

Why So Many Bible Interpretations?

People interpret the Bible in many different ways. Why do people who are equally sincere, educated, and determined interpret the Bible so differently? Does the fault lie with the Bible or us?

First, ignorance of God's word often leads to differences in interpretation and misunderstandings. This situation existed during the ministry of our Lord. Ignorance of the scriptures caused the Pharisees to bring false charges against Jesus (See Matt. 9:10-13; 12:1-7). Christ told the Sadducees, "You do err, not knowing the scriptures, nor the power of God (Matt 22:29)." Ignorance of God's word caused the Jews to crucify Christ (Luke 23:24; Acts 3:17). Paul persecuted the church out of ignorance (1 Tim.1:13-14). A failure to study and rightly divide the scriptures causes many of our religious differences.

Second, a lack of personal study of the Bible can produce different Bible interpretations. Superficial study can allow false teachers to victimize us (1 Tim. 4:1-6). The Bible calls on each of us to investigate and learn God's will (Acts 17:11; Eph. 5:17). Do you depend on a preacher, friend, or relative to tell you what the Bible says, or do you study God's word for yourself. John tells us to test every spirit: "Beloved, believe not every spirit, but prove the spirits, whether they are of God; because many false prophets are gone out into the world (1 John 4:1)." We must study the Bible for ourselves.

Third, using human creed books leads us to many different interpretations of the Bible. Church dogmas, church manuals, and catechisms mold all explanations of the Bible to conform to the various beliefs held by men. What men say becomes more important than what the word of God says. The Bible presents one message that we can all understand and understand alike. Jesus taught that the truth makes us free: "And you shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free (John 8:32)." He also taught that truth is the word of God: "Sanctify them in the truth: your word is truth (John 17:17)." Our role is to study the word of God, the truth, for ourselves: "Give diligence to present yourself approved unto God, a workman that needs not to be ashamed, handling aright the word of truth (2 Tim 2:15)." If we all handle aright the word of truth, we will all be one in that truth. Paul exhorts us in 1 Cor. 1:10 to speak the same thing "that there be no divisions among you." This unity in Christ can only come when we all study, understand, and interpret the Bible for ourselves.

Let us all set aside every human teaching, dogma, and doctrine and hold fast to the truth of God's word which can make us truly free.