

## God's Word – Understanding His Commands (#17)

Text : **Acts 15: 22-29**

### **INTRODUCTION :**

#### **A. Our study of the scriptures has taught us that :**

1. The scriptures must be approached with deep reverence and respect.
2. The bible is God speaking to man; every word in it comes from God.
3. This being true, the scriptures communicate God's sovereign will to man.
5. This means that one's attitude toward the scriptures is a direct reflection of his attitude toward almighty God. (*Love, seek, submit, ignore, rebel, etc.*)

#### **B. In our last lesson we observed :**

1. The attitude with which one approaches the bible strongly affects his success in understanding it.
  - a. We can understand it because God wrote it to be understood by average people.
  - b. Common sense is vital to understanding the scriptures.
2. From the beginning of time God had one plan for redeeming man.
  - a. That plan was not the Law of Moses. It was never intended to save mankind.
  - b. Before the foundation of the world God planned to save man by Grace through faith in Jesus the Christ. (**I Pet. 1: 20-21**)
3. The Law of Moses was :
  - a. only for the Israelites. (**Exod. 19**)
  - b. temporary.
    - 1) The prophet foretold that it would be replaced by an eternal law. (**Jer. 31:31-32**)
    - 2) The Apostle Paul said it was nailed to the cross when Jesus died. (**Col. 2: 1-14**)

**Remember :** *The nature of law is to define error, not to provide forgiveness.*

4. God wrote the bible according to His plan.
    - a. Each part of the bible has a specific purpose.
    - b. To understand the bible one must use each part according to God's purpose for it.
- C. With this lesson we will continue to look at practical ways to understand the message that God communicated in the book that He wrote to us.**
- God intended to communicate one thing by every passage that He wrote.**
- We must learn to understand HIS one message NOT what "it means to us."**

## I. In order to understand the message, we must understand the author's perspective

### A. The bible is the book of salvation.

1. It was not written to condemn man.
2. It presents the need for and the means whereby man can be saved.

### B. The great emphasis of Christianity is liberty, freedom from any legal system.

1. **II Cor. 3: 17-** Now the Lord is the Spirit, and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is liberty.
2. The law of Christ is referred to as the “**Law of Liberty.**” ( **James 1:25, 2: 12** )
3. Those called by the gospel are called to “**freedom.**”
  - a. **Gal. 5: 1-** It was for freedom that Christ set us free; therefore keep standing firm and do not be subject again to a yoke of slavery.
  - b. **Gal. 5: 13-14** For you were called to freedom, brethren; only do not turn your freedom into an opportunity for the flesh, but through love serve one another. <sup>14</sup> For the whole Law is fulfilled in one word, in the statement, “You shall love your neighbor as yourself.”

### C. The N. T. it is not God to communicating a different system of rules.

1. In the O.T. God demonstrated the futility of trying to approach God on the basis of a system of rules keeping.
2. God clearly stated that a rules based system was not His desire for His people.  
**Acts 15:28-** For it seemed good to the Holy Spirit and to us to lay upon you no greater burden than these essentials :
3. *What is the principle taught here by our text ?*
  - a. **God does not want a relationship based upon a system of rules keeping.**
  - b. God wants and relationship with man based upon mutual love.

## II. There are commands that must be obeyed, but some that are not to be obeyed.

### A. Commons sense tells us that direct commands must be obeyed.

1. The command given to Paul defines how sins are removed.
  - a. **Acts 22:16-** ‘Now why do you delay? Get up and be baptized, and wash away your sins, calling on His name.’
  - b. All who want to have their sins washed away would obviously need to do this.
2. The command given to the Philippians defines responsibility of all after baptism.  
**Phil. 1:27-** Only conduct yourselves in a manner worthy of the gospel of Christ, ...

**B. Some commands are given to specific people, not to be obeyed by all.**

1. **Mark 10:19- 20** And he said to Him, “Teacher, I have kept all these things from my youth up.” <sup>21</sup> Looking at him, Jesus felt a love for him and said to him, “One thing you lack: go and sell all you possess and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; and come, follow Me.”

**Note :** *A well know cult uses this passage to fleece its members.*

2. By the scriptures themselves we know that this command was not for all.

**Acts 5:4-** While it remained *unsold*, did it not remain your own?  
And after it was sold, was it not under your control? ....

**C. We must seek the principle taught by the command, not always the exact wording.**

1. **I Pet. 3: 1-3** In the same way, you wives, be submissive to your own husbands so that even if any *of them* are disobedient to the word, they may be won without a word by the behavior of their wives, <sup>2</sup> as they observe your chaste and respectful behavior. <sup>3</sup> Your adornment must not be *merely external*—braiding the hair, and wearing gold jewelry, or putting on dresses; <sup>4</sup> but *let it be* the hidden person of the heart, with the imperishable quality of a gentle and quiet spirit, which is precious in the sight of God. (*Must look for principle*)

2. What is the principle being taught by this command ?
  - a. Is it that a woman should not do anything to make herself physically attractive ?
  - b. **NO !!** It is that a woman should use her virtuous heart and godly behavior to impress people, not her physical appearance.
  - c. This runs directly counter to Western culture. (*advertising, cosmetics, fashion*)
3. The command is NOT to forbid jewelry or braided hair. (*Illustrations of externals*)
  - a. If it had forbidden jewelry, it would also have forbidden wearing dresses.
  - b. What it commands is do not draw attention to yourself by the way you dress.

