

Foundational Doctrines: We Can Understand The Bible Alike

INTRODUCTION:

1. Have you ever been in a serious bible discussion only to have it completely derailed by the words, “We cannot understand the Bible alike,” or “You have your understanding and I have mine.”
2. If you are like me this response is frustrating because we want people to look at the scriptures, and also difficult to grasp considering the many things the Bible presents that say differently.
3. Yet, we must show compassion, seeing it is both a natural outgrowth of denominationalism and is something they hear taught, even praised, regularly in their congregation.
4. So today I would like to return to our study of Foundational Doctrines and examine the nature of God’s revelation, the Bible, and how we can understand it alike.
 - A. To do this I will discuss how the Bible states that we can understand it, the purpose of revelation, how we can know the truth, and some miscellaneous arguments and considerations that all point to the truth that we can have a common understanding of the Bible.
 - B. Hopefully in doing so we can better appreciate the power of God’s word and approach our interactions with other with more confidence for the Lord.

BODY:

I. Understanding the Bible:

- A. Our ability to understand God’s word is a “given.”
 1. Israel was taught God’s Law to understand (Nehemiah 8:2-3 – “Then Ezra the priest brought the law before the assembly of men, women and all who could **listen with understanding**, on the first day of the seventh month. ³ He read from it before the square which was in front of the Water Gate from early morning until midday, in the presence of men and women, those **who could understand**; and all the people were attentive to the book of the law.”).
 - a. There comes an age where it is accepted that we can hear and understand the word.
 - b. The Scriptures were read to those people, the meaning given by Ezra, and the people understood (8:8 – “They read from the book, from the Law of God, clearly, and they gave the sense, so that the people understood the reading.” – ESV).
 2. Paul states that we understand the scriptures by reading (Eph. 3:2-4 – “if indeed you have heard of the stewardship of God’s grace which was given to me for you; ³ that by revelation there was made known to me the mystery, as I wrote before in brief. ⁴ By referring to this, **when you read you can understand** my insight into the mystery of Christ”).
 - a. If we cannot understand the bible, as some claim, then His will is still a mystery and Paul’s stewardship has failed!
 - b. But Paul says God’s will has been revealed and we can understand it by *reading* it.
 3. God demands we understand His will (Ephesians 5:15-17 – “Therefore be careful how you walk, not as unwise men but as **wise**, ¹⁶ making the most of your time, because the days are evil. ¹⁷ So then do not be foolish, but **understand** what the will of the Lord is.”).
 - a. God demands that we live in wisdom; and wisdom requires understanding His will.
 - b. Has God commanded that which is completely impossible?
- B. That we can *understand* God word, or will, necessarily implies that we *can understand it alike*.
 1. In other words, I do not believe we can *understand* it differently.
 2. If communication is possible so that words can be understood, then a common understanding of those words is possible.
 - a. If *math* can be communicated and students understand $2+2=$, they are all expected to understand that the answer is 4.
 - b. If *history* can be communicated and the truth about George Washington is taught, then students would be expected to know that He and no other person was our first president!
 - c. If *chemistry* can be communicated, then teachers expect their students to understand that the combination of certain chemicals and actions will always produce an explosion!
 - i. If students come to a different understanding, they will face an explosion!
 - ii. Different conclusions come not from understanding the teacher differently, but from *misunderstanding*, or not hearing the teaching, or ignoring the teacher!

