

# christian

## WORKER



"We are workers together with Him..." (2 Cor. 6:1)

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## STUDYING WITH THE RIGHT ATTITUDE

Johnie Scaggs Jr.

The need to study the Word of God cannot be emphasized enough. I believe one of the greatest challenges Gospel preachers have in their ministry is to help members recognize their need to study, as Paul wrote in 2 Timothy 2:15. As a workman for God, we should be ashamed not to know how to handle the Word of God. The only cure for this is to study His Word. Let me suggest three things one needs to remember when studying the Word of God.

### THE INSPIRED WORD OF GOD

As we look deep into the Word of God, we should understand the need for having a proper attitude toward it. As we study the bible, we must understand it is not just an inspirational book; it is a book inspired by God Himself. "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 Tim. 3:16-17). As we read and study the Bible, we should have a clear understanding that the words we are reading came from the very mind of God. Remember the words of Jesus to His disciples, "...But whatsoever shall be given you in that hour, that speak ye: for it is not ye that speak, but the Holy Ghost" (Mark 13:11). The words they were given are the very words they wrote down, and these are the words we read when we study the Word of God. If one does not love and appreciate the Word of God, then he or she will never be able to study it properly. It will never mean anything more than just a commentary on life to be taken with a grain of salt.

### YOU NEED AN OPEN HEART

Also, when we study, we should do so with an open heart. Luke wrote concerning the Bereans, "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). "Readiness of mind," means with a willing mind or that of an open heart. They were willing to make changes if God called upon them to do so. An open heart has always been needed and it is one of the more difficult things to convince people to do. In the parable of the sower of Luke 8, four different kinds of hearts are described. The last one is said to be a good and honest heart. "But that on the good ground are they, which in an honest and good heart, having heard the word, keep it, and bring forth fruit with patience" (Luke 8:15). This is the kind of heart we need, a heart that will be open to hearing the Word of God and then making proper application.

### YOU NEED TO MAKE PROPER APPLICATION

Of what value is the Word of God if it is not placed  
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"We are workers together with Him..." (2 Cor. 6:1)

### THE IMPORTANCE OF EFFECTIVE BIBLE STUDY

One of the most tragic statements in scripture is found in Hosea 4:6—"My people are destroyed for lack of knowledge..." God had given His people everything that they needed to know in order to please Him. He had clearly revealed His will in the Law, and sent prophets to them time and again to plead with them to repent of their sins and live righteously. But they continually rejected Him, and consequently He rejected them (Hos. 4:6b). Another tragedy is found in Amos 8:11—"Behold, the days come, saith the Lord God, that I will send a famine in the land, not a famine of bread, nor a thirst for water, but of hearing the words of the Lord." How sad it is that God's people had neglected one of God's richest blessings—His revealed will. Unfortunately, there are many people today who fall under the same heartbreaking consequence of these two passages. God's word is absent from their lives and they are, therefore, walking down the path of destruction.

The apostle Paul's desire for the Colossians was that they "be filled with the knowledge of His will" (Col. 1:9). He wanted them to know more and more of God's word because "it is not good" to be without it (Prov. 19:2). To know God's will is to know God (Col. 1:10), and what could be more important? But, being filled with the knowledge of God's word does not happen by accident. It does not come by osmosis or direct action from the Holy Spirit. The only way that I will be able to know God's word is by studying it effectively (2 Tim. 2:15).

Webster's collegiate dictionary defines the word "effective" as "producing a decided, decisive, or desired effect." There are a number of effects that come as a result of bible study. When we study we show ourselves "approved unto God" (2 Tim. 2:15). We study the bible because it provides us everything we need to know in order to please God and be with Him in eternity (2 Pet. 1:3). Scripture has the ability to make us complete (2 Tim. 3:17). It is "a lamp unto my feet and a light unto my path" (Ps. 119:105). The new birth is produced by

the word of God (1 Pet. 1:23). Studying God's word will help to strengthen our faith so that we may withstand the attacks of the devil (Ps. 1; Col. 1:9-11). These things are only possible when we study effectively. We must study with the proper attitude. We must understand the nature of what we're studying. We must respect its author, its authority, and its power. We must dedicate ourselves completely to being "filled with the knowledge of His will" (Col. 1:9).

