

How Readest Thou?

By John Thiel, [mp3](#)

Scripture reading: John 8:31 Then said Jesus to those Jews which believed on him, If ye continue in my word, [then] are ye my disciples indeed; 32 And ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free.

How difficult it is today in the time in which we live to find assurance from the Bible. We are surrounded by an atmosphere of Bible interpretation instead of Bible reading. In this message we want to deal with the subject of how we read the Bible. Jesus had that problem in His day as well. When confronted by the theologians of His day, the priests of the very church regarding which He had said, *Salvation is of the Jews*; those priests of the Jews came to Him with all kinds of different questions, and it is phenomenal to learn from Him how to deal with all the questions of today.

Luke 10:25 And, behold, a certain lawyer stood up, and tempted him, saying, Master, what shall I do to inherit eternal life? 26 He said unto him, What is written in the law? how readest thou? 27 And he answering said, Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy strength, and with all thy mind; and thy neighbour as thyself. 28 And he said unto him, Thou hast answered right: this do, and thou shalt live.

Jesus made the point quite clear; *How readest thou?* And the man quoted to Him because he was a lawyer; he knew the Scriptures. He quoted the Scriptures to Him, and Jesus said, You're right, you've quoted it, that's the way it is, that's the answer. But notice how it goes on:

Luke 10:29 But he, willing to justify himself, said unto Jesus, And who is my neighbour?

Can you see what this man was doing, like so many people do? A plain statement from the Scriptures is given, and then questioned as if to say, What really does it mean? when really it is plain and clear. It says that you are to love God with all your heart, and your neighbour as yourself. Isn't it plain? But the man said, *And who is my neighbour?* And there comes a question that can put confusion into a simple statement.

It Is Written

So we want to consider how Christ engaged the minds of His opponents, especially in the light of His words “How readest thou?” As soon as opponents come into His experience, He turns the attention to a plain reading of the word: How do you read?

Satan came to Him in the wilderness and tempted Him, and what did Jesus say to him? How did He answer it? *It is written*. This is what Jesus had to meet and how He met it:

Heavenly angels were with Him during all the period in which He was exposed to the assaults of satanic agencies. These assaults were more severe than any of us have ever passed through. Everything was at stake in behalf of the human family. {CTr 196.3}

When everything is at stake, how do you meet it? Look at Christ. How did He meet it?

In this conflict Christ did not frame His words even. He depended upon “It is written.” In this conflict the humanity of Christ was taxed as none of us will ever know. {Ibid.}

In this serious moment Jesus did not even answer by His own words that He framed. He simply quoted the Scripture. He did not trust anything else but a plain reading of the word. *In this conflict the humanity of Christ was taxed as none of us will ever know. The assaults were more severe than any of us have ever passed through.* And what else does Sister White write for those of us who have come so many generations after her?

In this time of trial we need to be encouraged and comforted by one another. The temptations of Satan are greater now than ever before, for he knows that his time is short and that very soon every case will be decided, either for life or for death. {EW 46.1}

Are we in a similar situation to Christ Himself? Everything was at stake. And now Satan is looking upon us in this last generation and he is saying, I’ve got to really break in here. As it says, every case is going to be decided, *either for life or for death*; so everything is at stake. And Satan is at work to make us suffer very similarly to Christ. This is what Sister White said for her time, and then it goes on to say:

It is no time now to sink down beneath discouragement and trial; we must bear up under all our afflictions and trust wholly in the Almighty God of Jacob. The Lord has shown me that His grace is sufficient for all our trials; and although they are greater than ever before, yet if we trust wholly in God, we

can overcome every temptation and through His grace come off victorious.
{Ibid.}

What were the trials of Jesus? They were more taxing than any of us will ever know. But as we come to the last generation of people, Sister White had said back then in her time that Satan's temptations were greater than ever before, and aren't they even greater now? I would say yes, even greater. And everything is at stake. So as we are facing similar things to what Jesus faced in the wilderness of temptation, are we in need of avoiding framing our own words, as Jesus avoided? Are we in need of doing what Jesus did – meeting the opponents with “How readest thou?” or “It is written”?

