

The Bible

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The One Thing Needful

Luke 10:38-42

Now it came to pass, as they went, that he entered into a certain village: and a certain woman named Martha received him into her house. And she had a sister called Mary, which also sat at Jesus' feet, and heard his word. But Martha was cumbered about much serving, and came to him, and said, Lord, dost thou not care that my sister hath left me to serve alone? bid her therefore that she help me. And Jesus answered and said unto her, Martha, Martha, thou art careful and troubled about many things: But one thing is needful: and Mary hath chosen that good part, which shall not be taken away from her.

It is so, so easy for all of us to fill our every waking moment with things. Thoughts and ideas about our activities in this world engage our minds constantly. Indeed, sometimes we can't even get to sleep for thinking about them, but our minds can be buzzing long into the night.

Now, while we have breath on this earth, the Lord has given each child of His work to do, and so we, of course, should do this to the best of the ability given to us, and that would include thinking, planning and using our minds accordingly. These are therefore perfectly legitimate things to be doing. But in our busy-ness, we often miss the one thing needful. We need to prepare and be ready for our death.

Are we ready to die and go to meet the great Judge of all the earth? You may say, "Yes, because I have trusted in Jesus." Very good, may that indeed be so. But we can't just sit back, trust in a decision we supposedly made many years ago and then forget about it. There are still warnings in the Bible to be diligent, to always be ready:

2 Peter 1:10,11

Wherefore the rather, brethren, give diligence to make your calling and election sure: for if ye do these things, ye shall never fall: For so an entrance shall be ministered unto you abundantly into the everlasting kingdom of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.

Not that we can lose our election once we have it, that is impossible, we can't be un-born again. But we must make the fact sure in our own hearts and minds, continually examining ourselves for our own benefit:

2 Corinthians 13:5

Examine yourselves, whether ye be in the faith; prove your own selves. Know ye not your own selves, how that Jesus Christ is in you, except ye be reprobates?

We are exhorted by the Lord to spend our time watching and praying:

Mark 13:33

Take ye heed, watch and pray: for ye know not when the time is.

But most people are too busy with their little lives in this world to be bothered to do much of this. Thoughts of heaven are very far away most of the time. Only when trouble comes do we begin to reconsider our lives in the light of eternity.

I am talking about professing Christians here. As for unbelievers, they can't do this. They have no hope. This world is all they have. They either think that death is the end, or they invent something beyond it that is pleasing to their carnal nature. None of them want to come to terms with the truth that:

Hebrews 9:27

It is appointed unto men once to die, but after this the judgment.

Christians should be so much more focused on eternal things than they are. Our critics accuse us of being so heavenly-minded that we are of no earthly use. But that's impossible! Our problem is that we're nowhere near heavenly-minded enough. We can only do the work we've been given to do down here properly – i.e. to the glory of God – if we view it in the light of eternity. So many of us busy, busy, busy ourselves with church activities. Working in our "corner of the Lord's vineyard" for what? To get more people in to our cosy little denomination? To make a name for ourselves in the church? But are we ready to die?? That's the question. I fear that a lot of the time, sadly, Christians keep themselves busy to avoid thoughts of eternity, rather than to prepare for it.

It has to be said that most Christians seem to have tunnel vision, and can't see beyond the activities of their own little church ghetto – as though theirs is the only denomination in the world, and the whole of Christ's kingdom is dependent upon them. They can't seem to be able to pass the baton on, to ease up in any of their busy-ness. Even Paul recognised the need to do this, as he handed over his work to Timothy:

2 Timothy 4:6-8

For I am now ready to be offered, and the time of my departure is at hand. I have fought a good fight, I have finished my course, I have kept the faith: Henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, shall give me at that day: and not to me only, but unto all them also that love his appearing.

I've come across people who fill their retirement travelling all over the world preaching. Now, there's nothing wrong with preaching, but when the activity completely takes over our lives, preparation for our latter end takes a back seat. I also know of ministers in their 70's who still feel they have to fill their lives with church work, even though they've got health problems and should have calmed down their active participation a long time ago.

STOP!! Whatever age we are, and in old age particularly, our great need is to prepare ourselves for the great translation that is death. As Christians, we should not be so full of busy-ness in this world that we neglect readiness for the next. All of us still, even after many years as a Christian, have a long, long way to go before we can be fitted for heaven, because we are still so full of the ways of this world in our hearts. And we just can't seem to learn to wean ourselves off this world. Help us, Lord! Change us, Lord! Make us ready! And it's only familiarity with the Word of God that can do that:

John 17:17

Sanctify us by thy truth, thy Word is truth.

Sadly, we'd rather stay here. We quite like our position and place in the church we're in, and the work we're doing. I even suggest that some of us, if we do ever get to heaven at all, would be bored spending the rest of eternity no longer in control of what's happening around us any more. That should not be. This world is merely a preparation place for the next. May we all realise that this is so.

Ecclesiastes 7:1-4

A good name is better than precious ointment; and the day of death than the day of one's birth. It is better to go to the house of mourning, than to go to the house of feasting: for that is the end of all men; and the living will lay it to his heart. Sorrow is better than laughter: for by the sadness of the countenance the heart is made better. The heart of the wise is in the house of mourning; but the heart of fools is in the house of mirth.

James 4:14

For what is your life? It is even a vapour, that appeareth for a little time, and then vanisheth away.

Colossians 3:1-4

If ye then be risen with Christ, seek those things which are above, where Christ sitteth on the right hand of God. Set your affection on things above, not on things on the earth. For ye are dead, and your life is hid with Christ in God. When Christ, who is our life, shall appear, then shall ye also appear with him in glory.

One is Your Master

Matthew 23:8

But be not ye called Rabbi: for one is your Master, even Christ; and all ye are brethren.

I used to have lots of Christian books, but the older I get, the more time I now spend reading the Holy Scriptures alone, and I hardly touch my library at all these days. In fact, I've got rid of most of it. Now, I'm not saying it is wrong to go to others for advice or help (including going to the authors of Christian books), but we must realise eventually that men can only help us so far. Not only do they have limited knowledge, but they are also prone to errors and wrong thinking - as indeed are we ourselves. Only the Holy Scriptures are inerrant and completely trustworthy.

2 Timothy 3:16

All scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness: that the man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works.

One major thing I've noticed in my reading is that, whereas Christ had compassion on the multitude, He had not one good word to say about the church leaders of His day. This culminates in Matthew chapter 23, where He pronounces eight "woes" on the leadership of the church, and concludes in verse 33:

Matthew 23:33

Ye serpents, ye generation of vipers, how can ye escape the damnation of hell?

Yes, there were good men in the Sanhedrin, Joseph of Arimathea and Nicodemus to name but two, and it's not wrong to be in church leadership. If you are, then use your position for good; but most likely you will be sidelined by those unregenerate men (and women these days) who want status in the church on earth.

