

Knowledge Vs Conversion

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As we all know, part of our job as Firstfruits that we are striving for and preparing for is to hopefully eventually be able to reign with Jesus Christ as kings and priests in the Kingdom of God. Serving Him and working with the rest of mankind to work with them towards their process of salvation. If you have ever looked at the job description for a priest, a lot of what that job is, is being a teacher of God's law. So obviously, if we are preparing to fulfill a similar type of role to be teachers of God's Word and His way of life to the rest of mankind, we need to be preparing for being "subject matter" experts in God's law; in the Bible and all that it has to teach. We need to be trying to build that knowledge base, so we are prepared to be teachers. While we do that, one of the most important things we need to remember is that it isn't just about the knowledge we gain along the way, the most important thing is that we are applying that knowledge. That we are actually practicing and living in our lives what we are learning from the Bible.

As we are going to see today, the actual practicing and putting practical application in our day to day lives of what we learn is absolutely fundamental. Not only to retaining the knowledge that we learn from God's Word but preventing that knowledge from being perverted. If we aren't actually practicing what we learn and putting into practice what we learn through God's Word, what happens over time is that we lose that knowledge, and it becomes perverted. So, what we need to understand is, while we need to be studying God's Word diligently to be "subject matter" experts in what the Bible has to teach us, we need to have that emphasis on putting into practice and living what we learn. That is the key to properly understanding the Bible and retaining that knowledge.

If you would like a title, it's:

Knowledge Vs Conversion

One of the things we don't want to fall into is the pitfall of just focusing on knowledge. Just being scholars and learning everything the Bible has to say but not focusing on the application side of it. That is always the most important thing. A lot of what we are going to focus on today is a parable in the Bible that I'm sure we are all familiar with and we have been over many times but one of the main important lessons gets missed and misunderstood. What we're going to see is that the whole focus of this parable is this lesson of "knowledge versus conversion". As you might guess we are going to look at the parable of the Ten Virgins. What we're going to see is that often one of the main points of this particular parable gets overlooked and misunderstood. I know growing up in the church of God, which has been my entire life, I've heard this parable addressed many times and it gets presented as if the lesson is, preparing for the long haul or having extra supplies to plan to endure through the long journey. While those may be valuable lessons that's really not the point of what this parable is talking about. If we just let the Bible interpret all the symbols presented in this parable—letting the Bible interpret itself—and put this together, what we are going to

see is that the real fundamental point of this parable is the point that I used in my title of “knowledge versus conversion”. The difference between if we just understand God’s Word and have the knowledge of what it says or are we actually applying it in our day to day lives? Is it becoming a part of our heart and becoming an aspect of conversion—changing who we are?

Let’s start first just reading through this parable to get an overview of what it says and then like a jigsaw puzzle we are going to look at each individual aspect of this parable and let the Bible interpret all the symbols being used to illustrate the point.

Matthew 25:1 *Then the kingdom of heaven shall be likened to ten virgins who took their lamps and went out to meet the bridegroom.*

2) Now five of them were wise, and five were foolish.

3) Those who were foolish took their lamps and took no oil with them, but the wise took oil in their vessels with their lamps. (NKJV)

We are going to come back to this as we take this parable apart and see what this distinction is really saying. This is often what gets missed here, the significance of the vessel. This is what separates the wise from the foolish—the oil in the vessel. We’ll come back to what that is really getting at. Verse 5.

5) But while the bridegroom was delayed, they all slumbered and slept.

6) And at midnight a cry was heard: ‘Behold, the bridegroom is coming; go out to meet him!’

7) Then all those virgins arose and trimmed their lamps.

8) And the foolish said to the wise, ‘Give us some of your oil, for our lamps are going out.’

9) But the wise answered, saying, ‘No, lest there should not be enough for us and you; but go rather to those who sell, and buy for yourselves.’

10) And while they went to buy, the bridegroom came, and those who were ready went in with him to the wedding; and the door was shut.

11) Afterward the other virgins came also, saying, ‘Lord, Lord, open to us!’

12) But he answered and said, ‘Assuredly, I say to you, I do not know you.’

13) Watch therefore, for you know neither the day nor the hour in which the Son of Man is coming. (NKJV)

You can see, obviously Christ is illustrating a principle through a parable. All we have to do is let the Bible interpret each of the symbols to put this together as a jigsaw puzzle to see what it’s getting at. I know a lot of this will be review and some of the basics here. But what we’re really going to see is the significance that gets missed, the significance of the vessel and what it’s really telling us. To put the whole picture together, let’s review some of the basics that you are probably very familiar with, but to just cover all the basics of the details.

Let’s first start off noticing that what we’re talking about are ten virgins. They are all described as virgins and they are all on the way to a wedding to meet a bridegroom. So, let’s first interpret from the Bible itself, who does the Bible refer to as virgins and who does it refer to as the bridegroom. These are very obvious principles, I’m sure you are ahead of me as to where we are going to go. Let’s turn to 2 Corinthians 11

and notice directly from the Bible—we don't have to guess at any of the symbols, we can just read it right off the page from the Bible.