Confusion on Truth

The minds of many believers today are in confusion on truth. Don't we see it around us? Everybody believes they have the truth, and it's all contradictory to another person's beliefs. I am going through this consistently with people whom come to me with their suggestions. I hear one, and then I hear another saying something different, and I hear another; and as I try to help them to know the pure truth on different things, my presentation also appears to them as just my own interpretation. This is where we are situated today – a horrifyingly confusing atmosphere. The proponents of truth, who are *claiming* that they have truth, are unnumbered and contradicting one another. And as you listen to the different preachers and teachers, even within Seventh-day Adventism, you come across so many contradictory presentations.

Jesus here speaks to the people in His day who were also confused by the Sanhedrin, the Pharisees, the Sadducees, and all the different trains of thought and belief of that time. He is speaking to them *which believed on Him*, and says:

John 8:31 ...If ye continue in my word, [then] are ye my disciples indeed;

In whose word? In *My* word, Jesus said.

John 8:32 And ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free.

To take heed to Christ's word, to take heed to the word as Jesus placed it before the people at that time and places it before us today, both in the Bible and the Spirit of Prophecy (because the Spirit of Prophecy is declared to be the *Testimony* of Jesus). Jesus said, *Ye shall know the truth*; and many people today, like Pilate, tend to retort, *What is truth?* because everybody claims to be preaching truth but they contradict one another. Does truth contradict truth? No way; there is a clear, concise truth, and it is found in the words of Jesus when He said, *How readest thou?*

The multiple, countless organisations and companies that are described in the Song of Solomon are the plight of our day.

Song of Solomon 6:8 There are threescore queens, and fourscore concubines, and virgins without number.

A huge number of mainstream organisations – some of them *queens*, some *concubines* – but then, from all those numbers of organisations that we have today, there are even little offshoots everywhere, called *virgins*. How many are there? You can't count them – *virgins without number*. Say, can we identify with this in our experience? Is this not the truth of our experience – preachers and teachers and churches, just as it is written there? How is the genuine believer going to discern truth in the light of the expression of the Ethiopian? Here he was, sitting in his chariot, reading Isaiah the prophet; he was reading and he needed some help.

Acts 8:29 Then the Spirit said unto Philip, Go near, and join thyself to this chariot. 30 And Philip ran thither to [him], and heard him read the prophet Esaias, and said, Understandest thou what thou readest? 31 And he said, How can I, except some man should guide me? And he desired Philip that he would come up and sit with him.

He was a humble man. He said, How can I understand what I am reading unless I have a man to guide me? Why did he say that? We live today in exactly the same atmosphere of religious mind contortions. He read and he couldn't understand because he had just been in Jerusalem and had heard the preachers preaching there. And he was an Ethiopian; he wasn't even a Jew, so he needed help to understand, because there were so many contortions of doctrine that were flowing across his mind. So the Lord sent Philip; and Philip was one those people that Jesus spoke of when He said, If you will continue in My word, then you will know the truth. Here was Philip, who continued in the words of Jesus, and he could now help the Ethiopian, and the Holy Spirit sent him to help him. And so it was that the Ethiopian was able to be instructed by Philip as to what the scripture was actually saying, with any human construction, and the Ethiopian went back to Ethiopia and the Christian church commenced with his ministry there. It is a fact that the Ethiopian church, before the papal infiltration took place, continued for many centuries to live a Sabbath-keeping Christianity. This is a historic fact. He was guided into reading the Scriptures aright.

Wresting the Scriptures

Inspiration describes to us the kind of difficulty that we are meeting

The vague and fanciful interpretations of Scripture, and the many conflicting theories concerning religious faith, that are found in the Christian world are the work of our great adversary to confuse minds so that they shall not discern the truth. {GC 520.3}

Can you see what we are meeting? And we need to be alerted to this reality.

And the discord and division which exist among the churches of Christendom are in a great measure due to the prevailing custom of wresting the Scriptures to support a favorite theory. {Ibid.}

What is the principle behind it? The Bible is wrested, twisted, *to support a favorite theory.*

Instead of carefully studying God's word with humility of heart to obtain a knowledge of His will, many seek only to discover something odd or original. {Ibid.}

So that they can feel that they have worked something out to present to people something original. They're not happy to just stay on the track that is well established; they think, I've got to be original.

