

Should You Interpret the Bible Literally?

(January 27, 2023)

Should you interpret the Bible literally? One of our recent shows has stirred up a hornet's nest with regard to that question. Just how do we interpret the Bible? Are we supposed to interpret everything in the Bible literally? Is that what God intended? Can something be true but not expressed literally? How are we supposed to interpret the text? And the way we'll introduce this is from a question that was sent in by Richard and this relates to the podcast we did a couple of weeks ago with Dr. John Walton. The podcast was talking about, How Do We Interpret Genesis. What's the right way to interpret Genesis? And here is what Richard writes.

"Sorry to have to say, I found this interview to exemplify the postmodern approach to the Scriptures. Dr. Walton ties meaning of Scripture to a 'cultural river'." Right. So does CRT and social justice, which tie their positions to attack or elevate one or another culture. "Dr. Walton urges that Genesis 1, for example, describes that God imposed order upon chaos. Wow. Jesus affirmed the Old Testament is accurate, but Dr. Walton claims that all the details of Genesis 1-11 are to be read in the context of what people in earlier times would think it meant according to their culture. Dr. Walton seems happy that not knowing exactly what Scripture means gives us options for understanding what Genesis and other portions mean. We have options, not the word of God. If we don't have the word of God, then we don't have hope of salvation in Christ.

After all, there may be options to understanding John 3:16. Right? Focus on this. Dr. Walton posits that Genesis 1-11 is designed to give people 3000 years ago some general ideas, not to describe what the Creator of the universe God actually did. Dr. Walton's position gives the skeptics and the atheists all sorts of ammo to say, See, your own people don't believe the Bible actually tells the truth. Thankfully, Dr. Turek asks some good questions and lets Dr. Walton talk. That way we hear Dr. Walton, in his own words. Dr. Walton's arguments do not convince me one bit.



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If scripture is the word of God, then it is true as written, not as understood in the cultural river at the time. If we have to rely upon ancient cultural river 2000 or 3000 years ago, then we never know what Scripture actually means. We only have faint clues about that river. If the words don't mean what they say, or if their metaphorical meaning is not relatively consistent over millennia, then we have lost the Bible as an authority. Hello. Am I the only one who observes the upshot of Walton's position?"

That's from Richard. Okay. Richard obviously doesn't like what Dr. Walton is doing with Genesis 1-11. Now, I understand the frustration here. I want, and I think you and most of us want everything to be expressed in a straightforward, literal way, to avoid any confusion at all and to make things as easy as possible. That's kind of what we think here in America. Why don't you just say it straightforwardly and then make it easy, so we just know exactly what you mean. There's not going to be any confusion about interpretation or any of that. However, what if God doesn't always communicate that way? I mean, is ease God's goal?

We're gonna get into all this today, hopefully. And is a wooden, literal, law like revelation God's goal? What if God, like human beings through whom he communicated, communicates in different genres that are not always literal? In fact, let me say this, and I think even Richard would agree with this, because he did mention metaphors. Everything in the Bible is literally true but everything in the Bible is not expressed literally. In fact, Dr. Walton said in the interview, Genesis is describing literal events, but not necessarily in a literal way. Now, let me be the first to admit, I don't agree with everything Dr. Walton believes. However, he is correct that understanding the culture of the time will often help you understand the meaning of the text.

Now, there might be a little bit of confusion based on what Richard said here. In fact, I have to interpret what Richard said, even though he thought he was being very straightforward. Maybe he was, maybe it's me that's misinterpreting. But it seems that Richard might be missing something as he interprets what Dr. Walton said. Dr. Walton is not saying that the meaning is relative and changing with the culture, he's saying that the culture at the time of the writing may help you discover the objective meaning of the text.

