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Can We Know the Mind of God? (Part II)

Ephesians 1:9: (NASB) *He made known to us the mystery of His will, according to His kind intention, which He purposed in Him.*

Study to show yourself approved



A few weeks ago, we began a discussion on the keys to understanding the Bible as the word of God, and therefore being able to understand the mind of God. Is it really possible to know what God is thinking and what He is planning for the entire race of mankind? Well, we believe it is not only possible but attainable as well! Let's continue the discovery process of Bible study.

We believe the Bible is the inspired word of God and that it has a detailed, consistent message throughout that reflects the mind of God.

We are offering the free booklet, "*How to Study the Bible and Have it Make Sense.*" There are three easy ways to get it: Write to us through ChristianQuestions.com, request it from Rick@ChristianQuestions.net or just click for it on our smartphone app.

Please refer to our program from November 9, 2014, "*Can We Know the Mind of God? (Part I)*" where we discussed the first two techniques: Topical Bible study and symbolic language.

Our belief is not what we are told by a minister, or which version of the Bible is infallible or what denomination we believe. It is the testing and scrutinizing of the Scriptures to find harmony of His mind and plan. We put a lot of pressure on ourselves to find the truth. Our understanding has to pass through all these different "gates" for us to believe it. We are inviting you to do the same thing - to put yourself in a place of discovering what is already there - to understand where and how to look. Now we continue our journey towards a clearer understanding of Scripture.

THIRD TESTING GROUND: THE STUDY OF TIME FRAMES: The examination of Scripture with the understanding that all scripture texts do not apply to all time frames of history. The Bible tells us it has divided itself into periods of time. Perhaps think of it like the four quarters in a football game. They play differently in the first quarter than the fourth quarter. Sometimes there is a focus on defense then offense, etc. What do we need to pass our personal scriptural understanding through this test of the study of time frames? We need a working knowledge of the kinds of time frames into which the Bible divides itself! Where do we find that?

Let's start with a set of Scriptures that divide Bible teaching into three major time frames: 2 Peter 3:5-7: (NASB) ⁵...by the word of God the heavens existed long ago and the earth was formed out of water and by water, ⁶through which **the world at that time** was destroyed, being flooded with water. ⁷But by His word **the present heavens and earth** are being reserved for fire, kept for the Day of Judgment and destruction of ungodly men...

2 Peter 3:13: (NASB) *But according to His promise we are looking for **new heavens and a new earth**, in which righteousness dwells.* What do we have here? There are three different "worlds" that have and will all exist on this earth, *but never at the same time.* Therefore, we can see these worlds as consecutive ages or "dispensations" (inclusive periods) of time.

2 Peter 3:5-7: (NASB) ⁵...by the word of God the heavens existed long ago and the earth was formed out of water and by water, ⁶through which **the world at that time** was destroyed, being flooded with water. The "world that was" - the social order in which the fallen "sons of God" mixed with the race of man here on earth - was destroyed, never to rise again.

Please see the program, "*What Can We Learn From Noah? (Part II)*" from December 7, 2014, for more on this point.

Even with its destruction, sin persisted: ⁷But by His word **the present heavens and earth** are being reserved for fire, kept for the Day of Judgment and destruction of ungodly men...The "world that is" - our present evil state of things here in earth - in which sin prevails under Satan's rule, is beginning to meet its end by a (figurative) fire, necessitating its replacement with something new. ¹³But according to His promise we are looking for **new heavens and a new earth**, in which righteousness dwells. Ah, this sounds better! A new world

- a new social order - here on earth where God once again will have His hand directly over man's affairs. There are different frames of time in which the way God works with mankind actually changes, grows and develops. World history according to Scripture is divided into specific frames of time. Certain Scriptures only apply to certain time frames. Now, let's fill in the details of these three Dispensations: (Each change represents progression in the plan.)

1. THE FIRST GREAT DISPENSATION: THE WORLD THAT WAS
The shortest of the three (1,656 years) and most easily defined

It begins with one man, created in perfection: [Genesis 2:7](#)
It ends with one righteous man, Noah, and his family: [Genesis 7:23](#)

2. THE SECOND GREAT DISPENSATION: THE PRESENT EVIL WORLD
Has three distinct ages, is far more intricate and begins with God dealing with individuals and family lines

The Age of the Patriarchs, "Fathers of Faith" [Genesis 8:20](#) [Genesis 12:1-2](#): After **Abraham** came **Isaac** then **Jacob**. Jacob had 12 sons and at his death a nation and a new age was born.

The age of the nation of Israel, the Jewish Age It began with **Jacob's deathbed blessing to his sons who became a nation that will eventually bless mankind.** [Exodus 19:5-6](#) [Amos 3:2](#)
Its end was proclaimed with a sad announcement of failure: [Matthew 23:38-39](#): (The last phrase is actually a hint about the beginning of the third dispensation!)

