

CHAPTER-1

INTRODUCTION

Heb. 13:9 (NIV)

Do not be carried away by all kinds of strange teachings...

Many different, but well intentioned people study the details of the Bible. Yet they arrive at widely divergent conclusions about the meanings of its most important ideas.

This book attempts to show why such doctrinal differences exist among groups. It does not try to force-feed the ideas and opinions of the author. Instead, it raises questions. Readers, in good conscience, will stop and think of reasons why they grasp and maintain particular beliefs, in light of what is presented here.

The subjects comprising the 15 chapters of this book were not chosen randomly. They represent matters of doctrine that seem to incite unacceptable anxiety, hostility, anger, and divisiveness between Christians and non-Christians. Even within congregations of Christians some of these matters of doctrine tend to divide people. Such intense feelings are not the fault of the Bible. They are the result of human ignorance of what God actually said in His scriptures. These areas of doctrine are explored in an attempt to discover how people have arrived at erroneous conclusions. They have been written to resolve the inter (and intra)- denominational conflicts. Resolution is attained by contrasting what people believe, against what God has actually intended and revealed in His scriptures.

Being right about Bible doctrine is important. Being right has direct bearing on whether or not our beliefs are consistent with God's intentions for our eternal lives. Unfortunately, many of us tend to think that our ability to believe what is right, is on a par with our right to believe what we choose. Especially in the United States this is a central problem for those seeking biblical truth. As Americans, each of us has the 'right' to believe anything we wish about God and the Bible. We have governmental protections. They preclude anyone from making us believe or accept any version of someone's

religious doctrine. This political right however, does not guarantee that we will be 'right' in the sense of being correct.

We live among a proliferation of religious denominations. With one Bible, its author (God) did not intend for us to all end up with so many different ideas concerning its meaning. To God there is only one right meaning for any book, chapter, or verse. How important is it to God that we enjoy a legal right to believe whatever we want? In fact, He places no importance on our legal rights to believe. There is only one biblical truth, and it is our responsibility through study, to understand and accept it.

Eph. 4:4-5 (NIV)

There is one body and one Spirit- just as you were called- one Lord, one faith, one baptism.

II Tim. 3:16 (NIV)

All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting, and training in righteousness.....

The many varying views of Bible doctrine cannot all be consistent with the 'one faith.' It's therefore incumbent upon us to strive with maximal effort to determine God's singular intent in His written plan for us.

Some readers may assert that this book is nothing more than an elaborate game of 'word engineering' and that I'm too involved with the specific meanings of a few simple words. In one sense they're absolutely correct. At times, the subtle meanings of simple words can change the whole meaning of a sentence or paragraph. Even Paul realized this. Look how closely he studied the details of the wording of a passage of scripture;

Gal. 3:15-16 (NIV)

Brothers, let me take an example from everyday life. Just as no one can set aside or add to a human covenant that has been duly established, so it is in this case. The promises were spoken to Abraham and his seed. The Scripture does not say 'and to seeds'

*meaning many people, but 'and to your seed,'
meaning one person, who is Christ.*

Paul's statement here shows the care with which the scriptures must be read. That care extends even to discerning the nuances of simple words. In this case, the contextual difference between 'seed' and 'seeds' is profound for the meaning of the statement.

MAKING SCRIPTURAL ERROR

How do people actively study scripture (often for years) and yet readily fail to find the truth? It's actually quite easy to be diverted onto the wrong path in such an endeavor. Here are some of the ways it can happen:

1. Reverent Acceptance

Some people accept whatever they are told by their religious leaders. Most often these leaders claim some sort of direct approval from God for their position. On a matter of doctrine they are not to be questioned. Most interesting about these leaders is the diversity of their doctrinal beliefs. They've invested significant time and energy to studies at divinity schools, theological seminaries, and other such institutions. At graduation their credentials seem impressive. Yet they all seem to come out from these places having widely divergent concepts on important biblical teachings. How is this possible? Simple. When these leaders were students, they were not taught the truth. Nor were they taught to seek the truth. Instead, they were 'indoctrinated' into a denominational belief system that requires self-perpetuation. They were told what to believe. Reverent acceptance is in strong contradistinction to the noteworthy attitude of the Bereans, mentioned in Acts 17:11

Acts 17:11 (NIV)

Now the Bereans were of more noble character than the Thessalonians, for they received the message with great eagerness and examined the Scriptures every

day to see if what Paul said was true.

The scriptures demand most definitely that we individually search the scriptures. Only then can we ensure that what we are told by anyone, is correct. That's what the Bereans did. Unquestionably it's a great example to follow.

2. Failure to See the Big Picture

The King James Version (KJV) of the Bible is widely read. Probably too widely read! The KJV seems to have taken on a 'holiness' of its own. Many consider it to be *THE* Bible. Such people study only that one translation. Even prayers are offered with the 'thee's' and 'thou's' and 'thence's' characteristic of the way people spoke in England more than 1500 years *after* the time of Christ on earth. There are several other excellent modern-day translations that many won't touch.

