

Romans 3:4 *God forbid: yea, let God be true, but every man a liar;...*

➡ Because these words are perfect and true, there can be no error or contradiction in the Bible. Thus, if we find passages that *seem* to contradict each other, we can know that we are not understanding one of those passages correctly. God often uses these *apparent* contradictions to call our attention to an important teaching of Scripture, forcing us to study more diligently.

The Bible is the power of God unto salvation:

Romans 1:16 *For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ: for it is the power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth; to the Jew first, and also to the Greek.*

Romans 10:17 *So then faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the word of God.*

➡ There is no more important book in the universe. God will not save anyone apart from the power of His Word. This is a matter of the greatest importance to all mankind.

We can only understand the Bible if God the Holy Spirit opens our (spiritual) eyes and our minds and hearts to give us understanding of the infinite Words of God:

1 Corinthians 2:14 *But the natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God: for they are foolishness unto him: neither can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned.*

Job 32:8 *But there is a spirit in man: and the inspiration of the Almighty giveth them understanding.*

Luke 24:45 *Then opened He (Christ) their understanding, that they might understand the scriptures,*

Psalms 119:18 *Open thou mine eyes, that I may behold wondrous things out of thy law.*

➡ We must study the Bible humbly and prayerfully, asking that God would open our spiritual eyes and allow us to understand His Word.

The Bible explains that we are to compare Scripture with Scripture (spiritual things with spiritual) to understand the Bible:

1 Corinthians 2:13 *Which things also we speak, not in the words which man's wisdom teacheth, but which the Holy Ghost teacheth; comparing spiritual things with spiritual.*

John 6:63 *... the words that I speak unto you, they are spirit, and they are life.*

2 Peter 1:20 *Knowing this first, that no prophecy of the scripture is of any private interpretation.*

➡ The Bible serves as its own "Commentary", and its own "Dictionary". The meanings of words and phrases are not defined by man's wisdom, or studying of secular Greek literature, but by God – we must look to see how God uses those words elsewhere in Scripture.

➡ Because the whole Bible is written by One Author, God, we can confidently compare words and phrases from one part of the Bible with any other part of the Bible. God tells us to compare Scripture with Scripture (spiritual with spiritual). He does not tell us to compare historical with historical, or grammatical with grammatical as many theologians teach today.

Even a child can understand the Bible, sufficient to salvation, if God gives the understanding:

2 Timothy 3:15 *And that from a child thou (Timothy) hast known the holy scriptures, which are able to make thee wise unto salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus.*

But another key fact (and somewhat surprising) is that the Bible has been written to be difficult for unbelievers to understand - this is consistent with Jesus' own method of teaching while He walked and taught on Earth:

Proverbs 25:2 *It is the glory of God to conceal a thing: but the honour of kings is to search out a matter.*

Psalms 78:2-3 *I will open my mouth in a parable: I will utter dark sayings of old: Which we have heard and known, and our fathers have told us. (This "parable" is the entire history of the nation of Israel, which is a historical picture or type of the Gospel.)*

2 Peter 3:16 *As also in all his (Paul's) epistles, speaking in them of these things; in which are some things hard to be understood, which they that are unlearned and unstable wrest, as they do also the other scriptures, unto their own destruction.*

More examples - Jesus spoke almost entirely in parables to the general public:

Mark 4:33-34 *And with many such parables spake he (Jesus) the word unto them, as they were able to hear it. But without a parable spake he not unto them: and when they were alone, he expounded all things to his disciples.*

Luke 8:10 *And he (Jesus) said, Unto you it is given to know the mysteries of the kingdom of God: but to others in parables; that seeing they might not see, and hearing they might not understand.*

➡ The Bible contains many verses that have a deeper spiritual meaning, written as parables and allegories.

The Bible testifies of itself that it is filled from beginning to end with the message of Jesus, the Gospel of Salvation, and that many Old Testament stories are actually historical parables which symbolically point us to Christ:

Acts 3:18 *But those things, which God before had showed by the mouth of all his prophets, that Christ should suffer, he hath so fulfilled.*

Acts 3:24 *Yea, and all the prophets from Samuel and those that follow after, as many as have spoken, have likewise foretold of these days.*

John 5:39 *Search the scriptures; for in them ye think ye have eternal life: and they are they which testify of me.*

Hebrews 10:7 *Then said I, Lo, I come (in the volume of the book it is written of me,) to do Thy will, O God.*

Luke 24:25-27 *Then he said unto them, O fools, and slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have spoken: Ought not Christ to have suffered these things, and to enter into his glory? And beginning at Moses and all the prophets, he expounded unto them in all the scriptures the things concerning himself.*

➡ As we study the Bible, we should be looking for the Gospel of Christ everywhere that we read. As we begin to see Christ, we can know that we are coming to the true meaning of a verse.

