

BEYOND TODAY

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Pitfalls of mistranslation

Vocabulary is important when seeking to understand the teachings of Christ. It is worth checking that translators have selected expressions that convey His intended meaning.

The work of the Bible translators is beneficial; nevertheless, there are verses and words that on closer inspection are not quite right. Words sometimes have meanings that seem alike but on reflection may be more divergent than they first appear. For example take the English terms *less* and *few*. Do these convey the same intent? To illustrate, if I ask would you rather be:

- a) one of the *less* successful Christians, or
- b) one of the *few* successful Christians?

Clearly these words have decidedly different meanings contextually.

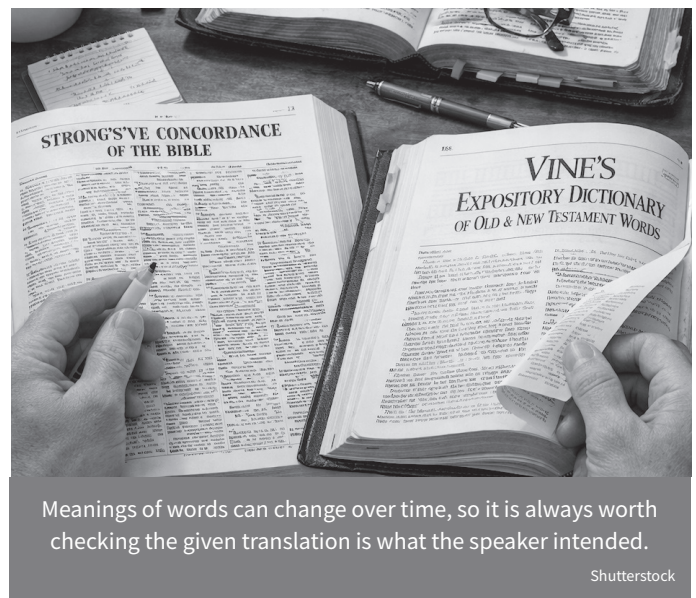
Words, or more importantly, appropriate words in our Bible are crucial to us as we learn to imitate Christ and dedicate our lives to our Creator. Many are called but few are chosen, so it is important that we get it right.

Bible translators did an admirable job overall. Some lost their lives for the cause. However, the Bible does contain some mistakes in translation and some instances where a better or more accurate rendering might have been preferable. Unfortunately, there are occasional cases where bias may have influenced a mistranslation.

An example of a poor choice of expression appears in one of Christ's parables.

Parable of the talents

Matthew 25 contains three teachings that Christ put forward following His Olivet prophecy in the previous chapter. In the second of these the "talents" are weights of money, given to the servants according to their ability. These are analogous to our personal skills. "And to one



Meanings of words can change over time, so it is always worth checking the given translation is what the speaker intended.

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he gave five talents, to another two, and to another one" (verse 15).

Jesus continued: "Then he who had received the five talents went and traded with them, and made another five talents" (verse 16). The word "traded" used here implies that this servant engaged in a very specific activity.

If we go further back in time, in the book of Ezekiel God explains some potential pitfalls of trading. The prophet records God addressing Satan thus: "You were perfect in your ways from the day you were created, till iniquity was found in you. By the abundance of your trading you became filled with violence within, and you sinned" (Ezekiel 28:15-16).

The Hebrew for “trading” used here, according to *Strong’s Concordance* (H7404) is “rek-ool-law” which primarily means: “trade [as in peddled], also traffic and can include merchandise itself.” Even today peddling and trafficking have poor connotations often implying gain at the expense of others and taking advantage.

Jesus had previously expressed concern about the market in the grounds of the temple in Jerusalem (Matthew 21:12-13). To pay the temple tax, visitors would have to exchange Roman coins for the required half shekel at a commission charge of up to 12.5%. Worshipers could find the animals they had brought with them for sacrifice rejected by the priests as defective in some way. This forced them to purchase expensive alternatives from the traders there. According to rabbinic tradition, sales of doves to the poor were controlled by the family of the high priest and generated huge wealth for them. (See biblehub.com/q/Why_call_temple_a_den_of_robbers.htm.)

