

Clarity of Scripture

The doctrine of the Clarity of Scripture (also known as Perspicuity of Scripture) teaches us that God has made His Word, the Bible, to be clearly understandable. Some people in the history of the church, and even today, want to tell us that the Bible is a mystical book or that its interpretation is unclear. As we shall see, that is not true.

The clearly understandable character of Scripture is founded on the character of God:

- God is a relational God. He wants to know us and for us to know Him. We can expect His Word to communicate properly with us because good communication is part of a good relationship. He is knowable through His Word, so it must have clarity because He wants us to understand who He is.
- God is an intelligent God (Psa 92:5). He is completely able to communicate intelligent and logical thoughts to us. His Word shows this.
- God is a God of order. He has created a universe that functions in an ordered fashion, and He expects us, as believers, to conduct ourselves in an orderly way. Just as we can expect His communication with us to be ordered and functional. 1 Corinthians 14:35 says, *“For God is not a God of confusion but of peace.”* His communication with us will not be characterised by confusion.

- God is also true, infallible, and reliable. Therefore, we can expect the same when He speaks. His Word in Scripture is representative of Himself and His character, so we can expect it to be clearly intelligible.

Scripture must be, and is, able to be clearly understood, because God sends it to perform certain tasks:

- Scripture is light. It gives understanding from the Lord *“Your word is a lamp unto my feet and a light unto my path”* (Psalm 119:105; 1 Peter 1:19).
- Scripture is profitable for us. *“All scripture is breathed out by God and is profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, that the man of God may be competent, equipped for every good work”* (2 Timothy 3:16-17).
- Scripture explains salvation. *“...the sacred writings, which are able to make you wise for salvation in Christ Jesus”* (2 Timothy 3:15b). The message of salvation is there for all who want to find it.
- Scripture tests the accuracy of religious ideas. *“Now these Jews were more noble than those of Thessalonica; they received the word with all eagerness, examining the scriptures daily to see if these things were so”* (Acts 17:11).
- The Lord has given us His understandable Word to do this kind of work in us. It is fit for these purposes because it has clarity of meaning.

God has given us clarity in scripture so that it can be read by everyone. Scripture is addressed to common people. Deuteronomy 6:4 says, *“Hear, O Israel.”* God’s Word is there to be heard and understood by all the different people that live in the community. Mark 12:37 says, *“The great crowd heard Him (Jesus) gladly.”* God’s Word was never intended to only be understood by a special or elite type of person but not the rest of us. It doesn’t have hidden meanings that ordinary people can’t find. We can all access it and read it for ourselves and expect to learn what it means.

- We are told by the Lord to teach Scripture to our children (Deu 6:6-7). Obviously, the basic and most important truths of the Word can be grasped in some measure even by children. As Timothy was taught; *“But as for you, continue in what you have learned and have firmly believed, knowing from whom you learned it and how from childhood you have been acquainted with the sacred writings...”* (2 Timothy 3:14-15a).

What the clarity of Scripture does NOT mean.

- It does not mean that all parts of Scripture are equally easy to understand. Clarity is not the same as simplicity. Some parts of Scripture are fairly simple, and some are more complex. Often, we find that we need to work to understand properly what the text is saying. Peter says of Paul’s writings, *“There are some things in them that are hard to understand, which the ignorant and unstable twist to their own destruction, as they do the*

other scriptures" (2 Peter 3:16). Those who are *"ignorant and unstable"* will twist the meaning of the verses that require greater understanding. Instead, we are to submit to the task of diligently seeking the meaning of more complex texts under the Lord's guidance, *"Do your best to present yourself to God as one approved, a worker who has no need to be ashamed, rightly handling the word of truth"* (2 Timothy 2:15). The clear meaning is there to be found, when we are prepared to apply ourselves in the right way. Also, an important principle here is that the more difficult texts are always to be seen in the light of those texts that are plainly obvious in their meaning.

- Clarity of Scripture does not mean that interpretation, explanation, and exposition by a Bible teacher are not necessary. The New Testament speaks of the gift of teaching and the office of the pastor/teacher. In Acts 8, Phillip heard the Ethiopian eunuch reading Isaiah and asked him *"Do you understand what you are reading?" And he said, 'How can I unless someone guides me?' And he invited Phillip to come and sit with him."* (Acts 8:30-31). Our Lord also explained Scripture to His disciples. After His resurrection, for example, He met some of His disciples on the road to Emmaus, *"And beginning with Moses and all the prophets, He interpreted to them in all the scriptures the things concerning Himself"* (Luke 24:27). We need teachers to explain to those of us who know less, to apply Scripture, to exhort and rebuke, and other such tasks.

Why would someone believe that Scripture is not clear in its meaning?

- ~ Perhaps they are a new believer and know nothing of the Bible or have never been taught well. They need to be shown the clear meaning of Scripture by those who are more mature. We instruct them, knowing that *“the unfolding of your words gives light, it imparts understanding to the simple”* (Psalm 119:130).
- ~ Perhaps someone will think Scripture is unclear because they are unwilling to diligently spend time in study. Or perhaps they have not bothered to grow spiritually. The writer of Hebrews rebukes his readers for their lack of growth, *“For though by this time you ought to be teachers, you need someone to teach you again the basic principles of the oracles of God. You need milk, not solid food”* (Hebrews 5:12). They were poor in their understanding and had not sought edification.
- ~ People with a wrong heart attitude can fail to grasp the intent of Scripture even if they are educated and intelligent. *“At that time Jesus declared, ‘I thank you, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, that you have hidden these things from the wise and understanding and revealed them to little children”* (Matthew 11:25).
- ~ People will struggle to understand what Scripture is saying if their methods of interpretation are bad. That is a whole other subject which we shall cover another time.

- ~ People will struggle to understand some parts of Scripture if they are not born-again believers. Their thinking about God's Word is distorted by their sin and their ungodly desires. We have the advantage of having the indwelling Holy Spirit to help us understand. *"You gave your good Spirit to instruct them"* (Nehemiah 9:20).
- ~ The work of false teachers deliberately obscures the meaning of some texts also. These are men (and women) who speak *"twisted things"* (Acts 20:29-30).

In conclusion, let us praise our God, who has given us His good, understandable Word. *"Your word is a lamp unto my feet and a light unto my path"* (Psalm 119:105). Thank Him that it is His will for us to know Him through His clear Word that He has provided.