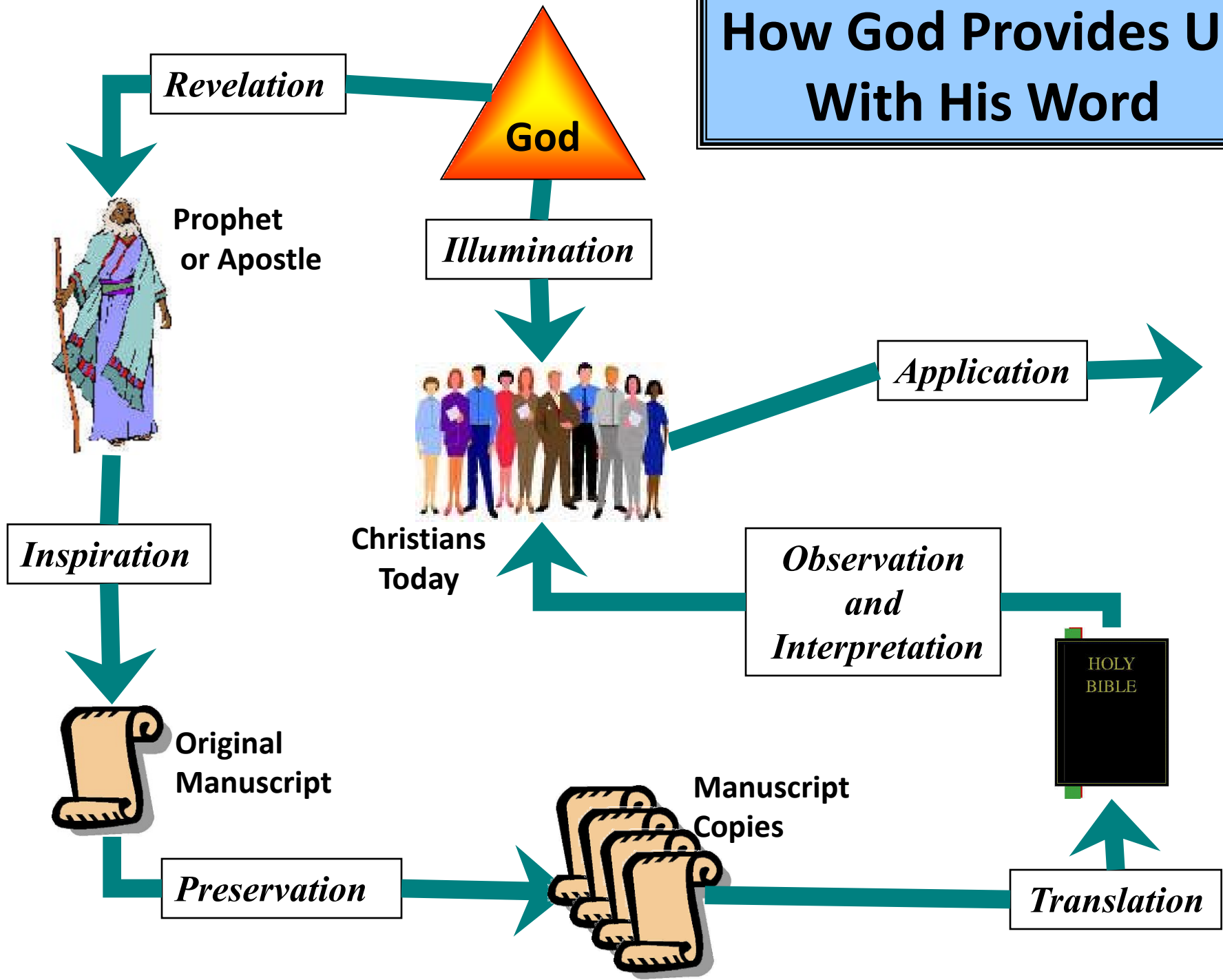


How God Provides Us With His Word



Applying the Word of God

Applying the Word of God

- It is not enough to hear or study the Word of God – we need to do what it says!
- We must be careful to distinguish between what the Word of God **prescribes** and what the Word of God merely **describes**.
- We must be careful to distinguish between the teachings of **the Word of God** and **our own personal legalisms** and traditions.
- Applying God's Word often requires wisdom and good judgment.

