Interpreting Problem Passages in the New Testament

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Introduction

1. Every problem passage in the Bible conforms to the divine purpose for the Scriptures (2 Tim. 3:16–17).
   a) All Scripture is inspired (God-breathed) for our spiritual profit.
   b) This profit comes from *"doctrine, reproof, correction, instruction in righteousness."* It is a process designed to teach, correct, and guide to obedience to what we have learned.
   c) The end result is to attain to the goal, *"That the man* [or woman] *of God may be complete* [mature]*, thoroughly equipped for every good work."* The end goal is always a transformed life, conformed to the character of the Lord Jesus Christ (Rom. 8:29; 12:1–2).
2. In Philippians 3:12–16, Paul declares that he was still learning and growing, and that mature believers will still differ on scriptural issues. He assures us that, in time, "God will reveal even this to you."

   Point: When dealing with another believer who differs, remember that you also once lacked understanding. Be kind to your former self!

3. The entire inspired Word of God is designed to reveal the incarnate Living Word—Jesus Christ. The two are always consistent, but both can be difficult to understand at times.
4. Every believer has problems with certain texts. All texts are a problem to someone at some time or another. Peter tells us that even the prophets and apostles wrestled with certain passages of Scripture (1 Pet. 1:10–12; 2 Pet. 3:16–17).
5. Our goal is not to resolve every problem text, but rather to establish some guidelines for the Bible student to apply to problem passages.
6. On approaching any text, certain assumptions must be kept in mind:
   a) All truth must be **coherent**. It is intended to be understood.
   b) All truth must be **consistent**. It cannot be self-contradictory.
   c) All truth must **correlate** to life as we know it. This is the concept of Natural Law, popularized by Thomas Aquinas. Our Founding Fathers incorporated this idea in the Declaration of Independence in the phrase, *"The laws of nature and of nature's God."*
7. Academic training and credentials are no guarantee of accurate interpretation. History shows us that the greatest minds will tend to err in certain areas of knowledge.
8. We all come to the text with certain presuppositions, gained either from life or training, that need to be constantly challenged and corrected. Every interpretation should:
   a) Honor and glorify the Lord Jesus Christ.
   b) Align with the rest of Scripture.
   c) Be edifying to the saints.

Some Simple Rules for Problem Texts

1. Every text, in its most minute detail, is inspired and infallible, **in the original manuscript** We must always deal with variants in the manuscripts that we have available. These are usually very minor but must be considered and weighed against the rest of the Scriptures.

2. Every problem text must conform to the clear and simple passages of Scripture. In essence, God designed His written Word to interpret itself.
3. All truth must conform to certain fundamental principles, as presented in number 6 above.
4. The root cause of problem texts is not in the content, but rather in our misunderstanding of the meaning of the text. We must be humble, keep an open mind, and pray for the guidance of the Holy Spirit.
5. Every obscure or problem text should be approached with two things in mind:
   a) The meaning of the text cannot contradict the clear and simple statements of other passages of Scripture.
   b) Proper attention must be given to proven rules of biblical hermeneutics and exegesis that consider history, culture, and language.
6. Understanding a text places on the Bible student accountability to live by the text. A pastor who says he understands every passage in the Bible inevitably must be asked, how well have you applied them all to life?
7. Paul made it clear that he was continuing to learn and grow and intended to do so until the end of this life (Phil. 3:12–14).

Principle
Never permit your confusion about a problem text make you doubt what you know from the clear statements of Scripture. Trust that with growth and learning you will gradually resolve the meaning of the passage.

"Therefore let us, as many as are mature, have this mind; and if in anything you think otherwise, God will reveal even this to you. Nevertheless, to the degree that we have already attained, let us walk by the same rule, let us be of the same mind." (Phil. 3:15–16).

I. THE HARD SAYING OF JESUS

1. Why are there "Hard Sayings" in the Bible? (John 6)

"Therefore many of His disciples, when they heard this, said, This is a hard saying; who can understand it?" John 6:60

a) After feeding the 5,000, the people followed Jesus hoping to receive more bread (vv. 22–26).
b) Jesus rebuked them and told them they should seek the food that gives eternal life, which was to believe in Him (vv. 27–29).
c) He then identifies Himself as the true manna from Heaven, who gives eternal life to those who believe in Him (vv. 30–40).
d) The word "believe" occurs five times from vv. 29–47. In using the figures of eating and drinking as analogous to faith, Jesus is following Old Testament example (Isa. 55:1–3).
e) The Jewish leaders took the figure literally, leading Jesus to emphasize the analogy of eating His flesh and drinking His blood even further (vv. 52–58).

Three Results of Jesus' Hard Saying:

1. It gave His enemies cause to harden their hearts even more (the same effect found in Matt. 13:11–17).
2. It weeded out "fair weather" disciples, who lacked genuine commitment (v. 66). There is a warning here for all of us!
3. It provided Peter and others an opportunity to declare their devotion and dedication, because of what they had already understood (vv. 67–69).

Principle

Every difficult passage, as well as trying times in life, are a test of our genuine faith and dedication to follow our Lord, even when we do not understand His word or His dealings with us.

Jesus fully explained the meaning of His metaphor when He instituted the Lord's Supper (Matt. 26:22–29; Mark 14:22–25; Luke 22:17–20; 1 Cor. 11:23–26). Any disciples who did not get the meaning in John 6 may have understood it by then, proving Jesus' statement, *"If anyone wills to do His will, he shall know concerning the doctrine …"* (John 7:17).

We ought not to avoid hard sayings but rather let them drive us to greater prayer and diligent study, knowing they will all make sense in due time.

2. Parables Expose the Problem in Problem Passages (Matthew 13)

We find that Jesus' parables often have the same effect as His metaphor of eating His flesh and drinking His blood in John 6. Even if we are not among those with hardened hearts, or the disciples who walked away, we often "miss the mark" when it comes to our grasp of what the Word is teaching.

The Parable of the Sower (Matthew 13:1–9)

Although we call this the parable of the Sower, we would do well to consider it also as the parable of the soils.

This is a story that anyone living in that time would understand, on the surface. The Sower scatters seed over a field, and the seeds fall on soil of varying conditions. Some of the field has been beaten down by people cutting across, other portions are rocky, thorny, or what the Sower desires, good soil.

The first key to understanding Jesus' point is found in His closing words, *"He who has ears to hear, let him hear!"* (v. 9). Why some do have ears to hear, while others do not, is explained in vv. 10–17. Faith and endurance are always the key to learning.

False interpretation: This parable is designed to show who is truly saved and who is not. The debate on this issue is never ending!

The explanation (vv. 18–23): Take note that Jesus' explanation is based on the fact that the disciples have "ears to hear" (vv. 16–17).

