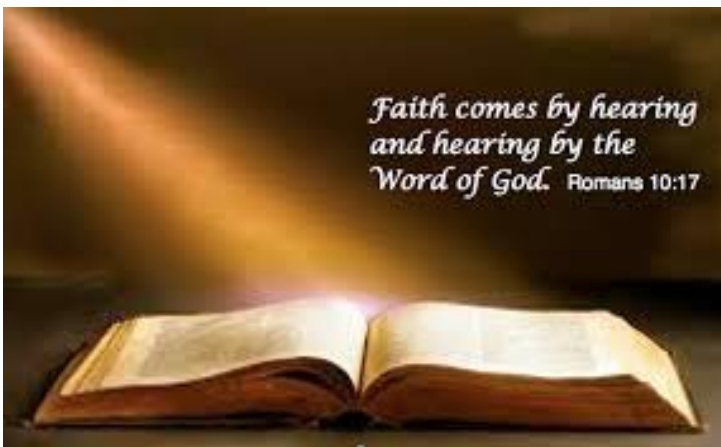




RESPONDING TO GOD'S WORD

"Despise not prophesyings."

- 1 Thessalonians 5:20

Responding to God's Word

Our text for this discussion is one verse, on very brief verse, verse 20 of chapter 5, 1 Thessalonians chapter 5, verse 20; the apostle Paul says, "Do not despise prophetic utterances." You know, in so many ways, the Bible is an absolutely amazing book. There are a number of different angles that one can take in looking at the amazing character of Scripture. Let me give you perhaps some of the more unique ones. Some years ago an Israeli business man by the name Ze-el Fetterman began to brood over the account of the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah. And he read in the Scripture that it said, "And lo, the smoke of the country went up as the smoke of a furnace." He guessed that such conflagration might indicate underground gas, and underground gas, he guessed, meant underground oil. He was right. In 1953, Israel's first oil well went into operation somewhere near the ancient site of Sodom and Gomorrah.

Standard Oil Company has discovered oil and has been operating wells in Egypt for a long time. It is generally known that they do that, but the reason for going to that ancient land to look for oil in the first place is not generally known. It has been said that one of the directors of the Standard Oil Company happened to be reading the second chapter of Exodus. The third verse caught his attention; it states that the ark of bulrushes, which the mother of Moses made for her child, was daubed with slime and with pitch. This gentleman reasoned that where there was pitch there must be oil, and if there was oil in Moses' time, it is probably still there. So the company sent out Charles Witchet, its geologist and oil expert, to make investigations, with the result that oil was in fact discovered.

Here's my favorite. The World Christian Digest reported that a Haifa policeman who knew his Bible got on the trail of a gang of smugglers. They used, to be inconspicuous, an ass-drawn caravan, or cart, to move through the city. The policeman managed to capture some of the asses, though the smugglers got away. The officer let the beasts of burden go without food for many days, and then he turned them loose. And just as he predicted from Isaiah 1:3, "the ox knows his owner and the ass his master's crib," the starving animals led the police directly to the smugglers.

The Bible is an amazing book. Through the centuries, people have centered their lives around the Bible. It is precious, as well as unique. One of my favorite stories is the story of a little girl in France who was poor and was stone blind. She had obtained the gospel of Mark in Braille and learned to read it with the tips of her fingers. Because she had such a passionate love for the Scripture and read it constantly, her fingers became calloused, and by becoming calloused, diminished the capability she had to discern the letters. One day, so much desiring to read the Scripture, she cut the skin from the ends of her fingers in an effort to increase their sensibility, only to destroy the nerves. She felt that she must give up the beloved book, and weeping, the story says, she pressed her lips to the pages of Mark, and said, "Farewell, farewell." To her surprise, her lips, more delicate than her fingers, discerned the form of the letters, and all that night she read, with her lips, the Word of God, and overflowed with joy at this new opportunity.

