

Isaiah 40:28 Hast thou not known? hast thou not heard, that the everlasting God, the LORD, the Creator of the ends of the earth, fainteth not, neither is weary? there is no searching of his understanding.

Have you ever tried to listen to pure genius talk passionately about their latest discovery? It doesn't take long before you get a head ache and leave. Maybe you get frustrated with them because they come off superior, haughty, or elite and suddenly you wish they would "get real". Part of us wants to bathe ourselves in the mystery of that genius, to understand. Another part of us is afraid to admit we feel a little stupid. We aren't stupid but being in the presence of pure genius we compare ourselves to them and that never ends well. If only there was some way for them to relate to us in terms we could understand then we could feel comfortable around them, we might even be able to have a relationship and exchange our thoughts and our feelings. If only there was a way for them to come down to our level, to "get real".

I think of God in those terms. There is no way for me to relate to Him on His level, so I look for understanding in terms I can relate to from my own reality. The Bible is truly God's Word to us, His vehicle of understanding, to relate to us, so I must find a way to relate to those words. The Bible is God's way of "getting real" with me. How I do that is personal, it is who I am. We are not the same, your reality is your own and how you relate to your surroundings is not the same as mine. For me to tell you how to read and understand the bible would be pointless if I did not encourage you to make it personal. You will not understand if you cannot make it personal. This should be about God relating to you in a personal way, as an individual, meeting your needs, showing you His plans for you, directing your feet down a path He has chosen for you to walk together.

Consider your motivations about studying the bible, or even just reading it. Proper motivation makes things enjoyable. If you don't want to do a thing, but engage in that activity because of pressure, guilt, or even a sincere sense of duty, you will not get as much out of it as you would if it was something you wanted to do. You are more likely to return to an activity if you found the last experience pleasant. So it should be with your bible study, your quiet time, and your prayer time. Enjoy God.

Bible 101 has to start somewhere and where better than Genesis 1:1a, not the whole verse but the very first prepositional phrase, "In the beginning". If there is a beginning and an end, then everything in between is called time. I glazed over these words for years, not relating to them with any meaningful understand until I sought to present this work to you. If I could so easily overlook its significance, perhaps others could also. Sharing my new found understanding relates to you and I together in comparison to this eternal God. The very first thing God created was not the heaven and earth as stated in the rest of Genesis 1:1. The very first thing God created was a realm called time. Substance, physical manifestation, requires separation, contrast, light and an observer to be deemed to be real. None of that could exist without the realm called time.

At the very core of our existence there is time. Before we even have blood vessels, a brain, or even a chest cavity to hold it, a tiny group of cells begin to count off the rhythm of time which will eventually become our heart. Time is such an integrated part of our lives that we are created with our very own metronome and built in clock. We cannot imagine a world without time. We try and describe God Himself in terms we relate to time, the eternal God. The Alpha and Omega, the beginning and the end. But God is Spirit and as such is not bound, limited, nor in any way associated with time. His realm is a realm without time. That we cannot imagine. This is what the International Standard Bible Encyclopedia has to say about Eternity.

"Eternity is best conceived, not in the merely negative form of the non-temporal, or immeasurable time, but positively, as the mode of the timeless self-existence of the Absolute Ground of

the universe. The flux of time grows first intelligible to us, only when we take in the thought of God as eternal—exalted above time. Timeless existence—being or entity without change—is what we here mean by eternity, and not mere everlastingness or permanence through time. God, in His internal being, is raised above time; in His eternal absoluteness, He is throned above temporal development, and knows, as the Scriptures say, no changeableness. The conception of eternity, as without beginning or ending, leaves us with but a negation badly in need of filling out with reality. Eternity is not a mere negative idea; to make of eternity merely a blank and irrelevant negation of temporality would not satisfy any proper theory of being; it functions as the positive relation to time of that eternal God, who is King of all the eons.”

Ever heard the term time limit? Time puts limits on things. The speed of light was thought to be the ultimate speed, but if man approaches it, time slows down. Atomic clocks synchronized to the most finite measurement man can invent, slows if they are placed in space and travel at high speeds. So time isn't a true constant, and can be affected. We spend our life time at a snails pace, but somehow the older we get the faster time seems to roll past. It has not changed, but our perception of it has. We can sleep and dream a very complex dream that seems to last for hours, perhaps even a day, only to wake up a few minutes later. Our perception of time is a mental state as well as physical. But yet it has boundaries, limits, constraints, and barriers that we just don't seem to be able to escape. Not so in God's realm. No time, no boundaries, no constraints; limitless possibilities are God's realm.

There is no way for us to understand nor even perceive in any human terms what eternity must be like for God, yet we vainly immortalize and glorify God with lyrics like “When we've been there ten thousand years, Bright shining as the sun, We've no less days to sing God's praise Than when we'd first begun.” While the words from Amazing Grace may touch our hearts they have no basis in reality, we merely try and express God's realm in terms we can understand because it makes us feel better.

So what is the harm in using your imagination to ponder the possibilities of being with our creator? Nothing as long as you do not use your imagination as a substitute for relationship. God is not like the imaginary rabbit Harvey who Jimmy Stewart conjured up in the movie by the same name. God is real and if we are to relate to God then we must relate to Him on the terms He has set before us. We must use the Holy Bible to perceive, translate, direct and change our lives. In order to do that we must have a proper understanding of its content and intent. We must not substitute our vain imaginations for the truth.

