

# Can We Understand the Bible Alike?

Ephesians 5:17

## I. INTRODUCTION: I

1. **2** There is an old saying that if you want to keep a friend you never discuss politics or religion. Why? Nobody ever agrees on these subjects.
2. The wisdom in this saying is good in the case of politics. But is it wise in the case of religion?
3. Underlying the so-called wisdom in avoiding religious discussions is the general belief (esp. among denominational people) that religious doctrine is viewed as a matter of opinion.
  - A. People say, “We just can’t all see it alike.”
  - B. Or, “We just understand the Bible differently.”
4. The thinking the Bible is a subject with varied and sundry “understandings” has led to another equally erroneous belief that the religious world is better off if we all just agree to disagree.
  - A. Drive-in movie, “worship at the church of your choice.” (explain)
  - B. The ecumenical movement among denominations is based on this very premise.
    - (1) We can be united if we simply “agree to disagree.”
    - (2) In other words, unity can only be achieved if choose to ignore the differences in doctrine and practice between us.
    - (3) Canard, “We may be traveling different roads, but we are all going to the same place.”
    - (4) **\*\*** Never was a greater lie invented by Satan! Jn. 14:6; 1 Cor. 1:10
5. Unfortunately, now many members of the Lord’s church have started to sing this same tune (e.g., NUM, Max Lucado’s crowd; explain).
6. The New Testament plea for unity stands in direct contradiction to the ideas espoused by the ecumenical movement (Jn. 17:20-21; 1 Cor. 1:10; **Phil. 3:16-17**: “Nevertheless, to the degree that we have already attained, let us walk by the same rule, let us be of the same mind. I 7 Brethren, join in following my example, and note those who so walk, as you have us for a pattern.”)
7. **3** Let’s answer the question: **Can we all understand the Bible alike?**

## II. DISCUSSION:

1. **4** Can people understand the Bible differently?
  - A. First, we need to stop and think: What is the Bible?
    - (1) **It is truth: Jn. 17:17**: “Sanctify them by Your truth. Your word is truth.”; **Psa. 119:160**: “The entirety of Your word is truth,”
      - (a) **\*\*** Five defining characteristics of **Truth**:
        - ① **Truth**, unlike an opinion, is not open to reasonable debate (*Dictionary.com*: truth is “the true or actual state of a matter”; truth is an “indisputable fact, propositions, principle”).
        - ② **Truth** will encounter great opposition (**Jn. 8:45**: “But because I tell the truth, you do not believe Me.”).
        - ③ **Truth** is appropriate and applicable everywhere at any time (universal) (*Dictionary.com*: truth is “conformity with fact or reality”).

④ **Truth** is self-authenticating (*Dictionary.com*: truth is “actuality or actual existence”).

⑤ **Truth** is best communicated through repetition.

(b) Can truth be understood differently and still be truth? ( $2 + 2 = 4$  example).

(i) If the Bible is what it claims to be “understanding it differently” is the greatest oxymoron of the ages!

(ii) To claim that truth can be understood differently violates the very essence of the definition of truth (e.g.,  $2 + 2 = 4$ ; not 3, not 5, etc.).

(iii) Truth is true regardless of time, space or culture.

(iv) Truth is open to *explanation* but not open to human *interpretation* (e.g., when we learned basic multiplication, etc.).

(c) **Application:**

(i) Because of the very essence of truth, truth cannot be “understood” differently!

(ii) Therefore, if the Bible is truth it is IMPOSSIBLE for us to “understand it differently.”

(iii) **\*\*** If we have a disagreement over its meaning; there are only three options:

☛ You are wrong and I am right,

☛ I am wrong and you are right,

☛ We are both wrong.

(iv) The option, “we understand truth (i.e., the Bible) differently” is **NOT** an option!