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In fact, let me give you an example of this. Suppose a friend takes out his phone and he reads this sentence to you. He's reading it off his phone. "After a strike, the text says that your entire team will celebrate". Alright, what does that mean? Well, he could be talking about bowling, right. A strike. Yeah. If I hit a strike and I'm on a team and it wins the game for us. Okay? Could be bowling. Could be baseball, right? After a strike the text says your entire team will celebrate. Could be two outs in the bottom of the ninth, game seven of the World Series. Your team's up by a run, there's two strikes on the batter. After that one last strike, the entire team's gonna celebrate. Could be that. Could be about fishing, right? After a strike.

You see, you don't know what the word strike means. You don't know the context, right? It could be about volleyball. I mean, if we're gonna go with the sports metaphor here, or the sports meaning, we're gonna say this is something about sports. After a strike, the text says your entire team will celebrate. Could be about oil or gold, right? Could be exploration after you strike oil or after you strike gold. Yeah, the team's gonna celebrate. Could be about a union strike. A worker strike. After a strike, the text says your entire team will celebrate. We're coming off strike now. We went to negotiations and we got what we wanted. It could mean that. This could be about the military, right? After a military strike. The text says your entire team will celebrate. This could be a horoscope for all we know. We just don't have enough information.

And by the way, what does the word text mean in this context? Well, if he's reading it off his phone, he's reading from a text, right? Yeah, he could be reading it from a book on his phone. It could be the text of a book, right? We've got to have some context. Now, if this was read, say 30 years ago, you probably wouldn't be reading it off a phone and the text wouldn't be something that we know today in the 21st century, this little message that we pass to one another via our phones. It might be the text of a book, right? Or the text of a magazine, or the text of a billboard, or whatever. In other words, knowing something about the culture and knowing something about the context is often critical to understanding what the meaning of the sentence you're reading is.

So, we're going to unpack this further here in the program. You're listening to I Don't Have Enough Faith to Be an Atheist with me, Frank Turek, on the American Family Radio Network.

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180 stations around the country. It's also in podcast a podcast by the same name. Back in two minutes.

Hey, if you're listening to this on January 27, it's my mom's 85th birthday. Happy birthday, mom. On Monday night, January 30, we are going to be streaming live a program that we tape for TV later, but you'll see us taping it. And we're going to be talking on Monday nights, not every Monday night, but if you go to our calendar you can watch the night Monday nights we're on. We're going to be going through a program, a new series called Digging up the Bible: The Archaeological Discoveries of the Bible. The first one is this Monday night at 7:30pm Eastern. Now this is just live streamed, it's not archived, so if you want to watch it, you've got to watch it live. It'll later turn into a TV program and a DVD series. But if you want to watch it, you can join us.

And then next weekend, I'm gonna be with my friends Dr. Ray Ciervo and Dr. Richard Howe down in Sarasota, Florida for the Sarasota Apologetics Conference. That is Friday, Saturday, Sunday, February 3-5. You can see that on our website. And on February 8, which happens to be my anniversary with my lovely wife - it's going to be our 37 year anniversary. But I'm going to actually be speaking at Corinth Reformed Church in Hickory, North Carolina. And we're going to be talking about, If God, Why Evil?. That's a beautiful church up there. I was up there last year. It's an old time, almost looks like a cathedral, just beautiful. It actually makes you feel the awe of God, unlike some of the boxes that we built now as Protestants that are just warehouses. There's no real awe. This is an old time church, so I'm looking forward to being there. Unfortunately, we had to have our Appalachian State University event delayed on February 9. That's going to be delayed till next semester. We had issues with the room, but we have a bunch of other colleges coming up. I'll tell you about later.

Alright, let's go back to our topic. We're talking about, should you interpret the Bible literally. And we pointed out that you have to know the context. And sometimes you have to know the culture to know what the Bible means. In fact, you probably heard of the 80-20 rule, that 20% of what you do is going to give you 80% of your results. What's the 80-20 rule applied to health? Well, eat right, get enough sleep, and exercise; you do those few things, chances are that's going to take care of 80% of your health. How about in football? You gotta block, you gotta tackle, and you can't turn the ball over; you do those three things, you're gonna improve

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your chances of winning. What are the big three in real estate? You know it. Location, location, location.

