

# Three Unique Characteristics of God's Word, The Bible

## Because of Its Inspired ("God-breathed") Nature - 2 Timothy 3:16

### Introduction

People seem to have a tendency to get things backwards. There is a purpose for resources and Bible study helps. There may even be some limited value for "interpretational schemes" - though I haven't found one yet. But the tendency is for people to elevate such things to a position of authority that is higher than the Word itself.

There are so many "facts," "principles," and other types of background information, that people often claim we *must* know, before (according to them) the Bible can be understood. These people often insist that a person *cannot* correctly understand the Bible unless we interpret it in the "light" of their teachings, rules or principles. This type of practice occurs not only among obscure "fringe" groups, but throughout the entire "spectrum" of people who claim to be "Christians."

A person who compares the claims of various so-called "authorities" will often find himself surrounded by a confusing mass of contradictions. Which "authority" should he believe? After all, they *all* claim to be the "right" way, and most of them seem to use Scripture to "prove" their view! They may even claim to be "using Scripture to interpret Scripture" - and this sounds very "spiritual"!

Before we give-up in despair, or conclude (wrongly) that it is *not* possible to know for sure what the Bible says, perhaps we should ask some important questions. For instance, if this "information" is so vital to our understanding of the Bible, then why did God leave it out of the Bible? Why is it that we must trust some human "authority" to give us the information that God, for some reason, "forgot" to tell us in his Word? If God knew about it when he gave us the Scriptures, and if it was so important, then why did he leave such vital information out?

Perhaps it is because this so-called "vital information" *isn't* as vital as some people would like us to believe! Perhaps God left it out for a purpose - so that we wouldn't be lead astray by it, or led into a truncated distortion of the truth! Maybe he even did so, in order to give us an opportunity to trust *him* over human "authorities"!

It is our view that God included in his Word *all* that he needed to include, in order for us to have an accurate understanding of the Word. And so, this article is written, in part, as a protest to all the schemes and "prerequisites" that people have invented and added to the Word of God. *Let God speak for himself, through his Word!* This may seem like a novel (or impossible) idea, but if more people did this, perhaps there would be less disagreement between them, over what the Bible says! At least we would be able to agree on where to start, when we were trying to understand the Bible!

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Many things can be said about the Bible, but the following three characteristics set it apart from all other books and "holy writings." These three things are true *because* of its "God-breathed" nature (2 Timothy 3:16).

### **1) The Bible is relevant in any society or culture.**

The books of the Bible were written within specific historic cultures, yet they transcend all cultural lines. Lack of knowledge of historical cultural details may prevent a person from understanding some of the minute details, but the main points - whatever is necessary for life and godliness - will *not* be hidden.

Some people tell us that if we do not study all sorts of background information, we cannot know or understand the Bible. What they say is *not* true, for many of the godliest people in the world *never* had the opportunity to do so. They had the Bible, but never had access to all these "helps" that some people think are so necessary. Such knowledge may at times be helpful (and we need not deny this fact), but it is *not* a mandatory requirement. Our only obligation is to be willing to accept what God says, the way he says it.

### **2) The Bible can be understood in any language.**

The books of the Bible were written in specific historic languages (Hebrew, Aramaic and Greek), yet once accurately translated, they can be understood in *any* language, if accepted as written, without adding to or subtracting from the message. Lack of knowledge of the original languages may prevent a person from learning certain minute details about a passage being studied, but it does not leave one impaired and unable to know what is necessary for his salvation and sanctification. He will be well-equipped for living a godly life, and will *not* be lead into error.

Some people seem to think that a person needs to know the original languages, if he wants to correctly understand the Bible. This assumption is *not* true, for (as with the previous characteristic) many of the godliest people in the world *never* had the opportunity to learn those languages.

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All three of these characteristics are important. Yet the third, given below, focuses on what is often the greatest source of problems, disagreements and conflicts, among people who claim to be "Christian." Because of this, much more is written about it.

### **3) The Bible tells us what God wants us to know, and it does so in the best way possible.**

The books of the Bible are totally perfect and very precise in the way they say things, even though they do not say things the way people often *want* them to be said. What people *want* and what they *need* are two different things.

These three things can be said about the Bible's message:

- It is totally accurate, precise, to the point, and it does not waste time on unimportant issues. (People often prefer to focus on trivial matters, while ignoring what the Bible says is of greater importance.)
- It cannot be corrected since it is already correct in its entirety. (People often criticize the Bible, because it doesn't present issues the way *they* want them to be presented, and it often disagrees with the opinions and viewpoints that people have invented.)
- It cannot be improved in the form in which it was given to us, since it is already written in the best form possible, so that it can communicate the message that God wanted to communicate. (People often choose a method or a literary structure that they think is best, and then criticize the Bible for *not* being written that way.)

