

Understanding God's Word

TEXT: Eph. 3:1-12

THESIS: If we desire to be heirs of God, we must also desire to understand His word.

INTRODUCTION:

1. How many people do we know who have the idea that it is impossible to understand the Bible?
 - a. The reality of this problem is seen when we consider the argument that some are saying, "official interpreters of the Bible are necessary."
 - i. Some try to prove this with Scripture.
 - (1) But, isn't it interesting that some use the Scripture to prove that one cannot understand the Scriptures!?
 - ii. Regardless, an argument is made from 2 Pet. 1:20-21 which says, "Knowing this first, that no prophecy of the scripture is of any private interpretation. 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) Now, Peter is not discussing the use of Scripture, but is simply stating the origin of it.
 - iii. However, some contend that the Bible is a dead letter which is open to many false interpretations and therefore, we need official interpreters, like, priest.
 - (1) However, Peter said, "As also in all his epistles, speaking in them of these things; in which are some things hard to be understood, which they that are unlearned and unstable wrest (*twist, pervert, torture the language*), as they do also the other scriptures, unto their own destruction." (2 Pet. 3:16)
 - (2) This clearly shows that those who are learning and those who are stable have little problems understanding the Scriptures.
 - iv. Yet, many protestant groups insist that the sinner is so dead that there must be an enlightenment of the Holy Spirit in order for one to have a saving knowledge of the Scriptures.
 - v. Others have the idea that they can let the Bible drop open anywhere and read intelligently the Scriptures without studying.
 - b. Now because of these thoughts of needing interpreters, we now have a rash of modern speech translations available because they say, we have to use language people can understand.
 - i. Well, I certainly agree that we need a language that people can understand, but these modern translations have become necessary because of the neglect of genuine Bible study.
 - ii. I oftentimes, chuckle at the idea that, given the intelligence of mankind today especially of our youth, that they can no longer understand the King James Version of the Bible which children of all ages have been able to

- understand until the last 20 years or so.
 - iii. What has changed is not our language, people have simply become careless and overlooked God's Word.
 - 2. However, an appreciation of man's ability to understand the Bible will:
 - a. Create an interest in personal Bible study and organized Bible classes.
 - b. It will promote unity.
 - c. It will open unto us the blessings of knowing God's word.
 - 3. Therefore, we will consider four key words in Ephesians 3:1-12 that relates to the understanding of God's word:
 - a. Mystery
 - b. Revelation
 - c. Read
 - d. Understand

DISCUSSION:

I. THE BIBLE IS A MYSTERY

- A. Many people certainly have this view of the Bible.
 - 1. They know that it cannot be understood.
 - 2. Thus, mystery is defined as: something beyond understanding or a religious truth that man can know by revelation alone, but cannot be fully understood.
- B. So, what does the Biblical mystery mean?
 - 1. It means that, which is outside the range of the natural fearful expectations, can be made known only by Divine revelation.
 - 2. Meaning, that which cannot be known until God reveals it who once kept it secret.
 - a. Paul said, "Even the mystery which hath been hid from ages and from generations, but now is made manifest to his saints:" (Col. 1:26)
- C. We may understand the mystery because it has been revealed.
 - 1. Paul said, "Whereby, when ye read, ye may understand my knowledge in the mystery of Christ) Which in other ages was not made known unto the sons of men, as it is now revealed unto his holy apostles and prophets by the Spirit;" (Eph. 3:4-5)
 - a. To whom are these words directed?
 - b. To official interpreters which only they can interpret or was it written, ". . . to the saints which are at Ephesus, and to the faithful in Christ Jesus:" (Eph. 1:1)?
 - 2. Therefore, this mystery of Christ to the saints is explained in Eph. 3:6, "That the Gentiles should be fellowheirs, and of the same body, and partakers of his promise in Christ by the gospel:"
 - 3. God's plan was Christ who took down the wall of division so as to unite (redeem) Jews and Gentiles in one body and for those in the body of Christ

to partake of the promise of Christ.

- a. This body is the church (Eph. 1:22-23).
- b. The body is made up of the saved (Eph. 5:23).
- c. The body identifies the people whom the Lord controls as head (Col. 1:18).

