

9 Whole Bible Instruction

⁷“Listen to Me, you who know righteousness, A people in whose heart is My law; Do not fear the reproach of man, Nor be dismayed at their revilings. ⁸“For the moth will eat them like a garment, And the grub will eat them like wool. But My righteousness will be forever, And My salvation to all generations.” (Isaiah 51:7-8 NASB95)

Reading and doing. You may be thinking at this point, “Hey I’m convinced. I see what the Bible is saying about one Body existing since the beginning with one faith which teaches one way to live. I’m hungry, thirsty, and tired of wandering in the desert of dogmatic, non-biblical church teachings. I’d like to begin ridding myself of man-created traditions and replace them with God’s traditions. I want to be a whole-Bible Christian for real (or maybe even a whole Bible Jew) and turn even the smallest area of my life over to Him. Where do I start?” The easy answer is: anywhere. Just start reading and doing.

“Oh no,” you say, “It couldn’t be so simple.” But I kid you not, it actually is that simple. Complications pop up when trying to read every day. More of them pop up when you try to do what you read. But abide in His love and law; consume His body and blood. I can’t emphasize enough how critical reading and doing are. Take time to sit down, even for a few minutes and a chapter or three, and read.

When you think you don’t have time, read anyway. If you get distracted, make space to read. It doesn’t matter if you are a fast or slow reader, stop whining and just read. If you don’t completely understand every word just keep reading, because it will gradually become clearer.

¹³⁰The unfolding of Your words gives light; It gives understanding to the simple. (Psalm 119:130 NASB95)

We need a frame of reference when God wants to speak through us. Jesus tells us that when we are brought before governors and kings for His sake we will be given what to say by the Holy Spirit.

¹⁹“But when they hand you over, do not worry about how or what you are to say; for it will be given you in that hour what you are to say. ²⁰“For it is not you who speak, but it is the Spirit of your Father who speaks in you. (Matthew 10:19-20 NASB95. See also Mark 13:11 and Luke 12:11)

How will we know what to say unless we have His Words filling our hearts? I suppose He could do it like a supernatural ventriloquist, but that’s not the way He usually does things.

²⁶“But the Helper, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in My name, He will teach you all things, and bring to your remembrance all that I said to you. (John 14:26 NASB95)

We aren’t dummies (I’ll refrain from the puns), so it’s much more likely that He will

bring to our remembrance what has been laid up inside of us for just that occasion. If we read His Words and do them on a regular basis, the Spirit has a full storehouse of living oracles from which to draw.

Every time someone tells me things aren't going so great in their life, I'll ask if they are reading the Word. Sure enough, when they think back on it, problems increased after they stopped. Or, they've been having a lot of frustration, and they haven't been reading in the first place. Funny, but it seems that problems increase when reading the Word decreases. Not to say it is some magic elixir, but there is a definite connection between reading, doing, and peace.

There are several different ways to read the Word. Casually, every once in a while, and because it's mildly interesting. Or the same 16 verses over and over again. Maybe as an academic exercise, breaking it into pieces and analyzing grammar and syntax. Or, like starving people at a buffet, we can read the whole thing seriously and regularly because it is our life.

I was standing at my window one winter morning looking out at the sunshine on the snow. Then I noticed six or eight mountain bluebirds hanging around a corner of my shop roof. One or two were actually hanging upside down by one claw from the thin fascia board at the edge of the roof. Every few seconds, one of these would fly up to the roof corner and one of the waiting birds would fly down and take his turn hanging upside down. This was a little unusual in my experience. After a minute of trying to solve the puzzle of their odd behavior, I realized they were getting a drink of water from snowmelt. It was just barely dripping down the fascia board.

It dawned on me that all their water was frozen, except for the little bit dripping from the corner of my shop roof facing the rising sun. Not only is this a picture of God's providence for even little birdies, but it is also a picture of the lengths one will go to when one needs a drink.

How we regard God's Word has a lot to do with its effectiveness, because the manner of our regard translates into understanding and actions (or lack of them). If we do not regard His Word very highly, we might think it sounds great, but probably won't want to follow it. If we regard it highly, then we must act on it. We would even hang upside down by one hand from the corner of a roof to get every drop if we had to.

So when you get to something in the Word you think you should do, do it. If it's something you should stop, then stop. It's not that hard to figure out. If you are not sure about something, then keep reading. Or do a word study,¹ or ask another who is also following the whole of the Word. Remember, perhaps the most important aspect of this is the determination to actually do everything God tells His people to do, no matter how minor or difficult. We return His love for us by treating every word as the absolute truth, fully applicable and relevant.

If you have trouble figuring out what to read, start at the front of the book and work your way back. Or there are several schedules around; try 'em all. Mix 'n match. Just keep reading.

I developed a schedule I call 'Manna for Whole Bible Christians' that is like one used in many synagogues for the annual reading cycle. We like this one because it has readings for God's festivals (Passover, Tabernacles, etc.) and it's nice to be unified with other people. You can always add more readings if you want. Another schedule is to read three chapters a day and five on Saturday (or whatever day you want) and you will read through the whole Bible in a year. Shari developed a schedule so that you read through the whole Book in about 30 weeks.

There should also be lots of reading of Scripture in public. In any meeting I lead we read out loud using the Manna schedule. We go through as many as eight to ten chapters with

¹ Be careful with word studies. Include similar words, and also the concepts and context. Remember, just because words look the same doesn't mean they have the same meaning. Looking at the context and comparing large chunks of the Word together will give better understanding. Don't get lazy and stop with a dictionary definition.

different readers. We just ask people on the spot to read as much as they want (usually a chapter), and rotate readers frequently. God speaks first, then if there's time left over, we speak.

