



THE ESSENTIALS OF HANDLING GOD'S WORD

*"1 Let us therefore fear, lest, a promise being left us of entering into his rest, any of you should seem to come short of it. 2 For unto us was the gospel preached, as well as unto them: but the word preached did not profit them, not being mixed with faith in them that heard it. 3 For we which have believed do enter into rest, as he said, As I have sworn in my wrath, if they shall enter into my rest: although the works were finished from the foundation of the world. 4 For he spake in a certain place of the seventh day on this wise, And God did rest the seventh day from all his works. 5 And in this place again, If they shall enter into my rest. 6 Seeing therefore it remaineth that some must enter therein, and they to whom it was first preached entered not in because of unbelief: 7 Again, he limiteth a certain day, saying in David, To day, after so long a time; as it is said, To day if ye will hear his voice, harden not your hearts. 8 For if Jesus had given them rest, then would he not afterward have spoken of another day. 9 There remaineth therefore a rest to the people of God. 10 For he that is entered into his rest, he also hath ceased from his own works, as God did from his. 11 Let us labour therefore to enter into that rest, lest any man fall after the same example of unbelief. **12 For the word of God is quick, and powerful, and sharper than any twoedged sword, piercing even to the dividing asunder of soul and spirit, and of the joints and marrow, and is a discernor of the thoughts and intents of the heart.** 13 Neither is there any creature that is not manifest in his sight: but all things are naked and opened unto the eyes of him with whom we have to do."*

- Hebrews 4:1-13

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The Bible is the most powerful book in existence. It can tear you to pieces. It has the power to do that, Hebrews 4:12, *“For the Word of God is living and active and sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing as far as the division of soul and spirit, both joints and marrow, and it able to discern the thoughts and intents of the heart.”* It cuts to the core; it can tear you apart. It can also put you back together again.

First Peter 1:23, *“We are begotten again by the Word of truth.”* It can make you holy. Jesus said, *“Sanctify them,” praying to the Father, “by Thy truth. Thy Word is truth.”* The Word of God can give you the greatest joy. “These things are written,” says the apostle John, “that your joy may be full.”

This is a powerful, powerful book. It tears you up; it puts you back together; it makes you holy; it gives you joy. It stands alone. It is the only book that heaven has ever delivered. All other claims to being heavenly books are fabrications and falsehoods authored by men and demons. The Bible is powerful because it is not the word of men, it is the Word of God.

When the apostle Paul was writing to the Thessalonians, he commended them in chapter 2, verse 13, he said, *“For this reason we also constantly thank God that when you receive the Word of God, which you’ve heard from us, you accepted it, not as the word of men, but for what it really is, the Word of God, which also performs its work in you who believe.”*

It does that work; it convicts; it restores; it sanctifies; it produces joy. It does it because it is not the word of men. It is not a collection of 66 books written by men who are sharing with us their religious instincts, experiences, intuitions. It is the Word of God. And I want you to see that as we begin tonight, so turn to Hebrews, chapter 1.

Three passages that lay this out will be a good foundation, Hebrews, chapter 1. This is a summation of revelation. God, after He spoke long ago to the fathers and the prophets in many portions and in many ways, in these last days has spoken to us in His Son whom He appointed heir of all things through whom also He made the world. This sums up what the Bible is: God spoke; God spoke. God spoke by the prophets, those other writers of Scripture.

They wrote down what God said. They wrote it down in many portions and in many ways – in many *polumerós*; books, sections – and in many ways, *polutrops*. The Word of God came to them in direct *verbiage*. The Word of God came to them in visions. The record of the Word of God includes prophecies, visions, parables, symbols, theophanies, audible voices. There are many portions to the Scripture. He's referring here to the Old Testament; and there are many forms that revelation came in. All of this is recorded in the Old Testament by men who were instruments of God to write it down; men enlightened, and energized, and inspired by God Himself.