A closer look at Matthew 25 reveals that the Greek verb here translated as “traded” does not generally mean that at all. The word (per *Strong’s Concordance* G2038) is *ergazomai*. Its primary meaning is: “to toil (as a task, occupation, etc.)” *Young’s Analytical Concordance* gives the meaning as “work, toil, labour”

Specific Greek word for trading

Unlike English where over time the word “trade” has acquired a variety of meanings, first-century Greek possessed a word that meant trading and everything associated with it. Writers of the New Testament would have been aware of these terms since they were commonplace.

The Greek word “*emporeuomai*” and its derivatives

were used in the New Testament where “trading” specifically was intended. Instances of these occur in James 4:13 translated as “buy and sell”; in Revelation 18:3 for “merchants”; in Matthew 22:5 as a noun referring to “merchandise” or trafficked goods, and another noun form in John 2:16 appears as “house of merchandise” or “marketplace.”

None of these forms, however, was used by Jesus Christ in this parable. Rather, Jesus Christ used a verb meaning “to work, to produce, to labour.” Thus, a more appropriate translation of Matthew 25:16 would be: “Then he that had received the five talents went and worked with the same, and produced five more talents.”

Laziness condemned

The servant who buried his master’s talent, supposedly for safekeeping, was simply not prepared to work with what had been entrusted to him. He did no work at all. We never want to hear these words: “You wicked and lazy servant!” (Matthew 25:26).

This parable, therefore, is encouraging toil, work and dedication, where everyone is a winner and success is not at the expense of another.

We should be aware that we live by faith but that “faith without works is dead” (James 2:20, 26). Ultimately it is through God’s gift that we are saved. Since faith without works is dead, we need to be about our Father’s business.

We cannot afford to be negligent; we need to labour (not hustle) to increase our spiritual talents. To add value acceptable to God, work hard to ensure we are not one of the *less* successful Christians, but one of the *few* successful ones.

Jason Godfrey

Bible helps: Concordances

There are many reference tools to enhance Bible study. Some are more reliable than others. An effective concordance such as Strong’s is a necessity.

A concordance is a reference tool that helps identify the common translations of the original Hebrew, Aramaic and Greek words in the Bible. It is also useful for finding other scriptures that contain the same original word. Indeed, it is possible to find almost any scripture where only part of the verse is remembered.

Strong’s Exhaustive Bible Concordance lists in alphabetical order all English expressions in the King James Bible providing their origins and primary mean-

ings. Strong’s references are numbered so the terms can be easily cross-referenced in lexicons such as *Thayer’s Greek Definitions*. Not all dictionaries are cross-referenced to Strong’s, but can still prove helpful such as *Vine’s Expository Dictionary of New Testament Words*.

Online Bibles often include access to a selection of these resources. However, if you would like to understand more, the following link may be helpful:

www.ucg.org/learn/bible-questions-and-answers/how-do-i-use-strongs-concordance.

In search of perfection

Jesus instructed His followers to “become perfect.” He was keen that they produce “fruit” – godly spiritual traits. The book of Hebrews provides a starting point on the path to perfection.

The Bible has been called “the mind of God in print,” containing His thoughts and instructions. One such gem is found in Hebrew 6, which advises: “Therefore, leaving the discussion of the elementary principles of Christ, let us go on to perfection, not laying again the foundation of repentance from dead works and of faith toward God, of the doctrine of baptisms, of laying on of hands, of resurrection of the dead, and of eternal judgement” (verses 1-2).

Where the New King James version and the King James version both state “let us go on to perfection,” other translations suggest, “Let us become mature in our understanding.” All are referring to reaching a level of basic understanding through the primary teachings of Christ, then going on to perfection, which indicates attaining to a higher level. Jesus Christ is the only Being to have lived a perfect human life, so we must follow His principles as we journey towards eternal life.