The Sanhedrin consisted of both Sadducees, liberals who deny the resurrection:

Matthew 22:23

The same day came to him the Sadducees, which say that there is no resurrection.

and Pharisees, evangelicals, who interpreted the Scriptures too literally, and completely missed their Messiah when He came:

John 5:39,40

Search the scriptures; for in them ye think ye have eternal life: and they are they which testify of me. And ye will not come to me, that ye might have life.

So we see that no church on earth is not affected by this phenomenon. We need to recognise it and avoid following men and movements. No church on earth can satisfy, only Christ.

There are very few places on this earth where the eternal world meets this one. Death is one of them, and in this I include near-death experiences, such as severe illnesses, earthquakes, famines, etc., all of which are ordained in the Lord's providence to one end - to get men to repent:

Luke 13:1-5

There were present at that season some that told him of the Galilaeans, whose blood Pilate had mingled with their sacrifices. And Jesus answering said unto them, Suppose ye that these Galilaeans were sinners above all the Galilaeans, because they suffered such things? I tell you, Nay: but, except ye repent, ye shall all likewise perish. Or those eighteen, upon whom the tower in Siloam fell, and slew them, think ye that they were sinners above all men that dwelt in Jerusalem? I tell you, Nay: but, except ye repent, ye shall all likewise perish.

If it seems a harsh thing to say that God ordains all these things, then we must always remember that Christ said:

Matthew 24:8

All these are the beginning of sorrows.

Compared to hell fire, these are nothing. We must never, ever ask God to give us what we justly deserve, because it would be much worse than anything we can experience on this earth. We should only ever cry for mercy.

This world is not under Satan's control, as Jehovah's Witnesses teach, nor does everything happen by random chance, as the humanists believe, but God is in control of all things, ordaining all things to His greatest glory in the end. This should be our comfort in this world.

Romans 8:28

And we know that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to his purpose.

The reading of Scripture is therefore a very precious thing. It brings us to the point where the eternal world meets this one before death can come anywhere near us. So we can prepare for the inevitable while we still have breath, reason and life. Sadly, when we are well, eternity seems so far away, and we often don't have the inclination to bother about it. Let's prepare ourselves properly for eternity, read our Scriptures, not follow men and their whims, but follow Christ alone, who will lead us to glory.

1 John 2:26,27

These things have I written unto you concerning them that seduce you. But the anointing which ye have received of him abideth in you, and ye need not that any man teach you: but as the same anointing teacheth you of all things, and is truth, and is no lie, and even as it hath taught you, ye shall abide in him.

This is An Hard Saying

We know that every word of Scripture is given by inspiration of God:

2 Timothy 3:16,17

All scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness: that the man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works.

Matthew 5:18

For verily I say unto you, Till heaven and earth pass, one jot or one tittle shall in no wise pass from the law, till all be fulfilled.

But have you ever wondered why God, in His inscrutable wisdom, has, in the Scriptures, used some rather odd turns of phrase instead of plainer language, such passages consequently leading many people astray? I mean, many people have taken verses from Scripture completely out of context and twisted them to fit their wrong ideas; and we can

easily see how this has happened because of the language used. Let's take a few examples:

John 6:53-56

Then Jesus said unto them, Verily, verily, I say unto you, Except ye eat the flesh of the Son of man, and drink his blood, ye have no life in you. Whoso eateth my flesh, and drinketh my blood, hath eternal life; and I will raise him up at the last day. For my flesh is meat indeed, and my blood is drink indeed. He that eateth my flesh, and drinketh my blood, dwelleth in me, and I in him.

Roman Catholics use these verses to condone their superstitious magical belief that the bread and wine in their "Mass" really turns into the body and blood of Christ. But the passage nowhere states that to be the case. It is not even talking about the Communion. Rather, "eating" and "drinking" Christ's flesh and blood refers to eating and drinking spiritually, and not in any physical way. Reading the complete passage clearly shows that. But taking these verses on their own, one can see how people can easily be mistaken in their understanding of the passage.

Or how about:

1 Corinthians 15:29

Else what shall they do which are baptized for the dead, if the dead rise not at all? why are they then baptized for the dead?

One phrase, "*baptized for the dead*," confirms Mormons in their idea that they can posthumously, retrospectively baptise their ancestors and bring them into the kingdom of God, long after they have died. But it can't mean that because that wouldn't tally with any other part of Scripture:

Luke 16:26

And beside all this, between us and you there is a great gulf fixed: so that they which would pass from hence to you cannot; neither can they pass to us, that would come from thence.

Or how about this verse:

Revelation 14:12

Here is the patience of the saints: here are they that keep the commandments of God, and the faith of Jesus.

Christian Zionists use this verse to try to tell us that there are two different ways to get to heaven, one for Jews (i.e. those who "*keep the commandments of God*") and one for born-again Christians (i.e. those who have "*the faith of Jesus*"). But no man, whether Jew or Gentile, can "*keep the commandments of God*," unless he has had a new heart put within him by the Lord, and thereby received "*the faith of Jesus*." To "*keep the commandments of God*" was never a means of salvation:

Romans 3:20-23

Therefore by the deeds of the law there shall no flesh be justified in his sight: for by the law is the knowledge of sin. But now the righteousness of God without the law is manifested, being witnessed by the law and the prophets; even the righteousness of God

which is by faith of Jesus Christ unto all and upon all them that believe: for there is no difference: For all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God.

Or how about these verses about the second coming of Christ:

Matthew 24:37-41

But as the days of Noe were, so shall also the coming of the Son of man be. For as in the days that were before the flood they were eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage, until the day that Noe entered into the ark, And knew not until the flood came, and took them all away; so shall also the coming of the Son of man be. Then shall two be in the field; the one shall be taken, and the other left. Two women shall be grinding at the mill; the one shall be taken, and the other left.

It is very popular today to believe that those “taken” must be all the Christians, who will one day suddenly disappear from the world, having been taken up in a “rapture,” while those “left behind” are all the unbelievers. But in the days of Noah, it was the wicked that were “taken” away and the believers “left behind” on the earth. Surely:

Psalms 37:10,11

For yet a little while, and the wicked shall not be: yea, thou shalt diligently consider his place, and it shall not be. But the meek shall inherit the earth; and shall delight themselves in the abundance of peace.

Or how about what is in my opinion one of the most misunderstood verses of all:

2 Peter 3:9

The Lord is not slack concerning his promise, as some men count slackness; but is longsuffering to us-ward, not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance.

Many people think this is saying that God wants all men everywhere to be saved. But it doesn't say that. God is long-suffering **to us-ward**, i.e. to His people, not to everybody; not willing that any **of His people** should perish, but that all **of His people** should come to repentance, which they indeed surely will:

John 6:37

All that the Father giveth me shall come to me; and him that cometh to me I will in no wise cast out.

In all these examples, and many more, we see that it is so easy to misunderstand what the passages say. And many false ideas have been propagated on the back of such misinterpretations.