What are the big three in interpreting the Bible? Context, context, and context? If you don't know the context, you may get things wrong. And you might also have to understand, with regard to the context, what's the situation going on in the text. In fact, here's a passage from Scripture. How do you interpret this? This is First Peter 3:12. This is just a few verses before the famous passage that we always quote, as apologists, always be ready to give an answer for the hope that you have. Here's what it says. "12 For the eyes of the Lord are on the righteous, and his ears are open to their prayer. But the face of the Lord is against those who do evil."

Okay. What does that mean? Does the Lord have eyes? Does he have ears? Does he have a face? I mean, literally. Richard, you were pointing out that Dr. Walton is mentioning that there are options to interpreting certain passages. You know, that's true of virtually every passage? You've got an option here as you look at this passage. Are you going to interpret this passage and say that God literally has eyes, ears, and a face? That's one of the options, that God is a material being? In fact, there's a kind of a heretical Bible out there called the Dake Study Bible, where this gentleman, Dake, who has since passed on, took everything in the Bible literally. So, he actually thinks God has ears, eyes, wings, noses. He has a face, because at certain place the Bible, the Bible says these kinds of things. So, he's just taken it in a wooden literal way.

You have the option to do that here. You say, Well, that's ridiculous, because in John 4 it says that God is Spirit, so this must be metaphorical. True. Well, how do you know that this isn't literal and God as spirit is metaphorical? Well, Jesus said, God is spirit. Okay, well, is he using it as a metaphor? I mean, he also said, I am the door. Does that mean he has hinges and a doorknob? No. You've got to try and discover, not just from the text, but from the context, which way to interpret the passage. What option are you going to use? Are you going to take the literal interpretation here or are you going to take that this is a metaphor? This is using certain words in a way that give you kind of a richer understanding of what this means about what God is and how God knows all things, and sees all things, and hears all things, and stands against evil. Not literally stand. See, now we're using another term that we might think applies to a physical being, but he opposes evil, we might say. Okay.

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Why do I think God is spirit? Because I think that the creation of the universe out of nothing shows that God isn't just another created being. He's immaterial. There are philosophical reasons to believe that God is immaterial, despite the fact that there are many places in this scripture where it gives God attributes that appear to be physical, but those are anthropomorphisms. Those are metaphors. Those are ways of richly expressing something but not in a literal, wooden way.

How about Psalm 50:1 which says, "The Mighty One, God, the LORD, speaks and summons the earth from the rising of the sun to the place where it sets". So, God is summoning the earth from the rising of the sun to the place where it sets. Is the sun going around the Earth or is the earth going around the sun? Well, if you take Psalm 50:1 at face value, you might say the sun is the one moving, because it talks about the rising of the sun. Why do you think that the sun isn't really literally rising? Why do we think we're turning and it only appears to make the sun rise? Because you don't get all of your interpretive tools from the Bible.

In fact, you can't get your interpretive tools from the Bible, because if they were locked in the Bible and you didn't have the interpretive tools outside of the Bible, you could never unlock what the Bible is saying. No, you get your ability to interpret the Bible from reality itself. You get it from philosophical principles. Yes, it's true, you can use bad philosophy to interpret the text, but you can't use no philosophy. You have to have certain principles in place before you can even understand what the Bible means.

Now, part of what Dr. Walton is saying with regard to Genesis is that you need to know some of the culture to understand what is being said in the book of Genesis. And I think that's true. But also a philosopher might say, you also need certain interpretive tools just to understand language at all. In fact, you need to understand language before you can understand what the Bible says, right. You need to understand logic, you need to understand grammar, you need to understand your senses that they are reliable and can give you truth about what you see.