The opposite of effective bible study is, of course, ineffective bible study. Something that is ineffective is "not capable of performing efficiently or as expected." There are many people who study the bible with negative results because they do so with for the wrong reasons or in the wrong manner (c.f. Jas. 3:13-4:4). Some completely ignore the things that they do not like; some study only to find justification for the way that they live; and others study only to find reasons to reject God. There are people who believe in God but do not believe that His word is completely inspired. Some believe that the scripture is only a part of what we need and the Holy Spirit directly provides the rest. Still, there are those who are sincere in their efforts to study God's word but simply do not know how or where to begin. The number of reasons why people study scripture ineffectively is endless. But, the result is always the same.

Our hope is that this issue of the Christian Worker, and the one to follow, will help to provide practical instruction on how to study the bible effectively. Some articles will deal with foundational aspects such as having the proper attitude, and understanding bible authority. Others will be very practical by providing step-by-step instructions for different methods of studying. We pray that God is glorified through this effort and that His people will have a revived desire to "study to show themselves approved" (2 Tim. 2:15).

CW

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## UNDERSTANDING BIBLE AUTHORITY

Kevin Rhodes

The entire concept of biblical authority has come under fire in the last generation in an originally subtle and presently blatant attempt to rewrite the meaning of scripture. The relativistic approach to interpretation characterized by the completely subjective plea “This is what it means to me,” now couched in hundred dollar words designed to disguise its penny worth meaning, has reached a level of acceptance that demonstrates the need to refocus on hermeneutics, the science of interpretation, in explaining everything we believe, say, and do (Col. 3:17).

The threefold nature of basic rhetorical interpretation, now ridiculed by those displeased by its limits, neither originated with the Age of Reason nor is unique to the interpretation of the Bible. To the contrary, the distinction of meaning recognized in direct statements, accounts of action, and implication are inherent in communication itself. Therefore, because God has communicated His will for man, His will is contained in direct statements, accounts of action, and implication. These, thus revealed, then necessarily carry His authority, as Jesus also said (John 12:48). Therefore, regardless of what modernists and post-modernists believe, understanding Bible authority is essential both to study and to understand the Bible properly.

Direct statements of various forms (commands, questions, exclamations, etc.) are the primary means by which a language communicates meaning, and thus a primary means by which the Bible, a message communicating through the written word, communicates God’s meaning to man. The words God chose and the way He presented them are essential elements of communication. Jesus acknowledged this when tempted by His repetition of the phrase, “It is written” (Matt. 4:1-11). Moreover, “He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved” (Mk. 16:16a) is a direct statement of fact. Said by Jesus, it carries divine authority. It does not communicate everything about baptism, but it does communicate relevant information. The written statements of inspiration thus communicate God’s will. To deny this is to deny everything about Christianity, for we can only know about Christianity through what God has said about it. Accounts of action are descriptions of someone else’s behavior designed to illustrate something meaningful as well. It is the verbal equivalent of a plumber telling his apprentice, “Here is how to do this in a way that works correctly.” Jesus referred to the priests’ behavior, working on

the Sabbath, as an account of action illustrating why the Pharisees’ interpretation of keeping the Sabbath holy was untenable (Matt. 12:1-8). Likewise, accounts of action in the New Testament that describe the behavior of Christians that was deemed acceptable by those first century men speaking or writing by inspiration prescribes behavior acceptable for Christians today. Christians in Troas met, along with the apostle Paul and his companions, on the first day of the week to worship (Acts 20:7). This shows that the practice was acceptable Christian behavior and is the only statement in the New Testament regarding the time of such as acceptable. Implication simply describes what logically follows from the direct statements provided. For example, the statement, “Jeff took a flight to California for a meeting,” implies a number of things depending on the nature of context, one of which is an airplane or helicopter. However, if instead the statement said, “Jeff went to California for a meeting,” the statement does not imply the specific means of transportation but only the fact of travel. Jesus interpreted the Old Testament with regard to its implications regularly. Indeed, it was a mainstay of His argumentation. For “Man shall not live by bread alone” had application to Jesus only by implication, because He was a man. In His reply to Satan’s quotation of Scripture, Jesus argued by implication that Satan’s interpretation was wrong because it was inconsistent with scripture elsewhere—a statement that implied the unity of scripture while arguing from it (Luke 4:1-13).

