

PICTURES OF THE WORD

Symbols That Help Us Understand The Scriptures

By Frank R. Parrish

Painting A Picture

Jesus, in describing the importance of the Bible, the eternal Scriptures, said, *"Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God"* (Matt 4:4). He used this quote from Deuteronomy 8:3 as He triumphantly resisted Satan's temptations in the wilderness at the beginning of His ministry. This dramatic and crucial moment will forever stand as a lesson to us in the use of Scripture as a powerful weapon against temptation, sin and the devil.

But there is more to this passage than simply a method for resisting temptation.

As Jesus speaks these words, it is as if He is painting a picture for us. Jesus links the idea of **bread** and **Scripture** and **hunger** together. This is a concept that can be grasped immediately, especially if one has been fasting 40 days like Jesus had been! Later in His ministry, Jesus, the Living Word of God, declares that He is the Bread of Life come down from heaven, and those that eat of it will live (see John 6). Jesus used a kind of **picture-language** called "**parables**" to help people understand – **or see** – more clearly what He was saying.

In the same way, the Holy Spirit used "picture language" throughout the Bible in describing the Holy Scriptures themselves, which were inspired by God. Often spiritual truths can be portrayed more clearly by the use of **symbols**. These **symbols** bring a **picture** to the human mind, making it much easier to understand certain truths.

There are a number of symbols that God Himself chose to describe His own Word. These symbols help us understand more about the nature of the Scriptures themselves. They also assist us in perceiving how the Holy Spirit uses the Word in the lives and circumstances of the believer whose life is surrendered to the Lordship of Christ.

This article will briefly examine these God-inspired symbols for the Word of God that the Bible contains, giving further insight into the power and life contained in the Holy Scriptures.

MIRROR

The Image Of Jesus

*"For if anyone is a **hearer** of the Word and **not a doer**, he is like a man observing his natural face in a **mirror**; for he observes himself, goes away, and immediately forgets what kind of man he was. But he who **looks into** the perfect law of liberty and **continues in it**, and is not a forgetful hearer but a **doer** of the word, this one will be blessed in what he does" (James 1:23-25).*

God's Word is a revealer of the human heart. It helps us to better understand our motives and our actions. The Bible reveals to us:

- What we **are like**,
- **Why** we are that way,
- What we **ought to DO** about what is revealed.

God uses the revealing power of the Word to bring us to a place of **taking action on what is revealed**. If we were to look at ourselves in a mirror and see dirt on our face, food on our chin or our hair mussed up, would we walk away and do nothing? Or would we stop and **take action on what is revealed**? Would we leave the mess that we see, or would we get cleaned up?

The Spirit and the Word, working together, call us to **take notice** of the Bible's corrective instruction in our lives, **be obedient** to what it tells us to do, and **be changed** more into the image of Jesus!

From Glory To Glory

But there is another important lesson to remember about what the Bible reveals. It is the temptation to **see (and judge) others** with the Word, instead of applying what we learn **to our own lives first**. It is too easy to get caught up in our opinions of what we think **others** ought to do with the truths of Scripture, and completely miss the opportunity for the Word to change our **own** lives first.

Second Corinthians 3:18 also describes God's Word as a mirror: *"But we all, with unveiled face, beholding **as in a mirror** the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into **the same image** from glory to glory, just as by the Spirit of the Lord."* In this mirror, we see the image of Jesus Himself.

When we put this scripture together with James 1:23-25, we learn an important dynamic of how this scriptural mirror works.

The Word shows us the image of Christ so that we will measure our character and conduct by HIS standards; and then allow God to shape us more and more into His image. When we allow **ourselves to be changed** by the mirror of God's Word, we will end up being of more help to others than if we spent our time trying to correct them (see Matthew 7:1-5).

This process brings us fully into the "*law of liberty*" (James 1:25), a life lived and shaped under the power of God's amazing grace, and then used to help others!

SWORD

Armed And Ready

"And take...the sword of the Spirit, which is the Word of God" (Eph 6:17).

In Ephesians 6:10-18, Paul outlines the armor that every good soldier of Christ ought to have with him constantly. This armor should not just be something the soldier **carries**; but by constant use, it should become familiar equipment that he skillfully **uses**.

The Holy Spirit revealed to Paul that believers are in a constant state of warfare. They are wrestling not against other humans *"but against principalities, powers, rulers of the darkness of this age, and against spiritual hosts of wickedness in the heavenly places"* (Eph 6:12). Because this is true, God has given us five **defensive** pieces of armament (Eph 6:14-17), **and one weapon for both offense and defense**. This one special weapon is the "**sword of the Spirit**" – the **Word of God**.

Counter-Attack

Satan's strategy from the beginning of time has always been to question God's Word. Satan sows doubt in people's minds, appeals to their "reason", and tries to tempt them to not take God at His Word by faith.

In Genesis 3:1, Satan approached Eve in the garden of Eden with the opening line of *"Hath God said..."*. He used this question to cause her to doubt a simple, straightforward command from God. She then began to question the command God had spoken, until she convinced herself that she did not need to obey it. The results were devastating for all of mankind from that day forward.

Satan tried the same strategy in tempting Jesus in Matthew 4:1-11. Here again the devil implied doubt about what God has said: *"If you are the Son of God..."*. Satan said this right after the baptism of Jesus (Matthew 3), when God had already declared in an audible voice, *"This is my beloved Son, in Whom I am well pleased"* (Matt 3:17).

But Jesus, knowing the power of God's Word, used it with authority to both **defend** Himself from the devil's temptation and **counter-attack** his treacherous lies.

Cutting Through

Hebrews 4:12 shows us another way in which God's Word is the *"sword of the Spirit."* This passage describes the Scriptures as *"living and powerful, and sharper than a two-edged sword"*. The Word of God contains a **life** and **power** by the Holy Spirit's anointing that is not placed upon any other words or books. There are many books filled with words, but **only God's Word gives life** (John 6:63). There are many sermons that are inspiring and clever, but they cannot compare to the **power** of God's Word.

God declared in Isaiah 55:11 that His Word *"shall not return to Me void [empty, without fruit], but it shall accomplish what I please, and it shall prosper in the thing for which I sent it"*. God was telling us that His Word is powerfully alive. His Word is a force, which goes forth and accomplishes things. That is because **all of God's life and power back up His Word – and ONLY His Word.**

The anointing of God flows through His Word. We can never defeat God's enemies or win God's battles without God's Book. God's Word is TRUTH! It is a weapon of Truth—a Sword that can cut through the devil's lies, and break the bondage that can come from believing those lies. It has a delivering power that can **cut through** the deceptions of our enemy, Satan, and bring freedom to a person in body, mind and spirit. *"And you shall know the truth, and **the truth shall make you free**"* (John 8:32).

Victory!

A well-known evangelist had just concluded a meeting. As he was leaving the sanctuary, he saw a man lying unconscious on the floor. He was told the man was a heroin addict in a coma from a recent overdose, and that he would probably die.

The evangelist knew that the man might not hear or remember anything he would say to him at that moment. But the Holy Spirit prompted him to speak to the man the scripture, *"You shall not die, but live"* (Psalm 118:17). So he went over and spoke into the man's ear this verse from God's Word.

The man who was the heroin addict later said he did not remember anything about that night except the words going around and around in his mind, *"you shall not die, but live"*. Over and over, he kept hearing that phrase in his mind. The next day, he suddenly awoke from his coma and was immediately sober and in his right mind. He had completely lost his craving for drugs, his addiction had been broken, and he received Jesus Christ as His Lord and Savior that very day!

The Sword of the Spirit, the Word of God, is truly a **mighty weapon of warfare** against the deception and bondage of the devil!

"MEASURING ROD"

The Very Depths

*"For the Word of God...is a **discerner** of the thoughts and intents of the heart"* (Heb 4:12). The Word of God is very penetrating. It is like an extremely sharp knife that can cut through even the hardest of substances.

In this same verse, the Holy Spirit says the Scriptures are *"piercing, even to the division of the soul and spirit"*. These two phrases in Hebrews 4:12 show us that the Word of God can reveal the very depths of the human heart, even what appears confusing or hidden. Reading or hearing the Scriptures can reveal the subtle differences between the soul and spirit, and show whether a person is living a **soulish** life or a **spiritual** life.

The Greek word for "discerner" is *kritikos*, from which we get the word "critic". The Holy Spirit purposefully chose this word to describe the role of the Scriptures in our lives. In this we can see that God's Word provides the standard, or "**measuring rod**", against which our lives are to be compared.