Let's just talk about the first verse of the Bible for a second. The first verse of the Bible says, In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth. Okay, what does that first verse assume you know before you can even understand what it means? Obviously, it assumes you understand language and grammar. It assumes you understand the laws of logic. It assumes you

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understand basic cause and effect. It assumes you understand what a beginning is. That God created, so God is somehow the cause of creation, that you understand basic cause and effect. It assumes you have some idea of what this word God means, that he's some kind of cause. It also assumes you have the ability to follow an argument.

All of these assumptions, by the way, that we are making before we come to the text are what theologians do, and philosophers do, when they go off to school, or a systematic theologian might do when he goes to seminary is, these are part of an area of study called prolegomena. It's what you do before you can understand what the Bible means. Before you do theology, you have to understand grammar, you have to understand logic, you have to understand basic cause and effect, you have to understand your senses are reliable, you have to get at least some idea of the historical context to know what's going on in the text. So, as much as we try and say things like, Well, let's just let the text speak for itself, in reality, we have to bring certain principles to the text to understand it. Whether it's the Bible or any kind of communication, as we already pointed out when I gave you that thought experiment in the first segment. After a strike, the text says that your entire team will celebrate. What does that mean? You need context, you need to know language, you need to know logic, you need to know where that came from in order to understand what it means.

And the Bible is the same way. In fact, if we think about Genesis 1, in the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth. I don't know if Richard thinks that the first chapter of Genesis is telling us that the earth is young or the universe is young. I don't know if he's a young earther or not. But let's just assume for the sake of argument he is. That could be a valid interpretation, but it's equally valid to say, in the beginning, God created the heavens in the earth. Okay, when did God create the heavens and the earth? In the beginning. Does it say when the beginning was? No. Well, what about the days? Well, the days don't begin until verse 3. If you're going to take a literal interpretation of Genesis 1, the heavens and the earth are created before the days ever begin. It says in the beginning, God created the heavens in the earth.

Now is that a summary statement of what is about to happen in the next 6 days? It could be. Or it could mean the heavens and the earth were created and now God is going to zoom in on earth. He talks about the universe in verse 1, and then beginning in verse 3, he zooms in on

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Earth. It's certainly a possible interpretation. It's an option, in other words, and you have to select which option you think makes the most sense. Alright, a lot more right after the break. You're listening to I Don't Have Enough Faith to Be an Atheist with me, Frank Turek, on the American Family Radio Network. We're back in two minutes.

Is everything literally expressed in the Bible? I think even Richard who wrote in would agree, no, not everything is expressed literally. We say Jesus is the door, we don't think he has hinges. In fact, the Bible has many different genres in it and we have to interpret the genre differently than maybe another genre. I mean, just think about what's in the Bible. You've got poetry, you've got law, you've got narrative, you've got prophecy, you've got gospels, you've got parables, you've got epistles or letters, you've got apocalyptic literature. All of those different genres might have different interpretations, or you might have a different interpretive approach when you approach those different genres.

You're not going to interpret poetry, for example, in the same way you would interpret law. They're different genres. And poetry might express a literal truth, but it's not going to express it, normally, in a literal way. In fact, if I say read a poem about the Civil War, I may get some good historical information from that poem, but I'm not going to stretch every word to its literal extent as if I were reading a news report about the war. So, you have to know the context.

Now, Dr. John Lennox, as you know, has written a great book on Genesis called Seven Days That Divide the World: The Beginning According to Genesis and Science. Now, Dr. Lennox analyzes what Dr. Walton says about interpreting Genesis, and while he agrees with some of it, Dr. Lennox does not agree with everything Dr. Walton says. So, let me just give you Dr. Lennox's perspective on this. This is from the book Seven Days That Divide the World: The Beginning According to Genesis and Science, which is a great little book on this topic, if you want to go further.

