

Scripture's Clarity

BI: The word of God can be readily understood by anyone who reads it with an eye of faith and a heart of obedience.

As we continue thinking and learning about what a marvelous gift the Scriptures are, many of you have communicated how this series of messages has rekindled a commitment to read, study, and fill your mind with the Bible. And that's a good thing, particularly when we consider the necessity of Scripture for the Christian life as Brent so eloquently unpacked for us last week. We need God's word. We need it for salvation. We need it for transformation. We need it for daily spiritual nourishment, and we need it to know how to please the Lord. It is the very foundation of the Christian life. It is the truth against which all other truth claims must be measured. Nevertheless, some of us may still be hesitant to make reading the Scripture to yourself and your family a priority in your home.

For many people the thought of reading the Bible seems intimidating. After all, you probably didn't attend Bible College, or get a degree in theology. Because of that you may be asking, how in the world am I supposed to even understand the Bible let alone teach it to my children? For you the word of God seems like a closed book. Maybe you picked it up one day to give it a try and it flopped open to the book of Revelation and you found yourself totally confused about who was sitting on the 24 thrones, and which beast had how many heads and what is the "anti-Christ," and all of that stuff... and you came away frustrated because none of that made any sense to you at all.

I understand that. I understand that there are portions of the Bible that are difficult at first blush to understand and there are things in the Bible about which good men disagree. On the other hand, however, I think there is great cause for hope that you – yes you – can read and understand the Bible. You see, while its true that some portions of the word of God are hard to understand, the essential teachings of the Bible can be readily understood by anyone who reads it with an eye of faith and a heart of obedience.

So far we have talked about Scripture's Authority, its Truthfulness (inerrancy), and its Necessity in the believer's life. This morning, however, I want us to think about Scripture's Clarity. While it is true that the word of God has enough depth and complexity to engage the most gifted scholars for a lifetime of study, at the same time its essential message is clear enough that even a child can understand.

This morning I want to answer three basic questions.

- I. What Do We mean by the "Clarity" of the Scriptures?
- II. What Inhibits Us From Comprehending the Scriptures?
- III. How Can We Rightly Understand the Scriptures?

I. What do we Mean by the Clarity of Scriptures?

1. Let's begin this discussion with a brief look at what the word of God is. To do this properly we need to remind ourselves of who God is. First, we must remember that God is King and absolute ruler of the universe. He orders all its affairs and works out His will in all that happens in it.¹ Second, we need to understand NOT ONLY that God is King but that God speaks. When we think of ancient kings and how they ruled their people, their speech took on two forms.

2. At one level a king would speak to establish laws and decrees that would regulate his subjects legal, financial, and cultural environment in which they must live. At another level, however, he would make speeches to establish a personal link between himself and His people.

3. This is helpful when we think about the word of God. At one level, God speaks to establish our environment. That is, sometimes in the Bible God speaks in a form of what might be called "sovereign fiat," as when He says "Let there be... ." "Let there be light." "Let there be sky." "Let there be land, and vegetation." "Let there be stars in the sky and fish in the sea," etc. This is the creative word of God by which all things burst into existence, and by which He establishes man's environment.

3. On the other hand, God, our King, speaks to us in order to establish a personal relationship with us. And His speech can be divided into three categories; 1) Law (commands and prohibitions), 2) Promises (both positive and negative), and 3) Testimony (information about Himself, man, the world, the past, and prospects for the future).

4. What we need to see here is that God did not give us His word merely to impress us with His unsearchable character and being. His purpose is not only to govern us but to fellowship with us.² It is not God's desire to live at a distance from His subjects. Rather, as J.I. Packer says,

He made us with the intention that we might walk together forever in a love-relationship. But such a relationship can only exist when the parties involved know something of each other. God our Maker knows all about us before we say anything (Ps. 139:1-4); but we can know nothing about Him unless He tells us. Here, therefore, is a further reason why God speaks to us: not only to move us to do what He wants, but to enable us to know Him so that we may love Him.³

5. Here's the point. When God speaks to us through His word He is not speaking to conceal but to reveal. He is not trying to hide Himself from us but to serve it to us so that we can be saved, transformed, nourished, and delighted in relationship with Him.

6. The question is, did God accomplish His goal? That is, did He communicate these things to us in a manner that we can readily understand? Are the Scriptures really that clear? Well, apparently, He thinks so.

7. Turn with me in your Bibles to Deut. 6:6-9

¹ J.I. Packer, *Knowing God*, (Downer's Grove, IVP, 1979), 98.