If I was composing Scripture (which, God forbid, I'm not), I would want to change such passages, in order to make them a lot clearer to the reader, so that it wouldn't be so easy for people to misunderstand.

But God never makes mistakes. The words of Scripture are exactly the words He wants to use. It almost seems as if He is wanting people to misunderstand. The Bible tells us the solemn truth that:

2 Thessalonians 2:11,12

And for this cause God shall send them strong delusion, that they should believe a lie: That they all might be damned who believed not the truth, but had pleasure in unrighteousness.

Christ Himself did something similar, in that He always spoke in parables to the general crowd, but only explained the meaning of them to His disciples afterwards:

Matthew 13:34

All these things spake Jesus unto the multitude in parables; and without a parable spake he not unto them.

Matthew 13:10,11

And the disciples came, and said unto him, Why speakest thou unto them in parables? He answered and said unto them, Because it is given unto you to know the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven, but to them it is not given.

He spoke in parables not to make His teachings more clear, but for exactly the opposite reason, to deliberately hide the true meaning from the crowd:

Matthew 13:13-15

Therefore speak I to them in parables: because they seeing see not; and hearing they hear not, neither do they understand. And in them is fulfilled the prophecy of Esaias, which saith, By hearing ye shall hear, and shall not understand; and seeing ye shall see, and shall not perceive: For this people's heart is waxed gross, and their ears are dull of hearing, and their eyes they have closed; lest at any time they should see with their eyes, and hear with their ears, and should understand with their heart, and should be converted, and I should heal them.

But why would He do such a thing? Well, if we were in the crowd listening to one of Christ's parables and it had no effect upon us, it didn't bother us and we just saw it as a nice story and nothing more, we would just go on our way, still in our sins, none the wiser. But if it affected us, and a desire to know more was planted in our hearts, what would we do? Surely, we would approach Christ and ask Him personally for a clearer explanation. That's exactly what He wants us to do. Those who approached Christ to ask questions, were in the group that gathered afterwards, called in the text "*the disciples*," to whom He would willingly explain everything. Similarly, today, we're taught:

Matthew 7:7,8

Ask, and it shall be given you; seek, and ye shall find; knock, and it shall be opened unto you: For every one that asketh receiveth; and he that seeketh findeth; and to him that knocketh it shall be opened.

The Lord wants us to genuinely seek Him, not just blindly follow men and movements, who easily trip up over the stumbling blocks God has put in the Bible and get it wrong. Rather, if we have a question, we should ask of Christ personally, for ourselves, and He will always show us the true way:

Jeremiah 29:13

And ye shall seek me, and find me, when ye shall search for me with all your heart.

John 14:6

.... I am the way, the truth, and the life

Many people have found hard sayings in the Lord's teaching, and given up on following Him:

John 6:60

Many therefore of his disciples, when they had heard this, said, This is an hard saying; who can hear it?

John 6:66

From that time many of his disciples went back, and walked no more with him.

2 Peter 3:16

As also in all his [Paul's] epistles, speaking in them of these things; in which are some things hard to be understood, which they that are unlearned and unstable wrest, as they do also the other scriptures, unto their own destruction.

The Lord has deliberately written His word in such a way that we have to think through it for ourselves. We should think through it prayerfully, being guided by the Holy Spirit, and He will always lead us into the truth. We should never just blindly accept whatever people or churches tell us, or whatever first comes into our heads.

1 John 2:27

But the anointing which ye have received of him abideth in you, and ye need not that any man teach you: but as the same anointing teacheth you of all things, and is truth, and is no lie, and even as it hath taught you, ye shall abide in him.

The Scripture is like a word fitly spoken:

Proverbs 25:11

A word fitly spoken is like apples of gold in pictures of silver.

And our job is to harvest the apples of gold.

The Quest for Certainty

Introduction

Westminster Shorter Catechism Q.2:

What rule hath God given to direct us how we may glorify and enjoy him?

A. The word of God (which is contained in the scriptures of the Old and New Testament)^a is the only rule to direct us how we may glorify and enjoy him.^b

^a 2 Timothy 3:16.

^b 1 John 1:3,4.

When Christ was set before Pontius Pilate, Pilate asked the question:

John 18:38
What is truth?

The Christian, who lives by faith, must answer “the Bible.” This book is his only source of truth. It contains the truth, the whole truth (or at least all that the Christian needs to know in this world) and nothing but the truth.

Westminster Confession of Faith 1:1:

I. ALTHOUGH the light of nature, and the works of creation and providence do so far manifest the goodness, wisdom, and power of God, as to leave men inexcusable^a; yet they are not sufficient to give that knowledge of God and of His will, which is necessary unto salvation^b. Therefore it pleased the Lord, at sundry times, and in divers manners, to reveal Himself, and to declare that His will unto His Church^c; and afterwards, for the better preserving and propagating of the truth, and for the more sure establishment and comfort of the Church against the corruption of the flesh, and the malice of Satan and of the world, to commit the same wholly unto writing^d: which maketh the Holy Scripture to be most necessary^e; those former ways of God’s revealing His will unto His people being now ceased^f.

^a Romans 2:14,15; Romans 1:19,20; Psalm 19:1-3; Romans 1:32 with 2:1.

^b I Corinthians 1:21; I Corinthians 2:13,14.

^c Hebrews 1:1.

^d Proverbs 22:19-21; Luke 1:3,4; Romans 15:4; Matthew 4:4,7,10; Isaiah 8:19,20.

^e 2 Timothy 3:15; 2 Peter 1:19.

^f Hebrews 1:1,2.

There are two very popular misconceptions in the church today, which we see corrected here. Firstly the idea that God still speaks to His people directly today and that therefore we don’t need a Bible; and secondly the idea that truth can never be found, everything is relative, so we can really believe what we like. Neither of these are true. In both cases, truth changes either depending on who has experienced the latest prophecy, or depending on whatever the individual wants it to be at the time. There must be one, and only one, absolute truth. And the Bible is the Christian’s only source of truth.

2 Peter 1:3,4

His [God’s] divine power hath given unto us all things that pertain unto life and godliness, through the knowledge of him that hath called us to glory and virtue: whereby are given unto us exceeding great and precious promises: that by these ye might be partakers of the divine nature, having escaped the corruption that is in the world through lust.

Every word of the Bible in the original languages, has been breathed out by God:

2 Timothy 3:16

All scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness: that the man of God may be perfect, throughly furnished unto all good works.

2 Peter 1:21

...the prophecy came not in old time by the will of man: but holy men of God spake as they were moved by the Holy Ghost.