Under Scrutiny

God's Word gives us something to measure our lives by, to see if we are living in a way that is pleasing to God. However, the Bible does not measure our **outward actions** alone, which can appear pure to human eyes. His Word also reveals our **inward motives**, those secret things in our hearts that are behind our actions. *"...But all things are naked and open to the eyes of Him to whom we must give account"* (Heb 4:13; see also Proverbs 16:2).

It would be no stretch of interpretation to say that God's Word tests both a man's earthly life and his spiritual life. His bodily life and his spiritual life alike come under the scrutiny and inspection of the Word of God.

There are times when we might doubt our own motives. Sometimes false condemnation can slip into our hearts. That's when the Word of God can either reassure us or convict us, and help us to know how to respond to God and His work in our hearts. The Holy Spirit will use the Word of God to guide us into righteousness.

To avoid using this "critical discernor" only on others, we should remember the lesson Jesus taught His disciples. In Luke 6:37-42, Jesus warns us against being judgmental and critical of others, especially when we might be blind to an even worse condition in our own lives. A person who is quick to condemn the faults in others, while ignoring his own shortcomings, will be of little help to God in influencing the

lives of others for Jesus' sake.

We can serve the Lord and others best by first and foremost applying the discerning power of the Word to our own lives.

WATER

Cleansing Word

"...that He might sanctify and cleanse her with the washing of water with the Word" (Eph 5:26). In this passage the Holy Spirit, speaking through Paul, uses imagery (or symbolism) to create understanding in the minds of both Hebrews and Greeks. This verse compares the work of the Word of God to being **washed with water**.

Ephesians 5:26 describes a double action:

- The **Living Word** of God—**Jesus**
- The **words** of God—the **Scriptures**.

In both the Jewish and Gentile cultures, before a bride was presented to the bridegroom she received a "cleansing bath". She was then dressed in her bridal clothing and the groom received her as his wife.

Jesus, as **the Word of God incarnate** (John 1:1-4), gave Himself as a sacrifice for His Bride-to-be, the Church (see Revelation 1:5; Titus 2:14). We are cleansed from sin by His blood, being justified by faith in His Name for salvation. The blood of Jesus provides the Church with a "washing" – a cleansing from sin in our lives. For this we will give Him praise now and throughout all eternity! HALLELUJAH!

Daily Bathing

But there is a second truth at work here that can have tremendous effect on our daily lives if we apply this principle. In John 15:3, Jesus said to His disciples, *"You are already clean because of the word which I have spoken to you."* The Word of God has a **cleansing power**. This cleansing power of the Word of God acts in both a **spiritual** and **soulful** dimension.

God Almighty has so designed His Word that it can cleanse, restore and rebuild our minds and our spirits as we read it, study it, and open ourselves to the Holy Spirit. There are many good books that say many good things; but there is **only one Holy Bible**, which is *"given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, thoroughly equipped for every good work"* (2 Tim 3:16-17).

We live in a sin-filled and broken world where we, as leaders, are often exposed to the brokenness of others. This can weigh heavily on our minds and in our spirits. We can have the added burden of our own failures because we, too, sometimes fail and fall short of the glory of

God (see Romans 3:23).

But there is a remedy – a regular, daily "**bathing**" in God's Holy Scriptures! God's Word has power in it, the power of the Holy Spirit. God's Word has a tremendous inward, **purifying** effect in the heart and mind of the believer in Jesus Christ.

Without Spot Or Wrinkle

Reading the Scriptures daily can give us the strength to repent and replace sin with God's righteousness, peace, joy, guidance, and strength! When we read the Word of God, it will often have the "mirror" effect (mentioned earlier) and reveal our sin. But God is so good! *The same Word that reveals our defilement ALSO provides us with A MEANS OF CLEANSING!*

So then, we are **cleansed from condemning sin** by receiving the free gift of the shed blood of Jesus Christ on the Cross; and we are **cleansed from the stains of this world** by the living power of the Word of God. Both work together to make us a fit Bride, "*not having spot or wrinkle*".

LAVER Bronze Sea

There is a special insight into the Word for the believer who was raised as a Jew. In the Old Testament, in the Tabernacle, there was a large bronze basin called a **laver**. In Solomon's Temple, it was called a Bronze Sea: it was 15 feet across and held approximately 8,000 gallons of water for the priests to wash in. (See 2 Chronicles 4.)

This bronze laver was positioned in a special place in both the Tabernacle and the Temple. The bronze laver stood between the worshipper and the rest of the Tabernacle, providing a **means of cleansing**. A worshipper was required to wash before being allowed to enter into worship.

In Exodus 30:17-21, God commanded Moses to make a statute for the priesthood concerning the bronze laver. Priests were required to wash their hands and feet before they could minister before the Lord. Their hands and feet, just like yours and mine, are what touched the things of this world.

Hands and feet are symbolic of our exposure to the sin-filled, fallen world we must live in.

In the days when Israel worshipped in the Tabernacle and later in the Temple, the priesthood was to go through a **ritual cleansing** before they were allowed to minister to the Lord on behalf of the people. They were to do this **without fail**...otherwise judgment would come and

they would die (Exo 30:20).

A Real Washing

Since Scripture states that "*all these things* [in the Old Testament] *happened to them as examples, and they were written for our admonition*" (2 Cor 10:11), we can learn some principles from the bronze laver of the Tabernacle.

First, in combining Exodus 30:17-21 with Ephesians 5:26, we see that the bronze laver is a "type"—**a symbol**—of the Scriptures. Just as the priests were required to go through a **ritual washing** before they ministered to the Lord and the people, so must we go through a **real washing**.

Our "*washing of water by the Word*" does not just happen at our salvation experience; it must happen **continuously**. The Old Testament priests had to wash **every time** they were to serve. We, too, need **regular "washings"** of the Word of God to keep us clean and purified from sin and the effects of this world.

Our ministry to others needs to be with **clean hands** and a **pure heart**, in order to be blessed and useful for service (see Psalm 24:4).

Second, we need **a constant washing** with the Word if we want to **regularly** experience the fullness of life Jesus offers. The Word of God feeds both our **spirit** and our **mind**. This helps to keep us **spiritually alive and strong**.

God had a harsh judgement (death) for the priest who did not wash. In much the same way, God calls us to keep our lives free of the spiritual "deadness" that comes from missing the regular washing by the Word of God. We must be disciplined, and **daily read and meditate on God's Word**, in order to be cleansed and to receive spiritual life and strength.

Life And Power

Third, it is a biblical principle that whatever is in the spiritual life of a leader (or parent of a family) can be duplicated in those who follow him or her. Therefore, it is necessary that we are washed by the Word and are alive spiritually. This will help ensure that we are passing along **spiritual life and health** to those we serve, instead of spiritual deadness.

Those we lead need to be taught how important it is to be washed in the water of the Word. It is a very important part of every believer's life. If people are cleansed, and **filled with the life and power** of God's Word, anointed by His Spirit, they will be able to minister powerfully to their family, their church...and to the world.

SEED

Life-Giving Breath

*"...having been born again, **not of corruptible seed, but incorruptible through the Word of God which lives and abides forever**" (1 Pet 1:23).*

God exalts His Name and His very words in the Scriptures. He and His words are also exalted in the preaching of His Word.

But He also exalts His Word in the saving of lost men and women. For **it is by His Word and His Spirit**, and not by testimonies, eloquent arguments, or emotional appeals, that He brings to true salvation those who are spiritually dead.

We owe our natural existence to the Creator's spoken Word and His life-giving breath (see Genesis 2:7). In the same way, we owe our **spiritual New Birth** to the power of God's Word activated by the Holy Spirit.

By studying 1 Peter 1:23 closely, we can learn some important lessons. The language structure of this verse in the Greek shows that the bringing forth of this seed to life is **God's action**; He and He alone does it. This means that people cannot attain this through study or self-effort (see John 1:12,13). Only God can cause the seed to bring forth salvation life in the human heart.

The **seed** is the Gospel message of the Kingdom of God. Jesus Himself declared in His parable of the sower that the Word of God is seed (Luke 8:5-15). God may allow people to **sow** the seed by preaching the Word, or to **water** or **nurture** the seed. But only **He** can cause it to bring forth **life unto salvation** (1 Cor 3:6-7).

Sometimes we, as leaders, are tempted to "help" God or His Word. We may want to push or force someone into responding. Sometimes we get in God's way and try to take the place of the Holy Spirit.

Instead, we need to believe in the power of God and His Word to perform that which it was sent to do (see Isaiah 55:11). We can sow the seed and plant the truth of God's Word into people, but He must be the One to cause it to grow into life.