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Just do it!

- *For it is not the **hearers** of the law who are righteous before God, but the **doers** of the law who will be justified.* (Romans 2:13)
- *Blessed ...are those who **hear** the word of God and **keep it!*** (Luke 11:28)
- ***Keeping** God's commands is what counts.*
(1Corinthians 7:19b NIV)

Just do it!

- ²² *Be **doers** of the word, and **not hearers only**, deceiving yourselves.* ²³ *For if anyone is a hearer of the word and not a doer, he is like a man who looks intently at his natural face in a mirror.* ²⁴ *For he looks at himself and goes away and at once forgets what he was like.* ²⁵ *But the one who looks into the perfect law, the law of liberty, and perseveres, being no hearer who forgets but a doer who acts, he will be blessed in his doing. (James 1:22-25)*

Background for James 1:22-25

- James, half brother of Jesus and an apostle, is writing to Jewish believers living outside of Israel (James 1:1).
- When we look through the book of James, we find evidence that those to whom James is writing were being influenced by the sinful world around them:
 - *Religion that is pure and undefiled before God, the Father, is this: to visit orphans and widows in their affliction, and to **keep oneself unstained from the world.*** (James 1:27)
 - *Whoever wishes to be a **friend of the world** makes himself an **enemy of God.*** (James 4:4b)

Background for James 1:22-25

- It seems that because of the world's bad influence on James's original readers, they were in danger of becoming “*double-minded*” or **spiritual schizophrenics!**
 - *He is a double-minded man, unstable in all his ways.* (James 1:8)
 - *Cleanse your hands, you sinners, and purify your hearts, you **double-minded**.* (James 4:8b)

Analysis of James 1:22-25

- James begins by giving a **command**: *Be doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving yourselves.*
(James 1:22)
- Notice that James does not condemn us for **listening** to the Word of God – you have to first listen to (study, read, etc.) the Word of God in order to obey it!
- What James condemns is **only** hearing the Word of God and **not doing** what it says.
- Can this happen today? Yes!
 - This can happen in church or in personal Bible study:
 - Analyzing the a passage of the Bible but not applying it
 - Feeling guilty but not ever making any actual changes
 - Agreeing with what is said but never actually doing it

Analysis of James 1:22-25

- James says that if we **just listen** to the Word of God and don't do what it says we are **deceiving** ourselves:
 - To be deceived means we are blinded to our true spiritual condition.
 - People can **think** they are in right standing with God when in reality they are not (*Not everyone who says to me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the kingdom of heaven, but the one who does the will of my Father who is in heaven.* – Mat 7:21)!

Analysis of James 1:22-25

- James then gives an **illustration** from everyday life to show the **absurdity** of hearing the word of God, but not obeying it.
- The illustration involves **two** different individuals who see their reflection in a mirror, but each has a different response to what they see.

Analysis of James 1:22-25

- The **first** individual, James says, is like the man who listens to the Word of God, but then doesn't do what it says:
 - ²³ *For if anyone is a hearer of the word and not a doer, he is like a man who looks intently at his natural face in a mirror.* ²⁴ *For he looks at himself and goes away and at once forgets what he was like.*
(James 1:23-24)
- This man:
 - Looks in a mirror
 - Sees something that requires action on his part
 - Then he walks away from the mirror and forgets about it – taking no action on what he saw!

