

UNDERSTAND THE BIBLE?

By Bill Irby, Minister, West Hobbs Street c/C, Athens, AL

One might say about the Bible that it has a lot in it. This is the truth. The Bible contains a massive amount of information. Sometimes the size and complexity of the Book discourages people. It is so big in terms of words and ideas that folks don't even feel like trying to understand it. I remember the feeling. Before 1975 I had given the Bible scant attention. I had learned a creed or two and the few verses that went with them. But I had not spent much time with the Book itself. I met some Christians that seemed to be quite secure in the way they were living and they said they gained that security from the Bible. This made me curious and I thought that perhaps another look was warranted. I bought a paperback Bible (a New American Standard translation) and read it. I concentrated on the New Testament after a while. I was still befuddled but I found that as I paid attention to the context of the work (as one does with any reading) it began to make sense.

A few important things came to my mind that I think are helpful to most if not all Bible students today. First, this is not a normal book...it is The Book. It is the inspired revelation of the mind of God (2 Timothy 3:16-17, Ephesians 3:1-7). Second, I was never going to understand every bit of the Bible. God said that His thoughts are above mine (Isaiah 55:8-9). We cannot approach the Bible with one little bit of arrogance. If we do, failure is assured.

The third thing I finally understood is that by being diligent and careful (2 Timothy 2:15) I could understand enough of the Scripture to save my soul. Paul reminded Timothy of the teaching work that his mother and grandmother had done. In this connection he wrote, *"But you must continue in the things which you have learned and been assured of, knowing from whom you have learned them, and that from childhood you have known the Holy Scriptures, which are able to make you wise unto salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus"* (2 Timothy 3:14-15). It is clear that Timothy did not know everything there was to know. Paul was still teaching him, after all. But he did know enough to be saved, and so can we.

Beginning towards the end of Hebrews chapter five and moving into chapter six there is material that indicates that the study of the Bible is a progressive thing. We start off with the simple things and progress to the more challenging material. Peter, in both of his letters, stresses the matter of remembering the things that we have learned. He was not at all hesitant to remind his readers of the things they had known before. Memory is an important component of knowledge (2 Peter 3:18). So it is that memory and progression are two essential factors in studying the Bible (indeed, in mastering any intellectual material).

Let's add to this the information in another familiar verse, John 8:32. *"...and you shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free."* I know that I can't be sure of everything in my life, but there is one thing I am sure of and that is that *God does not lie* (Titus 1:2). His character and nature precludes prevarication. So if Jesus (Who is God) says that I am able to do something, then I am able to do it. I might not do it due to the stubbornness of my will or laziness, but I most assuredly am able to do it. Furthermore, if I know what to do and refuse to do it, I am sinning. James said so (James 4:17). Now, Jesus said that we can know the truth and that knowledge can lead to salvation. It is just so.

What does this mean for us? It means that we must refuse all the excuses we make up and hear to keep from studying the Bible. It means that we must just get up and do it. And it means that we must use our God-given ability to understand to save our own souls and the souls of them that hear us (1 Timothy 4:16).