

How To Interpret The Bible

1 Corinthians 2:14-16

Pastor John Miller

I want to read the verse to get us started, and it's going to tie into some of my first points that I will share with you. In 1 Corinthians 2:10, I was going to start at verse 13, verse 10, Paul says, "But God hath revealed them unto us by his Spirit: for the Spirit searcheth all things, yea, the deep things of God." We're introduced to the subject of revelation, things that God has revealed. We haven't seen or understood by a man's heart, verse 9, ". . . the things which God hath prepared for them that love him. 10 But God hath revealed them unto us by his Spirit"—he's talking about the doctrine of revelation, which is the Bible, the Word of God—"for the Spirit searcheth all things, yea, the deep things of God. 11 For what man knoweth the things of a man, save the spirit of man which is in him? even so the things of God knoweth no man, but the Spirit of God. 12 Now we have received, not the spirit of the world, but the spirit which is of God; that we might know the things that are freely given to us of God. 13 Which things also we speak, not in the words which man's wisdom teacheth, but which the Holy [Spirit] teacheth; comparing spiritual things with spiritual."

Now, notice verse 14, "But the natural man"—that is a reference to a non-Christian, an unbeliever, someone who has not been born again or regenerated by the Holy Spirit is not a child of God—"receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God: for they are foolishness unto him: neither can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned. 15 But he that is spiritual judgeth all things, yet he himself is judged of no man. 16 For who hath known the mind of the Lord, that he may instruct him? But we have the mind of Christ."

Have you ever been talking to someone about the Word of God and sharing Scripture with them and have them say, "Oh, that's just your own interpretation." I remember one time I was witnessing to a young man. I was just quoting Scripture. I was quoting John 14:6, Jesus said, "I am the way, the truth, and the life: no man cometh unto the Father, but by me." And, do you know what he said? He said, "That's just your interpretation." "I didn't interpret anything, I'm just quoting. You can look it up yourself, this is what Jesus said." If you just quote Scripture, they freak out, "Oh, that's just your interpretation."

Sometimes people say, "Well, this is what it means to me." Have you ever had a group of people looking at a verse of Scripture and, "This is what it means to me. Well, what does it mean to you?" "Oh that's what it means to you? What does it mean to you?" "This is what it means to me." Maybe you have four different people tell us what it means to them, and all of them are different. It couldn't be any of them or at least it can only be one of them. But, everyone has an opinion or a view or an idea of, "This is what it means to me, and what does it mean to you." A lot of people make the Bible say and mean what they want it to say and mean. They impose...we're going to talk about expounding or pulling out of the text the meaning, not imposing the meaning. So, they impose the ideas that they want. They bring their bias, their prejudice, their presuppositions to the Bible. They're looking for something to satisfy what they

already believe, so they push into the text what is not there. We should never get out of a text what is not in a text.

Also, many feel that the Bible is hard to understand. Maybe you're here tonight and you think, I read the Bible, but I don't get anything out of the Bible, and I don't understand the Bible. You're to be commended that you're in church. The Bible says that God has given, Ephesians 4, "... pastors and teachers,"—to the church for the edification of the saints that they might do—"... the work of the ministry." And, God has given teachers to the church so that we can have an understanding of the Bible. But God also wants us individually and personally to do our own study and research. We should be Bereans searching, "... the scriptures"—to see—"... whether those things were so," and that includes my teaching. When I preach or teach the Bible, you should have your Bible open and looking at the Word of God saying, "Is that what the Scripture says? Is that what it means? Is that how it should properly be applied?" And, we should be Bereans, searching "... the scriptures"—to see—"... whether those things were so."

In the sense that the Bible is hard to understand is kind of a yes and no. Yes, there are challenges, and I'll give you some of the reasons why; but no I believe in what's called the perspicuity of Scripture, which means it is clear—God said what He meant and meant what He said. Someone once said, "It's not the verses I don't understand in the Bible that bother me, it's the ones I do understand that bother me." The Bible is very clear. It was written in the common Koine Greek language so that the common person could understand what God was saying in His Word.

