

# How Should We Deal with New Understanding?

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When God was calling me in 1964, I was a graduate student at Baylor University in Waco, Texas, and I heard an evangelist from our former association on the radio; I then took the same route that many of us took—I got the correspondence course that was offered, studied that, then got my hands on every booklet I could find, and read The Plain Truth and The Good News magazines—and I was just reading and studying and learning new truth every day. Listening to the radio broadcast every night, one could learn all this new information very quickly, and like many of you, I tried to convert my parents to this new truth.

My dad was not a religious man; he grew up on a ranch in New Mexico and was close to the land—the mountains and the trees and the streams—but he did not really have any religious training at all, and when I tried to convert him, he thought I had gone insane—that I had become an absolute nut case. My mom, who was raised in east Texas, was a rigid, uncompromising Baptist, and when I tried to convert her to this new truth, she thought I was a heretic—no Easter, no Christmas, no sunrise service; she was not happy—not happy at all. The truth, as we learned it, was so plain to us. As we studied, it became so clear, the Bible became so much easier to understand, and the truth was so plain to me; I could not understand why my parents didn't get it. I just couldn't understand it. We've all been through that before—we've experienced that.

Let's go forward fifty-two years, to March 13, 2016, and that was the day that Dorothy and I visited Mark and Michelle Mickelson in their home. Mark had just gone through prostate surgery and we had developed a friendship. Mark was in United and we were not, but we developed a friendship, and we made the trip over to Spokane to visit and see how Mark was doing. I've mentioned this before—we were there several hours and he casually asked the question: Do you believe Christ is the God of the Old Testament? And of course I answered in the affirmative because that's what we were taught. He said, well, have you read this scripture—it was Acts 3:13. I read it and it was like I had read it for the first time; I thought, that's strange. Then we read three or four other scriptures in the space of fifteen or twenty minutes, and then went on to other things.

I can remember going home from that visit; I was going west on I-90. I think we all remember where we were when 9/11 occurred, or where we were when President Kennedy was shot—momentous times in our lives—and I remember we were just passing the exit for the King's house, the Cheney exit, just west of Spokane, and I remember the thought came to me that I have to look into this. It was just too important not to look into. It was nagging at me, and I had a little knot in my stomach. So over the next several months—and I've mentioned this before—I changed my lifestyle completely, rising very early in the morning, to get in three or four hours of study, for

month after month, and it continues to this day. Over time, I came to the new and deeper understanding of God and Christ in scripture.

All of us here have been through this. We've all proved it for ourselves. Once again, as in the beginning, fifty-two years before, I became really excited about it and wanted to talk to people about it. I naively thought that everyone else would be just as excited about it as I was. It was like a second conversion—just as excited, probably more so—more excited than the first conversion. It just opened up a new understanding of the God we serve. As I said, I just made the assumption that everybody would be as happy with it and as excited as I was; it never even occurred to me that some brethren would close their eyes and stop their ears, not wanting to perceive or to understand this new teaching and new truth, just like my parents did. This indeed happened—it did.

Some said to me, we don't want to talk about it. That was shocking. Others said, don't mention any scriptures to me. That was in itself shocking. Others said, don't send us any papers you've written about it, and as a result, we lost a number of brethren because of that. They just couldn't abide this new understanding. There was a fear amongst them of looking into scripture to prove something, yea or nay. There was just a fear to even start the process. It was because their previous belief system was threatened and it was also because they were taken out of a comfort zone they had carved out for themselves over the decades. Despite all of that, we are commanded to continually grow in our knowledge and understanding of the two God Beings whom we serve and who exist.

Let's go to another first scripture that came up that day with Mark. John 17:3, I think, was the second scripture Mark mentioned to me; he had been studying it for a while. Christ is speaking, God's very Son in the flesh speaking, saying these words. We'll go through a few scriptures. We're going to prove here very briefly—you can spend the whole time proving it—in Christ's own words:

**John 17:3** [Christ is speaking] *And this is eternal life...* (NKJV)

All the antennas should go up, our radar should be honing in on the answer, because this is important stuff—Rick [Matthews] was talking about that in the sermonette—this is key. What is eternal life?

3 continued) ... *that they may know You, the only true God* [Christ is saying], *and Jesus Christ* [referring to Himself], *whom You have sent.* (NKJV)

If we want eternal life, we're being told here that the way to get it is to know the only true God, and His Son, Jesus Christ. Can you know somebody on a first meeting? Can you know—those of you who have been married for forty, fifty, sixty years—do you know your spouse better today than you did the first year of marriage? Of course, it's a process that occurs over time. God is saying—Christ is saying here—My Father wants you to know Me and Him, the only true God, more and more as time goes along. Let's

go to Jeremiah 9:23, the LORD (all capital letters) Yehovah, is speaking. I'm going to read this out of the New International Version. We're told,

**Jeremiah 9:23** *This is what the LORD [Yehovah] says: "Let not the wise boast of their wisdom or the strong boast of their strength or the rich boast of their riches ...*

Don't let that happen. Verse 24.