Look again at 2 Peter, chapter 1. In 2 Peter, chapter 1, we have a very familiar and important statement, verse 20: *“Know this first of all, that no prophecy of Scripture is of one's own interpretation, for no prophecy was ever made by an act of human will. But men move by the Holy Spirit spoke from God.”*

Now the first thing to identify for you, and it's a very important thing to identify for you, is what is meant by prophecy. If you ask that about verse 21, you might not have an answer: “No prophecy,” it's not defined. If you back up to verse 20, “No prophecy of Scripture.”

The word “prophecy” may mean predicting the future, but it doesn't have to mean that and it doesn't mean that. It means “no speech” or “no revelation.” No revelation of Scripture. No revelation of Scripture, that's the idea here. “Is a matter of one's own interpretation,” verse 20, “no revelation was ever made by an act of human will.”

Now what do we mean by one's interpretation in verse 20? *Epilysis* literally means “releasing,” literally means “releasing.” The generative case usage indicates “source.” In other words, Scripture was never released from a human source. Scripture doesn't come from you. Divine revelation doesn't come from you; it doesn't come from me. The origin of Scripture is never personal and private. And then he repeats similar ideas in verse 21: “No prophecy, no word from God was ever made by an act of human will; never born along, carried along, produced, brought forth from humans.” This is to say that Scripture and all that Scripture contains is divine. It doesn't have as its source any personal private releasing. It is not made by an act of human will. Contrary to that, every prophecy of Scripture comes because men moved by the Holy Spirit spoke from God. The verb is *pher*, it means “to be

carried along.” Like a ship when the sails are raised and the Holy Spirit filled those men like the wind fills the sails of a great ship and carries them along in the direction He desires. They spoke for God; they spoke for God. They spoke from God.

One other Scripture that is foundational is in 2 Timothy, chapter 3; and there’s a lot more that could be said about these, but I’m only using this as an introduction for a few minutes. In 2 Timothy 3:16, “All Scripture,” pasa graph. *“All Scripture is God-breathed, is God-breathed, and profitable for teaching for reproof, for correction, for training and righteousness so that the man of God may be adequate, equipped for every good work.”* Famous Greek phrase: Pasa graf theopneustos; all writing God-breathed.

Scripture is the very breath of God. It doesn’t have as its source the human will; it doesn’t come out of anybody’s private personal interpretation or releasing; it isn’t born in the heart of anyone or the mind of anyone; it all comes from God. All Scripture is God-breathed. It comes from Him. No person gives revelation. Divine revelation comes only from God.

The church didn’t invent the Scriptures anymore than Isaac Newton invented the law of gravity. He discovered it, and God’s people throughout all of history by the Holy Spirit’s leading discovered the 66 books of the Bible and identified them. So, God is the author of what Scripture says. “God spoke,” Hebrews 1, “God spoke.” The source is not any person, not the will of man; but men spoke from God and for God, and everything that they wrote down as Scripture is God-breathed. You have to have that view of Scripture, that’s what the Bible is. The Bible is not some high level of human achievement. It’s not like Shakespeare or some great poet, or some collection of esoteric, religious, elevated, gurus or geniuses. It is the very breath of God. As such, it stands alone. There is no other – listen – there is no other inspired book, no other; no other book. God gave us His entire revelation, 66 books contained in this one book.

Any faithful, diligent study of this book will yield internal evidence that that claim is absolutely true. You have sat here long enough under enough preaching and teaching, you have been exposed to verse by verse by verse by verse, examination of the Word of God, and you have seen the test; and the longer you’ve been there listening, the more confidence you have in the Word of God. It stands every test.

So here's my question. Since the Word of God is all this, since the Bible is all this, why is the Bible so intolerable in an age of tolerance? Since it has no parallel; it has no equal. Why is it so despised? Simple answer: hostility toward Scripture resides in the heart of all sinners. Hostility toward Scripture resides in the heart of all sinners. Not some sinners, all sinners; all of them. Now the degree may vary, but the hostility is there.

I was fascinated to see on the news that the pope said it's okay to spank your children, and now he's being blasted across the globe for making such an outrageous statement. And one of the people condemning the pope for that statement said, "Jesus would never do that." I would like to find all those people, line them up and say, "The Bible not only suggests spanking, it commands it." They hate that. That's the least of the things they hate about the Bible. Hostility toward God's Word resides in the heart of every sinner.

