

## 16.05.2020 LANGUAGE, TEXT AND CONTEXT

***“Take this Book of the Law, and put it beside the ark of the covenant of the LORD your God, that it may be there as a witness against you” Deuteronomy 31:26***

***And Jesus opened their understanding, that they might comprehend the Scriptures. Luke 24:45***

### Understanding the Scriptures

*All Scripture is given by inspiration of God (God-breathed), and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, thoroughly equipped for every good work. 2 Timothy 3:16, 17*

The Bible is God’s Word to man. It is, as Paul says in 2 Timothy 3:16, ‘God breathed...’

It is therefore profitable to mankind:

1. It is profitable to instruct us in salvation.

The Bible is a handbook of salvation. It tells of Man’s creation in God’s image, his Fall through disobedience into sin with the consequences of judgment, God’s continuing love for Mankind and His plan to save Mankind through an everlasting covenant of grace, through the work of His Son, Christ Jesus; the work of the Holy Spirit to convict men of their need of Christ, and to produce Christ’s righteousness in all who have saving faith in Him. And ultimately, to give all who accept the covenant of grace, eternal life and immortality.

2. It is profitable for instruction in salvation ‘through faith in Jesus Christ’.

Since salvation is through Christ, the Bible foretells Christ’s work in the Old Testament. The New Testament witnesses to His life and work and the work of His Spirit in the life of the believer and ends in Revelation with the judgment, the coming of Christ in glory and the ultimate victory of Christ over the Devil and his works.

3. It is profitable for teaching the truth.

4. It is profitable for refuting error.

5. It is profitable for teaching us right conduct.

The Bible is the revelation of God. As such, it has deep mysteries and secret things which belong to Him. The Christian who looks for ‘treasures old and new’ with a sincere heart and seeking the illumination of the Holy Spirit will not be disappointed.

**And yet, the poorly educated and the illiterate may also find wondrous things in God’s word.** It is true that the illiterate must depend on a teacher, evangelist or preacher to hear the Word (what a responsibility to those who have the ministry of the Word, to teach it aright), but before printing and translation, that was how most people heard the Word. True wisdom comes not from higher education but from a child-like surrender to the illumination of the Holy Spirit.

And the poorly educated can stand with the learned as they study the Word and are illuminated by the Spirit. John Bunyan, the author of *The Pilgrim’s Progress*, was a tinker in Bedford with a rudimentary education, but John Owen, one of the great Puritan theologians of the day used to go to listen to his sermons. When King Charles II heard of Owen attending the tinker’s sermons, he asked why an educated man would give himself to listening to an uneducated tinker preach. Owen replied, “I would willingly exchange my learning for the tinker’s power of touching men’s hearts.”

‘The Bible unfolds truth with a simplicity and a perfect adaptation to the needs and longings of the human heart, that has astonished and charmed the most highly cultivated minds, while **it enables the humblest and uncultured to discern the way of salvation.** And yet these simply stated truths lay hold upon subjects so elevated, so far-reaching, so infinitely

beyond the power of human comprehension, that we can accept them only because God has declared them. **Thus the plan of redemption is laid open to us, so that every soul may see the steps he is to take in repentance toward God and faith toward our Lord Jesus Christ, in order to be saved in God's appointed way;** yet beneath these truths, so easily understood, lie mysteries that are the hiding of His glory—mysteries that overpower the mind in its research, yet inspire the sincere seeker for truth with reverence and faith.' *Steps to Christ p.107*

We must:

1. Humble our hearts before God and look to him for wisdom, revelation and understanding of the Word (Ephesians 1:17, 18) and
2. Discipline our minds and intellect to understand Scripture.

John Stott puts it well...'Let us not inhibit our growth in understanding the Bible by a proud and prayerless self-confidence or by sheer laziness and indiscipline'.

### **Words and Their Meanings**

Though the English King James version has beautiful and poetic language, yet it has some limitations, in that the original Hebrews and Greek words have multiple meanings. Alternatively, the English language has only one word (e.g. love, life) to describe multiple words in the Greek. Below are a few examples:

In the Old Testament Hebrew, the word '*chesed*' is variously translated as mercy, goodness, favour, love, kindness, loving-kindness.

Exodus 20:6 *And showing mercy unto thousands of them that love me, and keep my commandments.*

1 Kings 8:23 *LORD God of Israel, there is no God like thee, in heaven above, or on earth beneath, who keeps covenant and mercy with thy servants that walk before thee with all their heart.*

Nehemiah 9:17 *Thou art a God ready to pardon, gracious and merciful, slow to anger, and of great kindness.*

Job 10:12 *You have granted me life and favour...*

Psalms 36:7 *How excellent is Thy loving-kindness, O God! Therefore the children of men put their trust under the shadow of Thy wings*

Psalms 31:21 *Blessed be the LORD: for He has shown me His marvellous kindness.*

Psalms 107:8 *Oh that men would praise the LORD for his goodness, and for his wonderful works to the children of men!*

In the New Testament, two English words have multiple words in the Greek...*love* and *life*.

The English word 'love' has at least 4 Greek words. Only one of these '*agape*' is used by the NT authors to describe God's unconditional, unchanging self-giving love. The other words describe human love; one of these is '*phileo*' - brotherly love. A passage from John 21:15-17 clearly sets out the difference in the Greek but not in English.

