

Can We Understand The Bible?

(Part 4)

by Bryan Gibson

Let's begin where we left off in part three. If God's will can be understood, why do we have so much division in the religious world? Why so many conflicting doctrines, so many different plans of salvation? Is the Bible to blame? Blaming God is not an option, so we believe it's a "people problem," not a Bible problem. Let's see if we can identify some of these people problems.

Pride—the kind of pride that elevates man's thoughts above God's (see Isaiah 55:8-9), the kind of pride that regards even some of the simplest truths as foolishness (see 1 Corinthians 1:18-21). Take baptism, for example. The fact that baptism is essential to salvation (Mark 16:16; Acts 2:38; Acts 22:16; 1 Peter 3:21) is seen as foolishness to some, only because it doesn't make sense to them. It's very similar to the reaction Naaman had when he was told to "go and wash in the Jordan seven times" (2 Kings 5:10). Naaman didn't think much of that plan—until his servants convinced him that he was the one being foolish (2 Kings 5:13-14).

A worldly or carnal mind—the kind of mind that "does not receive the things of the Spirit of God" (1 Corinthians 2:14), the kind of mind that has difficulty understanding "spiritual things" (1 Corinthians 2:13). "I fed you with milk and not with solid food; for until now you were not able to receive it, and even now you are still not able; for you are still carnal (1 Corinthians 3:2-3). It's really hard to "get" what Jesus says about marriage and divorce (Matthew 19:3-12) if we are still carnal—if we still have a worldly view of marriage. What we try to do is fit the teachings of the Bible into our worldly way of thinking, and that just won't work. Try that with the Sermon on the Mount (Matthew 5-7) sometime, and see how it turns out.

Pre-conceived notions. In other words, it's not the truth we're after; we're just trying to justify what we already believe, or what we want to keep on practicing. Obviously, if we "twist" (2 Peter 3:16) hard enough, we can make the Bible say about anything we want. Suppose someone wanted to justify hanging himself. He turns first to Matthew 27:5 where it says Judas "went and hanged himself." He then turns to Luke 10:37 where Jesus says, "Go and do likewise." Then, for the clincher, he uses John 13:27 where Jesus says, "What you do, do quickly." When we put these verses together, we've got Jesus telling us to go hang ourselves, and to do it quickly. An extreme example, we know, but it does show how we can force the Bible to say some strange things.

Lack of effort, something we covered in previous articles (see Proverbs 2:1-5; 2 Timothy 2:15). Can we not trace a lot of false teaching back to a lack of study? Ideas get taught before thorough study has been made, and then no one bothers to verify them with the Scriptures. Both teachers and students need to be more diligent in their search for "the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth."

Let me conclude this series with a personal note. My own understanding of the Bible is far from perfect. There is much in the Bible that I still don't understand. But I do not intend to quit trying, nor do I intend to blame God for my failures. I want my life to be conformed to the will of God, and I know that in order to do that, I must keep reading and studying. I beg all our readers to do the same.