

Mark 9:32

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

But they understood not that saying, and were afraid to ask him.

Analysis

The disciples' response reveals their spiritual dullness: 'they understood not that saying, and were afraid to ask him' (οἱ δὲ ἡγνόουν τὸ ὄντα, καὶ ἐφοβοῦντο αὐτὸν ἐπερωτῆσαι). The verb 'understood not' (ēgnooun, ἡγνόουν) indicates incomprehension, not mere ignorance. Jesus spoke plainly (v. 31), yet they couldn't grasp it. This demonstrates that spiritual truth requires divine illumination (1 Corinthians 2:14)—natural human reason cannot comprehend God's wisdom. Their fear to ask (ephobounto, ἐφοβοῦντο) shows awareness that they should understand but didn't. Perhaps they feared rebuke (like Peter in Mark 8:33) or dreaded confirmation of Jesus' disturbing words. This combination—incomprehension and fear—prevented them from seeking clarity. How often does pride or fear keep us from asking Jesus for understanding?

Historical Context

The disciples' inability to understand Jesus' passion predictions despite clear statements demonstrates the radical nature of a suffering Messiah concept. Every cultural and theological framework they possessed emphasized triumphant Messiah, not dying Messiah. Isaiah 53's suffering servant wasn't clearly connected to Messiah in Jewish interpretation. The disciples' fear to ask reflects ancient Mediterranean honor culture where admitting ignorance could bring shame. Additionally, Peter's recent rebuke (Mark 8:32-33) may have made them reluctant to question Jesus again. Only after the resurrection did they understand (Luke

24:25-27, 44-45; John 2:22). Reformed theology emphasizes that Scripture requires Spirit-illumination—objective revelation plus subjective enlightenment.

Related Passages

James 2:17 — Faith and works

Hebrews 11:1 — Definition of faith

Study Questions

1. How does the disciples' inability to understand despite clear teaching illustrate human spiritual blindness apart from divine illumination?
2. What does their fear to ask questions teach about how pride or fear of rebuke can prevent us from seeking clarity from God?

Interlinear Text

οἱ	δὲ	ὴγνόουν	τὸ	ρῆμα	καὶ	ἐφοβοῦντο	αὐτὸν
G3588	But	they understood not	G3588	that saying	and	were afraid	him
G1161		G50		G4487	G2532	G5399	G846

ἐπερωτῆσαι

to ask

G1905

Additional Cross-References

Luke 18:34 (Parallel theme): And they understood none of these things: and this saying was hid from them, neither knew they the things which were spoken.

Luke 9:45 (Parallel theme): But they understood not this saying, and it was hid from them, that they perceived it not: and they feared to ask him of that saying.

Luke 2:50 (Parallel theme): And they understood not the saying which he spake unto them.

John 16:19 (Parallel theme): Now Jesus knew that they were desirous to ask him, and said unto them, Do ye enquire among yourselves of that I said, A little while, and ye shall not see me: and again, a little while, and ye shall see me?

John 12:16 (Parallel theme): These things understood not his disciples at the first: but when Jesus was glorified, then remembered they that these things were written of him, and that they had done these things unto him.

Mark 9:10 (Parallel theme): And they kept that saying with themselves, questioning one with another what the rising from the dead should mean.

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