A Waxy Buildup

But we **can** play a part in the process of the Word bringing forth life. Our part is revealed in James 1:21, another verse of Scripture about the seed of the Word of God. *"Therefore lay aside all filthiness and overflow of wickedness and receive with meekness the implanted word, which is able to save your souls."* This scripture indicates clearly that we are called to **respond** to the Word of God as it is brought to us.

There are many truths in this verse in James. This time, let's focus on just two of them.

First, this passage commands us to *"lay aside all filthiness and overflow of wickedness"*. The text uses a special Greek word for "filthiness": It is the word *ruporia*, which comes from the root word *rupos*. This word had a special medical application in the Greek language: it meant a "waxy buildup in the ear".

So, with this "word picture" in mind, it is clear that the Holy Spirit is warning us that we are **to rid ourselves of anything that can block our ability to hear God's Word**. The collecting up, or accumulation, of man's sins can make him deaf to God. Attitudes of unforgiveness, self-righteousness, hatred, anger, pride and judgmentalism – along with the more obvious sins of sexual immorality, drunkenness, lying and stealing – can all cause **spiritual "deafness"**.

This kind of deafness is hard to fix because it blocks out one of the most important "medicines" for a cure – the Word of God! Scripture exhorts us to **clean out our spiritual ears** and keep them clean. This truth gives us new insight into what Jesus may have meant when He said, *"For him who has ears to hear, let him hear"* (Matt 11:15).

Only One Lord

A second great truth is in the phrase *"receive with meekness"*. The word "meekness" or "meek" is often misinterpreted by the world as "weakness" or "weak". But the term actually means the opposite. **To be meek means to "have power or strength under control"**. Now why would the Holy Spirit choose "meekness" to represent the attitude of our heart when we are receiving the Word of God?

God created us, and took on human flesh and lived among us; therefore, He knows what our flesh will try to do. Our "flesh", or old sin nature, will try to block the **whole** Word of God, and receive only the part we like. Our "old man" (see Ephesians 4:22-24) wants to take the Word of God and twist it to fit our own liking or advantage.

There can be **only one Lord of your heart**, and it will be **either you or Jesus Christ**. How we treat His Word and apply it to our lives will reveal who sits on the throne of our hearts (see John 8:47). Either we will make excuses for ourselves and justify our sin – or we will be **strong in God** and allow the Holy Spirit to use God's Word to convict, break, mold and shape us **according to God's desire**.

"Receive with meekness" tells us to take the seed of God's Word and let it be **planted deeply into our hearts**. We are to let it **take root** in us and **produce much fruit**. We must provide good soil in our hearts into which the Word of God can be planted. We cannot allow "weeds" to grow up around it and choke out the life of the Word growing in us. We must rise up in the strength of God – **under His Lordship and control** – and resist the things that would oppose the Word of God being planted into our lives.

Read Luke 8:5-15 several times, and allow the Holy Spirit to speak to you about **the condition of the soil** of your heart.

FIRE

By His Word...

"Is not my word like a fire?" says the Lord" (Jer 23:29).

The Word of God is like nothing else in all the world. Though there are many religious writings in the world today, none of them contains THE FULL TRUTH about God, salvation, and the right way to live except for the Bible, God's anointed Scriptures.

Fire is a profound symbol of the Word of God.

The Scriptures declare that God *"upholds all things by the word of His power"* (Heb 1:3). This ties in with Psalm 33:6-8, which declares that **by His word** God created the heavens and the earth and **by that same word** He holds them in place. God's Word is awesome and powerful!

The Holy Spirit shows us this powerful creativity by comparing the Word of the Lord to **fire**. This comparison suggests three very important actions of the Word in our lives.

1. God's Word As Purifier

There is a kind of fire that only God can bring to our souls. It brings a deep **conviction of sin** as well as an overwhelming **desire for purity**. The Word activated by the Holy Spirit in our hearts is what God uses to begin the purifying process.

Psalm 119:9 asks the question, *"How can a young man [or any person of any age] keep his way pure?"* All of us who have struggled with sin in our own lives have asked this question. The same Psalm answers the question in the same verse: *"by taking heed according to your word."*

How do we *"take heed"* to God's Word?

"Take heed" literally means "to pay attention, take notice". We must not ignore the Word of God. We must carefully pay attention to God's instructions contained therein, **and act upon** those instructions.

The same Psalm just two verses later says, *"Your word have I hidden in my heart that I might not sin against you."* Certainly this means more than just preaching it, teaching it, or believing it with only our minds. We must take God's Word into every part of our life and being – so much so that God's Word **fills us**, and stands like a mighty mountain at the very center of our being.

It is from this centermost place in our hearts that the Word begins its purging activity. It can reach deep within, to cleanse even the vilest sinner and the vilest sin. God's Word can purify our minds and hearts from foolishness, unbelief, lies, and other thoughts and attitudes that would be displeasing to God.

The Word of God is a **consuming fire**, burning up the chaff in our

lives. "Chaff" is the dry, dead husk from the kernel of wheat. It is the waste, or worthless matter that surrounds the healthy seed. We need the purifying fire of the Word of God to burn up what is worthless and unfruitful in our lives, so the life-giving seed that God imparts can grow unhindered!

The power of the Holy Spirit of God works in, through and with the Word of God!

If we want to live a pure life, filled with God's holy power, the Scriptures must be an essential part of the content of our heart. Hide the Word in your heart by reading it often, memorizing it, and doing what it says. Either the Bible will keep you from sin, or sin will keep you from the Bible.

2. God's Word as *Igniter*

The picture of "**fire**" suggests that there is a **consuming impulse or energy** that comes from the Word.

Jeremiah 20:9 describes how the prophet was trying to resist speaking God's Word to a rebellious people. But he could not keep quiet! **God's word burned within him** and he knew he must declare the whole of God's counsel to God's people.

There is an energizing that comes from God's Word, which enables and equips us through the Holy Spirit to do God's will and word. David, in a moment of great despair, when even his own followers wanted to kill him, "***strengthened himself in the Lord his God.***" Surely this "strengthening" included meditating on the Word and what it revealed of Who God is – reminding him that **his trust is in God**, not circumstances. God brought victory that day because David sought the Word of the Lord (I Sam 30).

When Jonah finally obeyed God and brought the Word of the Lord to Nineveh, **a great revival was ignited in that city**. It was such a profound revival that even the Son of God commented upon it (Matt 12:41).

God's Word ignites **life** in the discouraged soul. God's Word ignites **conviction**, so people will repent. God's Word ignites **zeal** for the things of God. God's Word is a fire that ignites His people!

3. God's Word As *Strengtheners*

In ancient human history, people used fire to harden certain tools and weapons made out of wood (such as the tip of a spear). In some primitive parts of the world today this is still being done.

God uses the **fire of His Word** to bring **strength** and **depth** to our convictions. As Christians, and as leaders, we have nothing firm to stand on if we do not stand on the Word of God.

The Bible itself warns us of the danger of being weak or wavering in

our convictions. In James 1:7-8 we are told that a person who is weak in his convictions and moral strength is "**double-minded.**"

This is a unique Greek word, used twice in the book of James (1:8; 4:8) and nowhere else in the New Testament. The word is *dipsuchos*, which literally means "a man with two souls, or having two different minds inside his head." This word gives us the picture of **a piece of wood tossed about by the waves** – coming near the shore, then being drawn back out to sea. It could also be a picture of someone who is drunk and staggers from one side of the street to the other, but never making any progress forward.

A "double-minded" person wavers back and forth between two opinions or two beliefs. This person has not wholly given himself to God or fully accepted all that the Scriptures reveal about Him.

James says this man will never receive anything from the Lord (1:7) and is "*unstable in all his ways*" (1:8). This person desperately needs the strengthening power that comes from the Word of God! Feelings will lead us astray, circumstances may show the facts, but **what we really need is the TRUTH!** And the truth, the whole truth and nothing but the truth is found **only in God's Word!**

It is in the holy Scriptures that God reveals Who He really is, and what He wants to do for us and through us. His Word will not disappoint us, for not even "*one jot or tittle will pass away*" (Matt 6:18). We can have confidence, unshakable faith, when we know what the Word of God says on any given subject having to do with life and godliness.

The whole world is full of conflicting opinions, each of them fighting for our attention and allegiance. Those opinions change constantly according to what is popular or what seems to fit within our culture at the moment.

My wife and I lived right near the ocean on the Oregon coast. Our weather changed constantly, even several times in one day. It would go from a rainy downpour to bright sunshine and back to rain again. We used to say, "If you don't like the weather, wait for half an hour and it will change!" Men's opinions are like that. They may declare something as absolute truth one day, and deny it just as fervently the next day.

Thank God His Word is not like that!

