

The **Bible** Unpacked

Intermediate Study Series

A compilation of the Bible's teaching
for believers growing in the faith

paul mallison

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A compilation of the Bible's teaching
for believers growing in the faith

Part G. Relating to People

Composed by Paul Mallison

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A Quick Word

This series of studies aims to present a compilation of the Bible's teachings in a clear and readable order. There are eight booklets in the series, based on the eight parts of the book *The Bible Unpacked - Intermediate Edition*. Each booklet has five chapters, with two sections each. These ten sections can be used for ten or more studies.

See *Topics in This Series* towards the end of this booklet for a full listing of all the topics. Note that studying booklets alternatively from the two major sections (*What to Know* and *What to Do*) would add variety.

The material contains Bible verses. Before the verses are headings, which reflect what the verses say – in particular the parts of the verses in *italics*. The verses are sometimes followed by a comment.

The verses often have a brief introduction. Usually these state who is speaking and often who they are speaking to. Apart from God and Jesus Christ, the main speakers are:

- Moses – who led the Israelites out of Egypt and taught them God's laws;
- David – Israel's greatest king who wrote many of the psalms, most of which are essentially prayers;
- Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, Daniel and other prophets – who spoke to the people of Israel on God's behalf; and
- Paul, Peter, John and other leaders of the early church – who spoke to various groups and wrote letters to believers.

Much care has been taken in order to correctly interpret the verses. Nevertheless, if you encounter a verse that is used to teach something that is contrary to or goes beyond your understanding, assess its use by doing such things as: reading the passage it is from; and considering how its teaching fits in with Scripture as a whole (e.g. interpret OT teaching in the light of NT teaching).

For more information on *The Bible Unpacked* and free downloads, go to the website: www.thebibleunpacked.net

Suggestions for Study Groups

Preliminary matters:

- Beforehand the leader should: check the context of any verses they are not familiar with; and review the questions. If need be, they should compose questions more applicable to the group.
- Each person should have a Bible, for things such as checking a verse's context. It would also be helpful to have Bible commentaries on hand.
- Pray before beginning the study. Ask God for help in understanding the meaning of the verses and to affect your lives through them. Also pray together at the end.

Doing the study:

- Ideally, read the material and answer the questions prior to the meeting. Then share answers and discuss any issues arising from the material in the meeting.
- Alternatively, read the material and answer the questions in the meeting – reading either aloud as a group or individually (prior to sharing answers). If reading as a group, **try having one person read the headings, another read the verses and another read the comments.** Additionally, a fourth person could read the Bible references.
- Answers need not be limited to only what is mentioned in the material.
- The group should feel free to diverge from the study if related issues arise.

General or concluding questions:

If time permits, conclude with one or more of the following questions:

- What is something that you either: **did not know** before; gained **greater insight** into; or **needed reminding** of?
- What verse would be helpful to memorize and bear in mind during the next week?
- In taking the verses seriously, is there anything you should change in:
 - (a) how you relate to God or to other people; or
 - (b) any other area of your life (e.g. attitudes, values or behavior)?

If so, are there any specific steps you could take to do this?

31. Love

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I. Loving Qualities

The importance of love could hardly be more emphatically stated by the Bible. Love should encompass every area of our lives and be the basis of all that we do in relating to people. Other personal qualities reflective of love are also regularly applicable in our relationships with other people (and are also discussed in this section).

Note that the teaching in this and the subsequent chapters in *Part G. Relating to People* is also relevant to the preceding part of this book, *Part F. Church Life*.

Love: Insights

What love is

Love is patient, love is kind, it is not envious. Love does not brag, it is not puffed up. ⁵It is not rude, it is not self-serving, it is not easily angered or resentful. ⁶It is not glad about injustice, but rejoices in the truth. ⁷It bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things. 1 CORINTHIANS 13:4–7

In v. 7, “believes all things, hopes all things” means that love: “...is ever ready to believe the best of every person” and that “its hopes are fadeless under all circumstances...” (AMP).

The supremacy of love

[AN EXPERT IN THE LAW, TO JESUS:] “Which commandment is the most important of all?” ²⁹Jesus answered, “The most important is: ‘Listen, Israel, the Lord our God, the Lord is one. ³⁰Love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your mind, and with all your strength.’ ³¹The second is: ‘Love your neighbor as yourself.’ There is no other commandment greater than these.”

MARK 12:28B–31

[PAUL, SPEAKING OF THE WAY OF LOVE:] And now I will show you a way that is beyond comparison. ^{13:1}If I speak in the tongues of men and of angels, but I do not have love, I am a noisy gong or a clanging cymbal. ²And if I have prophecy, and know all mysteries and all knowledge, and if I have all faith so that I can remove mountains, but

do not have love, I am nothing. ³*If I give away everything I own, and if I give over my body in order to boast, but do not have love, I receive no benefit. ...* ¹³*And now these three remain: faith, hope, and love. But the greatest of these is love.* 1 CORINTHIANS 12:31B–13:3

Love: Commands

Live a life of love . . .

As you have heard from the beginning, *his [God's] command is this: Live a life of love.* 2 JOHN 1:6B NCV™

Live in love as Christ also loved us. He gave his life for us as an offering and sacrifice, a soothing aroma to God. EPHESIANS 5:2 GW

. . . Do all things in love

Everything you do should be done in love. 1 CORINTHIANS 16:14

Love others as you love yourself . . .

Do not take revenge on anyone or continue to hate him, but *love your neighbor as you love yourself.* I am the LORD. LEVITICUS 19:18 GNT

. . . “Love your neighbor as yourself” sums up God’s law

Owe no one anything, except to *love one another, for the one who loves his neighbor has fulfilled the law.* ⁹*For the commandments, “Do not commit adultery, do not murder, do not steal, do not covet,” (and if there is any other commandment) are summed up in this, “Love your neighbor as yourself.”* ¹⁰*Love does no wrong to a neighbor. Therefore love is the fulfillment of the law.* ROMANS 13:8–10

The whole moral law – all that involves our relationships with other people – is summed up by the command to love others as we love ourselves. In doing so, we fulfill or carry out the law.

Love your enemies and do good to them

[JESUS:] *But I say to you who are listening: Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you,* ²⁸*bless those who curse you, pray for those who mistreat you. ...* ³¹*Treat others in the same way that you would want them to treat you.* LUKE 6:27–28, 31

Mercy

Mercy involves such things as: not penalizing those subject to one's judgment and retribution (due to things like wrongful action or debt); and doing more than one is bound to do in helping others. It is showing kindness beyond what is required of one or is otherwise considered fitting.

Show mercy

Be merciful, just as your Father is merciful. LUKE 6:36

You must see that justice is done, and must *show kindness and mercy to one another.* ZECHARIAH 7:9B GNT

Be merciful and God will show you mercy

Blessed are the merciful, for they will be shown mercy. MATTHEW 5:7

The final clause refers to being shown mercy by God.

Forgive others and God will forgive you

If you forgive others for the wrongs they do to you, your Father in heaven will forgive you. ¹⁵*But if you don't forgive others, your Father will not forgive your sins.* MATTHEW 6:14–15 CEV

Do not judge others, or God will judge you accordingly

Do not judge others, so that God will not judge you, ²for God will judge you in the same way as you judge others, and he will apply to you the same rules you apply to others. MATTHEW 7:1–2 GNT

We will all face God's judgment but the above passage speaks of the same condemnatory standard of judgment being applied by God to those who exercise it themselves.

