



When Listening Supersedes Reading

And this I pray, that your love may abound still more and more in real knowledge and all discernment, so that you may approve the things that are excellent, in order to be sincere and blameless until the day of Christ; having been filled with the fruit of righteousness which comes through Jesus Christ, to the glory and praise of God.

— *Philippians 1:9-11*

How do we know **for sure** when someone's teaching meets the biblical standard of "things that are excellent"? When we personally "abound more in real knowledge and all discernment". As I have pointed out many times before, such references to knowledge, wisdom and discernment are always connected with whether we are putting God's Word into practice— in other words, changing our behavior so as to become more loving as this passage stipulates from the outset. Unfortunately, this cannot be achieved solely by listening to streaming video sermons no matter how good and truthful we find their teaching. I continue to come across those who cannot confirm or refute a teaching because they rarely open their Bibles to study the text or themes presented. Without a consistent commitment to God's Word, it is impossible to fully develop the knowledge, discernment, and approval to always distinguish between truth and error.

In the first half of my life, many members of a given Evangelical congregation often knew the Scriptures at least as well (if not better) than the pastor. I recall an incident in the church I grew up in where a guest pastor misspoke some point of doctrine so egregiously that without consulting each other, a line of men formed immediately at the end of the service to correct him. That visiting speaker was not some kind of false shepherd or consistently teaching error, but a brother whose error was detected and corrected by a flock familiar enough with the Word to know the difference.

I am not addressing the unsaved or the hopelessly deceived. Those are separate issues to be addressed. I am speaking to the phenomena of saved, authentic believers who are more likely to end up on the wrong end of the parables Jesus gave in the Olivet Discourse. In each example, the main figures Jesus employs are all members of Christ's household— in other words, Christians. And the theme connecting them all is how they are handling and applying God's Word when Jesus returns, whether in personal relationships, feeding the house of God, or in the course of their ministry to the world in general. There is a simultaneous message to believers as to how Christ will hold us **personally** accountable for what we do with the Word and co-equally with how we act upon it both within the Church and without. These final parables given at the end of Jesus' ministry perfectly summarize His teachings throughout His 3-1/2-year ministry, that **all** of His teachings cannot simply be heard and acknowledged, but put into practice to prove the hearers' faith.

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“Therefore everyone who hears these words of Mine and acts on them, may be compared to a wise man who built his house on the rock. And the rain fell, and the floods came, and the winds blew and slammed against that house; and yet it did not fall, for it had been founded on the rock.

“Everyone who hears these words of Mine and does not act on them, will be like a foolish man who built his house on the sand. The rain fell, and the floods came, and the winds blew and slammed against that house; and it fell—and great was its fall.”

— Matthew 7:24-27

Over the past 20 or so years, there has been a sizable migration of authentic, born again believers who have come out of false movements and just plain unproductive churches. The common trait I have observed which continues to plague these dear brothers and sisters in Christ is that they spent the formative years of their new life in Christ in an environment that did not properly disciple them. In particular, they have not been taught how to handle or study God’s Word for themselves. Yes, they can now recognize the particular error they have personally escaped, but all too often they have difficulty with all the other traps and deception still awaiting us. It is not unusual to witness them having escaped error, only to be ensnared by a different one.

The result is a sort of “spiritual transference” where they seek recommendations for sound teachers to listen to, which they believe will keep them from falling back under a false or ineffective personality. While this isn’t an out-and-out wrong thing to do, the fact is that this really needs to be accompanied with a thirst to properly learn how to handle God’s Word for themselves. Since so many are alone or in small groups without the benefits of an organized and sound church, the issue becomes how such will get this much needed training. I would offer that it is the same as with most serious personal problems, that it begins with first admitting we have this problem, and then asking everyone possible, “What are the good resources— teachers, books, websites— for learning how to properly study God’s Word?” This is a case where we don’t know simply because we haven’t asked.

At [Walk with the Word](#), all of our studies and even the books we’ve written employ the [Inductive Bible Study](#) method. The Bible studies are all examples of this approach. Our favorite recommendation for an organization promoting this approach is [Intensive Care Ministries](#) (ICM). They provide a [free online course](#) to get you started, information on the possibility to participate in their seminars and workshops dedicated to teaching hands-on how to use this approach, and a few reasonably priced supporting materials in their minimalist online store.

How powerful is this particular approach? For decades, this ministry, which was born out of the Calvary Chapel movement, has visited many foreign countries, teaching the pastors this technique so they can provide proper sermons and teachings with nothing more than the Bible. My partner at Walk with the Word has gone with them on such trips, giving those filling the role of pastor/teacher the proper tools for developing effective sermons and Bible studies. In other words, Third World pastors who have never had the opportunity for a seminary education have been trained in this approach so as to become just as effective and fruitful in solid Bible study as any of their Western counterparts.

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Let me therefore plainly state that the solution to all our scattered brethren who are struggling to find proper Christian teachers is to learn this approach and discover that **they** are the much needed replacement for the shepherdless sheep with whom they currently find themselves loosely associated. Christians who commit themselves to this approach find themselves becoming Sunday School teachers, small group leaders, and even filling the pastoral role as long as needed. But at the very least, they acquire the knowledge and discernment to properly assess whether any person or thing is truly coming from God, Satan, or merely operating in the flesh.

But prove yourselves doers of the word, and not merely hearers who delude themselves. For if anyone is a hearer of the word and not a doer, he is like a man who looks at his natural face in a mirror; for once he has looked at himself and gone away, he has immediately forgotten what kind of person he was. But one who looks intently at the perfect law, the law of liberty, and abides by it, not having become a forgetful hearer but an effectual doer, this man will be blessed in what he does.

— James 1:22-25

If nothing else, this message hyper-targeted at believers by James, must be recognized as stipulating the important and non-compromising message that one's faith cannot be completed without a personal commitment to God's Word. Hearing is never a replacement for doing, and doing cannot be accomplished without knowing the text for our self. We live in an Internet age where the resources to remedy this issue are so easily available if we would only make the minimal effort of looking for them.

Remember, according to the Parable of the Sower, it was the Word which was originally implanted within us, and it is the Word within us that is expected to produce a proper and fruitful crop.

In Him,

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