

## **“Got Bible for That?” – The Perspicuity/Clarity of Scripture**

### **February 22, 2015**

“The clarity of Scripture means that the Bible is written in such a way that its teachings are able to be understood by all who will read it seeking God’s help and being willing to follow it.” (Wayne Grudem, *Bible Doctrine*, 52)

#### **1. Early Church Fathers**

- 1.1. Clement, Bishop of Rome often cites O.T. in his letters to the Corinthians (c. 96 AD) and assumes the readers will understand them.
- 1.2. Irenaeus (c. 140-202) fought for the clarity of Scripture by claiming that obscurity of a passage will be clarified in another portion.
- 1.3. When Christianity reached Alexandria, affected by Greek philosophy. Clement (c. 150-215) adopted allegorical approach of interpreting Scripture, seeking a “spiritual” meaning to text. Origen continued this approach.
- 1.4. Augustine (354-430) sometimes interpreted passages allegorically but not as much so as Origen or Clement: “Whatever we think is the meaning of some obscure passage should be either backed up by what is obviously the case, or it should be stated in other, clearer texts” (*City of God*).

#### **2. Middle Ages and Pre-Reformation**

- 2.1. Thomas Aquinas (1225-1274) moved back toward a more literal interpretive model, claiming that all allegorical interpretation must rise from the literal meaning, not apart from it.
- 2.2. John Wycliffe (1320-1384) argued that many in upper class had translations in their own language and argued that others should as well.

#### **3. Reformers: Scripture is clear because God does not hide his revelation in some secretive meaning in the text only to be understood by a select few (priests).**

#### **4. How do we know that Scripture is perspicuous?**

- 4.1. Scripture itself assumes it can be understood:  
Deut. 6:6-7 instructs Israel to teach “your children...”  
Deut. 30:11-14 “... so that you can do it.”  
Ps. 19:7 “making wise the simple”
- 4.2. Jesus used Hebrew Scriptures to reason with others. When he addressed any misunderstandings, he never blamed Scripture itself. Instead, the blame is primarily on those who misunderstand it. (Matt. 12:2-5; 19:4; 21:42; John 8:43-47)
- 4.3. The apostles also reasoned with their audiences, using Scripture as if they assumed they were clear and understandable. (Eph. 1:7-8; Col. 2:1-3)
- 4.4. N.T. epistles were written to churches that had a large number of Gentiles. They would’ve had no education in Jewish history, but the authors assumed their readers could understand.
- 4.5. Scripture is to be read publicly (1 Tim. 4:13), and most of the N.T. letters are written to entire congregations. (1 Cor. 1:2; Gal. 1:2; Eph. 1:1; Phil. 1:1)

## 5. Keep in mind:

5.1. Perspicuity does *not* mean work is not required to understand the text.

5.1.1. There are commands to meditate on Scripture and promises. (Josh. 1:8; Ps. 1:2)

5.1.2. Acts 15, the Jerusalem Council – “After there had been much debate.”

5.2. Perspicuity does not mean that each verse is as clear as the next. Some passages and books are more difficult to understand than others.

5.2.1. We interpret difficult passages in light of clearer passages.

All things in Scripture are not alike plain in themselves, nor alike clear unto all: yet those things which are necessary to be known, believed, and observed for salvation are so clearly propounded, and opened in some place of Scripture or other, that not only the learned, but the unlearned, in a due use of the ordinary means, may attain unto a sufficient understanding of them. (Westminster Confession of Faith, Chapter 1, Article 7)

5.2.2. “The main sense is the plain sense.”

5.3. The Holy Spirit must enlighten our hearts and minds to understand the text.

“Teach me, O Lord, the way of your statutes; and I will keep it to the end. Give me understanding, that I may keep your law and observe it with my whole heart.” (Ps. 119:33-34)

“But the Helper, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, he will teach you all things and bring to your remembrance all that I have said to you” (John 14:26).

“Now we have received not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit who is from God, that we might understand the things freely given us by God” (1 Cor. 2:12).

5.4. Translation and language issues do affect our ability to understand.

## 6. Practical Implications (“So what?”)

6.1. I can have a “settled assurance” in what I believe.

6.2. We should prioritize Bible translation.

6.3. Even if I can’t determine the meaning of a text in first reading it, I know there are adequate resources for finding its meaning.

6.4. But, what about differing interpretations of passages and doctrines?

“Perspicuity affirms that Scripture is able to be understood rightly, not that it will always be understood rightly.” (Grudem, *Themelios*, Vol. 39, Issue 1, April 2014, p. 13)

6.5. Because it is understandable, I have a greater desire to read it.

6.6. The Ultimate Result: Praise and thankfulness to God!