Alleged Biblical Contradictions

In spite of all the Bible's claim, and the innumerable evidences, of its Divine inspiration, skeptics still continue to reject the Bible as the authoritative Word of God. Whatever may be the real underlying reasons for this attitude, the expressed excuses often center on the so-called "*contradictions*" of the Bible.

To start with, let me say, **there is NO contradictions in God's Word**, despite the fact that, admittedly, there are some passages in Scripture that are difficult to understand.

REASONS FOR SEEMING DISCREPANCIES

Since, as we have seen, the very *words* of the Bible, in their original form, are Divinely inspired. If, therefore, there are some seeming discrepancies, is it not possible that God could have had some reason for allowing some of these difficulties, or seeming *discrepancies*, to exist? While I, for one, not only personally believe that the Bible is Divinely **_inspired_** , but, also believe that it is Divinely **_preserved_**, I, nonetheless, also believe that God must have had some good reasons for allowing some of these "*problematic*" passages to be incorporated into Scripture. some of these possible reason are the following:

1. These passages prove that there could not have been any collusion, or collaboration, between the writers.

2. These passages stimulate Bible study! One of the greatest ways to motivate, and stimulate, one to diligently search the Scriptures is to create within him, a desire to find an answer to some problem, or the solution to some difficulty.

3. When the Christian finally finds the solution to the problem that are created by these difficult passages, it not only strengthens his own faith in God's Word, but it also serves to increase his love for the Lord in a way that few other experiences would have been able to.

4. One's attitude toward a difficult passage of Scripture can be the determining factor as to what kind of faith he has. When one finds a problematic passage in Scripture, it can either serve to create an assurance within him that there is a good solution, which will ultimately serve to strengthen his faith, or, on the other hand, it can serve to create a subtle feeling of doubt within him as to the validity of Scripture which, ultimately, will serve to give him a feeling of release from what he feels are the restraints of Scripture.

In dealing with alleged contradictions of the Bible, we shall list the various **_kinds_** of supposed contradictions, and then we shall endeavor to give the Biblical principle that one needs to understand in order to find a solution to the seeming contradiction.

1. ALLEGED DOCTRINAL CONTRADICTIONS

What appears to be a serious "*contradiction*" in Scripture is very often, in reality, the writer only present **one side** of an *antinomy*, or, only one side of truth. For instance, in Ephesians 2:8-9, Paul states that a man is justified by faith alone, not by works, while, in James 2:4, James states that a man is **not** justified by faith alone, but, rather, by works as well

as by faith. While these writers appear to be stating opposing truths, in reality, they are stating *different sides* of the same truth, because . . .

> ***Truth is two-sided and the balance between the two sides is the***
> ***most important aspect to consider when studying God's Word!***

Whether one is studying what seems to be two opposing spiritual truths...[for example, the responsibility of man's will verses the sovereignty of God]...it is important that one understand that, because God knows man's tendency to cling to one extreme side of truth, He, therefore, counteracts this tendency of man's human nature by presenting two seemingly clashing, yet, harmonizing, sides of truth, to, thereby, prevent man from straying from truth in either of two opposite directions.

Martin Luther said, "*Man, in search for truth, is like a drunken peasant! When you try to help him up on one side of his horse, he will fall over on the other side*."

> To help understand all the dynamics that are involved in truth, it might be helpful to envision truth as a road that is hedged in on both sides. If one should wonder too far to one side, or the other, he is sure to hit a hedge. Or, to envision truth like a bird who, should someone destroy one of its two wings, would wonder around in circles.

Truth is found between two extremes and, because human nature tends to gravitate to one of the two opposite directions of truth, God provides us, through Scripture, with **_two_ _sides_ _of truth_**, and, it should behoove us not to trample on one side of God's truth in our zeal for the other!

2. ALLEGED ETHICAL CONTRADICTIONS

Because there are certain practices which God commands us to do under one set of circumstances, and then forbids us to do under another set of circumstances, there appears to be a number of *ethical* contradictions in the Bible. However, once again, there are certain Biblical principles which, once one has knowledge of them, will help him resolve whatever conflict he may feel over these seeming "*contradictions*."

These Bible principles are as follows:

(A) THE PRINCIPLE OF GOD'S HIGHER VIEW

> God tells us, "*As the heavens are higher than the earth, so are My ways higher than your ways and My thoughts than your thoughts*" [Isaiah 55:9].

> Because God's ways are higher than our ways [God cares more about our eternal state than He does about our earthly one] what we would deem to be *unethical*, from our earthly perspective, God views from His *eternal* perspective vantage point to be not at all unethical. What appears to be an ethical contradiction on God's part is not a contradiction at all, but, rather just the reality that God's ways are different than man's view.

For example, because "*God sees not as man sees*," we have a tendency to question how God could say of David, who was not only guilty of adultery, but also murder, "*he is a man after My own heart*." The answer to this question is due to the fact that, "*man looks at the outward appearance, but God looks at the heart*." God could see David's heart was truly repentant, that, in spite of his sin, he had a sincere desire to life for Him. Despite the fact that David still had to suffer the consequences of his sin [Psalm 32:5] God forgave him and viewed him as a man after His own heart. Even though David sinned, his heart was fundamentally right toward God and he was a repentant and humble man, the kind of person who truly reaches the heart of God.