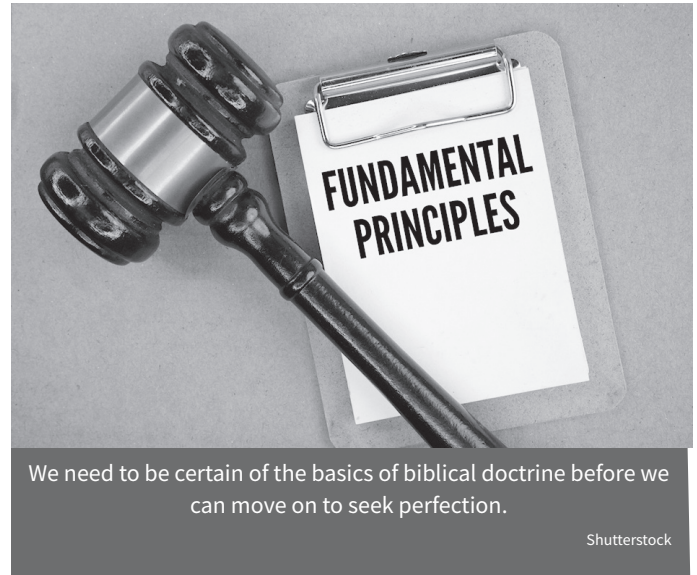
Turn from sin

The first principle of Christ listed is repentance. All humans, except Christ, are sinners. The apostle Paul declared: “. . . for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God” (Romans 3:23). He also stated: “For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord” (Romans 6:23). Since the penalty for sin is death, we need to know what sin is. The apostle John

“If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us” (1 John 1:8).

explained “Whoever commits sin also commits lawlessness, and sin is lawlessness” (1 John 3:4). Other definitions of sin are found in the Ten Commandments (Exodus 20:1-17) and their expansion in Matthew 5:21-48. Please review our booklet *The Ten Commandments*, which goes into greater detail.

Upon genuine repentance we can ask for Christ’s death to be applied to us, so we do not have to die for our sins with no hope of resurrection. In effect, it is as if our list of crimes and the death sentence due are nailed to His



We need to be certain of the basics of biblical doctrine before we can move on to seek perfection.

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cross, just as Pontius Pilate nailed the accusation against Christ above His head (Matthew 27:37; Colossians 2:14).

This does not mean we can carry on living as we please. Whenever we slip up, repentance is key. The instruction of the apostle John comes into play: “If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness” (1 John 1:9).

When He washed the feet of His disciples at His last Passover, He reflected: “He who is bathed needs only to wash his feet, but is completely clean” (John 13:10). Even though cleansed of our sins, we walk in an evil world and can metaphorically pick up its dirt in our thoughts and actions. Daily repentance washes us and restores our relationship with the Father and Christ (Acts 3:19; 1 John 1:7).

We follow God’s laws not in order to earn salvation, but to replace “dead works” with works pleasing to our Heavenly Father (1 Thessalonians 1:9; Hebrews 9:14). Salvation is through Christ; however following God’s commandments allows us understand better who God is and the nature of Christ.

Faith and baptism

The second principle of Christ addressed in Hebrews is faith towards God. We must live a life of faith. It is only the Father and Jesus Christ who can support us through this physical life and bring us to eternal life. Total faith on

our part is essential. We must prove to ourselves beyond any doubt who God is, what He requires of us and what He promises committed followers.

“Faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen” (Hebrews 11: 1). Whilst still physical, we cannot see God, but we must prove totally to ourselves that only He could create us and set the opportunity for eternal life before us.

To learn more about faith, please read our Bible study aid *You Can Have Living Faith*.

Thirdly, is the doctrine of baptism. The Bible recounts numerous baptisms and it is a requirement to commence our journey towards perfection. Full immersion in water is the correct method, since it represents a burial. Paul explains: “Therefore we were buried with Him through baptism into death, that just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life” (Romans 6:4).