Be generous and share with others

[PAUL, INSTRUCTING TIMOTHY WHAT TO TEACH BELIEVERS:] Tell them to do good, to be rich in good deeds, to *be generous givers, sharing with others.* 1 TIMOTHY 6:18

All day long he [a lazy person] continues to crave, while *the righteous one gives without holding back.* PROVERBS 21:26 ISV

Gentleness

Be humble, gentle and patient

[PAUL, TO BELIEVERS:] I, therefore, the prisoner for the Lord, urge you to *live worthily of the calling with which you have been called, ²with all humility and gentleness, with patience, bearing with one another in love, ...* EPHESIANS 4:1–2

Be meek

[JESUS:] *You have heard that it was said, ‘An eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth.’ ³⁹But I say to you, do not resist the evildoer. But whoever strikes you on the right cheek, turn the other to him as well. ⁴⁰And if someone wants to sue you and to take your tunic, give him your coat also. ⁴¹And if anyone forces you to go one mile, go with him two. ⁴²Give to the one who asks you, and do not reject the one who wants to borrow from you.* MATTHEW 5:38–42

The concept of “meekness” involves an approach of non-retaliation and even non-resistance in the face of offences. It is characterized by humility and gentleness.

The command to “not resist the evildoer” (v. 39a) is given in respect to one’s own rights; it is not saying that we should not stand against an evil person on behalf of others. The illustrations that follow (vv. 39b–42) show that one should not retaliate and not insist on one’s rights. Some commentators view these as hyperbole, while others consider such a view to be watering down the extent of what is being taught.

Seek peace, including peace with others

Turn away from evil and do good; *seek peace and pursue it.* PSALMS 34:14 ESV

Do everything possible on your part to live in peace with everybody. ROMANS 12:18 GNT

1 Corinthians 13:4-7 mentions a number of characteristics of love. Which of these do you: value the most; and need to bear in mind the most (in order to better love others)?

Do you have enemies? What can you do to love them?

How is a person who forgives better off for doing so? (Do not limit your answer to just what is mentioned in the verses.)

In what ways do you judge others? How can you avoid doing this?

Consider the actions/principles being proposed in Matthew 5:38-42 (*Be Meek*). Can you think of a situation you may well find yourself in, where one of these could be applied?

II. Antitheses of Love

We have various tendencies that work counter to love. These largely involve selfish attitudes and ill feelings – along with the adverse speech and actions that they produce. These greatly inhibit and harm our relationships with others, and must be avoided.

Selfish Attitudes

Do not pursue selfish ends

Don't act out of selfish ambition or be conceited. PHILIPPIANS 2:3A GW

... but *for those who are self-seeking* and do not obey the truth, but obey unrighteousness, *there will be wrath and fury.* ROMANS 2:8 ESV

Do not be greedy

How horrible it will be for you, scribes and Pharisees! You hypocrites! You clean the outside of cups and dishes. But inside they are full of greed and uncontrolled desires. MATTHEW 23:25 GW

Do not covet

'And you shall not covet your neighbor's wife. And you shall not desire your neighbor's house, his field, or his male servant, or his female servant, his ox, or his donkey, or anything that is your neighbor's.' DEUTERONOMY 5:21 ESV

We are not to crave or desire anything that belongs to another.

Seek the interests of others before your own . . .

[PAUL, TO BELIEVERS:] *None of you should be looking to your own interests, but to the interests of others. ...³³Just do as I do; I try to please everyone in all that I do, not thinking of my own good, but of the good of all, so that they might be saved.* 1 CORINTHIANS 10:24, 33 GNT

. . . Do so even at great cost to yourself, as Jesus Christ did

[PAUL, TO BELIEVERS:] For you know the grace of *our Lord Jesus Christ, that although he was rich, he became poor for your sakes, so that you by his poverty could become rich.* 2 CORINTHIANS 8:9

III Feelings

Control and avoid anger

When you are angry, do not sin, and be sure to stop being angry before the end of the day. ²⁷*Do not give the devil a way to defeat you. ...* ³¹*Do not be bitter or angry or mad. Never shout angrily or say things to hurt others. Never do anything evil.* EPHESIANS 4:26–27, 31 NCV™

Understand this, my dear brothers and sisters! *Let every person be quick to listen, slow to speak, slow to anger.* ²⁰*For human anger does not accomplish God's righteousness.* JAMES 1:19–20

Do not hate

You must not hate your fellow citizen in your heart. LEVITICUS 19:17A NCV™

If anyone says “I love God” and yet hates his fellow Christian, he is a liar, because the one who does not love his fellow Christian whom he has seen cannot love God whom he has not seen. 1 JOHN 4:20

Get rid of any bitterness or malice

Let all bitterness and wrath and anger and clamor and slander be put away from you, along with all malice. EPHESIANS 4:31 ESV

Do not be jealous

Wild parties, drunkenness, sexual immorality, promiscuity, rivalry, and *jealousy cannot be part of our lives.* ROMANS 13:13 GW

Adverse Speech

Do not quarrel

Starting a quarrel is like a leak in a dam, so stop it before a fight breaks out. ... ¹⁹*Whoever loves to argue loves to sin.* PROVERBS 17:14, 19A NCV™

Do not slander . . .

So get rid of all evil and all deceit and hypocrisy and envy and all slander. 1 PETER 2:1

. . . and do not gossip

A perverse person spreads dissension, and *a gossip separates the closest friends*. PROVERBS 16:28

Do not grumble against others

[JAMES, TO BELIEVERS:] *Do not grumble against one another, brothers and sisters, so that you may not be judged*. See, the judge stands before the gates! JAMES 5:9

Grumbling or complaining against others is an outward expression of inner condemnatory judgment of them – which leaves oneself open to such judgment.

Violent Actions

Do not use violence

[THE KING OF NINEVEH:] Every person and animal must put on sackcloth and must cry earnestly to God, and *everyone must turn from their evil way of living and from the violence that they do*. JONAH 3:8

Do not murder

You shall not murder. EXODUS 20:13

Do not rape

[MOSES, TO THE ISRAELITES:] *But if the man came across the engaged woman in the field and overpowered her and raped her, then only the rapist must die*. DEUTERONOMY 22:25

The NT does not propagate the death penalty. Nevertheless its mention in regard to such actions shows the seriousness of the crime.

Do not oppress

Thus says the Lord GOD: Enough, O princes of Israel! *Put away violence and oppression, and execute justice and righteousness. Cease your evictions of my people*, declares the Lord GOD. EZEKIEL 45:9 ESV

Choose one person that you have a lot of contact with. What is one way or area in which you could put their interests ahead of your own?

How do you deal with your anger? Do you have any tips on how to control anger?

What causes bitterness? What outcomes can it have if we remain bitter?

How can we stop ourselves from grumbling or complaining?

Which of the things mentioned do you see as most prominent in yourself? What verse/s could you use to help counteract this?

32. Justice

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I. Justice in Action

Topics encompassed by the theme of justice together form a very large proportion of what the Bible says about how to relate to other people. It is essential that we incorporate the Bible's teaching on these topics into our own lives. In doing so, we must be mindful that acting justly involves not only doing what is right ourselves; it also involves ensuring that others are treated fairly – notably the needy.

