

2 Peter 3 (14-18) – The Bible is Understandable

We don't use something because we don't think it works, or it takes too much effort. People today often complain about how hard it is to interpret and understand Scripture, but we have more teachers and tools than we have ever had. More importantly, we never hear Jesus sympathizing with our frustrations on this point. Instead, whether speaking to scholars or untrained common people, Jesus always placed the blame for misunderstanding any teaching on the reader, on those who misunderstand or fail to accept what is written, never on the Scriptures themselves (Matthew 12:3, 5, 19:4, 21:42, 22:31 / Luke 24:25 / John 3:10). We must be committed to a lifelong process of learning His Word. Our goal then becomes to grow to maturity in and unto Christ. Scripture contains everything necessary for our spiritual life. It makes the thoughts of God clear not cloudy. It is God's desire for us to abide in His Word.

- 2 Peter 1:3-11 – through the precious promises of Scripture we can know God, and if you apply them to your life you will become fruitful, you will be stable and not stumble
- 2 Peter 1:16-21 – the Bible is believable
- 2 Peter 2 – there are always false teachers who will entice you with false promises and if you listen to them you will become entangled again in the world and enslaved to sin
- 2 Peter 3:1-13 – there will be scoffers who try and steal your stability

2 Peter 3 (14-18) – Scripture is clear to the stable

- Be diligent
- Be patient
- Learn and live the scriptures
- Be on guard against license (forewarned is forearmed)
- Be growing in grace (true liberty) and knowledge

Scripture is Clear – perspicuity of scripture – clear & understandable.

What it does NOT mean

1. All scripture is equally clear and easily understood as to its precise meaning
2. Interpretation, explanation, and exposition by a Bible teacher are never necessary
3. Believers will agree universally on every point

What it DOES mean

1. Scripture is clear enough for the simplest person to live by, yet deep enough for the most intellectual and diligent readers
2. Obscurity is the fault of our finite and sinful minds, not a problem with the Bible
3. Interpreters must use ordinary means

Scripture is clear in the essential matters, like the virgin birth of Jesus, the deity of Christ, the physical resurrection of Jesus from the dead, the universal sinfulness of man (Romans 3:23), and justification by faith. The illumination by the Holy Spirit is a major part of the doctrine of the clarity of Scripture. However, we cannot ask the Holy Spirit to replace our intellectual engagement with the text. We need to learn it and believe it. Whenever we depart from the plain and simple meaning of Scripture, interpreted using normal means, we are headed for trouble.

If an essential doctrine seems to be obscure in one place, it will be clear in other places. What the Bible teaches against is looking for esoteric things and clues like Bible codes. These are not mysteries to unlock they are mysteries that are now revealed. We do not need some other book as the “key” to provide a spiritualized meaning to an already clear text. God gave us Scripture to reveal Himself, His works, and His plan and we are not supposed to go wandering off into myths and looking for secret knowledge (cf. 1 Timothy 1:3-4, 4:7, 6:3-5, 11, 20 / 2 Timothy 2:16,23, 3:5, 7-8 / Titus 1:14, 3:9). Any other “revelation” can only be inferior, and if it is not supported by the Bible you don’t want it (1 Corinthians 4:6 / Galatians 1:8-9 / 1 John 4:5-6).

The common, unlearned people of Jesus’ day were able to understand much of what He was saying (Mark 12:37 / those willing to obey – Matthew 11:25 / Luke 19:48). Even children can learn from and begin to understand the Bible (Deuteronomy 6:6-7 / 2 Timothy 3:14-15). There are even sections that assume that children are in the audience (Ephesians 6:1-3). Most of the NT epistles are written not to church leaders but to entire congregations. Paul encourages the sharing of his letters with other churches (Colossians 4:16). The exhortations to read Scripture publicly also affirm an expectation that ordinary believers in ordinary congregations could understand the Scriptures (1 Timothy 4:13 / John 20:30-31 / 1 John 5:13).

Scripture affirms that it is able to be understood but not all at once. Understanding Scripture is a process. Further study will lead to further understanding (Joshua 1:8 / Psalm 1:2, 19:7-8, 119:15, 23, 33, 48, 78, 105, 130). Scripture affirms that it is able to be understood but not without effort (2 Timothy 2:15). Scripture affirms that it is able to be understood but not without the reader’s willingness to obey it (Philippians 3:14-16 / 1 Corinthians 3:1-3). Deeper understanding is given to those who are more mature in their faith (Hebrews 5:14).

