

CHAPTER FIFTEEN

Hermeneutics

How to interpret the Bible for all it's worth.



Papyrus 46 is one of the oldest extant New Testament manuscripts in Greek written on Papyrus (175 – 225 A.D.).

Section One

The Nature of Exegesis

The English word “exegesis” is a transliteration from the Greek word ἐξήγησις. We got the word “excavate” from the same Greek word. It means to interpret a literary unit by digging out of the words the syntax, the context of the passage, and the original meaning in the mind of the author who wrote the text. The theological term was

developed from John 1:18, where Jesus Christ is described as the “exegesis” of the Father.

We are always amused by liberal theologians who claim that it is impossible in principle to discover the original meaning of the authors of the Bible. We always respond by asking,

Do you expect your students to understand the original meaning you had in mind when you wrote your book? Do you not test them to see if they have exegeted your book correctly? Do you allow your students to make up whatever had meaning to them? No. Let’s be honest. You expect your readers to discover the original meaning you had in mind when you wrote your book. How then do you deny this fact to the authors of Scriptures?

Obviously, when liberals claim that it is impossible to discover the original meaning of the Bible, they do not want you to apply their rule to their writings!

Deconstructionism and Postmodernism

We have had some good belly laughs at a recent modern attempt to deny that it is possible to discover the objective meaning of biblical texts. Deconstructionists argue that the interpreter must subjectively “enter into” the meaning of the text. But as soon as you begin to deconstruct deconstructionism and treat their books as they treat the Bible, they are the first to cry foul. They fully expect you to understand the objective and original meaning in the texts they have written! *Any literary principle that if valid would render itself meaningless is nonsense.*

The Nature of Eisegesis

The English word “eisegesis” is a transliteration from the Greek.

The prefix “eis”, which means “into”, is in contrast to the prefix “ex,” which means “out of.” Eisegesis means to insert a meaning into the words and syntax of the text that is foreign to the original meaning in the mind of the author of that text. When we read modern ideas or scientific models back into the text of Scripture, we are guilty of eisegesis.

For example, I have heard many preachers interpret the word “nature” in I Cor. 11:14 as a reference to “natural law.” But the concept of “natural law” that forms the basis of their interpretation did not appear in human history until Sir Isaac Newton! Obviously, the Apostle had never heard of Newton or his concept of “natural law.” It is sheer eisegesis to insert the Newtonian world and life view into the Bible.

Widespread Problem

One of the greatest problems we face today is that most pastors and Christians abuse the Bible by using constant eisegesis. There is little concern today to discover the original meaning of the text. The so-called “inductive” Bible study has deceived many naïve people to think that what the text “means to them” is what the text means. They do not understand that when you relate a text to your personal life, this is application, not interpretation.

The exegesis of a text gives you the objective meaning of the passage and has nothing to do with you or your circumstances. But when you take the meaning and relate it to your personal life, this is *application*.

The interpretation of Scripture is objective because it is based on the grammar, syntax, literary context, and cultural context of the passage in question. The application of a passage is subjective and personal.

Theological Distinctions

There is another pitfall in biblical interpretation that has produced a great deal of confusion. I am referring to the problem of “theological distinctions.” They are clichés or nifty phrases that

arise in Church history as a byproduct of the process of doctrinal formulation. Theological distinctions can be good or bad. They can clarify Scripture or blind us to it. Perhaps an illustration will help us at this point.

As a ship sails through the sea, barnacles slowly attach themselves to the hull of the ship. These barnacles pose a threat to the ship's survival. Thus a ship has to be put into dry dock and the barnacles knocked off. If they are not removed, the ship will eventually sink under their weight.

As the Church sails through human history, theological distinctions, like barnacles, gradually attach themselves to theology and philosophy. They have to be knocked off from time to time, or the Church will sink under their weight. This was what the Reformation was all about.

Spiritual Gifts

One clear illustration of how the problem of modern theological distinctions can color one's interpretation of Scripture is the issue of spiritual gifts. The anti-gift theologians interpret I Cor. 12-14 with such a *priori* distinctions as "permanent vs temporary gifts," "natural vs supernatural gifts," "sign miracles vs power miracles," etc. Then they arbitrarily run through the gifts listed by Paul and pronounce one gift "permanent" and the next one "temporary." They seem oblivious to the fact that Paul could not have understood spiritual gifts in terms of such modern distinctions. The anti-gift crowd is clearly guilty of gross eisegesis.