Jesus summed it up in that familiar eighth chapter of John when he says, "Why do you not understand what I'm saying? It's because you cannot hear My Word. You're of your father, the Devil, and you want to do the desires of your father. He was a murderer from the beginning, doesn't stand in the truth because there's no truth in him. Whenever he speaks a lie, he speaks from his own nature, for he's a liar and the father of Lies. But because I speak the truth, you do not believe Me. He who is of God hears the words of God; for this reason, you do not hear them, you're not of God."

That is Jesus saying hostility toward His Word resides in the heart of every sinner. It's not just that they can't understand it – that true, 1 Corinthians 2:14 – it's that they resent it. There always will be, always has been a fundamental, irreconcilable, incompatibility between the revealed truth of God in Scripture and the world; always, always.

Jesus – and I've been quoting this recently – summed it up by saying this: "*The world hates Me because I testified to it that its deeds are evil,*" that there's too much sin and too much judgment in the Bible for the sinner to embrace it. Why? "Because men love," John 3:19, "darkness rather than," what? "Light, because their deeds are evil."

Still, understanding the truth of Scripture, understanding its antipathy to everything in the world, understand that sinners are hostile toward it; that's natural, that's the default position of every sinner.

Through the history of the church there have always been people who are convinced that we can overcome this antipathy, we can overcome this hostility if we just kind of tweak the Bible a little bit and let some things go, don't talk about them, release them, don't make an issue out of them, soften the deal down a little bit, and cater it to their tastes. But I would remind you, the only time, the only time, the church ever makes any spiritual impact on the world is when the people of God are faithful to the full message: uncompromising, boldly proclaiming the truth right into the face of the sinner's hostility. Faddish ministry is just compromise. We are dealing with the Word of God. Every word is true.

Now let me construct a paradigm for you, okay, I'm going to take you to class, like seminary class, okay. I'm going to give you six words to think about, and this is how to think about the exclusivity of Scripture.

First of all, we'll use the word "objectivity," objectivity. We start with the reality that the source of truth is objective. What does that mean? "It's outside of me." It's outside of me.

Luther called it the "external word," the external word. Luther said, "It's fixed; it's set; God gave it. You can believe it or you can not believe it. You can't tamper with it, it's outside of you."

The truth does not come from man, we saw that in the verses we read. You may discover it, you may be exposed to it, you may learn it, you may understand it; you cannot change it, you cannot alter it, you cannot play with it.

You can either accept it or reject it; you can't tamper with it. You either take all of it or none of it, not part of it. Authentic Christianity understands that Scripture and the Bible is objective, absolute, external, divine truth. No person has ever had in himself any idea or any experience that determine divine truth, it comes from God. No human being has ever been a source for divine truth. No human being has ever been the one who established divine truth.

"Not an angel," Galatians 1. In fact, if anybody, even an angel, comes along with another gospel, he's cursed. What someone thinks is true doesn't make it true. There is no individual truth. You don't have your truth and somebody else has his truth.

That's hard to sell in a post-modern world that doesn't believe in absolute truth. What you think is true is not necessarily true. What is true is true; and Scripture is true. It is not only true, it is perspicuous, it is clear, clearly true. The meaning is evident on the face of it. It's not puzzles hidden; it's not mysteries; it's not conundrums; it's not hopeless allegories. Yeah, there are some things hard to understand, but the main message of Scripture is clear and unambiguous. It is not existential; it doesn't rise from you. The Bible isn't inspired because it hits you in certain ways that make you feel something.

Let me tell you something: the Bible is true if you never lived; the Bible is true if you never failed anything; the Bible is true if you never read it. It is true on the face; it is true in and of itself.

Authentic Christianity has always held that the Scripture is absolute, objective truth. It is as true for one person as it is for another regardless of anyone's opinion about it. It has one true meaning that applies to everyone. Every passage has one true interpretation. Every passage has one true interpretation that applies to everyone in every age.