*24) but let the one who boasts boast about this:*

So if we're going to boast, God is saying, this is what I want you to boast about—this is what He wants us to understand:

*24 continued) that they have the understanding to know me, [what are we to know about Him?] that I am the LORD [Yehovah] ... (NIV)*

We have to know it, we have to understand it, that He is Yehovah and all that that implies. There's another sermon or two (or three or four), right there. Various speakers have covered that.

*24 continued) ... who exercises kindness, justice and righteousness on earth, for in these I delight,' declares [Yehovah] the LORD. (NIV)*

He's saying, if you're going to boast, then boast that you understand Me and you know Me, that I am above all. Let's go to Hosea 6:6. In the sermonette, Rick [Matthews] was in chapter 4:6, which tangentially applies, too. Hosea 6:6—again we see what God desires. He tells us directly.

**Hosea 6:6** *For I desired mercy, and not sacrifice; (KJV)*

Obviously He is referring to the tens of thousands, perhaps millions of animals that were sacrificed. He says compared to that, what I really desire is mercy.

*6 continued) [and in addition to mercy] ... the knowledge of God more than burnt offerings. (KJV)*

Look at the effort Ancient Israel went to, sacrificing animals—every aspect of it. He says, that is minuscule to My desire that you get to know Me. It's a life-long process. Now let's go to the New Testament, to Ephesians 1:17. Paul makes an appeal about this very subject. He's appealing to us today, and to the people in Ephesus, of course, in that day. Paul says,

**Ephesians 1:17** *That the God of our Lord Jesus Christ [so, Christ's God is] the Father of glory, [who, Paul says] may give unto you the spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of him: (KJV)*

—*him* refers to the Father of glory, who is the God of Jesus Christ,. What we're being told here is that if we get to know God, and we expand our knowledge and understanding of Him and of Jesus Christ, we will have a spirit of wisdom and it will be a revelation to us. So this is very important to God.

A last scripture that we know by heart, 2 Peter 3:18; you can turn there or not, but we're told to grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. We're told to do that. You put all these scriptures together and they tell us that it's very important to God and very important to Jesus Christ that over time we get to know Them. Then if that is the case, and we understand that, how on earth can we reject any revelation from God that opens our understanding to Him and His Son? How can we do that? How can we close our eyes and close our ears to block new revelations that God might be showering on the New Testament church in this day? Yet there are people today who are literally sticking their fingers in their ears and closing their eyes because they don't want to do so. So that leads to the question contained in the sermon title today:

### How Should We Deal with New Understanding?

Should we turn our back on it, or should we, with open arms, address it and listen to it? We'll investigate that question today. The first point is:

#### **1. God's people have a history of rejecting new understanding.**

We could start with Adam and Eve on that one, but let's go instead to Ancient Israel, to Exodus 20, to see the example of Ancient Israel and how they received new understanding. As we know, Exodus 20 records the giving of the Ten Commandments, and we're breaking into the story immediately after the Ten Commandments have been given from Mount Sinai, so let's look at verse 18 and start our investigation here. There are some telling events that happen; I notice this when I counsel with people—you can know whether someone is receiving what you're saying or not based on body language. If somebody folds their arms over their chest, that's a way of blocking what is coming. We have probably all seen that. With that in mind, let's notice what Ancient Israel did.

**Exodus 20:18** *And all the people saw the thunderings, and the lightnings, and the noise of the trumpet, and the mountain smoking: and when the people saw it, [Were they inquisitive, did they want to see what was going on, did they want to get close to the might and power that was there?—No] they removed, and stood afar off. (KJV)*

That's an interesting response.

19) *And they said unto Moses, Speak thou with us, and we will hear: but let not God speak with us, lest we die.*

20) *And Moses said unto the people, Fear not: for God is come to prove you, and that his fear may be before your faces, that ye sin not. (KJV)*

God wants you to respect His power and might to the point that maybe you'll think twice before you attempt to sin.

*21) And the people stood afar off, and Moses drew near unto the thick darkness where God was. (KJV)*

It's plain that the people did not want to hear directly from God. They just didn't want to do it, and even more importantly, they didn't want to hear what He had to reveal to them—Moses, you talk to us, you translate, you interpolate, you interpret it for us, but we don't want God to speak to us directly. I can't tell you the number of times I've asked God, would you just whisper in my ear and tell me what You want me to do, and I'll be very happy with that. I would love that to happen but Israel didn't want any part of it.

Now let's go to Hebrews 12 because Paul is talking about this very same event, and let's notice what he has to say about it. In Hebrews 12:19, he's writing about Israel, standing at the foot of Mount Sinai. He adds to our understanding here.

**Hebrews 12:19** *And the sound of a trumpet, and the voice of words; which voice they that heard intreated that the word should not be spoken to them any more:*

They didn't want to hear it.

*20) For they could not endure that which was commanded ... (KJV)*

They did not want to hear it, despite the miracles that they saw with their own eyes, coming out of Egypt, with God saving their lives so many, many times—Israel did not want to hear God directly and they did not want to hear what He had to say to them. They just didn't want to. That carried down all the way to Christ's day. How many times did God appeal to Ancient Israel?—if you'll just turn, if you'll just hear Me, if you'll just obey My words—but they just wouldn't do it.