Modern interpreters have attempted to move the emphasis in interpretation away from the Author and the text and move it toward the reader and his situation. Such an approach renders the Author’s meaning irrelevant and the text a mere footnote while transforming every person into the sole authority by which to determine divine meaning. I would hope this demonstrates what is at stake when it comes to Bible authority and Bible study. It takes the difference between studying the Bible so man can conform to God’s will and studying the Bible to try to conform God to man’s will. How you understand Bible authority matters—immensely.

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## THE SILENCE OF THE SCRIPTURES

Steven Lloyd

When I was in my early twenties, my wife and I signed up to participate in the church’s visitation program. We received the name of a young man in his late teens. At the end of our visit

we asked him if he had any questions. He said yes: “Why don’t you have music in the church?” I was not brought up going to church—any church—so the absence of instruments was a non-issue for me until that visit. It sent me back to the elders and preacher with questions.

Perhaps you were brought up in a similar background, or perhaps you were brought up worshipping where instruments were used. How big a deal is this, or are we making too much of it?

A debate between Martin Luther and Ulrich Zwingli, names associated with the early Reformation movement, provides us with an appropriate beginning. Martin Luther wanted to retain in the Catholic Church all that was not expressly forbidden, while Zwingli was intent on abolishing all that could not be proved by Scripture.

The debate, on the surface, may seem strictly academic, but the implications are not. The debate persists to this day. It affects how we read the Bible, and what we believe and practice. I hope that much of what I write will strike the reader as common sense. For that reason, I hope to keep this simple.

The following illustration strikes me as having a great deal of explanatory power. Let’s say the doctor gives you a prescription. The only writing on the note is what the doctor prescribed. It does not need to list everything that does not go into the prescription.

The same line of reasoning is used by writers of the Bible. Take, for example, these tried and true illustrations. Noah was told to build an ark of a particular kind of wood—gopher wood. Do you suppose Noah could have or should have built it with some other kind of wood?

Moses makes explicit reference to the principle in reporting the death of Nadab and Abihu, the sons of Aaron. They “offered unauthorized fire before the Lord, which he had not commanded them” (Lev. 10:1; 16:12, ESV). In the previous chapter, fire came out from before the Lord and consumed the burnt offering, and the people shouted and fell on their faces (Lev. 9:22-24). In Leviticus 10, fire came out from before the Lord and consumed the offerers. Notice again the words, “unauthorized” and “had not commanded.”

To clarify, the idea of silence does not always prohibit. The specific statements of Scripture qualify silence. For example, the Bible says nothing about songbooks, song leaders, or singing in four-part harmony, but it does say something about singing psalms, hymns and spiritual songs (Col. 3:16). Songbooks and singing four-part harmony in no wise nullifies the injunction to sing. They are all aids or means by which singing is accomplished.

Someone might argue that instruments are aids or means by which singing is accomplished, but I think a categorical mistake is made with this line of reasoning. The general category is music. There are two kinds of music: instrumental and vocal. God has called the church to sing. In light of the fact that no injunction for the church to “play” is found, this would eliminate any other kind of music as much as specifying Gopher wood would eliminate any other kind of wood from being used to build the ark.

Back to examples of specificity and silence, who would have ever thought to add two silver cherubim over the mercy seat when the Lord instructed Moses to place two golden cherubim over the ark (Exod. 25:10-22)? Who would risk being so presumptuous as to add to or substitute elements in the Lord’s Supper (1 Cor. 11:23-34)? Does it not strike the reader as obvious that the specificity of the Lord limits the observer to using bread and fruit of the vine?

The most egregious violation I have ever seen was an advertisement inviting people to attend an evening worship service in which Polynesian Belly dancers were the featured attraction. You tell me, where does the Bible condemn that?