The meaning is determined by God; it is not determined by you, or me, or anyone else. It isn't determined by you because you feel this is what it might mean. It isn't determined by me because I'm some kind of a scholar. The meaning is determined by God. It's like any other truth; it's like any other reality. It is reality; it is truth. What is true is true.

In no way is any truth in Scripture decided by your experience. Whether it affects you or doesn't affect you subjectively has nothing to do with its truthfulness. Now this deals a very heavy blow to vast numbers of people in professing Christianity who look at the Bible like some kind of a verbal Ouija board and run their fingers in their minds through it waiting for some kind of esoteric impulse. And you hear people get together in a Bible study and say, "What does this mean to you?"

Who cares. Who are you? What does this mean to God? What did He say and what did He mean by what He said? Biblical truth is objective; it is true in and of itself. Psalm 119:160 says this: "*The entirety of Your Word is truth.*"

Now, friends, the very starting point and necessary foundation for a truly Christian world view is right there. The Bible is all true, absolutely true. It is God-breathed. Every word has come from God. It is objective truth in and of itself. It is external to you, and your experience, and your mystical feelings. If you give that up, you have wandered into non-Christian paganism. You give up the ground of biblical truth that is objective, and whatever belief system you have left isn't worthy to be called Christian, even if it has some vestiges of Christian symbolism.

You see this all the time. You listen to people talking about the fact that they're Christians and they advocate Christianity. Sometimes they say they're Roman Catholics. But they're for homosexual marriage. You have just eliminated the foundation of Christianity.

That's not Christianity. You have literally taken the Bible, set it aside, and made yourself God. You can't pick and choose. True Christianity begins with objective truth revealed by God. That's the first word, "objectivity."

Second word, "rationality," rationality. What does that mean? That the objective revelation of God breathed into the Scripture can be understood by normal reasoning. It can be understood by normal reasoning. Scripture is logical, non-contradictory, clear, subject to mental assessment.

Listen, there are no errors; there are no discrepancies; there are no contradictions; there are no lies; there are not unsound principles. I'll go step further; anything that contradicts the Scripture is untrue. There are no fantasies; there are no absurdities; there are no avatars; there are no inconsistencies; there are no weird things; there are no myths; there are no allegories. It is absolutely true, and it is reasonably true and understood by reason in a normal process of using the mind.

In Nehemiah, chapter 8, Nehemiah opened the Word of God and he gave the sense of it. Remember that? He gave the sense of it. He interpreted it, as it Ezra, Ezra 7:10. Scripture is understood, listen to this, by the exact same process of reason that you use to solve a math problem. Surely you don't believe that somehow during the week, maybe hopefully by Wednesday or something, some angel shows up in my study and deposits in my mind some esoteric interpretation of a passage.

The context informs the reason. The flow of the argument, every passage of Scripture is making a case, presenting truth, and it is reasonable truth. There are no secret meanings. That's been a deceptive part of Christianity going way, way back, even into pre-Christian times when rabbis got caught up in all kinds of mystical things, and it came out as what you've heard called "Kabbalah" which is nothing but a bunch of nonsense.

If you're an engineer, or you're a mechanic, or you're an architect, use your reason to do your work and come to the right conclusion. That's essentially what a student of the Bible does. I use my mind. I don't sit and wait for some special delivery from heaven. The meaning of the Scripture is the Scripture, and the meaning is there, clear to be understood by the normal process of reason.

"As we approach the 21st century, says one writer, "it doesn't take a rocket scientist to recognize that our entire culture is in trouble. We're staring down the barrel of a loaded gun and we can no longer afford to act like it's loaded with blanks."

One of the bullets in this gun is the bullet of fantasy which is just dominating our culture, just dominating it. By the way, that's a sign of nihilism. That's a sign of abandoning everything. That's the bottom rung of the ladder that leads to decadence. You've gone from living in a world of reality to living in a world of fantasy. This is a ploy of Satan to disconnect people from reality. Here we step into that world; we can't condescend to that. We have to speak of things that are real, and reasonable, and rational to people who are looking for fantasy. There is in the world a massive move toward anti-intellectualism; anti-intellectualism.

Cotton Mather, the American Puritan said, "Ignorance is the mother, not of devotion, but of heresy." Ignorance is the mother of heresy.

