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# Heart

## Preparation

*"Thy word is a lamp unto my feet,*
*and a light unto my path."*

PSALM 119:105



**JOHN WEAVER**

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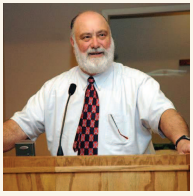
*For Ezra had prepared his heart to seek the law of the LORD, and to do it.*

**EZRA 7:10, EXCERPT**

Preparing the heart means more than waiting for a spiritual feeling. Using Ezra and other biblical examples, John Weaver explores deliberate study, the application of truth, and readiness to obey. These messages hold together dependence on God's enabling grace and the diligent use of the means He has provided.

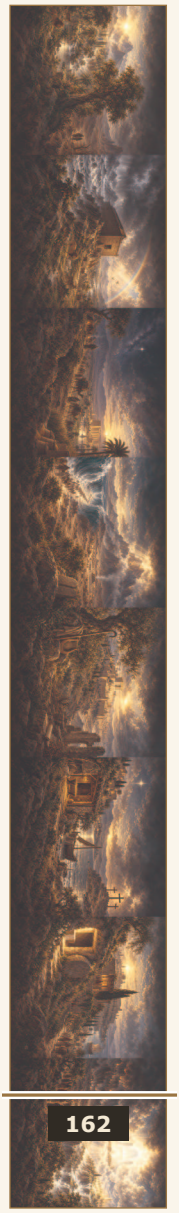
*"No one will ever prepare his heart until he realizes the importance and necessity of heart preparation."*

JOHN WEAVER



## John Weaver

John Weaver's sermons form the teaching collection presented by Weaver Bible College. This volume gathers his teaching from that collection.





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# Heart Preparation

New Testament Studies

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# Heart Preparation

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Edited from the sermon corpus of John Weaver.

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CHAPTER 1

# Heart Preparation - 1 of 7

## The Importance of a Prepared Heart

## Introduction to the Series

This message is a very general introduction. We are going to see from the Bible what prompted these thoughts. Next week, I want to continue by showing you how to prepare your heart. The third week, if I am able to continue as planned, I want to show you how to prepare your heart to receive the Word, and the fourth message would be how to prepare your heart to teach the Word.

Look in your Bibles to 2 Chronicles chapter 12, beginning with verse 1: “And it came to pass when Rehoboam had established the kingdom, and had strengthened himself, he forsook the law of the Lord, and all Israel with him. And it came to pass in the fifth year of King Rehoboam, Shishak king of Egypt came up against Jerusalem.” Note the reason: “because they had transgressed against the Lord.”

You cannot sin against God and get away with it. “And he came with 1,200 chariots and threescore thousand horsemen, and the people were without number that came with him out of Egypt; the

Lubims, the Sukkiims, and the Ethiopians. And he took the fenced cities which pertained to Judah, and came to Jerusalem. Then came Shemaiah the prophet to Rehoboam and to the princes of Judah that were gathered together to Jerusalem because of Shishak, and said unto them, Thus saith the Lord, Ye have forsaken me, and therefore have I also left you in the hand of Shishak."

## Rehoboam's Evil and Its Cause

Now come down to verse 14. Here we continue reading about King Rehoboam: "And he did evil"—that is, King Rehoboam—"and he did evil because he prepared not his heart to seek the Lord." Stop and think about the implications of that verse. Rehoboam did evil. Why? Because he prepared not his heart to seek the Lord.

Rehoboam was the grandson of King David and the son of Solomon. David, his grandfather, was known as a man after God's own heart. Solomon was known for the wisdom God had given him. Yet the grandson was known for the evil and wickedness he had done. Look again at verse 1: "And it came to pass when Rehoboam had established the kingdom and had strengthened himself, he forsook the law of the Lord, and all Israel with him."

Rehoboam simply played along until he was in the right position, had the right amount of power, and had control of the kingdom; then he forsook the law of the Lord. It was bad enough that the high civil ruler of the land forsook the law of the Lord, but, according to verse 1, when he did so, he took all Israel with him. You have heard the old saying that one bad apple spoils the barrel. That is certainly true when the one bad apple happens to be the high civil ruler in the land. But when you come down to verse 14 and ask yourself why Rehoboam did evil, the answer comes back: he did evil because he did not prepare his heart to seek the Lord.

## The Natural Tendency to Sin

Think about the other side of the coin for a moment. Do you realize that we are absolutely prone to evil and wickedness? There is no preparation necessary for you and me to do wrong. We do wrong absolutely naturally. No one had to teach us how to sin, lie, cheat, or lust. We sin naturally, normally, easily, readily, and willingly. That is

what God is saying. However, if we are not going to do that, something is absolutely necessary, and that is heart preparation.

The reason Rehoboam sinned was that he did not prepare his heart to seek the Lord. He did not prepare his heart to do God's will, to pray, or to do anything that was right. Consequently, all he did was that which was evil and wrong. I want to deal today with one point: the principle of heart preparation.

If you look down to verse 14, the Bible says, "...and he did evil..." Why? "...because he prepared not his heart to seek the Lord."

## The Meaning of 'Prepared' (Kun)

The word prepared—and you are going to hear me say this several times during this message—is the Hebrew word kun, K-U-N, but it is pronounced koon. The word prepared is the Hebrew word kun, and it literally occurs 219 times in our Bible. It is used in a multitude of ways, all of which indicate that heart preparation involves work, planning, foresight, determination, and skill. I will show you a few of these verses in a moment. But let me tell you firsthand, right off the bat, that a prepared heart is not an accident.

A prepared heart does not happen on its own. It is not something with which some people are born while others are not. Moreover, a prepared heart is not something that God simply gives or bestows upon people arbitrarily. It is not something obtained by “going forward” in a church service, nor by “rededicating” your life. No. A prepared heart is something that must be developed and attained over a lifetime.

## Heart Preparation as Exercise

Let me give you an illustration. Hold 2 Chronicles, but turn in your Bibles to 1 Timothy chapter 4 and look at verses 7 and 8. It is much like the grace of godliness. Notice 1 Timothy chapter 4 and verse 7. The Bible says, “But refuse profane and old wives’ fables, and exercise thyself rather unto godliness.” Now verse 8: “For bodily exercise profiteth little, but godliness is profitable unto all things, having promise of the life that now is, and of that which is to come.” Now go back to verse 7. He says, “But refuse profane and old wives’

fables." Do not listen, he says, to all the television and radio preachers; that is basically where you are getting your old wives' fables. Rather, exercise yourself unto godliness. I do not care how many people tell you, or how many preachers say, "You just come forward and that'll make everything right." It will not make everything right.

Salvation is not going forward in the church. Godliness is not going forward in the church. Godliness is not making a decision, and salvation is not making a decision. Salvation is the work of God. Godliness is the work of God. What he says in verse 7 is that you exercise yourself unto godliness. The word exercise is the Greek word gymnazo, from which we get our English words gymnasium and gymnastics. Literally, he says, you gymnasticize yourself unto godliness.

How many of you think that a gymnast simply decides one day, "I'm going to be a gymnast. I'm going to go out and do these wonderful acrobatic tricks, all these flips. I'm just going to do it"? Shane, would you like to try that? I cannot even touch my toes; sometimes I cannot even see them. The point I am trying to make is simple: if you are going to be a gymnast, what must you do daily, weekly, monthly, and annually? You must stretch, exercise, and practice, practice, practice.

That's exactly what God is saying: "Exercise yourself, brethren, unto godliness." The godly men in the Bible and the godly men in history did not wake up one morning and decide, "I'm godly, isn't that wonderful?" No! They developed a godly habit, a godly character, and a godly mindset over a period of years. It was a lifetime goal and a lifetime achievement. So, when you're talking about heart preparation, don't just think, "Well, this is something that just happens."

No, it does not happen. Heart preparation is in line with 1 Timothy 4 and verse 7. In 1 Chronicles chapter 12, we find a number of places where this same Hebrew word, kun, is used and translated in our Bibles as prepared.

## Biblical Examples of Preparation

This passage shows the absolute necessity of work, planning, and foresight in heart preparation. In 1 Chronicles chapter 12 and verse 39, the Bible says: “And there they were with David three days eating and drinking, for their brethren had prepared for them.” These men were with David for three days, eating and drinking, because their brethren had prepared for them.

Consider verse 36: “And of Asher, such as went forth to battle, expert in war, 40,000.” This does not count all those numbered before them. Verse 37 says: “And on the other side of Jordan, of the Reubenites, and the Gadites, and of the half tribe of Manasseh, with all manner of instruments of war for the battle, 120,000.” That is 160,000 in two verses. “And all these men of war, that could keep rank, came with a perfect heart to Hebron, to make David king over all Israel: and all the rest also of Israel were of one heart to make David king. And there they were with David three days, eating and drinking: for their brethren had prepared for them.” We have just read of 160,000 in two verses.

If you look at the context and discover that these hundreds of thousands of men were there with David eating and drinking for three days, did that just happen? Did the food just mysteriously appear out of nowhere? Did the drink just mysteriously appear? How about the utensils, the cooking, the seating arrangement, and the table? Did all of that just happen? No. The Bible says that the men were there who had prepared for them. If you are going to prepare a meal three times a day for several hundred thousand men, you have your work cut out for you.

You must do a lot of planning. You must have a lot of foresight. You must do a lot of thinking and a lot of work. The point is that this is the exact same word, and it always refers to foresight, planning, and work. In 1 Chronicles 15:1, we read, “And David made him houses in the city of David, and prepared a place for the ark of God, and pitched for it a tent.” Here is the same word again. The Bible says that David prepared a place for the ark of God.

If you think it was easy simply to go out, pick out a space, clean it out, pitch the tabernacle, and put in the ark, you need to read the

rest of the chapter. You will find all the priests, all the Levites, all the singers, all the musicians, and everything that was involved. When David prepared a place for the ark, it was not just that he was pitching a tent.

He was preparing a worship service. He was preparing sacrifices. He was preparing for all of the people in order that they might worship the Lord.

The preparation for the tabernacle was not something that was done lightly or flippantly. In 1 Chronicles 22, the word preparation denotes an ongoing process.

Look at 1 Chronicles 22:1: “Then David said, This is the house of the Lord God, and this is the altar of the burnt offering for Israel.” God did not allow David to build the temple; Solomon built it. But David received the plans and prepared for its building. He says, “Then David said, This is the house of the Lord God, and this is the altar of the burnt offering for Israel. And David commanded to gather together the strangers that were in the land of Israel; and he set masons to hew wrought stones to build the house of God. And David prepared iron in abundance for the nails for the doors of the gates, and for the joinings; and brass in abundance without weight; also cedar trees in abundance: for the Zidonians and they of Tyre brought much cedar wood to David.”

“And David said, Solomon my son is young and tender, and the house that is to be builded for the Lord must be exceeding magnifical, of fame and of glory throughout all countries: I will therefore now make preparation for it. So David prepared abundantly before his death.”

What did David do? He knew this house would require money, materials, and time, so he began gathering materials well before Solomon ever began the temple. In other words, preparation had to be made.

In 1 Chronicles 29, we see the depth of David's preparation for the temple. Beginning in verse 1: “Furthermore David the king said unto all the congregation, Solomon my son, whom alone God hath chosen, is yet young and tender, and the work is great: for the palace

is not for man, but for the Lord God." David says, "Now I have prepared with all my might for the house of my God."

Do you remember Deuteronomy chapter 6? "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, with all thy might." What is your might? In David's life, it was his money. It does not just refer to strength; it refers to money. "Now I have prepared with all my might for the house of my God." Here is how it means money: "The gold for things to be made of gold, and the silver for things of silver, and the brass for things of brass, the iron for things of iron, and wood for things of wood; onyx stones, and stones to be set, glistering stones, and of divers colours, and all manner of precious stones, and marble stones in abundance. Moreover, because I have set my affection to the house of my God, I have of mine own proper good, of gold and silver, which I have given to the house of my God, over and above all that I have prepared for the holy house, even three thousand talents of gold, of the gold of Ophir, and seven thousand talents of refined silver, to overlay the walls of the houses withal." Then, verse 5: "The gold for things of gold, and the silver for things of silver, and for all manner of work to be made by the hands of artificers."

"And who then is willing to consecrate his service this day unto the Lord?" David knew that gold, silver, precious stones, and wood would be involved. He wanted to start then. He was preparing and laying up. This was something David did not do once or twice, but constantly and continually.

When you read the word prepared, sometimes that word is translated in our Bibles as fixed. The word kun means to be prepared, to be fixed, to be steadfast, to be confirmed, to be arranged or directed toward a specific object.

**SCRIPTURE READING - Psalm 57:1-7 (KJV)**

Look in your Bibles to Psalm 57. Notice the prayer that David prays:

## David's Fixed Heart in Psalm 57

"Be merciful unto me, O God, be merciful unto me: for my soul trusteth in thee: yea, in the shadow of thy wings will I make my refuge, until these calamities be overpast. I will cry unto God

most high; unto God that performeth all things for me. He shall send from heaven, and save me from the reproach of him that would swallow me up. Selah. God shall send forth his mercy and his truth."

Now look what he says: "My soul is among lions."

"And I lie even among them that are set on fire, even the sons of men, whose teeth are spears and arrows, and their tongue a sharp sword. Be thou exalted, O God, above the heavens; let thy glory be above all the earth. They have prepared a net for my steps; my soul is bowed down: they have digged a pit before me, into the midst whereof they are fallen themselves. Selah."

Then he says in verse 7: "My heart is fixed, O God, my heart is fixed: I will sing and give praise."

Psalm 57 was written by David, especially during the time that he was being persecuted and hunted by King Saul. What was King Saul trying to do? He was trying to kill David. He wanted him dead. Psalm 57 deals with when Saul and his men are after David, and David and his men are now hiding in a cave. Saul and his men do not know they are in the cave, and Saul and his men are on the outside. That is why he keeps saying, "My soul is among lions. I lie even among them that are set on fire, even the sons of men, whose teeth are spears and arrows, and their tongue a sharp sword." In other words, they are out to kill me.

Go back in your Bibles to 1 Samuel, chapter 24. Here is the historical background for Psalm 57:

"And it came to pass, when Saul was returned from following the Philistines, that it was told him, saying, Behold, David is in the wilderness of Engedi. Then Saul took three thousand chosen men out of all Israel, and went to seek David and his men upon the rocks of the wild goats. And he came to the sheepcotes by the way, where was a cave; and Saul went in to cover his feet: and David and his men remained in the sides of the cave. And the men of David said unto him, Behold the day of which the Lord said unto thee, Behold, I will deliver thine enemy into thine hand, that thou mayest do to him as it shall seem good unto thee. Then David arose, and cut off the skirt of

Saul's robe privily. And it came to pass afterward, that David's heart smote him, because he had cut off Saul's skirt."

"And he said unto his men, The Lord forbid that I should do this thing unto my master, the Lord's anointed, to stretch forth mine hand against him, seeing he is the anointed of the Lord." So David would not kill Saul, nor would he allow his men to kill him.

The Bible says Saul went into a cave to cover his feet. I once heard a preacher say that Saul evidently had poor circulation and cold feet. I asked him, "Do you understand what that really is talking about?" He answered, "He had cold feet." I said, "No. That is a euphemism to say that Saul went to the bathroom. He went into the cave to use the bathroom privately." While Saul was there, David slipped up behind him and cut off the skirt of his robe, and David's heart smote him. Saul went back outside, and David came out and said, "You've heard I've been trying to kill you. Look at this. Here's part of your skirt."

David had the perfect opportunity to kill Saul. He could have justified himself because Saul had already tried to kill him on numerous occasions. David could have claimed self-defense, even though his life was not necessarily in imminent danger at that point. They had come out to kill him, and he knew it. Moreover, his men were urging him to kill. They said, "Now is the time that God has delivered your enemy into your hand. Take him now."

If anyone had a right to kill his enemy, David had that right, for the whole purpose of Saul's pursuit was to kill David. If Saul had then been killed by David, it would have been a plain act of self-defense or self-preservation. But David did not kill Saul.

Go back in your Bible to Psalm 57. David is talking about how these men had come out to kill him. They had come out to herd him; they had prepared a net for him and dug a pit for him. Then, in verse 7, he says, "My heart is fixed, O God, my heart is fixed. I will sing and give praise." Here is what he meant: "My heart is prepared, O Lord, my heart is prepared. I will sing and give praise."

David had prepared his heart so that he was not going to have the kingdom by violence, force, or murder. He had come to this position: If God wants me to be king, I will be king. If God wants Saul dead, God will kill Saul. I am not going to kill him. That is why he told his

men, “The Lord forbid that I should stretch forth my hand against the Lord’s anointed.” He wants king. He was simply not going to do that.

Listen carefully: If David had not already prepared his heart, if he did not already know what he was going to do in that situation, do you think he would have succumbed to the temptation to kill his enemy—especially when all his men were encouraging him, and especially when they said, “This is the day that the Lord hath delivered your enemy into your hand”?

David's men thought, “This is God's providence. This is God's act. This is God's work. Take care of him now.” But David said, “No. I'm not going to do it. My heart is fixed. My heart is prepared. I'm not going to take the kingdom by violence or force.” He told his men, “The time will come when Saul shall fall in battle or fall at some other man's hands. I will not do it.”

That is what David means in Psalm 57 when he says, “My heart is fixed. My heart is prepared. My heart is established. I've already set this thing up. I'm not going to falter from it.” The Hebrew word kun means to be established, stable, secure, fixed, prepared, and ready. Modern dictionaries define fixed as firmly in position; stationary; not subject to change or variation; constant; and firmly held in the mind, as a fixed notion.

One key to preparing our heart is to fix beforehand what we will and will not do in a given situation or whenever we encounter temptation. Every one of us has weaknesses. Maryland's weakness may not be mine, mine may not be Ed's, and Ed's may not be Hobie's, but each of us is susceptible in particular areas. We need to think, “If I'm going to sin or fall, I will probably be tempted in the areas where I am weaker. So I will think through the scenario now and prepare my heart. If I ever face that temptation, I will say, ‘No, I will not do this. I've thought this through. I know it is wicked and wrong. I will not yield to that temptation.’”

That is what David meant when he said, “My heart is fixed.” Do you realize that a prepared heart can do what is right even in the most serious, heart-wrenching, and life-threatening circumstances?

A prepared heart keeps us from giving in to temptation, no matter how beneficial, alluring, or enticing it may appear. In Psalm 108, David says this again. It is the same Hebrew word, kun, but it is translated fixed. Psalm 108:1 says, "O God, my heart is fixed; I will sing and give praise, even with my glory." Literally, he says, "My heart is prepared. I will sing and give praise."

Interestingly, back in Psalm 57, when he said, "My heart is fixed, I will sing and give praise. My heart is fixed, O God," every time he was challenged with an opportunity to do wrong, he always said, "I believe I'd rather sing and give praise to God."

In other words, he takes his mind off the sin, the temptation, and the pressure, and puts his mind upon the Lord. Psalm 108:1 is known as the warrior's morning song, in which David adores God and strengthens his heart before entering the conflicts of the day. Before he takes up his sword or does anything, he says, "Lord, my heart is fixed. I want to sing and give praise to you. I want to do what's right. Even in my fighting, I'm still going to do what's right."

There was an old Prussian soldier who used to pray to God, his majesty's august ally—in other words, the king's august ally. I am thinking of Oliver Cromwell and one of his battles, which was one of the major battles.

He said in prayer, "Lord, I shall be very busy this day. And in the midst of the heat of battle, I may forget thee, but O Lord, do not thou forget me." What he was saying is, "Lord, my heart is really fixed on you, but if I don't have time to think about you every minute, Lord, please just don't forget me." He wanted his heart fixed and prepared.

In Psalm 112, verse 7, David says it again, talking about a godly man: "He shall not be afraid of evil tidings: his heart is fixed, trusting in the Lord."

Suppose you went to the doctor tomorrow, received a checkup and a test, and then were told, "You have cancer. You'll be dead in 30 days." What kind of attitude will a godly man have whose heart is prepared? What does the Bible say? "He shall not be afraid of evil tidings." Why? His heart is prepared, trusting in the Lord.

What if you go to the bank tomorrow and they tell you that the IRS has confiscated all your money? Once you get over your initial

anger, can you say, "Well, Lord, you gave and you took away. Blessed be your name"? Or, "Lord, you gave it and let the devil take it away. But blessed be your name regardless." The man who has a prepared heart is not going to be fearful of evil tidings. His heart is prepared.

The old Robert Leighton said concerning the godly man, "His heart is fixed or prepared, ready and in arms for all services, resolved not to give back, able to meet all adventures and to stand its ground. God is unchangeable, and therefore faith is invincible, for it sets the heart on Him, fastens it there on the rock of eternity, then let the winds blow and storms arise, it cares not, for it is fixed upon God."

In each instance that we read the word fixed in the book of Psalms, we could substitute prepared, and the meaning would be the same, because it is exactly the same word. The Bible teaches us that Rehoboam did not prepare his heart to seek the Lord. Therefore, he did that which was evil.

While Rehoboam may have been going through the ceremonies, rituals, and outward practices of worshiping God, he was not sincere or genuine. He did not engage in them in earnest, with a heartfelt desire. All Rehoboam was doing was using God until he got to where he wanted to be; then he forsook God and His law.

The point is to see the worthlessness as well as the wickedness of hypocritical worship. What good did it do Rehoboam to go through the ceremonies and rituals? None. What good did it do our Lord? None. There was no heartfelt worship of God. There was no genuine seeking after God. In other words, it was totally and absolutely worthless. Do you realize—and I'm not making this a message on worship, although I could—but do you realize what Rehoboam did is exactly what most professing Christians do today?

Do you know many people go to church only as a business venture? That is the place to make contacts. That is the place to meet people. That is the place to obtain votes. That is why a lot of politicians go to church. For some, it is a place to be entertained; it is a place to salve the conscience. In some instances, it is just a free babysitting service for a few hours or up to half a day, when these buses go around and pick up the children of parents who are too lazy

and too ruthless to take their children to church. They view church as nothing more than a free babysitting service.

Rehoboam did not serve the Lord because he did not seek the Lord. People today do not worship God because their hearts are not prepared. They are not interested in seeking God. They are not interested in serving God. Rehoboam did not pray as Solomon prayed. He did not seek out the Lord as David his grandfather did. The truth of the matter is, Rehoboam did not consult God's Word to find out God's will and God's way for his life. He really did not care. It was just something he had to do until he got in the position of power, and then he forsook the Lord. Why did he sin? Because he prepared not his heart to seek the Lord.

Preparation involves work, foresight, and planning. It is something that must be done now. The Bible says that Rehoboam sinned. Why? Because he did not prepare his heart to seek the Lord.

Let me deal secondly today just with the word heart. I am still dealing with this one point, the importance of heart preparation. I have preached in time past a message on keeping the heart. I preached two other messages on a prepared heart, and I am going to reinforce today one truth that I brought forth in one of those messages.

## The Heart as the Mind

Some of you automatically know this because you have been here for years and certainly should have learned it by now. But not everybody has heard it, and not everyone knows it. The Bible says that Rehoboam prepared not his heart to seek the Lord.

What in the world is the heart? When you ask someone what the heart is, they usually respond, “Well, the heart is the innermost being of man.” Well, what is the innermost being of man? “Well, it is the seat of affections.” Well, what is the seat of affections? “Well, it is the soul.” Well, what is the soul? “Well, the soul is the innermost being of man.” You go around and around in a circle, and no one ever knows what the heart really is.

Now, there is a command that God gives us in Proverbs 4:23, and there the Scripture says, “Keep thy heart with all diligence; for out of

it are the issues of life." The word keep in Hebrew means to set double guards around it. You keep your heart above and before anything else. It is that important.

But when God says, "Keep your heart with all diligence," obviously He is not talking about the physical organ in our chest. I am thankful that our hearts, and at least my heart, are involuntary muscles. What does that mean? It means they beat whether I think about them or not. I am thankful I do not have to lie awake at night saying, "Beat, heart, beat. Pump, heart, pump." It just does it.

And one day, it will stop, and there is not one thing I can do about it. So, when God says, "Keep your heart," very obviously He is not referring to the physical organ, for we have no control over the physical organ. So, what in the world is the heart? I want you to turn in your Bibles, first of all, to the book of Genesis, chapter 6, and look at one verse here. Genesis 6:5 is the very first time the word heart occurs in the Bible. I am going to show you about five verses, but this one, Genesis 6 and verse 5, is the first occurrence.

In hermeneutics, which is the art or science of Bible interpretation, there is that which is known as the Law of First Mention. The Law of First Mention simply says this: the very first time a word is used in the Bible, that is the way the word is going to be used throughout the Bible unless the context indicates otherwise. Every time you see the word heart, it is going to mean exactly what it means here, unless the context emphasizes otherwise. So, let us look at Genesis 6 and verse 5, and the Bible says, "And God saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that every imagination of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually."

There is something here that speaks to me in verse 5: whatever the heart is, it can imagine and it can think, because God saw every imagination of the thoughts of the heart. Whatever the heart is, it can think and it can imagine. If you will turn over in your Bible to Genesis 27, I will show you something else about the heart.

Everybody knows the story about Jacob and Esau. You remember how Jacob had gotten the blessing from his father Isaac, and he had done it kind of deceitfully. When Esau found out about it, he was planning on killing Jacob. Genesis 27:41 says, "And Esau hated

Jacob because of the blessing wherewith his father blessed him: and Esau said in his heart, The days of mourning for my father are at hand; then will I slay my brother Jacob."

Now notice what the Bible said: Esau said in his heart. So, according to Genesis 6:5, whatever the heart is, it can think and imagine. According to Genesis 27:41, whatever the heart is, it can speak: "For he said in his heart." Then, in Proverbs 5:12, we read, "And say, How have I hated instruction, and my heart despised reproof." Whatever the heart is, it can either receive instruction or despise instruction.

Put it together: according to Genesis 6:5, the heart can think and imagine; according to Genesis 27:41, it can speak; and it can either receive or despise instruction.

Now look in Matthew chapter 5, verses 27 and 28. You will see that somehow the heart is intimately connected with the eyes. Our Lord says, "Ye have heard that it was said by them of old time, Thou shalt not commit adultery: But I say unto you, That whosoever looketh on a woman to lust after her hath committed adultery with her already in his heart." The heart is intimately connected with the eyes. Our Lord said, "Whosoever looketh on a woman to lust after her," looking with the eyes, "hath committed adultery with her already in his heart."

Thus, the heart can think and imagine, speak, either receive or despise instruction, and is intimately connected with the eyes. If you have not yet put together what the heart is, go back in your Bibles to Daniel, chapter 4, and let me show it to you point blank from the Word of God.

**SCRIPTURE READING - Daniel 4:16, 25, 28-32 (KJV)**

Everyone knows the story of proud, arrogant, haughty Nebuchadnezzar, the king of Babylon. God determined to teach Nebuchadnezzar a lesson. Everyone that is proud, God is able to abase, and He certainly abased Nebuchadnezzar.