If we bring something from outside of the Bible into the equation when searching for truth, there is always the problem that whatever comes in from outside of the Bible *may* be mixed with error. I have read many books, and heard many sermons that try to explain a passage of the Bible by use of outside sources. For example, in the Free Presbyterian Church of Scotland Magazine (January 2004), an article was printed on the parable of the wedding garment by W.K. Tweedie (a Free Church minister in the nineteenth century). He started the article by saying, "This parable cannot be understood unless we keep in view certain of the customs of the East." The rest of the article interpreted the Bible passage in the light of extra-biblical information on eastern wedding customs. How do we know the accuracy of these? Will not scholars change their views on what these eastern wedding customs were twenty years from now? There are therefore big problems with the use of *any* material other than that which is in the Bible itself, purely because we cannot vouch for the accuracy of it. However we *can* vouch for the accuracy of the Bible. We must only interpret Scripture with Scripture and nothing else:

Westminster Confession 1:9:

IX. The infallible rule of interpretation of Scripture is the Scripture itself: and therefore, when there is a question about the true and full sense of any Scripture (which is not manifold, but one), it must be searched and known by other places that speak more clearly^a.

^a 2 Peter 1:20,21; Acts 15:15,16.

But we still have a big problem. Not, I hasten to add, with God or with the Bible. We thoroughly agree that every word of the Bible is God-breathed, and is our only source of truth. That's not the issue. The big problem we have is with *language*. And this is the subject we have to deal with here.

The Need for Logical Analysis

Every time we read the Bible, before we can get to the truth, we have to analyse the text. In order to understand a passage properly, we must apply the rules of logic to it. We must convert every sentence in the Bible into its categorical form and analyse what can be deduced from the sentence by good and necessary consequence, and indeed what *cannot* be deduced from it by these means too. This is not a logic text book, so I am not going to go into these things here, but just to say that's not as easy as it sounds, and we, being stupid creatures, will often make mistakes.

Most professing Christians try to avoid this because it's too much like hard work. They just don't have the patience to do this, and so go off on their own, thinking they know better. They find another source of truth that their own tiny brains *can* understand. These sources can be many and varied: other men such as the pope, other literature such as the Watchtower magazine, or maybe they believe that the Holy Spirit can guide them directly without the use of the Bible. All of these are very common ideas, and used by countless numbers of professing Christians. But they are all blindly following an uninspired source. It is not real faith, which involves *the understanding of the truth*.

But while we can't approve these things, we still have the problem that logical analysis is an extremely difficult exercise for all of us. Sadly, logic has been missing from the state school curriculum for many years now. It would be good if it returned, and we had a nation of people who thought logically once more. But even if we had this, we all have different capacities to understand, and some people would understand more than others. All of us only have a limited capacity to understand anything.

But the Reformation gave the Bible into the hands of the ploughboy for him to understand *for himself*, to get away from him having to rely on others to tell him what the Scriptures meant. We are not to rely on doctors, scholars, priests or ministers to tell us what to believe. They will invariably lead us astray, for their own evil ends. But we are to have the Scriptures *for ourselves* so we may understand it *for ourselves*.

But we all have different capacities to understand. Some have been given five talents by God, and others only one. We should realise this. There is only one truth, and that is the truth that can be deduced from proper logical analysis of the propositions in the Bible. But all Christians have great difficulty performing this deduction process.

But, despite the fact that most people have not got the capacity to get to the bottom of a text for themselves, the fact remains that we still need proper logical analysis if we are to understand any passage of the Bible properly. It may be *very difficult* to get to the bottom of a passage of Scripture using logical analysis, but it is still *possible*. So far, so good.

The Problems with Language

But the problems grow. When we apply logical analysis to a passage of Scripture, we assume that the passage in question means exactly what it says, and all we have to do is logically analyse it, trying not to make mistakes along the way. However, this is not so. Many passages in the Bible do NOT mean what they say. We repeat: **Many passages in the Bible do NOT mean what they say**. This might seem a shocking thing to say to the average evangelical Christian, but it is true for the following reasons:

(a.) Firstly, we must realise that God breathed out the Scripture originally in Hebrew (Old Testament) and Greek (New Testament). (Other languages are present as well, in short passages, Aramaic, Chaldee etc., but it is mainly in Hebrew and Greek). So, if we want to understand God's meaning of a passage, we must always perform our logical analysis on the passage *in these original languages*. The problem with a translation from one language to another is that the translation itself automatically brings about some changes. Change is inevitable in any translation. It may be possible to directly translate nouns, as these words point to objects we can see and know about, but translation of other words such as prepositions, or dealing with the word order, grammar and syntax, all these present problems in translation that cannot be translated absolutely perfectly.

Just looking up two common words in "*Vine's Expository Dictionary of New Testament Words*," we find 34 Greek words for the English word "*take*" (plus 17 notes), and 39 for "*come*" (with 16 notes); each Greek word having its own nuance. Unless we learn every Hebrew and Greek word in the Bible, together with each word's exact nuance (which will not necessarily be identical to the translated English nuance), then we have not really got to the bottom of the meaning of the text.

Not only that, but how do we find out what these nuances are? We can try using Strong's Hebrew and Greek dictionaries, but we've just started to interpret the Bible using an outside source, which may or may not be correct. Strong's may be wrong. Your Hebrew or Greek teacher may be wrong. How can we know for sure, unless Hebrew or Greek is our mother tongue? We can't.

(b.) Secondly, we can't take everything in the Bible literally. Some of the Bible is poetry and should be taken as such. For example:

Isaiah 55:12

The trees of the field shall clap their hands.

This does not mean that trees will literally grow hands and clap them. It is "obviously" poetry, and should be read as such. But how do we *know* which passages are poetry and which aren't? In some texts we are told that we have a "psalm" or "song," so we can know we are dealing with poetry in those places, but in other passages we really can't tell. Most modern Bible versions change seamlessly from printing the text in prose to printing it in poetry. But how do the compilers of those version *know* which is which? We can't explain how we come to the conclusion that certain passages are poetry. It is not "obvious" at all. We go along the lines of thinking that the idea of trees growing hands and clapping is ridiculous, so we conclude that it must be poetic. But Christ dying on a cross to save His people from their sins is "ridiculous" to human reasoning, but it is nonetheless true. We can never use what we call "common sense" to analyse a passage of Scripture.

And what about parables? How far do we go in our interpretation of them? Christ often gives us the interpretation, but what about, for example, the parable of the unjust judge (Luke 18:1-8)? We can understand it to teach that God "*will avenge His own elect speedily*" (vv.7,8), but we can't extend the interpretation to teach that God is unjust, because we know from other passages of the Bible that that's not true. But unless we are told, how do we know how far to take a parable? We don't.

And how do we interpret allegorical language? Many people think that they can understand the book of Revelation, but in most cases they only interpret it to conveniently fit in with their already preconceived ideas about things to come. Can any of us really understand an allegory, unless the interpretation is also revealed in Scripture at the same time?