Isaiah 55:9 For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways, and my thoughts than your thoughts.

Foundational Truths

The demands for foundational truths are necessary in order to identify a proper understanding of content and context of scripture, whether historical or allegorical. If conclusions drawn by the text lead you to an understanding of God that is something other than these foundational truths about God, then your understanding is imperfect and further prayerful study is required. While I list these foundational truths about God they are not set in order of importance. They are all equally true, no one characteristic is more important than another.

1. God is Holy. Sin does not exist in God nor can it exist in His presence.
2. God is love. Agape love, God's love is pure, without any selfish intent.
3. God is just. Since God is Holy sin must be dealt with, justice is demanded.
4. God is merciful. We are saved by grace and that is a gift from God, unmerited, unearned.
5. God is true. God neither lies, nor tempts. All God's promises are real, He will keep His word.

Note that I did not list any of the omni words. Only omnipotent appears in the King James version, meaning almighty, ruler of all things, and does not appear in the New International Version at all. The reason I left them out is that while they convey a sense of what God is capable of doing, they will not indicate if you are having an improper understanding of scripture. The same applies to the Jehovah characteristics of God. God may act within any one of those characteristics at any time, but not present Himself as another. These five truths about God will remain true at all times.

Malachi 3:6a For I am the LORD, I change not.

Code Key

I have heard many of my friends say that they just don't understand the bible. Knowing that this is God's message to His children, it is important that we understand the mysteries that seem to exist in scriptures. The key to understanding some things is like breaking a code. Not all things, some things God says plainly. If we look to scriptures to explain scripture then some of those codes can be broken.

Genesis 1:2c And the Spirit of God moved upon the face of the waters.

In the natural sense water would not exist in the void spoken of in Gen. 1:2a. So rather than thinking of water in the natural sense, think of it in the Spiritual realm. This early reference to the Spirit moving upon the face of the water is a code key. Many of the scriptures which relate to a moving of water should be thought of in the Spiritual realm and not the natural. Noah's Ark, the parting of the Red Sea, water issuing from the rock when Moses struck it, the River Jordan being held back for Israel to cross, baptism, Peter walking on water with Jesus and more, all contain spiritual messages. Water is not the vehicle of the spirit, just a sign of the Spirit moving in power.

If we look up the biblical definition of spirit we find initially that it means breath. We say the Holy Spirit is the breath of God. God breathed life into Adam. Once again we should look at these descriptions as relating to our ability to understand. The Holy Spirit is not a thing set apart from God as our breath is temporal, a thing we let go of and it becomes part of another realm, external to our being. The Holy Spirit is fully God, co-equal and never separate from God. The quality and character of that breath isn't God, isn't the Holy Spirit but just a sign of His presence, power and purpose.

I attended Standing in the Gap on the Washington Mall in October of 1997. The one thing that kept resounding in the tales spoken of that day was the quality of the wind. I was returning to the mall from the Vietnam War Memorial, on the sidewalk south of Madison Avenue when the final blow of the Shofar, the ram's horn blown to call upon God. The wind began to swirl on the mall and my hair was being tossed about as if I were riding in a convertible at sixty miles per hour. I looked up and the leaves on trees just barely a foot about my head were still, unmoved. How was that possible? I looked over at the flag poles in front of the Smithsonian and the banner of Christ was flapping loudly in the wind while Old Glory, which was just above it lay still and silent. More than that was the sense of joy and peace and a pure cleansing breath. The Holy Spirit was not the wind, but caused it to move and changed its quality and character. As the Holy Spirit is with the wind, so He is in us, moving us, affecting us, changing our quality and character.

Numbers also mean something, even if the number isn't called out plainly. Such an example is found in Genesis 2:9 "And out of the ground made the LORD God to grow every tree that is pleasant to the sight, and good for food; the tree of life also in the midst of the garden, and the tree of knowledge of good and evil." While God created every tree He only named two. Two is the first number that can be divided and is indicative of choice. I know this because Adam and Eve chose the tree of knowledge of

good and evil. After they made their choice the option of partaking of the tree of life was removed. (ref. Genesis 3:22-23) You can also look at it from the standpoint that God gave one command, do not eat, and they chose to disobey. Two appears again in scripture in connection with the wave offering. Two loaves of bread, one without yeast, one with yeast. Now I have introduced three more key codes, bread, yeast and trees. If choice is at stake then we must search out the scriptures to determine what we are to choose between. Always use scriptures to define scriptures. Once again, do not allow vain imaginations tell you what spiritual matters mean, let scripture tell you.

John 6:33;35 For the bread of God is he which cometh down from heaven, and giveth life unto the world. And Jesus said unto them, I am the bread of life: he that cometh to me shall never hunger; and he that believeth on me shall never thirst.

If Jesus is the bread of life, what is the choice to be made between the unleavened Jesus and the leavened Jesus? To understand the differences we must look at one of the other elements, the yeast.

1 Corinthians 5:6-8 Your glorying is not good. Know ye not that a little leaven leaveneth the whole lump? Purge out therefore the old leaven, that ye may be a new lump, as ye are unleavened. For even Christ our passover is sacrificed for us: Therefore let us keep the feast, not with old leaven, neither with the leaven of malice and wickedness; but with the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth.