II. THE REALITY OF REVELATION

- A. Paul wrote, “How that by revelation he made known unto me the mystery; (as I wrote afore in few words, Whereby, when ye read, ye may understand my knowledge in the mystery of Christ) Which in other ages was not made known unto the sons of men, as it is now revealed unto his holy apostles and prophets by the Spirit;” (Eph. 3:3-5)
 1. In the original, a compound word apo meaning “from” and kalupto meaning “to cover” shows us that the word revealed literally means “to remove the cover from or to unveil.”
 2. Thus, God’s word is a revelation to man which has been uncovered so we can read it.
- B. So, since the Christian religion is given in a written revelation, if it cannot be understood as some claim, is it a revelation?
 1. Unless the writings can be understood, the Christian religion cannot be understood.
 2. For, “All scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable (*helpful*) for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness: That the man of God may be perfect, throughly furnished (*fully equipped*) unto all good works.” (2 Tim. 3:16-17)
 - a. Yet, how can the scripture be helpful and how can man be completely furnished unto every good work if he cannot understand the inspired writings?
 - b. This shows a flaw in those who think we need interpreters.
- C. Notice, Paul’s discussion of revelation. (1 Cor. 2:9-14)
 1. First of all, there was a need for revelation, “But as it is written, Eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of man, the things which God hath prepared for them that love him.” (1 Cor. 2:9)
 - a. This illustration is given by Isaiah 64:4.
 - b. So, what was prepared?
 - (1) Isaiah said, “For, behold, I create new heavens and a new earth: and the former shall not be remembered, nor come into mind.” (Isa. 65:17)
 - (2) Well, this is not talking about Heaven, but about the Gospel and the Church.
 - (3) How do I know this?
 - (a) Because Paul said, “But God hath revealed them unto us by his Spirit: for the Spirit searcheth all

- things, yea, the deep things of God.” (1 Cor. 2:10).
- (b) You see, Paul did not see heaven yet.
 - (c) However, God had already revealed them (past tense) which is the word of God.
 - (d) Therefore, that which was revealed was the new system of faith that they proclaimed in their preaching and teaching of all truth.
- c. Yet, the nature of man is limited.
- (1) “For what man knoweth the things of a man, save the spirit of man which is in him? even so the things of God knoweth no man, but the Spirit of God.” (1 Cor. 2:11)
 - (2) The Holy Spirit knows our minds like He knows the Father.
 - (3) And, we are not to follow worldly thoughts.
2. Therefore, notice the nature of revelation as Paul wrote, “Now we have received, not the spirit of the world, but the spirit which is of God; that we might know the things that are freely given to us of God. 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.” (1 Cor. 2:12-13)
- (1) We know that, “when the fulness of the time was come, God sent forth his Son, made of a woman, made under the law,” (Gal. 4:4).
 - (2) That in the right time, God opened up the mystery and it became known.
- b. And these things from God have been “freely” given, yet people will not know of the “freely” unless they study.
3. Now, the natural man is the one who tries to apprehend God’s truth by natural means exclusively and it cannot be done.
- a. For, “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.” (1 Cor. 2:14)
 - (1) The soulish man or worldly philosopher are those who teach their own philosophy and who try to find God through their own thinking.
 - (2) But, God is not there.
- D. However, revelation did come to the apostles and prophets.
- 1. “Which in other ages was not made known unto the sons of men, as it is now revealed unto his holy apostles and prophets by the Spirit;” (Eph. 3:5)

III. THE NECESSITY OF READING THE REVELATION

- A. Notice what Paul says in Eph. 3:4, “Whereby, when ye read, ye may understand my knowledge in the mystery of Christ)”
- B. The word translated read is the compound word *ana* meaning “again” and *ginosko*

meaning “to know.”

1. Therefore, to know again.
 2. This is not to some official interpreter, but was to the saints, the faithful in Christ.
 - a. “Paul, an apostle of Jesus Christ by the will of God, to the saints which are at Ephesus, and to the faithful in Christ Jesus:” (Eph. 1:1)
 - b. So, these saints, or those who had been set apart by the Gospel, who were dedicated servants of God, were, to know what was being written to them clearly so there is no confusion on their part.
- C. Now, one problem of understanding is getting people to really read.
1. Some skim over material and think they got it.
 2. Some have their minds on other things while they look at the words.
 3. Many seem to think that they can understand without reading and studying which are the most dangerous.
- D. It was said, “behold, a certain lawyer stood up, and tempted him (*Jesus*), saying, Master, what shall I do to inherit eternal life? He said unto him, What is written in the law? how readest thou?” (Lk. 10:25-26)
1. Now as a lawyer, it was his business to read and know the law.
 - a. This shows that the Scriptures can be known (Jn. 8:32) and understood by the lawyer and by all others.
 - b. We can read the same way that they did in the first century.
 2. Yet, one man suggest that before we read, we ask these questions:
 - a. Are we resolved to do what God says?
 - b. Are our minds "made up" before we consult God's word?
 - c. Do we have complete trust in what Christ says?
 - d. Does God's word determine the decisions we make?
 - e. Are we honest in the application of God's word to our conduct?
 - f. Are we willing to distinguish between fact and fiction?
 - g. Is the impact of God's word strong enough to cause us to obey?
 3. Why should we ask ourselves such questions?
 - a. Because some read carelessly.
 - b. Others will read critically.
 - c. But the wise will read carefully.

