

Understanding the Bible

by Anton Bosch

The sermon emphasizes the importance of approaching Bible study with wisdom, obedience, and an open heart to truly understand God's Word.

Scripture: 1 Samuel 3:10, Psalm 119:18, Psalm 119:100, Matthew 7:7, John 16:13, 2 Corinthians 3:18, Galatians 2:2, 2 Timothy 3:16, James 1:5, 1 Peter 2:2, 2 Peter 1:21

Topics: "Biblical Interpretation", "Spiritual Discernment"

Description

Anton Bosch emphasizes the importance of discerning truth from error in interpreting the Bible. He highlights the need to seek wisdom from God, be in a right relationship with the Lord, be open to changing views, and turn to the Bible first before seeking other sources. Bosch stresses the significance of studying the Scriptures with a specific goal of allowing God to speak to us personally.

Transcript

Many people will agree that the Bible is the authoritative Word of God. The problem however is often how it is interpreted. How can we be sure that our understanding is the right one?

In discerning truth from error, we must begin by understanding Truth for ourselves. Many people try to discover the Truth by analyzing and dissecting error. You simply cannot do that. It is like someone trying to drive a car by looking only in the rearview mirror while trying to move forward. You cannot see where you are going by looking where others have gone wrong. So before we try to judge error or someone else's doctrine, we need to be sure about what we believe. I agree, that many are prompted by the rise of some error to study truth. But, if you want to learn the truth on some matter, you will only learn it by studying the Bible, not by studying the mistakes of others. So what must I do to understand?

First I must ask God for wisdom. "If any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask of God, who gives to all liberally and without reproach, and it will be given to him" (James 1:5). The same Spirit Who inspired the men to write the Bible (2Timothy 3:16, 2Peter 1:21), is available to help us understand what is written. The Bible is not an academic book which can be studied in an intellectual way only. Yes, the Bible is logically sound and intellectually deep, but it is primarily a spiritual book in which God speaks to His people. And His Spirit will lead, guide and counsel us so we may come "into all truth" (John 16:13). Studying the Bible is both an academic and spiritual exercise. Read it in a "spiritual" way without applying sound reasoning and you will not discover the Truth. But study it as academic literature without the Spirit's help and you will most certainly end in error. Pray David's prayer every time you approach the Word: "Open thou mine eyes, that

I may behold wondrous things out of thy law" (Psalm 119:18).

Second, the reader must be in a right relationship with the Lord. When we are disobedient, in habitual sin or rebellion, we will always read into the Bible what we want it to say. This is the most dangerous way of handling the Word of God. Countless errors have been "discovered" when the reader looked into the Bible for justification for his disobedience or sin. If the Lord has been convicting you about something, you must be obedient to Him first else your reading will always be distorted and you will not see clearly. David was able to say "I understand more than the ancients, because I keep thy precepts" (Psalm 119:100). Obedience leads to understanding, disobedience leads to error.

Third, we must be open and willing to change our views if they are proven to be wrong. When our prejudice or preconceived ideas overwhelm sound thinking, we will inevitably end with a distorted view of Scripture. We grossly underestimate the power of tradition and preconceived ideas to keep us from discovering the truth. Our traditions invariably are a filter through which we read and which colors the teaching of the Bible. Just think about the word "church." Every person who reads has an established view of what that word means, even before they begin to read. Thus when one reads, he sees the Roman Church, or one of a thousand denominations. Others see a building of a particular shape while others see two or three believers agreed and in the name of Jesus. The same word - many different meanings - but only one can be right!

Paul says: "But we all, with unveiled face, beholding as in a mirror the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from glory to glory, just as by the Spirit of the Lord" (2Corinthians 3:18). By "unveiled face" he was referring to the veil which Israel put over Moses' face to filter the glory of God's revelation and to deliver it in a form with which they were comfortable. But we must come to the Word without a veil or filter. We need to be willing to be open-faced in order to absorb the full impact of God's revelation. The same revelation transformed Moses and blinded Israel. Come to the Word with an open face and it will transform you. Try to veil, limit or modify it and it will blind you (2Corinthians 3:14).

Sometimes we actually need to suspend what we believe on a particular subject while we do an in-depth study of God's Word on it. If we don't do so, we may continue to build on bad foundations. I have found it invaluable, at different times in my life, to actively put all my experience, training and tradition on hold while I seek to understand some aspect afresh. Only the fool keeps going down the wrong road without checking from time-to-time if he is indeed on the right way. Even Paul felt the need to check (Galatians 2:2).

Fourth, we must turn to the Bible first. Many people will turn to their pastor, guru, commentary or internet before going to the Bible. (Some will only go to these sources and never get to the Bible). If we go to any source outside the Bible first, it will invariably color and bias our thinking, more than it already is. In order to understand a particular subject, you need to enlist the aid of a concordance (preferably computerized) and search for every part of the Bible that speaks to that subject. Then you need to read those sections - not just the verses, but the entire passages. Note down the ones that make a specific point. Only once you have read the whole Bible (Old and New Testaments) on a particular subject, and have collated all the information, can you begin to come to some conclusions. Only after having searched the Scriptures, and have come to some conclusion, should you turn to other sources. (More about that next week.)

"As newborn babes, desire the pure milk of the word, that you may grow thereby" (1Peter 2:2). It is the pure milk that causes us to grow. If it is diluted with the words, thoughts and traditions of men, it is no

longer pure. If it is sugar coated by the eloquence and stories of the preacher, it is also no longer pure. What I am writing here is not the pure milk of the Word - they are my ideas based on the Word. And while my thoughts may help some to understand a few things, it can never have the same effect as when you read, study and understand the Bible yourself.

Finally, we must study the Scriptures with a specific goal in mind. This goal is not to increase our knowledge, or to prove that someone else is wrong, or to justify your own actions. The only valid attitude is to allow God to speak to us through His Word. The reading and study of the Bible is first, foremost and primarily a personal issue. The Lord does not use the Bible to speak to others through us, unless, we have heard Him speak to ourselves first. We can only approach it with trembling hands and with the prayer of Samuel: "Speak, for Your servant hears" (1Samuel 3:10). Only if we truly want to hear and obey, will its truths begin to unfold.

"Ask, and it will be given to you; seek, and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you. For everyone who asks receives, and he who seeks finds, and to him who knocks it will be opened" (Matthew 7:7-8)

(To Be Continued)

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