3. If communication of God's word is possible, a common understanding is possible.
 - a. For instance, in Ephesians 3 when Paul said we can understand his insight into the mystery of Christ by reading what he wrote, he then explains that this mystery involves how "the Gentiles are fellow heirs and fellow members of the body, and fellow partakers of the promise in Christ Jesus through the gospel" (3:6).
 - i. If one reads these words and believes them to teach that only Jews are heirs in Christ, have they understood these words? Of course not!
 - ii. You can't have opposing doctrine/practice from the same scripture and claim everyone has understood that scripture!
 - b. Jesus' discussion concerning the Pharisees' and Sadducees' doctrine (Mt. 16:5-12).
 - i. Jesus' warning about "the leaven of the Pharisees and Sadducees" resulted in the disciples concluding that He addressed how they "did not bring any bread" (16:5-7).
 - ii. Jesus, however, rebuked them and said they were wrong (16:8-11).
 - 1) Despite this great opportunity given Jesus to praise how they had all understood His word differently, as people do today, He did not do so!
 - 2) Instead, Jesus rejected their wrong conclusion and stated that their problem was that *they did not understand* (16:9, 11) and *corrected* them (16:11).
 - iii. Based on Christ's rebuke and teaching, they all *understood*. And when they all understood, they understood it alike, or all came to the *same conclusion* (16:12).
 - c. So, to understand the message of Christ requires that we understand it alike!

II. The word's *purpose* demands a common understanding

- A. God revealed His word through the apostles so that all can *know the truth* (1 Cor. 2:7-13).
 1. The apostles:
 - a. Preached a wisdom hidden which God revealed to them through the Spirit (2:7-10).
 - b. This wisdom had to be *revealed* because man cannot know it any other way (2:11).
 - c. The Spirit revealed these things to the apostles that all might "**know** the things freely given to us by God," which in turn they preached (2:12-13).
 - d. So, revelation come so people could *know* the truth.
 2. That we can *know God's will, the truth*, means that we *know/understand the same things*.
 - a. Consider Paul's warning (1 Tim. 4:1-5 – "But the Spirit explicitly says that in later times some will fall away from the faith, paying attention to deceitful spirits and doctrines of demons,² by means of the hypocrisy of liars seared in their own conscience as with a branding iron,³ men who forbid marriage and advocate abstaining from foods which God has created to be gratefully shared in by those who **believe and know the truth**.⁴ For everything created by God is good, and nothing is to be rejected if it is received with gratitude;⁵ for it is **sanctified** by means of the **word of God** and **prayer**.").
 - b. Paul confirms one can *fall away from the faith* by listening to false doctrine taught in hypocrisy by liars with seared consciences (4:1-3a).
 - i. They teach one cannot marry and must abstain from certain foods (4:3a).
 - ii. These are the very things people today would call *doctrine* and claim freedom to "understand them differently"!
 - c. God says they are *lying* and in contradiction to His will because He created marriage and food is to be "gratefully shared in by those who **believe and know the truth**" (4:3b-5).
 - i. When one knows the truth, one knows what God has created is good and not to be rejected if received in gratitude because it is sanctified by God's word and prayer!
 - ii. So, if one teaches marriage and eating certain foods is evil, does that one know the truth? Of course not, seeing knowing the truth means the very opposite!
 - B. God's word is to reprove and correct (2 Tim. 3:16-17 – "All Scripture is inspired by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training in righteousness;¹⁷ so that the man of God may be adequate, equipped for every good work.").
1. Defined:
 - a. Reproof – "conviction...for convicting one of his sinfulness" (*Thayer*).

- b. Correction – “restoration to an upright or right state; correction, improvement of life or character” (*Thayer*, p. 228).
- 2. Without a common understanding of scripture, reproof and correction are not possible.
 - a. If it is God’s design that everyone understands the word differently...
 - i. How could use the scriptures to convict or correct someone of their sinfulness and restore them, seeing they could rightfully reply, “I understand it differently.”
 - ii. Or how could you every truly know if someone needed reproof or correction, or keep the church clean as commanded in 1 Corinthians 5?
 - b. If a common understanding is not possible, not only could we never collectively know what sin it, we could never be unified on what is an upright state in Christ.
- 3. Christians did *correct* others (Acts 18:24-26 – “Now a Jew named Apollos, an Alexandrian by birth, an eloquent man, came to Ephesus; and he was mighty in the Scriptures. ²⁵ This man had been instructed in the way of the Lord; and being fervent in spirit, he was speaking and teaching accurately the things concerning Jesus, being acquainted only with the baptism of John; ²⁶ and he began to speak out boldly in the synagogue. But when Priscilla and Aquila heard him, they took him aside and explained to him the way of God more accurately.”).
 - a. Baptism is a doctrine people claim liberty in determining its meaning and value.
 - b. Yet, here there was only one accurate way and the error was corrected!
 - c. Cite Gal. 2:11 – “But when Cephas came to Antioch, I opposed him to his face, because he stood condemned.”
- 4. So, we must conclude that *reproof* and *correction* imply we can understand the bible alike!