(c.) If the above problems about language seem overwhelming enough, this third problem is the biggest of all - *figures of speech*. In every passage we always need to work out whether a figure of speech is being used or not. There are many figures of speech, most of which do not affect the sense of the passage, but some do. Two of the most common of these are *ellipsis* (where something is deliberately missing from the sentence) or *hyperbole* (exaggeration for effect). These are used a lot in the Bible. For example, take the following verses:

Matthew 14:19

And he commanded the multitude to sit down on the grass, and took the five loaves, and the two fishes, and looking up to heaven, he blessed, and brake, and gave the loaves to his disciples, and the disciples to the multitude.

Matthew 15:36

And he took the seven loaves and the fishes, and gave thanks, and brake them, and gave to his disciples, and the disciples to the multitude.

In both these passages the Bible clearly says that Jesus “*gave... the disciples to the multitude.*” That is what the Bible says, so it must be true. But, that is “obviously” wrong. We “obviously” have an ellipsis here. It should read “*and the disciples gave the loaves to the multitude.*” (or *bread* might be a better word instead of *loaves*, because the loaves would have been multiplied by this point).

So which is right? Did Jesus give the disciples to the multitude, or did the disciples give the bread to the multitude? One must be right and the other wrong, but which one, and why? Is a figure of speech (in this case an ellipsis) being used here or not? How do we *know*? We really, seriously can't tell. Again, we go along the lines of thinking that it can't mean Christ gave the disciples because that would be ridiculous, and the disciples giving the bread would be the more “obvious, common sense” meaning, but we can't really *know* this for sure.

There is a book written by Ethelbert Bullinger called “*Figures of Speech in the Bible.*” It lists hundreds of different types of figures of speech, and gives Biblical examples to illustrate each one. It is in general a very useful book, but in some cases he sees a figure of speech where there isn't one, mostly in order to promote his preconceived premillennial dispensationalist views. So who is right? Are these examples figures of speech or not? How do we know whether a figure of speech is being used in a passage or not? The fact is, we don't.

The Impossibility of Bible Interpretation

Do you see the dilemma now? How can we know the nuances of the words of Scripture in the original languages, whether the text is poetry or not, or whether a figure of speech is being used or not? Or how to interpret a parable or allegorical passage?

We need to know all these things before even beginning to apply logic to a passage in order to get to the bottom of a Biblical text, and find out what it teaches.

Who is sufficient for these things? How can anybody get to the absolute truth? As we have seen, no-one is capable of doing this, for two reasons:

(1.) Most of us are just not clever enough to analyse a text properly, and those who try, easily make mistakes. This excludes nearly all of us from understanding the truth of a passage at all, although it is still theoretically possible to do so for those who persevere.

(2.) But, more than this, there are many passages where we have to guess the nuances of the original words, whether it is poetry, allegorical or whether a figure of speech is being used or not, and all this can affect the sense. And in all these we have to *guess*, because not one of us can *know* for sure, even the best logician in the world.

If we can't tell whether a passage is a figure of speech or poetry or not, then how can we know for sure whether, for example, the first three chapters of Genesis should be taken literally? Or the resurrection of Christ? Liberals would say that they shouldn't be taken literally, whereas Evangelicals would say that they should, but how do we *know*? We have

just concluded that ***no-one can know the truth***, even from the Bible alone. So are the liberals right?

No. We hasten to add that we are not becoming liberals at all by saying any of this. We fully accept that the Bible in the original languages is the Word of God, every word has been inspired by Him and providentially preserved through the ages - a fact that the liberal theologian would completely dismiss. What we are saying is that it is *language* that is the problem, not the Bible. We can't know the truth because of the difficulties of *language*.

The Answer

Should We Follow Men?

Sadly, to solve this problem, a vast majority of professing Christians end up following other men who, to them, at least *seem* to have a gift of understanding the truth. However, that's not necessarily so. We've just proved that *no-one* can know the truth. Many who end up in leadership positions in the church (or in any other walk of life for that matter), don't get into those positions for their intelligence or knowledge of the subject in hand at all. They get there for their *ability to impress other people* that they're right. A good hospital consultant doctor is not someone who has all the right answers. Rather, he is one who can make a decision (right or wrong) and stick to it, and is able to impress other people that his decision is right, rather than it necessarily being right absolutely. All people in leadership have this persuasive, almost hypnotic power. And the ordinary Christian finds it a lot easier to blindly follow someone like that, than to even try to think for themselves. These leaders don't have to be right, but they just have to give the *impression* they are right to people who can be easily persuaded of it.

As an example, we once heard a good Bible teacher expounding 1 Peter 2:8:

1 Peter 2:8

And a stone of stumbling, and a rock of offence, even to them which stumble at the word, being disobedient: whereunto also they were appointed.

He explained that "the Greek text supports the idea that..." these people were appointed to salvation, but they chose to reject it. This interpretation is completely the opposite of what the passage actually says. Firstly, notice that he referred to the Greek. He knows very well that hardly any of the congregation would understand Greek, neither would they check up for themselves; and he also knows very well that the fact of his mentioning that he knew the Greek would impress most of them how scholarly he was. So that's why he did it. Also, he must have read John Calvin's commentary on the passage, because Calvin states that this interpretation (that they were appointed to salvation) is possible, but then immediately says that he rejects it, and gives good reasons why, Calvin then going on to explain the true interpretation of the text. Of course the speaker never mentions any of this, but simply tries to impress his hearers of his own point of view.

Other people can be helpful in our search for truth, but they are not to be blindly followed.

Should We Follow the Holy Spirit?

Look at Christ's teaching about the parables:

Mark 4:11,12

And he said unto them, Unto you it is given to know the mystery of the kingdom of God: but unto them that are without, all these things are done in parables: that seeing they may see, and not perceive; and hearing they may hear, and not understand; lest at any time they should be converted, and their sins should be forgiven them.

Christ Himself said that He deliberately taught in parables so that those outside the church would **not** understand. So we shouldn't be surprised that men can't fully interpret Scripture themselves.

Having said that, the Pharisees, who were unregenerate men, could at least find out something from a parable:

Matthew 21:45

And when the chief priests and Pharisees had heard his parables, they perceived that he spake of them.

So they did know something. The parable didn't mean nothing to them.

But note that unto believers it is given to know the mystery of the kingdom of God. How can this be? Of course as Evangelicals we know the answer: the Holy Spirit interprets the Scripture for the believer.

Westminster Confession of Faith 1:10:

X. The supreme judge by which all controversies of religion are to be determined, and all decrees of councils, opinions of ancient writers, doctrines of men, and private spirits, are to be examined and in whose sentence we are to rest; can be no other but the Holy Spirit speaking in the Scripture^a.

^a Matthew 22:29,31; Ephesians 2:20 with Acts 28:25.

Christ has given us two witnesses:

John 15:26,27

But when the Comforter is come, whom I will send unto you from the Father, even the Spirit of truth, which proceedeth from the Father, he shall testify of me: and ye also shall bear witness, because ye have been with me from the beginning.