(B) THE PRINCIPLE OF AN EXHAUSTIVE STUDY OF THE CONTEXT

When one finds two statements in Scripture which appear to be contradictory, one must weigh every word within the context of which it was spoken if he hopes to understand what it is that God is saying. For example, in Exodus 20:13, God says, "*Thou shalt not kill*" [The Hebrew word used here means "*murder*"] and, yet, in Genesis 9:6, God says, "*Whoso sheds man's blood, by man shall his blood be shed; for in the image of God He made man*." [With this state- ment, which God made to Noah when He was making His covenant with him, God instituted the law of **Capital Punishment**.] How can we account for the seeming contradiction of these two statements? The answer is, simply, that when God said, "*Thou shalt not kill*," He was saying that one man does not have the right to take the life of another because, when one man takes the initiative to kill another, it is "*murder*!" So, when God says, "*Thou shalt not kill,*" what He is really saying is "*Thou shalt not **murder**.*" However, on the other hand, when God says, "*Whoso sheds man's blood, by man shall his blood be shed*," He is saying that **government**, [which, immediately after the flood He commanded man to establish to represent Him in maintaining order and righteous-ness in human societies], **does** have the right, and authority, to take the life of another if that's what it takes to maintain law and order. Therefore, a soldier, who goes to war under government orders, because he represents governmental authority in carrying out this responsibility, is not guilt of committing "*murder*" when he kills another.

(C) THE PRINCIPLE OF DRASTIC MEASURES

Although we have already covered the subject of what seems to be God's severity, we mention it again simply because an understanding of the concepts that were covered on this subject, in a previous lesson, are pertinent to a study on seemingly Biblical contradictions, because, God's seeming "*cruelty*" appears to be a contradiction to the Biblical statement that "*God is* a "*loving God!*"

In order to reconcile this seeming contradictions, we remind you, again, that it was the *exceeding wickedness* of sin, and the depth of depravity that certain civilizations had fallen into, that made it necessary for God to take such extreme, *drastic*, measures . . . [Like the destruction of the Canaanites, Sodom and Gomorrah, or, even Ananias and Sapphira in the New Testament] . . . to stop the spread of their wickedness, and evil, to others. So, what appears to be an act of "*cruelty*" on God's part is, really an act of "*love*" . . . a love that desires that others not be polluted by

evil, a love that chooses the "*lesser evil,*" in this case, the destruction of the unrighteous for the sake of the righteous.

And, it is the same Biblical principle that is the answer to people's question as to why God, on one hand, makes it clear that Christians must always have "*spirit of love and forgiveness*" toward all men and, yet, on the other hand, instructs those same Christians to "*excommunicate, reject*" certain ones from the Church [Titus 3:10], or, even to "*deliver such a one to Satan for the destruction of the flesh*" [1 Corinthians 5:5 and 1 Timothy 1:20]. The answer to this seeming contradiction is that, like Jesus, Who, though He never *defended His own personal rights, defended His Father's Kingdom,* we, too, are **not** to "*defend,*" or retaliate, when someone affronts, or threatens, our own personal rights, but we **are** to defend the Kingdom of God if anyone is hurting His kingdom, or the work of the Church, and we are to take a stand against that evil even if, in doing so, we have to take what seems to be a "*harsh*" action, or, resorting to "*drastic measures.*"

(D) THE PRINCIPLE OF AUTHENTIC FACTS

In a study of seemingly Biblical contradictions, it is important to make note of the fact that God often uses Scripture to record the *facts* as they actually happened, however, just because God **records** what actually took place, does not mean that He **approves** of what happened. The assumption that many people make is that, because an event is recorded in Scripture, God *approves* of it. And this assumption makes God *appear* to be contradictory.

An example of God recording an incident of which He did not necessarily approve of, because He was simply presenting the authentic facts of the story, is Jephthah's vow in Judges 11:30-3.

(E) THE PRINCIPLE OF UNDERSTANDING HEBREW AND GREEK WORDS

Many alleged contradictions arise simply because one, being unfamiliar with the peculiarities of the Hebrew, or Greek, language, inadequately translate a word, or the meaning of a word, which causes him to misunderstand what is being said.

A good example of a seeming contradiction that is a result of this kind of misunderstanding is found in the first and second chapters of Genesis. The first chapter of Genesis makes it quite plain that God created the animals *before* He created Adam. Yet, the second chapter of Genesis states, "*Out of the ground the Lord God formed every beast of the field, and every fowl of the air, and brought them unto Adam to see what he would call them,*" which makes it appear that God created the animals *after* He created Adam.

This seeming problem arises from an inadequate translation of the original Hebrew word in Genesis 2:19. The word is translated as "*formed,*" however, the very same Hebrew word also has the meaning of, "*__had__ formed.*" [The same Hebrew word for both "*formed,*" and "*__had__ formed,*" are one and the same.] This being true, the translators could just as well have translated Genesis 2:19 as , "*the Lord __HAD__ formed every beast of the filed,*" thus, eliminating any contradiction.

