

**Introduction...**

**Deut 6:4** "Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one. <sup>5</sup> You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might. <sup>6</sup> And these words that I command you today shall be on your heart. <sup>7</sup> You shall teach them diligently to your children, and shall talk of them when you sit in your house, and when you walk by the way, and when you lie down, and when you rise. <sup>8</sup> You shall bind them as a sign on your hand, and they shall be as frontlets between your eyes. <sup>9</sup> You shall write them on the doorposts of your house and on your gates.

This passage is among the most well-known in all of Scripture. It contains profound statements about the nature of God; He is *The Lord*, He is *Our God*, and He is *One*. It also contains a list of commands laying before us our appropriate response to this knowledge of God; because He is our Lord and God we ought to love Him with all of our being. We ought to teach His word to our children and allow His word to shape every aspect of our lives.

Now, as we read this passage there are any number of things that we might choose to focus on. We could focus on the theological side of things. We could spend weeks studying and meditating on what this passage teaches us about the nature of God.

Or we could focus on the practical side of things and lock in on the commands we see. There is a pattern of application. What begins in the heart as individual/personal love for God, moves to consume our entire being (heart, soul, strength). Then it flows from us into those nearest to us, our family and our children. The word of God affects the way we talk, the way we walk and the way we sleep. His commands guide our hands and influence how we interact with the world.

Or maybe, like me, you have a tendency to focus on the historical side of things. This passage was written near the end of Moses' life and when I think about Moses, my mind gets carried all the way back to the Exodus and what God did to deliver Israel from slavery. I think about the plagues, the Passover, the Exodus itself and God's presence leading the people through the sea and into the wilderness. I want to follow that history all the way through to this particular moment, when Moses is recounting the mercy of God, the grace of God, the love of God, the law of God and this passage is being established as the theological foundation for Israel as a nation.

Now, we would be right to focus on any of these or all of these things when we read this passage, but that is not what we are going to focus on this morning. **This morning I want us to focus on the underlying assumption inherent, not simply to this passage, but to all of Scripture. I want to focus on the things that almost all of us take for granted when we read this passage, assuming that you have not been hopelessly corrupted by the postmodern theory of indeterminate meanings. I want to focus on the fact that the central message of the Bible is clear and understandable.**

**Transition...**

The Word of God has been revealed to us in a way that its message and meaning are clear and because of its clarity all men are fully accountable to its message. The Bible assumes not only that God can communicate with words, but that He has communicated with words that are unchangeable and knowable.

In this passage from **Deuteronomy 6** there is no mystery concerning what God has said about himself and what He has commanded of us. And in case you missed it, His word is so clear and understandable that it can be taught to children. We don't have to solve complex riddles and engage

in impossible interpretive paradigms; the Word of God is right in front of us in plain language that is easy to understand and easy to obey.

This morning I want to talk about a characteristic of Scripture known as the Clarity of God's Word or you may be more familiar with the older term Perspicuity. The Clarity of Scripture ***affirms that the Bible is written in such a way that all things necessary for salvation and for our Christian life and growth are very clearly set forth in Scripture.***<sup>1</sup>

**There are three things I want us to look at this morning: 1. Define Biblical Clarity, 2. Look at some Objections to Biblical Clarity, 3. Talk about why this matters.**

### ***Sermon Focus...***

## **I. Defining Biblical Clarity**

The Clarity of Scripture, as a protestant doctrine, has been carefully defined by the Westminster Confession of Faith as well as the 1689 Second London Confession. Here is the article on clarity in a **modern English version of the 1689.**

1.7. Some things in Scripture are clearer than others, and some people understand the teachings more clearly than others.<sup>12</sup> However, the things that must be known, believed, and obeyed for salvation are so clearly set forth and explained in one part of Scripture or another that both the educated and uneducated may achieve a sufficient understanding of them by properly using ordinary measures.<sup>13</sup> (<sup>12</sup>2 Peter 3:16. <sup>13</sup>Psalm 19:7; Psalm 119:130.)<sup>2</sup>

Some of you might prefer the older language, but I think this one is a bit clearer, and after all that is the point. **But what does this statement tell us?**

First, it tells us that some passages in the Bible are clearer and easier to understand than others. Not every passage has a simple or obvious meaning. When you read the parables of Jesus, the prophecy of Ezekiel or Daniel, and the Revelation; you find that it is more challenging to understand than the historical narrative of the book of Acts. But the point is that the Bible was written in order to be understood. God hasn't revealed himself in riddles nor as a paradox.