In order to sustain erroneous doctrines or unchristian practices, some will seize upon passages of Scripture separated from the context, perhaps quoting half of a single verse as proving their point, when the remaining portion would show the meaning to be quite the opposite. With the cunning of the serpent they entrench themselves behind disconnected utterances construed to suit their carnal desires. Thus do many willfully pervert the word of God. Others, who have an active imagination, seize upon the figures and symbols of Holy Writ, interpret them to suit their fancy, with little regard to the testimony of Scripture as its own interpreter, and then they present their vagaries as the teachings of the Bible. {GC 521.1}

The Spirit of Prophecy plays this out for our mind to appreciate the dilemma that we are in today. This is the predicament; you and I today are in this atmosphere and our stability of understanding that what we believe is really the truth is severely undermined. We begin to question our own stand, Well, maybe I am not interpreting correctly... because so many others are not interpreting correctly, putting interpretations upon the word. Examine yourselves closely. How can I know that what I believe as truth is truth, and not a vagary of my own interpretation? There is a problem that we have to be honest with; this is a very serious suggestion:

The State of Our Minds

Proverbs 16:25 There is a way that seemeth right unto a man,

It seems right,

Proverbs 16:25 ...but the end thereof [are] the ways of death.

So we are surrounded by this and are also meeting the same challenge in our own minds. It seems right to me. Is what seems right to me really truth? Or am I also among the multiple readers of the Scriptures that are walking in the paths of death? We read the following to exercise our mind on this and see how possible this is, how it comes into existence in my own mind.

The priests and rulers had been deceived, as Satan meant them to be, into believing that Christ came out of Galilee. {CTr 234.6}

Remember, Satan tempted and tried to deceive Christ; and he is tempting us because everything is at stake.

Some who knew that He had been born in Bethlehem kept silent, that the falsehood might not be robbed of its power. {Ibid.}

The facts were plain. There was no dimness of the light. But the work of Christ was interpreted by different ones in accordance with the state of their minds. {CTr 234.7}

When I read this the first time I thought, Oh... how important that my state of mind is correct; because there is a way that seems right to a man, according to the state of his mind, and he will interpret even the work of Christ according to the state of *my* mind, according to the other person's mind. No wonder there are so many interpretations. So when a subject arises, the words come to us from Jesus, *How readest thou?*

This poem really enlarges this serious problem that the majority of human beings on this planet are facing:

*It is one thing to read the Bible through,
Another thing to read to learn and do.
Some read it with design to learn to read,
But to the subject pay but little heed.*

*Some read it as their duty once a week,
But no instruction from the Bible seek;
While others read it with but little care,
With no regard to how they read, nor where.*

Some read to bring themselves into repute,

*By showing others how they can dispute;
While others read because their neighbors do,
To see how long 'twill take to read it through.*

*Some read it for the wonders that are there,—
How David killed a lion and a bear;
While others read it with uncommon care,
Hoping to find some contradictions there.*

*Some read as if it did not speak to them,
But to the people at Jerusalem.
One reads with father's specs upon his head,
And sees the thing just as his father said.*

*Some read to prove a pre-adopted creed,
Hence understand but little that they read;
For every passage in the book they bend.
To make it suit that all-important end.*

*Some people read as I have often thought,
To teach the book instead of being taught;
And some there are who read it out of spite.
I fear there are but few who read it right.*

*But read it prayerfully, and you will see,
Although men contradict, God's words agree;
For what the early Bible prophets wrote,
We find that Christ and His apostles quote.*

*So trust no creed that trembles to recall
What has been penned by one and verified by all.*

—*Bible Readings for the Home Circle* (1914 Edition), *How Readest Thou?*, p. 32.

This is a very fitting poem to exercise our mind and to be very honest with ourselves when we come to read the Bible. What attitude am I meant to read the Bible with? What is the attitude? Jesus gives us the simple and straightforward answer:

John 7:17 If any man will do his will, he shall know of the doctrine, whether it be of God, or [whether] I speak of myself.

