

When apparent Bible conflicts give way to perfect harmony.

If you read your Bible daily, you will occasionally read a verse that almost seems to contradict doctrines you have believed. Assuming you believe that the entire Bible is the very Word of God, you know that it cannot contradict itself. If you are like me, you assume that, even if you cannot explain it immediately, there is a logical explanation for the apparent conflict. When I read a verse that does not seem to harmonize perfectly with my current understanding, I assume that my understanding most likely needs to be adjusted. So, I ask God daily to shape my thinking and bring it in line with His truth. Though some answers do not come immediately, He has shown Himself faithful to answer my prayers. He has been reshaping my thinking. Apparent discrepancies gradually melt away as He lets me see the harmony that exists throughout His Word. This helps to strengthen my faith and build confidence that I possess the inerrant Word of God. Hopefully, this has been your experience also.

Shown below are some verses in Paul's letters to Timothy that used to confuse me. Based upon the popular teaching in the twenty-first century, it is quite possible that these verses may be confusing to you. Before discussing them, let me assure you that Paul did not contradict himself. Any apparent conflicts can be eliminated once certain words are properly (biblically) defined. Now, let's examine why some of these verses may be confusing to some Christians.

In II Timothy 3:15, Paul told Timothy that paying diligent attention to the Scriptures could make him wise unto salvation. If Timothy was already "saved," why did he need to be made wise unto salvation? Didn't he already possess salvation?

In I Timothy 4:16, Paul told Timothy that if he takes heed to himself and the doctrine, and continues in them, he would both "save" himself and those who hear him. Wasn't Timothy already "saved?"

In I Timothy 6:12, Paul told Timothy to lay hold of eternal life. Didn't he already have eternal life?

Now if Paul did not think Timothy was a believer, these verses would not be so confusing. But based upon passages like II Timothy 1:5 and Philippians 2:19-20, we know Paul was convinced that Timothy was a believer.

These verses may be confusing to you. But I assure you that they are not confusing to me. If they seem to be in conflict with your understanding, let me suggest that you need to tweak how you currently define the words "salvation," "saved" and "eternal life." Any apparent conflicts will immediately vanish if you bring your definition of the words "salvation," "saved" and "eternal life" in line with Paul's teaching about **these words**.¹

Be diligent to present yourself approved to God, a worker who does not need to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth- II Timothy 2:15.

¹ Many Christians automatically assume that when Paul used the words "saved" and "salvation," he was talking about conversion, something that happened in their past. In reality, he was usually talking about our future salvation that will take place when Jesus comes back. If Paul was usually referring to our future salvation when he used these words, then suddenly, the confusion and apparent conflicts melt away. (Rather than listening to pastors or commentaries which are often wrong on this issue these days, I suggest you do word studies to see how they are used throughout the New Testament, especially by Paul.)