In fact, the point about the fact that Genesis 1:1 potentially leaves the age of the universe indeterminate comes from this book because the first verse says in the beginning God created the heavens and the earth. When did he create it? It does not say. I mean, you could take Genesis 1 to try and figure out that the Earth is just 1000s of years old, but is that what the text

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actually is saying? Maybe. The other option, though, maybe it's not. Maybe that's not what it's saying. And that's what Lennox points out in here.

Anyway, with regard to Walton, here's what he says. Walton is surely right to warn us of the dangers of ignoring context and forcing the text to say more than the author intended to say. So, he's agreeing with Walton on that. You got to know the context, you got to know something about the history for some of this. But then here's what Lennox says. "However, I wonder also, if there is an equal and opposite danger of forcing the text to say less than the author intended to say. While agreeing that Genesis 1 does not attempt to address modern cosmology, in modern terms, I am also not convinced that it altogether fails to address that we have cosmological content."

In other words, Lennox is saying, hey, it does say the universe was created, and it was created out of nothing. He goes on to say this, because you know, other creation stories at the time, talked in their creation stories these pre-existing gods, these finite gods were fighting one another and had to fight one another to figure out how to bring order to chaos. Here's what Lennox says about that. "In contrast to the view that the universe was made from pre-existing gods, Genesis teaches that the universe was created by one God who spoke it into existence from nothing".

And then he goes on to point out this is what John 1 says. Also, you could look at Hebrews for creation out of nothing. And, of course, I think it's Colossians 2 says that Jesus Christ created all things. Actually, I think that's Colossians 1. It's 1 or 2. Christ created all things. So, the point here is that Lennox is saying that Genesis 1:1 is literally talking about, not just the order of creation, as Dr. Walton might say, but it's literally talking about the creation of material from nothing. That the universe was created from nothing out of nothing into this space time continuum we have now.

Now, I commend you this book, Seven Days that Divide the World. And if you want to see What Dr. Walton thinks about that, you can get his book as well. I understand Richard's frustration, but when you really go a little bit deeper, you realize that all communication requires some kind of interpretation. And you are making assumptions when you come to the text. The question is, are those assumptions good? In fact, let's talk about some other things in the Bible

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that require a little bit of insight in order to know what's happening. Let's go to First Samuel 24 for a second. Here's what the King James Version says. And the context of this passage, by the way, this is when Saul is hunting down David in Engedi, which is near the Dead Sea.

David is in a cave hiding from Saul and Saul goes into the cave in which David is hiding. And here's what First Samuel 24:3 says, King James Version. "3 And he came to the sheepcotes by the way, where was a cave; and Saul went in to cover his feet: and David and his men remained in the sides of the cave." You're going, he went in to do what? To cover his feet? What does that mean? Well, the literal translation says, He went in to cover his feet. If you look at the NIV, the nearly inspired version... Look the NIV normally gets it right. Don't get me wrong. Anyway, here's what the NIV says. "3 He came to the sheep pens along the way; a cave was there, and Saul went in to relieve himself. David and his men were far back in the cave." In other words, cover his feet was an idiom in Hebrew that meant urinate.

Now I don't know about you, ladies and gentlemen, gentlemen especially, when I urinate, I want to do more than cover my feet. I want to pass my feet, okay. But the bottom line here is, you would not know what that meant unless you knew Hebrew idioms. So, you have to know something about the culture to know what that meant. Now in the NIV, the translators, they do that work for us, but they are pointing out that you've got to know something about the culture to know what some of these things mean.

Here's some Old Testament Hebrew idioms. See if you know what they mean. Flowing with milk and honey. What does that mean? It means fertile. Okay, the land is flowing with milk and honey. How about, What comes from you? That's a phrase used in the Old Testament. It's a Hebrew idiom. What does it mean? It actually means excrement, crap, you get the idea. Okay. That's what comes from you. How about gird up your loins? You've probably heard that. It means get ready. How about slept? Sometimes the word slept actually means the person died, in the Old Testament.