Jesus summed it all up when He said, "Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceeds out of the mouth of God." The Bible is a marvelous, unequalled book. In fact, it's my judgment that somebody should put a warning label on the Bible, and maybe it ought to read like this, "Warning: this book is habit forming, regular use causes loss of anxiety, decreased appetite for lying, cheating, lusting, hating and stealing. Symptoms of condition are increased feelings of joy, peace, love and compassion."

The Bible is the supreme book. No book even comes close to its excellence. The apostle Paul has the supremacy of Scripture in mind in that verse I read you a moment ago. When he said, "Do not despise prophecies, or prophesyings, or prophetic utterances," he has in mind the revelation of God. He is speaking here about our attitude toward God's revelation, whether it be spoken, or written. Now remember, this is, verse 20 is, a part of a list of basics for Christian living. Back in verse 16, he reminded us to rejoice always, then to pray without ceasing, then in everything to give thanks. Then last time we noted he said, "Do not quench the Spirit." Now he goes to really a unique subject all its own, and says, "Do not look down on the revelation of God."

This is all part, remember, of growing a healthy flock, which involves the sheep having the right relationship to the Great Shepherd. The apostle Paul has talked about how the church is to relate to itself, leaders to people, people to leaders, people to people and now people to the Lord, and these are all components of what makes an effective church. Now these last

commands are very direct and very specific. “Do not quench the Spirit” is unmistakable. Verse 21, “Examine everything carefully,” that’s unmistakable. “Hold fast to that which is good,” very clear. “Abstain from every form of evil,” very clear. The only one that might be a bit confusing is that second one, “Do not despise prophesyings, or prophecies.” We need to look a little bit closely at this to find out exactly what he is saying.

Just as a footnote for those of you who are interested in the language structure, in each of the five commands starting in verse 19, the subject is first. The Spirit, do not quench. Prophecies, do not despise. Everything, examine. What is good, hold fast. Evil, abstain from it – so that the emphasis is on that subject. This causes a very forceful kind of statement in the Greek. Let’s then look at just some of the specific elements of this verse that will free us to understand its meaning. The word “despise” means to downgrade. It means to consider as nothing, or to make absolutely nothing of. Prophecies, prophteias, is another very important Bible word that is going to take a little bit more study for us to understand. But it basically means “what God has said” – what God has said.

Now, that falls into two categories, spoken and written, and I want you to understand that. The word prophteias, which is the word here, is used in the New Testament both for spoken word and for written word. That’s very important, because when you go to interpret this, there’s not really anything there contextually to help you; and so you have to look at the word, and then you have to go to other texts and find out how it’s used. Sometimes it is used for the spoken word, sometimes it is used for the written word.

Let me give you some illustrations of that. Turn in your Bible to Romans chapter 12, and just to kind of help you to grasp this word so that you have a clear understanding of this interpretation, you will find in chapter 12 of Romans a list of spiritual gifts. Then in verse 6 is that beginning point of that list, and it says in verse 6, “We have gifts that differ according to the grace given us, let us exercise them accordingly.” Then this, “If prophecy according to the proportion of his faith.” Now there is the use of that same word. And here it has to do with speaking, a speaking gift. In fact, 1 Peter 4 divides the spiritual gifts into two categories, speaking gifts and serving gifts. The word means to “speak before.” Not in a prophetic sense, but to stand up in front of people and speak before them. It means literally to speak publicly, to proclaim publicly. This gift, the gift of prophecy, that some Christians

have been given, is a Holy Spirit given skill for public proclamation of God's Word. It is a Holy Spirit given skill for public proclamation of God's Word.

Now, if we look at the New Testament, when the gift of prophecy was really in its fullness, we will see two categories – two categories. Sometimes when someone exercised this gift it was revelation. Sometimes it was the first time anybody had heard it. It was a direct word from God. Sometimes it was not. Sometimes it was simply a reiteration or a proclamation of what God had already said or what had already been written. But the word “prophecy” does not necessarily tell us anything about the form, whether it was new revelation or something revealed earlier; it only tells us about the manner in which it was articulated. It is a public proclamation.