Baptism is a two-part process, and the fourth doctrine of Christ is the laying on of hands. Without this and the accompanying prayer from the elder requesting God to fulfil His promise, we do not receive God’s Holy Spirit and become begotten children of God (Romans 8:16; 29-30). For more in-depth information please request or download *What You Need to Know About Baptism*.

Restored to life

Without Christ’s sacrifice and shed blood there would be no resurrection either to eternal life or back to physical life. The resurrection is the fifth doctrine of Christ. God has a plan for all of mankind, having created us with the purpose of bringing us into His family as ever-living spirit beings. Truly understanding this is very important when it comes to resurrection matters. This world usually teaches the immortal soul and often heaven and hell rather than death. Please request our booklets *Heaven and Hell: What Does the Bible Really Teach?* and *What Happens After Death?* to study this topic further.

Those called by God in this age have access to His true teachings now and have an opportunity to be in the first resurrection (Revelation 20:4-6). This is for those who will be transformed into spirit beings at the return of Jesus Christ (1 Corinthians 15:50-57; 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18).

The second resurrection includes all who never previously understood, or perhaps never even heard, the truth about God. Once resurrected back to physical life, they will have their opportunity to hear the true gospel message, repent, accept Christ’s sacrifice on their behalf and show that they truly desire to be in God’s family (Revelation 20:5-6, 11-13). This is often designated as the Great White Throne Judgement.

Judgement and sentencing

The final foundational teaching of Christ concerns eternal judgement. At the conclusion of the Great White Throne Judgement those who have refused to obey or do not desire to live within God’s Family will be sentenced to the second death in the lake of fire. From this there is no further chance of resurrection.

Those called now have the most difficult struggle living in this world but not becoming a part of it and having to constantly avoid Satan’s attempts to divert them to his ways of negativity, anger and hatred. Through the Holy Spirit we can have access to the mind of Christ. God

Without Christ’s sacrifice and shed blood there would be no resurrection either to eternal life or back to physical life.

is giving us the opportunity to be in the first resurrection – elsewhere called the “better resurrection” (Hebrews 11:35).

Our calling from God is truly a great blessing. If we don’t embrace it, instead allowing elements of the world to come between us and our Heavenly Father, we will not receive eternal life. We must choose to live in a manner that is worthy of Christ and not appear as other parts of secular society. Anything less and we are in danger of missing out on eternal life within God’s Family.

We long to hear the words, “Well done good and faithful servant.” God does not want any of us to fail, but we must submit totally, let go of our own desires and opinions, yielding wholeheartedly to His way of life instead.

These principles are the basics. Beyond this, to achieve perfection we need to “put on Christ” – His traits and characteristics – and bring every thought into obedience to Him (2 Corinthians 10:5; Galatians 3:7). To study further please read the chapter on “Growing to Spiritual Maturity” in our booklet *Transforming Your Life: The Process of Conversion*.

David Riddell

Our literature can be downloaded from our website at www.ucg.org or requested from the address at the bottom of the front page.

Avoid burnt fingers

We all learn by bitter experiences whether in government, friendships, finance, marriage, business, family matters, at work or in other interactions.

Have you ever accidentally touched a red-hot oven or a boiling kettle? Maybe you have been stopped by police for a traffic violation and heavily fined. Chances are you won't do it again in a hurry. Learning big lessons from our past mistakes so we do not repeat them is known by psychologists as "aversion therapy".



A brush with the law can sometimes prevent an individual heading further down a pathway of wrongdoing.

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According to Wikipedia: "Aversion therapy is a psychological treatment in which the patient is exposed to a stimulus while simultaneously being subjected to some form of discomfort. This conditioning is intended to cause the patient to associate the stimulus with unpleasant sensations with the intention of quelling the targeted (sometimes compulsive) behaviour."

What God permits

In a sense that is exactly what God is allowing His human creation to experience. The results are clearly obvious in today's world of dysfunctional governments, human relations, wars, families, marriages, finances . . . and so the list goes on – untold suffering for many the world over.

