

The Old Hickory Bulletin

Old Hickory Church of Christ

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Can We Understand the Bible?

Many think of the Bible as a mystical book of dark sayings, which cannot be understood by the common people. The most simple passage becomes a deep mystery to some for various reasons. If a Bible passage contradicts a much-loved false doctrine of man its advocates may dismiss the passage by saying, "We cannot understand it," or by other illogical statements. For example, when Acts 2:38 is quoted or read without comment to prove that baptism is for the remission of sins, some say "I do not see it that way" or "that is only your interpretation." Such statements have led many to believe that the Bible cannot be understood because men differ religiously.

It is erroneous to think that men cannot understand the Bible because some do not understand it. Furthermore, it is absurd to say we cannot understand any of it because we do not perfectly understand all of it. I admit there are some things hard to understand. "And account that the longsuffering of our Lord is salvation, even as our beloved brother Paul also according to the wisdom given unto him hath written unto you: as also in all his epistles, speaking in them of these things; in which are some things hard to be understood, which they that are unlearned and unstable wrest, as they do also the other scriptures, unto their own destruction." (2 Peter 3:15-16.) Notice that some things, not all, are hard to understand, but not impossible. These hard things simply require more study and effort to understand.

Sometimes Roman Catholics and Protestants assert that ordinary men of average learning are not capable of understanding the Bible, and consequently a specially trained priest or preacher is essential to explain what God said. The idea that we cannot understand what God, Christ and the Spirit-guided apostles said in the Bible but can understand an uninspired man's explanation of what they said is utterly ridiculous. Are these educated preachers and priests more intelligent, more capable of speaking clear

understandable statements than God, Christ and the Spirit-guided apostles? To assert such is to elevate man above God. It is true that we can assist each other in study by pointing out what the Bible says and discussing it, but I deny that it is necessary to have man's explanation.

God promised the Holy Spirit to guide the apostles into all truth, speaking to and through them, revealing the will of God to man. (John 16:13.) These men spoke as the Spirit gave them utterance. (Acts 2:1-4.) They did not choose and use words of man's wisdom, but words that the Spirit taught. (1 Cor. 2:13.) Thousands understood these words without having an intermediate interpreter to explain the apostles' preaching and letters. We now have those same words from the same apostles in the Bible, and we can understand now what thousands understood then.

The apostle Paul wrote, "If ye have heard of the dispensation of the grace of God, which is given me to you-ward: how that by revelation he made known unto me the mystery; (as I wrote afore in few words, whereby, when ye read, ye may understand my knowledge in the mystery of Christ) which in other ages was not made known unto the sons of men, as it is now revealed unto his holy apostles and prophets by the Spirit." (Eph. 3:2-5.) To say one cannot understand what was written is to deny this passage and charge God with inability to give the word an understandable message.

God's commands have always been and still are simple and easy to be understood. I challenge anyone to name one command of God that men cannot easily understand. Every command necessary for one to become and remain a faithful Christian in order to be saved in heaven is so clear that no honest soul who seeks the truth can possibly misunderstand. Read the following list of God's requirements to become a Christian and observe the simplicity of the gospel.

One must believe in God (Heb. 11:6), believe in Christ (John 8:24), repent of sins (Luke 13:3), confess Christ (Matt. 10:32, 33, Rom. 10:10), and be buried in baptism for the remission of sins. (Rom. 6:4; Acts 2:38.) The many cases of conversions recorded in the Bible prove that multitudes clearly understood God's plan. It is still being understood and obeyed by multitudes.

Man's failure to obey God is not caused by the impossibility of understanding the Bible, but by a failure to read and believe it. Many are willingly ignorant of God's truth because their way of life, fulfilling the lust of the eyes, the lust of the flesh and the pride of life, demands freedom from God's restraining and condemning laws. They want to practice sin without a painful conscience, so they quit reading rather than cease sinning.

This reminds me of the smoker who became greatly disturbed in reading about the relation of smoking to cancer. He quit -- reading!

Dear reader, be not deceived. You can clearly understand what you must do to be saved and keep saved, for God's commandments are not mysteries. I earnestly urge you to study, believe and obey the Bible, for the truth shall make you free. (John 8:32.)