Now let's look at the Jews and Judah in Christ's day. Let's go to Matthew 13:1. Did anything change when Christ began His ministry on this earth? We're going to see that nothing changed. In fact, it got worse.

**Matthew 13:1** *The same day went Jesus out of the house, and sat by the sea side.*

*2) And great multitudes were gathered together unto him, so that he went into a ship, and sat; and the whole multitude stood on the shore. (KJV)*

He could communicate better and they could all see Him.

*3) And he spake many things unto them in parables ... (KJV)*

Then in verse 10, the disciples are talking to Him privately.

10) *And the disciples came, and said unto him, Why speakest thou unto them in parables?*

11) *He answered and said unto them, Because it is given unto you to know the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven, [we're going to talk about that in just a second, but just note, He says, it is given unto you to know the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven] but to them it is not given. (KJV)*

We have to stop and ask the question: Why was it not given? Why was it not given to them to have their minds opened? Christ gives us a hint in verse 12. Let me read this out of the New Living Translation because I believe this translation gets it right.

12) *To those [who are open] who listen to my teaching [that's interesting], more understanding will be given, and they will have an abundance of knowledge. But for those who are not listening [meaning, who are not open to My teaching], even what little understanding they have will be taken away from them. (NLT).*

That's an interesting concept. Christ is talking directly to people who grew up believing in Yehovah, believing in one God. In a way, it's similar today; we have brethren who have been in the church for decades and they have grown up with a certain belief system. In both cases, the Jews of Christ's day and some of God's people today are not open to new revelations from God. They don't want to hear it—get away from me! We have to understand that what Christ was saying to them in His day was new and radically different from anything they had ever heard before. Look at verse 15; we'll go back to the King James.

15) [Christ says] *For this people's heart is waxed gross [the Greek means "to make dull", they have a dull heart], and their ears are dull of hearing, [notice this next phrase] and their eyes they have closed; (KJV)*

What we're being told is, no one else closed their eyes. Nobody came and dropped their eyelids; they did it on their own.

15 continued) *... lest at any time they should see with their eyes, and hear with their ears, and should understand with their heart ... (KJV)*

Christ is saying there are some people who don't want to understand any more than they've already understood. They don't want to know.

15 continued) *... and should be converted, and I should heal them. (KJV)*

That could refer to original conversion but it could also mean being converted so that one can understand and receive further knowledge. As I said, this new understanding of God and Christ for me was like a second conversion. The key is, they closed their own eyes, and it was their doing, not somebody else's doing—nobody put a gun to their head and made them do anything, they closed their own eyes. Here's the scary thought: When one rejects new revelations from God, blindness sets in. We have seen

that. That is a scary concept, that if we reject something that God wants us to understand, that He begins to reveal to us, and we turn our back on it, then blindness slowly begins to set in. I spoke earlier of verse 11, in which Christ discussed the mysteries of the Kingdom. Why were they not given? God and Christ are the only two Beings who know our hearts. Let me just ask this question: Could it be that further knowledge about the mysteries—further revelation—was not given because God knew their hearts and knew they would close their eyes? Is that a possibility? I think it is. Today, God could be saying to His own people, I want to reveal more about Myself to you as we get closer to the end. I want you to understand Me more, who I am, what I've done, what My names and titles are, and what My Son has done—I want to reveal that to you as we get closer to the end, but I know some of you will close your eyes and ears. That's something to think about. That's something to ask ourselves. We must all ask ourselves the question, have I been guilty of that?

We're talking about the conditions at the time in the New Testament, about God's people rejecting Him, so let's go to Acts 6 and look at the account of Stephen, and see what the reaction of the people was. I think we all know what it was, but let's look in detail. Acts 6:8.

**Acts 6:8** *And Stephen, full of faith and power, did great wonders and miracles among the people.*

9) [Notice this] *Then there arose certain of the synagogue, which is called the synagogue of the Libertines, and Cyrenians [Cyrenians were from the north coast of Libya, right on the southern edge of the Mediterranean Sea], and Alexandrians [they were from the north coast of Egypt where Alexandria was], and of them of Cilicia [Cilicia is an area in southern Turkey] and of Asia, disputing with Stephen.* (KJV)

This was a diverse crowd from all over, arguing back and forth with Stephen.

10) *And they were not able to resist the wisdom and the spirit by which he spake.* (KJV)

They could not disprove Stephen from scripture, but notice what they did when they couldn't disprove him.

11) *Then they suborned men, which said, We have heard him speak blasphemous words against Moses, and against God.* (KJV)

These men were lying.

12) *And they stirred up the people [so they induced liars to commit perjury, to stir up the people], and the elders, and the scribes, and came upon him, and caught him, and brought him to the council,*

13) *And set up false witnesses, which said, This man ceaseth not to speak blasphemous words against this holy place, and the law:* (KJV)

Again, they are lying.

14) *For we have heard him say, that this Jesus of Nazareth shall destroy this place, and shall change the customs which Moses delivered us.*

15) *And all that sat in the council, looking steadfastly on him, saw his face as it had been the face of an angel. (KJV)*

Remember when Moses came down from Mount Sinai after he gave the Ten Commandments? He had to wear a veil—his face glowed because he had been in the presence of God. It wouldn't surprise me if Stephen's face had started to glow, as a sign and a witness to these people. Going on in chapter 7, and verse 1.

