



“Why Do We Not See the Bible Alike?”

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I am so very blessed to be with you today and to be given a few moments of your precious time to talk with you about the word of God. Speaking of the word of God, why do we have such a hard time agreeing about what it says? It seems like there is no end to the explanations that people put forth about even some of the plainest passages. Is the Bible even meant to be understood? If so, can we ever understand it alike? Should we simply accept the fact that people are very much divided over what the Bible teaches and leave it at that? Or does God want us all to have the same understanding of what is written in His word?

II Peter 1:19-20 “And so we have the prophetic word confirmed, which you do well to heed as a light that shines in a dark place, until the day dawns and the morning star rises in your hearts; know-ing this first, that no prophecy of Scripture is of any private interpretation,”

We’re going to look at what Peter is telling us in this passage and how it relates to the common notion that folks have that there are many ways to understand and interpret the scriptures.

The religious world is filled with numerous churches and organizations that claim to follow the Bible. Even though the Bible is being increasingly dismissed by some who claim to believe in and worship God, the majority of the religious world claims to follow at least some part of the Bible. But if that’s the case, why are there so many conflicting bodies? Why do we have denominations and warring sects and factions? For most of the two centuries since the scriptures were penned and the church was established, apparently sincere people have disagreed over what the scriptures teach. Does God intend for this to be the case? Did hundreds of churches and denominations come from this same book? Imagine, if you will, an army commander giving orders to his troops. They listen to the orders, then immediately go out and break up into a hundred companies and begin fighting—not the enemy, but each other. We would certainly conclude that, somewhere, there was a major breakdown in communication. In the same way, Christ (our Commander) gives us His word and we break into hundreds of warring and divided groups, fighting each other instead of the enemy. Something is surely

wrong somewhere. Surely the Lord did not deliver His word to His people only to have His people draw all kinds of different, conflicting conclusions about what He said.

So, what should we conclude about all of this? Why do we not see the Bible alike? Let's begin by asking, whose fault is it that there is so much division over the Bible? Every time some kind of communication takes place, there are three things involved: the source, the message itself, and the receiver or recipient of the message. If you write a letter or send an email to a friend, you are the source. What you write is the message, and your friend is the receiver. We're communicating now through the mediums of television, radio, and internet. In this case, I am the source of the words that you are hearing. The sermon is the message that I am trying to send. And you are the recipient as you sit and watch or listen.

The same thing is true with the message of God.

II Timothy 3:16-17 "All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, thoroughly equipped for every good work."

That word *inspiration* means *breath*. *All scripture is the breath of God*. It came from God's mouth, in other words. The Bible came from God, through inspiration of the Holy Spirit. God is the source of the Bible message. It came to those who wrote it down by inspiration of God's Spirit. The word itself, therefore, is the message that God has sent into the world, and we are on the receiving end of that message. If there is a breakdown in communication between God and us, it has to lie in one of these three areas: either in God, in His word, or in us. It's as simple as that. The problem is in one of these three areas, so which one is it?

Is it God's fault when we fail to understand His revelation alike, and that results in us dividing into different churches? We need to establish the fact that God is the source of all truth—not man—and that Christ affirmed the fact that God's truth has been expressed through His word. You may recall that Jesus prayed, ***Sanctify them through Thy truth. Thy word is truth (John 17:17)***. Jesus also said that truth is knowable.

John 8:32 "And you shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free."

Truth cannot contradict itself and still be truth. That's axiomatic. This means that God's revelation has unity if God Himself is true. God cannot lie.

Titus 1:2 "in hope of eternal life which God, who cannot lie, promised before time began,"

God cannot say one thing that is true, then turn around and say something that contradicts it. When the Bible is studied logically and thoroughly, those things which some allege to be contradictions can be reconciled. So, if God is the source of all truth and what He says is always true, then misunderstanding His word cannot be the result of God saying different and conflicting things.

Well then, could it be that God's words are just so deep and mysterious that we can never really understand them? Did God speak in riddles? The pagan gods that men have created throughout history have always been shrouded in mystery and their supposed will has to be discerned through interpreting nature or mystical signs of some kind. This is not the case with the true and living God. God does not tantalize men by giving some cryptic message that must be decoded through some special power or only

by an elite class of those with a powerful enough intellect. The Bible teaches that God's word both saves and condemns. It saves those who submit to it, and it condemns those who do not obey it. Are we really to suppose that God gave us a message so convoluted and mysterious that it's just as likely to destroy us as to save us? Surely not!