² Ibid, 99

³ Ibid, 99

These words, which I am commanding you today, shall be on your heart. ⁷ “You shall teach them diligently to your sons and shall talk of them when you sit in your house and when you walk by the way and when you lie down and when you rise up. ⁸ “You shall bind them as a sign on your hand and they shall be as frontals on your forehead. ⁹ “You shall write them on the doorposts of your house and on your gates.

8. Apparently, God believes even children can understand His word. And the Psalmist concurs when he writes,

Listen, O my people, to my instruction; Incline your ears to the words of my mouth. ² I will open my mouth in a parable; I will utter dark sayings of old, ³ Which we have heard and known, And our fathers have told us. ⁴ We will not conceal them from their children, But tell to the generation to come the praises of the LORD, And His strength and His wondrous works that He has done (Psa. 78:1–4).

9. Apparently, Israel believed it was their responsibility to teach their children the “dark sayings of old,” and “the praises of the Lord... His strength and His wondrous works.” This is a reference to Scripture. We see this again in Proverbs:

My son, if you will receive my words And treasure my commandments within you, ² Make your ear attentive to wisdom, Incline your heart to understanding; ³ For if you cry for discernment, Lift your voice for understanding; ⁴ If you seek her as silver And search for her as for hidden treasures; ⁵ Then you will discern the fear of the LORD And discover the knowledge of God. ⁶ For the LORD gives wisdom; From His mouth come knowledge and understanding (Pro. 2:1–6).

10. Paul picks up on this in Eph. 6:4, “Fathers, do not provoke your children to anger, but bring them up in the discipline and instruction of the Lord.”

11. Moreover, we should also note that God not only considered the Scriptures to be clear enough for children to understand, but for the church to understand as well. Witness the fact that most of the NT epistles were written NOT to church leaders but to entire congregations. Paul writes, “To the church of God which is at Corinth” (1 Cor. 1:2), “To the churches of Galatia” (Gal. 1:2), “To all the saints in Christ Jesus who are at Philippi, with the bishops and deacons (Phil. 1:1). Wayne Grudem explains, ‘Paul assumes that his hearers will understand what he writes, and he encourages the sharing of his letters with other churches: “And when this letter has been read among you, have it read also in the church of the Laodiceans; and see that you read also the letter from Laodicea’ (Col. 4:16).”⁴

12. But perhaps the strongest argument for the clarity of Scripture comes from Jesus, himself. Again, Wayne Grudem helps us by writing,

In a day when it is common for people to tell us how hard it is to interpret Scripture rightly, we would do well to remember that not once in the Gospels do we ever hear Jesus saying anything like this: “I see how your problem arose – the Scriptures are not very clear on that subject.” Rather, we find him again and again simply asking, “Have you not read in the

⁴ Wayne Grudem *Systematic Theology*, (Zondervan, 1994), 107

Scriptures...” (Mat. 21:42), or even “You are wrong because you know neither the Scriptures not the power of God” (Mat. 22:29; cf. Mat 9:13; 12:7; 15:3; 21:13; John 3:10, et al).⁵

13. You see, beloved, God has spoken to us in a manner that is clear and understandable to the common man, and we are responsible for learning it and teaching it to our children. It’s not as difficult as we may think. Moses said in Deut. 30:11-14

For this commandment which I command you today is not too difficult for you, nor is it out of reach. ¹² “It is not in heaven, that you should say, ‘Who will go up to heaven for us to get it for us and make us hear it, that we may observe it?’ ¹³ “Nor is it beyond the sea, that you should say, ‘Who will cross the sea for us to get it for us and make us hear it, that we may observe it?’ ¹⁴ But the word is very near you, in your mouth and in your heart, that you may observe it.

14. Now someone is asking, “Do you mean to say that there is nothing in the Bible that’s difficult to understand?” No. There are plenty of things that are difficult. But the doctrine of the clarity (perspicuity) of Scripture doesn’t suggest that every portion of Scripture is easy to understand. In fact, the Westminster confession saw fit to offer a precise definition by stating,

All things in Scripture are not... plain in themselves, nor... clear unto all: yet those things which are necessary to be known, believed, and observed for salvation, are so clearly propounded, and opened in some place of Scripture or other, that not only the learned, but the unlearned, in due use of the ordinary means, may attain unto a sufficient understanding of them (WCF 1.7).⁶

15. This is what we mean by the clarity of Scripture. And now that we understand the clarity of Scripture, we are ready for the next question; namely,

II. What Inhibits Us From Comprehending Scripture?

1. There are some practical things to consider when we think about why it is difficult to understand the scriptures that should be rather clear.

2. First, lack of clarity may be owing to indifference.

A. Turn with me to 2 Tim. 2:15. Paul says, “Be diligent to present yourself approved to God as a workman who does not need to be ashamed, accurately handling the word of truth.” (cf. Heb. 5:13-14).