We're speaking rational truth; we're rejecting fantasy. Let me tell you something: fantasy doesn't help your children, whether it's Twilight or Harry Potter, it's loaded, first of all, with homosexual innuendos. It's packed full of the cult of death. Why, that's so far different from our message of resurrection and life. Mystical movements, charismatic movements, relying on emotion, intuition, personal interpretations, feelings, experiences antithesis to the cultivation of the mind.

There are more and more pastors starting churches who've never been to seminary. "Why would you go to seminary? Jesus will show you what it means in your intuition." Scary; scary.

What do I mean by rationality? I mean that the Bible is to be understood in normal ways. It is regular language, real people, actual history; and you learn to interpret it that way, just as if you were reading a book on the Civil War, or if you're reading a book on the Revolutionary War, or if you're reading a book on Ancient Rome. There are no secret meanings; there are no allegories; there are no transcendental insights; there is no divine voice coming down. You hear people all time: "Listen to the voice of God. Listen for the voice of God." The only place you'll ever hear that is in the Bible.

Let me invert what I've been saying and say it negatively: any kind of irrational approach to Scripture is not only dangerous, it's a denial of Scripture's truth. You can't get to the truth of Scripture irrationally, you can only get to error.

So, the first word is "objectivity." The second is "rationality." The third word is "veracity." What happens when a sanctified rational mind looks at the objective word "veracity"? That's an "-ity" word for "truth."

Objective revelation of Scripture interpreted rationally yields divine truth in perfectly sufficient measure to accomplish God's intention for His revelation. How does God expect us to understand His Word and therefore to respond to His Word, do what He wants, apply His Word? Simply this: to recognize it is His Word, it is outside of us, it is to be apprehended rationally – and I'll say it again – irrational approach to the objective revelation of Scripture yields divine truth in perfectly sufficient measure to accomplish God's intention for His revelation. You'll come up with the truth.

It's all true and it's all necessary for life and godliness. It's the truth by which all other truth claims are measured. It's the truth which exposes all error. And you only have the truth if you have the meaning right, and that takes a refined mind and a trained mind. The Bible is not about inducing feelings or emotions, it's about divine truth.

By the way, if you wonder how far we've slipped, go into most of the contemporary churches and watch the light show and the music suck you into some kind of emotional bath. That doesn't lead to cognitive, rational, deep thinking about Scripture. That's where the truth comes from.

We are then committed to the truth. We have to be committed to the truth. So when we get into dialog with the sinners of the world, whether they're our friends, or our family or, classmates, or the guys we work with, ladies we work with, or whether or not we're in the media or wherever we are, we don't have dialog. We don't have dialog. Why? Because there's really nothing to dialog about. I'm always happy to show up and say, "I'm glad I'm here because I'm telling you the truth. I'm just telling you the truth."

Contemporary evangelicals like the idea of dialog because, again, remember now, if you're going to make the Bible an issue, hostility toward the Bible is natural to sinners. So modern evangelicals prefer dialog. They don't want to clash with every-other idea, every-other world view. We want dialog.

So, what do we do to get dialog? We minimize biblical authority; we minimize biblical clarity; we minimize judgment. I mean we do that all the time anyway.

I was reading a book this week in which the author says, "I wonder when we tell the story of Noah and the ark with the kids," he said, "why we always have this beautiful little boat and all these cute animals going in two-by-two, and then Noah and his family look like little Precious Moments statues standing on the ramp?"

And then he asked this: "Where are the ten million dead bodies floating? Why isn't that a part of the story?" Because that is the story. You can't make this biblical truth cute. We have to make it clear, it has to be the truth, and that's not for the discussion.

And, again, that takes us to 2 Corinthians 10 where our job is to use spiritual supernatural weapons to smash the walls of people's ideologies. That's spiritual warfare; smashing down false ideologies with the power of the truth. All right.

So, we start with objectivity, and we approach it with rationality, and we end up with the truth. Now you know what that leads us to? The fourth word, “authority.” You know, this would be true in just about any area of life.

