Doctrine of Bible Interpretation

Contradiction, Paradox, Mystery

1. There are important concepts which guide Bible interpretation.

- Law of Non-Contradiction. Simply stated, “A cannot be A and non A at the same time, and in the same way, or relationship.” Something cannot be what it is, and not what it is, in the same time and in the same way. A man can be a father and a son at the same time without violating any law of reason. But a man cannot be father and son at the same time and in the same way without violating the Law of Non-Contradiction. A man cannot be his own father.

  **Special Note.**
  A seminary professor who taught R. C. Sproul, once declared, “God is absolutely mutable in His essence.” Then, the professor paused and said, “God is absolutely immutable in His essence.” As deep and spiritual as that may sound, it is logically nonsensical. It violates the Law of Non-Contradiction.

Paul Tillich (August 20, 1886 – October 22, 1965) taught that God was the ground of Being. He went on to declare that we cannot attribute personality to God for God is neither personal, nor impersonal. But that is non-sense. A student asked Dr. Tillich, “If God is the ground of all Being, is the ground personal, or impersonal?”

- Law of Causality.
- The Basic Reliability of Sense Perception
- The Analogical Use of Language

2. There are important concepts which must be distinguished for the terms are often used interchangeably.

- Contradiction (Latin, contra, against; diction, to speak). A contradiction means literally to speak against something.

- Paradox (para, alongside; dox, to seem, to appear). A paradox is something that seems or appears to be contradictory, but it is not.

  **Special Note.**
  Antinomy (anti, against, nomos, law). An antinomy means literally, to be against law. An antinomy is a contradiction of the Law of Non-contradiction, and is therefore a contradiction.
• Mystery (Greek, musterion). A mystery is different from a contradiction and a paradox, historically. The word

**Special Note.**
Lexicography concerns itself with the original meaning, origin, and use of words historically, and in a contemporary setting.

3. It is easy to get these concepts confused. Many reject the Doctrine of the Trinity by charging the Biblical teaching on the Trinity to be illogical, and a violation of the Law of Contradiction.

4. The Doctrine of the Trinity does not violate the Law of Non-Contradiction. The Doctrine of the Trinity says that God is one in essence, but three in person.

• God is 1 in A meaning He has 1 in unity
• God is 3 in B meaning He has 3 in diversity

To say that God is one in one thing, but three in another thing, is not to violate the Law of Non-Contradiction.

**Special Note.**
If the Doctrine of the Trinity was to teach that God is one in essence, but three in essence, then the doctrine would violate the Law of Non-Contradiction.

If the Doctrine of the Trinity was to teach that God is one in person, but three in person, then the doctrine would violate the Law of Non-Contradiction.

5. While the Trinity is not a contradiction, it is a paradox.

6. The prefix “para” means, “that which is alongside something else.” A parable is a truth with a story thrown alongside. We are familiar with “paralegal”, “paramedic”, and “para ministries.”

7. The root of the word, “dox”, means, “to seem; to appear.” This word forms the basis for the early heresy of Docetism, which taught that Jesus did not have a real body, He only appeared to have one.

**Special Note.**
The great scandal for the Greek was not the resurrection, but the incarnation of Christ. They resisted the idea of God taking on the form of a human nature, for the body was vile. So, the idea arose among Greek Christians that Jesus only seemed to have a body. It was an illusion. John said such a person who taught this was antichrist.
• 1 John 2:18 Little children, it is the last time: and as ye have heard that antichrist shall come, even now are there many antichrists; whereby we know that it is the last time. 19 They went out from us, but they were not of us; for if they had been of us, they would no doubt have continued with us: but they went out, that they might be made manifest that they were not all of us. 20 But ye have an unction from the Holy One, and ye know all things. 21 I have not written unto you because ye know not the truth, but because ye know it, and that no lie is of the truth. 22 Who is a liar but he that denieth that Jesus is the Christ? He is antichrist, that denieth the Father and the Son.

8. A paradox is that which seems at first appearance to be a contradiction, but it is not. There are a number of paradoxes in Scripture.

• Finding life by losing it. Matthew 10:39 He that findeth his life shall lose it: and he that loseth his life for my sake shall find it.

• Living through dying. John 12:24 Verily, verily, I say unto you, Except a corn of wheat fall into the ground and die, it abideth alone: but if it die, it bringeth forth much fruit.

• Receiving a blessing by giving. Acts 20:35 I have shewed you all things, how that so labouring ye ought to support the weak, and to remember the words of the Lord Jesus, how he said, It is more blessed to give than to receive.

• Finding freedom through servitude. Romans 6:18 Being then made free from sin, ye became the servants of righteousness.

• Being strong through weakness. 2 Corinthians 12:10 Therefore I take pleasure in infirmities, in reproaches, in necessities, in persecutions, in distresses for Christ's sake: for when I am weak, then am I strong.