The Law of God

Another clear example of how theological distinctions can get in the way of exegesis is when we fall into the trap the dividing the law of God into the three categories of "civil, ceremonial, and moral" laws. These theological distinctions arose in medieval Catholic theology and, unfortunately, were retained by Protestant scholasticism and ended up in various Protestant creeds. It is thus not surprising that most Christians today assume them to be true and use

them to interpret the Bible.

While the theological distinctions of “civil, ceremonial, and moral” enable some people to define what they believe about the law of God, the authors of Scripture never heard of, much less believed in, these distinctions. This fact, however, does not stop most Christian philosophers and theologians from reading these theological distinctions back into biblical texts, making exegesis impossible. Any attempt to read these distinctions back into Scripture is nothing more than gross eisegesis.

This problem is apparent when we examine commentaries on the Book of Galatians. The commentators run through the book assuming that νόμος in this or that verse is “moral” or “ceremonial” or “civil” law. The entire process is so arbitrary that when νόμος appears more than once in the same sentence, it is interpreted as “moral” in one instance and “ceremonial” in the other!

Galatians 3:13 is a good example of this error. It states that the Messiah “redeemed us from the curse of the law.” Now, did Jesus redeem us from the curse of the civil, ceremonial or moral law, or did He redeem us from the curse of “the law” in its entirety? If Jesus only redeemed us from the curse of the ceremonial law, then we still have to bear the curse of the civil and moral law! If that is the case, we are all doomed to an eternal hell. See my book, *How the Old and New Testaments Relate to Each Other*, for an extended discussion of the many problems with the traditional threefold division of the law.

We will never understand the New Testament concept of “law” by taking medieval ideas and inserting them into the text. Since we have discussed this issue elsewhere, it is sufficient to illustrate how theological distinctions can hinder our understanding of Scripture.

Principles of Approach

The following principles of approach should be observed:

- First, we must first admit to ourselves that we have unconsciously adopted many theological distinctions that do not arise out of the text of Scripture. We pick up these ideas like dogs pick up fleas – Here, there and everywhere. If we

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do not become epistemologically self-conscious of these distinctions, they will so color our interpretation of Scripture that we end up being guilty of eisegesis.

- Second, once we have identified the hidden theological distinctions that clutter our minds, then we must judge whether they are:

<i>valid or false,</i>	<i>helpful or harmful,</i>
<i>vague or clear,</i>	<i>necessary or unnecessary,</i>
<i>useful or useless,</i>	<i>exegetical or creedal</i>

Not all distinctions are harmful and some can be helpful if they truly arise out of solid exegesis.

- Third, beware of taking modern doctrines and trying to read them back into the Bible. For example, the doctrine of “Middle Knowledge” was invented by a Jesuit priest named Luis de Molina. He developed it as a way to attack the biblical gospel that we are saved by grace alone, through faith alone, in Christ alone. His doctrine was so radical that even the Catholic Church almost condemned it as heresy! But, sadly, several popular “evangelical” apologists have swallowed it hook, line, and sinker!

All scholars, Catholic and Protestant, acknowledge that Molina invented a radically new doctrine that had never been taught by any Jewish Rabbi, church father or theologian. Since the doctrine of “Middle Knowledge” did not come into existence until the Counter-Reformation period, it cannot, in principle, be found in the Bible, because it was written thousands of years before Molina was born.

Smart Molinists do not appeal to the Bible, but depend entirely on philosophical arguments. But the not-so-smart Molinists find a verse here or there in the Bible that they think they can twist to teach Middle Knowledge. Their “biblical” arguments are nothing more than fanciful eisegesis. Since Molinism is not part of “the faith once and for all delivered to the saints” (Jude 3), it cannot in principle be found in the Bible.

Conclusion

Although theological distinctions can become so widely accepted that they become part of the vocabulary of orthodoxy, we must not unconsciously impose such distinctions upon Scripture. We must not take modern ideas and pretend that they can be found in the Bible.