In His explanation, Jesus likens the seed to the Word of God, and the soils to various conditions of heart in those who hear. We can say that wayside ground represents hardened hearts, stony ground shallow hearts, thorny ground is the double–minded heart, and the good soil is the fruit–bearing soul. So far so good.

Two primary interpretations

1. Only the good fruit-bearing soil represents the believer.
2. The wayside soil is the unbeliever, and the other soils represent those who receive the word, with varying results.

I have heard these two positions argued endlessly both by pastors and students and have (I hate to admit) joined in the argument. I would suggest that neither of these positions is what Jesus wanted us to get out of the parable.

Let's go back to Paul's criteria for every passage of Scripture in 2 Timothy 3:16–17.

1. This parable is teaching us a doctrine.
2. The immediate purpose of the doctrine is to rebuke us.
3. The rebuke should lead to correction of things in our Christian life.
4. This parable should give us instruction on how to live righteously.
5. If we both understand and apply the truth revealed, we will become complete/mature, and ready for every good work God has for us.

Question: If we hold to either of the two major interpretations given above, how well do they fulfill the purpose that Paul sets before us? If you have finally convinced a Christian friend that all but the wayside soil represent believers, how has that accomplished the five-fold goal stated above? How has it changed your life?

The Key: In v. 9, the word *"hear"* is a command, that compels us not to evaluate others, but to apply the lesson of the parable to ourselves!

Solution: How much of a difference would it make if we simply asked a couple of questions of ourselves?

1. Which kind of soil represents my soul? If we are honest, we will have to confess that there have been times when we have been each kind at different points in our lives. Where are we now?
2. Which level of production, fruit bearing, do I intend to achieve? Am I content with 30%? Or is 60% above average, and I'll settle for it? Or do I truly want to be 100%, if even for moments of time in my life?

I think we can all see that this is a much more effective understanding of the parable, and one that proves that we truly "have ears to hear."

Point: Convincing another believer that I am right about the text is not the chief goal of God's word. It is for the Lord to speak to me, and to draw me nearer to His plan and purpose for my life. Once we have understood, and applied, God's Word to our lives, then we can be

useful in helping to instruct others, but with *"meekness and fear* [reverence]; *having a good conscience"* (1 Pet. 3:15–16), so that our lives are increasingly reflecting the glory of the grace and truth of the Lord Jesus Christ (John 1:18).

One last point worth making: In v. 19 of Matthew 13, Jesus says, *"If anyone hears the word of the kingdom, and does not understand it …"* The verb tenses for hearing and understanding are both present, active, participles. This speaks of continuous, volitional action that has become a characteristic of one's life. I would suggest that there is great danger in attending Bible class often but failing to apply what we hear to our lives. In that case, even what we have will be taken from us, as Jesus said in verse 12.

3. Will Some Believers Be Cast into Outer Darkness?

"But the sons of the kingdom will be cast out into outer darkness.
There will be weeping and gnashing of teeth." Matthew 8:12

False interpretation: Only the most spiritual and productive believers (i.e., the 30% to 100% fruitful field above) will be allowed close contact with the Lord. Those who were not really "with it" spiritually, that is, not faithful and productive—though still saved—will be cast into outer darkness.

A few years ago, a book hit the bookshelves in Christian bookstores entitled *The Outer Darkness."* The gist of the book was that many believers who were not completely faithful would inhabit a region called "outer darkness." This teaching led many astray and probably led many to lose hope. This is not what the passage is teaching, as we shall see.

The context behind the text

The story related is of the Roman centurion, who seeks out Jesus to heal his servant. When Jesus agrees to come, the centurion says in effect, "I know Your authority. All you have to do is speak the word, and my servant will be healed." Jesus responds with the key words, *"I have not found such great faith, not even in Israel"* (v. 10).

The contrast is between a believing Gentile versus unbelieving Jews. By the way, Jesus only *"marveled"* twice in the Gospels. The first is here, with the centurion (see also Luke 7:9) and the second is at the unbelief of His own people (Mark 6:6).

Some interpretive keys

1. The phrase *"outer darkness"* is used only by Matthew—here, and in 22:13 of the man without a wedding garment, and 25:30 of the unprofitable servant.
2. Alfred Edersheim, in his monumental work, *The Life and Times of Jesus the Messiah,* shows that at the time of Jesus, the Rabbi's used "outer darkness" as a synonym for Gehenna, or the Lake of Fire.
3. Furthermore, he shows that the phrase *"sons of the kingdom,"* in this context, is how the Pharisees referred to themselves. In Matthew 13:38, Jesus, speaking to the disciples, uses *"sons of the kingdom"* to refer to believers.

Note: One of the most fundamental rules of interpretation is this; the meaning of a word or phrase is determined by its use in the context. The error of the "outer darkness" teaching is the result of assuming that because Jesus uses "sons of the kingdom" to refer to believers in Matthew 13:38 (when He is addressing disciples), it means that the *"sons of the kingdom"* in Matthew 8:12 (where He is rebuking unbelieving Jews, who assumed they were "sons" by birth), also refers to believers.

4. Jesus' point is simple: believing Gentiles will enter into the kingdom promised to the Jews, while unbelieving Jews will be cast out.

What we know

1. Jesus is Light, in Him is no darkness at all (John 1:5; 8:12; 1 John 1:5).
2. All who believe in Him are "transferred out of the kingdom of darkness into His kingdom of light" (Col. 1:13).
3. All believers share alike in the inheritance of light (Gal. 3:26–29; Eph. 2:4–10; Col. 1:12–15).
4. Believers are called *"sons of light and sons of the day. We are not of the night nor of darkness."* (1 Thess 5:5).
5. Jesus dwells in the light, and our eternal home is with Him (1 Tim. 6:16; John 14:6).
6. All who believe in Him will be made like Him forever (Rom. 8:29; 1 John 3:2).

Some final considerations

1. Each of the Gospels were written with a different audience in mind:
   a) Matthew wrote to the Jews. His theme is Jesus the King/Messiah.
   b) Mark wrote for the Romans. His theme is Jesus the Servant.
   c) Luke wrote for the Greeks. His focus is Jesus the perfect Man.
   d) John wrote for the world. His theme is Jesus the only Savior.
2. Matthew was written specifically to the Jews. The primary theme of Matthew is that Jesus is indeed the promised Messiah (Matt. 1:21–23). A secondary theme is that the book is an indictment against Israel for rejecting Him, in light of overwhelming evidence (Matt. 23:13–39).
3. While we should all strive to be faithful and productive, and we can lose eternal rewards (1 Cor. 3:10–15), no believer should live in fear of being a cast away in eternity. Every believer will receive an eternal inheritance from the heavenly Father (Gal. 3:26–29).

