Charisma* magazine (October 1993) quoted the Assemblies of God general superintendent as saying, “We might be Pentecostal in doctrine but we’re not Pentecostal in experience.”

“Too many people,” George Wood said (in the same meeting), “are leaving our churches unchanged, unmoved, unsaved, unfilled, unsanctified and unmotivated to turn their heart and will over to God completely. We need a holy fire which sets aside business as usual in the church until Jesus comes.”

Hold on. Before casting a judging eye on another’s church, there is a question for consideration. Could this same thing be said of your church?

3. Churches drift when they move away from soul winning.

L. R. Scarborough, a Southern Baptist once said, "It is found that so long as the heart of an institution burns hot with the fires of soul-winning, it is not likely to drift in its theology."

4. Churches drift when they concentrate on maintaining the organizational structure.

Arnold Cook said, "As a result of their position on the aging side of the life cycle, congregations are being sustained by their management rather than fueled by their vision. Generally, the more aged the congregation, the longer it takes to produce lasting change."

5. Churches drift when seminaries and Bible schools fail in training the leaders.

Timothy Beougher and Alvin Reid in *Evangelism for a Changing World* cautioned, "When a denomination's theology changes, that change almost always begins in the seminaries that train its leaders."

6. Churches drift when Satan lulls us into sleep rather than the church experiencing revival.

Revival means "to bring back to life." As believers backslide they become a corpse. Revival is imperative.

Stuart Piggin in *Firestorm of the Lord* said Satan likes to threaten us. "I will cool you insensibly, by degrees, by little and little. What care I ... though I be seven years in chilling your heart if I can do it at last; continual rocking will lull a crying child asleep."

George Barna in *The Frog in the Kettle* explained the drift in this way: "Place a frog in boiling water and it will jump out immediately because it can tell that it's in a hostile environment. But place a frog in a kettle of room temperature water and it will stay there, content with those surroundings. Slowly, very slowly, increase the temperature of the water. This time, the frog doesn't leap out, but just stays there, unaware that the environment is changing. Continue to turn up the burner until the water is boiling. Our poor frog will be boiled, quite content, perhaps, but nevertheless dead."

Ruth Rieder in *Covenant by Sacrifice* related the story of a man that met an overland traveler, who had walked on foot for a long distance. He was interested in knowing what the greatest difficulty the traveler had encountered was in his long journey.

He suggested that perhaps the mountains on the trail had been the greatest barrier, but the traveler assured his questioner it was not that. Then he suggested that perhaps the swollen streams, which cut across the road, presented the greatest hazard, but it was not that. After a

little the traveler said, "What almost defeated me in my journey across the continent was the sand in my shoes."

Rieder points out that life is forever tripping over small things. It is not the big diversion that will send you down the path of compromise. It is usually just the subtle curve in the road. More than likely the giant assaults of the enemy will not destroy our consecrations. It will probably be nothing more than...little foxes. (See Song of Solomon 2:15.)

7. Churches drift because their leadership drifts.

Arnold Cook in *Historical Drift* stated, "Organizations don't drift, only their leaders."

There is a backsliding in the pulpit before there is a backsliding in the pew.

8. Churches drift when there is the lack of vision.

"Where there is no vision, the people perish: but he that keepeth the law, happy is he" (Proverbs 29:18).

9. Churches drift when there is a desire for the world (and to be like everyone else).

Arnold went on to say that, "Robert Bork, in his book, *Slouching Towards Gomorrah*, comments on the power of culture to unrelentingly squeeze us into its mold: With each new evidence of deterioration, we lament for a moment, and then become accustomed to it."

Look closely at what happened to Lot. The same picture could happen today.

- Looked toward Sodom (Genesis 13:10).
- Chose the ground near Sodom (Genesis 13:11).
- Pitched his tent toward Sodom (Genesis 13:12).
- Moved to Sodom and dwelt there (Genesis 14:12).
- Became like the people of Sodom. Acted like a citizen (Genesis 19:9).
- Gave his daughters to Sodom (Genesis 19:8).
- Hesitated in leaving the city (Genesis 19:15-16).

Even when the angels delivered him from destruction, he still wanted to live as close to Sodom as possible (Genesis 19). His wife even looked back to the city—longing to be there.

J. R. Ensey in the *Apostolic World Report* offered a book review on *Slouching Towards Gomorrah*. He said, "Prosperity urged him to move on into the city where he became a judge, or maybe a mayor. He never intended for things to turn out as they did for his family, but he pitched his tent too far in the wrong direction...If we don't want to go to Gomorrah, we shouldn't pitch our

tent in that direction.” Consider the short warning found in God’s Word: “Remember Lot’s wife” (Luke 17:32).

We should fight against compromise and the pull of the things of this world. “Love not the world, neither the things that are in the world. If any man love the world, the love of the Father is not in him” (1 John 2:15).

