

Reference: VARIOUS

Church: GRACE

Date: 5/7/00

Word of God - Perspicuity and Interpretation

Purpose: To examine whether believers can understand everything in God's word

1. Introduction

Have seen:

- the inspiration of Scripture
- its inerrancy
- how we have the canon of scripture today
- the authority of Scripture
- how Scripture attests to itself
- the sufficiency of Scripture
- the work of the Spirit in illumination
- How Scriptures were transmitted to us
- Translation – how we get our English Bible

This week, 2 topics

Perspicuity – clarity of scriptures

Interpretation (begin) – review of Christ in OT opener

2. Perspicuity

The question is, can a believer understand everything in the Bible?

Have seen the work of illumination done by the Spirit

Does this mean all difficulties are resolved?

Why not?

It is our sin in large part

But also because the infinite can never be fully comprehended by the finite

Any Bible verses which show believers won't understand it all?

2 Peter 3:14-16 Therefore, beloved, since you look for these things, be diligent to be found by Him in peace, spotless and blameless, 15 and regard the patience of our Lord as salvation; just as also our beloved

brother Paul, according to the wisdom given him, wrote to you, 16 as also in all his letters, speaking in them of these things, **in which are some things hard to understand**, which the untaught and unstable distort, as they do also the rest of the Scriptures, to their own destruction.

Mark 9:31-32 For He was teaching His disciples and telling them, "The Son of Man is to be delivered into the hands of men, and they will kill Him; and when He has been killed, He will rise three days later." 32 **But they did not understand this statement**, and they were afraid to ask Him.

Luke 24:44-45 Now He said to them, "These are My words which I spoke to you while I was still with you, that all things which are written about Me in the Law of Moses and the Prophets and the Psalms must be fulfilled."

45 **Then He opened their minds to understand the Scriptures**, John 20:8-9 So the other disciple who had first come to the tomb then also entered, and he saw and believed. 9 For **as yet they did not understand the Scripture**, that He must rise again from the dead.

Clear implication of a growth in understanding

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

But how is this understanding obtained?

Psalm 119:97-100 Oh, how I love your law! I meditate on it all day long. 98 Your commands make me wiser than my enemies, for they are ever with me. 99 I have more insight than all my teachers, for I meditate on your statutes. 100 I have more understanding than the elders, for I obey your precepts.

2 Timothy 2:7 Consider what I say, for the Lord will give you understanding in everything.

Colossians 1:9 For this reason also, since the day we heard of it, we have not ceased to pray for you and to ask that you may be filled with the knowledge of His will in **all spiritual wisdom and understanding**,

Does this apply to all Bible knowledge?

Is all knowledge beyond the simple minded saint?

No – by definition the saint has already understood certain things

The things pertaining to salvation – these are presented clearly

People of all abilities may grasp them

Matthew 11:25 At that time Jesus said, "I praise You, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, that You have hidden these things from the wise and intelligent and have revealed them to infants.

3. Interpretation

Review what we considered at the beginning of the Christ in the OT series

3.1. ***Our understanding is not the touchstone***

Do not aim to find an interpretation subject to our understanding e.g. JW's – tend only to believe what can be humanly understood

We hold to the Truth – even when we cannot explain it fully
Should reassure us there are difficult areas – this is Divine Truth!

3.2. Interpret a text in its proper context

A text out of its context is a pretext

Consider the immediate context and context of whole Bible

e.g. Hebrews 6

Hebrews 6:4-6 For in the case of those who have once been enlightened and have tasted of the heavenly gift and have been made partakers of the Holy Spirit, 5 and have tasted the good word of God and the powers of the age to come, 6 and then have fallen away, it is impossible to renew them again to repentance, since they again crucify to themselves the Son of God and put Him to open shame.

“There it is!” – say some – “a Christian can fall from grace!”

“There is no perseverance of the saints”

But if we read on in the context to verse 9:

Hebrews 6:9 But, beloved, we are convinced of better things concerning you, and things that accompany salvation, though we are speaking in this way.

So we must understand that whatever is said in vv 4-6 is not said of true believers – the context governs our interpretation.

3.3. Do not interpret Scripture so it contradicts Scripture

Since Scripture contains no errors

Must never interpret a difficult passage so that it differs from passages that are easier to understand e.g.

1 John 2:1-2 My little children, I am writing these things to you so that you may not sin. And if anyone sins, we have an Advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous; 2 and He Himself is the propitiation for our sins; and not for ours only, but also for those of the whole world.

Did Christ indeed propitiate for the sins of the whole world?

Some say yes – so all are saved!

But that is to fly in the face of other scriptures which make it clear:

That Christ dies for “many”

That He came for His Elect

That there is a Hell where people suffer

So we must come to another understanding of “whole world” that fits the sense of Scripture

Some think it speaks of sufficiency as opposed to efficiency of Christ’s sacrifice

Some think it means that He is the only propitiation there is
Some that as many as are saved, from all languages, tribes and nations the world over (not just the Jews), are saved through His propitiation.

All are certainly true!

All are in harmony with the rest of Scripture

3.4. Interpret Scripture with Scripture

The corollary to the last point

Always use simpler passages to shine light on harder ones

But must ensure that they speak of the same thing!

e.g. Colossians and Ephesians, Romans and Galatians

Contain many parallel passages and can help us

3.5. Take the simplest, most natural meaning

Where there are a number of plausible interpretations available

Generally a good guide to take the simplest

Complication normally product of human, not Divine, explanation.

3.6. Do not stop short or go beyond Scripture

Must give Scripture its full weight and no more

e.g. “None shall snatch them out of my hand”

Some, wishing to believe we can lose our salvation, have said,

“But it doesn’t say they can’t walk out!”. This is not doing justice to the passage!

3.7. Interpret from the Bible outwards

We do not begin with us and our experiences

Then seek to read these into Scripture

Rather, start with the Bible and read out from there

Judge your experiences by the Word

e.g. Psalm 23:2 “He makes me lie down in green pastures” has been used to justify Toronto blessing! They began with their experience and then desperately search Scripture to find support.

4. Conclusions

God has given everything we need for life and godliness

He has given His word

He gives sufficient understanding and clarity for all His children to come to a knowledge of the way of salvation

We can grow in our understanding through prayer and meditation

We must learn to interpret Scripture correctly

The touchstone for the interpretation of Scripture is Scripture