4. Can a Believer Attain Sinless Perfection? (see also 1 John 3:9)

"Therefore you shall be perfect, just as your Father in heaven is perfect."
Matthew 5:48

False interpretation: It is possible for believers to become so spiritual and sanctified that they will no longer sin (see comments in 1 John 3:9).

There are some Christian sects or denominations that teach that it is possible for believers to become sinless. I have known people who claimed to never sin. Having spent time around

them, I can assure you that they are like the rest of us, *"For we all stumble in many things"* (James 3:2).

This passage should be seen in connection with two other passages:

1. In Matthew 5:28–30, Jesus instructs His disciples to cut off and cast away every bodily member that causes us to sin. Jesus is of course using hyperbole— a figure of speech that makes its point by extreme exaggeration. The key here is twofold:
   a) Jesus identifies the seat of sin in the heart (v. 28), that is, the sin nature. Our bodily members are simply the instruments that carry out the will of the heart.
   b) If you cut off every member that is involved in sin, how much of the body would be left? **Note:** In the early church, Origen took this passage, along with Matthew 19:10–12 about making oneself a eunuch for the kingdom literally, and castrated himself, lest he be tempted sexually. In later years, he admitted that he ought not to have done it!
2. The solution is that only the indwelling Holy Spirit can put the "old man," the sin nature, to death (Rom. 6:1–14).
3. Paul shows that we put our sinful members to death when we *"put on the new man"* in obedience to God's Word (Col. 3:5–11).
4. Next, in 1 John 3:9, John says that *"whoever is born of God does not sin … and he cannot sin."* It is clear that our sinful nature is not born of God, but the new creature in Christ (2 Cor. 5:17) is *"created according to God, in true righteousness and holiness"* (Eph. 4:24).

Point: Bear in mind that in the same epistle, John says if we say we have no sin we lie (1 John 1:8), and that when we sin, we have Jesus as our advocate (1 John 2:2).

5. So how do these passages fit with the command to be perfect? The key is in the Grammar. In Matthew 5:48, *"You shall be perfect"* is from the verb *eimi,* the verb for "being." It is a future, middle, indicative. A better way of translating it would be, "keep on becoming perfect, as your Father in heaven is perfect", or alternately, "keep on being perfected, as your Father in heaven is perfect." The word *"perfect"* is often translated "complete" or "mature" (Phil. 1:15; Col. 1:28).
6. This essentially carries the same idea as being conformed to Christ's image (Rom. 8:29; 12:1–2) or of growing in grace and truth (2 Pet. 3:18).
7. Think about this: Is the command to be perfect (Matt. 5:48) any greater challenge than the command to love God with all our *"heart ... soul ... mind"* (Matt. 22:37)? Both require a lifetime of growth!

Conclusion

When we walk in the Spirit, we cannot fulfill the lusts of the flesh (Gal. 5:16). In that point of time, we are "perfect," as our life is controlled by the Spirit and reflecting the nature of the Father and the Son. The more we grow in spiritual maturity, the more time we will spend in the Spirit, and not in the flesh.

5. What Is the Unforgiveable Sin, and Who Can Commit it?

"But he who blasphemes against the Holy Spirit never has forgiveness, but is subject to eternal condemnation." Mark 3:29 (see also Matt. 12:31–32)

False interpretation: There is a sin that, even if believers commit it, they cannot be forgiven, and if unbelievers commit it, they cannot be saved.

This statement has troubled believers down through the ages. As a young believer, I went through a time of despair, and this passage nearly drove me to commit suicide. We can resolve this easily by considering some other Scriptures.

Principle: All Scripture must be consistent and cannot be self-contradictory.

1. To blaspheme is to speak about God, or holy things, with scorn or contempt. To blaspheme the Holy Spirit is to consider His work of convicting of sin, and offering eternal life (John 16:7–11), as something contemptible.
2. The background of this sin is found in Matthew 12:24 and Mark 3:22. The Pharisees accused Jesus of being an agent of the devil. The following context of each Gospel shows that this was a hardened position from which they would not recover.
3. We must consider the unique nature of this particular case. No one today could duplicate this exact sin because:
   a) The Pharisees were experts in the Law and Prophets; they knew the prophecies of the coming Messiah like no one else.
   b) They had been witnesses of Jesus' teaching and miracles, which convinced several of them to believe (Nicodemus—John 3:3–19, 7:50; Joseph—John 19:38–42; and others—John 12:42–43).
   c) They were in the presence of God in the flesh and could not recognize or honor godliness (1 Tim. 3:16).
   d) They rejected His open declaration as to His identity (John 5:16–18).

Some help in interpretation

1. Only the Holy Spirit can reveal the deep things of God (John 16:7–11; 1 Cor. 2:13–16). To blaspheme the Spirit is to call His truth a lie and to treat it with contempt.
2. Since every believer has entered into eternal life, and can never perish, no believer can commit the unpardonable sin (John 10:28–29). *"And you … He has made alive together with Him, having forgiven you all trespasses."* (Col. 2:13).
3. Jesus made it clear in John 3:16–19 that God loved the world, Christ died for the world, and the only sin that keeps one from eternal life is the sin of unbelief—the only equivalent today of the Pharisee's sin.
4. No one who has committed this sin in finality has any concern about it, and no one who worries they might have committed it has; for you would, like Pharoah, have hardened your heart beyond the point of no return.

Principle: By applying the law of non-contradiction, combined with the unique historical setting, we can resolve a passage that troubles many needlessly. It should, however, cause great concern and conviction to those still in unbelief.

6. Feed The Children, Not the Dogs

"It is not good to take the children's bread and throw it to the little dogs."
Matthew 15:26

This passage has troubled many, as it seems out of character for Jesus, whose love and grace are available to all. One of the problems with this text is that we do not see the twinkle in Jesus' eye or hear the warmth and compassion in His voice.

False interpretation: Gentile believers are of less value than Jews and their salvation is not as important.