• Exaltation through humiliation. Philippians 2:8 And being found in fashion as a man, he humbled himself, and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross. 9 Wherefore God also hath highly exalted him, and given him a name which is above every name:

• Losing all things to win Christ. Philippians 3:7 But what things were gain to me, those I counted loss for Christ. 8 Yea doubtless, and I count all things but loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord: for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and do count them but dung, that I may win Christ,

• Being lifted up by being humble. James 4:10 Humble yourselves in the sight of the Lord, and he shall lift you up.

9. To say that God is one in essence but three in persons in setting forth the Doctrine of the Trinity is to say something which passes the Law of Non-Contradiction.

10. There is another word that must be understood and that is the word “antinomy.”
11. An “antinomy” literally means, in classical philosophy, the same as “contradiction.”

*Special Note.*
Dr. J. I. Packer, a British scholar and theologian, uses the word “antinomy” often in his writings to speak of the many “antinomies” within the Christian faith. However, he misuses the word for the American audience causing confusing, but confirming the adage that “the English and the Americans are a united people, divided by a common language.” The Bible does not have “antinomies”. Dr. Packer, when asked, affirmed that he was using the term “antinomy” in the sense of a “paradox”, not a contradiction.

12. The Bible does not have any contradictions. God does not speak with a forked tongue. God is not irrational.

13. It is wrong to postulate a higher view of God that allows Him to engage in contradictions. While this view is found within the church, it will destroy the Christian faith for God’s Word would always be in doubt. He could not be trusted.

14. The Bible does have many mysteries. To say that God is one in essence but three in persons is to state a great mystery. It is a truth that cannot be fully penetrated.

15. The hypo-static union of Christ is another mystery. But the Bible does teach both the divinity and the humanity of Christ in the one person.

16. The story of divine creation whereby God spoke and the world sprang into existence, that is a great mystery.

17. The finite cannot contain or grasp the Infinite. After death, there will be a quantum leap in our understanding, but we will still be finite.

18. The mysterious nature of something, does not diminish its reality. Even in our physical universe there are many mysteries yet to be known. No one has fully defined gravity. There are disputes about the actual nature of motion, and time.

19. The rudiments of electricity can be mysterious, but there are elements which can be understood.

20. There are many things which are mysterious to one person, is not a mystery to others. Medicine, microbiology, physics, are subjects which are a great mystery to those who have studied them.

21. There are things yet to learn about nature, and about God.

22. A mystery was something that could be concealed, or revealed. Jesus spoke of the mystery of the kingdom of God, and declared that this mystery could be made known.
• Mark 4:11 And he said unto them, Unto you it is given to know the mystery of the kingdom of God: but unto them that are without, all these things are done in parables: 12 That seeing they may see, and not perceive; and hearing they may hear, and not understand; lest at any time they should be converted, and their sins should be forgiven them.

23. Paul was fond of speaking of mysteries. To Paul, a mystery was something that was once concealed, but is now revealed.

• Ephesians 3:3 How that by revelation he made known unto me the mystery; (as I wrote afore in few words, 4 Whereby, when ye read, ye may understand my knowledge in the mystery of Christ) 5 Which in other ages was not made known unto the sons of men, as it is now revealed unto his holy apostles and prophets by the Spirit; 6 That the Gentiles should be fellow heirs, and of the same body, and partakers of his promise in Christ by the gospel:

24. A mystery does have something crucial in common with a paradox and a contradiction. What they have in common is a present lack of understanding.

Special Note.
If I say, “This piece of chalk is not a piece of chalk”, nothing is learned because the statement is contradictory. Logic is needed in order to understand anything. There has to be sense made out of the data.

25. If something remains a mystery, a contradiction, or a paradox, then it is of limited value at the present. But each one can be discovered to have meaning with understanding. At that point, the paradox is understood, the contradiction is proven to be illogical, or only an apparent contradiction, and a mystery is revealed.

26. Our lack of understanding is never to be used as an excuse for rejecting Christ, or God, or the Bible.

“Open my eyes, that I may see
glimpses of truth thou hast for me;
place in my hands the wonderful key
that shall unclasp and set me free.
Silently now I wait for thee,
ready, my God, thy will to see.
Open my eyes, illumine me, Spirit divine!

Open my ears, that I may hear
voices of truth thou sendest clear;
and while the wave notes fall on my ear,
everything false will disappear.
Silently now I wait for thee,
ready, my God, thy will to see.
Open my ears, illumine me, Spirit divine!
Open my mouth, and let me bear
gladly the warm truth everywhere;
open my heart and let me prepare
love with thy children thus to share.

Silently now I wait for thee,
ready, my God, thy will to see.
Open my heart, illumine me, Spirit divine!”

Clara H. Scott
1841 - 1897