Belief and Logic

In our introduction to Biblical research, the first two principles given for approaching God’s Word were: (1) Believe what you read and (2) think and be reasonable: you can’t throw logic out the window just because you are reading the Bible. Those who can stare a clear scripture in the face and deny what it obviously says because it disagrees with a previously held belief have ceased learning. Likewise, those who can accept two or more contradictory views at the same time will never come to an accurate understanding of God’s Word (or of much of anything else for that matter). On the surface, this seems so obvious to most of you (I hope) that you are probably scratching your heads, wondering why I am making an issue of it. As it plays out in practical application, however, relatively few people are completely consistent about this as it pertains to Biblical exegesis.

As one example, let’s look at 2 Corinthians 5:20, a familiar verse for many of us, but have you ever considered the fundamental problem with how the King James and a number of other versions translate this verse?

2 Corinthians 5:20 Now then we are ambassadors for Christ, as though God did beseech you by us: we pray you in Christ’s stead, be ye reconciled to God. [KJV, as are all other scriptures unless otherwise noted]

How could Paul be beseeching those he is addressing to be reconciled to God? 2 Corinthians is addressed to the Church, believers, the born-again ones.

2 Corinthians 1:1 Paul, an apostle of Jesus Christ by the will of God, and Timothy our brother, unto the church of God which is at Corinth, with all the saints which are in all Achaia:
The context of 2 Corinthians 5:20 shows clearly that reconciliation is a past-tense reality for the believer.

2 Corinthians 5:17 Therefore if any man be in Christ, he is a new creature: old things are passed away: behold, all things are become new.
18 And all things are of God, who hath reconciled us to himself by Jesus Christ, and hath given to us the ministry of reconciliation;
19 To wit, that God was in Christ, reconciling the world unto himself, not imputing their trespasses unto them; and hath committed unto us the word of reconciliation.
20 Now then we are ambassadors for Christ, as though God did beseech you by us: we pray you in Christ's stead, be ye reconciled to God.
21 For he hath made him to be sin for us, who knew no sin; that we might be made the righteousness of God in him.

Also, compare the following:

Romans 5:8 But God commendeth his love toward us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us.
9 Much more then, being now justified by his blood, we shall be saved from wrath through him.
10 For if, when we were enemies, we were reconciled to God by the death of his Son, much more, being reconciled, we shall be saved by his life.
11 And not only so, but we also joy in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, by whom we have now received the atonement [reconciliation].

Colossians 1:21 And you, that were sometime alienated and enemies in your mind by wicked works, yet now hath he reconciled

So what's the story? Scratch the italicized “you” in 2 Corinthians 5:20. (Italics in the KJV indicate words that were added; not translated from a word in the Greek or Hebrew text.) Paul wasn’t reaching out to the Corinthian believers to be reconciled. He was simply quoting what his declaration was to the world as an ambassador for Christ. Some versions accurately reflect this. Darby and Young’s Literal Translation are both good renderings of 2 Corinthians 5:20.
2 Corinthians 5:20 We are ambassadors therefore for Christ, God as it were beseeching by us, we entreat for Christ, Be reconciled to God. [Darby]

Editors of some other versions, however, seem to have missed the point. Compare the following:

2 Corinthians 5:20 We are therefore Christ's ambassadors, as though God were making his appeal through us. We implore you on Christ's behalf: Be reconciled to God. [New International Version]

2 Corinthians 5:20 Therefore, we are ambassadors for Christ, as though God were making an appeal through us; we beg you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God. [New American Standard (1995)]

2 Corinthians 5:20 So we are ambassadors for Christ, since God is making his appeal through us; we entreat you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God. [New Revised Standard (1989)]

2 Corinthians 5:20 So we are the representatives of Christ, as if God was making a request to you through us: we make our request to you, in the name of Christ, be at peace with God. [Bible in Basic English]

2 Corinthians 5:20 So we are ambassadors for Christ; it is as though God were urging you through us, and in the name of Christ we appeal to you to be reconciled to God. [New Jerusalem Bible]
One has to wonder why the difference. I have no doubt that there were men working on each of these versions who were Greek scholars, intimately familiar with the intricacies of the language. Knowledge of Greek is a fine thing, but it is obviously not a guarantee for truth. It is not the great pinnacle of all requirements for accurate Biblical exegesis. The editors of the versions that missed the point on 2 Corinthians 5:20 were certainly capable of reading other related Scriptures such as the ones quoted above. How could they, therefore, translate this scripture in a manner repugnant to those scriptures? The Greek text could allow for their translations but did not require them.

Apparently, when these men read these scriptures, they never changed their thinking accordingly. Otherwise, their translations of 2 Corinthians 5:20 would have immediately sent up a big red flag that said, "Whoa! That can’t be." Why no red flag? Because the translations offered did not violate their belief system. When people read a scripture and choose to not genuinely believe it from the heart, changing whatever contrary belief they may have previously held, they open the door to violate yet other scriptures. They also close the door to further learning on the subject.