"Forever, O Lord, Your word is settled [stands firm] in heaven" (Ps. 119:89).

Changing a Nation

There are many excellent examples of the **strengthening fire** of God's Word in the Scriptures. One of the most powerful is found in 2 Chronicles 34 and 35. This is an historical account of Josiah's reign in the Kingdom of Judah around 640 BC. He was only eight years old when he became king, and he was one of the few godly kings Judah

had.

In the eighth year of his reign, Josiah began to **diligently seek the Lord** (see 2 Chronicles 34:3). He was only 16 years old at the time; but **the result of this young man's earnest seeking of God's face was great spiritual reform in his nation.**

Something profound happened during the reign of Josiah, changing the destiny of the nation of Judah.

While the temple that Solomon had built was under repair, Hilkiah the priest found the Book of the Law of the Lord (34:14). When the Scriptures were read to King Josiah, he tore his clothes (a sign of repentance in Jewish culture).

Josiah then inquired of the Lord, gathered all of the elders of Judah and **read all the Scriptures to them.** He then led all the people, great and small, to the temple where they renewed their covenant with the God of their fathers.

Josiah, **so deeply convicted by God's Word**, cleansed the nation of Judah from every idol, high place, altar and form of worship other than the worship of the one true God (see Kings 22-23). But Josiah did not just cleanse out the bad. He went the rest of the way and **replaced the bad with the good.**

These events brought a time of great restoration to Judah. 2 Chronicles 35:18 says that the celebration of the Passover was so great that *"there had been no Passover kept in Israel like that since the days of Samuel the prophet."*

The Word of God is living and powerful! It is a consuming fire! When we allow the entrance of God's Word into a situation, or circumstance, or into our heart, great things begin to happen. **We change**; and because **we change, everything we influence** also begins to change.

Without God's Word, we are weakened and our convictions can be easily swayed. We can get caught between two "minds" or beliefs. We can begin to doubt God and the power of His promises.

But with the **strengthening fire** of God's Word and the grace of God, we can be mightily used of the Lord – even to the changing of a nation!

A LAMP AND LIGHT

Illumination

"Thy word is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path" (Ps. 119:105).

This is such a familiar scripture to us as leaders that we might overlook the significance of God's Word as **light**. In Psalm 119:130 the writer declares, *"The entrance of Your words gives light; it gives understanding to the simple."* Into our minds **darkened by sin**, and into situations we encounter in our **dark and sin-filled world**, the

entrance of the Word of God brings light. The Word is a light that can **illuminate** any situation or person, no matter how bound by sin or broken by failure.

We can begin to see how the light of God's Word disperses and defeats darkness by looking at just one word of one verse in the Gospel of John. In John 1:5, the Holy Spirit reveals that "*the **light** shines in the darkness and the darkness did not **comprehend** it.*" That Light is Jesus. He is the personification and exact representation of the Word of God; and, as the Word of God, He is the Giver of all the words of God.

The Greek word for "comprehend" is *katalambano*. This is a unique and special word in the Greek language in which the New Testament was written. In His wisdom, God chose this language because it is flexible yet very accurate and precise in its linguistic characteristics. This word for "comprehend" in John 1:5 is a perfect example.

The Greek word *katalambano* (**comprehend**) can be interpreted three ways in this verse. All three interpretations are theologically and doctrinally correct and do not contradict each other. Rather, they **complement** each other in this particular verse. By using *katalambano* in this passage, the Holy Spirit gives us greater insight into scriptural truths. Let us briefly examine the three equally correct interpretations of this word.

The word *katalambano* (comprehend) can be interpreted as:

1. "To seize, lay hold of, overcome"

If we use this interpretation, John 1:5 reads, "*The darkness cannot **gain control** of it.*"

This means that hell, no matter how hard it tries, cannot control, stop, diminish, modify or turn God away from accomplishing His purposes. The devil cannot interfere with or defile what God will do. This should prompt us to praise His holy Name out loud right now!

But we don't have to stop there. This same interpretation of *katalambano* also means that all the demons of hell cannot control, stop, diminish, turn away or interfere with **any saint who is full of the Holy Spirit and God's Word** and walking in obedience to the Lord's leading! HALLELUJAH!

"*Greater is He [Jesus] that is in you than he [the devil] that is in the world!*" If the Scriptures say it, you can believe it, and that settles it! Satan cannot defeat us! Satan can only harass, tempt, or try to intimidate the blood-washed, Word-filled, Spirit-anointed saint. We don't have to believe the devil's lies or let him have control of our lives, our families, our churches, our cities, or the nation we live in. He is a defeated foe whose head was crushed at Calvary! Let's not let him rob, kill, destroy or darken people's hearts any more!

2. "To perceive, attain, lay hold of with the mind; to apprehend with mental or moral effort."

This interpretation would make the verse read: "*The darkness is unreceptive and **does not understand** it.*"

If the devil had known what God would accomplish at the cross – Satan's absolute defeat (Col. 2:15) and our total freedom from sin (Gal 6:14) – he would have tried to keep Christ from dying there for us! Of course the devil wouldn't have been able to stop what God had planned (Acts 2:23) even if he tried!

Some have suggested that the devil and his minions howled with glee as Christ was on His way to Golgotha where He was crucified. They were not able to understand that the perfect plan of God was actually being fulfilled. Their joy was turned to weeping and gnashing of teeth as they discovered that the cross was our victory, loosing us from the bondage of sin (Rom 6:16) and from the power of death (Heb 2:14).

Imagine their dismay when three days later the dead body of Christ was raised to full immortal, eternal life – sealing forever our salvation in Him (Rom. 6:5, 7-11).

Our adversary knows his days are numbered and he is a defeated foe! **Satan knows that he has no real power. He must, therefore, resort to trickery and cunning deceit** operating through the spirit of this present world system. The devil is not only ignorant of God's ways; he wants us, believers and non-believers alike, to be ignorant and blind to God's ways as well.

Paul exhorts the Ephesian Christians in Ephesians 4:17-24 to no longer walk in the futility of a "**darkened understanding**" (vs. 18), but to "*put off the old man*" (our sin nature, corrupt and bound in spiritual darkness—vs. 22), and "*be renewed in the spirit of your mind*" (vs. 23). In Paul's letter to the Romans the Holy Spirit uses the same idea and makes it a command: "*And do not be conformed [fashioned, modeled, patterned] to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind*" (Rom 12:2).

How can we have our minds "renewed"?

It cannot be done through any self-effort of our own. But if the Word of God is truly "*a lamp to our feet and a light to our path,*" then surely a daily, deep feasting and soaking in the Word of God can radically change us! It can illuminate our understanding and restore our minds.

I personally know a young man who was addicted to drugs. He had so destroyed his mind with these substances that he would hallucinate even when he wasn't taking drugs! His memory was ruined and it was killing him. But God saved him, and the Holy Spirit led him to start reading the Bible every day – sometimes all day long!

Many years have passed, and now this man has graduated from college and seminary – and serves God full-time as a Christian leader! His mind was **restored** and his understanding **illuminated** by the living and powerful Word of God! (Heb 4:12).

God's Word has power – power to heal, power to restore, **power over**

darkness!

3. "To quench, extinguish, snuff out the light by smothering it"

With this interpretation, John 1:5 reads, "*The darkness will never be able to **eliminate** it.*" Physicists tell us that the fastest thing in the universe is the **speed of light**. But actually there is one thing faster: the speed of darkness! Wherever light comes in, the darkness goes out – fast! Wherever and whenever the light of God's Spirit and His Word are given entrance, hell can't and won't stay around.

There was a witchdoctor who was deeply involved in the spiritual realm of the demonic. He used demon powers to see into the spirit-world, and he could actually spot Christians coming as they passed by on the street. This man could tell who the Christians were by the **glow of light** he could see on the chests of believers. He could tell the strong believers from the weak ones by the size **and brightness** of this glow.

Some believers were just smoldering, sputtering, barely alive spiritually; others were so bright he could not look at them.

The Christians who were filled with light he would avoid at all costs. The demons inside him would shudder in fear and make him cross the street to walk on the other side just so he would not go near them.

Eventually, Christ caught this man in His arms of love and salvation. When he shared his testimony about coming out of witchcraft and demon-worship, he explained why certain Christians were glowing brightly with light and others were barely glowing at all. He testified that the light-filled believers were those **filled with God's Word!** The dim ones were Christians who had only a little bit of God's Word in their heart or life.

James 2:13 tells us that "*even the demons believe – and tremble!*" It is time for God's people to more **fully believe** and be **transformed by the light** of God's Word! Darkness cannot smother the light when it is bright, fully lit and being fed by the holy Scriptures.