How about if someone who is referred to as, they have a good eye? What would you think that would mean? Like they could see well, they have good vision? No, you know what it means? It means that person is generous. How about hide your face in the Old Testament? That actually means refuse to answer. You're hiding your face, so you don't want to answer. How about they

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knew no quiet in their bellies. Hebrew idiom. What does it mean? It means they're greedy. Or ears that are uncircumcised? These people have ears that are uncircumcised. It means they don't listen.

How about New Testament? These are Greek idioms. If your eye is good, what does that mean? It means you're generous. How about if your eye is evil? In fact, Jesus talks about this. It means you're stingy. Take up your cross. You might know what that means. It means be prepared to suffer or to die. How about don't look at the face of men? In Greek, that New Testament idiom would mean don't judge by appearance. And as you know, Jesus didn't just say, don't judge, you said, judge not lest you be judged. Now, he's not telling people not to judge, he's telling them how to judge. And in fact, in John 7:24 he says, Stop judging by mere appearances and make a right judgment. You have to make judgments or you'd be dead. Okay. You have to make a judgment to be a Christian or not to be a Christian. You make judgments every day but you have to judge without judging improperly, without judging by appearances, without judging hypocritically.

How about this idiom, placing a yoke on the neck? What does that mean? It means burdening with rules. Now, we live in 21st century America. We might not even know what a yoke means. Well, it was the device that you put on your ox to help you plow a field or to keep two ox together to help you plow a field. But it was a burden on them, right? So, it's burdening people with rules. How about kick against the goads? Jesus says to Paul, when he appears to him on the road to Damascus, you're kicking against the goads. What does that mean? It means you're getting hurt by resisting. How about talking into the air? What does that mean? It means that no one understands what you're saying. How about eat their own bread? It means they're working for a living.

You see, you got to know something about these things to know what the text means. So, we don't take every text literally. In fact, Dr. Gleason Archer, who wrote some fabulous books years ago, a great scholar - I think it was more of a scholar of the Old Testament. He knew at least five languages fluently, wrote a number of books. One of them is a book about Bible difficulties. Here's what he said about interpreting the Bible literally.

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"A careful study of parallel passage usage elsewhere in Scripture is absolutely vital for valid interpretation of any biblical text. It should also be perfectly evident that it is wrong to take figuratively what the original author meant literally."

Let me stop right there. It's wrong to take figuratively what the original author meant literally. Notice he said, original author. We know that the resurrection was literal, that Jesus had a body of, as he said, flesh and bones. It wasn't a spiritual resurrection; it was a literal resurrection. Although there'll be some more liberal minded theologians who will say, Oh, the resurrection is just figurative, it's just God can resurrect you from your problems. Here's what Archer is saying. That would be wrong to take a literal resurrection and take it figuratively. But he also says this. It would also be wrong to take literally what the author meant to take in a figurative way.

Like, for example, God does not have eyes, ears, and a face, or wings, or any of these things. He's using that figuratively. Jesus doesn't have hinges. He's the door but that's just a metaphorical way of saying he's the way to eternal life. And Archer says this, "It is therefore ill advised for any evangelical Bible teacher to urge the necessity of taking the Bible literally. Anyone who takes literally what God means figuratively is right on the brink of heresy." Okay? Now, he's not saying we don't take some things literally, he's saying, don't take things meant figuratively literally. Now, how do you know which to do? Well, it takes some work. It's not always easy. You got to do some research. In fact, the Bible even tells you have to do that. And we'll talk about where the Bible says that right after the break, so don't go anywhere.

Ladies and gentlemen, if you like apologetics and philosophy and theology like I do, and you want to be able to better express yourself in front of a group, or through Q&A, or just generally in your everyday conversations, you might want to attend CIA, the CrossExamined Instructor Academy. We're going to hold it this year in Albuquerque, New Mexico. It's going to be at the end of July. Not only will I be there, but Greg Koukl, Brett Kunkle, Alisa Childers, Alan Parr of The Beat. You may know Alan Parr from YouTube. He'll be one of our instructors as well. Also, Jorge Gil and others. Go to CrossExamined.org, click on events, and you'll see CIA there. We only have 60 seats, so it fills up pretty quickly. If you want to be a part of that, check it out.