**Acts 7:1** *Then said the high priest, Are these things so?*

2) *And he said, Men, brethren, and fathers, hearken; The God of glory appeared unto our father Abraham ... (KJV)*

(We know who the God of glory is; He is described in Acts, chapters 3 and 13.) Going on, in verses 3 through 46, Stephen recounts a history of their forefathers. Then in verse 51 he confronts the Jews and he does not hold back. He says, in verse 51,

51) *Ye stiffnecked and uncircumcised in heart and ears, ye do always resist the Holy Spirit: as your fathers did, so do ye. (KJV)*

Wow. Can you imagine what they were thinking? How their blood pressure must have gone up?

52) *Which of the prophets have not your fathers persecuted? and they have slain them which showed before of the coming of the Just One; of whom ye have been now the betrayers and murderers:*

53) *Who have received the law by the disposition of angels, and have not kept it. (KJV)*

They kept the Talmud, they kept the oral law; they did not keep God's law, certainly not from the heart.

54) *When they heard these things, they were cut to the heart, and they gnashed on him with their teeth. (KJV)*

Can you imagine? I can remember as a little child, being very young, when a couple of kids would be playing in the sandbox and get into an argument. Then one little kid would bite the other on the arm or somewhere else—they'd get so angry and frustrated that they didn't know what to do, so they would just bite and gnash. We've all seen it; maybe we've done it ourselves as children. This is exactly what was happening. They were acting like furious, out-of-control, little children. They didn't know what to do but gnash at him with their teeth.



*55) But he, being full of the Holy [Spirit], looked up steadfastly into heaven, and saw the glory of God [what a concept, He saw the glory of God], and Jesus standing on the right hand of God,*

*56) And said, Behold, I see the heavens opened, and the Son of man standing on the right hand of God. (KJV)*

What an astonishing revelation; God can be seen, in vision—what a concept.

*57) [Notice the reaction of the Jews.] Then they cried out with a loud voice, and stopped their ears ... (KJV)*

They literally put their hands over their ears or their fingers in their ears—they did not want to hear.

*57 continued) ... and ran upon him with one accord,  
58) And cast him out of the city, and stoned him: (KJV)*

They murdered him. The Jews rejected the opportunity to come to know the Messiah. They and their temple were destroyed forty years later—interesting number—the temple and many of those same people were destroyed forty years later. The same holds true today. We've seen how it was with Ancient Israel, we've seen how it was with Israel at the time of Jesus Christ. What about today?

The same holds true today. The Jews said to Christ, we have Abraham. Today, many say, we have this man or we have that man, or, we have the traditions of the Worldwide Church of God that we hold to. Others say that all truth was complete with the death of Herbert W. Armstrong, which completely ignores the series of scriptures we read in the introduction. You have to not even pay attention to those, you have to wipe them out of the Bible, if you hold to the belief that all knowledge was frozen at the time of Mr. Armstrong's death. We read in the introduction about continually growing in the knowledge of God and Christ. Many today put church tradition above what their Bible plainly says, thus rejecting any new truth—they don't want to hear it: That's not what I was taught, that's not what I believe, and I'm not even going to entertain it—I'm not even going to look into it.

So closing out this first point, from Adam and Eve to Ancient Israel, to the Jews in Christ's day to us today, God's people have had a tendency to reject new truth revealed by God Almighty. Let's keep that in mind. The second point:

## **2. There are two radically different approaches to addressing new understanding.**

We're going to look at those two approaches in the second point. God doesn't do anything by accident. He doesn't do anything on a whim. Everything He does has a purpose, it has a plan. What we're going to do today is look at a section of scripture where there are two huge contrasts—there is a huge contrast between two sections of

scripture that are adjacent to each other and I believe God puts it there so that we can notice the contrast and we can see the difference. Let's go to Acts 17 and look at this huge contrast that God draws our attention to. Acts 17. This is Paul's second missionary journey and you'll probably want to place a marker here because we're going to go to a couple of scriptures as we plow our way through this. Acts 17:1.

**Acts 17:1** *Now when they had passed through Amphipolis and Apollonia, they came to Thessalonica, where was a synagogue of the Jews: (KJV)*

Thessalonica is in modern-day northern Greece, and at the time it was capital of the Roman province of Macedonia. It was the center, an important city.

*2) And Paul, as his manner was, went in unto them, and three sabbath days reasoned with them out of the scriptures ... (KJV)*

We know that at that time the scriptures were housed in the synagogue as rolled-up scrolls. So they had the opportunity to unroll the scrolls, and prove whether or not what Paul was telling them about Jesus Christ was true.

*3) Opening and alleging, that Christ must needs have suffered, and risen again from the dead; and that this Jesus, whom I preach unto you, is Christ. (KJV)*

The Anointed one, the Messiah. As I said, this is a radically new teaching; this is something they had never heard before.