Do What Is Just and Right

Act justly

No, the LORD has told us what is good. *What he requires of us is this: to do what is just*, to show constant love, and to live in humble fellowship with our God. MICAH 6:8 GNT

[MOSES, TO THE ISRAELITES:] *You must pursue justice alone* so that you may live and inherit the land the LORD your God is giving you. DEUTERONOMY 16:20

In acting justly, do what is right

[GOD:] *Learn to do what is right! Promote justice!* ISAIAH 1:17A

To do what is right and just is more acceptable to the LORD than sacrifice. PROVERBS 21:3 ISV

Maintain justice

This is what the LORD says: *Preserve justice*, and do what is right. My salvation is about to come. My righteousness is about to be revealed. ISAIAH 56:1 GW

Do not show favoritism

You must not deal unjustly in judgment: you must neither show partiality to the poor nor honor the rich. LEVITICUS 19:15A

[PAUL, TO TIMOTHY:] Before God and Christ Jesus and the elect angels, I solemnly charge you to *carry out these commands without prejudice or favoritism of any kind.* 1 TIMOTHY 5:21

Justice and the Needy (I): Instructions

Do not mistreat the needy

Don't oppress widows, orphans, foreigners, and poor people.

ZECARIAH 7:10A GW

Treat foreigners the same as your native-born

The foreigner who resides with you must be to you like a native citizen among you; so you must love him as yourself, because you were foreigners in the land of Egypt. LEVITICUS 19:34A

Note that foreigners were seen as being vulnerable and needy.

Defend the cause of the needy

Defend the weak and the orphans; defend the rights of the poor and suffering. ⁴Save the weak and helpless; free them from the power of the wicked. PSALMS 82:3–4 NCV™

“Speak up for those who cannot speak for themselves; defend the rights of all those who have nothing. ⁹Speak up and judge fairly, and defend the rights of the poor and needy.” PROVERBS 31:8–9 NCV™

Provide the needy with food and clothing . . .

John answered them, *“The person who has two tunics must share with the person who has none, and the person who has food must do likewise.”* LUKE 3:11

Now in Joppa there was a disciple named Tabitha (which in translation means Dorcas). *She was continually doing good deeds and acts of charity. . . .* ³⁹So Peter got up and went with them, and when he arrived they brought him to the upper room. *All the widows stood beside him, crying and showing him the tunics and other clothing Dorcas used to make while she was with them.* ACTS 9:36, 39

. . . Even sell your possessions so as to give to the poor

[JESUS:] *Sell your possessions and give to the poor.* LUKE 12:33A

They [believers] made it their practice to sell their possessions and goods and to distribute the proceeds to anyone who was in need.

ACTS 2:45 ISV

Justice and the Needy (II): Insights

Defending and providing for the needy are part of true religion

[GOD, REFERRING TO KING JOSIAH:] *He always did right— he gave justice to the poor and was honest.* ¹⁶*That’s what it means to truly know me.* JEREMIAH 22:15B–16A CEV

Pure and undefiled religion before God the Father is this: to care for orphans and widows in their misfortune and to keep oneself unstained by the world. JAMES 1:27

Providing for the needy brings oneself blessing

The one who is gracious to the poor lends to the LORD, and the LORD will repay him for his good deed. PROVERBS 19:17

[JESUS:] *Give, and it will be given to you: A good measure, pressed down, shaken together, running over, will be poured into your lap. For the measure you use will be the measure you receive.* LUKE 6:38

Quite possibly Jesus has giving to the poor primarily in view. This teaching is at least inclusive of it.

God will punish those who ignore the needy

“Then he [Jesus Christ] will say to those on his left, ‘*Depart from me, you accursed, into the eternal fire that has been prepared for the devil and his angels!*’ ⁴²*For I was hungry and you gave me nothing to eat, I was thirsty and you gave me nothing to drink.* ⁴³*I was a stranger and you did not receive me as a guest, naked and you did not clothe me, sick and in prison and you did not visit me.*’ ⁴⁴Then they too will answer, ‘Lord, when did we see you hungry or thirsty or a stranger or naked or sick or in prison, and did not give you whatever you needed?’ ⁴⁵Then he will answer them, ‘*I tell you the truth, just as you did not do it for one of the least of these, you did not do it for me.*’ ⁴⁶*And these will depart into eternal punishment, but the righteous into eternal life.*” MATTHEW 25:41–46

Why is it more important to do what is right and just than to make offerings to God (cf. Prov 21:3)?

Are there any situations where you find it hard not to show favoritism?

To what extent is Jesus' command to sell your possessions and give to the poor (Luke 12:33) meant to be taken literally?

Why is giving justice to the poor linked with knowing God (Jer 22:15b–16a)?

Almost all of us are able to do more to speak up for and provide for the poor. What could you do? What do you intend to do?

II. Being True

In order to do what is right in our relationships with others, we must be true – both faithful and truthful. It is important to remember that faithfulness and truth – with the trust that they generate – are absolutely essential for our relationships with others to work, for so many aspects of our relationships are dependent on them. Accordingly we must avoid deceitfulness and associated dishonest practices. Bear in mind that deceitfulness is arguably the prime characteristic of Satan and evil.

Faithfulness

Be faithful

Never let go of loyalty and faithfulness. Tie them round your neck; write them on your heart. ⁴If you do this, both God and people will be pleased with you. PROVERBS 3:3–4 GNT

Be trustworthy

In the same way, women must be respected by others. They must not speak evil of others. They must be self-controlled and *trustworthy in everything*. 1 TIMOTHY 3:11 NCV™

Stand by others

[JESUS, TO HIS DISCIPLES:] *You are the ones who have always stood by me in my trials.* LUKE 22:28 ISV

So Naomi said, “Look, your sister-in-law is returning to her people and to her god. Follow your sister-in-law back home!” ¹⁶*But Ruth replied, “Stop urging me to abandon you! For wherever you go, I will go. Wherever you live, I will live. Your people will become my people, and your God will become my God. ¹⁷Wherever you die, I will die – and there I will be buried. May the LORD punish me severely if I do not keep my promise! Only death will be able to separate me from you!”* RUTH 1:15–17

Ruth’s promise to stand by her bereaved mother-in-law is a superlative expression of loyalty and commitment.

Truthfulness

Speak the truth

These are the things you must do: Speak the truth, each of you, to one another. ZECHARIAH 8:16A

Be honest

If you are a thief, quit stealing. *Be honest* and work hard, so you will have something to give to people in need. EPHESIANS 4:28 CEV

Be sincere

[PAUL, TO THE CORINTHIAN BELIEVERS:] Our conscience testifies that *we have conducted ourselves in the world with pure motives and godly sincerity*, without earthly wisdom but with God's grace—and especially towards you. 2 CORINTHIANS 1:12B ISV

Have integrity

[GOD, TO SOLOMON:] *You must serve me with integrity and sincerity, just as your father David did.* Do everything I commanded and obey my rules and regulations. 1 KINGS 9:4

Deceitfulness

Do not deceive

Never steal, lie, or deceive your neighbor. LEVITICUS 19:11B GW

Do not lie . . .

[PAUL, TO THE COLOSSIAN BELIEVERS:] *Do not lie to one another* since you have put off the old man with its practices¹⁰ and have been clothed with the new man that is being renewed in knowledge according to the image of the one who created it. COLOSSIANS 3:9–10

. . . and so do not give false testimony

You shall not give false testimony against your neighbor. EXODUS 20:16

Do not use flattery

[DAVID:] People lie to one another; *they flatter and deceive.* ³*May the LORD cut off all flattering lips, and the tongue that boasts!* PSALMS 12:2–3

Do not plot evil schemes

Do not plan evil in your hearts against one another. ZECHARIAH 8:17A

Deceit is in the heart of those who plot evil, but those who promote peace have joy. PROVERBS 12:20

Dishonest Gain

Note that because much of what can be described as “dishonest gain” involves deceitfulness, a good portion of this section is also relevant to the previous section, *Deceitfulness*.

Do not steal . . .

