

PathLights

*"Your word is a lamp to my feet
and a light to my path"
Psalm 119:104*

July 23, 2017

Difficult Verses (3)

by Frank Himmel

What makes a Bible verse difficult? It may be the subject under consideration, or perhaps the terminology is such that the specific reference is uncertain.

Another "difficulty" arises when the apparent meaning of the verse makes it contradict others.

Truth, by its very nature, is not contradictory. God's word is truth (John 17:17); therefore, it is not self-contradictory.

Explanations

When two Bible statements appear to conflict, there is generally an easy explanation. These include...

The time at which the statements were made. God viewed His creation as good at the beginning (Genesis 1:31), but later He was sorry that He made man (Genesis 6:6).

The author of the statements. The Bible was written by inspired men, but the history they recorded sometimes includes the statements of uninspired men, even the devil himself!

The perspective of the statements. Opposite statements can both be true, depending on how you

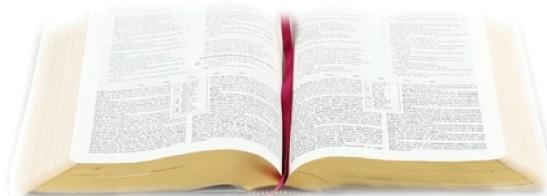
look at something. For example, Jesus is the prince of peace (Isaiah 9:6), yet He said He did not come to bring peace but a sword (Matthew 10:34-36).

The author's approach or purpose. Paul, who was showing that we cannot earn salvation by keeping God's law, said we are justified by faith, not by works (Romans 3:28). James, who was emphasizing the importance of obedient faith, said we are justified by works and not by faith alone (2:24). Incidentally, note Romans 1:5 and 16:26, the opening and closing references to faith in that book.

Note also that an author's approach may dictate how he arranges his material. Sometimes Bible writers group things topically rather than following a strict chronological sequence.

Historic repetition. Similar events may occur on multiple occasions. Twice, a woman washed Jesus' feet (Luke 7:36-50; John 12:1-8). Confusing the two incidents has led to some inaccurate conclusions.

General vs. specific references. Like all of us, Bible writers sometimes spoke in generalities or summary terms, at other times they were more detailed or specific. We are saved by grace through faith (Ephesians 2:8). The terms *grace* and *faith* summarize salvation from the divine and human sides; surely they are not so exhaustive as to eliminate expressions of grace or faith! ▶



Idiomatic phrases. Every society has a few unique ways of saying things (e.g., our “kick the bucket”). Trying to take such expressions literally creates confusion. When the ancient Hebrews spoke of doing something “from the womb,” that simply meant as far back as they could remember (Job 31:18; Psalm 58:3; 51:5), not that they were actually born that way.

Many other factors explain apparent contradictions in Bible verses: differences in methods of computation, variations in word meanings, multiple names for the same person or place (or multiple people and places with the same name), etc.

Caution

If a verse appears contradictory, perhaps the first question we need to ask is: Is this a contradiction with what another verse actually says or is it a contradiction with what I think?

Most of my books on Bible difficulties, which are written by denominational preachers, include discussions of Mark 16:16; Acts 2:38; and 1 Peter 3:21 with reference to baptism. It is hard to think of a simpler statement than Mark 16:16—“He who has believed and has been baptized shall be saved”—or a more straightforward one than “baptism now saves you” in 1 Peter 3:21. What is so difficult about these? Nothing, unless you do not believe what they say! Ironically, the explanations various authors suggest to take away the force of these statements are far more complex than the Bible statements themselves.

Bible study calls for honesty, both dealing honestly with the text and being honest with ourselves. ■

A Peacemaker



by Frank Himmel

“Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called sons of God” (Matthew 5:9).

God is the ultimate peacemaker. While we were His enemies (because of our sins), He graciously provided the means of reconciliation in the death of His Son (Romans 5:10). He wanted reconciliation, He made the opportunity, He invites us back into peace with Him, He forgives. It is no wonder, then, that “sons of God” are peacemakers.

God teaches us several important lessons about making peace. First, peacemakers take the initiative; they do not just wait around for the other party to act. Second, peace does not come about by ignoring issues; it occurs when we resolve them. Third, peace is a two-way street. Not everyone responds favorably to peacemakers’ efforts. Thus Paul wrote, “If possible, so far as it depends on you, be at peace with all men” (Romans 12:18). Fourth, peacemaking requires patience. God is definitely patient; He will not, however, be patient indefinitely (2 Peter 3:9-10). ■

Service Leaders for the Week

	Sunday Morning	Sunday Evening	Wednesday Evening
GREETER	Bruce Williams	John Baucom	Josh Baucom
SONG LEADER	Carlos Garcia	Gary Hagler	Ian Brown
OPENING PRAYER	David Gray	TBD	
LORD’S SUPPER			
BREAD	Albert Lee Harrison	Albert Lee Harrison	
CUP	Greg Winget	Greg Winget	
CONTRIBUTION PRAYER	Jason Chandler		
SERMON/INVITATION	Frank Himmel	Singing	Bruce Williams
CLOSING PRAYER	John Baucom	TBD	Josh Baucom