The leaven subject of 1 Corinthians 5 is fornication, sin. The unleavened Jesus is Old Testament sinless Jesus, and the Jesus with sin is the New Testament Jesus. But wasn't Jesus without sin? We again look to scripture to explain scripture.

2 Corinthians 5:21 For he hath made him to be sin for us, who knew no sin; that we might be made the righteousness of God in him.

Jesus walked in perfection, performing in the law a sinless life and became the perfect sacrifice for sin, taking away the sins of the world. Our choice here is to follow the pre-cross Jesus and make every human effort to be perfect in performance of the law, which by the way you broke before you ever heard of Jesus Christ, or to follow the resurrected Christ as a born again believer.

That explains two of those three key code words, the last being the tree. The tree of life was in the "midst" of the garden. The midst is the middle, the center, so it should be seen as the center of attention. Adam and Eve chose the tree of knowledge of good and evil. Choice can also be seen as contrast. e.g. choosing good over evil. We will get back to that shortly. Let us look again to scripture and try and do a comparison of trees to see if we can understand the key code.

Jeremiah 17:7-9 Blessed is the man that trusteth in the Lord, and whose hope the Lord is. For he shall be as a tree planted by the waters, and that spreadeth out her roots by the river, and shall not see when heat cometh, but her leaf shall be green; and shall not be careful in the year of drought, neither shall cease from yielding fruit.

Man shall be as a tree. Can we find anything else to substantiate this claim?

Zechariah 1:10 And the man that stood among the myrtle trees answered and said, These are they whom the LORD hath sent to walk to and fro through the earth.

Ezekiel 47:7;10 Now when I had returned, behold, at the bank of the river were very many trees on the one side and on the other. And it shall come to pass, that the fishers shall stand upon it from Engedi even unto Eneglaim; they shall be a place to spread forth nets; their fish shall be according to their kinds, as the fish of the great sea, exceeding many.

Trees don't fish, men do. Fish is another code key, but we won't get into that right now. If these two represent men, then what kind of men are they to be so important as to appear so prominently this early in scriptures? Understand please that they are representative images, Adam is the first man, so these trees have major spiritual implications. Since the tree of knowledge of good and evil has more text associated with it, let us examine the scriptures associated with that tree.

Genesis 3:3-5 But of the fruit of the tree which is in the midst of the garden, God hath said, Ye shall not eat of it, neither shall ye touch it, lest ye die. And the serpent said unto the woman, Ye shall not surely die: For God doth know that in the day ye eat thereof, then your eyes shall be opened, and ye shall be as gods, knowing good and evil.

Here we find a serpent presenting an alternative theory to Eve, contradicting God. Since one of the characteristics of God that has to remain fixed and true for our understanding to be correct, God does not lie. So the serpent lied. If you will read John 8:44 you will discover that the devil is the father of all lies, and since the serpent spoke the first lie, that would indicated his birthing of the issues of lies. So the serpent represents the devil and is associated with the tree of knowledge of good and evil. The root word for serpent in Hebrew is derived from the hissing sound which the serpent makes, also called whispering. The hissing sound is a warning of danger and Satan often approaches us with whispering lies. God's voice on the other hand is described as being a "still small voice". Ref. 1 Kings 19:12 The voice of God is heard when we are at peace, when we are still, not anxious, when we humble ourselves enough to hear that small voice.

Looking to the tree of life, the alternative to Satan, we can add truth to His description, since He is the opposite choice of the tree of knowledge of good and evil. So let us look in scripture and see who can be found using truth and life together.

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

Jesus Christ was in the garden? Can this be true? What does scripture say about that? This is what the gospel of John has to say about Jesus.

John 1:1-3 In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. The same was in the beginning with God. All things were made by him; and without him was not any thing made that was made.

It sounds a little confusing doesn't it? How could Jesus be in the garden, yet had not been born of woman? We once again get caught up in seeing things from our own perspective and not from God's. The resurrected Christ, the Word made flesh, the Son of God, God in the flesh, is God and therefore not subject to natural laws. Jesus is able to slip in and out of time, from our realm of time, into eternity, a place without time, and back again. He demonstrated that ability before His disciples at the Mount of Transfiguration where He appeared in His glory with Moses and Elijah. (ref. Matthew 17:1-3) He is spoken of with titles within the Old Testament, such as the Captain of the army of the Lord. He is

thought to have appeared to Abraham in warning about the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah. He appeared with Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego in the fiery furnace and saved them. Ref. Daniel 3:25 description "like the Son of God"

So the choice to be made in the garden was between the heir to the throne of God or the rebellious Satan. Choose life or death. Chose truth or a lie. Chose love or hatred. Chose to obey or not. I have my own personal message from God in this view. It isn't anything I would encourage as doctrine, just a personal view. "Do I have to die for you to prove how much I love you?" The fact that the tree of life remained silent while Satan was vocal and boisterous in his tempting of Eve only reminds me of the quality of humility Christ exhibited against his accusers. This is what Isaiah prophesied of the coming Messiah.

Isaiah 53:7 He was oppressed, and he was afflicted, yet he opened not his mouth: he is brought as a lamb to the slaughter, and as a sheep before her shearers is dumb, so he openeth not his mouth.

