

How to Interpret Scripture Living by the Word of God

Lesson #13 for June 27, 2020

Scriptures: Philippians 2:12-16; Luke 4:4,8,10-12; Psalm 37:7; 46:10; 62:1-2,5; Colossians 3:16; James 1:22.

1. How would you like to have the world's wisest person as your constant guide? God offers you something even better than that! The inspired records provide wisdom beyond any human's capacity; our only problem is understanding it and following it. Even knowing what the Scripture says is not going to help very much if we do not live by its directions.
2. The Scriptures are a treasure house of information about how God has dealt with rebellion in His universe and how He has guided various people through the centuries in their own lives.
3. Think particularly of the life of Jesus Himself. We wish, of course, that we knew more about His childhood and youth. The three chapters in *Desire of Ages* about the youth of Jesus are incredibly challenging and insightful. So, are we prepared to start thinking about living God's way? During this quarter, we have studied some different approaches to understanding Scripture. But, are we willing to live according to what we have learned? What would happen if everyone in the Seventh-day Adventist Church were actually living up to the guidance that s/he already has available from Scripture?
4. Read Philippians 2:12-16. Paul was in prison in Rome; he thought there was a chance that he would be released soon, and he was writing to his friends in Philippi. He encouraged them to get along, not to argue or complain, but to shine like the stars lighting up the sky. He wanted to be proud of those with whom he had worked to give the gospel.
5. Let us remember that the most important work that the Holy Spirit has done relative to this earth is the giving of the Scriptures. In our day, the Holy Spirit not only helps us to read and understand the Scriptures, but also He can help us understand and follow God's directions.
6. And what happens if we do not follow God's directions?

Romans 1:25: They exchange the truth about God for a lie; they worship and serve what God has created instead of the Creator himself, who is to be praised for ever! Amen.—American Bible Society. (1992). *The Holy Bible: The Good News Translation** (2nd ed., Romans 1:25). New York: American Bible Society.

Ephesians 4:17-18: ¹⁷ In the Lord's name, then, I warn you: do not continue to live like the heathen, whose thoughts are worthless ¹⁸and whose minds are in the dark. They have no part in the life that God gives, for they are completely ignorant and stubborn.—*Good News Bible*.*

7. Do we recognize that, apart from Jesus, the Holy Spirit is the best Teacher this world has ever had? He wants to help us understand the Scriptures. He wants us to bring the truth of God's Word into our daily lives.

No one is able to explain the Scriptures without the aid of the Holy Spirit. But when you take up the word of God with a humble, teachable heart, the angels of God will be by your side to impress you with evidences of the truth.—Ellen G. White, *Advent Review and Sabbath Herald*,* February 18, 1890, par. 14. Compare *Selected Messages*, Book 1, 411.3.

8. Have you had the experience of having the Holy Spirit help you to understand some challenging portion of Scripture? How is that supposed to work? Should we receive visions?

9. Read 1 Corinthians 2:13-14 and Isaiah 50:4-5. How is it that God's faithful people can understand things that do not make any sense to those who do not have the Holy Spirit's guidance?
10. We need to remember that the real reason for having church organizations is to facilitate the spreading of the gospel to those who have not yet received the message. But, how can we clearly explain the truths of the Bible if we do not understand them ourselves?
11. How much Scripture have you memorized? How much of it can you still quote? Many of us had memory verses that we learned in times past; but, they have slipped from our memories. When dealing with Satan's temptations, wouldn't it be good to have a number of Scriptures stored in our memory for ready access? That is what Jesus did! See Luke 4:4,8,10-12. The records suggest that there were some in Jesus's day who memorized the entire Old Testament in the original language! God is not asking you to do that much today!
12. But, we can see from the story of Jesus that He had memorized significant portions of the Old Testament and had appropriate Bible texts available in memory whenever needed. Quoting the Bible is probably the best possible response we can give to Satan when he attacks us. Repeatedly, Jesus answered His critics by referring them to Scripture. For example, see Luke 24:45-46; Matthew 11:10; and John 6:45.
13. Did Jesus know from His association with God the Father that the words He was quoting from the Old Testament were words that He Himself had inspired? Did He ever try to tell His disciples that? (*DA* 70.1 says, "God was His instructor.")
14. What has been your own personal experience in quoting Scripture in response to temptation? How can we do that on a practical basis? **Sin cannot be stamped out; it must be crowded out with thoughts and ideas from God!** Only by filling our minds with God's ideas as recorded in the Bible can we be prepared to meet Satan and his angels when they attack us.
15. In John 5 and again in John 8, Jesus responded to the attacks of the Pharisees and Sadducees. And He was blunt! He said that they were not following the guidelines set down in the Pentateuch by Moses because if they were, they would have accepted Him. As recorded in John 8, He went on to say three times that He, in fact, was/is God! (John 8:24,28,58) Finally, He said it so clearly that they could not miss it. And what was their response? They tried to stone Him.
16. There are some Christians who claim that they are following Jesus in contradistinction to the Old Testament. They like to quote Matthew 5:21-22,27-28,33-34,38-39 where Jesus appeared to contrast what was written in the Old Testament with what He was teaching in His day. Jesus was not trying to throw out the Old Testament; He was interpreting it and teaching it in a more expanded way. If we followed His directions in the Sermon on the Mount, we would not have to worry about breaking any of the laws recorded in the Old Testament.
17. There are some in our day who want to separate the gospel from the teachings of the Bible. That might seem strange to those of us who consider the Bible to be a guide for our lives. One of the most famous examples of someone who saw a separation between his teachings and the doctrines of the Bible was Martin Luther. Look at these comments.

