



The Ryburn Christian Clarion

BIBLICAL STUDIES RESOURCE

Upholding the Accuracy of the God-Breathed Word

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Unless otherwise stated, all passages are quoted from the King James Version (KJV) of the Holy Bible. All explanatory remarks by a writer within scripture verses are enclosed in brackets [].

INSIDE AT A GLANCE

IT'S BEEN A long time in coming, but the Clarion is now being produced in a "magazine" format, and on heavier grade paper. We're certain you will appreciate and enjoy the differences.

“‘ALLOWED OF GOD’ ” is certainly quite a statement, but who is “allowed,” and to do what? For centuries, the congregant sat in a pew and, hopefully, absorbed something, but is that what God truly intended?

by Rick Heeter, Editor-in-Chief.....1

“GOD’S MATCHLESS WORD” tackles an age-old quandary. The Bible says, “Thou shalt not kill,” but what if you’ve put on the uniform in defense of your country? “Military Service: No Condemnation” looks afresh at the problem.

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“FROM THE RESEARCH DEPARTMENT” examines the dispersion of the disciples from Jerusalem following the martyrdom of Stephen. Was it a mad dash to get to safety? “God Sows The Sowers” notes a more orderly departure.

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“INVESTIGATING CREATION SCIENCE” focuses its attention on the waters “...above the firmament...,” as described in Genesis 1:7. An unsurpassed quantity of water comprises “‘The Faces Of The Deep’ ”. Is it still out there?

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“FOR YOUR SPIRITUAL ENRICHMENT” invites you to take charge of your own spiritual growth. Learn the keys to research that unfold the Scriptures. They are indispensable when it comes to “Making Up Your Own Mind”.

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“ALLOWED OF GOD”:

Entrusted With The Good News

THE WORLD WAR II GENERATION, over the past several years, has been lauded and praised for its remarkable achievements relating to the successful conduct and completion of that greatest of all military conflicts. In a united stand that has no equal in the American drama, men and women, and even schoolchildren, from every corner of the United States, did their part to support the “war effort,” and to confront political oppression. From servicemen on the front lines; to USO volunteers offering food and entertainment to weary GIs; to female factory workers who stepped into assembly-line jobs to free-up men for military service; to mom’s and kids who collected scrap metal and rationed their food supplies so there would be more to go around, the majority of that generation labored and sacrificed, and brought the nation through unto a prosperous peacetime.

Like them, we, too, face a global conflict that seeks to undermine our security, steal our blessings, and restrict and finally eliminate our liberties, despoiling orderly society, and bringing us into merciless captivity. Unlike military confrontation, however, our struggle is not carnal, but spiritual (Eph. 6:11 and 12), and demands the sustained attention of every child of God. Every believer has been set

continued on next page...

in the Body of Christ, "...as it hath pleased him [God]." (I Cor. 12:18) Furthermore, all have been equipped for duty (II Cor. 10:4 and Eph. 6:13), and all have been given an assignment to carry out, or jobs to do. (Rom. 12:4-6a)

II Corinthians 10:4

(For the weapons of our warfare are not carnal, but mighty through God to the pulling down of strong holds;)

Ephesians 6:13

Wherefore take unto you the whole armour of God, that ye may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand.

Romans 12:4-6a

*For as we have many members in one body, and all members have not the same office [or "function"]:
So we, being many, are one body in Christ, and every one members one of another.
Having then gifts differing according to the grace that is given to us...*

The preceding passages clearly indicate just how completely God has prepared His people for the spiritual conflict. Indeed, the Heavenly Father has "...clothed..." His children with "...power from on high..." (Luke 24:49), a tremendous array of spiritual enablements made possible by the finished work of our Lord Jesus Christ. (Acts 1:8) In addition, He has placed us in The Church, in duties and areas where we may be most effectual in the outreach of God's Word. In that regard, no one believer is more important to God than any other, but all are "...members in particular..." as I Corinthians 12:27 proclaims. Our individual callings and collective stand for God thus compliment one another in the furtherance of the Gospel.