(2) **\*\*** *It is a revelation of God’s mind by His Spirit:* 1 Cor. 2:6-13

**2 Pet. 1:20-21:** “knowing this first, that no prophecy of Scripture is of any private interpretation, 21 for prophecy never came by the will of man, but holy men of God spoke as they were moved by the Holy Spirit.”

(a) Vine: on *interpretation*: “the writers of Scripture did not put their own construction upon the ‘God-breathed’ words they wrote.”

(b) That’s exactly what Paul, through inspiration tells us: **1 Cor. 2:13:** “These things we also speak, not in words which man’s wisdom teaches but which the Holy Spirit teaches...”

(c) God’s revelation is **verbal** and **plenary**:

**\*\***“Verbal plenary inspiration means that every word found in the Bible is given to us by God (verbal), everything in the Bible is authoritative (plenary), and every word is also divinely directed (inspired).” (*Christian Apologetics & Research Ministry*)

(d) **Application:**

(i) Can the same revelation from an eternal God that cannot lie (Titus 1:2) be “understood differently” by mankind? **NO!**

(ii) Such a belief is an indictment of the character and intelligence of God Almighty! Do we worship a God that is too stupid to reveal Himself to His creation in a way that the people He created cannot understand? Surely not!

(iii) If I were to describe a fellow as one “who says one thing to me and something else to you,” what would you call that man? **A liar!**

- (iv) What does this make of God, when one says of his word, “It says one thing to me and something different to you”? **A liar!** (Titus. 1:2)
- (3) **\*\* It can be understood: Eph. 5:17:** “Therefore do not be unwise, but understand what the will of the Lord is.”
- (a) Paul makes this simple and direct command because he knew as an inspired apostle of Jesus Christ that God’s word is truth and as such could be understood.
- (b) Did Paul command us to do something that we cannot possibly do? **Eph. 3:3-4:** “...by revelation He made known to me the mystery (as I have briefly written already, 4 by which, when you read, you may understand my knowledge in the mystery of Christ),”
- (c) Application: What does God’s word do for us?
- (i) Calls us to salvation: 2 Thess. 2:13-14
- (ii) It is God’s “power unto salvation”: Rom. 1:16-17
- (iii) It produces faith: Rom. 10:17
- (iv) It sanctifies us and makes us free: Jn. 17:17; 8:32
- (v) It judges us: Jn. 12:48
- (vi) Did an eternal, omnipotent, omnipresent, omniscient God reveal Himself to His creation in such a way that:
- ☛ His creation would be called to salvation in a variety of ways?
  - ☛ His power to save would be based on a multitude of pathways?
  - ☛ He would require mankind to be saved based on “one faith” yet send mankind a word that produces “many faiths”?
  - ☛ He would judge mankind by a word that cannot be understood the same way by any two individuals (in essence there is no “standard,” but many standards, each one subject to human definition and interpretation)?

## 2. **5** Can we understand the Bible?

A. Is the Bible an understandable book? If not, there are only two alternatives:

- ① God could but wouldn’t make the Bible understandable (unfair, capricious) or,
  - ② God would make the Bible understandable, but couldn’t (unable, incompetent).
- ☛ God wants us to understand: 1 Tim. 2:4
  - ☛ He revealed an understandable plan: Eph. 3:3-4

B. Is man capable of understanding the Bible? YES! We are commanded to! Eph. 5:17

**Jn. 6:44-45:** “No one can come to Me unless the Father who sent Me draws him; and I will raise him up at the last day. 45 It is written in the prophets, ‘And they shall all be taught by God.’ Therefore everyone who has heard and learned from the Father comes to Me.” (recall Eph. 3:3-4; 2 Thess. 2:13-14).