Daniel 4:16 says, "Let his heart be changed from man's, and let a beast's heart be given unto him; and let seven times pass over him." Seven times is the Chaldean way of saying seven years. God says, "Let his heart be changed from a man's, and let a

> beast's heart be given unto him." What is in Nebuchadnezzar that is going to be changed? His heart. He is going to get a beast's heart.
>
> Daniel then gives Nebuchadnezzar the interpretation of his dream: "That they shall drive thee from men, and thy dwelling shall be with the beasts of the field, and they shall make thee to eat grass as oxen, and they shall wet thee with the dew of heaven, and seven times shall pass over thee, till thou know that the Most High ruleth in the kingdom of men, and giveth it to whomsoever he will."
>
> He would be driven from men and live with the beasts for seven years, until he learned one lesson: God is sovereign, not man.
>
> "All this came upon the king Nebuchadnezzar. At the end of twelve months he walked in the palace of the kingdom of Babylon. The king spake, and said, Is not this great Babylon, that I have built for the house of the kingdom by the might of my power, and for the honour of my majesty? While the word was in the king's mouth, there fell a voice from heaven, saying, O king Nebuchadnezzar, to thee it is spoken; The kingdom is departed from thee. And they shall drive thee from men, and thy dwelling shall be with the beasts of the field: they shall make thee to eat grass as oxen, and seven times shall pass over thee, until thou know that the most High ruleth in the kingdom of men, and giveth it to whomsoever he will."

"The same hour was the thing fulfilled upon Nebuchadnezzar: and he was driven from men, and did eat grass as oxen, and his body was wet with the dew of heaven, till his hairs were grown like eagles' feathers, and his nails like birds' claws." For seven years his hair matted like birds' feathers, his fingernails grew like claws, and he walked—or crawled, I should say—around eating grass like an ox. What was he? He was insane. He was crazy.

This condition is known as boanthropy, when a man acts like a bovine or an animal. It is a real condition.

Now let me ask you: What did God say was going to be changed? In verse 16, his heart. His heart. You want to know what the heart is? Look at verse 34: "And at the end of the days I Nebuchadnezzar

lifted up mine eyes unto heaven, and mine understanding returned unto me, and I blessed the most High, and I praised and honoured him that liveth for ever, whose dominion is an everlasting dominion, and his kingdom is from generation to generation." Then, in verse 36, he says it another way: "At the same time my reason returned unto me."

So what is the heart? The heart is the mind. It is the understanding. It is the reason. God can see the thoughts and imaginations of the heart because the heart is your mind. The heart can speak because the mind can speak. The heart can either receive or despise correction because the mind can do so. The heart is intimately connected with the eyes because of the mind.

Only occasionally does the word heart refer to the affections or emotions in the Bible. Ninety-nine times out of one hundred, it refers to the mind and understanding. The Hebrew word for heart is leb, L-E-B; it is translated mind twelve times and understanding ten times in our Bibles. When God says, "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart," that is with all your mind, with all your soul, and with all your being.

Let me show you one other word, because this word is sometimes confused as well. Turn in your Bible to Acts chapter 24. If I were to ask you, “What is your conscience?” I have heard people say, “The conscience is that little voice that, when you start to do something wrong, says, ‘You better not do it. You know better than that.’” That may be right, but they do not know why it is right. Look at Acts 24:16. The apostle Paul says, “And herein do I exercise myself, to have always a conscience void of offence toward God, and toward men.”

## The Conscience as Knowledge

Paul says, “Here is one area that I gymnasticize myself. This is one area that I really work out in.” He works at having a conscience void of offence toward God and toward men. In other words, I am not going to be mad at God, and I am not going to be mad at Brother Tim. I am not going to carry a grudge or be hateful. He said, “I work it.”

"I keep my heart clean. I keep my mind clean. I keep my conscience pure. That is what I want to do." Let me tell you what the word conscience means. The Greek word for conscience is suneidesis. Sun is a preposition that means with. Eidesis is the Greek word to know. Your conscience is that which you know with. In English, con is a preposition meaning with, and science means know. Your conscience is that which you know with.

Do you know what your conscience is? It is your mind, the same thing as your heart. It is your understanding. When you start to do something wrong and that little voice says, "Eh, eh, eh," that is because you know better; you have better understanding than that. So when God commands you to keep your heart, He is commanding you to keep your mind. When your conscience convicts you, that is because in your mind you know what you are doing is wrong. When He tells us that we are to have a prepared heart, what is He saying? Our minds should be constantly and continually prepared. They should be made up in advance. Our understanding and reasoning ability should be based upon the principles and truth of Scripture.

We have learned two truths today. Both of them are vitally important.

## Conclusion: Two Key Truths

Unless our hearts are prepared, we will do that which is evil. We must stop and consider: I have to do something to stop myself from sinning and doing wrong. What must I do? I must prepare myself to do that which is right. I must learn to think correctly and believe correctly.

The second truth is that your heart is your mind; it is your understanding. It is that which must be prepared. Unless your heart is prepared, you will disobey and do wickedly. It is impossible to stand for truth, righteousness, and holiness without heart preparation. So you must ask the Lord, "Teach me to prepare my heart. Help me to prepare my heart, because Rehoboam did evil. Why? Because he prepared not his heart to seek the Lord." Unless our heart is prepared, we will end up sinning, disobeying, and grieving our Heavenly Father.

Father, we ask in the name of Jesus Christ that You would teach us. Help us, Lord, and build us up in the most holy faith. Teach us the importance of preparing our heart, and help us to think right, act right, and do right. In the name of Jesus Christ, we ask and pray. Amen.

CHAPTER 2

# Heart Preparation - 2 of 7

## Introduction and Review

We are continuing this series on heart preparation. Last week was number one, so I will take just a few moments to review, and then we will pick up from there. Lord willing, we will have at least three more weeks on this subject.

In 2 Chronicles chapter 12, we read, “And it came to pass when Rehoboam had established the kingdom, and had strengthened himself, he forsook the law of the LORD, and all Israel with him. And it came to pass, that in the fifth year of king Rehoboam, Shishak king of Egypt came up against Jerusalem, because they had transgressed against the LORD.” Then, in verse 14, we are still reading about King Rehoboam: “And he did evil, because he prepared not his heart to seek the LORD.”

Notice that verse: he did evil. Why? Because he prepared not his heart to seek the Lord. Last week, I brought the message on the importance of heart preparation. I showed how undoubtedly Rehoboam had a lot of advantages, since David was his grandfather and Solomon was his father. And yet he sinned against the Lord. The

reason he sinned against the Lord was because he prepared not his heart to seek the Lord. I showed you that it is normal and natural to sin.

No one has to teach us how to do what is wrong. We do that by nature. But if we are ever going to do what is right, then our hearts must be prepared. I went through Scripture and showed you how the word prepared is used. It did indeed teach and speak of constancy and consistency, and of the fact that it involved a great deal of work and skill. Then I took the word heart and went through the Bible, showing you from the Bible that the heart is the mind; it is the understanding. Also, the word conscience is the same, because the Greek word is suneidēsis.

Sunē is a preposition which means with. Eidēsis means to know. So your conscience is that which you know with. Even the English word con is the preposition with, and science means to know. Your conscience, basically, and your heart and your mind are all one and the same. I pointed out that ninety-nine times out of a hundred, when the word heart was used in the Bible, it referred to the mind, the understanding. Only occasionally does it refer to the affections, but usually it refers to the mind.

So we are coming back today to deal with the second subject: How do I prepare my heart? Since the Bible teaches the importance of heart preparation, the question should automatically arise in your minds: How do I prepare my heart?

I do not believe that any real, genuine Christian wants to turn out like Rehoboam—a disappointment to God, a disappointment to his grandfather, and a disappointment to his father. I suppose that every family has a black sheep in it, and each family is embarrassed, humiliated, and ashamed over the actions and lifestyle of that black sheep. King David, a man after God's own heart, would be ashamed of his grandson. Solomon, with his wisdom, certainly would be ashamed of his son.

Even humanly speaking, I do not want to do anything that will embarrass or humiliate my family. When you do something like that, it shows that you have absolutely no regard for honor, integrity, or family. Likewise, I do not want to bring reproach upon my heavenly

Father or my heavenly family. Certainly, it would be a reproach to do so. If we want to please our Heavenly Father, we must understand one simple truth: our hearts must be prepared to obey and honor Him.

## The Necessity of Heart Preparation

If our hearts are not prepared, we are going to sin, disobey Him, and dishonor Him. Very obviously, heart preparation is not only important; it is imperative. If we are not going to bring reproach upon the Father, the church, and the ministry, we must have our hearts prepared. The sad thing is that most Christians never think of heart preparation.

The average Christian simply goes along life's way without concern, or literally without a thought, of living a holy, godly life—a life well-pleasing and honorable to the Heavenly Father. Those who live halfway decent and halfway godly lives often do so without realizing where they are or how they got there. It is just something that seemingly happened. They have never really given it a thought.

If keeping the heart is important, if it is commanded in Scripture—and it is—then the question automatically has to arise: How then do I prepare my heart? How do I go about doing it? No one will ever prepare his heart until he realizes the importance and necessity of heart preparation. If you do not understand this first simple principle, if your heart is not prepared, you will do evil; then you will never prepare your heart. So let us try to answer this question: How do I prepare a heart?

## Step One: Realization

There are three simple steps. Number one is realization. There is something that you must absolutely realize first and foremost; it is paramount. You must realize that you do not have the ability to prepare your heart. We have the responsibility to prepare our hearts, but we do not have the ability to do so. Heart preparation is primarily a work of God. However, it is our responsibility to seek Him and to use the means that He has ordained in order to prepare our heart.

Hold 2 Chronicles chapter 12, but look in your Bibles to Proverbs chapter 16 and verse 1. Here is the realization that must sink deeply into your minds. Proverbs 16, verse 1, says, “The preparation of the heart in man, and the answer of the tongue, is from the LORD.” I am only going to be dealing with really half of this verse today. Look at it: The preparation of the heart in man is from the Lord, if you leave out the second part. Does heart preparation come from the Lord? The answer is, from the Lord.

Men can neither think nor speak wisely well by themselves without divine assistance. The preparations of the heart in man are from the Lord. Let me give you just a paragraph, and then I am going to explain it. It was written by John Gill, the old Baptist scholar, and he was commenting on this verse. He is talking about the entire verse. Proverbs 16, verse 1, and I am quoting: “The sense of these words, according to our version, depends upon the next clause, and the meaning of the whole is, that a man can neither think nor speak without God, the orderings or marshallings of the heart, as it may be rendered, that is, the”

The thoughts of the heart are generally irregular and confused. The ranging of them in order, as well as an army in battle, or things regularly placed on a table—that is, a furnished table—the fixing of them on any particular subject, though about things civil and natural, so as closely to attend them and proceed in a regular manner in their consideration, are not without the concurrence of divine providence.

In other words, we cannot even marshal our thoughts, array them as an army, or furnish them as a table is well furnished without or apart from the concurrence of divine providence. Concurrence means that it happens at the same time. God must be involved in arranging our thoughts.

Whereas the thoughts of men's hearts are evil and evil continually, and nothing but evil thoughts naturally proceed from this, the ordering and marshalling of them, and fixing them to the attention and consideration of divine and spiritual things, are not without the supernatural grace of God. Man by nature cannot think anything but evil and wickedness. If we think good thoughts, if we have thoughts concerning spiritual truths, it is because of God's

divine, supernatural grace. We cannot think a good thought of ourselves, nor anything indeed of ourselves, in a spiritual manner. Second Corinthians 3 and verse 5 says this.

All preparations for religious service and duty, whether it be to pray unto God or to preach in His name, are from the Lord. It is He that works in men both to will and to do, giving them the willing mind, or suitable frame, for service, as well as ability to perform it. He pours out the spirit of grace and supplication on them, disposes and directs their minds to proper petitions, and furnishes His ministering servants in their studies with agreeable matter for their ministrations. So all he is saying is this: we cannot really order or marshal our thoughts apart from God's divine providence.

We cannot have good thoughts, spiritual thoughts, or godly thoughts apart from God's supernatural grace. Now, let me give this to you in one sentence. Do you remember what our Lord said in John 15 and verse 5? He said, “Without me ye can do nothing.” Does that mean think? Does that mean consider? Does that mean meditate? Does that mean plan? Without Him, we can do absolutely nothing. Is the preparing of our hearts something? Yes. Which means without Him, we cannot do it.

## The Deceitfulness of the Heart

Here is why we must be wholly, totally, and completely dependent upon God and His grace and mercy. Jeremiah 17:9 says, “The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked: who can know it?”

How in the world can I prepare my heart if I do not even know my heart? How can I prepare my heart if my heart is capable of deceiving me? How can I plan and prepare my mind if I cannot even control or marshal my thoughts? How can I prepare something when, in my preparation, I am literally being deceived?

I have heard men, and women as well, say, “Well, if I know my heart.” The truth is, you do not know your hearts. You do not know your minds. You do not know the depth of the depravity. You do not know what you are capable of thinking, or not thinking, or capable of doing. This is why the preparation of our hearts must be from the

Lord. Jeremiah 17:9 says again, “The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked: who can know it?” Then verse 10 says, “I the LORD search the heart, I try the reins, even to give every man according to his ways, and according to the fruit of his doings.”

Who alone knows our minds, our understanding, and our thoughts? None but God Himself. I suppose that if you were to search for godly men in the Old Testament, David certainly would rank among the top three or four, certainly in the top ten—even if you named Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. Yet David, who is classified in Scripture as a man after God’s own heart, prayed in Psalm 139:23–24, “Search me, O God, and know my heart: try me, and know my thoughts: and see if there be any wicked way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting.”

What is David confessing? He is confessing that he does not know his heart. He does not know what is in his mind. He does not know what is in his understanding.

And he said, Lord, I want you to search me, know my thoughts, and see if there be any wicked way in me. Then, Lord, I want you to give me repentance, basically, and lead me in the way everlasting—that is, in the right way. Did you know the Bible in Psalm 9 and verse 7 specifically proclaims that God trieth the hearts and the reins? Only God can know our hearts totally, completely, and perfectly. When Proverbs 16 and verse 1 says that the preparations of the heart in man are from the Lord, we must realize that God must prepare our hearts.

If our hearts are ever prepared to pray, God prepared them. If our hearts are ever prepared to repent, God prepared them. If our hearts are ever prepared to come to Christ, God prepared them. If our hearts are ever prepared to worship or study, God prepared them. If our hearts are ever prepared to suffer for Christ's sake, God prepared them. Why?

The preparations of the heart in man are from the Lord. Philippians 2:13 is a verse that you need to memorize and underline: “For it is God who worketh in you both to will and to do His good pleasure.” Notice that it is God who worketh in you both to will and to do His good pleasure. If God ever puts the “to will” in you, He is

going to put the “to do” in you. Whenever you do, it is because God put the “to will” in you. God is the source and the author of both the will and the doing.

## Step Two: Determination

There first must be a realization. Has this realization sunk deeply into your soul—that you cannot prepare your heart, yet God requires your heart to be prepared? The preparations of the heart in man are from the Lord. That is why there first must be a realization.

Secondly, there must be a determination. Once you realize that God must prepare your heart, you are going to determine to fulfill your responsibility in complete dependence upon the Lord.

Your efforts will accomplish nothing unless they are blessed by the Lord. One of our problems in Christianity is that we divide or separate that which God has united and joined together. What does that mean? Simply stated, we either separate God’s absolute sovereignty, which is taught very clearly in Scripture, and rest everything upon Him, or we deny that and go over to man’s responsibility and rest everything upon him.

Is God sovereign? Yes. Is man responsible? Yes. When you say, “God is sovereign; the preparation of the heart in man is from the Lord. There is nothing I can do about it. My heart is either going to be prepared or it is not going to be prepared, so I might as well forget it,” you are denying your responsibility. You are saying, “I am not answerable. I am not accountable to God. I do not have to obey Him. I do not have any responsibilities to fulfill. It is all up to Him. Either He does it, or it does not get done.”

On the other hand, there are some people who will work and put forth all kinds of effort to fulfill their duties. They will dot every I and cross every T. But what are they trusting in? They are trusting in what they are doing—their works and efforts—to make sure they are right. They are totally ignoring God.

God is sovereign, and man is responsible. When you trust in your own efforts, you are denying your inability and trusting in yourself rather than God. Now, here is what God has done: He has not only ordained the end; He has also ordained the means to the end. We

must not put asunder that which God has joined together. He demands that our hearts be prepared. He alone has the ability to prepare our hearts, but we must seek Him for His blessing as we fulfill our responsibility, that our hearts might be prepared. Those two things must go together.

Whenever you say, “I am going to do it,” it will never get done. And whenever you say, “I will just trust God to do it. I am not going to fulfill any of my responsibilities,” it will never get done either. If He does it, fine. If He does not, fine. It will never get done. I am going to explain that just a little bit for you in a few minutes. But the two must go together.

God has given us responsibility. Although He has all of the ability, we have the responsibility. This applies not just to my grandchildren, but to all children and all adults as well. Proverbs 23:12 says, “Apply thine heart unto instruction, and thine ears to the words of knowledge.” The word apply has the force of govern, or to cause to enter into, or to cause to go into. What is God telling you? He is telling you that you have the responsibility to govern your heart and cause that heart to go into instruction, and your ears to the words of knowledge.

## Biblical Responsibilities: Govern and Guide the Heart

Who did God command to govern your heart? You. You are the one who must apply your heart to instruction and your ears to the words of knowledge. That is your responsibility.

Then, in verse 19, He says, “Hear thou my son, and be wise, and guide thine heart in the way.” Oh, wait a minute. You are not only responsible to govern your heart; you are also responsible to guide your heart—in God's way.

Now look at verses 20 through 22. They are negatives. Here is where you are not to guide your heart. He says in verse 19, “Hear thou my son, and be wise, and guide thine heart in the way.” Then he says, “Be not among winebibbers, among riotous eaters of flesh. For the drunkard and the glutton shall come to poverty, and drowsiness shall clothe a man with rags.” In other words, you do not listen to the drunkard and the winebibber. But he does tell you this: “Hearken

unto thy father that begat thee, and despise not thy mother when she is old." In other words, you listen to your elders. Here is the positive as well as verse 22: "Buy the truth, and sell it not; also wisdom, and instruction, and understanding."

You have a responsibility to govern your heart. You have a responsibility to guide your heart. You have a responsibility to guide your heart out of the way of wickedness and into the way of righteousness, godliness, and obedience. How do you govern your heart? How do you guide your heart? Skip down to verse 26. Look what God says: "My son, give me thine heart, and let thine eyes observe my ways."

God says that you must realize both your responsibility and your inability. You must realize that you have a responsibility to govern and a responsibility to guide, but at the same time, you have an inability. You must come to Him and give Him your heart, saying, "Lord, I have a responsibility, but I have an inability. If my heart is ever governed, if my heart is ever guided, if my heart is ever prepared, You must do it."

When He says, "My son, give me thine heart," the word give means to bestow. It means to grant, to devote, or to consecrate. Literally, He says, "My son, consecrate your heart unto me." How can we know whether our hearts are consecrated unto God? That is a good question. Very simply, if my heart is consecrated unto Him, I will observe His ways. If I do not observe His ways, what does that mean? My heart is not consecrated unto Him; I have not given Him my heart. I have a responsibility to govern, and I have a responsibility to guide, but God is the only One who can give me that ability.

So what do I do? I come to Him and say, "Lord, I have a responsibility, but I do not have the ability. I want to govern my heart, and I want to guide my heart, but without Your grace, without Your power, and without Your blessing upon my efforts, it is worthless. You must make the means which You ordain effectual."

Remember the passage in Proverbs 23 and verse 12: "Beat thy child with a rod. If thou beatest him with a rod, he shall not die. But thou shalt deliver his soul from hell." Does that mean every child

who has been beaten with a rod is going to heaven? No. If it meant that, the best thing we could do would be to break off some limbs and start walking up and down the streets, beating the living daylights out of everyone we found. That would be the conclusion, because the passage says, “Beat thy child with a rod, and thou shalt deliver his soul from hell.” What does it mean? It means that, as you use the means God has ordained for discipline and correction, with the blessing of God upon that discipline and correction, the child will learn right from wrong and ultimately be converted and trust in Christ. There is the use of the means, but there must be the blessing of God upon those means.

Look again in your Bibles to the book of Hosea, chapter 10 and verse 12. It is wonderful to see in Scripture how God has brought these two things together. God says, “Sow to yourselves in righteousness, reap in mercy, break up your fallow ground, for it is time to seek the Lord, till he come and rain righteousness upon you.” Notice what He says: “Sow to yourselves in righteousness, reap in mercy, break up your fallow ground, for it is time to seek the Lord, till he come and rain righteousness upon you.”

## The Means and God's Blessing

This passage first and foremost places emphasis upon our responsibilities. We are to sow to ourselves in righteousness, reap in mercy, break up our fallow ground, and seek the Lord until He comes and rains righteousness upon us. Those who were raised on a farm understand that sowing and reaping are laborious efforts. They are labor-intensive. Usually, breaking up fallow ground is more laborious. Fallow ground refers to untilled ground, often full of weeds, unfertilized, and hardened from a lack of work. You can take a harrow and disk and disk and disk hardened ground, and very seldom will you break it.

Finally, you have to get a turning plow and begin to turn, and then you can go back and harrow. The point is that when he says, “Break up your fallow ground,” the fallow ground in this passage is our hearts and minds, usually overgrown with thorns and thistles, the cares and burdens of this life and world, and hardened from the lack

of attention we have given them. They must be broken up before we can ever sow and reap.

The breaking up of sinful hearts is a singular means to prevent the breaking down of life, family, church, and nation. Unless our hearts are broken up, we will break down—individually, familially, ecclesiastically, and nationally.

It is not enough just to break up the fallow ground. It is not enough to get the weeds and thorns out, nor merely to sow the right seed. What else is involved? We must seek the Lord till He come and reign righteousness upon us. You can try to break up your fallow ground all day long. You can pull weeds and thorns and sow all day long, but unless God sends the rain of His grace and mercy, all your efforts are worthless. Have you ever planted a garden with no rain? You know what happens: no harvest.

It is the same thing here. Unless we seek God's blessing to make the means effectual, nothing we do will actually come to pass. It will not prosper or produce. God is saying that we have a responsibility to break up our fallow ground and to sow, but we also have a responsibility to seek Him to make those means effectual.

So, in preparing your heart, you must have the realization that you cannot prepare your heart; God must prepare it. You have a responsibility, and in light of that responsibility, you must make a determination: you are going to fulfill your responsibilities, seek God's blessing upon those means, and ask God to make them effectual. I have given you, first, a realization; secondly, a determination; and thirdly, an actualization. An actualization means that you must apply the first two principles. If you do not apply the first two principles, everything is worthless.

## Step Three: Actualization

Do you realize that one can recognize the truth and determine mentally to apply it, yet never get around to doing it? You remember those little round toots? How many of us have said, "I'm going to do that when I get around to it," and never, ever gotten around to it? You may have realization and determination, but no actualization.

Truth misunderstood, or understood and unapplied, will never benefit anyone. What is the difference between someone who does not understand the truth and cannot obey, and someone who understands it and will not obey? The second receives a little greater condemnation, but otherwise they are both in the same boat. In order for truth to become effectual in our lives, it must be actually applied, actually practiced, and made a part of us.

The relationship between realization, determination, and actualization begins with this question: Does God demand repentance? Of course He does. In Luke chapter 13, our Lord said, "Except ye repent, ye shall likewise perish." John the Baptist and even our Lord came preaching repentance. Acts 17 records the Apostle Paul preaching on Mars Hill, and as he concludes his sermon, in verses 30 and 31, he says, "At the times of this ignorance, God winked at; but now commandeth all men every where to repent." Is repentance a command? Yes. Here is why it is commanded. Verse 31 says, "Because he, that is God the Father, hath appointed a day, in the which he, God the Son, will judge the world in righteousness by that man, God the Son, whom he hath ordained; whereof he hath given assurance unto all men, in that he hath raised him from the dead."

Just as surely as God the Father raised Jesus Christ from the dead, just as surely there is going to be a judgment. Therefore, He commands all men to repent.

We have established one truth so far: God commands men to repent. Now that you know God has commanded you to repent, go ahead and repent. If you are commanded to do it, then do it. But what is the truth? You cannot repent on your own. How can I say that? Because Scripture teaches us that repentance is the gift of God. Thus, the command to repent does not mean that man can fulfill it independently of God's gracious provision. Look in Acts chapter 5, and then we will go to Acts 11.

Verse 31 is talking about Jesus Christ. Acts 5, verse 30, says, "The God of our fathers raised up Jesus, whom you slew and hanged on a tree. Him hath God exalted with his right hand to be a Prince and a Savior, for to give repentance to Israel and forgiveness of sins." Who is it that gives repentance? It is God. When Peter came back from the

house of Cornelius and gave his report, they said in Acts 11:18, “Then hath God also to the Gentiles granted or given repentance unto life.” Notice that God had to grant it. God had to give it. Why? It was God’s gift.

Second Timothy 2:24–26 says, “And the servant of the Lord must not strive, but be gentle unto all men, apt to teach, patient in meekness, instructing those that oppose themselves. If God peradventure will give them repentance to the acknowledging of the truth. And that they may recover themselves out of the snare of the devil, who were taken captive by him at his will.” When do men recover themselves out of the snare of the devil? According to verse 25, it is when they acknowledge the truth. When do they acknowledge the truth? According to verse 25, it is when God gives them repentance.

I have established two things. Number one, God commands you to repent. Number two, you cannot repent on your own, because repentance is God’s gift. What does that mean? It means you have a responsibility to seek Him to give you His gift of repentance.

Here is the connection between realization, determination, and actualization. If you seek God to give you His gift of repentance, and He gives you His gift of repentance, who is going to repent? You are. God is not going to repent for you. God is not going to turn from sin for you. He gave you His gift, and you actually make use of that gift when you turn from your idols, when you turn from your sins, and when you obey Him.

There is realization, there is determination, and there is actualization. You do not actually repent until you do it, but God is holding you accountable to do it. Especially if He gives you His gift, you will use that gift and turn. The point is that God is not turning for you; you are actually turning yourself.

I want to try to put it together for you. Look in your Bibles to 1 John 3. I could show you many passages, but here it is, 1 John 3. And look at verse 23. 1 John 3 and verse 23. And this is His commandment. That we should believe on the name of His Son Jesus Christ and love one another as He gave us commandment. Now look at that. And this is His commandment. That we should

believe on His Son Jesus Christ. Here's my question. Has God commanded us to believe on Jesus Christ? Yes. And all of you have read that verse, you know, where our Lord said, when you pray, believe that you have these things and you shall have them. And how many of you said, well, I believe, oh Lord, I believe, I believe. And you try to force yourself to believe. Well, now God has commanded you to believe, so just go ahead and do it. How many of you can believe on your own? None. You know why?

Because faith is God's gift. Help me out. For by grace are you saved through faith, and that not of yourselves. It is the gift of God, not of works, lest any man should boast. So how do you work this out? You understand that God commands you to believe. You understand that you're unable to believe. But you have a responsibility to seek God for His gift of faith. And when God gives you that gift, what do you do? You actually believe in Jesus Christ. Or you actually believe His Word. You follow me?

So there has to be realization, determination, and actualization. God is not going to believe for you, just like God is not going to repent for you. He may give you that gift, but you must actually use that gift. The same thing is true with heart preparation. You must realize you have an inability to prepare your heart. You may determine to seek God to fulfill your responsibility, but then you must actually do it and say, Lord, enable me, empower me, bless my efforts, give me your righteousness so that I may actually prepare my heart. Now, let me just tell you something else.

## Two Stages of Heart Preparation

I hope you see this connection. But I believe that there are basically two stages of heart preparation. I believe there is a long-term preparation and a short-term preparation, or what I would call an emergency preparation. Let me explain the difference to you. I'm going to call the long-term preparation a constant and continuous preparation. Under this heading, a constant and continuous preparation, one must understand that keeping the heart, or preparing the heart, is a constant and continuous battle. Listen, please.

