

THE KEY FOR INTERPRETING THE BIBLE

April 1, 2018

How do you "take" the Bible? It seems that two different people can read the same Bible-saying and come up with two opposite views! Some people call this a matter of "interpretation." And it is. These two people have two interpretations of the same words! Is the Bible-saying so muddy, so mysterious, that it can be understood in more than one way? Is the fault with God, or, is the fault with the readers? What does it take for two people to understand the Bible alike?

Hello I'm Larry Murdock. I preach for the Gandy church of Christ.

Newt Gingrich, an American political figure and historian, recently gave four illustrations as to how "readers" understand the news. He shows how the same news story can be interpreted as **good news** by some, but **bad news** by others. Gingrich says that Americans increasingly **reframe** the news to fit their own worldview.

I think this phenomenon has been in the world for a long time. Humans everywhere are in the "reframing business". In fact, I believe "reframing" is an age-old occurrence. People are naturally this way. We humans always attempt to justify our thinking and our behavior. And so, we tend to understand things based on our own experiences, our own desires, our own politics, our own worldview! We have our own reading classes! Thus, we have our own Truth! Can two things be TRUE when they contradict one another? No friends, if one thing is TRUE, then its opposite is FALSE!

What does this occurrence have to do with religion? Well, look around you! How many religions do you see in the world? Are there truly that many gods? How many churches do you see saying opposite things about the Bible? Do some churches' teaching suit you, but others' do not? Are there that many Bibles?

I am reminded of hearing about a group of self-described Bible scholars who meet together periodically to discuss the Gospel accounts of Jesus Christ. The group is called the **Jesus Seminar**. They take a saying of Jesus and vote on it. Is this truly something Jesus said, or is it a fake saying? And so, these so-called Bible scholars

cut up Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John until there is very little left. I would say that these people have no **real** interest in believing and obeying Jesus Christ!

What about you? Do you wish to believe and obey Jesus Christ? Can you trust your understanding, your interpretation of his TRUTH?

There is one thing you and I **need** in order to be equipped to understand the Bible alike. That one thing is taught by Jesus in John, chapter 7. Jesus was talking with a hostile group of people who wondered how Jesus came by the knowledge he exhibited. "The Jews there were amazed and asked [one another], "How did this man get such learning without having been taught?"" (John 7:15 NIV)

Jesus replied, "**My doctrine is not mine, but his that sent me. If any man will do his will, he shall know of the doctrine, whether it be of God, or whether I speak of myself.**" (John 7:16-17 KJV) Those people to whom Jesus said this had their own worldview of Bible teaching. And it was their understanding that religious teachers could come by their doctrine only from the academic scribes and rabbis. Jesus had not been properly trained in the schools of the scribes and rabbis. So how had Jesus come to know this impressive doctrine that He was teaching?

Jesus' answer was that He was simply the mouthpiece of the One who sent Him. "**My doctrine is not mine, but his that sent me.**" Then Jesus made a remarkable statement. He gave His audience the key to understanding the origin of His "doctrine." "**If any man will do his will, he shall know of the doctrine, whether it be of God, or whether I speak of myself.**" What was the source of Jesus' teaching? Did Jesus' teaching originate with God, or Himself? How was a person to know? "If any man will do his will, he shall know of the doctrine."

Jesus then proceeded to give an important rule of evidence. Jesus said, "**Whoever speaks on their own does so to gain personal glory, but he who seeks the glory of the one who sent him is a man of truth; there is nothing false about him.**" (John 7:18 NIV) Ah yes! Here is the key to understanding! Do I attempt to understand the teaching of Christ **for my own "personal glory"**, or do I interpret the teaching of Christ and the Bible so as to promote my own desires? Or, do I truly desire **to practice in my life the "will" of God**? Do I seek to live for "the glory of the one who sent" Jesus?

You see, the key to interpretation depends upon what I am seeking! My interpretations of God's Word depend upon my worldview! If I am seeking my

personal desires then I will interpret the doctrine to suit myself, to justify what I do. However, if I am seeking God's will for my life so as to further God's glory with my life, then I will discover the truth in the teaching! No wonder that Jesus said that His follower must "take up the cross and follow him." Jesus' follower must "die" to his own interests in order to recognize the interests of God!