You shall not steal. EXODUS 20:15

. . . and do not defraud

You shall not cheat your neighbor . . . LEVITICUS 19:13A NKJV

Do not take excessive interest or extort money

[EZEKIEL, SPEAKING OF A RIGHTEOUS PERSON:] He keeps his hand from doing wrong. *He does not take too much interest or profit when he lends money.* He obeys my laws and lives by my rules. He will not die for his father’s sin; *he will surely live.* ¹⁸*But his father took other people’s money unfairly and robbed his brother and did what was wrong among his people. So he will die for his own sin.* EZEKIEL 18:17–18 NCV™

Do not accept bribes

Be careful that no one entices you with riches; do not let a large bribe turn you aside. JOB 36:18

Give an example of how a person has shown faithfulness to you. Describe what it meant to you.

What does integrity involve?

Is telling a lie ever justifiable?

Is there anything in which you find it hard not to be hypocritical?

Is there a situation where you might be tempted to make dishonest gain? How can one who is susceptible to such temptations learn to resist?

33. Wisdom

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I. Being Wise

Wisdom is one of the attributes most highly valued in the Bible. Thankfully the Bible says much about how we can gain wisdom. The Bible also contains very astute advice on other topics associated with wisdom, notably speaking – a key medium that we use in relating to others.

The Precedence of Godly Wisdom

“Godly Wisdom” is used here to denote the wisdom which the Bible advocates, wisdom which is based on the Bible’s teachings.

Godly wisdom is superior to anything else

Wisdom is supreme – so acquire wisdom, and whatever you acquire, acquire understanding! PROVERBS 4:7

[WISDOM:] *Grab hold of my instruction in lieu of money and knowledge instead of the finest gold, ¹¹because wisdom is better than precious gems and nothing you desire can compare to it.* PROVERBS 8:10–11 ISV

Worldly wisdom is flawed and inferior to the wisdom of God

No one should fool himself. *If anyone among you thinks that he is wise by this world’s standards, he should become a fool, in order to be really wise. ¹⁹For what this world considers to be wisdom is nonsense in God’s sight. As the scripture says, “God traps the wise in their cleverness”; ...* 1 CORINTHIANS 3:18–19 GNT

Here Paul portrays worldly wisdom as inferior to the wisdom of God – to both the wisdom of God himself (v. 19) and to godly wisdom (v. 18), which ultimately comes from God. Note that in saying that one should become a “fool” (v. 18), Paul means that one needs to forgo aspiring to the flawed wisdom of this world and recognize the shortcomings of one’s understanding – in effect see oneself as a “fool” – in order to be open to true, godly wisdom.

Worldly wisdom is ultimately futile, even detrimental

“The Lord knows that the thoughts of the wise are futile.”

1 CORINTHIANS 3:20B

Wisdom through God

Fearing God is the beginning of wisdom

The fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom, and the knowledge of the Holy One is insight. PROVERBS 9:10 ESV

Fearing God is the beginning of wisdom as it leads us to base our thinking and life on God and his teachings or commands – the source of true wisdom for life. For fear of God moves us to obey God’s commands and do what is right, thus manifesting wisdom (as indicated in the following two subsections).

Obeying God’s commands brings wisdom . . .

[MOSES, TO THE ISRAELITES:] Look! I have taught you statutes and ordinances just as the LORD my God told me to do, so that you might carry them out in the land you are about to enter and possess. ⁶*So be sure to do them, because this will testify of your wise understanding to the people who will learn of all these statutes and say, “Indeed, this great nation is a very wise people.”* DEUTERONOMY 4:5–6

[A PSALMIST, TO GOD:] *I have greater wisdom than those who are old, because I obey your commands.* PSALMS 119:100 GNT

. . . Wisdom involves doing what is right – and avoiding evil

[A WISE FATHER, TO HIS SON:] I will guide you *in the way of wisdom* and I will lead you *in upright paths*. PROVERBS 4:11

A wise person is cautious and turns from evil, but a fool throws off restraint and is overconfident. PROVERBS 14:16

One should in fact ask God for wisdom . . .

But if anyone is deficient in wisdom, he should ask God, who gives to all generously and without reprimand, and it will be given to him.

JAMES 1:5

. . . For it is God who gives wisdom

He gives wisdom to the wise and knowledge to the discerning.

DANIEL 2:21B ISV

Wisdom through Others

Pay attention to instruction

Apply your heart to instruction and your ears to the words of knowledge. ... ¹⁹*Listen, my child, and be wise, and guide your heart on the right way.* PROVERBS 23:12, 19

Heed discipline and correction

A fool rejects his father's discipline, but whoever heeds reproof shows good sense. ... ³²*The one who refuses correction despises himself, but whoever hears reproof acquires understanding.* PROVERBS 15:5, 32

Here “reproof” appears to refer to a rebuke or reprimand, a form of discipline (v. 5) or correction (v. 32).

Wise Speech

Be quick to listen and slow to speak

Understand this, my dear brothers and sisters! *Let every person be quick to listen, slow to speak, slow to anger.* JAMES 1:19

Use few words

When words abound, transgression is inevitable, but the one who restrains his words is wise. PROVERBS 10:19

Speak graciously

The words spoken by the wise are gracious ... ECCLESIASTES 10:12A ISV

Let your speech always be gracious, seasoned with salt, so that you may know how you should answer everyone. COLOSSIANS 4:6

Remember that our words are determined by our “heart”

The mouth speaks the things that are in the heart. ³⁵*Good people have good things in their hearts, and so they say good things. But evil people have evil in their hearts, so they say evil things.*

MATTHEW 12:34B–35 NCV™

Wise Personal Practices

The following topics are prominent in what are known as the Bible's wisdom books, notably in Proverbs and Ecclesiastes – as well as occurring elsewhere in the Bible.

Be self-controlled

Foolish people lose their tempers, but wise people control theirs.

PROVERBS 29:11 NCV™

Do not act in haste

It is dangerous to have zeal without knowledge, and *the one who acts hastily makes poor choices.* PROVERBS 19:2

Work hard

[PAUL, TO THE THESSALONIAN BELIEVERS:] *We didn't waste our time loafing,*⁸ and we didn't accept food from anyone without paying for it. We didn't want to be a burden to any of you, *so night and day we worked as hard as we could.* 2 THESSALONIANS 3:7B–8 CEV

*She [a wife of noble character] obtains wool and flax, and she is pleased to work with her hands.*¹⁴ *She is like the merchant ships; she brings her food from afar.*¹⁵ *She also gets up while it is still night, and provides food for her household and a portion to her female servants.*¹⁶ *She considers a field and buys it; from her own income she plants a vineyard.*¹⁷ *She begins her work vigorously, and she strengthens her arms.*¹⁸ *She knows that her merchandise is good, and her lamp does not go out in the night.*¹⁹ *Her hands take hold of the distaff, and her hands grasp the spindle.* PROVERBS 31:13–19

Enjoy life and be happy

[A WISE TEACHER:] *So I recommend the enjoyment of life, for there is nothing better on earth for a person to do except to eat, drink, and enjoy life. So joy will accompany him in his toil during the days of his life which God gives him on earth.* ECCLESIASTES 8:15

[A WISE TEACHER:] *I have concluded that there is nothing better for people than to be happy and to enjoy themselves as long as they live, ...* ECCLESIASTES 3:12

How can one distinguish between godly wisdom and worldly wisdom?
What is the difference?

Do you actively try to gain more wisdom? What things should you do
- or do differently - to achieve this?

What personality traits or attitudes help one to readily accept
correction and rebuke?

What areas of weakness do you have in regard to your speech?
What can you do about them?

How does one's heart determines one's words (cf. Matthew 12:34-35)?