IV. WE MAY UNDERSTAND WITH PAUL

- A. “Whereby, when ye read, ye may understand my knowledge in the mystery of Christ)” (Eph. 3:4)
1. Paul certainly does not fall into the trap that we cannot know.
 - a. Jesus said that all we need to know for salvation is available for us to know (Jn. 8:31-32).
 - b. Solomon said, “Wisdom is the principal thing; therefore get wisdom: and with all thy getting get understanding.” (Prov. 4:7)

2. Thus, Paul wanted his readers to know and understand and apply what God has revealed concerning the mystery.
 3. Sadly, there are some who seek to justify their spinelessness in matters of doctrinal purity by saying that there is no way to know for certain God's will on this issue or that issue.
 4. But, we can know and we will be judged by the Word of God whether we know it or not!
- B. Paul claims, "The eyes of your understanding being enlightened; that ye may know what is the hope of his calling, and what the riches of the glory of his inheritance in the saints," (Eph. 1:18).
1. These eyes of understanding was made possible by the truth of the Gospel and could know the depths of the glorious inheritance intended by the saints because their understanding being enlightened (meaning, spiritual knowledge) had become clear to all.
- C. Thus, the challenge is to understand God's will.
1. "Redeeming the time, because the days are evil." (Eph. 5:17)
 2. And God wants us to understand for, "Wherefore be ye not unwise, but understanding what the will of the Lord is." (Eph. 5:17)
 3. Yet, there must be a desire to know God's will.
 - a. One must love God's truth.
 - b. For as Paul said, "And with all deceivableness of unrighteousness in them that perish; because they received not the love of the truth, that they might be saved." (2 Thess. 2:10)
- D. There is great importance for understanding.
1. Because on the negative side Paul mentioned, "This I say therefore, and testify in the Lord, that ye henceforth walk not as other Gentiles walk, in the vanity of their mind, Having the understanding darkened, being alienated from the life of God through the ignorance that is in them, because of the blindness of their heart: Who being past feeling have given themselves over unto lasciviousness, to work all uncleanness with greediness." (Eph. 4:17-19)
 - a. They reached a state of intellectual darkness and continued in it which lead them to their hardness of heart.
 - b. This was from ignorance.
 - (1) Thus, it does not always pay to be ignorant.
 - (2) Peter told some that they did things in ignorance (Acts 3:17), that the Athenians worshipped idols in ignorance of the true God (Acts 17:23).
 - (3) However, Paul said, "the times of this ignorance God winked at; but now commandeth all men every where to repent:" (Acts 17:30).
 2. Now, the positive side of understanding is seen in, "That the Gentiles should be fellowheirs, and of the same body, and partakers of his promise

in Christ by the gospel: Whereof I was made a minister, according to the gift of the grace of God given unto me by the effectual working of his power. Unto me, who am less than the least of all saints, is this grace given, that I should preach among the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ; And to make all men see what is the fellowship of the mystery, which from the beginning of the world hath been hid in God, who created all things by Jesus Christ: To the intent that now unto the principalities and powers in heavenly places might be known by the church the manifold wisdom of God, According to the eternal purpose which he purposed in Christ Jesus our Lord:” (Eph. 3:6-11)

CONCLUSION:

1. Our desire to know God’s will, will open the eyes, ears, and the heart of the individual.
 - a. For Jesus said, “For this people's heart is waxed gross, and their ears are dull of hearing, and their eyes they have closed; lest at any time they should see with their eyes, and hear with their ears, and should understand with their heart, and should be converted, and I should heal them. But blessed are your eyes, for they see: and your ears, for they hear.” (Matt. 13:15-16)
2. In some ways we must approach a study of the Bible the same way we would approach the study of a book.
 - a. But, we must approach God’s Word with the realization that it is indeed God’s Word.
 - b. That word by which we eventually shall be judged.
 - i. For, “He that rejecteth me, and receiveth not my words, hath one that judgeth him: the word that I have spoken, the same shall judge him in the last day.” (Jn. 12:48)
 - ii. God’s promise involves the blessings of all mankind through Christ (Eph. 3:6).
 - (1) And, those who obey Christ, who become Christians, who are baptized into Christ become Abraham’s seed and heirs according to the promise (Gal. 3:26-29).
3. Therefore, it is important to know God’s will.
 - a. James said, “Of his own will begat he us with the word of truth, that we should be a kind of firstfruits of his creatures. Wherefore, my beloved brethren, let every man be swift to hear, slow to speak, slow to wrath: For the wrath of man worketh not the righteousness of God. Wherefore lay apart all filthiness and superfluity of naughtiness, and receive with meekness the engrafted word, which is able to save your souls.” (Ja. 1:18-21)
 - b. God’s word is milk and meat by which the Christian lives (1 Pet. 2:2; Heb. 5:12-14).
 - c. God’s word has the ability to edify: “Take heed therefore unto yourselves, and to all the flock, over the which the Holy Ghost hath made you overseers, to feed the church of God, which he hath purchased with his own blood.” (Acts 20:28)

4. But, in order to be blessed by God's word, men must read and understand; therefore, they must know how to handle aright the word of truth (2 Tim. 3:15).
 - a. And, since the word understand and understanding appears 304 times in the Bible, God evidently wanted men to appreciate the possibility of reading and understanding His Divine, revealed will!