Just because God has given me the victory today, or just because God has given me the victory this week or this month, does not mean that the fight is over. Let me reemphasize that. Just because God has given you the victory one day, one week, or one month does not mean that the fight is over. What did I say? There has to be a constant and a continual renewing of the mind, a constant and continual repentance, a constant and continual believing, a constant and continual meditation upon His Word, a constant and continual prayer life, a constant and continual trusting in His Word.

In other words, it's something that has to go on constantly and consistently. We have to learn to live this principle of heart preparation on a daily basis. How many of you don't answer out loud, but how many of you ask God to prepare your heart for this day? How many of you ask Him to prepare your heart yesterday? How many of you ask to fulfill your responsibilities in keeping your heart for this week?

You see what I'm saying? Unhappily, most people who live halfway decent lives just stumble into it. They don't understand the principles. Let me give you a good illustration of what I'm talking about, a constant and continuous heart preparation. You can find that in the life of Hezekiah. If you would look in your Bibles to 2 Chronicles chapter 31, you will find out in 2 Chronicles 30 and 31 there was a great revival that took place under Hezekiah. And the scripture tells us that Hezekiah was a good and a godly king. In fact, the scripture affirms that everything that Hezekiah did for the Lord, he did with all of his heart and prospered. Look in 2 Chronicles chapter 31 and let's begin reading there in verse 20. 2 Chronicles 31 and verse 20. The Bible says, And thus did Hezekiah throughout all Judah, and wrought that which was good and right and truth before the Lord his God. Now look, and in every work that he began in the service of the house of God and in the law and in the commandments to seek his God, he

Hezekiah did it with all his heart and prospered. He had wrought a great revival in seeking God's law, God's commandment, and God Himself. The Bible said he did it with all his heart. In other words, his heart was prepared. He prospered and did what God would have him to do.

But when you get to chapter 32, look in verses 25 and 26: “But Hezekiah rendered not again according to the benefit done unto him. For his heart was lifted up, therefore there was wrath upon him and upon Judah and Jerusalem. Notwithstanding, Hezekiah humbled himself for the pride of his heart, both he and the inhabitants of Jerusalem, so that the wrath of the Lord came not upon them in the days of Hezekiah.” It did come, but what did Hezekiah do? He lifted up his heart in pride and arrogance. What happened in chapter 31 was wonderful, but in chapter 32 he had sinned. Why?

There was no constant and continual preparation. Ecclesiastes 8:8 says there is no discharge in this war. The victory God gives me one minute is not carried over for the next five minutes. I may have to fight the same battle again in my mind. I may have to continually fight to keep my thoughts pure and my mind on Scripture. If I have to, I have to.

The second type of preparation is instant and immediate; it is short term. If you are constantly and continually preparing your heart, you will not have any problem with this instant and immediate preparation. All of us are confronted by sin, the flesh, and the world. We are all tempted. There is no doubt about that.

Although we are confronted by the flesh, the world, and sin, we must remember this one truth: there is no such thing as a sudden sin. I do not just happen to jump up and run off with Janet. It does not work like that. If I ran off with Janet, what would that mean? I had thought about it, she had thought about it, and we had schemed.

Sin does not just happen. I do not just reach out and steal $100 from Roy; I think about it before I do it. There is no such thing as a sudden sin. When we are confronted with sin on a constant, daily basis, what we have to do instantly and immediately is say, “Lord, wait a minute. Thou has said thou shalt not commit adultery. Thou has said Thou shalt not covet thy neighbor’s wife. Lord, I’m not going to think those thoughts. I’m not going to have those thoughts in my mind.” I purposely and deliberately turn my mind away from that and place my mind upon Your Word.

## Instant Preparation and Victory Over Sin

I know sin promises me joy, happiness, and pleasure, but all it ever delivers is death, destruction, and misery. Lord, I do not want that. I refuse that. I am renewing my mind and purposefully and deliberately saying, “Thou shalt not commit adultery, Thou shalt not steal, Thou shalt not covet, Thou shalt not bear false witness.” In other words, in this instant and immediate preparation, I take my eyes away from sin, temptation, the world, and the flesh, and place them upon Christ and His Word. According to His truth, I choose not to sin.

Romans chapter 6 tells me that I am no longer under the lordship of sin. I am under the lordship of Jesus Christ. Sin may tempt me as a Christian, but it cannot command me. Why? I have a new Lord, Jesus Christ. We have been delivered from the lordship and dominion of sin. Therefore, I deliberately and purposefully place my mind upon Jesus Christ.

And what does the Bible tell me in Isaiah 26 and verse 3? “Thou wilt keep him in perfect peace, whose mind is stayed upon thee.” So we have to take a constant and continuous preparation. There may be times when there must be an instant, an immediate, or an emergency time that we must say, Lord, I want my thought life pure. I want my thoughts prepared. Lord, I want to think scripturally. I want every thought to be brought into captivity to Jesus Christ.

Do you really want to be used of the Lord? Do you want to please him? Do you want to obey him? Do you want to be mighty in his service and live for his honor and his glory?

## Conclusion: God Seeks Perfect Hearts

In 2 Chronicles 27, verse 6, we are told about Jotham: “So Jotham became mighty.” Why? “Because he prepared his ways before the Lord.” Basically, he prepared his heart. You cannot prepare your way without preparing your mind. Jotham deliberately set out to make sure that whatever he did was biblical and right. He thought about what was biblical and right. He became mighty because he prepared his ways before the Lord.

The truth of the matter is this: We have to continually and constantly prepare our hearts. In certain emergency situations, we must instantly and immediately reaffirm that preparation and say, No, I'm not going to sin against God. I'm not going to violate His word. I will stand true and faithful to Him. We must seek His help, His strength, and His power to do so.

We have been praying for our nation, for our churches, and for our people. God did not need multitudes. But I want to show you from Scripture what God is really looking for. Look in your Bibles to 2 Chronicles 16 and verse 9. Here is where I want to be found, and here is where I want you to be found.

For the eyes of the Lord run to and fro throughout the whole earth, to show himself strong in behalf of them whose heart is perfect toward him. The rest of the verse is rebuke against the king who has done wickedly. But here is the truth that he announced: the eyes of the Lord run to and fro throughout the whole earth to show Himself strong on behalf of them whose heart is perfect toward Him.

You keep your heart, thoughts, mind, and understanding prepared, and you keep them scriptural, biblical, and godly. God is going to show Himself strong through you in ways that you have never imagined. He can use you to turn your family around, your church around, your state around, even your nation around. But God is looking for men and women whose hearts are perfect toward Him.

How do I prepare my heart? Realization, determination, and actualization. I must actually apply the principles of the Word of God to my life.

Father, help us today. Lord, this subject is so important and so overlooked. We cannot live godly or holy lives without Thee, serve and honor and worship Thee without heart preparation, or be used of Thee without it. Teach us to prepare our hearts. Teach us to realize that we have no ability in and of ourselves, that we must seek Thee. Teach us to determine that we will fulfill our responsibilities, depending upon Thy blessing and power. Help us to apply these truths, follow through, and be constant and continuous. Help us to use instant and immediate preparation whenever necessary, that we

might not sin against Thee. Help us to bring honor and glory to Thy name. In the name of Jesus Christ we ask and pray, Amen.

CHAPTER 3

# Heart Preparation - 3 of 7

## Introduction and Review of Heart Preparation

Open your Bibles to 2 Chronicles chapter 12 and to the book of James chapter 1. We are still dealing with the general theme of preparing your heart. As far as I can tell right now, there are going to be six messages in this series, but I believe it will be one of the most important series that I have preached in a while. I think all of them are important since they are from the Word of God. But this one is important because it is extremely practical. It is extremely needful.

In 2 Chronicles chapter 12 and verse 14, we are talking about King Rehoboam. The Bible says, "And he did evil, because he prepared not his heart to seek the Lord." Let me take a few moments and review and bring you up to where we are today. I showed you from the Bible that we do not need anyone to teach us how to do evil. We do that normally and naturally. But if we ever do that which is right and holy, then our hearts must be prepared.

I went through the Bible and showed you how the word prepared indicated work, foresight, planning, and skill. Then I took you through the Bible and showed you what the heart really was: the

heart is the mind; it is the understanding. I also showed you that the word conscience is basically the same. God is telling us that unless our hearts are prepared, we are always going to be doing that which is evil.

Last week I tried to ask and answer this one simple question: How then do I prepare my heart? I gave you three simple points. The very first point was that there must be realization, and that realization was that we cannot prepare our hearts ourselves. Proverbs 16:1 tells us that the preparation of the heart in man is from the Lord. Over and over I showed you from Scripture how our Lord said, “Without me ye can do nothing,” and our preparation is something. So very obviously, we have to realize our own inability. At the same time, we must recognize our responsibility. Therefore, we must seek our Lord in our responsibility to enable us to fulfill that responsibility, because He alone has the ability. So there must be realization. Secondly, I pointed out that there must be determination. You have to determine to fulfill your responsibility.

God has laid a number of things upon you. He says that you are to sow to yourself in righteousness, break up your foul ground, and seek the Lord till He rains righteousness upon you. So you have responsibility. There must be a determination in your heart that you are going to fulfill that responsibility by the grace of God. Then comes actualization: you must actually do what you determine in seeking the Lord.

Repentance is God's gift, but you have a responsibility to seek Him for that gift. When God gives you the gift of repentance, He is not going to repent for you. That is something you must actually do yourself. When you repent, you are exercising the gift God has given you. Likewise, faith is God's gift, but God is not going to believe in Jesus Christ for you. When you actually receive Christ as He is fully and freely offered in the gospel, you are exercising the gift of faith that God has given you.

The same truth applies to preparing the heart. When we seek Him to fulfill our responsibility, we do what He requires, and He enables us to do it. Then we are exercising the gift God has given us. There must first be a constant and continuous preparation. We must prepare our hearts daily, sometimes hourly, sometimes minute by

minute. It must be done constantly and continually. Hezekiah prepared his heart, and God wrought a great revival under him; yet one chapter later Hezekiah's heart was lifted up in pride, and God judged him. There was no constant and continual preparation.

Just because God gives us victory today does not mean that we can presume upon Him for victory tomorrow. There must be constant and continual preparation. There must also be an instant and immediate preparation. When faced with sin and temptation from the world, the flesh, or any other source, we must immediately return to the Word of God and His commands, put the thought of sin and wickedness out of our minds, and fill our minds with the Word of God and with Jesus Christ. We must refuse everything contrary to the Word of God. If we refuse a sin five minutes ago and the same sinful thought enters our minds now, we must still refuse that sin.

You've heard the old adage: You can't stop a bird from flying over your head, but you can stop him from building a nest in your hair.

The world, the flesh, and the devil can throw thoughts into your mind quicker than lightning can flash. You can't stop those thoughts from entering your mind, but you can refuse to think about them and keep them there. You have to say, "Lord, that's a wrong thought. That's wicked. That's ungodly. I will not have that thought in my mind. I've put it out of my mind. I refuse that." Then you purposely put into your mind whatever word from the Bible applies to your situation.

There is that instant and immediate preparation. Preparation in every area of life is absolutely necessary. Most of us have gardens, and we know that gardens do not materialize by themselves. You do not simply go out, throw a few seeds on the ground, and say, "We're going to have a very good garden this coming year and a large harvest." It does not work like that. If there is no preparation of the ground, then I can assure you there is not going to be very much harvest.

The same is true in the spiritual realm. Probably the most neglected duty of every child of God is heart preparation. The problem in our churches and in our lives is that most people's hearts are not prepared to receive the Word of God. Consequently, there is

not much harvest in our lives. Have you ever wondered how we can hear the truth so frequently and have so little fruit in our lives? How can we hear so much truth and produce so little fruit? How can we hear it over and over and seemingly remain unaffected by the truth? The answer has to be that our hearts are not prepared to receive the truth.

## The Parable of the Sower and Four Types of Hearers

Now, by way of introduction today, I want to tell you and show you briefly about the parable of the sower. The parable of the sower is found in Matthew 13, Mark 4, and Luke chapter 8. And I want you to turn to those passages and hold them because I'm going to show you something about this parable. That's Matthew 13, Mark 4, and Luke 8. In fact, our Lord tells us that this parable is vitally important because He also says, if you know not this parable, how will you know other parables as well? So I want you to turn then to Matthew 13, to Mark 4, and then to Luke chapter 8. Okay? And I want you to hold these passages because we're going to be looking at them in just a moment in a little more detail. Now, without me going into great detail and exposition of this parable, the parable of the sower is simply this. First of all, the sower in this parable is none other than the Lord Jesus Himself.

By implication, it would imply that the sower then would not only be Christ, but all true preachers and teachers of the Word of God. In other words, it's someone who is putting forth the Word of God. The seed in this parable, according to Luke 8, verse 11, is the Word of God. He says the seed is the Word of God. Then, of course, the ground is the heart or mind of man.

Now, what I want you to see in this is simply that our Lord will show you the different types of ground, the condition of that ground, and the different responses. In fact, let's go to our Bibles to Matthew 13. I'm sorry, Matthew 13. And let's begin with verse three. And let me just read these first few verses and then I'll point it out. Matthew 13, verse three.

"And he spake many things unto them in parables, saying, Behold, a sower went forth to sow. And when he sowed, some seeds fell by the wayside, and the fowls came and devoured them up. Some fell

upon stony places where they had not much earth, and forthwith they sprung up, because they had no deepness of earth. But when the sun was up, they were scorched, and because they had no root, they withered away. And some fell among thorns, and the thorns sprung up and choked them. But other fell into good ground, and brought forth fruit, some a hundredfold, some sixtyfold, and some thirtyfold, who have ears to hear, let him hear."

Now, I want you to note there are four different types of hearers. And there are four different responses.

## The Wayside Hearer: The Hard-Hearted

The first hearer is known as the wayside hearer because verse 4 says, “some seeds fell by the wayside.” Now, there is another name that you can give the wayside hearer. What is it? He could also be called the hard-hearted hearer.

We know the interpretation of this parable in detail because our Lord gives the interpretation Himself. For instance, we are talking now about the wayside hearer. Look in verse 4: “And when he sowed, some seeds fell by the wayside, and the fowls came and devoured them up.” Now skip over to verse 19. In fact, if you look at verse 18, our Lord says, “Hear ye therefore the parable of the sower.” He is going to explain this parable. He says in verse 19, “When anyone heareth the word of the kingdom, now look, and understandeth it not, then cometh the wicked one and catcheth away that which was sown in his heart. This is he who receives seed by the wayside.”

Mark 4:15 gives the same explanation: “And these are they by the wayside, where the word is sown, and when they have heard, Satan cometh immediately, and taketh away the word that was sown in their hearts.” Originally it was the fowls; now it is Satan. If you look in your Bibles, Luke chapter 8 and verse 12 says, “Those by the wayside are they that hear, then cometh the devil, and taketh away the word out of their hearts, lest they should believe and be saved.” First of all, we know that the wayside hearer is unsaved. Our Lord says so Himself.

Now, what in the world is the wayside hearer? Let me explain it. I was raised on a farm. Some of you were raised on a farm. It does not

matter how well you prepare a field for planting; you still have to have a way into that field, a little road. When you start bringing tractors, combines, or whatever other equipment you need into that field, it packs down the ground where the equipment passes. You can sow your seed in the receptive ground, and that is fine. But any seed that falls on the wayside, the hardened or hard-packed ground, is not going into the ground. What is going to happen? The birds are going to come along, and if you happen to have turkeys, it is going to be the turkeys who gobble up all the seed. They are just going to come along and take care of it.

Now, our Lord interprets this as Satan coming and taking away the Word of God. In other words, when someone hears the Bible, does not understand it, does not care whether he understands it or not, and does not want it, then he loses it. This is a picture of someone so hard-hearted that he does not care one iota about the Word of God or truth.

He simply wants to be left alone. He wants to live his life, and he could care less whether there was any fruit in his life based upon the Word of God. He is a wayside hearer; he is hard-hearted. I have encountered people like that. I have tried to witness to people, and they have told me poignantly, “I am not interested in hearing that.”

## The Stony Ground Hearer

The hard-hearted hearer says, “Don’t talk to me about Christ. I don’t want to hear that.” That is exactly what this is. Any little truth that has been given him is immediately taken out of his mind.

## The Stony Ground Hearer: The Shallow-Hearted

Secondly, there is not just the hard-hearted hearer; there is the stony ground hearer. In Matthew chapter 13, verse 5, He said, “And some fell upon stony places where they had not much earth, and forthwith they sprung up because they had no deepness of earth.” Another name for the stony ground hearer is the shallow-hearted hearer.

When you think of the stony ground hearer, do not think of ground with a lot of stones on it. Plants can grow through stones.

Have you noticed how grass goes through concrete? If there is just a little crack, there is grass or a weed there.

I was preaching in Pennsylvania one time at a camp. A creek ran down by the cabin where I was staying, so one morning I went walking down the creek. To my amazement, I stood there with my mouth open because there was a boulder as big around as this room, and sitting right on top of it was a pine tree. The pine tree was that big around. Its roots went around the boulder and down into the ground and into the creek. In fact, some of the roots were almost as big around as the tree itself.

What is our Lord talking about when He speaks of this stony ground? He is not talking about ground with many stones on it. He is talking about ground that appears to have three, four, or five inches of good topsoil, but underneath is a solid sheet of stone, a solid layer of rock.

What happens when you put a plant in that kind of ground? Once planted, it immediately shoots straight up because it cannot develop a root system or get deep down into the ground. All its energy goes upward. When you see those plants, you think, "Boy, look at that. I wish all my gardens were like these." But when the sun gets really hot, the plant wilts and dies. Why? It has no root system; it cannot get sustenance or nourishment. Now look at what our Lord says.

Matthew 13:20–21 interprets the stony-ground hearer: "But he that received the seed in the stony places, the same is he that heareth the word, and anon with joy receiveth it; yet hath he not root in himself, but dureth for a while: for when tribulation or persecution ariseth because of the word, by and by he is offended." The word anon means at once or immediately.

This is the person who hears the Word of God and says, "Praise God, hallelujah, this is just what I have been waiting for. This is wonderful." You may think, "I wish all my converts were like this," but the next thing you know, a little persecution comes, or his feelings are hurt, and he says, "If this is Christianity, I am not going to put up with it." Then he leaves.

Mark 4 tells us the same thing, beginning in verse 16: "And these are they likewise, which are sown on stony ground, who, when they

have heard the word, immediately receive it with gladness, and have no root in themselves, and so endure but for a time: afterward, when affliction or persecution ariseth for the word's sake, immediately they are offended." The wayside hearer was lost, and the stony-ground hearer is likewise lost—just as lost as the wayside hearer.

Luke 8:13 says, "They on the rock are they, which, when they hear, receive the word with joy; and these have no root, which for a while believe, and in time of temptation fall away." There is such a thing as a temporary believer. That does not mean he is saved; he is not. He believes temporarily, and the proof that he was never really saved is that his belief was only temporary.

That is the stony-ground hearer. I have encountered people like that all my life. Someone says, "Praise God," and seems to be on fire, but six months later you cannot find him anywhere. Then, very quickly, there is a third kind: the thorny-ground hearer in Matthew 13. Just as the wayside hearer is hard-hearted, and the stony-ground hearer is shallow-hearted, the thorny-ground hearer is half-hearted. Look at verse 7.

## The Thorny Ground Hearer: The Half-Hearted

"And some fell among thorns, and the thorns sprung up and choked them." Let me tell you what the thorny ground hearer is. He is someone who tries to begin and continue a Christian life. Come on in. He is someone who tries to begin and continue the Christian life without repentance.

Now, I want you to note something in Matthew 13. Notice, if you would please, he said this seed fell among thorns. Help me out. If the seed fell among thorns, what does that mean? The thorns were already there. Never been dealt with. They'd never been pulled up. So the thorns already had the advantage. And when the seed fell among those thorns, what happened? The thorns choked the seed and the seed yielded no fruit. Now, I want you to notice how our Lord interprets this. So if you look at Matthew 13 in verse 22, he says, "He also that receives seed among the thorns, is he that heareth the word, and the care of this world, and the deceitfulness of riches, choke the word, and he becometh unfruitful." Now, it doesn't matter

if you want to look at it in Mark chapter 4, in verses 18 and 19. Mark chapter 4. And that which fell among thorns are they, note if you would, are they, we're talking about people now, "and that which fell among thorns are they which when they have heard go forth and are choked with the cares and riches and pleasures of this life and bring forth no fruit to perfection."

So here is the man then that just absolutely brings nothing to perfection. He brings no fruit. I was reading in Mark 4 and verse 18. "And these are they which are sown among thorns, such as hear the word, and the cares of this world, and the deceitfulness of riches, and the lust of other things entering in. Choke the word, and it becomes unfruitful." So it really doesn't matter where you read, either Matthew 13, Mark 4, Luke 8. What he's saying is that once again, that the thorny ground hearer never ever produces fruit. The only hearer in this parable that produces fruit is the good ground hearer. The good ground hearer has another name. He is called the whole-hearted hearer. So look in your Bibles, Matthew 13, verse 8. Our Lord says, "But other, that is other seed, fell on the good ground and brought forth fruit, some a hundredfold, some sixtyfold, some thirtyfold." Now, I do want you to look at Mark 4 and Luke 8 only because there's another phrase that I want to show you.

## The Good Ground Hearer: The Whole-Hearted

Look in Mark chapter 4 and verse 20. We are still talking about the good ground hearer: “And these are they which are sown on good ground, such as hear the word, and receive it, and bring forth fruit, some thirtyfold, some sixty, and some an hundred.” Now look in Luke chapter 8, verse 15: “But they that on the good ground are they which in an honest and good heart, having heard the word, keep it, and bring forth fruit with patience.”

This message is preparing your heart to hear the Word of God. Our Lord has given us the parable of the sower. Whenever the Word of God is preached, there are usually four responses. There is the wayside response, the hard-hearted hearer who could care less. There is the stony-ground response, where a person says, “Yippee, praise the Lord, this is it,” but six months later you cannot find him anywhere. Then there is the thorny-ground, or half-hearted, hearer:

“I am tied up making a living. I can barely make ends meet. I have this payment, this car, this boat.” The cares of this world and the pleasures of this life eat him up. He has no time. Only the wholehearted hearer, the good-ground hearer, brings forth fruit.

Let me point something out. What did our Lord say in Matthew 7, verses 16 and 20? “By their fruit ye shall know them.” Some good-ground hearers bring forth thirtyfold, some sixty, and some an hundred. Not everybody produces the same amount of fruit, but every true Christian does produce some fruit. It is discernible. If the Holy Spirit of God is in us, there will be fruit. The Bible says in Romans 8, verse 9, “Now if any man have not the Spirit of Christ, he is none of his.”

Let us put two and two together: if there is no fruit, there is no Holy Spirit; and if there is no Holy Spirit, you do not belong to Christ. If you are a child of God, there will be fruit in your life.

The whole point of the parable of the sower is this: unless your heart is prepared, you will never receive any benefit from the preaching of the Word of God. Did the wayside hearer receive any benefit? No. The stony-ground hearer? No. The thorny-ground hearer? No. The only one who received any benefit was the one whose heart was prepared. You may give a positive response temporarily, like the stony-ground hearer, but it is still a non-beneficial response because it is a non-saving response. It is only the good-ground hearer who, in a good and honest heart, heard the Word of God and kept it. Mark this down: unless our hearts are prepared, we will never benefit from the Word of God.

## The Necessity of Heart Preparation to Benefit from the Word

I've heard people complain over and over, “My pastor doesn't feed me. My pastor doesn't teach me.” I know there are many preachers who do not study, and many for whom preaching is simply a job, not a ministry. I understand that. But a lot of the time, it is not the preacher and it is not the sermon. It is you. Unless your heart is prepared, no matter how glorious or how good the sermon, you will never benefit one thing from the Word of God. Heart preparation is necessary.

Now, go in your Bibles to James chapter one. We started in Second Chronicles 12 and verse 14, and that will be our lead text throughout this study. But God commands us not only to understand the importance of keeping our heart and how to keep it; He also commands us to prepare our hearts to receive the Word of God. James chapter 1, verse 16:

## Exposition of James 1:16-18: Admonition, Declaration, and Illustration

"Do not err, my beloved brethren. Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above and cometh down from the Father of lights, with whom is no variableness, neither shadow of turning. Of his own will begat he us with the word of truth, that we should be a kind of firstfruits of his creatures. Wherefore, my beloved brethren, let every man be swift to hear, slow to speak, slow to wrath, for the wrath of man worketh not the righteousness of God. Wherefore, lay apart all filthiness, and superfluity, and naughtiness, and receive with meekness the engrafted word, which is able to save your souls. Be ye doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving your own selves."

It will take not only today but two more Sundays to finish this passage, so I am going to give it to you point by point. Remember, we are talking about preparing your heart to hear or receive the Word of God. The very first point is an admonition. James says in verse 16, "Do not err, my beloved brethren."

As you read through your Bibles, you will discover many warnings, cautions, prohibitions, and admonitions. The Apostle Paul uses the phrase, "Do not be deceived." James says, "Do not err." The Greek word translated "deceived" is the same word translated "err": planaō. It means to cause to go astray, to lead astray from the right way, to wander, to roam, to be led into error, to be led from the truth, to go into error, or to be deceived.

What is James saying? In verse 16, he says, "Do not be led astray. Do not be deceived. Do not be in error concerning this." Verse 16 is not only a strong word of caution; in the Greek, it is in the imperative mode. An imperative is a command.

I could look at Doc and say, “Please stop doing that.” That is a request. But if I said, “Stop doing that,” that is a command. This is exactly what James is writing: “Do not err, my beloved brethren.” In other words, I command you not to err.

Many commentators apply verse 16 only to verses 13 through 15: “Let no man say when he is tempted, I am tempted of God: for God cannot be tempted with evil, neither tempteth he any man: But every man is tempted, when he is drawn away of his own lust, and enticed. Then when lust hath conceived, it bringeth forth sin: and sin, when it is finished, bringeth forth death.” They say that “Do not err” is a caution against the maliciousness and ridiculousness of charging God with sin.

But verse 16 occurs in the middle of a paragraph. The paragraph begins in verse 13 and does not end until verse 18. You may not be able to see that in your Bibles, but it is that way in the Greek text. Therefore, verse 16 applies not only to what precedes it, but also to what follows it.

It is a serious sin and great wickedness to charge God Himself with sin, to make God the author of sin, or to make Him the infuser of wickedness. That is sin in and of itself. Elihu said in Job 34:10, “Far be it from God, that he should do wickedness; and from the Almighty, that he should commit iniquity.” God is not the author of sin, nor is He the infuser of sin. It is true that He is the controller of sin, and that He may have allowed it for His greater glory, but God is not its author. Man is the one who sins, not God; man is responsible for sin.

Yet it is an even greater error not to prepare your heart to receive the Word of God. If your heart is not prepared to receive the Word of God, you will never be corrected in any error.

So verse 16 applies not only to that which precedes it, but to that which follows it as well. When James says, “Do not err, my beloved brethren,” he is saying that there are some things in which you can err and get by, but there are other things in which you cannot err and get by. I might err in counting my money and think I have more than I do, or even less than I do. I can get by with that. But if I look down

the barrel of my pistol and say, “I wonder if this thing is loaded or empty,” and pull the trigger, I cannot get by with that.

You cannot get by with not having your heart prepared to receive the Word of God. You might get by with some errors and misunderstandings concerning the Bible and some of its teaching. But if your heart is never prepared, those errors will never be corrected, and you will never receive any benefit from the Word of God. James begins by saying, “Do not err.” Do not be deceived in this.

Secondly, in verse 16 you have an admonition; in verse 17, you have a declaration: “Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, and cometh down from the Father of lights, with whom is no variableness, neither shadow of turning.”

