



Can We Know the Truth?

By Bill Reeves

Introduction:

It is incredible that, among brethren, it is necessary to discuss this subject. Yet, some brethren deny that we can fully know truth, because they need a rationale for innovating where there is no authorization!

They tell us "We cannot understand truth alike..." Is that so? If we understand truth at all, we understand alike. Two people who understand the truth must have the same understanding. If not, one, or both, of them does not understand it at all. There cannot be two separate understandings of one truth.

The above bold-type assertion is simply an ipse dixit. For obvious reasons, there is no accompanying Scripture. Even if these erring brethren could cite Scriptures for their false doctrines, how could we be sure that they really understand those Scriptures? According to them, I could not know for a fact, that for which they are contending. If we cannot know truth, why do they bother to tell us the "truth" of the matter? How can I be certain that the quibbler and I understand alike that for which he contends? There is neither reason nor logic for his case.

I. Let us go to the Scriptures:

Jno. 8:32 - And you shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free.

Jno 17:17 - Sanctify them by Your truth. Your word is truth.

Eph. 3:4 - when you read, you may understand my knowledge in the mystery of Christ.

2 Pet. 1:12 - you know them, and are established in the present truth.

1 Jno. 2:21 - I have not written to you because you do not know the truth, but because you know it, and that no lie is of the truth.

Jesus commands us to understand (Matt. 15:10; Matt. 24:15). Paul commands us to understand (Eph. 5:17). It was prophesied that we would understand (Rom. 15:21). Faith brings understanding (Heb. 11:3).

In a classic Old Testament illustration, the people could understand, were caused to understand, and the reading was with interpretation so that the people would understand (Neh. 8:3,7,8,13).

There are people who do understand, and there are those who do not (Matt. 13:19,23). But, there is good reason for this (v.13-15). These are people who do not want to understand.

More Scripture:

Prov.28:5 - they that seek Jehovah understand all things.

Dan.10:12 - Daniel set his heart to understand.

Dan.12:10 - they that are wise shall understand.

Psa.119:104 - through thy precepts I get understanding.

Col.1:9 - that you may be filled ... in all wisdom and spiritual understanding.

Col.2:2 - full assurance of understanding.

2 Tim.2:7 - may the Lord give you understanding in all things.

1 Jno.5:10 - He who believes in the Son of God has the witness in himself.

II. The purpose of revelation:

Learn the truth and obey it (Lk.8:16-18). God's will is not a hidden secret; rather, it is a revelation of light. Therefore, man must take heed how he hears that truth. Yet, is hearing enough? Man must put what he hears into practice. (Matt.7:24-27)

God's plan is a teaching plan (Jno. 6:44,45; Isa. 2:2,3). Paul had preached the whole counsel of God to the Ephesian elders (Acts 20:27). Did they understand?

God intended for his gospel to be made known to all nations (Rom. 16:26; Eph. 6:19).

God gave us the Scriptures so that we can know certain things (1 Tim. 3:15; Eph. 1:18; 1 Jn. 5:13).

To affirm that we cannot all understand God's will alike reflects on His love, on His wisdom, and on His power. Has God spoken? (Heb. 1:1,2) "God, who at various times and in various ways spoke in time past to the fathers by the prophets, has in these last days spoken to us by His Son, whom He has appointed heir of all things, through whom also He made the worlds." Did He speak intending to be understood? If men cannot understand alike the revealed will of God, it logically follows that God is too loveless, too unwise, and too limited in power to reveal his will for man in language that all can understand. Is the quibbler ready to accept this logic? Could God, who is the One with infinite wisdom and created the heavens and earth, be considered unable to give an understandable record to His creation of what He expects from them? Who can believe it?

III. God's people are knowledgeable:

Rom.15:14 - filled with all knowledge.

1 Cor.1:5 - enriched in everything by Him in all utterance and all knowledge.

1 Cor.8:1 - we know that all have knowledge.

Col.1:9 - that you may be filled with the knowledge of His will in all spiritual wisdom and understanding.

Col.2:2 - attaining to all riches of the full assurance of understanding.

Isa.11:9 - the earth shall be full of the knowledge of the Lord.

IV. If God's word is true, there are things that the Christian must certainly know.

Jno. 7:17 - if any do his will, he shall know.

Matt. 3:11 - it is given unto us to know.

1 Jno. 2:3 - we know that we know Him, if we keep His commandments.

Lk.1:4 - we can know the certainty of the thing written.

