

Chapter 6: The Four Characteristics of Scripture: (2) Clarity

1. Is it possible for us to understand the Bible rightly?

a. First we must admit, there are _____ passages to understand within Scripture.

—2 Peter 3:15-16

b. But it would be a mistake to think that most of Scripture or Scripture in general is difficult to understand.

—The OT and NT frequently _____ that Scripture is written in such a way that its teachings are able to be understood by ordinary believers.

—Peter did not say that there are things _____ to understand, but only difficult to understand.

2. The definition of the clarity of Scripture

a. The clarity of Scripture means that the Bible is written in such a way that it is able to be _____, but right understanding requires time, effort, the use of ordinary means, a willingness to obey, and the help of the Holy Spirit; and our understanding will remain _____ in this lifetime.

3. The Bible frequently affirms its own clarity.

a. The OT Affirmations of Clarity

—Deuteronomy 6:6-7

—Deuteronomy 30:11-14

—Psalm 19:7

—The idea here seems to be that God's testimonies make even _____ people to be wise, and if they make wise the _____, then surely they make everyone else wise as well.

—Psalm 119:105

b. The NT Affirmations of Clarity

—Whether he was speaking to scholars or untrained common people, Jesus _____ the misunderstandings not on the Scriptures themselves but on those who misunderstand or fail to accept them.

—The blame for failing to understand is always on the _____, never on the Scriptures themselves.

—John 3:10

—Matthew 22:29

—Luke 24:25

—Most of the NT Epistles are written not to church leaders but to entire _____.

—1 Corinthians 1:2

—Galatians 1:2

—Philippians 1:1

— Paul assumes that his _____ will understand what he writes, and he _____ the sharing of his letters with other churches.

—Colossians 4:16

—There are even some sections that assume that _____ are in the audience, listening to Paul's letters as they are read and understanding at least part of what is written.

—Ephesians 6:1-3

—Should we define the clarity of Scripture merely to say that Scripture was able to be understood only by its original readers and not necessarily by readers today?

— No, Jesus repeatedly held his hearers _____ for understanding the OT writings, many of which were written more than 1,000 years prior and because the NT authors similarly expected their readers to know and to be able to understand the OT rightly.

—The clarity of Scripture _____ us to believe that it is still able to be understood rightly by readers today.

—Not only certain verses or statements but the meaning of the _____ of Scripture on many topics is able to be understood by God's people. These affirmations are not limited to understanding the basic way of salvation, only major themes, or certain topics or parts.

—Such a quality of Scripture seems _____ if God is going to hold us morally accountable for obeying his Word. If he has given us commands that are confusing or that most people cannot understand, then we might wonder how he can rightly hold us accountable for disobeying them.

4. Requirements for Understanding Scripture Rightly

—These qualifications remind us that Scripture does not _____ to whatever concept of clarity we might bring to the text. Rather, we need to give careful attention to the text of Scripture and allow it to define in what sense we should understand its clarity.

a. _____

—Scripture affirms that it is able to be understood, but not all at once: growth in understanding is a lifelong process.

—Hebrews 5:14

—Clarity is a property of Scripture, not a property of its readers, who vary widely in their understanding.

b. _____

—Ezra 7:10

c. The Use of _____ Means

—Using a _____ of the Bible in one's own language.

—_____ to teachers of the Word, for God has given the gift of teaching to the church (1 Corinthians 12:28).

—Reading of _____ where available, for these are merely the written form of what is taught by teachers in the church.

—Being aware of the wisdom contained in the history of interpretation of the church (even if this only comes not firsthand but through reading commentaries that reflect some knowledge of that tradition).

—Seeking understanding in _____ with others, as in small group Bible studies (or at academic conferences).

—Using modern tools such as concordances, Hebrew and Greek lexicons, grammars, and sources of historical background information, which help modern readers understand more precisely the sense of the original language and the historical context in which a passage was written.

—Readers who begin to use such tools to help interpret Scripture will often encounter two specialized terms: hermeneutics and exegesis.

—The word hermeneutics (from the Greek word hermēneuō, “to interpret”) refers to the study of correct _____ of interpretation (especially interpretation of Scripture).

—The word exegesis refers more to the actual _____ of interpreting Scripture, not to theories and principles about how it should be done: exegesis is the _____ of interpreting a text of Scripture.

d. A Willingness to Obey

—A willingness to obey should also be considered _____ to the right understanding of Scripture:

—James 1:22-25

—Paul implies that the moral and spiritual immaturity of the Corinthian church _____ him from imparting deeper wisdom

(“solid food” and not “milk” to them):

—1 Corinthians 3:1-3

—The practical implication of this qualification is that Christians who begin to practice willful, repeated sin (and even, or especially, pastors and scholars who begin to practice willful, repeated sin!) will likely soon begin to lose _____ in interpretation and will become less and less able to understand Scripture rightly.

e. The Help of the Holy Spirit

—2 Corinthians 3:14-16

—2 Corinthians 4:3-4

—John 14:26

f. A Humble Recognition That Our Understanding Is Imperfect

—Clarity is a property of _____, not a property of its _____. The clarity of Scripture affirms that Scripture is able to be understood rightly, not that it will always be understood rightly.

—The clarity of Scripture _____, then, that it is capable of being understood rightly, not that all believers will understand it rightly.

—The clarity of Scripture is a doctrine about its _____, not about how various people actually understand it.

—Why is there always more that we can learn from Scripture? One reason is because it is the product of the _____ wisdom of God.

—We might say, then, that we do understand Scripture because it is able to be understood, and we are always seeking to understand Scripture more fully because it is always able to be understood more fully. Both are implications of its _____.

5. The Reasons for These Requirements

a. The _____ of the Subject Matter.

b. The Value of _____.

c. The Value of a _____ Process.

—God causes us to delight in the process of growing in likeness to Him. Growth in understanding Scripture is merely part of the larger process of growth in sanctification, and God in his wisdom has ordained that sanctification is a process, a lifelong journey.