C. Are things different today?

- (1). God’s teaching is unchanged: 1 Pet. 1:24-25: (**v, 25:** “But the word of the LORD endures forever.’ Now this is the word which by the gospel was preached to you.”)
- (2) Man’s needs are unchanged: Eccl. 1:9-10; Rom. 3:23; 6:23
- (3) There is no more to be revealed: Jude 3

- (4) So, what is the problem, why do people differ on what they believe the Bible teaches?
- (a) It is not that we cannot understand it.
  - (b) The word is truth, and truth can only be truly understood in the same way.
  - (c) \*\* So, what is the problem? The problem is a matter of attitude:

**Matt. 13:13-15:** *“Therefore I speak to them in parables, because seeing they do not see, and hearing they do not hear, nor do they understand. 14 And in them the prophecy of Isaiah is fulfilled, which says:*

*‘Hearing you will hear and shall not understand,  
And seeing you will see and not perceive;  
15 For the hearts of this people have grown dull.  
Their ears are hard of hearing,  
And their eyes they have closed,  
Lest they should see with their eyes and hear with their ears,  
Lest they should understand with their hearts and turn,  
So that I should heal them.’”*

Cf. 2 Kgs. 5:11-12 (“Behold, I thought...”)

- (5) It is like school. I have taught at the undergraduate level in college.
- (a) The concepts taught in the class were not difficult.
  - (b) The methods I used to teach were sound.
  - (c) The students were all capable of learning.
  - (d) The problem was that not all of them wanted to learn so they refused to be taught; refused to put in the effort to learn.
  - (e) A teacher, any teacher (even the Master Teacher) is powerless to force people to learn when they don’t want to learn!
- (6) When men claim the Bible can be “understood differently” they are wrong.
- (a) The teacher (Jesus is the master teacher!!) teaches the same to all the students.
  - (b) The fault lies in the students, they are unwilling, for whatever reason, to not open their ears, eyes, and heart to the truth (**2 Thess. 2:9-12:** *“The coming of the lawless one is according to the working of Satan, with all power, signs, and lying wonders, 10 and with all unrighteous deception among those who perish, because they did not receive the love of the truth, that they might be saved. 11 And for this reason God will send them strong delusion, that they should believe the lie, 12 that they all may be condemned who did not believe the truth but had pleasure in unrighteousness.”*).
- (7) **Notice the key facts in these verses:**
- (a) False teachers will appear to be from God (“all power, signs, lying wonders”) (Matt. 7:15: come in sheep’s clothing; Acts 20:28-31: these false teachers will even come from within the church.)
  - (b) These teachers are actually doing the works of Satan, because they are “lawless” (Col. 3:17; Matt. 7:21-23: very important...these people ARE religious, may even appear to be very pious, etc. ....”...with all unrighteous deception...”).
  - (c) Due to their deceptive teaching many will be deceived and perish.
  - (d) Why will many be deceived and perish? “...because they did not receive the love of the truth, that they might be saved.” How do we know if a person loves the truth?

**\*\*Isa. 8:20:** “To the law and to the testimony! If they do not speak according to this word, it is because there is no light in them.”

(e) **\*\*** Note six characteristics of one who really loves the truth:

- ① Believes Bible can be understood! Eph. 3:3-4
- ② Takes responsibility for his own salvation (**Phil 2:12:** “...work out your own salvation in fear and trembling.”).
- ③ Searches the scriptures to make sure what is being taught is really the truth of God’s word (Acts 17:11). (search here is from *anakrino* – to examine, to investigate, enquiry; Vine),
- ④ Treasures the truth above all else (2 Thess. 2:10-11; **Prov. 23:23:** “Buy the truth, and do not sell it.”; **Job 23:12:** “I have not departed from the commandment of His lips; I have treasured the words of His mouth more than my necessary food.”; cf. Matt. 10:34-37),
- ⑤ Obeys the truth (1 Jn. 2:3-5; **Jn. 8:31-32:** “If you abide in My word, you are My disciples indeed. 32 And you shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free.”).
- ⑥ Works at it! 2 Tim. 2:15; 2 Pet. 3:16

**Note:** Just because a person is “morally upright” does **NOT** mean they love the truth! The measure of whether a man/woman loves the truth is **IF** they keep God’s commandments (btw: that will also mean they are “morally upright”).