The case of Sodom and Gomorrah is not the only biblical example of historical drift. In the Book of Judges the appalling cycle of drift is repeated seven times.

- The people fall into sin.
- God disciplines them with foreign oppression.
- The people cry out in repentance.
- God raises up a deliverer.
- Peace is restored.

God provided them with leaders called “judges,” but still “every man did that which was right in his own eyes” (Judges 21:25).

The following adaptation from *Historical Drift* is another illustration of the typical evidence of loss of commitment. (Several additions have been made.) Watch for these “lacks” in your life and in local church.

Lack of faithfulness	Inconsistent church attendance. Quest for fewer and shorter services.
Lack of stewardship	Not faithful in tithing and giving of time, talent, and treasure.
Lack of love and understanding for God’s Word	No apparent desire for serious Bible study.
Lack of biblical preaching	More interested in modern trends, methods, and current events than sound, doctrinal preaching and teaching.
Lack of worship	Not interested in consecrating one’s life, bowing, and submitting to God as King of kings.
Lack of prayer	No interest in attending prayer meetings.
Lack of repentance	No interest in deep soul-searching and conformity to God’s will and Word.
Lack of evangelism	No involvement in witnessing.
Lack of vision	No involvement in outreach or missions.
Lack of holiness	No apparent interest in godly living.

Steer Away from the Drift

“Take heed therefore unto yourselves, and to all the flock, over the which the Holy Ghost hath made you overseers, to feed the church of God, which he hath purchased with his own blood. For I know this, that after my departing shall grievous wolves enter in among you, not sparing the flock. Also of your own selves shall men arise, speaking perverse things, to draw away disciples after them. Therefore watch, and remember, that by the space of three years I ceased not to warn every one night and day with tears” (Acts 20:28-31).

The church in the Book of Acts spread like a blazing fire. Persecution could not stop it. The church was vibrant, active, and powerful. Great signs and wonders were performed. Its members were strong, loved God and His truth, and shared it with everyone.

You would have suspected that the church would have continued in its greatness. It did not. It slipped from being a bright light into what has been termed the Dark Ages. Paul prophesied this would happen in Acts 20:29.

What caused the church to drift into darkness?

The church began to drift during the second century. The church, once persecuted, became publicly accepted. Nearly half of the Roman Empire accepted the Christian faith. As persecution lessened, the people’s devotion toward God began to cool. Uncommitted people started joining the church. False doctrine and teachings crept in. Constantine, hoping to gain political power, joined the church. He pretended to be a Christian. The church opened its doors and beckoned the world to enter. The world rushed at the invitation—remained unchanged, and the church was weakened. Eventually the church and state became united. Constantine requested the backing of the church, and in return promised all persecution would stop. An answer to prayer, or was it? He promised the cross would become the standard of his army instead of the Roman eagle. It looked like the church was going to rule the world. Or was the world going to rule the church?

Constantine became both the political and religious leader. The government paid the preachers. Instead of spiritual men occupying church offices, political rulers took over. False teachers arose, bringing their own philosophies, popular teachings that replaced or diluted the Word of God. The church was permeated with the current ideas of the times. How sad. The church triumphant drifted to an impotent, sin-stained, weakened body of half-hearted believers.

History has a way of repeating itself. Vance Havner said, “All we learn from history is that we learn nothing from history.” It does not have to be like that. History is a willing teacher if we are eager students. We can avoid the pitfalls that crippled previous generations.

We must be careful we do not become like the men Paul met at Athens. They were “very religious” and “spent their time doing nothing but talking about and listening to the latest ideas” (Acts 17:21, *NIV*).

“See to it that no one takes you captive through hollow and deceptive philosophy, which depends on human tradition and the basic principles of this world rather than on Christ” (Colossians 2:8, *NIV*).

How can we steer away from drifting?

Arnold Cook in *Historical Drift* said, “Steer right to go straight. According to aerodynamic experts, when a propeller-driven airplane takes off, it naturally veers to the left unless it is steered to the right. Based on my observations of evangelical institutions and leaders over the past half-century, it appears to me that the same principle applies. The only way to keep on a straight orthodox path is to keep turning to the right. Churches, schools and even evangelical scholarship will naturally go left unless they are deliberately turned to the right. The prevailing winds of doctrine blow against us, and if we are to resist them then we must have a firm grip on the wheel of the good ship evangelicalism and steer it to the right.”

1. Face reality.

Where are you? How far have you moved/drifted from where you should be? If necessary, repent!

“Those who live in the past are blind in one eye. Those who never consult the past are blind in both eyes.” (Arnold Cook)

2. Know your direction.

Have a vision for the future. Chart the course by having firm direction. Make decisions now concerning tomorrow. Stick with your core values, and beliefs.

Cook said, “Those who have most powerfully and permanently influenced their generation have been the ‘seers’—men who have seen more and farther than others.”