Of course, the Gospel of Jesus Christ is what it's all about. Sharing the "gospel" (*euaggelion*, in Greek, meaning, "good news") is something every saint is called and equipped to do. In fact, according to II Corinthians 3:6a, God "...has made..." all believers, whether we realize it or not, "...able ministers of the new covenant..." God has done this! Even if a Christian never rises up to claim and live the fullness of what God has made him to be, the ability is still there, waiting to be used. Such is the grace of our God.

A couple of verses from II Corinthians 5 further illustrate the depth of God's grace toward His sons and daughters. Verse 18 plainly declares that He has

"...given to us the ministry of reconciliation..." The following scripture, verse 19, goes on to add that God has "...committed [*tithemi*, in Greek] unto us the word of reconciliation." It seems that Almighty God has "freely assigned and entrusted" His Word to His people, for that is the meaning of *tithemi*, the Greek word translated "committed."

Imagine that! Even though God devised the plan of redemption for mankind, and even though His beloved Son, Jesus Christ, carried it out, the Father freely entrusted the telling of it to His children. He did not assign it to His holy angels, who always obey His commands, but, instead, deposited the ministry in and among His people, The Church.

In Acts 10:5 and 6, we see that an angel of the Lord brought a message to Cornelius, instructing him to "...send men to Joppa...for *one* Simon...Peter..." for, "...he shall tell thee what thou oughtest to do." The angel could direct someone seeking salvation to a child of God, but it took that believer, in this case, Peter, to make known Jesus Christ, and teach that "...whosoever believeth in him [Christ] shall receive remission of sins." (verse 43) What a privilege God has granted us.

I Thessalonians 2:4

But as we were allowed of God to be put in trust with the gospel, even so [or "in this manner"] we speak; not as pleasing men, but God, which ["who"] trieth our hearts.

The Word is replete with examples of those who took the ministry of reconciliation to heart. Men like the Apostle Paul, and his companions, Silvanus and Timotheus (Timothy), labored in the ministry, imparting, "...not the gospel of God only, but..." as Paul put it, "...also our own souls..." (I Thes. 2:8) In proclaiming salvation in Jesus Christ, meticulous accuracy is required, for by the words of God, men and women, when they believe, pass "...from death unto life." (John 5:24) Needless to say, compassion and tender concern must also be at the heart of sharing The Word, for, by us, people are introduced to the Father, and lay hold on eternity.

In I Thessalonians 2:4, Paul declared how he and his friends had been "...allowed [*dokimazo*] of God to be put in trust with the gospel..." *Dokimazo*, the Greek word rendered here as "allowed," means, "to prove or try," the way metal is separated from impurities when it is refined and smelted, thus, to "try the fitness or goodness of" something or someone. Not only did the Father "allow" these men to share the message of salvation, but also worked in them to

“refine” their relationships with Him and, therefore, their “fitness” and/or “goodness” in ministering the things of God.

Curiously, the Greek word *dokimazo* appears a second time in the closing phrase of the same verse. “...God,” the apostle noted, “...trieth [*dokimazo*] our hearts.” What a wonderful way to emphasize the truth we’ve just observed. Twice we are shown that, as we walk faithfully, announcing the grace of God and His plan of redemption, our relationships with Him will be refined, while our hearts are purified. As Ephesians 4:15 promises, by “...speaking the truth in love...,” we are able to “...grow up into him in all things, which [“who”] is the head, *even* Christ...”

Naturally, by extension, the believers of today are “allowed of God” to declare the “good news.” It certainly is true that when Paul originally used that expression, he was referring first and foremost to himself, Silvanus, and Timothy. The great apostle, however, in I Corinthians 4:16 and 17, urged other

saints to mimic his “...ways which be in Christ...” and that includes us, for this book is addressed to “...all that in every place call upon the name of Jesus Christ our Lord...” (I Cor. 1:2) I don’t know about you, but I fall into that group. I, too, must be “allowed of God,” and, so are you.

We have been given the ministry and entrusted with the word of reconciliation. (II Cor. 5:18 and 19) Almighty God has assigned these things to you and I, having reserved other areas of responsibility for the angels. Although the spiritual conflict may be daunting at times, and the efforts of our enemy vile, God will work in us to fulfill His good pleasure (Phil. 2:13), and bring others into His family and household. (Eph. 2:19) We have been commissioned, not like those in the military who fight a physical foe, but ours is a heavenly calling. We are equipped, and we have been authorized to speak and act. We have been “allowed of God!”