III. What is needed for people to understand the Bible alike?

- A. Honest and good hearts (Luke 8:15 – “But the *seed* in the good soil, these are the ones who have heard the word in an honest and good heart, and hold it fast, and bear fruit with perseverance.”).
 - 1. People must be willing to listen with honesty and consider what it says.
 - 2. One cannot study to justify one’s beliefs but must trust in the power of the word to lead one to the truth.
- B. Proper attitudes toward the scriptures and its authority (1 Corinthians 4:6 – “Now these things, brethren, I have figuratively applied to myself and Apollos for your sakes, so that in us you may learn not to exceed what is written, so that no one of you will become arrogant in behalf of one against the other.”).
 - 1. Much of the misunderstanding and division that exists over the word of God is not based upon what it says, but what it does not say.
 - 2. Lenski’s commentary and I:
 - a. Basically agree about what the bible teaches about elders: “The arrangement of having several elders or overseers in a congregation was an adoption of the system that was followed in the Jewish synagogues. Yet the Christian office was a divine institution, and its ideal became “to labor in the Word and doctrine” (1 Tim. 5:17).
 - b. Disagree about how to deal with what it does not say: “What we call church government, the organization of many congregations under one overseer or bishop, developed at a later time, not *jure divino*, but *jure humano*, and was a product of **Christian liberty**, and the offices were by human appointment only.” (*Interpretation of Philippians*, p. 702).
 - 3. Until all agree that the scriptures, not man, are the authority and that they cannot be added to or taken from, there will never be unity in the Scriptures!
- C. Diligence in their efforts to find the truth.
 - 1. 2 Tim. 2:15 – “Be diligent to present yourself approved to God as a workman who does not need to be ashamed, accurately handling the word of truth.”
 - 2. Acts 17:11 – “Now these Jews were more noble than those in Thessalonica; they received the word with all eagerness, examining the Scriptures daily to see if these things were so.” (ESV)
 - 3. Refusal to learn lead to destruction (2 Pet. 3:16).
- D. Willingness to accept all that God says upon a subject (Psalms 119:160 - “The sum of Your word is truth, and every one of Your righteous ordinances is everlasting”).

1. Example: Matthew 7:7 says, “Ask, and it will be given to you,” but that is not all God says.
 2. God also says we must ask in faith (James 1:6) and according to God’s will (1 John 5:14).
- E. Willingness to *reject* any interpretation of scripture that contradicts the plain teaching of other scripture (Matthew 4:5-7 – “Then the devil took Him into the holy city and had Him stand on the pinnacle of the temple, ⁶ and said to Him, “If You are the Son of God, throw yourself down; for it is written, ‘He will command His angels concerning You’; and ‘On their hands they will bear You up, so that You will not strike Your foot against a stone.’” ⁷ Jesus said to him, “On the other hand, it is written, ‘You shall not put the Lord your God to the test.’”).
1. T have a verse that can be quoted to support your position does not mean it does so.
 2. Any interpretation of one scripture must not contradict the plain teaching of another.

CONCLUSION:

1. Surely from these things we can rightfully conclude that God desires for us to have a common understanding of His word and a common understanding is possible.
2. With that in mind we should approach the world with the gospel in confidence that it has the power to lead us all to the truth that brings freedom from sin and hope of eternal life.
3. If you are not a Christian, will you come to Christ in F-R-C-Bp?