God tells us He loves His creation and He wants us to love him in return: "He who does not love does not know God, for God is love" (1 John 4:8). God clearly explains

that He *is* love, so if that be the case why does He allow us to make such huge mistakes in life with disastrous consequences?

He could force us to obey but He wants us to see the error of going our own way and instead choose His way. God is allowing humanity to experiment in whatever way they choose (Genesis 11:6). Only occasionally does He step in and prevent a person or a government from imposing a wrong way of life. This is because He wants us to have free will. In the end, after thousands of years of human existence, the vast majority of those who have ever lived will finally realise His way is the best, and the only way that really works.

Fear of God – respect, not terror

Christ's fundamental message was "I am the way, the truth, and the life" (John 14:6). It is important to note that God will work with anyone who is willing to submit to His ways in reverence and respect – the true meaning of the expression "fear of the Lord." Our Heavenly Father wants willing obedience because we know that His ways are right and really do work for everyone.

God gave this advice to the twelve tribes that comprised ancient Israel: "I call heaven and earth as witnesses today against you, that I have set before you life and death, blessing and cursing; therefore choose life, that both you and your descendants may live" (Deuteronomy 30:19).

After thousands of years of human existence the vast majority of those who have ever lived will finally realise only God's way works.

The apostle John wrote: "There is no fear in love; but perfect love casts out fear, because fear involves torment. But he who fears has not been made perfect in love" (1 John 4:1).

Just fearing God will not work. He desires that we become His children. As such we should not be cowering in fear all the time, but looking to Him for His wise guidance. As a loving Father, He desires constant close contact with us and it works both ways. Christ's half-brother James wrote: "Draw near to God and He will draw near to

us” (James 4:8). We need to ask God for the closeness He desires.

Rescued in love

When Christ returns, He will save humanity from the brink of total destruction (Matthew 24:22). The world’s armies will have joined forces and gathered at Armageddon with the aim to destroy each other, but will turn to fight against Christ as He returns to the Mount of Olives near Jerusalem. This is a battle they cannot win.

God the Father could easily force mankind into submission but that would not produce children who have *chosen* to follow His way of life. He is always pleased when humanity makes the right decision.

When Christ sets up His Kingdom on earth, its citizens will have come to loathe all the evil deeds they had committed. Many will say: “Come, and let us go up to the mountain of the LORD, to the house of the God of Jacob; He will teach us His ways, and we shall walk in His paths.’ For out of Zion shall go forth the law, And the word of the LORD from Jerusalem” (Isaiah 2:3).

Aversion therapy will have worked and all will seek

Let the Bible answer...

Below are some character traits prophesied in the end times. Perhaps you have seen them either in person or on daily news feeds.

Lawlessness will abound: Matthew 24:12.

“But know this, that in the last days perilous times will come: For men will be lovers of themselves, lovers of money, boasters, proud, blasphemers, disobedient to parents, unthankful, unholy, unloving, unforgiving, slanderers, without self-control, brutal, despisers of good, traitors, headstrong, haughty, lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God” (2 Timothy 3:1-4).

His ways and His law and at last come to know true peace. To learn more please request or download our booklet *Christ’s Reign on Earth: What It Will Be Like.*

David Jardine

Not of this world

The end times are prophesied to be chaotic. How can Christ’s followers ensure they do not become embroiled in secular issues?

We live in a divided and confused world. Conflicts abound amongst nations and within nations, often due to friction between differing racial, religious and socio-economic groups. Strong passions and opinions are frequently involved. Christ’s followers can sometimes be affected by these and become strongly partisan which can lead to division and disagreements. Friendships can be broken and the harmony of the Church damaged (Galatians 5:15). This is emphatically not what Jesus Christ wants (John 17:11, 22).

Disciples of Christ should remember that this is not currently God’s world. Jesus Christ plainly said this “My kingdom is not of this world. If My kingdom were of this world, My servants would fight, so that I should not be delivered to the Jews; but now My kingdom is not from here” (John 18:36).