Yes, there are things about God that we can never understand because He is God and we are human. He is infinite, we are finite. He is all-knowing, all-powerful, ever-present, and eternal. We, on the other hand, are limited by the bounds of human understanding, which is far inferior to divine understanding. Our existence and experience right now is confined to time and space. But since God created time and space, He is outside, above, and beyond it. There are things about God that we cannot understand and there are things that God has chosen *not* to reveal to us.

Deuteronomy 29:29 **"The secret things belong to the LORD our God, but those things which are revealed belong to us and to our children forever, that we may do all the words of this law."**

While there are many things that we don't know about God because He has not revealed them, He HAS revealed His law and His will to us in His word, *that we may do all the words of this law*, as Moses said. I submit to you that God has revealed what our duty to Him is in His word. Wouldn't it be cruel of God to give us a duty to do, but then wrap it in such mystery that we cannot know it? When we misunderstand the teachings of God's word, the Bible, it is certainly not the fault of God, the author of the Bible. So, if it's not the fault of the source, God, is it then the fault of the message? Is it the Bible's fault that we don't agree on its teaching? Is it written in such a way that we just cannot understand it? Remember that God is truth and therefore, everything He said is true. So, what then is the Bible? Is it not truth? Does it not claim to be truth? Some will point out that the Bible is really a collection of writings by various men over about 1,500 years. Yes, but all of those men were guided by the Holy Spirit as they wrote. Remember what Paul said:

II Timothy 3:16 **"All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness,"**

Let's look back at a verse from our text passage.

II Peter 1:16 **"For we did not follow cunningly devised fables when we made known to you the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, but were eyewitnesses of His majesty."**

The apostles were not only with Christ during His time on earth, but they like the prophets of the Old Testament, were used by the Holy Spirit to reveal the words of God to all of the rest of us.

II Peter 1:19-21 **"And so we have the prophetic word confirmed, which you do well to heed as a light that shines in a dark place, until the day dawns and the morning star rises in your hearts; know-ing this first, that no prophecy of Scripture is of any private interpretation, for prophecy never came by the will of man, but holy men of God spoke as they were moved by the Holy Spirit."**

No prophecy of the scripture is of any private interpretation literally means that *no prophet of God ever spoke of his own ideas*. In other words, the prophecies of the Bible are not a collection of various men's thoughts about the matter. Rather, Peter goes on to explain that ***prophecy never came by the***

will of man, but holy men of God spoke as they were moved by the Holy Spirit. That word *moved* in the original language means that those men were *picked up and borne along*, like a prevailing wind might carry a ship along on the surface of the water. This is how the Holy Spirit operated in and through the apostles to bring us the word. The Holy Spirit orchestrated and superintended the writings of all sacred scripture. All of the contents of Holy writ, therefore, are ultimately from one source. Yes, revealed to and written through the hands of forty-some men, but ultimately from one source, and that is the mind of God revealed through the Holy Spirit, who inspired men in the past to write those things down.

I Corinthians 2:13 “These things we also speak, not in words which man's wisdom teaches but which the Holy Spirit teaches, comparing spiritual things with spiritual.”

God used the words of His choosing to make known His mind and will to us.

Ephesians 3:3-4 “how that by revelation He made known to me the mystery (as I have briefly written already, by which, when you read, you may understand my knowledge in the mystery of Christ),”

Ephesians 5:17 “Therefore do not be unwise, but understand what the will of the Lord is.”

So, the will of the Lord can be understood. The Bible is the revealed mind of God. The Holy Spirit gave it to the men who wrote it down, and they wrote it in a way that we can understand it and live according to it. To suggest that the Bible is so complex, ambiguous, and convoluted that we may not mutually come to an understanding of its teachings as they apply to our lives is simply false. When you get right down to it, whether we intend for it to be or not, it is blasphemy against the word of God to suggest such. Again, it would be very cruel for God to give us a book to guide us but make that book so that people cannot know what it means.

So, the problem is not with God, the source. The problem is not with God's message, the Bible. That only leaves one culprit, the recipients. Surely, we are to blame for the division that exists in religion today. The fact is that men and women *misinterpret* the scriptures. We sometimes hear folks say, *we just understand the Bible differently*. That's a misnomer. Truly, it is impossible to understand the Bible differently. It may be that all of us fail to understand it, but we cannot all be understanding it while arriving at different conclusions about its meaning.