Mark 4:15-20 – “Who are we listening to?” We see here that for most it is the false teaching of the world (vs.18-19), the flesh (vs.16-17), and the devil (vs.15) that are doing the talking and being listened to. The world feeds it, the devil enflames it, the flesh indulges it. Where there is no fuel the fire dies out (Proverbs 26:20). What are you fueling your life with? Hebrews 3:12-13 – the deceitfulness of sin is what hardens you into unbelief. We are blinded by sin and not our intellect, we might accept these things in our heads, and deny them in our hearts. Those who listen to God hear His Word, accept it, and it bears fruit (vs.20).

Even an unsaved person can understand the plain teachings of Scripture on an external level. Some might think of 1 Corinthians 2:14: the things of the Spirit are foolish to the man without the Spirit, and he cannot understand them. But 1 Corinthians 2:14 does not mean that unsaved people cannot understand any part of the Bible. The point is that they cannot have a spiritual understanding. They can know the facts but not the spiritual value (Matthew 13:13-15 / cf. James 2:19). The Holy Spirit must illumine the mind of the reader or hearer of Scripture if he is to understand the significance of it. This is the correct meaning of 1 Corinthians 2:14.

This is the reason that although the purpose and plans of God are revealed to us in Scripture, many fail to truly understand them because they have not been born again. Others may know the truth but not apply it to their lives, they live as an atheist regarding certain matters, and they are as the Corinthians were, acting carnally. We can see something but not get it; we can know the truth but not trust it. Even as Christians we need to continue to be disciplined in order to come to a

fuller understanding of our life in Christ. You can see it and still not get it. This doesn't mean that there are deep things that only the super spiritual can attain and that we must have gurus to guide us into. No, in that passage Paul is simply contrasting the human wisdom and human mind with the things of God as taught and understood by the empowerment of the Spirit of God, things all Christians have and can grow in the knowledge of (Ephesians 1:15-21).

This does not mean every believer has equal spiritual wisdom, and it does not mean we will understand all spiritual mysteries. It means all Christians can understand the fundamentals of the faith. Many of the deeper things can be understood by most Christians as well, because while it is a matter of spiritual enlightenment and illumination, Christians can obtain it by obedient study. This is not just study for study's sake, but in order to become obedient to the faith (Romans 16:25-26). Oswald Chambers – The golden rule for understanding in spiritual matters is not intellect, but obedience...Obey God in the thing he shows you, and instantly the next thing is opened up. God will never reveal more truth about himself until you have obeyed what you know already...If things are dark to us spiritually, it is because there is something we will not do.

In 1 John 2:27 the Apostle was condemning the notion of spiritual gurus, and he was saying that scripture is clearly presented and able to be understood. He was not saying that we don't need teachers at all. He was a teacher himself. Truly the clarity of scripture is an important doctrine, but it doesn't preclude being taught in the Word (Ephesians 4:11-12 / 1 Timothy 3:2 / 2 Timothy 2:2 / Titus 1:9). It means that we don't need to have enlightened masters to initiate us into secret truths. We just need to learn to interpret the Bible like anyone and everyone else can and should. The Bible isn't a secret code for the swami's to solve.

We must all start out as students, and students are not scholars, and even scholars learn and glean from others. When we talk of the doctrine of the clarity of scripture it means that we can understand the most basic and fundamental truths, not that we can all have an easy handle on all things. We do need teachers, and it does take time. It is a big book. You don't have to have a PhD to study and learn and know the Bible, but a teacher can help you understand it more fully. The NT realizes along with us that we can be lead astray by false teachers, but our own stability is a bulwark against this, as our text today teaches. We don't have to learn fast, we need to learn well, and we do that by applying the Scriptures, by obedience and trust in the things we are sure of. We get in a good community of Bible saturated believers, and we move and grow in grace (we don't have to be sprinters), and we grow in knowledge (our own mind becomes Bible saturated, Romans 12:1-2). What better could you be spending your time on?

We should be thankful to God who clearly reveals in the Bible how to have one's sins forgiven, how to have eternal life, and how to live a life pleasing to Him. This doctrine is very important because the clarity of Scripture is denied by every false theology, usually putting an elite priesthood, a cult's founder, an inner light, or a false methodology between the Scriptures and the Christian. You can understand the Bible without my sermons. I do want you to hear my sermons, but I also want to help you to learn to love, read and study God's Word. We are born again by the will of God (James 1:18), through the Word of God (1 Peter 1:22-25), because of the work of God in Christ (1 Peter 1:18-21). The Bible helps us live for Christ, win others for Christ, and edify our brothers and sisters in Christ. You can learn and live Scripture. You can become trusted counsel for others. You can become stable. You don't have to stumble.