

Can We All See the Bible Alike?

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By Johnny Elmore

In our modern world, men have formed hundreds of different denominations and have taught hundreds of contradictory doctrines, yet all of them claim to follow the Bible to some extent. Many people have seen the confusion among the religious teachers and have given up in despair. If preachers cannot agree, they feel, what hope do ordinary people have of being agreed upon the teaching of the Bible? Many have taken refuge in the very unsatisfactory idea that we cannot all see the Bible alike. If the Bible is true, obedience to its commands brings man's only hope of salvation. If the Bible must be obeyed, then it must be understood. Can we all see the Bible alike, or does it mean one thing to you and something different to me? The word most often translated "understand" in the Bible is a word which means "to put together, (mentally) to comprehend" (Strong). God has given us a revelation. He expects men to hear or read facts in this revelation and put them together, that is, reach a conclusion. This is not some strange operation; we do it every day. For example, we face the equation: two plus two equals-what? Every person who has any degree of intelligence knows there is only one answer to that equation, if truth matters, and that is four. If a different answer is given, either there was no understanding or no regard for the truth. Can people understand something and still see it differently? No, as in the equation above, if two people understand, they must see it alike. To see it differently implies a lack of understanding. Men may fail to see something many different ways, but if they see it at all, they will see it exactly alike.

Is man capable of understanding the Bible? Some say that man must have an immediate operation of the Spirit upon his heart before he can understand. If that were so, then God would be responsible if man did not understand. But man does have the capacity to understand. Man is the only creature that can deal with abstractions, weigh evidence, reason from cause to effect, and from effect back to cause. Because of his intelligence, man is morally responsible and he will give an account of his acts.

Can the Bible be understood? If the Bible cannot be understood, then the fault lies with its author. Has God purposely given us a book that we cannot understand, or was He incapable of giving us a revelation that we can understand? If we say that God purposely gave us a book we cannot understand, we cast a reflection upon God's moral character. If we say that God could not give us a book we can understand, we cast a reflection upon his power. If either alternative be true, then God is not what we believe him to be. God is pictured as all-wise, full of goodness and loving-kindness, and all-powerful. Surely a good God would not give us a book that could not be understood. We are told that "God is not the author of confusion" (I Cor. 14:33). Surely an all-wise, all-powerful God, who made man and endowed him with reasoning ability, was capable of giving man a book he could understand. We must conclude that the Bible can be understood sufficiently for man to follow its

instructions.

Does God want and expect men to see the Bible alike? Yes, men are commanded to understand God's will and to do it. The apostle Paul said, "Wherefore be ye not unwise, but understanding what the will of the Lord is" (Eph. 5:17). John taught that he that doeth the will of God abideth forever" (I John 2:17), and stated: "Blessed are they that do his commandments, that they may have right to the tree of life, and may enter in through the gates into the city" (Rev. 22:14). Not only are we to understand, but we are to see it alike. Paul commanded the Corinthians, "Now I beseech you, brethren, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that ye all speak the same thing, and that there be no divisions among you; but that ye be perfectly joined together in the same mind and in the same judgment" (I Cor. 1:10). There are many things that cause men to fail to understand including laziness, prejudice, pride, dishonesty, vested interest, emotional bias, etc. Most of the disagreement arises over what the Bible does not teach, and not over what it does teach. We can agree that Paul had a thorn in the flesh (II Cor. 12:7), but we may not agree about what it was, because the Bible does not say. Such controversial subjects as infant membership, sprinkling for baptism, instrumental music in worship are not taught in the New Testament. We can agree on what the Bible teaches. Man is a responsible being. He is commanded to understand and obey God's will. He should lay aside all prejudice, pride, and dishonesty because his soul is at stake. He should not study to prove what he already imagines, but he should approach it objectively, prayerfully, reverently and humbly. He should take four things into account in Bible study- (1) Who is speaking? We are not to obey the words of Satan which the Bible records. (2) To whom is it spoken? Some commands and promises do not include us. (3) When was it spoken? (4) Why was it spoken? Much of the present confusion about miraculous gifts could be eliminated with these four simple rules. Some promises had only a temporary or local application. Jesus said to the believing Jews, "If ye continue in my word, then are ye my disciples indeed; and ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free" (John 8:31,32).

If we are strictly honest in studying the Bible, and are willing to use ordinary rules of common sense in drawing conclusions, not adding anything to God's revelation or taking anything away, then we can understand the Bible alike and avoid the division and religious confusion that now pervades the world .Johnny Elmore P.O. Box 1657, Lebanon, MO 65536.