¹³Until I come, give attention to the public reading of Scripture, to exhortation and teaching. (1 Timothy 4:13 NASB95)

It takes about 40 minutes to read through about 10 or 12 chapters. This is just about the amount of time taken by pastors preaching on just a few verses. Then we have a discussion time for anyone to ask questions if they want. Participation is encouraged both by reading and by inviting responses. Everyone can contribute whatever God has given them for the edification of our local part of the Body.

²⁶What is the outcome then, brethren? When you assemble, each one has a psalm, has a teaching, has a revelation, has a tongue, has an interpretation. Let all things be done for edification. (1 Corinthians 14:26 NASB95)

Some people say lots of reading is too hard. They can't grasp it all. There is a preference for only doing a few verses at a time and "covering them in depth." Based on tons of experience, my opinion is this attitude is smoke and mirrors. The real reason we don't want to do a lot of reading is we don't want to hear His voice. Then we'd have to do something about it – either move towards Him or away.

What does examining a few verses in-depth really mean? How many times have you read a section over and over, only to find out after years of "in-depth" study there was something you missed? How many centuries have been devoted to "in-depth" analysis and commentary, and we ignore Him still? If we really want to understand the Word, we have to read a lot of it. We also have to respond. Sitting like a bump on a log and listening to a pastor or rabbi drone on and on with opinions or stories about a bicycle trip through Ireland is not going to produce what God wants. It certainly doesn't make fruit. All we've got to do is look at the church honestly and we can see that. Eating His body and drinking His blood is the ticket to life.

The stages of whole-Bible reading. The first time reading through the whole book, there will be sections you do not understand. They won't seem to have a place in your daily living. Trust me (better yet, trust God) they will eventually make sense. What is happening is that your frame of reference, your worldview, the cubbyholes in your brain that you've been using to store information are getting enlarged and rearranged. The first time through (remember, with the determination to do what you read) is the toughest. You will stop and start and retrace your steps a lot. You will ask a lot of questions. Just be patient and give yourself time to absorb this introduction.

The second time through the Bible you will have a changed perspective. Many of the sections you struggled with before will start to become clearer. This is because the larger cubbyholes can handle more of what He's trying to get across to you. The cubbyholes will also be arranged better, in more God-centered ways. You will remember a little better, and you will see connections between sections of the Word that you didn't see before. This second time through the Bible might scare you a little, because you are getting better at taking God at His Word. You may doubt your salvation a little, because His standard will seem so much higher than you can reach. The fear of God at some point will become sharper and more defined. You will wince when some unbeliever Calm down, and brace yourself for the third time through.

The third time eating and drinking His body and blood will be even better. You will have realized that God is always in control, and you are His child not because of what you believe but because you love Him and can't imagine leaving. You will know He loves you too, and will continue to guide and bring fruit from within you, sometimes even when you don't realize it. Connections between all of the previously misunderstood sections will become clearer. As His Word works its way through your heart, mind and literally your muscles and body parts, filling you, changing you, you will wonder how you were making it in life before when you were so deaf, dumb, and blind.

Reading, and re-reading, doing and adding to our doing, over and over again, is all part of the process. The more you read, the more you will understand. The more you act on, the more you will understand. This is called being filled with the Word (Colossians 1:9-12). As your understanding grows, then teach it to others. Sooner or later (hopefully sooner) the Law (a.k.a. all of the Word) will be written on your heart, and you will know it without having to be told. This is love in action – love for God, and love for each other.

4“Hear, O Israel! The Lord is our God, the Lord is one! 5“You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might. 6“These words, which I am commanding you today, shall be on your heart. 7“You shall teach them diligently to your sons and shall talk of them when you sit in your house and when you walk by the way and when you lie down and when you rise up. 8“You shall bind them as a sign on your hand and they shall be as frontals on your forehead. 9“You shall write them on the doorposts of your house and on your gates. (Deuteronomy 6:4-9 NASB95. See also Deuteronomy 11:19)

Adding and Subtracting. The Bible warns us in a number of places not to add to the words that God has given, and not to take away from them.

2“You shall not add to the word which I am commanding you, nor take away from it, that you may keep the commandments of the Lord your God which I command you. (Deuteronomy 4:2 NASB95)

32“Whatever I command you, you shall be careful to do; you shall not add to nor take away from it. (Deuteronomy 12:32 NASB95)

14I know that everything God does will remain forever; there is nothing to add to it and there is nothing to take from it, for God has so worked that men should fear Him. (Ecclesiastes 3:14 NASB95)

5Every word of God is tested; He is a shield to those who take refuge in Him. 6Do not add to His words Or He will reprove you, and you will be proved a liar. (Proverbs 30:5-6 NASB95)

18I testify to everyone who hears the words of the prophecy of this book: if anyone adds to them, God will add to him the plagues which are written in this book; 19and if anyone takes away from the words of the book of this prophecy, God will take away his part from the tree of life and from the holy city, which are written in this book. (Revelation 22:18-19 NASB95)

This gives us another guiding principle to live and love by—do not add to God’s Word, and do not take away. This is not as easy as it sounds. How many times have you heard of a law that you can’t find in the Word? And how many times are you tempted to add something?

I suggest there are at least two things we can establish from verses like these. One is, if we are uncertain of an application of a law, then it is better to leave things unclear than to add to the Word. Since the Word leaves some meanings open, then we should also.

We can’t get into trouble if we just leave things as the Bible seems to leave them. I can’t see any biblical reason why we have to clear it up if God left it murky. Usually only minor things are a little murky anyway, because the major things are clear. Why not let people make their own determination about what to do in the minor things?