What we know

1. Again, Matthew wrote for the Jews and included many words and figures familiar to them that are not so clear to us (Matt. 8:12).
2. The Jews, particularly the Pharisees, referred to Gentiles as "dogs," a term of contempt and scorn.
3. It was for this very reason that Jesus often used a Samaritan in His stories (Luke 10:33; 17:16), because the Samaritans were likewise scorned. On one occasion, they even called Jesus a Samaritan (John 8:48).
4. When Jesus said He was "sent to the lost sheep of Israel"—He meant this initially, as seen in Matthew 10:5–6 with Matthew 28:18–20 and Romans 1:16–17. This is clear from Mark 7:27, when He said, *"Let the children be filled first."*

Some help in interpretation

1. The attitude of the disciples toward the woman, in light of their culture and training, is that they were the elect, she was not.
2. That this woman is already a believer is clear from three things: first, she worshipped Him. All true worship is directed to God alone.
3. She calls Him *"Lord."* Used in the common sense this could mean only "Sir," a term of respect. In the context of her words, it means "Lord."
4. In v. 22, she calls Him, *"Son of David,"* which means she recognizes Him as the awaited Messiah.
5. Jesus' response, which we miss, is kind, using the term "*little dogs"* (*kunarion*). We would use the term "puppies." This term referred to the household pets of the children. No doubt this was spoken with a smile and a twinkle in His eyes.
6. The woman's response shows that she takes it in this way, referring to the way the little dogs eat the crumbs (and hidden offerings) of the little children.
7. Jesus' response is similar to that with the centurion (Matt. 8:10; Luke 7:9). This woman's faith was great, and her request was answered.

Remember: In the Gospels, Jesus only marveled twice: First, at the faith of the Roman centurion, and second, at the unbelief of the Jews (Mark 6: 6).

II. HARD SAYINGS OF PAUL

We could find many of Paul's sayings that are hard to understand. I have chosen seven as examples for our consideration.

1. Is God Unjust to Inflict Wrath? (Romans 9:14)

Of all of Paul's writings, many believers find Romans 9–11 to be one of the most difficult sections. Here, we enter into the Doctrine of Election, which has been misunderstood and distorted for centuries.

False interpretation: Since God promised salvation and a kingdom to Israel, He is unjust to judge them for rejecting Jesus as their Messiah.

Some of the false doctrines that come out of this section

These three chapters are often mistakenly seen as a parenthesis in the book of Romans. Thus, many pastors teach them in a way that is disconnected to the earlier portions of the book, and thus lose their context:

1. A distortion of the Doctrine of Election (Chapter 9).
2. The false concept of lordship salvation (Chapter 10).
3. The false concept of replacement theology (Chapter 11).

The context of these chapters (three questions from Chapter 3)

1. What is the advantage of the Jew? (3:1). If the Gospel is *"to the Jew first, and then to the Gentile"* (1:16), and all who believe have equal standing, what advantage has the Jew? Paul answers this in 9:4–5, where he lists eight privileges given to Israel, ending with Christ. If they reject Jesus Christ, they lose all of their advantages! (See vv. 14–21 with Jer. 18:1–15, where personal volition is the determining factor).
2. Does the unbelief of Israel make the faithfulness of God null and void? (3:3). This question is answered in 10:9–13, that the promises are sure and God's faithfulness remains to all who believe. Verse 10:13 is the key, *"Whosoever calls on the name of the LORD shall be saved."* It is a quote from Joel 2:32, where *"LORD"* is Yahweh. The failure of Israel as a whole to recognize Jesus as God in the flesh led to the formation of the predominantly Gentile church.
3. Is God unjust to inflict wrath on Israel? (3:5). Paul repeats the question in 9:14, but the answer is given in both 9:30–33, where Israel's unbelief is the cause, and 11:11–27, where Paul presents the Church as the cure by showing that God will use the Church to *"provoke them to jealousy"* (11:11–14), and thus ultimately *"all Israel will be saved"* (11:26–27).

Point: Although Romans 9–11 is often used to prove determinism and unconditional election, these chapters actually teach the opposite, developing the point made in 2:28–29 and 4:1–6 that one's eternal destiny is determined by their response to the Gospel message (Rom. 1:16–17).

What we can know

1. The Scriptures teach that God's throne, and thus all His decrees, are based on righteousness and justice (Psalm 89:14; 97:2).
2. Since we know that all truth must be:
   e) Consistent—truth cannot contradict itself (law of non-contradiction).
   f) Coherent—It must be capable of human understanding.
   g) Correlative—It must be expressed in terms consistent with life and language that we know and understand. This enters into the arena of natural law, as expounded by Thomas Aquinas.
3. Paul's question in 9:14, which really encompasses all three of the questions from Chapter 3, is rhetorical (*me adikia para to theo*), and in the Greek demands a "No" answer.
4. Thus, the question affirms that in regard to all three questions from Chapter 3, God is true to Israel, faithful in all His promises, and just in His execution of wrath, even to the Jews.

The Overall Theme of Romans

1. Paul states His theme in Romans 1:16–17: the saving power and righteousness of God is revealed in the Gospel message to all who believe, as the prophet said, *"The just shall live by faith"* (Hab. 2:4).
2. The nation of Israel, in Chapters 9–11, is exhibit "A" in proving this point. With all their God-given privileges, they rejected Jesus Christ as their Messiah, and thus in the justice of God, are under His wrath ("wrath" occurs eleven times in the book).
3. That these three chapters are pivotal to the whole book is seen by Paul's *"Therefore"* in 12:1–2, in which he appeals to us *"by the mercies of God."*

   He is not resuming from Chapter 8, but from Chapters 9–11! The word *"mercy"* is not found in Chapters 1–8 but occurs nine times in Chapters 9–11. Israel is the model that proves that God's righteousness, justice, and mercy, are all working in harmony, through the Gospel message (1:16–17).

2. Destroy God's Temple and You Will Be Destroyed (1 Corinthians 3:17)

False interpretation: This passage has often been misused (as I once did, to my shame) to say that if you abuse the body (by smoking, drinking, taking drugs, illicit sex) God will destroy you.

What we can know

1. Paul gives a clear biblical perspective on health and fitness vs. godliness in 1 Timothy 4:8. One is profitable for a few things, the other for all things now and forever.
2. While it is true that personal sin can lead to physical death for a believer (Rom. 8:13; 1 Cor. 5:5; 1 John 5:16), what Paul is addressing here is something different.
3. The destructiveness of sin always affects more than just the one sinning. This is the point Paul is making.

Some help from the Greek

1. As has been said, the context of Scripture is not just the text, but also the history, culture, and language used in the writing.
2. There is much in the English translation that does not convey the meaning of the original language.
3. In both 1 Corinthians 3:16–17 and 6:19–20, the pronouns are plural, speaking of the Church body. As in 2 Corinthians 6:16, *"For you* [plural] *are the temple of the living God."* While every believer is indwelt by the Spirit, Paul's point is that the Church—Christ's body—is the temple of God.
4. Peter illustrates this in 1 Peter 2:4–5, declaring that each believer is a *"living stone,"* that together make up *"a spiritual house."*
5. Paul's point is that personal sin not only defiles and destroys our physical body, but it defiles the whole temple—the church.
6. Therefore, as believers, we have a double duty. To not defile our own body, but also to keep from causing defilement in the Church body, which is the temple of the living God.
7. The word *"defiles"* in v. 17 is a present active indicative, indicating ongoing and persistent action. It anticipates the sinful man in 1 Corinthians 5:1–5 in his refusal to confess and correct his sin.