You can also take the online course, the online CIA course. It's not as good as being there, quite obviously, but if you can't go to Albuquerque, look out for the online CIA course, which is

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starting in March. Also, you want to be a part of the Return of the God Hypothesis course with Stephen C. Meyer. It starts next week, February 1. We only have a limited number of seats for that, as well. If you do take the premium version, you'll be on zoom with Steve six different times for Q&A. And as you know, Return of the God Hypothesis covers three of the biggest discoveries in modern science that relate to God, the creation of the universe, the design of the universe, and the creation and design of life. So, you're gonna want to be a part of that class.

Also, if you have a sixth to eighth grader, or maybe fifth to eighth grader, you want to take the brand-new course that we'll be running for the second time. The great Shanda Fulbright will be teaching it and I'll assist her on one of the zooms. It's a course called Let's Get Real. It's basically I Don't Have Enough Faith to Be an Atheist for young people, so get them grounded in that, if you would.

All right, we're talking here about how to interpret the Bible. Do you interpret literally? Is everything in the Bible meant to be interpreted literally? And we pointed out that, no. Some things are, quite obviously, but not all things. And I know we want everything easy in America. We just want things to be easy to us, and we just want to be spoon fed stuff, but that's not the way it actually works. In fact, let's talk about what Peter said about Paul's writings.

This is from Second Peter 3:15-16. Here's what Peter says about Paul's writings. "And count the patience of our Lord as salvation, just as our beloved brother Paul also wrote to you according to the wisdom given him, as he does in all his letters when he speaks in them of these matters. There are some things in them [Paul's letters] that are hard to understand, which the ignorant and unstable twist to their own destruction, as they do the other Scriptures."

Now, notice a couple of things that Peter says here. He's saying that look, some of the Bible is hard to understand. But notice he's saying that Paul's writings are part of the Bible. He's saying that people twist these to their own destruction as they do the other scriptures. So, Peter is writing that Paul's letters are already considered scripture - this is in the first century - but they're hard to understand. They may be hard to understand. This isn't always easy. It takes some work. Well, why does God make us work? Actually, work is good for you.

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In fact, here's what Solomon says in Proverbs 2. He says, talking about getting wisdom, talking about learning the Scriptures - remember Proverbs are written to young men and also women, so they could become wise followers of God of Yahweh. And here's what Solomon says to his son who he wants to teach. "My son, if you accept my words and store up my commands within you, turning your ear to wisdom and applying your heart to understanding— indeed, if you call out for insight and cry aloud for understanding, and if you look for it as for silver and search for it as for hidden treasure, then you will understand the fear of the LORD and find the knowledge of God."

Are you looking through the Bible as if it were a hidden treasure? Are you searching? Are you straining? Are you working as if you were discovering hidden silver or hidden gold? That's basically what he's saying here. This often takes work. If God spoon feeds you everything, just like if your parents spoon feed you everything, you're not going to be a person who is going to be a person of depth. In fact, you might ask, why isn't the Bible simpler? Well, notice that salvation is simple but reality is complex. Reality is complex. There's a lot going on in reality, not only in the areas of reality we can observe directly with our senses, but even in the subatomic realm, the places we can't observe.

You might look at a desk in front of you, and go, it just looks like a desk, but what's going on inside that desk at the molecular level, at the quantum level? Right. Yes, salvation is simple trust in Jesus, and you will be saved, your sins will be forgiven, but reality is often complex. And God works through history and people. We tend to think, why doesn't God just give us a straightforward list of rules? Well, he does do that. There are straightforward rules but Christianity is not all about following rules. I mean, that's part of the way you get to know God, by knowing his moral will for your life, but your real goal in life is to know God.