Sometimes a prophecy could be very practical – sometimes very practical. For example, in the book of Acts, and chapter 11, verses 27 and 28, we find a very practical expression of prophecy. Prophets came down, in verse 27, from Jerusalem to Antioch and one of them, named Agabus, stood up, and began to indicate by the Spirit that there would certainly be a great famine all over the world. Now here, God speaks through this man what is a very practical prophecy. It wasn't doctrinal. It wasn't to be recorded as a book in the Bible or a part of a book. It wasn't theological. It was simply practical. And this frequently occurred. New Testament prophets spoke the Word of God directly with regard to the practical life and ministry of the church. In chapter 15 of Acts, verse 32, “Judas and Silas, also being prophets themselves, encouraged and strengthened the brethren with a lengthy message.” There, you have a couple of New Testament prophets who are just preaching. They're just preaching. No doubt they were preaching an encouraging, exhorting word, that was not direct revelation at that point, but they were simply passing on something which God had revealed to encourage the saints. There may have been a supernatural element in it. We don't know that, it's not indicated in the text, as it is in Acts 11, where it says he was speaking actually by the Spirit.

So, prophecy is a broad term that refers to public proclamation of the message from God. It can be a new message, at least in New Testament times it could be, when they were still receiving revelation and God could speak directly through the mouth of a prophet, or it could be reiteration, that is, simply communicating publicly what God had already said, and already revealed. The miraculous part of it – that is, new revelation, whether it was practical or

doctrinal – was distinctive to the early church era. Most often, even in the early times, most often the gift of prophecy was the ability to proclaim God’s Word already revealed. And in Romans 12:6, that is precisely what Paul is saying. If you’ll look back at that verse a minute, I want to call something to your attention that is of utmost importance. In Romans 12:6, he says, “If you have the gift of prophecy, use it according to the proportion of the faith.” I want to get that translation right according to the Greek. “If prophecy, according to the proportion of the faith,” not his faith; the possessive pronoun not there in the original.

Now, the word “proportion,” very important: analogia, analogia, from which we get “analogy.” When we say something is analogous to something else, we mean that it has a relationship of agreement with something else. If I say “That truth is analogous to this,” I mean that there is an agreeing relationship; that whatever this is it agrees with this. That’s why the Reformers used to say analogia scriptura, the Scripture always agrees with itself, right? It isn’t in disagreement with itself.

So what is he saying in Romans 12:6? That this gift of prophecy must be used in proper agreement with the faith – very important statement – in proper agreement with the faith. What is “the faith?” The faith is used several times in the New Testament as a synonym for the God-given body of Christian truth; doctrine; the God-given body of Christian truth; the revelation of God. In Acts 6, verse 7, “The Word of God kept on spreading, the number of the disciples continued to increase greatly in Jerusalem, and a great many of the priests were becoming obedient to the faith,” that is, the doctrine, the truth. In Jude, Jude reminds the reader that we are earnestly contend for the faith. What faith? The once for all delivered to the saints faith, that’s the body of revelation we know as the Word of God. And in verse 20 of Jude, “Building yourselves up on your most holy faith.”

So Paul says in Romans 12:6, “Anybody who prophesies, is empowered to speak forth words for God, must be in complete agreement and harmony with God’s already revealed faith.” You understand that? So the one who speaks, speaks in agreement with the faith; that’s how that word is used. So if when Paul says “Do not despise prophesyings,” and we ask ourselves, “What does he mean,” we can say, first of all, he means those utterances coming from gifted men, which are in perfect agreement with – what – the Word of God – the Word of God. Revelation, toward the end, in chapter 19 and verse 10, says, “And I fell at his feet to worship him” – that is John – “and he said to me, ‘Do not do that, I am a fellow servant of

yours,” “the angel said, ‘and your brethren who hold the testimony of Jesus; worship God.’” Then this, “For the testimony concerning Jesus is the Spirit of prophecy.” Prophecy testifies to Jesus Christ. Prophecy is in accord with the revelation of the Word of God. Anytime anyone stands to speak a verbal message, we can judge its validity by acknowledging that it is in perfect agreement with the Scripture. Prophecies can never deviate from the written Word.