2 Corinthians 11:1 *Oh, that you would bear with me in a little folly—and indeed you do bear with me.*

2) For I am jealous for you with godly jealousy. For I have betrothed you to one husband, that I may present you as a chaste virgin to Christ. (NKJV)

This is a letter written by the Apostle Paul. He is writing to the church at Corinth, so he's writing to Firstfruit Christians and telling them that he wants to present them as virgins to Christ. So, they are going to marry Christ—so Christ is obviously our bridegroom—and he's referring to Firstfruits Christians as virgins. So, if we just take the Bible's interpretation itself, if we have ten virgins and they are on their way to a wedding to marry a bridegroom, then we have a parable addressing Firstfruit Christians and they're on their journey—their Christian life—on the way to be able to marry Christ. So, we know who we are talking about. Then it tells us that all ten of these virgins—we're going to see that there are several things that all ten have in common—then we're going to notice what distinguishes the wise from the foolish. It tells us that all ten of the virgins are carrying a lamp. What is this lamp trying to picture for us? If we turn to Psalms 119, we can let the Bible itself interpret that.

Psalms 119:105 *Your word is a lamp to my feet And a light to my path. (NKJV)*

In other words, it's referring to the Word of God, it's referring to this book, referring to the Bible. It's saying it is like a lamp for us. If you think about it in terms of our Christian journey on the way to obtain salvation and live the Christian life, this is what lights our path. This is what shows us the way, how to live as a Christian, how to try and make good decisions and follow God's way and to change our behavior to be in line with His law. This is the book that shows us the way to do that. To be able to understand this book, there is another component that we need. If anyone just picks up this book and reads it without the guidance of the Holy Spirit they typically get really confused and don't make a lot of sense out of it and come up with really flawed conclusions. That's what happens because that's what the Bible tells us. The fundamental thing we have to have for this book to make sense is the Holy Spirit. We can see the obvious analogy here that if the lamp is the Bible—the Word of God—if you need oil in your lamp to burn to allow it to give you light, then the oil we are talking about is the Holy Spirit. To see that, turn to John 16:13.

John 16:13 *However, when He, the Spirit of truth, has come, He will guide you into all truth; for He will not speak on His own authority, but whatever He hears He will speak; and He will tell you things to come. (NKJV)*

In other words, this is the Spirit of truth. Christ is referring to the Holy Spirit as the Spirit of truth, it's what guides you into truth. Not only is it a good guide in leading us to understand truth, but the Bible also tells us that you can't understand this book without it. It's impossible for a carnal human being to properly understand this book without the Holy Spirit. Without it, it's a lamp but it doesn't produce any light. It's not going to guide anybody in their life. Turn over to 1 Corinthians 2 and we'll see this directly stated.

1 Corinthians 2:6 *However, we speak wisdom among those who are mature, yet not the wisdom of this age, nor of the rulers of this age, who are coming to nothing.*

7) But we speak the wisdom of God in a mystery, the hidden wisdom which God ordained before the ages for our glory,

8) which none of the rulers of this age knew; for had they known, they would not have crucified the Lord of glory.

9) But as it is written: "Eye has not seen, nor ear heard, Nor have entered into the heart of man The things which God has prepared for those who love Him."

10) But God has revealed them to us through His Spirit. For the Spirit searches all things, yes, the deep things of God.

11) For what man knows the things of a man except the spirit of the man which is in him? Even so no one knows the things of God except the Spirit of God. (NKJV)

What it's directly telling us is, without the Holy Spirit we can't make sense of this book. I'm sure if you've ever read through a Protestant commentary of people who have PhD's in Greek and Hebrew and biblical studies, they read through this and they may have great information on the languages and the history but you read a lot of their doctrinal conclusions and realize that's not what the Bible says; they got it completely wrong. They can be the smartest people in the world, but if they don't have the Holy Spirit, it's not going to make sense to them and they aren't going to be able to put it together and they come up with very, very flawed conclusions. We have to have the Holy Spirit to be able to understand the book, to give us light and show us how to live our lives.

Now just understand that so far what we have discussed are all the things that both the wise and foolish virgins have in common. Notice it mentioned, ten virgins are on their way to meet the bridegroom so they are all converted Christians, in their Christian walk hopefully on their way to the Kingdom of God. They all have their lamp—they all have the Bible—the Word of God—and they all have the Holy Spirit because they all have the oil. If you notice in the parable, even the foolish later in the parable, their lamps are going out which means they were burning in the first place. They had oil, it was producing light, it just later goes out on them. What's the distinction between the wise and the foolish? This is the important part of this parable that very often gets missed.