Friends, you can straighten out your life by straightening out your deep desires! You can use the Key to interpretation to understand God's Word if you will discover and straighten out your own deep desires! Do you want to do God's Will?

Jesus kept on teaching God's truth even in the face of opposition. He was teaching people who did not want to do God's will. Jesus even accused these opponents as having a different "Father" than the one they claimed. On one occasion these hostile opponents replied to Jesus "We were not born of sexual immorality. We have one Father—even God." ([John 8:41 ESV](#))

Jesus said to them, "If God were your Father, you would love me, for I came from God and I am here. I came not of my own accord, but he sent me. Why do you not understand what I say? [There is our question! "Why do you not understand what I say?" Why can't people agree on what Jesus and the prophets say? Why can they not interpret the Bible alike? Jesus gave the reason.] "It is because you cannot bear to hear my word. You are of your father the devil, and your will is to do your father's desires. He was a murderer from the beginning, and does not stand in the truth, because there is no truth in him. When he lies, he speaks out of his own character, for he is a liar and the father of lies. But because I tell the truth, you do not believe me." ([John 8:42-45 ESV](#))

Friends, when will we come to grips with our desires? When will the chords of our strong desires be broken? When will we claim the true and living God as our god? When will we drop Satan from the throne of our hearts? WE MUST DESIRE TO DO GOD'S WILL IN ORDER TO INTERPRET THE BIBLE CORRECTLY!

Our prayer should be this: "[Oh] God, see what is in my heart. Know what is there. Put me to the test. Know what I'm thinking. See if there's anything in my life you don't like. Help me live in the way that is always right." ([Psalms 139:23-24 NIV](#)) David asked God, "Prove me, O LORD, and try me; test my heart and my mind. "

(Psalms 26:2 ESV) Moses told the Israelites in the wilderness, "Remember how the LORD your God led you all the way in the wilderness these forty years, to humble and test you in order to know what was in your heart, whether or not you would keep his commands. He humbled you, causing you to hunger and then feeding you with manna, which neither you nor your ancestors had known, to teach you that man does not live on bread alone but on every word that comes from the mouth of the LORD. Your clothes did not wear out and your feet did not swell during these forty years. Know then in your heart that as a man disciplines his son, so the LORD your God disciplines you. Observe the commands of the LORD your God, walking in obedience to him and revering him." (Deuteronomy 8:2-6 NIV) Friends, those words are good advice for you and me!

We should remember the God who has made us and who has sustained us all these years! Jesus' apostle Peter says, "Humble yourselves, therefore, under the mighty hand of God so that at the proper time he may exalt you, casting all your anxieties on him, because he cares for you. Be sober-minded; be watchful. Your adversary the devil prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour. Resist him, firm in your faith, knowing that the same kinds of suffering are being experienced by your brotherhood throughout the world. And after you have suffered a little while, the God of all grace, who has called you to his eternal glory in Christ, will himself restore, confirm, strengthen, and establish you. To him be the dominion forever and ever. Amen." (1 Peter 5:6-11 ESV)

The old proverb reads, "The crucible is for silver, and the furnace is for gold, [but] the LORD tests hearts." (Proverbs 17:3 ESV)

Is the LORD testing your heart? Is the LORD giving you some doubts about your own desires? Have your interpretations of the Bible twisted God's truth, because you desired it your way?

Evidently, some of the people with whom Jesus was talking began to understand what Jesus was teaching when He said, "When you have lifted up the Son of Man, then you will know that I am he, and that I do nothing on my own authority, but speak just as the Father taught me. And he who sent me is with me. He has not left me alone, for I always do the things that are pleasing to him." As he was saying these things, many believed in him. So Jesus said to the Jews who had

believed him, "If you abide in my word, you are truly my disciples, and you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free." (John 8:28-32 ESV)

Friends, we can know Jesus' truth, and we can know it alike! Will you seek to do God's Will, so that you can know the truth? According to Jesus, if we will abide in His word then we can be truly His disciples. We can know Jesus' truth, not our own interpretations. We will come into oneness; we will come into agreement! After all, it is Jesus' truth that will set us free!

Visit a church of Christ near you and give over your heart to knowing Jesus' truth!