And by the way, in Romans 12 the gift of prophecy is in a list that is devoid of any reference to any miraculous gift. No miraculous gifts are listed in Romans 12. Some are listed in 1 Corinthians 12, but not in Romans 12. So we can then discern that this can be a nonmiraculous gift; that is, simply the proclamation of truth in perfect agreement with the Word of God.

But let’s go to 1 Corinthians chapter 12. I need to take you a step further. First Corinthians, chapter 12 and verse 10; here we see this same gift again, only this time it is sprinkled in a verse that has discussion of miraculous gifts. He talks about the effecting of miracles, 1 Corinthians 12:10, to another person has been given prophecy, to another the distinguishing of spirits, to another various kinds of tongues or languages, to another the interpretation of those languages. Now, there you have some miraculous gifts which were unique to the apostolic era. But the gift is here mentioned again, this time among the miraculous gifts, so we conclude that there are times when this gift, in apostolic time, was miraculous – in fact, when the prophet was literally getting a direct revelation from God, not prior given. So there were times when it had that miraculous element. Once that miraculous era of revelation ended with the apostles, we then have the nonmiraculous gift remaining; that is, the public proclamation of that which is the truth of God in perfect accord with the written Word.

So there were times when the prophet in the apostolic era spoke revelation. There were also times, and most often, when even in that age they spoke what was reiteration, just reiterating what God had already revealed which, of course, is the way the gift is used today.

Now further, I want to take you into 1 Corinthians, chapter 14, because you need to understand this gift. You say, “Why?” Because in verse 1 of chapter 12, he says, “I don’t want you to be ignorant about them,” neither do I. I want you to understand them. Chapter 14 of 1 Corinthians, verse 1, “Pursue love, yet desire earnestly spiritual gifts, but especially

that you may prophesy” – a very important word, listen carefully. This is not written to an individual, this is written to a church. No individual can earnestly desire a spiritual gift and therefore get it. He is saying when the church comes together you must desire earnestly that the spiritual gifts be in operation, but especially that you may prophesy – collectively. He’s not saying an individual believer is to desire this gift if he doesn’t have it, he is saying the church collectively is to desire its use. Why? Verse 3, “One who prophesies speaks to men for edification, and exhortation, and consolation” – it edifies, it exhorts, and it comforts, prophecy does all of that. Prophesying does all of that. It is essential to the life of the church.

Verse 6, he says, “If I come to you speaking in tongues, or languages, what am I going to profit you? To profit, I have to speak by way of a revelation, or knowledge, or prophecy, or teaching.” And there again he’s saying prophecy fits into an intelligible, meaningful, edifying, exhorting, and comforting mode.

Look down in verse 39 for a moment of the same chapter. He says it again. “Therefore, my brethren, desire earnestly to prophesy.” Then he says, “I’m not telling you to forbid languages,” tongues; in its proper usage in ancient times, it had a place. But I’m saying when you desire something to be in your assembly, desire to prophesy. Why? Because it edifies, it exhorts, and it comforts. Why? It is the Word of God that is able to build you up. It is the Word of God that calls you to holy conduct. It is the Word of God that is the source of your comfort. And anybody who prophesied prophesied the revelation of the Word of God.

For example, look at verse 37, 1 Corinthians 14, “If anybody thinks he’s a prophet or spiritual, then let him recognize that the things which I write to you are the Lord’s commandment.” In other words, if anybody says he’s a prophet, then he’s going to have to square up accurately and be in complete agreement with everything I write, because I’m writing the very commandment of God. So anybody who claims to be a prophet has to square up with the Scripture.

Back in verse 24 of chapter 14, he says, “If everybody prophesies and an unbeliever, an ungifted man enters, he’s convicted by all, he’s called to account by all.” In other words, if an unbeliever comes into a meeting and you’re prophesying, proclaiming the Word of God, he’s going to hear it, he’s going to understand it, he’s going to be convicted by it. Verse 25,

“The secrets of his heart are going to be disclosed, he’ll fall on his face and worship God declaring that God is certainly among you.”