-----by Rick Heeter, Editor-in-Chief

GOD'S MATCHLESS WORD:

A Forum For Presenting The Light Of Life

(This column features a wide range of subjects from God's Word as they are set forth by a host of preachers and teachers from differing avenues of Christian thought and various areas of Biblical study and concern.)

“Military Service: No Condemnation”

by Susan Nickerson

RECENTLY, A FELLOW SOLDIER in the Army National Guard discussed with me his views on the morality of war. In his concern, he questioned his security relating to everlasting life. He asked, “Do I risk damnation by choosing to remain in the military?”

God’s Word is clear regarding our salvation in Jesus Christ. Romans 8:1 explicitly states, “*There is therefore now no condemnation to them which are in Christ Jesus....*” How could we be condemned if we have confessed that Jesus is Lord, believing that God raised Him from the dead? (Rom. 10:9) Our salvation does not depend on any other conditions. In I Peter 1:23, our new-birth spirit is described as “incorruptible” seed. The spirit life from God is a permanent, free gift: the result of believing in Christ. This spirit life cannot be removed by any work in the flesh. Furthermore, no stipulation exists in the Scriptures implying that our salvation is conditional *after* the moment of conversion.

My fellow soldier continued: “Isn’t remaining in an organization whose purpose is primarily the conduct of war an immoral choice? How are we to love our fellow man if we are going about to kill him?” The purpose of our armed forces, however, is not primarily to pursue war. It is, rather, to defend our freedom.

History teaches us that those nations which have laid down their weapons, or which cannot or will not defend themselves, are overtaken by more aggressive enemies. Citizens who criticize members of the military, calling them warmongers (or worse), nevertheless, enjoy the freedoms that service personnel secure. Our Founding Fathers, men whose lives and thinking were based in the Scriptures, understood this need, ensuring that the right to bear arms and the right to maintain a militia should not be taken from the people.

Some of the confusion regarding the issue of taking up arms has come from misunderstanding the verb in the Fifth Commandment given to Moses: “Thou shalt not kill.” The word translated “kill” is the Hebrew word *rasah*, and is used in both instances where the Ten Commandments are recorded: Exodus 20:13 and Deuteronomy 5:17. Its meaning is more accurately rendered as “murder,” and differs from “kill,” in that there is premeditated, violent intent in murder. A difference, therefore, exists between killing, which soldiers are sometimes obligated to do, and murder.

The first military enrollment of Israel is recorded in chapters 1 and 2 of Numbers. It occurred in the second month of the second year after the people of

Israel came out of Egypt. The Ten Commandments, however, had been given earlier, in the third month after the exodus from Egypt. Why would God give instructions to set up a military force if He had previously given a commandment forbidding one of its critical functions, namely, killing the enemy? It was God, Himself, Who gave the instructions to form Israel's fighting force.

Later, God told Joshua, the man He established as the leader of Israel after Moses' death, "...arise, go over this Jordan, thou, and all this people, unto the land which I do give to them..." (Josh. 1:2) This was not going to happen without resistance from the current inhabitants of the land. God knew this. He further told Joshua, "There shall not any man be able to stand before thee all the days of thy life..." (Josh. 1:5) Joshua later encountered a messenger from God, the captain of the Lord's host, with "...his sword drawn in his hand..." just prior to taking the city of Jericho. Would God have sent an angel to support an action He had forbidden? (Josh. 5:13-15)

Any reader of the Bible could hardly miss the number of battles sprinkled throughout the Old Testament. Israel's success or failure in any battle depended upon the people's obedience to God's specific instructions. The record in Joshua 10:11 describes the battle at Gibeon, where "...great stones from heaven..." descended upon the enemy, and the sun and moon stood still until Israel had complete victory over the Amorites. Then, Joshua 10:14 completely states, "...the LORD fought for Israel."

