

LET THE BIBLE SPEAK SERIES

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Why We Don't Understand The Bible Alike

Acts 8:26-31

There are two things evident from the reading in Acts. First, it is possible to understand the truth. Second, it is possible to misunderstand the truth. The man from Ethiopia was asked by Philip "do you understand what you are reading? Unfortunately today, many do not understand the bible. In fact many do not think that is possible. The divided state of the current religious world is evidence that people just don't understand the bible.

We are told in scripture that there is "one Lord, one faith, etc. (Ephesians 4:1-4). Jesus prayed that we all might be one in John 17:20-21, and Paul commanded that there be no division in the church in 1Corinthians 1:10-13. That being the case, why does this state of misunderstanding exist? There are, perhaps, a number of reasons, among them:

I. Because of different attitudes toward the bible.

One major cause of religious division is the way people view the bible. Some believe that it cannot be understood. Jesus, however, plainly taught that "not everyone that saith unto me Lord, Lord shall enter into the kingdom of heaven but he that doeth the will of my father which is in heaven" Matthew 7:21. We learn from this passage that it is possible to understand the will of God. If it is impossible for us to understand the will of God, then it is impossible for us to be saved. That cannot be true.

Some believe that God never intended for us to understand the bible. If so, then why did he give it? Would God be just if he gave us a book that we could not understand and then condemn us for not understanding and obeying it? It is a shame when some religious organizations actually teach that the bible is not to be read by the masses. That others must read and interpret it for everyone else. That destroys individual responsibility.

Some believe that the bible is not to be understood alike. If this is so, it would make God a respecter of persons. If he saved some one way and others another way, who could know which way was right?

II. Because of the influence of parents.

Another cause of religious disagreement is the fact that children are often inclined to follow their parents. In standards of courtship, ideals, morals, work ethic, etc. children often consider their parents out of date. They are not willing to dress or travel, like their parents, but often blindly follow them in religious matters. The scriptures teach that "everyone of us shall give account of himself to God" Romans 14:12. We are personally responsible for our actions and therefore cannot blindly rely on what our parents believed. What if our parents didn't believe in Jesus as the Son of God? Would you be willing to believe that just because of your parents? Surely not.

III. Because of the Creeds of men.

As long as men write different creeds and teach them, people will not see the bible alike. The creeds of men must be discarded. They are of man, not of God. They are not parallel to the bible. One is inspired of God, the other is not. See 1 Timothy 3:16-17

IV. Because of different rules of bible study.

People do not understand the bible alike because they follow different rules of bible study. Some think that any practice in religion is right, unless the bible specifically forbids it. Others practice in religion only what is authorized in the scriptures. Being governed by these two rules leads those who follow them to vastly different conclusions. For example those who believe we may do anything that is not specifically forbidden may justify sprinkling infants, counting beads, using instrumental music in worship because none of these are condemned by name. This rule would permit anything so long as the bible does not say "thou shalt not to it." We must remember that there are many things wrong, even though the bible does not specifically mention them by name. Therefore we must follow the rule that causes us to walk by faith and do only those things that are authorized. Faith comes by hearing the word of God Romans 10:17. Whatever we do in word or deed, we must do all in the name or by the authority of the Lord Colossians 3:17.

V. Because the bible is not rightly divided by all.

We often fail to understand the bible alike, because we do not properly divide the bible. There is a right way and a wrong way. Those who recognize no divisions in the bible make a serious mistake. The word of God is separated into three great divisions.

1. The patriarchal period which embraces the first 2500 years of time was represented by a family religion. During this time frame God instructions were given orally to the head of the family.
2. The Mosaic period represented a national religion in which God dealt with His people the Jews. This period lasted for about 1500 years. During this period God gave the first written law to His people. The ten commandments 1 Kings 8:9.
3. The Christian period is an international or universal religion and will last until Jesus comes again. During this time frame God speaks to us through His Son Jesus Christ. Hebrews 1:1-2

To fail to recognize these time divisions and the instructions that apply to each, has been the cause of much religious division and misunderstanding.

VI. Because no common authority is accepted.

Some accept creeds, others feelings, and still others follow their conscience, while others accept only the word of God as authority in religion. Because of this people have been unable to unite in religion. It is interesting to note that we do not follow this same procedure in other matters. For example when driving we don't let our feelings or conscience guide us in the matter of how fast we may go. If we were stopped for speeding we wouldn't say "I just let my conscience be my guide." We know the officer would reject that and lecture us on staying within the posted speed limit. Yet in religion

some ignore what God says in His word and do what feels good or seems right. We must remember that no dispute in any field of learning can be settled until a common authority is accepted. That is true in ball games, how we weigh and measure commodities, how we measure time etc. By the same token it should be true in religion as well. We must have a common ground of authority, and that ground is the word of God. That is our authority in religion.

IT IS POSSIBLE TO UNDERSTAND THE BIBLE ALIKE.

Yes, friend it is possible to understand the bible alike. In fact if we understand it all, we will understand it alike. Many people before us have understood the bible alike. Noah understood the bible and built an ark. Moses understood the bible and built the tabernacle just as God had directed. Gideon and 32,000 men all understood the bible alike in Judges 7:3 "Now therefore proclaim in the ears of the people saying whosoever is fearful and trembling, let him return and depart from Mt. Gilead and there returned of the people 22,000 and there remained 10,000." There was no dispute or disagreement here. Twenty-two thousand men returned home because they were afraid. Ten thousand remained to fight. They all understood the instruction alike. Surely we can do that today. In fact in Acts 2 there were at least 3000 people who understood the bible alike. When Peter told them to repent and be baptized they understood him and 3000 were baptized that day. We have little difficulty understanding what the bible says. The problem is some are not willing to believe what the bible says.

HOW CAN WE UNDERSTAND THE BIBLE/

Following are some suggestions for bible study and understanding:

1. Study, don't just read. Reading is good, but often we need to dig deeper. Buy a bible concordance, dictionary, lexicon, and commentary. This investment will pay off in rich dividends.
2. Study with an open mind. Don't study to establish or prove a theory. Be prepared to accept what the bible says.
3. Find out all you can about the setting of the book, who wrote it, to whom it was written, in which dispensation and why it was written.
4. Consider all the bible teaches on each subject studied. Don't take one verse and disregard all the others.
5. Follow the plain passages. Allow the plain passages to explain the difficult ones.
6. Never construe a figurative passage in such a way that it conflicts with a plain passage.
7. Do what God commands and don't try to do something just because God did not say "don't do it."
8. Rightly divide the word. Recognize the three divisions of bible time as previously outlined in this study.
9. Consider to whom the scripture was written or spoken. Was it to saints or sinners? Study the context in which the passage appears.