God actually wants us to know Him. The Bible was given to us by God as a revelation of Himself and His redemptive plan for us. Those things which we need to know, believe and obey for salvation are incredibly clear. Even if those things are not abundantly clear in one part of Scripture, they are made clear in other parts of Scripture, so that the essential message can be properly understood.

Some people understand the Bible more clearly than others, but you don't have to be a scholar to read and grasp the message of the Scriptures. It might be of benefit to you to get a degree in theology, Biblical languages, and ministry; but these things are not necessary for disciples to understand and obey the word of God. After all, if we are supposed to teach the Bible to children it must be understandable to them.

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<sup>1</sup> Wayne Grudem Systematic Theology (Pg. 108) the clarity (perspicuity) of Scripture as follows: Scripture affirms that it is able to be understood but (1) not all at once, (2) not without effort, (3) not without ordinary means, (4) not without the reader's willingness to obey it, (5) not without the help of the Holy Spirit, (6) not without human misunderstanding, and (7) never completely.

<sup>2</sup> <https://founders.org/library/1689-confession/chapter-1-the-holy-scriptures/>

**Ordinary people, using ordinary measures** may achieve sufficient understanding of what must be known, believed and observed for them to be faithful Christians. What does it mean to use ordinary measures? It means that we are to interpret the Bible as it is written; we read it and apply basic principles of language and interpretation in order to understand it.

A noun is treated as a noun and a verb as a verb. Poetry is to be treated as poetry. Historical accounts are to be treated as history. Parables as parables, hyperbole as hyperbole...In other words, the Bible is to be interpreted according to the rules that govern the interpretation of any book.<sup>3</sup>

**Now for most of us, this is not earth-shattering news. We instinctively accept that the Bible is clear and understandable, but this was not always the case.** Let me give you some examples of what I'm talking about.

In Jesus' day, the Pharisees and Scribes were widely considered to be experts in the law of God. They were revered for their knowledge of God's Word, but in the interactions between the Pharisees and Jesus it becomes clear that their knowledge was flawed. In **Matthew 12**, they argued with Jesus about what the Bible taught concerning the Sabbath. In **Matthew 19**, they argued with Him over what the Bible taught on divorce. In **Matthew 22**, it was His view of the resurrection.

In each case, they had a position on these issues that they claimed was faithful and orthodox, Jesus however, told them that they were wrong. **But the question is, why were they wrong?** At no point in these arguments did Jesus say, "Oh, I understand your confusion – the scriptures are not very clear on that subject."

Instead, He tells them that their problem is that they haven't read and understood the Scriptures. "Have you not read?" Is His ready reply and in one case He flat out tells them that they "know neither the Scriptures nor the power of God."

The problem was not that the Scriptures were unclear, but that they had not relied upon the clear teaching of Scripture. **Jesus' underlying assumption when dealing with the Pharisees was that the Bible was sufficiently clear and understandable, they just weren't relying on it.**

The Pharisees and Scribes had developed a method of interpreting the Bible that led them into serious error. They weren't satisfied with the plain meaning of the text, so they added to and expanded on the law such that the 10 commandments became 248 man-made commandments and 365 man-made prohibitions. But they weren't the only religious group to make this type of error.

During the Medieval period, church leaders developed a very complex method of interpreting the Bible. That method was known as the *quadriga* and it claimed that every passage had a fourfold meaning – **a literal sense, a moral sense, an allegorical sense, and an anagogical sense.**

R.C. Sproul commented on this method by saying,

To know the literal or most obvious meaning of a passage was a good thing, but to know the higher moral, allegorical, and anagogical meanings was even better. Precious few, however, could attain to these other, more hidden meanings of Scripture. This tended to obscure the meaning and significance of the Bible...Only the most "advanced" thinkers, for example, could

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<sup>3</sup> R.C. Sproul *Essential Truths of the Christian Faith* (pg 25)

see that the census recorded in Numbers was not really about the number of Israelite soldiers but rather the several steps it takes for the soul to ascend to God.

Nowhere in Scripture will you find support for such a view, for such a method of interpretation. In fact, the Bible teaches that the most basic meaning of the text is clear enough for anyone to understand.