Since, however, Jesus Christ came fulfilling the law (Matt. 5:17) and redeeming us from its curse (Gal. 3:13), we no longer live under the Old Covenant. Today, we live during the Administration of Grace, the Administration of The Church, the Body of Christ. Matthew 22:37-39 establishes the great commandments governing our times, that of loving God and loving each other. (Gal. 5:13 and 14) How do we reconcile these commandments with the occupation of a soldier? The key lies in understanding that we are to walk by the spirit, and not the flesh. (Gal. 5:16)

Few occupations can be identified as being outside the will of God. It is up to each one of us to determine what paths to follow in life. For example, the Bible shows us that we have the freedom to decide to be a vegetarian, or not. (Rom. 14:2) We are not to judge one another on the basis of personal decisions like these. Additionally, the seventh chapter of I Corinthians describes the freedom believing men and women have in deciding whether or not to marry. (verses 7-16) Certainly, the decision to join the military, or not, is no less such a personal decision.

Service in the military is not a requirement in order to serve in the Body of Christ and, yet, God has called us all to serve in the walks of life wherein we find ourselves. To this point, The Word speaks.

I Corinthians 7:20 and 21

Let every man abide in the same calling wherein he was called.

Art thou called being a servant? care not for it: but if thou mayest be made free, use it rather.

If the release from duty can free the soldier to a life where he can more easily serve in The Church, then, the will of God is that he should take advantage of the opportunity. We should not, however, construe that serving in the military is contrary to God's will, or is an immoral choice. If The Word does not condemn us, then, we ought not to allow ourselves to feel condemned by any prevailing political or religious thinking. The Scriptures even draw an analogy between the disciplined life of a follower of Christ and the disciplined life of a soldier.

II Timothy 2:3 and 4

Thou therefore endure hardness, as a good soldier of Jesus Christ.

No man that warreth entangleth himself with the affairs of this life; that he may please him who hath chosen him to be a soldier.

Indeed, the first Gentile household blessed by the new birth, with the accompanying manifestations of holy spirit, was a soldier's family. The Biblical record talks of both Cornelius, a Roman centurion, and one of his subordinate soldiers as being "devout." (Acts 10:2 and 7) This tells us it is possible to be a godly soldier. Furthermore, God testified to the faithfulness of Cornelius before he had even heard the salvation message concerning Christ. The angel sent to him, said, "...Thy prayers and thine alms are come up for a memorial before God." (Acts 10:4b) A military family thus became the first example of born-again believers from among those outside Israel.

We have seen that the issue of endangering our salvation by serving in the military is a non-issue. God has saved us in Christ by grace, and not by any works we have done. (Eph. 2:8 and 9) God's remarkable salvation, by Christ's sacrifice for us, is complete and everlasting, and cannot be undone by anything we do, because of the incorruptibility of the spiritual seed God placed in us at the new birth. We have further noted, in the Old Testament, that God organized Israel's first military force and, later, fought for them.

Today, our commandment is to serve one another in love, but we are free to serve in whatever capacity to which we've been called in The Church. If we believe we have a calling to serve in the military, we may do so without fearing condemnation. (Rom. 8:1) Christ has made us free, even if we have taken on an obligation of military service. Finally, the disciplined life of a soldier closely parallels the life of a disciple of Christ, thus, no Christian soldier should ever feel condemned or in danger of losing salvation by choosing to serve in the military.*

(Mrs. Susan Nickerson has been a Christian and a student of the Word of God for many years. She is a retired sergeant first class (SFC) with the Massachusetts Army National Guard, and is a veteran of Operation Iraqi Freedom. Susan and her husband, Stephen, presently live in Westminister, Massachusetts.)

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FROM THE RESEARCH DEPARTMENT

(This column, featuring the work of Keith Jamison, the director of The Ryburn Christian Clarion's Research Department, examines God's Word and how its application in our Twenty-First Century lives has been influenced by mythology, philosophy, and tradition.)

“God Sows The Sowers”

THE BOOK OF ACTS, in chapter 8, and in verse 1, says that a “...great persecution...” arose at the time of Stephen’s death, and many of The Church were “...scattered abroad...” In fact, this phrase, “...scattered abroad...” appears a second time in verse 4, arresting our attention. When we read it, we may tend to think that they ran for the hills. Did they really flee, or did they, instead, move out in a more orderly fashion? We will take a closer look at this expression to put the early Church’s movements in perspective.