When you and I think of gifts, we think of birthdays, anniversaries, and special occasions. But when it comes to our heavenly Father, we need to ask this question: Is not everything that He gives us a gift? The truth of the matter is yes. Some will respond, “I work for what I possess.” You may work for what you possess, but who gave you the ability to work? Who gave you the ability to think, to know, and to understand? Who gave you life, health, and strength and enabled you to do what you are doing? Everything that God gives you is a gift. Everything that God gives you is for your good and His glory—even if what He gives us is suffering.

The Bible says in Philippians 1:29, “Unto you is given on behalf of Christ, not only to believe on his name, but also to suffer for his sake.” That is a tremendous thought. Do you realize that faith is the gift of God? So is suffering. Just as not everyone has the gift of faith, not everyone has the gift of suffering. Whatever God gives us is His gift.

It is for our good and His glory. The Bible says this in Deuteronomy 32 and verse 4 concerning God. I love this: “He is the rock. His work is perfect for all of His ways are judgment. A God of truth and without iniquity, just and right is He.” Whatever God does is right, and whatever God gives us is His gift. When we think about gifts, look at verse 17 again: “Every good gift and every perfect gift is

from above and cometh down from the Father of lights with whom is no variableness, neither shadow of turning."

When we normally think of gifts, we tend to think of God's common gifts: health, life, family, friends, provision, and protection. Can you imagine how many miles we've traveled in automobiles and planes? We've never been involved in a wreck. That's the mercy, grace, and gift of God. We have seen plenty of them, but God has spared us. That's grace and a gift. We ought to thank Him for those common gifts, but there are special gifts that God gives us that most of the time we never even think about nor praise Him for. Do you know what one such gift is? Are you listening? One such special gift is the ability to hear and understand the Word of God.

We are talking about the parable of the sower, and our Lord says this is a very important parable. After He had given the parable, the disciples came and said to Him, "Why speakest thou unto them in parables?" Why was He talking in parables? Look at what our Lord says in Matthew chapter 13 and verse 11: "And he answered and said unto them, Because it is given." Stop right there. It is given.

That is, it is a gift. "It is given unto you to know the mysteries of the kingdom of God, but to them it is not given. For whosoever hath to him shall be given, and he shall have more abundantly, but whosoever hath not from him shall be taken away even that he hath. Therefore, speak I to them in parables, because they seeing, see not, and hearing they hear not, neither do they understand. And in them is fulfilled the prophecy of Isaiah, which said, By hearing you shall hear, and shall not understand, and seeing you shall see, and shall not perceive. For this people's heart is waxed gross, and their ears are dull of hearing, and their eyes they have closed, lest at any time they should see with their eyes, and hear with their ears, and should understand with their hearts, and should be converted, and I should heal them. Look, but blessed are your eyes, for they see, and your ears, for they hear. For verily I say unto you, that many prophets and righteous men have desired to see those things which you see, and have not seen them, and to hear those things which you hear, and have not heard them."

Now, notice what our Lord said. Why did He speak to these people in parables? He said, "Because it is given unto you to hear,

but not to them." Then He said, "But blessed are your eyes, for they see. Blessed are your eyes, for they see. Blessed are your ears, for they hear." Many righteous men—the Old Testament prophets—would have given their right arm to have seen the day of the Messiah and to know in fullness what we know today, but they saw only dimly through a picture. If you understand the Word of God, if you are able to hear it, believe it, and receive it, it is a gift of God.

John 12 gives another clear demonstration of this. Though our Lord had performed many miracles before them, they still did not believe on Him. John records: "But though he had done so many miracles before them, yet they believed not on him. Now watch. Here our Lord is performing all of these miracles, and yet they believe not on him. Verse 38, that the saying of Isaiah the prophet might be fulfilled, which he spake, Lord, who has believed our report? And to whom hath the arm of the Lord been revealed? Therefore, they could not believe, because Isaiah said again, He hath blinded their eyes, and hardened their hearts, that they should not see with their eyes, nor understand with their heart, and be converted, and I should heal them. These things said Isaiah, when he saw His glory, and spake of Him."

Our Lord was performing miracles one after another before all these people, and they still did not believe. They had eyes to see, but they saw not. They had ears to hear, but they heard not. Their heart was hardened, not prepared. Therefore, nothing they saw or heard benefited them in any way whatsoever.

Luke 24 gives a perfect illustration. Two men were walking on the road when a man joined them and asked why they were sad. They answered that Jesus of Nazareth had been crucified. They had supposed Him to be the Messiah, and this was the third day—the day on which He was supposed to have risen. Our Lord then said to them: "O fools, and slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have written. Ought not Christ to have suffered and entered His glory, and beginning at Moses and all the prophets, He expounded in them all things concerning Himself?"

Our Lord joined Himself to these two men and walked with them, yet they did not know Him. He talked with them, and they did not know Him.

The Bible said their eyes were holding. They did not see Him. They saw, but they did not see; they heard, but they did not hear. When they reached their destination, they invited our Lord in, and He made as if He was going home further. But He went in with them. When He took the bread, broke it, and blessed it, the Bible says their eyes were opened.

Luke 24 says, "And they drew nigh unto the village where they went, and he made it as though he would have gone further. And they constrained him, saying, Abide with us, for it is toward evening, and the day is far spent. And he went in to tarry with them. And it came to pass, as he sat at meat with them, he took bread and blessed it, and break and gave it to them."

"And their eyes were opened, and they knew him. And he vanished out of their sight. And they said one to another, Did not our heart burn within us while he talked with us by the way, and while he opened to us the scripture? And they rose up the same hour, and returned to Jerusalem, and found the eleven gathered together, and them that were with them, saying, The Lord is risen indeed, and hath appeared unto Simon. And they told what things were done in the way, and how he was known to them in breaking of the bread."

"And as they thus spake, Jesus himself stood in the midst of them and said unto them, Peace be unto you." Skip down to verse 44: "And he said unto them, These are the words which I spake unto you while I was yet with you, that all things must be fulfilled which are written in the law of Moses and the prophets and the Psalms concerning me."

Then opened He their understanding, that they might understand the Scriptures. What did our Lord do to those two men on the road to Emmaus? He opened their eyes. What did He do to His disciples, people who already believed—Christians? He opened their understanding, that they might grasp the Word of God. It is a special gift to hear, believe, receive, and understand Scripture. You know what our Lord said in Matthew 11, verse 27?

Our Lord said, “All things are delivered unto me of my father. And no man knoweth the son, but the father. And no man knoweth a father but the Son, and he to whomsoever he will reveal him.” How many people know the Son? Only the Father. How many people know the Father? Only the Son. Who gets to know the Son and the Father? Only those to whom it is revealed.

In Matthew chapter 16, when Christ came again into the coast of Caesarea Philippi, He asked His disciples, “Who do the sons of men say that I am?” They answered that some said He was Elijah, Elisha, or one of the prophets. Then He asked, “But who do you say that I am?” Simon Peter made this great confession: “Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God.”

When Peter made this confession, did Jesus Christ praise Peter’s intellect, his investigative skills, or his quickness of observation? Did He say, “Peter, you’re really smart. You figured this out when no one else could”? No. When Peter said, “Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God,” Jesus said, “Blessed art thou, Simon Barjona, for flesh and blood have not revealed it unto thee, but my Father which is in heaven.” What did He do? He opened Peter’s understanding. He opened his eyes that he might see. We have to conclude that spiritual sight and spiritual understanding are the gift of God. They are the gift of God.

What did Paul tell Timothy in 2 Timothy chapter 2 and verse 7? He said, “Consider what I say; and the Lord give thee understanding in all things.” Understanding is the gift of God.

We have seen an admonition and a declaration. Now, if you go back in your Bibles to the book of James, chapter 1 and verse 18, we will see an illustration. We are talking about preparing your heart to hear and receive the Word of God. We have seen the admonition: Do not err in this. We have seen the declaration: Every good gift comes from above, from the Father of lights. God gives us the gift of hearing and understanding. Now James gives us an illustration: “Of his own will begat he us with the word of truth, that we should be a kind of firstfruits of his creatures.” James gives us an illustration of God’s sovereignty, particularly God’s sovereignty in salvation.

## The Sovereign's Will

In the context of receiving the Word of God and preparing your heart to receive the Word of God, ask yourself: Why does James bring up the subject of God's absolute sovereignty at this point? Or, why is James referring to God's sovereignty in salvation now as an illustration? In this verse are four very important truths. First, the sovereign's will. Look in verse 18: "of his own will."

Do you realize that God's will is the cause of everything? What prompted God to create the world? Was God under any pressure, coercion, duress, or compulsion to create? Did God have to create? No. Why did God create the world? Because He willed to create the world. He created the world and everything therein because of His own will. He chose to do it for His own honor and glory.

Revelation 4:11 says, "Thou art worthy, O Lord, to receive glory and honor and power, for Thou hast created all things, and for Thy pleasure they are and were created." Why did God create the world? Because He willed to. It pleased Him to do it.

Now, what prompted God the Father to send Jesus Christ? Was He under any duress, pressure, coercion, or compulsion? Was God the Father obligated to save His fallen, sinful creatures? No. The fact that God sent Christ means that He did so out of His own will. That was the cause.

Look at Ephesians 1:9–10. We are talking about Christ now in this context: "Having made known unto us the mystery of His will, according to His good pleasure which He had purposed in Himself; that in the dispensation of the fulness of times He might gather together in one all things in Christ, both which are in heaven, and which are on earth; even in him." What was the cause of God sending Christ and making Him preeminent in all things? His will—the mystery of His will. The only reason Christ came was because God the Father willed that He came.

What prompted Christ to create his own will? What prompted God the Father to send Christ his own will? What prompted God to save sinners? Was God under any duress, any pressure, any compulsion, or any coercion to save? Was God obligated to save anyone? Was God obligated to save you? You know, I like what the

Apostle Paul said in Romans 9, verse 29: “Except the Lord of the Sabbath had left us a remnant, we should all have been made as Sodom and Gomorrah.”

Do you realize God may justly have condemned us all? God was not obligated to save us. Look at Paul's argument in Romans chapter 9, beginning with verse 9: “For this is the word of promise, At this time I will come, and Sarah shall have a son. And not only this, but when Rebecca had also conceived by one, even by Father Isaac, the children being not yet born, and neither having done any good or evil, that the purpose of God according to election might stand, not of works, but of him that calleth. It was said unto her, The elder shall serve the younger, as it is written, Jacob have I loved, but Esau have I hated.”

“What shall we say then? Is there unrighteousness with God? God forbid. For he saith to Moses, I will have mercy on whom I will have mercy, and I will have compassion on whom I will have compassion. So then, it is not of him that willeth, nor of him that runneth, but of God that showeth mercy. For the scripture saith unto Pharaoh, Even for this same purpose have I raised thee up, that I might show my power in thee, and that my name might be declared throughout all the earth. Therefore hath he mercy on whom he will have mercy, and whom he will he hardeneth.”

"Thou wilt say then unto me, Why doth he yet find fault? For who has resisted his will? Nay, but, O man, who art thou that replyest against God? Shall the thing formed say to him that formed it, Why hast thou made me thus? Hath not the potter power over the clay of the same lump to make one vessel of honour and another dishonour? What if God, willing to show his wrath and to make his power known, endured with much longsuffering the vessel of wrath fitted to destruction, that he might make known the riches of his glory on the vessels of mercy which he had aforeprepared unto glory." Notice what he says. God was not obligated in saving anyone. It is not of him that willeth or him that runneth, but God that showeth mercy.

The passage I like is in Psalm 115 and verse 3: "But our God is in the heavens. He hath done whatsoever he hath pleased." That is what he is talking about: of his own will. Why did God create? He

willed to do it. Why did God send Christ? He willed to do it. Why did God save sinners? He willed to do it. Everything is the will of God.

You say, "Brother Weaver, God foreknows everything." I understand that. But the foreknowledge of God is not what causes things to happen. It is his will. I foreknow that, if the Lord lets the world stand, the sun will come up in the morning. But my foreknowledge does not make the sun come up. God's will makes the sun come up.

Now notice the sovereign's will. Secondly, in James chapter one, the sovereign's work: "Of his own will begat he us." Begetting is the work of God, and especially it is the work of the Father. My wife may have borne all of our children, but I beget them. Begetting is the work of the Father.

Of His own will, beget He us. The word begat is from the Greek word apokueō, and it literally means to bring forth, to bring forth from the womb, to cease being pregnant. Of His own will, God brought us forth. What is He saying? Regeneration is the work of God alone. It is God who speaks life to the soul. It is God who places life in man. Regeneration is the operation of God, not of man. Regeneration and conversion are not the same thing.

Let me show you something. I want you to turn to two passages. The first one, Psalm 28, and the second one, Colossians Chapter 2. Colossians 2 and Psalm 28, and we're going to Psalm 28 first. But get ready to find Colossians 2, hold it. So look in Psalm 28, and let me just show you about the operation of God. In Psalm 28 and verse 5, there's a declaration that God issues against the heathen, against the wicked. He says this, "because they regard not the works of the Lord, nor the operation of his hands, he shall destroy them and not build them up." The wicked then have no regard for the works of God, nor the operation of his hands. What is the operation of God's hands? Look in your Bibles to the book of Colossians chapter 2 and verse 12. Colossians 2 and verse 12. We've got two doctors in here today, and neither one of them have ever performed this operation. Watch this Colossians 2. In fact, let's begin. Let's begin reading with verse 11.

Colossians 2 verse 11. "In whom also you are circumcised with a circumcision made without hands, in putting off the body of sins of

the flesh by the circumcision of Christ," are you looking? "...buried with Him in baptism, wherein also you are risen with Him through the faith of the operation of God who has raised us from the dead." What? The operation of God? What was the operation of God? The operation of God was not just raising Christ from the dead, but raising us from the dead in Him and circumcising our hearts, regenerating us, giving us life in Christ. That was the operation of God.

Of His own will begat He us, the sovereign's will, the sovereign's work. It is the work of God to regenerate. It is the work of God to beget. And look, if you would please very quickly at James 1 in verse 18 again, you have the sovereign's word. "Of his own will begat he us with the word of truth." Do you remember what our Lord said in John chapter 6 in verse 63? He said a lot of things in that passage in John 6.

He's the bread of life. You remember that? But when you get to John 6 and verse 63, it says this, "it is the spirit that quickeneth. The flesh profiteth nothing. The words that I speak unto you, they are spirit and they are life." You know, when our Lord was demonstrating His deity at the Pool of Siloam in John chapter 5, He said this in verse 21, "For as the father raiseth up the dead and quickeneth them, even so the son quickeneth whom he will." Do you realize only God can speak life into the soul of man? Only God can do that.

How did this world come into existence? God spoke it into existence, as Scripture says. Do you know how you came into existence as a Christian? Listen to 2 Corinthians 4:6: “For God, who commanded the light to shine out of darkness, has shined in our hearts to give us the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ.” Just as God sovereignly said, “Let there be light” in creation, God said, “Let there be light” in our hearts.

The Sovereign, by His own will and sovereign work, begat us by His sovereign Word. It is life. In John 11, when our Lord came to Lazarus, Martha said, “Lord, not now, for he has been dead for four days; he stinketh.” Our Lord said, “Remove that stone,” and cried, “Lazarus, come forth.” What did He do? He sovereignly and powerfully gave Lazarus life in that tomb.

His word is life. Consider the sovereign's work in verse 18: "Of his own will begat he us with the word of truth, that we should be a kind of firstfruits of his creatures." We are the beginning of a new creation. This new creation differs from the old creation: those who belong to it have been brought back to God.

When God created the world, He created Adam and Eve and placed them in the garden. They sinned, hid from God, ran from God, and covered themselves with fig leaves. Ever since then, man has been running from God. Why did Jesus Christ come? You would answer, "He came to save sinners." That is true if you understand what salvation entails. In 1 Peter 3 and verse 18, the Bible tells us specifically why Jesus Christ came. Jesus Christ came and died, the just for the unjust, that He might bring us back to God. Instead of running from God, now we run to God.

We have been raised to walk in newness of life. Instead of wanting to get away from His commandments, we want to keep them. Instead of ignoring Him, we want to acknowledge Him. In other words, we are the firstfruits of His creatures. We are a new world order. In the fall of man, man fled; in regeneration and conversion, man comes back to God. The only new world order that will always exist and continue is the one where Jesus Christ is head of a glorious and godly people that He made.

That is what the Bible says in 2 Peter 2 and verse 13: "Nevertheless, we according to His promise, now listen, look for a new heaven and a new earth wherein dwelleth righteousness." The only new world order that will continue throughout all eternity is the one that God ordained and predestinated in His Son, Jesus Christ. In that new world order, Jesus Christ will be recognized totally, completely, and absolutely as Lord of Lords and King of Kings. We are talking about preparing your heart to receive the Word of God.

## The Unanswered Connection and Call to Prayer

We've given you an admonition. Do not err. We've given you a declaration, every good gift and every perfect gift coming from above. We've now given you an illustration out of God's sovereignty. I want you to ask yourself this question. Why did James introduce God's sovereignty in verse 18? Ask it another way. Why is James

emphasizing God's sovereignty in salvation? Ask it another way. Ask this question. What is the connection between the sovereignty of God in salvation and preparing your heart to receive the Word of God? What possible connection could there be? How can James talk about God's sovereignty and then immediately begin to say, let every man be swift to hear and slow to speak and slow to wrath? What is the connection?

Well, in order to receive that answer, you must tune in next week at the same time, at the same channel. And I can assure you the answer will be well worth your time. When you will find out about preparing your heart to receive the word of God. Let's pray. Father, we ask that you speak to our hearts, that you teach us, help us, build us up in the most holy faith and help us to see the absolute importance of preparing our hearts constantly, continually, even instantly and immediately when the emergency arises. Lord, help us to see there must be a preparation to receive the Word of God. Give us grace now, Lord, to serve Thee acceptably with reverence and godly fear. In Thy name we pray. Amen.

Well, in order to receive that answer, you must tune in next week at the same time, at the same channel. And I can assure you the answer will be well worth your time. when you will find out about preparing your heart to receive the word of God. Let's pray. Father, we ask that you speak to our hearts, that you teach us, help us, build us up in the most holy faith and help us to see the absolute importance of preparing our hearts constantly, continually, even instantly and immediately when the emergency arises. Lord, help us to see there must be a preparation to receive the Word of God. Give us grace now, Lord, to serve Thee acceptably with reverence and godly fear. In Thy name we pray. Amen.

CHAPTER 4

# Heart Preparation - 4 of 7

## Review of Previous Messages on Heart Preparation

Our general theme is preparing the heart. This is the fourth message, and I will take a little time to review. In 2 Chronicles chapter 12 and verse 14, the beginning of our study, we read of King Rehoboam: "And he did evil because he prepared not his heart to seek the Lord." In James chapter 1, beginning with verse 16, the Bible says, "Do not err, my beloved brethren."

"Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, and cometh down from the Father of lights, with whom is no variableness, neither shadow of turning. Of his own will begat he us with the word of truth, that we should be a kind of firstfruits of his creatures. Wherefore, my beloved brethren, let every man be swift to hear, slow to speak, slow to wrath, for the wrath of man worketh not the righteousness of God. Wherefore, lay apart all filthiness and superfluity of naughtiness, and receive with meekness the engrafted word which is able to save your souls."

Today's message is a continuation of last week's message, "Preparing Your Heart to Receive the Word of God." The very first

message dealt with the importance of heart preparation. We found that without heart preparation we are bound to sin, because Rehoboam did evil. Why? Because he prepared not his heart to seek the Lord. In other words, heart preparation is absolutely essential and necessary.

The second message answered the question, “How do I prepare my heart?” There are actually three steps. The first is realization: we have a responsibility to prepare our hearts, but we cannot. The Bible says, “The preparations of the heart in man are from the Lord.” So if our hearts are ever prepared, God must prepare them.

Secondly, there is determination. That is where we determine that we are going to seek the Lord for His grace, His mercy, and His power to enable us to fulfill our responsibility. Thirdly, there is actualization. That is where we actually receive and apply that grace and mercy, and our hearts are actually prepared. I gave two or three illustrations, including repentance and faith.

We also discovered in heart preparation that there are two basic steps. There is a constant and continuous preparation that we need to be doing on a daily basis, constantly and continually and consistently. And secondly, there is that instantaneous or immediate heart preparation which we are to do when we are faced with temptation, sin, and wickedness. That is, we must once again fly to the Scriptures and appeal to God for mercy and grace to keep our hearts and minds.

Probably there is much more that could be said as far as how I prepare my heart. But the three steps that I gave you would be what I would call an irreducible minimum. I do not believe that it could be explained any more succinctly.

## Review of Last Week's Message on Receiving the Word

Last week we began the message on preparing our hearts to receive the Word of God. Very quickly, we went through the parable of the sower, found in Matthew 13, Mark 4, and Luke 8. We found that our Lord said there were four different types of hearers. There was the wayside hearer, and another name for him would be the

hard-hearted hearer. There was the stony ground hearer, and another name for him would be the shallow-hearted hearer. There was the thorny ground hearer, and another name for him would be the half-hearted hearer. Fourthly, there was the good ground hearer, and another name for him would be a whole-hearted hearer.

Out of those four different responses, only one of them was saving. Only the good ground hearer brought forth fruit, which led us to a biblical conclusion: not all responses to the Word of God are saving responses. The stony ground hearer gave a response, but it was non-saving. The thorny ground hearer was the man who tried to begin and continue the Christian life without repentance, and that was non-saving as well.

The only seed that produced was the seed that fell on fertile ground. In Luke chapter 8, the Bible says, our Lord speaking, that the good ground hearer is he who received the seed in a good and honest heart. In other words, the ground had been prepared.

We began last week in James chapter 1, where we saw three points. First, we saw an admonition in verse 16: “Do not err, my beloved brethren.” I pointed out that there are some things in which you may make an error that are certainly not very detrimental to your life. But there are other things in which you may err that are extremely detrimental, and that is exactly what the Apostle is talking about here. In fact, it is an imperative, which means it is a command. He is commanding us not to be deceived and not to err in this particular thing.

Then, secondly, we saw in verse 17 a declaration: “Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, and cometh down from the Father of lights, with whom is no variableness, neither shadow of turning.” We went through the Bible and saw how God gives us common gifts: life, health, breath, family, finances, and friends. But there are also those special gifts that God gives us. One of those special gifts is the ability to hear, receive, and understand the Word of God. Our Lord said in Matthew 13, Mark 4, and Luke 8, He told His disciples, “To you it is given to hear and understand the Word of God, but to them it is not given.” It is a gift. Therefore, He said, “I speak unto them in parables.”

Then, thirdly, we looked at an illustration in verse 18: “Of his own will begat he us with the word of truth, that we should be a kind of firstfruits of his creatures.” Under this point, James is using an illustration, and he uses the sovereignty of God in salvation as an illustration. So we saw very quickly in verse 18 the sovereign’s will, the sovereign’s work, the Sovereign’s word, and the Sovereign’s world. “Of His own will begat He us,” that is His work, “with His word,” and “that we might be a kind of firstfruits of His creatures,” His world, that is. He is begetting people who will be obedient unto Him.

God was under no pressure, coercion, or duress to create, redeem, or save. Whatever God did in any of those areas, He did according to His own will. The will of God is the source of all things. God created because He willed to create. God sent Christ because He willed to send Christ. God saved because He willed to save. David says it like this in Psalm 115, verse 3: "But our God is in the heavens. He hath done whatsoever He hath pleased."

## The Connection Between God's Sovereignty and Receiving the Word

James is giving us an illustration of God's absolute sovereignty, especially His sovereignty in salvation. Just as God was not obligated to create, send Christ, or save, what He did, He did according to His own will. The Apostle Paul said, "If the Lord of Sabaoth had not left us a remnant, we should have been made as Sodom and Gomorrah."

When I closed the message last week, I asked several leading questions. The first was, "Why did James introduce God's sovereignty in verse 18? Why did he particularly introduce God's sovereignty in salvation?" The third question was, "What is the connection between God's sovereignty in salvation and receiving the word of God?" Today, look at verses 19 through 21. We are going to cover one point, and that is an application—an application of what James has been teaching. In fact, verses 19 and 21 are applications of that teaching. If you look in verse 19, it says, "Wherefore, my beloved brethren," and if you skip down to verse 21, it also begins, "Wherefore." In other words, verses 19 and 21 each begin with the word "wherefore."

"Wherefore" is translated from one simple Greek word that literally means "therefore, in light of, on account of, for which cause, so that, or inasmuch as." Thus, after verse 18, you could read verse 19 this way: "Of His own will begat He us with the word of truth, that we should be a kind of firstfruits of His creatures, on account of," or "for which cause," or "inasmuch as," or "therefore." James is making an application in verses 19 and 21 of what he has already taught. In light of God's absolute sovereignty, mentioned in verse 18, you need to make certain preparations so that whenever He does speak, you will be ready to hear and receive what He says.

Why does James mention God's sovereignty in verse 18? What is the connection between that sovereignty and receiving the Word of God? Just as God is absolutely sovereign in salvation, and He is not obligated to save, so God is equally sovereign in illumination, and He is not obligated to teach. Whenever God does teach, whenever God does speak, you and I had better be ready to hear and receive what God says.

Consider Isaiah 55:6: “Seek ye the Lord while he may be found. Call ye upon him when he is near.” In other words, there are times when He may not be found. There are times when God is not near.

Hold James chapter 1, but look back in your Bibles to Proverbs chapter 1. When God spoke to some people, they did not hear, and the consequence was that God would not hear them. Proverbs 1:23 says, “Turn you at my reproof. Behold, I will pour my spirit upon you. I will make known my words unto you.” God says, “Here I am. I am ready to teach. I am ready to give you truth because I have called.”

But then: “and you refused. I stretched out my hand, and no man regarded. But you have set at nought all my counsel, and would have none of my reproof.” What is God going to do? “I will also laugh at your calamity. I will mock when your fear cometh, when your fear cometh as desolation, and your destruction cometh as a whirlwind, when distress and anguish cometh upon you.”

“Then shall they call upon me, but I will not answer. They shall seek me early, but they shall not find me.” Why? “For that they hated knowledge and did not choose the fear of the Lord, they would have

none of my counsel. They despised all of my reproof. Therefore shall they eat of their own ways and be filled with the fruit of their own devices."

God said, "I'm ready to speak, but you're not ready to listen. I did speak and you totally ignored me." He is not obligated to speak. He is not obligated to teach. And when He does, we'd better be ready.

Let me give you somewhat of an illustration. I say somewhat because it is not a perfect illustration, but I think you will get the point. This truth may be seen in the life and duties of a pastor. Timothy was a pastor, and Paul gave him admonition and counsel. In 2 Timothy 2:2, he tells Pastor Timothy, "And the things that thou hast heard of me among many witnesses, the same commit thou to faithful men who shall be able to teach others also."

I hope you remember that one of the requirements of a pastor is that he must be apt to teach. He must be ready and capable of teaching, but notice something: God does not command me to chase down men and force feed them the truth. I am to be apt to teach, but whom am I to teach? I am to teach faithful men—men who want the truth, who are willing to be taught, and who are willing to make sacrifices for the truth. That is whom I am to teach.

I am not to chase people down and try to make them receive the Word of God. I am to teach men who are willing to hear, who want to hear, and who are willing to sacrifice. In the same way, God is not going to chase us down and cram His truth down our throats. He will speak, and He will speak through His Word, but we had better be ready to hear when He does speak. Look back in James chapter 1, because I want you to get ready for the first application.

