



Why Are There So Many Different Interpretations Of The Bible?

DISCOVERING GOD'S WORD BIBLE STUDY SERIES

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Why are there so many different interpretations of the Bible? It is commonly claimed today that the Bible cannot be understood – at least not understood alike. And, there are tens of thousands of different religious organizations who believe they have the truth – even though they all practice their faiths differently from the others. But, how can there possibly be this many different interpretations of the same book (the Bible)? Can they all be accurate? Let's investigate.

It Is Not Because...

As you read the pages of God's word, you notice (among many other things) that the Bible makes some claims about itself. And, as you investigate some of these claims and consider them alongside the fact that there are many different interpretations of the Bible, you should recognize that these two things do not harmonize with each other. Therefore, let's investigate some reasons that are *not* to blame for all the different interpretations of the Bible.

It is not because God has given more than one law to govern us. God has only given one universal law that mankind is accountable to today. That is the gospel of Jesus Christ. Consider that Paul stated the fact that the gospel of Christ is the "power of God to salvation for everyone who believes, for the Jew first and also for the Greek" (Romans 1:16). As such, there are not many different systems of law for people to live under today so as to justify multiple interpretations of the Bible. Instead, in Ephesians 4:1-6, Paul said that there is only "one faith" – and that one faith (the one system of acceptable religious belief, teaching, and practice) is among the things which ought to unite us rather than divide us. If God had given more than one law to govern us, then it would be reasonable for there to be different interpretations of God's word. However, God's word claims that there is only one faith that all mankind is accountable to. You (and all mankind) must simply follow that one faith!

It is not because God's word cannot be understood. Though there are some today who claim that God's word cannot be understood by a common person, God's word claims that it can!

For instance, Ephesians 3:4, Paul told the Ephesians, “when you read, you may understand my knowledge in the mystery of Christ.” Similarly, Ephesians 5:17 says, “Therefore do not be unwise, but understand what the will of the Lord is.” If God’s word could not be understood, then it would be reasonable for there to be different interpretations of what is written. However, God’s word claims to be understandable. You can know exactly what God’s will is for you if you study its message!

It is not because God’s word is incomplete. Jude wrote, “Beloved, while I was very diligent to write to you concerning our common salvation, I found it necessary to write to you exhorting you to contend earnestly for the faith which was once for all delivered to the saints” (Jude 1:3). The gospel of Jesus Christ (the revelation of God’s new covenant) has been revealed once for all time! There are no amendments for God to add to His revelation. If God’s word was incomplete, then it would be reasonable for there to be different interpretations of what is written. However, God’s word claims to be complete. There is no further revelation God will add to the things that have been written in the pages of His word!

It is not because God’s word contradicts itself. God’s word is perfect. It contains absolutely no flaws, errors, or inconsistencies. Psalm 19:7 says that the “law of the Lord is perfect, converting the soul” and the “testimony of the Lord is sure, making wise the simple.” James 1:25 describes the gospel of Jesus Christ as “the perfect law of liberty.” If God’s word contradicts itself, then it would be reasonable for there to be different interpretations of what is written. However, God’s word is perfect. There is nothing that it contains that is not 100% true.

It is not because God’s word allows for multiple interpretations. Though there are some points of difficulty in the Bible’s message, all mankind can be united in the doctrines and practices that are outlined within the pages of God’s word. In fact, God demands unity among those who will follow Him. 1 Corinthians 1:10, for instance, commands, “Now I plead with you, brethren, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that you all speak the same thing, and that there be no divisions among you, but that you be perfectly joined together in the same mind and in the same judgment.” If God’s word allowed for multiple interpretations of His word, then it would be reasonable to expect such. However, God commands that His followers be perfectly united. The only way that is possible is if He has given us a message that allows us to be united. Otherwise, He has commanded something of us that is impossible!

It Is Because...