Section Two

Basic Definitions

The importance of rightly interpreting Scripture cannot be underestimated. If the people of God do not know how to read the Bible, false teachers will easily deceive them (Acts 20:28-32).

I. **What is Hermeneutics?**

Hermeneutics is the science of the (1.) discovery, (2.) understanding, and (3.) use of those linguistic and literary principles and rules of interpretation that should be followed when interpreting the Bible or any other ancient literature.

II. **What Are the Foundational Concepts of Hermeneutics?**

A. The bible is literature. It is not music or paintings. It is composed of ancient Jewish scrolls.

B. Since the Bible is *literature*, it should be interpreted the same way any other ancient literature is interpreted. No special methods of interpretation should be followed.

III. **What is Exegesis?**

A. Exegesis is the application of hermeneutics to a particular text of Scripture to discern the ideas that the author was conveying to his readers by his choice of words and the syntax of his sentences.

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EXEGESIS - Superstructure (application)
HERMENEUTICS - Foundation (principles)

B. Exegesis is the opposite of eisegesis, which is the reading into a text your own ideas with little or no concern for what the author was saying.

IV. **Why Bother with Hermeneutics?**

A. The Bible comes to us as literature: prose, poetry, historical narrative, apocalyptic literature, letters, dialogue, theological treatise, biography, etc.

B. Hermeneutics is the study of the valid ways in which we interpret any piece of literature.

1. We must observe vocabulary, grammar and syntax.

2. We must observe literary units such as context (paragraph, chapter, book, and place in the canon).

3. We must seek to discern the historical and cultural context of the situation of the author.

V. **There Are Right Ways and Wrong Ways to Interpret the Bible.**

A. The Right Way:

1. II Tim. 2:15:

“Be diligent to present yourself approved to God as a workman who does not need to be ashamed, handling accurately the word of truth.”

σπούδασον σεαυτὸν δόκιμον παραστήσαι τῷ θεῷ ἐργάτην ἀνεπαίσχυντον ὀρθοτομοῦντ σπούδασον σεαυτὸν δόκιμον παραστήσαι τῷ θεῷ ἐργάτην ἀνεπαίσχυντον ὀρθοτομοῦντα τὸν λόγον τῆς ἀληθείας

The Greek word ὀρθοτομοῦντα translated “handling accurately” is in a present active participle (imperative sense) masculine 2nd person singular from the verb ὀρθοτομέω, to use or interpret correctly. It is found only once in the New Testament. A. T. Robertson comments:

“Handling aright (*orthotomounta*). Present active participle of *orthotomeo*, late and rare compound (orthotomos), cutting straight, *orthos* and *temno*, here only in the N.T. It occurs in Prs3:6;11:5 for making straight paths (*hodous*) with which compare Heb. 12:13 and “the Way” in Acts 9:2. Theodoret explains it to mean ploughing a straight furrow. Parry argues that the metaphor is the stone mason cutting the stones straight since *temno* and *orthos* are so used. Since Paul was a tent maker and knew how to cut straight the rough camel-hair cloth, why not let that be the metaphor? Certainly plenty of exegesis is crooked enough (crazy-quilt patterns) to call for careful cutting to set it straight.”

B. The Wrong Way:

1. Matt. 22:29:

“But Jesus answered and said to them, ‘You are mistaken, not understanding the Scriptures, or the power of God.’”

Jesus rebuked the Sadducees because they did not have a valid interpretation of Scripture. This led them to false doctrine.

Ἀποκριθεὶς δὲ ὁ Ἰησοῦς εἶπεν αὐτοῖς· Πλανᾶσθε μὴ εἰδότες τὰς γραφὰς μηδὲ τὴν δύναμιν τοῦ θεοῦ·

Πλανᾶσθε is a perfect active participle nominative masculine 2nd person plural from πλανᾶω . μὴ is the word for “not.” Jesus rebuked the Sadducees because they did not have a valid interpretation of Scripture. This led them to false doctrine.

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2. II Pet. 3:16:

“As also in all his letters, speaking in them of these things, in which are some things hard to understand, which untaught and unstable distort, as they do also the rest of the Scriptures, to their own destruction.”