Back in verse 23, he says, “If you’re all jabbering in languages and an ungifted or an unbeliever enters, he’s going to say you’re mad.” It’s not going to have any evangelistic effect at all. Prophecy, then, is the proclamation of the truth of God in perfect agreement with Scripture. It is evangelistic, it is edifying, it is exhortative, and it comforts. That is prophecy. It is the proclamation publicly of the truth of God. Now, we don’t live in the apostolic era. Ephesians 2:20 says the church is built on the foundation of the apostles and the prophets. We’re a long way from that foundation. We still have the gift of prophecy, which is proclaiming the Word of God.

Now, having said all of that, we want to say prophecy is not only spoken, but prophecy is written. There are a number of times in the New Testament when the word *prophteias* is used or written revelation. Go back to Matthew 13. And we need to do this Bible study, because this verse can be and has confused many, many people, and frankly, most commentators appear to me to be confused by it. In Matthew 13, verse 14, you have the same word, *prophteias*, and it’s there referring to Isaiah. Matthew 13:14, “In their case the prophecy of Isaiah is being fulfilled,” and then He goes on to quote out of the prophecy of Isaiah itself, chapter 6. So here you have this word prophecy not referring to a speaking, but referring to a writing; not referring to verbal communication, but written communication. And in fact here it refers to the Old Testament prophet Isaiah.

Go over to Romans, the very end, the last chapter, Romans chapter 16, and here you have a very interesting statement in verse 26, Romans 16:26. He says, does Paul, “Now is manifested” – that, of course, he’s referring to the gospel and the revelation of the mystery which is long been hidden; that’s the new covenant of verse 25 – “is now manifested” – and how – “by the Scriptures of the prophets.” In other words, these men who wrote the Scriptures had a prophetic ministry. They spoke before the people. They wrote before the people. They gave the Word of God to the people, either in spoken form and/or written form. So we know, then, that the word can refer to speaking or it can refer to the written Word.

Go to 2 Peter, for a moment, 2 Peter 1, he says in verse 19, “We have the prophetic word.” Then in verse 20, he defines it, “Prophecy of Scripture,” he calls it. The prophetic word, the

prophecy of Scripture, here is the same term again, and here it refers to inspired Scripture. That little phrase “prophecy of Scripture” in verse 20 was the current term for the Old Testament as a unit. It was the Word prophesied. The Old Testament, then, is the composite of prophesied revelation. Peter’s words also would embrace the New Testament, because he says, “No prophecy, old or new, was ever made by an act of human will, but men moved by the Holy Spirit spoke from God.” There he’s talking about prophecy as written Scripture, written Scripture.

Look at Revelation, chapter 1, for just a moment, verse 3. You can just listen if you want. Speaking of Revelation, John writes, “Blessed is he who reads and those who hear the words of the prophecy.” And there he is calling the book of Revelation the prophecy – the prophecy. In the last chapter of Revelation, three times John refers to the book of Revelation as the prophecy – the prophecy – verse 10, verse 18, verse 19. Now all that aside, let me sum it up, okay? Sometimes this word *prophteias* refers to spoken Word, the revelation of God coming through the mouth of a prophet, but always that spoken Word had to be in perfect agreement with the written Word. Sometimes the word prophecy refers to the written Word. In either case, then, prophecy attaches itself to the Scripture. Okay? It is either the Scripture, or in perfect agreement with the Scripture. Paul’s point is clear. When he says, “Do not despise prophesyings,” he is saying, “Do not look down on or consider lightly the revelation of God inscriptured; whether you read it, or whether you hear it proclaimed, do not think lightly of it, do not diminish its importance, do not downgrade or degrade it.”

Job said he treasured the Word of God more than his daily food, chapter 23, verse 12. Jeremiah fed on it every day with joy. Joshua, you remember, in giving that wonderful instruction in chapter 1, verse 8, said, “The book of the law” – that is the Bible, the Scripture – “shall not depart from your mouth; you shall meditate on it day and night, so that you may be careful to do according to all that is written in it; then you will make your way prosperous, then you will have good success,” Joshua 1:8. In Deuteronomy, the Lord instructed the people very, very clearly about how they were to treat the Word of God with supreme devotion. He says to them, “These words which I am commanding you this day” – Deuteronomy 6:6 – “shall be on your heart. You shall teach them diligently to your sons, 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; and you shall bind them as a sign on your hand, and they shall be as frontals on your forehead; and you shall write them on the doorposts of your house

and on your gates.” Fill your life with the Word of God, is what he’s saying. Fill your whole life with the Word of God.

