

The Bible
Can we understand it?
by Hendrik Joubert

When we say that the Bible is the word of God, does that mean it contains wisdom beyond man's ability to comprehend? Since I was a young boy I remember people suggesting that we will never be able to completely understand the Scriptures and as an adult I have read the same idea expressed by *theologians* and *scholars*. Some even suggested that if you study the Bible too much you will go insane, perhaps as a result of Festus' remarks to Paul: **...you are beside yourself! Much learning is driving you mad! Acts 26:24** (NKJV) Are any of these perceptions correct?

Some of it sounds quite logical. Not only does it seem a humble submission to the superior wisdom of the Lord God Jehovah, it also subtly releases man from the responsibility of carefully following it – *who is able to understand what the Omniscient God revealed through His word? We are mere mortals, sinners incapable of such perfection – no one is able to follow the Bible a hundred percent.*

Paul exhorts the **Ephesians** to *not be unwise, but to understand what the will of God is.* (5:17) In the same letter he says that when they *read*, they *may understand* his *knowledge in the mystery of Christ.* (3:4) Did he misinform them and expect the impossible? Through Peter we learn that Paul wrote *all his letters according to the wisdom given him; by inspiration of God.* (2Peter 3:15-16; 2Timothy 3:16-17) Notice that his writings are therefore considered part of the *rest of the Scriptures*, which *untaught and unstable people twist to their own destruction.*

When Peter speaks of the *untaught*, or as some translations read *unlearned*, the temptation is to consider this as referring to intellectual ability – only those who are *educated* may come close to understanding such *deep wisdom*. It is said that the dark ages was the period during which the Scriptures were in the hands of the clergy; however after it was translated into English and German it was effectively put back into the hands of the common people. Unfortunately it seems that it was soon removed again, this time at an intellectual level; only those of higher learning are supposed to be able to uncover the complex wisdom revealed in the Scriptures.

Again, this is quite convenient for the *ordinary* people; they would have an excuse if they are erroneously guided by their religious leaders. Jesus says to the leaders of His day: **You search the Scriptures, for in them you think you have eternal life; and these are they which testify of Me. John 5:39** (NKJV) Was it their inferior wisdom, or was it their preconceived ideas that caused them not to recognize the Messiah? Jesus *includes* their followers when He says: **Let them alone. They are blind leaders of the blind. And if the blind leads the blind, both will fall into a ditch.** Matthew 15:14 (NKJV) The solution to this problem is found in Acts 17:11: **These were more fair-minded than those in Thessalonica, in that they received the word with all readiness, and searched the Scriptures daily to find out whether these things were so.** (NKJV) Ordinary people checking the Scriptures as their eternal salvation are at stake.

The simplicity of the Scriptures is obvious from the verses leading up to the declaration that *all Scripture is given by inspiration of God* (2Timothy 3:16-17) when Paul says to Timothy: **...and that from childhood you have known the Holy Scriptures, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus.** (3:15) Understanding the Scriptures is within the ability of a child, perhaps because of the uncomplicated reasoning of a mind not polluted by preconceived ideas and personal preferences - **But Jesus said, "Let the little children come to Me, and do not forbid them; for of such is the kingdom of heaven.** Matthew 19:14 (NKJV)

More evidence concerning the simplicity of the revelation coming from God is to be found in the first letter Paul wrote to the Corinthians: **For you see your calling, brethren, that not many wise according to the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble, are called.** ²⁷ **But God has chosen the foolish things of the world to put to shame the wise, and God has chosen the weak things of the world to put to shame the things which are mighty;... 1 Corinthians 1:26-27** (NKJV) In his **second** letter to the **Thessalonians** he specifically says that **He (God) called you by our gospel.** (2:14)

Consider the phrase *some things hard to understand* said to be in the writing of Paul. (2Peter 3:15-16) The temptation again is to regard this as an exercise in superior intellect, however it may simply be because it is not what we want to hear: **...having their understanding darkened, being alienated from the life of God, because of the**

ignorance that is in them, because of the blindness (hardness ESV) of their heart;... Ephesians 4:18 (NKJV) The writer of Hebrews found it things hard to explain, since you have become dull of hearing. (5:11)

Notice the following words: ***...baptism doth also now save us...1Peter 3:21 (KJV)*** This statement is not accepted by the vast majority of those who consider themselves believers in God. Every denomination will practice some form of baptism, however they will not accept that one is *saved* by it. Through Peter God explains *how* baptism saves, and this explanation is used to argue that ***baptism doth also now NOT save us.***

Many find it ***hard to understand.*** Not only the action itself, but also the purpose of this simple act is rejected in the name of the *grace* of God. It is suggested that one would be working for, and therefore able to deserve salvation by making an *appeal to God for a clear conscience* in this simple way, as you are buried with Christ to be raised a new person, ***born again of the water and the spirit. (Romans 6:3-4; John 3:3-5; 1Corinthians 6:11; Hebrews 10:22)***

Complex terminology and complicated reasoning is used to describe the rules of interpretation so as to eventually justify what we want to do. This becomes obvious when all who claim to follow these rules cannot agree on the simple teachings of the Bible. Many conveniently receive revelations, or *messages laid upon their hearts* to confirm their views, effectively suggesting that God tells different people contradictory things. ***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 Corinthians 1:10 (NKJV)*** This is impossible where each one wants to see things his way...

God inspired men to write down His will for us ***that the man of God may be complete, thoroughly equipped for every good work. (2Timothy 3:17)*** When the Bible seems a mystery, we need to read it so we *may understand* among others Paul's ***knowledge in the mystery of Christ. (Ephesians 3:4)***