¹⁶ ὡς καὶ ἐν πάσαις ἐπιστολαῖς λαλῶν ἐν αὐταῖς περὶ τούτων, ἐν αἷς ἐστὶν δυσνόητά τινα, ἃ οἱ ἀμαθεῖς καὶ ἀστήρικτοι στρεβλοῦσιν ὡς καὶ τὰς λοιπὰς γραφὰς πρὸς τὴν ἰδίαν αὐτῶν ἀπώλειαν.

“Distort” is a present active indicative 3rd person plural from στρεβλόω, to distort, twist.

3. Other wrong ways:

- a. Partial quotation: “There is no God” (Psa. 14:1).
 - b. Not observing who said it: “You shall be as God” (Gen. 3:5).
 - c. Stringing together unrelated proof texts (Matt. 23:37 cf. Lk. 19:41)
 - d. Taking a verse out of context: (John 15:1-6).
4. Allowing tradition to influence your interpretation of Scripture: (Mk. 7:1-13; Phil. 2:10).
 5. A mystical approach, where you let the Bible fall open at random and pick a verse by “chance.”
 6. A cultic or occultic interpretation that comes from God, angels, spirits, ascended masters, aliens on UFOs, the dead, etc.
 7. Misquoting a verse (Mat. 23:37; Phil 2:10-11).
 8. Deliberate mistranslation of verses. ex. The New World Translation (JW), The Jewish Publications translation, the Anchor Bible, The Promise, The Living Bible, RSV, etc.
 9. Not noticing to whom the verse is directed (Heb. 6:1-10).

VI. How Should We Interpret the Bible?

It is erroneous to say, "The Bible can be interpreted any way you want." Except for a few difficult places, if the principles of hermeneutics are consistently followed, there will be only *one valid* interpretation of a text.

We should interpret the Bible by following *objective rules*. By "objective" I mean that our reason, feelings, faith or experience should not enter into the meaning of a text. Thus the meaning comes from the grammar and syntax of the text. The text reveals the meaning the author intended to convey to his readers when he wrote it. Note: If this is true, then why are there so many denominations? The reason why there are conflicting interpretations is that people allow religious traditions, personal prejudices, racism, pagan philosophy, and denominational biases to influence their interpretation of Scripture. Some people approach the Bible determined to make it say what they want it to say. They run through the Bible looking for proof texts to support their pet doctrine.

VII. Where Should We Obtain our Hermeneutical Principles?

A. The foundational principle of approach:

The same basic linguistic and literary rules which we use when interpreting any historic or contemporary literature should be utilized when reading the Bible. Since the Bible does not contain any unique literary forms, our hermeneutics should not be unique only to Scripture.

B. The science of hermeneutics reveals the basic error of liberal and neo-orthodox hermeneutics. They have developed hermeneutical principles that cannot be applied to any historic or contemporary literature. They then apply these special hermeneutics to the Bible to discredit it. The so-called "New Hermeneutics" are nothing more than another way

that liberals twist the Scriptures to their own eternal damnation.

1. The J.E.P.D Higher Critical Theory cannot be applied to Homer, Plato, Shakespeare or contemporary works.
 2. A computer analysis of vocabulary cannot be applied to literature in general.
- C. This basic principle also reveals the error of Medieval or Roman Catholic hermeneutics. It was taught that a text had three meanings:
1. A literal meaning that ignorant and uneducated people could discern.
 2. A moral meaning that educated and cultured people could discern.
 3. A spiritual meaning that only the clergy could discern.
- D. This basic principle also reveals the fallacy of cultic and occultic hermeneutics. Each cultic or occultic leader or group gives an “inner” or “secret” meaning which is not discernible from the text. Their interpretation ignores grammar, syntax, context, etc. ex. Christian Science, The Church of Bible Understanding, The Watchtower, The Metaphysical Bible Dictionary, SDA, etc.
- E. The fact that the Bible was written in everyday language for normal people dispels all “secret” and “mystical” interpretations. A “plain” Bible written for “plain” people needs a “plain” interpretation. There are no “secret keys” to interpreting the Bible because it does not come to us as a locked book waiting for some special mystical interpreter to arrive on the scene.
- F. This is why the “Bible Codes” fad is a fraud. It came from the occultic teachings of the Kabala, and attempts to find hidden meanings beneath the plain meaning of Scripture.