V. In his sophistry, the quibbler misstates the issue.

"Do you know everything?" he asks. Of him I ask, do you know anything (for sure)? How do you know that we can't know everything (that is, everything needed for our eternal salvation)? If you know any one thing (e.g., baptism is for the remission of sins), why is it that you can know that, but you cannot know all else that God revealed for us? These quibblers need to answer some questions. (But don't hold your breath waiting for them to do so!)

"Do you have perfect understanding and knowledge?" he asks. If I am mature, then I am perfect. "Therefore let us, as many as are mature, have this mind; and if in anything you think otherwise, God will reveal even this to you. Nevertheless, to the degree that we have already attained, let us walk by the same rule, let us be of the same mind." (Phil. 3:15,16). There is a relative knowledge, and we grow in it (2 Pet. 3:18). Let me now ask the questioner, "do you understand anything at all?" If yes, explain how you can "perfectly understand" one point of truth, but cannot have such understanding or knowledge of other doctrinal points. We can either understand all that God has revealed for man, or we cannot understand anything that God has revealed. These quibblers want to pick and choose what to know and understand, and what not to know and understand.

Jesus settled this issue when He said, "Ye shall know the truth and the truth shall set you free." (Jno. 8:32). Does the quibbler believe Jesus was wrong!

VI. The problem:

Some people want to tell God how He should reveal His will. Have they not read Isa. 55:9? How did God reveal to Paul and his companions where they should go to preach the gospel (Acts 16:6-10)? After twice being forbidden by divine message to go where they thought they should go, while not being told where to go, Paul had a vision. The vision implied that they were to go to Macedonia, and they, concluding that such was His divine will, went to Philippi. Did God finally reveal to them where they should go to preach? Yes. Did he do it with a direct command? No. He did it by sending a vision that implied where to go, and they made the necessary conclusion. Would I have done it that way? No, but that doesn't matter? I'm not in control; I am not God. God does things His way. Is there anything wrong with that, oh professed believer in Christ? And, please tell us what would have happened had Paul and his companions, rejecting God's implication in the vision, gone elsewhere rather than to Philippi. Tell us, please! But no, you are not about to do so!

Hidden agendas! Innovators always use carnal tactics. They must deny authority in order to bring in their practices, or to discard certain practices to which they object. This

is the epitome of unbelief. To say that we cannot be certain of God's truth is to demonstrate a lack of faith. Truth directs our paths. "Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path." (Psa. 119:105).

So, beware of uncertain sounds of unbelief, which undermine faith in the truth and understanding of God's holy word "Through Your precepts I get understanding; therefore I hate every false way...The entrance of Your words give light; it gives understanding to the simple." (Psa. 119:104,130).

VII. Look at the inconsistencies:

Some say that commands, examples, and implications are not equally authoritative. Such statements, by saying that commands, examples, and implications are not equally authoritative, imply that all three are authoritative. And so the quibbler admits that examples and implications are authoritative, but in reality he doesn't accept it. The next statement proves my point. "Since, implication is not authoritative, musical instruments would, in all reality, be okay." But, when God chooses to use implication to express His will, it is authoritative (Acts 16:6-10). Is the quibbler ready to admit into public worship, not only musical instruments, but also incense burning, using water (as the Mormons do) in place of the fruit of the vine, ringing bells to signal the Lord's Supper, wearing ecclesiastical robes, and having choirs and women preachers?

But another one says: "our differences are matters of semantics." No, they are not. Our differences have to do with our respect, or lack of respect, for revealed truth. By their "smooth and fair speech" they engage in propaganda and evasive tactics. "For those who are such do not serve our Lord Jesus Christ, but their own belly, and by smooth words and flattering speech deceive the hearts of the simple." (Rom.16:18)

VIII. Concluding thoughts:

Why is it that we cannot know all of the truth? Whose fault is it? Was truth given to be read and understood? Since, according to some, we don't have all the truth, what is there about God's truth that we cannot understand? Why can we understand some of it and not all of it? Whose fault is it that we cannot understand the truth alike? What are the consequences of not understanding the truth alike? Are there consequences? Let the quibbler answer. If he ever answers, will we be able to understand? If so, how is it that we can understand him but not God? If we can't all understand him alike, is each of us free to make of what he said anything we wish?

If we can know the truth, as Jesus said (Jno. 8:32), don't we have to understand the truth alike (if indeed we know it)? Can two people who understand the truth differently both still know the truth? If so, then truth is whatever one wants to make of it!

Dear brethren, "be ye not foolish, but understand what the will of the Lord is" (1 Thess. 5:17).