Note: In Mark 7:18, Jesus declares, *"Whatever enters a man from outside cannot defile Him."* Defilement always begins in the heart!

8. *"God will destroy him"* refers to physical death, as seen in 1 Corinthians 5:5. This is the judgment of physical death, not loss of salvation, *"That his spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord Jesus"* (1 Cor. 5:5b).

3. Those Who Commit Certain Sins Cannot Be Saved (1 Cor. 6:9–10).

Are 1 Corinthians 6:9–10 and Galatians 5:19–21 parallel passages? In other words, are they teaching the same truth? In both of them, we find the phrase *"will not inherit the kingdom of God."* But there is a critical difference between them!

Read both passages. Do you see a difference?

False interpretation: Many use these passages to teach that, if a believer commits, or continues in certain sins, they either 1) were never really saved, or 2) They have lost their salvation (a position contrary to all of Scripture).

In approaching these two passages, there are two critical things to consider.

First: inheritance is not salvation

1. While salvation and inheritance are closely related, they are not precisely the same. Salvation must always precede inheritance.

Example: Consider the case of the rich young ruler (Matt. 19:16–26; Mark10:17–31; Luke 18:18–27). He wanted to do good works to inherit eternal life. Jesus' demand, in

essence, showed him that he must put Him above all other things; in essence, surrender to His will. The rich young ruler was not willing, and the lesson the disciples learned from this incident was articulated by Jesus, *"*[disciples] *Who then can be saved?* [Jesus] *"The things which are impossible with men are possible with God."* Interestingly, his pet sin was covetousness—the same one that plagued Paul (Rom. 7:7–12).

2. One must enter eternal life by faith before one can be an heir, *"And if you are Christ's, then you are Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the promise"* (Gal. 3:29).
3. The idea here, which plays a big part in Scripture history, is that you have to be a son in order to be an heir.
4. In Scripture history, inheritance takes two forms: general and specific. In other words, while all sons were heirs, the firstborn received the *"double portion"* (Deut. 21:17).
5. This was the *"birthright"* Esau bartered away to Jacob (Gen. 25:29–34).
6. By application, Paul teaches us that we are all *"heirs of God,"* but that by diligent faithfulness, we can also be *"joint heirs with Christ, if we suffer with Him"* (Rom. 8:17, Peter makes the same point in 1 Peter 4:12–14).
7. Joseph illustrates that even the lastborn, due to diligence and faithfulness, can be promoted above the firstborn (Gen. 37; 48:12–16), while Reuben proves that the firstborn can lose his double portion by unfaithfulness (Gen. 49:3–4). What many miss in the parable of the Prodigal Son, is that upon his return he is promoted above the elder brother, which is the whole point Jesus is making (see Luke 15:7, 10). Sonship guarantees inheritance, but faithfulness assures a greater portion!
8. This is the whole point Paul makes in 1 Corinthians 3:10–15. All *"wood, hay, and straw"* is burned, but all *"gold, silver, precious stones,"* receive a reward. *"If anyone's work which he has built on it* [i.e., the foundation of faith in Christ] *endures, he will receive a reward"* (1 Cor. 3:14). The believers whose works are of the flesh *"will be saved, yet so as through fire"* (1 Cor. 3:15). The *"unrighteous"* (*adikos*) refers to unbelieving judges.

<u>Second</u>: The critical difference in the two passages

1. In 1 Corinthians 6, Paul is making a contrast between believers and unbelievers. See *"the unrighteous"* (v. 9). The Greek word *adikos* is used 12 times in the New Testament—but never of believers. For proof, just look at v. 1.
2. Paul's point in 1 Corinthians 6 is that unbelievers are not sons, thus cannot inherit, *"And such were some of you. But you were washed, but you were sanctified, but you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus and by the Spirit of our God"* (v. 11).
   a) Three times, Paul uses the strongest conjunction of contrast, *"but"* (*alla*).
   b) The phrase *"you were"* (*eimi*) is imperfect, indicating finished past action.
   c) The three verbs, *"washed ... sanctified ... justified"* are all aorist indicative, speaking of a point of time, when they believed in Jesus Christ. Interestingly, *"washed"* is first (see Eph. 5:26), and the compound verb (*apolouo*) means "to wash completely" (see John 13:10 with Eph. 5:26). The verb is in the permissive middle voice, indicating the believer's reception of spiritual cleansing by faith.

3. In Galatians 5 however, the contrast is between spiritual versus carnal believers. Look at v. 16, *"But I say then: walk in the Spirit, and you will not fulfill the lust of the flesh,"* (see also vv. 18, 25–26).
4. The *"works of the flesh"* (vv. 19–21) are contrasted with *"the fruit of the Spirit"* (vv. 22–23).

Conclusion: In 1 Corinthians 6, the issue is that unbelievers cannot inherit the kingdom, because they are not sons. In Galatians 5, those believers who are sons, as well as heirs (Gal. 3:26–29), are forfeiting the inheritance that comes with obedience and faithfulness (eternal rewards).

Note: Jesus made this distinction very clear in the Sermon on the Mount. If we grow spiritually, as faithful disciples, we will be *"Blessed"* (Matt. 5:1–12) and rewarded above the benefits of salvation (Matt. 6:4, 6, 18, 20). However, believers who do good works to be seen by men, will get no further reward (Matt. 6:2, 5, 8, 16, 19).

Who are the guilty?

1. Some may read verses 9 and 10 of 1 Corinthians 6 and breathe a sigh of relief. However, this list is only representative. If we include Paul's other lists, such as Galatians 5:19–21, Ephesians 5:3–5, and Colossians 3:5–9, we have such sins as hatred, contention, jealousy, angry outbursts, selfish ambition, foolish talking, coarse jesting, covetousness, etc. Anyone still pure?
2. We are inclined to ask with the disciples, "Who then can be saved?" or "Then who can inherit?" The answer is the same, *"What is impossible with men is possible with God"* (Luke 18:27).
3. If we do a careful study of First Corinthians, we find that many of the sins mentioned here were still happening in the church. But the point Paul makes in v. 11 is that we are no longer seen in light of our sins, but in the light of Christ's righteousness. *"But of Him you are in Christ Jesus, who became for us. Wisdom from God, and righteousness, and sanctification and redemption"* (1 Cor. 1:30). God sees us first and foremost as we are "in Christ." Thank God!

