

Who Can Understand the Bible?

by Dave Hunt

The Berean Call Question: At a Bible study, the subject of who can understand the Bible came up. I said that a person who is born again and is depending on the Holy Spirit can understand it. My pastor said that we are too depraved and sinful to fully understand the Bible on our own and that we need a "consensus of teachers."

He then said that anyone who thinks they can understand the Bible without this consensus of teachers is "Satanic and arrogant." I believe that teachers are important, but with all the false teaching going around, it is not only possible but necessary that we arrive at an understanding of the Bible independently of people, or how would we know who is a false teacher and who isn't? What about *Psalms 119:98-100* and *1 Corinthians 2:14-16*?

Response: We agree with you. The idea that we need a "consensus of teachers" sounds much like a Catholic Magisterium. Who are the chosen ones? Further, "consensus" is an agreement that may or may not be true. Moreover, how does one correct an authoritative magisterium? In words applicable to all saints, Paul exhorts Timothy the individual to "Study to shew thyself approved unto God, a workman that needeth not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth" (*2 Timothy 2:15*). Are we not all workmen?

In Scripture, the Lord exhorts to "...take heed to thyself, and keep thy soul diligently, lest thou forget the things which thine eyes have seen, and lest they depart from thy heart all the days of thy life: but teach them thy sons, and thy sons' sons" (*Deuteronomy 4:9*). *Second Timothy 3:16-17* is often rightly cited as evidence for the sufficiency of Scripture. We may sometimes forget that immediately preceding that portion is *verse 15*, which states that "...from a child thou hast known the holy scriptures, which are able to make thee wise unto salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus." Paul is speaking of Timothy's familiarity with the Word of God. Was this familiarity the result of exposure to a "consensus of teachers?"

On the contrary, Paul wrote, "I call to remembrance the unfeigned faith that is in thee, which dwelt first in thy grandmother Lois, and thy mother Eunice; and I am persuaded that in thee also" (*2 Timothy 1:5*). According to *Romans 10:17*, "so then faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the word of God." It is true that the Lord has gifted individuals as teachers (*Ephesians 4:11*) "for the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ" (*verse 12*). Yet in *Acts 8:1*, "there was a great persecution against the church which was at Jerusalem; and they were all scattered abroad throughout the regions of Judaea and Samaria, except the apostles."

These ordinary believers subsequently "went everywhere preaching the word" (*Acts 8:4*). Certainly these folks understood the Word of God! Consider, in *Acts 18*, the case of Apollos (who was "mighty in the scriptures"). He was preaching the "things of the Lord," but he knew only the baptism of John (*verse 25*). He did not know that the Messiah had come, lived, bled and died on the Cross, been buried, and then raised again in power.

Two disciples, Aquila and Priscilla, took him aside and "...expounded unto him the way of God more perfectly" (*verse 26*). In conclusion, yes, there are those equipped to be teachers, but even teachers can go astray, regardless of any official consensus. Paul wrote that the saints were to "prove all things, hold fast that which is good" (*1 Thessalonians 5:21*).

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