What happens when this lesson gets taught is they think the wise had oil in the vessel which is what it says, but it's put across like they planned for the long haul and brought extra supplies. It's the idea that you knew there was a going to be a gas shortage so you bought extra gas with extra containers and stored those in the garage so when the shortage came you would have some extra in a can. That's really not the point of what this is getting at, at all. If we understand what the Bible refers to as the vessel, we understand what the issue was that Christ was trying to get across. What we're going to see is it's this whole lesson of how I titled the sermon, "Knowledge versus Conversion". That's the point He is getting at. To realize that we have to understand how the Bible refers to a vessel. What it's referring to is not the concept of having extra supplies, of stocking up for a shortage and got some extra cans of gas so you would have it when things got scarce—that's not what it's

talking about. The Bible often refers to a vessel as our bodies or our human life—a person's life can be referred to as a vessel. So, we're talking about just having the "knowledge versus conversion" in our lives.

To notice some scriptures to back this up, turn to 1 Thessalonians 4:3.

1 Thessalonians 4:3 *For this is the will of God, your sanctification: that you should abstain from sexual immorality;*
4) that each of you should know how to possess his own vessel in sanctification and honor,
5) not in passion of lust, like the Gentiles who do not know God;
6) that no one should take advantage of and defraud his brother in this matter, because the Lord is the avenger of all such, as we also forewarned you and testified. (NKJV)

He's referring to avoiding sexual immorality and keeping your vessel—your body or your life—free of this sin. If we understand a vessel in that context, we're not talking about an extra can of gas to prepare for a gas shortage, we're talking about what you have practiced in your vessel in your life. Notice another example of this in Acts 9:15. To set the scene, what's happening in this chapter is this is the famous story of the Apostle Paul being struck down on the road to Damascus. As I'm sure you're probably familiar, the Apostle Paul prior to this was a zealot Pharisee, he's persecuting the church of God and not following Christianity and Christ at all. In fact, he's very hostile to it. He gets struck down, struck blind, and God gets his attention. Then Paul is praying to "please give me back my sight" and he's in a very vulnerable position. Then God sends Ananias to go in and anoint and heal him of all of this and to baptize Paul, giving him this instruction. We're going to pick up in verse 15. Notice the statement he makes and how he uses the term "vessel" in referring to this.

Acts 9:15 *But the Lord said to him, "Go, for he is a chosen vessel of Mine to bear My name before Gentiles, kings, and the children of Israel."*
16) For I will show him how many things he must suffer for My name's sake." (NKJV)

He's telling Ananias, go in and anoint and baptize Paul because I have plans for this guy. I'm going to make him an apostle to the Gentiles, he's going to write the majority of the New Testament—I have big plans for this guy. He's going to have to suffer a lot in the process. Notice how He refers to *he's going to be a vessel of Mine*—his life is going to be a tool for God's purposes—that's what is being said here. If we understand a vessel in that context, now we can understand what the parable of the ten virgins is talking about. It's not just that the wise prepared for the long haul and they knew a gas shortage was coming so they bought some extra gas and put it in some containers in the garage and kept it, so when things were scarce, they would have some. That's a valuable lesson but it's not what this is talking about. It's saying that all of the virgins had the lamp—they all had the Word of God, they all had a Bible. There were all converted, they had all received the Holy Spirit. So, they all had the ability to understand the Word of God, to read it and make sense of what it was saying, so they could understand it and be able to follow it. The distinction between the two is, all of them had the knowledge, but the wise were the ones actually practicing it. They were actually changing who they were and making it a

part of their life. It wasn't just knowledge; they were being converted and it was changing who they were as a person. So, this is what distinguished one from the other.

Now let's notice, it mentions a time where they all slept in slumber. What are we talking about with them all sleeping in slumber. Obviously, we are not talking about just going physically to sleep and taking a nap. That's obviously not what this parable is talking about, we're illustrating spiritual lessons. We're talking about being spiritually asleep. Let's turn over to 1 Thessalonians 5 and we'll see an example of this.

1 Thessalonians 5:4 *But you, brethren, are not in darkness, so that this Day should overtake you as a thief.*

5) You are all sons of light and sons of the day. We are not of the night nor of darkness.

6) Therefore let us not sleep, as others do, but let us watch and be sober.

7) For those who sleep, sleep at night, and those who get drunk are drunk at night.

8) But let us who are of the day be sober, putting on the breastplate of faith and love, and as a helmet the hope of salvation. (NKJV)

Notice what he is referring to is, He's using sleeping as a spiritual analogy of, we're not on target with our spiritual life. We're not paying attention, we're not diligently studying, we're not diligently overcoming, we're just drifting. Not making progress or maybe falling back into sin and giving into our carnal nature and getting distracted, going off in the wrong direction. That's what being spiritually asleep is. If we are honest with ourselves, we all go through periods like that.

As one of my professors at AC would love to illustrate, he put this example on the chalkboard one day and said, "We would all love to believe that a Christian growth plan looks kind of like this." He would have this chart where it's going straight up and he said, "That's not the reality of how it goes. It looks more like this—these ups and downs". Then he said the objective is that you still have this upward trend. His whole point was, you overcome and you're doing well and something knocks you down and you feel like this and you're going like this.