**Note :** **The misinterpretation of this command has become an identifying doctrine of a certain “charismatic” religion.**

**D. All commands must be understood in their proper context.**

1. Without context commands can sometimes appear to conflict with each other.
  - a. **Matt. 6: 1-4** Beware of practicing your righteousness before men to be noticed by them; otherwise you have no reward with your Father who is in heaven. <sup>2</sup> So when you give to the poor, do not sound a trumpet before you, as the hypocrites do in the synagogues and in the streets, so that they may be honored by men. Truly I say to you, they have their reward in full. <sup>3</sup> But when you give to the poor, do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing, <sup>4</sup> so that your giving will be in secret; and your Father who sees *what is done* in secret will reward you.

- b. **Matt. 5: 14-16** You are the light of the world. A city set on a hill cannot be hidden; **15** nor does *anyone* light a lamp and put it under a basket, but on the lampstand, and it gives light to all who are in the house. **16** Let your light shine before men in such a way that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father who is in heaven. ( *Christian's duty to God* )

2. Do these two commands contradict each other ? **NOT in the least !!**
3. One must understand the context before he can understand the command.
  - a. **Matt. 6: 1-4** deals with the use of a religious act to glorify one's self before men.
  - b. **Matt. 5: 14-16** deals with the responsibility of God's servants to glorify Him.
  - c. Context : Who gets the glory ... Motive for good work, for religious activities.

**Basic rule of interpretation :** *Each and every passage must be interpreted in harmony with all other passages.*

### III. When properly understood, obscure passages will not become major doctrines.

#### A. All scriptures come from God so every command is from Him.

1. However, not every command is of equal importance.
 

**Matt. 23: 23-24** 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.

**24** You blind guides, who strain out a gnat and swallow a camel!
2. Thus, Jesus Himself taught that some commands are more important than others.
  - a. "weightier provisions"
  - b. "a gnat" as compared to "a camel"
3. Jesus identified LOVE as the most important command of all. ( **Matt. 22: 34-40** )

#### B. Obscure passages must not be used as the basis for important teaching or practices.

1. One command establishes a doctrine, but not all doctrines are equally important.
  - a. Not all doctrines are a matter of salvation.
  - b. If one was required to know and understand all commands, no one could be saved.
2. God has emphasized the things that are the most important **to Him**.
  - a. Love is commanded more than 50 times in the N.T.
  - b. Baptism is commanded 13 times in the N.T.
  - c. That which is not once plainly, empirically stated is clearly **NOT** emphasized.
3. False doctrines have arisen because men have over-emphasized minor passages.

#### IV. One does not know the will of God until he has ALL God has said on the subject.

##### A. **Psa. 119: 160-** The sum of Your word is truth, And every one of Your righteous ordinances is everlasting.

1. It is the truth of God's word that sets men free. ( **John 8: 32** )
2. The truth is the "sum" of all God has revealed on any particular subject.

##### B. The word of God is not a buffet from which one chooses the verses he wants.

1. This attitude has fostered more erroneous teachings than any other.
2. Religious movements and denominations have been founded upon the interpretation of one or two verses w/o considering others.
3. If the bible says two things about the same subject **both** apply. ( *not .. either / or* )

##### C. This one error may have caused more "believers" to be lost than any other.

1. Many urge the lost to respond to **John 3:16** as if it were the only verse in the bible.
  - They ignore **Mark 16: 16** which adds baptism to belief as prerequisites to salvation.
2. Others point to **Rom. 10: 8-11** saying "call on" the Lord in sinners prayer to be saved.
  - They ignore **Acts 22: 16** which says one is saved when he is "baptized calling on ..."
  - They ignore **Luke 24:47** where Jesus ordered that repentance be taught for salvation.
  - They ignore **Acts 2: 38** which links both repentance and baptism to forgiveness.
3. This is the most obvious example, but there are many others which have divided us.

#### CONCLUSION :

##### A. We have seen that to understand God's instructions for us .. His commands :

1. We must first come to understand them from God's perspective .. *given to free*.
2. Not every command is for every person; all must be viewed in context.
3. We can't make major doctrines out of minor commands, examples or inferences.
4. Realize that we don't have the will of God until we have all He said on the subject.

##### B. A correct attitude will enable one to correctly understand the scriptures.

1. Respect the scripture as being instructions from God.
2. Have faith that the God who created us can communicate with us.
3. Use our common sense to seek out the principles God is giving us to live by.

##### C. Humble ourselves to submit to God's will and obey all His commandments.

## **Lesson Texts :**

### **Psalms 119: 160**

The sum of Your word is truth,  
And every one of Your righteous ordinances is everlasting.

### **Acts 15: 22- 29**

**22** Then it seemed good to the apostles and the elders, with the whole church, to choose men from among them to send to Antioch with Paul and Barnabas—Judas called Barsabbas, and Silas, leading men among the brethren, **23** and they sent this letter by them,

“The apostles and the brethren who are elders, to the brethren in Antioch and Syria and Cilicia who are from the Gentiles, greetings. **24** Since we have heard that some of our number to whom we gave no instruction have disturbed you with *their* words, unsettling your souls, **25** it seemed good to us, having become of one mind, to select men to send to you with our beloved Barnabas and Paul, **26** men who have risked their lives for the name of our Lord Jesus Christ. **27** Therefore we have sent Judas and Silas, who themselves will also report the same things by word *of mouth*. **28** For it seemed good to the Holy Spirit and to us to lay upon you no greater burden than these essentials: **29** that you abstain from things sacrificed to idols and from blood and from things strangled and from fornication; if you keep yourselves free from such things, you will do well. Farewell.”

### **Psalms 119: 160**

The sum of Your word is truth,  
And every one of Your righteous ordinances is everlasting.