Psalm 1 said, “Blessed is the man who walks not in the counsel of the ungodly, but who walks in the truth of God.” The man whose life is totally devoted to the Word; “His delight,” it says, “is in the law of the Lord, and in His law he meditates day and night.” That is the godly man. We do not look down on Scripture; we exalt it, we lift it up. “How blessed are those whose way is blameless, who walk in the law of the Lord. How blessed are those who observe His testimonies, who seek Him with all their heart,” Psalm 119:1 and 2. “O how I love Thy law,” said David. That command, then, takes us to a very serious consideration of Scripture. “Do not degrade the Word of God.” Treat it with eminent respect is what he is saying.

Now, this is only possible for Christians. First Corinthians 2:10 says that God is revealed them to us through the Spirit. And then down in verse 14, 1 Corinthians 2:14, “A natural man” – that’s an unconverted man, a non Christian person – “does not accept the things of the Spirit of God. They are foolishness to him; he cannot understand them because they are spiritually appraised.” The unregenerate person cannot lift up Scripture, exalt Scripture properly. Martin Luther said that “the unconverted man is like a pillar of salt; he’s like Lot’s wife, like a log and a stone, like a lifeless statue which uses neither eyes nor mouth, neither sense nor heart, until he is converted and regenerated by the Holy Spirit,” end quote.

The best the unsaved man or woman can do is to gnaw on the bark of Scripture without ever really getting to the wood. Kierkegaard, the Danish philosopher, suggested, I think, a graphic illustration of the wrong approach to Scripture. And he was looking at all these people in Academia, who purport to be Bible scholars, and he said this, “A little boy is to be spanked by his father. While the father goes for the rod, the boy stuffs the bottom of his pants with several table napkins. When the father returns and administers the whipping, the boy feels no pain as the napkins absorb the whack of the rod. The little boy represents biblical scholars. They pad their britches with their lexicons, commentaries and concordances. As a result, the Scripture never reaches them as the Word of God. Having nullified its power by shielding themselves with their academic paraphernalia, they thus never hear the Scriptures as the Word of God. If they would unpack their books from their britches – which are necessary,

rightfully used, as illustrated in the story of the Love Letter – then the Scriptures could get through to them as the Word of God.”

Allowing holy Scripture to get through to us as the Word of God is the special work of the Holy Spirit. Only those who have the Holy Spirit can obey this command of not despising the Word of God. You have people in seminaries, and colleges, and churches across America and around the world who purport to be students of Scripture, whose britches are so padded that the Word of God cannot touch them, whose minds have not the knowledge of truth because their hearts have not the indwelling of the Holy Spirit. But those of us who know the Spirit, who know the living God, can understand the truth and see it properly. These people who deny the veracity, authenticity, authority, inspiration, inerrancy of Scripture only reveal that they are in violation of the command “Do not despise prophecies” – do not downgrade, degrade, think lightly of the Scripture.

In fact, beloved, if you do, there is no way possible that you could ever live a Christian life, because the only chart, and compass, and manual you have is the Scripture. All you’re going to be left with is human effort – doing good deeds to try to earn your way in. Unless the Spirit lives in you, and unless you exalt the Word of God, not only in mind but in obedience, you will despise prophesying and violate this very direct command.

Now, as we bring this to a close, and that took a long time just to get through that so you would understand it, I want to ask you two questions. Why should I not despise the Scripture? Why should I not do it? And I’ll just run this by you very briefly. Number one, because of its essential character - because of its essential character. We talked at the very beginning about the uniqueness of the Bible, but let me just tell you about its character as it comes from its own claims. First of all, it is authoritative. The Scripture is authoritative. Isaiah 1:2 says, “Hear, O heavens, and give ear, O earth, for the Lord has spoken.” When God speaks, you’d better listen; it is authoritative.