II. Antitheses of Wisdom and Knowledge

Foolishness and spiritual ignorance are the antitheses of godly wisdom and knowledge. Moreover, foolishness and spiritual ignorance are very closely related to ungodliness; for ungodliness is the prime cause of them and further ungodliness results from them. Foolishness and spiritual ignorance with their consequences, stand in stark contrast to wisdom and her blessings.

Foolishness

Fools spurn and lack wisdom

Fearing the LORD is the beginning of moral knowledge, but *fools despise wisdom and instruction*. PROVERBS 1:7

Wisdom is unattainable for a fool; in court he does not open his mouth. PROVERBS 24:7

Foolishness involves disobedience to God . . .

Then Samuel said to Saul, “*You have acted foolishly. You haven’t obeyed the commandment of the LORD your God, which he commanded you*. For then the LORD would have established your kingdom over Israel forever, . . . 1 SAMUEL 13:13 ISV

. . . As such, foolishness encompasses doing wrong

A foolish person enjoys doing wrong, but a person with understanding enjoys doing what is wise. PROVERBS 10:23 NCV™

Notably Foolish Practices

Being quick-tempered is foolish

A person who has a quick temper does foolish things, and a person with crafty schemes is hated. PROVERBS 14:17

Drunkenness and gluttony are unwise, causing one trouble

[A WISE TEACHER:] *Listen, my child, and be wise, and guide your heart on the right way.*²⁰ *Do not spend time among drunkards, among*

those who eat too much meat, ²¹because drunkards and gluttons become impoverished, and drowsiness clothes them with rags.

PROVERBS 23:19–21

Indulging in pleasure is foolish and pointless

[A WISE TEACHER:] *I said of partying, “It is folly,” and of self-indulgent pleasure, “It accomplishes nothing!”* ECCLESIASTES 2:2

Further notably foolish practices

He who commits adultery lacks sense; he who does it destroys himself. PROVERBS 6:32 ESV

The one who conceals hatred utters lies, and the one who spreads slander is certainly a fool. PROVERBS 10:18

Those who trust in themselves are foolish, but those who live wisely will be kept safe. PROVERBS 28:26 NCV

Spiritual Ignorance (I): Causes and Results

Spiritual ignorance is caused basically by sin

[JESUS:] *The light has come into the world, but people loved the darkness more than the light because their actions were evil. ²⁰Everyone who practices wickedness hates the light and does not come to the light, so that his actions may not be exposed.* JOHN 3:19B–20 ISV

Due to people’s evil deeds, they spurn the spiritual light that is Jesus Christ and his truth. For this light exposes their deeds for what they really are – evil. Spurning Christ’s light means spiritual ignorance.

Spiritual ignorance is caused partly by the ungodly being closed-minded

They [godless people] are darkened in their understanding, being alienated from the life of God because of *the ignorance that is in them due to the hardness of their hearts.* EPHESIANS 4:18

This hardness of heart indicates that such people have “shut their minds” (NLT) – being stubborn (cf. CEV, GNT) and refusing to listen (cf. NCV).

Spiritual Ignorance (II): Knowledge Lacked

The assertions contained in the subheadings in this section are typically true of ungodly people. Having said this, not all ungodly people and unbelievers are totally ignorant of all the things mentioned here.

The ungodly do not know God or Jesus Christ

Then they [the Pharisees] began asking him, “Who is your father?” *Jesus answered, “You do not know either me or my Father. If you knew me you would know my Father too.”* JOHN 8:19

The ungodly do not comprehend God’s word

[JESUS, TO THE JEWISH RELIGIOUS LEADERS:] *You study the scriptures thoroughly because you think in them you possess eternal life, and it is these same scriptures that testify about me,⁴⁰ but you are not willing to come to me so that you may have life.* JOHN 5:39–40

Although they diligently studied the Scriptures, the Jewish leaders – who had in fact become in many ways ungodly – did not comprehend that the Scriptures spoke about Jesus, the way to life.

The ungodly are ignorant of and deceived about their sin

An evil man is rebellious to the core. He does not fear God,² for *he is too proud to recognize and give up his sin.* PSALMS 36:1–2

This is the way of an adulterous woman: she eats and wipes her mouth and says, “I have not done wrong.” PROVERBS 30:20

The ungodly are largely oblivious of God’s pending punishment – which they will bear

[GOD:] At that time *I will search Jerusalem with lamps, and I will punish the men who are complacent, those who say in their hearts, ‘The LORD will not do good, nor will he do ill.’* ZEPHANIAH 1:12 ESV

Explain the connection between foolishness and ungodliness.

If one has a quick temper, what measures could one take to keep it in check? For example, what personal attributes could one develop to counter it?

How does sin lead to spiritual ignorance?

How do people become closed-minded? How can we recognize if we ourselves are closed-minded (e.g. in regard to aspects of the Bible's teachings)?

How can a person study the Scriptures thoroughly, yet like the Jewish religious leaders (cf. John 5:39-40) fail to grasp key things that they say?

34. Common Relationships

I. Family Relationships

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I. Family Relationships

The Bible contains discerning insights and directions regarding relationships with those who are closest to us. As such these teachings are among the ones which are the most often applicable to our lives.

Prologue: Issues regarding Marriage

Unmarried people can be fully devoted to the Lord

[PAUL, TO BELIEVERS:] I would like you to be free from worry. *An unmarried man concerns himself with the Lord's work, because he is trying to please the Lord.* ³³*But a married man concerns himself with worldly matters, because he wants to please his wife;* ³⁴*and so he is pulled in two directions. An unmarried woman or a virgin concerns herself with the Lord's work, because she wants to be dedicated both in body and spirit; but a married woman concerns herself with worldly matters, because she wants to please her husband.* ³⁵I am saying this because I want to help you. *I am not trying to put restrictions on you. Instead, I want you to do what is right and proper, and to give yourselves completely to the Lord's service without any reservation.* 1 CORINTHIANS 7:32–35 GNT

Do not marry outside of God's people

[PAUL, TO BELIEVERS:] *Do not become partners with those who do not believe, for what partnership is there between righteousness and lawlessness, or what fellowship does light have with darkness?* ¹⁵*And what agreement does Christ have with Beliar? Or what does a believer share in common with an unbeliever?* 2 CORINTHIANS 6:14–15

A person should have only one spouse

An elder must *be blameless, the husband of one wife*, with faithful children who cannot be charged with dissipation or rebellion. TITUS 1:6

Remarriage and adultery

[JESUS:] And I say to you: *whoever divorces his wife, except for sexual immorality, and marries another, commits adultery.* MATTHEW 19:9 ESV

Spouses

A husband and wife should be as one

The LORD God used the rib from the man to make a woman, and then he brought the woman to the man. ²³And the man said, “Now, *this is someone whose bones came from my bones, whose body came from my body. I will call her ‘woman,’ because she was taken out of man.*” ²⁴*So a man will leave his father and mother and be united with his wife, and the two will become one body.* GENESIS 2:22–24 NCV™

Just as originally the man and the woman were of the one body (vv. 22–23), so a husband and wife will be united as “one body” (v. 24). The term “one body” appears to encompass a oneness in spirit, and is signified and expressed through sexual bonding.

Husbands should love their wives

Husbands, love your wives just as Christ loved the church and gave himself for her ... EPHESIANS 5:25

This calls for a love that is ever persistent and is all surpassing, even to the point of sacrificing one’s life.