If you’re in a hospital and you’re working as a medical doctor and somebody presents in a hospital with some kind of issues that – symptoms that you’re trying to figure out, and you have a lot of people gathered in the room; whoever knows the most about those symptoms is the authority. It doesn’t matter who ranks over who. Whoever’s got the most pertinent and accurate information is the authority. The crisis calls for that.

I mean that’s true in military battle. You can have all kinds of ranks in the military; but whoever knows the most about the enemy, the most about the weapons, the most about the strategy, he’s the authority. Everybody says, “Okay, okay, okay.” Guess what? We are the authority in the world because we know the truth. That means we speak the truth with authority. That is fundamental to what it is to be a Christian.

Do we make enemies? We already have enemies. God has enemies; Christ has enemies; the Bible has enemies. Jesus told His disciples, *“If they persecuted Me, they’re going to persecute you. If they hated me, they’re going to hate you.”* But if you know the truth, then you can only speak with authority; you can only speak with author.

But it’s not really stylist to speak with authority like that; not really popular, not in this particular age. People like soft words, words that don’t trouble the mind, don’t trouble the heart and leave room for everybody’s opinion. They see this as some kind of tenderness, some kind of acceptance, some kind of tolerance. But it’s really the opposite.

One writer put it this way: “The one who really wanted a tender heart would be calling for a jackhammer.” Hard words, hard teaching, hard truth is the jackhammer of God, and it takes a great deal to break up hard hearts. And the God of all mercy is willing to do it, but He always does it according to His Word, and His Word is not easy on us.

Jeremiah 23: *“Is not My Word like a fire?” said the Lord, “and like a hammer that breaks the rock in pieces.”*

When people call for smooth words, easy words, the result is hard people. When we submit to hard words, we become the tenderhearted of God. Well, I hate to tell you folks, but we can say it with love, but we're the jackhammers in the world, to break up the hard-hearted, buried under lies.

Well, just for the sake of time, let me give you a fifth word. The word is "incompatibility," incompatibility. The noose is now tightening in our paradigm, right? We started with objectivity and then we went to rationality. We understood that that yields veracity, truth, divine truth. That gives us literally delegated authority from God to speak. And now the noose tightens right around the neck to the point where you begin to feel the rope burn. Here it comes: truth is absolutely incompatible with error.

To put it in the language of 1 John 2:21, "*No lie is of the truth.*" What a great statement: "No lie is of the truth." Truth is in the end – listen – absolutely and finally intolerant. It doesn't mean you have to be mean or unloving, just the opposite. But the truth itself is intolerant. It is intolerant.

1 Corinthians 16:22, "*If you love not the Lord Jesus Christ, you're condemned.*" Listen, tolerance toward people is good, biblical. Tolerance toward error is bad; that's a sin.

God hates lies, doesn't He? The Old Testament says God hates lies. He hates lying tongues and he hates the liars who waggle them.

Isaiah 8:20, "*To the law, to the testimony Scripture: if they do not speak according to this word, it is because no light is in them.*" It's incompatible with error. So here we are in the world. They, by nature, like we were once, hate the Word of God. And we have the truth, and we have to proclaim it with authority and let them know it is incompatible with all error.

And that leaves me to a final point: "integrity," integrity. What do I mean by that? The truth is to be preached and lived. The truth is to be preached and lived. To live otherwise is hypocrisy, right? If I say, "I have the Word of God, I understand the Word of God," it carries the truth of God with authority, it is incompatible with error; then I am mandated to both proclaim it and live it.

I don't want to be like those people in Titus 1:16 who profess to know God, but in works deny Him, being abominable, disobedient, disqualified for every good work. I want to be like Ezra, and I refer to this verse, Ezra 7:10, wonderful testimony to Ezra: *"For Ezra set his heart to study the law of the Lord and to practice it, and to teach his statutes and ordinances in Israel."*

That's it: study the Word of God; practice the Word of God; teach the Word of God. That's integrity; that's integrity. Anything less is hypocrisy. That's why Paul said to Timothy in 1 Timothy 4:16, *"Pay close attention to two things, yourself and your doctrine,"* yourself and your doctrine: what you preach and how you live.