Another point he was making was, we would all love to believe that the real measure of our spiritual life is all these high points. But that's not the reality. What we really are, are the lower dips. That's who we really are. The main point is, this is continuing as an upward trend; that we're always continuing to grow and do better. If it's going in the wrong direction, that's really bad. The reality is, we all have that. We all start doing well, we're diligent, we're overcoming and something trips us up and our carnal nature gets us—we get distracted or other things happen and we just aren't doing as well. Then something jolts us awake and we realize we've been messing up and that we need to get back on track. That's a natural trend of what happens throughout lives, as long as we're paying attention and we get those wake-up calls.

It mentioned here that there was a wakeup call and all the virgins arose. Then they trimmed their lamps. The other thing is to understand what it means "to trim the lamp". About twenty-five years ago when I was first digging through what I am

presenting here today—again most of my life I heard this presented as this lesson of just having extra supplies for the long haul and I realized that didn't quite make sense—so I was trying to understand every detail of this parable and I got to this concept of “trimming the lamp”. I started thinking about that from a literal context and realized there was a lesson I am missing obviously because if this book is the lamp—which is what the Bible says. If you think of this from a literal standpoint, if you have an oil burning lamp with a wick that burns, there is always a point where the wick burns down and becomes useless and you want to trim that off. If you try to apply that literally to the Bible, what part of this would I say is useless and burned up and I want to trim that off and toss it aside? Obviously, that wouldn't apply and that can't be what that is talking about. What is the point Christ is really trying to get at? He's not telling us that there is a point they all woke up and said this part of the Bible isn't needed anymore, let's cut it off and throw it away. That is obviously not what He meant. So what was He getting at?

I dug into what this Greek word here translated as *trim* actually means and then it made more sense. The Greek word translated into *trim* in English is *kosmeo* and is [Strong's #2885](#) and I'll give you a definition from [The Complete Word Study Dictionary of the New Testament](#) by Spiros Zodhiates. It means “to order, to set in order”. If you look it up in [Strong's](#) concordance, it's “to put in proper order”. You look at [Thayer's](#) and other sources and it gets worded pretty much the same. It means “to put in order, place in proper order”; you'll find various different ways it's worded like that. If you think about that, it's a concept that could apply to the Word of God. So how do we do that? How do we place “in order” or “place in proper order”?

There are two ways you can do that. One is obviously the order of priority. Turn to Matthew 6:25.

Matthew 6:25 *Therefore I say to you, do not worry about your life, what you will eat or what you will drink; nor about your body, what you will put on. Is not life more than food and the body more than clothing?*

26) *Look at the birds of the air, for they neither sow nor reap nor gather into barns; yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not of more value than they?*

27) *Which of you by worrying can add one cubit to his stature?*

28) *“So why do you worry about clothing? Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow: they neither toil nor spin;*

29) *and yet I say to you that even Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these.*

30) *Now if God so clothes the grass of the field, which today is, and tomorrow is thrown into the oven, will He not much more clothe you, O you of little faith?*

31) *Therefore do not worry, saying, ‘What shall we eat?’ or ‘What shall we drink?’ or ‘What shall we wear?’*

32) *For after all these things the Gentiles seek. For your heavenly Father knows that you need all these things.*

33) *But seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things shall be added to you.*

34) *Therefore do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will worry about its own things. Sufficient for the day is its own trouble. (NKJV)*

Obviously one of the ways we can place our lamp—the Word of God—in proper order is in order of priority in our lives. How much importance we place upon it, how much time we place in our lives in studying it and trying to apply it in our day to day lives. As human beings, we all have a deceptive human nature. I'm sure we've all heard and seen in practice many times in our lives, as the old statement goes, "watch a person's actions more than their words". We can all say that X is important to me or this is more important to me or that is the most important to me but then watch what a person does. Are their actions in line with what they say is most important to them? As a general rule with human beings, you can look at two things to see what is important to them. How do they utilize their time and their money? They are both finite resources that we all have and in both cases we all have to choose. There are always more things to do with our time than we have time to do. There are always more things we would like to spend our money on than we have to spend. We always have to make choices about what we are going to do and what we are going to prioritize. What it comes down to is, what we tend to prioritize speaks to whether the words we say or not, proves what we consider most important.

Think about how we spend our time. How often can we as Christians—when we say, "Being a part of the Kingdom of God is my number one priority, I want to follow God's Word and that is my number one priority."—let ourselves slide into opening the Bible on the Sabbath and we follow along during services and then the Bible goes on the shelf and stays there until the next weekend when we pull it off again and take it to services again? I'm sure we've all had times in our lives when we allow that to happen and allow that to go on for extended periods of time. What happens then is, we're saying that that becomes more important to us. We all have times where life just consumes our time and we have urgent issues that pull us aside to things we wouldn't want to spend our time on—that happens to everybody. But if we wind up having a general practice in our lives that our favorite TV show is more important than studying God's Word and we never have time to get the Bible open, but we always have to sit in front of the TV and see our favorite show—our favorite movie or hobby, but we never have time to study God's Word. What we are saying with how we spend our time is what's most important to us. If we want to place God's Word in proper order, we need to show that in how we spend our time—making a priority not only of studying it and trying to understand and build that ability to be a "subject matter" expert to teach to the rest of mankind, but to be actively living and practicing what we understand. As we go through this sermon that is always the most important issue. It's not just what we understand, it's making sure that we are diligently living and practicing what we understand.