The age of the Gospel call, the Gospel Age To the Jew first, but then to Gentiles as well!
[Acts 10:34-35](#): This is in the context of going to Cornelius, the first Gentile convert.
[Revelation 2:10](#) This age ends with the completion of the call of true Christians and trouble - lots of trouble! [Daniel 12:1](#)

Sometimes Scriptures don't apply all the time - they apply ONLY in the context of a certain time frame.

3. THE THIRD GREAT DISPENSATION: "THE WORLD TO COME"
Has at least two distinct parts we know of

First, it is the great Day of Judgment: [John 5:28-29](#) [Jeremiah 31:29-30](#) But then, it is a great day of God's kingdom: [Jeremiah 31:31-34](#): We should not twist the Bible to fit what we want, but rather, twist ourselves to conform to it. The Bible's intentions should be reflected within our lives. Also, sometimes the traditions and ceremonies we grew up with do not actually match up with biblical teachings.

FOURTH TESTING GROUND: STUDY BASED ON CONTEXT. To know the context of a statement is the first step in understanding the statement itself. Biblical context establishes biblical teaching.

What do we need to pass our personal scriptural understanding through this particular test? We need the power of observation and a willingness to allow our observations of context to influence our direction and conclusions. In short, we need a desire for truth and the humility

Let's start with a text that creates a context that we may not even see: [1 Timothy 4:10](#): (KJV) *For therefore we both labour and suffer reproach, because we trust in the living God, who is the Saviour of all men, specially of those that believe.* Here the Apostle Paul is encouraging young brother Timothy to remain deeply focused in the responsibility he has been given to nurture the churches. Paul tells him that godliness is much more profitable than bodily exercise, for it brings eternal life. The admonition is to be godly in everything you do in life. Now we re-read our verse: [1 Timothy 4:10](#): (KJV) *For therefore we both labour and suffer reproach, because we trust in the living God, who is the Saviour of all men, specially of those that believe.* What context does this verse set? What is it talking about? Salvation! But wait - salvation here is divided into two categories - those who are saved and those who believe and are "specially" saved! Salvation is for all men, but especially for those who believe. How is that possible? Is this a unique thought, or are there other verses that do the same?

Another verse with two distinct classes: [1 John 2:2](#): (NASB) *and he himself is the propitiation for our sins; and not for ours only, but also for those of the whole world.* Propitiation means satisfaction or the fulfillment of sins - not only for us as believers, but for the whole world.

A verse that establishes the universal effect of the ransom: 1 Timothy 2:5-6: (NASB) ⁵For there is one God, and one mediator also between God and men, the man Christ Jesus, ⁶who gave himself as a ransom for all, the testimony given at the proper time. There is a universal effect of the blood sacrifice, the ransom, of Jesus. Ransom means paying a price of equal value. 1 Corinthians 15:22: As in Adam all die, so in Christ shall all be made alive. Because of the sin of Adam, we all die. Because of the life and sacrifice of Christ, we are all made alive. Jesus paid the right amount to cancel the sin of Adam. With that, the context of these verses shows different things happen. There is a revitalization of those who believe now in the Gospel Age (*especially those who believe*) and the rest of the world mentioned in a very positive way - not one of burning forever. If there are *two different classes* who receive salvation as these verses indicate, then we cannot always assume that all verses speaking of salvation apply only to just the one class of true Christians! So, how do you tell when the verse applies to the Christian or to the rest of the world?

The following is an example of grasping the larger context of Scripture. Most of the New Testament is a collection of letters. To whom are they written?

Romans 15:25: (KJV) *But now I go unto Jerusalem to minister **unto the saints**. The saints are the followers of Jesus.* 2 Corinthians 1:1: (KJV) *Paul, an apostle of Jesus Christ by the will of God, and Timothy our brother, unto the church of God which is at Corinth, **with all the saints** which are in all Achaia: Not only those of the brotherhood at the church in Corinth, but all the saints in Achaia.* Ephesians 1:1: (KJV) *Paul, an apostle of Jesus Christ by the will of God, **to the saints** which are at Ephesus, and to the faithful in Christ Jesus:* Philippians 1:1: (KJV) *Paul and Timotheus, the servants of Jesus Christ, **to all the saints** in Christ Jesus, which are at Philippi, with the bishops and deacons:* Colossians 1:2: (KJV) ***To the saints** and faithful brethren in Christ which are at Colosse: Grace be unto you, and peace, from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.* We can see this is a common phrase. The saints, the enlightened followers of Christ, are those to whom are given special promises and from whom are required to give special sacrifices. The New Testament specifically is written to the saints, the true followers of Jesus. No wonder so many who look at the Bible are scoffers! They are reading someone else's mail! If they do not have the context they are reading about, who would be expected to understand correspondence that is not meant for them? The larger context of the New Testament is written to the saints - not always *about* them, but *to* them for their understanding. This helps them not only understand their job and objective but also understand the world around them, Satan, prophecy, and more.

