Understanding The Bible #2

Joe Slater

Yes, you can understand the Bible. It will take time. It will take work. But God is capable of communicating with you, and He made you with the ability to grasp the meaning of words. We ended last week by point out that truth is always consistent with itself, so we should understand difficult texts in light of clear passages.

Likewise, we must not allow our own preconceived ideas to color our understanding of Scripture. Suppose I’ve thought something was true for as long as I can remember. Does that make it so? Could I be wrong?

Jesus encountered this from His contemporaries in first-century Palestine. They viewed God’s word through the lens of their traditions. To be sure, traditions are not always wrong. But when Scripture and tradition clashed, tradition won the day. Sometimes that involved binding human tradition as though it were divine law, which the Pharisees did by condemning Jesus’ disciples for not ritually washing their hands before eating (Matthew 15:2). This had nothing to do with hygiene, and God’s law said nothing about it. At other times, tradition absolutely contradicted God’s law. Jesus denounced those same Pharisees for their tradition of “corban,” which they used as a loophole to avoid honoring their aged parents with financial support (Matthew 15:3-6). Do you approach the Bible with a set of conclusions already reached? Being open-minded isn’t easy, but it helps in gaining a good understanding.

Finally, when you’ve studied a difficult text and still don’t understand it, don’t give up! Rather than getting bogged down, move on to other passages and come back to that one later. The passage of time along with a knowledge of other Scriptures might help you to understand the one that’s troubling you!

Where You Are

"What ails thee, Hagar? Fear not; for God hath heard the voice of the lad where he is" (Gen. 21:17, ASV).

Do you ever feel like God doesn't hear you? That although your heart is full of sorrow, you're not as bad off as others to whom God must attend? Or perhaps you feel that you and what you are doing are not important enough for God to care?

Hagar felt that way. Banished from the only home she had ever known, she wandered in the wilderness until her water ran out. She may have felt like she had nothing to live for, and she might have welcomed death, except for one thing. Her young son Ishmael was a stone's throw away under a shrub. She couldn't bear to watch him die, and she had given up hope.

But God heard her voice and the cry of Ishmael. He told an angel to tell her that Ishmael would become a great nation. He opened her eyes to see a well of water. Hagar and Ishmael lived because God took care of them. The angel said, "God heard the voice of the lad where he is."

God hears your voice too, wherever you are. Are you in a wilderness where you can't seem to accomplish anything? Maybe in a desert where you have lost all hope? Cry to God. He knows about your troubles, and he hears your voice where you are.

When we feel lost and alone, may we say with the Psalmist, "I will lift up mine eyes unto the mountains: From whence shall my help come? My help comes from Jehovah, Who made heaven and earth" (Psalm 121:1, 2).

--Donna Wittlif (Denver, CO)

*Unless you can create the whole universe in six days, perhaps giving advice to God isn’t such a good idea!*

We Need Each Other

A man’s car got stuck in the mud on a country road. He went to a nearby farmhouse to ask for help. The old farmer gladly obliged. He came with an old mule named Dusty. They hooked the car to the harness and the old man shouted, “Pull, Sammy!” Dusty didn’t move. He shouted, “Pull Charlie!” nothing. “Pull, Phillip!” Still nothing. Finally he yelled, “Pull, Dusty!” Instantly, Dusty yanked the car out onto dry ground.

The driver asked the farmer about the curious scene he had just witnessed. The farmer explained, “Old Dusty is blind, and if he thought he was doing all the work by himself, he wouldn’t even have tried!”

The Lord’s intention is for His children never to have to stand alone, work alone, or be alone. Aloneness can paralyze people. In the struggles of our daily lives we are to *“encourage one another day after day”* (Hebrews 3:13). In our labors in the vineyard we are to *“stimulate one another to love and good works”* (Hebrews 10:14). In view of our weaknesses and failings we are to *“bear one another’s burdens”* (Galatians 6:2). Regarding our needs and concerns, each one should *“regard one another as more important than himself”* (Philippians 2:3).

We need each other. We often extol the virtues of loyalty to God and to Christ, admiration and respect for the Bible, and love for the church (in the corporate sense), and rightly so. But we must consider our need for each other as being every bit as much a part of God’s plan for our well-being and continued faithfulness.

--David Deffenbaugh (adapted; via *Old Paths*)