

Understand the Bible Alike
11-20-16PM

The most common reply anyone gives to scripture is “that’s your interpretation”. Many people believe (based on ideologies such as denominationalism and ecumenicalism) that we are entitled to having distinct interpretations on Scripture. Many even believe that it is not possible to avoid having differing opinions on the meaning of Scripture. By the logic of many, because God’s word is open to their interpretation, it is useless, since no two interpretations would be the same.

Yet the Bible says:

2 Peter 1:20 *knowing this first, that no prophecy of Scripture is of any private interpretation*

In this statement, Peter makes it clear that one of the fundamental principles of Scripture is that we are NOT permitted to have our own interpretations of the meaning. Contextually, in the verses before 2 Peter 1:20, Peter was describing his experience on the mount of Transfiguration. This event is recorded in Matthew 17:1-8. There we see Peter making a mistake of his own interpretation of the situation. He believed that Jesus was on equal footing with Elijah and Moses. However, God the Father spoke from heaven and revealed that he had misinterpreted things; the actual point was that Jesus was superior to Moses and Elijah, symbolic of the Law and the Prophets whom Jesus came to fulfill and put away.

Scriptures are not open to private interpretation based on their nature. Interpretation means “*the action of explaining the meaning of something*”. Scriptures can be understood, but not privately; they are meant to be understood universally. This is due to the nature of Scriptures.

First, consider that Scriptures are Truth (John 17:17). Just after Jesus made this declaration He discusses truth with Pilate, who seems to admit that he does not know what is truth in that moment. An example of the type of truth Scriptures are is a mathematic equation; it is universally true, and cannot be personally interpreted. $2 + 2 = 4$ in all situations; it is not open to a personal interpretation.

Second, consider that Scriptures represent law (Micah 4:2). While law can be interpreted, it cannot be interpreted personally. We cannot look at a speed limit sign and determine “what it means to me”; it is meant to be universally understood.

Finally, consider that Scriptures are directions (1 Timothy 3:14-15). When someone buys a piece of furniture that requires assembly, it comes with directions. These directions are not meant to be personally interpreted, but universally understood. They are designed to be universally understood, so that anyone can assemble the product. Scriptures have the same characteristic.

So how can we understand the bible alike? First, we can do so by understanding that God commands our universal understanding (Romans 16:17, 1 Corinthians 1:10, 2 John 9-11). Second, we can try to understand what prohibits a common understanding. Things such as a lack of love for truth (2 Thes. 2:10-11) or a preconceived notion of what truth must be (consider Peter’s error at the mount), or even the absence of desire to have a common understanding prohibit us from being unified. Finally, we need to refuse to permit misunderstanding or division. This means we are refusing to “agree to disagree” on doctrine, or refusing to accept multiple interpretations.

When Jesus prayed in John 17, He revealed His desire for unity. This can be achieved if we will understand the Bible alike.