Secondly, it is infallible – it is infallible. And that is collectively, totally, comprehensively, it misses nothing, makes no mistakes. Psalm 19:7, “The law of the Lord is perfect. The law of the Lord is perfect.” It is total, comprehensive and perfect. And then I like to use the word inerrant. While it is infallible in the whole, it is inerrant in every part. Proverbs 30:5 and 6 says, “Every word of God is pure,” every one – every one, down to the jot and the tittle,

“which will not be removed,” Jesus said. The Word of God is authoritative. When God speaks, you’d better listen. The Word of God is infallible; that is the comprehensive Scripture is flawless. It is inerrant. There is not one mistake in it; in its original autographs, every word of God is pure.

Fourthly, it is sufficient – it is sufficient. It is able to totally transform the soul, Psalm 19 says, to make simple people wise, to bring rejoicing to the heart, to enlighten the eyes. It is sufficient. It is able to make the man of God perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works. It is able to make you wise unto salvation, 2 Timothy 3:15 to 17. It is sufficient for everything.

Number five, it is effective – it is effective. You remember Isaiah 55 says, “So shall My Word be that goes out of My mouth, it shall not return to me void but shall accomplish what I please.” It is effective. When God speaks a word, it comes to pass. And then, it is determinative. It is determinative. What do I mean by that? Your response to the Word of God is determinative of your eternal destiny. “He that is of God hears God’s words. You, therefore, hear them not because you’re not of God.” When someone comes along and denies the authority, infallibility, inerrancy, sufficiency, and effectiveness of Scripture, all they do is reveal their spiritual condition, because if you don’t hear God’s words, you don’t belong to God. Jesus said that. If you do, you belong to God. It is determinative in ascertaining one’s eternal destiny.

So why should we not despise Scripture? Because of its essential character, and secondly, because of its generous benefits – because of its generous benefits. Scripture is the source of truth. John 17:17, Jesus said, “Thy word is truth.” Oh, what a great, great reality that is. Thy word is truth. It is the source of happiness, secondly, it is the source of happiness. Proverbs 8:34 said, “Happy is the man who hears Me.” John said, in 1 John 1:4, “I write these things so your joy may be full.” Luke says, “Happy is the man who obeys the Word,” Luke 6:47 and 48, Luke 11:27 and 28, that’s all throughout Scripture. Revelation 1:3, “Happy is the person who reads this book.” It’s the source of joy and happiness and blessedness.

Thirdly, it’s the source of victory. “Thy Word have I hid in my heart that I might not sin,” said the psalmist. Ephesians 6:17 says, “Take the sword of the Spirit,” which is our weapon. When Jesus was tempted, according to Matthew 4:1 to 11, every time He was tempted He

answered with what? Scripture. He said three times, “It is written.” Yes, the Word of God is the source of our victory over temptation. It’s the source of our happiness. It’s the source of truth.

Fourthly, it’s the source of growth. You remember how we have referred often to 1 Peter 2:2, “As babes desire the pure milk of the Word that you may grow by it.” The Word is the source of our growth. Spurgeon had a great word. He said, “It is the Word that prunes the Christian. It is the truth that purges him, the Scripture made living and powerful by the Holy Spirit.” That’s true. The Word cleanses, purifies and that’s the key to growing. That’s why in John 15, Jesus said, “The Word is like a pruning knife;” it cuts off the succor branches so that the power of growth can reach the productive areas. The Word is the only source of truth, the only source of happiness, the only source of victory, the only source of growth.

Fifthly, the only source of guidance. Psalm 19:8 says that the Word is right, and what it means is it lays out a right path. It is a right path to walk in. And then Psalm 119:105 says, “It is a lamp to that path.” It is the path, it is the lamp that lights the path; it is the way to walk. It makes us wise. It reveals God’s will.

