

# Lesson 11 - Can We Understand the Bible the Same?

**Main Point:** The Bible was written to be understood. God did not give us a document that was so hard to understand that it would cause division in His church.

**REVIEW:** There are many different Bible translations and it is important to know the difference between them including their translation philosophy and what manuscripts they used for their translation. The KJV used the Textus Receptus as its main manuscript in translation while the newer versions have been able to make use of more recent discoveries.

There are two philosophies when translating the Bible. Word for Word which translates the words just as they have seen them from the original with making very few changes and the Thought for Thought which tries to translate a verse not just with word for word equivalency but also tries to get the main thought of the verse or passage across which leaves room for a little wiggle room when translating a verse. It is important to use many different versions to get different perspectives on a verse.

## What You'll Need

- materials for powerpoint if possible (T.V. or projector and computer)
- Make copies of handout for all the teens.
- Make a copy of the "Devil's arguments" and cut out the three to give to student before class starts.

**HOOK: Matthew 3:11** *"I baptize you with water for repentance. But after me will come one who is more powerful than I, whose sandals I am not fit to carry. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and with fire."* "He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire," that is an interesting verse. Don't be afraid to speak out, what do you think this verse is referring to. What does it mean to baptize with the "Holy Spirit and with fire." Does it mean Jesus is going to go around and burn people up? Does it mean he has a big baptistery and he fills it up with the Holy Spirit and fire and then dunks people under? What do you think this is referring to?

I had never really studied this verse before and I have been told that it was a reference to the Day of Pentecost. It says in Acts 2:1-4, 17, "*When the day of Pentecost came, they were all together in one place. 2Suddenly a sound like the blowing of a violent wind came from heaven and filled the whole house where they were sitting. 3They saw what seemed to be tongues of fire that separated and came to rest on each of them. 4All of them were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other tongue as the Spirit enabled them. ... 'In the last days, God says, I will pour out my Spirit on all people. Your sons and daughters will prophesy, your young men will see visions, your old men will dream dreams."*

Others think that it could be referring to the purifying work of the Spirit.

But if you look at the context of the verse it is easy to see what this verse is referring to. Read verse 10 and 12, "*The ax is already at the root of the trees, and every tree that does not produce good fruit will be cut down and thrown into the fire; His winnowing fork is in his hand,*

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*and he will clear his threshing floor, gathering his wheat into the barn and burning up the chaff with unquenchable fire”* It is referring to the day of judgment and it is contrasting those who will be baptized with the Holy Spirit and be saved and those who will be punished and be immersed in fire.

Now, I did not expect you to know what Matthew 3:11 was talking about but we can all agree that it is referring to one thing. It cannot be referring to both punishment and the Day of Pentecost and a “refiners fire”. There is only one interpretation that is right and that the Scriptures support.

That takes us to today’s lesson: “Can We Understand the Bible the Same?”

Some will acknowledge that the Bible has 1. been faithfully preserved and translated and 2. contains the books that serve as our authority (canon) in religion, and 3. it is inspired by God, **yet they contend that Bible cannot be understood**, or at the very least they will argue...

a. That we need a guide to help us (such as some church authority). Many Catholics believe that they cannot understand the Bible correctly so they have to ask their priest or refer to their book that tells them what to believe called the catechism. Ex: Tessa’s dad growing up was told not to read the Bible because it was hard to understand and if he had questions, he needed to ask the nuns.

b. Or that we need the help of the Holy Spirit to understand it

## **Your Understanding, My Understanding**

*Give someone the piece of paper at the beginning of the lesson and tell them that they should present this argument and be Devil’s advocate and see what the other classmates have to say. Start out by saying There are many out there that think we don’t have to understand the Bible the same and they will give you different arguments. Have this be the queue where the student raises there hand and makes this argument:*

**“Well I understand what you are saying T. J. but you understand the Bible one way, and I understand it another. Neither of us should condemn the other. And well, that is your interpretation of the Scriptures. I have mine as well. Perhaps both of us are right.”** *Then ask the class, Do you think what Laneigh said is true, how would you respond?*

These statements contain a logical contradiction. There is no such thing as “understanding the Bible differently. If two people differ on the meaning of a biblical text, one of them is wrong about the matter—possibly both. Moreover, a passage does not yield two different interpretations; somewhere, there is misinterpretation. Another way to put it is to ask someone what  $1+1=$ . The answer is of course 2. If you said 3 the answer would be wrong as well as if you said 4. It would also make God contradict himself. He would be saving one man in a certain way and another man in a different fashion. He will not require one man to be baptized and then require something less from another man. We understand this concept very well

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in school. Whether we are taking a history test or math or science we know that there can only be one right answer and we don't have a problem with that. We never try to say to the teacher well you say the 15<sup>th</sup> amendment gives everyone the right to vote but I feel like my answer that it prohibits alcohol is right also. There is one right answer and we understand that and are ok with that. Why would the Bible be in different?

