

Understanding the Bible

All people, if they claim to be “Christian,” will recognize the Bible as religious authority. Yet many people believe they cannot understand the Bible, so they must take the word of some religious leader. What does the Bible say?

To answer the questions below, please take out your Bible and look up the **>indicated Scriptures<**. Then underline the correct answer to each question marked **. Correct answers are found at the end.

Consider the following principles:

The Importance of Truth and Danger of Error

God’s word often emphasizes the importance of following Scripturally correct doctrine and avoiding false doctrines. How important is knowing truth?

The Importance of True Doctrine

> Please read John 8:32; 17:17. <

1 Why do we need to know the truth? (a) so we can be truly free, (b) so we can win arguments, (c) so we can be seminary professors.

2 What is the ultimate source of truth? (a) human teachings, (b) church laws, (c) God’s word, (d) the Koran, (e) all the preceding.

> Please read 1 Peter 1:22,23. <

3 How can we purify our souls so we are born again? (a) by following church law, (b) by obeying the truth, (c) by obeying human tradition.

In religion, God’s word is the source of truth. To please God and receive eternal life, we must know and obey the truth. This is why truth in religion is so important and error is so dangerous.

We need to be sure that we are following truth, and God’s word is the source of truth. So why should we just take the word of religious teachers for what the Bible says?

(Cf. Proverbs 23:23; Ephesians 4:14-16; 2 Thessalonians 2:10-12.)

The Danger of False Doctrine

> Please read 2 Timothy 4:2-4. <

4 What did Paul predict people will do? (a) dislike sound doctrine, (b) turn away from truth, (c) follow fables, (d) all of these.

> Please read 1 John 4:1. <

5 Why should we not believe every spirit but test them? (a) to cause trouble, (b) to avoid false teaching, (c) to blaspheme the Holy Spirit.

People often think that false doctrines are rare or they are not a serious problem or that few people follow them. But God warns us that false doctrine is a common problem and a very real danger.

(See also Matt. 7:15-23; 2 Cor. 11:13-15; Acts 20:28-30; Titus 1:9-14.)

It follows from these passages that we must take great care to seek the truth and avoid error. God assures us that the truth is available in the Scriptures (John 17:17; 2 Tim. 3:16,17; Acts 17:11). If we just take the word of religious teachers, how do we know which ones are true teachers and which are false teachers? But can we understand the Bible when we study it?

Can the Bible Be Understood?

In order to justify following standards besides the Bible, some groups discredit the Bible by saying that it cannot be understood. So they claim we need other standards to explain the Bible, or they say we must take the word of the clergy about what is true.

The Teachings of Men

“Did God intend that the Bible alone should be the guide to salvation? No, because certain things in the Bible can be misunderstood, and because the Bible does not have everything God taught” — *A Catechism for Adults*, Cogan, pp. 9,10,51.

“...the Scriptures ... are not of themselves clear and intelligible even in matters of the highest importance” — *Faith of Our Fathers*, Gibbons, p. 73.

So some acknowledge that they have taught people not to study the Bible but to blindly follow church leaders.

“In early times, the Bible was read freely by the lay people ... No prohibitions were issued against the popular reading of the Bible. New dangers came in during the middle ages ... To meet these evils, the Councils of Toulouse (1229) and Tarragona (1234) forbade the laity to read the vernacular translations of the Bible. Pius IV required the bishops to refuse lay persons leave to read even Catholic versions of Scripture unless their confessors or parish priests judged that such reading was likely to prove beneficial” — *Catholic Dictionary*, p. 82.

“Obey blindly, that is, without asking questions ... in obeying your confessor you obey God ... if you obey him you are secure. But you say, if I am damned in consequence of obeying my confessor, who will rescue me from hell? What you say is impossible” — *True Spouse of Christ*, p. 35 (via *CAI*, Vol. II, p. 98).

So some groups have taught people to blindly follow human religious teachers and have even forbidden people to study the Bible itself, because they say common people cannot understand the Bible.

The Teaching of Scripture

> Please read Mark 7:14. <

6 To whom was Jesus speaking here? (a) the multitude (common people), (b) just the clergy, (c) seminary students, (d) it does not say.

7 What did He expect all of them to do? (a) obey preachers blindly, (b) follow the catechism, (c) hear and understand His teachings.

Think: Did Jesus believe that the common people could not understand His message? Did He think they needed to rely on some human “authorities” to explain His words?

> Please read Acts 17:11,12. <

8 How did these people determine truth? (a) by accepting human tradition, (b) by reading Scripture, (c) by accepting decrees of councils.

Think: Would searching the Scriptures lead people to know the truth, if they could not understand the Scriptures? Does this passage harmonize with the idea that common people need not read the Bible?

Instead of just accepting what church leaders taught, these people are commended because they used the Bible to check out the leaders!

> Please read 2 Timothy 3:16,17. <

9 In what ways do Scriptures profit us? (a) teaching, (b) reproof, (c) instruction in righteousness, (d) providing all good works, (e) all of these.

Think: Can the Scriptures profit us if we cannot understand them?

No writing can profit us if we cannot understand it. Yet this passage expressly says that the Scriptures (the written word) are profitable for the very things people say the Scriptures cannot do!

> Please read Psalms 119:105. <

10 When one is in the dark, what purpose would light serve? (a) understanding, (b) guidance (c) avoiding dangers, (d) all of these.

Think: Can God’s word spiritually be a lamp to our feet and a light to our path if we cannot understand it? Do the passages we have studied agree or disagree with the claim that the Bible cannot be understood?

Bible study is not always easy. Some Scriptures are harder to understand than others. The Bible must be approached with an honest, open heart, and diligent, regular study is required. But God gave us the Bible so we can understand. When people claim that the average person cannot understand the Bible, they dishonor God’s very purpose for giving us the Scriptures. Such people are simply rationalizing their desire to follow something besides the Bible.

Yes, you can understand the Bible if you are committed to studying diligently with an honest heart. Spiritual teachers may be helpful, but we must always check them out to be sure their teachings agree with the Bible. We urge you to “search the Scriptures daily.”

(See also Eph. 3:3-5; Psalms 119:105.)

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Correct Answers: 1) a; 2) c; 3) b; 4) d; 5) b; 6) a; 7) c; 8) b; 9) e; 10) d