## First Application: Swift to Hear, Slow to Speak, Slow to Wrath

Understand, God is not going to force-feed us. James 1:19 says, "Wherefore, my beloved brethren, let every man be swift to hear, slow to speak, slow to wrath, for the wrath of man worketh not the righteousness of God." The first application is this: after he talks about God's sovereignty in salvation, he says, "Wherefore"—in light of, on account of, and because God is sovereign in salvation, He is

therefore absolutely sovereign in illumination—“let every man be swift to hear.” Let us start right there. The word “swift” means quick, fleet, and speedy. In other words, let nothing slow you down. Let nothing deter you. Let nothing get in your way. You had better be quick about hearing the Word of God. Isn’t that amazing? “Let every man be swift to hear.” Run to hear the Word of God, and make every sacrifice necessary to hear the Word of God. Be swift to hear.

The word “hear” is akouo, which means, listen now, not only to hear, but to attend to, consider what has been said, understand, perceive the sense of, and give ear to a teacher. So what is he saying? “Let every man be swift to hear” the teaching of the Word of God. I know and appreciate that some of you drive three hours or two hours to get here. Yet isn’t it amazing that there are a multitude of people wanting to walk across the street to hear the Word of God? In light of the fact that God is sovereign in His teaching and sovereign in His illumination, He says, “Let every man be swift to hear.” Then He says, “Let every man be slow to speak.”

One of my favorite verses is Proverbs 21:23: “Whoso keepeth his mouth and his tongue keepeth his soul from troubles.” I learned this truth a long time ago. I remember telling it years ago, but I will tell you how I learned it. It was when I was a teenager. I was unsaved. I was raised in church, but I was unsaved, and I was out at the lake, a hangout for teenagers. They had swimming, a bowling alley, a skating rink, and a little dance hall.

I went back to the dance hall, where a jukebox was playing, and saw a little girl dancing. It was absolutely repulsive—even to me as a lost teenager.

I looked at this big boy who was standing by me, and his name was Tiny. You know why they called him Tiny, don't you? He was about six-two or three and 250 pounds. When Alice and I got married, the most I ever weighed was 140. I was a skinny little fella with a 28-inch waist and wore a size 14 shirt. I grew up after we got married, but you understand. I looked at this fella and said, "That girl is acting like a slut. Somebody ought to stop her."

I never will forget this big old boy looking at me and saying, "Boy, that's my sister. I don't appreciate you're talking about her like that."

I swallowed and said, "Well, Tiny, I'm sorry if that's your sister, but if it is, you better get out there and stop her." He said, "Oh no, man, I was just teasing you. I don't even know the girl."

I said, "Thank God, thank God, thank God." You see what I'm saying? I didn't have to say that, especially to him, but "whoso keepeth his mouth and his tongue keepeth his soul from troubles."

God says we're to be slow to speak. Let me give you what some of the ancients have said about being slow to speak. Some have said, "Men have two ears but one tongue, and therefore they should hear more than they speak." Another said, "The ears are always open, ever ready to receive instruction, but the tongue is surrounded with a double row of teeth to hedge it in and to keep it in its proper bounds."

How noble was the response of Xenocrates when someone reproached him. He answered that reproach with a profound silence. When someone asked him why he was silent, he answered, "I have sometimes had occasion to regret that I have spoken, but never regret that I have remained silent."

Now God says, "Let every man be swift to hear and let him be slow to speak." The Bible talks about the tongue a great deal in James chapter 3. I could preach an entire message on that. I never will forget what I heard one preacher say. He was a real preacher and pulled no punches. He talked about the tongue being like an automatic sewing machine set on fire out of hell. He told about one woman in a church where he was preaching. After the meeting, she came forward and said, "I want to lay my tongue on the altar."

He said, “Well, lady, there’s 60 feet of it right there. Put what you can on the altar and throw the rest in the corner.” She evidently had a long tongue. A lot of people do. But the Bible says in Psalm 73 and verse 9 how the wicked use their tongue to walk through the heavens. In other words, they could care less about insulting God or insulting man. Now, God is saying, “Let every man be swift to hear, let him be slow to speak.” You be cautious about what you say, especially in response to the teaching of the Word of God.

Let me give you an illustration. Years ago, I was preaching from 1 Thessalonians chapter 1. I simply read the entire chapter because

there were nine verses in it. I was not dealing with verse 4. Verse 4 simply says, “Knowing, brethren beloved, your election of God.” After the service, a man came up to me and said that I should not have read that verse. I said, “Why not? It’s in the Bible.” He replied, “There’s a lot of people that don’t understand election and it upsets them.” I said, “What you’re telling me is you don’t understand election and you’re upset.” He went on to say, “You shouldn’t even be reading those verses.”

I said, “Let me ask you a question. Have you ever read the Bible all the way through one time?” “No, sir.” “Have you ever read the Old Testament all the way through one time?” “No, sir.” “Have you ever read the New Testament all the way through one time?” “No, sir.” I said, “I’ll tell you what you do. You shut up and go home and read your Bible. After you get it thoroughly digested, come back and start talking to me. We’ll look at the Scriptures, and maybe you’ll understand that that word occurs a multitude of times in the Old Testament and the New Testament. You cannot rip out the Word of God just to please people.”

Be careful about your response. That response was very ungodly and very unbiblical. But notice what God says: “Let every man be swift to hear, slow to speak, and slow to wrath.” In other words, do not become angry or upset at the preaching and teaching of the Word of God, nor at the man dispensing it.

When the Word of God is preached, many times our consciences will be pricked and our secret sins exposed. Remember, the Word of God is salt, and sometimes when you rub salt in a wound, it hurts; it smarts. But that salt will also keep the wound from festering. The trouble is that so many people want to become angry at the Word of God. I have had people get up and walk out while I was preaching because they were angry. I have had people cuss me out because they were angry. What is God saying?

You had better be slow to speak, and especially slow to wrath. He tells you why in verse 20: “For the wrath of man worketh not the righteousness of God.” You will never be righteous when you are full of wicked, sinful wrath against the Word of God.

The only reason I am reading this to you is to show you that some of our faithful expositors sometimes get it wrong. I want to read what Matthew Henry said on verse 20. Looking at verses 19 and 20 together, he says, “Wherefore, my beloved brethren, let every man be swift to hear, slow to speak, slow to wrath, for the wrath of man worketh not the righteousness of God.” Now listen to this paragraph from Matthew Henry.

## Correcting Matthew Henry's Disconnection of the Passage

This may be understood as referring to the disputes and differences that Christians in those times of trial were running into among themselves. Whatever matters of differences arise among Christians, each side should be willing to hear the other. People are often so stiff in their own opinions because they are not willing to hear what others have to offer against them. We should be swift to hear reason and truth on all sides, and slow to speak anything that should prevent this. When we do speak, there should be nothing of wrath, for a soft answer turneth away wrath. This epistle is designed to correct a variety of disorders that existed among Christians. These words, “swift to hear, slow to speak, slow to wrath,” may very well be interpreted according to this last explication. We may further observe from them that if men would govern their tongues, they must govern their passions.

When Moses’ spirit was provoked, he spoke unadvisedly with his lips. If we would be slow to speak, we would be slow to wrath.

Now, while Matthew Henry has said some good things in that paragraph, I want you to listen to what he said. He said, “And so this part of the chapter,” that is, verses 19 and 20, “may be considered without any connection with what goes before.” How could he say that? I hate to disagree with someone as eminent as Matthew Henry, but I certainly cannot conclude that this part of the chapter has no connection with what goes before. Let me show you what the connection is.

Here is what God is saying. Look in James 1 and let us begin reading there. Let us read verse 13: “Let no man say, when he is tempted, I am tempted of God, for God cannot be tempted with evil,

neither tempteth any man. But every man is tempted when he is drawn away of his own lust and enticed, and when lust hath conceived, it bringeth forth sin, and sin when it is finished, bringeth forth death."

"Do not err, my beloved brethren. Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, and cometh down from the Father of lights, with whom is no variableness, neither shadow of turning. Of his own will begat he us with the word of truth, that we should be a kind of firstfruits of his creatures. Wherefore, my beloved brethren, let every man be swift to hear, slow to speak, slow to wrath, for the wrath of man worketh not the righteousness of God."

Here is the connection. Since God is the only source of good, since God tempts no man, and since, by His sovereign goodness, without any claim on our part, we have had the high honor conferred upon us of being made the firstfruits of His creatures, we ought to be ready to hear His voice, subdue our evil passions, and bring our souls into practical obedience to Him.

What James is saying is that we must learn—not merely learn, but practice what we learn. Christianity requires a meek and humble spirit in order to learn. In light of the fact that God is not obligated to speak or to teach, we had better be swift to hear, slow to speak, and slow to anger.

Do not get upset with God, His Word, or the preacher. The reason is that the wrath of man does not work the righteousness of God. You will never be righteous if you are angry with God or with His Word.

## Second Application: Lay Aside Filthiness and Receive with Meekness

Here is the second application, in verse 21: "Wherefore, lay apart all filthiness and superfluity of naughtiness, and receive with meekness the engrafted word which is able to save your soul." In light of, and on account of, the fact that God is absolutely sovereign in illumination as well as salvation, we should not only be swift to hear, slow to speak, and slow to wrath; we should also lay apart all filthiness and superfluity of naughtiness, and receive with meekness the engrafted Word which is able to save our souls.

The particular object in verse 21 is the reception of the truth. James is teaching that a corrupt mind—a mind full of sensuality and wickedness—is not favorable to receiving the truth. Such a mind will never see the beauty of truth, appreciate its value, or understand its just claims upon the soul. James is teaching us this—listen carefully: purity of heart is the best preparation for always seeing the truth and the force of truth.

I want to take this part by part. In light of the fact that God is not obligated to teach, James says, "Wherefore," lay aside or lay apart "all filthiness and superfluity of naughtiness." Let me put it very bluntly: it is impossible to receive the truth until we lay aside everything opposed to the truth. I am going to say that in a different way before I close. What are we to put off? First of all, we must put off or lay aside filthiness.

The word "filthiness" is the Greek word rhuparia, which literally means filthiness, to make filthy, to be foul, to defile and dishonor. Properly speaking, this word actually means filth.

When we talk about filth, we mean something absolutely disgusting, vile, and offensive. I remember going into a home in Greenville, South Carolina, where, immediately inside the door, right in front of the door, there was a car motor on the floor. Oil, gas, everything had dripped out. The house was a wreck, and the stench was awful. It was pure filth. I went next door, and the man told me, "I've already called the health department four or five times."

He said, "They don't even have an indoor and outdoor toilet. They just use the back room in the house." You are talking about something filthy and disgusting? That is exactly what the word means.

When you speak of sin, you may call it wrong, wicked, and a violation of God's law, and that is true as well. But sin also has another aspect: it is filthy, vile, and loathsome. That is why, in Isaiah 1, God speaks of man as being full of putrefying sores, from the top of his head to the sole of his foot. It is filth; it is vile; it is loathsome. This same word is used by the Apostle Paul to speak of the filth of the body.

When he talked about the off-scouring, we are the off-scouring. The off-scouring is that which you scrape off. You cannot even wash it off; you have to scrape it off your body. It is that filthy. But that which pollutes the body can also pollute the soul.

Second Corinthians 7, verse 1, says, "Having therefore these promises, dearly beloved, let us cleanse ourselves from all filthiness of the flesh and of the spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of God." It is not just the flesh that can be filthy; it is the spirit as well. The apostle is telling us that, if we are going to receive the Word of God, we have to lay aside everything that is filthy, everything that is polluting: our ill will, our anger, our wrath, our malice, and our envy—sins of the spirit, just like sins of the flesh. So we must lay apart all filthiness, anything that would be loathsome or offensive in the sight of God. Paul said in Acts 24, "Herein do I exercise myself to have a conscience void of offense toward God and toward man." He exercised himself to have a conscience that was pure and clean and unoffensive.

Then James says, "Lay apart all filthiness and superfluity of naughtiness." The Greek word for "superfluity" is perisseia. It means abundance, superabundant, that which is superfluous, preeminent, or gainful. This word was used by the Greeks to describe excessive wax in the ear. When you get too much wax in your ear, you cannot hear; you go deaf. What is God saying? Lay aside everything that is not needful. It is superfluous. The word "naughtiness" here is kakia. Kakia is different from the Greek word poneros. Ho poneros is the word for the devil, and poneros describes that which is evil, wicked, and vile in and of itself. But kakia means that which is bad or foul. It does not necessarily have to be particularly evil in and of itself.

It is just not right. So it says, “You lay aside all this kakia, this malice, this ill will, a desire to injure.” What God is talking about is an attitude where someone is not ashamed or afraid to violate the law of God or to break the law of God. That is a bad person; they are simply unashamed. This naughtiness does not produce the righteousness which God requires. It does not tend to lead us to keep God’s law; it tends to enable us to break God’s law. Therefore, all of this naughtiness, anything and everything, must be laid aside.

Simply stated, one who has thoughts, attitudes, and actions that are in rebellion to truth will never submit to truth. If you have attitudes, faults, or actions that are contrary to truth, you are never going to submit to the truth. If you want truth and desire truth, you must throw down your weapons of warfare, cease from your rebellion, cease from your sin, and be ready to receive the truth. As long as you have your weapons of warfare in your hands to charge against God, you will never receive His truth.

So he says, "Wherefore, you lay apart all filthiness and superfluity of naughtiness," and then, "receive with meekness the engrafted word, which is able to save your souls." There is an immediate contrast. When you talk about filthiness and a superfluity of naughtiness, what do you normally think of? Someone like that would be proud, arrogant, heady, and high-minded. "I'll do what I want to do. Nobody's going to stop me. I'll do my own. I don't care what you like or not. I don't care whether you're a priest or not. I don't care if you're a god. I'll do what I want to do." What does God say? Lay apart all filthiness and superfluity of naughtiness and receive the engrafted word with meekness. You know what meekness is?

It is that mildness of disposition, that gentleness of spirit, which enables us to be teachable. We sit down as a child to receive the Word of God. The only way you can receive the Word of God is with meekness. You cannot receive it in pride, arrogancy, or rebellion. James 4 and verse 6 tells us why: "Wherefore he saith, God resisteth the proud, but he giveth grace to the humble." The word "resisteth" actually means to fight against. God fights against the proud. If you come to God and to His Word with a proud, arrogant, haughty, heady, high-minded spirit, God is not going to teach you anything. He is going to fight against you.

You come to the Bible with a know-it-all attitude, and God is going to fight against you. You come to the Bible saying, "Well, I know this is right. I'm going to find me some verses to prove that I'm right," and God is going to fight against you. You better come to be instructed. You better come with a meek and humble spirit. You need to say with David, "That which I see not, teach thou me." God says, "receive with meekness the engrafted word."

## The Engrafted Word and Its Saving Power

Albert Barnes said about the phrase “the engrafted word,” “The gospel is here represented under the image of that which is implanted or engrafted from another source.” By a figure readily understood—for the art of engrafting is everywhere known—the gospel is represented as a shoot implanted or engrafted that produces fruit of its own, whatever may be the original character of the tree into which it is engrafted. Sometimes the gospel is represented as a seed sown, as in Matthew, Mark, and Luke, but here it is under the figure of a shoot implanted or engrafted.

The meaning is that we should allow the principles of the gospel to be engrafted on our nature, so that, however crabbed or perverse our nature may be, or however bitter and vile the fruits it may bring forth of its own accord, through the engrafted Word it might produce the fruits of righteousness. You can take the bitterest persimmon tree, or the bitterest crabapple tree, and engraft a good branch of beautiful fruit into it. It will produce fruit separate from the bitter persimmon or bitter apple.

That is what he is saying here. Receive the engrafted Word, which is able “to save your souls.” These principles are to become so much a part of us that they take root and bring forth fruit consistently and constantly.

You receive the engrafted word with meekness, which is able to save your souls. When we think of salvation, the first thing we think of is spiritual salvation, and certainly we ought to in one sense of the word. But the Bible talks about different kinds of salvation. Paul told the Philippians to pray for him that it would turn to his salvation, although the Apostle Paul was already saved. He was talking about release from prison, because he was in prison there in the book of Philippians.

When the Bible says the engrafted word is able to save your souls, understand that the Word of God may save us in innumerable ways. It may save us not only spiritually, but mentally. I have known people who were thrown in dungeons, and the only thing that kept them sane during the whole year or so they were there was their

ability to quote and recite the Word of God and keep their minds upon Christ. It saved them mentally.

It will save you emotionally. It will save you physically. How can the Word of God save me physically? As a Christian, I ought never to die of venereal disease, nor of cirrhosis of the liver from being a drunkard. It can save me physically from a number of things, and it will if we abide by and obey the principles of the Word of God. It will save us financially if we follow the principles God has laid down in His Word. It will save us familially—that is, as a family.

I get upset when some young couples marry, have their first fight, and want to run and get a divorce. Alice and I have been married going on forty-four years; the thought of divorce has never entered my mind. Murder, yes, but not divorce. She can say the same thing, I assure you. The Bible has ways of working through problems, and there is a biblical doctrine of biblical problem-solving. You do not run off and get a divorce just because you have problems. You work through them.

That is what draws you closer together and makes you stronger. If you understand the principles of the Word of God, it will give you a stronger family and a stronger church. There is no church that does not have problems. I have been offered other churches, but why would I trade one set of problems, which I know about, for another set, which I do not know about? I would rather handle the ones I already know about. There is no place where you do not have problems. If you know the Word of God, it will save you financially, familiarly, and ecclesiastically; and it is quite capable of saving us nationally if we, as a people, would repent, turn back to God, and obey His Word.

So he says, here is what you do: you lay apart all filthiness and superfluity and naughtiness, and receive with meekness the engrafted word, which is able to save your souls. When you are preparing your heart to receive the Word of God, there are negatives and positives. Some things you must put off, and some things you must put on. One thing you must put on is a meek disposition and a teachable spirit. If you do not, you will never have the Word of God. You must put away your sin, your argumentative spirit, and that

which is resistive and rebellious to God and His truth. You must put away your arrogance, headiness, and high-mindedness.

You have to sit like Mary at Jesus's feet and say, "Here I am, Lord, teach me."

Paul writes in 1 Thessalonians 2:13, "For this cause also thank we God without ceasing." Why is he thanking God for these Thessalonians? Here is why: "Because when you receive the word of God, which you heard of us, you received it not as the word of men, but as it is in truth, the Word of God, which effectually worketh also in you that believe." Isn't that amazing? When the Thessalonians heard the Word of God, they did not simply stand there and say, "That's what Paul thinks," or, "That's Silas's opinion." No, when they heard the Word of God, they received it as it is in truth, the Word of God, which effectually worketh also in them who believe.

## Closing Question and Preview of Next Message

How do you know whether or not your heart is prepared to receive the word of God? How can you tell whether or not you have received the word of God with meekness? How can you know whether or not you've really and truly laid aside your naughtiness, your superfluity, your wickedness, your filthiness, and your superfluity of naughtiness? How can you tell that you've really laid that aside and uniquely submitted to the Word of God?

Well, Lord willing, I'm going to answer that next week. You can know whether or not your heart has been prepared to receive the Word of God. Let's pray. Father, we do ask in the name of Jesus Christ that You would once again prepare our hearts. Lord, help us to receive the truth with meekness, humbleness, and gentleness of spirit. May our hearts, Lord, rejoice at Your word. We do pray for repentance, and that You would grant us, Lord, a heart of love and mercy and goodness, not only toward Thee, but Thy people. And give us, Lord, a reviving in this land. In the name of Jesus Christ, we ask and pray. Amen.

CHAPTER 5

# Heart Preparation - 5 of 7

## Review of Previous Messages

We are thankful that you are here. Open your Bibles to 2 Chronicles chapter 12 and James chapter 1 as we continue our study on heart preparation. This is the fifth message in the series. We began in 2 Chronicles chapter 12 and verse 14: “And he, that is King Rehoboam, did evil, because he prepared not his heart to seek the LORD.”

James chapter 1, beginning with verse 16, says: “Do not err, my beloved brethren. Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, and cometh down from the Father of lights, with whom is no variableness, neither shadow of turning. Of his own will begat he us with the word of truth, that we should be a kind of firstfruits of his creatures. Wherefore, my beloved brethren, let every man be swift to hear, slow to speak, slow to wrath: for the wrath of man worketh not the righteousness of God. Wherefore lay apart all filthiness and superfluity of naughtiness, and receive with meekness the engrafted word, which is able to save your souls. But be ye doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving your own selves. For if any be a hearer of the word, and not a doer, he is like unto a man beholding his natural face in a glass: for he beholdeth himself, and goeth his

way, and straightway forgetteth what manner of man he was. But whoso looketh into the perfect law of liberty, and continueth therein, he being not a forgetful hearer, but a doer of the work, this man shall be blessed in his deed. If any man among you seem to be religious, and bridleth not his tongue, but deceiveth his own heart, this man's religion is vain. Pure religion and undefiled before God and the Father is this, to visit the fatherless and widows in their affliction, and to keep himself unspotted from the world."

Let me take a few moments to review. I want to explain why I review. I learned a long time ago that if you can see the connection between what precedes and what follows, it is much easier to tie everything together. When I was in college, I went to school full-time and worked full-time. I had very little time to study.

I tried to get to class at least five minutes early if possible. I would sit down and review all my notes, especially everything covered that week and particularly what had been covered the day before. I would have that fresh in my mind so that, when the instructor taught, I could tie together what he taught yesterday with what he was teaching today. Once you begin to see the whole picture and how it ties together, it is much easier to assimilate. That is why I always tried to review.

The very first message we looked at was the importance of heart preparation. That importance really boils down to this: if our hearts are not prepared, we are going to do evil. The Bible says that Rehoboam did evil. Why? Because he prepared not his heart to seek the Lord. Unprepared hearts are hearts bent on evil. Secondly, we dealt with how to prepare the heart.

I gave you three actual steps. First, there must be realization: God alone has the ability to prepare our hearts. There is determination, where we realize that we have a responsibility and determine to fulfill it by seeking Him. Then, thirdly, there is actualization, where we actually do that and apply the truths of God to our hearts. The three steps in heart preparation are realization, determination, and actualization. Then we moved to James chapter 1 because the last two messages have dealt with preparing your heart to receive the Word of God.

Let me quickly review so I can tie today's message together with what has preceded. First, in verse 16, there is an admonition: "Do not err, my beloved brethren." You must make sure that you do not err concerning this truth. James is admonishing you: do not be deceived, do not be led astray, do not err in this particular truth.

Secondly, in verse 17, there is a declaration: "every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, and cometh down from the Father of lights, with whom is no variableness, neither shadow of turning." Under this point, I showed you from Scripture that these are not merely common gifts God gives us, such as air, health, and breath, but also a special gift He gives us in hearing and understanding the Word of God. He told His disciples, "To you it is given, but to them it is not given."

So very clearly, everything comes from God. In verse 18, we have an illustration in which He gives us God's sovereignty, especially God's sovereignty in salvation. We saw under this point the sovereign's will, the sovereign's word, and the sovereign's work: "Of his own will begat he us with the word of truth." Everything depends upon the will of God. God was under no duress, coercion, or pressure to create, redeem, or save. The very fact that God created the world means He chose to create it. The very fact that He sent Christ means He chose to send Christ. The very fact that He saves means He chooses to save. Everything hinges upon the will of God. The will of God is the source of all things. Psalm 115, verse 3, tells us, "But our God is in the heavens; he hath done whatsoever he hath pleased." God is absolutely, totally sovereign.

Then we looked at verses 19 through 21 and saw the connection between verse 18 and those verses. As God is absolutely sovereign in salvation and under no obligation to save, so He is equally sovereign in illumination and under no obligation to teach, enlighten, or show. Whenever God moves and teaches, we must be prepared. That is why verse 19 says, "Wherefore"—a conclusion based upon what precedes—"my beloved brethren, let every man be swift to hear, slow to speak, slow to wrath: for the wrath of man worketh not the righteousness of God."

Whenever God speaks, we must be swift to hear and slow to speak. Do not interrupt God. Let Him speak, and be slow to wrath.

Do not become angry at what He says, because the wrath of man does not work the righteousness of God.

The next application is found in verse 21: "Wherefore lay apart all filthiness and superfluity of naughtiness, and receive with meekness the engrafted word, which is able to save your souls." God tells us that we have a responsibility. We must not only be swift to hear; with meekness, we must lay apart anything and everything in our lives contrary to God and His Word, and receive that Word with meekness.

## An Exhortation and an Explanation

In light of all the explanation that I gave you last week, there is still a connection that must be seen and a question that must be answered: How do I know if my heart is prepared? Or, to ask it another way, how do I know that I have received the engrafted Word with meekness? How do I know that I have laid apart all filthiness and superfluity of naughtiness and really responded to the Word of God as the wholehearted hearer? The answer is given in verses 22 through 27. This is the fifth point in the outline: an exhortation and an explanation.

## The Exhortation to Be Doers

In verse 22, he says, "But be ye doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving your own selves." The old Puritan Thomas Manton said concerning this verse, "This verse catcheth upon the heel of the former." In other words, you better get ready. There is a connection, just like it was Jacob who grabbed, was it Esau by the heel? This verse grabs the former by the heel as well. This section is certainly connected to the other truths to which we have already been exhorted. Here we are exhorted to be doers of the Word and not hearers only.

The word "doer" is a very interesting word. The Greek word is poietes, referring to a maker, a producer, an author, a poet, poietes, or one who obeys the law. In other words, a doer is someone who does something. He says, "Be you a doer of the Word and not a hearer only." In the context of verse 22, the doer is the one who not

only hears the Word of God, but embraces and receives that Word and testifies by his life that he has really believed and really received.

Our Lord said in Luke 11:28, “Blessed are those who hear God's word and keep it.” There is more than simply audible hearing. He said, “Blessed are those who hear God's Word and keep it.”

Then, in Matthew 7:24, our Lord said, “Therefore, whosoever heareth these sayings of mine, and doeth them, I will liken him to a man who built his house upon a rock.” Notice what He said: “Whosoever heareth these sayings of mine, and what? Doeth them.” The man who heard and did not was the man who built his house upon the sand. The man who hears and does is the man who builds his house upon the rock. This is almost like the question our Lord asked in Luke 6:46: “Why call ye me, Lord, Lord?” “I do not the things which I say unto you.” In other words, if I am truly, genuinely your Lord, you will evidence that by obedience.

James tells us that we must not content ourselves simply with hearing the Word of God, even if we are sure that the preacher is faithful in its exposition. It is indeed a matter of rejoicing to have the Word of God faithfully preached and expounded, and we should be thankful for that. But there is more than having the Word of God faithfully preached and expounded. It must become part of our lives through application, implementation, and habitual practice.

## The Contrast Between Hearer and Doer

In this passage, James says, “But be ye doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving your own selves.” The doer is contrasted with the hearer. The hearer may hear faithfully, regularly, intently, and carefully, but it does him absolutely no good if all he does is hear it. There must be an application and an implementation of the Word of God.

Now, I am going to come back to James 1, but I do want you to hold that passage and turn, if you would please, to Mark 4.

You remember in the previous messages, I have gone over this passage, the parable of the sower. You remember I told you that parable is found in Matthew 13, Mark 4, and Luke 8. I am not going to re-preach the message, but let me remind you that our Lord spoke

of four types of hearers. He talked about the wayside hearer, who is a hard-hearted hearer; the stony-ground hearer, who is a shallow-hearted hearer; the thorny-ground hearer, who is the half-hearted hearer; and finally, the good-ground hearer, who was the wholehearted hearer. The good-ground hearer, the wholehearted hearer, was the only one who brought forth fruit. In fact, Luke 8 and verse 15 says that he received the Word in a good and honest heart. So the good-ground hearer was the only one who was a doer of the Word of God.

