

**The Clarity of Scripture**  
**The Revelation of God - Week 8 - Summer 2019**

- **Introduction**

- This subject is related to the Reformation.
- This topic also addresses a deep and significant philosophical question:
  - If the Bible is God's own authoritative and inerrant speech...
  - Does that mean it's something beyond our own limited understanding?

- **The Clarity of Scripture is a Biblical Doctrine**

- The Bible makes it clear that God gave His written Word to be *understood*:

*Deuteronomy 30:11–14* - <sup>11</sup> "For this commandment which I command you today is not too difficult for you, nor is it out of reach. <sup>12</sup> "It is not in heaven, that you should say, 'Who will go up to heaven for us to get it for us and make us hear it, that we may observe it?' <sup>13</sup> "Nor is it beyond the sea, that you should say, 'Who will cross the sea for us to get it for us and make us hear it, that we may observe it?' <sup>14</sup> "But the word is very near you, in your mouth and in your heart, that you may observe it.

*Psalms 19:7* - The law of the Lord is perfect, restoring the soul; The testimony of the Lord is sure, making wise the simple.

- And the Bible tells us that it's clear on an *individual* level:

*Psalms 1:2–3* - <sup>2</sup> But his [the blessed man's] delight is in the law of the Lord, and in His law he meditates day and night. <sup>3</sup> He will be like a tree firmly planted by streams of water, which yields its fruit in its season and its leaf does not wither; and in whatever he does, he prospers.

- God's Word has been given to be understood by those who encounter it.
- But not everyone understands God's Revelation.

- **The (Divinely) Selective Clarity of Scripture**

- God does not make His word equally plain to everyone.
  - Isaiah's whole prophetic ministry involved speaking and writing God's Words...Words meant to confuse and harden!

**Isaiah 6:9–10** - <sup>9</sup> He said, “Go, and tell this people: ‘Keep on listening, but do not perceive; Keep on looking, but do not understand.’” <sup>10</sup> “Render the hearts of this people insensitive, Their ears dull, And their eyes dim, Otherwise they might see with their eyes, Hear with their ears, Understand with their hearts, And return and be healed.”

- ▶ Jesus told parables with the intent of confusing some.

**Matthew 13:10–14** - <sup>10</sup> And the disciples came and said to Him, “Why do You speak to them in parables?” <sup>11</sup> Jesus answered them, “To you it has been granted to know the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven, but to them it has not been granted. <sup>12</sup> “For whoever has, to him more shall be given, and he will have an abundance; but whoever does not have, even what he has shall be taken away from him. <sup>13</sup> “Therefore I speak to them in parables; because while seeing they do not see, and while hearing they do not hear, nor do they understand. <sup>14</sup> “In their case the prophecy of Isaiah is being fulfilled, which says, ‘You will keep on hearing, but will not understand; You will keep on seeing, but will not perceive;’

- ▶ Speaking of unbelieving Jews, Paul says this of the Old Testament:

**2 Corinthians 3:14–15** - <sup>14</sup> But their minds were hardened; for until this very day at the reading of the old covenant the same veil remains unlifted, because it is removed in Christ. <sup>15</sup> But to this day whenever Moses is read, a veil lies over their heart.

- The point is that the Bible is only clear to those whom God chooses to make it so.
  - ▶ If the Scriptures remain a hopeless puzzle to someone, that’s not the fault of the Bible’s supposed lack of clarity.
  - ▶ It’s because God has not chosen to give them understanding of His word.
- This should make us so thankful for the understanding of the Bible we do have, as well as good stewards of the understanding we’ve been given!

## - **The Varying Clarity of Scripture Among Christians**

- Even though God has granted a level of Scriptural understanding to all believers, it’s not the same amount for every Christian.
- Sometimes that is due simply to differences in Christian maturity.
- Often, however, this is due to the nature of the Scriptures themselves, as well as the nature of the Body of Christ:

- ▶ Our Westminster Standards state this very well:

*All things in Scripture are not alike plain in themselves, nor alike clear unto all: yet those things which are necessary to be known, believed, and observed for salvation are so clearly propounded, and opened in some place of Scripture or other, that not only the learned, but the unlearned, in a due use of the ordinary means, may attain unto a sufficient understanding of them. (WCF 1:7)*

- ▶ The Confession states rightly that not all of God’s Word is equally clear, even to Christians. (See 2 Peter 3:15-16)
- ▶ But, there are elements of Scripture that are clear enough to be understood by all, with reasonable effort.
  - ❖ These are the matters that are “necessary to be known, believed, and observed” for salvation.
  - ❖ The message of the gospel is so clearly present throughout the Bible, that even the “unlearned” can perceive and believe it.
  - ❖ This was a key point of contention that the Reformers had with the Roman Catholic Church.
- ▶ That said, the Reformers (including the Westminster authors), did not hold to a solo-scriptura (*only* the Bible) view of Scripture.
  - ❖ The difficulty of understanding non-basic gospel teachings led them to see a place for the church in the *teaching* of Scripture.
  - ❖ The teaching ministry of the church would have been *part* of the “ordinary” means mentioned above.
  - ❖ The ministry of teachers within the church is Biblically affirmed:
 

*Nehemiah 8:7b–8 - <sup>7</sup> ...the Levites, helped the people to understand the Law, while the people remained in their places. <sup>8</sup> They read from the book, from the Law of God, clearly, and they gave the sense, so that the people understood the reading.*

*Ephesians 4:11–12 - <sup>11</sup> And he gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the shepherds and teachers, <sup>12</sup> to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ,*
  - ❖ God’s people are supposed to supplement their own reading and meditating upon God’s word with the teachings of those so gifted within the church.

- The Bible becomes increasingly clear to all of us, *in community*.
- That is why the Reformers would have never been for an individualistic “just me, Jesus, and the Bible” approach.
- ❖ And the communal learning of past Christians forms an important part of our current learning and interpretation too.
  - The Westminster Standards are a perfect example.
  - Not that such tradition is infallible or equal to the Bible in authority.
  - But it does represent work of the Holy Spirit over time to bring greater clarity to all of the Bible.
    - ★ That is why we should respect it.
    - ★ That is why only the clearest testimony from Scripture itself should cause us to reject it.