**Psalms 19:7** The law of the Lord is perfect, reviving the soul; the testimony of the Lord is sure, making wise the simple;

**Deut 30:11-14** For this commandment that I command you today is not too hard for you, neither is it far off. It is not in heaven, that you should say, "Who will ascend to heaven for us and bring it to us, that we may hear it and do it?" Neither is it beyond the sea, that you should say, "Who will go over the sea for us and bring it to us, that we may hear it and do it?" But the word is very near you. It is in your mouth and in your heart, so that you can do it.

It is clear enough to give instruction to the wise, prudence to the simple, knowledge and discretion even to youth (**Prov 1:3-4**).

This doctrine of Biblical clarity may seem clear to many of us, but I must let you know that not everyone agrees with this position. Let's talk about some of the historical objections to Biblical Clarity.

## II. Some Objections to Biblical Clarity<sup>4</sup>

**The Mystical Objection** sounds very spiritual and sincere because it claims that God is so complex and transcendent that he cannot be described meaningfully with mere words. The idea is that God is beyond the ability of human language and often those who make this claim believe that they need to rescue God from our man-made theologizing. They want to keep us from putting God in a box and they argue that truth cannot be captured in words or propositions.

The truth is that, yes, God is a complex and incomprehensible being. There are aspects of God's character and nature that remain a mystery to us; but that doesn't mean that we cannot understand what He has communicated about Himself in the Word. The doctrine of Biblical clarity does not assume that everything about God is clear and understandable to us, but that the things which God has revealed to us are clear and understandable. This objection falls apart when you consider the fact that the Scriptures have been given to us by God himself and He gave them to us in order to reveal Himself and His plan with clarity and for the purpose of understanding.

**The Catholic Objection** is one that the Protestant Reformers had to deal with. Catholic theologians argue that the Bible as a whole is not sufficiently clear and therefore it needs the aid of tradition and papal interpretation in order to be made clear and understandable. The Catholic church has long claimed that the average person is more apt to misunderstand and misapply the scriptures on their own and therefore they need the help of the Magisterium, the Popes and bishops to help them get it right.

The reformers disagreed and encouraged every Christian to study and interpret God's Word on their own. The reformers argued that **Scripture Alone** is sufficient to clearly teach us all truth that is necessary for salvation and spiritual life.

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<sup>4</sup> List taken from Kevin DeYoung *Taking God at His Word* (pgs. 59-61)

Martin Luther wrote,

But, if many things still remain unclear to many, this does not arise from obscurity in the Scriptures, but from [our] own blindness or [lack] of understanding... Let, therefore, wretched men cease to impute, with blasphemous perverseness, the darkness and obscurity of their own heart to the all-clear Scriptures of God... nothing whatever is left obscure or ambiguous; but all things that are in the Scriptures, are by the Word brought forth into the clearest light, and proclaimed to the whole world.<sup>5</sup>

Now, this doesn't mean that we always interpret and understand the Bible with perfect accuracy. We, like the reformers, understand that we can and do make mistakes when interpreting the Bible. But those mistakes aren't the result of the Bible itself being unclear. When mistakes are made they are the result of our own blindness, our own lack of understanding, our own suppressing the truth in unrighteousness; but the Scriptures themselves remain perfectly clear in presentation of the Truth.

**The Pluralism Objection** is probably one that you have heard or even used before. **This objection questions how can we say that the Bible is clear and understandable if there is so much disagreement about what it means?** Why are there so many denominations, and four views books?

The objection is not that one interpretation is greater than another, but that no one has any sufficient grounds to know whether any interpretation is right or wrong. **This is a staple of post modernism. At best, they will only accept that everyone is entitled to their own opinions and personal interpretations; but they will reject that the Bible can be understood to clearly communicate any objective truth.**

So, if you met this person at a coffee shop to talk about Scripture and you presented to them the meaning of Ephesians 2:1-4 they would look you in the eyes and say, "Well, that's just your interpretation." You might respond by pointing out the meaning of Greek terms and explaining the sentence structure and grammatical syntax. To which they might reply, "but human language is inadequate to accurately represent the reality of God."

At the end of the day you can't get anywhere because they have rejected the base assumption of the Bible itself, which is that it can be understood to communicate timeless truths from God with sufficiency and clarity.