The basic Greek word for “scattered abroad” is *diaspora*, meaning, “to sow throughout.” A farming term, it could be literally rendered, “to sow here and there,” implying deliberate action. It is a manner of sowing seeds in which an entire area is thoroughly and completely sown. When sowing seed in this manner, you do not just strew them about willy-nilly. Care is taken to ensure maximum growth. The idea is to have them evenly distributed, a uniform dispersion, without ending up with large clumps of seed here and bare patches of soil over there. The use of a form of this word in Acts 8:1 and 4 carries with it the same connotation of deliberateness.

Diaspeiro, the specific form of this Greek word, is used three times in the New Testament: in Acts 8:1 and 4, which we have already noted, and in Acts 11:19. All three refer to the scattering that arose during the persecution that surrounded Stephen’s death. The use of this term indicates that thought went into the dispersion, so they would spread out and evenly cover the areas to which they traveled. It’s likely that thought went into who should go and where. This certainly does not sound like a mad dash to get to safety. When one flees in desperation, he may or may not have a destination in mind.

According to Acts 8:1, the believers departing the persecution in Jerusalem moved out through “...the regions of Judaea and Samaria...” boldly speaking God’s Word, and fulfilling the prophetic words of the Lord Jesus, which He spoke just prior to His ascension. (Acts 1:8b) He had declared that The Word would be (1) preached in Jerusalem, then, (2) throughout Judea, and, also, (3) in Samaria. These saints departing from Jerusalem, in Acts 8:1, were fulfilling the Lord’s utterances.

When heading out, the believers not only would have decided who will go and where but, also, how and when. In addition, they would have been equipped with whatever they needed. Traveling in Biblical times was serious business. Try to imagine: there were no planes, no trains, no automobiles, or superhighways (and, in some cases, no roads at all). There was little protection from the elements or from bandits, therefore, no trip of any significant distance was taken without a good reason, and plenty of forethought.

The use of this agrarian term brings to mind Matthew 13:3-9, where Christ shared the parable of the sower. The parable deals with seed falling on different kinds of ground. Later, the Lord explained to His disciples that it represented the different ways people receive The Word. Those from Acts 8, who were scattered, or sown throughout, spoke The Word wherever they went. The Word is the seed sown, and the people, themselves sown by God, were the means of sowing that seed.

Acts 1:8b

...ye shall be witnesses unto me both in Jerusalem, and in all Judaea, and in Samaria, and unto the uttermost [or “remotest”] part of the earth.

Jesus Christ commanded His disciples to spread The Word over the entire world, and by Acts 8, they were fulfilling the initial portion of His directive. The persecution was almost incidental, for, even without it, The Church still needed to spread out and grow. Persecution simply gave them another reason to go forth. Besides, the execution of Stephen by the ruling council of Israel (in Acts 7) made it plain that the religious leadership of the nation, in general, had rejected the notion that the Messiah had truly come.

Acts 8:4

Therefore they that were scattered abroad [diaspeiro] went every where preaching the word.

This is proof that they “...that were scattered abroad...” were not fleeing for their lives, for they “...went every where preaching the word.” The preaching of God’s Word is the very thing for which

they were being persecuted. The persecution was aimed at getting them to *shut up*; instead, they *spoke up*. This is not the normal response when fleeing. Usually, you would want to “keep your head down,” and not attract attention. Of course, they did not like the persecution, and were glad to avoid it. It simply increased their motivation to go. It made them more willing to give up the comfort of what they knew for the unknown road.

A persecution arose, and these early believers decided to leave Jerusalem, and go elsewhere. Instead, however, of just fleeing danger, they went forth and

spread the Word of God every place they visited. They weren't cowering in fear; they went out doing that for which they were being persecuted, for being Christians, and boldly sharing God's Word. Thank God they did.*

(Mr. Keith Jamison is the director of The Ryburn Christian Clarion's Research Department and, also, serves as the Clarion's production assistant. Please send your comments, inquiries, and article submissions to Keith at kejamison.rd@gmail.com.)

INVESTIGATING CREATION SCIENCE

(In this column, which appears in every winter and summer issue of The Ryburn Christian Clarion, members of the Clarion's research team explore the timely and unfolding evidence that supports the Biblical assertion concerning the Divine creation of all things, visible and invisible. Join us as we take a journey into scripture and science alike to investigate the latest, compelling proofs.)