The entire Bible contains a deeper Spiritual meaning hidden as parables and allegories within verses that appear to be simple historical or moral statements. Every historical and moral statement of the Bible is still absolutely true, but we can learn even more by looking at the symbolic Spiritual message of these verses. Jesus had to rebuke His followers, and Pharisees alike for trying to take His words literally when He meant them symbolically (with a deeper spiritual meaning). Just a few examples:

Matthew 16:6-8 *Then Jesus said unto them, Take heed and beware of the leaven of the Pharisees and of the Sadducees. And they reasoned among themselves, saying, It is because we have taken no bread. Which when Jesus perceived, he said unto them, O ye of little faith, why reason ye among yourselves, because ye have brought no bread?*

John 4:11,13 *The woman saith unto him, Sir, thou hast nothing to draw with, and the well is deep: from whence then hast thou that living water? Jesus answered and said unto her, Whosoever drinketh of this water shall thirst again: (She mistook literal water for spiritual, living water).*

John 3:4,10 *Nicodemus saith unto him, How can a man be born when he is old? can he enter the second time into his mother's womb, and be born? (And in verse 10, Jesus' rebuke): Jesus answered and said unto him, Art thou a master of Israel, and knowest not these things?*

John 11:11-13 *These things said he: and after that he saith unto them, Our friend Lazarus sleepeth; but I go, that I may awake him out of sleep. Then said his disciples, Lord, if he sleep, he shall do well. Howbeit Jesus spake of his death: but they thought that he had spoken of taking of rest in sleep.*

John 6:51-53, 60-61,66 *I am the living bread which came down from heaven: if any man eat of this bread, he shall live for ever: and the bread that I will give is my flesh, which I will give for the life of the world. The Jews therefore strove among themselves, saying, How can this man give us his flesh to eat? Then Jesus said unto them, Verily, verily, I say unto you, Except ye eat the flesh of the Son of man, and drink his blood, ye have no life in you.... Many therefore of his disciples, when they had heard this, said, This is an hard saying; who can hear it? When Jesus knew in himself that his disciples murmured at it, he said unto them, Doth this offend you?... From that time many of his disciples went back, and walked no more with him.*

Luke 24:45-46 *Then opened he their understanding, that they might understand the scriptures, And said unto them, Thus it is written, and thus it behoved Christ to suffer, and to rise from the dead the third day: (Jesus here says that the Old Testament Scriptures wrote that Christ had to be killed*

and resurrected the third day. However, that is not explicitly written anywhere in the Old Testament—this is only stated allegorically as in **Jonah 1:17** “*Now the LORD had prepared a great fish to swallow up Jonah. And Jonah was in the belly of the fish three days and three nights*”. Christ points to this Old Testament verse, showing that it is allegorically describing His resurrection in **Matthew 12:40**. Thus, Christ shows us that to correctly understand the story of Jonah, we must see what it is telling us about the resurrection of Christ.)

Luke 17:12,14-17 *And as he entered into a certain village, there met him ten men that were lepers, which stood afar off: And when he saw them, he said unto them, Go show yourselves unto the priests. And it came to pass, that, as they went, they were cleansed. And one of them, when he saw that he was healed, turned back, and with a loud voice glorified God, And fell down on his face at his feet, giving him thanks: and he was a Samaritan. And Jesus answering said, Were there not ten cleansed? but where are the nine?*

In this account we see one of the clearest indications of how we must understand the spiritual aspect of the Scriptures. Here, Christ commands the ten lepers to show themselves to the priest as the Old Testament law commanded. This was a reference to ceremonial laws in **Leviticus 14:2** which says “*This shall be the law of the leper in the day of his cleansing: He shall be brought unto the priest.*” Christ shows us in His response to the one leper that this command was actually to be understood *spiritually*, and that it pointed to our coming to the Great High Priest (**Hebrews 4:14**) when we become saved. Jesus rebuked the other nine lepers for following the literal command of God while ignoring the *true spiritual* intent of His command to go show themselves to Christ the High Priest and to give thanks.

The Bible is a Spiritual book and is not to be read just as a book of moral teachings, or history, or poetry, or wisdom. The focus is on mankind’s greatest need – Salvation.

