

Understanding How God Communicates with Mankind, Today!

Text: “Brethren, join in following my **example**, and note those who so walk, as you have us for a **pattern**” (Philippians 3:17 NKJV).

Thesis: God communicates with mankind today through direct statements, examples and implications recorded upon the pages of the New Testament.

Songs: “Ancient Words,” “O Sacred Word,” “Precious Words,” “Wonderful Words of Life,” “The Precious Book Divine”

Introduction:

1. God communicates with mankind today through *direct statements, examples* and *implications* recorded upon the pages of the New Testament.
 - a. There are only three basic avenues of verbal communication: *commands or direct statements, approved examples* and *implications* from which one is obligated to *infer* precisely what is implied—no more and no less.
 - b. The New Testament is the only applicable covenant today—not the Old Testament (in which are Patriarchy and Judaism) and not what might be the case in eternity (e.g., heaven).
 - c. What may be applicable eternally in heaven is immaterial to contemporary conduct.
 - d. The Old Testament has been replaced with the New Testament (Rom. 7:6-7; 2 Cor. 3:6-11; Eph. 2:15; Col. 2:14).
 - e. For instance, the New Testament, rather than instructions to Adam and Eve or Noah or Moses, is applicable today.
 - f. Without a valid biblical interpretation, there is no way to comprehend divine revelation.
2. The basic principle of interpersonal communication is innate—*we are born with it!*
 - a. The young child who pleads with a parent for or against something will often go to great lengths, including citing the example of or the implied approval of an action based on what Mommy and Daddy do.
 - b. “Don’t do as I do, but do as I say!” simply does not work, especially in childrearing.
 - c. Fundamental biblical interpretation is no more difficult than conversation (communication) between children.
3. There is no essential difference between the study of the Scriptures and the study of any other subject.
 - a. Basic biblical instructions in the New Testament for salvation, Christian worship and Christian service are not complicated.
 - b. God chose to use the mechanism of verbal communication between humans (even between children) to communicate His will to mankind through the Bible (Rom. 10:13-15).
 - c. Divine instruction is *not* cloaked in God-words (so-called, “God-speak”) and mechanisms of communication foreign to the ordinary ways people communicate and comprehend communication.
4. The Bible must be viewed as authoritative respecting whatever topic that it addresses.

- a. There would be no reason for God to provide divine revelation unless both God was able to provide discernible communication, and He designed mankind with sufficient faculties to understand it (2 Timothy 2:15; John 8:32).
- b. God gave divine revelation (the Bible) to communicate with mankind, and God intended for his revelation to be understood.
- c. Correct biblical interpretation is helped along by acknowledging that God has a right to make demands of mankind, and that He has done that through the Bible.
- d. Without correct biblical interpretation, one could not organize a local congregation, conduct its worship in an acceptable manner to God or practice anything else with regard to Christianity.

Body:

I. The Bible is of divine origin, it has been divinely transmitted, and it has been divinely preserved.

- A. The Word of God is to be revered because it is God-breathed (2 Timothy 3:16, lit. “divinely breathed” *Biblesoft’s; Robertson’s; Vincent’s*).
 1. Therefore, the student of God’s Word realizes that the Bible does not contradict itself.
 2. Yet, one must distinguish between historical inclusion of information versus divine instruction in the Bible to arrive at correct biblical interpretation (e.g., King Solomon’s sins versus divinely inspired instruction).
- B. One must determine to understand what the Bible means **and** be willing to make any needed application to himself.
 1. Irrespective of how inconvenient it may be, one needs to follow the **evidence** wherever it leads.
 2. All divine instruction (e.g., salvation, worship, Christian living, Christian service, etc.) and promised blessings (e.g., eternity in heaven) that are applicable to mankind today can only be learned from properly interpreting the New Testament.
 3. Without proper biblical interpretation, one cannot have proper biblical faith.
 4. Mankind is obligated to try to understand divine revelation.
- C. Without proper or valid interpretation, how could one know:
 1. what **blessings** God reserves for his creation—man,
 2. what **prohibitions** God expects mankind to respect,
 3. how God desires to be **worshipped**,
 4. how one can **become a child of God**,
 5. how God expects mankind to practice **Christian living**,
 6. **Christian service** or
 7. what God expects men to believe and do regarding **other Christian doctrine**?
- D. “The true canon of Scripture has been established. ...The text we have is reliable. ...The text of the Bible can be adequately translated and understood” (Flatt 65-66).
- E. Successful interpretation of Scripture requires one to ascertain what the original audience or recipients of it were expected to understand.
 1. Learning of the historical setting of the biblical text will help one understand the correct interpretation of Scripture.
 2. Knowing something about the prevailing culture of the people involved in a passage will aid comprehension of the divine message.