If, for example, a person can read 1 Thessalonians 4:15-18 and simply set it aside because it doesn’t agree with his previously held belief that the “dead” are already alive in heaven, what chance does he have of accurately interpreting other scriptures on this subject? 1 Thessalonians could not be any more clear that the resurrection of the dead in Christ will occur at some point in the future when he returns to gather the Church. They will meet the Lord at the same time as those who are still alive at that moment. They haven’t already met Him.

**1 Thessalonians 4:15** For this we say unto you by the word of the Lord, that we which are alive and remain unto the coming of the Lord shall not prevent [precede] them which are asleep.

**16** For the Lord himself shall descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel, and with the trump of God: and the dead in Christ shall rise first:

**17** Then we which are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds, to meet the Lord in the air: and so shall we ever be with the Lord.

**18** Wherefore comfort one another with these words.

OK, I know I have just opened up a whole can of worms as a mere sideline. Most Christians believe that people go to heaven immediately upon death. For the dead it will be as though it
were the next moment. There is no consciousness in death, no awareness of time. But 1 Thessalonians clearly states that the dead in Christ have not yet risen.

There are, of course, other scriptures that people use to try to validate their belief. But reason dictates that if the Bible is God’s Word, then no scripture can be accurately interpreted in a manner repugnant to other scripture.

They use, “to be absent from the body is to be present with the Lord.” The verse (2 Corinthians 5:8) doesn’t say that. It says, “…willing rather to be absent from the body, and to be present with the Lord.” This is not expressing a desire for death. The desire here is for Christ’s return when we will shed our old bodies, be “clothed upon” with our new heavenly bodies and enter into his presence. Another one is, “God is not the God of the dead but of the living.” Yes, Jesus is recorded as saying this in Matthew 22, Mark 12, and Luke 20, but the obvious context of these records is the resurrection.

The point of this article is not this particular piece of doctrine. The point here is to examine the proper mindset toward the study of God’s Word. There must be a willingness to believe what the Scriptures say regardless of previously held beliefs. One whose mindset demands ignoring a clear record like 1 Thessalonians 4 and twisting other records to try to make them support a long held tradition will never get anywhere in learning God’s Word. (Incidentally, a thorough discussion of this topic may be found in Are the Dead Alive Now?, Victor Paul Wierwille, American Christian Press, available through our bookstore.)

Let’s take another example. Ephesians 1 is very clear that God has already MADE us accepted.

**Ephesians 1:6** To the praise of the glory of his grace, wherein he hath made us accepted in the beloved.
7 In whom we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins, according to the riches of his grace;

Here is Young’s Literal Translation of these verses:
Ephesians 1:6 to the praise of the glory of His grace, in which He did make us accepted in the beloved,  
7 in whom we have the redemption through his blood, the remission of the trespasses, according to the riches of His grace

Yet, when the editors of the King James Version translated 2 Corinthians 5:9, they had no problem rendering it in a contradictory manner:

2 Corinthians 5:9 Wherefore we labour, that, whether present or absent, we may be accepted of him.

The Greek word translated “accepted” in Ephesians 1:6 is the verb form of “charis,” grace. Literally, the verse says God “graced” us. He bestowed grace upon us. Translating it as “accepted” was not demanded by the Greek word, but it works in this context, showing what the grace was that was extended to us. The Greek word translated “accepted” in 2 Corinthians 5:9 is “euarestos” which literally means “well pleasing,” as is reflected by Young’s Literal Translation:

2 Corinthians 5:9 Wherefore also we are ambitious, whether at home or away from home, to be well pleasing to him,

OK, so again, what was going through the minds of the King James Version editors that they gave a thumbs-up to translating these two verses in a self-contradictory manner? Did they just not notice? That seems unlikely, but even if so, there was a reason for not noticing, a reason for there being no immediate big red flag. Apparently these two contradictory readings did not violate their belief system. Apparently, when they read in Ephesians 1:6 that “he hath made us accepted” they still held open the possibility that this only applied to us in some sense, and that there could be some other sense in which we must work to be accepted. The problem is that the verse in Ephesians does not say that.

It just says He made us accepted. So are we accepted or not?
Belief and Logic

A child in a loving family is always and will always be accepted by his parents. It is not likely, however, that he will always be well pleasing to them. Every child has his incorrigible moments that displease his parents, but no loving parent rejects his kid because of it. There is a difference between being accepted and being well pleasing. We work to be well pleasing, but God made us accepted in the beloved one, in Jesus Christ, in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins.

If a person believes that he can be accepted of God and at the same time not accepted of God, then he will look no further to find the answer to the apparent discrepancy. (Of course there is a word to describe the mental condition that holds two contradictory beliefs at the same time. Secularists call it “insanity.” Theologians call it whatever they have to in order to maintain their belief system.)

But what about redemption?

Ephesians 1:7 says we HAVE redemption. Are there not other scriptures that say we have not yet been redeemed? No.