The true believer has the Holy Spirit *and* the Scriptures (the latter being the witness of the apostles and prophets). The world cannot receive the Holy Spirit:

John 14:17

Even the Spirit of truth; whom the world cannot receive, because it seeth him not, neither knoweth him: but ye know him; for he dwelleth with you, and shall be in you.

So the unbeliever only has Scripture, out of which he can find some truth, but he is bound to make mistakes, because even if he was the greatest logician in the world, he can't distinguish between a piece of prose (whereby he can use logical analysis) or poetry or

allegory or a figure of speech, and he certainly can't get to the bottom of a parable, although he can know something about it - particularly the fact that it condemns him. Also, every time a true believer trusts in himself to interpret Scripture, rather than relying on the Holy Spirit, he too will assuredly go wrong.

But, can we not see another problem here? With Scripture not being able to furnish us with the answers on its own, and with the Holy Spirit being needed to determine the interpretation of Scripture for sure, do we not become no different from all those who say they rely on (what they consider to be) the Holy Spirit alone as their guide?

This produces problems. I used to know someone who was utterly convinced through reading the Scriptures that the Holy Spirit has taught her that there is no such place as hell-fire. I am thoroughly convinced, from the Holy Spirit interpreting the same Scriptures, that she is completely wrong, but how do I convince her of this? We both claim the Holy Spirit has taught us the truth through reading the Scriptures. Who is right? How do we *know*?

Only the Lord knows. We can never get to the bottom of it. That is a humbling message, isn't it? This doesn't mean that we shouldn't try to know truth, because we are sanctified by the truth:

John 17:17
Sanctify them through thy truth: thy word is truth.

So knowing truth is very important to our sanctification. All any of us can do is stick to, and live by, what we believe to be the truth to the best of our understanding at the time, knowing that this will be constantly changing over the years as we learn more from the Scriptures.

There is only one truth, and it is found in the Bible. But our condition is such that we are never going to arrive at a position where we can honestly say that we know as much truth as we need to know, without it still being mixed with a lot of error. This will result in us always having disagreements with other fellow professing believers who are all at different stages in their Christian lives. A lot of churches believe that we should never have disagreements amongst the members of the congregation and that we should always put on a united front as a church, but we have here proved that we can't avoid disagreements. So we should never pretend that we can. This is normal.

We will all come to some knowledge of the truth from our reading the Bible, we will not be completely ignorant. And we will be growing in that knowledge, the more we read the Bible and are led by the Spirit into the truth. We will over time change our views on things, as we align our beliefs with what we are learning from Scripture. And this is the point. All of us only ever have the knowledge of some truth but it is mixed with a lot of error. And it changes over the years.

We shouldn't be arrogant enough to think we have arrived anywhere on this earth. No church is our home here. We can always know some truth from the Bible. There is no other source of truth, after all. But we shouldn't be arrogant enough to think that any of us are not still full of error. Since Adam's fall, we're all in bondage to decay and death because of our sin. We're born knowing nothing, and having to learn everything we need in this world as we grow up. But in our old age, we forget things and decay until we know nothing again. Do you want to learn humility? Here it is.

Genesis 3:19

....dust thou art, and unto dust shalt thou return.

But if we know Christ for ourselves, we will continue learning of Him and loving Him to all eternity. This is the one thing needful.

1 Corinthians 8:2

....if any man think that he knoweth any thing, he knoweth nothing yet as he ought to know.

Galatians 6:3

For if a man think himself to be something, when he is nothing, he deceiveth himself.

The Apocrypha

If we have ever picked up a Bible more than 300 years old, we will immediately notice that, more often than not, it contains the Apocrypha, a collection of 14 books usually situated between the Old and New Testaments. The question must therefore be asked: Why are these books not in our Bibles today? Many enemies of the Bible, including muslims and atheists, notice that at the Protestant Reformation these books were condemned as not being canonical, and consequently these enemies cast aspersions over the validity of the text of the whole Bible, suggesting that if men can add or remove some of it, then it must therefore all be of human origin (although the Koran has also suffered from attempts to change the text and add “satanic verses” into it).

Many modern day Protestants are also attempting to defend these 14 books and trying to suggest that they should be included again in modern Bibles. Some of the allegations are as follows:

- (1.) Christ used the Septuagint Greek Bible, which would have contained the Apocrypha.
- (2.) New Testament writers quote over 400 times from the Apocrypha.
- (3.) Jerome, who translated the Bible into Latin, had doubts about the Apocrypha only because he was influenced by Jews.
- (4.) The council of Carthage canonised the Apocrypha with the other Scriptures.
- (5.) Condemning the Apocrypha was a ploy by the seventeenth century Puritans.
- (6.) Most Bibles of Protestants nearly always contained the Apocrypha up until as recently as the revision led by the higher critical movement in the 1880's.
- (7.) Parts of the Apocrypha were found in Hebrew in the Dead Sea Scrolls, therefore the Apocrypha was not originally of Greek origin.

With all these attempts to defend the Apocrypha, we therefore need to know why we don't believe it to be the inspired Word of God, so that we may have confidence in the true Scriptures, which are:

2 Timothy 3:16,17

...given by inspiration of God, and profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness: that the man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works.

The “*Apocrypha*” as a name was coined by Jerome in the fifth century, from the Latin meaning “*hidden writings*.” It must be asked here: Why would God “hide” his writings away? Of course the answer is that He didn’t, and never has done. It referred in Jerome’s day to the fourteen books that had become included in many Bibles by that time, but which were not in the original Hebrew text that the Jews considered to be canonical. Rather, they were Greek writings that were produced in the period between the close of the Old Testament and the beginning of the New. They became widely known after being included in the Greek translation of the Old Testament known as the Septuagint, which was made during this period in Alexandria.

It is commonly thought that the Apocrypha contains the following 14 books:

1. The First Book of Esdras
2. The Second Book of Esdras
3. Tobit
4. Judith
5. The Rest of the Chapters of the Book of Esther
6. The Wisdom of Solomon
7. Ecclesiasticus or the Wisdom of Jesus Son of Sirach
8. Baruch (incl. Letter of Jeremiah as chapter 6)
9. The Song of the Three Children
10. Daniel and Susanna
11. Daniel, Bel, and the Dragon
12. The Prayer of Manasseh
13. The First Book of the Maccabees
14. The Second Book of the Maccabees

But this list is not definitive at all, as different churches have their different ideas:

The Roman Catholic church accepted all the above as canonical, except First and Second Esdras and the Prayer of Manasseh, although these were still printed as an appendix in Latin Vulgate Bibles.

The Greek Orthodox church accepted all of the above list as canonical except Second Esdras, but they also included Psalm 151 and the Third Book of the Maccabees. The Fourth Book of the Maccabees was included in an appendix.

The Russian Orthodox church accepted all of the above list as canonical, as well as Psalm 151 and the Third Book of the Maccabees.

