

Question: Is it really that important that we understand the Bible alike?

Answer:

Have you ever heard the word “sophistry” or “sophism” used? Maybe you have but don’t remember the context. Webster’s dictionary defines sophism as “an argument correct in form or appearance but actually invalid; an argument used to deceive.”

The use of sophism is abundant in matters pertaining to religion and the soul of man. When a person makes an argument and defends a position that seems reasonable to them, without considering whether it has any basis in fact, they have used a sophism.

Recently we heard a man respond to a question from the grand jury by saying, “It depends on what your definition of *is* is.” The statement made perfect sense to him because it was stated in correct form, but the public perceived it to be a deceptive argument meant to mislead the listener and the examination process.

Many of us were embarrassed by such an absurd response to a simple question, but we can do the same thing in matters pertaining to our eternal destiny. “I don’t see any reason to change my religious beliefs,” is a legitimate argument to many people, but is faulty reasoning when compared to scripture. “Examine yourselves, as to whether you are in the faith” (2 Co 13:5). In other words, compare your life and beliefs to the teaching of Christ and the apostles. Here are three more sophisms often used by religious people.

1. “As long as people are sincere, what they believe is unimportant.”

Do you know of any scripture that supports this conclusion? How does one harmonize the sentiment above with the following passages:

“There is a way that seems right to a man, but its end is the way of death” (Pro 14:12).

“Brethren, my hearts desire and prayer to God for Israel is that they may be saved. For I bear them witness that they have a zeal of God, but not according to knowledge. For they being ignorant of God’s righteousness, and seeking to establish their own righteousness, have not submitted to the righteousness of God” (Ro 10:1-3).

Solomon’s warning in the Proverbs went unheeded by the Jews of Paul’s day. Even so today, many honest, well-meaning people are mistaken to believe that “sincerity” in religion can substitute for an accurate understanding of God’s word. Remember, only the word of Christ can make a disciple, and only His truth can make men free from sin (Jn 8:31-32). Don’t be deluded by the sophism that what you believe is unimportant so long as you are sincere.

2. “Paul told the jailer only to believe and he would be saved.”

He did indeed, but it is a sophism to conclude that his belief and salvation was complete at that moment of time he gave a mental assent to the deity of Christ.

Paul said that, “faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the word of God” (Ro 10:17). Paul and Silas “spoke the word of the Lord to him and to all who were in his house” (Ac 16:32). After preaching of Christ, the jailer “took them the same hour of the night and washed their stripes. And immediately he and all his family were baptized...and he rejoiced, having *believed* with all his household” (Ac 16:33-34).

The point is that an isolated passage may not give us all the information we need to draw an accurate conclusion. Study each verse in the light of its context. Our understanding of a Bible topic must harmonize with all New Testament teaching on that subject; otherwise, we may fall prey to sophism.

3. “The Bible says, ‘Call on the Lord and you will be saved.’”

Yes it does (Ro 10:13), but it is sophism to think “calling on the Lord” is simply saying something like, “Lord, save me! I’ve opened my heart to You, now make me Your child.”

The preacher Ananias tells what calling upon the name of the Lord means for an unsaved person. He once told a strict Jew, waiting to be told what he *must* do, “And now why are you waiting? Arise and be baptized, and wash away your sins, *calling on the name of the Lord*” (Ac 22:16). Calling on the Lord’s name means doing what the Lord commands us to do for the removal of our sins.

Sophisms may seem rather innocent in some areas of life, but they cloud a clear view of God and His will for man. In that way, they are quite dangerous! Sophisms have a tremendous power of influence over our minds. They are very persuasive methods of reasoning, because they appear to be true when they are not. They satisfy our conscience, but do not have a foundation in fact. Sadly, though, they keep us from understanding the Bible alike and thus “endeavoring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace” (Ep 4:3).

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