The other thing I see in this idea of not adding to, or taking away, from the Word is that the Word is the Authority for every decision a whole-Bible Christian makes. I’ve been called a ‘Bible-ist’ a few times, which I think was an attempt at an insult. Except it didn’t work, because I wasn’t insulted, I was pleased. A Bible-ist is, in fact, just what I am; at least as far as authoritative influence goes.

I remember one time a self-appointed pastor was frustrated with me because I told him that his teaching about ‘generational curses’ was not in the Word. He believed that people suffering from alcoholism or other ‘besetting sins’ inherited a curse from someone in their family tree (though he had no Scripture for this). His answer was to confess and get immersed (baptized) or ‘clean;’ repeatedly if necessary. So I pointed out Ezekiel 18 (see also Scripture such as Romans 6:6 and following). There we are told by God that each person will pay the penalty for their own sin, not the sins of their fathers. It didn’t help.

Obviously, the clear teaching of the Word wasn’t appealing to this man. He had added to the Word, made up his mind, and didn’t want to be confused with facts. It’s true there are some tendencies we inherit from the people who raised us. But as new creations, we are no longer slaves to them.

Of course, this guy thought of his teachings as ‘biblical,’ even if he couldn’t find any verses in the Word to back up his teaching. Perhaps he wanted the credit for ‘healing’ people. It might be that he wanted people to come to his church and tithe so they could get access to the healing ritual. Charge for admission, as it were.

There are lots of good rules that don’t show up in the Bible. For instance there isn’t a lot on modest clothing in the Word. But we can certainly tell what is and isn’t modest, even in this thoroughly tasteless era. The Bible doesn’t tell us to avoid cigarette smoking, for another instance, but we know that it isn’t very good for you. It’s not a good idea, either, to eat too much sugar because it can lead to diabetes among other things.

The difference is these rules are not God’s Law. The key is not in the extra laws we make up. It is in the way we handle His Word. Something might not be a good thing to do (whatever it is). But there’s a big difference between what we think is good and putting words in God’s

mouth. Adding or subtracting is a big temptation that we give in to all the time. But it's a temptation that whole Bible Christians work at resisting.

Remember the wizard behind the curtain in the movie 'The Wizard of Oz?' He had a great smoke and fire show, but for all the scariness up front, he was not a very scary person. Many people want to scare you in the same way with their own smoke and fire show of apparent in-depth biblical knowledge or power. But we don't have to pay attention.

3As I urged you upon my departure for Macedonia, remain on at Ephesus so that you may instruct certain men not to teach strange doctrines, 4nor to pay attention to myths and endless genealogies, which give rise to mere speculation rather than furthering the administration of God which is by faith. 5But the goal of our instruction is love from a pure heart and a good conscience and a sincere faith. 6For some men, straying from these things, have turned aside to fruitless discussion, 7wanting to be teachers of the Law, even though they do not understand either what they are saying or the matters about which they make confident assertions. 8But we know that the Law is good, if one uses it lawfully, 9realizing the fact that law is not made for a righteous person, but for those who are lawless and rebellious, for the ungodly and sinners, for the unholy and profane, for those who kill their fathers or mothers, for murderers 10and immoral men and homosexuals and kidnappers and liars and perjurers, and whatever else is contrary to sound teaching, 11according to the glorious gospel of the blessed God, with which I have been entrusted. (1 Timothy 1:3-11 NASB95)

Paul says not to pay attention because these are "mere speculation" and "not faith." The myths are probably things like the Sadducee teaching that denies the resurrection. The "endless genealogies" probably had to do with tracing Jewish lineage to prove how Jewish (meaning righteous in their own eyes) they are. Understand that these teachings are not in The Word. They are teachings from outside the Word. All these (and others) are "strange doctrines" not of faith.

Notice that Paul says here that the "Law is good" (verse 8) "if one uses it lawfully," that is, according to the Law. There is a lot that goes into the Law. All of it should be heeded, blended, and balanced together in order to arrive at a decision.

Some try to say that a person can prove anything by the Bible. This is not the case in the least. A person might be able to pick a single verse or two and build a doctrine. In the same way I can use the letters of the alphabet to make up any teaching I want. But if we really use the whole of the Word as He intended, we find it's a lot more difficult to "prove anything."

Love fills up everything that God commands us to do; the letter needs the Spirit. Too often, we try to cut the process of blending and balancing short and just throw a verse at somebody. Often with condemnation mixed in. A lot of people use the law 'unlawfully,' without the Spirit and without love. They use only part of it to justify actions, or prove a teaching. But if we are going to use His Word for anything, use it without adding or subtracting.

Guidelines from Jesus. Our Lord and Master gave us a number of helps for living the whole of the word. Some of them were indirect and stated in His parables. But some of them were direct. Technically, everything in the whole Book is from Jesus (all the words should be in red!) but here we are just speaking of what Jesus said directly during His incarnation.

When confronted by evil, Jesus shows us the living way of defense. In Matthew chapter four, He made three statements to counter the deceiver's temptations, and all three statements came from "what is written" meaning Torah or the Law.

4But He answered and said, "It is written, 'Man shall not live on bread alone, but on every word that proceeds out of the mouth of God.'" (Matthew 4:4 NASB95)

7Jesus said to him, "On the other hand, it is written, 'You shall not put the Lord your God to the test.'" (Matthew 4:7 NASB95)

10Then Jesus said to him, "Go, Satan! For it is written, 'You shall worship the Lord your God, and serve Him only.'" (Matthew 4:10 NASB95)

Each response is saying essentially the same thing in three different ways. On the surface what looks like three different temptations have the same goal. The deceiver tries to get Jesus to abandon God's will and do His own thing (in reality the deceiver's own thing).