Light and darkness, the Kingdom of God and Satan's chaotic realm, are totally antagonistic to each other. They are in total conflict with each other – and hell knows it has already lost the war! The darkness will never be able to eliminate the light!

As ambassadors of Christ and His Kingdom, let us be filled with the light of His Word – and with Jesus Christ, the Word incarnate, the Light of the world.

HAMMER

To Break – And Build

*"Is not My word . . . like a **hammer** that breaks the rock in pieces?"*
(Jer 23:29).

There is tremendous power in the Word of God. This power is not in cleverly devised words (2 Peter 2:16; 1 Thess 1:5; 1 Cor 1:17-25).

*"For the kingdom of God is **not in word** [the words of men] **but in power**"* (1 Cor 4:20). The power of the Word is the power of the One Who spoke it, and Who backs up every "jot and tittle" of it with His authority.

God describes His own Word as a hammer. A hammer is used for two basic purposes: to **break** and to **build**. Let's look at these two functions of the hammer of God's Word.

To Shatter The Strongholds

God's heart toward all mankind is always to save, to heal, to reconcile us to Himself. He draws us to Himself with "cords of love".

But sometimes more harsh measures are called for when His reasonable and righteous commands are ignored or rejected. His written Word, just like the incarnate Word Jesus Christ, aggressively pursues, overcomes and conquers demonic strongholds. God sent His Son **and** His Word to **destroy** the works of darkness (1 John 3:8) – to *shatter* the strongholds!

Like a hammer, the Word breaks through the...

HARDNESS **Of Human Hearts**

Many indeed have made their hearts a stronghold of the enemy. They harden their resistance to God's Word of grace...and of warning.

King Manasseh hardened **his** heart – and became one of the most evil rulers of Judah. 1 Chronicles 33:1-16 and 2 Kings 21 tell us he built temples to heathen idols, worshipped the stars of heaven and practiced witchcraft. Not only did he do this himself, but he *"seduced Judah and all the inhabitants of Jerusalem to do more evil than the nations whom the Lord destroyed before the children of Israel"* (1 Chron 33:9).

The Lord warned Manasseh and the people about this behavior, but they would not listen (33:10). God sent His Word through His prophets, but they ignored the Word He sent. Therefore, God stirred up the Assyrian army to visit judgment upon Manasseh and Judah. The Assyrians conquered the land and put hooks in Manasseh's nose, bound him with chains, and took him captive to Assyria.

God tried to deal with Manasseh through His Word, but Manasseh **hardened his heart** against God's warnings. God then sent a stronger, more irresistible "word" in the form of judgment carried out by a foreign invader. This was effective in getting Manasseh's attention, for we read that **Manasseh genuinely repented, and God received him back** (2 Chron 33:12-13).

Manasseh further showed that his repentance was genuine by the **action** he took – he cleansed the land of idols and foreign gods.

Proverbs 21:1 says “*the king’s heart is in the hand of the Lord; like rivers of water He turns it wherever He wishes.*” God does not want to deal harshly with us. He wants us to choose to do what is right in His sight.

Yet for our own good and the good of others, He will deal with us **in whatever way necessary to bring us to righteousness**. It is always best to keep our hearts yielded and soft -- willing to respond to His almighty Hand.

The Word breaks the power of the...

CURSE **of Hell**

Satan, who hardened his heart before the world was made, hurls curses at humanity – especially God’s people. Proverbs 26:2 tells us “*a curse without cause shall not alight.*” In other words, God will not allow a curse to attach itself to us, unless we have opened a door through sinful behavior or received a curse by believing lies.

This principle is illustrated in Numbers 22-25. The prophet Balaam is employed by a Moabite king to curse Israel, so that the Moabites could defeat Israel in battle.

But try as he might, Balaam could not work his way past the Word of the Lord to him that he was NOT to curse Israel. Eventually, God sent an angel to intercept Balaam. As a prophet, Balaam should have seen the angel, but was blinded by his own greed. The Lord went so far as to speak to Balaam through his donkey (22:28); and Balaam finally repented.

God then used Balaam to bring **blessing** on the children of Israel! A plan for cursing a nation was turned to blessing **by the power of the Word** of the Lord (see Deuteronomy 23:5).

Christians need not fear those who would try and use demonic power to curse them. For “*greater is He that is within you, than he [satan] that is in the world*” (1 John 4:4). Christ actually stripped away all of hell’s power and authority at the cross (see Colossians 2:15).

The Word also assures us that there is no name more powerful than the Name of Jesus. For God has “*given Him the name which is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of those*

in heaven, and of those on earth, and of those under the earth, and that every tongue should confess that Jesus is Lord, to the glory of the Father” (Phil 2:9,10).

There is no curse or demon power that can stand against the power of the Word of God and the Name of Jesus!

No power can stand, not even the...

LIES

Of False Doctrines

“The Spirit [of God] expressly says,” Paul warned his young disciple Timothy, *“that in latter times some will depart from the faith, giving heed to deceiving spirits and **doctrines of demons**”* (1 Tim 4:1). A quick survey of the seven churches mentioned in the Book of Revelation shows how three of *them* were destructively influenced by false doctrines.

These unbiblical doctrines were destroying the churches. Christ’s word to them was *“Repent, or else I will come to you quickly and will fight against them with the sword of My mouth”* (Rev 2:16). This “sword” is none other than the Word of God (Heb 4:12; Eph 6:17). The only thing that can expose and destroy deception and lies is the truth. And the only place to find **THE** truth is in God’s Word.

Jesus also tells us that *“you shall know the truth and the truth shall set you free”* (John 8:32); and *“I [Jesus] am the way, **the truth, and the life...**”* (John 14:6). The Truth is Jesus Christ Himself, and what He has done and is doing for us **as revealed in the Word of God!** The better we know Jesus and His Word, the less likely we are to be deceived by lies.

Satan is the father of lies (John 8:44) and never tells us the truth. He seeks constantly to ensnare people, even leaders, in his lies. But how can we easily know the difference between the truth and demonic deception?

In many countries, bank clerks are taught to identify counterfeit money by spending hours and hours handling real money. They count and touch genuine bills over and over again. In time, they become so familiar with the characteristics and feel of real money that they can easily detect counterfeit bills by just a quick look or touch.

This same principle works for the Christian. If one regularly and consistently “handles the truth” of the Word of God, it becomes easier and easier to identify the lies of Satan and doctrines of demons. The more familiar we become with the truth of the Bible, the less likely we are to be deceived!

We must know the Scriptures! The Word of God is a hammer, a weapon given to us by the Lord **to break the power of deception!** Thank the Lord for His Truth! *“For though we walk in the flesh, we do not war according to the flesh. For the weapons of our warfare are not of the flesh, but **mighty in God for pulling down strongholds, casting down arguments and every high thing that exalts itself against the***

knowledge of God” (2 Cor 10:3-5a).

How easily the Word of God, full of His immeasurable wisdom, shatters the...

ARROGANCE

Of Human Reason

Man’s mind builds up lofty intellectual arguments against the truth of the Gospel. The people of the Corinthian church were all too familiar with endless philosophical debates. Such discussions were common among the Greeks. Paul addresses this when he writes, “*Where is the wise? Where is the scribe? Where is the debater of this age? **Has not God made foolish the wisdom of this world?***” (1 Cor 1:20).

Paul, one of the great thinkers of his time, declares with all his heart, “*I determined not to know anything among you except Jesus Christ and Him crucified*” (1 Cor 2:2). This means that if any doctrine or argument is not firmly rooted and established in the Cross of Christ, it will lead one astray, and is not worth wasting time on.

The call of the New Testament worker is to uncover sin and **to reveal Jesus Christ** as Savior. Thus, we must always lift up Christ and Him crucified in our preaching and teaching. We should avoid the clever arguments of men, or useless, flowery words.

We should follow Jesus’ example in our teaching, speaking and counseling. He consistently answered the questions, arguments and verbal traps of the Pharisees and others **with the Word of God**. His answers were simple and direct – and contained nothing but the truth! It is **the** Truth that sets people free from intellectual and spiritual bondage.

And nothing **but** that truth can smash the...

POWER

Of The World System

The New Testament uses several Greek words for *world*. The most significant is the Greek word *kosmos*. Its original and most basic meaning is “order” or “arrangement”.

When used in the New Testament, *kosmos* represents our human society **as a system that is distorted by sin and subject to uncontrolled desires and passions**. This “world system” is influenced greatly by the demonic (Eph 6:12) and is controlled by Satan (1 John 5:19). This warped system operates on basic principles that are not from God (Col 2:20; 1 John 2:15-17).

