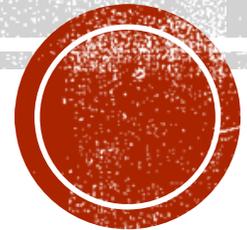


AVOIDING BIBLE PASSAGE DIFFICULTIES

(Don't leap to conclusions !)



SOME GOOD RESOURCES

- *When Critics Ask: A Popular Handbook of Bible Difficulties*
Norman L. Geisler, Thomas A. Howe

[The majority of key points in the slides are from this work]

- *Difficulties in the Bible*
R.A. Torrey

- *Study Like a Pro: Explore Difficult Passages from Every Book of the Bible*
John D. Barry, Rebecca van Noord

- *Can I Trust the Bible*
R.C. Sproul

TRAPS WE CAN FALL INTO

- Scholars and serious Bible students have collected a number of ways in which we can “create” Bible passage difficulties that are really not there
- Bible critics love to focus on these to “prove” that the Bible is inaccurate and therefore not reliable in guiding our lives
- Believers need to recognize how these traps trick us into losing confidence in the inerrancy of the Bible’s original writings

ASSUMING THERE REALLY IS NO EXPLANATION FOR WHAT IS NOT NOW EXPLAINABLE

- Bumblebee supposedly can't fly because of constraints imposed by physics
- Critics used to say that Moses couldn't have written the Pentateuch because there was no form of writing in his day
- Uriah the Hittite ? But the Hittites never existed was the claim by historians
- **GUIDELINE:** Diligent and patient research is necessary to understand Biblical dilemmas

ASSUMING THAT THE BIBLE IS WRONG UNTIL IT IS PROVEN RIGHT

- Would you routinely disbelieve what the authors saw and heard for other non-fiction books ?
- Approaching structured criticism of the Bible in this way easily leads to assumption of falsehoods
- **GUIDELINE:** God has stated that His word is pure truth in every way. Approach it that way from the first

FORGETTING THAT GOD'S REVELATIONS ARE INFALLIBLE, OUR **INTERPRETATIONS** ARE NOT

- Look at Jesus speaking on the infallible Word
 - In John 10.35: “If he called them gods, to whom the word of God came (and the Scripture cannot be broken)“
 - In Matt 5.18: “For truly I say to you, until heaven and earth pass away, not the smallest letter or stroke shall pass from the Law until all is accomplished.“
- The Bible is infallible, and the reader must approach it that way
 - We should not accept the prevailing view over the Bible's infallibility
 - Example: Supposed conflict between science and the Bible

NOT HEEDING THE CONTEXT OF THE PASSAGE SUPPOSED DIFFICULT

- “A text out of context is a pretext.”
- Example from Ps 1
 - Bible critic might quote it as “There is no God“
 - In context, the verse reads "The fool has said in his heart, 'There is no God.' "
- Example from Matt 5.39
 - "But I say to you, do not resist an evil person...“
 - Note the full context of the verse
 - "But I say to you, do not resist an evil person; but whoever slaps you on your right cheek, turn the other to him also"

FAILURE TO INTERPRET A DIFFICULT PASSAGE IN THE LIGHT OF CLEAR PASSAGES

- Common difficulties
 - The passage may be obscure in meaning
 - The passage may appear to be teaching something opposed to other passages
- Example # 1 of Salvation through Works versus Grace
 - James 2.14-26 appears to be saying that salvation is by works

“14 What use is it, my brethren, if someone says he has faith but he has no works? Can that faith save him?

17 Even so faith, if it has no works, is dead, being by itself.

20 But are you willing to recognize, you foolish fellow, that faith without works is useless?

24 You see that a man is justified by works and not by faith alone.

26 For just as the body without the spirit is dead, so also faith without works is dead.”

FAILURE TO INTERPRET A DIFFICULT PASSAGE IN THE LIGHT OF CLEAR PASSAGES *(CONT'D)*

- But Paul says that salvation is by grace alone

Rom 4.5

“But to the one who does not work, but believes in Him who justifies the ungodly, his faith is credited as righteousness”

Eph 2.8-9

“8 For by grace you have been saved through faith; and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God;
9 not as a result of works, so that no one may boast.”

- How do we resolve this ?
 - 1st - Don't assume there is opposition from the start
 - 2nd – Consider/pray ... How COULD both passages be true ?

FAILURE TO INTERPRET A DIFFICULT PASSAGE IN THE LIGHT OF CLEAR PASSAGES (CONT'D)

- Example # 2 of Salvation through Works versus Grace
 - Phil 2.12 seems to say you must work for your salvation
“So then, my beloved, just as you have always obeyed, not as in my presence only, but now much more in my absence, work out your salvation with fear and trembling”
- But the passages we gave from Paul show that this can't be true
- So what's the answer >> CONTEXT

Phil 2.13

“for it is God who is at work in you, both to will and to work for His good pleasure”

- Wiersbe: "God must work in us before He can work through us"
- *The Bible Knowledge Commentary*:
"God makes His own both willing and desirous to do His work"

BASING UNDERSTANDING ON AN OBSCURE PASSAGE

- Situation # 1: A key word's meaning is unclear

Lord's Prayer: Matt 6.11

“...Give us this day our daily bread”

- Word “daily” is translated from Greek word *epiousios*
- Some possible meanings from Greek scholars
 - Give us this day our continuous bread.
 - Give us this day our supersubstantial (indicating supernatural, from heaven) bread.
 - Give us this day bread for our sustenance.
 - Give us this day our daily (or, what we need for today) bread.