II. There are helps and hindrances to correct biblical interpretation.

- A. Hindrances to correct biblical interpretation include:
1. Desiring to please others or oneself hinders correct biblical interpretation (Galatians 1:10; 1 Thessalonians 2:4).
 2. Reading the Bible *without expecting to understand it* also hinders interpreting the Scriptures successfully.
 3. Not having a predetermination to accept God's Word as authoritative *in whatever it specifies* will surely lead to a train-wreck of biblical interpretation.
 4. One must avoid backdating present circumstances to the ancient, biblical past (i.e., we must avoid overlaying the past with the template of the present).
- B. Helps to correct biblical interpretation include:
1. To comprehend the Word of God, one must bring as much *objectivity* as he possibly can to the process of biblical interpretation.
 2. For successful biblical interpretation, one must examine the *biblical context* carefully: immediate context (passage), remote context (Bible book, testament), total biblical context (entire Bible).
 3. It is important to know *to whom* any portion of Scripture under scrutiny is *addressed*.
 4. Knowing the *type of biblical literature* (e.g., history, prophecy, prose, literal, figurative) being studied contributes to successful biblical interpretation.
 5. Knowing *when* a portion of Scripture was *written* can help understand its meaning and application better.
 6. "Always interpret according to the *known purpose* of the author" (Dungan 172).
 7. The *Bible is its own best commentary*; difficult biblical passages can be more easily understood by consulting the Bible in other passages that are more easily understood about the same subject.
 8. *Sound reasoning* is a necessity to successful biblical interpretation
- C. It is not the case that generally mankind is unable to understand divine instruction, but rather he understands it well enough to know that in many instances he does not like it.
1. The Bible is not so vague as to be overpowered by examination by honest hearts.
 2. "If the Bible does not *mean what it says*, there is no way by which we can know what it does mean" (Dungan 60).

III. Commands or Direct Statements

- A. Since no part of the Bible is directly addressed to any person living today, one must *infer* that some *commands* or *direct statements apply* to people *today*.
1. The entire New Testament (Gospel) is irrelevant and non-applicable (i.e., a dead letter) *unless* correct biblical interpretation includes divine implication, from which mankind is obligated and capable of drawing only warranted (necessary) inferences.
 2. One must correctly *infer* from divine *implications* even from among commands or direct statements in the New Testament as to which commands or direct statements apply today (e.g., "desire spiritual gifts" 1 Cor. 14:1; etc.).
 3. Some New Testament commands, but not all of them, are applicable today (e.g., "thy kingdom come," Matt. 6:10).

- B. Some *biblical commands* are *general* in nature—the details for fulfillment of the command are not specified in Scripture.
 1. *Mark 16:15* has two general commands within it—“go” and “preach.”
 2. Since “how” we are to “go” into all the world with the Gospel is not specified, we must decide for ourselves which types of transportation seem expedient to us (e.g., motorcycle, car, bus, plane, boat, walking, etc.).
 3. Since “how” we are to “preach” is not specified, we must choose the means by which we will communicate God’s Word (e.g., oral presentation, TV, radio, Internet, literature, etc.).
- C. Other *biblical commands* are *specific* since the details of how the command must be fulfilled appear in Scripture.
 1. For instance, the direct statements or commands respecting the kind of worshipful music God requires of Christians is so specific that it rules out every other kind of music for Christian worship (Eph. 5:19; Col. 3:16; Jam. 5:13).
 2. “Make music” would have been a general command had God authorized that, which could be satisfied by playing and singing, playing instead of singing or singing only.
 3. “Use vocal music” would have been somewhat of a general command as well, authorizing humming, whistling, making the sounds of instruments or singing.
 4. The biblical direction in the New Testament to “sing” is specific instruction that authorizes “singing,” but it does not authorize playing mechanical instruments of music or other vocal sounds besides singing.

