

THE WHY AND HOW OF PERSONAL BIBLE STUDY

Ursula Kemp, 1977

Lesson 10

REVIEW:

Our Lord Himself demonstrated that LOVE demands total devotion. Love gives because of the value of the object loved. Thus, God the Father so loved the world that He spared not His own (unique) Son but delivered Him up for us all (John 3:16; cf. Rom. 8:32). Thus, the Son loved us and gave Himself for us (Gal. 2:20), and the Holy Spirit produces the very love of God within us (Rom. 5:5). Such great love should prompt response in the objects loved (I John 4:19)! However, because love has its price in that it requires commitment on the part of the believer, few believers can truly say, "Yes, Lord, I love (agapao) You." In Genesis 22, Abraham's love for God was put to the test. Abraham passed that test with flying colors. Put to the test of his love for the Lord, Peter flunked. God gives all of us repeated occasions to prove our love for Him, for mankind and for our fellow believers. These tests have one thing in common--obedience! "Not my will, but thine!"

Of the two Greek words for "love" used in Scripture, which is a love of EMOTION? (Phileo). The word AGAPAO is a love of DEVOTION. PHILEO indicates pleasure in the one loved; AGAPAO, the preciousness of the one loved. The highest degree of love is AGAPE. Scripture states that GOD IS LOVE (agape; I John 4:8), and it is that type of love which is the fruit of the Spirit (Gal. 5:22)!

OUTLINE:

I. TOPICAL STUDY

- A. Definition.
- B. Selection.
- C. Objective.

II. TOPIC UNDER CONSIDERATION: WORKS

- A. Establishing a vocabulary.
- B. Categorizing "works."
- C. Examining biblical facts.

III. CONCLUSION: TO WORK OR NOT TO WORK

APPROACH:

What would you teach if you were called upon to present ONE and only one lesson? A "one-night stand" calls for a complete lesson or message, all tied up into a neat bundle, with no loose ends dangling. You cannot come back to clarify or fill in what you left out, and you cannot take for granted that your hearers have the necessary frame of reference for what you intend to teach. Yet, you want it to be meaningful, challenging and satisfying. The occasion calls for a specific topic, the preparation of which is called "TOPICAL BIBLE STUDY."

But even if you are never invited to speak to a group, you can still do a topical study for your own enjoyment and enlightenment. All Bible study is profitable! Your own curiosity regarding some concept in the Bible should lead you into topical Bible study; you may even wish to involve your friends and/or family. This type of study is a most rewarding and short-term study. It will lead you to a better grasp of some particular truth of Scripture or deepen your understanding of some doctrine. Lesson 10 is designed to help you undertake future topical studies on your own.

I. TOPICAL STUDY

A. Definition. Exactly what is a topical study? It is **the close examination of a subject**, in our case, one that is **mentioned in Scripture**. The subject may then be developed into a treatise, discourse or even a thesis. **Example from Scripture: The Bread of Life Discourse (John 6:22-58)**. You understand, of course, that in His omniscience our Lord need not sit down to correlate the passages about the eating and giving of manna before He presented Himself as the True Bread from heaven. Nevertheless, the discourse is based on one subject. Time and eternity are brought together; so are the past and the present, as Jesus points out that there is a greater need than that of the body--the need of the immortal soul. He alone can meet that need.

B. Selection. I have purposely chosen a topic which is not listed as such in a Bible dictionary. This was done in order to show you that you can trace even a concept or a principle provided you have a key word or phrase. Apart from your notebook and pen, there are certain tools you will need to carry out your study. They are, (1) your Bible, (2) a standard dictionary, (3) a Bible dictionary or Topical Bible, (4) an analytical concordance. Follow this general Outline, and watch for its development as our lesson unfolds.

The topic selected is a matter of choice or preference. So wide is the range of Bible topics that you will never exhaust it! You may wish to choose from among subjects you have always wanted to know more about, or you may wish to check out something you have heard or were taught. Remember that God did not delete I Thessalonians 5:21 from Scripture! You are to be discerning! You may select a topic

that presents a present need in your life. (**Example: doubts, fear, marriage, family, guidance, etc.**)

C. Objective. As in all Bible study, you must have an objective! It does not do much for you to aimlessly flip from reference to reference. You set out with a definite purpose in mind. In topical Bible study that purpose is to KNOW WHAT THE BIBLE SAYS ABOUT SOMETHING IN PARTICULAR, AND HOW THAT KNOWLEDGE SHOULD BE APPLIED IN YOUR LIFE.