The others were hearers, but they were not doers. Now, if you look in Mark chapter 4 and verse 24—in fact, we will begin with verse 23—our Lord is giving us some applications based upon the parable of the sower. In verse 23 he says this: "If any man have ears to hear, let him hear."

## The Principle of Measure in Hearing

Now all he is telling us is simply this: if we have ears, if we have the ability to hear, then we are obligated and responsible, as well as commanded, to hear the Word of God. You are obligated, responsible, and commanded. If God has given you the ability to hear, you are obligated, responsible, as well as commanded to hear the Word of God.

Look in verse 24: “And He said unto them, Take heed what you hear. With what measure you mete, it shall be measured to you, and unto you that hear shall more be given.” Take heed what you hear. You have a responsibility to make sure that whatever you are hearing is indeed the Word of God. Watch verse 24 again: “Take heed what you hear.” Then He says, “With what measure you mete, it shall be measured to you.”

Now let me state the principle our Lord is enunciating. If I read it a little differently, I think you will understand it. He said, “With what measure you measure, it shall be measured to you.” Here is the principle: to the same degree, or measure, that you give to understanding the Word of God and studying the Word of God, to that same degree, to that same measure, God will measure truth back to you. Now let me put it where we can understand it. You are not going to study your Bible ten minutes and get an hour’s worth of

knowledge. You are not going to study your Bible an hour and get twenty-four hours' worth of knowledge. No. God will measure truth back to you according to the same measure that you give in seeking the truth.

What does that mean? If you want to read your Bible five minutes a week, that is all you are going to get—five minutes' worth of truth, if you get that much. It depends on how you read the Bible. Then He makes an astounding statement in the latter part of verse 24: "And unto you that hear shall more be given." "And unto you that hear shall more be given."

Before proceeding, remember that there are basically two essential ways to hear the Word of God. The first is audibly. Everyone in this room who has the ability to hear is hearing the Word of God audibly. But the second way that you hear the Word of God is internally and spiritually. It is only the internal and spiritual hearing that moves us to obey and heed the Word of God.

Without your turning there, let me remind you of 1 Samuel chapter 15. Do you remember the passage where God sent Saul to slay the Amalekites? Saul spared Agag the king, along with the best of the sheep and the best of the oxen. When Samuel came, it was Saul who said, "Blessed be thou of the Lord. I performed all the commandments of God."

About that time, something went baa and moo. Samuel said, "If you've obeyed God, what meaneth the bleating of the sheep in mine ears and the lowing of the cattle?" In other words, if Saul had obeyed God, everything would have been dead. What did Saul say? "The people spared them, that I may sacrifice them to God." Then Samuel came with this tremendous truth. In 1 Samuel 15:22, Samuel asked, "Hath the Lord as great delight in burnt offerings and sacrifices as in obeying the voice of the Lord?" Then he said, "Behold, to obey is better than sacrifice, and to hearken is better than the fat of rams."

Notice that in 1 Samuel 15:22, hearkening and obeying are synonymous. They are one and the same. No one ever really hears the Word of God until he obeys the Word of God. No one ever really hears it until he heeds it. When Samuel says, "To obey is better than sacrifice, and to hearken is better than the fat of rams," he is saying

that hearkening and obedience are basically one and the same. The fat of rams was the choicest part of the sacrifice, which was always given to God.

Why am I emphasizing this? Because it is the doing of the Word of God that makes it uniquely our own. That is why James said, "Be ye doers of the Word and not hearers only." It is the doing, implementing, applying, and practicing of the Word of God that makes it ours.

Toby has been learning Greek, and we have been working on luo. Any Greek student knows luo and knows the Greek alphabet. You have to know it instantaneously. I told Toby, "You've got to be where you can say this thing in your sleep—alpha, beta, gamma, delta—and just spit it out. You've got to be able to say luo, luo, luo..." [repeats luo conjugations]. Have it like that in your life. It is not yours until it becomes part of you, so that you can spit it out and do it naturally and normally. Why? Because it is in you. It is doing the Word of God that makes it uniquely ours.

Look at verse 24 again: "And to you that hear shall more be given." Verse 25 says, "For he that hath, to him shall be given, and he that hath not, from him shall be taken even that which he hath."

You left out one or two, but that was pretty good. You understand what I am saying. If you took a few minutes and went over that several times, you could say it just like that. If you do not have it in you, you cannot say it. And if you learned it twenty years ago and have never used it, guess what? You still will not be able to say it. Why? If you do not use the truth, you lose the truth.

Now look at what he said in verse 25: "For he that hath, to him shall be given; and he that hath not, from him shall be taken even that which he hath."

Let me tell you something. I could take my right hand, reach down, pick up a fifty-pound barbell or a hundred-pound barbell, curl it, and even hold it over my head. But if you tied my right arm to my chest for three months and then untied it, do you think I could pick up that fifty-pound barbell and put it over my head? No. Why? I would have lost the strength in that arm.

If you do not use it, you lose it. It is the same principle here. If you do not make the Word of God uniquely yours, if you do not implement it and apply it, inevitably it will be taken from you; it will fall by the wayside.

Now look at what our Lord said: "And unto you that hear shall more be given." Do you realize this is the main reason most professing Christians never grow in grace and knowledge? Why should God give you more truth if you are not going to obey the truth He has already given you? "And to you that hear"—that is, to you that hearken and obey—"shall more be given. But if you don't obey, from you shall be taken even that which you seemeth to have." You do not really have it if you do not implement it in your life.

James 1:22 says, "But be ye doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving your own selves." God is saying that the man who only hears, but does not do, is deceiving himself. The Greek word for deceive here is paralogizomai, which means to beguile, to deceive, to reckon wrongly, to miscount, to cheat by false reckoning, and to deceive by false reasoning.

What is our Lord saying? The man who only hears the Word of God—no matter how intently, carefully, or regularly—but does not do or apply it is only deceiving himself. He is not deceiving God or the other saints; he is the one being deceived. He is not obeying the Word of God, yet he thinks hearing only is sufficient. Thus he is falsely reckoning and falsely reasoning, and he is cheating himself.

## The Mirror Illustration

James explains the difference in verses 22 through 24: "But be ye doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving your own selves. For if any be a hearer of the word, and not a doer, he is like unto a man beholding his natural face in a glass. For he beholdeth himself, and goeth his way, and straightway forgetteth what manner of man he was."

Why do you look into a mirror? Is it not to check and see if you look presentable? There may be a blemish on your face that you need to cover or medicate. You look into a mirror to see and ascertain

what, if anything, needs correcting. You want to see yourself as others see you.

What good does it do you to wake up, look into a mirror, and then never shave, comb your hair, brush your teeth, blow your nose, or put on makeup? You simply look, turn around, and walk away. What good has looking into the mirror done you? Absolutely none, because you walk out without correcting one thing.

In essence, you will have forgotten that you need help, and that you need it desperately. Someone asked Dr. Bob Jones one time, "Should women wear makeup?" He said, "Well, I think any old barn looks better with a new coat of paint." I am not advocating it, but you understand. Why would you look up and say, "There is a pimple on my face, and I need to put some medicine on it, or I need to cover it," if you are not going to do anything about it? Why would you even look?

What is the purpose of looking into the mirror of the Word of God? Is it not to see all of our blemishes, cuts, bruises, abrasions, scratches, ugliness, sins, and lack of conformity to the Word of God? Is it not to see what we need to correct, medicate, and take care of, in order that we might be conformed to the image of Jesus Christ?

Now, I want to show you one verse out of the whole of James 1. Look in your Bibles to Romans 8:29. I want to show you the will of God for every child of God. I do not care who you are or where you are; this is the will of God for every child of God. It is part and parcel of it. I am not telling you that God is calling you to preach or to be an engineer. I am showing you that this is God's will for every child of God: "For whom he did foreknow, he also did predestinate"—what? "To be conformed to the image of his Son."

God desires that every one of us become more and more like Jesus Christ. We are to become more obedient, more holy, more godly, and more honoring to the Father. This is the will of God. In eternity we shall be perfectly like Him, but how do we become like Him now, in time and in history?

The Bible has the answer. In 2 Corinthians 3:18, here is how we become like Him now in time and in history: "But we all, that is all of us Christians, with open face, beholding as in a mirror, the glory of

the Lord are changed into the same image from glory to glory even as by the Spirit of the Lord."

What is Paul saying? As we look into the mirror of the Word of God, we see the perfection, grace, and glory of Jesus Christ. As we behold Him in the mirror of His Word, we see our own deficiencies, sins, faults, and failings. We come to Him in the Word and say, "Lord, change us, make us holy, make us godly." As we implement that by the power of the Spirit of God, we are changed from glory unto glory.

In other words, we grow in grace as we bring our lives to the Word of God, see what is lacking and where we are failing, and change it. Now, for practicality, if you wake up in the morning with five big pimples on your face and look in the mirror—perhaps one is just starting, the second is a little bigger, and the third, fourth, and fifth are headed out—will you be able to correct all of those pimples at one time? What is the answer? No. You ought to take the worst one, work on it, and then try to stop the others from developing. You follow me?

All I'm trying to show you is that you can sit back and say, "Well, Brother Weaver, there's so many things wrong in my life." Well, you just look in the Word and start working on the worst thing that you have. Then, when you see that you're becoming a little more unscriptural in some other areas, try to stop that and prevent it from becoming a full-blown pimple. That's what he's saying. As you continue to look, you are changed, or are to be changed, from glory to glory. It is by His Word, through the power of the Holy Spirit, that we're to be constantly and continually changed into greater and greater conformity to Jesus Christ.

We should never be content with just hearing the truth. We must make the truth ours with an experimental application. We must implement that truth. We must experience the transforming power of the Gospel and the transforming power of the Word of God.

Here is our goal: "Herein is our love made perfect, that we may have boldness in the day of judgment." Stop and think about that. The day of judgment is coming. Hear my Lord, I'm ready. Judge me first. How many of you want to be judged first? What would give us

boldness in the day of judgment? Here it is: "Because as He is, so are we in this world."

What? Yes, we lived as He lived. We're not going to be perfect the way He is; I understand that. But our lives have been constantly and continually changed and brought into greater and greater conformity to Christ. That will give us boldness in the day of judgment. Why? Because we're living the way He lived.

Looking into a mirror and forgetting straightway is an apt description of someone who hears the Word of God, but does not apply it or obey it. I've known people in the ministry, unsaved people, who would come and hear the Word of God preached. I've seen them weep, tremble, and shake. Yet they go out, get involved in their sins again, and totally and completely forget whatever happened under the preaching of the Word of God.

A lot of Christians are like that. I am absolutely amazed at the number of Christians who will hear the Word of God and know that things are not right in their lives. They think about their sins. They think about turning from their sins. They wish to live right. Then, after the preaching is over, after the service is over, they go and straightway forget everything they heard. What have they done?

They looked in the mirror and forgotten they have pimples, uncombed hair, unbrushed teeth, and no makeup. They have totally forgotten everything.

Now, notice how James confirms this interpretation. James is a very important passage to keep before us. In verse 22 he says, “Be ye doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving your own selves. For if any be a hearer of the word, and not a doer, he is likened to a man beholding his natural face in a glass or mirror. For he beholdeth himself, and goeth his way in a straight way, forgetteth what manner of man he was.” Now that is the hearer. Watch the doer. Verse 25 says, “But whoso looketh in the perfect law of liberty, and continueth therein, he being not a forgetful hearer, but a doer of the word, this man shall be blessed in his deed.” James 1:25 confirms the interpretation from verses 22 through 24. He said, “But whosoever looketh into the perfect law of liberty and continue therein, he being

not a forgetful hearer, but a doer of the word, this man shall be blessed in his deed."

## The Doer Who Looks and Continues

Look at verse 25, at the word "looketh." It is a special word, parakupto in the Greek, and it really means more than just to look. It means to stoop to a thing to look at it—to look with the head bowed forward, with the body bent, or to stoop down and look into it. What does that remind you of? Go back and look at verse 21: "Wherefore, lay apart all filthiness and superfluity of naughtiness and receive with what? With meekness. With meekness."

The word "looketh" means to stoop down or to bow the head. In other words, God is demanding meekness and humility, as well as a teachable spirit, as we look into the Word of God. James 4 and verse 10 says, "Humble yourselves in the sight of God and the Lord shall lift you up." In 1 Peter 5 and verse 6, Peter says, "Humble yourselves under the mighty hand of God that he may exalt you in due time."

God does not place His best gifts on the highest shelf so that, as we grow taller and grow in grace, we can reach up and get those best things. No, no, no. God says, "I put my best on the bottom." You have to humble yourself and reach down to get it. You have to stoop to look into the Word of God.

That means laying aside your arrogance, pride, haughtiness, headiness, high-mindedness, and know-it-all attitude. You have to come with meekness. James says, "But whoso looketh into the perfect law of liberty, and continueth therein." The doer of the Word is the man who not only stoops down and looks into it, but continues therein. He continues looking into the Word of God until he has it, and it has him. In other words, he does not and will not forget. He applies and he obeys.

Note that God's law is here called the perfect law of liberty. This does not simply refer to what we would call the Old Testament or the Mosaic law. It refers to the totality of the Word of God. In Romans 3 and verse 27, Paul refers to the gospel as the law of faith. God's Word is our perfect standard. Psalm 19 and verse 7 says, "The law of the Lord is perfect." It is converting the soul and making wise the

simple. It is our perfect standard of conduct, and it is called the law of liberty because it frees us from our sin, lusts, and evil passions, that we might obey God and be holy and godly.

How do I know whether I am a hearer of the Word of God or a doer of the Word of God?

That question may properly be answered by asking other questions. Here is how I can tell whether I am a doer or a hearer: Do I constantly and continually add to my life, or am I simply one of those who are forever learning but never able to come to a knowledge of the truth? Am I obedient? Do I incorporate the teaching of the Word of God into my life? Do I implement God's truths? Do I practice the things of God? Do I think about the Word of God and how it should affect my life? James gives us a wonderful illustration of the difference between a hearer and a doer.

## Practical Tests of a Doer

Verse 26 says, "If any man among you seem to be religious, and bridleth not his tongue, but deceiveth his own heart, this man's religion is in vain." Notice the word "seem." It is the Greek word dokeo, which means to appear, or for one to suppose or account. If someone appears to be religious, or is accounted or supposed to be a religious man, but bridleth not his own tongue, that man's religion is in vain. In other words, he is a hypocrite. His worship and religion are worthless, and the evidence is that he cannot control his own tongue.

Let me explain that. The hypocrite may have heard the teaching about the tongue. He may have heard James 3 expounded, but it did not change anything in his life. He continues to use his tongue to walk through heavens and to say ungodly, wicked, and unchristian things. The hypocrite does not bridle his tongue; his tongue is used in an unbiblical and ungodly manner.

He boasts of his works. He speaks ill of his brethren and backbites them. He hurts their names and characters by private insinuations and public charges without any foundation. He uses his tongue with liberty, saying things regardless of whom they hurt or whether they are true. He has no control over his tongue. What is God saying? He

is refusing to act scripturally and biblically in that area. There are a multitude of areas in which God demands that we act biblically and scripturally. That is simply one of them.

There are times when we must pay special attention to our tongues. David said in Psalm 39:1, "I said, I will take heed to my ways, that I sin not with my tongue: I will keep my mouth with a bridle, while the wicked is before me." David wanted to make sure he did not sin with his tongue. You can sin a whole lot more with your tongue without outright lying or outright cussing. All you have to do is insinuate or flatter yourself. One problem with so many people is that they think they elevate themselves by attacking someone else and cutting them down. David said, "I'm going to watch my tongue at all times, but I'm especially going to watch it when the wicked is in front of me."

God gave us a promise in Psalm 32. "I will instruct thee and teach thee in the way that thou shalt go. I will guide thee with mine eye." Stop and think about that promise: God will instruct you, teach you, and guide you. Then He says, "Be ye not as the horse or as the mule, who have no understanding, whose mouth must be held in with bit and bridle, lest they come near unto you."

What has God just said? If you will listen to Him, He will instruct you, teach you, and guide you. But if you do not listen to Him, He can put a bit and bridle in your mouth. If you act dumb, God knows how to control you. But God says, "I'd rather just teach you. I'd rather just instruct you. I'd rather just guide you. Don't act stupid. Don't make me put a bit and bridle in your mouth."

Why would you put a bit and bridle on a horse? To restrain him. Why would you put a bit and bridle on an ox? To restrain him. God is simply saying that the hearer only is one who shows no biblical restraint. He says what he wants to say and does what he wants to do.

The hearer, then, is one over whom the Word of God really has not had an effect. He may have heard it, but he has not implemented or applied it.

What does the doer of the Word recognize that the hearer does not? First, the doer recognizes that all things are to be done before

God and for God's honor and glory: “Pure religion and undefiled before God and the Father is this, to visit the fatherless and the widows in their affliction and to keep himself unspotted from the world.” Secondly, the doer is willing to apply God's law by showing mercy and compassion to those around him. He is willing to help the widow, help the orphans, and do whatever needs to be done. Thirdly, the doer is willing to live a holy, godly life. He keeps himself unspotted from the world.

## The Motivation: God Sets Apart the Godly

One final passage deserves attention: Psalm 4. In fact, let us read the first three verses. If there was nothing else to encourage you to apply the Word of God and make the correct applications in your life, this should do it. This should motivate you to holiness, godliness, and obedience. David said in Psalm 4, “Hear me when I call, O God of my righteousness. Thou hast enlarged me when I was in distress. Have mercy upon me and hear my prayer.” He is asking for mercy.

Then David talks about the ungodly: “Oh, you sons of men, how long would you turn my glory into shame?” That is God’s glory. “How long would you love vanity, idolatry, and seek after leasing?” Leasing is the word for lying. Then David makes this astounding statement: “But know that the Lord has set apart him that is godly for himself. The Lord will hear when I call upon him.”

It is doing the Word of God that makes it uniquely ours. As we obey and conform our lives to Jesus Christ, God in His grace makes us uniquely His. “But know that the Lord has set apart him that is godly for himself.” How do I know whether or not I am a hearer or a doer? My obedience or my disobedience demonstrates whether or not I am a hearer or the doer of the Word of God. Your obedience or your disobedience demonstrates whether or not you are a doer or a hearer only.

We must prepare our hearts, said James, to receive the Word of God. We must understand that God is sovereign in illumination. We must be swift to hear, slow to speak, and slow to wrath. We must lay aside all superfluity of naughtiness and all filthiness and receive with meekness the engrafted Word, which is able to save our souls.

The way we know that we genuinely receive the Word of God is that we become doers of that Word, not merely people who say, “Yes, I heard that. Yes, I know that.” We do it. It becomes ours; we lay hold of it, and it lays hold of us, bringing our lives into conformity to Jesus Christ.

Let us pray. Father, in the name of Jesus Christ, help us to have prepared hearts to receive the Word. We ask for enlightenment, but enlightenment comes from Thee and through Thy Word. Give us understanding; open our understanding, give us truth, and enable us to see truth. Enable us, Lord, to be more godly and to apply the Word of God, and above all, to be conformed to the image of Jesus Christ, that we may surely know that God has set apart those who are godly for Himself. Make us uniquely Yours by enabling us to make the Word of God uniquely ours. May it lay hold of us, and may we lay hold of it and live by it. In the name of Jesus Christ, we ask and pray. Amen.

CHAPTER 6

# Heart Preparation - 6 of 7

## Introduction and Review

In Ezra chapter 7, beginning with verse 1: “Now after these things, in the reign of Artaxerxes, king of Persia, Ezra the son of Seraiah, the son of Azariah, the son of Hilkiah, the son of Shallum, the son of Zadok, the son of Ahitub, the son of Amariah, the son of Azariah, the son of Meraioth, the son of Zerahiah, the son of Uzzi, the son of Bukki, the son of Abishua, the son of Phinehas, the son of Eleazar, the son of Aaron, the chief priest.”

“This Ezra went up from Babylon, and he was a ready scribe in the law of Moses, which the Lord God of Israel had given, and the king granted him all his requests according to the hand of the Lord his God upon him.” Verse 10 says, “For Ezra had prepared his heart to seek the law of the Lord and to do it, and to teach in Israel statutes and judgments.”

We have been dealing with heart preparation. I showed you the importance of heart preparation in lesson number one, and how, if our hearts are not prepared, we will do that which is evil. In the second lesson, I showed you how I prepare my heart: there must be

realization, determination, and actualization. The next three messages were basically preparing your heart to receive the Word of God.

I showed you the four types of hearers out of Matthew 13, Mark 4, and Luke chapter 8. I showed you the sovereignty of God in illumination. Because God is not obligated to preach or teach, we should be swift to hear, slow to answer, and slow to wrath, and simply listen to God. The next lesson dealt with how we know that we have received with meekness the engrafted word which is able to save our souls. The answer is that we must be doers of the word and not hearers only. We must make application and implement it in our lives. Our lives are to be brought in conformity to the Word of God.

## Preparing Your Heart to Teach

## The Responsibility to Teach

This is the sixth message on preparing your heart, or preparing your heart to teach the Word of God—not just preparing your heart to receive the Word of God, but preparing your heart to teach the Word of God. Once we know the truth, and once we have the truth, we are responsible to teach and communicate the truth.

Our Lord told His disciples in Matthew 28, verses 19 and 20, "Go ye and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost." He continued, "teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you. And lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the world." So He said, "Go forth and teach," and then, "teaching them all things whatsoever I've commanded you."

The apostle Paul, in 2 Timothy 2 and verse 2, instructed Timothy: "The things which thou hast seen and heard of me, the same commit thou to faithful men who shall be able to teach others also." So once you and I have the Word of God, we are responsible to communicate it. It is one thing to be prepared to receive the Word of God; it is quite another thing to be prepared to teach the Word of God.

In either case, there must be specific heart preparation. Remember this: You cannot teach that which you do not know. If

one is going to be a teacher, basically he must master the material, know the answers, know from experience, and be able to instruct, communicate, and deliver the truth. Moreover, he must experience the truth, and the truth must come from within. Not only must the teacher grasp the truth; the truth must have grasped him. Then, when the teacher communicates, everyone understands that what he is saying he knows, believes, and holds—the truth holds him.

## Ezra's Identification and Occupation

Ezra is a perfect example of this, because the Bible tells us that Ezra had prepared his heart to teach. Before proceeding with the message, let us note three things concerning Ezra. First is his identification, found in verse 1: “Now after these things, in the reign of Artaxerxes, king of Persia, Ezra the son of Seraiah, the son of Azariah, the son of Hilkiah,” and then we go right on down to verse 5, where we find Ezra’s genealogy.

Chapter 7 begins with the words, “and now after these things.” When I read a passage like that, the first question that comes to mind is, After what things? After these things means that which went on before chapter 7: the finishing of the temple, the dedication of the temple, and the observance of the Passover. After these things, Ezra came. Ezra’s name salutes us at the beginning of this book because it is entitled Ezra.

But it is only as we begin to read that we see the character, conviction, courage, and worth of Ezra—not only under Artaxerxes, but also throughout the rest of this book. By the time we reach Ezra in chapter 7, Zerubbabel and Joshua have passed off the scene. They have either grown old or died. We no longer hear about the ministry of Haggai and Zechariah, the minor prophets who also prophesied during this time. Evidently, they had finished their testimony as well.

As we read through the Bible, whenever someone like Moses finishes his course, God always raises up a Joshua. After Zerubbabel, after Joshua, we find Ezra coming onto the scene. It is a principle of Scripture that God never leaves Himself without witness. When any of the old instruments pass away, God always raises up new instruments to stand in their stead and replace them. When one

servant finishes his course, God raises up another in his room, because God will never leave Himself without witness.

Although we are talking about Ezra's identification, in one sense his identification is unimportant to the message. I point it out simply because it is here in the Word of God. Ezra is merely the example; what Ezra has done and accomplished is important to this message. The Bible teaches us that Ezra's heart was prepared to teach the Word of God.

There is a passage in James chapter 5 and verse 10: "Take my brethren, the prophets, for an example of suffering, affliction, and patience. Take my brethren, the prophets, who have spoken to you in the name of the Lord, for an example of…" In other words, if you want an example, look to these prophets who have spoken the Word, and consider their patience and suffering. We can also look to the prophets and make them our example in other areas, especially in the areas in which they excel. Ezra was one who excelled in studying the Word of God.

When you come to Ezra 7 and look at verses 1–5, you see that his lineage is traced back to Aaron the high priest. He is called Ezra, the son of Seraiah. Seraiah was the high priest who was murdered by Nebuchadnezzar in Jeremiah chapter 52, verses 24 and 27. Ezra was a younger son of Seraiah, a brother to Josedek, and also an uncle to Joshua, who happened to be high priest in succession. Thus Ezra's pedigree is carried back, ascending all the way to Aaron, the high priest.

Only six generations are omitted in these brief verses, and those six generations can be found in 1 Chronicles 6, verses 7 through 10. For brevity's sake, the passage is saying that Ezra was a direct descendant of Aaron the high priest. He was identified not only as a Levite, but as a descendant of Aaron and of the priestly order.

Notice, secondly, not just his identification, but his occupation. The Bible says in verse 6, "This Ezra went up from Babylon and he was a ready scribe in the law of Moses, which the Lord God of Israel had given." Ezra was not simply called a scribe, but a ready scribe in the law of Moses. We must understand the import of what a scribe is and the implications of Ezra being called a ready scribe. With all the

commendation given to Ezra in the Bible, it would be improper, even an insult, to identify him with the scribes in the New Testament who were unscriptural, antichrist, and fought against the Lord Himself. Those scribes are condemned by our Lord in Matthew 23:25: “Woe unto you scribes, Pharisees, and hypocrites.” But undoubtedly, a few scribes in the New Testament were still honest, genuine, and sincere.

For such a one was found in Mark chapter 12, verses 28 through 34, whom Christ commended. In fact, He told him that he was not far from the kingdom of God when He saw the honesty and the integrity of this man.

The term scribe does not refer merely to a penman or merely to an attorney well versed in law and skilled in methods of making and preparing public or private deeds. When you read the word scribe in reference to Ezra, it means he was a rabbi, a teacher, and a doctor. He was someone learned in the Mosaic Law, and he understood how that law was to be applied civilly, politically, and religiously. In other words, here was a man who understood the law and was able to apply it to the people in any given situation. Ezra was one who knew the law of God. He knew how to expound it, and he also knew how to apply it. Such scribes are called in the New Testament lawyers and doctors. That is, these were very learned men. Ezra was called a ready scribe.

The Hebrew word translated ready is Mahir, which literally means ready, diligent, quick, prompt, and skilled. He was therefore a ready, diligent, quick, prompt, and skilled man in the law. Ezra studied the law. He knew the Bible. He was quick, prompt, and skilled at applying it. Ezra's proficiency may be seen not only in that which he attained, but also in that which is ascribed and attributed to him.

John Trapp, for one, who was an old Puritan, along with a multitude of others, says that Ezra wrote the Hebrew Bible out in Chaldean letters, the same that we now call Hebrew. The ancient Hebrew characters remained with the Samaritans for the use of his countrymen who returned out of Chaldea.

According to many scholars, it was Ezra who first ordained the vowels, the accents, and the Masoreth. Ezra was a great scholar, and his knowledge of the Scripture was, and probably still is, unmatched.

## Ezra's Scholarly Contributions

Now, I said the Masoreth. The Hebrew word Masorah refers to the transmission of a tradition. But I am not talking merely about the tradition of the Jews, which our Lord condemned in the New Testament. That is not what he is talking about. The Masorah here refers to the Masoretic Text. You may never have heard of it, but it refers to the concise marginal notes in manuscripts and later printings of the Hebrew Bible, noting textual details, usually concerning the precise pronunciation and spelling of words. In other words, Ezra and the men of the Great Synagogue gave us what is known as the Masoretic Text.

