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## Can We Understand The Bible Alike?

Notwithstanding the fact that Jesus **prayed** for the unity of all who believe on Him through the apostles' "*word*" (John 17:20,21), and notwithstanding the fact that Jesus **died** to make it possible for both Jews and Gentiles to be reconciled "*unto God in one body*" (Eph. 2:16), religious division abounds in today's world. It abounds, even though God's people were admonished to "*keep the unity of the Spirit*" (Eph. 4:3), and to have "*no divisions among*" themselves (I Cor. 1:10). Indeed, there is an obvious disparity between the **unity** for which Jesus so fervently prayed and died to make possible, and the rampant **division** which exists!

Of course, the "**whys**" of religious division are many. Multitudes could "care less" about true Bible unity, and are determined to have their own way regardless of the division caused. Others are attached to human creeds, or the contradictory writings of mere men, and as long as they place the doctrines and commandments of men on a par with the inspired word of God, then division is inevitable. However, the fact remains that many, who correctly believe the Bible must be our sole guide in matters religious, have major religious differences among themselves. These differences are often so grievous as to render unity almost impossible. This greatly bothers conscientious, sober-minded people — especially those who genuinely believe that Jesus really did die in order to unite and reconcile both Jews and Gentiles unto God in that "*one body*" (Eph. 2:16), or "*church*" (Eph. 1:22,23).

It is axiomatic that in order for unity to exist there must be **agreement**, and for agreement to exist, there must be a *common understanding*. Inasmuch as unity is based upon all speaking "*the same thing*" (I Cor. 1:10) — that being the "*oracles of God*" (I Pet. 4:11) — then to have true unity there must be a common understanding of the word of God. However, from many quarters we are told that we cannot understand the Bible alike. Of course, **if** we can't understand the Bible alike, **then** the unity for which Jesus so fervently prayed becomes an impossibility. Hence, the question, "**can we understand the Bible alike,**" demands our attention!

### **If We Can Not Understand The Bible Alike, Then:**

**1. Jesus' prayer for unity was a waste of words!** Moreover, His prayer was misleading! You see, **if** a common understanding of the Scriptures is impossible, **then** unity is impossible; hence, the inference that unity could be attained through the "*words*" of the apostles (John 17:20,21) leads to a false hope!

**2. Jesus' death was for naught!** As before stated, Jesus died in order to unite

and reconcile both Jews and Gentiles unto God “*in one body*” (Eph. 2:16), but **if** we cannot understand the Bible alike, **then** there is no way that Jews and Gentiles could come to a common understanding of what is necessary in order even to **enter** the “*one body!*”

**3. Obedience to God is impossible.** One has to “*know the truth*” in order to **obey** the truth (John 8:32; Romans 6:17,18). The Lord gave us but one gospel, and upon it our salvation is predicated (Rom. 1:16; 2 Thess. 1:7-9), but **if** we can not arrive at a common understanding of the gospel, **then** we can never know whether we have actually obeyed the gospel! **If** that be the case, **then** no one can really know if he is a child of God, or if he is a child of the devil!

**4. Either God’s Character or God’s wisdom is less than perfect!** This is a strong statement to make, but please consider the facts. **If** on the one hand God gave us the Bible that we must understand in order to obey, but which He knew we could not understand, **then** God has required of us the impossible! That charge reflects upon the very character of God! On the other hand, **if** God commanded us to understand His word, but gave us a message which we can not understand, **then** God lacked the ability to communicate His will in a way in which man can understand!

#### Test Cases

In order to illustrate the fact that we can understand the Bible alike we shall now cite Matthew 3:13-17, which records Matthew’s account of the baptism of Jesus. Please carefully read these verses and then answer the questions which follow:

(13) *Then Jesus came from Galilee to John at the Jordan to be baptized by him.* (14) *And John tried to prevent Him, saying, ‘I need to be baptized by You, and are You coming to me?’* (15) *But Jesus answered and said to him, ‘Permit it to be so now, for thus it is fitting for us to fulfill all righteousness.’ Then He allowed Him.* (16) *When He had been baptized, Jesus came up immediately from the water; and behold, the heavens were opened to Him, and He saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove and abiding upon Him.* (17) *And suddenly a voice came from heaven, saying, ‘This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased.’”*

Now for the questions. **Who** came from Galilee to John at the Jordan. **Why** did He go from Galilee to John at the Jordan? **What** did John see descending like a dove? From **what place** did a voice come saying, “*This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased?*”

I am fully confident that all who took the time to read the scriptures cited, and then considered the questions which followed, gave the **same answers** to the **same questions!** **If** that be the case, **then** (with reference to the questions asked) they all understood the Bible alike!

“But you cited passages which pertain to a historical event, and not to a **doctrinal**

issue,” someone may say. That is true, so let us now consider a couple of references which pertain to a doctrinal matter; yea, one which is both doctrinal and controversial, namely **baptism**. For your open-minded consideration, we now cite:

Mark 16:16: “*He who **believes** and **is baptized** will be saved; but he who does not believe will be condemned.*”

Now for the questions on this verse: Who is the “*he*” that Jesus said “*will be saved?*” Is salvation (in this verse) predicated upon **one** item (either faith or baptism), or is it based upon **two** items (faith and baptism)? If you were reading this verse for the first time in your life, and you had never heard anything from any person or any church regarding salvation, what answer would **you** give regarding the necessity of both faith and baptism? The point should be clear: Mark 16:16 is not hard to understand if one simply reads it for what it says and does not try to make it harmonize with preconceived ideas!

**Acts 2:38:** “*Then Peter said to them, Repent and let every one of you be **baptized** in the name of Jesus Christ **for** the remission of sins; and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.*”

Now for the questions: **What** did Peter tell the people to do? For what **reason** did Peter command his listeners to “*repent and be baptized*” Were Peter’s listeners commanded to repent and be baptized because they had **already** received the remission of sins, or were they commanded to repent and be baptized in order to **receive** the remission of sins? If you had never heard any person say anything about repentance and baptism, and you were approaching the subject for the first time in your life (having formed no preconceived ideas about either repentance or baptism) what understanding would you now have regarding the **place** and **purpose** of **both** repentance and baptism in the plan of salvation? It is my belief that every person who took the time to read what is said in that Scripture (neither reading anything **into** the verse or taking anything **from it**) would reach the **same** conclusion regarding what this verse says one must do in order to be saved. If that be the case, then **all** arrived at the **same understanding** — an understanding simply based on what the Bible says in that verse — which illustrates that we **can** understand the Bible alike!

### Conclusion

It is one thing to say that we **can** understand the Bible alike, and quite another to say that we **do** understand the Bible alike. However, the fact that unity is commanded and obedience is necessary means that **if** we can understand the Bible alike, **then** we ought to make every effort to correctly **learn** and **obey** the will of God. This demands integrity, effort, and open-mindedness upon the part of one and all. We should not quibble with **why** God commanded this or that. It is **His prerogative** to reveal His will, and it is **our obligation** to learn and obey His will! Consider ye well!

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—B. Witherington