We still get hammered with the same sort of temptations on a regular basis, and the defense used by the Master works just as well now as it did then.

It is written – man lives by every word. (Matthew 4:1-4). The first temptation was about making stones into bread. This choice would ignore God's way of doing things. But Jesus chooses a higher calling.

¹"The whole commandment that I command you today you shall be careful to do, that you may live and multiply, and go in and possess the land that the LORD swore to give to your fathers. ²And you shall remember the whole way that the LORD your God has led you these forty years in the wilderness, that he might humble you, testing you to know what was in your heart, whether you would keep his commandments or not. ³And he humbled you and let you hunger and fed you with manna, which you did not know, nor did your fathers know, that he might make you know that man does not live by bread alone, but man lives by every word that comes from the mouth of the LORD. (Deuteronomy 8:1-3 ESV)

The Law, even at the time of Sinai, was to be followed "from the heart" (verse 2). All of God's Words, whether viewed as 'commands' or not, are similar to bread feeding us, providing nourishment, and keeping us strong. We are to live by all that God says, including any statute, ruling, decision, decree, rule, instruction, suggestion, idea, or whim.

It doesn't matter whether we hear it in a shout that shakes the earth, a whisper like the still small voice heard by Elijah, or from the letters on a page. It's all good, as the saying goes, and very much worth following in every tiny jot or tittle, in the fullness of His spirit.

Jesus tells the deceiver that all Words from God are life, and the first priority of every living thing is to do exactly as God directs. No more and no less. The Spirit led Jesus out into the wilderness, so God wanted Him to fast. Making bread out of rocks would sidestep what God wanted Jesus to do. So Jesus says He's not going to do it.

His bread is the will of the Father. The Father was certainly capable of turning stones into

bread, or providing something else to eat. He did it for Israel in the wilderness, and He could do it again if He so desired. But Jesus was going to wait on the Father. This He did until God sent angels (Matthew 4:11) to help Him recover from His ordeal.

We are to do the same thing. God knows we need bread, a place to sleep and other things. But our first task and priority is to do what He says. He will provide all the other stuff. I know trusting God is hard to do on many occasions. Life is tough and there are hard choices. But we need to cling to what He says in spite of what we see and hear to the contrary. Constantly hunger and thirst after every tiny syllable He may utter. This is the path to life and that more abundantly.

It is written – no testing God. (Matthew 4:5-7). The meaning here might be a little more obvious if we realize that the word ‘put’ is the same word as ‘test.’ Literally, ‘test God with a test.’ And testing is exactly what we think it is. We do not make God prove Himself with tests of our own making. Testing like this includes a lack of belief and even outright disobedience. The deceiver quoted parts of Scripture (he’s skilled at part-Bible doctrine) and Jesus responds with the missing sections.

16“*You shall not put the Lord your God to the test, as you tested Him at Massah.*
17“*You should diligently keep the commandments of the Lord your God, and His testimonies and His statutes which He has commanded you.* (Deuteronomy 6:16-17 NASB95)

Israel ‘tested’ God at Massah (a word that means ‘test’) by moaning and complaining about the lack of water, and faulting God for failing to provide. They were questioning whether God was present, and disobedience followed. Instead, they should’ve had patience and trusted that God would not have led them to that place without providing water.

7He named the place Massah and Meribah because of the quarrel of the sons of Israel, and because they tested the Lord, saying, “Is the Lord among us, or not?” (Exodus 17:7 NASB95)

In effect, they were saying that God couldn’t or wouldn’t follow through. That implied either He was too dumb to know they needed water or was deliberately messing with them. They were saying that God did something deliberately wrong. Testing God in this way is nothing more than high-handed disobedience, and shows we do not trust God’s Word. When we test Him with a test, it is because we are afraid He won’t live up to His Word. Or that we want to use a perceived failure of the test for an excuse to go our own way.

A different kind of test is laid out for us in Malachi. This testing is approved by God.

10“*Bring the whole tithe into the storehouse, so that there may be food in My house, and test Me now in this,*” says the Lord of hosts, “if I will not open for you the windows of heaven and pour out for you a blessing until it overflows. (Malachi 3:10 NASB95)

The testing mentioned here is within the bounds of obedience, as in ‘obey the Lord, and in so doing test Him and see that His Word is true. He will deliver as He promised.’ We don’t test God by disobedience; we test Him by trusting His Word and obeying it.

When we decide on our own to switch the Sabbath to another day, this is also testing God with a test. We eat some pork, and don't drop dead, and it tastes good, so we keep eating. Because He doesn't immediately (or apparently) zap us, we think we're okay. We presume on His grace, making it cheaper. Then we compound our sin by sharing the results of the test with others. We encourage them to test Him in a sinful way also. It just keeps getting worse and worse. Either we stick with the whole of His Word, carefully and exactly, as Jesus did, or we test Him to justify our own knowledge and pride. I think I'll pick the testing of obedience, myself.

It is written - worship God only (Matthew 4:8-11) is how Jesus responds to the third temptation. The deceiver abandons misquoting of Scripture and tries a direct approach, offering cash and power if Jesus will turn from the Father. And again, Jesus quotes from what is written.

13 "You shall fear only the Lord your God; and you shall worship Him and swear by His name. 14 "You shall not follow other gods, any of the gods of the peoples who surround you, (Deuteronomy 6:13-14 NASB95)

To "fall down and worship me" (Matthew 4:9) would be to do what the deceiver commanded. This is equated to "follow other gods" in verse 14 above, and to "fear" or "swear by" in verse 13 above. Each of these terms means the same thing. We "worship" (fear, swear by, follow) God when we do what He says.