“ ‘The Faces Of The Deep’ ”

by Rick Heeter

THERE HAVE BEEN SO many fine points from the Scriptures covered in this column over the past few years that I am sometimes asked, “How does this affect my salvation?” My response is to admit that much of the information has no direct bearing on a believer's salvation, for that is an unalterable work established by Christ. When, however, a person becomes regularly exposed to the rich detail of the Bible, it often impacts *how he perceives* his salvation. If a believer has the hunger to know more, the unfolding depth of Holy Writ cannot help but enrich his or her appreciation of the God Who authored it, and authored salvation, as well.

Our position is simply, if God's Word contains all things that “...*pertain* unto life and godliness, through the knowledge of him that hath called us...,” as II Peter 1:3 says, then, the Gospel of Jesus Christ is far richer and more interesting than many have suspected. If the “...words [plural] of the LORD *are* pure words [plural]...” (Ps. 12:6), then, EVERY THING God has chosen to reveal to man is significant. With that in mind, let's take a look at some more “fine points” from Genesis 1.

Genesis 1:1

In the beginning [breashith] God [elohim] created [bara] the heaven [shamayim] and the earth.

With the exception of the Hebrew words, the verse displayed above is exactly how it appears in the King James Version (KJV) of the Bible. The word *breashith*, meaning, “origin,” approximates the Greek word *genesis*, “beginning.” *Bara*, here in the past tense rendered as “created,” literally means, “brought into existence.” While these are interesting points, I want to key in on the words for “God” and “heaven.”

Both *elohim* (God) and *shamayim* (heaven), in the Hebrew text, are in the plural. As such, they express the vastness or immensity of a thing. What is being conveyed

is, not only the act of creation by God but, also, God's creative greatness, and the enormity of the creation. Additionally, in old Hebrew or Estrangelo Aramaic, the order of the words is different, including the placement of “God,” *elohim*, as the first word in the Scriptures.

Genesis 1:1 (from Hebrew and Estrangelo Aramaic)

God, in the beginning, brought into existence the heavens and the earth.

While we're observing plural Hebrew words designed to express immenseness, let's move on to the latter half of Genesis 1:2.

Genesis 1:2b

...darkness was upon the face of the deep [tehom]. And the spirit of God moved upon the face of the waters.

The word “waters,” as you can see, is rightly translated as a plural noun. The word “face,” *panim* in Hebrew, might also have been rendered as “front,” “forepart,” “forefront,” or “upside.” It, too, is in the plural form in both uses in this verse. Before God spoke light into being in verse 3, darkness covered “...the faces of the deep.” The spirit of God then moved upon “...the faces of the waters.” The Word of God is describing, as best it can to our finite minds, an enormous vastness of water, languishing in utter darkness for, possibly, untold eons.

The word translated as “the deep” is truly astounding. The Hebrew word *tehom*, it appears a number of times in the Old Testament. To learn how God uses it, we must do more than simply look up its meaning in a lexicon. The traditional understanding of many Biblical terms may be often flawed, because it relies heavily upon contemporary perceptions of some very ancient words. Just as our minds learn to extrapolate the meanings of words based on the contexts in which we hear them,

context is also an indispensable tool in learning the God-intended meanings of Biblical terms. Perhaps a more essential key is the context surrounding a word's first occurrence in scripture, because this will reveal its basic meaning throughout The Word.

Traditional thinking considers this word, *tehom*, to refer to "seas," but the context of its first occurrence in the Bible does not support that idea. *Tehom* first appears in Genesis 1:2, the verse we are considering, which took place even before "...the first day." (Gen. 1:5) On the other hand, the seas were not formed until the third day. (Gen. 1:9-13) Before that occurred, God did something extraordinary on the second day.

Genesis 1:6-8

And God said, Let there be a firmament ["an expanse"] in the midst of the waters, and let it divide the waters from the waters.

And God...divided the waters which were under the firmament from the waters which were above the firmament...

And God called the firmament Heaven. And the evening

and the morning were the second day.

