

“How to Interpret the Bible”

1 Corinthians 2:14

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I. Introduction

- A. A lot of people make the Bible say what they want it to say.
 - 1. “That’s just your own interpretation.” Or, “Everyone has his own interpretation of the Bible.”
 - 2. The Bible is God’s Word, and when the Bible speaks, God speaks.
 - 3. Many feel the Bible is too hard to understand.
 - 4. It is God’s revelation
 - a) Illustration- Story of the Ethiopian official (Acts 8)
 - 5. Problems:
 - a) A time gap
 - b) A space gap
 - c) The customs gap
 - d) A language gap
 - e) A spiritual gap

II. Qualifications for Interpreting the Bible

- A. You must be born again (1 Corinthians 2:14)
- B. You must have reverence for and interest in God and His Word
- C. You must have prayerful dependence and humility
 - 1. No interpretation is infallible
- D. The Bible must be approached with a willingness to obey its teaching.
 - 1. “Every Christian’s Bible” – D.L. Moody
- E. You must have dependence on the Holy Spirit (Spirit of Truth)
 - 1. Even with the Spirit’s help, we must use the ability God has given us to understand His Word.
 - 2. It’s both the word of man and the Word of God.
 - 3. We study it like any other book, but also study it like no other book.

III. The Rules of Interpretation (Hermeneutics)

- A. Work from the assumption that the Bible is the authority
 - 1. Not:
 - a) The church or church history
 - b) The Pope or pastor
 - c) Tradition
 - d) Reason

e) Experience

- B. The Bible interprets itself. Scripture best explains Scripture.
 - 1. (Isaiah 7:14)
 - 2. (Matthew 1:23)
 - 3. Let the clear interpret the unclear
- C. Interpret personal experience in the light of Scripture and not Scripture in light of personal experience.
 - 1. Day of Pentecost (Acts 2)
 - 2. (2 Peter 1:16-21)
- D. Biblical examples are authoritative only when supported by a command.
 - 1. Illustration- David committed adultery
 - 2. Mormon leader Brigham Young had more than 30 wives
 - 3. Jesus' love- "A new commandment" (John 13:34-35)
 - 4. A Biblical example can verify what you think the Lord is leading you to do.
 - a) Illustration- If you feel God wants you to stay single
 - b) Illustration- Jesus got up early in the morning to pray. If you feel God is leading you to do that, great, but do not command others to follow.
- E. Correct interpretation is essential before you can make a correct application.
 - 1. Illustration- (Acts 16:31)
 - 2. (1 Corinthians 7:9)
 - 3. "Living stones" (1 Peter 2:5)
 - 4. Ask:
 - a) What does it say?
 - b) What does it mean?
 - c) How does it apply?
- F. A doctrine cannot be considered biblical unless it sums up and includes all that the Bible says about it.
 - 1. Jesus' life and teaching
 - 2. Book of Acts
 - 3. Taught in epistles
 - 4. Kind of genre
- G. Interpret a passage in light of its context.
 - 1. Illustration- Danger of preaching from one verse with no background
 - 2. Illustration- (1 Corinthians 7:1)
 - 3. (Matthew 16:28-17:2)
 - 4. Faith teachers
 - 5. Children of Abraham
- H. Scripture has only one meaning and should be taken literally.
 - 1. It uses figures of speech, parables, similes, metaphors, and symbolism.
 - 2. Ask yourself:
 - a) Because I don't want to obey it?
 - b) Because it doesn't fit my preconceived theological bias?

- I. When two doctrines are clearly taught in the Bible, yet appear to be contradictory, accept both as Scriptural in the confident belief that they resolve themselves into a higher unity.
 - 1. Illustration- The Trinity
 - a) The dual nature of Christ
 - b) The sovereign election of God and the responsibility of free will of man
- J. The primary purpose of Bible study is to change our lives, not increase our knowledge.
 - 1. Look for Jesus
 - 2. Knowing God

V. Conclusion

- A. To give the Bible its rightful place is to bring glory to God, health to the church, and light to the world.