



DEALING WITH DIFFICULT PASSAGES

Lesson 12 for June 20, 2020

Have you ever found a Bible passage that you couldn't understand?
Maybe a difficult passage written by the apostle Paul (2 Peter 3:15-16)?

Difficult passages may lead to wrong interpretations, so it's important to study them with the right attitude. How should we deal with difficult passages?



Logic



Honesty



Humbleness



Perseverance



Prayer

LOGIC

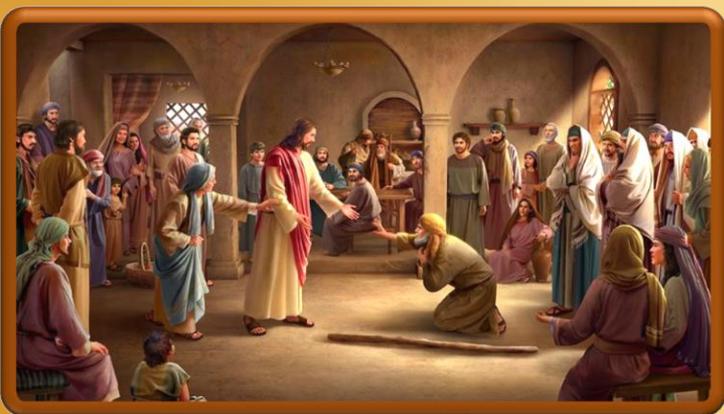
“Solemnly charge them before the Lord not to wrangle over words. [...] teaching the message of truth accurately.” (2 Timothy 2:14-15 NET)

The Word of God is infallible. How should we deal with apparent errors or contradictions in it? Many of them have a logical answer.

CONTRADICTIONS

How many blind men did Jesus heal in Jericho? How many demon-possessed men were there in Gadara (Mt. 8:28; Lk. 8:27)? Who tempted David to take a census (2S. 24:1; 1Chr. 21:1)?

Most of the apparent contradictions the in the Bible are found in parallel passages.



When two people tell the same event, they usually recall different details, even if both witnessed it at first hand. This happens because different things caught the attention of each person. Logically, this results in differences between the two accounts.

LOGIC

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ERRORS OF COPYISTS

One of the most evident errors of copyists is found in some translations of 1 John 5:7-8.

In this case, the marginal note of a copyist was included by other copyists as part of the original text.



ORIGINAL TEXT

For there are three
that bear witness:
the Spirit, the water
and the blood, and
these three agree

MARGINAL NOTE

*In heaven, the Father, the
Word, and the Holy
Ghost: and these three are
one. And three bear
witness on Earth:*

“All the mistakes will not cause trouble to one soul, or cause any feet to stumble, that would not manufacture difficulties from the plainest revealed truth.”
(E.G.W., Selected Messages, book 1, p. 18)



“Solemnly charge them before the Lord not to wrangle over words. [...] teaching the message of truth accurately.”
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TRANSLATION ERRORS

Sometimes, the error of a copyist may result in translation errors, like in Revelation 22:14.

Some Greek manuscripts use an expression (**HOIPOIUNTESTASENTOLAS**) that translates as “those who do His commandments” (NKJV).

Other manuscripts use a different expression (**HOIPLUNONTESTASSTOLAS**) that translates as “those who wash their robes” (NIV).

We must check these passages against similar ones to understand which interpretation is the right one. These errors are human, they have nothing to do with the divine inspiration of the Bible.

LOGIC

"He stores up sound wisdom for the upright; He is a shield to those who walk uprightly." (Proverbs 2:7)

HONESTY

We may find some passages that we cannot understand or explain.

In those cases, we should be honest and acknowledge that we are not able to solve the problem.

If we know that an explanation may be wrong, it's a serious mistake to embrace it as true. It's even worse to introduce this explanation with the intention of deceiving others, making them believe something we know the text does not actually support.

Honest Christians will wait until God enlightens them to understand those difficult texts better.



"But He gives more grace. Therefore He says: 'God resists the proud, but gives grace to the humble.'" (James 4:6)

HUMBLENESS

What about those passages that seem to go against something we believe it's true?

What if those passages are pointing out something we're doing as sin?