Wives should submit to their husbands

Wives, submit to your own husbands, as to the Lord. ²³*For the husband is the head of the wife even as Christ is the head of the church, his body, and is himself its Savior.* ²⁴*Now as the church submits to Christ, so also wives should submit in everything to their husbands.* EPHESIANS 5:22–24 ESV

Such submission should be voluntary and willing. The corresponding authority of the husband is not about control and should only be practiced in a Christ-like manner and in love, which should characterize all he does in relating to his wife.

Do not commit adultery

You shall not commit adultery. EXODUS 20:14

Avoid divorce

So they [husband and wife] are no longer two, but one flesh. Therefore what God has joined together, let no one separate. MATTHEW 19:6

Parents' Duties to Children

Parents should love their children

[PAUL, SPEAKING OF WOMEN IN THE CHURCH:] In this way they [older women] will train the younger women to love their husbands, *to love their children*, ... TITUS 2:4

Parents should care for their children

[PAUL, TO THE THESSALONIAN BELIEVERS:] But we were gentle when we were with you, *like a mother taking care of her children*.
1 THESSALONIANS 2:7 GNT

[MOSES, SPEAKING TO THE ISRAELITES OF GOD'S CARE:] You saw how *he brought you safely all the way to this place, just as a father would carry his son*. DEUTERONOMY 1:31B GNT

Parents should discipline their children

Discipline your children while they are young enough to learn. If you don't, you are helping them to destroy themselves. PROVERBS 19:18 GNT

Besides this, *we have had earthly fathers who disciplined us and we respected them.* HEBREWS 12:9A ESV

Parents should teach their children about God and his deeds, inspiring them to trust and obey God

We will tell the next generation about the LORD's praiseworthy acts, about his strength and the amazing things he has done. ⁵He established a rule in Jacob; he set up a law in Israel. He commanded our ancestors to make his deeds known to their descendants, ⁶so that the next generation, children yet to be born, might know about them. They will grow up and tell their descendants about them. ⁷Then they will place their confidence in God. They will not forget the works of God, and they will obey his commands. PSALMS 78:4B–7

This speaks of parents telling their children of God's deeds and power (v. 4) and subsequently of his commands (vv. 5–6). Verse 7 then concludes that in light of God's wonderful deeds for them, the children would trust God and obey his commands.

Children's Duties to Parents

Children are to honor their parents

“Honor your father and mother,” which is the first commandment accompanied by a promise, namely, ³*“that it may go well with you and that you will live a long time on the earth.”* EPHESIANS 6:2–3

Children are to obey their parents

Children, obey your parents in everything, for this pleases the Lord.
COLOSSIANS 3:20 ESV

Children should heed their parents' teaching

[A WISE FATHER, TO HIS SON:] *My son, keep your father's commands, and don't forget your mother's teaching.* ²¹*Keep their words in mind forever as though you had them tied around your neck.* ²²*They will guide you when you walk. They will guard you when you sleep. They will speak to you when you are awake.* ²³*These commands are like a lamp; this teaching is like a light. And the correction that comes from them will help you have life.* PROVERBS 6:20–23 NCV™

“They will guard you when you sleep” (v. 22) speaks of the security or protection that living by such teaching provides.

Children are to help their parents

But if a widow has children or grandchildren, they should first learn to fulfill their duty toward their own household and so repay their parents what is owed them. For this is what pleases God. 1 TIMOTHY 5:4

What are some specific things husbands should do in applying the teaching regarding loving their wives?

Should wives submit to their husbands? Explain your answer.

What aspects of your parents' love and care did you value and feel you should imitate?

What things should disciplining of children involve – and not involve?

What other things could you do for your parents and/or grandparents?

II. Civil Relationships

In addition to relationships with family members, the Bible looks at other relationships which have a marked effect on our lives. In doing so, it gives wise and challenging teaching regarding relationships between citizens and governing authorities, and between employees and employers.

Citizens' Duties to Authorities

Citizens should submit to and obey the governing authorities

[PAUL, INSTRUCTING TITUS WHAT TO TEACH BELIEVERS:] Remind them *to be subject to rulers and authorities, to be obedient*, to be ready for every good work. TITUS 3:1

As with the command “be subject to”, the command to “be obedient” is also given in regard to “rulers and authorities”.

For authorities are established by God and punish wrongdoers

Every person should obey the government in power. No government would exist if it hadn't been established by God. The governments which exist have been put in place by God. ²Therefore, whoever resists the government opposes what God has established. Those who resist will bring punishment on themselves. ³People who do what is right don't have to be afraid of the government. But people who do what is wrong should be afraid of it. ROMANS 13:1–3A GW

But citizens should defy commands that conflict with God's will

Nebuchadnezzar spoke up and said: ‘Blessed be the God of Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego! He sent his angel to deliver his servants who trusted in him. *They disobeyed the king's command and were willing to risk their lives in order not to serve or worship any god except their own God.* DANIEL 3:28 ISV

The chief priest questioned them. ²⁸*He said, “We gave you strict orders not to mention Jesus' name when you teach. Yet, you've filled Jerusalem with your teachings. You want to take revenge on us for putting that man to death.”* ²⁹*Peter and the other apostles answered, “We must obey God rather than people.* ACTS 5:27B–29 GW

Authorities' Duties to Citizens

Authorities should act and rule according to God's ways

[MOSES, GIVING INSTRUCTIONS FOR A KING:] *When he sits on his royal throne he must make a copy of this law on a scroll given to him by the Levitical priests. ¹⁹It must be with him constantly and he must read it as long as he lives, so that he may learn to revere the LORD his God and observe all the words of this law and these statutes and carry them out.* DEUTERONOMY 17:18–19

And he [King Hezekiah] *did what was right in the eyes of the LORD, according to all that David his father had done.* 2 KINGS 18:3 ESV

Authorities should rule as servants of God and their people

[PAUL:] Would you like to be unafraid of those in authority? Then do what is good, and they will praise you, ⁴because *they are God's servants working for your own good.* ROMANS 13:3B–4A GNT

[Elders, to King Rehoboam], “If you will *be a servant to this people today and serve them*, and speak good words to them when you answer them, then they will be your servants forever.” 1 KINGS 12:7B ESV

Authorities should rule wisely

[GOD, TO ISRAEL:] I will give you leaders who will be faithful to me. *They will lead you with knowledge and insight.* JEREMIAH 3:15

Authorities should rule justly

[THE QUEEN OF SHEBA, TO KING SOLOMON:] Because of your God's love for Israel and his lasting commitment to them, *he made you king over them so you could make just and right decisions.* 2 CHRONICLES 9:8B

Authorities should defend the needy

[INSTRUCTIONS TO A KING:] “*Speak up for those who cannot speak for themselves; defend the rights of all those who have nothing. ⁹Speak up and judge fairly, and defend the rights of the poor and needy.*” PROVERBS 31:8–9 NCV™

Servants and Masters

A number of verses in this section refer to slaves rather than servants. Generally the teaching regarding one of them is also very much applicable to the other.

Servants should be obedient, submissive and respectful

Slaves, obey your earthly masters in every respect, not only when they are watching – like those who are strictly people-pleasers – but with a sincere heart, fearing the Lord. COLOSSIANS 3:22

Servants, be subject to your masters with all respect, not only to the good and gentle but also to the unjust. 1 PETER 2:18 ESV

Servants should be trustworthy and faithful

They [slaves] should not steal from them but should show their masters they can be fully trusted so that in everything they do they will make the teaching of God our Savior attractive. TITUS 2:10 NCV™

And he [a servant] who had received the five talents came forward, bringing five talents more, saying, ‘*Master, you delivered to me five talents; here I have made five talents more.*’²¹ *His master said to him, ‘Well done, good and faithful servant. You have been faithful over a little; I will set you over much. Enter into the joy of your master.’*

MATTHEW 25:20–21 ESV

Masters must treat servants justly

Masters, treat your slaves with justice and fairness, because you know that you also have a master in heaven. COLOSSIANS 4:1

Masters must not withhold servants’ wages

You must not withhold the wages of the hired laborer overnight until morning. LEVITICUS 19:13B

Is there a situation where you find it hard to obey the governing authorities? Is there anything that you can or should do about it?