*4) 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.*

*5) [Notice this] But the Jews which believed not, moved with envy ... (KJV)*

What was their motivation? To understand more about God and Christ? No, they were motivated by envy: We're going to lose power, we're going to lose control, we're going to lose authority if these people listen to this Paul, about this man Jesus Christ. We're going to be in trouble. They didn't want to know more, they wanted to protect their own turf. Going on in verse 5,

*5 continued) ... took unto them certain lewd fellows of the baser sort, and gathered a company, and set all the city on an uproar ... (KJV)*

They whipped the people into a frenzy—an emotional frenzy.

*5 continued) ... and assaulted the house of Jason, and sought to bring them out to the people. (KJV)*

They did the same thing here as they did with Stephen; they whipped the crowd into a frenzy and told lies.

6) *And when they found them not, they drew Jason and certain brethren unto the rulers of the city, crying, These that have turned the world upside down are come hither also;*

7) *Whom Jason hath received: and these all do contrary to the decrees of Caesar, saying that there is another king, one Jesus. (KJV)*

So when these unbelieving Jews could not disprove Paul out of the scriptures, what did they do? They spread lies. They whipped the people into an emotional frenzy. Then, if that weren't enough, they went to their hated enemies, the Romans, to get them to stop the new teaching.

8) *And they troubled the people and the rulers of the city, when they heard these things. (KJV)*

Rather than letting the scriptures be their absolute guide, they allowed themselves to be carried away with carnal emotions, carnal agendas, and those ruled the day rather than God's word. Keep the reaction of the Jews in mind and let's notice what comes right after that. This is here for a reason; God wants us to notice the contrast. Let's contrast what we read just now with Paul's experience in Berea, sixty miles to the west. They got Paul out of Thessalonica and he went to Berea, verse 10 of Acts 17.

10) *And the brethren immediately sent away Paul and Silas by night unto Berea: who coming thither went into the synagogue of the Jews. (KJV)*

Just as they had done before.

11) *These were more noble than those in Thessalonica ... (KJV)*

The English words *more noble* are one word in Greek. Spiros Zodhiates, in his Complete Word Study Dictionary of the New Testament, says it means "noble-minded". They were more noble-minded. In English, to be noble can mean to have high moral principles. What we're being told is these Bereans had high standards, high principles, which they adhered to. We'll see that comes out as we read through.

11 continued) *... in that they received the word with all readiness of mind, and searched the scriptures daily, whether those things were so.*

And because they received the word with readiness of mind, and because they then proved it out of scripture,

12) *Therefore many of them believed; also of honourable women which were Greeks, and of men, not a few. (KJV)*

Why did they believe? Because it was in the scriptures, in the scrolls, and they saw it with their own eyes. In contrast to the Thessalonians, the Bereans did three things that the Jews in Thessalonica did not do. Number one, they listened with an unbiased mind

to what Paul had to say. They didn't decide in advance. They opened their mind up like a blank sheet and said, okay, what do you have to say?—let's look at it. Keep your marker here; let's go to Proverbs 1:5 and see the wisdom of this approach. We get wisdom from the proverbs. Proverbs 1—the very first chapter—and verse 5, is what the Bereans did—this is one of the principles they adhered to.

**Proverbs 1:5** *A wise man will hear, and will increase learning; and a man of understanding shall attain unto wise counsels:*

7) *The fear of the LORD is the beginning of knowledge: but fools despise wisdom and instruction.*

If the fear of God is the beginning of knowledge, maybe the Bereans did a right thing by looking into scripture and asking, is this knowledge and is it backed up by scripture? We're also told that a fool won't listen, and will despise knowledge and instruction. Let's go to Proverbs 9:9, another principle that the Bereans adhered to.

**Proverbs 9:9** *Give instruction to a wise man, and he will be yet wiser: (KJV)*

He takes the instruction and puts it to use.

9 continued) *... teach a just man, and he will increase in learning. (KJV)*

Obviously the instruction has to be according to God, according to God's word. The point is that the Bereans looked forward to learning; they were not afraid to learn, they didn't turn their backs on something new, but that leads to the second thing they did. They proved it out of scripture, whether or not what Paul said was true. They went to the scrolls and read them very carefully. Their standard of authority was not what some man thinks, their standard of authority was the word of God, which was contained in the scrolls. Remember, all that they had at that time was the Old Testament. They went back to the Old Testament and they looked.

Let's now look at Psalm 119:97 and see the wisdom in these scriptures. Go back a few pages. David is speaking.

**Psalms 119:97** *O how love I thy law! it is my meditation all the day. (KJV)*

God's law was in the scrolls. David said, I meditate on Your law all the day; I think about it, I ponder it, I ruminate on it.

100) *I understand more than the ancients, because I keep thy precepts. (KJV)*

You can't keep them if you don't know them, so he looked up God's precepts, studied God's precepts, and kept them. Now look at verse 148.

148) *Mine eyes prevent the night watches, [Why did he stay awake?] that I might meditate in thy word. (KJV)*

David understood more than the elders that came before him because he was continually growing in his understanding of God and God's law. He grew in knowledge, he grew in understanding, he grew in application, because of what God's law meant to him. Let's go to Isaiah 8:19. I'm going to read this out of the New Living Translation [an older, online version]. God is chiding those who do not go to His word as the standard, but they go to other human beings, whose influence on them is certainly questionable, as we will see.