The "waters" of verse 6 are the same "waters" originally referred to in verse 2. In verse 7, the waters were divided by "an expanse," so, we then have waters "...under the firmament..." and waters "...above the firmament..." Verse 8 then reveals that the firmament is "Heaven." Also, as verses 9 and 10 show, the "...waters under the heaven..." God "...gathered together unto one place..." calling them "...Seas..." As for the firmament, God made the sun, moon, and stars, placing them in that vast expanse.

We, thus, have waters "...under the firmament..." (verses 7 and 9), that are the seas we know of today. We also have the expanse itself, where God placed the stars (verses 14-18), but what of the waters "...above the firmament..."? (verse 7) Are we to believe they are still out there, beyond the stars? What do you think? *

(Mr. Rick Heeter is the editor-in-chief and a columnist for The Ryburn Christian Clarion. Please send your comments to him at theclarion@godsivingroom.com.)

FOR YOUR SPIRITUAL ENRICHMENT

Essay

(This column offers our readers a variety of inspirational and edifying submissions. In this "grab-bag," you will find essays, book reviews, testimonies, poetry, compositions, letters, music reviews, and other things designed to exhort and comfort God's people.)

“Making Up Your Own Mind”

by Robert Parker

WHEN CONSIDERING what to believe concerning the many conflicting teachings regarding God, His Word, and His Son, Jesus Christ, the most important consideration is, perhaps, whether we have simply been told what we know, or have investigated it for ourselves. Biblical research is a daunting task in the minds of many, yet, the principles that ensure accuracy are quite simple. It is not enough for a believer, disciple, or *doulos* (a Greek word, meaning, a free-will, bond slave) to take someone else's word for something as important as rightly dividing God's Word for one's own life. (II Tim. 2:15) Some of the most loving and well-meaning people can let tradition, emotion, experience, or a multitude of other things cause the acceptance and passing on of scripturally unsound principles and/or logic.

It does make a difference, both now and throughout eternity, whom and how we worship. What we do now determines what eternity holds for us. God has given us free will to choose Him and His Son, or not. He has also given His Word to be the light to us, and it holds every answer we will ever need. (II Pet. 1:3) Sometimes, the things we think we know beyond any doubt fail to hold up when compared to the rightly divided Word. To continue to hold onto these things after discovering THE Truth of THE Word does nothing to help us. At times, we are so concerned with being right that we forget that learning can

involve more unlearning than learning *new* things. The right dividing of The Word demands the highest discipline, and simply cannot be left to others. To let others tell you what God's Word means, without checking it line by line for accuracy, can lead to problems.

Many words in God's Word, for example, Old Testament Hebrew or New Testament Greek, may be easily verified with a concordance or lexicon. Context, a critical consideration in the study of God's Word, is often clear enough, as well. A verse taken out of its context, however, may be misused and/or misleading. It is very important, as well, to set aside preconceived ideas when we go to The Word. Obviously, most everyone has some ideas about God and His Son, or even the written Word itself. The key is not to go to the Bible to back up one's belief system, but to develop correct beliefs and, when necessary, to modify them to agree with God's Word.

Where God's Word is most simple and clear, there is little disagreement as to its meaning or intent. When, however, two or more doctrines arise from a single point in scripture, because it is wrongly divided or its meaning is not immediately clear, private interpretation is almost always the result. This is spoken against by God's Word itself in II Peter 1:20.

Most division, doctrinally and/or practically, within the Body of Christ today, comes from the private

interpretation of God's Word. Doctrine, regarding the nature and character of God, what happens to us when we die, or the integrity of The Word itself, has divided Christianity for nearly two millennia, with no visible end in sight, save the return of Christ Himself. If, however, the majority of believers, or even a key few, would start looking into God's Word, while operating under true and proven research principles, instead of relying on second-hand sources, true Biblical education and enlightenment could occur on a large scale.

My point is simply that each individual seeking God carries the responsibility of verifying what they are discovering as completely as they can. This is the only way I know of to counter the preconceived ideas we all bring to the study of God's Word. We may be unable to forget what we have been previously taught, but we can put everything we are learning currently, together with all our previous learning, to the true "acid test," by checking it against sound research principles.