"All the genuine sacred books agree in this, that all of them preach and inculcate [*treiben*] Christ. And that is the true test by which to judge all books, when we see whether or not they inculcate Christ."—*Martin Luther, Luther's Works, Vol. 35: Word and Sacrament I, Preface to the New Testament*, eds. E. Theodore Bachmann and Helmut T. Lehmann, vol. 35 (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1976), p. 396.—[as quoted in the *Adult Teachers Sabbath School Bible Study Guide** 173]. [German word in brackets is in the source.]^{†§}

“Briefly, Christ is the Lord, not the servant, the Lord of the Sabbath, of law, and of all things. The Scriptures must be understood in favor of Christ, not against him. For that reason they must either refer to him or must not be held to be true Scriptures. . . . Therefore, if the adversaries press the Scriptures against Christ, we urge Christ against the Scriptures. We have the Lord, they the servants; we have the Head, they the feet or members, over which the Head necessarily dominates and takes precedence. If one of them had to be parted with, Christ or the law, the law would have to be let go, not Christ. For if we have Christ, we can easily establish laws and we shall judge all things rightly. Indeed, we would make new decalogues, as Paul does in all the epistles, and Peter, but above all Christ in the gospel. And these decalogues are clearer than the decalogue of Moses, just as the countenance of Christ is brighter than the countenance of Moses (2 Cor. 3:7-11).”—Martin Luther, *Luther’s Works, Vol. 34: Career of the Reformer IV*, eds. Hilton C. Oswald and Helmut T. Lehmann, vol. 34 (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1999), pp. 112, 113.—[as quoted in *Adult Teachers Sabbath School Bible Study Guide 173].^{†§}**

18. We believe that Scripture must be interpreted in light of the life and teachings of Jesus. They cannot be set against each other. Luther used his ideas of *sola Scriptura* and the *Christomonistic principal* to downplay the usefulness of five books in the New Testament: Hebrews, James, 2 Peter, Jude, and Revelation. Imagine what the Seventh-day Adventist Church would be without Hebrews and especially without Revelation.

19. Jesus made the instructions He gave so clear; it was almost impossible to misunderstand Him. Trying to set aside certain portions of the Old Testament as perhaps uninspired because of something Jesus said as recorded in the New Testament is one of the subtlest and perhaps most dangerous criticisms of Scripture. Remember that the Bible that Jesus and the disciples had was only what we call the Old Testament. Jesus specifically said that He was not trying to contradict the Old Testament.

Matthew 5:17-19: ¹⁷ “Do not think that I have come to do away with the Law of Moses and the teachings of the prophets. I have not come to do away with them, but to make their teachings come true. ¹⁸Remember that as long as heaven and earth last, not the least point nor the smallest detail of the Law will be done away with—not until the end of all things. ¹⁹So then, whoever disobeys even the least important of the commandments and teaches others to do the same, will be least in the Kingdom of heaven. On the other hand, whoever obeys the Law and teaches others to do the same, will be great in the Kingdom of heaven.”—*Good News Bible*.*

20. Can you name any teaching found in the New Testament that really directly contradicts what is said in the Old Testament? In fact, there are some things which are spelled out in the Old Testament that are not spelled out in the New Testament but which are foundational to our understanding of the whole of Scripture. Think of the creation story and also the story of the fall and, later, the account of the flood. The Old Testament clearly teaches that the Messiah/Christ would come. And in the New Testament, we read about that first coming. But, the New Testament goes on to further expand God’s plan for this earth by explaining that He will come a second time and, yet again, a third time to make this world His future headquarters.