**Isaiah 8:19** *Someone may say to you, "Let's ask the mediums and those who consult the spirits of the dead. With their whisperings and mutterings, they will tell us what to do." But shouldn't people ask God for guidance? Should the living seek guidance from the dead?* (NLT)

That's an interesting concept—go to God instead!

20) *Look to God's instructions and teachings!* [God's testimony is God's word; that's exactly what the Bereans did—they examined God's word.] *People who contradict his word are completely in the dark.* (NLT)

The fact remains that all true knowledge comes from God's word and the Bereans took what Paul said and they went to the source of truth—God's word, their standard—and they checked it out. The Bereans were not naive, just believing anything they heard.

I've counseled church members who've gone on the Internet and listened to some person—who knows who the person is, or their credentials—who has some blog or post, and the church members believe it—just completely believe it. They don't go to God's word and check it out to see if it's true. The Bereans checked what they heard against scripture and because they were familiar with scripture—they obviously read it and made it a part of their life, because they were familiar with God's word—it put them in a position to recognize truth versus falsehood. They could quickly recognize the difference. Think of the scripture, prove all things and hold fast to that which is good—1 Thessalonians 5:21. What is good is revealed in God's word, so the Bereans set us the example—we'll listen with a ready mind but we are going to check you out, see what you say, and compare it to God's word.

The third thing the Bereans did, that the Thessalonians didn't do, is they continued to learn the truth. They didn't just stop when Paul walked out the door (or was chased out, in some cases). They didn't stop there. Let's go back to Acts 17:13. The Jews in Thessalonica were adamant against Paul.

**Acts 17:13** *But when the Jews of Thessalonica had knowledge that the word of God was preached of Paul at Berea [sixty miles away], they came thither also, and [guess what they did] stirred up the people.* (KJV)

The Jews of Thessalonica could not stand the truth and they traveled sixty miles on foot to oppose this new teaching, they hated it so much. The same is happening today, sad

to say—there's nothing new under the sun. People reject the truth that is plainly there in scripture and they attempt to influence others through lies and through slander and through innuendo. The Pacific Church of God has been the object of many lies and much slander over the last year or two. There are things out there that are just absolutely not true, but they're out there. People who call themselves Christians have no qualms about lying, repeating gossip, slander, personal attacks and so forth. It's happening today.

*14) And then immediately the brethren sent away Paul to go as it were to the sea: but Silas and Timotheus abode there still. (KJV)*

Why did they do that? Why would they stay there? It's obvious—the Bereans wanted them to stay there so they could continue their education. They could continue their discussion, they could continue to understand these new principles, look into the scrolls, and see if they were indeed true. So the Bereans, you see, didn't want to just learn one new thing, they wanted to continue to grow over time, and that's why they asked Timothy and Silas to stay behind. We need to talk more about this, we need to understand this better. So we see in this section of Acts two radically different approaches to addressing and understanding new truth. Both are right next to each other and I think God did that for a reason, so that we could draw a contrast between the two, and we could learn from that contrast. Now ask the question, which approach is more godly? That of the Thessalonians or the Bereans? Which approach does God want us to emulate? That of the Thessalonians or the Bereans? We all have to answer that question and stand before God.

The third and last point.

### **3. We must be aware that Satan is always trying to turn us away from the truth.**

Satan does not take a day off. Satan doesn't sleep. He is opposed to God and everything God stands for, and he is opposed to anybody who believes the truth. Let's go to 2 Peter 2:1. Just keep in mind that Satan is there, and he is provoking people to turn their backs on God.

*2 Peter 2:1 But there were false prophets [there were] also among the people, [notice this] even as there shall be false teachers among you, who privily shall bring in damnable heresies, even [to the point of] denying the Lord that bought them, and bring upon themselves swift destruction. (KJV)*

Remember, Peter wrote this epistle somewhere between 64 and 67 A.D. So did false teachings come into the church after Peter died? Of course they did—absolutely. Sunday came in, Easter came in, Christmas came in, Sabbath went away, the Holy Days went away—all of those huge changes came after Peter's death. The point is that this evil process continues to this day. Satan hasn't stopped it, and it continues to this day. It says they even got to the point they were *denying the Lord that bought them*. How do we deny Jesus Christ today? One thing we can do is to not respect the

enormity of His sacrifice, or, not respect Him by continuing to sin the same sins, over and over. Asking Christ's blood to cover us again and again, over years and decades, over exactly the same sins—that shows disrespect to Jesus Christ. No spiritual growth, no spiritual progress—that shows disrespect to God and Christ.

*2) And many [it doesn't say a few] shall follow their pernicious [or destructive] ways; by reason of whom the way of truth shall be [looking to the future] evil spoken of. (KJV)*

Is the way of truth being evil spoken of today? How about severing retirement from elders who have served in the church for decades—how about that? My wife and I have a financial advisor we were very blessed to meet, about twenty-five years ago, when we had nothing and were starting a new business. He has helped us immensely—he is very moral, very ethical. He and his father started the business and he has given us great advice. After our last meeting with him a couple of weeks ago—I won't use his name—I said, let me ask you a question. He knows about the Pacific Church of God, he knows that I'm a pastor, he knows some things about the reach of the church because he looks at our personal finances. I said to him, you're an accountant and have all of these degrees (what I really didn't say is, you're a man of the world and let me get your opinion), and I asked, what would you think if the administration of a church group did away with the retirement of elders who had served for decades? His eyes got big as saucers, and he said, you mean that happened? I said, yes it did. He said, they can't do that. That's not moral, that's not ethical, you just can't do that. He said, they call themselves a church and do that? Is it happening today? Is the way of truth evil spoken of, today? That's just one example.