(8) **6 Illustrations/applications:**

- (a) #1: **Is baptism necessary for salvation?** The vast majority of “Christian” denominations say “NO!” But, what does the Bible say? Mk. 16:16; Acts 2:37-38, 41, 47; 1 Cor. 13:12; Eph. 5:23; Gal. 3:27; 2 Tim. 2:10; Acts 4:12
  - (a) So, you tell me: Does someone who teaches that baptism is not necessary for salvation...is he speaking “lawfully” or “lawlessly”?
  - (b) Is he teaching truth or error? 1 Pet. 4:11
- (b) **\*\* #2: Denominationalism is a sin!** Matt. 16:18; Eph. 1:22-23; 4:4; 5:23; **1 Cor. 1:10:** “Now I plead with you, brethren, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that you all speak the same thing, and that there be no divisions among you, but that you be perfectly joined together in the same mind and in the same judgment.”; **1 Cor. 3:3-4:** “for you are still carnal. For where there are envy, strife, and divisions among you, are you not carnal and behaving like mere men? 4 For when one says, ‘I am of Paul,’ and another, ‘I am of Apollos,’ are you not carnal?”
  - (a) So, you tell me: Does someone who teaches the Lord established a multitude of churches (i.e., denominations) teach the truth of God’s Word?
  - (b) Does one who teaches such speak “lawfully” or “lawlessly”? Is he teaching truth or error? 1 Pet. 4:11
- (c) **\*\* #3: Can people divorce and remarry for “any cause”?** Matt. 19:9
  - (a) So, you tell me: Does someone who teaches all divorced people can remarry (fornication innocent party exception) teach the truth of God’s Word?
  - (b) Does one who teaches such speak “lawfully” or “lawlessly”? Is he teaching truth or error? 1 Pet. 4:11

(9) **The key:** \*\*2 Thess. 2:9-12

- (a) The reason people believe and practice error is not due to the unavailability or understandability of the truth.
  - (i) It is because people do not “love” the truth.
  - (ii) The lack of love for the truth can bridge the entire spectrum from blatant rejection to apathetic acceptance of error to even sincere acceptance of error (believing a lie sermon, 1 Kgs. 13 & 14).
  - (iii) Very simple: People want to do what they feel is best; not what the Lord says! \*\* 2 Kgs. 5:11: “Behold, I thought”
- (b) \*\* Notice that God will allow one to be deluded who does not love the truth (v. 11; “*strong delusion, that they should believe the lie*” = “a working of error, an active power of misleading,” Vincent).
  - (i) God gives those that do not love the truth over to error, because they do not love the truth, see Rom. 1:24).
  - (ii) God acts righteously here!! (Jas. 1:13)
- (c) The false teacher and those that believe them are in the same predicament:
  - (i) They don’t love truth (deliberately reject truth, apathetic, sincere but unwilling to search the scriptures, unwilling to expend the effort to study, truth too inconvenient to the lifestyle they want to live, etc.),
  - (ii) God allows false teachers to deceive & allows people to fall prey to them.
  - (iii) God will condemn them (v. 12).

**III. CONCLUSION: 7**

1. Do you love the truth? 2 Thess. 2:9-12
  - A. All men face a most grave a danger...the condition of their heart regarding the truth.
  - B. Love or not loving the truth has eternal consequences (2 Cor. 13:5).
2. Those that do not love the truth will be deceived and lost.
  - A. What about our loved ones, our friends, our neighbors who do not obey the truth?
  - B. There is hope: 1 Tim. 2:4; 2 Pet. 3:9
  - C. We must do all we can to persuade them concerning the truth: Acts 26:28-29; Heb. 10:31
3. Can we all understand the Bible alike? YES!! Eph. 5:17; Eph. 3:3-4
4. How wonderful it would be if we would all heed the admonition: 1 Cor. 1:10
5. We can have that unity if we simply speak as the oracles of God: 1 Pet. 4:11
6. Invitation