IV. Approved Examples

- A. The apostle Paul required first century Christians to follow *apostolically approved examples*.
 1. “Imitate me, just as I also imitate Christ” (NKJV). “Follow my **example**, as I follow the **example** of Christ” (NIV) (1 Corinthians 11:1).
 2. “Brethren, join in following my **example**, and note those who so walk, as you have us for a **pattern**” (Philippians 3:17 NKJV).
- B. We learn from an *apostolically approved example* that the *Lord’s Supper* is to be observed by Christians *weekly* on the *first day of each week* (Acts 20:7).
 1. There is no other verse of Scripture to which one can turn to learn this information.
 2. Therefore, to ignore approved examples would *do away with* any *biblical authority* regarding the day on which and the frequency with which God desires Christians to observe the Lord’s Supper.
- C. *Approved examples*, for instance concerning worshipful music, *support biblical commands* on the same subject.
 1. Examples of worshipful music after the establishment of the Lord’s church only promote singing (Acts 16:25; Rom. 15:9; Heb. 2:12).
 2. Even the example of Jesus and His disciples during our Lord’s ministry and immediately before the beginning of the church was singing, rather than playing or, playing and singing (Matt. 26:30; Mark 14:26).

V. Implications and Inferences

- A. Consider the nature of implications and inferences.
 - 1. A square with a 5-inch long side obviously has a perimeter of 20 inches, and the area within the square is 25 square inches.
 - 2. One evaluates the available evidence or information, recognizes the implication and correctly infers the perimeter and the area.
 - 3. ***Absolute, objective truth can be known through implication and inference!***
 - 4. The fact that a person ***can reason incorrectly*** does not mean that reason cannot be trusted.
- B. “Inference may be used legitimately in the ascertaining of facts, and also in the conclusion reached from them. ...Abraham went down from Canaan into Egypt; when he came out from that country Lot returned with him. Though it is not said that Lot went into Egypt with him, we infer it” (Dungan 91).
 - 1. “...[T]hat which is taught implicitly is just as binding as that which is taught explicitly” (Warren, “Logic” 64).
 - 2. Careful consideration of sufficient evidence can yield definitive knowledge.
- C. Only ***inference*** from ***biblical implications*** can account for the ***refusal*** of Christians in the New Testament record and in early church history ***to obey civil government*** whenever government interfered with the practice of Christianity (Rom. 13:1-7; Titus 3:1; 1 Pet. 2:13-17; Acts 4:17-21; 5:29).
 - 1. If first century Christians had not so reacted, then Christianity would have vanished from planet earth centuries ago, almost at its inception.
 - 2. Christians are obligated to obey the law of the land (Rom. 13:1-7; 1 Pet. 2:13-17), except when doing so would require disobeying God.
- D. The requirement of the church to assemble implies certain responsibilities for which Christians must make inferences (Heb. 10:25; 1 Cor. 16:1-2; Acts 20:7).
 - 1. ***A place must be selected*** in which a local congregation can assemble (e.g., public building, rented space, an outdoor location, someone’s home, church-owned property, etc.).
 - 2. ***Times*** to assemble must be selected and made known to the congregation in order for it to assemble together.
 - 3. Someone must be responsible for selecting the location and times of assembling (Acts 20:28; Heb. 13:7, 17).

Conclusion:

- 1. God’s Word can be known—biblical interpretation is not all that complicated.
 - a. There is little difference between biblical interpretation and the common, everyday interpretation that people, from small children to adults, exercise through ordinary communication between each other.
 - b. This skill is the core of **all** communication.
 - c. The difficult part is obeying the Word of God when our desires differ from divine instruction.
- 2. There is definitive application of God’s Word that God requires of all people.
- 3. The Bible was never intended to be subject to different interpretation than what God expected the original recipients to understand and do (2 Peter 1:20).

- a. Correct biblical interpretation may be inconvenient, but we must be prepared to obey God in any case.
- b. Anyone preaching, teaching or otherwise affirming a doctrine is obligated biblically to defend that doctrine with a correct biblical interpretation of God's Word.
- c. To a degree, every Christian needs to be a defender of the Christian faith (Col. 4:6; 1 Pet. 3:15).
4. Successful verbal communication between persons (divine or human) derives from commands or direct statements, approved examples and implications.
5. Orderly thinking, rather than disorganized thinking, is essential to correct biblical interpretation.
6. Can we know how to become the children of God in this age?
 - a. Can we know how God wants to be worshipped?
 - b. Can we know how God wants us to live our lives?
 - c. Can we know how God wants us to serve Him while we are on earth?
 - d. Has God not left us sufficient instructions to answer these questions with certainty?
 - e. Has God not made mankind sufficiently able to understand divine revelation respecting these matters just mentioned?
7. Only through proper biblical interpretation can one adequately order his life on earth and prepare for eternity.

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