

UNDERSTANDING THE BIBLE

Joe Slater

No doubt about it, the Bible contains some things that are difficult to understand. Even the apostle Peter acknowledged that it has “*some things hard to understand*” (2 Peter 3:16). But far too many have jumped to the conclusion that they cannot understand it.

Unfortunately, even some religious leaders claim that rank-and-file Christians (“laity,” they call us) can’t understand the Bible; we have to rely on the “clergy” to “interpret” it for us! Not so, says the apostle Paul! “*When you read, you may understand my knowledge in the mystery of Christ*” (Ephesians 3:4).

How, then, can we understand the Bible? Don’t take this as a wise-crack or an insult, but to understand the Bible, you’ll have to study it! The same is true of any other subject. What would you understand about math if you never studied it? Will you comprehend everything the first time you see it? Not likely! But you keep on studying and learning. We see the advantage of children being in school several hours daily and doing their homework in the off hours. But are we anywhere near that diligent about their study of the Bible, or about our own?

But now, what about those difficult passages? Even when we study regularly, the complicated and obscure places challenge our thinking. Remember this principle: truth is always consistent with itself, so let your understanding of difficult texts be guided by passages that are clear. Don’t be like the people Peter mentioned who, when they encounter difficult Scriptures, “*twist (them) to their own destruction*” (2 Peter 3:16). One quick example: when you read complicated texts about predestination and election, remember clear passages stating that God doesn’t show partiality. (more later!)

Changing Habits

A habit is the resulting action of a disengaged mind. One may not realize he is biting his nails while another suddenly finds himself absentmindedly munching on junk. Sinful habits are spiritually devastating (1 Corinthians 6:9-10) while habits like prayer promote spiritual maturity (Daniel 6:10). Between the two extremes lay habits ranging in varying shades of gray.

One factor renders a fatal blow to any habit: thought. Especially for the bad habit, thought interrupts the thoughtless actions throwing a mental “monkey wrench” in the mind idling in neutral. It is far from a risky venture to assume that everyone who reads this has, will and needs to devote thought and attention to changing some action that has grown habitual.

Everyone has habits. Many need to be changed. The evil one needs to be replaced by the good one and it in turn needs to be replaced by the better one. While it is true that change hurts, it is also true in some cases that not changing kills! Even this early in the New Year, many good resolutions are already being broken. Take some time to honestly examine the habits in your life.

--David Bragg (via *Bulletin Gold*)

#

Out Of The Mouths Of Babes

Last weekend I cleared a small area of ground for planting a little okra. My soon to be 4-year-old grandson of course wanted to help. In fact, if it involves a shovel, he's ready to move the earth. In times past he's helped clean the dog pen and a few

other shovel-ready projects that most adults hate doing, much less kids. Not Talmage, he's all in and ready to work of he can use a shovel to get 'er done.

He had no idea what planting okra was about, and didn’t care, but if he could use a shovel to do it he was ready. So, he had the pointed spade shovel and I had a square shovel. We were working together (actually I was more on the defense after getting hit in the head a couple of times) when something took place that I'll never forget. It was the perspective of a 4-year-old child that touched my heart.

The ground was fertile and easy to move. From my knees, without a lot of effort, I pushed the shovel through the loose soil and got a shovel-full of dirt to move. I did that several times. He, of course, wanted to move a big shovel-full of dirt just like papaw. After arduously attempting several times (but to no avail) to get as much dirt in his shovel as I did, he decided he wanted to trade shovels. He said, "I want your shovel, it's stronger!" In his little mind he thought the instrument used to move the dirt was the source of strength, not the person or muscle behind the shovel.

After a moment of reflection on his precious words it occurred to me . . . Moses had a rod, Samson a jawbone, and David a sling, but it wasn’t the instruments they respectively used wherein their strength resided; it was God. Sometimes in ones efforts and achievements one may think “*it is with my hand that I have gotten these things*” (see Deut. 8) and all too often forget that God is the real source of strength behind it all. Just a reminder that from the mouths of babes a deeper, richer nugget of truth can be found that will help us adults put things in a true perspective.

--Bill Fergerson (via Facebook)