Analysis of James 1:22-25

- In **contrast**, James describes a **second** individual:
 - *But the one who looks into the perfect law, the law of liberty, and perseveres, being no hearer who forgets but a doer who acts, he will be blessed in his doing.* (James 1:25)
- This man looks into “*the perfect law, the law of liberty*” – from the parallel it is clear that James is using this phrase to refer to the Word of God.
- And in this “mirror” he too (by implication) sees something that requires action on his part.
- But in contrast to the first man who looked and then forgot, this man “*perseveres, being no hearer who forgets but a doer who acts*”.
- As a result of making the changes demanded by the Word of God, this man is blessed. And you will be too if you follow his example!

Applying the Word of God

- It is not enough to hear or study the Word of God – we need to do what it says!
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- To apply God's Word in a balanced and God-honoring way requires wisdom and good judgment.

Prescriptive Versus Descriptive

- The Bible **prescribes** (commands) that we do or not do certain things.
- In **some** cases the commands given are **not applicable** to us and therefore we are not required to obey them. For example:
 - Not eating from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil (Gen 2:17)
 - Building an ark (Gen 6:14)
 - Offering animal sacrifices
 - Not eating certain foods (e.g. pork)
- But in those cases where the commands **are** applicable, we are required to obey them.

Prescriptive Versus Descriptive

- The Bible also **describes** many attitudes and behaviors.
- Sometimes the Bible describes behavior which is commanded or forbidden elsewhere in the Bible. In such cases what is described can serve as an example of something that we should (or should not) do.
- Often the Bible describes behavior which is **not** forbidden or commanded elsewhere in the Bible. In such cases, we are not under any obligation to do or avoid doing what is described. It is an area of Christian liberty.

Prescriptive Versus Descriptive

- Examples to consider:
 - Herod on his birthday gave a banquet for his nobles and military commanders and the leading men of Galilee. (Mark 6:21)
 - And David danced before the LORD with all his might. (2Sam 6:14)
 - There is no example in the New Testament of a musical instrument being played in a church meeting.
 - The “doctrine of the **upper room**”:
 - Jesus met with his disciples for the Last Supper in an “**upper room**” (Mark 14:15, Luke 22:12)
 - After watching Jesus ascend into heaven, the disciples met in an “**upper room**” in Jerusalem for a time of prayer (Acts 1:13)
 - Peter raised a female disciple named Tabitha from the dead in an “**upper room**” (Acts 9:39-40)
 - When Paul met with the believers in Troas on the first day of the week, they met in an “**upper room**” (Acts 20:8)

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Distinguishing Between God's Word and Our Own Personal Legalisms

- As Christians, we are obligated to obey **all** of the applicable rules that God has given us in his Word.
- Within the Christian community (the church) we are also required to hold **one another** accountable to obey God's Word – *Is it not those inside the church whom you are to judge?* (1 Cor. 5:12b, see also 1 Cor. 6:1ff, Mat 18:15-17, Gal. 6:1, etc.)

Distinguishing Between God's Word and Our Own Personal Legalisms

- Sometimes Christians come up with rules and standards of behavior that go **beyond what is written** in the text of scripture and then judge and condemn anyone who does not keep their manmade rules.
- Apparently the Corinthians were guilty of judging Paul and Apollos in this way: *But with me it is a very small thing that I should be judged by you or by any human court ... do not pronounce judgment before the time, before the Lord comes, who will bring to light the things now hidden in darkness and will disclose the purposes of the heart. Then each one will receive his commendation from God. ⁶ I have applied all these things to myself and Apollos for your benefit, brothers, that you may learn by us not to go beyond what is written, that none of you may be puffed up in favor of one against another. (1 Cor. 4:3,5-6)*