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## THE IMPORTANCE OF CONTEXT

Rick Brumback

**T**he politician accuses his opponent, “You took my words out of context!” And according to the *Oxford English Dictionary*, the word “right,” comprised of a brief five letters, has sixty-nine major definitions and numerous sub-meanings. If we should come across this word in a text, which of these myriad meanings are we to assign at that point? Both these examples highlight the significance of what is known as “context”—the setting in which a particular word or statement is found and which shapes the meaning of that word or statement. We are familiar with the first example: someone claims that what they said has been made to mean or say something not intended by the speaker. And the second example is also familiar: we cannot know which meaning of a word we should understand until we use the context to specify which definition is meant in the text.

It is important to make sure words are used as intended and with a meaning fitting the situation, so we should

not be surprised that good Bible study, just as in any careful reading and study of a text, depends heavily upon attention given to context. There are two kinds of context that are important for good study of God's word: historical/cultural and literary.

The historical/cultural context indicates the historical setting of a text or statement that shapes the meaning in that situation. Giving attention to the historical/cultural context means answering questions like these:

- Who spoke or wrote the text?
- To whom did they speak or write?
- When and where did the speaker/writer and recipients live, and in what circumstances?
- What common understandings did the speaker/writer share with the recipients?
- What values, beliefs, and practices did the speaker/writer and recipients have that shaped how they would have meant or understood these words?
- What occasion necessitated the speaker/writer to communicate to the recipients?

We can see the importance of answering these questions when considering Acts 16:16-40. Paul and Silas had cast a spirit of divination from a young maiden, and her masters became angry. They forced the two Christians into the presence of the city leaders, made accusations against the two men, and as a result Paul and Silas were summarily beaten and cast into prison (v. 19-23). The chapter concludes with the magistrates, on the next day, sending men to release Paul and Silas from prison. When Paul informs the authorities that they were both Roman citizens, the magistrates became afraid (v. 38-39). Why would the magistrates have reacted so? In Roman law of the first century, a person holding Roman citizenship was protected against this type of violent action; citizens had a right to a trial and conviction before any punitive measures could be taken. Knowing this fact means we can understand both Paul's statement and the reaction of the magistrates. A familiarity with aspects of the historical/cultural context enables an accurate understanding of the text.

The literary context involves the text in the Bible before and after the passage under investigation. This literary context can be broken into two different sections: the near context, meaning the words and sections immediately around our passage, and the larger or remote context, meaning the sections of text that are found well before or well after our passage. Knowing both contexts is crucial. As an example of the near context's significance, consider Colossians 3:1—"If ye then be risen with Christ, seek those things which are above, where Christ sitteth on

the right hand of God." What does Paul mean by the phrase "risen with Christ"? The precise meaning only becomes clear when we look back to Colossians 2:12, "Buried with him in baptism, wherein also ye are risen with him through the faith of the operation of God, who hath raised him from the dead." So the immediate context of 2:12 informs us that "risen with Christ" in 3:1 is referring to the Colossian Christians, those who had been baptized into the faith.

An example of the remote context's significance comes from Acts 26:32, where Paul had made an impassioned appeal for Christianity before Festus and King Agrippa II. At the end of the episode, the king said to Festus, "This man might have been set at liberty, if he had not appealed to Caesar." We read in Acts 25:11 that the apostle had indeed appealed, as a Roman citizen, to have his case heard in the imperial court. Knowing this, we might read Agrippa II's words and feel as if freedom had just slipped from Paul's grasp! But no, the remote context informs us otherwise. Acts 23:11 tells us that Jesus had, a couple of years prior, told Paul that he would preach in Rome, and it turns out the appeal to Caesar provided the means for the apostle to travel to the capital city under imperial aegis. It is only by taking into account the larger context that we learn God planned for Paul to remain under Roman guard.

We need the utmost care in reading the Bible text, and paying attention to context, both historical/cultural and literary, is vital for good understanding. And having good resources like reliable history texts and Bible dictionaries helps make it possible to do justice to a passage's context.