As I mentioned there are two ways that we can place our lamp—the Word of God—trim it and place it in proper order. One is, as we discovered, the order of priority. The other is the concept of rightly dividing the Word of God. Turn to 2 Timothy 2:15.

2 Timothy 2:15 *Be diligent to present yourself approved to God, a worker who does not need to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth.* (NKJV)

If you look at the Greek word translated in this verse as *dividing*, it's transliterated into English as *orthotomeo* and is [Strong's #3718](#). [The Complete Word Study Dictionary of the New Testament](#) by Spiros Zodhiates defines it as "to cut or divide,

to handle correctly, skillfully correctly teach the word of truth.” In other words, to do this we have to be utilizing the oil—the Holy Spirit—to understand God’s Word. As we will see as we go through his sermon, the practicing of what we know is going to be a very critical thing to being able to maintain that ability. As I mentioned, it’s such an issue of priority, we have to be using the Holy Spirit to understand what the Bible tells us to come to correct conclusions. If we’re not, we can be diligently studying and coming to all the wrong conclusions.

Notice in Matthew 13, as Mr. Armstrong used to say, he would refer to the Bible as a coded book. We need the Holy Spirit to de-code the book to be able to understand what it’s saying. Christ teaches this very principle in Matthew 13:10; He’s explaining to the disciples why He teaches in parables.

Matthew 13:10 *And the disciples came and said to Him, “Why do You speak to them in parables?”*

11) He answered and said to them, “Because it has been given to you to know the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven, but to them it has not been given.

12) For whoever has, to him more will be given, and he will have abundance; but whoever does not have, even what he has will be taken away from him.

13) Therefore I speak to them in parables, because seeing they do not see, and hearing they do not hear, nor do they understand.

14) And in them the prophecy of Isaiah is fulfilled, which says: Hearing you will hear and shall not understand, And seeing you will see and not perceive;

15) For the hearts of this people have grown dull. Their ears are hard of hearing, And their eyes they have closed, Lest they should see with their eyes and hear with their ears, Lest they should understand with their hearts and turn, So that I should heal them. ’

16) But blessed are your eyes for they see, and your ears for they hear;

17) for assuredly, I say to you that many prophets and righteous men desired to see what you see, and did not see it, and to hear what you hear, and did not hear it. (NKJV)

In other words, He’s saying that unless you’ve been given the Holy Spirit and the opportunity to understand, it’s not going to make sense. You can study and try to put it all together and spend a lot of time doing it but you’ll come to the wrong conclusions and it won’t make sense. We have to be utilizing the Holy Spirit and how we study the Bible to come to the right conclusions. As we’re going to see, one of the primary keys with that is the oil in the vessel.

Let me give you an example that I experienced firsthand right before I really started studying this subject twenty-five years ago. It’s a personal example that I think really illustrates the principle of what happened with the wise and the foolish. As you notice, the parable talks about all ten virgins had a lamp—the Word of God. They all have oil in the lamp—they all have the Holy Spirit. They all go to sleep and slumber, so even the wise had their period of sleeping and slumbering and not being fully engaged and paying attention. There is a wakeup call and they all trim their lamps, but over time what happens? The foolish start coming to the wise saying their lamps are going out. The foolish thought, because they were associated with the wise that they could get oil from who they were associated with—other human beings. It

wasn't a matter of having a good relationship with God because the wise tell them, it doesn't work like that. You have to have a direct relationship with God; you have to go back to the source and get oil for this to work, to be able to replenish your lamp.

Something I experienced with this, for those of you have been involved in the church of God for many decades—the majority of our audience lived through the time of the breakup of the Worldwide Church of God. I know that doesn't apply to everybody listening to us today but I know for many, you do relate to that. If you lived through that time frame, you probably remember in the '90's, for most of us—I certainly would include myself of being guilty of this—there was a period where we were sleeping and slumbering. We were all just part of a big culture, a big organization that we were familiar with. We had the social culture around us and we got into the habit of just showing up for services on the weekend and coasting along. Then a lot of heresy gets slowly introduced into the church and a lot of us started coasting along with it not realizing what had happened. Then a wakeup call comes and you really start paying attention and realizing that something is going on; I've been asleep.

For myself, when I woke up and saw the full extent of what was going on, I left Worldwide and joined another organization in Dallas at the time. There was an individual I'm going to share as an example who was already a part of this congregation that I walked into while this was happening. This was an individual who quite frankly, in terms of spotting the technical errors in what was being presented at the time in Worldwide, probably saw what was happening and in tune with it faster than I was. He had drawn a line in the sand and walked out about six months to a year prior to when I did. He was focused on the technical details and exactly why they were right and why the group he was in was correct and why Worldwide was going astray and he was right about most of that. But as I got to know this individual, if you looked at his personal life and asked the question, "Would I consider this individual as someone whose life speaks to me as the fruits of God's Holy Spirit—would I consider this someone who is a good example and one I would want to follow in my life?" You would quickly say, "No." I look at his life as a cautionary tale. It's a personal train wreck, because he was someone who I would say, yes, he trimmed his lamp in the sense that he figured out the technical details and was very focused on why they were wrong and why he felt where he was going was correct—which I would say was on the right track—but over time his lamp went out. This individual doesn't live in the Dallas area anymore, he's been gone for many years. But he happened to attend Ambassador College a number of years before I did. We never actually crossed paths at AC, I got to know him as a part of this congregation.