Let's say a math teacher is teaching a class and she has her students work out the problem “5x5” on a piece of paper. When she begins going around the room asking for the correct answer, one of the students says that the answer is 25. The next student says that he came up with 0 and another says that the answer is 10. Did they all understand the problem? Suppose the student who said the answer was 0 says that he understood that he was to subtract 5 from 5, and that equals 0. Would the teacher allow for that student's understanding? Perhaps some other teacher before taught him addition and subtraction, but not multiplication. Should this teacher just say, *well, that's your experience. That's the background from which you come and that's what you decided when you saw the problem, so who am I to correct it?* Of course not. She would lose her job if that's how she approached that situation. She would say, *you misunderstood the problem*. The same is true of the third student who apparently added 5 and 5 and got 10. Both of these students did not have their own understanding of math; they misunderstood the teacher's requirement.

Our country has a Constitution and laws that are to be passed in compliance with that Constitution. While we sometimes get into complex situations where we have to carefully consider the background and context in which the framers wrote those words in order to determine the meaning of those words, the fact is the framers had a meaning when they wrote those words, and we today are constrained to live within the boundaries of that Constitution. What if I break the law and in my appeal to the judge, I say that I have my own understanding of the Constitution and how that law should be applied. Would the judge simply accept that and dismiss the case? Of course not. A process would begin to try to determine, perhaps, what the Constitution does actually say. Such a process may work its way all the way up to the Supreme Court, but that process will be carried out. The matter will not just simply be dismissed as “the defendant just has a different interpretation or understanding of the Constitution.” The Republic would fall apart if we treated the law that way.

So it is with the kingdom of heaven. Some matters may take more diligent study than others, but God’s word has meaning. God’s word has original meaning and we must strive to understand that meaning and not simply dismiss the differences that divide the religious world under the guise that ‘we all have our own understanding.’ Truth be told, we have so much division over the Bible today for many reasons, which all reflect upon us and not upon God or His word. Many don’t learn to study the Bible, and if you don’t learn to establish what the Bible is, when, where, how, and why it was written, if you don’t work to understand the framework and arrangement of it—and you can come to understand those things—you’ll be likely to misunderstand and, consequently, misuse the Bible. It is attainable to understand these things, but we must put the effort into understanding them and applying basic logical principles of interpreting human language.

Many approach the Bible with prejudice to the point of using the Bible to justify their practice or belief as opposed to allowing the Bible to establish their practice and belief. Many have a vested interest in error. They agree with the Bible so far as it agrees with their creed, instead of the other way around. Prejudice blinded the Jews of the first century to the claims of Christ. The Old Testament scriptures were replete with hundreds of prophecies, types, and symbols that ALL pointed to Jesus Christ of the first century. He came and fulfilled ALL of them. But they had formed a conception in their minds of what the Messiah would be like that had evolved over time and was based on their tradition and on the geopolitical situation they found themselves in at the time when He was born. When Jesus did not come matching their presupposed picture of what the Messiah would be, they rejected Him and crucified Him. Perhaps you have an image of Christ or of the Church of the Lord Jesus Christ and what it means to be a Christian that has been formed by tradition, family, culture, or emotional preference instead of from God’s word. This is what leads us to misunderstand the teachings of our Savior. The word of God CAN bring unity to those who will be pure in heart and will accept the scriptures as God’s one and all-sufficient revelation, and who will believe and follow it—nothing more and nothing less. May God give each and every one of us today the wisdom and the courage to do just that.

Psalm 119:130 “The entrance of Your words gives light; It gives understanding to the simple.”

The key to understanding the Bible is first opening our hearts to whatever it has to say to us. Only when we come to the word of God with that humble attitude will we begin to understand and then live by its precepts. With that open heart, we can begin to apply the proper principles of Bible study and learn its great truths which God does intend for us to know and understand in order to transform our lives. Not only that, but to also unify His people. Unity IS possible in the religious world today, but you cannot wait for everyone else to strive for it. It must begin with you and it must begin with me, laying aside our own ideas and prejudices and our own wants and wishes, and taking the Bible alone as our sole authority in

faith and practice. We'd love for you to strike hands and hearts with us in our desire to simply be Christians—nothing more and nothing less. We do that by following the Bible—nothing more and nothing less.

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