At this point, it is good to mention that God gives wisdom; He gives it freely and generously. (James 1:5) It is also a good idea to point out that The Word, according to Hebrews 4:12, is the critic of all thought, especially regarding whether the thought is natural (soul) or spiritual (spirit) and, by extension, is temporal and unreliable or eternal and always perfect and trustworthy. God's Word itself must always be the standard of its own accuracy, reliability, and completeness. Anyone can hazard a guess, and even the uneducated can make an "educated guess," but what is required to truly know?

It seems that God has made man with the capacity to know some things individually (Jer. 9:24) and some things collectively (Eph. 3:10), but we are ill equipped to convince any other person of anything. Each must come to his or her own conclusions regarding the truths of God's Word, as well as every other knowable thing.

To borrow an example from the secular realm, there is debate as to whether the speed of light may be surpassed by a material object. Einstein's equations and formulas say, "No." Recent mathematical constructs, however, imply or state outright that faster-than-light travel is possible. We may choose to believe whichever view we wish, but the reality is that one view is correct, and the other is not. People who strongly believe things, whether or not there is specific evidence to the contrary, may be right and they may be wrong, but they believe nonetheless, basically, according to their own desires and/or the information at hand. Producing quality evidence or compelling testimony is thus often not enough to dissuade someone from their beliefs. The truths presented in the

Bible are like this, in that strong beliefs and preconceived ideas can interfere with a person believing rightly.

Trust is a tendency to regard someone as having your best interests at heart. The people we trust and like, we generally believe more readily. It is, however, a mistake to believe and trust people more than we believe and trust our Heavenly Father. If someone has hurt us, we are asked by God to forgive them, but, we may not easily trust them again in that category. We may trust someone to teach us God's Word, and they then hurt us, perhaps deeply. Is it honest to "throw the baby out with the bathwater," rejecting all they have taught us? Not if at least some of what they taught us is God's accurate Word. Conversely, if we really like someone, and accept what they present as being God's Word, without checking it for ourselves, our emotional attachment to that person may afford more weight to what they teach than is its due. We might even be tempted to accept the words of that individual so completely that we do not even pause to consider the accuracy of what they are saying.

Clearly, even people with noble intentions and outstanding morals may be mistaken. Keep in mind, too, that the conviction a person maintains and the charisma with which he or she speaks guarantee only the degree to which they hold to their beliefs and, sometimes, not even that. We must, therefore, always check what we are being told against the pure, accurate Word of God. Learn to rightly divide God's Word for yourself, becoming fluent in the Truth. Your life and heart will then be grounded on a solid rock, and not shifting sands of emotion and opinion.

I encourage you to learn the principles from God's Word that will lead you into a proper and accurate understanding of it, for yourself, and your family. You are the one person for whom you are directly and totally responsible. Neither our spouses nor our children can, or should, be controlled by us the way we are to master ourselves. Be certain of what you are learning. The principles of research and critical thinking are not difficult to acquire, practice, and master. Be fair and honest to yourself, and know that you know, at all times and in all points. Indeed, when Christ told us to love ourselves (Matt. 19:19), this is part of what He meant.*

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*Articles and columns submitted to The Ryburn Christian Clarion are edited to ensure correct spelling and punctuation, proper grammar, and clarity of expression. Furthermore, no article or column herein should be construed to be a comprehensive study of the subject under consideration.

SOME BASIC BIBLICAL RESEARCH AND STUDY PRINCIPLES**

"Knowing this first, that no prophecy of the scripture is of any private interpretation." --II Peter 1:20

All scripture interprets itself:

- 1) In the verse:
 - a) Right where it is written.
 - b) Words must be interpreted according to Biblical usage.
 - c) Words must be in harmony with verse and all related subject matter.
 - d) Scripture build-up (narrative development).
- 2) In the context.
- 3) Used before (previous uses of words or phrases).

Biblical truths we must adhere to as workmen of The Word:

- 1) Identify "to whom" a section of scripture is written (individual or group).
- 2) Determine the administration or "age" in which section of scripture is set.
- 3) Difficult verse must be understood in light of clear verses (on same subject).
- 4) Interpretation and application always in light of "to whom" it is addressed.

**** For other principles and additional information, please visit:**

<http://www.cffm.org/doc/brp.shtml>