VIII. **How Should We Approach the Bible?**

A Christian Student's Survival Guide

- A. In an attitude of Worship: Isaiah 66:1-2, Psa. 119:97; Psa. 138:2; John 1:1-2
 - 1. Spirit of dependence: Psa. 119:18, 24; I Cor. 2:11-12; Lk. 24:25-32.
 - 2. Spirit of submission: John 7:17; Psa. 119:4, 5, 11; Heb. 11:6.
 - B. It involves our Whole Being:
 - 1. Mind – Call to believe: Jn. 20:31; Acts. 17:10-12.
 - 2. Will – Call to obey: Rev. 2:5; Psa. 119:33-35; Matt. 7:24.
 - 3. Emotions – Call to feel: Phil. 3:1; Jn. 15:11-12.
- IX. **Who is Qualified to Interpret the Bible?**

The Basic Qualifications of the Interpreters of Scripture:

- A. We must have a heart regenerated by the Holy Spirit (John 3:3-5). Why?
The natural man cannot understand the things of God (I Cor. 2:11-14; Rom. 3:11).
 - 1. The sinful nature of man renders him incapable of understanding the truth (Rom. 3:10-11; 8: 3-9).
 - 2. Man's love of darkness rather than light renders him unwilling to understand the truth (John 3:19-21; John 5:40).
 - 3. Man's allegiance to Satan and to sin renders him rebellious against understanding the truth (John 8:43-47).
- B. We need a mind illuminated by the Holy Spirit. ex. Paul's prayers on behalf of the saints (Eph. 1:17).
- C. We must have an impartial and seeking spirit. We must come to the Bible totally convinced that we want nothing but the truth. Some use the Bible to prove their pet ideas or to defend their denominational doctrines. We should come realizing that the truth:
 - (1) Liberates (John 8:32)
 - (2) Sanctifies (John 17:17)
 - (3) Enables us to worship God (John 4:23-24).

- D. We must have a humble spirit. Why?
 - 1. God resists the proud (James 4:6)
 - 2. God reveals truth to the humble (Matt. 11:25)
 - 3. Man knows so little (I Cor. 8:2; 13:9-12)
- E. We must have a praying heart (Psa. 119:18, 34, 73, 125, 144 and 169).
- F. We must have a pious motive (Psa. 119: 34, 73; Col. 1:9-12).

X. **Basic Principles of Interpretation**

- A. The Absolute Inspiration of the Scriptures.

The Christian doctrine: the verbal, plenary, inspiration of the infallible, inerrant Bible, which is the Written Word of God.

 - 1. **“VERBAL:”** Every single letter and word of Scripture as put down in the original autographs was inspired of God (Matt. 5:18; 22:32).
 - 2. **“PLENARY:”** All of the Bible, in all of its parts, is equally inspired. No part is more inspired than the other parts. The 66 books comprising the Old and New Testaments are all equally inspired (Matt. 5:17-18; II Tim. 3:16).
 - 3. **“INSPIRATION:”** God sovereignly prepared the authors of Scripture from birth in all things. He stirred them up to write. He guided them so they wrote down the very words of God. God’s sovereign control of the authors did not remove the characteristics and personalities of the authors, but such things were ordered by God to be a better vehicle of expression.
 - 4. **“INFALLIBLE:”** In principle, the Bible is infallible, i.e., incapable of error or mistake. Why? God cannot lie (Titus 1:2), and the Bible is His Word; therefore, the Bible cannot be a lie (John 17:17).
 - 5. **“INERRANT:”** The Bible is without error in all it affirms as true, including matters of science, geography, miracles, history, etc.

6. **“Bible:”** The books in the Protestant Bible. There are no “lost” books. The Apocrypha is not inspired.
 7. **“WORD OF GOD:”** The Word of God expressed in human words by human authors under the direct control of the Holy Spirit (2 Pet. 1:20-21).
- B. The unity of the Bible.
Although it was written by over 40 different authors from many different walks of life over a period of 2000 years with no collaboration between authors, the Bible is a harmonious unit. It contains no contradictions. The N.T. does not contradict the O.T.. Paul does not contradict Jesus or James. All the teachings of the Bible dovetail into one another. The Bible presents one, consistent, cohesive, coherent view of truth throughout all its parts. Liberals say that the Old Testament and the New Testament contradict each other and even present different gods. This comes from ignorance, both spiritual and scriptural. The following chart reveals how the New Testament completes the Old Testament.