So we see that the commonly accepted list is not a cut and dried affair at all, as extra books are included or excluded depending on which church one follows. This is in sharp contrast to the acceptance of all the other books in the Old Testament and all the books in the New Testament, all 66 books of which are agreed today (in the Lord’s providence) in churches right across the “Christian” world. Some individuals in history have questioned some of the New Testament books, such as Origen questioning James and Jude, Cyril omitting the Revelation and Martin Luther questioning the Epistle of James. However, in the main, there has been total agreement amongst churches on these 66 books.

However, history should not be our guide. As we believe the Bible to be our absolute authority in all things, we can turn only there for our answer. And it is found in Romans 3:1,2:

Romans 3:1,2

What advantage then hath the Jew? or what profit is there of circumcision? Much every way: chiefly, because that unto them were committed the oracles of God.

This passage alone proves beyond doubt that, up to the time of Paul's writing, the Jews were the keepers of the oracles of God. God in His providence kept His Word pure, through them, in the Hebrew text. This was written long before the Greek Apocrypha, which all the Jews rejected. They only held what are the 39 books of our Old Testament to be the sacred canonical writings directly inspired of God.

Since Paul's day, the Jews' house is left to them desolate (Matthew 23:38) and the Christians have since that time been the keepers of the oracles (now to include 27 books of the New Testament as well), which God has preserved throughout the ages. The church is now "*the pillar and ground of the truth*":

1 Timothy 3:15

But if I tarry long, that thou mayest know how thou oughtest to behave thyself in the house of God, which is the church of the living God, the pillar and ground of the truth.

This argument should therefore end here.

However, let's now come to the above criticisms of our position, and make some more comments on them:

(1.) Christ used the Septuagint Greek Bible, which would have contained the Apocrypha.

Christ used the Bible in the common tongue of the day, which was Greek. The most common translation available at the time was the Septuagint. All this proves to us is that we have authority to translate the Scriptures into the language of the people, seeing as Christ approved of it. Nowhere does Christ actually quote from the Apocrypha. Just because a particular edition of the Bible contains rubbish in it (which it ought not to do), as long as you avoid the rubbish, it is perfectly all right to use.

(2.) New Testament writers quote over 400 times from the Apocrypha.

This allegation is just not true. I took the 1560 edition of the Geneva Bible and counted the number of marginal references in the Apocrypha to any passages in the New Testament. (To be honest, I didn't do this the other way around and go through the New Testament looking for references to passages in the Apocrypha. I just assumed that references would point both ways). I found 105, a lot less than "over 400." I then discovered that, of these, only three could seriously be considered to have any similarity to a New Testament passage. All of these were in 2 Esdras:

2 Esdras 1:30

I gathered you together as a hen gathereth her chickens under her wings; but now what shall I do unto you? I will cast you out from my sight.

cf. Matthew 23:37

O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, thou that killest the prophets, and stonest them which are sent unto thee, how often would I have gathered thy children together, even as a hen gathereth her chickens under her wings, and ye would not.

2 Esdras 2:42

I Esdras saw upon mount Sion a great people whom I could not number, and they all praised the Lord with songs.

cf. Revelation 7:9

After this I beheld, and, lo, a great multitude, which no man could number, of all nations, and kindreds, and people, and tongues, stood before the throne, and before the Lamb, clothed with white robes, and palms in their hands.

2 Esdras 8:3

There be many created, but few shall be saved.

cf. Matthew 20:16

So the last shall be first, and the first last: for many be called, but few chosen.

Most scholars put the date of writing of 2 Esdras after the destruction of the Temple in AD 70, in other words 2 Esdras was written AFTER the New Testament, not before. Hence, the author of 2 Esdras copies from the New Testament, not the other way around.

(3.) Jerome, who translated the Bible into Latin, had doubts about the Apocrypha only because he was influenced by Jews.

Good. I am glad he was influenced by Jews, because the Bible says that the Jews were the “keepers of the oracles of God” until New Testament times (Romans 3:2). Jerome was not so influenced by them that he abandoned the New Testament.

(4.) The council of Carthage canonised the Apocrypha with the other scriptures.

What the councils of men do is neither here nor there. The Bible is our only authority. The council of Carthage was in AD 397. One of the things that it decreed was exactly what the church believed the canonical text of Scripture to be. The New Testament was correctly decreed to be the 27 books we have today. The fact that it took such a long time for men to agree on these books does not prove that the church came before the Bible, as the Roman Catholics would teach, rather it merely shows how difficult men find it to agree on anything. Scripture establishes itself as God’s Word **at the point of writing**, not when or whether men agree on it or not. In any case, the Council of Carthage got it wrong when at the same time it adopted the Septuagint (including the Apocrypha) as the Old Testament canon. The Septuagint was but a Greek translation from the original Hebrew plus the Greek Apocryphal texts (which were written at a later date). As has already been mentioned, the Hebrew text is the true canonical text of the Old Testament, which never had the Apocrypha in it. The first seven Ecumenical Councils (of which this one in Carthage was one) are treated by Eastern Orthodox churches as their ultimate authority, above Scripture itself. Similarly the Roman Catholic church invests its ultimate authority in the pope. Neither is necessarily correct or to be relied upon. Scripture alone is our guide.

(5.) *Condemning the Apocrypha was a ploy by the seventeenth century Puritans.*

The Puritans, and indeed all of the Reformers, were concerned about the purity of the church. This reformation in the church happened over time. Among other things, they got rid of papal authority, they got rid of the trappings of popery such as vestments, statues, organs etc. and they purified God's Word. The first thing they did with regards God's Word was to collect out of the Old Testament all the Apocryphal writings and put them together in a separate place in the Bible between the two Testaments. This idea was not known before the Reformation, as all Latin Bibles for 1000 years before then, had them dispersed into their chronological place, mixed in amongst the rest of the Old Testament books. Along with the gathering out of these writings, the Reformers printed a warning in their Bibles that these books were not canonical, as a preface to them.

