

Can We Understand the Bible?

INTRODUCTION:

- I. In a previous lesson we talked about the problem of Biblical illiteracy – of people simply being ignorant of what the Bible teaches.
 - A. Biblical illiteracy is the result of being indifference or outright hostile toward the Word of God.
 1. It is not only a problem in the world around us, Biblical illiteracy is also a serious problem within the Lord's church.
 2. Until we solve the problem of Biblical illiteracy in our own lives it will be impossible to reach the lost.
 - a. We simply cannot teach what we don't know.
 3. Since we have talked about the importance of reading our Bibles, I want to spend some time in this lesson answering the question "Can We Understand the Bible."
- II. We all believe the Bible is the inspired Word of God.
 - A. However, simply believing the Bible is the Word of God does little good unless we take time to read the Bible.

1. Therefore, finding some quiet time every day to immerse ourselves in the Word of God is the first step toward wiping out Biblical illiteracy.
- B. But, simply reading the Bible has no lasting benefit unless we understand what we are reading.
1. The Bible was not written for entertainment or for the pure joy of learning about Biblical history.
 2. God intended for us to understand what we are reading, and then make application of those truths to our lives.
 - a. The reason why this is so important is because understanding the Bible will not only help us live holy, godly lives here, but will also help us lead others to a belief and understanding of God's Word.
- C. Unfortunately, the world is filled with those who admire and revere the Bible, but they believe no one can really understand the Bible.
1. They point to all the different churches with all their different beliefs and practices and say "There is your proof that no one can really understand the Bible!"
 2. Unfortunately, even some of our own brethren have come to believe this lie.
 - a. Some believe it's impossible to reach agreement on all the different doctrinal teachings in the Scriptures.

- b. Their way of handling doctrinal differences is to simply say, "Let's just agree to disagree."
 - c. Agreeing to disagree is not how we achieve unity. I prefer to disagree to agree to disagree!
- D. So this evening I want us to spend some time addressing this misconception about God's divinely inspired Word.
- 1. We'll start by showing the Bible can and must be understood.
 - 2. Then we'll look at steps we can take to understand the Scriptures, as well as traps to avoid that lead to misunderstanding or misapplying the Word of God.

BODY:

- I. Those who believe the Bible cannot be understood may be surprised to discover that the Bible says just the opposite.
 - A. The Old Testament was written so that it could be understood.
 - 1. Jesus expected people in His day to understand the Old Testament Scriptures. He repeatedly challenged the false teachings of the religious leaders of His day by asking: "*Have you not read?*"
 - a. When Jesus and His disciples were accused of breaking the Sabbath laws, Jesus replied:

(1). **Matthew 12:3-8** – "Have you not read what David did when he was hungry, he and those who were with him: 4 how he entered the house of God and ate the showbread which was not lawful for him to eat, nor for those who were with him, but only for the priests? 5 Or have you not read in the law that on the Sabbath the priests in the temple profane the Sabbath, and are blameless? 6 Yet I say to you that in this place there is One greater than the temple. 7 But if you had known what this means, 'I desire mercy and not sacrifice,' you would not have condemned the guiltless. 8 For the Son of Man is Lord even of the Sabbath."

b. When these same religious leaders (Pharisees) tried to entrap Jesus on the question of divorce, Jesus replied:

(1). **Matthew 19:4-6** – "Have you not read that He who made them at the beginning 'made them male and female,' 5 and said, 'For this reason a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh'? 6 So then, they are no longer two but one flesh. Therefore what God has joined together, let not man separate."

c. When the Sadducees tried to snare Jesus over the question of the resurrection – something they denied – Jesus replied:

(1). **Matthew 22:31-32** – *"But concerning the resurrection of the dead, have you not read what was spoken to you by God, saying, 32 'I am the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob'? God is not the God of the dead, but of the living."*

2. The apostle Paul also appealed to the Old Testament Scriptures on many occasions:

a. In Paul's efforts to prove Jesus was the Christ, we read:

(1). **Acts 17:2-3** – *Then Paul, as his custom was, went in to them, and for three Sabbaths reasoned with them from the Scriptures, 3 explaining and demonstrating that the Christ had to suffer and rise again from the dead, and saying, "This Jesus whom I preach to you is the Christ."*

b. In warning the Corinthians how God punished the rebellious Israelites, Paul wrote:

(1). **1 Corinthians 10:6-7, 11** – *Now these things became our examples, to the intent that we should not lust after evil things as they also lusted. 7 And do not become idolaters as were some of them. As it is written, "The people sat down to eat and drink, and rose up to play." . . . 11 Now*

all these things happened to them as examples, and they were written for our admonition, upon whom the ends of the ages have come.

c. Paul wrote the same thing to the church at Rome:

(1). **Romans 15:4** – *For whatever things were written before were written for our learning, that we through the patience and comfort of the Scriptures might have hope.*

d. Paul also reminded Timothy of the importance of the Old Testament Scriptures:

(1). **2 Timothy 3:14-15** – *But you must continue in the things which you have learned and been assured of, knowing from whom you have learned them, 15 and that from childhood you have known the Holy Scriptures, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus.*

3. Were there times when people needed help understanding the Old Testament Scriptures? Absolutely!

a. Jesus helped His disciples understand how the Old Testament Scriptures were fulfilled in Him:

(1). **Luke 24:27** – *And beginning at Moses and all the Prophets, He expounded to them in all the Scriptures the things concerning Himself.*

b. Philip helped the Ethiopian eunuch understand the Scriptures:

(1). **Acts 8:30-35** – *So Philip ran to him, and heard him reading the prophet Isaiah, and said, "Do you understand what you are reading?" 31 And he said, "How can I, unless someone guides me?" And he asked Philip to come up and sit with him. 32 The place in the Scripture which he read was this: "He was led as a sheep to the slaughter; and as a lamb before its shearer is silent, so He opened not His mouth. 33 In His humiliation His justice was taken away, and who will declare His generation? For His life is taken from the earth." 34 So the eunuch answered Philip and said, "I ask you, of whom does the prophet say this, of himself or of some other man?" 35 Then Philip opened his mouth, and beginning at this Scripture, preached Jesus to him.*

4. Why did these need help understanding of the Old Testament Scriptures?

- a. The Old Testament prophecies pointing to Christ and His spiritual kingdom were still cloaked in mystery in the early days of the church.
- b. However, when people were shown how those Scriptures were fulfilled in Jesus Christ, the mystery became clear.

B. What about the New Testament? Can we understand those writings?

1. The writers of the New Testament Scriptures expected their readers to understand the things they wrote.

a. Writing Theophilus, Luke said:

(1). **Luke 1:3-4** – . . .*it seemed good to me also, having had perfect understanding of all things from the very first, to write to you an orderly account, most excellent Theophilus, 4 that you may know the certainty of those things in which you were instructed.*

b. John said he wrote his gospel for the same reason:

(1). **John 20:30-31** – *And truly Jesus did many other signs in the presence of His disciples, which are not written in this book; 31 but these are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that believing you may have life in His name.*

c. The apostle Paul certainly expected his readers to understand the things he wrote:

(1). **2 Corinthians 1:13-14** – *For we are not writing any other things to you than what you read or understand. Now I trust you will understand, even to the end 14 (as also you have understood us in part), that we are your boast as you also are ours, in the day of the Lord Jesus.*

2. Even though the New Testament Scriptures were written to be understood, some of Paul's writings required diligent study to fully grasp the deep meaning.
 - a. Speaking of Apostle Paul's letters, Peter wrote:
 - (1). **2 Peter 3:15-16** – . . .*and consider that the longsuffering of our Lord is salvation — as also our beloved brother Paul, according to the wisdom given to him, has written to you, 16 as also in all his epistles, speaking in them of these things, in which are some things hard to understand, which untaught and unstable people twist to their own destruction, as they do also the rest of the Scriptures.*
3. Even though some Scriptures may be "*hard to understand*" they are not impossible to understand.
 - a. According to Peter, those who misunderstand the Scriptures are "*untaught and unstable.*"
 - b. Therefore, when "*untaught and unstable*" people teach, they frequently twist and pervert the Scriptures.
- C. So, let there be no mistake about it.
 1. The Bible, both the Old and New Testaments, was written to be understood.

2. And since God did His part in giving us a Bible that could be understood, it's now up to us to do our part and learn what it says.