Distinguishing Between God's Word and Our Own Personal Legalisms

- It is **fine** to have **personal** standards that go beyond what the scriptures require, but to judge others by those standards is **forbidden**: *Who are you to pass judgment on the servant of another? It is before his own master that he stands or falls. And he will be upheld, for the Lord is able to make him stand. One person esteems one day as better than another, while another esteems all days alike. Each one should be fully convinced in his own mind. The one who observes the day, observes it in honor of the Lord. The one who eats, eats in honor of the Lord, since he gives thanks to God, while the one who abstains, abstains in honor of the Lord and gives thanks to God... Therefore **let us not pass judgment on one another any longer** (Rom 14:4-6, 13a)*

Distinguishing Between God's Word and Our Own Personal Legalisms

- I like to refer to extra-biblical rules that we make for ourselves as a **personal legalisms**.
- Personal legalisms are not necessarily bad things – in fact they **can be helpful!**

Personal Legalisms Can Be Helpful

- If your **conscience** requires it:
 - *As to the eating of food offered to idols, we know that “an idol has no real existence,” and that “there is no God but one.” ... However, not all possess this knowledge. But some, through former association with idols, eat food as really offered to an idol, and **their conscience, being weak, is defiled.** (1 Cor. 8:4,7)*

Personal Legalisms Can Be Helpful

- If a personal weakness requires it:
 - *Flee from sexual immorality.* (1 Cor. 6:18a)
 - *Flee from idolatry.* (1 Cor. 10:14b)
 - *For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evils. It is through this craving that some have wandered away from the faith and pierced themselves with many pangs. But as for you, O man of God, flee these things.* (1 Tim 6:10-11)

Personal Legalisms Can Be Helpful

- If you think it will help others
 - *To the Jews I became as a Jew, in order to win Jews. To those under the law I became as one under the law (though not being myself under the law) that I might win those under the law. To those outside the law I became as one outside the law (not being outside the law of God but under the law of Christ) that I might win those outside the law. To the weak I became weak, that I might win the weak. I have become all things to all people, that by all means I might save some. (1 Cor. 9:20-22)*
- If it is a personal preference

Some Cautions About Personal Legalisms

- Be careful that your personal legalisms do not interfere with your obedience to the Word of God
 - *And [Jesus] said to them, "You have a fine way of rejecting the commandment of God in order to establish your tradition! For Moses said, 'Honor your father and your mother'; and, 'Whoever reviles father or mother must surely die.' But you say, 'If a man tells his father or his mother, "Whatever you would have gained from me is Corban"' (that is, given to God)--then you no longer permit him to do anything for his father or mother, thus making void the word of God by your tradition that you have handed down. And many such things you do (Mark 7:8-13)*
- Be careful that your personal legalisms do not cause you to become prideful or self-righteous.

Some Cautions About Personal Legalisms

- It is okay to impose “household legalisms” on those living under your authority – though you should make it clear that these are not things that God requires in and of themselves.
- But you **do not** have a right to try to impose your personal legalisms on other Christians who are outside of your household!

Distinguishing Between God's Word and Our Own Personal Legalisms

- Some examples to consider:
 - Celebrating (or **not** celebrating) Christmas
 - Going to the theater
 - Drinking
 - Smoking
 - Gambling
 - Home school versus Private School versus Public School

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The Need for Wisdom and Judgment

- We are given many responsibilities in Scripture. For example, a man may be required to:
 - Work and provide for his family's financial needs
 - Financially support the ministry of the church
 - Give to the poor
 - Lead and spend time with his wife
 - Train up and discipline his children in the Lord
 - Study the Word of God
 - Use his spiritual gifts to serve the church
 - Attend church meetings
 - Fellowship with other believers
 - Evangelize his neighbors and co-workers
- Balancing these responsibilities well requires wisdom and good judgment.

The Need for Wisdom and Judgment

- Some areas of the Christian life require wisdom and judgment to know how much is enough and how much is too much
- Some Examples:
 - What constitutes modest dress?
 - How much giving is considered “generous”?
 - How much alcohol is too much?
- In serious or extreme cases the elders and ultimately the church might need to make a judgment.
- Other than that, these judgments must be left to the individual believer who will give an account to God in the day of judgment.