Here is a very simple testing point by which we can examine how we read the Bible. Am I reading so that I will do God's will? Is it my will to do just what God says and my own opinion and way of life I am prepared to lay down, to place myself entirely under God's direction? If I will read the Bible like that,

then Jesus says, You will know the doctrine; you will know the truth. This is the examination I must place upon myself. What is motivating me to read? As we read in the poem, many different motivations come into it. And as we saw in the Spirit of Prophecy, I will understand it according to the state of my mind. No; I must not read the Bible according to the state of my own mind. I must read it according to the mind of God. *Let this mind be in you*, we are told, *which was also in Christ Jesus*. With that state of mind I must read it; and that is a state of mind where I am saying, Lord, I give up my own opinion; I just want to do your will. This is the attitude I must come to the word with – with prayer.

What Motivates Me?

We are to examine ourselves in the presence of God now, and ever after when we open the Scriptures. He is here talking to the Hebrews during their wilderness wanderings:

Deuteronomy 8:2 And thou shalt remember all the way which the LORD thy God led thee these forty years in the wilderness, to humble thee, [and] to prove thee, to know what [was] in thine heart, whether thou wouldest keep his commandments, or no.

We are to examine ourselves like the children of Israel were to do as they were led by Him. He is saying, I have led thee all these years, so that you would be humbled, and so that I would prove to you what is actually in your heart. This is what the Lord is in the process of doing in our life – checking us out; showing me what is in my heart, what motivates me. And as He led them, it continues to say:

Deuteronomy 8:3 ...he humbled thee, and suffered thee to hunger, and fed thee with manna, which thou knewest not, neither did thy fathers know; that he might make thee know that man doth not live by bread only, but by every [word] that proceedeth out of the mouth of the LORD doth man live.

They were murmuring; they said, We want the garlic and onions and leeks that we had in Egypt; they were complaining, so God gave them their flesh, and they were dying of it, and He said, “I humbled you to show you what is in your heart. You wanted certain things that were not My will, and I gave you the manna to show you that what I give to you, whether you like it or not, you are to live by every word that proceeds out of My mouth.” This is what He was communicating. This is how our heart, our state of mind, should be, to let God show me what is in my heart, so that as I read it there, it may cut across what I like, but I’m going to live by it. And then I will know the doctrine, as Jesus said.

So as I read the Bible, I read with this motivation, for security sake, so that I will read it without adding my own state of mind to it. I am reading it from God's state of mind, not my own.

Add Thou Not Unto His Words

Proverbs 30:5 Every word of God [is] pure: he [is] a shield unto them that put their trust in him. 6 Add thou not unto his words, lest he reprove thee, and thou be found a liar.

How many liars there are today who teach the word out there? They add to it, they put their construction and their state of mind upon it. And if we want to examine whether or not we are reading aright, we have all these counsels before us. So when we come to the Bible, the attitude we should have is here delineated. It should be to do His will, to be prepared to learn what is in my heart as I read it, so that I might live by every word that proceeds out of His mouth; to add nothing to it, but to read there only what God is saying. I must not add or take away from it, lest I be found a liar.

And with that, there comes then the other ingredient of Isaiah 66. To whom does God look? Who is He going to reveal the truth to?

Isaiah 66:2 For all those [things] hath mine hand made, and all those [things] have been, saith the LORD: but to this [man] will I look, [even] to [him that is] poor and of a contrite spirit, and trembleth at my word.

This is the attitude with which we must come to the word, and it is these people that God approves, because they *rightly* divide the word of God, as it says in 2 Timothy.

Understanding According to God's Mind

The language of the Bible should be explained according to its obvious meaning, unless a symbol or figure is employed. {GC 598.3}

When it is obvious that there is a symbol, a figurative speech, then you look for its explanation by the Bible itself; but "the language of the Bible should be explained according to its *obvious* meaning," without any human, entangled interpretations. Read it as it reads. And as we read it as it reads, as God's mind intended it be, played out for us in simple language, what will be our experience? What kind of experience will we make if we come to the word with that kind of approach? This is an experience that is at the heart of every soul: He yearns for this, for unity, for comfort. Jesus says:

John 5:39 Search the scriptures; for in them ye think ye have eternal life: and they are they which testify of me.