In what sense are the governing authorities God's servants (cf. Rom 13:3b–4)?

What can we do on behalf of other citizens who are not treated justly by the authorities - in our own country or overseas (e.g. in regard to Christians persecuted by their government)? What do you intend to do?

Are you in a position of authority over others? If so, how can you improve the way you relate to those under your authority?

In relating to your employer, what do you need to keep in mind the most?

35. Spreading the Gospel

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I. Instructions

The theme of spreading the gospel, or message about Jesus Christ, pervades the New Testament and should be also one of the main focuses of our lives. This section largely looks at what we need to say and do, in advancing the spread of the gospel.

Tell Others the Gospel

Tell others the gospel message about Jesus Christ

So Philip started speaking, and beginning with this scripture *proclaimed the good news about Jesus to him* [an Ethiopian official]. ACTS 8:35

[PAUL:] Timothy, our brother, works with us for God and *helps us tell people the Good News about Christ*. 1 THESSALONIANS 3:2B NCV™

Tell all people, everywhere

Then he [Jesus] told them: *Go and preach the good news to everyone in the world. ...* ²⁰*Then the disciples left and preached everywhere.*

MARK 16:15, 20A CEV

Do not be ashamed of the gospel

[PAUL:] For *I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is God's power for salvation to everyone who believes, to the Jew first and also to the Greek*. ROMANS 1:16

What Things to Explain

Explain who Jesus Christ is

Soon he [Paul] went to the Jewish meeting places and started *telling people that Jesus is the Son of God*. ACTS 9:20 CEV

Paul became wholly absorbed with proclaiming the word, *testifying to the Jews that Jesus was the Christ*. ACTS 18:5B

[PETER, TO A CROWD OF LARGELY JEWS:] Therefore *let all the house of Israel know beyond a doubt that God has made this Jesus whom you crucified both Lord and Christ*. ACTS 2:36

Tell people about Jesus' death and resurrection . . .

[PAUL:] *I passed on to you what I received, which is of the greatest importance: ⁴that Christ died for our sins, as written in the Scriptures; ⁵that he was buried and that he was raised to life three days later, as written in the Scriptures; that he appeared to Peter and then to all twelve apostles.* 1 CORINTHIANS 15:3–5 GNT

. . . and tell people about the results

What we mean is that *God was in Christ, offering peace and forgiveness to the people of this world. And he has given us the work of sharing his message about peace.* 2 CORINTHIANS 5:19 CEV

We are to tell others that because of Jesus Christ's death, their sins can be forgiven and they can be at peace with God.

Tell people about the kingdom of God

From morning until evening he [Paul] explained things to them, testifying about the kingdom of God and trying to convince them about Jesus from both the law of Moses and the prophets. ACTS 28:23B

Tell people about what God is like and what he has done . . .

Sing to the LORD! Bless his name! *Proclaim his deliverance every day! ³Declare his glory among the nations and his awesome deeds among all the peoples!* PSALMS 96:2–3 ISV

This illustrates that we should proclaim God's salvation, glory and marvelous deeds to all people and nations.

. . . and tell what God has done for you

[JESUS, TO A MAN HE HAD HEALED:] *“Return to your home, and declare what God has done for you.” So he went away, proclaiming throughout the whole town what Jesus had done for him.* LUKE 8:39

Tell people how they should respond

[PAUL:] *To Jews and Gentiles alike I gave solemn warning that they should turn from their sins to God and believe in our Lord Jesus.* ACTS 20:21 GNT

How to Spread the Message

Present the gospel accurately and plainly

He [Apollos] had been instructed in the way of the Lord, and with great enthusiasm *he spoke and taught accurately the facts about Jesus*, although he knew only the baptism of John. ACTS 18:25

[PAUL:] We use no trickery, and *we do not change the teaching of God. We teach the truth plainly*, showing everyone who we are. Then they can know in their hearts what kind of people we are in God's sight. 2 CORINTHIANS 4:2B NCV™

Spread the gospel by the Holy Spirit

They [past prophets] were shown that they were serving not themselves but you, in regard to the things now announced to you through *those who proclaimed the gospel to you by the Holy Spirit* sent from heaven – things angels long to catch a glimpse of. 1 PETER 1:12

Spreading the gospel by the Holy Spirit involves relying on the Holy Spirit's guidance and power (cf. 1 Corinthians 2:4–5).

Spread the gospel boldly – with God's help

So he [Saul] was staying with them, associating openly with them in Jerusalem, *speaking out boldly in the name of the Lord*. ACTS 9:28

[PAUL, TO THE THESSALONIAN BELIEVERS:] As you remember, we had been mistreated and insulted at Philippi. *But God gave us the courage to tell you the good news about him, even though many people caused us trouble*. 1 THESSALONIANS 2:2 CEV

Work hard at spreading the gospel message

[PAUL:] So we preach Christ to everyone. With all possible wisdom we warn and teach them in order to bring each one into God's presence as a mature individual in union with Christ. ²⁹*To get this done I toil and struggle, using the mighty strength which Christ supplies and which is at work in me*. COLOSSIANS 1:28–29 GNT

Note that here Paul is probably referring to his evangelistic work in spreading the gospel as well as to his pastoral work amongst Christians.

Supplementary Actions

Pray for your proclamation of the gospel . . .

[THE EARLY BELIEVERS:] And now, Lord, pay attention to their threats, and *grant to your servants to speak your message with great courage,* ³⁰*while you extend your hand to heal, and to bring about miraculous signs and wonders through the name of your holy servant Jesus.*”
³¹*When they had prayed, the place where they were assembled together was shaken, and they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak the word of God courageously.* ACTS 4:29–31

. . . and pray for others who proclaim the gospel

[PAUL, TO BELIEVERS:] *Be sure to pray that God will make a way for us to spread his message and explain the mystery about Christ, even though I am in jail for doing this.* ⁴*Please pray that I will make the message as clear as possible.* COLOSSIANS 4:3–4 CEV

Pray for the salvation of unbelievers

[PAUL:] Brothers and sisters, *my heart’s desire and prayer to God on behalf of my fellow Israelites is for their salvation.* ROMANS 10:1

Act in the interests of others for the sake of the gospel

[PAUL, TO BELIEVERS:] *Just do as I do; I try to please everyone in all that I do, not thinking of my own good, but of the good of all, so that they might be saved.* 1 CORINTHIANS 10:33 GNT

Act in a way that is consistent with the gospel

[PAUL, TO BELIEVERS:] *Only conduct yourselves in a manner worthy of the gospel of Christ so that – whether I come and see you or whether I remain absent – I should hear that you are standing firm in one spirit, with one mind, by contending side by side for the faith of the gospel, . . .* PHILIPPIANS 1:27

Conducting oneself “in a manner worthy of the gospel” – a manner consistent with its message – is an important aspect of “contending... for the faith of the gospel”.

Write down what you think are the main points to mention when telling someone the gospel.

What should we tell people about the kingdom of God?

What have you witnessed personally (regarding God or Jesus Christ) that you can tell others about?

Is there anything in this section that you - or Christians generally – tend to overlook when spreading the gospel?

Who could you share the gospel with? Do you need to do anything beforehand to prepare?