This is yet further confirmation that the tree of life in the garden represents our Lord Jesus Christ. This is just an example of code keys and how they can be discovered by allowing the bible to explain itself. There are more examples but I will leave them for you to discover yourselves. Just remember the seeking is what is important.

Deuteronomy 4:29 But if from thence thou shalt seek the LORD thy God, thou shalt find him, if thou seek him with all thy heart and with all thy soul.

Words have Meaning

Do you read Hebrew, Aramaic, or Greek? Neither do I. Translating the bible into other languages is a very difficult task. Scholars, theologians, and linguists have done wonderful things to fulfill the prophesy that God's word would be spoken in every tongue, tribe and nation.

Revelation 14:6 And I saw another angel fly in the midst of heaven, having the everlasting gospel to preach unto them that dwell on the earth, and to every nation, and kindred, and tongue, and people,

This is no easy task. Praise God for such dedicated men and women. Their work is important and needful in this present time. Along with this good work, there is yet another great work available to us which will help us understand God's message better. That is the Lexicon. This is the definition of Lexicon as found at dictionary.reference.com.

1. a wordbook or dictionary, especially of Greek, Latin, or Hebrew.
2. the vocabulary of a particular language, field, social class, person, etc.
3. inventory or record: unparalleled in the lexicon of human relations.
4. Linguistics .
 - a. the total inventory of morphemes in a given language.
 - b. the inventory of base morphemes plus their combinations with derivational morphemes.

If you do not quite understand morphemes it is simply a root word which can be altered to emphasize, or conjugate as in walk, walked, walking. The complicated form of derivational morphemes comes from a relevant understanding of words which are particular to a time period, a place, a people as they related those words to their environment and history. These words have context which have been altered over time because people change, environments change, understandings change, social history

changes. One example would be Israel during the Babylonian exile. The experience of exile, being enslaved, and the pressures and demands placed on them brought a whole new way of relating to their environment, and the influences of the captors language is one inevitable outcome.

So here we are thousands years removed from the origins of some of these writing. In order to understand in context what those words meant to those people we need help and the Lexicon is one tool. I find it difficult to clearly understand the King James Version which was written in 1611. It became the authorized version by the command of King James. It was not the first English version of the bible nor the last, but unlike many of the earlier English translations it included the difficult to translate Old Testament scriptures. Its widespread use came about thanks to the invention of the printing press by Gutenberg in the mid-1400's.

I read and use the King James Bible for two reasons. It has no copy write and as a writer I can freely quote it as much as I like without paying a fee for using more than the allotted words. The second reason is even more important. The language of the King James Bible was archaic at the time of its release. The difficulty of the language itself causes me to be a seeker. I do not rest on my own understanding. I seek out the Lord by asking, "What are you trying to tell me here?" I shy away from translations of convenience. I don't like bible versions that paraphrase with language to make it more consumer friendly. I don't like to be told what it means in a manner which negates the possibility that God has something more to say about a subject. It is fine for a novice to get familiar with God's word, to read and understand the milk of the word but I am a mature Christian who needs to feed on more than milk. I like strong meat.

Hebrews 5:12-14 For when for the time ye ought to be teachers, ye have need that one teach you again which be the first principles of the oracles of God; and are become such as have need of milk, and not of strong meat. For every one that useth milk is unskilful in the word of righteousness: for he is a babe. But strong meat belongeth to them that are of full age, even those who by reason of use have their senses exercised to discern both good and evil.

I see that as a necessary thing, to have my senses exercised. But that is me, and some others. How much this is necessary within your experience has to be about what God is calling you to do.

Hebrews 6:1 Therefore leaving the principles of the doctrine of Christ, let us go on unto perfection; not laying again the foundation of repentance from dead works, and of faith toward God,

Leaving the principles doesn't mean they are to be forgotten, nor neglected to be taught. It is a pressing forward, to not be satisfied with where you are in your relationship with Christ. We ought to seek to draw closer to Him. A closer relationship, a closer view, these things bring us to a better, and proper understanding of God's will. Obedience of faith is easier if you are more sure of those things God is asking of you.

For this reason I use Lexicons to attempt to have a more complete and proper understanding of the bible and not to merely relate to things in my present environment, culture and language. I will give you a few examples. The word created in Ephesians 2:10 caught my eye and I looked up the usage of the word and found ktizo {ktid'-zo}. Root: probably akin to 2932 (through the idea of proprietorship of the manufacturer)

- 1) to make habitable, to people, a place, region, island
- a) to found a city, colony, state
- 2) to create

- a) of God creating the worlds
- b) to form, shape, i.e. to completely change or transform

Strong's number 2932 renders even more interesting text.

- 1) to acquire, get, or procure a thing for one's self, to possess
 - a) to marry a wife.

He molds us into the image of His Son Jesus Christ, with purpose and design. In essence He is preparing His bride. God sees to it that we will become a proper helpmate for His Son, Jesus Christ.

From Easton's Bible Dictionary

Lees: (Hebrew - shemarim), from a word meaning to keep or preserve. It was applied to "lees" from the custom of allowing wine to stand on the lees that it might thereby be better preserved (Isaiah 25:6). "Men settled on their lees" (Zephaniah 1:12) are men "hardened or crusted." The image is derived from the crust formed at the bottom of wines long left undisturbed (Jeremiah 48:11). The effect of wealthy undisturbed ease on the ungodly is hardening. They become stupidly secure (Psalm 55:19; Amos 6:1). To drink the lees (Psalm 75:8) denotes severe suffering.