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## TYPES AND SHADOWS

Don Walker

When the inspired writers of the New Testament compared the two testaments, they spoke of the New Testament as being the very image of the things that cast a shadow of good things to come (Heb. 10:1). In Hebrews 8, the Levitical High Priest and the sanctuary, or tabernacle, were shadows cast by Jesus Christ and His new and better promises (vv. 1-5). The things of the Old Testament were types while Christ and the New Testament items were the antitypes. "Type" and "typology" are defined as a:

Branch of biblical interpretation in which an element found in the OT prefigures one

found in the NT. The initial one is called the “type” and the fulfillment is designated the “antitype.” Either type or antitype may be a person, thing, or event, but often the type is messianic and frequently refers to salvation.<sup>1</sup>

Because many of the types of the Old Testament point to Jesus the Messiah and those spiritual items that benefit the one who pursues the spiritual, they provide fascinating studies for the serious student who desires to grow in faith.

There are many items in the Old Testament, which are referenced by the inspired writers of the New Testament. As we close a study of the Book of Exodus and enter into the Book of Leviticus, we see the completion of the building of the tabernacle and the establishment of the Levitical system of worship. Moses was told to build the tabernacle according to the pattern and concerning the Levitical Priesthood; they were to be very careful concerning the details. In Hebrews 8:4-6 we see why the details were so important.

For if he were on earth, he should not be a priest, seeing that there are priests that offer gifts according to the law: Who serve unto the example and shadow of heavenly things, as Moses was admonished of God when he was about to make the tabernacle: for, See, saith he, that thou make all things according to the pattern shewed to thee in the mount. But now hath he obtained a more excellent ministry, by how much also he is the mediator of a better covenant, which was established upon better promises.

There are other clear passages that illustrate this area of study. The Passover lamb described in Exodus 12:1-13 is a type of Christ “Who is our Passover” (1 Cor. 5:7). The rock that provided water for the Israelites in the wilderness (Ex. 17:6) also prefigured Christ (1 Cor. 10:3,4). In fact the Book of Hebrews is saturated with many types, which represent Christ and His covenant.

With the remainder of our space we will consider another type to which Jesus speaks. In Numbers 21 the “people spake against God, and against Moses” (v. 5). Because of their murmuring, God sent fiery serpents which when they bit the people the people died (v. 6). Verse 7 says, “Therefore the people came to Moses,

<sup>1</sup> Walter A. Elwell and Barry J. Beitzel, *Baker Encyclopedia of the Bible* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1988), 2109-2110.

and said, We have sinned, for we have spoken against the Lord, and against thee; pray unto the Lord, that he take away the serpents from us. And Moses prayed for the people.” The prescription was to fashion a serpent out of brass and when the people turned to look upon it, they would live (v. 8). In His discourse with Nicodemus, Jesus said this concerning that very serpent. “And as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of man be lifted up: That whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have eternal life” (John 3:14, 15). The serpent served as a type of Christ as it pointed to the fact that Christ would be lifted up on the cross as he offered Himself for our sins. It is a most fascinating type of Christ.

There are a number of other examples that could be given. The scapegoat on the day of Atonement or even Abraham offering Isaac and then Isaac being replaced by the ram that was caught in the thicket all point to the perfect lamb of God Who was offered for our sins. It is our prayer that this brief study may have stirred in each one of us a greater desire to study these types and antitypes as we strive to exalt our Lord and our God. Until next time, let us each study our Bibles much, much more.

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## UNDERSTANDING THE COVENANTS

Clay Bond

It has been said that “the Old Covenant is the New Covenant concealed and the New Covenant is the Old Covenant revealed.” If we are to find truth and walk in the light, we must learn to rightly divide the two covenants contained in the Bible. A proper understanding of these covenants will enable the Bible student to draw correct conclusions about what God expects of him.

The Old Testament or Covenant is made of up thirty-nine writings that can be classified into four major sections: books of law, books of history, books of poetry, and books of prophecy. It contains accounts of the creation of all things, God’s early dealings with mankind and the beginnings of His plan to redeem mankind. We learn in the Old Covenant that God created all things with man as the centerpiece (Gen. 1:26-27). We learn how man fell by sinning against God and that God had a plan to restore His fellowship with mankind (Gen. 3:1-15). We learn that God chose a man named Abraham and made three promises to him. God

promised to: 1) make Abraham's descendants a great nation, 2) give them a specific land, and 3) bless all nations through Abraham's seed (Gen. 12:7; 22:17-18).