How many of us "buy the kingdoms" every day in small ways! To worship God, first and foremost, requires a heart of loving obedience. Anything else is mere lip-service, as stated in Isaiah (Isaiah 29:13-14). To worship God and Him only is to, in essence, obey. It happens that God is the only God, and He is the source of all light, life and love. So it doesn't make any sense to move away from Him in the first place.

Worshipping God is a whole person effort. If we say we love Him, praise Him and adore Him, but we don't do what He says, we only have our lips involved. That is not enough for God. He wants everything we've got. After all, He gave it to us in the first place.

Jesus gives us the pattern for responding to whatever is thrown at us by anyone. Even when part of the Word was used to tempt Him, He responded with another part in a balanced way (or even a 'whole Bible' way). Always with loyalty to God uppermost.

Jesus knew God and God's Words intimately, and His worship of God included the whole of His heart, soul, and strength. He always referred back to God's Word as the basis for meeting the challenges thrown at Him by the father of lies. Each time He was tempted He clung to the Word for defense. In doing so, He showed that His intent and actions were submitted to God in complete obedience.

For me to have the same steadiness and fearless response to temptation means I have to eat His body and drink His blood all the time. I need to read and do the whole of His Word, balancing all of the parts together. I worship God alone by submitting myself to His Word alone through continual and loyal obedience to Him.

12 For though by this time you ought to be teachers, you have need again for someone to teach you the elementary principles of the oracles of God, and you have come to need milk and not solid food. 13 For everyone who partakes only of milk is not accustomed to the word of righteousness, for he is an infant. 14 But solid food is for the mature, who because of practice have their senses trained to discern good and evil. (Hebrews 5:12-14 NASB95)

Since God's Word is the final authority for a whole Bible believer, that's where we go to resolve disputes. If He says "do this" then that's what we do. If He says "don't do this" then we should avoid it. And if He's not specific, maybe we shouldn't try to help Him out by adding to or subtracting from what He says. If He left it open, we should also. The Bible shouldn't have to be extremely detailed about every tiny little thing. There is enough in there that, coupled with our God-given conscience, we can figure out what is right and what is wrong in every situation.

‘Now these things, brethren, I have figuratively applied to myself and Apollos for your sakes, so that in us you may learn not to exceed what is written, so that no one of you will become arrogant in behalf of one against the other. (1 Corinthians 4:6 NASB95)

We don't have to turn around and make our understanding the standard for everyone else. We are given some slack by God to learn, and we can extend the same slack to others while they are learning. When we push too hard it just ends up as legalism. That's when a person gives up studying and learning for themselves and just copies what they see others doing.

It takes time to understand the Word and understand how to change and fit every new thing into daily living. Encourage growth in others by sharing your insights and methods. Don't freak out if they don't jump into your thinking processes. As Paul says, learn not to go beyond what is written.

Moses' seat. When inquiring about the validity of the Law in a believer's life, sooner or later this Scripture will pop up.

¹Then Jesus spoke to the crowds and to His disciples, ²saying: "The scribes and the Pharisees have seated themselves in the chair of Moses; ³therefore all that they tell you, do and observe, but do not do according to their deeds; for they say things and do not do them. (Matthew 23:1-3 NASB95)

On the surface, it looks like we should do everything the scribes and Pharisees say. But let's look closer. Notice that the leaders "seated themselves." This I think is a clear indication of usurping God's authority. There's no provision for Pharisees or Sadducees in the Law. But even if we could classify them under the term 'elders,' Jesus says they're hypocrites.

Jesus is teaching us to follow the leaders only as long as they follow Moses (the written Law). Why just the written Law, and not the oral? Because the written is the only standard that we can verify came from God. Some claim the oral law came directly from Moses, but this claim is one of those power grabs from the Bible that some religious leaders do. Large portions of the Talmud (or church tradition) have very little basis in the Word.

Many times in Israel's past, the leaders led into idolatry and many horrible practices. Is Jesus saying we are required to follow leaders when they lead off the path? Emphatically not. When they take a left turn, we should keep on going straight. The church is routinely leading away from the Word now too; all we have to do is look at the results. We shouldn't be blindly following those leaders either.

As long as teaching fits in the framework and on the foundation that Moses laid down (Genesis through Deuteronomy) we should follow. All other books that were added to the Bible

had to pass this muster, and so should every other teaching that claims to be God's. When a teacher departs from the Word, true believers should depart from the teacher.

Every Jot and Tittle. Jesus teaches us in another way not to go beyond what is written when He speaks of jots and tittles. A jot or a tittle is a small part of Hebrew letters, like the dot on an 'i' or the cross of a 't.' The ESV calls them an "iota" and "dot." When Jesus speaks of small things like this in Matthew 5:18, He is comparing them to the tiniest parts of God's Word.

18For verily I say unto you, Till heaven and earth pass, one jot or one tittle shall in no wise pass from the law, till all be fulfilled. 19Whosoever therefore shall break one of these least commandments, and shall teach men so, he shall be called the least in the kingdom of heaven: but whosoever shall do and teach them, the same shall be called great in the kingdom of heaven. (Matthew 5:18-19 KJV)

Every part of every letter of God's Word is important, and will not pass away at the whim of any man. In case there is any misunderstanding, Jesus goes on to say that any who break the smallest command and teach others to break it shall be called least in the kingdom.

"Least" may mean the lowest rewards but still in the kingdom, or it might mean being assigned to the lowest part of the kingdom (like hell). Whatever it means, it is certain that Jesus takes God's commands seriously and wants all of His followers to do the same. Who in their right minds would shoot for 'the least' in anything?

