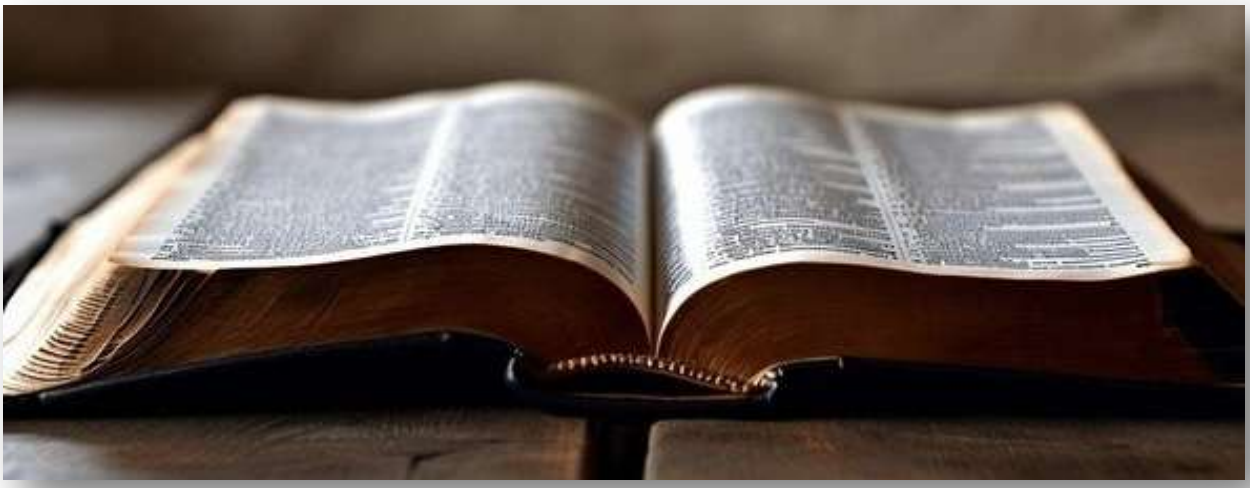
Why Didn't God Just Tell Us Plainly? (Abridged)

By Reagan McClenny



A preacher was studying salvation with his neighbor when the subject of baptism arose. The neighbor declared, "I need to be baptized, but I'm already saved, like the thief on the cross." The preacher turned to Hebrews 10:9: "He takes away the first that He may establish the second." He explained that the thief lived and died under the old covenant, before baptism for the remission of sins became a command under the new covenant.

"Wow," replied the neighbor. "You learn something new every day."

Did this distinction *become* truth when the neighbor understood it? Certainly not! Truth existed long before his discovery. When we draw a conclusion God intended from Scripture, we discover something that was always there.

The Necessity of Necessary Inference

"Inference" simply means deriving conclusions from established facts. Some recoil at the phrase "necessary inference," yet without inference, how could Scripture apply personally to anyone today?

No inspired epistle was addressed specifically to me. I was not physically present when Jesus taught His disciples. Consequently, applying Scripture requires recognizing that instructions originally addressed to others may also apply to us.

Consider Acts 2:38–39. Peter commanded his audience to repent and be baptized for the remission of sins, declaring that the promise extended to their children and "all who are afar off." I must infer that this promise includes me and that Peter's command was not restricted to first-century Jews.

We not only *can* use inference in understanding Scripture; we must use it to make personal application.

Not Just Necessary Inference—Divine Implication!

We must reject the false choice between understanding everything immediately and understanding nothing with certainty. Peter acknowledged that some of Paul's writings were "hard to understand" (2 Peter 3:16), yet urged believers to "grow in grace and knowledge" (3:18).

Difficulty does not make truth unknowable. When I understand Scripture for the first time, truth is not created; it is discovered. I may infer something today that God implied centuries ago!

Necessary inference is not an educated guess. It is the unavoidable conclusion reached through honest, careful examination of God's revelation. When no reasonable alternative remains, the conclusion is necessary—not because we invented it, but because God implied it!

Faith in God's Means of Revelation

The New Testament acknowledges Christ's law (James 2:12; Galatians 6:2), yet God did not reveal His will merely through lists of regulations. Instead, He gave us history, letters, prophecy, and the teachings of Jesus.

Why?

Consider Matthew 13:10–19. Jesus employed parables to reveal truth to receptive hearts while exposing the blindness of those unwilling to listen. His illustrations moved listeners from familiar experiences toward deeper spiritual understanding.

Jesus implied truths His listeners were expected to infer.

Understanding required more than intelligence; it demanded honest hearts. Those convinced they already possessed every answer often missed the kingdom truths standing before them.

Jesus also expected His audiences to reason correctly from Scripture, sometimes rebuking their failure to understand (Matthew 16:6–12; 19:3–6; 22:29–34).

Likewise, the entire New Testament reveals principles applicable across generations and circumstances. These principles address actions, motives, attitudes, and intentions. They instruct, correct, comfort, encourage, and transform.

Hebrews 4:12 describes God's word as "living and active," discerning even "the thoughts and intentions of the heart."

A mere catalog of regulations could never accomplish everything God's revelation accomplishes.

Sometimes God speaks explicitly. Elsewhere, He reveals truth through implications that thoughtful, honest readers must recognize. Both methods communicate His will.

Our responsibility is neither to invent conclusions nor reject reasoning, but to discover faithfully what God has revealed.

We must approach Scripture with humility, careful reasoning, and confidence in God's wisdom. His word accomplishes His purposes, and honest hearts must diligently seek its meaning.

Truth does not become truth when we discover it. Truth was already there, waiting to be understood.