RESOLVING APPARENT CONTRADICTIONS IN SCRIPTURE

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Resolving apparent contradictions in scripture calls for proper methods of interpretation. The approach assumes the inerrancy of scripture; brain teasers often become paradoxes in wording rather than real contradictions. The approach also assumes that scripture is divine in such a way that makes it harmonious throughout. The mechanisms available for harmonizing scriptures with each other and with experience amount to the same mechanisms for interpreting human language in general. What we do to clear up ambiguities we do to resolve difficulties. Apparent difficulties arise because either or both sides of a dilemma are unclear, but readers do not realize that when they sense a problem with the text. The following list is a brief list of mechanisms for resolving apparent discrepancies.

1.   Is there a <u>textual problem</u> in one of the verses? English Bibles often give marginal notations at places where significant textual issues exist.
2.   Is there a <u>translation problem</u> in any of the references? Checking for different translations is helpful.
3.   Is there a difference between the <u>meanings of terms</u>? Sometimes the fact that a shift has occurred in the English word at two points is evidenced by a difference in Greek or Hebrew words. Comparing translations may help identify this problem.
4.   Is there a <u>literal-figurative variable</u> that could be responsible for the tension between texts? The literal-figurative distinction relates to the genre issue, whether there may be exaggeration for emphasis, and the like.
5.   Is there a <u>technical-non-technical variable</u> in the terms that appear?
6.   Could there be a <u>restrictive-non-restrictive variable</u> at work in the wording?
7.   Do the contexts have a different <u>frame of reference</u>? Is the same <u>topic</u> addressed in both places?
8.   Are there different <u>intended contrasts</u> involved?
9.   Is there any possibility for <u>allegorizing the comparison</u> that in turn sets up a problem with other scriptures?
10. What possibility exists for confusing <u>sequence of presentation and sequence in the referent</u>—whether of chronological order, logical order (importance, conditions), *etc*.
11. Can an <u>inappropriate model</u> be the source of the difficulty?
12. Is there a <u>difference in idiom</u> between biblical languages and modern English, which then creates an unconscious misunderstanding of one of the passages? Words of particular importance here include *all*, *is*, *can*(*not*), *necessary*, *forever*, *prophecy*, *fulfill*, *give*, *nature*, *judge*. There could be cases also of linguistic interchange of nature, state, and action terms.
13. If the issue is about something to be done, there may be an <u>advice-commandment distinction</u> at work.
14. What difference would a <u>permissive-prescriptive</u> and/or <u>direct-indirect variable</u> bring to the text?
15. A <u>general *vs*. absolute variable</u> may be at work with one statement being a generality and another that deals with an exception assumed in the generality statement. Implied <u>cultural limitation</u> applies to this point. Perhaps one context is addressing a specific <u>unusual</u>

situation that is an exception to the rule stated by the other. One may be a negligible matter of degree that the other decides not to overlook.

16. Is relative negative possible in one of the references?

17. Is a different audience/circumstance addressed, including dispensational distinctions?

18. It may help to compare translations and commentaries and specialized treatments useful in seeing through paradoxes.

It is well to work out more than one solution. (1) Sometimes the various solutions we can come up with are aspects of one larger answer. (2) Later we may discover that one solution does not work for reasons we did not know about at the time we made it. We still have the others to fall back on if we have seen more than one way of handling it. This procedure increases our confidence in the text. Besides, (3) it gives us an added sense of objectivity if we see more than one answer in ambiguous cases.

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