II. TOPIC UNDER CONSIDERATION: WORKS

Our topic for this lesson is WORKS! Works are a fascinating subject and, perhaps, a disquieting one to some of you. **The teaching of the Bible on this and all other biblical subjects is clear and balanced.** IT IS ONLY WHEN EMPHASIS IS GIVEN TO ONE SUBJECT TO THE EXCLUSION OF ITS COUNTERPART THAT PERVERSION OF SCRIPTURE OCCURS! We simply cannot make the Word say something it does not, just because it suits our purposes!

A. Establishing a vocabulary. Allow the Word to speak for itself. What does it say about the topic you have chosen? What reference, if any, does the Bible dictionary make to it? In what portions of the Bible does this subject come up, and in what settings? (Here is where you make good use of your concordance.) **First things first!** FAMILIARIZE YOURSELF WITH THE TERMS WHICH IDENTIFY YOUR TOPIC! ESTABLISH A WORKING DEFINITION AND VOCABULARY. DETERMINE WHAT IS ITS HEBREW OR GREEK CONNOTATION? LIST THE DEFINITIONS AND VERSES YOU WANT TO LOOK INTO! SUMMARIZE STATEMENT OR USE PORTION OF THE VERSE (saves looking up the verses you may not otherwise remember)!

Example: As many as **thirteen different Hebrew nouns, plus their cognates** (derivations) are used. All were translated "work(s)." The word has several connotations: work, workmanship, labor, act, action, deed, doing and service. In addition, there are **seven Greek words; some are derivations.** That is, they originate from the same root. "Work(s)" in the Greek denotes added concepts: energy in working, energy that works within, business (gain), anything done and anything made.

If you wanted to, you could go deeper into your topical study by taking in related words, such as those given as meanings. You may also wish to look up those involved in performing the work.

While the Hebrew words will be foreign to the English reader, many of the Greek terms are familiar for they gave birth to words in our own vocabulary. For instance, there is the word "ENERGIA, *ἐνέργεια*," from which we get "energy." (Derivative, "ENERGEMA, *ἐνεργημα*"); "PRAGMA, *πραγμα*" ("pragmatic, pragmatism"); "PRAXIS,

πρᾶξις" ("praxis, practice"). Even the word "LOGOS, λόγος" and its Hebrew equivalent "DABAR, דָּבָר" have been pressed into service, meaning "a matter, word, thing."

B. Categorizing "works." As you scan the list of "works" in your concordance, you will quickly note that the Bible mentions more than one category of works. Can you think what these might be? (The work of God; the work of man; that of the believer vs. that of the unbeliever; works for salvation vs. works after salvation; worthwhile and worthless works; works judged vs. works evaluated; works as a basis of condemnation or reward.) Each category represents a study in itself, and each has its biblical citations. That is why it is essential that we have an OBJECTIVE! Once that objective has been established, we need to examine HOW IT IS DEFINED IN SCRIPTURE.

C. Examining biblical facts. Let us say that we have set out to determine **the role of works in salvation**. It would not take us long to discover that SALVATION IS ENTIRELY THE WORK OF GOD (Psa. 3:8; Acts 4:12; Acts 16:31; I Thess. 5:9). Thus, we cannot purchase it, pray for it or work for it. The statement to that effect is dogmatic in Ephesians 2:8, 9 and in Titus 3:5!

The **facts pertaining a certain topic may be cited by direct statement** (as in Ephesians 2:8,9 and Titus 3:5), **in principle** (as in Romans 4:4, 5), **or by precedent** (as in Gen. 15:6; cf., Rom. 4:3, 6). FIND THE FACTS--FOR THEY CONSTITUTE YOUR PREMISE! (They form the basis or foundation for your study.)

Of course, what we are mainly interested in is **the role of works after salvation!** Although **the basic test** of discipleship is that of **LOVE** (John 14:23; 15:12), **the basic mandate to the Christian** (or the believer in any age) **is that he be PRODUCTIVE!**

Examine with me **the biblical facts concerning that statement!** While Ephesians 2:8, 9 and Titus 3:5 rules out WORKS AS A MEANS OF SALVATION, Ephesians 2:10 (and many other passages) insist on WORKS AS A RESULT OF SALVATION. Let us read Ephesians 2:10:

"For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus UNTO GOOD WORKS, which God hath before ordained that we should walk in them (works, our pattern of life)."

Do you wonder why God's plan for the believer requires good works? Scripture explains that "Faith (the necessary ingredient in salvation) is the ... evidence of things not seen" (Heb. 11:1). James writes in his epistle that UNLESS FAITH HAS ITS APPLICATION IT IS INOPERATIVE (Jas. 2:17). You see, the unbeliever cannot see our faith, but he can see its outworking in our life! If we are devoid of any outward manifestation of what we believe with all our heart, we are incapable of proving the difference Christ has made in our lives! This is what Jesus Christ meant when He said, in **Matthew 5:16:**

"Let your light so shine before men (unbelievers), that they may SEE YOUR GOOD WORKS, and glorify your Father which is in heaven."