II. God's expectations about learning and understanding His Word are found throughout the Scriptures.

A. Here are some things God expects us to do with the Word:

1. As new Christians we're told to desire it so we can grow spiritually:
 - a. **1 Peter 2:2** – . . .*as newborn babes, desire the pure milk of the word, that you may grow thereby.* . . .
2. God also expects us to continue growing:
 - a. **2 Peter 3:18** – . . .*but grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.*
3. We are expected to increase in knowledge – in our understanding:
 - a. **Colossians 1:10** – . . .*that you may walk worthy of the Lord, fully pleasing Him, being fruitful in every good work and increasing in the knowledge of God;*
4. We are also expected to reach a level of spiritual maturity where we can handle the "solid food" of the Word:
 - a. **Hebrews 5:12-14** – *For though by this time you ought to be teachers, you need someone to teach you again the first principles of the oracles of God; and you have come to need milk and not solid food. 13 For everyone who partakes only of*

milk is unskilled in the word of righteousness, for he is a babe.

14 But solid food belongs to those who are of full age, that is, those who by reason of use have their senses exercised to discern both good and evil.

- B. All this shows that the New Testament was also written to be understood – not all at once, but rather to be understood in stages.
 - 1. When we first come to Christ in obedience to the gospel, we learn to feed on the "*milk*" of the Word – simple, basis, first principles.
 - 2. But as we grow and mature spiritually, we are expected to be capable of digesting the "*solid food*" of the Word – the deeper, more complex principles taught in the Word, and how those principles should be applied.
 - 3. That means, there is "*milk*" suitable to help mature the new Christian, and there is "*solid food*" to help the spiritually mature to continue remaining strong and vibrant.

- III. However, God not only expect us to understand His will, He also expects us to understand it alike.
 - A. This means God expects us to all have the same understanding of His will so we can have unity among us as believers.
 - 1. Jesus prayed for unity among His followers:

- a. **John 17:20-21** – *"I do not pray for these alone, but also for those who will believe in Me through their word; 21 that they all may be one, as You, Father, are in Me, and I in You; that they also may be one in Us, that the world may believe that You sent Me."*
- b. The only way to achieve that oneness is for us to understand the Lord's will the same way.
2. This is why the apostles Paul demanded unity among believers:
 - a. **1 Corinthians 1:10** – *Now I plead with you, brethren, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that you all speak the same thing, and that there be no divisions among you, but that you be perfectly joined together in the same mind and in the same judgment.*
 - b. **Philippians 2:2** – *. . . fulfill my joy by being like-minded, having the same love, being of one accord, of one mind.*
3. Obviously, Jesus would not pray for unity, nor would Paul demand unity unless unity among all believers was achievable.
 - a. So, this means we can and must understand the Scriptures alike.
- B. So, why do some still have problems understanding the Scriptures? I believe the reason why people today do not understand the Scriptures is basically three-fold.

1. First, many make little or no effort to understand the Word of God.
 - a. They rarely read or study the Bible. Because of this, they are simply spiritually ignorant – they are Biblically Illiterate!
 - b. Unfortunately, people who rarely, if ever, read or study the Bible will continue to remain spiritually immature in their knowledge and understanding – and because they are gullible, they will believe anything that sounds good.
2. Second, some study for the wrong reasons, or with the wrong motives.
 - a. Some study only when they want to prove themselves right and others wrong.
 - b. For those who take this approach, their spiritual knowledge and understanding of the Scriptures will remain shallow at best.
 - c. At worst, those who only study to justify their beliefs run the highest risk of twisting, perverting and misapplying the Scriptures – twisting the Scriptures to make them say something God never intended.
3. And third, many never grow in their understanding and knowledge of the Scriptures because they simply don't use their God-given common sense.

- a. They don't look up words they don't understand; they don't define words in their proper context; or they don't consider everything else God has said on a given subject.
- b. This is typical of those who study just for the sake of learning.
- c. Unfortunately, they never concern themselves with making an application of God's Word to their own lives.

CONCLUSION:

- I. So, what conclusions can we reach when it comes to understanding the Bible?
 - A. The only conclusions we can reach are: we can and must understand the Bible, and we can and must understand it alike.
 1. The Bible was written so that everyone can learn something; whether children, truth-seekers, new Christians, or those who are spiritually mature.
 2. God's desire is that we not only know and understand the truth, but that we also be obedient to that truth.
 - a. **1 Timothy 2:3-5** – *For this is good and acceptable in the sight of God our Savior, 4 who desires all men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth.*
 3. Therefore, the question is not, "Do you understand the Bible?"

4. The question is, "Will you obey what it teaches?"