*3) And through covetousness shall they with feigned words make merchandise of you: whose judgment now of a long time lingereth not, and their damnation slumbereth not. (KJV)*

Is that happening today? This was written 64-67 A.D., so is that happening today? How about asking brethren to take out second mortgages on their homes and send money to an individual who already lives a lavish lifestyle? How about that? Is that making merchandise out of God's people? God prophesied what we're reading, over 2,000 years ago—think about that. The only reason I mention these events inside the church—I'm not trying to throw rocks at anybody and haven't named any groups or individuals—is to point out that these prophecies, two millennia old, are coming true before our eyes at this very time. It is to God's glory that we are here and can see them with our own eyes. God knew what He was doing. Jumping to verse 20,

*20) For if after they have escaped the pollutions of the world through the knowledge of the Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ ... (KJV)*

Remember, what did Christ come to do? To give and to serve—He gave His life and He served God's people.

20 continued) ... *they are again entangled therein, and overcome, the latter end is worse with them than the beginning.*

21) *For it had been better for them not to have known the way of righteousness, than, after they have known it, to turn from the holy commandment delivered unto them.*

22) [He goes on to say] *But it is happened unto them according to the true proverb, The dog is turned to his own vomit again; and the sow that was washed to her wallowing in the mire.* (KJV)

Rather than serving and giving as Christ did, some (after conversion) turn it around, taking to serve themselves. That is contrary to every concept of godliness from Genesis to Revelation. God is creating a family, to serve His family. God has sacrificed His own Son to serve His family, and His own Son willingly gave Himself to serve that family. But there is good news; go back to verse 9.

**2 Peter 2:9** *The Lord knoweth how to deliver the godly out of temptations, and to reserve the unjust unto the day of judgment to be punished:* (KJV)

This tells us that our intercessor will deliver—who? It says *the godly*. Who are the godly? Those who seek God, those who want to put God first, those who want to understand Him more and more over time. We are also told, again making this third point, that Satan is active and is not going to rest, and some will turn from the truth to false teaching. Let's go to Matthew 24:21, talking about these end days.

**Matthew 24:21** *For then shall be great tribulation, such as was not since the beginning of the world to this time, no, nor ever shall be.*

22) *And except those days should be shortened, there should no flesh be saved: but for the elect's sake those days shall be shortened.*

23) *Then if any man shall say unto you, Lo, here is Christ, or there; believe it not.*

24) [this is key here] *For there shall arise false Christs, and false prophets, and shall show great signs and wonders; insomuch that, if it were possible, they shall deceive the very elect.*

25) *Behold, I have told you before.* (KJV)

The question is, what do these great signs and great wonders have to do with God's word? Like the Bereans, our standard is God's word. Our standard is not some great sign that's going to be orchestrated by Satan—we'd better be aware of that and be prepared for it. Our standard is still God's word. It's not some Satanic miracle that occurs. Let's go to 2 Thessalonians 2:3. I'm going to read this out of the New Living Translation because I think they translate this section of scripture accurately. It can be very unclear in the King James. We are being warned—in essence, Paul is saying, beware of Satan, he's not going to take a day off.

**2 Thessalonians 2:3** *Don't be fooled by what they say. For that day will not come until there is a great rebellion against God and the man of lawlessness is revealed—the one who brings destruction.*



- 4) *He will exalt himself and defy everything that people call god and every object of worship. He will even sit in the temple of God, claiming that he himself is God.*
- 5) *Don't you remember that I told you about all this when I was with you?*
- 6) *And you know what is holding him back, for he can be revealed only when his time comes.*
- 7) *For this lawlessness is already at work secretly, [it was back then, when this was written; it is at work secretly, right now] and it will remain secret until the one who is holding it back steps out of the way.*
- 8) *Then the man of lawlessness will be revealed, but the Lord Jesus will slay him with the breath of his mouth and destroy him by the splendor of his coming.*
- 9) *This man will come to do the work of Satan [not God's work, the work of Satan] with counterfeit power and signs and miracles.*
- 10) *He will use every kind of evil deception to fool those [notice what it says] on their way to destruction [so there are some on their way, down the path—they haven't got there yet but they are heading in the direction of destruction, away from God and away from God's law], because [why are they on their way to destruction?] they refuse to love and accept the truth that would save them.*  
(NLT)

Satan takes advantage of that, and because they're already heading in a wrong direction, and they're already withdrawing from God, and they already maybe have some blindness occurring, then Satan can force wicked deception to fool them.