Christ also said of His followers: “They are not of the world, just as I am not of the world” (John 17:16). True Christians should neither engage in this world’s wars, nor fight amongst themselves over divisive political issues.

Whilst some political policies might well appear to be more in accord with God’s ways and instructions than

others, we are warned not to be wise in our own opinions (Romans 12:16). Only the return of Jesus Christ can provide an ultimate solution to the world’s overwhelming troubles and remove its present ruler (Revelation 20:1-3).

Contained within the outline prayer Christ gave us as a model on which to base our petitions to our Heavenly Father is the phrase “Thy Kingdom come.” Even those who recite these words verbatim, quite possibly minus any understanding of what they are truly requesting, are asking God to put an end to this world’s strife, divisions and sufferings (Revelation 11:15; 20:1-4). Those who wait for Christ should always be looking to the Kingdom that He will establish.

He has promised He will come before the world destroys itself (Matthew 24:22). He will then usher in God’s glorious Kingdom. The apostle John records loud voices in heaven declaring: “The kingdoms of this world have become the kingdoms of our Lord and of His Christ, and He shall reign forever and ever!” (Revelation 11:15).

So always remember that while God is in ultimate control, currently this is not His world.

Philip Perry



Q Are Christians required to keep the Ten Commandments to be saved?

FAQ

A Jesus was asked a similar question in Matthew 19:16. His answer: “If you want to enter into life, keep the commandments” (Matthew 19:17). He then listed several, including enough of the Ten Commandments to make clear which commandments He meant: “You shall not murder,’ ‘You shall not commit adultery,’ ‘You shall not steal,’ ‘You shall not bear false witness,’ ‘Honour your father and your mother,’ and, ‘You shall love your neighbour as yourself’” (Matthew 19:18-19).

Some claim that keeping the commandments was fulfilled by Christ and obeying God’s law is therefore no longer required. Jesus Himself refuted this idea: “Do not think that I came to destroy the Law or the Prophets. I did not come to destroy but to fulfil” (Matthew 5:17).

Even with this plain, simple statement, there are those who interpret the verse to mean the law was not abolished until Jesus came and fulfilled it. They then interpret “fulfil” as “bringing to an end,” “superseding” or some other synonym for “abolishing.” In essence they have Jesus saying, “I did not come to abolish the law, but to *abolish* it.”

Jesus, on the other hand, said heaven and earth would disappear before the smallest part of the law would do so (Matthew 5:18). He said the law would continue until everything is accomplished. The fulfilment of many biblical prophecies of Christ’s second coming is yet to occur (so not accomplished), thus we know the law still exists.

Law to be magnified

At that time His audience believed in keeping all of the Ten Commandments. He reaffirmed the necessity for all who come to Him to do likewise. In Matthew chapters 5-7 Jesus explained how God intended for the Ten Commandments to be kept. By giving this explanation and

exemplifying it in His life, He was fulfilling a prophecy about Himself from Isaiah 42:21: “The Lord is well pleased for his righteousness’ sake; he will magnify the law and make it honourable” (King James Version).

The word “fulfil” in Matthew 5:17 means “fill up,” “make full,” “fill to the full” or “complete.” Jesus came to magnify, or fill completely full, the meaning of God’s law. Jesus’ teaching that a man who lusts after a woman has already committed adultery in his mind represented His magnification of all of the Ten Commandments. He explained the full meaning and intent of the commandments, showing that He expects more than just a legalistic, letter-of-the-law approach. He expects a submissive, yielded mind focused on love for God and our fellow humans.

Jesus further clarified: “Whoever therefore breaks one of the least of these commandments, and teaches men so, shall be called least in the kingdom of heaven; but whoever does and teaches them, he shall be called great in the kingdom of heaven” (Matthew 5:19).

Clearly, fulfil does not mean “abolish.”

