

Chapter 6: The Four Characteristics of Scripture: (2) Clarity

Can only Bible scholars understand the Bible rightly?

Explanation and Scriptural Basis (105)

The Old Testament and New Testament frequently affirm that Scripture is written in such a way that its teachings are able to be understood by ordinary believers.

A) The Bible frequently affirms its own clarity. (105-107)

1) In the OT, the people were expected to be able to understand the words of Scripture.

Deut. 6:6-7: And these words that I command you today shall be on your heart. You shall teach them diligently to your children, and shall talk of them when you sit in your house, and when you walk by the way, and when you lie down, and when you rise.

Ps. 1:1-2: Blessed is the man who walks not in the counsel of the wicked, nor stands in the way of sinners, nor sits in the seat of scoffers; but his delight is in the law of the Lord, and on his law he meditates day and night.

Ps. 19:7: The law of the Lord is perfect, reviving the soul; the testimony of the Lord is sure, making wise the simple;

Ps. 119:130: The unfolding of your words gives light; it imparts understanding to the simple.

2) In the NT, both Jesus and the apostles have the same expectation.

a) Jesus never blames people's confusion on the obscurity of Scripture.

Matt. 12:3: He said to them, "Have you not read what David did when he was hungry, and those who were with him:

Matt. 21:42: Jesus said to them, "Have you never read in the Scriptures: " 'The stone that the builders rejected has become the cornerstone; this was the Lord's doing, and it is marvelous in our eyes'?"

Matt. 22:29: But Jesus answered them, "You are wrong, because you know neither the Scriptures nor the power of God.

b) Most of the NT epistles are written to entire congregations.

1 Cor. 1:2: To the church of God that is in Corinth, to those sanctified in Christ Jesus, called to be saints together with all those who in every place call upon the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, both their Lord and ours:

Gal. 1:2: and all the brothers who are with me, To the churches of Galatia:

Phil. 1:1: Paul and Timothy, servants of Christ Jesus, To all the saints in Christ Jesus who are at Philippi, with the overseers and deacons:

Col. 4:16: And when this letter has been read among you, have it also read in the church of the Laodiceans; and see that you also read the letter from Laodicea.

c) NT authors expect that their Gentile audience would familiarize themselves with a translation of the OT.

Rom. 15:4: For whatever was written in former days was written for our instruction, that through endurance and through the encouragement of the Scriptures we might have hope.

2 Tim. 3:16-17: All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, that the man of God may be competent, equipped for every good work.

B) The Moral and Spiritual Qualities Needed for Right Understanding (107)

- 1) The ability to understand Scripture rightly is more a moral and spiritual than intellectual ability.

1 Cor. 2:14: The natural person does not accept the things of the Spirit of God, for they are folly to him, and he is not able to understand them because they are spiritually discerned.

2 Cor. 3:14-16: But their minds were hardened. For to this day, when they read the old covenant, that same veil remains unlifted, because only through Christ is it taken away. Yes, to this day whenever Moses is read a veil lies over their hearts. But when one turns to the Lord, the veil is removed.

C) Definition of the Clarity of Scripture (108)

- 1) The clarity of Scripture means that the Bible is written in such a way that its teachings are able to be understood by all who will read it seeking God's help and being willing to follow it.

D) Why do people misunderstand Scripture? (108-109)

- 1) Jesus' disciples failed to understand all of his teaching.

Matt. 15:16: And he said, "Are you also still without understanding?"

Mark 4:10-13: And when he was alone, those around him with the twelve asked him about the parables. And he said to them, "To you has been given the secret of the kingdom of God, but for those outside everything is in parables, so that "they may indeed see but not perceive, and may indeed hear but not understand, lest they should turn and be forgiven." And he said to them, "Do you not understand this parable? How then will you understand all the parables?"

Luke 24: 25: And he said to them, "O foolish ones, and slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have spoken!"

- 2) There were times in the early church when Christians did not understand or agree on the teachings of the OT or about the letters written by the apostles.

Acts 15:7: And after there had been much debate, Peter stood up and said to them, "Brothers, you know that in the early days God made a choice among you, that by my mouth the Gentiles should hear the word of the gospel and believe.

Gal. 2:11-15: But when Cephas came to Antioch, I opposed him to his face, because he stood condemned. For before certain men came from James, he was eating with the Gentiles; but when they came he drew back and separated himself, fearing the circumcision party. And the rest of the Jews acted hypocritically along with him, so that even Barnabas was led astray by their hypocrisy. But when I saw that their conduct was not in step with the truth of the gospel, I said to Cephas before them all, "If you, though a Jew, live like a Gentile and not like a Jew, how can you force the Gentiles to live like Jews?" We ourselves are Jews by birth and not Gentile sinners;

- 3) In order to avoid mistakes in interpreting Scripture, many Bible teachers have developed "principles of interpretation," or guidelines to encourage growth in the skill of proper interpretation.

- a) Hermeneutics: the study of correct methods of interpretation.

- b) Exegesis: the process of interpreting a text of Scripture.
- E) Practical Encouragement From This Doctrine (109-110)
 - 1) This doctrine tells us that where there are areas of doctrinal or ethical disagreement, there are only two possible causes for these disagreements:
 - a) It may be that we are seeking to make affirmations where Scripture itself is silent.
 - b) It is possible that we have made mistakes in our interpretation of Scripture.
 - 2) We are not free to say that the teaching of the Bible on any subject is confusing or incapable of being understood correctly.
 - 3) This truth should give great encouragement to all Christians to read their Bibles daily and with great eagerness.
- F) The Role of Scholars (110-111)
 - 1) They can teach Scripture clearly, communicating its content to others and thus fulfilling the office of “teacher” mentioned in the NT.
 - 1 Cor. 12:28:** And God has appointed in the church first apostles, second prophets, third teachers, then miracles, then gifts of healing, helping, administrating, and various kinds of tongues.
 - Eph. 4:11:** And he gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the pastors and teachers,
 - 2) They can explore new areas of understanding the teachings of Scripture.
 - 3) They can defend the teachings of the Bible against attacks by other scholars or those with specialized technical training.
 - Titus 1:9:** He must hold firm to the trustworthy word as taught, so that he may be able to give instruction in sound doctrine and also to rebuke those who contradict it.
 - 4) They can supplement the study of Scripture for the benefit of the church.

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