The reason I mention that, is there's a group on Facebook of AC alumni. People will join and have discussions about various things. A few years ago, I noticed this gentleman commenting. I had lost track of him and didn't know where he had gone, he lives in a different state now. It was obvious from the comments he was making; he was directly commenting that he no longer believes that the Bible is a valid book. He was talking about how we got hoodwinked because the Bible is fraud and I'm just amazed that this is a guy who saw the apostasy faster than I did. He was focused on this but he wasn't in the vessel. You might say he trimmed his lamps in terms of being focused on technical knowledge but he wasn't living it in his own personal life.

What happened over time was his lamp went out and he lost all the knowledge that he had.

We have to understand that that is the most important thing. It's always the most important thing, living what we know. We should always be striving to be "subject matter" experts in what the Bible has to say and what it's teaching us but living it is always the most important concept. Turn to Psalm 111; it gives us some good insight about how we can have a good understanding of God's Word. It tells us that there is a very intimate connection between living this and having a good understanding of what the Bible teaches.

Psalm 111:10 *The fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom; A good understanding have all those who do His commandments. His praise endures forever. (NKJV)*

Notice the key to good understanding is not just studying—we definitely need to be studying and spending time getting our face in the book—but the key to maintaining a good understanding and properly understanding it, is doing it. It's living it and practicing it in our lives. That isn't just the key to wisdom—we often think of wisdom as the application of knowledge—we can have a lot of good knowledge but if we don't know how to apply it and practice it in our lives, that's really how we think of wisdom. That fear of God, that obeying Him is fundamental to even just having basic knowledge. Turn to Proverbs 1 and we'll see that as well.

Proverbs 1:7 *The fear of the LORD is the beginning of knowledge, But fools despise wisdom and instruction. (NKJV)*

It isn't just wisdom, the application of knowledge that living it is fundamental to, even just having the basic understanding of it all. The key is always actually living it, practicing it in our day to day lives. That is always going to be the most important thing. If we aren't doing that, what happens over time is we either lose our knowledge completely or our knowledge becomes perverted. Notice in Hebrews 5—what can happen to us over time? If we aren't diligent in our living and practicing and even our studying.

Hebrews 5:9 *And having been perfected, He became the author of eternal salvation to all who obey Him,
10) called by God as High Priest "according to the order of Melchizedek,"
11) of whom we have much to say, and hard to explain, since you have become dull of hearing. (NKJV)*

Obviously, the author of Hebrews is talking about the role of Jesus Christ—His role as Melchizedek—and he's saying that there is much to understand but you have become "dull of hearing". If they became dull of hearing, it means they weren't always dull of hearing. It wasn't like they were always numb like this; he says "You have become this". If we read the verses that follow after this, he's talking to an audience of seasoned Christians. He is saying "You guys need to be teachers and experts by now but you have become dull of hearing." It wasn't like they started like this. He said "You've had the ability to understand and had access to this knowledge,

you've just been neglectful and that's what has put you in this position." Continue reading in verse 12.

12) For though by this time you ought to be teachers, you need someone to teach you again the first principles of the oracles of God; and you have come to need milk and not solid food.

13) For everyone who partakes only of milk is unskilled in the word of righteousness, for he is a babe.

14) But solid food belongs to those who are of full age, that is, those who by reason of use have their senses exercised to discern both good and evil.

(NKJV)

What we're talking about is by reason of use. Those who practice it and spend their time diligently studying this Word. Notice he's talking to an audience who by now should be scholars and teachers—"subject matter" experts in this. He's not talking to a bunch of newbies who are just beginning to understand and study the Bible. He is saying, "You guys are seasoned Christians and should know all this by now but you've been neglectful." So, what has happened? You need people now to teach you the basics again. They lost their knowledge; their lamps were going out. How did that happen? By being neglectful; by not having the oil in the vessel—actively living and practicing it in their lives. As a result, you start losing that understanding. That can even happen to people who are regularly reading and studying the Bible. Let me give you an example of what I witnessed a few years ago now.