Some further thoughts on inheritance

1. While all who believe have an eternal inheritance, we all are enabled to *"lay up for yourselves treasure in… heaven"* (Matt. 6:19–20). We do this as we walk in the power of the Spirit (Gal. 5:16).
2. All of the time we spend in the flesh is lost forever. But every moment we spend in the Spirit, is laying up *"gold, silver, and precious stones"* (1 Cor. 3:12–14).
3. Furthermore, we must never forget that much of our inheritance includes the blessings we receive here and now, as we are obedient to God's Word and faithful to serve Him. God's blessings in time (consider the Beatitudes, Matt. 5:3–12), will translate into rewards in eternity (Matt. 6:4, 6, 18, 21).
4. In the Lord's Prayer, the plea, *"Thy kingdom come, Thy will be done,"* is both an appeal for the here and now, and for the eternal future. Let us then live as heirs of the kingdom here and now, *"Knowing that from the Lord you will receive the reward of the inheritance; for you serve the Lord Christ"* (Col. 3:24).

4. **<u>What is The Baptism for the Dead</u>?**

> *"Otherwise, what will they do who are baptized for the dead. If the dead do not rise at all? Why then are they baptized for the dead?"*
> 1 Corinthians 15:29

<u>False interpretation</u>: The error that often comes from this passage is that baptism for dead loved ones can give them salvation. This is today a Mormon practice, which should tell you a lot about it.

<u>Who were they and why did they do it</u>?

1. When Paul is writing to believers, and he refers to "they" or "them," he is often referring to those outside the Body of Christ.
2. Some group, whether errant Christians, or Gnostics, or one of the Greek mystery religions, was practicing this ritual.
3. Paul does not endorse, nor does the Bible ever teach, such a practice, which would be heretical, based on Hebrews 9:27.
4. We tend to lose sight of Paul's main objective by focusing on this verse, as the whole chapter is an argument in defense of the bodily resurrection: first of Christ, then of those who belong to Him (v. 23).

<u>The primary problem of this chapter</u>

1. The real problem in this chapter is that some among the Corinthians were denying the resurrection (v. 12). It is worth mentioning that among many Greek philosophers, the body was seen as a prison, and death was pictured as deliverance from that prison.
2. Besides the issue of baptism for the dead, some have stumbled over the phrase in v. 2, *"unless you believed in vain."* Some preachers have taught that you might convince yourself that you have believed in Christ, but in reality, you believed in vain. You didn't have the "right kind" of faith, or you did not believe "enough."
3. What Paul refers to in v. 2 is resolved in vv. 14–17. It is only if Jesus Christ was not raised from the dead, *"our preaching is empty* [vain] *and your faith is also empty* [vain],*"* v. 14, and *"If Christ is not risen, your faith is futile* [vain],*"* v. 17. There is a play on three different words for "vain, empty" that builds in intensity—too complex to go into at this point.
4. In closing, Paul's point in using the false practice of baptism for the dead, is that there is a latent belief in resurrection, which we know fully in Christ.

5. **<u>Is the Church Considered to be the Israel of God</u>? (Galatians 6:16)**

<u>False interpretation</u>: This position is held by those who follow what is known as "replacement theology." Romans 11 is one of the most clear arguments against this belief, however, the issue in this passage is easily dealt with.

The Context of the Text

1. The book of Galatians is the sternest and most argumentative of all of Paul's epistles. This stems from Jewish believers who were trying to keep the church "Jewish" (see Acts 15:1–5; Gal. 2:11–21).
2. How amazing is it that now, two thousand years later, there are Gentile Christians who are trying to replace Israel with the Church!
3. Paul's primary argument in the book is for salvation by faith apart from any works of the law, which was the heresy of the Judaizers.
4. His concluding argument, in 6:15, is, *"For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision nor uncircumcision avails anything, but a new creation"* (see Rom. 2:28–29; 2 Cor. 5:17).
5. This is the rule mentioned in v. 16 by which we are to walk, i.e., live our Christian lives. The English translation of v. 16 ends, *"Peace and mercy be upon them, and upon the Israel of God."* In the English translation it appears that the Church and Israel refer to the same group.
6. This is not so in the Greek, which reads, "And as many as walk according to this rule, peace be upon them and mercy also upon the Israel of God." This of course refers to those Jews yet future who will make up the *"all Israel will be saved"* of Romans 11:26. (Credit to Manfred T. Brauch, in his book, *Hard Sayings of Paul.*
7. This would anticipate the 144,000 Jewish evangelists and all those whom they would lead to faith in Christ (Rev. 7:1–8).

6. How Are Women Saved Through Childbearing? (1 Timothy 5:11–15)

"Nevertheless she will be saved in childbearing if they continue
In faith, love, and holiness with self-control."
1 Timothy 2:15

False interpretation: This fits with all other passages used to promote the idea that "perseverance" or "production" is the real proof of salvation.

Context is key

1. In vv. 13–14, Adam and Eve are used as God's standard for the Christian marriage. Adam was not deceived by the serpent, but Eve was. Adam failed to instruct her clearly in God's command (Gen. 2:16–17), and he failed to protect her from the serpents lies, as he was right there with her (Gen. 3:6).
2. The result was the fall of man, which God held to Adam's account—not Eve's (Gen. 3:9–11; Rom. 5:12–19).
3. God then gave the promise of a Savior, *"the Seed of the woman"* (Gen. 3:15). Thus, the principle, *"she will be saved in childbearing."*
4. Paul then applies the principle to women in Timothy's church, *"If they continue in faith, love, and holiness …."* The *"saved"* here is not speaking of eternal salvation, but of deliverance from disobedient lives.

The mind of a Pharisee and Rabbi

Paul was trained as a Pharisee and a Rabbi. He was also a student of philosophy, as seen by his many quotes of stoic and epicurean philosophers. For example, in Acts 17:28 he quotes

Epimenides and Aratus; in 1 Corinthians 15:32–33, he quotes Menander; and in Titus 1:12, he quotes Epimenides again. This does not mean those men were inspired, but simply that what they said, in that context, is correct.

1. His arguments are often very condensed and assume a level of understanding on the part of his readers. Elipsis is the practice of leaving out certain words or phrases because it is assumed they are understood.
2. The shift from *"she"* to *"they"* takes the principle of eternal salvation from Eve and applies it to temporal salvation on the part of some rebellious women in the church.
3. We must always remember that when we see the word "saved," we should always ask, "Saved from what?" The word can be used, just as we use it today, for either eternal salvation or for deliverance in time. If we said, "He jumped into the raging water and saved the child," we obviously do not mean he gave the child eternal life.
4. In vv. 9–12, there was a problem of the women overemphasizing external adornment, speaking out in the service, and seeking to usurp authority over either their husbands, or men in the church.
5. If *"they"* would dedicate themselves to the home—bearing and raising children—they would be "saved" from these errors.
6. This argument is resumed in 1 Timothy 5:11–15. Younger widows were becoming a problem in the church, as they became idle gossips and busybodies.
7. Paul's solution is, *"Therefore, I desire that the younger widows marry, bear children, manage the house, give no opportunity to the adversary to speak reproachfully. For some have already turned aside after Satan."* It was from such errors that they needed to be "saved."