Psalm 55:19 God shall hear, and afflict them, even he that abideth of old. Selah. Because they have no changes, therefore they fear not God.

Smith's Bible Dictionary - Selah:

This word, which is found only in the poetical books of the Old Testament, occurs seventy-one times in the Psalms and three times in Habakkuk. It is probably a term which had a meaning in the musical nomenclature of the Hebrews, though what that meaning may have been is now a matter of pure conjecture (Gesenius and Ewald and others think it has much the same meaning as our interlude,-a pause in the voices singing, while the instruments perform alone.)

I read Selah as a meaningful pause. When you see this word in scripture stop and think. Something meaningful has just been said. Something spiritual in context.

Probably one of the most misunderstood words in the Old Testament is the word covenant. Here is what Vine's Expository Dictionary of New Testament Words has to say about covenant. The Greek word *diatheke* primarily signifies "a disposition of property by will or otherwise." In its use in the Septuagint it is the rendering of a Hebrew word meaning a "covenant" or agreement (from a verb signifying "to cut or divide," in allusion to a sacrificial custom in connection with "covenant-making," e.g., Gen 15:10, "divided" Jer 34:18,19). In contradistinction to the English word "covenant" (lit., "a coming together"), which signifies a mutual undertaking between two parties or more, each binding himself to fulfill obligations, it does not in itself contain the idea of joint obligation, it mostly signifies an obligation undertaken by a single person.

As I said, words and meanings change over time. The Lexicon is a valuable tool for the earnest seeker to discover what God has to say. Towns, tribes, names of men, events, alters, holidays, and some obscure words such as lees, have meaning. If you truly want to understand what God is saying to you, take the time, use your Lexicon and marvel at God's ability to relate to His creation.

Teachers, preachers and authors.

We are men and women, called of God, given gifts to build up the church, to instruct you in

righteousness, to encourage you to good works, remove doubt, to lift the veil of ignorance even. Yet we are human and subject to human frailty. Some of us have ascended to lofty positions only to fall and weaken the faith of those who looked to us for help. We try to do what is right and sometimes miss the mark. Babies in Christ cannot be expected to feed themselves. Babies grow and they are expected to feed themselves. They also need to be cautious of their diet.

Before I get too carried away with that metaphor, allow me to say that we all are in need of sound counsel, learned instruction, even correction from time to time. We all need to have our personal theology examined. No one likes to be made a fool or embarrassed. We seek to be accepted by our peers and it is important to fit in, like a piece of a puzzle, fitted jointly together. Ref. Ephesians 4:16 What we are to do about following the teachings of others has to be based on more than personality, auditory prowess, appearance, or position. There are those who will not question a higher authority because of loyalty to a man or position, title or personal relationship. Respect is one thing but blind obedience is after all, blind.

Give us gracious space to be human. The more we stick our necks out, the more exposed we become. We are bound to make mistakes if our volume of work is extremely large. The laws of probability and the human condition almost guarantees it. Some mistakes are so trivial you can chalk them up to a slip of the tongue and let it slide. Other things need to be questioned, call for clarification, because your understanding might be wrong. In this case I seek a wise counsel and ask them if they heard the same thing I did. In those cases I would never approach the preacher, teacher directly until all doubt was removed. Then there is the dangerous theology which must be exposed and brought before the overseers.

Hero worship doesn't belong in the church. We have one Lord, one God, and one Comforter. The ultimate goal to me is to hear God speaking through others, no matter who they are in the body of Christ. If we are to be glorified, then God must be seen in us, and speak through us. That is what is at the heart of this scripture.

1 John 2:27 But the anointing which ye have received of him abideth in you, and ye need not that any man teach you: but as the same anointing teacheth you of all things, and is truth, and is no lie, and even as it hath taught you, ye shall abide in him.

The abiding spirit within me says "Yes and Amen" when He speaks through others.

Some might think that is a profound statement, others might totally get it, and some might think hogwash. In any case I have to say, it is personal, that is my experience. It doesn't mean you cannot or will not feel the spirit as clearly as others. Faith is measured out unequally. That doesn't mean you are less. That doesn't mean God loves you less. What it does mean is found within you and not me. God is your God and what you make of that relationship is between you and God. I don't have the right to tell you it is less important, it is not. If you have the peace of God and have love and joy, are gentle and kind, humble and have self control, then God has had greater influence in changing your nature than most of us and that is a great gift from God. If that is the case I applaud you.

For me that change from the man who I was to the man I want to be has been and continues to be a great struggle. I need sound counsel, I need teachers and pastors who are not only dedicated but gifted in grace, wisdom and discernment. I prefer men who operate in the power of the love of God over those who seek to operate in the power of the gifts. Paul lays out the better gifts in 1 Corinthians chapter 12 but goes on to say there is a better way and then in chapter 13 explains the character and nature of God's love working in and through us. That love is the ultimate goal.