- Earl Fly, Truth Magazine, May, 1962 [edited]

Strength In Unity

I grew up in the Clearwater-Florida area where we had quite a few hurricane-related storms. I can still remember one such night in my youth when my friend Bill and I went out during a particular tempest in order to investigate the damages and disarray it was causing. It was a most exhilarating night to say the least.

The sky was dark and threatening, and many tree limbs had been snapped in two by the strong gales that ripped them apart relentlessly and scattered them about with the rest of the debris that was cluttering the streets and yards. Violently, the wind howled; and many a tree was tested of its pliability. The palm trees were swaying frantically; and huge pine trees appeared as if they were trying to run from the oncoming danger, but could only move their upper portions because their "legs" had frozen from the panic.

We had circled on foot a wide area during this riveting observation; and as we began to head back, we came near a rather large condominium -- the Mease Manor. From an aerial view, its backside shape would appear somewhere between a "V" and a flat line: perhaps close to the same degree of a typical boomerang.

Little did I realize, as we walked past the front side of this building, that the back of it was serving as a huge scoop that caught the mighty winds and redirected them in a strongly concentrated turbulent path that we were soon to walk into unaware.

The unexpected encounter of this intense wind made it necessary for me to grab on to a nearby pole in order to stabilize myself. The wind's velocity felt to be at its strongest point at this area, but perhaps that was because it had become such a concentrated force.

In retrospect, one lesson I can derive from this absorbing experience is the importance and power in a concerted effort. Just like the mighty winds which were made stronger through a concentrated force, unity can serve to increase the strength of God's people today -- and that's not just a lot of wind!

The old wise man once gave his boys a bundle of sticks in order to illustrate a valuable lesson. Having given this bundle to the first son, the father asked him to break it. This he tried with all his might, but to no avail. The bundle was passed on, and each son strenuously attempted to accomplish his father's request, but none of them could do so. Finally, the father took the bundle, untied the cord that had bound the sticks together, and began breaking each one individually. What was the lesson he was trying to instill within his sons? That there is **STRENGTH IN UNITY**. If his sons would learn to always remain united and not become divided -- to be there for each other, to provide moral support when any of them grows weak -- their own strength would be greatly increased.

Solomon writes: "Two are better than one because they have a good return for their labor, for if either of them falls, the one will lift up his companion. But woe to the one who falls when there is not another to lift him up.... And if one prevail against him, two shall withstand him; and a threefold cord is not quickly broken" (Eccl. 4:9,10,12).

Yes, there is strength in unity; but let us be sure we are becoming united with the right cause. What more noble and needed pursuit could there be today than for the people of the world to become united in the peace and love which God's word has to offer? To be united in the faith and to be of one mind when it comes to the Scriptures is certainly the desire and the prayer of Jesus Christ for each of us. Unity in spiritual matters is not only possible, but also commanded (Phil. 2:2; John 17:20-23; 1 Cor. 1:10-13). May we ever strive to increase our strength by this means.

- Tom Edwards

Questionable Indulgences

"I think a Christian can go anywhere," said a young woman, who was defending her continued attendance at a very doubtful place of amusement.

"Certainly she can," rejoined her friend, "but I am reminded of a little incident that happened last summer when I went with a group of friends to explore a coal mine. One of the young ladies appeared dressed in a dainty white gown.

"Can't I wear a white dress down into the mine?" she asked petulantly.

"Yes'm," returned the old miner who was to lead the party. "There's nothing to keep you from wearin' a white frock down into the mine, but there'll be considerable to keep you from wearin' one back."

"Nuff said?" "Nuff said."

- via The Instructor, April, 1971

- > "Being at peace with yourself is a direct result of finding peace with God!"
 - > "The trouble with most of us is that we would rather be ruined by praise than saved by criticism!"
 - > "A skeptic is a person who, when he sees the handwriting on the wall, claims it is a forgery!"
 - > "Swallowing angry words before you say them is better than having to eat them afterwards!"
 - > "For peace of mind resign as general manager of the universe!"
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THIS WEEK'S LESSONS: Sunday morning: "*Of What Use Is The Old Testament?*" (Text: Rom. 15:4); Sunday evening: "*The Witness: John!*" (Text: John 1:6-13).