It is important to remember that the intended purpose of the message is *not* to distribute a sterile list of doctrinal facts in an easy-to-remember, "systematic" manner. Nor is its purpose to give us a collection of "inspirational stories," which we can interpret in whatever way we want. Rather, its purpose is to change a person's whole perspective on reality, along with his conduct. It wants to make these changes within *all* the contexts of life - even those not explicitly mentioned. The form in which the words of Scripture have been given is the best form possible for accomplishing this task. Even if we do not fully understand the reason for the way something is presented, we can trust God to accomplish his purposes through it - even if those purposes involve other people, rather than us!

Note that we are focusing here on the *message* of the Word, and the way God gave it to us. There is history, poetry, doctrinal presentations, stories, songs, genealogies, and much more. The Word was given to us over a span of perhaps 20 centuries, through approximately 40 human authors who came from many different cultures and backgrounds. Yet it all comes together as a unified message from God. *Note that we are not focusing on the issue of variations between manuscripts* (copies of the original documents which the apostles and prophets wrote). Passages *do* exist, in which there are questions as to the exact wording. Yet we have thousands of manuscripts available for examination, and it has been shown that, among all these variations, there are *none* which have a significant impact on the *message* of the Word! (Errors of this type are just a fact of life. Even today, with computers, printing presses and other forms of technology, there are often spelling errors and other types of mistakes in printed literature. Even without comparing thousands of manuscripts, we can normally understand the message being communicated with no problem at all. I repeat: Errors of this type are just a fact of life!)

There are many types of "resources" and "helps" that people have written, to aid us in understanding the Bible. Some are helpful in certain ways - and we do not need to ignore this fact. But too often, man's "improvements," which appear to help in one way, just serve to hinder the Bible's ability to accomplish what God intends in *other* ways. At times, the only thing they *really* prove is that "God's ways are *not* the same as man's ways" - and when this is the case, man's ways are the wrong ways.

Many so-called "resources" have absolutely no legitimate place in the interpretation of the Bible. Interpretational schemes and "keys" beyond number have been invented and superimposed upon the Bible. It is claimed by proponents of such things that the Bible cannot be correctly understood until their own favorite "key" or "basic principle" is accepted. *Yet if they were really necessary, God would have included them in his Word.*

Furthermore, they would have been strongly emphasized, rather than being some obscure interpretation of some isolated verse or "proof text." We must conclude that, since he *didn't* include them, they *aren't* really necessary.

Other people try to make the Bible "relevant" by superimposing man-made teachings *into* the Bible. Popular religious trends and viewpoints (or even non-religious *worldly* ones) are suddenly "discovered," after being read into the Bible, and then they are taught to others as "the Christian perspective." Whatever the latest fad is, someone will come along, who will *re*interpret the Bible and then "prove" that the Bible teaches the fad they are trying to promote. Frequently, there will be two or more groups holding contradictory viewpoints, with *each* claiming that the Bible promotes their own view and not the others' view! This is why many people claim (wrongfully so) that a person can prove "anything" with the Bible.

Of course, scheme-inventors will claim that the Bible supports their view. But people normally have to be *told* to interpret a verse the way that the scheme promotes, before they will begin to "see" it that way! They will not normally reach such a conclusion by simply reading the Scriptures the way they are written.

As we said before, some resources *are* truly helpful. Yet even these might not be perfect in all ways, for they are written by imperfect people. We who use them are also imperfect, and are capable of abusing them. If there is ever a potential for conflict or disagreement between a resource and the Bible, the message of the Bible as a whole must be given priority over the resource.

We need to follow the example of the Bereans, mentioned in Acts 17:11. They were unwilling to accept the words of the apostle Paul, until after they had compared what he said with Scripture - and they were *praised* for having such an attitude! Certainly Paul was a much greater "resource" than anything we have today!

## Final Comments

We don't have to have an "anti-intellectual" attitude and reject *everything* that appears to help us when we study the Bible. However, if our ultimate loyalty is to the Bible, we will be constantly submitting these "resources" to the message of the Word, rather than submitting the Bible to these "resources." Though there may be value in certain helps, and we don't need to be afraid of using them, we need to remember that many of the godliest people in the history of Christianity *didn't* have them. And not having them did *not* cause them to suffer in their spiritual growth.

If we are willing to accept what we *can* understand, without adding to or subtracting from the Word - accepting it the way God gave it to us - then we will know *all* that we need to know for life and godliness. Missing out on some tiny detail *won't* be a "life-or-death" matter. However, our willingness to accept and live by what we *do* know *will!*