

May God bless you on His Sabbath day!

The Jews all knew Scripture, from the least to the greatest. Old Testament Scripture was the foundation of their society, government, education, and worship. All were taught Scripture from childhood, so why was it that Jesus had to “open the minds of the disciples to understand?”

[TS2009] LUKE 24:44-45 And He [*Jesus Christ*] said to them, “These are the words which I spoke to you while I was still with you, that all have to be filled that were written in the [Law of Moses and the Prophets and the Psalms] concerning Me.” 45 Then **He opened their minds to understand [G4920 suniemi = put together]** the Scriptures,

Jesus opened their minds so that they could understand scriptures in the context of God the Father, Jesus Christ, and the Kingdom; that is, He gave them the ability to grasp their meaning and purpose within the plan of God. The Bible above all is both simple and yet highly complex. Simplicity is in Jesus Himself—obedience to the Law, His sacrifice for sin, agape love, and good works. The complexity is that Scripture was written over thousands of years by many different authors addressing a variety of topics and under a diversity of geopolitical and religious influences. Simply stated, biblical knowledge is here a little and there a little<sup>1</sup>. Given all this, it is one thing to learn Scripture but a completely different matter to UNDERSTAND it. That was the dilemma of the Ethiopian eunuch:

ACTS 8:30-31 So Philip ran to him [*the eunuch*], and heard him reading the prophet Isaiah, and said, “Do you **understand [know; have intimate knowledge] what you are reading?**” 31 And he said, “**How can I, unless someone guides me?**” And he asked Philip to come up and sit with him.

Education is a process of learning—first gaining knowledge and then, by putting it to use and practice, understanding how to use that knowledge. The most effective method involves a teacher, student, and reference sources (i.e., books). Books provide both an outline for the teacher and a source of knowledge for the student. A student learns knowledge under the tutelage and guidance of a teacher. This system works very well and has been used for thousands of years. But a teacher guides a student into knowledge—NOT understanding. Even the Holy Spirit is simply a *guide*:

JOHN 16:13 “However, when it, the Spirit of truth, has come, it will **guide [show the way; teach] you into all truth;** for it will not speak on His own *authority*, but whatever it hears it will speak; and it will tell you things to come.

Knowledge is facts and information, concepts and principles; whereas, understanding is the ability to comprehend the meaning, purpose, and usefulness of the knowledge. A student can be taught knowledge but not understanding—that is something the student acquires through practice and experience. Without understanding, knowledge has limited use. Knowledge is necessary to build a house or bridge but understanding how, when, where, and why that knowledge applies is vital to successful construction. Knowledge is the possession of facts and information; whereas understanding is the

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<sup>1</sup> Isa. 28:10.

ability to grasp the meaning or significance of those facts. Knowledge is knowing the *what*; whereas, understanding is knowing *why* and *how*. Knowledge is ascertaining truth; whereas, understanding is the application of it.

This might seem obvious but some in the *ekklesia* rely too heavily upon 'teachers'. All they know is what the teacher taught them. However, a student is responsible for reading the source of knowledge (the Bible) and then putting that knowledge to use. As God said, "**Prove [test] Me.**" (Mal. 3:10).

In my experience, there are two types of students: those that listen to the teaching, diligently search the Scripture, and then put it into practice but there are those who listen to the teaching and do nothing more. The Bible has names for both of them:

JAMES 1:22-25 But **be doers** of the word, and **not hearers only**, deceiving yourselves. 23 For if anyone is a hearer of the word and not a doer, he is like a man observing his natural face in a mirror; 24 for he observes himself, goes away, and immediately forgets what kind of man he was. 25 But he who looks into the perfect law of liberty and continues *in it*, and is not a forgetful hearer but a doer of the work, this one will be blessed in what he does.

Doers are those that learn from a teacher, study the Bible, and practice what they know. Hearers ignore the last two steps. Ideally, there is nothing wrong with either type of student. IDEALLY. The reality is risky for hearers. No single teacher, no matter how long he has studied the Bible, is an expert on Scripture. Part of the challenge is time; it has been 2,000 years since the source of knowledge and understanding was here on earth<sup>2</sup>:

COLOSSIANS 1:9 For this reason we also, since the day we heard it, do not cease to pray for you, and to ask that **you may be filled with the knowledge of His [Jesus Christ's] will** in all wisdom **and spiritual understanding**;

A lot has been lost over time which causes a gap in knowledge because of the original languages, cultures, and practices. Throw in intentional corruptions by deceptive men and the problem gets worse.

All people are influenced by pride, life experiences, and even how they were raised as children. They can cause us to be blind or deaf in certain things. How many times have you looked at a verse in the Bible and said, "I have read that dozens of times but I never saw that before?" It is hard enough to be a teacher who sincerely tries to be humble and unbiased but those who are arrogant and prideful are a danger to all. They can usually be recognized by their boasting of their knowledge and condemnation others with different teachings. (NOTE: This is not referring to knowledge of doctrines pertaining to the "simplicity in Christ.")

The best recourse to avoid the natural bias and failings of teachers is to be a DOER. Those who are only HEARERS face several pitfalls. Religious topics above all others—math, science, history, etc.—generally evoke deep emotions. Hearers can easily be enticed to follow one particular teacher, usually someone who boasts of his knowledge and disparages other teachers (sometimes even if they have the same teachings). The hearers are reticent to 'defy' such teachers because they lack understanding.

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<sup>2</sup> Also Col. 2:1-3.