You say, “What significance does that have to me?” Well, are you listening? These men not only purified the text; they added the vowel points and punctuation marks, set the reading, fixed the canon of the Old Testament, and divided the verses, paragraphs, and books. Finally, in the providence of God, they presented it as the pure, infallible Word of God. It is from the Masoretic Text that we get our King James Bibles.

All of this has been attributed back to Ezra. The Old Testament, the Masoretic text, came from Ezra—or at least that is what most scholars say. Let me give you one illustration. I have a book in my library entitled God's Secretaries, containing brief biographies of the men who helped translate the King James Bible. One of the leading translators was Lancelot Andrews. He read, wrote, and spoke twenty-one different languages, about fourteen of which were considered dead languages, such as Chaldean and Assyrian. These men were scholars. Ezra was a scholar. He prepared his heart.

## Ezra's Heart Preparation

His occupation was that of a scribe, and he was ready, diligent, and skilled. Look, thirdly, at his orientation in verse 6: "This Ezra went up from Babylon and he was a ready scribe in the Law of Moses which the Lord God of Israel had given." Ezra was inclined toward and majored in the Law of Moses, which the Lord God of Israel had given. Let it be duly noted and pointed out: it was God who gave the Law of Moses. Moses was merely the instrument; God was the giver

of the law. The Bible says in Galatians 3:19, "Wherefore then serveth the law?"

"It was added because of transgression till the seed should come to whom the promise was made, and it was ordained by angels in the hand of a mediator." Moses was simply the mediator. The law was given by God. There is no room for despising the law of God, because God gave that law. Period.

We must remember that at the time of Ezra there was no New Testament. He had the Law and the Prophets. That phrase, the Law and the Prophets, referred to the totality of the Old Testament, including the poetical books. What, then, was Ezra oriented toward? He was oriented toward the Word of God that God had given at that particular time. Ezra was the teacher, the scholar, the doctor, and the minister.

Now here is my question: How did Ezra become so adept in the Word of God? Obviously, no one is born knowing the Word of God. How many of you, when you were born, could immediately recite the books of the Bible?

Could most of us quote Scripture? None of us. The sad fact is that most of us who were raised in church still cannot quote most of it, and cannot find most books of the Bible. Sometimes, when I am in different meetings, if I want to have fun, I say, “Open your Bibles to the book of Hezekiah, chapter 3 and verse 15,” and simply watch. Most people do not even realize Hezekiah was a king, not a book. They try to find the book of Hezekiah. I am simply saying that we are not born with that knowledge. We also have to understand that we cannot pick up the truths of the Word of God quickly, easily, and lightly. No, they do not come like that. Here is the answer in verse 10:

“For Ezra had prepared his heart to seek the law of the Lord and to do it and to teach in Israel statutes and judgments.”

Note that Ezra had prepared his heart. Since this whole series is on heart preparation, remember that I told you the word prepared is sometimes translated in our Bibles as fixed. It means the same thing. You can read this, “For Ezra fixed his heart to seek the law of the Lord.” In other words, his heart was prepared, fixed, and set upon

the Word of God, and he kept his heart that way. I am not going to re-preach, especially, the first two messages in this short series. His heart was prepared, his heart was fixed, and his heart was set upon it.

Let me put it like this: it was a singleness of purpose. It was much like the Apostle Paul in the New Testament when he wrote this in Philippians 3, verses 13 and 14: "Brethren, I count not myself to have apprehended, but one thing I do, forgetting those things which are behind and reaching forth unto those things which are before, I press forward toward the mark of the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus." What was Paul saying? "I've got one goal." He did not say he had obtained it; he said, "One thing I do." He forgot what was in the past and pressed forward toward that goal.

In order to be like Ezra, we have to find the pearl of great price and be willing to sell and sacrifice everything else for it.

There are men I admire who have great abilities in different areas. I get upset with people like Roy and some of these others who can seemingly do whatever they want to do. I do not care whether they are carpenters, plumbers, or photographers; they simply do it. It seems as though they have multiple abilities. I have never had multiple abilities. But when someone becomes good at something, it is usually because he has done it all his life. I would never become an OBGYN doctor or a veterinarian starting at my age. I could never do that.

The point I am trying to make is very simple. People have said, "I sure would like to know the Word of God the way you do." My answer is, "Are you willing to sacrifice day after day of your life just studying to know it?" A doctor asked me, "Are you willing to sacrifice eight years of your life to go to medical school just to learn some basics?" Once we find the pearl of great price, once we find the Scripture, it will require a great deal of sacrifice to learn it, to know it, to have it, and to make it ours.

I do not know how many times Alice says, "All you want to do is study." That may be true, but that is my life. That was Ezra's life. If we are going to know the Word of God, we must understand that there has to be some sacrifice. We had a concert pianist come to our

church in Jessup. He was a missionary and gave a piano recital, or concert, for us. For over an hour he sat there and played with no music in front of him. It looked as though the music simply flowed out of his fingers.

When he finished, I said, “I would give anything to be able to play the piano like that.” He said, “Would you? I practice eight hours a day, six days a week.” All of a sudden, I did not want to be a concert pianist. I did not want to sit in front of a piano eight hours a day, six days a week.

If we are going to be like Ezra, we have to get this determined: we are going to set our hearts upon the Word of God. We are going to know it, and we are going to sacrifice whatever it takes to know it.

Three truths found in verse 10 clearly demonstrate what is necessary to teach the Word of God. Ezra 7:10 says, "For Ezra prepared his heart to seek the law of the Lord and to do it and to teach in Israel statutes and judgments." After Ezra had prepared and fixed his heart, three things followed: investigation, application, and education. He prepared his heart to seek the law of the Lord and to do it. That is application; he applied it to himself. Then he said, "and to teach in Israel statutes and judgments"; that is education.

## Three Steps: Investigation, Application, Education

You cannot teach that which you do not know, and you cannot teach that which you have never experienced. The first point, then, is investigation. The Bible says that Ezra prepared his heart to seek the law of the Lord.

## Investigation: Seeking the Law

The Hebrew word for seek is darash, which means to resort to, to seek, to seek with care, to inquire, to require, and to investigate. What did Ezra do? He retired to inquire. In other words, he got away to investigate, to seek, and to look into the Scriptures. He made it his business to look into them, to find out what they meant, to understand how to apply them, and how to teach them.

You cannot do this without seeking. Our Lord told the Pharisees in John 5:39, "Search the scriptures, for in them ye think ye have

eternal life, and they are they which testify of me." If you want to find out about eternal life and who He is, search the Scriptures. It is your responsibility. Ezra's reigning desire was to study the divine law—its principles, its institution, its privilege, and its requirements.

He did this from a love and zeal for God's Word. He devoted himself to it and made it his great business in life. His life was given to studying, applying, and educating. He bent his heart, inclined his way, prepared his heart, and fixed his way into the reading of the Word of God.

I believe Ezra understood David, Jeremiah, and Job. He understood the meaning of what David spoke in Psalm 19:8–10: “The statutes of the Lord are right, rejoicing the heart. The commandment of the Lord is clean, pure, enlightening the eyes. The fear of the Lord is clean, enduring forever. The judgments of the Lord are true and right altogether. More to be desired than gold, yea, more than fine gold. Sweeter also than honey and the honeycomb.” That is what the Word of God was to Ezra. It was worth more than gold, even fine gold, and sweeter than honey and the honeycomb. He would rather study it than eat; he would rather study it than be a billionaire.

He understood Jeremiah in Jeremiah 15:16, where Jeremiah said, “Thy words were found and I did eat them. And they were the joy and the rejoicing of mine heart. For I am called by thy name, O Lord my God.” Ezra understood what Job meant in Job 23:12: “Neither have I gone back from the commandment of my lips. I have esteemed my words more than my necessary food.” Job was saying, I would rather have your Word than eat when I am hungry. Ezra placed an extremely high value upon the Word of God.

## Principles of Biblical Interpretation

But how did he investigate the Word of God? I want to be absolutely honest: I do not really know Ezra’s method of study. I can give you some things that he probably used. I am not trying to give a course on hermeneutics, the art or science of biblical interpretation. There are certain broad principles you should know. You cannot interpret one passage of Scripture so that it contradicts another clear passage. If your interpretation of one passage contradicts another, your

interpretation is wrong; it is not the Bible. A second principle is that Scripture must interpret Scripture. First Corinthians 2:13 says that we are to compare spiritual things with spiritual. We cannot be exactly sure how Ezra investigated the Word of God, but the twelve things I am going to give you will probably come close to at least some of the methods he used.

How do we investigate the Word of God? When you sit down to read your Bible, how do you know what it means? How do you know how to apply it? You say, “Well, I’ve never been to college.” Well, you do not have to go to college to know that. You may have to be taught. Let me give you twelve ways—only one of them today.

The very first thing you need to know when you read your Bible, whether you are looking at one verse, one paragraph, or one chapter, is that you must consider it linguistically. All that means is: What do the words mean? What do the words mean?

## Linguistic Study: Understanding Word Meanings

If you do not have a Strong’s Concordance, I would urge you to get one. Here is why: if you do not know what a word means, you can look it up in the Old Testament or the New Testament, in the back of Strong’s, and it will give you the Hebrew and the Greek word.

That is a brief, short definition. I do not imagine even many of you could tell me what the word Tirshatha means, though you will find it in Ezra and Nehemiah. You might not be able to tell me what a Nethinim was, yet it is mentioned in the book of Ezra. If you want to know what Tirshatha is, you have to look the word up in Strong's.

Strong's will give you a number. You go to the back of the book, find that number in the Old Testament, and it will tell you what the word means. If you really want to study and know more than a brief word or explanation, you need to get the two-volume set of the Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament. It will expand the Old Testament words. Instead of receiving one-half sentence, you might get a paragraph, a page, or two pages explaining the word. For the New Testament, you would need either Trench's Synonyms of the New Testament or Thayer's Greek-English Lexicon.

You say, “I can't understand all that.” Sure you can. If you can use a dictionary and spell, you can use the Greek-English lexicon. It is very simple. If you do not know how, I will show you how. If you really want to get down into things, and you do not know Greek and Hebrew yourself—as most people do not—you need those tools. When I speak about understanding words linguistically, I mean understanding what they actually mean.

One of our common errors today is assuming that because we know, recognize, or use a word, we automatically give it the meaning prevalent today, or the meaning prevalent in our understanding. Do you realize that there are common words you and I use every day, and those same words are in the Bible, but they do not mean what we mean?

## Examples of Word Study: Flesh, World, Love, Friend

The word flesh is used four different ways in the Bible. When you read the word flesh, it does not always mean that thing around your bones. Sometimes the word refers to all humanity. Notice Isaiah 40, verses 6 and 7. You will find this also in 1 Peter 1, verse 24.

Isaiah 40:6-7 says, "The voice said, Cry. And he said, What shall I cry? All flesh is grass and all the goodness thereof is the flower of the field. The grass withered, the flower faded because the spirit of the Lord bloweth upon it. Surely the people is grass."

What does it mean when he says, "All flesh is grass"? He is referring to all humanity. What is all humanity going to do? Die. Because whoever you are, wherever you live, you are flesh. Sometimes, then, the word refers to all humanity. Sometimes it refers to the body. These are distinct uses of the same word, and the context shows which meaning is intended.

In Job 19, the word refers to the body. Job 19:25-26 says, "For I know that my Redeemer liveth, and that he shall stand at the latter day upon the earth, and though after my skin worms destroy this body, yet in my flesh shall I see God." What does the word flesh refer to? The body. Job is not speaking of all humanity in general, but of his own body: after his skin is destroyed, he will see God in his flesh.

Then, in Romans chapter 7, the word flesh refers to a sin principle. It does not refer to the body or to all humanity. Romans 7:18 says, "For I know that in me (that is in my flesh) dwelleth no good thing. For the will is present within me, but how to perform that which is good I find not." Here Paul is not saying that his physical body contains no good thing, nor merely that he belongs to humanity. He is referring to the principle of sin dwelling in him, in his flesh.

"For the good that I would, I do not. For the evil that I would not, that I do." What is he talking about? "I know that in my flesh dwelleth no good thing." He is talking about the evil principle, or the principle of sin. Here, it has no reference to the body and no reference to all humanity; it has reference to the principle of sin.

Then, in 1 Corinthians 15:39, Paul says, "All flesh is not the same flesh, but there is one flesh of men, another flesh of beasts, another of fishes, and another of birds." Here we are talking about flesh—flesh. What do you eat when you eat a fish? Do you eat the scales? No, you eat the meat, the flesh. Do you eat a deer? Do you eat the hide? No, you eat the flesh. He says there are different types of flesh, and there the word means simply flesh. Thus, there are four different ways the word flesh is used in the Bible.

Let me give you another illustration. Consider the word world. When you think of the word world, what do you think of? I have heard people say, "The word world means world. It means everybody in the world." No, it does not mean that every time. The word world is translated from the Greek word cosmos. Although cosmos is the Greek word from which world is translated, the word world has over twelve different meanings in the New Testament.

The word world has over twelve different meanings in the Bible. For instance, look in your Bibles at John 1. Let me show you one verse where the word world occurs three times and has three different meanings, though it is the same Greek word, cosmos. By the way, ladies, you get your English word cosmetics from cosmos. It is supposed to mean an orderly arrangement. Sometimes I have seen women who did not have an orderly arrangement with their cosmetics.

Look at John 1:10, where the word world occurs three times and has three different meanings, though it is the same Greek word, cosmos: "He was in the world. And the world was made by him. And the world knew him not." "He was in the world"—he was on earth; "the world was made by him"—the universe; and "the world knew him not"—the world of men. The same word is used three different ways in one brief sentence. There is a world of the elect, or a world of believers, and there is a world of the ungodly—two totally different worlds.

You say, “Show me that in the Bible.” Look in John 1:29. Here is the world of the godly, or the world of the believers. The Bible says, “The next day John seeth Jesus coming unto him, and saith unto him, Behold the Lamb of God, who taketh away the sin of the world.” What world is that? That has to be the world of the believers, or the world of the elect. He does not take away the sins of those who die in their sins without repentance.

That is why there is a doctrine of eternal punishment. That is why there is a judgment. If you look in John 6:33, the Bible says, “For the bread of God is he which cometh down from heaven and gives life unto the world.” What world is that? The world of the believers, the world of the elect. He has not given life to every individual.

Then, if you look in your Bibles to 2 Peter 2:5, notice what the Bible says: “and spared Noah the old world, and spared not the old world, but saved Noah the eighth person, a preacher of righteousness, bringing in the flood upon what? The world of the ungodly.” So there is a world of the godly and there is a world of the ungodly.

The word world does not simply mean everybody that ever lived, or everybody that is alive, which is what most people say. It has so many different meanings in the Bible. Sometimes it refers to the world system. Do you remember what our Lord said in 1 John 2:15? “Love not the world, neither the things that are in the world.” Is our Lord telling us not to love His creation? No. Is He telling us not to love the world of the godly? No. He is saying, love not the world system. When He said, “the prince of this world has come and is cast out,” He was talking about the world system—the system that hates Christ and hates the Bible. So the word world does not always mean

every single individual. Sometimes the word world refers to humanity minus believers. For instance, in John 15:18, our Lord is talking to His own and says, “If the world hate you.”

“You know that it hated me before it hated you.” Who is He talking to? He is talking to believers. So here is something about the world, or humanity minus believers. “If the world hate you,” He said, “you know, it hated me before it hated you.” The same thing is found in Romans chapter 3 and verse 6. When you look at the word world, do not assume that it means every individual who ever lived or who is alive today. It does not. There are many different meanings of the word world, so you have to look at things in the context.

Consider the word love. When I read in English, “For God so loved the world,” or “so-and-so loved his wife,” all I can see is the word love. But in the Greek, there are three different words for love: agape, phileo, and eros. As far as I know, the word eros is not used in the Greek New Testament.

Agape love is the love that God has—the love that gives and never expects anything in return. “For God so loved the world.” It is a sacrificial love, a spiritual love. Phileo is the love that gives and receives. That describes the relationship between Alice and myself: I give love, and I receive love. From it we get Philadelphia, the city of brotherly love, philanthropy, the love of mankind, and filial, family love. We get our English word erotic from eros, which is that which just takes.

When you see the word love, you must understand that it could be talking about a special kind of love, God's love, or family love. You need to know which word is used in that text. The same is true of the word friend. Everybody knows what a friend is, but there are different kinds of friends.

You have dear, intimate friends, and you have acquaintances. There are some people you can let your hair down with, and there are some you cannot. Some folks you can joke around with; they know it is all in fun, with no seriousness involved. But with others, you start doing that and they get upset. There are things you would tell a dear, intimate individual that you would never tell a mere acquaintance.

The two words used in the New Testament for “friend” include philos, from phileo, meaning a loved one, someone dear and intimate. Then there is hetairos, the word used to describe a prostitute. It is also used of someone who worked with you—an acquaintance, but someone whom you never really knew.

You remember when Judas went to betray Christ in the garden with a kiss. In Matthew 26:50, our Lord said, “Friend, wherefore cometh thou?” Would you like to guess which word was used? Hetairos. Judas, you’re a prostitute; you’re selling the Son of God. You walked with Me and worked with Me for three years, but you never knew Me. You were never a dear, intimate one.

## Conclusion and Prayer

When we look in our Bibles and see the word Comforter, is that a quilt, something you throw over yourself when you get warm? That is what most people think. Comforter is the name of the Holy Ghost and comes from the word paraclete, meaning one called alongside to help. We need to stop and say, “Lord, if I want to understand this passage, I need to know what these words mean.”

The first way you begin to investigate is by considering it linguistically. I have said this before, but let me emphasize it: I would rather read one verse and understand it than read twenty chapters and not understand anything I have read. If we are going to be prepared to communicate, teach, and deliver the Word of God, we must learn to investigate, and we must first learn to do it linguistically. Lord willing, we will cover those other eleven points next Lord’s Day.

Father, we ask that You help us today. Thank You for enabling me to physically get through this message. Help me as I preach this afternoon as well. Thank You for Your Word and Your truth. Teach us, we pray. Enable us to be students of the Word. Make us Ezras. In the name of Jesus Christ we ask and pray, Amen.

CHAPTER 7

# Heart Preparation - 7 of 7

## Preparing the Heart to Teach

### Introduction and Review

Ezra chapter 7, verse 1: "Now after these things, in the reign of Artaxerxes king of Persia, Ezra the son of Seraiah, the son of Azariah, the son of Hilkiah, the son of Shallum, the son of Zadok, the son of Ahitub, the son of Amariah, the son of Azariah, the son of Meraioth, the son of Zerahiah, and the son of Uzzi, the son of Buki," and he traces his ancestry back to Aaron in verse 5. Verse 6 says, "This Ezra went up from Babylon; he was a ready scribe in the law of Moses, which the Lord God of Israel had given: and the king granted him all his request, according to the hand of the Lord his God upon him." Verse 10 was our text: "For Ezra had prepared his heart to seek the law of the Lord, and to do it, and to teach in Israel statutes and judgments."

This is the last message on preparing your heart, dealing with preparing your heart to teach, as was the message last week. May I remind you from 2 Chronicles 12:14 that Rehoboam did evil because he prepared not his heart to seek the Lord. We have considered the

importance of heart preparation and how to prepare the heart. The next three messages concerned preparing your heart to hear the Word of God, and last week and this week concern preparing your heart to teach the Word of God.

As we look at verse 10, "For Ezra had prepared his heart to seek the law of the Lord, and to do it, and to teach in Israel statutes and judgments," we see the order clearly. When I ended last week, I was dealing with the first point, investigation. We were analyzing verse 10 with this outline: He prepared his heart to seek the law of the Lord—that is investigation; and to do it—that is application; and to teach in Israel statutes and judgments—that is education.

## Three Stages in Ezra 7:10

I told you that I could not tell you exactly how Ezra investigated because I do not necessarily know all of his techniques, but I can assure you that I will cover some of them. I was going to give you basically twelve ways to consider truth. The very first way, which I gave you last week and which we only covered in one point, was that you must consider truth linguistically.

When you look at a text, a paragraph, or a chapter, the first thing you want to know is, What do the words actually mean? Just because you know a word, or have a preconceived idea concerning its meaning, does not mean that it is the actual meaning in Scripture. For instance, I gave you the word "flesh" and showed you that it has four different meanings in the Bible. Sometimes it refers to all humanity; sometimes to the human body; sometimes to the sin principle; and sometimes to what is on our bones—flesh.

## Considering Truth Linguistically

I also gave you the word "world." The word for "world" is "cosmos" in the Greek, but "cosmos" is used a minimum of twelve different ways in the Bible. In fact, we looked at John 1:10 and saw the word "world" used three times in one verse, with three different meanings each time. So, just because you see a word and say, "I know what that means," not necessarily. I also gave you the words "love" and "friend" and showed you that they have different meanings.

When you investigate the Word of God, whether you look at a verse, a paragraph, or a chapter, the first thing you need to know is what those words actually mean. Please remember that biblical meanings are not necessarily the same as modern-day meanings. We have to understand the Word of God linguistically.

The second way to consider truth is historically. I have this a little differently in my notes than in Obie's notes, but I will follow Obie's. I gave them to him originally, and I jotted these down on the way over here. I have all twelve points, though I may not have put them in the way that I wanted to. The next way that we are to consider truth is historically. When I talk about considering truth historically, you have to ask yourself this question.

## Considering Truth Historically

Consider these questions: who, what, when, where, and why. Who was this book written to? Why was this book written? Where was it written from? What is it written about?

Let me give you an illustration. Hold Ezra chapter 7; certainly, we are not finished with that passage. But turn in your Bibles to the little book of Philemon, right before Hebrews. This small book has one chapter, and not just one chapter, but twenty-five verses. It is a very small book, so you could use it as an illustration of considering truth historically. For instance, let us begin reading a few verses: "Paul, a prisoner of Jesus Christ, and Timothy our brother, unto Philemon our dearly beloved, and fellowlabourer, and to our beloved Apphia, and Archippus our fellowsoldier, and to the church in thy house."

Now, if I were to ask you who wrote this book, you would respond, the Apostle Paul. If I were to ask you to whom this book was written, you would say Philemon. That is very obvious. Philemon undoubtedly was the pastor of the church that was in his house, or at least he was co-pastor, because here Archippus, his son, is named as well, as a fellow soldier. It could be that both of them were pastors there, and Apphia would be Philemon's wife. If you were to ask why this book was written, it was written because of Onesimus, the runaway slave. If you asked where this book was written from, it was

written from the Roman prison, because the Apostle Paul was in prison.

Now let me show you several things that the Apostle Paul mentions. He says, beginning with verse 7: "For we have great joy and consolation in thy love, because the bowels of the saints are refreshed by thee, brother. Wherefore, though I might be much bold in Christ to enjoin thee that which is convenient."

The Apostle is saying, I could command you, but I am not going to. Then he says: "Yet for love's sake I rather beseech thee, being such an one as Paul the aged, and now also a prisoner of Jesus Christ." He continues: "I beseech thee for my son Onesimus, whom I have begotten in my bonds: which in time past was to thee unprofitable, but now profitable to thee and to me: whom I have sent again: thou therefore receive him, that is, mine own bowels: whom I would have retained with me, that in thy stead he might have ministered unto me in the bonds of the gospel."

“But without thy mind would I do nothing; that thy benefit should not be as it were of necessity, but willingly. For perhaps he therefore departed for a season, that thou shouldest receive him for ever; not now as a servant, but above a servant, a brother beloved, specially to me, but how much more unto thee, both in the flesh, and in the Lord? If thou count me therefore a partner, receive him as myself. If he hath wronged thee, or oweth thee ought, put that on mine account; I Paul have written it with mine own hand, I will repay it: albeit I do not say to thee how thou owest unto me even thine own self besides.”

Philemon has a slave by the name of Onesimus. Onesimus not only steals from Philemon, but runs away to Rome to party with whatever he has stolen. In the midst of his partying, somehow he is apprehended and thrown into a dungeon. That happens to be where the Apostle Paul is, and Paul begins to witness to him. Maybe he knew him; I do not know. He may not have known him, but he witnesses to him, and Onesimus is converted.

Somehow Onesimus is released from prison, and the Apostle Paul sends the slave Onesimus back to Philemon. In this book, Paul says in verse 8, “Wherefore, though I might be much bold in Christ to

enjoin thee that which is convenient." If he were bold, he says, he would simply tell, ask, or command Philemon to do what he wanted. But then notice the wisdom Paul uses: "Yet for love's sake I rather beseech thee, being such an one as Paul the aged, and now also a prisoner of Jesus Christ."

How many of you are going to refuse an old preacher of the gospel who has been so faithful that he has ended up in jail for the faith's sake? Paul is saying, "Philemon, I am Paul the aged, an old man. I am also now in prison for the faith's sake. I have done nothing wrong." He is saying, "I really need some help."

Therefore, he says in verse 10, "I beseech thee for my son Onesimus, whom I have begotten in my bonds." This man was converted while Paul was in prison. Notice what he says in verse 11, because it is really a play on words: "Which in time past was to thee unprofitable, but now profitable to thee and to me." The word "Onesimus," or the name Onesimus, actually means "profitable." But how could Onesimus be profitable if he stole and ran away from his master? He was unprofitable. But now Paul says he has been converted, and Paul is sending him back; now he will be profitable to Philemon and to Paul.

"Whom I have sent again: thou therefore receive him, that is, mine own bowels." In other words, Paul says, Philemon, receive Onesimus as though he were my child, my son. Then Paul says in verse 13: "Whom I would have retained with me, that in thy stead he might have ministered unto me in the bonds of the gospel." That is what Paul wanted to do. He wanted to keep Onesimus with him so that he might minister to him in Philemon's stead. Paul is saying, "I know that if you were here, you would help me, minister to me, and take care of me. But you are not here, and I really wanted to keep him."

"But without thy mind would I do nothing," Paul says. He does not want to do this without Philemon's knowledge and permission, "that thy benefit should not be as it were of necessity, but willingly." He is not trying to put Philemon in a corner and make him help him. He wants Philemon to be willing to help.

"For perhaps he therefore departed for a season, that thou shouldest receive him for ever." Paul says Onesimus ran away for a little while, but now Philemon is going to have him forever. Perhaps some questions are coming into your mind. You know about a passage that deals with slavery, biblical slavery. There is a difference in the Bible between biblical slavery and pagan slavery, and here is an illustration of biblical slavery.

We are considering this book historically. Look what happens. He says in verse 15, "For perhaps he therefore departed for a season, that thou shouldest receive him for ever." Now look at verse 16: "Not now as a servant," or slave, "but above a servant," or slave, "a brother beloved."

Paul says Onesimus is not merely a slave; he is above a slave, a brother. That is, he has been saved by the grace of God. Paul makes this amazing statement: "Not now as a slave, but above a slave, a brother beloved, specially to me. But how much more unto thee, both in the flesh, and in the Lord?"

What does that mean? Onesimus, the runaway slave, was the physical brother of Philemon. Now Philemon is receiving him back not just as a physical brother, but as a spiritual brother.

How could a man keep his own brother as a slave? We need to understand the law of the kinsman-redeemer in the Old Testament and biblical slavery. There were a number of ways a man could become a slave. If a man sold himself to a pagan, or if he was financially irresponsible, a family member could redeem him; but that man became the slave of a family member until he paid him back. In other words, biblical slavery was always intended to make someone responsible and accountable.

Old Onesimus, though undoubtedly redeemed by Philemon, stole from his own brother and ran down to Rome to throw away the money. Then he was converted, and Paul sent him back. Here we see the law of restitution as well.