This world system can appear cultured, wise, powerful, even outwardly moral at times. Yet all the unsaved who live in it are thoroughly evil and separated from God. **The world system is hostile both to God and to those who have aligned themselves with Him** (John 17:14; 1 Cor 2:12). This present *kosmos* is going to be done away with and is even now disintegrating (1 John 2:17; 1 Cor 7:31).

In contrast, Jesus says “*My kingdom is NOT of this world*” (John 18:36). The world system constitutes a **dark kingdom**; but believers in

Jesus Christ – “*the true Light*” (John 1:9) -- have been delivered from this dark kingdom (Col 1:13,14). However, Christians must still live their earthly lives **on this planet**.

This presents Christians with a dilemma: How do we live **in** this world system, yet not be **of** this world system?

This is a big question, and the complete answer could fill volumes of books. But to put it simply: *the “hammer” of the Word of God is our best protection against the influence of the world system*. The truth and promises contained in the Bible are a protection to us; they help us to know how to live **according to God’s order and not the world’s**.

God’s Word tells us that a committed disciple is to “*no longer live the rest of his time for the lusts of men [evil human desires], but rather for the will of God*” (1 Pet 4:2).

Though we must live on this sin-warped planet in the society of mankind, we are to do so in a special way. We are to have values, marriages, relationships, business practices, and lifestyles that are distinctly Christian. We must be constantly on our guard to not unthinkingly adopt the attitudes, values and practices of the culture we live in.

This can be done by applying the hammer of the Word of God to our thoughts, “*bringing every thought into captivity to the obedience of Christ*” (2 Cor 10:5). We need to present ourselves daily to God, and be renewed and transformed in our whole being (Rom 12:1-2). We must subject **every** thought, desire and attitude to the scrutiny and washing of God’s Word on a regular basis.

His Word is able to break through the lies and mind-numbing deceptions of this world. The Bible enables us to keep our hearts and minds pure and undefiled, keeping ourselves “*unspotted from the world*” (James 1:27).

The Word of God keeps us spiritually healthy. And it can even break the chains of...

SICKNESS

Forged by Sin and Satan

The Word of God is **powerful!** The Scriptures have a strength and restoring power found in no other writings. However, they are not “magical”. Believers in Jesus should not use the Word of God for mystical chants, as some religions do with their sayings.

But when we confess and declare the truth of God’s Word with faith, God’s power is loosed in our lives and into the lives of others.

There was a young man who was in a coma after a serious car accident. The doctors gave him no hope of recovery, and could find no brain activity with their instruments.

But his mother was a godly woman; she believed in the living power of God’s Word. She would go daily to her unsaved son’s bedside and read out loud from the Bible and pray over her son.

One day, after many months, her son suddenly awoke from his coma. She could hear him speaking, at first weakly, then stronger and stronger. To her amazement, he was quoting the Scriptures!

He told her later that all he could remember were words from the Bible going round and round in his mind, calling to him, drawing him back to reality.

This godly woman's son is now recovered and serving the Lord!

Psalms 107:20 declares: "*He [the Lord] sent His Word **and healed them**, and delivered them from their destructions.*" Our adversary, the devil, who "*walks about like a roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour,*" seeks to put sickness, disease and calamity upon people.

But God's Word and will are greater than Satan's strategies! God's Word assures us that it is the Lord's desire for us to be healed. He reveals His nature to us by His very name Jehovah-Rapha, "the Lord our Healer" (Exodus 15:26). He prophesied that we would have healing provided for us by what Jesus did on the Cross (Isaiah 53:4-5). And the Holy Spirit reaffirms to us that healing was released in Christ's atonement (1 Peter 2:24).

Thank God He "*sends His Word to heal us,*" and that **He has sent the "Word made flesh", Jesus Christ, to be our Healer!**

TO BUILD

Jesus said that **upon the bedrock** of Peter's confession (that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, the Messiah) He would BUILD His Church (Matt 16:18).

Paul declared that he laid a foundation in the Corinthian church, and "*no other foundation can anyone lay than that which is laid, which is Jesus Christ*" (1 Cor. 3:10-11). Paul goes on to say (vs. 10, 12) that **we will all build on that one foundation** with a variety of materials. Some will build with cheap, substandard material. Others will build with durable, high-quality material. What is the difference between the two?

We need to know that **how well we build** and **what we build with** will be judged by fire (1 Cor 3:13). It will be judged by the Word of God and the incarnate Word of God, Christ Himself.

The appeal of its appearance, the cleverness of how it is put together, and the wisdom of men will not be the standard of judgment. Our works and lives will be judged with a righteous judgment based upon God's standard, not mankind's.

The Holy Spirit affirms that, with Christ as the Church's chief cornerstone, the Church is built upon the "*foundation of the apostles and prophets*" and "*the whole building, being fitted together, grows into a holy temple in the Lord, in whom you also are being built together for a dwelling place of God in the Spirit*" (Eph 2:20-22). The

New Testament church understood this: *"And they continued steadfastly in the apostles' doctrine [teaching] and fellowship, the breaking of bread and in prayers"* (Acts 2:42).

Certainly, the "foundation" in Ephesians 2:20 could not mean the apostles or prophets themselves; even though they were great saints, they were still men with finite lives. Nor could it mean the ministry of those apostles, for their ministries ended with the ending of their lives. The only reasonable interpretation, in light of Acts 2:42, is that the **foundation** was **the teaching and doctrines given by the Holy Spirit** through them.

These teachings are preserved for us today in the New Testament, the Word of God.

Peter affirms that the apostles' doctrines and prophetic utterances did not belong to them, but were given by God: *"knowing this first, that no prophecy of Scripture is of any private interpretation, for prophecy never came by the will of man, but holy men of God spoke as they were moved by the Holy Spirit"* (2 Peter 1:20, 21).

Paul, too, affirms this when by the Holy Spirit he states, *"All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, thoroughly equipped for every good work"* (2 Tim 3:16-17).

It becomes very clear, then, that regardless of our gifts, or calling, or ministry expression, **we can build Christ's Church with one thing only: God's holy Word** as found in the Scriptures. And this we must do under the anointing power of the Holy Spirit in obedience to the Lordship of Christ.

Scripture, and Scripture alone, is our only totally reliable guide to doctrine, practice and lifestyle.

Built In Us

The Lord also uses His Word to **build us up** in a very personal way.

Eliakim, a high priest in Israel, was said to be *"like a peg driven in a secure place"* (Isa 22:23). Eliakim was a **foretype** of Christ. This passage reveals a foreshadowing of the role that Christ fulfilled, in Whom the hopes of mankind for salvation and a restored relationship with the Creator would be realized.

As we walk in this intimate relationship with God, He works in us to restore us to the image of Christ, Whose image we were originally created in (Gen 1:26). To do this God uses the Scriptures, quickened and ignited by the Holy Spirit, **to shape our hearts and lives**.

We humans have such difficulty retaining the "shape" we were designed for. This is where we need the "hammer" of God's Word to drive the peg of His Word deeply into a secure place in our hearts and lives. **Jesus desires to fasten His Word permanently into our**

hearts. He helps give us strong convictions through His Word, so that whatever happens we can be secured and established by His Word.

But a house is not built with one "nail"; and so we must **constantly** study, meditate on and memorize the Word of God. With daily exposure and application of Scripture – *"line upon line, precept upon precept, here a little, there a little"* (Is. 28:10) – we are built up in Christ.

FOOD

Nourishing The Spirit

"I have treasured the words of His mouth more than my necessary food" (Job 23:12).

"Your words were found, and I ate them, and Your word was to me the joy and rejoicing of my heart" (Jer 15:16).

Scripture is full of a variety of foods that are symbols for the Word of God. Food makes an excellent allegory – not only for the Scriptures themselves, but also for what God's Word does in us and for us. As food is to the body, so Scripture is to the spirit of man.

A balanced, nutritious, daily intake of food helps us grow in healthy ways. It also fortifies the body against sickness, disease and weakness. Food aids in the proper development of tissues and organs – such as our eyes, so we can have good vision. Balanced nutrition promotes the growth and proper function of each part of the body.

A lack of proper foods, on the other hand, can have long-term effects on us besides just hunger.

There are many places in our world today where healthy food in plentiful quantities is not available. And even in some countries where there is enough food, people may refuse to eat the foods that would be best for them. Instead, they substitute poor-quality food that can have a negative effect on their health and well-being.

Can you see the parallels between food and the Scripture? It is no mistake or coincidence that the Holy Spirit chose certain types of food and drink to illustrate practical principles of applying the Scripture in daily life. **As food nourishes the body, so the Word of God nourishes the spirit...**

Let's look at four of these as outlined in the Scripture:

1.MILK

Pure and Unadulterated

"As newborn babes, desire the pure milk of the word that you may grow thereby" (1 Peter 2:2).