21. So, why is it that so few of us find time to really read and study the Scriptures? Our lives tend to be hectic, and there is always something to distract us. Solomon reminded us in the book of Ecclesiastes that none of this world’s attractions have any permanence.

22. How can we deliberately and intentionally set aside some time every day to respectfully and quietly study God's Word and pray? Remember that the One we are talking to when we pray, actually holds our lives in His hands. (Acts 17:25,28)
23. Read Psalm 37:7; 46:10; 62:1-2,5. These verses suggest that God wants to have an appointment with us on a daily basis. And He needs to have our undivided attention during that time.
24. If we truly love someone, wouldn't we love to spend time with him/her? Do you have a special place where you can go and talk to God in private? Beginning your day with God will prove to be a huge benefit.
25. Have we outgrown our need to memorize Scripture? Having access to the Scriptures in a word-by-word memorized form can prove to be a huge benefit.
26. One way to memorize Scripture is to learn "Scripture songs."

Ephesians 5:18-20: ¹⁸ Do not get drunk with wine, which will only ruin you; instead, be filled with the Spirit. ¹⁹ Speak to one another with the words of psalms, hymns, and sacred songs; sing hymns and psalms to the Lord with praise in your hearts. ²⁰ In the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, always give thanks for everything to God the Father.—*Good News Bible*.*

Colossians 3:16: Christ's message in all its richness must live in your hearts. Teach and instruct each other with all wisdom. Sing psalms, hymns, and sacred songs; sing to God with thanksgiving in your hearts.—*Good News Bible*.*

27. Singing God's Word is a blessing. Combining the words of Scripture with brief but beautiful melodies is a tremendous aid to memorizing. We remember what we sing.

Music was made to serve a holy purpose, to lift the thoughts to that which is pure, noble, and elevating, and to awaken in the soul devotion and gratitude to God. What a contrast between the ancient custom and the uses to which music is now too often devoted! How many employ this gift to exalt self, instead of using it to glorify God! A love for music leads the unwary to unite with world lovers in pleasure gatherings where God has forbidden His children to go. Thus that which is a great blessing when rightly used, becomes one of the most successful agencies by which Satan allures the mind from duty and from the contemplation of eternal things.

Music forms a part of God's worship in the courts above, and we should endeavor, in our songs of praise, to approach as nearly as possible to the harmony of the heavenly choirs. The proper training of the voice is an important feature in education and should not be neglected. **Singing, as a part of religious service, is as much an act of worship as is prayer.** The heart must feel the spirit of the song to give it right expression.—Ellen G. White, *Patriarchs and Prophets** 594.2-3.†

28. What else can the Holy Spirit do for us?

The natural eye can never behold the comeliness and beauty of Christ. The inward illumination of the Holy Spirit, revealing to the soul its true hopeless, helpless condition without the mercy and pardon of the Sin-bearer—the all-sufficiency of Christ—can alone enable man to discern His infinite mercy, His immeasurable love, benevolence, and glory.—Ellen G. White, *The Upward Look** 155.2; *OFC** 266.2.

Portions of Scripture, even whole chapters, may be committed to memory, to

be repeated when Satan comes in with his temptations.... When Satan would lead the mind to dwell upon earthly and sensual things, he is most effectually resisted with, "It is written."—Ellen G. White, *Advent Review and Sabbath Herald*,* April 8, 1884, par. 4; *OHC** 88.5; *2MCP** 659.1. Compare *1MCP* 95.3-4.

29. The truth about God as displayed in Scripture needs to be lived, not just believed. And the One who can make that possible is the Holy Spirit who brings the words of Scripture to new life. It is through the Holy Spirit that we even want to be true followers of God. Of course, the One who illustrated that best of all was Jesus Christ Himself.

30. Jesus never set aside Scripture as unimportant in any way. He consistently quoted Scripture as authoritative. It is clear from Scripture that during His ministry, every night and/or early morning, He spent time with His Father in prayer and communion, planning for the next day.