Knowledge Vs. Knowing

That title needs to be explained. Our cleaver way of viewing word meanings and playing word games often adds confusion. I understand what I mean but I intentionally morphed the word know in an attempt to prove a point. The first use concept of understanding the bible is often helpful. A vital lesson concerning knowledge can be seen in the very first time the word is used. Its first use was in God's placing a condition called don't. The don't condition came with a warning. This is cause and effect. We base all of our laws off this very principle. We make laws that say what you shall not do and if you violate those laws then there will be consequences. Violation of God's laws we call sin. Violation of man's laws we call crime. Man dispenses justice for crimes. God dispenses justice for sin.

So how does that help your understanding of the differences between knowledge and knowing? To discover that, we need to observe the first violation. We will look at both Eve and Adam eating of the tree of knowledge of good and evil. Since Eve first ate, we will examine her act. We will discover that in the opening verses of Genesis chapter 3.

Genesis 3:2-3 And the woman said unto the serpent, We may eat of the fruit of the trees of the garden: But of the fruit of the tree which is in the midst of the garden, God hath said, Ye shall not eat of it, neither shall ye touch it, lest ye die.

Nowhere in the bible will you find God telling Eve don't eat, don't touch. Where did Eve get the understanding of don't eat, don't touch? It may have been Adam's instruction that Eve was quoting, not God's. Did Eve violate Adam's interpretation of what God said? When Eve ate, did she know that she was naked? Did she hide from Adam? Did God come looking for her? Was any part of the curse imposed? No, it wasn't. Eve ate, nothing happened and then she gave the fruit to Adam to eat, verse 6.

Genesis 3:7 And the eyes of them both were opened, and they knew that they were naked; and they sewed fig leaves together, and made themselves aprons.

It wasn't until Adam ate that the curse went into effect. While it is important to note that God said don't to Adam while Adam was alone and represented all mankind, and that the curse fell on all mankind, it doesn't help add to our understanding of knowledge. I want to get back to the issue of Adam's instructions to Eve. They point to some very fundamental truths about our human condition and how we interact with other people. The very first point is simple, accuracy.

I can imagine, and only imagine what must have been going on in Adam's mind during those first days and possibly years in the garden with God and Eve. I can see myself saying to Eve, "Don't eat it, don't touch it, don't go anywhere near it." My reasoning would be based on two distinct issues which are both false thinking. God told me, so she needs to obey me. Secondly she cannot be trusted to understand properly, so I have to be emphatic. The root cause of both of these issues is judgment. What I would have done, is the very thing that causes problems for others. When we alter God's words, when we do not accurately render a proper understanding, we give the enemy a place to stand and whisper in their ears. It is a lie and the father of lies is Satan. We have a responsibility to every person we talk to in being accurate and not adding to what God has said. Nor deleting.

What if the serpent was in the tree, winding in and out of the branches, touching the fruit of the tree of knowledge of good and evil? Eve, believing Adam, that if you touch the fruit you die, now doubt comes into question, since the serpent wasn't dead. If Adam was wrong about touching, is it possible he was wrong about eating also. So Eve was tricked into eating, What about Adam?

1 Timothy 2:14 And Adam was not deceived, but the woman being deceived was in the transgression.

What I see here in relationship to knowledge is that the act of making wrong choices, whether out of ignorance or willfulness, have consequences and you gain knowledge from suffering. Often those ignorant mistakes don't reveal themselves right away, as with Eve, but they will become known. Willful disobedience, knowing what is right and choosing wrong is a form of rebellion. Since Jesus Christ is your Lord, rebellion has to be dealt with by chastening, God chastens those He loves. Any good parent wants to protect their child from harm. God is a great father.

That is the simplistic form of knowledge. The bible contains examples of nearly every mistake man can make. It also shows the consequences. We can read about the mistakes of others and hopefully avoid the chastening. Which sins we avoid by watching other peoples mistakes varies. Christians are sinners saved by grace. Sinning is the inevitable side effect of being human. Self control is the last and most difficult of gifts of the spirit to manifest itself, but it can be done. So what about knowing?

1 Corinthians 8:2-3 And if any man think that he knoweth any thing, he knoweth nothing yet as he ought to know. But if any man love God, the same is known of him.

The Greek word for think here is *dokeo*?; it seems good to, pleased me, I determined. It is self determination, education, reasoning, rationalization. It is self determination, a force of will. The result is not the way we should know. But if we truly love God, things are known. So what is the difference between education and God knowing? Intimacy, love, a relationship with the creator of all things. How does that alone make learning and educating yourself different? Well it is like having your own private tutor who never leaves you and can explain things as you need the help.

John 14:16-17 1And I will pray the Father, and he shall give you another Comforter, that he may abide with you for ever; Even the Spirit of truth; whom the world cannot receive, because it seeth him not, neither knoweth him: but ye know him; for he dwelleth with you, and shall be in you.

There is the definition of knowing, right there. Having the Holy Spirit in you to teach you and guide you. That does not dissolve you of your responsibility in the relationship. You need to read the bible over and over again. Not as an educational tool to get a passing grade, but to allow the word to be ingrained into your heart.

1 Thessalonians 2:13 For this cause also thank we God without ceasing, because, when ye received the word of God which ye heard of us, ye received it not as the word of men, but as it is in truth, the word of God, which effectually worketh also in you that believe.

Philemon 1:6 That the communication of thy faith may become effectual by the acknowledging of every good thing which is in you in Christ Jesus.