The Holy Spirit is showing us some precious truths in this verse. To

see this verse more clearly we must first look at its setting in the surrounding verses.

The Holy Spirit, through Peter, is reminding the new believers that they have been purchased with the priceless blood of Christ, and therefore should live a holy lifestyle (1:13-21). Then Peter rejoices with them over the fact that they **have** been living such a lifestyle – purifying themselves since the "seed" of God's Word, activated by the Holy Spirit, has birthed them into the kingdom of God (1:22-23). He goes on to remind them that God's Word is eternal, unlike human flesh that is so temporary. And this eternal Word is the word they have received (1:24-25).

Then the Holy Spirit starts the next chapter with an important word, "*Therefore*". Whenever you see that word in the Bible, pay close attention because the Holy Spirit is linking together some important truths. In this passage (1 Peter 2:1) it means, "*Therefore* [since all that was in the previous verses – that we have received new life – is true] *now lay aside all malice, all deceit, hypocrisy, envy and all evil speaking. . .*" This verse commands us to strip off all the old way of life. This is not an option, but rather a divine expectation upon us. Thank God He gives us His Word and His Spirit to help us!

In the middle of this exhortation we are told to **desire the pure milk of the Word** as newborn babes. What is the Holy Spirit trying to help us understand here? Simply this: that there are two kinds of "milk" with which we can be fed, and they come from two radically different sources: the **world** and the **Word**. The world's "milk" is characterized in 2:1 as "*malicious, deceitful, hypocritical, filled with envy and evil speech.*" The milk of God's Word is "pure". The Greek word used for "pure" means "unadulterated." This tells us that God's Word is guileless, it has no hidden motives or false promises, like so many human teachings or ideas. Its only purpose is **nourishing the soul**.

Appetite For The Word

Two very important principles emerge from a careful study of 1 Peter 2:2.

First, we are exhorted to earnestly long for God's Word.

In the physical realm, if we are hungry we can eat food that is good for us or food that is bad for us. If we eat good food we are nourished and strengthened. If we eat bad food with no nutritional value, not only do we not receive health from it, but we also lose our desire for good food because we are feeling full.

In the spiritual realm it is also true that **sin in the life destroys the appetite for the Word of God**. If we are full of the **world's "milk"** it will severely reduce our desire for the "pure milk" of the Word. The Christian who tries to find satisfaction in the "husks" of the world has no appetite left for the things of God. **A spiritually healthy Christian is a spiritually hungry Christian**. God will always respond to

spiritual hunger in the human heart (Matt 5:6). And He wants us to be filled and have a healthy hunger for only His Word. **This is true whether you are a "newborn babe" in Christ or you are a "grandfather" in the things of God!**

Second, a daily feasting in the Word of God is an absolutely essential part of growing in the grace and knowledge of the Lord Jesus Christ.

The final phrase of 2:2 is *"that you may grow thereby."* The Greek words used in this phrase are very expressive and actually say, "resulting in your making progress in your salvation". Peter is addressing those who are new Christians, and helping them understand that **the Word of God is spiritual food**. He is also showing us that growth is an expected and desirable part of normal Christian experience.

Our physical bodies do quit growing at a certain point. However, our spiritual growth should continue throughout our stay on earth. In fact, other scriptures seem to indicate that we will continue to grow even in eternity! It would be safe to say that we are **not** human beings having a temporary spiritual experience, but we are spiritual beings going through a temporary human experience!

2. MEAT

Growing Spiritual Teeth

*"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 meat**. For everyone who partakes only of milk is unskilled in the word of righteousness, for he is a babe. But **solid meat** belongs to those who are of full age, that is, they have their senses exercised to discern both good and evil"* (Heb 5:12-14).

As we take a closer look at this passage, several principles of growth begin to emerge.

a. Growth

These verses clearly demonstrate the possibility and **necessity** of personal spiritual growth. God does not want us to remain mere "babes" in our walk with Him, but to be **maturing, growing, learning sons and daughters of the King**. In verse 13 we are told that *"everyone who partakes only of milk is unskilled in the word of righteousness, for he is a babe."* This refers to those whose diet is **only** milk. Adults do drink milk, but it is not their exclusive diet. What this means is that a maturing Christian will always have and appreciate the basic foundational truths – the milk – of his faith (for instance, *"We are saved by grace through faith"*). But a maturing Christian will grow **spiritual "teeth" (understanding)** in order to absorb and use stronger teaching – the meat of his faith. (For further study look up 1 Corinthians 14:20, Ephesians 4:14-15, Philippians

3:12-15, Colossians 2:6-7, 2 Peter 1:2-11.)

Nothing in life ever remains the same – it is either growing, or it is going backwards, breaking down. This is also true of our spiritual lives: we are **growing** or we are **going backwards – regressing** instead of **progressing**. The people to whom the epistles were written had stopped growing.

The writer of Hebrews rebukes them, telling them they had become "*dull of hearing*" (vs. 11) and needed to be taught the simplest, most basic things all over again (vs. 12).

Paul, in his first letter to the Corinthian church, makes a similar point: "*And I brethren could not speak to you as to spiritual people but as to carnal, as to babes in Christ. I fed you milk and not with solid food; for until now you are still not able; for you are still carnal. For where there are envy, strife, and divisions among you, are you not carnal and behaving like mere men?*" (1 Cor. 3:1-3). Here we see that the sin of disunity, caused by attitudes of envy, competition and fleshly pride, was inhibiting proper growth.

b. Hearing

The word "**babe**" in both the Hebrew and Corinthian passages is not the Greek word for either "child" or "new convert", but rather means "immature".

You can be 40 years old in the faith, yet still be immature – a "babe" in Christ.

But if God wants us to grow spiritually, why are so many people immature in their spiritual life?

The Greek used in Hebrews 5:12-14 indicates that the Christians this letter was written to had been at one time maturing believers; but now they were in a **settled state of spiritual sluggishness**.

In verse 11 the writer tells them they are "*dull of hearing*". The word for "dull" in Greek means *slow* or *sluggish*. The same word was used to describe the numb limbs of a sick animal. The Holy Spirit is telling us that **spiritual sloth** (or laziness) **in HEARING results in a lack of spiritual GROWTH**. It is important to know, however, that this "dullness" in hearing has **nothing** to do with how intelligent we are or how educated we are. It **does** have to do with how **yielded** we are to the Holy Spirit and how **willing** we are to **pursue personal spiritual growth** with all of our hearts.

In speaking of how we hear the Word of God, Jesus warns us to "*Take heed what you hear. With the same measure you use, it will be measured to you; and to you who hear, more will be given. For to him who has, more will be given; but whoever does not have, even what he has will be taken from him*" (Mark 4:24-25).

Jesus is pointing out the importance of **spiritual perception**. Those who receive and apply the truth will have their capacity for understanding increased and their knowledge expanded. **Those who disbelieve, or who are indifferent or careless with the truth, will lose whatever ability for understanding they had**. Therefore they will not only continue to be ignorant – they will get worse.

This illustrates what was happening to the recipients of the letter to the Hebrews. These Christians were **willfully refusing to grow**. Their "dullness" was a result of gradual and willful neglect of their walk with God – especially **spending time in God's Word regularly** and daily prayer. But there is another principle of growth in this passage.

c. Application

In Hebrews 5:14 we are shown that "*strong meat*" (i.e. solid food) is for those who are truly maturing ("*of full age*").

How have they reached maturity?

There are several factors, but a very important one is given in the same verse. It refers to "*those who by reason of use have their senses exercised to discern both good and evil.*"

Physical exercise is a necessary part of being healthy in our bodies. This is also an allegory (picture or type) of a spiritual principle. As Paul tells Timothy, his young disciple, "*For bodily exercise profits a little, but godliness is profitable for all things, having promise of the life that now is and the one to come*" (1 Tim 4:8). This "*godliness*" Paul speaks of is what the writer of Hebrews refers to when he uses the phrase "*by reason of use*". It means that our **spiritual senses can be trained ("exercised")** by practiced habit of constant usage, so that they are strong and sharp. The Greek word for "exercise" is the word for "gymnastics," and points to a condition produced by consistent training. The same word is also used for practicing an art or profession.

Let me illustrate this point.

Let's pretend I was a trained engineer who understood all about the physics, geometry and engineering needed to build things. Suppose you came to me and asked me to build a bridge for you, so that your town would prosper and grow. If I did not know how to **practically apply** my education, what good would my knowledge be?! You, along with your whole town, would be very disappointed.