Another Scriptural passage which has been misunderstood because of a lack of understanding of the peculiarities of the Hebrew language is Exodus 9:12, which states, "*The Lord hardened the heart of Pharaoh.*" Before one can under- stand what this passage is really saying, he need to have knowledge of the fact that, in the Hebrew culture, whenever someone, in any way, ***permitted*** something . . . *permitted any action to take place* . . . it was said that he was ***responsible*** for that thing having been done. Since this was the Hebrew culture's way of expressing itself, what Exodus 9:12 is really saying, is that God simply ***permitted*** Pharaoh's heart to be hardened. The Biblical context will show that it was Pharaoh's own choice, his constant choice of resisting God every time that God gave him the occasion to do so, that caused him to harden his own heart.

In the same way, the presentation of the Gospel affords one the opportunity to either harden, or soften, his heart, to its message. If he accepts, and "*receives*," the Gospel message, his heart is softened and he is, consequently, saved and made alive. On the other hand, if he rejects, and resists, the Gospel message, his heart is hardened and he is consequently, damned, and "*lost.*"
[See Romans 2:4-11 and 2 Corinthians 2:15-16]

Just as the sun either hardens clay, or softens wax, God's truths, His actions, either break the self-nature, subdue the self-life of an individual, or they, ultimately, only serve to ***harden*** his heart, and, just as the "*determining factor*" of whether the sun will either *cause* a material to harden or soften, lies in the material itself, and not in the sun. So, too, the "*determining factor*" of whether or not God's truths, or actions, "*causes*" an individual's heart to harden of soften, lies in the individual himself, rather than in God.

Whenever anyone studies a language, [such as French, German, Greek, Latin, or **any** language], he learns that there are some words in one language that does not have any *exact equivalent* in other languages. This, of course, means that there is no such thing as a "***word-for-word***" translation from one language to another. Therefore, a word-for-word translation is impossible, not only because of the lack of word-equivalents between languages, but, also, because words, in every language, carry ***cultural connotations*** which, apart from the narrative discourse accompanying the text, cannot be translated *with any degree of absolute accuracy*! Add to all this, the fact that individual words can have *numerous* meanings.

For example, the English word "*fast,*" when used as an adjective, has different meanings, depending on the word it is defining; a "*fast*" shut door is a door that is closed tightly; a "*fast*" friend is a person who is especially close to someone; a "*fast*" plane is one that travels at a high speed; a "*fast*" dye is a dye that doesn't fade, etc, etc.

In the same way, we are told that the English word "*run*" has at least ninety-two [**that's 92!**] meanings in the English language!

It is also true that, like English words, Greek words can have a number of different meanings: For example the Greek word "*katergadzomai*" can mean "*to achieve,*" "*to create,*" "*to prepare,*" or "*to overpower,*" which means that each time a translator is faced with translating

this Greek word into English, he is also faced with having to choose one of several alternative meanings. Once he makes that choice, he departs from the idea of "*mechanical*" translation and moves into the realm of "*interpretation*."

Another problem that the translator is faced with is the fact that, because the **construction**, and *word order*, of the Greek language is different from that of the English language, a **literal** translation of the Greek, as it is constructed in the Greek, would render an unreadable translation in English.

> For example, a literal translation of Galatians 2:20 would read, "*Christ I have been crucified with, I live yet, no longer I live, but in me Christ,*" which, as one can tell, is a very difficult to understand.

Despite the fact that a good translation endeavors to carry over, into the English language, the emphasis of meaning that exists in the Greek language, one must keep in mind that there is no way to avoid the fact that any translation is, in its own way, also a concise *commentary*.

There is a certain tension between a translator's desire to translate a Scriptural passage in such a way as to make it understandable to the reader and his desire to, at the same time, translate it in such a way as to make the reader aware that, because he is handling a piece of ancient literature, the real meaning of the passage must be understood in its ancient setting.

For example, one translation translates the phrase, "*Greet one another with a holy kiss*" as "*shake hands all around,*" and, this translation does seem to make good sense in our contemporary churches today, nevertheless, it does eliminate the meaning of an important liturgical expression of Christian love which prevailed in the first centuries of Christendom.

Because great benefit has come to us from the various English translations of the Bible, I, for one, thank God for them! However, one should keep in mind that, because there **are** problems of translation, before he accepts some particular wording of Scripture as expressing the absolute truth that is intended, he should check out the particular wording [particular translation] in a good commentary based on the original Greek or Hebrew text! One must also keep in mind that, in order to safeguard what God was really saying through the prophets and apostles, he must approach the Bible in its original historical, and grammatical, setting!

There are, of course, other seeming Biblical discrepancies, or "*contradictions*," that have not been cited in this study. However, if one accepts, as fact, the *plenary inspiration of the Bible*, he can have the assurance that, as this study has endeavored to illustrate, with careful, study, the solutions to these seeming discrepancies can be found.