Two examples will suffice, firstly from the first complete English Bible ever printed, the Matthews Bible (1536):

"In consideration that the books before [i.e. our Old Testament] are found in the Hebrew tongue, received of all men; and that the other following, which are called Apocrypha (because they were wont to be read, not openly and in common, but as it were in secret and apart) are neither found in the Hebrew nor in the Chaldee; in which tongue they have not of long been written (in less than it were haply the book of Sapience) whereupon it were now very hard to repay and amend them: And that also they are not received, or taken as legitimate and lawful, as well of the Hebrews as well of the whole church, as St. Jerome sheweth: we have separated them and let them aside, that they may the better be known, to the intent that men may know of which books which ought to be received, and of which not. For the said St. Jerome, speaking of the book of Judith (which is Apocrypha) sayeth that the authority thereof is not esteemed worthy and sufficient to confirm and stablish the things that light in disputation. And generally of all the books called Apocrypha, he sayeth that men may read them to the edifying of the people, but not to confirm and strengthen the doctrine of the church. I leave out here the law (as they call it) of Canon c. Sancta Romana. iv. divine, where he sheweth his judgment. Likewise the Gloss of c. Canons, cvi, divine, which sayeth that men read them, but not in general; as though he should say that generally and thoroughly they are not allowed. And not without a cause; for that they have been corrupted and falsified in many places, it appeareth sufficiently by Eusebius in his book called Historia Ecclesiastica; which thing is easy to be known nowadays in certain points, namely in the books of the Maccabees, whose second book St Hiero confesseth that he found not in the Hebrew, by the means whereof it is become unto us the more suspect and the less received. In like manner is it of the third and fourth books of Esdras [N.B. Our books of Ezra and Nehemiah were known as I Esdras and II Esdras, whereas the Apocrypha books we know as I Esdras and II Esdras were known as III Esdras and IV Esdras], which St Jerome protesteth that he would not have them translated, esteeming them for dreams; whereas Josephus yet in his book of his Antiquities, declareth the sum of the matter after the manner of a story, as well of the book of Maccabees as of the third of Esdras; although he esteem the books compiled from the reign of king Artaxerxes but this time to be Apocrypha. Wherefore then, when thou wilt maintain anything for certain, rendering a reason of thy faith, take heed to proceed therein by the living and pithy Scriptures, following St Peter which sayeth, He that speaketh, let him speak as though he spake the Word of God. He sayeth the Word of God, as a thing most true and certain, opened by the prophets and apostles, inspired with the Holy Ghost; of whom we have witness more clear than the day.

Lawyers having great desire to confirm and stablish their opinions by the law of man, say that it is shame to speak without law; how much more fear and dread then ought he to have that sayeth he is a Christian, the which holdeth not himself, or teacheth not in the laws of the living God, but in men's inventions, judging of all things according to them, and leaning to an uncertain imagination and fantasy? Let us therefore that are builded on the foundation of the holy prophets and apostles, and on the head cornerstone (on which they themselves were founded, and which they preached, that is Jesus Christ the sure stone) leave the things that are uncertain to follow the certain; holding us and resting us in them, and fastening our anchor there, as in a sure place. For our Christian faith consisteth not in doubtful things, but in plain and most certain assurance, and in most true persuasion, taken and confirmed by infallible desire. In which God grant us to walk perpetually, to the intent that according to it (fulfilling His holy will in us, and setting aside all inventions contrary unto Him), we may live to His honour, and to the edifying of His church. So be it."

Then the Geneva Bible (1560):

"These books that follow in order after the Prophets unto the New Testament, are called Apocrypha, that is books which were not received by a common consent to be read and expounded publicly in the church, neither yet served to prove any point of Christian religion, save inasmuch as they had the consent of the other Scriptures called Canonical to confirm the same, or rather whereon they were grounded; but as books proceeding from godly men, were received to be read for the advancement and furtherance of the knowledge of the history, and for the instruction of godly manners: which books declare that at all times God had an especial care of His church and left them not utterly destitute of teachers and means to confirm them in the hope of the promised Messiah, and also witness that those calamities that God sent to His church were according to His providence, who had both so threatened by His prophets, and so brought it to pass for the destruction of their enemies, and for the trial of His children."

Note also that the Geneva Bible, which contains profuse notes in the canonical material, does not contain any notes at all in the Apocrypha, only references. However, it does have the occasional note indicating where the text clearly teaches falsehood. These prove the Apocrypha's unworthiness to be counted as canonical Scripture. For example:

Geneva Bible footnote to II Maccabees 12:44 [on prayer for the dead]:

"From this verse to the end of the chapter the Greek text is corrupt, so that no good sense, much less certain doctrine can be gathered thereby. Also it is evident that this place was not written by the Holy Ghost, both because it dissenteth for the rest of the holy Scriptures, and also the author of this book acknowledging his own infirmity, desireth pardon, if he have not attained to that he should. And it seemeth that this Jason the Cyrenean, out of whom he took this abridgement, is Joseph Ben Gurion, who hath written in Hebrew five books of these matters, and in treating this place, makes no mention of this prayer for the dead (lib. 3, chap. 19), for it is contrary to the custom of the Jews, even to this day, to pray for the dead. And though Judas had so done, yet this particular example is not sufficient to establish a doctrine no more than Zipporah's was to prove that women might minister the sacraments (Exod. 4:25), or the example of Razis that one might kill himself, whom this author so much commendeth (II Macc. 14:41)"

N.B. There is a footnote in the normally footnote-free Matthews Bible at this point as well.

Geneva Bible footnote to II Maccabees 14:41 [on suicide]:

“As this private example ought not to be followed of the godly, because it is contrary to the word of God, although the author seems here to approve it; so that place as touching prayer (12:44), though Judas had appointed it, yet were it not sufficient to prove a doctrine, because it is only a particular example.”

It must be noted that the original King James Bible (1611) had no such warning about the Apocrypha in it at all.

Later on, Geneva Bibles from 1599 onwards and King James Bibles from 1625 onwards started being produced without the Apocrypha altogether. So we note the progression. First the Apocryphal books were gathered together with a note stating that they were not canonical, and later they were omitted altogether.

(6.) The Bible of Protestants nearly always contained the Apocrypha up until as recently as the revision led by the higher critical movement in 1885.

In 1831 the Trinitarian Bible Society was formed because the British and Foreign Bible Society had passed a motion in 1813 stating that to avoid unnecessary offence in Lutheran and Roman Catholic countries, they would distribute Bibles with the Apocrypha in them in those places (previously they had not done this).

So long before the higher critics became influential in the 1880's, Bibles had been purified of all material that was not inspired, and for a few generations at least, a pure Word was being published again. Since the 1880's, the higher critics have done their damage. All the modern translations of the Bible now produced are based on their erroneous modern text. If ever there was another Reformation, what do you think one of the first priorities of the new Reformers would be? Of course it would be to purify the Word of Life again, and get rid of all the erroneous translations and either distribute older translations based on the correct received text again, or indeed make new translations from the same.

(7.) Parts of the Apocrypha were found in Hebrew in the Dead Sea Scrolls, so they were not originally of Greek origin.

The fact that a strange sect by the Dead Sea had some copies of the Apocrypha in their own language hidden away somewhere means nothing. It does not imply that they were in Hebrew first, they could have been translations from the original Greek. Much less does it imply that the Apocrypha is canonical, because God would not have hidden His Word away for centuries in such a sect and nowhere else.

So from all this, we can conclude that the Apocrypha is not the Word of God, and should not be printed with our Bibles. Today, we have the wonderful gift of having the whole, pure Word of God (with nothing added and nothing taken away) in a language we can understand - something that not many generations in past times have ever had. Let us not go back to the Dark Ages again where the Word is corrupted, but let it be our life, and let us revere it with all the authority that it has, and love it with all our heart.