Don't we desire eternal life? So read aright; search the Scriptures according to this. And this is the experience we will make: we will discover that eternal life is really ours. But it's more than that. While eternal life can be really mine and I can think I have eternal life, there is much more to this eternal life.

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

It is not to be understood according to the state of a man's mind – no *private interpretation*.

2 Peter 1:21 For the prophecy came not in old time by the will of man:

It came not by the will of man, not by his state of mind. No;

2 Peter 1:21 ...but holy men of God spake [as they were] moved by the Holy Ghost.

This is why the apostle wrote:

2 Peter 1:19 We have also a more sure word of prophecy;

Even surer than our experience,

2 Peter 1:19 ...whereunto ye do well that ye take heed, as unto a light that shineth in a dark place, until the day dawn, and the day star arise in your hearts:

If we read the Scriptures with this attitude that we have just seen, adding nothing and taking nothing from it, just letting God illuminate our mind, coming to it to do His will, to live by every word that proceeds by His mouth; as we do this we will discover God's thoughts for us. He gives me eternal life through His word; and it is not an interpretation of mind. And when I read the sure word of prophecy like that, the day star will arise in my heart. Is He not the Word? Isn't Jesus the Day Star, the Word? The living Word. The interpretation is not man's state of mind; *holy men of God spake as they were moved by the Holy Ghost*. And as we do all this, the Scriptures lay it out to us in various different forms.

Through the Communion of the Holy Spirit

Apostle Paul places here a benediction after everything he has written to the Corinthians, and the benediction is this:

2 Corinthians 13:14 The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the communion of the Holy Ghost, [be] with you all. Amen.

What is the benediction here? The wonderful blessing of the gospel, the grace of Jesus, the love of God, but now the communion of the Holy Ghost. Holy men wrote *as they were moved by the Holy Ghost*. And as I commune with the Holy Ghost, will I read aright? No private interpretation. Just as the communion of the Holy Spirit caused it to be written, the communion of the Spirit will cause it to be read aright. This is the way it is.

1 Corinthians 2:10 But God hath revealed [them] unto us by his Spirit:

As it says earlier, *eye hath not seen, nor ear heard*. This has nothing to do with what eyes see or ears hear or what we think. It is beyond us. *God hath revealed these things unto us by His Spirit*. By the communion of the Spirit He will reveal things to us,

1 Corinthians 2:10 ...for the Spirit searcheth all things, yea, the deep things of God.

And it is that Spirit that inspired the writing of the word.

1 Corinthians 2:11 For what man knoweth the things of a man, save the spirit of man which is in him? even so the things of God knoweth no man, but the Spirit of God.

So no man knows what God knows *but the Spirit of God*.

1 Corinthians 2:12 Now we have received, not the spirit of the world, but the spirit which is of God; that we might know the things that are freely given to us of God.

The Holy Scriptures were written under inspiration of the Holy Spirit; and the benediction is, The communion of the Holy Spirit be with you. If you will be under the communion of the Spirit of God, you and I may *know the things that are freely given to us of God*;

1 Corinthians 2:13 Which things also we speak, not in the words which man's wisdom teacheth, but which the Holy Ghost teacheth; comparing spiritual things with spiritual.

The communion of the Spirit who inspired those words can be with us so that we can correctly receive the things of God; not man's wisdom but God's meaning. This is our privilege. And this is what the experience of the apostles was. They had that experience; they said, We have touched, we have handled, we have experienced it, and this is what we tell you; and your communion can be

with us. This can be found in 1 John 1:1-4. The apostle John says, Our communion is with the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, and you will have communion with us. In other words, we will experience what the apostles experienced, when we read aright. We will take the words of the apostles and say, Yes, what they said is right. Not *what I think they said*, but what *they said*, what they wrote under inspiration. And the great consequence of coming into harmony with them, the experience we will make is what Jesus was praying for in John 17:20. What He gave them we are to receive as He gave to them.