Effectual workings, cause and effect, receiving the word of God changes you and draws you closer to God. The closer you are the more clearly you can hear God, like picking up a distant radio station and then hearing it more clearly as you approach the radio tower. It is not that we are really any further from God at any one moment, but that our affections have strayed. Whether it be the concerns of this world, or things which cannot love you in return, when your affections move away from God it is like tuning to another station when you are right under God's transmission tower.

I would now like to point back to a phrase in 1 Thess. 2:13 above, which is "received it not as

the word of men". The reason centers around the style and tenor of each authors writings. We tend to favor certain authors, at least I do. When we judge, either good or bad, it is setting up a form of favoritism which can often pigeon hole our ability to receive instruction from the Spirit of Truth. He is not limited in His ability to reveal the will of God by what we read. When we limit our supplemental diet of the bible to just one book or author, we may find ourselves digging a rut of our own making. My goal in reading other authors is to open up my viewing angle, much like changing the lens on my camera. Perspective is good as long as you seek God in the view. God speaking through others is still my hope, not to admire the talent God has placed in them. We should never grow so enamored of an author's writing as to allow that to take the place of Holy Spirit instruction, correction and growth. Neither should we fear or hate in the name of righteous indignation. Holding high opinions can be a put off, even if right. Grace and humility in the face of maturity is love at its best.

Promises

Deuteronomy 28:8 The Lord shall command the blessing upon thee in thy storehouses, and in all that thou settest thine hand unto; and he shall bless thee in the land which the Lord thy God giveth thee.

Sounds fantastic doesn't it? The Lord God of the Universe, creator of all things will provide a blessing of wealth, fame and respect. We need only examine the kingdom of Solomon to see just how blessed that promise can be. We need only look at the end results, a kingdom divided by two ambitious sons, and the ruination of all the good that Solomon had accomplished. It came about because the promise was conditional. If you will read Deuteronomy 28 and 29 you will find a conditional covenant based in this thought; "If you will, I will." The blessing was followed with a curse for those who did not keep the law. Israel and man in general has proven over time that no one can keep all the law.

Examine these promises and it is a laundry list of everything man would take for himself if he were capable. Some men have and in the end either died a violent death or suicide. It is a parable of the condition of prosperity, that eventually someone will try and steal it, or kill you for it. I would like for you to keep that in mind as we examine the New Covenant promises of God. He makes them to all whom have already obtain the keys to the Kingdom of Heaven.

Romans 8:29-30 For whom he did foreknow, he also did predestinate to be conformed to the image of his Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brethren. Moreover whom he did predestinate, them he also called: and whom he called, them he also justified: and whom he justified, them he also glorified.

This is the essence of every New Covenant promises. If you have a view and an understanding of those promises which does not result in you looking and acting more like Jesus, if your hope in a promise does not elevate you in righteousness and humility, you need to re-examine your expectation of those promises. I have heard far too many prosperity preachers stir up a congregation to a frenzy of giving, in hopes that the blessing will follow. To quote one of my favorite movies, "I'm not interested in your money, you know that."

Matthew 16:19 And I will give unto thee the keys of the kingdom of heaven: and whatsoever thou shalt bind on earth shall be bound in heaven: and whatsoever thou shalt loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven.

When a preacher tells you that this means not to hold onto you money here on earth because it

will cause you loss in heaven, he is wrong. This passage is often taken out of context and has nothing to do with prosperity or rewards. All you have to do is read Matt. 16:18 to understand that Jesus is talking about winning souls to Himself and building up a church of faithful believers. The issue of binding and loosing here in verse 19 is directly related to Romans 6:18 "You have been set free from sin and have become slaves to righteousness."

Every one of God's promises in the New Testament are directly related to winning souls and conforming them to the image of His Son Jesus Christ. Examine the scriptures and ask the Holy Spirit to reveal the truth. In Jesus own words He said:

John 5:39 Search the scriptures; for in them ye think ye have eternal life: and they are they which testify of me.

If you have read your bible and heard some things, you might ask me here, right now about Romans 8:32, and how that applies to what I just said. So let us look at that verse.

Romans 8:32 He that spared not his own Son, but delivered him up for us all, how shall he not with him also freely give us all things?

Nowhere will you find a list which identifies what "all things" consist of here. I will admit that the words do stir up the imagination but at the very beginning of this book I said to be wary of allowing your imaginations to tell you what the bible means. If we look to the preceding verses to help define the scope of content and context, Paul was addressing the issue of conformation and glorification of Christ Jesus in us, believers and followers of Christ. It seems reasonable that "all things" would be a list of character attributes which we do not have which we need to exhibit Christ in our lives.

Even if I were to include wealth, fame and position, I would still have to examine those things in light of other scriptures to render a proper understanding of God's intentions in blessing me in that manner or withholding that blessing. When I think of have and have not, I think of Job, who had it all and lost it all. I will quote a few verses from the book of Job and see what conclusions can be drawn about God's intentions.

Job 1:8-11 And the Lord said unto Satan, Hast thou considered my servant Job, that there is none like him in the earth, a perfect and an upright man, one that feareth God, and escheweth evil? Then Satan answered the Lord, and said, Doth Job fear God for nought? Hast not thou made an hedge about him, and about his house, and about all that he hath on every side? thou hast blessed the work of his hands, and his substance is increased in the land. But put forth thine hand now, and touch all that he hath, and he will curse thee to thy face.