**Ephesians 4:30** does indeed refer to a coming day of redemption.

**Ephesians 4:30** And grieve not the holy Spirit of God, whereby ye are sealed unto the day of redemption.

But what is it that gets redeemed at that day? It can’t be you. Ephesians 1:7 says we already have redemption (as does Romans 3:24, 1 Corinthians 1:30 and Colossians 1:14). Romans 8:22 & 23 make it clear that what has yet to be redeemed is your body (and all the rest of “creation”), not you.
Romans 8:22 For we know that the whole creation groaneth and travaileth in pain together until now.

23 And not only they, but ourselves also, which have the firstfruits of the Spirit, even we ourselves groan within ourselves, waiting for the adoption, to wit, the redemption of our body.

Don’t confuse you with your body. Your body is not you. Your body is just where you live. I know it is tempting for us oldsters to look at old pictures of friends or ourselves and consider how much we have aged. Don’t give in to the temptation. It isn’t true. Your body has aged, but your body is not you. You haven’t aged a bit.

OK, fine for reconciled, accepted, and redeemed, but Ephesians 1:7 also says we have the forgiveness of sins. Isn’t there a sense in which this is true but also a sense in which it is not true? The verse doesn’t say that, does it? It doesn’t say we have forgiveness of sins in one way but not in another. Nor does it say we have been forgiven of some sins but not others. It just says we HAVE the forgiveness of sins. We can believe this or not (trust me, it is better to believe it), but it isn’t sane to think that it is true AND that it is not true. The same truth is given in Ephesians 4:32.

Ephesians 4:32 And be ye kind one to another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, even as God for Christ’s sake hath forgiven you.

It does not say you have been forgiven of some things but not others. It just says HATH FORGIVEN you. Compare the following records from Colossians.

Colossians 1:14 In whom we have redemption through his blood, even the forgiveness of sins:

Colossians 2:13 And you, being dead in your sins and the uncircumcision of your flesh, hath he quickened together with him, having forgiven you ALL [emphasis mine] trespasses;
Colossians 3:13 Forbearing one another, and forgiving one another, if any man have a quarrel against any: even as Christ forgave you, so also do ye.

There is nothing in the seven Church Epistles that in any way comes close to contradicting these verses. Quite the contrary, there are many more verses which corroborate them. We were dead IN our sins but now are dead TO them. That is what the Epistles say. There is not a single verse in all the Church Epistles that so much as alludes to the believer needing to do or say anything to gain God’s forgiveness. The Epistles say we already have it. I can think of two verses outside the Church Epistles that would seem to say otherwise, but there is an answer to the apparent contradiction. (I delve into this subject in detail in the series of articles on the gift of righteousness.) Unfortunately, those who are willing to hold two contradictory views at the same time will not even recognize that there is a problem, let alone seek a solution.

Avoidance of self-contradiction doesn’t take a scholar, just people who are willing to believe the Scriptures exactly as they are written. Are we already reconciled to God or do we still need to be called unto reconciliation? You can’t have it both ways, as the editors of the King James Version (and others) seemed willing to accept. Have we been made accepted by God or do we still need to do something to become accepted? Both can’t be true. Have we been redeemed or not? Do we have the forgiveness of sins or do we still need to do something to obtain God’s forgiveness? Is the “old man” dead or do we still have to deal with him? Which is it? It can’t be both. Have we been made the righteousness of God in him (in Jesus Christ) or do we still need to do something to get cleansed of our unrighteousness? Holding both views defies reason. Accurate Biblical understanding requires that we not choose paths repugnant to reason.

God intended for His Word to be understood and believed. That’s why He made it simple. He isn’t responsible for the theological doublespeak that complicates so much of what many have been taught. I used to accept the doublespeak. It is what I was taught. Rather than just believe that I have been made the righteousness of God as 2 Corinthians 5:20 declares, I accepted the teaching that, “We have it spiritually, but in our walks...” Just exactly what does that mean? And if it is true that we only have it “spiritually,” why doesn’t Corinthians say so? Every benefit of the accomplished works of Jesus Christ can be minimalized or even down right denied by using the line, “We have it spiritually, but....”

How would you like to have that line applied to eternal life?
There are many other theological phrases used to promote acceptance of contradictory views. It is not a matter of the Bible contradicting itself. It doesn't. It is a matter of theology contradicting the Bible: thus, the smoke screen. If we will but rid ourselves of all non-biblical terms and phrases in our efforts to communicate Biblical matters, we will have made great progress in understanding and communicating what God's Word actually says. I look forward to Christ's return, but I never call it “the rapture.” Why should I? God never called it that (just another example).

Theology can be very complicated. Truth is simple. The Bible becomes much more easy to understand when we believe what it says rather than invent ways to explain away what it says where it contradicts what we believe. So believe what you read, and apply the same logic you use in every other aspect of your life. Don't accept the doublespeak or other complicated theological jargon. This will help greatly in coming to an accurate understanding of the pure and simple Word of God.