The problem does not really lie with the KJV . The problem lies in attaching oneself to one single translation of the ancient manuscripts. Often, serious errors can be made by accepting as perfect, a particular version like the KJV. In any translation (even the KJV) a mistranslated word can change the original meaning and intent contained in the ancient manuscripts. This will become more evident as you proceed through the chapters of this book.

3. Literal Translation

A prevalent attitude among Bible readers is to interpret every passage, every word, in a completely literal way. With a literal interpretation, what a word specifically says is precisely what it means. That sure sounds like an honest and sincere approach. I know a lot of truly sincere people who use this approach. It can however, lead to serious misunderstandings of the intended meanings of some very important passages. A more reliable approach is a 'contextual-literal' interpretation of the biblical passages. In this way, the Bible is still interpreted literally. But the context of the statements, or even the individual words is an essential part of the interpretation. Who said it? When & where was it said? Why was it said? Also, what events are occurring at the time of the statement? Any and possibly all of these contextual factors can change the literal meaning of a word, verse, or even a chapter.

Consider this interesting problem. Let's assume that one person literally interprets the KJV. Another person does the same with the NIV. Then despite all their sincerity and honesty, they'll sometimes arrive at different conclusions on matters seriously affecting their spiritual lives. Much of this too, will become evident in the chapters that follow.

4. The Snowball Syndrome

Someone accepts an erroneous doctrine as true. Such acceptance comes with a terrible price. It often forces that person to make erroneous conclusions about a chain of other, related matters of doctrine. The first doctrine cannot be shown to be false by any part of the second doctrine. If it does happen, one must work hard to weave and convolute the meanings of some biblical passages involving the second doctrine. Here's an example that you may already have come across (if not, you might... some day). Let's say that you have been taught that you will have eternal life here on earth, in your present bodily form (see Chapter-8, The Kingdom). If you accept that doctrine, you must then construct alternate interpretations of many other scriptures. You must find new meaning for simple terms that demonstrate the existence of your soul. You must do the same about scriptures dealing with heaven as a place of being in the presence of God. And you must change the meaning of scriptures illustrating the existence of hell as a place of eternal torment. Since those concepts are not needed in your doctrine (eternity on earth), you must somehow distort the meanings of passages that introduce and affirm them.

ABOUT THE ENGLISH TRANSLATIONS

I accept the Bible as the whole, complete, age-independent, and perfect word of God to mankind;

Gal. 1:11-12 (NIV)

I want you to know, brothers, that the gospel I preached is not something that man made up. I did not receive it from any man, nor was I taught it; rather I received it by revelation from Jesus Christ.

Jas. 1:25 (NIV)

But the man who looks intently into the perfect law that gives freedom, and continues to do this, not forgetting what he has heard, but doing it- he will be blessed in what he does.

I Pet. 1:25 (NIV)

... but the word of the Lord stands forever. And this is the word that was preached to you.

The translations of the ancient biblical manuscripts over approximately two millennia are NOT perfect. So we need to study the scriptures in a more thorough way than by using only one translation. A single translation (like the KJV) might not provide an understanding of all the truths contained in God's word. How does one proceed?

First, continue working with whatever translation you are actively using. Eventually something might become confusing or difficult to understand. The confusion could come from your own reading. Maybe it's because of something you heard from a radio or TV minister. A door-to-door evangelist could be the source of the problem... or perhaps even a friend. The problem has led you to some idea that does not seem consistent with the rest of your Bible studies. You'll need to do additional study when you come across inconsistent, or confusing information.

It's best to proceed in an organized fashion. Let's assume for example, that a particular word in the KJV has you puzzled about the meaning of a whole paragraph. Start by studying the word in the context of the verse and chapter containing it. Next, review the verse in a few reliable translations. Make comparisons to see if subtle or direct differences exist among the translations. In this regard, I have found the following translations most useful in comparing scriptures;

English Translation

Abbreviation

**Reference
Number**

King James Version

KJV

1

New King James	NKJ	2
American Standard	AS	3
Living Bible	LB	4
New International Version	NIV	5
Revised Standard	RS	6
Simple English	SE	7
Good News Bible	GNB	8

You'll see these listed abbreviations throughout the pages of this book. They always refer to the English translations in the left column. Each of these translations has good and bad points, and none of them should be singularly relied upon in your search for scriptural truth.

TRANSLITERATIONS

If your word translation problem persists after comparing some of the listed translations, then you will probably need a couple more books. A good next-step is to study the word or verse in a biblical transliteration. Transliterations often go by different names. Some call them 'diaglots' or 'polyglots', some call them 'interlinears' and some simply call them 'Literal Translations.' The primary thing they all have in common, is the correlation of English words with the specific wording in the ancient Greek and Hebrew manuscripts. For New Testament study, I like using the Zondervan interlinear (Reference-10). Page-by-page, it allows a 3-way direct comparison of the scriptures. Parallel verses of the KJV and the NIV are on one page. On the facing page are the same verses, but they appear in the untranslated Greek; and the word-for-word translation of the Greek words into corresponding English, appears directly below the Greek wording. Since the Greek and English languages are different, the order of the English words is often different from our normal usage. But very often additional information is made available by having the direct correspondence between the Greek and English. A transliteration called the "Literal Translation" (LT; Reference-9) is a valuable aid in correlating English wording to both the Greek and Hebrew manuscripts. Using a resource like the LT, you essentially become a translator on your

own. You can use that information in conjunction with the translations from the list, to help understand a difficult passage of scripture.