And then sixthly, it is the source of hope – it is the source of hope. Over and over again in Psalm 119, the psalmist says, “I have hope in Thy Word, I have hope in Thy Word, I hope in Thine ordinances,” which means the Scripture. And so, the Word of God is the source of truth, and happiness, and victory, and growth, and guidance, and hope, and we could probably add a lot more to that list, but you get the idea. Little wonder it should be more desired than honey, and the honeycomb, and gold, even fine gold. Why, then, do we pursue it? For the reason of its essential character, and its marvelous generous benefits.

Then a last issue; how are we to pursue it? How can I be sure I don’t despise it? Very simply. How can you be sure you don’t despise Scripture? Listen carefully. Number one, believe it – believe it. That’s where it starts. Jesus cried out again and again to people, “Believe Me – believe what I say.” And in John 5:24, He said, “Truly, truly I say to you, he who hears My Word and believes Him who sent Me has eternal life and doesn’t come into judgment.” Believe it. Another way to say that is to say, “Receive it” – Paul said to the Thessalonians, “I’m so thankful that when I preach to you the Word of God you received it, as it is the Word of God.”

Secondly, honor it – honor it. What do we mean by that? Exalt it, lift it up. How do you do that? In obedience – in obedience. Don't be a huckster of the Word, 2 Corinthians 2:17, don't use the Word to manipulate for your own purposes and your own ends. He says in 2 Corinthians 4:2, "Some people adulterate the Word of God, but you are to honor it, to exalt it, to treasure it."

Thirdly, love it. David said in Psalm 119:97, as I mentioned earlier, "Oh, how I love Thy law," and then as you get to the end of Psalm 119, there are just a myriad of repeated statements with that same thought in mind. "Thy Word is very pure," Psalm 119:140, "therefore Thy servant loves it." Deep affection, deep desire – that's what Peter was talking about when he said, "As a babe desires, you're to desire."

Then obey it, that's fourth. Obey it. In fact, the greatest mockery that you can render to Scripture is to say you believe it, but don't obey it. "If you continue in My Word, you're My real disciple." "If you say you abide in Christ, you ought to walk the way He walked." And how did He walk? In perfect obedience to God's Word. Jesus told the story, you remember, about the two houses, and one went down in the flood, Matthew 7, and one remained, and the difference was that one person "didn't do the will of My Father," and the other "did the will of My Father."

Number five, fight for it. Jude 3 says, "Earnestly contend for the faith." Engage yourself in the battle for the Bible.

Number six, study it – "Study," Paul says, "to show yourself approved unto God, a workman needing not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the Word of truth." Be like the noble Bereans, "who searched the Scripture daily to see whether these things were so." Be like Apollos, of whom it was said he was "mighty in the Scriptures." "Let the Word of Christ dwell in you richly," Colossians 3:16.

Finally, proclaim it – proclaim it. If you obediently and faithfully believe the Word, honor the Word, love the Word, obey the Word, fight for the Word, study the Word, proclaim the Word, you're not going to look down on it. You're not going to despise it. It will be too much a part of the fabric of your life.

In closing, I was reading a little note about Martin Luther and how he studied the Bible. He said, "I study my Bible like I gather apples. I shake the whole tree first, that the ripest might fall. Then I shake each limb, and when I have shaken each limb, I shake each branch. And then I shake every twig. And then I look under every leaf. I search the Bible as a whole, like shaking the whole tree. Then I shake every limb, I study book after book. Then I shake every branch, I give attention to the chapters. Then I shake every twig, or a careful study of the paragraphs and sentences and words and meanings."

The Word is such a unique book. "When I am tired, the Bible is my bed. Or in the dark, the Bible is my light. When I am hungry, it is living bread, or fearful, it is armor for the fight. When I am sick, it is healing medicine, or lonely, throngs of friends I find therein. If I would work, the Bible is my tool. Or play, it is the harp of tuneful sound. If I am ignorant, it is my school. If I am sinking, it is solid ground. If I am cold, the Bible is my fire, and it gives wings, if boldly I aspire. Does gloom oppress? The Bible is a sun. Midst ugliness, it is a garden fair. Am I athirst? How cool its waters run, or stifled, what a vivifying air. Since thus thou givest of Thyself to me, how should I give myself, great Book, to thee."