**Throughout the Bible we see that God communicates to men and He expects them not only to understand what He has said but also to obey what He has said.** Throughout the Old Testament, the prophets speak the Word of God and they call on the people to read, understand and apply the Word of God to their lives. God even expected the Kings of Israel to write out their own copy of the Law of God and to meditate on it day and night, so that they would know how to lead the nation and please God.

In the NT, Jesus approached the written word of God as a book that could be clearly read, understood, and obeyed. He used the Word of God to teach, to correct, to rebuke and to train His own disciples. To Jesus, the OT was the word of God (period).

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<sup>5</sup> Martin Luther *Bondage of the Will* (pgs. 25-29)

This doctrine of Clarity is the underlying assumption of the entire Bible. It is the ground level of how we interact with the Word of God. And if we lose this doctrine of clarity, then we lose our ability to understand anything with certainty.

### *Conclusion...*

### **III. Why does this matter? 5 reasons...**

1. **It matters because human language is a gift from God.** When you read the Bible, from the beginning you see that God speaks. In fact, He was the first being to ever speak. He spoke the universe into existence and then He spoke to His creation. He taught Adam and Eve how to communicate and He taught them the consequences of failing to heed His words carefully.

Human language, human communication has its foundation in God and He has chosen to use everyday human speech as the way to spread the knowledge of Him and His plan of redemption to the very ends of the earth. If we can't trust the Word of God then we have nothing to stand on, nothing to rest our heart on, nothing to hope in, and nothing to drive us in life. **But if we can open our Bibles, read its pages and understand what it says; then all of life comes into beautiful, God-glorifying focus.**

2. **It matters because it tells us what God is like.** Every couple of years a new book comes out and in a culturally relevant sort of way this new book claims to show us a picture of God that is more accurate than what we see in the Bible. Many of these books become bestsellers, which shows that people really are curious about God, some of these books are even made into movies. But what these books do is they try to humanize God in ways that make Him more acceptable to our cultural sensitivities.

But the clarity of Scripture means that you don't have to wait on the next best-seller to come out in order for you to know what God is like. There is an old poem about the **6 blind men of Hindostan** where 6 blind men all come across an elephant but they each approach it and touch it from in a different angle. One touches the side of the elephant and immediately declares that the elephant is like a wall. One touches the elephants tusk and declares that it is like a spear. Another touches the tail and declares that the elephant is like a rope.

These men then begin to argue, all asserting that their opinion about the elephant is the right one, but in the end, they are all right and wrong at the same time. **Religious people will often use this to illustrate that it is arrogant to claim that we know what God is truly like when all the other people of the world and the various religions of the world claim something else.**

Now, there are a couple of problems with claiming the moral and religious high-ground using this poem; but the point that I want to make is that the whole story falls apart the moment the elephant speaks. If humanity is groping around blindly seeking to discover who God is and what He is like, then all of our groping ceases when God opens His mouth and reveals Himself to us.

In the Bible that is exactly what we have. God has spoken, and He has spoken clearly so that we can know Him and know how to be His people. If we close our ears and keep groping around thinking that we know more about God than what He has revealed, we aren't just blind, we are hard of hearing and hard-hearted.

3. **It matters because our eternity is at stake.** This doctrine of clarity insists that even the simplest disciple can pick up the Bible, read and understand the gospel, and be saved. You

don't need a scholar to explain it to you because God has made His Word clear. Children, you can and should pick up and read the Bible. When you find something that you don't understand get help but you can read it for yourself to learn the truth about God, the truth about your sin, the truth about Jesus and be saved from your sin.

4. **It matters because God has called each of us to love the Lord our God with all our heart, soul, mind and strength.** To love God we must know Him and to know Him we must know what He has revealed to us in His Word. Mysticism is not the answer to how we can know God. Theological liberalism is not the path that leads us to true knowledge of God. The Emergent conversation, is pretty much finished, but it wasn't the path leading to a true knowledge of God.

Jesus prayed, "Sanctify them in the truth, your word is truth." We will grow in our love for God as we grow in our knowledge of and obedience to His Word.

5. **It matters because Christ has called each of His disciples to engage in the ministry of the gospel.** It is not just for scholars and professionals to know and share God's Word. It is a right and responsibility given to all believers. Because the Bible is clear and understandable, everyone one of us can read it, study it, think deeply about it, and then teach it or share it with others. Moms and dads, you can teach the Bible to your children. Sunday school teachers can faithfully teach the next generation what God has said and done.