



ISSUE

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Faithful Sayings

BULLETIN
OF THE
OLSEN PARK
CHURCH OF
CHRIST

Services

Sunday: 9:00 AM

9:30 AM

10:30 AM

Wednesday: 7:00 PM

Elders:

Patrick Ledbetter

Brady McAlister

Jeff Nunn

Deacons:

Ben Hight

Blake McAlister

Walker McAnear

Sam Nunn

Lance Purcell

Justin Smiley

Trevor Yontz

Evangelists:

Austin Byers

Kyle Pope

Can the Bible Be Understood?

By Kyle Pope

In his second epistle to the church in Corinth, Paul wrote: **“For we are not writing any other things to you than what you read or understand. Now I trust you will understand, even to the end (as also you have understood us in part), that we are your boast as you also are ours, in the day of the Lord Jesus”** (2 Cor. 1:13-14, NKJV). Paul claims that what he was writing to them was nothing other than what they could **“read”** and **“understand.”** He concluded the verse with an expression of confidence that indeed they will understand **“even to the end”**—that is, he hoped they would become complete in their understanding—**“I hope you will understand fully”** (RSV).

Throughout the ages there have been those who have falsely taught that the Scriptures cannot be understood by the average person. Some have argued that only if the Bible is interpreted by a priest or religious organization can it be properly understood. Others have claimed that Scripture can only be understood if the Holy Spirit directly acts upon a person (separate from the revealed words He has already inspired) to empower a person to be able to understand. The Gnostics imagined that their secret knowledge of some higher truths enabled them to understand

what others could not. Each of these views paint a picture of the biblical text that leads souls to imagine that it is a confusing and hidden puzzle that cannot be “read” and “understood” as we would any other type of written material. Sadly, this results in people leaning exclusively on what other people tell them, following what they feel strongly within their hearts (imagining that it is the Holy Spirit leading them), or refusing to read the Bible at all.

The Bible warns us about each of these responses to the word of God. When the religious leaders tried to tell the apostles not to teach

what Jesus had commanded them, they responded boldly, **“We ought to obey God rather than men”** (Acts 5:29). Paul taught that Christians must, **“Test all things; hold fast what is good”** (1 Thess. 5:21). John instructed Christians, **“Beloved, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits, whether they are of God; because many false prophets have gone out into the world”** (1 John 4:1). We cannot test doctrines that are taught if we do not have the ability to understand God’s word. We cannot distinguish between the commands of God and the commands of men if we cannot understand what God has revealed.

The Lord warned, through Ezekiel, **“Thus says the Lord GOD: “Woe to the foolish prophets, who follow their own spirit and have seen nothing!”** (Ezek. 13:3). Paul taught that the way we are led by the Holy Spirit is by focusing our minds on what the Spirit has revealed. He told the Romans, **“For those who live according to the flesh set their minds on the things of the flesh, but those who live according to the Spirit, the things of the Spirit”** (Rom. 8:5). He told the Ephesians to take up **“the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God”** (Eph. 6:17). We can only know the difference between the inclinations of our **“own spirit”** and the revelation of God by *setting our minds on* the things which the Holy Spirit has revealed in Scripture. It is the Spirit’s

A photograph of a sunset over a field with trees. The sun is low on the horizon, casting a warm orange glow across the sky. The trees are silhouetted against the bright light of the setting sun.

Olsen Park Church of Christ

“two-edged sword” that acts as a **“discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart”** (Heb. 4:12). If we do not read the Bible we are not allowing the Spirit to work through the word to shape our hearts and lead our actions.

In Paul’s words in 2 Corinthians 1:13 we should note some things that directly contradict these false views of Scripture. Paul says he wrote to them things they could...

“Read”—*anaginōskō* (ἀναγινώσκω)—*“To gather exact knowledge of, recognize, discern; especially to read”* (Harold K. Moulton, *The Analytical Greek Lexicon Revised*, Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1978, 21). Paul tells the Corinthians that by *reading* his inspired words they can gather the knowledge they need of things pertaining to life in Christ.

“Understand”—*epiginōskō* (ἐπιγινώσκω)—*“Properly to make a thing a subject of observation; hence, to arrive at knowledge from preliminaries; to attain to a knowledge of; to ascertain; to perceive; to discern, detect”* (ibid., 155). These words are drawn from the same word, only the prefix differs. By reading his inspired word, Paul says the Corinthians may fully know the things they need to know about life in Christ

This is seen further in his next words—**“(as also you have understood us in part), that we are your boast as you also are ours, in the day of the Lord Jesus”** (2 Cor. 1:14). Paul claims that they had only understood **“in part.”** This is interesting in light of his words in his first epistle. He had claimed of them that they had been, **“enriched in everything by Him in all utterance and all knowledge”** (1 Cor. 1:5). *What does*

this indicate about what is necessary to understand Scripture?

Here is what is clear:

1. The Corinthians had spiritual gifts (1 Cor. 12-14). So, the Holy Spirit had worked within them. Yet...

2. They did not yet fully understand all aspects of the truth—they only understood **“in part”** (2 Cor. 1:14).

3. What was written to them could be understood if they truly applied themselves to it **“to the end”** (2 Cor. 1:13).

If Scripture can only be understood if interpreted by the proper religious authority why would Paul claim *they* could come to understand it? If Scripture can only be understood if the Holy Spirit grants the ability to understand it, why didn’t the Corinthians understand it—the Spirit had done His part (1 Cor. 1:5)?

God has given the Scriptures to mankind in a form that can be accepted or re-



jected and fully understood if, *rightly divided* (2 Tim. 2:15). When men do not understand (or accept) the truth, it is not because they don't have the ability to do so, but rather because something about the condition of their heart is not right. We see this in the Parable of the Sower. The same seed was sown, but what determined

whether or not it grew was not whether it was interpreted by a religious leader or organization—it was not because the Holy Spirit didn't empower it—it was because of the condition of the soil (Matt. 13:1-9; 18-23). If men and women will put out of their hearts and minds preconceptions and personal desires and openly and

sincerely look to God's word, it can be understood as we would any other written document. All who sincerely wish to understand Scripture can understand it. Jesus said, **"If anyone wants to do His will, he shall know concerning the doctrine, whether it is from God or whether I speak on My own authority"** (John 7:17).



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