<u>OLD TESTAMENT</u>	<u>NEW TESTAMENT</u>
Unexplained Ceremonies	Ceremonies Explained
Unfulfilled Prophecies	Prophecies Fulfilled
Unsatisfied Longings	Longings Satisfied
Incomplete Destiny	Destiny Completed

Some liberal theologians have claimed that Jesus contradicted the O.T. in His “Sermon on the Mount:”

“Look at Matthew 5 where Christ contradicts the Old Testament and throws out the “eye for eye and tooth for tooth” doctrine of the primitive and uncivilized Jews who believed in a bloody and savage tribal war-god named Jehovah. In its place, Jesus teaches the Fatherhood of God, the brotherhood of man, pacifism and other teachings shared by all the great religious leaders of all religions.”

But the Liberals misinterpret Matthew 5 completely:

1. Christ came to fulfill, not to contradict or destroy (Matt. 5:17-19).*
2. Christ was contradicting the rabbinic interpretation of the Torah, which had externalized it.

- He did not say “As it is written....”
- He did not quote Scriptures but the Rabbis (Matt. 5:21, 27, 33, 38, 43).
- He was establishing a “New” Covenant with greater laws.

C. Diversity of clearness

While all Scripture is equally inspired, it is not equally clear (II Pet. 3:16).

Thus we must interpret the:

1. Unclear in the light of the clear.
2. Difficult in the light of simple. ex. John 14:28 must be interpreted in light of John 1:1, 18; 5:18, 23; 20:28.

***Note:** Legalists also twist Matt. 5:17-19 to bring people back into bondage with the *Old/Mosaic Covenant* such as Sabbath keeping, food laws, women cannot teach or hold an office (see I Cor. 5:11 & I Timothy 13:5-9), etc. However, even under the *Old/Mosaic Covenant* there were women Prophetesses (Miriam (Exodus 15:20-21), Huldah (2 Kings 22:14), Noadiah (Nehemiah 6:14), Isaiah’s wife (Isaiah 8:3) and Judges/Leaders (Deborah; Judges 4:4-5)). The New Testament has Anna & The daughters of Philip as examples of Prophetesses under the *New Covenant* (Luke 2:36 & Acts 21:9) and Presbutidas (women elders that “teach the women”; see Titus 2:3-5) and Deaconesses (who were

women; see Romans 16:1). Yes, men are still the “head of the household” (this is a different sphere – the family; see Ephesians 5:22-24). The Bible tells us “do not be under the beggarly elements” of the Old/Mosaic Covenant (Heb. 10:1). For example, Matt. 5:17-19 is not referring to individual laws, but the Scriptures. Christ was establishing a *New Covenant*, not the *Old/Mosaic Covenant* polished—there are 4 Covenants in the Old Testament (the *Noahic Covenant*, the *Abrahamic Covenant* (the land promise is part of the Abrahamic Covenant), the *Mosaic Covenant* (David & Solomon are personal applications of the Mosaic Covenant), and the *New Covenant*); only the *Mosaic Covenant* was defective and obsolete. The other Covenants are still valid. The (4th) *New Covenant* is everlasting. (See my book entitled *How the Old & New Testaments Relate to Each Other.*)

Section Three

I. Basic Method of Interpretation

- A. The example of Christ and the Apostles: They dogmatically appealed to the Scriptures as the sole source of their authoritative teaching (Matt. 4:3-10 cf. I Cor. 15:3-4).
- B. The method used by Christ and the Apostles in their interpretation of Scripture should be our method (I John 2:6).
- C. The writers of Scripture treated the text of Scripture in terms of grammar and syntax.
 1. ex. Galatians 3:16-17: The difference between singular and plural nouns.
 2. ex. Matthew 22:32: The difference between present and past tense.
- D. The writers of Scripture treat the text of Scripture as being a reliable historical account from which they can draw doctrinal conclusions. ex. Romans 4:9-12: Two doctrines are drawn from the historical fact that Abraham was justified before he was circumcised.
 1. Justification is by faith alone, apart from works.
 2. Gentiles are now included in Abraham's Covenant.