As we follow the history of God's interaction with Abraham's descendants we learn much about the love, mercy, and patience of our Creator. Over and over the Hebrew people violated their covenant with God and turned their back on Him. Yet, as a loving Father or a tender husband, He worked to draw them back with "bands of love" (Hos. 11:4).

The Old Covenant, which was given to Israel (Deut. 5:1-3), was a temporary covenant with a very specific purpose. It served to prepare the way for the coming Messiah by showing man his own insufficiency. Mankind would come to realize that he could never be restored to fellowship with Jehovah through law ordinances, because law would always be weak in the flesh (Rom. 8:3). It was this realization that laid the foundation for the coming of the Messiah and the covenant based on His blood (Gal. 3:24-25).

The New Testament or Covenant is contained in twenty-seven writings in which we find accounts of the fulfillment of the promises and prophecies recorded in the Old Testament. It is in the New Covenant that we discover the culmination of God's plan of redemption.

The gospel accounts begin by pointing the reader back to the Old Covenant with its genealogies and prophecies. These four accounts of Christ's earthly ministry identify Him as the subject and fulfillment of the Old Covenant (John 5:39).

The book of Acts records both the establishment of the Lord's kingdom and the process of establishing relationship with Christ under the New Covenant (Acts 2; 8:1-40; 9:1-22; 10:1-48; 16:14-15; 16:30-34; 18:1-11; 19:1-7). The twenty-one epistles follow Acts as the road map for daily life under the New Covenant. These letters give instructions "for the perfecting of the saints" by providing instructions for the daily reality of walking in newness of life with Jesus Christ (Eph. 4:12; Rom. 6:4; Gal. 2:20; 2 Cor. 13:5; Jas. 1:23-27; 1 Pet. 2:21; 1 John 2:6).

The New Covenant closes with the book of Revelation which can be summed up in one verse, "...be thou faithful unto death, and I will give thee a crown of life" (Rev. 2:10). Too many times Christians allow outward circumstances to drag us down. We are so focused on violence, chaos, trouble and sorrow that we lose sight of Christ and His victory. We forget that we can be triumphant over all of these things, and even over death, through Jesus Christ. The message of the Revelation of Jesus Christ is that we

can overcome Satan, self and, sin and come on over to live with Him in eternity. The final message of the New Covenant is that, in the midst of struggles, with torment and death on every side, Christians can rest in a hope that transcends this earthly existence.

Far too often a well meaning Bible student will turn to the Old Covenant seeking to establish authority for some religious practice. The Biblical distinction between the Old and New Covenants is made with good reason. Two laws with different requirements cannot both be binding on the same people at the same time. Hebrews provides us with the most important key to understanding the two covenants; "He taketh away the first, that He may establish the second" (Heb. 10:9). Thank God for the New Covenant. With its better sacrifice, better promises and better priesthood, it is truly a better covenant (Heb. 8:6).

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*continued from page 1*

in one's life properly? Jesus spoke about the attitude of the Pharisees and Sadducees and said, "All therefore whatsoever they bid you observe, that observe and do; but do not ye after their works: for they say, and do not" (Matt. 23:3). James said, "But be ye doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving your own selves" (Jam. 1:22). James says when you are a hearer only, you deceive yourself. That is, you are lying to yourself in telling your mind that you don't need to make any application to yourself concerning the things you have heard as it relates to the Word of God.

How often do we read a passage and then say something to the effect; that is me? What we need to say is, "He is taking about me and I need to apply this to my life." For example, Paul wrote in 1 Corinthians 13 about how love acts. Next time you read these verses, take and place your name in the place of love and when you finish reading it in this manner, ask yourself is this true about me? It might open your heart to see that a proper application has not been made in your life. God is not speaking to everyone else, He is speaking to me and I need to apply His words to my life daily.

## CONCLUSION

There is no greater book than the Bible. We must read it daily, study it daily, open up our heart to it, and make proper application of it. If we will, God will bless us abundantly. And because we will be blessed, we will be a blessing to others as they see us walking with God.

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