Every jot, tittle, dot and iota in the Law (the Word) is important, but we've also got to watch making big doctrines out of little words as it says in 2 Timothy 2:14 (NASB95).

14Remind them of these things, and solemnly charge them in the presence of God not to wrangle about words, which is useless and leads to the ruin of the hearers.

Some people like to use a concordance (sort of a dictionary for Hebrew and Greek if you don't know) and thumb through it until they find a word definition that suits them. Others take an English word, translate it back into the Greek, and then look for the Hebrew equivalent. They translate that word back into English, and build a huge doctrine that just doesn't have any support (or very little support) from the Word. All that really gets them is a lot of exercise making stuff up. If something was that important, I'm sure God would've spelled it out plainly in His own Words.

Wrangling over words is the last refuge of someone who is intent on shoving a pet doctrine down everyone else's throat. These people also tend to discount the ability of God to convey His Word in a way that is easily understood by the average man. To shove effectively they need to scrounge authority from the Word by wrangling over words (1 Timothy 6:3-5).

Really, do you think God would hide His will in some obscure word ending or dictionary definition? No. His will is plain and easy to understand and plastered repeatedly all over the Bible. It doesn't take a genius word wrangler to find out His meaning.

It seems clear from a plain reading of the Word that God said what He meant and meant what He said. We don't have to go through a lengthy bunch of grammatical gymnastics to get His point. Oh, sometimes it helps to clarify a word or two here and there. But if we are responsible in comparing Scripture with Scripture and maybe comparing translations, along with judicious use of the concordance, we'll generally be fine. Mostly we need to read it and heed it. But we do need to remember that every part of every one of our Father's words is important. Our

best bet is to shoot for ‘greatest’ in the kingdom and devote ourselves to a serious understanding and application of every tiny piece.

Don't be a piker. Speaking of small pieces, in the section of the Word below Jesus is pointing out that all of the commandments important. But some are more ‘weighty’ than others.

23“Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you tithe mint and dill and cummin, and have neglected the weightier provisions of the law: justice and mercy and faithfulness; but these are the things you should have done without neglecting the others. (Matthew 23:23 NASB95)

The measuring mentioned in the verse is just being ridiculous. They are using a precise measurement for less weighty issues and being stingy with the weightier provisions of the Law - justice, mercy, and faithfulness. If I am nit-picky about tithing some spices, yet ignore more important issues that have a far greater effect on people, something is out of whack somewhere.

Jesus says that, while it is a good thing to measure out the spices, we should pay equal if not greater attention to weightier issues. This is like a child with a laser sense of judgment when eyeing a sibling’s dessert, but steals money out of mom’s purse when she’s not looking.

This is one of those teachings from Jesus ignored by people who divide the Law into civil, ceremonial and moral sections. He clearly says all the commands are important. Some are weightier than others, as He showed by healing on the Sabbath, but none of them are gone.

A Thorough Investigation. This is where quite a few people falter in spectacular fashion. We jump to a conclusion based on what little we see. Or we react by our own set of laws instead of God’s. This is such a common occurrence now, especially in the church. It is easy to lose sight of the fact that it is a standard part of God’s Word to make a thorough investigation. After all, everyone should have a fair trial before the hanging!

14then you shall investigate and search out and inquire thoroughly. If it is true and the matter established that this abomination has been done among you,
(Deuteronomy 13:14 NASB95)

18“The judges shall investigate thoroughly, and if the witness is a false witness and he has accused his brother falsely, 19then you shall do to him just as he had intended to do to his brother. Thus you shall purge the evil from among you.
(Deuteronomy 19:18-19 NASB95)

I’m sure we’ve all experienced a rushed judgment directed at our self. We desperately wish that people would give us a chance to explain the circumstances. But they’ve already passed sentence and consigned you or me to the outer darkness for all they care. Sometimes there’s another agenda, such as someone just wanting to get rid of you or smear your reputation. This is another reason people don’t want to have an objective standard around. The standard makes it harder to railroad people.

If I am on the receiving end of this, there’s not much I can do except heave a large sigh of regret and move on. Actually, I’m quite practiced at this by now, because it seems very few people care to investigate thoroughly. But it really frustrates when people are judging you on their own personal criteria not connected with the Word.

A thorough investigation is when facts are gathered, witnesses come forward and we evaluate their testimony. We compare the facts to the Word in order to render an impartial and just verdict. At least, this is what's supposed to happen. You and I both know how very rare this is in most congregations today.

Our God is a just god, and He expects His people to pursue justice too. But influence pedaling is a major past time. Pastors or rabbis are untouchable. Money is king with a lot of people. Real justice is scarce. Many want to commit the Law to the rubbish heap so they can pursue their agendas unburdened by accountability or humility.

And don't try to sell me the lame concept that justice and love are separate. People try this all the time. You've heard it said (now where have I heard that statement before?) that we should exercise 'justice in love.' This is true, except that the two are not separate. Justice is love; love without justice isn't love.

If we use the Word properly, we are doing both. The reason Jesus had to die is because justice and love both had to be satisfied. One could not be exercised by God without the other. It was a very difficult puzzle for God – how to justify sinners without merely 'overlooking' sin. The resolution of this puzzle was the death and resurrection of God in human form. There is such a thing as being too harsh. But that is condemnation, not justice. We condemn when we try to practice justice outside of God's Word.