He adds that this becomes the lonely side of spiritual leadership. Often it translates into going with the minority report, e.g., Joshua and Caleb. No leadership style breeds historical drift better than consensus—going with the flow of compromise. Stephen was willing to take a costly stand for truth. Noah was another man of God that was willing to stand alone.

The trend today is that there are no absolutes—no one is wrong, and everyone is right. The denominational world pulls us toward tolerance. The prevailing viewpoint is everyone should be united.

C. H. Spurgeon once said, “I am quite sure that the best way to promote union is to promote truth. It will not do for us to be all united together by yielding to one another’s mistakes.”

Philip Melancton said, “In essentials, unity. In nonessentials, liberty. In all things, charity.”

What does this mean to us? We should be united when it comes to the essential, major doctrines of the Word of God. We should always speak the truth in love.

Our association with others can either lift us up or pull us down. Let us learn a lesson from the trees.

The world's largest tree (and one of the world's oldest) is the Coast Redwood (of California). It grows from a seed that is no larger than the one from a tomato. It rises like a skyscraper (tall, towering building) to 367 feet (122 m). These trees can live for more than two thousand years.

These natural giants have an attention-grabbing root system. (Trees are held in place by anchoring organs called "roots." Roots grow constantly. We are to be rooted in the Word of God.)

The roots of the redwood only go down 10-13 feet deep (3-4 m) before they spread 60-80 feet (20-27 m). How can such a tall tree with such a shallow root system withstand the wind? The roots often entangle with neighboring trees. This provides for greater stability. The trees grow close together and gain strength from being a forest. Through growing together and networking with other members of the body, we have the strength of the combined body. We become stronger through our association with each other. We also become grounded and settled in God's Word.

"Let your roots grow down into him and draw up nourishment from him, so you will grow in faith, strong and vigorous in the truth you were taught. Don't let anyone lead you stray with empty philosophy and high-sounding nonsense that come from human thinking..." (Colossians 2:7-8, *NLT*).

You now have a hint of the down side to these close relationships. Because the roots are entangled or fused together, it is conceivable that when disease strikes, it can spread throughout the common root system, as is common with the oak tree. The root systems of oak trees within fifty feet of each other can become grafted together. If one tree becomes infected, the disease can easily move from tree to tree.

"It takes only one wrong person among you to infect all the others—a little yeast spreads quickly through the whole batch of dough! I am trusting the Lord to bring you back to believing as I do about these things. God will judge that person, whoever it is, who has been troubling and confusing you" (Galatians 5:9-10, *NLT*).

Our association with others can build us up, or pull us down. It has often been said that if you show me your associates, I can tell you a lot about your personal character. We are like those we hang around.

3. Stand firm for truth. Stay on guard.

G. K. Chesterton once said, "Whenever you remove any fence, always pause long enough to ask yourself the question, 'Why was it there in the first place?'"

The *National Geographic* magazine (July 1985) made this interesting statement that could serve as a potent reminder to the church, "They opened up the doors of the world, but they closed up the heavens forever."

Dr. Ralph Winter, founder of the U. S. Center of World Mission, said, "I would rather fail in that which will ultimately succeed than to succeed in that which will ultimately fail."

"Preach the Word of God urgently at all times, whenever you get the chance... Correct and rebuke your people when they need it, encourage them to do right, and all the time be feeding them patiently with God's Word. For there is going to come a time when people won't listen to the truth but will go around

looking for teachers who will tell them just what they want to hear. They won't listen to what the Bible says but will...follow their own misguided ideas" (2 Timothy 4:2-4, *TLB*).

4. Be committed.

The National Board of United Pentecostal Church International—Ghana came up with the following points in one of their annual prayer and fasting retreats.

They encouraged fellow ministers to be committed:

- To love and maintain unity among ministers and leaders (Acts 1:14; Acts 2:1; John 13:44-45).
- To respect protocol and ethics (1 Timothy 5:17; Hebrews 13:17).
- To pray and fast (Luke 18:1; 1 Thessalonians 5:17).
- To be guided by the Word and doctrine (1 Timothy 4:13, 16; Job 23:12).
- To personal ministerial assessment (2 Timothy 1:6; 4:5; Acts 26:16-18; Acts 9:2).
- To develop spiritually for effective ministerial leadership (Philippians 3:13-14; Luke 2:52).
- To emphasis on evangelism and church planting (Mark 16:15-20; Matthew 19:19-20).
- To maintain discipline and cooperation (1 Timothy 5:19-20; 3:10)

5. Be courageous in your leadership.

Cook wrote, "Although drift is inevitable in all social structures, including religious organizations, it can be curbed and even reversed through renewal and wise, godly and courageous leadership."

Take a stand for righteousness and truth in your leadership. Lead the way. Others will follow.