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**"I understand what you are saying T. J. but when I read the Bible many time I feel the Holy Spirit talking to me and telling me how I should understand the Scripture. And in fact 1 Corinthians 2:11 says, "For who among men knows the thoughts of a man except the man's spirit within him? In the same way no one knows the thoughts of God except the Spirit of God." And so I feel like I cannot understand Scripture on my own but it is the Holy Spirit who enables me to learn what it means." So guys what do you think about this do you agree or disagree with Eric?**

(Even if that was true then the Holy Spirit would be giving us all the same interpretation because he would not give one person one interpretation and someone else another.) But note the context - **1 Corinthians 2:9-14**. Paul is contrasting God's wisdom with the wisdom of this world. The world with its wisdom cannot know what God has prepared but God has revealed it to us through his Spirit (v. 10). 3) What is known in the mind of God comes only through divine revelation. What divine revelation has God given us? The Bible. **2 Peter 1:20-21**, *"Above all, you must understand that no prophecy of Scripture came about by the prophet's own interpretation. <sup>21</sup>For prophecy never had its origin in the will of man, but men spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit."*

If you believe the Bible is beyond human comprehension, then we are all hopelessly lost because we must do what the Bible says in order to be saved!

**Matthew 7:21-23** says, *"Not everyone who says to Me, 'Lord, Lord,' shall enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of My Father in heaven. "Not everyone who says to me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the kingdom of heaven, but only he who does the will of my Father who is in heaven. <sup>22</sup>Many will say to me on that day, 'Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name, and in your name drive out demons and perform many miracles?' <sup>23</sup>Then I will tell them plainly, 'I never knew you. Away from me, you evildoers!'"*

If we must do the Father's will in order to be saved, but we cannot understand His will, it follows that we are hopelessly lost.

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## The New Testament was meant to be understood.

- Paul wrote for people to understand, to have his knowledge - **2 Corinthians 1:13**, “For we do not write you anything you cannot read or understand”
- When Jesus rebuked the Sadducees for their error concerning the resurrection of the human body, he charged that a part of their problem was that they were ignorant of the Scriptures (**Matthew 22:29**, “Jesus replied, “You are in error because you do not know the Scriptures or the power of God”). Does this not assume that had they been good students of the Old Testament they could have uniformly known that there was to be a resurrection of the body? -
- The citizens of the city of Berea were considered to be nobler than those of Thessalonica, because they received the word of God with all readiness of mind, examining the Scriptures daily to determine the accuracy of what they were being taught (see Acts 17:11). Does this affirmation not imply that these inquirers were able to draw harmonious conclusions about the word of God?
- The Christians in Rome were commanded to be on the lookout for those who caused divisions and occasions of stumbling “contrary to the doctrine which ye learned” (Romans 16:17). If we cannot understand the Bible alike, how could anyone ever be disciplined for walking contrary to sound doctrine? That would make no sense whatsoever.

## Also we know there was only one way to understand it because the New Testament can be misinterpreted

- **Galatians 1:6-9**, “I am astonished that you are so quickly deserting the one who called you by the grace of Christ and are turning to a different gospel—<sup>7</sup>which is really no gospel at all. Evidently some people are throwing you into confusion and are trying to pervert the gospel of Christ. <sup>8</sup>But even if we or an angel from heaven should preach a gospel other than the one we preached to you, let him be eternally condemned! <sup>9</sup>As we have already said, so now I say again: If anybody is preaching to you a gospel other than what you accepted, let him be eternally condemned!”

*Give someone the piece of paper at the beginning of the lesson and tell them that they should present this argument and be Devil’s advocate and see what the other classmates have to say. Start out by saying: So the Bible says we can understand it. Have this be the question where the student raises their hand and makes this argument:*

“But some things are hard to understand. In fact even Peter said Paul wrote some tough stuff. Like in that one passage in **2 Peter 3:15b-16**, “just as our dear brother Paul also wrote you with the wisdom that God gave him. <sup>16</sup>He writes the same way in all his letters, speaking in them of these matters. His letters contain some things that are hard to understand, which ignorant and unstable people distort, as they do the other Scriptures, to their own destruction. And what about the book of Revelation. It is hard to understand also?” What that is a really good point Emily. What would you have to say to that Zach?

- But that does not mean they cannot be understood. It is the “untaught and unstable” that have problems - **2 Peter 3:16**.