Here the accusation is directly related to the relationship between Job and God. So God, knowing His relationship with Job was deep, sincere and everlasting, allows the accuser to test Job for himself. This is the result of the first test.

Job 1:20-22 Then Job arose, and rent his mantle, and shaved his head, and fell down upon the ground, and worshipped, And said, Naked came I out of my mother's womb, and naked shall I return thither: the Lord gave, and the Lord hath taken away; blessed be the name of the Lord. In all this Job sinned not, nor charged God foolishly.

The primary concern of our God is the relationship, not our comfort, wealth, fame or position. If

He builds in us the character of His Son, Jesus Christ, don't you think that we would be more likely to have some of those "things" without damaging that relationship? As a father I would not give something to my children that would damage our relationship or cause them to distance themselves from me. God, being perfect in knowledge, wisdom and love, would know my heart better than I do. He would do what is best to draw me closer to him and deny me things that would interfere with our relationship. Validation of that is found in Jesus' teachings.

Matthew 7:9-11 "Which of you, if his son asks for bread, will give him a stone? Or if he asks for a fish, will give him a snake? If you, then, though you are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father in heaven give good gifts to those who ask him!"

The good gifts of God are the fruits of the Spirit and the gifts of service. Both of those are given to enhance the relationship with God and with each other. These grace gifts are by their very definition unmerited favor. We have done nothing to earn them, unlike the old testament promises which had to be earned. More importantly, the very faith to believe is a gift from God.

Faith

Faith is only used twice in the old testament. In every other reference it is faithful or faithfulness, as it applies to a relationship between master and servant or obedience to the law. While it is used many times in the new testament, reading what others have said to define faith can be as simple as faith equals belief, or so complex it takes a doctorate to understand. Rather than try to define it in simple terms or to rehash what others have written, I would like to impart my sense of wonder and respect for faith. I begin with those two old testament verses which contain the word faith because important issue of words can often be found in first use..

Deuteronomy 32:20 And he said, I will hide my face from them, I will see what their end shall be: for they are a very froward generation, children in whom is no faith.

Habakkuk 2:4 Behold, his soul which is lifted up is not upright in him: but the just shall live by his faith.

Children in whom is no faith makes faith sound as if it were a body part. Something essential is missing and shall be supplied by Jesus Christ. This prophecy in Habakkuk is speaking of Jesus. What amazes me is that the substance of faith is His faith, not our faith, not a thing possessed by us. Nor is it simply an act of will on our part, in obedience to commands, or a symbol of our relationship. Faith, once we have accepted Jesus Christ as our Lord and Savior is an integrated part of who we are, supplying that which was missing in that very forward generation. No action on our part will ever remove it, destroy it or alter it.

Romans 1:17 For therein is the righteousness of God revealed from faith to faith: as it is written, The just shall live by faith.

Galatians 2:20 I am crucified with Christ: nevertheless I live; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me: and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me, and gave himself for me.

Please note here that the Word does not say the faith in the Son of God but rather faith of the Son of God. The distinction between the two is important. This faith isn't trust, it is not a belief, it is not an experience, learned by trial and error. This faith is the active, living, moving, power of God. Referring back to the relationship between Spirit and water, let me float this by you. Water flowing into dust makes mud. Water flowing into water guarantees that there is no change in the substance being transported. We are mere vessels, not the substance, not the power, nor are we the source.

So much has been said about faith by so many that many believers accept that faith is nothing more than an action on their part in response to what they believe God is asking of them. When things don't work out as they expect, they do one of two things, both of which are wrong. They either think their faith was weak, or they blame someone else. Neither is true because the motivations of their actions might have been rooted in self determination. The faith of Christ is not rooted in self, it flows from the throne of God. The will of the Father is everything and no amount of wishing on our part can alter that. The fact that we do not see the results of our actions does not mean that God was not the author of that call to faith.

Hebrews 11:1 Now faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen.

Substances can be quantified and qualified. This means it can be measured. Anything that can be measured leaves evidence of its existence. Our error in understanding this verse doesn't come from the issue of faith, it rests in our vision of what hope means. In verse 6 of Hebrews 11 we are told that it is impossible to please God without faith. We are also told that He rewards those who diligently seek Him. At this point allow me to drag you back to the beginning of this book and remind you that nothing can be gained by vain imagination. This hope has to relate to something more substantial than what we want, driven by emotional or physical need. It has to be found in the Word of God, because according to Romans 10:17 faith comes from the Word of God. But where do we find it?

Lamentations 3:24 The LORD is my portion, saith my soul; therefore will I hope in him.

What this says to me is that I can only hope in those things God promises. My portion, reward is my portion and that is the Lord. God's promise to us, conformance, justification and glorification are the only things which we can count on, quantify and qualify. Not because we obtained them, but because they were grace gifts from God by faith. All else is but vain imagination.

One last word on faith as it relates to hearing. If numbers are the language of math, isn't faith the language of the spirit? We hear God by faith, it is a language without words. We often confess it as a knowing because there are no words to express a language without words. It is why some say, "I know that I know that I know." Faith isn't limited by words nor bound by actions. It is a gift from God.