People ask me questions quite a bit about the Law. Most of the questions don't really qualify as questions but are more like accusations. These usually center on the penalty aspect of the Law, such as whether or not we should stone homosexuals or adulterers. The answer is most emphatically not. The original idea for 'due process' comes from God. He tells us not to take the Law into our own hands, especially to "act against the life of your neighbor."

15'You shall do no injustice in judgment; you shall not be partial to the poor nor defer to the great, but you are to judge your neighbor fairly. 16'You shall not go about as a slanderer among your people, and you are not to act against the life of your neighbor; I am the Lord. 17'You shall not hate your fellow countryman in your heart; you may surely reprove your neighbor, but shall not incur sin because of him. 18'You shall not take vengeance, nor bear any grudge against the sons of your people, but you shall love your neighbor as yourself; I am the Lord.

(Leviticus 19:15-18 NASB95)

Believers do not have a sovereign state with the power for capital punishment. That was removed when Israel was booted out of the Land. Since they've returned they have yet to decide to follow God's Laws. Even if we had the state and the power, we would still have to carry out other provisions, such as a thorough investigation. We are not allowed to go around throwing rocks at someone on a whim just because we think they broke the Law. There's too much of that going on as it is. We are not to act as judge and jury by ourselves, nor are we to sit in judgment on His Word.

If there was a question about the Law in a dispute, it went to the elders. If the elders could not settle it, the case went to the priests.² But since we don't have Levitical priests anymore, we go right to the Word of God for the final authority. Both elders and priests would

² Exodus 18:25-27; Numbers 11:17; Deuteronomy 17:8-12.

have to use the Word anyway, so we can also. This is where we might use a couple of other principles clarified for us in the New Testament.

7Actually, then, it is already a defeat for you, that you have lawsuits with one another. Why not rather be wronged? Why not rather be defrauded? 8On the contrary, you yourselves wrong and defraud. You do this even to your brethren. (1 Corinthians 6:7-8 NASB95)

If you can't reach agreement with someone, perhaps there is too much reliance on the letter and not enough on the Spirit. I think there is a good possibility that in such a case the grievance is probably a small one. Existing 'case law' covers the major sins. So if the legal wrangling drags on, there's a good chance it is more a matter of pride than of justice. Either that or the Law is being ignored in the first place, and we cannot force someone (yet, anyway) to follow it. In that case, maybe it's just better to let it go.

Weights and measures. The following verses are specifically about weights and measures, as in accurate scales and measuring tapes or rulers. But the principles apply to all of our dealings with each other, especially in the field of justice and judging. We are to be honest and fair in all of our dealings, not just the merchant transactions. Everyone who doesn't is an "abomination to the Lord." This is along the same lines as homosexuality and eating pork.³

13“You shall not have in your bag differing weights, a large and a small. 14“You shall not have in your house differing measures, a large and a small. 15“You shall have a full and just weight; you shall have a full and just measure, that your days may be prolonged in the land which the Lord your God gives you. 16“For everyone who does these things, everyone who acts unjustly is an abomination to the Lord your God. (Deuteronomy 25:13-16 NASB95)

Some want to bring up the following verse here to suggest that we don't judge at all.

37“Do not judge, and you will not be judged; and do not condemn, and you will not be condemned; pardon, and you will be pardoned. (Luke 6:37 NASB95)

Jesus seems to be saying we should avoid judging all together. But look at another verse on the same subject.

24“Do not judge according to appearance, but judge with righteous judgment.” (John 7:24 NASB95)

It would appear on the surface that Jesus is contradicting Himself, wouldn't it? But of course, that's not the case. It might help to realize that judging has several different meanings. Sometimes we can think of judging as condemning⁴ and sometimes as discernment.

³ Deuteronomy 22:5, wearing the opposite gender's clothing; see also 'detestable' in places like Leviticus 7, 11 and 20, or 'abhorrent' in Leviticus 11:12 and Leviticus 20:21. These are interchangeable words.

⁴ The word in Luke 6:37 translated 'condemned' (G2613a *katadikazo*) means much the same as the word translated 'judge' (G2919 *krino*) but the gist of the meaning I believe is to practice discernment according to the Word.

I think when Jesus says ‘don’t judge’ He means not to pass sentence by ourselves. When He says ‘judge with righteous judgment,’ He means to use discernment (according to the Word). This includes removing the log from our own eye so we can have clear vision to judge (Matthew 7:3-5). We condemn when we step outside of the spirit-filled Word and consign someone to punishment without proper discernment. Judging apart from the Word is the proper definition of ‘judgmental.’

Judging by appearance is also wrong because there is not enough information to render a fair and balanced verdict according to the legal principles He gave us. We use discernment when we balance the whole of the Word together in justice, compassion, and mercy. Each of these is part and parcel of the Law of love. This is why God doesn’t like bribes – they pervert justice. We are not to be so stiff-necked. Instead, we must operate with a circumcised heart of flesh, tender toward God’s Word and ways.

16“So circumcise your heart, and stiffen your neck no longer. 17“For the Lord your God is the God of gods and the Lord of lords, the great, the mighty, and the awesome God who does not show partiality nor take a bribe. 18“He executes justice for the orphan and the widow, and shows His love for the alien by giving him food and clothing. (Deuteronomy 10:16-18 NASB95)

8“You shall not take a bribe, for a bribe blinds the clear-sighted and subverts the cause of the just. 9“You shall not oppress a stranger, since you yourselves know the feelings of a stranger, for you also were strangers in the land of Egypt. (Exodus 23:8-9 NASB95. See also Deuteronomy 16:19-20.)

Bribes take a multitude of forms from tangible to intangible, and direct to indirect. They could be something as simple as acceptance by the crowd. Or as complex and harder to buy as political office.