True Unity

Here is the great experience that we may make:

John 17:20 Neither pray I for these alone, but for them also which shall believe on me through their word;

How important is this in this age in which we live, when the younger generation says, It's as I see it, not as this other person sees it. Here it says that He is praying for us, that we may believe on Him through what? *Through their word*. This is what the Ethiopian said; "I need someone to tell me, to show me." And Philip did, he showed him. It was *their* word; but it was inspired by the Holy Spirit. They wanted to do God's will; they went through an experience by which their lives were purged. And as it continues, Jesus prayed

John 17:21 That they all may be one; as thou, Father, [art] in me, and I in thee, that they also may be one in us: that the world may believe that thou hast sent me. 22 And the glory which thou gavest me I have given them; that they may be one, even as we are one:

In this world of conflict, with everybody doing their own thing, and everybody respecting what everybody else is doing while at the same time saying, But I can't agree with it; in this world and atmosphere, there is no true unity. In the churches there is no true unity. You just let them get close to each other and you will find it. And I am experiencing it all the time, even now as I mingle together with certain people. My experience is the same every time; they start off saying, This is wonderful, this is so lovely, we are so happy now; and then something toxic happens and separates them. And it is doomed to happen again and again because the reality is that every man thinks that what he is seeing and interpreting is right. This is where it comes from. But Jesus prayed that we would be in unity by being submissive and reading as we read, rather than as we interpret.

What follows is the way that the word of God is going to achieve perfection for those who will read aright. The apostles, prophets, pastors and teachers were given for the perfecting of the saints;

Ephesians 4:13 Till we all come in the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, unto a perfect man, unto the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ: 14 That we [henceforth] be no more children, tossed to and fro, and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the sleight of men, [and] cunning craftiness, whereby they lie in wait to deceive; 15 But speaking the truth in love, may grow up into him in all things, which is the head, [even] Christ:

Isn't that precious? This is to me the heart's cry of my being. I want this unity. And in a world with no unity, this is possible for those who respond to the words of Jesus "How readest thou?"

In the fear of God I tell you that the true exposition of the Scriptures is necessary for the correct moral development of our characters. {RH, February 14, 1899 par. 15}

Jesus met the devil, and everything was at stake; and the devil came and gave Him a hard time. And he gave Him an even harder time at the cross. Now what does Jesus say to the overcomer in this period of time? You must overcome *as I overcame*. And how did Jesus overcome? He did not even frame His own words. And He went through an experience that was something which we can hardly comprehend. But as we come to this time now, there are a people, called the 144,000, who will overcome as Christ overcame the terrible onslaught of the evil one.

Now, while our great High Priest is making the atonement for us, we should seek to become perfect in Christ. Not even by a thought could our Saviour be brought to yield to the power of temptation. Satan finds in human hearts some point where he can gain a foothold; some sinful desire is cherished, by means of which his temptations assert their power. But Christ declared of Himself: "The prince of this world cometh, and hath nothing in Me." {GC 623.1}

What does Satan come to do? He comes along to trigger our thoughts, to lead us to read things according to our state of mind. Jesus said, He comes to Me, and He finds nothing in Me.

Satan could find nothing in the Son of God that would enable him to gain the victory. He had kept His Father's commandments, and there was no sin

in Him that Satan could use to his advantage. This is the condition in which those must be found who shall stand in the time of trouble. {Ibid.}

How readest thou? Not to frame even our own words, this is how Jesus overcame. *It is written* only. Not how I feel, not how I want to speak and react; nothing of that nature; just as it is written.

God grant us that we may join together according to the experience that it is our privilege to have, that we will hold ourselves aloof from every human state of mind, my own included. And as I submit my state of mind to a plain “How readest thou?” and let it govern me, I will make the experience that the Scripture promises. We will find eternal life; we will know God. What a privilege. And as we convey what is written we will find the state of mind of other people arguing with us, but never mind; we are not studying to dispute; we are studying as it is written, and we are living by every word that proceeds out of God’s mouth. This is where we are to be found; and there we will find unity with one another. May God bless us with to this end.

Amen.