

Can you prove *anything* with the Bible?

Complementary Truths

Throughout Scripture, we can find teachings that are intended to *complement* each other - concepts which go together as the full expression of the truth. A person who does not accept the Word may wrongly interpret these teachings as *opposites* which contradict each other, but they are actually similar to "boundaries" that keep us from wandering into error. When we are faced with two complementary truths (such as God's sovereignty and human responsibility), failure to give *equal* emphasis to each of them leaves us prone to error. When we become focused on one aspect of the truth, to the point of neglecting its complement(s), we cannot avoid entering the realm of "half-truth." The absence of the other "half" of the truth allows (or even forces) error to creep into our perspective. Every time we take our focus off *part* of the truth, we are neglecting one of the boundaries that helps to direct us *into* the truth.

Complementary truths keep us from wandering off the "straight and narrow." They keep us from turning to the right or to the left. When we remove one of the boundaries, it is our *nature* to go astray or wander off. When we become so focused on one aspect of truth that we take our eyes off other aspects of it, the truth we accept (actually, the "half-truth") can quickly become a springboard for *reinforcing error and false conclusions*.

"Half-Truths" and the Bible

How does this happen? When a person accepts a half-truth - whatever it may be - it will influence the conclusions he reaches, every time he "applies" that half-truth to the Word of God. This can result in a wide variety of opinions about what the Word says. Two people can look at the *same* Scripture passage, but if they focus on opposite half-truths, they will reach *opposite* interpretations! Then each will use the false interpretation he has reached to reinforce his own opinions - after all, since it originated in his views, it will agree with his views. The result will be a conflict, in which each person uses the Bible to "prove" his own erroneous (yet partially correct) viewpoint, and to "disprove" the other person's perspective. Having begun with opposite "starting points," each will be claiming that the Bible teaches *his own* viewpoint and opposes *the other's* view. An observer who did not understand the nature of the teachings of Scripture could easily conclude that the Bible can be used to "prove" *anything*. In reality, however, all this really shows is that, *when the Bible is not taken in its entirety*, the remaining *half-truth* can be used to "prove" anything.

It must be emphasized that this type of problem is possible *only* when the Bible is *not* accepted in its entirety. When accepted "as is," there will be only one possible conclusion - and it will be a viewpoint that doesn't agree with *either* half-truth, because both half-truths are distortions of the genuine!

There is one issue we need to clarify in this matter: We are not dealing here with isolated instances in which there are *genuine* questions related to the grammar and syntax of some specific phrase in a specific passage. Instead, we are dealing with a much more serious issue than a question about the way one part of a sentence connects with another part of the sentence, or the location of punctuation marks. (These types of issues tend to have very little impact on the overall message of a text.) In contrast, the disagreements caused by "half-truths" tend to involve clear passages - lots of them - which have become clouded by those who are using them to promote their own views.

When faulty assumptions are superimposed into the Word, *anything* can be "proven." And when this happens, anything in the Word that goes against those assumptions tends to be explained-away or ignored. Sometimes statements that oppose the half-truth will not even be noticed, because they have been "pre-assumed" to not exist!

Not only does the Bible *not* support *any* of the distortions, half-truths or false conclusions people may reach when they "interpret" it based on their own assumptions, but *it opposes the very act of using Scripture to "support" one's views*. People who approach the Word in this manner are, by the very nature of things, approaching it wrongly. They are approaching it backwards! God gave us the Bible, so that we could *change* our perspectives, not so we could force the Word into a distortion that *reinforces* them.

This being said, should we ignore everything people say, claiming that we want to focus only on the Bible? Of course not! (To reach such a conclusion would, itself, be the result of viewing the issue from the "half-truth" perspective!) Instead, we need to examine what is said, the same way the Bereans did, in Acts 17:11. They took what they were told, submitted it to the Word, and accepted only what could be confirmed by the Word. (In this case, it was the apostle Paul who was teaching them, and his words were 100% accurate - unlike ours. But since they had never met him before, they didn't know it until they examined Scripture and verified that fact.)

Most likely, *both* sides of an argument will contain fragments of truth. Our task is to determine which parts are true and which are false. The only objective way to do this is to submit what we hear to what the Bible says, and let the Bible filter out what is error. We do not need to accept *any* of the supposed "arguments" or "proofs" or interpretational schemes. If their assertions are really true, we will be able to find support in the Word - *strong* support - *without* having to follow their line of "reasoning"! We do not need to start with their assumptions and methods of approaching Scripture, because *any* method of approaching Scripture which allows people to begin with their own views, or to start with what sounds good to them, has entered the realm of subjective opinion *and error*.

The Practical Value of Knowing These Things

There are some practical aspects to all of this. First, when we hear an argument, we can look at *both sides* for aspects that may be true. We can also be equally open to finding error on both sides - whether it is a blatant falsehood, or merely the neglect of something that needs an equal emphasis. (Many errors begin by an "innocent" omission of part of the truth.) We do not have to go blindly after what the majority may claim is the "truth." We do not have to pick "sides" in an argument.

There is another practical aspect to all of this: Even though we have been focusing on how people get false opinions about the *Bible*, the issue actually goes far beyond that. After all, *all* truth has the same character or nature, since it *all* came from the same source - God. Because of this, it is *all* prone to distortion in the same way. This is why there are so many viewpoints on just about any issue - even in issues that seem to have no direct connection with the Bible. But this is also why we can apply these same principles for seeking truth to just about any aspect of life!

This nature of truth - the fact that it all comes from God and is consistent with God's Word - will influence the *way* we approach issues. When we apply these principles to the various issues that are a part of life, we will be starting with the *Bible*, to whatever degree its teachings speak (directly or indirectly) about the matter in question. We will not choose to cling (blindly) to teachings that seem to be "opposites," not knowing where they came from, because this will *not* guarantee that we are being led into the truth. (We could be clinging to "opposite" *errors*, rather than "opposite" *truths*!)

One "Drawback" to Knowing These Things

There is one "drawback" to holding this perspective. If we hold firmly to the "straight and narrow," we might end-up making enemies on *both* sides of an argument, since we will not be able to place our support with either. People on each side may even conclude that we are endorsing the perspective which is the *opposite* of theirs, because of *their own* false assumptions! This may be a "cross" we have to bear (as in Matthew 10:38). But we can remember that, in the end, there will be a day of justice. At that time, any trials or suffering we may have had to endure, for the sake of the truth, will be remembered and dealt with justly, by the One to whom we must *all* give account (Hebrews 4:13). For us, it will be worth any trouble we may experience at the present!