

Sunday, March 7, 2021 am

CONCERNING FIRST PRINCIPLES Can We Understand the Bible Alike?

Is it possible to understand the word of God? You might think the answer to that question is obvious – yes. But there are many, who for many different reasons, do not believe this. Some outright declare that we cannot understand the Bible alike. They might say, “You understand it your way, and I’ll understand it my way.” But that is not a logical approach to truth. Others see the religious division that is so prevalent and believe that the reason is because we cannot understand the Bible alike. Such an attitude keeps many from even trying to understand.

I am a firm believer that we CAN understand the Bible alike. Why? Because that is the message of the Bible. And in this lesson, I would like for us to consider this. This is a fundamental message that must be understood if we are to be able to study the Bible with others. So let’s get started with this.

I. The Bible was written with the intent that we understand it

- a. John 17:17 – FIRST, the Bible claims to be truth! That means it is a message that is unmistakable.
 - i. When you TRULY understand TRUTH, you know that it is absolute (i.e. truth is truth always, and anything that is not truth is false).
 - ii. When there are two (or more) differing views that oppose each other, they cannot both be right. They may BOTH be wrong (because neither is the real truth), but at most only one is right, and thus truth.
 - iii. We apply this in society every day.
 1. Examples: $2 + 2 = ???$
 2. When a sales promotion is released, and people flock to the stores on the same day, they expect the sale item to be sold at the advertised price. They understand what the ad is saying. For the manager to change the price and say, “that price is not what I meant” is not acceptable. And we have laws against deceitful advertisements. The laws expect advertisements to be truthful!
 3. A recipe, IF followed exactly, will produce the same product every time.
 - iv. OUR quest ought to be to find what is the TRUTH of God’s word.
- b. Ephesians 5:17 - Understand what the will of the Lord is
- c. Calls for unity imply an understanding
 - i. John 17:20-22 – Jesus prayed for REAL unity.
 - ii. 1 Corinthians 1:10 – Paul’s pleading was that they all speak the same thing. He then proceeds to rebuke their divisive spirit. (11-13)
 - iii. Philippians 2:2 – we are called upon to be “*like minded, having the same love, being of one accord, of one mind.*”
 - iv. How can we be united, if it is not possible to understand God’s word?
- d. The same message was taught in various congregations
 - i. 1 Corinthians 4:17, Paul taught the same thing in every church
 - ii. Revelation 2 & 3, 7 times we read, “*He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches*” (Revelation 2:7, 11, 17, 29; 3:6, 13, 22). What is interesting about that statement is that it is the same and applied to ALL the churches.
- e. Numerous other passages point toward that direction as well. Consider the following:
 - i. John 7:17, Jesus in declaring that His teachings were from God notes, *If anyone wills to do His will, he shall know concerning the doctrine, whether it is from God or whether I speak on My own authority.*

- ii. John 8:31,32, *Then Jesus said to those Jews who believed Him, "If you abide in My word, you are My disciples indeed. And you shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free."*
- iii. Jesus speaking to Nicodemus – John 3:10, *Are you a teacher and do not know these things? While this was about Nicodemus, who was a leader and likely a member of the council (3:1, 7:45-53).*
- iv. Matthew 4:4 – Jesus, in answering Satan’s first temptation to turn stones to bread answered, *"It is written, 'Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God.'"* If man is to live by every word of God, it must be understandable.
- v. Ephesians 3:3-4 – Paul wrote with the intent that they understand. 3:8-9, he preached among the Gentiles, *"the unsearchable riches of Christ, and to make all see what is the fellowship of the mystery..."*
- vi. 2 Timothy 3:15-17 – 1) Timothy knew the scriptures which could make him wise unto salvation; and 2) the scriptures are given - that the man of God may be complete, thoroughly equipped for every good work
- vii. 2 Peter 1:3-4 – we have all things that pertain to life and godliness...
- viii. Finally, consider that we are going to be judged by scripture – Matthew 7:21-23, John 12:48 – the words He spoke will judge us; Romans 2:16 – Paul noted it would be *"according to my gospel"*, Revelation 20:12 – books were opened, and we are judged by what is written in the books. I may not know what all books are addressed, but I can say with confidence, the Old and New Testaments will be part of it.

II. **Why do people think we cannot understand the Bible?**

a. *Because of Satan*

- i. He seeks to divide us. He lies, as he has done from the very beginning. Matthew 13:19, Satan snatchers out the word when he can.
- ii. Because "the experts" have muddied the waters – 1 Corinthians 1:18ff notes that the message of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing. See also Romans 1:20-23, etc.
Today, we are seeing the word of God attacked everywhere, and far too many take the words of someone who sounds convincing, without taking the time to investigate.
This is Satan snatching out the word before it even has a chance to take root.

b. *Improper attitudes*

- i. Self-will – people do what they want to do. This is really what rejecting God’s word boils down to.
- ii. Indifference – this could be that some just do not care about what the Bible really says. But for others it is the fact that they do not care ENOUGH to do what needs to be done to find out. Matthew 13:15 noted that the hearts of some had become dull. Hebrews 5:11, the writer, as he tries to explain some concepts, notes that they had become dull of hearing. This leads to a rebuke at their failure to be as far along as they ought to have been (many should have been teachers by them).
- iii. Pride – often stands in the way of truth. People do not like to be humiliated, or to even humble themselves enough to admit they are wrong, OR perhaps that others are wrong (maybe family and friends).
1 Corinthians 4:6 Paul admonished them not to think beyond what is written, lest they be puffed up one against another.
- iv. Closed minds – an unwillingness to consider something different. One reason we noted about why Jesus taught in parables, was because of closed minds. They had made up their minds that Jesus was not worth listening to.

c. *Poor Bible study habits*

- i. Ignorance – Ephesians 4:18, their understanding darkened...because of the ignorance that is in them. Hosea 4:6, people destroyed for lack of knowledge.
1 John 4:1 – we are not to believe every spirit, but to test the spirits...
- ii. Busyness – sometimes people get so busy, they do not have OR do not take the time to learn the truth, to investigate something they do not understand. This could be the thorny ground in the parable of the sower (Matthew 13:22) where the word is choked out.
- iii. Failure to incorporate adequate time to study God's word - far too many (often because of busyness) just don't take time to study. They are not really interested in it.
Ephesians 5:16 calls for us to redeem the time – make wise use of your time. As a Christian, how much time do you set aside for personal spiritual growth (prayer, study, etc.)?
- iv. Listening to others rather than studying oneself. We have mentioned this already. It really can become a stumbling block. We need to make our faith OUR faith, not that of others.
NOTE: I am not saying that learning from others, especially the experienced, is not helpful. It is actually where you are going to start. And it is emphasized in scripture.
BUT will you do the homework and verify that what is said is the truth. Cf. Acts 17:11.

Thus, we can see in this lesson, that the Bible is understandable. And if ALL are willing to openly study and discuss God's word, we can come to an understanding of what God wants us to do to be united in doctrine.

Of course, this doesn't mean that everything is easy (cf. 2 Peter 3:16), nor does it mean that we will fully understand everything we would like to understand. BUT the point is, we CAN come to agreement on what God's word wants us to do, if we are honest and willing to do the work. So, what about you? How well do you understand His word?