It is the tangible proof of our faith that makes an impact on others around us! The missionary who builds hospitals and schools and helps to alleviate hunger and suffering is more likely to gain a hearing for the Gospel than the missionary who is insensitive to the physical needs and emphasizes only the spiritual needs of mankind! Only too often the unbeliever puts the believer to shame when compassion is concerned! (Matt. 8:22, "Let the dead..." bury the dead," often cited in favor of leaving good deeds to the unbeliever, is addressed to a believer but regards a matter of priorities.) Our Lord held up as a shining example the good Samaritan who did what God's people, personified in the priest and the Levite, disdained to do (Luke 10:30-37)!

So much for a statement of biblical facts by direct statement and principle. Now for documentation by **precedent**. First, we will turn to the **Old Testament**, to **Isaiah 5:1-7**. (This parable is reiterated by Jesus Christ in Matt. 21:33-46). God had chosen Israel to be His own special people. He provided for them and protected them in every grace-way possible, and He had every right to expect of them "fruits meet for repentance" (Matt. 3:8). As the writer of Hebrews puts it, "We are persuaded better things of you, ... things that accompany salvation" (Heb. 6:9). Likewise, our Lord looks for "much fruit" in the believer of this dispensation. (Read John 15:1-5).

But let us look at a precedent set in the New Testament. Turn to Acts 9:36-41, where the Holy Spirit sees fit to record a citation for a woman named Dorcas (Tabitha in the Hebrew, a Hellenized Jewess famed for her good deeds). Note what characterized this gracious believer, she was said to have been "full of good works (cf., I Tim. 2:10) and almsdeeds"(v. 36). She had made "coats and garments" (v. 39). In other words, she had seen believers in need and had met their needs in a very practical way (I Tim. 5:9, 10). God allowed her to be restored to life that she might continue to be a blessing to the church in her area.

III. CONCLUSION: TO WORK OR NOT TO WORK!

Where do you and I fit into the picture? The Word is practical and timely. We step into the gap vacated by those who have gone before us. Why, "Even a child is known by his doings, whether his work be pure, and whether it be right" (Prov. 20:11)! We are given many exhortations, but we are also given incentive to produce! We are told what type of production is acceptable to God--that which is done according to "his working, which worketh in me (us) mightily" (Col.1:29). How can we be sure that we meet that condition? The answer is twofold: (1) Check your motivation--why do I do what I do? (2). Make sure you are filled with the Spirit. It is not by might, nor by power but by His Spirit that mighty deeds are done!

TO WORK! We are to be "abounding in the work of the Lord" (I Cor. 15:58), "fruitful in EVERY good work" (Col. 1:10). Wealthy believers are exhorted to be "rich in good works" (I Tim. 6:18), and pastors must be "patterns of good works" (Titus 2:7). The Lord bought for Himself a "people zealous of good works" (Titus 2:14) -- not sky rockets that give one splendid flare and then fizzle out, but believers who "maintain good works" (Titus 3:8, 14). Did you know that there is even a verse in Scripture that tells us to **provoke** (excite) one another? But note, it does not stop there. It goes on to say, "provoke one another unto love and to good works" (Heb. 10:24). In this era of addiction to one thing or another, we, like the members of Stephanas' household, should become "**addicted**...to the ministry of the saints" (I Cor. 16:15)!

NOT TO WORK! Are there times when you should not work? There are, but these are rare and can easily be avoided! You should not work when you are obviously out of fellowship. Your own efforts on behalf of God simply do not count. Turn to **Psalm 39:5**, and you will learn that your best is not good enough! You should not work the works of the flesh (Gal. 5:19), nor should you work out your problems once you have put them in the Lord's hands (Prov. 3:5, 6)! You should not work when your work becomes interference in the ministry of another! Other than that, **WORK AHEAD!**

We know that God keeps count of our good deeds (Heb. 6:10). When we stand before the judgment seat of Christ our works will be evaluated and rewarded or destroyed (I Cor. 3:13-15). It is God's prerogative to decide whether we were profitable servants or not! And although we will receive the reward of the Lord, it is God the Holy Spirit who has produced it; He deserves it, not we! How is that for **GRACE?**

In conclusion, since it is "God who works in you (and in me) both to **WILL** and to **DO** of his good pleasure" (Phil. 2:13), "let us not be weary in well doing: for in due season we shall reap, if we faint not" (Gal. 6:9)!