- E. The writers of Scripture treat the text of Scripture as being a reliable historical account from which they can draw ethical and moral imperatives and prohibitions.
 - 1. I Corinthians 10:1-12
 - 2. I Timothy 5:19
 - 3. Matthew 12:1-8
- F. Why did Christ and the Apostles treat the Scriptures the way they did? They had a primary assumption concerning the nature and use of the Bible (II Tim. 3:16-17).
 - 1. All Scripture:
 - a. Is inspired
 - b. Its purpose is to perfect and to protect the elect.
 - c. Its method or use:
 - (1) Doctrine – Theology and Philosophy
 - (2) Reproof
 - (3) Corrections
 - (4) Training in righteousness

II. **The Canon of Scripture**

- A. The canon was not a product of human invention or ingenuity, but it everywhere manifests itself to be the product of Divine design.
- B. Justification of the canon of Old Testament and New Testament:
 - 1. The historical roots of the canon end in mystery.
 - 2. The arrangement is not according to chance, size, chronology, date of composition or authorship.
 - 3. The arrangement is according to subject matter. See diagrams #1 and #2.
 - 4. The arrangement manifests a Divine hand.
- C. The significance of canonical observations in studying a book of the Bible:

We can find a clue as to the theme of a book and its importance in the whole counsel of God by observing where it is placed in the canon. (See my book *The Bible: Intelligent Design or Chance?*)

III. **How to Study a Book of the Bible**

Seek to answer these basic introductory questions:

- A. What is its place in the canon?
- B. Who wrote it?
- C. What were the circumstances of the author?
- D. To whom was the book written?
- E. What do we know about them and their relationship to the author?
- F. What is the tone and theme of the book?
- G. What is the outline of the book?

IV. How To Study a Verse

Basic questions to ask yourself:

- A. Who spoke or wrote it?
- B. To whom was it spoken or written?
- C. What is the context?
- D. Are there any parallel passages?
- E. Is it an Old Testament quotation or allusion?
- F. Is there a clearer or fuller passage which explains this verse?
- G. Is this a passage of full mention?
- H. Are there any historical observations which throw light on the verse?
- I. What is the grammatical significance of the verse?

V. How to Do a Word Study

Basic principles:

- A. Identify all the places in the Bible where the word occurs. There are books and computer software that do this.
- B. Be careful to observe the principle of progressive revelation. The meaning of a biblical word changed as God revealed more truth. For example, what "soul" meant in Genesis is not set in stone. It developed and deepened in meaning as revelation progressed.
- C. Check the Greek/Hebrew dictionaries for the basic meaning.
- D. If there are different meanings to the word, classify them into groups. Make a chart to show the different meanings.
- E. The context of the passage in view determines the meaning of the word. Do not assume that the lexicon definition fits the verse you are studying.

- F. Check the classic commentaries to make sure you are not coming up with a nutty interpretation. (Pro. 11:14).

VI. Special Principles

- A. Analogy of faith (Rom. 12:6): Any interpretation of any particular verse in the Bible must not contradict, but be in harmony with the teaching of the whole of Scripture.
- B. A simple positive implies a negative and a simple negative implies a positive (Psa. 40:9, 10; Eph. 4:25, 28).
- C. Rhetorical questions are expressed for emphasis sake (Matt. 6:27; 16:26; 22:42; John 5:44; Rom. 9:14).
- D. Do not absolutize general statements and promises (Pro. 17:6; 18:22; 23:1, 2)
- E. Observe non-literal language (Matt. 15:11; 16:6, 7; John 4:32, 33).
 - 1. Metaphor: John 6:35; 15:1
 - 2. Ironical language: I Cor. 4:8
 - 3. Hyperbole – exaggeration for emphasis sake: Josh. 11:4; Judges 7:12; John 21:25
- F. Observe the significance to types. Various people, places, actions and things in the Old Testament were instituted by God for the express purpose of prefiguring the person and work of Jesus in the New Testament (John 1:29; Heb. 12:22).
- G. Seek out the passage of full mention. There is usually one central passage in which a particular doctrine is expounded. All other scattered references should be interpreted in the light of the passage where it is discussed in full. ex. Isa. 40 (the transcendence of God); John 3 (regeneration); Matt. 24-25 (the return of Christ); I Cor. 15 (the resurrections), etc.
- H. Do not forget to remember that divine revelation was progressive in nature (Heb. 1:1-2). This means that the N.T. interprets the O.T.. The N.T. has the priority over the O.T.
- I. Principles for interpreting parables:
 - 1. Parables are not be regarded or used as a proof of truth but only as an illustration of truth.
 - 2. As illustrations, they never expressed the whole truth but only part of the truth.

