

5 Basic Rules for Bible Interpretation

God calls all Believers in Jesus to read the Bible which is God's holy Word given to us to know, love, and serve Him. However, at times, reading the Bible and understanding it clearly can be a challenge. How does one know if they are correctly understanding or "interpreting" the Bible text with accuracy? The Bible states, "Be diligent to present yourself approved to God as a worker who does not need to be ashamed, **accurately handling** the word of truth. (2 Timothy 2:15). Perhaps one of the most dangerous questions is for a group leader to ask the group... "What does this particular passage mean to you?"... With all love and grace, the Bible cannot mean today or to you what it did not mean to the original audience millennia ago. In other words, you nor I get to determine the Bible's meaning in any part of it! Rather, God has called each of us as Believers to do the hard work of reading, learning, researching, and relying on the Holy Spirit (the Very Author of Scripture - 2 Peter 1:21-22) to discover what the biblical passage/text mean to the intended ancient audience years ago - and how that text applies to our life today. The Bible text can only have one meaning, but it may have many applications to our life today. Read below for (5) key principles for Bible Interpretation.

- 1.) The Bible can never be made to say (today) what it never meant. (We have to discover who the audience was and the original author's intention to his audience - Who wrote it? What did he intend for that church/audience?)
- 2.) Allow Scripture to interpret Scripture. Let the clearer sections of Scripture clarify more difficult sections of Scripture.
- 3.) The rule of totality stands! What does the *whole* counsel of God's Word speak to the one theme, issue, problem, or context. (Though there are different contexts, settings, cultural cues, and authors, there can be no contradiction of truth. The Holy Spirit is the Author & He nor His message are self-contradicting).
- 4.) Scripture is only rightly understood within the text's immediate context. What is the point of the whole chapter that the text is situated? We cannot "lift" single verses/passages OUT of their context to derive an accurate understanding. Text proofing (or just simply quoting one verse out of its normal context is how bad theology begins)
- 5.) Rely first and foremost on the Holy Spirit to guide you to understanding of the texts of Scripture (John 16:13-14).

REVIEW:

- A. What does the text **SAY**? = What is the plain and literal sense/implication/command?
- B. What did the text **MEAN** to the **original audience**? - Ancient Author's original intention
- C. How does the text **APPLY** to me today? The text = ONE meaning, but many applications

3 helps to Discovering the meaning of difficult Texts

Many texts in Scripture can be difficult to understand - especially in light of vast differences in the culture today and in the ancient world of the Bible. When you come across a particularly difficult text it can help to remember a 3-fold lens with which to better perceive the original author's intention/meaning under the direct inspiration of the Holy Spirit:

1. In that text, look for a specific appeal, a command, a divine charge to be carried out, an admonition ("stop this"), or a very specific application given to the OT Jews/NT church in their cultural context.
Examples: 1 Cor. 11:1-16 = Women are directed to wear head coverings in church setting - WHY? What was happening in the Corinth church? AND in 1 Tim 2:9-15 = Women are directed to receive teaching quietly and to not teach men - WHY? What was happening in the Ephesian church? This is the command/appeal (the "WHAT")
2. After you discover the WHAT, the command or appeal in that culture, then discover the "**WHY**." The *Why* in that difficult passage will reveal a **Universal Principle** which applies to all people, all cultures, for all time because it is God's revealed will on that subject in a specific culture - the truth which reflects holy God's

design for you and your church and applies to your life today. The *Why* reflects the divine ideal - the command to be more like Jesus in all ways. What is happening in this difficult text which implies how Jesus Christ was either foretold, prefigured, a type to come (typology), fulfilled that command perfectly, or took that sin completely upon Himself on the cross. What in this text helps us see how Jesus perfectly accomplished that command or fulfilled that admonition by His death? Remember, Jesus Himself taught that ALL Scripture has Him at the center as both the focus and ultimate fulfillment (John 5:39-44; Luke 24:27)(**Examples:** 1 Cor. 11:1-16 - Women are directed to wear head coverings in that church setting in order to demonstrate submission to their husbands. - In 1 Tim. 2:9-15 = Women are directed to receive teaching quietly and not teach men out of respect for God's order of roles within the Church between men and women. SO... what is the Universal Principle (for all) in both these texts? **Women, as unto the Lord, are to demonstrate submission to their husbands if married, and to the Elders of that local church)**

3. Last, the difficult text in question usually reveals not only the **WHAT** (an appeal/command in that local context) and a WHY (a Universal Principle for all people which is fulfilled in/through Jesus Christ), but a **"WHO."** God is the SOURCE of all truth (John 17:17); thus, both the WHAT and WHY of Scripture is based on the **Axiomatic Truth** = a Self-evident claim about God Himself as **THE Source of Truth. Look how this plays out in the 10 Commandments:**

Local/Direct Command (The What)	Universal Principle (The Why)	Axiomatic Truth - God's Nature (The Source)
i.e. Do Not Murder!	- Murder is wrong	- God is Life
i.e. Do Not Lie!	- Lying is Wrong	- God is Truth
i.e. Do Not Covet!	- Coveting/Lusting is Wrong	- God is Sufficient. God is Giver. Etc...

Examples: in 1 Cor. 11:1-16 and in 1 Tim. 2:9-15 Women are directed to submit to their fathers, husbands, and male leaders in the church **BECAUSE [Axiomatic Truth: God is a God of Order and Roles**: In the Trinity (Who are all perfectly equal in essence and worth - just like men and women are equal in essence/worth/dignity in all things) - Jesus willingly **submits** Himself and His own will to the Father within His role in the Trinity. So, God also calls men to submit to Jesus in their role. Women are to submit to men in their roles and order within the creation. God created Adam first. Then He took Eve *from* Adam's **side** (rib) = equality. But, God has designed the woman to serve the man as is her unique role and blessing, to show him respect and submission AND the man is to love and serve his wife faithfully as he does his own body (Eph. 5:22-33). Everything and everyone within God's good Creation has a purpose. God is a God of ORDER!

Introduction to Christian Doctrine

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