But we do need sometimes to interpret a text or a passage of Scripture. In Acts 8, there's the story of Philip the evangelist. He was instructed to go from Samaria down to Gaza, and the Lord was leading him there to speak to one man from Ethiopia, that Ethiopian eunuch who was coming back from Jerusalem to Africa, riding in his chariot. He was reading from a scroll. The scroll was Isaiah, and it was a passage about Jesus being led like a lamb before the slaughter and not opening His mouth. It was a description of Christ and the crucifixion. Philip ran up to this Ethiopian eunuch and said, "Do you understand what you're reading?" What the man said was, "How can I unless someone comes to instruct me." The man right away, Philip jumped up in that chariot, he was riding shotgun out. He took the Scripture and began to speak to him about Jesus, and the Ethiopian got saved. They came upon a water that he wanted to be baptized. But he said, "How can I lest someone guide me," and Philip was ready, and we should be ready when people ask us about the Scriptures to be able to interpret it properly and be able to cut it straight as Paul told Timothy, "... rightly dividing the word of truth." That we be, "... workman that needeth not to be ashamed."

So, how do we interpret Scripture? Well, there's difficulty in interpreting Scripture for these five simple reasons. Again, I'm just warming up to my ten points on how to interpret. Some of the problems in interpreting Scripture is the time gap. The last of the Scriptures were written over two thousand years ago, so there's this huge gap of time that we need to go back to. A lot of times people think that we've got to bring the Bible into our modern culture, and it's better first to go back into the ancient culture and understand the times and understand the customs and

what's going on in the part of the world. So, we have this big gap of time that we need to get spanned.

Another problem is the geographical gap. The Bible takes place in the Middle East, and we are in the west here in America, at least; if we were in that part of the world, we would be able to understand, no doubt, more of the customs and things that are going on. Which leads me to my third statement about the problem of interpreting Scripture, that is, not only is there a time gap and a geographical gap of location, but there's a language gap. The language in the Old Testament was Hebrew, and in the New Testament, primarily Greek, some small portions of Scripture in Aramaic, but basically Old Testament originally written in Hebrew and the New Testament written in Greek.

The fourth reason it's a challenge is because of the manners and customs. Again, that's kind of tied into the geographical gap—the way they did things in the part of the world when the Bible was written—and very, very challenging to understand the manners and customs and to bridge that gap.

The most important, and this is why I started with 1 Corinthians 2 is the spiritual gap, the spiritual gap. There's a huge gap between the things that be of God given by the Spirit and the natural man or the unregenerated man, who has not the Holy Spirit or the things of the Spirit in his life, so it's impossible for him to discern or understand the things of God; though the believer is understood by no man, but we understand them because they've been given to us by God, the Holy Spirit.

When I talk about Bible study, and we talk about Bible interpretation, we need to remember the Holy Spirit is given to be our teacher. We can have human teachers, but it's the Spirit of God alone that can open our eyes, open our hearts, open our ears. This is why I often pray before I preach or teach, "God, open our hearts. Open our ears. Open our eyes." When you're going to study the Bible, you should pray for your time in the Word that God would give you illumination. So, we believe the Bible is given by inspiration, we believe that the Bible by the Holy Spirit can give us illumination, we believe the Holy Spirit while studying the Word can give us transformation—making us more like Jesus Christ.

I want to move to some qualifications for interpreting the Bible. The qualifications for interpreting the Bible, these are just five quick, again, lead-in points. First, you must be born again, which is self-evident—right?—in light of Corinthians, ". . . ye must be born again." That's why I think it's dangerous to listen to YouTubers that try to teach the Bible, yet they're not born again, they're not regenerated, they haven't the Holy Spirit. So, you must be born again. Again, the Corinthian passage is in support of that. If you're not, you don't understand the things of God, ". . . for they are foolishness unto him . . . they are spiritually discerned." When I hear Bill Maher talking about the Bible, of course he doesn't believe in God, he doesn't believe the Bible is the Word of God, and he's quoting Scripture trying to explain things. Again, it's like, he has no idea what he's talking about, he's not been born again.

Know this tonight, if you have not been born again, your great need if you're going to get an understanding of this Book called the Bible, you need to be born again. You need to have the Holy Spirit. You need to believe and trust in Jesus Christ and be born of His Spirit, and then you'll have the Spirit of God to teach you. You'll be “. . . he that is spiritual,” instead of he that is carnal or the natural man in 1 Corinthians 2:14. So, we must be born again.

Secondly, we must approach the Bible with reverence for God and His Word. We don't come flippantly or proudly, we come humbly. We come reverently with a reverence for God and His Word. Thirdly, we must have prayerful dependance on the Holy Spirit. Again, which is self-evident, we must prayerfully pray and depend upon the Spirit. So, prayer and Bible study go together—praying for God to speak through what He's spoken. It's the living, powerful, active Word of God, “. . . sharper than any twoedged sword,” and it will transform your life, but you must reverence God and be hungry for God and want to hear God and meet with God in your study of the Word of God. That's what Bible study is about, by the way, it's getting to know God—getting to know about God and getting to know God and being changed and transformed into the image of God. So, come with a prayerful dependence on the Holy Spirit. In John 16, He's called the Comforter, who's come to lead us and to guide us and comfort us, and He does that so powerfully through the Word of God.