Anybody can read the New Testament. But when they do, they should realize the larger context. This helps us understand the mind of God. Knowing the larger context (written for the benefit of the saints) can help us zero in on the smaller contexts (the specific subject matter). We don't want to discourage study and anyone's desire to understand the mind of God, but we need to keep it within the actual context. The Bible is many individual thoughts that make up the integrity of the mind of God. If we try to break them down to such a fine point, we could lose the big meaning. For example, the parables of Jesus were very symbolic because he told us they were stories. We don't want to read into every single detail (where did the foolish virgins go when they were late?) and miss the intent of the story. 1 Timothy 4:10

With the concept of there being more than one type of salvation on the table, let's now look at some resurrection Scriptures: John 5:28-29: (NASB) ²⁸Do not marvel at this; for an hour is coming, in which all who are in the tombs will hear His voice, ²⁹and will come forth; those who did the good deeds to a resurrection of life (a heavenly reward), those who committed the evil deeds to a resurrection of judgment. Why would the resurrection of judgment be a "good" resurrection? Because it beats being dead and judgment in righteousness is a good thing! I would rather be alive, answer for the things I have done and have the opportunity to make it right than to never be alive again.

Please refer to the program from November 2, 2014 called, "How Many Resurrections Will There Be?" for more on this subject.

Can we go from good to better? Hebrews 11:35: (NASB) *Women received back their dead by resurrection; and others were tortured, not accepting their release, **so that they might obtain a better resurrection**.* What is the context? Who is being spoken about in Hebrews 11? This chapter reviews those who were found faithful in the Old Testament. These are examples

of individuals who lived above the world around them. These were not followers of Jesus because he had not yet come. But here these faithful to God receive a *better resurrection*.

How about from better to best? Revelation 20:6: (NASB) *Blessed and holy is the one who has a part in the first resurrection; over these the second death has no power, but they will be priests of God and of Christ and will reign with him for a thousand years.* These are the faithful followers of Christ. Again, having context for many Scriptures that deal with the same topic makes understanding a much easier task!

All three of these Scriptures deal with resurrection, but they are dealing with different aspects of resurrection that apply to different individuals. It is only by seeing them in context that we can get where they belong and how they apply. 1 Timothy 4:10 helped us to first see the two general classes.

Now let's see how the good and the best resurrections dovetail: 2 Corinthians 5:17-19: *He has committed to us the word of reconciliation - who is us?* The followers of Jesus. We know this by the context - that is to whom the letter was written. What are the followers reconciling back to God? The world of mankind. God is reconciling - through Christ - the world to Himself. We can now build verse upon verse as to how these resurrections dovetail.

Studying the Scriptures in context really does help us understand the mind of God through the word of God. Anyone can read the Bible, but very few will end up truly understanding it. It takes work. The idea that you can say, "I want to know God, so I'm just going to start reading the Bible and it will all come together for me," is a very disappointing idea. 2 Timothy 2:15: The word of truth can be wrongly divided very easily and frequently.

Can context help when Scriptures seem to contradict each other?

First thought, only a pass or fail approach: Matthew 7:13-14 Second thought, a get everyone together and make progress approach: Isaiah 35:8-10 Can both be true? Jesus is teaching his followers; therefore, this is a "Gospel Age" application: Matthew 7:11-15 The Isaiah text in context - this is a "World to Come" text! Isaiah 35:4-7 ...Now the highway is spoken of in the next verse. These verses apply for a different time than when Jesus was talking to his followers in Matthew 7! Isaiah is talking about the future destiny of mankind. This highlights the two paths of salvation we previously discussed. So, contextual understanding helps us to solve the mystery of contradiction! They apply at two different times to two completely different groups of people. An important aspect of context is that every verse in the Scriptures does not explain the whole plan every time. It deals with different parts of it. We need to realize what part of the plan we are dealing with, and who is being dealt with and why. This helps to unlock the mind of God and His grand and glorious plan. We do not want to limit ourselves to our own little troubles in our little world.

FIFTH TESTING GROUND: STUDY BY TYPE AND ANTITYPE. Observing the larger and future meaning of certain events as a means of grasping the breadth of God's plan.

(Source: How To Study The Bible And Have It Make Sense) "In the Old Testament are many events which actually happened but which have significance above and beyond their original import. For example: Exodus describes the institution of the Passover which involved the slaying of a lamb, the deliverance of the firstborn at night, and the deliverance of the rest of the people in the morning. The miracle would have been great in itself. But in 1 Corinthians 5:7 Paul states, "Christ, our Passover, is sacrificed for us," indicating that God meant to make an informative picture of the Passover event."

The Passover in Exodus was a "type." The "antitype" - the fulfillment of that original picture - was Jesus as our Passover lamb. We will study this the Sunday before Resurrection Sunday. There is so much to understand trying to grasp the mind of God by studying Scripture. If we understand the different methods used and how to apply them, the mind of God becomes clearer. We see His intention for mankind, and it is all good news!

*So, can we know the mind of God?
For Jonathan and Rick and Christian Questions...
Think about it...!*