Understanding

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Hermeneutics: How to Read and Understand the Bible

What Is Understanding?

A. It is not enough to read the Bible. As children in elementary school, we learned that reading was not enough. We had to learn to read with comprehension, with understanding. Deciphering the letters and words on a page and reciting them to yourself or to another was not enough. We had to learn to gather and absorb the situation, actions, qualities, and ideas being conveyed by the letters and words. It is the same in reading the Bible. We must understand the meaning, importance, and implications of what God is stating by the letters and words.

B. Let us look at the word "understand." **Understand.** To comprehend; to apprehend the meaning or import of; to grasp the idea of.

C. Let us look at understanding in the Bible. Reading or hearing is different from and far inferior to understanding. We do not recite the Bible, as Muslims do the Koran, thinking there is some mysterious spiritual value in the sound and noise of the recitative chanting. We want to gather from the words the ideas that we can grasp to increase our knowledge of God and truth.

1. Paul judged Jews at Rome for seeing and hearing without understanding (Acts 28:23-28).
    a. He spent a day expounding and persuading about Jesus from their Scriptures.
    b. He concluded they fulfilled God's prophecy of no understanding (Isaiah 6:9-10).
    c. We learn that seeing, hearing, and reading are not the same as understanding.
    d. He explained that understanding was to hearing what perception was to seeing.
    e. **Perceive.** To take in or apprehend with the mind or senses. To apprehend with the mind; to become aware or conscious of; to observe, understand. To take in fully or adequately; to grasp the meaning of, comprehend, understand.
    f. Though they knew the Scriptures and understood primary definitions as some of Rome's most educated men, they could not understand the sense of the words.
2. Other Jews at Jerusalem fulfilled their very own Scriptures in crucifying Jesus, because they did not know, or understand, the Scriptures that were read to them (Acts 13:27).
3. Jesus spoke in parables to the Jews, so they would hear but not understand (Luke 8:10).
4. If we do not hear carefully and obediently, we will lose our understanding (Luke 8:18).
5. Jesus frankly warned His hearers not to read Daniel without understanding (Mat 24:15).
6. He damned the Jews for being unable to hear words with understanding (John 8:43-47).

D. The religion of Jesus Christ is based on understanding. We read the Bible in order to discover and comprehend the meaningful instruction God placed there for us. We are not content without

understanding, and the emphasis on our use of the Bible is to obtain understanding.

1. A great celebration in Nehemiah was because they understood the reading (Neh 8:1-12).
2. Luke wrote a treatise to Theophilus to give him certain understanding (Luke 1:1-4).
3. The eunuch did not understand the reading, so Philip explained it to him (Acts 8:30-35).
4. Paul rejected an open use of tongues, for they brought no understanding (I Cor 14:1-20).
5. It is a high ministerial ambition is to be easily understood (II Cor 3:12; 4:2; Col 4:4).

E. Understanding is necessary for the Bible to affect a life; for it is only by knowing the God of the Bible, His glorious salvation in Christ, and His will for our lives that will bring change.
   1. Conversion requires understanding, which greatly promotes it (Matt 13:15; Acts 28:27).
   2. If we do not understand the preached word of God, Satan can take it away (Matt 13:19).
   3. Being without understanding is a sin, for God has made it easily available (Rom 1:31).

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