Here's the fourth qualification that we must believe the Bible is God's Word written. Now, I could do a whole study on the inspiration of Scripture, and I've done a series on Sunday morning called, “Great Doctrines Of The Bible,” and you can go right to the website, click it, and listen to it. It's there under topical series, “Great Doctrines Of The Bible,” and study the doctrine of Scripture, the doctrine of Scripture. But it's important for you to have a high view of Scripture.

Turn with me to 2 Timothy 3 for just a quick moment again. This is just one of several classic passages, probably the paramount key passage on the doctrine of inspiration, 2 Timothy 3:14-17. He says to Timothy, you need to “. . . continue thou in the things which thou hast learned and hast been assured of, knowing of whom thou has learned them; 15 And that from a child thou has known the holy scriptures,”—of course for Timothy, that would be the Old Testament—“which are able to make thee wise unto salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus. 16 All scripture is given by”—here it is, verse 16—“inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness: 17 That the man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works.”

I'm not here to do a whole study on the doctrine of inspiration, but inspiration is defined like this: God superintended the human authors—yes, the Bible was written by human authors—but God superintended their writing so that the very words, not just the concepts or thoughts, the very words were given by inspiration of God. This statement “inspiration” literally means God breathed, and it has the idea of God breathed out. So, the Bible was breathed out by God.

God used their own styles, the human authors, their own personalities, their own situations, the historical setting, yet God made sure that the very words they wrote were the words of God.

This leads us to what we believe to be the right view of Scripture, what's called the verbal, that's the words, plenary, all of them, are given by God's breath. They're inspired by God. The Bible is actually God's Word written. If you want to hear God speak, read the Bible. If you want to hear Him speak audibly, read it out loud and you'll hear the Word of God. If you're going to study the Bible, you need to approach it as, "This is the Word of the Lord."

I'm going to talk about genre—different types of literature—that are found in the Bible that you need to understand when you're interpreting Scripture and take that into consideration, but it's all equally inspired. All the Bible, from Genesis to Revelation, equal in inspiration but not necessarily equal in value. There are portions of Scripture that are more valuable to us because of us living in the Church Age and living the Christian life and needing the full revelation that started and then progressed into the New Testament from the Old. But we need to have a high view of Scripture, 2 Timothy 3:16, "All scripture is given by inspiration of God."

Now, it's interesting, the Bible, written by man but breathed by God, so it has two natures. Jesus is God and Man, He's truly God and truly Man; so He has two natures. The Bible has, in a sense, two natures—it was written by men, but it's the Word of God. You say, "Well, I don't understand that." Neither do I. Welcome to the club. We're going to talk about that in just a moment, too, how to reconcile those things that seem to be contradictory we can't understand. But because it's the word of man, we study it like any other book using our minds—studying geography, studying grammar, studying the language, studying the customs the manners the history, the context, the setting.

If you're going to understand the Bible, you need to know who wrote it, to whom and why, and what were the circumstances, the reason for the author to write to that person. I recommend you get a good study Bible that has introduction to each book of the Bible, which is not the Word of God but it helps you to understand what the book of the Bible is about that you're reading so that everything you do and study is done in proper context. It's so very important.

So, we study it like any other book using our minds and all the resources we can gather together to help us. We study maps, we study customs and manner, and study language. But we study it like no other book, we get on our knees and we pray and ask God to give us illumination and transformation as we study God's Word.

Fifthly in the qualifications for interpreting the Bible is we must approach the Bible with a readiness to obey its commands. That's super important. If you're going to read the Bible but you've already determined you're not going to obey the Bible, why do you read the Bible? "I'll read the Bible, but I'm not going to believe it; I'm not going to obey it." Then, you're only wasting your time. If you're not going to submit to its authority, if you're not going to put it in shoe leather, if you're not going to practice what you've studied, then what good does it do?