B. As long as you’re indifferent or lazy about understanding the word of God, you will never have clarity. God’s message is readily understood by those who will put forth a little consistent effort. You don’t have to be a scholar, but you do need to have a little self discipline.

3. Second, lack of clarity may be owing to unbelief.

⁵ Ibid. 106

⁶ Kevin DeYoung, *Taking God At His Word*, (Wheaton, Crossway, 2014), 58

A. 2 Cor. 2:14, “But a natural man does not accept the things of the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him; and he cannot understand them, because they are spiritually appraised.”

B. In other words, in order to truly understand the word of God you must be indwelt by the Holy Spirit. In fact Paul makes this clear in previous verses:

For to us God revealed them through the Spirit; for the Spirit searches all things, even the depths of God. For who among men knows the thoughts of a man except the spirit of the man which is in him? Even so the thoughts of God no one knows except the Spirit of God (1 Cor. 2:10-11).

C. In other words, unsaved people will never fully understand the word of God. Oh, liberal scholars may have the ability to explain what the words mean, but they will never come to really know God through them because they don't have the H.S. because they refuse to believe.

4. Third, lack of clarity may be owing to disobedience.

A. Jesus said in John 7:17 “If anyone is willing to do His will, he will know of the teaching, whether it is of God or whether I speak from Myself.”

B. There is a direct connection between your willing to obey the Scriptures and your ability to understand the Scriptures. Listen, as long as there is habitual, unconfessed sin in your life; as long as you are unwilling to submit to God's rule in your life, you will never desire to read His word, let alone discipline yourself to understand it.

C. Understanding the Scriptures is more a moral and spiritual issue than an intellectual one.

D. If you come to the Scriptures with a closed heart you will find the Bible a closed book. So James exhorts us to “be doers of the word and not hearers who delude themselves...” (Jam. 1:22).

5. So sometimes a lack of clarity about the Scriptures is owing to indifference; sometimes unbelief, and sometimes disobedience. I'm sure there are more reasons why the word of God is not clear to us at times, but these are probably the basics. And this is a good place to consider how we may need to repent. Perhaps the fact that the word of God is not clear or compelling to you is a problem you can do something about. What do you know God wants you to do about that today?

6. So we have considered the definition of the clarity of Scripture, the reasons where there is sometimes a lack of clarity, and now finally...

III. How can we rightly understand the Scriptures?

1. Now, I'm not going to dive into a lecture on the science of studying the Bible. There are a lot of excellent materials written to teach us how to inductively study the word of

God, and I commend those resources to you. As we get ready to land the plain here, let me just offer you some simple suggestions about how to rightly understand the teaching of Scripture.

2. Before I give these to you I should tell you that I came up with this list assuming that you have not yet read or studied the science of Biblical hermeneutics or read any books on the topic. Rather, I assume that you are either a single person attempting to make the best of your quiet time or a mom or dad who wants to lead your family with the Scriptures and would benefit from some simply guidelines to help you get started. So here is a list of do's and don'ts:

A. Pray before you read: Invite the H.S. to illumine your mind and change your heart however He pleases.

B. Read Repetitively: Take a short book of the Bible (Gal. Eph, Phil, Col. et al) and commit to reading it every day for a month.

C. Study the context: (use note on your phone, or Talk Through the Bible, by Bruce Wilkensen and Ken Boa).

D. Ask questions:

- 1) What does it say about God?
- 2) What does it say about men/women/children?
- 3) What does it reveal about the glory of Christ?
- 4) Are there commands to obey?
- 5) Are there errors to avoid?
- 6) Are there examples to follow?
- 7) Are there promises to claim?
- 8) Are there principles to live by?
- 9) Are there ways to serve Christ better?
- 10) Are their ways to love others (friends, enemies, strangers)?
- 11) Are there temptations to be alert for?
- 12) Are their thoughts or desires to subdue?
- 13) Are there sins to forsake?
- 14) Are there reasons to worship?

E. Be cautious:

- a. Don't allegorize the Scripture. As one preacher said, "If the plain sense makes good sense, to seek another sense is nonsense."
- b. Don't moralize the Scripture.
- c. Don't "proof-text" your own ideas.
- d. Don't exasperate your family by being too deep, too strict, or too long.

F. If you are looking for a structure for family worship, here's one: Sing, Read, Pray.

3. Church, the reason we have been preaching on the word of God these past four weeks is because the Scriptures are the very bedrock of who we are as Christians and who we are as a church. My prayer is that God would use these messages to inspire you to be devoted to the reading and study of Scripture so that we would truly know God and be conformed to the likeness of His Son in every way. And if you are a child of God you can do it. You can understand what God has said because His word is clear.

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