3. They emphasize one major lesson or truth: the details are only part of the study, i.e., “filler” and, as such, cannot be viewed as teaching anything significant.
4. They are always in subjection to doctrinal passages.
5. The context determines the scope or purpose and the point of the parable (Lk. 15:2).
6. The best interpretation is the one that Christ or the Apostles supply.

Conclusion

The Bible is the revelation of the mind and heart of God. It is our responsibility not to corrupt (2 Cor. 2:17) or adulterate (2 Cor. 4:2) the Word of God.

Appendix

Verse Abuse – Introduction

The importance of rightly interpreting Scripture cannot be underestimated. If the people of God do not know how to interpret the Bible accurately, false teachers can easily deceive them.

Traditions have always been a problem for the people of God. Like barnacles, they slowly grow on the hull of the ship of the Church, and must be removed or the ship will sink. It is a hard, dirty, painful, and smelly job. But someone has to do it!

- A. Jesus faced this problem in His own day. Matt. 15:1-20 cf. Mk 7:1-23
 1. Man-made traditions that come from outside of scripture.
 2. False interpretations of Scripture that render the Word ineffective.
- B. Evangelicals rightly condemn Roman Catholicism, Greek Orthodoxy, the cults and the occult for having traditions that

contradict or nullify Scripture. These traditions are so serious in nature that they deny the Gospel.

C. But we evangelicals have also been blinded at times by our own vain traditions. While these “evangelical” traditions are not so serious in nature as to damn us, they do keep us from understanding the Bible correctly and can make the Christian life difficult. They obscure the truth of Scripture and rob us of many precious blessings.

D. There are three ways we can mishandle Scripture:

1. **Misquotation:** A Tradition of not quoting the words of a verse accurately.

Examples:

Matt. 23:37

Eph. 2:8

Phil. 2:9-11

2 Pet. 3:9

2. **Mistranslation:**

Examples:

Matt. 16:19

Matt. 28:19

John 3:3-5

1 Cor. 4:6

3. **Misinterpretation:**

Examples:

Gen. 3:16

Matt. 5:9

Matt. 7:1-5 (cf. John 7:24)

Matt. 18:20

Matt. 23:37

Lk. 15:11-32

Old Testament –Diagram No. 1

A Christian Student's Survival Guide

History			Experience		Prophecy	
Basic Law	Pre-Exile History	Post-Exile History	Inner Life	Basic Prophecy	Pre-Exile Prophets	Post-Exile Prophets
5	9	3	5	5	9	3

New Testament – Diagram No. 2

History	Doctrine	Doctrine	Experience
Historic Foundation	Church Epistles	Pastoral Epistles	General Epistles
5	9	4	9

Questions for Discussion

1. Can we interpret the Bible any way we want or are there objective rules of grammar and syntax that must be followed?
2. Are all interpretations of the Bible equal (i.e. subjective and relative)?
3. What is the difference between the “interpretation” and the “application” of a biblical passage?
4. Are all interpretations of the Bible nothing more than personal opinion and prejudice?
5. The New Testament tells the members of a congregation to submit to the teaching and discipline of the elders (or pastor) of the church (Heb. 13:7, 17). Yet, people today think that their interpretation of Scripture is equal to the elders (pastors). Thus they disrespect their pastors and rebel against the doctrine of the church. What is the root cause of this modern rebellion? Is relativism the root problem?