LEXICONS

It's even possible that your problem understanding a verse or a word, is still not resolved, even with the transliteration text. A lot of the time, a specific word can have multiple and varied shades of meaning, depending on how it is being used in a particular verse. To get the distinctions in meaning, you'll have to go to the lexicons. A biblical lexicon is just a dictionary... and like a dictionary, it provides the multiple meanings of a word, if more than one exists.

It's easiest to locate your word in a lexicon if the words there, are given index numbers that correspond to a thorough concordance like Strong's Exhaustive Concordance (Reference-11). In Strong's, you can locate your problem word. It will have an index number assigned to it. Then use lexicons like Thayer's Greek Lexicon (Reference-12), and Gesenius' Hebrew Lexicon (Reference-13). These two texts use the same indexing system as that in Strong's Concordance. Therefore it's quite easy to find the word in question, in these lexicons. If appropriate, the multiple definitions of a word are given, and the scriptures fitting each definition are listed.

There are a couple of additional good reasons for using Thayer's work. For one, his credibility as a lexicographer is virtually unquestioned. Most denominations quote his work for their own purposes. Their pamphlets and other releases are fraught with references to his work. Also, Reference-12 provides us with evidence of Thayer's persistent objectivity. He belonged to a denomination that has strong doctrinal differences with most other groups. Yet his lexicon is overwhelmingly impartial. In fact, in many points of doctrine his definitions of the Greek words run counter to the doctrinal beliefs of his own denomination. Altogether, we have strong indication of Thayer's integrity and honesty, and lack of bias in his lexicon.

On some occasions, Vine's dictionaries (References -14 & 15) are of great supplemental support. So is the Theological Wordbook (Reference-16).

HOW TO USE THIS BOOK

It is crucial to know the scriptural basis for the beliefs of other people. Without such knowledge, you can only discuss one viewpoint against another. Such well-intentioned discussions will most often degenerate unacceptably, into arguments. With knowledge of the beliefs of others however, you can more clearly understand the origin of their misconceptions. You are therefore much less likely to argue, or to be swept up into acceptance of their false doctrines. This book studies the key scriptures used by various teachers of incorrect bible doctrine. Understanding how these key scriptures are used to justify such false teachings will help ensure that you do not fall into the doctrinal traps of virtually all denominations.

The chapters of this book summarize hundreds of dialogues occurring over a span in excess of twenty years. In places throughout this book the discussion appears in the form of a dialogue between a proponent of a false doctrine, and me. These conversations actually occurred with door-to-door evangelists representing a wide array of denominations, and in some cases, with friends and their acquaintances. In some chapters, the discussion is developed from studies initiated by me, in response to seriously erroneous statements made by radio and TV evangelists. No attempt is made to directly or accurately quote all of these Bible teachers. Throughout the years, different teachers have tried to make the same point of doctrine but have approached it from different directions. Therefore, the statements and responses to these teachers have been put into a cumulative paraphrasing of all those individual conversations. When the proponent of a false doctrine is talking, the words are prefixed by "VISITOR:," and when I am speaking, the prefix "ME:" is placed before the statement.

This book does not identify specific denominations. In each situation however, it will not take much effort to figure out the denominations under discussion. The identification of any specific denomination can usually be discerned by the doctrines they propose. The goal here, is not to get you out of a particular denomination. You should be able to reach your own conclusions after comparing the scriptural truth to the denominational error. This book will help you identify a specific teaching as a false one. Once you reject such erroneous doctrine, the choice is yours. You might try to stay within that group. You might decide to leave it. Perhaps you might even be asked (or told) to leave that group.

Sometimes the door-to-door visitors realize early-on, that they do not have a potential convert to their cause. At that point, they like to make a quick

exit. Few of them are solid enough in their beliefs to stay and deal with the questions that challenge their beliefs. Some though, have stayed long enough for me to become thoroughly familiar with their teachings.

This book evaluates false doctrine by examining the scriptures upon which the doctrine is based. The mistake is revealed and studied. Only after this is done, is an attempt made to reveal alternate scripture that amplifies on the truth of the matter. If you apply this material to show false teachers the source of their erroneous teaching, then a couple of points should be kept in mind. To successfully engage discussion with a sincere (but false) teacher, the other person must be willing to listen to you. Similarly, you must demonstrate a willingness to listen to that teacher, make notes about key points, keep calm, and avoid an adversarial attitude entirely. Your calm and friendly approach in a low-key voice, will offer the best chance that the other party will reciprocate with the same demeanor you display. That is the only way you will be able to get to substantive issues concerning the scriptural errors they have made, and the scriptural remedies leading to the truth.