**BIBLE TALK Radio Broadcast**

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**Can The Bible Be Understood Alike?**

Sometimes when people disagree with one another about what the Bible teaches, they just dismiss the problem as though a mutual understanding is impossible or unnecessary. It may be expressed this way, “You understand the Bible one way, and I understand it another. Neither of us should condemn the other.” OR “Well, that is your interpretation of the Scriptures. I have mine as well. Perhaps both of us are right.” These statements contain a logical contradiction. There is no such thing as “understanding the Bible differently.” If two people differ on the meaning of a biblical text, one of them is wrong about the matter – possibly both. We might misunderstand something differently, but we do not understand something differently.

Today, on our program I want to address the question, “Can the Bible be understood alike?”

John 17:17 tells us that God's word is truth. Yet, everyone realizes that truth does not contradict itself. Since the Bible is truth, it necessarily follows that two contradictory views of the Bible cannot both be right. If one man teaches one thing and another man teaches the opposite, it must be that one or the other does not know the truth. Yet, Jesus promised in John 8:32, *"Ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free."* So, we can know the truth, and when we do, we will not contradict one another.

Suppose one man said "two plus two equals four," and another said "two plus two equals three," and another said "two plus two equals five." Would we say, "Oh well, it's just a matter of interpretation, and all of them are right"? Of course not. What has happened is that one man understood that answer correctly, and the other two misunderstood differently! So it is with the Bible. We may misunderstand differently; but when we understand the Bible, we will understand it alike.

In 1 Corinthians 1:13 Paul wrote to a church who were becoming divided. He asked them: "Is Christ divided?" Does Jesus contradict Himself? Of course not! If He did, He would be teaching lies. How then can two men contradict one another about what Jesus' taught and both be right? The answer is they cannot. If they contradict one another, one is wrong and the other is right, or else both are wrong!

When we speak today, we assume the people to whom we speak will understand our words. We operate daily upon the presumption that we, frail mortals though we are, can make ourselves understood to our peers. A department store places an advertisement in the newspaper about an upcoming sale. Hundreds of people flock to the same establishment on the correct day at the right time expecting specific items at a certain price to be available for purchase. How is it that they understand the ad alike?

A recipe is printed in a magazine. Hundreds of ladies across the country follow it and bake delicious muffins for their families. Do they understand the instructions alike?

A physician prescribes an antibiotic for someone with the flu, do we believe that the pharmacist will understand what the doctor has prescribed, and are we confident that the person with the flu can understand the instructions for taking the medicine?

If we can sensibly operate our lives on a routine basis, recognizing that we are able to communicate with one another in an intelligible fashion, why can’t we acknowledge that God, who is infinitely wiser and abler than man, can clearly make His will known to humanity?

God has chosen to communicate His will to us by means of words, human language. Paul said in 1 Cor. 2:13, *“These things we also speak, not in words which man's wisdom teaches but which the Holy Spirit teaches, comparing spiritual things with spiritual.”*  2 Tim. 3:16 says, *“All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness,”* The word “Scripture” in this passage means “a writing.” This is the writing of words. These words are inspired of God, or breathed out by God. Words are conveyors of thought, and God has chosen to convey His thoughts to us by means of words, the words of Scripture, the Bible.

Question: Is God capable of communicating by means of words in a manner that man is able to understand? If we are going to accept that God is a higher power who created human beings and knows us better than we know ourselves, are we going to deny his ability to communicate in a way that we can understand? To suggest that we cannot understand the Bible is to suggest that God is incompetent in his abilities to communicate by means of words with humans.

Further, if God cannot communicate his will to us in a way that we can understand, then we cannot know Gods will. But God expects us to understand His will. Eph. 5:17 says, *“Therefore do not be unwise, but understand what the will of the Lord is.”* Jesus said in Matt. 7:21, *"Not everyone who says to Me, 'Lord, Lord,' shall enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of My Father in heaven.”* How can we do the will of the Father if we do not understand it? Do we suppose that we will be able to make the case on the Day of Judgment, “Lord, the reason we didn’t obey Your will is because You did not communicate in a way we could understand? No! The Bible, God’s will can be understood. Just as we are able to communicate with on another by means of words, and we do it every day, God, even more so, is capable of communicating His will to us so that we can understand it.

