

How can I understand the Bible?

Jesus said- "My sheep listen to My voice; I know them, and they follow Me." (Jn. 10:27). We hear His voice whenever we read His word, the Bible. God gave us the Bible, so that we could follow Jesus, by understanding it, and obeying it.

The Holy Spirit wrote the Bible, using human authors. Just as they could not have written it without The Spirit, so we cannot understand it without The Spirit- "...the man without The Spirit does not accept the things that come from The Spirit of God...he cannot understand them, for they are spiritually discerned." (1 Cor. 2:14).

Therefore you must be a Christian before you can understand the Bible. But all those of us who are Christians, can ask The Holy Spirit to give us spiritual discernment to understand whatever part of the Bible we're reading.

However this promise of God-given discernment doesn't mean we don't also need to work at understanding the Bible. Like many other things in the Christian life, God rewards our "sanctified effort". Paul said to Timothy "Reflect on what I am saying, for The Lord will give you insight into all this." (2 Tim. 2:7).

Paul was "saying" the words of the Bible. That same promise therefore applies to you and me. If we will put in the effort to study, to "reflect" upon the Bible, then God will give us insight into what He's saying to us in it.

Here are four truths which I hope will encourage you whenever you face a "hard" Bible passage.

1. **God** has given us the Bible.

God is perfectly able to communicate with us through the Bible. He is able to make us understand everything in it that He wants us to (Is. 55:11). He is completely in control of everything in the universe (Mt. 10:29).

However, as He says "As the heavens are higher than the earth, so are My ways higher than your ways and My thoughts than your thoughts." (Is. 55:9). This means there will be things in the Bible which we will not be able to fully understand, at least not until Jesus returns.

2. God has given us **the whole** Bible.

The Bible is not always a “logical” book by our human standards. However, if we look carefully, we can see a “big picture” running right throughout its pages, from start to finish. We can see God working out His wonderful plan to save a people for Himself through Christ.

God is not a God of disorder (1 Cor. 14:33). An individual Bible passage can often be explained by reference to this “big picture” of how God orders all the people and events of history towards His great purpose. Hard passages often become easier, when we see them in their Biblical context.

3. God has given **us** the Bible

God has given the Bible to all of **us**, His people. And we have the mind of Christ (1 Cor. 2:16). All Christians ought to agree about what the Bible teaches (1 Cor. 1:10).

So we must be cautious if we have arrived at an unusual interpretation of a Bible passage, which goes against what most other Christians believe.

However, if we are humbly certain before God that our understanding is right, we must be prepared to take a stand for this truth, even if fellow Christians disagree with us (Gal. 2:11-14).

4. God has given us the Bible to **bless us, if we obey it**

Sometimes we understand a command in Scripture all too well, but we claim we don't, because we don't want to pay the price of obeying it.

But God is Love. God will bless us when we obey His Word. God gives us His Word to make us “...thoroughly equipped for every good work” (2 Tim. 3:17).

God conforms us to the likeness of Christ, as we obey His Word. In John 17:17 Jesus says His truth sanctifies us. So, if you're in doubt about whether you've understood a hard Bible passage properly, then consider the likely consequences of obeying it. If following your understanding of the passage would lead you into evil, then your understanding must be wrong (Jas. 1:13).