II. Insights

This section provides insights on the gospel message itself and on why it is so critical that we tell others the gospel. It also teaches us that in all our efforts to do so, we must bear in mind that the effectiveness of the message comes from God – and that people’s responses to it are in his hands, not ours.

Insights on the Gospel Message

The gospel is not made up by men – it is true

[PAUL:] Now I want you to know, brothers and sisters, that *the gospel I preached is not of human origin.* ¹²*For I did not receive it or learn it from any human source; instead I received it by a revelation of Jesus Christ.* GALATIANS 1:11–12

But Paul replied, “I have not lost my mind, most excellent Festus, but *am speaking true and rational words.* ²⁶*For the king knows about these things, and I am speaking freely to him, because I cannot believe that any of these things has escaped his notice, for this was not done in a corner.* ACTS 26:25–26

Verse 26 makes a very important point attesting to the truth of the gospel. The events it is based on were widely known, familiar to the king, as they did not take place in some obscure setting.

The gospel reveals God’s secret plan concerning Jesus Christ

[PAUL:] To me, though I am the very least of all the saints, this grace was given, *to preach to the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ,* ⁹*and to bring to light for everyone what is the plan of the mystery hidden for ages in God who created all things, ...* EPHESIANS 3:8B–9 ESV

The gospel is good news

God sent his word to the people of Israel and brought them *the Good News of peace through Jesus Christ.* ACTS 10:36A GW

Note that the Greek word which is often translated as “gospel” basically means “good news”.

The Need to Spread the Gospel

We are responsible for telling others the gospel

[PAUL:] For *I have an obligation to all peoples, to the civilized and to the savage, to the educated and to the ignorant.* ¹⁵*So then, I am eager to preach the Good News to you also who live in Rome.*

ROMANS 1:14–15 GNT

Like Paul, believers have an obligation or responsibility to tell all people – people of all nations and levels of understanding.

Through believers spreading the gospel others come to believe

[JESUS:] I'm not praying only for them [the disciples]. I'm also praying for *those who will believe in me through their message.*

JOHN 17:20 GW

But a lot of people who had heard the message believed it. ACTS 4:4A CEV

There are many people ready to respond to the gospel – but they need someone to tell them

When he [Jesus] saw the crowds, he had compassion on them because they were bewildered and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd. ³⁷Then he said to his disciples, *“The harvest is plentiful, but the workers are few. ³⁸Therefore ask the Lord of the harvest to send out workers into his harvest.”* MATTHEW 9:36–38

There are many ready to respond to the gospel – to be “harvested”. But more workers are needed to proclaim the gospel to them.

The gospel brings salvation, saving those who respond to it

[PAUL, TO THE EPHESIAN BELIEVERS:] And you also became God's people when you heard the true message, *the Good News that brought you salvation.* EPHESIANS 1:13A GNT

[JESUS, TO HIS DISCIPLES:] Go into all the world and *preach the gospel to every creature.* ¹⁶*The one who believes and is baptized will be saved, but the one who does not believe will be condemned.*

MARK 16:15B–16

God and the Gospel's Effectiveness

The gospel is the power of God to save – though it may seem foolish to the world

[PAUL:] For I am not ashamed of *the gospel, for it is God's power for salvation to everyone who believes, to the Jew first and also to the Greek.* ROMANS 1:16

[PAUL:] For *the message about the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God.*
1 CORINTHIANS 1:18

The gospel is not dependent on us and our presentation of it – but on the Holy Spirit and God's power

[PAUL, TO THE CORINTHIANS:] *My conversation and my preaching were not with persuasive words of wisdom, but with a demonstration of the Spirit and of power, ⁵so that your faith would not be based on human wisdom but on the power of God.* 1 CORINTHIANS 2:4-5

The effectiveness of Paul's message was not due to any great display of wisdom on his part, but to the Holy Spirit and God's power, working through him and in the minds of his listeners.

The Holy Spirit testifies about Jesus Christ to people, fostering belief

[JESUS, TO HIS DISCIPLES:] When the Advocate comes, whom I will send you from the Father – *the Spirit of truth who goes out from the Father – he will testify about me, ²⁷and you also will testify, because you have been with me from the beginning.* JOHN 15:26-27

The Holy Spirit testifies to non-believers about the reality of Jesus Christ and the truth of the gospel message. He does this often through believers as they tell others the gospel (which Jesus quite possibly alludes to here). This work of the Holy Spirit is crucial to the effectiveness of the gospel's proclamation (cf. 1 Corinthians 12:3).

God and Jesus at times confirm the gospel message by miracles

They [Paul and Barnabas] spoke boldly about the Lord, who confirmed their message about his good will by having them perform miracles and do amazing things. ACTS 14:3 GW

What evidence is there that the gospel message has not been made up? Do you know of a good book or resource about this?

What responsibility do you feel to tell others the gospel?

Can you tell of any instances – ones you have either witnessed or know of – where you are sure of God's power being behind the spreading of the gospel?

What teaching about God and the Holy Spirit's role in the spreading of the gospel do you need to be most mindful of? Why?

What teachings in this section do you personally find the most motivating to spread the gospel?

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3. Jesus Christ

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- II. What to Do in Persecution

Overview of *The Bible Unpacked*


There are seven editions of *The Bible Unpacked*, as shown below. Each edition is an abbreviated version of the next longest edition. As such they have similar structures. Four of the editions have studies based on them, with the same text along with questions. For more details and free downloads of all the material, go to www.thebibleunpacked.net.

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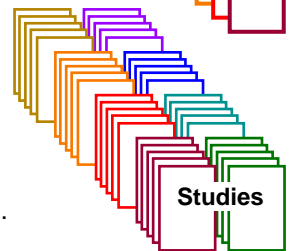
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An Appeal on Behalf of Persecuted Christians

Over 200 million Christians in at least 60 countries are denied basic human rights solely because of their faith. (Source: World Evangelical Alliance) Every year many Christians are killed because of their faith.

Through prayer, encouragement and practical assistance we can assist and fellowship with persecuted Christians in their suffering. You can play a vital part in this through contacting one of the organizations listed below. Most produce regular news/prayer letters.

Barnabas Fund – www.barnabasfund.org

It provides material and spiritual support in response to needs identified by local Christian leaders.

Christian Faith and Freedom – www.cffreedom.org

It advocates on behalf of and aids persecuted Christians.

Christian Solidarity International – www.csi-int.org

CSI works to defend religious liberty and help persecuted Christians.

Christian Solidarity Worldwide – www.csw.org.uk

It advocates for freedom of religion and justice for persecuted believers.

Compass Direct – www.compassdirect.org

This is a Christian news service providing news, reports, interviews and analyses of situations facing persecuted Christians.

Open Doors – sb.od.org; www.opendoors.org.au

It provides Bibles and other Christian materials, to prepare believers for persecution and equip them to maintain a witness to the Gospel.

Religious Liberty Commission – www.worldevangelicals.org/commissions/rlc/; www.ea.org.au/ea-family/Religious-Liberty.aspx

RLC defends and aids persecuted Christians. See also www.idop.org
Receive weekly updates by sending a blank email to join-rlpb@hub.xc.org.

The Bible League – www.bibleleague.org/persecuted; www.bibleleague.com

It supplies Bibles to persecuted Christians and also provides training.

Voice of the Martyrs – www.persecution.com; www.persecution.com.au

VOM provides Bibles, literature, radio broadcasts and other assistance to help persecuted Christians spread the gospel. They also send material aid.

Then the King will answer, 'I tell you the truth, anything you did for even the least of my people here, you also did for me.' Matthew 25:40 NCV

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