A handful of years ago I was having a conversation with a good friend of mine who I've known for several decades. He was mentioning to me another mutual friend that we both know. The friend I've known for several decades, he and I were talking on the phone and he was sharing with me that a good friend of ours had recently shared with him that he had decided to reject a fundamental, very easy, straight forward, easy to understand doctrine of the Church of God. I won't give you all the details because that will create a distraction from where I'm going. Let me just say that it's something as simple as the Sabbath—the Sabbath wasn't the issue at hand—but the reason I use the Sabbath is that pretty much everybody who is trying to follow the Bible and trying to be a Christian agrees that Saturday is the Sabbath and you're supposed to keep it. It's not one of those subjects that is highly debated and there is a lot of speculation and opinions on, it's just one of those fundamental things that if you're honestly studying the Bible, it's hard to miss. You're either going to keep it or you're not. This gentleman had basically decided to reject a doctrine that was that basic and fundamental. Something that if you're honestly studying, it's pretty straight forward. As my friend was telling me this, that this mutual friend decided he didn't need to do this anymore and he was going to teach this side, I commented that it's unfortunate. I said, "If he stays on this path what we're about to see are two things. One is, if he keeps doing this, his understanding of the Bible in general is going to continue to go further and further south. And so is his personal behavior."

The reason being is the Holy Spirit is fundamental to both of these. It's fundamental to the fruits of the Spirit and how we behave and as we've seen in this sermon, it's fundamental to our understanding. If we take something straightforward and fundamental and we refuse to do it and reject it and decide that we're going to go our own way and reject what the Bible clearly says, then we are quenching the Holy

Spirit. We're pushing it away and what happens is the lamp starts to go out. Unfortunately, what happened with our mutual friend, we watched over several years is that very thing happening. His understanding becoming more and more perverted and just going off. This is not an individual who neglects studying the Bible. This is someone who studies it very regularly but the oil just wasn't in the vessel and as a result the lamp was going out. The knowledge then becomes more and more perverted and goes off into left field. That is just fundamental to how it works. We can spend lots of time studying but if we're not sincerely following it and living it in our lives, that's the natural result.

Something we always need to keep in mind is, the most important issue of how God judges is always how we live what we understand. There are two aspects of that that we are going to talk about from both sides of the coin. Sometimes one of the pitfalls that Christians can fall into is being judgmental of other people who don't understand every aspect of the Bible, doctrine or prophecy the same way that we do. Maybe we look at a particular subject and think it's clear and straightforward and to be right with God, you have to understand it the way that I do. We can get on a high horse and appoint ourselves in that regard. What we have to keep in mind is, the way God judges us is based upon how we live what we understand. That's always the most important issue. Turn to Luke 12 because this is laid out very clearly for us here. Christ will explain this to us.

Luke 12:35 *Let your waist be girded and your lamps burning;*

36) and you yourselves be like men who wait for their master, when he will return from the wedding, that when he comes and knocks they may open to him immediately.

37) Blessed are those servants whom the master, when he comes, will find watching. Assuredly, I say to you that he will gird himself and have them sit down to eat, and will come and serve them.

38) And if he should come in the second watch, or come in the third watch, and find them so, blessed are those servants.

39) But know this, that if the master of the house had known what hour the thief would come, he would have watched and not allowed his house to be broken into.

40) Therefore you also be ready, for the Son of Man is coming at an hour you do not expect."

41) Then Peter said to Him, "Lord, do You speak this parable only to us, or to all people?"

42) And the Lord said, "Who then is that faithful and wise steward, whom his master will make ruler over his household, to give them their portion of food in due season?"

43) Blessed is that servant whom his master will find so doing when he comes.

44) Truly, I say to you that he will make him ruler over all that he has.

45) But if that servant says in his heart, 'My master is delaying his coming, ' and begins to beat the male and female servants, and to eat and drink and be drunk,

46) the master of that servant will come on a day when he is not looking for him, and at an hour when he is not aware, and will cut him in two and appoint him his portion with the unbelievers.

47) And that servant who knew his master's will, and did not prepare himself or do according to his will, shall be beaten with many stripes.

48) But he who did not know, yet committed things deserving of stripes, shall be beaten with few. For everyone to whom much is given, from him much will be required; and to whom much has been committed, of him they will ask the more. (NKJV)

The reason I mention this—to use my favorite example—my favorite example is the issue of Pentecost. The reason I mention that is, if you've been in the church of God for many decades and had a history going back to the Worldwide Church of God, you're aware of the fact that the Worldwide Church of God and its predecessor the Radio Church of God, for about forty years from the early 1930's to the early 1970's taught that Pentecost should be on a Monday. That was official church teaching and what everybody did for about forty years. That's not correct; if you're honest with Leviticus 23 it teaches how to calculate Pentecost, it's obvious that it's a Sunday. You have to start the count on the day after the Sabbath and end on the day after the Sabbath; you have to start on a Sunday and end on a Sunday—that's what it says. But at the time it was misunderstood and the teaching was you were to keep Pentecost on Monday. When you're looking at a forty-year period like that, I'm sure it's very easy to say that there were numerous Christians who came into the church during that time, baptized and lived out their whole time in the church of God their whole Christian life, died and never once kept Pentecost on the right day. I don't believe for a moment that God is going to judge those people and keep them out of the Kingdom of God because they didn't keep that one doctrine right when they just never had the opportunity to understand it right in the first place. They were sincerely trying to obey the best that they understood.