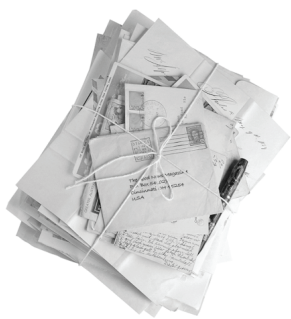
Apostles praised the law

Another common misunderstanding is that the New Testament Church came to believe that it is not necessary to follow Christ’s example of obeying the law. His apostles, who were personally taught by Him, certainly did not agree with this idea. The apostle John said: “Now by this we know that we know Him, if we keep His commandments. He who says, ‘I know Him,’ and does not keep His commandments, is a liar, and the truth is not in him. But whoever keeps His word, truly the love of God is perfected in him. By this we know that we are in Him. He who says he abides in Him ought himself also to walk just as He walked” (1 John 2:3-6).

Even the apostle Paul, who is often cited by those attempting to do away with God’s law, refuted this erroneous idea, saying, “Imitate me, just as I also imitate Christ.” Far from condemning the law, Paul said, “The law is holy, and the commandment holy and just and good” and, “I delight in the law of God.” Indeed, he said that “keeping the commandments of God is what matters” (1 Corinthians 11:1; Romans 7:12; Romans 7:22; 1 Corinthians 7:19).

We must avoid reading our own ideas into the Bible. Quoting from the prophet Isaiah, our Saviour warned against trusting our own ideas instead of the laws of God: “‘This people honours Me with their lips, but their heart is far from Me. And in vain they worship Me, teaching as doctrines the commandments of men.’ For laying aside the commandment of God, you hold the tradition of men . . . All too well you reject the commandment of God, that you may keep your tradition” (Mark 7:6-9).

We, too, must be sure we follow Christ’s example instead of our own ideas.



Letters From Our Readers

Areas of study

This [*Bible Study Course*] has been great. Since my illness I have begun revising earlier lessons, and am surprised at what I have forgotten. I am also looking forward in case you can manage to produce any more units.

Reader in Didcot

I have always been interested in the book of Revelation and its stark imagery. I haven't read it for a while and would love a copy of *The Book of Revelation Unveiled*.

Reader in Leighton Buzzard

Editor's comment: In addition to our study guides and paper-based Bible Course, we have many recorded in-depth Bible studies on our web site. These include Daniel and Revelation at www.ucg.org/course/ambassador-bible-college/world-news-prophecy-daniel-and-revelation.

Check out what else is available at www.ucg.org/learn/bible-study-tools/bible-study-video-series.

Signs of the times

Please find enclosed a donation for your use. We seem to be living in increasingly lawless times with the world yet again in turmoil. It feels as if the end times are underway. I am trying hard to remember that God is in control and He will work it out according to His plan, not ours. Longing for Christ to return – what a wonderful day that will be despite the mayhem that the world will be in then.

Reader in Torpoint

Deeper understanding

I am very blessed as I am now understanding the Bible better via your teachings and the end-time prophecies.

Reader in Dagenham

Please continue my subscription to *Beyond Today*. I do appreciate its help to keep me studying the Bible and in daily prayer. The articles presented are most encouraging.

Reader in Ossett

I have no words to express my gratitude for your wonderful work of sharing the good news of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Reader in Newmarket

Thank you very much for *Beyond Today* and all your free Bible study resources. I am able now to make sense of politics and religion thanks to your guidance.

Reader in Liverpool

Thank you for *Beyond Today* magazine. It helps me understand what the Bible is saying.

Reader in Croydon

I really appreciate these interesting reads. Please send me *The Final Superpower* and *Russia and Bible Prophecy* as I want to learn more.

Reader in Basingstoke

I would like to keep receiving *Beyond Today* magazine. I have learned so much from them.

Reader in Liverpool

How you can help

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Distribution of *Beyond Today* magazine, this Supplement and other literature of the United Church of God is funded by the generosity of Church members, co-workers and readers.

Jesus Christ instructed His disciples that as they had freely received they were to freely give (Matthew

10:8), so we supply our literature free of charge, making Christ's message available to all. Our gratitude goes to those who assist financially in this aspect of the Church's work.

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