*After breakfast Jesus asked Simon Peter, "Simon son of John, do you love (agape) me more than these?"*

*"Yes, Lord," Peter replied, "you know I love (phileo) you."*

*"Then feed my lambs," Jesus told him.*

*Jesus repeated the question: "Simon son of John, do you love (agape) me?"*

*"Yes, Lord," Peter said, "you know I love (phileo) you."*

*"Then take care of my sheep," Jesus said.*

*A third time he asked him, "Simon son of John, do you love (phileo) me?"*

*Peter was grieved because He said to him the third time, "Do you love (phileo) Me?". He said, "Lord, you know everything. You know that I love (phileo) you."  
Jesus said, "Then feed my sheep."*

The English word 'life' has multiple Greek words. 'Bios' or 'psyche' refers to our physical life now ruled by sin and under sentence of death. 'zoe' refers to the life we receive in Christ Jesus; it is the life of God and makes us partakers of the Divine nature. We are called to lose our 'bios' that we may gain 'zoe'.

*In Him was life (zoe) and the life (zoe) was the light of men. John 1:4*

*Most assuredly, I say to you, unless a grain of wheat falls into the ground and dies, it remains alone; but if it dies, it produces much grain. He who loves his life (psyche) will lose it, and he who hates his life (psyche) in this world will keep it for eternal life (zoe). John 12:25*

### **Repetition, Word Patterns, and Meaning**

The original languages of the Bible had no punctuation, so the authors used literary devices to convey the importance of a message.

#### Repetition:

Emphasis is gained by a number of techniques that repeat the same word, phrase, or sentence.

*"For His mercy endures forever"* is repeated in each verse of Psalm 136.

*"Blessed"* is repeated through the beatitudes in Matthew 5:3-11.

The phrase *'Oh that men would give thanks to the LORD for His goodness, and for His wonderful works to the children of men!'* is found throughout Psalm 107.

#### Parallelism

In Hebrew poetry, instead of rhyming sounds, Hebrew poetry rhymes ideas. Since the rhythm is logical rather than phonetic, much of it is retained in translation. In most verses, the thought of the second line is parallel to the thought of the first line.

*Bless the LORD, O my soul;  
And all that is within me, bless His holy name!  
Bless the LORD, O my soul,  
And forget not all His benefits: Psalm 103:1, 2*

*Lift up your heads, O you gates! And be lifted up, you everlasting doors! And the King of glory shall come in.  
Who is this King of glory? The LORD strong and mighty, the LORD mighty in battle.  
Lift up your heads, O you gates! Lift up, you everlasting doors! And the King of glory shall come in.  
Who is this King of glory? The LORD of hosts, He is the King of glory. Psalm 24:7-10*

#### Meaning:

In general, we are to take the natural meaning of Scripture as the literal meaning.

*For in six days the Lord created the heavens and the earth...*

*And it came to pass in those days that a decree went out from Caesar Augustus that all the world should be registered. This census first took place while Quirinius was governing Syria. Luke 2:1, 2*

Sometimes however, the meaning is figurative rather than literal. (Non-literal or figurative language refers to words, and groups of words, that change the normal meanings of the words). Figurative language includes similes, metaphors, allegory and symbolism.

Examples of figurative language in the Bible:

Metaphors:

*You are the salt of the earth...Matthew 5:13*

*I am the Bread of Life...John 6:35*

*We are the clay, and You our potter; And all of us are the work of Your hand. Isaiah 64:8*

Symbolism: God's redeemed people *'have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb'*. John wants us to understand that their righteousness (white robes) is entirely due to the death of Christ (the blood of the Lamb).

Parables: Parables were Jesus' favourite form of teaching. A parable is an everyday story told to illustrate one main lesson e.g. the Good Samaritan – Who is my neighbor?

Allegory: this was used only a few times by Jesus. In an allegory multiple lessons can be learnt at many points in the story- e.g. John 10 – the Good Shepherd and Mark 4 – The Sower.

### **Texts and Contexts**

The words of the Bible are always written in a context (the circumstances that form the setting, and in terms of which it can be fully understood).

Every text in Scripture has 2 contexts: the historical context and the scriptural context.

The historical context is the time and situation in which it was written.

The scriptural context is 1. The place in the Bible it is found (book, chapter, verse) and 2. Its interpretation in the light of the entire revelation of the Bible (the unity of Scripture).

e.g. The creation and fall of Adam and Eve.

The birth, life, ministry, death, resurrection and ascension of Christ Jesus.

### **Books and Their Message**

The Old Testament: The Law, the Prophets and the Writings (the Psalms and Wisdom literature) all foretell Messiah in various ways.

*Then He said to them, "These are the words which I spoke to you while I was still with you, that all things must be fulfilled which were written in the Law of Moses and the Prophets and the Psalms concerning Me." Luke 24:44*

The Gospels: the story of Jesus birth, life and works, ministry, death and resurrection.

Acts of the Apostles: The Spirit of Christ enabling the apostles to teach and preach the gospel and establishing the church.

The Epistles: Apply the Person and work of Christ to the Church and the life of Christian.

Revelation of Jesus: Christ as Judge, Christ as victorious King, coming to usher in the kingdom of glory.

### **Conclusion:**

Peter exhorts his brethren to "grow in grace, and in the knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ." 2 Peter 3:18. When the people of God are growing in grace, they will be constantly obtaining a clearer understanding of His word. They will discern new light and beauty in its sacred truths. This has been true in the history of the church in all ages, and thus it will continue to the end. "The path of the righteous is as the light of dawn, that shineth more and more unto the perfect day." Proverbs 4:18, R.V., margin. *Steps to Christ p 113*

---