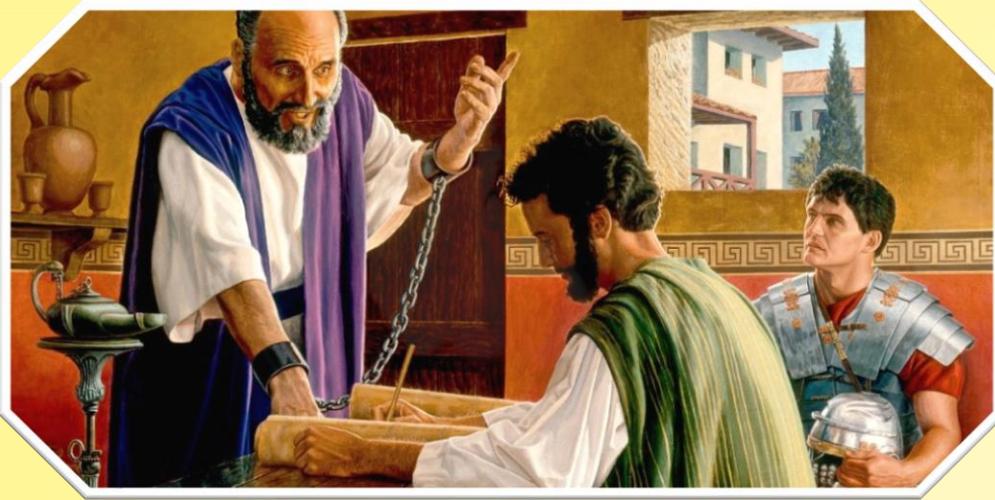
Pride may prevent us from admitting we're not right. We may try to find an explanation to make the passages support our "truth" or sin at any cost, no matter how twisted the explanation.

On the other hand, a humble spirit will help us to accept the truth as written in the Bible, and let God mold our lives according to that truth.



“And let us not grow weary while doing good, for in due season we shall reap if we do not lose heart.” (Galatians 6:9)

PERSEVERANCE

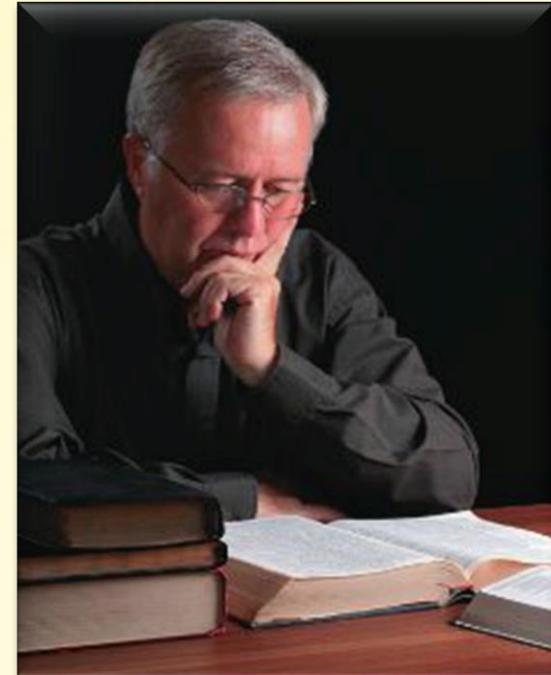


Some texts require a special effort to be understood. For example, we may have to compare them to similar ones, to understand their original context, to investigate why the original author decided to write them that way.



We must take time to perseveringly study those texts. We may even have to set them aside for some time, until God gives us more light to understand them. After all, we're serving “the God of patience” (Ro. 15:5).

The time we devote to a matter is directly proportional to how interested we are on it. Therefore, be persistent and patient in Bible Study.



PRAYER

"These things we also speak, not in words which man's wisdom teaches but which the Holy Spirit teaches, comparing spiritual things with spiritual." (1 Corinthians 2:13)

Who better than the Bible's author to explain it (2P. 1:21)?

God inspired the Bible writers so that we can understand the passages easily by comparing different verses (Is. 28:10).

We don't need to turn to philosophical or scientific sources in order to understand the truth revealed in the Bible.

Even better, we can ask the author of the Bible directly when we don't understand something. God gave us prayer to communicate with Him.

We should never study the bible without praying. We must let the Holy Spirit guide us into all truth (John 16:13).



“We shall advance in true spiritual knowledge only as we realize our own littleness and our entire dependence upon God; but all who come to the Bible with a teachable and prayerful spirit, to study its utterances as the word of God, will receive divine enlightenment. There are many things apparently difficult or obscure which God will make plain and simple to those who thus seek an understanding of them.”

E.G.W. (Testimonies for the Church, book 5, cp. 84, p. 704)