The Bible tells us that understanding the scriptures is possible. Paul said to the Ephesian Christians, *“how that by revelation He made known to me the mystery (as I have briefly written already, by which, when you read, you may understand my knowledge in the mystery of Christ), which in other ages was not made known to the sons of men, as it has now been revealed by the Spirit to His holy apostles and prophets:”* (Eph. 3:3-5). I don’t know how many people were in the church in Ephesus, but there was more than one person and Paul told all of them that they could understand, as he did, the mystery of Christ when they read the words he had written. These words that Paul had written were not subject to personal interpretation. They were written so we might understand what God wants us to know.

And we can understand it alike. Jesus prayed for unity in John 17:20-21. He said *"I do not pray for these alone, but also for those who will believe in Me through their word; that they all may be one, as You, Father, are in Me, and I in You; that they also may be one in Us, that the world may believe that You sent Me.”* In this fervent prayer, Jesus prays for unity among His believers. That’s what the Lord truly desires. But in order for unity to exist we must be able to understand the Bible alike. How can we be one even as Christ and the Father are one if we are divided over what God has said in His word. In Amos 3:3 a question is asked, *“Can two walk together, unless they are agreed?”* True unity can only exist if there is agreement.

Paul said to the church in Corinth, *“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. 1:10) How could they be perfectly joined together in the same mind and in the same judgment, with no divisions among them, if the words of God that Paul taught them were open to many different interpretations? If the Bible cannot be understood alike then there is no basis upon which unity can be required.

Paul wrote to the Ephesian Christians in Eph. 4:3-6, *“endeavoring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. There is one body and one Spirit, just as you were called in one hope of your calling; one Lord, one faith, one baptism; one God and Father of all, who is above all, and through all, and in you all.”* In order to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace, we must recognize these unifying facts, these ones that are mentioned here, One body, one Spirit, one hope, one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all. You see, the unity that is enjoined by the Spirit and provided by the Spirit requires that we all believe the same thing about the one faith, the one baptism, the one hope, etc. Now, what if my interpretation of what the Bible teaches concerning the one baptism is different than your interpretation, will that difference affect unity? Sure it will. Can we know the truth about the one baptism, the one faith, or the one hope, and be united on that truth? Sure we can, because God has made it possible for us to understand what His will is in these matters. Unity requires our being able to understand the Bible alike.

Why is it that people do not understand the Bible alike? We can be assured that the problem is not with the Bible. To blame the Bible for division is to blame God.

The problem is with us. Where there is division the blame must rest on the shoulders of men.

Consider with me two reasons why men do not understand the Bible alike.

1) Ignorance – It may be that we have not had the time to learn the truth as yet. But as we continue to search we will find the truth, because the Lord has made it available to all who search for it. It can be understood. When we learn the truth, we change.

Or it may be that we are ignorant of the truth, because of distractions with the world that hinder us from diligently searching for the truth. We are ignorant of the truth because we are not studying, and we are not studying because we do not care to know the truth. Or it may be we are ignorant of the truth because we tend to rely too heavily on what other people, preachers and teachers, tell us. Rather than searching for the truth ourselves, we rely on what others believe. We are the blind following the blind.

Another reason why men do not understand the Bible alike is

2) Prejudice – Some people read the Bible with preconceived ideas. They then study the Bible to prove what they already believe. What we already believe, may or may not be the truth. If it is not the truth, we will be guilty of distorting, or twisting the Scriptures to make it fit what we already believe. We can convince ourselves that a certain passage teaches such and such because that is what we want it to say, not because that is what it actually says. Peter mentions certain ones who “twist” the Scriptures “to their own destruction.” (2 Peter 3:16) It is important to approach God's word without the rose-colored glasses.

What we have concluded today is that God has made it possible for the Bible to be understood, and since it can be understood, it can be understood alike. But in order to understand it we must have that good and honest heart that Jesus talks about in His explanation of the parable of the sower in Luke 8:15. If we will search the truth with that kind of heart, we will come to an understanding of God’s word and will be united with others who have done the same.

Our time is gone for today. We thank you for listening.

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