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- Because we are expected to grow in knowledge (**2 Peter 3:18; Colossians 1:10**), when we are mature, we are able to handle the “meat” (**Heb. 5:11-14**). The New Testament was written to be understood, though in progressive stages. When you are first a Christian you are not going to understand and know the Bible like someone who has been a Christian for 25 or 30 years and has been studying it his whole life.

## HE EXPECTS US TO UNDERSTAND HIS WILL...

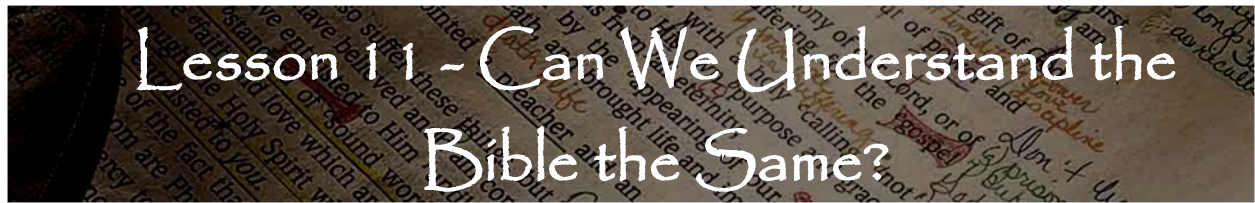
- He desires all men to come to a knowledge of the truth –  
**1 Timothy 2:3-4**, “*This is good, and pleases God our Savior, <sup>4</sup>who wants all men to be saved and to come to a knowledge of the truth.*”
- He commands it of His children –  
**Ephesians 5:17**, “*Therefore do not be foolish, but understand what the Lord's will is.*”
- How can one handle rightly a message he cannot understand?  
**2 Timothy 2:15** – “*To be approved of God and not ashamed, we must handle rightly the word of God.*”
- A proper and accurate understanding of the Bible is so important that our very salvation hinges on it. Whether we walk in Truth will hinge on our grasp of the Truth.  
**1 Timothy 4:16** - “*Take heed unto yourself, and unto the doctrine [proper teachings]; continue in them: for in doing this you shall save both yourself, and them that hear you*”

## HE ALSO EXPECTS US TO UNDERSTAND IT ALIKE...

- Jesus prayed for unity among His followers –  
**John 17:20-23**, “*My prayer is not for them alone. I pray also for those who will believe in me through their message, <sup>21</sup>that all of them may be one, Father, just as you are in me and I am in you. May they also be in us so that the world may believe that you have sent me. <sup>22</sup>I have given them the glory that you gave me, that they may be one as we are one: <sup>23</sup>I in them and you in me. May they be brought to complete unity to let the world know that you sent me and have loved them even as you have loved me.*”
- Paul commanded Christians to have the same mind -  
**Philippians 2:1-2** - “*If you have any encouragement from being united with Christ, if any comfort from his love, if any fellowship with the Spirit, if any tenderness and compassion, <sup>2</sup>then make my joy complete by being like-minded, having the same love, being one in spirit and purpose.*”

-- The problem is not with God’s Word; the problem is with us and how we handle God’s word - cf. **2 Tim. 2:15**

**We operate daily upon the presumption that we, frail mortals though we are, can make ourselves understood to our peers. For example:**



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- A department store places an advertisement in the newspaper about an upcoming sale. Hundreds of people flock to the same establishment on the correct day at the right time expecting specific items at a certain price to be available for purchase. How is it that they understand the ad alike?
- A recipe is printed on a cereal box for oat bran muffins. Hundreds of ladies across the country follow it and bake delicious muffins for their families. They are all able to follow the instructions and get the same result.
- A physician prescribes a medication. We believe that the pharmacist will understand what the doctor has prescribed, and we are confident that we can understand the instructions for taking the medicine.

**If we can sensibly operate our lives on a routine basis, recognizing that we are able to communicate with one another in an intelligible fashion, why can't we acknowledge that God, who is infinitely wiser and abler than man, can clearly make his will known to humanity?**

# Devil's Advocate Arguments

You are going to play Devil's advocate to help discussion in class. Here is the argument you are going to say in class. Read it a few times before class starts and try to say it without looking at the paper. Your queue to raise your hand and ask the question will be right after I say, "*There are many out there that think we don't have to understand the Bible the same and they will give you different arguments.*"

"Well I understand what you are saying T. J. but you understand the Bible one way, and I understand it another. Neither of us should condemn the other. And well, that is your interpretation of the Scriptures. I have mine as well. Perhaps both of us are right."

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- a. That we need a guide to help us (such as some church authority). Many Catholics believe that they cannot understand the Bible correctly so they have to ask their priest or refer to their book that tells them what to believe called the catechism.
- b. Or that we need the help of the Holy Spirit to understand it.

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