The sad fact is that in many cases people who wear His name don’t even have to be paid to turn a blind eye to the plight of others. Frequently we do it for free or just on the promise of payment. We cater to the whims of wealthy people, for instance, simply because they might favor us with a reward eventually. We don’t seem to realize that many wealthy people have their money because they don’t give it away!

1My brethren, do not hold your faith in our glorious Lord Jesus Christ with an attitude of personal favoritism. (James 2:1 NASB95)

Balance the Word. In 2 Samuel 6:6-8 (also 1 Chronicles 13) a priest named Uzza (or Uzzah) touches the Ark, as it is being brought to Jerusalem by David on a cart, and dies. In 1 Chronicles 15:13 David speaks of the reason for Uzza’s death – the priests were not carrying the Ark as specified.

13“Because you did not carry it at the first, the LORD our God made an outburst on us, for we did not seek Him according to the ordinance.” (1 Chronicles 15:13 NASB95)

Later, we read of Hezekiah and his Passover, where he prays for the people because they were not observing it exactly.

¹⁸For a multitude of the people, even many from Ephraim and Manasseh, Issachar and Zebulun, had not purified themselves, yet they ate the Passover otherwise than prescribed. For Hezekiah prayed for them, saying, "May the good LORD pardon ¹⁹everyone who prepares his heart to seek God, the LORD God of his fathers, though not according to the purification rules of the sanctuary." ²⁰So the LORD heard Hezekiah and healed the people. (2 Chronicles 30:18-20 NASB95)

There are two attitudes represented by these references. Do we fear to make a wrong move unless we do it according to "the rule," or do we think Jesus is our passport to do whatever we want? The answer lies in balance. We balance the Word together with love and the Spirit and prayerfully consider how to follow Him. Consult God first; try to obey exactly as He says; but make allowance for good faith effort. Lack of understanding is one thing; deliberately avoiding what is clearly taught is another.

An unbalanced extreme is the standard Christian idea that Jesus came to repudiate the Law. Now we think we can do anything we want because He paid the price of our disobedience. "Let us sin that grace may abound." Other unbalanced extremes are in legalism or Jewish orthodoxy. Legalism is misuse of the Law for earning salvation. Orthodoxy is restrictive traditions that override the Word, squeezing Jesus out. The extra restrictions make us feel like we are paying our own price, but this means ignoring grace in favor of personal holiness or merit.

A cup of flour is not a cookie, and a tomato is not lasagna. Balancing the Word means all of it comes into play in any area of life, and all the ingredients have to be there in proportion to get something sweet or tasty. The deceiver tries to derail our practice of God's Word in any way he can by trying to shove us to one extreme or the other. Balanced application is abhorrent, detestable, and an abomination to him and his ilk. He just can't stand the smell of cookies.

The guy executed for gathering sticks (Numbers 15:32-36) on the Sabbath was ignoring what God said in a 'high-handed' or deliberate way. If he ignored God in the little things, he would ignore God in the big things. It's like the broken window theory of crime prevention.⁵ In addition to his own disobedient action, if left unpunished the stick guy's attitude would give others permission to sin.

It's obvious that attitudes in Israel weren't all that great in the first place, seeing as how this episode came right between two of the worst examples of disobedience ever committed. Israel decided they should do what God said in this instance, right on the heels of refusing to go into the Land (Numbers 14) and just before Korah's rebellion (Numbers 16). Wild swings in obedience are not what God desires from His people.

The Word itself tells us how to handle the Word if we just read it and do it as if we are taking in His body and blood. It doesn't get any simpler. Man lives and worships by every word from God. Testing is by obedience, not by disobedience. Additives, editing, opinions or teachings of men are not needed. A soft heart intent on doing the will of God will easily find out what pleases God.

⁵ If a window (a small crime) is broken and nobody does anything about it, then more windows get broken (bigger crimes). Rudy Giuliani, the mayor of New York, caused drastic reduction in crime by directing the police to enforce the 'little laws' as well as the big ones.

¹⁶ So Jesus answered them, “My teaching is not mine, but his who sent me. ¹⁷ If anyone’s will is to do God’s will, he will know whether the teaching is from God or whether I am speaking on my own authority. ¹⁸ The one who speaks on his own authority seeks his own glory; but the one who seeks the glory of him who sent him is true, and in him there is no falsehood. (John 7:16-18 ESV)

But it’s not the finding that’s the problem. Jesus gave concrete examples of how to follow God when challenged by the deceiver. Each time He went back to the plain meaning of what is written, properly balanced. Each time He gave the same response – “It is written.” Paul echoes the Messiah with caution not to go beyond what is written. Of course both are referring to the Word of God, not just any writing from the opinions of men.

Believers don’t have to follow men who usurp authority from Moses’ seat, yet depart from Moses’ teachings. I’ve got file cabinets full of such commentary, and in the end it’s mostly fire starter. Every jot and tittle of God’s Word, on the other hand, stays fresh and relevant and as full of life as ever. Why would we want to be piker’s with such plenty? True discipleship strives for just weights and measures. We use the Law as a scale for thorough investigations, balancing all of His living oracles together for defense against the deceiver’s attacks.

Jesus corrected the partial use of Scriptures and put it all back together with, I might say, a ‘whole Bible’ view. He gave us all we need to make outstanding cookies. Or lasagna. Or other good tasting life mix-ins.

⁴⁷ Whoever is of God hears the words of God. The reason why you do not hear them is that you are not of God.” (John 8:47 ESV)

These are some of the general guidelines from the Word on how to apply the Word. In the next chapter, we will look at some specifics and try to answer some of the controversial stuff that will be thrown at you when you try to practice what God preaches.