Obviously, what they were doing was wrong—Pentecost is Sunday, it wasn't magically Monday because they misunderstood, they were doing it wrongly but they were sincerely doing it wrongly and didn't know any better. I think God judges them accordingly. I think it's important to realize that in our lives and all those that we know, God judges all of us based upon what we do with what we understand. Not everyone has the same understanding at the same period of time. God is our judge; we are not each other's judge. We all need to take that into consideration and not at times exalt ourselves and say, we're better than everybody else because we understand this subject or that subject. It really comes down to an issue of what we're living with what we understand.

There's another side to that coin as well. If we have been given an understanding on a subject, we better be living it. We will be held accountable for that and if we're not we are playing a very, very dangerous game. What can happen with human nature is sometimes we compromise our beliefs—to put in common terminology—we just want to be a part of the herd. We want to go along with what everybody else is doing and be accepted by the crowd around us and not face the consequences for not fitting in and that approach can literally cost us our salvation.

To look at an example turn to John 12:42.

John 12:42 *Nevertheless even among the rulers many believed in Him, but because of the Pharisees they did not confess Him, lest they should be put out of the synagogue;*
43) *for they loved the praise of men more than the praise of God.* (NKJV)

Obviously, what we're referring to are those who understood that Christ was the Messiah. They understand who He really was but they didn't want to acknowledge that because it wasn't going to be popular. In the environment that they lived in, if I start talking about the fact that Christ is the Messiah and I acknowledge who He is and I want to follow Him, I'm going to get kicked out of the synagogue, I'm going to lose friends and I'm going to be ostracized and it's going to be painful for my life. In reality, in the environment they lived in, that's exactly what would have happened. Unfortunately, there were folks who really made the wrong choice. If they continued down that path and never repented of that, that's a salvation issue. Christ flat out said, if you deny Me before men, I will deny you before the Father. There's no other name by which we can be saved, so if Christ is denying you before the Father, you're toast. That is a very big issue. So, we have to understand that *to whom much is given, much is required* and if we understand something, we better be willing to stand up and live it.

Even if that means losing our job, losing friends, even if it means losing our own life. There are certainly circumstances where that can happen and as we go forward into the future, I'm sure that will happen more and more. As we get close to the end time, living the truth could literally cost you your life and that is something we have to be willing to do. If we are cowardly and fearful and not willing to stand up to live what we believe, the Bible directly tells us that we will be rejected by the Kingdom of God. Turn to Revelation 21:7.

Revelation 21:7 *He who overcomes shall inherit all things, and I will be his God and he shall be My son.*

8) *But the cowardly [some translations say the fearful], unbelieving, abominable, murderers, sexually immoral, sorcerers, idolaters, and all liars shall have their part in the lake which burns with fire and brimstone, which is the second death.*" (NKJV)

This is a list of people who go into the lake of fire and if we are cowardly and fearful, we will be included with those who go into the lake of fire. That's people like we read about in the book of John who understand that Christ was the Messiah but who said, "If I acknowledge Who that is, I'm going to be a leper; I'm going to be rejected, thrown out of the synagogue and all by myself if I acknowledge that." Yes, they would be but they would still make it into the Kingdom of God. That's the situation we can be in as well. We have to realize that we need to be "subject matter" experts and studying God's Word but most importantly realizing that it's not just academic knowledge. Once we understand something, we're held accountable for living it. We all fall short; we all have our weaknesses and times we stumble and sleep and slumber and we have to repent of those and get back up and get ourselves back on the straight and narrow. We all go through that and God understands that we are all flawed and we're all struggling to do this.

We have to understand that we are held accountable for what we know. The most important thing is not just what we understand, it's what we live; it's having the oil in the vessel. As we prepare, going into the spring Holy Days, which are all about our repentance and getting ourselves straight with God, let's realize it's not just about our knowledge and understanding of God's Word. Yes, we need to be spending time and dedicating time regularly to studying His Word so we understand it, so we can become "subject experts" on it and prepare to teach the rest of mankind. But the most important thing is going to be living it. It's going to be practicing it in our day to day lives. That is the whole significance of what the parable of the Ten Virgins is trying to tell us.

It often gets taught about this lesson of preparing for the long haul and having extra supplies and some of those are valid, viable lessons, but it's not what the parable is telling us. What it's telling us is, all the virgins have the Word of God, all have the Bible, they have all been given the Holy Spirit and given the opportunity to understand it and use it as a guide for their lives, as a lamp to show them the way. But what distinguished the wise from the foolish? The wise had it in their vessel. They had it in their lives and they understood they could not get their oil from other human beings. What did the foolish do? When they realized they were running out and their lamp was going out and they were losing their understanding, their thought process was that if they were hanging around with these other wise people, it would rub off on them.

The modern-day equivalence of that concept is, as long as I'm in this group, as long as I'm hanging around with these people, as long as I'm following this particular leader, then I'm okay. No, you are not; you have to be living it in your day-to-day life, you have to have a personal relationship with God because that is where the source of the oil is. That's how we can have oil in our vessel in our day to day lives. We understand that we all need to be developing our knowledge and regularly studying God's Word but the most important thing is that personal relationship with Him and actively practicing what we know in our lives because the real issue is about conversion. About having oil in our vessel and practicing what we know on a day to day basis.