In James 1:22-25, James says, "But be ye doers of the word, and not hearers only,"—if you do that, you deceive yourself and the truth is not in you. You're " . . . like unto a man beholding his natural face in a glass . . . goeth his way, and straightway forgetteth what manner of man he

was. 25 But whoso looketh”—deeply—“into the perfect law of liberty”—the Word of God—“ . . . being not a forgetful hearer, but a doer of the work, this man shall be blessed in his deed.” Write down Psalm 1. It’s a psalm about the blessed man who “ . . . walketh not in the counsel of the ungodly, nor standeth in the way of sinners, nor sitteth in the seat of the scornful.” Listen carefully, “But his delight is in the law of the LORD; and in his law doth he meditate day and night. 3 And he shall be like a tree planted by the rivers of water . . . his leaf also shall not wither; and whatsoever he doeth shall prosper.” The most fruitful thing you could ever do is learn to study the Bible, learn to interpret the Bible, learn to apply the Bible to your lives on a daily basis, getting into the Word of God. It’s so very, very important.

Now, let’s move to some general rules for interpreting the Bible. My only frustration is there’s so much I have to leave out, and I’m not going to put them in categories, it’s just kind of general principles. Before we do that, again, let me give you two important words that you should understand. The first word is the word “exegesis.” It means to guide out of. The word “exit” is at the beginning of that word, “ex” means to take out. We have the word “exit,” to go out. What we’re trying to do when we study the Bible, which is involved in interpreting the Bible, is pull out of the Bible its meaning. One of our principles is going to be you can’t apply the Bible until you first understand what it means. You cannot properly apply the Bible until you get to the meaning of the Bible. What we want to do is exegete.

The guys that were in our preaching class a few weeks ago, by the way, we had 47 guys from all around the area, and we spent a whole week just instruction on how to preach the Bible. What we talked about was being “exegetes”—preaching, teaching the meaning of the text. We call it expository preaching because it means you’re preaching by taking the text and letting it speak—pulling the meaning out of the text, not imposing it or using it for a pretext to convey your thoughts and your own ideas, you’re letting the Bible speak. So, all of us need to do that, not just the preacher. When you study the Bible, you want to pull out the meaning of the text, so exegesis means to pull out the meaning.

Here’s the second key word, and this is what we’re doing tonight, is the word “hermeneutics.” Basically, that’s the technical term for what’s called the art and the science of interpreting Scripture or the Bible—the art and the science. It’s called “art” because it takes some skill; it’s a “science” because there are definite rules that you can use to be able to properly interpret Scripture.

So, let’s rip through these ten rules. I know that sounds like a lot, but we don’t need to tarry too long on all of them. First, if you’re taking notes, work from the assumption that the Bible is the final authority. Again, we’ve already discussed the idea of being prayerful and humble and dependent on the Spirit, and that we come as born-again believers with the Spirit to teach us, but we need to work from the assumption that the Bible is the final authority—not only given by inspiration and profitable, but that it is the final authority. Notice I choose my words carefully—not just authority, but final authority. It’s not the only authority, but it’s the final authority. We might say it’s the last court of appeals.

Let me say something before I forget. It's not in my notes. It's the only authority that is without error, that is immutable, unchangeable and is inerrant and infallible. Other sources of authority can error. The Bible cannot error. If the Bible's the Word of God, and God cannot lie, then the Bible does not lie because it's the Word of God. If the Bible's the Word of God, and it is, and if you don't believe that, do some of your own research and you'll see great evidence for divine inspiration, and God cannot lie—and God cannot lie—then the Bible does not lie. I believe the Bible is inerrant and infallible and given by divine inspiration.

The point I want to make in this first point is that it is the final court of appeal. When the Bible speaks, that ends the discussion. It is the authority. Every person has a source of authority, and the list could go on quite lengthy. For some, it's the church; some, it's the early church fathers. This, by the way, and I won't get sidetracked, is one of the fundamental differences between Protestantism and Roman Catholicism. In Roman Catholicism, they believe that the Bible is the product of the church and that the church has authority over the Bible. The church is the final authority and not the Bible. This is a foundational difference between the Protestants. This is what was brought about by the Protestant Reformation, they called it *Sola scriptura*—the Scriptures alone are the authority.

I believe that they're correct in doing that. Not the church, the church has been mixed up in all kinds of crazy ideas that were not scriptural; not the early church fathers, though we do hear them and listen to what they have to say and give some credence to that. They're not the authorities. Church history is not the authority, though we can study doctrines throughout history of the church. The Pope is not the authority, and the pastor is not the authority. Amen? The authority is "The B-I-B-L-E / Yes, that's the book for me / I stand alone on the Word of God / The B-I-B-L-E." You're going to have to wrestle with that on your own, but I think it's a commitment that every believer should make.