BASING UNDERSTANDING ON AN OBSCURE PASSAGE *(CONT'D)*

- Situation # 2: Words are clear, but what they refer to isn't

1 Cor 15.29

“Otherwise, what will those do who are baptized for the dead? If the dead are not raised at all, why then are they baptized for them?”

- Some possible explanations for what Paul is saying
 - Baptizing of live representatives to ensure salvation for dead believers who were not baptized, e.g. Mormon beliefs
 - Others being baptized into the church to fill the ranks of those who have passed on
 - A believer being baptized “for” (i.e., “with a view to”) his own death and burial with Christ
- Some GUIDELINES to interpretation in such a case
 - “the main things are the plain things, and the plain things are the main things.”
 - If a passage is unclear, don't assume that it contradicts other Biblical passages that are clear

ASSUMING THAT A NT "INEXACT" QUOTE OF AN OT PASSAGE IS AN INACCURACY

- Some causes of the variations

- The speakers of the same essential statement are different

Zechariah quoted the Lord in Zech 12.10

"...they will look on Me whom they have pierced..."

John, in restating Zech 12.10 in John 19.37 says

"And again another Scripture says, 'THEY SHALL LOOK ON HIM WHOM THEY PIERCED.' "

- Some NT writers state a general truth without citing a reference

Matt 2.23

"... and came and lived in a city called Nazareth. This was to fulfill what was spoken through the prophets: 'He shall be called a Nazarene.' "

ASSUMING THAT A NT "INEXACT" QUOTE OF AN OT PASSAGE IS AN INACCURACY *(CONT'D)*

- Some causes of the variations *(cont'd)*
 - Some NT speakers quote only a part of the OT text

In Luke 4.18-19, Jesus quoted from Isaiah 61.1-2 in the Nazareth synagogue

18 "THE SPIRIT OF THE LORD IS UPON ME,
BECAUSE HE ANOINTED ME TO PREACH THE GOSPEL TO THE POOR.
HE HAS SENT ME TO PROCLAIM RELEASE TO THE CAPTIVES,
AND RECOVERY OF SIGHT TO THE BLIND,
19 TO SET FREE THOSE WHO ARE OPPRESSED,
TO PROCLAIM THE FAVORABLE YEAR OF THE LORD."

But He stopped in the middle of Isa 61.2

"To proclaim the favorable year of the LORD
And the day of vengeance of our God;
To comfort all who mourn,"

ASSUMING THAT DIFFERING DESCRIPTIONS OF THE SAME EVENT ARE FALSE

- How many angels were at the tomb of Jesus ??
 - Matt 28.5 "The angel said to the women..." - One ?
 - John 20.12 "...she saw two angels in white sitting..." - Or two ?
- How did Judas die ??
 - Matt 27.5 "...he went away and hanged himself."
 - Luke says in Acts 1.18 "...falling headlong, he burst open in the middle and all his intestines gushed out."

ASSUMING THAT THE BIBLE APPROVES OF ALL IT RECORDS

- It records lies, as well as truths, spoken

Rahab in Joshua 2.4

"But the woman had taken the two men and hidden them, and she said,
'Yes, the men came to me, but I did not know where they were from.' "

- It records human conditions that a sinful, but does not uphold them
 - David's sin with Bathsheba
 - Solomon's polygamy
 - Atheism

Psalm 14.1 "The fool has said in his heart, 'There is no God.' "

ASSUMING GENERAL STATEMENTS HAVE NO EXCEPTIONS

- Proverbs gives many general truths to live by, but they are not guaranteed to be without exception

Prov 16.7

“When a man’s ways are pleasing to the LORD,
He makes even his enemies to be at peace with him”

Prov 22.6

“Train up a child in the way he should go,
Even when he is old he will not depart from it”

ASSUMING THAT THE BIBLE COPIES ARE INERRANT

- Example re. King Ahaziah's age when he became king
 - 2 Kings 8.26 "Ahaziah was twenty-two years old when he became king"
 - 2 Chron 22.2 "Ahaziah was forty-two years old when he began to reign" (NRSV)
- Guidelines about copyist errors
 - There are errors in the copies, not in the original
 - They are minor errors not affecting Christian doctrine
 - There are relatively few
 - The error can usually be detected by their context, and/or other related passages
 - Multiple copies of the same passage can be compared to determine the error and solution

SUMMARY

- God's Word is inerrant (in the original) and infallible
- Begin by believing this in interpreting ANY passage
- If a difficulty occurs, look for your possible bias in these cautions

**DON'T LEAP TO CONCLUSIONS BEFORE
STUDY & PRAYER!**