In fact, what is the purpose of the Bible? The Bible actually tells us what its purpose is. It comes from the last letter that Paul wrote, 2 Timothy 3:14-17. He is speaking to Timothy now. This is the person he's mentoring, and by extension, us. "14 But as for you, continue in what you have learned and have become convinced of, because you know those from whom you learned it, 15 and how from infancy you have known the Holy Scriptures, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus. 16 All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for

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teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, 17 so that the servant of God[a] may be thoroughly equipped for every good work."

So, the purpose of Scripture is to get you wise unto salvation, and equip you to do good work, and to help you teach, rebuke, correct, and train one another. So, you can do these good works, to know God and to do good works, that's why we're here. So, it's not just a list of do's and don'ts. God is working through human beings to help us know him. Just like when you know somebody else, you don't just want them to give you a list of do's and don'ts. Want to have a relationship with me, here's what you can do. Do these things. Don't do these things. Okay. There may be some of that, but if that's what the whole relationship was about, it wouldn't be much of a relationship, would it? No.

Life is more of a story and that's why the Bible is more of a story. It's more of a robust, eloquent reality than just hard, dry, wooden, literal prose. The Bible reflects life. It's not just about law. It's not just not everything is written in a straightforward simple way. Some things are more complex because life is more complex. So, we have to keep that in mind when we come to the Scriptures. And relationship growth is fueled by struggle. If you think about the deepest relationships you have with people, whether it's your spouse, your parents, your kids, your closest friends, you will find the deepest relationships you have are relationships that have been forged through struggle. They have been deepened through pain and suffering. You appreciate them more because you've had to go through so much. In fact, when you do go through so much, that's what creates a deeper relationship.

And so, God doesn't spoon feed you everything, because he doesn't want you to be a baby. He doesn't want you to be a spoiled brat. He doesn't want you to take things for granted. He wants you to work for the relationship, just like he had to work on the cross. So, everything isn't going to always be communicated in a straightforward way. That wouldn't be very robust. That wouldn't be very interesting. It wouldn't be very deep. And it wouldn't lead you to a growing relationship with Christ.

And of course, not everything that we see is the whole story. Quite obviously, God is infinite, we're finite. In fact, it would be strange if an infinite God wasn't strange to us. You say, well, I wouldn't do it that way. Well, you're not God and neither am I. So, yeah, there are some things

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about the scriptures I don't get. There are some things I don't understand. I do understand the essential things. In fact, it was Mark Twain, who wasn't a Christian, who put things very clearly. He said, "It ain't those parts of the Bible that I can't understand that bother me, it's the parts that I do understand." Right? I mean, the main things are the plain things, and the plain things are the main things. Focus on those.

I find it fascinating to read Genesis. I find it fascinating to look at other ancient Near Eastern accounts to try and see if there are parallels, to try and see if we can learn from what other people or other cultures had written. Is Genesis 1 a polemic against the Egyptian creation story? It might be because those were the questions that people 3500 years ago, were asking. They weren't wondering how old the universe is. They weren't wondering whether micro or macro evolution is true, or even if evolution exists. They didn't know anything about that. But they wanted to know was Yahweh the true God? And does Yahweh just speak and bring things into existence? Yes, he did that. That's consistent with modern science but it's not teaching modern science. That's consistent with what we see. There was a creation and order was infused from the beginning. But it's not teaching it in a modern scientific way. The folks 3500 years ago wouldn't have understood that. So, we need to keep that in mind when we approached the text.

There's so much more we can talk about and maybe we'll pick this up again. We also have a course called How to Interpret the Bible. Some of what I've said today is taken from that course. You may want to check that out. But in the meantime, don't forget to tune in for the midweek podcast. We're going to have Dr. William Lane Craig and Dr. Steven C. Meyer to talk about, is the cosmological argument still sound? And I hope to see you here next week. God bless. See you then.

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