7. <u>How Can a Believer be Worse Than an Unbeliever</u>? (1 Timothy 5:8).

This passage is easily dealt with in just a few points.

> *"But if anyone does not provide for his own, and especially for those of his household, he has denied the faith and is worse than an unbeliever."*
> 1 Timothy 5:8

<u>False interpretation</u>: If a Christian does not persevere in the spiritual life, they either were never truly saved, or they have lost their salvation and are worse than an unbeliever (see 2 Peter 2:20).

<u>The shame of the believers</u>

1. The care of widows was a historic practice among Jewish believers as a reflection of God's mercy and compassion (Psalm 68:5; James1:26–27).
2. The issue in the context is the care of widows (vv. 3–10). Paul lays down rules for those who should be supported by the church and those who should not.
3. Widows who had children or other relatives should be cared for by them and not the church (vv. 3–4).
4. Widows who were without family support had to also meet the requirements of faithful obedience and service (vv. 5–7, 10).

5. These faithful widows were to be cared for by the church, a practice from the very beginning (Acts 6:1–6), which gave rise to the office of deacons.
6. For the family of a widow to refuse to care for her, pushing that obligation off on the church, was to be *"worse than an unbeliever."* That is because even unbelievers cared for their elderly widows.
7. Tragically, in many cases, believers fall far short of unbelieving relatives or neighbors, simply because they are not faithful to live out the Word of God in their lives.

Note: In 2 Peter 2:21, the point is made that to know and yet not do is worse than to never have known. This of course fits with Luke 12:48, *"For everyone to whom much is given, from him much will be required."*

III. SOME HARD SAYINGS OF PETER AND JOHN

1. Why Did Jesus Preach to the Spirits in Prison? (1 Peter 3:15–22)

False interpretation: Some take this to mean that Jesus went to the unbelievers in Hades from Noah's day and gave them a second chance to believe. This contradicts Hebrews 9:27 and therefore must be rejected.

Alternate interpretation: Others (including Gleason J. Archer, a very eminent scholar) take this to mean that Jesus Christ, in His pre-incarnate state, was preaching through Noah to the people of his generation who are now in Hades due to their unbelief. This approach is further linked to 2 Peter 2:5, where Noah is called *"a preacher of righteousness."* The same word, *kerusso*, is used.

This interpretation does no violence to any Scripture, nor does it violate the grammar, though I do not believe it to be right, based on the following reasons:

1. The "preaching" (from *kerusso*, "a royal proclamation"; not from *euangelizomai*, "to evangelize"), refers to a proclamation made by the Lord Jesus, which was not for the purpose of evangelism.
2. The recipients are referred to as *"spirits in prison"* (not souls) and has links to two other important passages:
   a) In 2 Peter 2:4, he refers to angels from the time of Noah, who were cast down to hell (here, *tartarus* is used) and are in chains of darkness, awaiting the day of judgment.
   b) In Jude 6, reference is made to *"angels who did not keep their proper abode,"* who are chained in darkness, awaiting the final judgment.
3. Without doubt, both 2 Peter and Jude are referring to the same group. It is worth pointing out that *"angels"* would better fit the *"spirits"* of 1 Peter 3:19, than would human souls.
4. Also, Peter says of them that they *"formerly were disobedient … in the days of Noah".* This appears to put the preaching as occurring, not in the time of Noah, but after the Resurrection.

5. I believe this refers to fallen angels, referred to as *"sons of God"* in Genesis 6:2, who cohabited with earthly women, resulting in a race of "giants," or Nephilim, at that time.
6. As a final point, the phrase *"sons of God"* is used in the Old Testament four times (Gen. 6:2; Job 1:6; 2:1; 38:7) and always refers to angels.
7. The "proclamation" (or preaching) would have been Jesus declaring to these angels, who sought to contaminate the human race, so as to make the coming of the promised *"Seed"* (Gen. 3:15) impossible, that He had won the victory on the cross, and that their doom was certain.
8. In the apocryphal book 1 Enoch, which Jude quotes in vv. 14–15, Enoch declares the *"sons of God"* to be "watchers" (angels) from Gen. 6:1–4.

2. <u>How Do We Make Our Calling and Election Sure</u>? (2 Peter 1:10–11).

<u>False interpretation</u>: From a Calvinistic position, this is taken to mean that we should guarantee that we are of the "elect" by our "perseverance" in the faith. Otherwise, we cannot be sure that we are elect ones. This comes from a false understanding of what constitutes election, and what Paul means by "make sure."

1. The Doctrine of Election is focused first of all on Jesus Christ. In Isaiah 42:1, the prophet writes, *"Behold! My Servant whom I uphold, My Elect One in whom My soul delights."* This is the first use of the term "elect" in the Bible and sets the parameters for all later uses.
2. Jesus defines the mode of election in the parable of Matthew 22:1–14. A king gives an invitation to the wedding feast for his son (see Luke 14:15–24 for a parallel passage). The citizens of his kingdom scorned his invitation and even beat and killed the servants who brought the invitation. This is without doubt a picture of Israel's treatment of the prophets (see Matt. 23:29–36).
3. The king then sent servants to the "highways," to invite those who were sojourners and travelers in his kingdom (representative of the Gentiles), and they gladly came to celebrate the wedding.
4. It is most interesting that Jesus concludes the parable with a phrase often used by Calvinists, *"For many are called, but few are chosen"* (Matt. 22:14). The point is clear that the invitation goes out to all, but the *"chosen"* are the ones who respond to the call.
5. Jesus uses the same words here for "called" and "chosen" that Peter uses. So how do we make our "calling and election sure"?
6. Obviously, we begin by accepting the invitation of the King, by believing in the Lord Jesus Christ. But Peter means more than this.
7. The word translated *"sure"* in 2 Peter1:10 is from *bebaios*, used with the infinitive of purpose, meaning, "to certify, to confirm, to attest to." We do this by being *"even more diligent."* The word is *spoudazo*—the same word translated *"diligent"* in v. 5, as the prerequisite to all spiritual growth and productivity, which is portrayed in vv. 5–10.
8. The end-goal, found in v. 11, is *"for so an entrance will be supplied to you abundantly into the everlasting kingdom of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ."*

The reason Peter gives for diligent spiritual growth and service is the attainment of rich spiritual rewards (see Matt. 6:1, 4, 6, 18, 20–21).

3. <u>Can Believers Live Sinless Lives?</u> (1 John 3:9; see Matthew 5:48 above).

