

## How do we deal with difficult texts?

There are many Bible verses that have perplexed believers throughout church history. Most of these have been dealt with by godly teachers in various churches, but some remain difficult; they are not hard to believe but difficult to comprehend with our finite minds. For instance, verses which teach that God is sovereign over, and predestines, the free actions of men are impossible to fully comprehend, but not difficult to believe as we see the results of fulfilled prophecy everywhere in the NT.

But most supposedly challenging texts do have satisfying answers and the believer must learn to grapple with these himself. How do we do this?

The first thing is that we must have a humble and reverential attitude; in any difficulty, the problem is my understanding not the Bible since the Bible is God's self-revealed word to men and has no errors. Thus we first come to God in prayer, seeking the answer and submitting to him. It is of first importance that we submit our minds to God at this point and do not listen to the counsel of heretics, liberals, satanic temptations or over-rational doubts. The Spirit leads us into truth so as to reveal Christ to us. Trust God and wait.

Next we read the troubling text in context. Very many 'difficult' verses are made clear by simply reading the surrounding verses or the chapter. For instance, a verse cannot be interpreted in a way that contradicts the overall teaching of the writer. If a verse appears to say that Christ died for everyone, but the writer plainly teaches the opposites in all his letters, then it cannot mean that and must be carefully examined.

After this we should consult all the resources that we have to hand: commentaries, systematic theologies, dictionaries, confessions and so forth. This is using fellowship in the body to gain aid. We should also ask questions of those we trust who are sound in doctrine. Seek as much fellowship as necessary to get to the truth. There are books designed just to assist in dealing with problem passages, of these some are very helpful, but use trustworthy writers.

These methods ought to deal with every question. However, if a problem remains then the believer must submit to God and wait. He must not allow himself to submit to doubts, fears or the manufactures of his mind – 'the just shall live by faith'.

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