Once Paul sends Onesimus back, he says, "If thou count me therefore a partner, receive him as myself." What would you do if the Apostle Paul walked into your house? You would roll out the red carpet for him.

Paul says, Philemon, you may have been upset with your brother. Undoubtedly, you were. But I am sending him back, and I want you to receive him exactly the way that you received me. In verse 18, he says, "If he hath wronged thee, or oweth thee ought, put that on mine account." There is the doctrine of imputation. And then Paul says, "I Paul have written it with mine own hand, I will repay it: albeit I do not say to thee how thou owest unto me even thine own self besides." Paul said, "You put it on my tab. I'll pay it when I get there."

But let me remind you of something, Philemon: you owe me. If it had not been for me, you would not even be converted. What is Paul doing? Paul is tightening down the screws. He is saying, you had better treat him right; you had better treat him the way he is supposed to be treated. He may owe you, but you owe me. Receive him as myself. Receive him as my child. I will repay everything.

If you are going to understand the book of Philemon historically, you have to know all of its elements. You need to know the law of the kinsman-redeemer in the Old Testament, the biblical doctrine of imputation, the biblical doctrine of restitution, and the biblical doctrine of reconciliation and forgiveness. When you look at this book, you must consider it linguistically: What do the words mean? "Onesimus," for instance, means "profitable." You must consider it historically: Who wrote this book? When was it written? Where was it written from? What was it written about? Why was it written? When you look at it historically, you come out with such a wonderful story. Everyone can see all of the applications that can be made from it. So you must consider truth linguistically, historically, and, thirdly, judicially. If you will put a little parentheses by "judicially"—legally, that is all I mean.

## Considering Truth Judicially (Legally)

Do you realize there are many truths in the Bible that can only be understood from a judicial or a legal perspective? For instance, justification. Every one of us can say we're justified by faith, but what in the world is justification?

Deuteronomy 25:1 says, "If there be a controversy between men, and they come unto judgment, that the judges may judge them; then

they shall justify the righteous, and condemn the wicked." Justification and condemnation are opposites. Yet they have something in common in the fact that they are both legal or judicial declarations.

What shall the judges do? They shall justify the righteous, and they shall condemn the wicked. The judges are to justify the righteous, and they're to condemn the wicked. It is important that you see this, because justification and condemnation are judicial terms.

Proverbs 17:15 says, "He that justifieth the wicked, and he that condemneth the just, even they both are abomination to the Lord." God says that if you justify the wicked, or if you condemn the just, you are an abomination to the Lord. Thus, justification and condemnation are judicial terms.

Let's suppose Cindy stole $1,000. She was discovered, and there was an indictment made. She was brought to trial, and the facts were presented. The judge stands up and says, "I find you guilty of stealing $1,000." Now, what is that? That is condemnation. But it is a legal declaration in light of the law.

Suppose the facts were that she really did not steal that money, and the judge says, "I find you innocent," or justified. You know what that is? That is a legal or a judicial declaration in light of the law.

Justification does nothing to or in the sinner, but it is something done for him. Justification is an act of God whereby God, in light of the law and in relation to the law, looks at the sinner who is in Jesus Christ and says, "I find him innocent." Why? Because Christ has already taken our place and suffered in our stead. Justification is therefore a legal declaration. The sinner who has not come to Christ, who has not trusted Christ, who has not been washed in the blood of Christ, and who knows nothing of the work of Christ is condemned by God. That, equally, is a judicial declaration. He is found guilty in relation to the law, and the full penalty of the law applies to him.

When you look at truth in the Bible, you must consider it not only linguistically and historically, but also judicially. There are truths in the Bible that cannot be understood unless you perceive them from

the legal or judicial standpoint in which they are given in Scripture. You must consider truth judicially.

## Considering Truth Experientially

Fourthly, you must consider truth experientially. Not everything in the Bible is experiential. For instance, justification is not an experience. It is something God does, but it is not something we experience. It is something done for us, and not to us. But there are other truths in the Bible that can only be known experientially. For instance, sanctification. Justification deals with the guilt of our sins, whereas sanctification deals with the pollution of our sins. The man who has been justified by God will experience sanctification. He will bring his life into conformity to the Word of God; he will become obedient, and more obedient, as his life goes on.

As God shows him truth, he grows in grace and knowledge of the Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. There are truths that are experiential in the Bible. When God shows you, for instance, 2 Peter 3:18, where He commands us, "But grow in grace, and in the knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ," you have to stop and ask yourself: Am I experiencing that? Am I actually growing in knowledge? Am I learning anything?

## Considering Truth Expositorily

Is my life becoming more and more holy? Am I becoming more and more conformed to the image of Christ? Am I becoming more scriptural, more obedient? That is what I mean by considering truth experientially. So you are to consider truth linguistically, historically, judicially, and experientially. Number five, you are to consider truth expositorily.

## Considering Truth Expositionally (Contextually)

When I say expositorily, you may put another word, contextually, beside it. When you deal with a passage expositorily, you are dealing with that passage in its context. Let me show you the difference. In interpretation, turn in your Bibles to the book of Luke, chapter 15.

“Then drew near unto him all the publicans and sinners for to hear him. And the Pharisees and scribes murmured, saying, This man receiveth sinners, and eateth with them. And he spake this parable unto them, saying, What man of you, having an hundred sheep, if he lose one of them, doth not leave the ninety and nine in the wilderness, and go after that which is lost, until he find it?”

Skipping down to verse 8: “Either what woman having ten pieces of silver, if she lose one piece, doth not light a candle, and sweep the house, and seek diligently till she find it? And when she hath found it, she calleth her friends and her neighbours together, saying, Rejoice with me; for I have found the piece which I had lost. Likewise, I say unto you, there is joy in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner that repenteth.”

And he said, “A certain man had two sons.” Now we have the prodigal son story. Here is the question: How many parables are there in Luke chapter 15? We normally think that there are three parables here. But look at what the Bible says in verse 3: “And he spake this parable unto them, saying…” Singular. Then you have the lost sheep, the lost coin, and the lost son. What you have is not three parables, but one parable in three parts.

Now let me show you what is meant by looking at things expositionally, or contextually. To whom is our Lord speaking? Did you catch it when the passage was read? The Pharisees are on the one hand, but that is not all. Go back to verse 1 and look at it.

"Then drew near unto him all the publicans and sinners for to hear him. And the Pharisees and scribes murmured, saying, This man receiveth sinners, and eateth with them." How many groups are there? Two: the publicans and the sinners, and the self-righteous Pharisees. Our Lord therefore has two groups, two different audiences, and to these two audiences He speaks one parable in three parts.

Note the first part of the parable in verse 4: "What man of you, having an hundred sheep, if he lose one of them, doth not leave the ninety and nine in the wilderness, and go after that which is lost, until he find it?"

Before I came off without my Bible that morning, I had written out the first two stanzas of that wonderful hymn, "The Ninety and Nine." Everybody has heard that song: "There were ninety and nine that safely lay in the shelter of the fold." It is a beautiful, touching song, and it is sung so beautifully. The only problem with it is that it is just so unbiblical.

Look at everything in the context. "What man of you, having an hundred sheep, if he lose one of them, doth not leave the ninety and nine in the wilderness, and go after that which is lost, until he find it? And when he hath found it, he layeth it on his shoulders, rejoicing. And when he cometh home, he calleth together his friends and neighbours, saying unto them, Rejoice with me; for I have found my sheep which was lost. I say unto you, that likewise joy shall be in heaven over one sinner that repenteth, more than over ninety and nine just persons, which need no repentance." One sheep is lost.

The song says there were ninety and nine safely in the shelter of the fold. Would you look at verse 4 and tell me where the ninety and nine were left? In the wilderness. Wilderness in the Bible speaks of sin, lostness, wretchedness, and wickedness. Where was the lost sheep taken? Home. He was taken home while the others were out in the wilderness. Then notice what our Lord said in verse 7.

"I say unto you, that likewise joy shall be in heaven over one sinner that repenteth, more than over ninety and nine just persons, which need no repentance." What did the Pharisees always say? They weren't sinners like those publicans. In fact, Luke chapter 18 records our Lord's parable: "And he spake this parable unto certain which trusted in themselves that they were righteous, and despised others: Two men went up into the temple to pray; the one a Pharisee, and the other a publican. The Pharisee stood and prayed thus with himself, God, I thank thee, that I am not as other men are, extortioners, unjust, adulterers, or even as this publican.

"I fast twice in the week, I give tithes of all that I possess. And the publican, standing afar off, would not lift up so much as his eyes unto heaven, but smote upon his breast, saying, God be merciful to me a sinner. I tell you, this man went down to his house justified rather than the other: for every one that exalteth himself shall be abased; and he that humbleth himself shall be exalted."

So what was the attitude of the Pharisee? He was not a sinner. That is why the ninety and nine just persons, which need no repentance, represented the Pharisees. The ninety and nine sheep left in the wilderness were not His; He never sought them, because they were not lost. The Son of Man came to seek and to save that which was lost. You have to be lost in order to be found.

When you look at this parable, it is one parable in three parts. The lost sheep depicts the work of God the Son. The lost coin and the woman sweeping the house—that is internal—depicts the work of God the Holy Spirit. And the prodigal son, coming home to the father, depicts the work of the Father. So here it is: the Son finds, the Spirit converts, and they come to the Father. That is the parable.

Our Lord is still not through with the Pharisees, because the third part of the parable deals with the son. Look at the prodigal when he said in verse 17: "And when he came to himself, he said, How many hired servants of my father's have bread enough and to spare, and I perish with hunger! I will arise and go to my father, and will say unto him, Father, I have sinned against heaven, and before thee, and am no more worthy to be called thy son: make me as one of thy hired servants. And he arose, and came to his father. But when he was yet a great way off, his father saw him, and had compassion, and ran, and fell on his neck, and kissed him. And the son said unto him, Father, I have sinned against heaven, and in thy sight, and am no more worthy to be called thy son."

"But the father said to his servants, Bring forth the best robe, and put it on him; and put a ring on his hand, and shoes on his feet: and bring hither the fatted calf, and kill it; and let us eat, and be merry: for this my son was dead, and is alive again; he was lost, and is found. And they began to be merry. Now his elder son was in the field. And as he came and drew nigh to the house, he heard musick and dancing. And he called one of the servants, and asked what these things meant." He was a stranger to rejoicing, this elder son. "And he said unto him, Thy brother is come; and thy father hath killed the fatted calf, because he hath received him safe and sound. And he was angry, and would not go in: therefore came his father out, and intreated him. And he answering said to his father, Lo, these many

years do I serve thee, neither transgressed I at any time thy commandment."

"And yet thou never gavest me a kid, that I might make merry with my friends." What did the Pharisees think? That they had never violated the law of God. They were upset when a sinner came home and was rejoiced over. They could not figure out how God could save a prostitute, a drunk, a dopehead, or some self-righteous person. They would never do those things, you see. They did not like it when others were saved. They were self-righteous.

In Luke 15, when you consider it contextually and expositionally, you have one parable in three parts that demonstrates the work of the Son, the work of the Spirit, and the work of the Father in salvation. Those whom the Son finds, the Spirit converts, and they always end up coming to the Father. When our Lord had these two audiences—the publicans and sinners on the one hand, and the Pharisees on the other—what did He do? He lovingly bid those publicans and sinners to come to Himself, and then He justly slapped the Pharisees for their self-righteousness and rebellion.

When you look at things in context, you get a whole different meaning from what the modern-day religious crowd sees. They go around singing "The Ninety and Nine." It is a beautiful song; it is just unbiblical. You have to consider truth linguistically, historically, judicially, experientially, and expositionally. Number six, you also have to consider truth applicatorily.

## Considering Truth Applicatorily

You may say, "I've never heard that word." Applications—applicatorily—is the best way I know to say it. What does it mean to consider truth applicatorily? You have to ask yourself: How does this truth apply to me, to my situation, or to our current-day problems? Not all of the Bible is written to you. Not all of the Bible is written about you. But all of the Bible is written for you. I have never had an epistle addressed to "the most excellent John Weaver," nor have I seen one addressed to the Freedom Baptist Church. It is not all written to me or about me, but it is all written for me.

The Apostle Paul makes a tremendous statement in Romans 15:4: "For whatsoever things were written aforetime were written for our learning, that we through patience and comfort of the scriptures might have hope." Now stop and look at that passage. What is he talking about when he says, "whatsoever things were written aforetime"? The Old Testament. The New Testament had not been completed at that time. All those things were written for our learning. It is not all written to us, and it was not all written about us, but it was written for us, or is written for our learning, "that we through patience and comfort of the scriptures might have hope."

Let me put it to you very plainly. There is not one passage in the Bible from which one could not derive benefit and blessings. I do not even care if you are thinking about those chronologies and those long names that most people cannot pronounce. If you take the time to study the names and the meaning of those names, I can assure you that you will have a benefit and a blessing. There is nothing in the Bible, nothing there, that has no benefit. Everything has benefit and blessing. We have to figure out the applications.

In 1 Corinthians 10, Paul is writing to the Corinthian believers. Corinth was a New Testament church. He writes, "Moreover, brethren, I would not that ye should be ignorant, how that all our fathers were under the cloud, and all passed through the sea." What is the Apostle Paul talking about? The Exodus—the redeeming of the children of Israel from the land of Egypt. They all passed through the Red Sea. Then he writes, "And were all baptized unto Moses in the cloud and in the sea; and did all eat the same spiritual meat; and did all drink the same spiritual drink: for they drank of that spiritual Rock that followed them: and that Rock was Christ."

But then he says, "But with many of them God was not well pleased: for they were overthrown in the wilderness." I get tickled every time I read that verse: "But with many of them God was not well pleased: for they were overthrown in the wilderness." How many of that original crowd escaped? How many of the original crowd got into the promised land? Two: Joshua and Caleb.

## The Heavenly and Human Sides of Truth

Their children got in, but for forty years they wandered until they all died. “But with many of them God was not well pleased.” Many of them—only two got in. What fraction of a percent would that be out of all that came out?

Paul says, “Now these things were our examples, to the intent we should not lust after evil things, as they also lusted.” Everything that happened to Old Testament Israel in bringing them out and through the wilderness happened for our example, “to the intent we should not lust after evil things, as they also lusted.” Then he begins to make applications:

“Neither be ye idolaters, as were some of them; as it is written, The people sat down to eat and drink, and rose up to play. Neither let us commit fornication, as some of them committed, and fell in one day three and twenty thousand. Neither let us tempt Christ, as some of them also tempted, and were destroyed of serpents. Neither murmur ye, as some of them also murmured, and were destroyed of the destroyer.”

Again he says, “Now all these things happened unto them for ensamples: and they are written for our admonition, upon whom the ends of the world are come.” Do you see what Paul said twice? Everything that happened to Israel in the Old Testament is there for our example. If I am reading about their murmuring, idolatry, or fornication, I have to stop and say, “Wait a minute, Lord. How does this apply to me? What are the principles? How does this apply to the situation that I’m in?”

Everything in the Word of God is applicable. It does not matter if it is past or history; it is applicable. “Whatsoever things were written aforetime were written for our learning,” and, as the Apostle Paul says, “for our examples.” We have to understand the Scripture applicatorily. It does apply to us.

## Considering Truth Heavenly and Humanly

Number seven: we have to understand the Scripture heavenly—the heavenly side—and humanly. Heavenly means there is a divine side of truth; humanly means there is a human side of truth. Let me give

you, first of all, the illustration heavenly. Look in your Bibles to John 6, verse 37, and then also go to John 17. Go to John 17 second.

In John 6:37, our Lord says, "All that the Father giveth me shall come to me; and him that cometh to me I will in no wise cast out." Notice what He said: "All that the Father giveth me shall come to me." That is a heavenly truth, something from the divine side. The Father has given to Christ a people. If you are going to consider truth, you must consider that God has done something.

In John 17, our Lord's high priestly prayer, He says, "I have manifested thy name unto the men which thou gavest me out of the world: thine they were, and thou gavest them me; and they have kept thy word." He continues, "Now they have known that all things whatsoever thou hast given me are of thee. For I have given unto them the words which thou gavest me; and they have received them, and have known surely that I came out from thee, and they have believed that thou didst send me. I pray for them: I pray not for the world, but for them which thou hast given me; for they are thine."

Over and over in John 17, our Lord says, "I pray for them which thou hast given me." John 6:37 says, "All that the Father giveth me." You cannot comprehend truth unless you are willing to consider it from every side. There is a divine side of truth. The Father has given to Christ a people, an innumerable number; Scripture says, "which no man can number."

Now consider the human side of truth. Go back to John 6:37: "All that the Father giveth me shall come to me; and him that cometh to me I will in no wise cast out." Does the fact that there is an election—and Paul calls it an election of grace—negate our responsibility to come to Christ? No.

On the contrary, it enforces it. He said, "All that the Father giveth me shall come to me; and him that cometh to me I will in no wise cast out." If we have been given to Christ by God the Father, the evidence is that we will come to Christ. That is the human side.

In 2 Thessalonians chapter 2, these things go together—the divine side and the human side. Verse 13 says, "But we are bound to give thanks alway to God for you, brethren beloved of the Lord, because God hath from the beginning chosen you to salvation." Did you hear

that? "God hath from the beginning"—the beginning of what? Well, it does not matter. God chose you. He says we are bound to give thanks to God for that because God chose you to salvation.

But God has not only ordained the end; He has also ordained the means to the end. He chose you to salvation "through sanctification of the Spirit and belief of the truth." Verse 14 says, "Whereunto he called you by our gospel, to the obtaining of the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ." Those whom God has chosen are called. There is a human side: we actually come to Christ. Therefore, we must consider truth heavenly—that is, the divine side—and then humanly—that is, the human side.

## Considering Truth Eternally and Temporally

Nine and ten go together as well. Seven and eight, nine and ten. Number nine is that you must consider truth eternally. That is kind of close to heavenly, but not quite. Number ten is that you must consider truth temporally. I will explain both of those.

What do I mean when I say consider truth eternally? If you look in your Bibles to Ephesians chapter 3, verse 11: “According to the eternal purpose which he purposed in Christ Jesus our Lord.” The eternal purpose. Did you hear that? “According to the eternal purpose which he purposed in Christ Jesus our Lord.”

If you think upon it long enough, you realize how helpless we really are. How many purposes must God have? One. And that eternal purpose included everything.

Pick up any systematic theology book you want to, and when you get to the doctrine of God, there is always this section, “The decrees of God.” How many decrees did God have to have? One. The reason we say the decrees of God is because we cannot even comprehend that God could do everything with one purpose or one decree. We have to think successively—in succession. We must consider one thing right after the other. We cannot comprehend what God can do. But the Bible talks about that eternal purpose which God purposed in Jesus Christ.

Look in your Bibles, if you would, to Acts chapter 2. Let me give you an illustration of what I am talking about. We are talking about

the eternal purpose which God purposed in Christ Jesus our Lord. In Acts chapter 2, verse 22: “Ye men of Israel, hear these words; Jesus of Nazareth, a man approved of God among you by miracles and wonders and signs, which God did by him in the midst of you, as ye yourselves also know: him, being delivered by the determinate counsel and foreknowledge of God, ye have taken, and by wicked hands have crucified and slain.” Jesus Christ was delivered by the determinate counsel and foreknowledge of God.

Do you realize everything about Jesus Christ was foreordained down to the absolute letter? It was the eternal purpose. Acts 4:27 says, "For of a truth against thy holy child Jesus, whom thou hast anointed, both Herod, and Pontius Pilate, with the Gentiles, and the people of Israel, were gathered together, for to do whatsoever thy hand and thy counsel determined before to be done." What happened to Christ was exactly what God ordained before the foundation of the world and nothing less. Every detail was included in that eternal purpose, which He purposed in Jesus Christ—the number of lashes, the number of drops of blood He lost, everything down to the last detail. God has one eternal purpose. Ephesians chapter 1 even talks about that purpose where we are involved, where He's going to gather us together in one in Christ.

So you have to consider truth eternally. You also have to consider truth temporally—in time. If I were to ask you, when did God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Ghost enter into an everlasting covenant? What would be your answer? In eternity past. That's why it's everlasting. It's what the Bible says in the book of Hebrews.

When were you and I given eternal life? Before the foundation of the world, in eternity past. That's true. But when did we find out about it? In time. Titus 1:1 says, "Paul, a servant of God, and an apostle of Jesus Christ, according to the faith of God's elect, and the acknowledging of the truth which is after godliness; in hope of eternal life, which God, that cannot lie, promised." When did He promise it? "Before the world began." But He "hath in due times manifested his word through preaching, which is committed unto me according to the commandment of God our Saviour."

What God promised in eternity, what God did in eternity, is manifested in time. By the way, if you understand this, you'll never despise history. History is nothing less than God's eternal decree coming to pass in time. Deuteronomy 29:29 puts both of these together: "The secret things belong unto the Lord our God: but those things which are revealed belong unto us and to our children for ever, that we may do all the words of this law."

Does God have an eternal purpose? Sure He does. Does anyone in this room or anywhere else understand that eternal purpose perfectly? Do we understand hardly anything about it? No. Am I to be really concerned about that eternal purpose? No. I know God has it, and I must endeavor to understand it as best I can. But those things which He has revealed in this book—that is what I am to be concerned about. That is what I am to obey. That is what I am to live by.

You say, "Well, I just don't know whether or not my name's written in the Lamb's Book of Life." I cannot climb up there and see, but I can tell you one thing: based upon your life and based upon your profession, I could probably pretty well give a good guess. But my responsibility is not to climb into heaven and look in the Lamb's Book of Life. My responsibility is to live by this book.

## Considering Truth Negatively and Positively

So we have to consider truth eternally and temporally. We also have to consider truth negatively and positively. Every negative has a positive, and every positive has a negative. By negative, I mean that you have to look at a verse and understand what is not being said. For instance, Proverbs 18:22 says, "Whoso findeth a wife findeth a good thing, and obtaineth favour of the Lord."

What is not being said is that everyone who gets a wife gets a good thing. That is not being said. If you find a woman with God's blessing upon that marriage and upon that life, you have a good thing. Not everybody who got a wife got a good thing. Not every woman who got a husband got a good thing. So God is not giving a carte blanche statement saying, "Well, if you got a wife, you got a good thing." No, I have news for you.

I wouldn't want to be married to Jezebel, would you? A lot of women I wouldn't want to be married to. So you've got to understand what is not being said. Look in your Bibles to Proverbs 23. This will explain it a little bit better. Notice, if you would please, verse 13: "Withhold not correction from the child: for if thou beatest him with the rod, he shall not die. Thou shalt beat him with the rod, and shalt deliver his soul from hell." Does that mean every child that's ever been whipped with a rod is going to heaven? No. You've got to say, what is not being said here? That's not what is being said.

What he is saying is, if you discipline your child faithfully and consistently with the blessing of God upon that discipline, it'll end up in his conversion. But if you just took this statement and said, "Well, bless God, I believe what the Bible says," the best thing you can do is get a rod and go out and start beating everybody you find. No, that's not what that verse is saying. So you have to say, what is not being said?

I'll give you another one. You've got to consider what is not being said. You've got to also consider truth positively, what is being said. Let me show you how sometimes these go together. A lot of times, you're going to have to consider these things simultaneously. I've broken them down for you and given point by point, but you have to consider them together.

Look in your Bibles to the book of John, chapter 1, verse 17: "For the law was given by Moses, but grace and truth came by Jesus Christ." Now, let's take the negative and let's take the positive. Let's ask, in verse 17, what is not being said? He said, "For the law was given by Moses, but grace and truth came by Jesus Christ." Was there grace in the Old Testament? Of course. Noah found grace in the eyes of the Lord. Anybody that's ever been saved has been saved by grace. So he's not saying there was no grace in the Old Testament. Was he saying, or is he saying, there is no truth in the Old Testament? No. Everything that God says is truth. There was truth given in the Old Testament. Ever been any truth?

Once you figure out what is not being said, you must figure out positively what is being said: “For the law was given by Moses, but grace and truth came by Jesus Christ.” What is he saying? He is saying that the fullness of truth, the apex, the climax, the highest

fulfillment of grace and truth came in Jesus Christ. Yes, there was grace in the Old Testament. Yes, there was truth in the Old Testament. But Jesus Christ is the apex. He is the top. He is the one who brought the totality of grace and truth to light.

Therefore, He said in verse 18, “No man hath seen God at any time; the only begotten Son, which is in the bosom of the Father, he hath declared him.” That is how He can bring it forth, because He is God.

In Ezra 7:10, I gave you three points: “For Ezra had prepared his heart to seek the law of the Lord”—that is investigation—“and to do it”—application—“and to teach in Israel”—that is education. Let me cover implication, or application. When Ezra was studying and investigating, it was not merely so that he could gain intellectual knowledge. He wanted to understand the law so that he might apply it first to himself. In other words, he wanted to make sure that his life was brought into conformity to the Word of God.

## Application and Education in Ezra's Example

Let me ask you, do you remember the statement that the Apostle Paul made: “Be ye followers of me, even as I also am of Christ”? That was what Ezra wanted. Ezra wanted his life to be an example. God not only says to the preacher, but to other Christians as well, “Be thou an example of the believers.” What did He condemn the Pharisees for?

They say and do not. Ezra said, “Yes, I want the Word of God. I want to know it. I do not really want to have it intellectually. I do not really want to understand it only in my mind. I want it in my life. I want it practiced. I want it obeyed.” Ezra therefore sought the law of the Lord, first of all, for his own benefit. Then, in education, “and to teach in Israel statutes and judgments.” Thirdly, he wanted it for the benefit of others.

You cannot teach that which you do not know, and you cannot educate in that which you have not experienced.

When I was in college, I had a class in Christian education. A young professor who had just graduated from graduate school was teaching. I had a blessing in one sense of the word: I had preached

before I ever went to college, and I had been out and around some. I sat and listened as that professor gave out all these marvelous little tidbits.

I raised my hand. He said, “Yes, Mr. Weaver.” I said, “Doctor,” and called his name. “You know what you’re telling us is absolutely wonderful.” He smiled. “There’s only one thing wrong with it.” “What’s that?” “It won’t work.” “What do you mean?” “I’ve been there, done that. It won’t work.”

Then I asked him, “Have you ever pastored a church?” “No.” “Have you ever done mission work?” “No.” “Have you ever done evangelistic work?” “No.”

I said, "Your theories are good. They just won't work. How in the world can you tell other people that God is able to bring you through suffering, grief, difficulties, tests, and trials if you have never been in them yourself?"

How can you say God is able to fulfill all of your needs if you have never been down and out, begged and cried, and seen His hand fulfill your need? When I am talking about education, it is more than just giving out tidbits or intellectual data. Education is when you are not only able to impart knowledge, but experience as well.

What Ezra wanted was this: He wanted to know the law of the Lord, wanted it applied to his life, and wanted to educate his people so that their lives would be impacted and affected by the Word of God. He wanted them to know what it is like to apply the Word to themselves. Heart preparation is necessary, not just in receiving the Word, but in communicating the Word. What this day and age needs is the Word of God.

Folks, let me tell you, we have the answer. The answer is in God's book. It is there. I do not care about the problem, the heartache, the test, or the trial; God's Word has the answer. We could solve the problems in this country in a heartbeat if people were willing to do what God said. But we must educate—not just give facts, but from experience say, "I know. I've been through this. I've done this. Trust God, obey His Word. It works."

Father, we ask that You would help us, teach us, and build us up in the most holy faith. Give us, Lord, Your grace and Your mercy.

Help us above all, Lord, to learn how to study and apply Your Word, that we might educate others. In the name of Jesus Christ, we ask and pray. Amen.

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