John 6:63 *It is the spirit that quickeneth; the flesh profiteth nothing: the words that I speak unto you, they are spirit, and they are life.*

Romans 7:14 *For we know that the law is spiritual: but I am carnal, sold under sin.*

So we can summarize the key teachings of God regarding how we are to study and understand the Bible:

1. Always pray before studying the Bible, since it is only God the Holy Spirit who can open our eyes and give us any understanding of His infinite Word.
2. Know that every statement in Scripture is written by God and is completely true; therefore, it will be in harmony with every other statement. If there is an apparent contradiction, we do not yet understand one of the statements correctly.

3. We are to compare Scripture with Scripture. The Bible is its own dictionary and defines its own terms. This means that as we read the Bible, we should make a note when we see a verse or idea that seems related to other verses we have read. Studying these verses together can help us to understand them better, since each one may contain different clues to the overall meaning. Another implication is that we do not look to Greek or Hebrew dictionaries to find the meaning of a Biblical word; we must instead see how that Greek or Hebrew word is used by God elsewhere in the Bible. There are excellent tools to help with this task—such as Strong’s Exhaustive Concordance or Young’s Analytical Concordance, and Personal Computer Bible search software which can be obtained on the **free EBF1 CD** from our website at: www.ebiblefellowship.com/free_cd. Many other free Bible languages can be downloaded from the Help menu of this software. These tools can help us find all of the verses where a particular Greek or Hebrew word is used, without requiring us to learn the original languages.
4. The entire Bible, Old Testament and New Testament, is laced throughout with God’s gospel of salvation, pointing to the sinner’s need for salvation from the coming judgment, Christ’s atoning sacrifice on the Cross, the fact that this salvation is totally God’s sovereign work, or a related spiritual truth. Any symbolic or allegorical meaning must ultimately point to Christ and His Gospel, and must be consistent with everything else in Scripture.
5. Parables and allegories must not be pressed too far... being symbols and shadows of the truth that they point us to, they sometimes are not applicable to every aspect of the underlying truth. This means that they teach some aspects of the substance they point to, but may be incomplete or imply some other aspect that cannot be applied. This is where the principle in item #2 must be applied—making sure that the conclusions reached are consistent with everything else in Scripture on that subject.

Psalm 119:97 O how love I thy law! It is my meditation all the day.

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Understanding the Bible

Many people find the Bible to be a difficult book to read. They start out with good intentions but stop reading before long because they just cannot understand what they are reading. This is very unfortunate, because (1) the Bible is the very word of the infinite God who created this universe and everything in it, revealing His will for how we are to live our lives, and (2) God’s Word is the saving power that He applies to the lives of those that He has decided to save - no one can be saved apart from the Word of God.

Mercifully, God does show us how we are to interpret the Scriptures so that we might understand what He is saying to us. We will now examine what God Himself tells us about how the Bible is to be understood.

The Bible alone, and in its entirety is the revealed Word of God:

2 Timothy 3:16 *All scripture is given by inspiration of God, [literally, “is God-breathed”] and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness:*

2 Peter 1:21 *For the prophecy came not in old time by the will of man: but holy men of God spake as they were moved by the Holy Ghost.*

1 Thessalonians 2:13 *For this cause also thank we God without ceasing, because, when ye received the word of God which ye heard of us, ye received it not as the word of men, but as it is in truth, the word of God, which effectually worketh also in you that believe.*

Revelation 22:18 *For I testify unto every man that heareth the words of the prophecy of this book, If any man shall add unto these things, God shall add unto him the plagues that are written in this book:*

➡ Because the Bible is like no other book (it is not written by men but by infinite God), we must look to God alone for the instructions of how to study and understand the Bible. The Bible must be our only authority. We cannot use the vain thoughts from our own sin-tainted minds to develop the rules for interpreting Scripture.

Every word of Scripture, every character of the original autographs, is perfect and true:

Proverbs 30:5 *Every word of God is pure: He is a shield unto them that put their trust in Him.*

Psalm 12:6 *The words of the LORD are pure words: as silver tried in a furnace of earth, purified seven times.*

Psalm 119:160 *Thy word is true from the beginning: and every one of Thy righteous judgments endureth for ever.*

Revelation 21:5 *...And He said unto me, Write: for these words are true and faithful.*

Matthew 5:18 *For verily I say unto you, Till heaven and earth pass, one jot or one tittle shall in no wise pass from the law, till all be fulfilled.*