Mark 1:35: Very early the next morning, long before daylight, Jesus got up and left the house. He went out of the town to a lonely place, where he prayed.—Good News Bible.*†

Luke 6:12-16: ¹² At that time Jesus went up a hill to pray and spent the whole night there praying to God. ¹³When day came, he called his disciples to him and chose twelve of them, whom he named apostles: ¹⁴Simon (whom he named Peter) and his brother Andrew; James and John, Philip and Bartholomew, ¹⁵Matthew and Thomas, James son of Alphaeus, and Simon (who was called the Patriot), ¹⁶Judas son of James, and Judas Iscariot, who became the traitor.—*Good News Bible.*†*

31. Ellen White said that even when there was trouble at His work in the carpenter shop, He would cheer things up by singing a Scripture song. (*DA* 73.3)

32. But, we are told that only the spiritually enlightened can understand God's plan for their lives.

1 Corinthians 2:14: Whoever does not have the Spirit cannot receive the gifts that come from God's Spirit. Such people really do not understand them; they are nonsense to them, because their value can be judged only on a spiritual basis.—*Good News Bible.**

2 Peter 1:19-21: ¹⁹ So we are even more confident of the message proclaimed by the prophets. You will do well to pay attention to it, because it is like a lamp shining in a dark place until the Day dawns and the light of the morning star shines in your hearts. ²⁰**Above all else, however, remember that no one can explain by himself or herself a prophecy in the Scriptures.** ²¹**For no prophetic message ever came just from human will, but people were under the control of the Holy Spirit as they spoke the message that came from God.—Good News Bible.*†**

We need to counsel together to avoid problems.

2 Timothy 3:16-17: ¹⁶All Scripture is inspired by God and is useful [Footnote: **Every scripture inspired by God is also useful**] for teaching the truth, rebuking error, correcting faults, and giving instruction for right living, ¹⁷so that the person who serves God may be fully qualified and equipped to do every kind of good deed.—*Good News Bible.*†*

These were final instructions for Timothy.

33. Without the help of the Holy Spirit, we will neither desire nor appreciate the Scriptures.

1 Corinthians 2:12-15: ¹²We have not received this world's spirit; instead, we have

received the Spirit sent by God, so that we may know all that God has given us.
¹³ So then, we do not speak in words taught by human wisdom, but in words taught by the Spirit, as we explain spiritual truths to those who have the Spirit.
¹⁴ **Whoever does not have the Spirit cannot receive the gifts that come from God's Spirit. Such people really do not understand them; they are nonsense to them, because their value can be judged only on a spiritual basis.** ¹⁵ **Whoever has the Spirit, however, is able to judge the value of everything, but no one is able to judge him.**—*Good News Bible*.^{*†}

34. There are stories coming out of places where you would not expect the Word of God to be read at all, indicating that the Holy Spirit continues to speak through the Bible, even today, and to make the written Word come alive. Check the information on Adventist World Radio.

John 15:26: “The Helper will come—the Spirit, who reveals the truth about God and who comes from the Father. I will send him to you from the Father, and he will speak about me.”—*Good News Bible*.^{*}

1 John 4:2-3: ²This is how you will be able to know whether it is God's Spirit: anyone who acknowledges that Jesus Christ came as a human being has the Spirit who comes from God. ³But anyone who denies this about Jesus does not have the Spirit from God. The spirit that he has is from the Enemy of Christ; you heard that it would come, and now it is here in the world already.—*Good News Bible*.^{*}

35. The work of the Holy Spirit is to make the life and teachings of Jesus as well as the meaning of His death clear to human beings.
36. We are told in several places that the Holy Spirit opens the Scriptures to our understanding. What does that mean?

Luke 24:45-46: ⁴⁵ Then he [Jesus] opened their minds to understand the Scriptures, ⁴⁶and said to them, “This is what is written: the Messiah must suffer and must rise from death three days later.”—*Good News Bible*.^{*‡}

37. One of the most inspiring things that a person can do is reading the Gospels in connection with Ellen White's book, *The Desire of Ages*. See *The Desire of Ages* 83.4.
38. So, what is the best time of the day for you to spend some quiet time with God? Do you really have so many things to do that you need to crowd God out of your life?
39. How should we respond to those who think that diet is not a big deal so long as they believe in Christ? Or, what about those who say that being married is just having a piece of paper and that as long as they love Jesus and love each other, that is all that matters?

The Spirit was not given—nor can it ever be bestowed—to supersede the Bible; for the Scriptures explicitly state that the word of God is the standard by which all teaching and experience must be tested.—Ellen G. White, *The Great Controversy*^{*} vii.3 (Introduction).

40. So, what have you learned from and about Scripture during this series of lessons? Have you learned how to take Scripture more seriously? And to make it a rule for your life?

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