- 11) *So God will cause them to be greatly deceived, and they will believe these lies.*
- 12) *Then they will be condemned for enjoying evil rather than believing the truth.*  
(NLT)

Think about this—over and over in scripture, God keeps asking, what do you believe? Do you believe Me or do you believe Satan—what do you believe? He asks the question, what are you willing to act upon? Are you willing to act upon the truth or are you willing to just ignore the truth, not doing what I am telling you to do? How many times did He say that to Ancient Israel? What are you willing to die for? Are you willing to die for the Sabbath? Are you willing to die to know Me? These are questions we have to prove to God every single day of our lives, by our thoughts and actions. Who am I putting first, who am I obeying first? Am I putting myself in front of God Almighty? Let's go to 2 Corinthians 4:4, again talking about Satan's efforts to lead us astray, to get us off track.

**2 Corinthians 4:4** [Paul says] *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.* (KJV)

Traditionally this has been applied to the world and of course it does apply to the world. But could this not also refer to people in God's church who refuse to open their minds, open their eyes, open their ears to new truth God is revealing? Could this apply to them

too? Now that Satan has a foothold to begin to turn people aside, off the path, and to pull blinders down before their eyes? Part of the truth is to understand who God really is. That's the essential truth—that has to come first, before we understand prophecy or anything else we have to know. Look at Matthew 11:27; Christ is speaking.

**Matthew 11:27** [Christ says] *All things are delivered unto me of my Father:* [He is saying, everything I speak, everything I do, comes from My Father, My God] *and no man knoweth the Son, but the Father; neither knoweth any man the Father, save the Son ...* (KJV)

Obviously They are both Spirit Beings, They are both in heaven, They have both lived for eternity, They obviously know each other far better than any human being does.

27 continued) ... *and he to whomsoever the Son will reveal him.* (KJV)

The Greek word for *reveal* means “to remove the cover”. A lot of people say, Christ is revealing God for the first time, or, nobody knew God before this moment in time. Can this be true? No. When you think about that, it's just bizarre—it's unbelievable. One of the reasons Christ came, in part the reason He came, was to give us—mankind, human beings—a greater understanding of His Father. I harken back to Terry Swagerty's sermon—the first sermon he gave with Pacific, on August 11 of 2018—and his title was, Was Jesus Christ-Centered? He proved that, no, Jesus was God-centered. If you remember, he went through the book of John, and time after time, scripture after scripture, proved it over and over and over again. The fact is that Christ came—yes—to talk about His Father, to amplify our understanding of His Father, but it wasn't because God was hiding Himself away during the Old Testament. As they say, that's a nonstarter. That doesn't even come up on our radar screen.

So concluding this third point, we see that Satan, right to the very end, will do all he can to turn God's people from the truth. We have to keep that in mind.

Let's conclude now. How should we approach new revelations from God? We don't want to follow the track record of Adam and Eve, Ancient Israel, the Jews at the time of Christ, or some of the people today, by rejecting any new revelation that God might want us to see. Rather than do that, we should follow the righteous example of the Bereans, and we also need to be aware that Satan is in the mix, and is doing everything he possibly can to get us off the track, to turn us away from God, to put distance between us and God. Satan wants to get us involved in the world, get us involved in controversy, get us involved in upheaval, all of which take our mind off God and Christ.

Let's go to a last scripture in Matthew 13—we were there earlier. Christ is addressing His disciples and by extension, us today; we'll begin in verse 16. This applies to us and we should be so thankful that we're in this situation. All of God's people have an opportunity, right here, right now, to be in this situation.

**Matthew 13:16** *But blessed are your eyes, for they see: and your ears, for they hear.*

*17) For verily I say unto you, That many prophets and righteous men have desired to see those things which ye see, and have not seen them; and to hear those things which ye hear, and have not heard them. (KJV)*

This new understanding about God and Christ—and I know I am speaking for a lot of people because we have talked back and forth—this new understanding has fundamentally changed my life—fundamentally! It has changed my prayer life.

When I pray to God, I know He is God Almighty, I know He is the Most High God, He is the Living God, He is the LORD of Hosts, who dwells between the cherubim, and I know Jesus Christ—His Son, His Servant—is right there beside Him, and Jesus Christ intercedes for us, and He is the Mediator, and He is our Elder Brother; Jesus Christ is the Forerunner of our salvation and He is the one in whose footsteps we want to walk. I didn't really understand this all that well before, because God and Christ and their names and titles were all just mushed together. This new understanding has fundamentally changed my prayer life, my study life. My wife is continually running out of her bedroom (she studies before she goes to bed) and says, look at this scripture! It's Jeremiah, Habakuk, or somewhere else, and it's a new understanding, it's opening more up.

When we sing hymns here and we are singing to the LORD of Hosts, it means something it did not mean five years ago. When we meditate and think about God's names and titles and actions, and what Christ has done, it opens up our meditation to go in ways that we've never even thought of before. It is exciting.

This new understanding is a gift from God. God is giving us something that brings us such great joy, in coming to know Him and His Son more fully. Indeed it is like a second conversion. Once somebody grasps the enormity of this, knowing God in scripture—it's like a second conversion because you go back and read scriptures that you have read for forty, fifty, sixty years, and they take on an entirely new meaning.

We need to approach any new understanding as eagerly as the Bereans did, but always proving it out of scripture. In these last days, let's realize how blessed we are that our God, the great God, the Almighty God, is opening the minds of His kids—His children—to new truths about Himself and His Son and His plan of salvation.