The various contradictions and differences in interpretations are absolutely *not* due to these factors. There is no problem with God’s revelation of His will to mankind (in the pages of the Bible). This, then, leaves all of the fault with mankind. 2 Peter 3:16, for instance, says that Paul wrote some things that are “hard to understand,” which “untaught and unstable people twist to their own destruction, as they do also the rest of the Scriptures.” Mankind has the responsibility to be diligent to rightly interpret the Scriptures (2 Timothy 2:15) – even when those Scriptures may

be more difficult (not impossible) to understand! There are a number of ways, then, in which mankind has caused God's word to be twisted, misinterpreted, and misapplied.

Sometimes the way that we understand some passages and Biblical concepts can become distorted because of ideas that have been engrained in our minds. Sometimes these ideas come from our parents. Sometimes they come from the ways in which we were raised. Sometimes they come from our cultures. Sometimes they come from the ways in which we have been educated. They can come through many different sources. Then, when we study the Bible, we can be guilty of interpreting what God says through our own personal worldviews rather than allowing God to shape our worldviews!

Sometimes we can be guilty of distorting Bible passages (knowingly or unknowingly) in a way so they fit our own ideas/opinions. Then, opinions often are bound on others (forcing others to accept our own opinions). However, the Bible says that there is a way which often "seems right to a man" but its end "is the way of death" (Proverbs 14:12). Therefore, we must not be wise in our own opinions (Romans 12:16) – or place our confidence in the opinions of other men.

Sometimes we can be guilty of placing more emphasis on man's traditions (even his religious traditions) than on what God's word actually teaches. In fact, in some churches, tradition is viewed as being just as authoritative as the Bible! However, in Matthew 15:3-9, Jesus condemned some religious people because they violated God's commandment by holding to man-made traditions!

Sometimes we can fail to accept the truth that God's word teaches because we simply do not want to change. So, whenever we read of something God wants us to do, we distort God's message to fit what we want. Or, we can also desire to justify someone else (i.e. a family member or friend) and be guilty of the same. For instance, in 2 Timothy 4:3-4, Paul warned Timothy (a preacher) that a time would come when individuals would not "endure sound doctrine" (they would not like what true gospel teaching required of them). According to their own desires and because of their "itching ears" (wanting to be told something that was pleasing to them), they would find "teachers" to tell them what they desired to hear. Thus, they would "turn their ears away from the truth, and be turned aside to fables." Many individuals today do not want to study God's word to find out what they are doing wrong and what they need to change. Instead, they study God's word and listen to preachers only to learn what they *desire* to know.

Sometimes folks are guilty of not being diligent to search out what the Bible teaches – for themselves. They will only listen to what some people tell them the Bible says and what the Bible means. Therefore, many people only ever know what the Bible says by what their parents, teachers, preachers, etc. say – without searching the truth out for themselves. Rather than being guilty of this, we should imitate the example of the Bereans (in Acts 17:11) – who "searched the Scriptures daily" to find out whether they were being taught the truth or not!

Sometimes false teachers assist folks in coming to false conclusions about God's word. There are many warnings about false teachers and false prophets in the Bible. These individuals claim to speak the things of God but actually teach things that do not originate with God. For instance, Jesus warned about false prophets in Matthew 7:15-20. Peter warned about such in 2 Peter 2:1-3. In Galatians 1:6-9, Paul warned about those who would "pervert the gospel of Christ" and urged that no other gospel be accepted besides the one true gospel! He even said that all false gospels must be rejected – no matter who preaches them (even if it would originate with an apostle of Christ or an angel of God)! Therefore, you must determine never to listen to any false teacher – no matter who is teaching you!

The "bottom line" is that there are a large number of things that can get in our way of understanding the Bible accurately – and understanding it alike (even in addition to the things discussed here). But, we can be sure that God is not one of those things!

Conclusion

It is possible to understand the Bible alike! God is not the reason for the many different interpretations of the Bible – and He does not approve of them either! There is still only "one faith" that is revealed once for all time in the pages of the gospel of Jesus Christ. And, He expects mankind to be diligent to "stand fast in one spirit, with one mind striving together for the faith of the gospel" of Jesus Christ (Philippians 1:27)!

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