Hearers are also fearful when their knowledge is questioned. Anger is a common response when their beliefs are threatened because they have knowledge but lack understanding. Doers, on the other hand, will listen to a teacher, go to the source of Truth, and evaluate it through their experiences and practices. A doer is very much at peace and calm when confronted with different teachings because they are an opportunity to gain knowledge and establish a deeper understanding. In fact, doers are much more likely to allow others to hold differing beliefs because they do not feel vulnerable. Knowledge of opposing views can even provide a deeper understanding of one's own beliefs. Anger simply breeds, and shows, ignorance.

Hearers often respond to questions by saying, "My minister said ...;" whereas, doers will say, "The Bible says ...." This is an important distinction because the Bible is the source of knowledge, not the teacher. No human teacher has full or perfect knowledge of the Bible. Ministers used to say, "Do not believe me, read the Bible for yourself." Great advice; however, that is not what a hearer does.

Perhaps, the classic example of the difference between hearers and doers happened decades ago when a COG organization changed their teaching that Pentecost occurred on Monday to Sunday. Some rejected that idea because they only knew what a minister told them while others recognized the error because they listened and then proved it from Scripture.

Why all this talk about hearers and doers? Because hearers are the number one source of anger and offenses. They are too easily offended or they become angry. Going back to the example of the Monday Pentecost, many died keeping it that way before the change to Sunday. Are they condemned to eternal death? Some hearers might be inclined to think so because they only know what they have been told by teachers and have completely overlooked what is in Scripture.

My question for the hearers who get angry and offended is: WHY is it so important to you that others believe exactly as you do? Christ is the judge of all<sup>3</sup> and says, "Judge not, that you be not judged. For with what judgment you judge, you will be judged; and with the measure you use, it will be measured back to you." (Matt. 7: 1-2). Hearers who get angry with those who have different beliefs are in effect gambling that their salvation is dependent upon their knowledge being absolute Truth. Really? Yes! What was the conclusion of Jesus when He rebuked the scribes and Pharisees? They should keep the Law but also heed "**the weightier matters of the law: judgement and mercy and faith.**" (Matt. 23:23). Judgment, mercy, and faith are not given by someone who is angry.

Jesus said that is it a blessing to be HUMBLE, a blessing to be MEEK, a blessing to be MERCIFUL, and a blessing to be a PEACEMAKER<sup>4</sup>. But in my experience, very few hearers bestow these things upon those who believe differently. That makes hearers, as Jesus told the scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites<sup>5</sup>.

Only the apostles taught perfectly. Every teacher since is further from that perfect knowledge. This is why perfection is not through the keeping of the Law, knowing prophecies, or a minister; it is through humility and meekness:

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<sup>3</sup> Rom. 2:3.

<sup>4</sup> Matt. 5:1-9.

<sup>5</sup> Matt. 23.

EPHESIANS 4:31-32 Let all bitterness, wrath, anger, clamor, and evil speaking be put away from you, with all malice. 32 And **be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another**, even as God in Christ forgave you.

Perfection is not about knowledge and understanding but from agape love:

ROMANS 12:9-10 Let love be without hypocrisy. Abhor what is evil. Cling to what is good. 10 **Be kindly affectionate to one another with brotherly love, in honor giving preference to one another;**

Scripture is overflowing with verses commanding us to “love one another”<sup>6</sup>. We are to be kind to one another, whether or not others are members of a particular organization. We are to be tenderhearted to one another, whether or not others keep a different calendar. We are to forgive one another, whether or not others offended us or committed sins. We are to love one another whether or not others hold the same beliefs or are even baptized. We are to love with ALL our heart because THAT is perfection. IF YOU ARE NOT DOING THESE THINGS, THEN:

[TS2009] ROMANS 2:1-2 Therefore, O man, **you are without excuse, everyone who judges, for in which you judge another you condemn yourself**, since you who judge practice the same *wrongs*. 2 And we know that the judgment of [God] is according to truth against those who practice such *wrongs*.

If agape love is perfection, if agape love is the heart of all that Jesus said and the apostles wrote, why is it so few talk about it or do good works for others? People discuss ad nauseam biblical history, prophecy, dates, the two witnesses, what is work on a Sabbath, etc. but rarely agape love. When was the last time YOU talked with someone about love and good works?

There is not a single person on earth that is even close to perfect knowledge and understanding of anything in the Bible. NO ONE. That applies both to ‘students’ as well as elders or teachers. Doers will “Prove all things; hold fast that which is good.” (1 Thess. 5:21). Even if the teacher is wrong, anger has no place in education and learning. Instead, Scripture says YOU must prove what is taught and keep that which is good. Instead of anger, “**fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom; a good understanding have all those who do His commandments.**” (Ps. 111:10).

All are under God’s GRACE, not under His Law<sup>7</sup>. If the awesome and fearful Creator God Most High gives grace to the weak, foolish, and ignorant children He has called, why is anyone angry toward others and withhold from them the same mercies He has shown any who are also seeking to be a child of the Father?

May God’s grace and peace be upon you!

Steven Greene

<https://sabbathreflections.org>  
[sabbathreflections@gmail.com](mailto:sabbathreflections@gmail.com)

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<sup>6</sup> John 13:34-35; 15:12, 17; Rom. 12:10; 13:8; Gal. 5:13; Eph. 4:21 Thess. 3:12; 4:9; Heb. 10:24; 1 Pet. 1:22; 3:8; 1 John 3:11, 23; 4:7, 11-12; 2 John 1:5; et al.

<sup>7</sup> Rom. 5:20; 6:14-15; Gal. 2:21; 5:4.