<u>False interpretation</u>: Some denominations have taken the view that it is possible to attain "total or final sanctification" in this life, where one no longer commits sin. I know one man who claimed he had not sinned for 35 years! One woman I met said she did not sin anymore, I asked her husband who was with her if this was true, his smile told me all I needed to know.

1. In Romans 7:7–25, Paul recounts his struggle with sin in his life, after he believed. This is a struggle every believer is familiar with.
2. In James 3:2, James, whose piety earned him the nickname "James the Just," says, *"For we all* [including himself] *stumble* [*ptaio*] *in many ways."* The iterative present tense speaks of what occurs over and over again. This includes to *"stumble in word"* alone.
3. In James 2:10, the word is used of one who *"shall keep the whole law, and yet stumble in one point."* In other words, break one command of the Law, and you have violated it all.
4. In 2 Peter 1:10 (the previous section), he says, *"If you do these things you will never stumble."* His point echoes Paul in Galatians 5:16, *"Walk in the Spirit, and you shall not fulfill the lusts of the flesh."* In both passages, the double negative (*ou me*) indicates the impossibility of sinning while filled/walking by means of the Spirit.
5. John's point here is that the new nature (2 Cor. 5:17), which is born of God, and is *"created according to God, in true righteousness and holiness"* (Eph. 4:24), cannot sin. All sin comes from our sin nature.
6. Earlier in First John (1 John 1:5–2:2) he makes it clear that to "say we have no sin is to deceive ourselves," that sin results when we fail to walk in the light, and that when we sin, we need to confess that sin for cleansing and restoration to fellowship; and that the Lord Jesus is our advocate when we do sin.
7. In 1 John 5:18 we read, "*We know that whoever is born of God does not sin; but he who has been born of God keeps himself, and the wicked one does not touch him."* (This may also be translated, "The One born of God (Jesus) keeps him (the believer)".
8. The point in both 1 John 3:9 and 5:18 is that the "new man" is incapable of sin. This is why Paul urges us to *"put on the new man"* (Eph. 4:24; Col. 3:10), which is analogous to *"be filled with the Spirit"* (Eph. 5:16), and *"Walk in the Spirit, and you shall not* [*ou me* = "by no means"] *fulfill the lusts of the flesh* (Gal. 5:16)*."*

4. <u>What is the Sin Unto Death</u>? (1 John 5:16).

<u>False interpretation</u>: Some would take this to relate to the unforgiveable sin of Matthew 15:32 and Mark 3:29. However, there he is addressing unbelievers, and here in the context he is speaking about a *"brother,"* a fellow believer. Others think this is some sin a believer can commit by which they lose their salvation.

Point: This is of course contradictory to all of the promises of the security of the believer (John 10:28–29, et al). It is worth pointing out that the phrase *"shall never perish"* uses the absolute negation *ou me*, which Jesus uses seven times in the Gospel of John, to speak of the security of the believer (John 4:14; 6:35 x2; 6:37; 8:51; 10:28; 11:26).

1. What John is addressing here is not some specific sin, but any sin which is perpetuated through all the increasing levels of divine discipline (1 Cor. 11:32; Heb. 12:3–11) to the point of physical removal from this Earth.
2. We have many examples of believers being removed because of sin, such as the sinful man in Corinth (1 Cor. 5:5), who Paul clearly said would be saved, to Ananias and Saphira (Acts 5).
3. In Romans 8:13, Paul says to believers, *"For if you live according to the flesh you will die."* At some point, if a believer persists in sin, God's discipline moves beyond rebuke, chastening, and scourging (Heb. 12:5–6), to removal from this Earth.
4. Some in Corinth, because of their abuse of the Lord's Table, had been taken in death (1 Cor. 11:29–32).
5. Earlier, we saw in 1 Corinthians 3:17, that believers whose lives were destructive to the Church—the Lord's Temple—were warned that God would destroy them if they continued to *"defile the body,"* the Church.
6. It is a tragedy when a believer sins to the point of death, but we can be assured that they still have eternal life through faith in Christ.

5. Are Apocryphal Books Inspired? (Jude 9, 14).

False interpretation: Some assume that because Jude quoted from apocryphal books, that he endorsed them as Scripture. This can easily be shown to be a false assumption.

1. First, we should make a distinction between apocryphal books (which were written in the intertestamental period) and pseudepigrapha (pseudo-writings) which were written after 100 AD.
2. While the pseudepigrapha were often written by gnostic groups seeking to pervert the message of Scripture, the Apocrypha were often based on ancient manuscripts lost to us, or were commentaries on the Scriptures, such as many of the Dead Sea Scrolls.
3. Since we know that *"All Scripture is God-breathed* [inspired]" (2 Tim. 3:16), the quotes of extra biblical works are true in the context intended.
4. We need to be sure that what we have in the 66 books of the Old and New Testaments are the true and complete inspired Word of God. To claim otherwise would mean that two thousand years of Church history has been missing parts of Scripture, that God has not preserved His Word for His people—a serious and self-defeating charge.

6. Is There War in Heaven, and How Is that Possible? (Revelation 12:1–11)

False interpretation: If there is war in Heaven, then God's throne is not secure, He is not in control of His kingdom, and Heaven is not at peace.

1. First, we need to understand that the term *"heaven"* is applied to three different spheres. In 2 Corinthians 12:2, *"Such a one* [speaking of himself] *was caught up to the third heaven."* The ancients saw the First Heaven as the place where the birds fly; the Second, as the "firmament" or what we call space; and the Third, as God's domain—often called *"the highest heavens"* (1 Kings 8:27; 2 Chron. 2:6; 6:18; Neh. 9:6; Psalm 148:4).
2. Next, Paul indicates that the host of Satan occupy the Second Heaven (Eph. 6:12), or *"heavenly places."*
3. When Satan sinned, he was cast out of his position in God's domain (Ezek. 28:16), though he apparently still had access as the Accuser (Job 1–2) of men.
4. The spiritual warfare depicted in Daniel 10:12–13 and 20–21 shows the struggle of Gabriel and Michael against the *"principalities and powers"* mentioned by Paul (Eph. 6:12), against which we also are fighting.
5. The battle portrayed in Revelation 12:7–9 refers to a spiritual battle that takes place during the Tribulation, in which Satan and his angels are *"cast to the earth"* (v. 9).
6. This probably coincides with the devil indwelling Antichrist (2 Thess. 2:3–8; Rev. 13:3–8; 17:8).
7. The Third Heaven, what we call the domain of God, is where the perfect will of God is fulfilled at all times, *"Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven"* (Matt. 6:10).

Conclusion: It is my prayer that these studies will be helpful to many in dealing with "hard sayings," and that in anything you may feel I have erred, you will *"study to show yourself approved unto God,"* and find better answers!

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