The same is true in a spiritual dimension.

We must have our "senses" (faculties of perception) sharpened so that we can distinguish between right and wrong doctrine and holy or unholy conduct. The first place we can and should make practical application of the Word of God is to **ourselves**. It is a sad truth that as leaders we are very perceptive and discerning about others, but are **blind to our own shortcomings**. Often we excuse, justify and rationalize behavior and attitudes in ourselves that we would not tolerate in the people we are shepherding. This kind of behavior leads to the "**dullness of hearing**" mentioned earlier. When we are quick to apply the Word to our own lives and live accordingly, there will be a corresponding release of a greater anointing to minister to others.

3. BREAD

The Word That Feeds Us

"...Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God" (Matt 4:4).

Jesus is quoting a statement declared by God through Moses in Deuteronomy 8:3. Bread had a central place in the Hebrew culture and the Old Testament. A thorough study of this is beyond the scope of this article. However, one important **image** or **type** as illustrated in the Old Testament would be interesting to note.

The stories, events and prophecies of the Old Testament were written as **examples** and a **source of illumination** for us concerning spiritual principles for powerful and practical holy living. We discussed this earlier in this article – see I Corinthians 10:1-11. The Old Testament gives us many "foretypes" or symbols of New Testament realities. In Exodus 25:23-30, God is instructing Moses on the building of furnishings for the tabernacle, specifically **the table of showbread**. This bread, baked fresh every week, was to be placed before the Lord every Sabbath. There were **twelve loaves** representing the **twelve tribes** of Israel.

This showbread is also a **foretype** of Christ Himself as the **Bread of Life** (John 6:48).

It is also a symbol for the **Word of God** that **feeds us** and gives us **nourishment** and **strength**.

This bread was unleavened, and as Leviticus 24:5-9 tells us, it was made of fine (or pure) flour. The bread was **unmixed with anything else**, and was considered **"most holy"** (vs. 9). Pure frankincense was put on this bread, which was to be eaten only by Aaron the High Priest and his sons. The showbread was to be placed every Sabbath **"on the table before Me always"** (Exo 25:30).

Fine, Pure Flour

Here we see a rich symbolism that teaches and instructs us about the place and priority the Word of God should occupy in our lives. The following is just a brief overview of some important lessons we can learn from the showbread.

First, the showbread, as mentioned above, is a type or symbol representing the Word of God. It was made of fine, pure flour, showing us that **the Scriptures are pure and undefiled**: They are **not mixed with the opinions of men**, but are God's holy and righteous words. When we teach or preach from God's holy words – the Bible – we must make sure we are not mixing with them our own opinions and ideas.

We must be certain that we are following the scriptural admonition, *"rightly dividing the word of truth"* (2 Tim 2:4). We must be accurate and clear when we teach God's Word, making it easy for others to understand the truth. "Dividing" the word of truth does not mean separating the Scriptures into parts; but it means **rightly discerning its truth** and communicating **both the actual Word** and the **spirit of the Word**. Let us make sure to study intensely enough to thoroughly understand, and then communicate only what God would give to the flock.

Second, mixed with the showbread was a generous portion of **pure frankincense**. In both the Old Testament and New Testament, incense was a symbol of prayer and worship sacrificially given to God. We should add a generous portion of **conversation with God (prayer)** and **humble adoration (worship)** as we partake of the bread of His Word.

A Life-Changing Experience

We should study God's Word because it does so much for us; but, more importantly, **His Word reveals the character and nature of Jesus** to our hearts. Those moments when the Holy Spirit reveals something of the nature, life or heart of Christ to us are life-changing moments.

In Luke 24:35, the two disciples who had unknowingly walked with Jesus on the road to Emmaus had a life-changing experience. As they reported to the other disciples, "*He was made known to them in **the breaking of the bread***"! Their hearts were changed from discouragement, fear and hopelessness to joy and great hope.

As we "break the bread" of God's Word by reading and meditating upon it, we must receive it into our spirit, not just our mind. This can happen when we pray and ask the Spirit of God to breathe life in and through the printed word on the pages of our Bibles.

God wants our minds filled with His Word; but He also wants His Word to penetrate the deepest part of our beings. This will lead to us "*being transformed into the same image from glory to glory just as by the Spirit of the Lord*" (2 Cor 3:18).

Sabbath Rest

Third, as Christians we have entered the "*Sabbath rest*" (Hebrews 4) of **daily intimate relationship with God** through what the Lord of the Sabbath, Jesus Christ, has done for us on the cross.

This salvation is **by grace through faith**, not by works (Eph 2:8-9). Therefore we need not come to God only once per week through ritual and ceremony. Instead, we can daily approach the Lord, **the Bread of Life** (John 6:48), by coming simply and humbly to Him through His Word.

To read and **meditate on His great promises** when we are troubled in our soul, to be **assured of His faithfulness** by His Word when it seems that our whole life is crumbling – this is what His Word, **and only His Word**, can supply. The Bible is there to guide us into His **Sabbath rest** of salvation and freedom from bondage.

A Most Holy Place

Fourth, Aaron and his sons in Leviticus 24 are instructed to eat the showbread "*in a holy place; for it is most holy to him from the offerings of the Lord made by fire*" (vs. 9).

This means we are to approach our daily times in the Scriptures with deep respect and a true reverence for the Lord and His Word. We are not permitted to add or subtract from His Word, nor to twist it and use it for our selfish purposes (Rev 22:18-19).

But there is another lesson here.

God commands Aaron and his sons in Leviticus 24:9 to "*eat it [the showbread] in a most holy place.*"

Keeping Nourished

We as leaders can easily become too busy, or so "burned out" and tired that we can forget some simple basics of **keeping ourselves fed spiritually**. Although we can read the Word and have fellowship with God anytime or anywhere, a scattered and unplanned kind of "quiet time" with God doesn't usually work for most of us.

May I make some suggestions?

First, find **one place** you can go most of the time **to be alone with God and His Word**. Second, go at a time when you are alert, awake and at your mental best. Third, do not let work or the demands of people interfere with your "holy time" with God. There will always be exceptions, times when you cannot have this daily communion; but if they become too frequent, something is wrong. Either the devil is interfering to keep you from God and His Word, or you are not enforcing proper priorities in your life. Do not miss a single opportunity for being with God in His Word and prayer – for that is usually the time we need it the most.

4. HONEY

Sweet Message...

"How sweet are your words to my taste, sweeter than honey to my mouth!" (Ps. 119:103).

There are several places in Scripture where the Word of God is described as honey. In Ezekiel 3:1-3, the prophet is commanded to **eat a scroll**. On this scroll is the word of the Lord to the nation of Israel. Before the prophet can deliver the Lord's message, he must first take it into his own heart and **fully "digest" it**.

This should also be our practice as preachers and teachers of God's Word. His Word must be put into our minds, hearts and lifestyle before

God can fully bless and anoint the Word we deliver to others. God's Word was sweet to Ezekiel's taste because he **received the Word completely**.

We see a similar symbolic action and description of God's Word in Revelation 10:9-10. In this verse John also is commanded to **eat the "little book"** containing God's Word. Again, the Word is **sweet as honey** as the message saturates the personality of the proclaimer. But this time there is a difference: the sweet message of God's grace, love and mercy turns bitter in John's stomach (vs. 10). This bitterness is symbolic: though the revelation of God's divine love is sweet, **if it is rejected it brings inevitable judgment**. John is experiencing the "bitterness" of the divine judgment about to come on the people who have rejected God's offer of salvation through Jesus Christ.

But the Word of God is sweet – sweeter than anything or any experience we can have.

Honey was a rare and valuable substance in Bible days. It was acceptable as a gift to royalty, and as a tithe or first-fruit offering to God. It was also **the sweetest known substance** to the Hebrews, sweeter than any fruit. Yet the writer of Psalms declares God's Word to be sweeter still!

...Sweeter Than Honey

So much more could be said, and has been said, regarding the Word of God. The symbols of Scripture used by the Holy Spirit to describe the Bible help us to understand its awesome power, its matchless beauty and its incredible worth.

But one of the best things that can be said about it comes from the holy Scriptures themselves:

"The law of the Lord is perfect,

restoring the soul;

The testimony of the Lord is sure,

making wise the simple;

The statutes of the Lord are right,

rejoicing the heart;

The commandment of the Lord is pure,

enlightening the eyes;

The fear of the Lord is clean,

enduring forever;

The judgments of the Lord are true

and righteous altogether.

More to be desired are they than gold,

yea, than much fine gold;

Sweeter also than honey and the honeycomb.

Moreover by them Your servant is warned,

And in keeping them there is great reward."

Psalm 19:7-11