Tradition is not the authority. Again, in the Roman Catholic tradition, they place tradition many times over the Word of God and they put the emphasis there. But tradition is not inerrant or infallible or inspired by God.

Intellectual reasoning or human mind is not the authority. This is where even in Protestantism we get liberalism, where we rationalize with our minds, "How can a man be swallowed by a whale?" "How can a man be born of a virgin?" "How can someone rise from the dead? This is not logical. It doesn't make sense." We take our human wisdom and we impose it into Scripture and we fall away from " . . . the faith which was once"—and for all—"delivered unto the saints." My intellect is important, given by God, but it must be educated and influenced by the Word of God. I must think biblically.

The highest IQ is not going to be the thing you really need studying the Bible, you need the Spirit of God. The youngest child could know more about the infinite things of God than the greatest intellect who has no knowledge of the Bible at all. That's one of the problems with our culture today. We have these people that are educated beyond their intelligence and they have no idea about the great things of God. The greatest science you could ever study is theology,

the study of God. We were made by God, made to know God, and find our fulfillment in walking in fellowship with God, so it should be a lifelong pursuit in His Word.

Experience, and I'm going to get ahead of myself here, experience is not the final authority. "I felt it." "I saw it." "I heard it." "I experienced it, and I know it's real." That's subjective. You can eat the wrong food and have an experience. If I want visions, I just eat a bunch of chocolate ice cream before I go to bed at night. I get visions and dreams, but they're not from God, they're induced by the food I eat, so they're subjective. Scripture alone is the final authority and the only inerrant, infallible authority.

Here's the second, the Bible interprets itself. Scripture best explains Scripture. This is one of the most foundational, fundamental principles of Bible interpretation. I can't take a lot of time to give you illustrations, but get a Bible, and I have a Bible that I'm using here tonight, one that I preached out of mostly for many years, but has a center column full of cross-references. Right there in the Bible, even, if you don't have a Concordance, you can just look up these cross-references and compare Scripture with Scripture. Let the Scripture comment on the Scripture. Let the Scripture interpret Scripture.

A little example, back in Isaiah 7:14, there's a prophecy of a virgin shall be with child, " . . . and bear a son, and shall call his name Immanuel." It's obviously a prophecy about Jesus Christ being virgin-born. Well, the great Hebrew scholars say that the word used there for "virgin" could be translated young maiden, and it leaves them sometimes to deny the doctrine of the virgin birth. So, it's interesting that if you cross-reference that and go to Matthew 1:23, that Mary is actually called a virgin, and the Greek word used for virgin there can only be used for a virgin—not just a young maiden, but an actual virgin. Not to mention Luke's gospel, as we compare Scripture with Scripture, that Mary said to the angel, "How can this be that I'm going to have a baby, ' . . . seeing I know not a man?'" which means, "I'm a virgin." How can this possibly be? So, we want to take Scripture and compare Scripture with Scripture and get clarity.

Here's the principle under this point: let the clear interpret the unclear. I find people get all wrapped up with these obscure verses that they think might be teaching baptism for the dead or some other far-out thing or that you can have multiple wives, and they just get all wrapped up in these verses to the neglect of multiple clear teachings elsewhere in the Scripture. So, the clear trumps the unclear. Make sure that you use that principle when you're interpreting Scripture—let the clear interpret the unclear.

Here's principle three, interpret personal experience in the light of Scripture and not Scripture in the light of personal experience. This one means a lot to me because I grew up in a Pentecostal environment where there was a lot of emotion, a lot of excitement, a lot of so-called "manifestation of the Spirit," which I do believe now that a large portion of it is just emotionalism, not that I don't believe the Holy Spirit can do miracles or that the gifts are not for today, I do, but a lot of what goes on in these circles is not the Spirit of God. He's blamed for silly things that they do, and they're not supported by the Word of God.

Let me mention one thing. Some of you probably have never heard about it, don't even know about it, I probably shouldn't even mention it, but it's referred to as being "slain in the Spirit." Has anybody ever heard the term of being "slain in the Spirit"? And, you can see it on sometimes Christian television, not that I've seen Benny Hinn for a long time, but Benny Hinn used to have people falling over. He'd take his jacket off and swing his jacket and they'd go under. Or, he'd pray for them and put his hand on them, usually a little pushing, and you know there's a catcher, and you go back and, "Oh, you're blessed," and you fall over.

I grew up in churches where people were being "slain in the Spirit," lying on the floor, supposedly under the power of the Spirit, that the Spirit of God is knocking people over in church. I remember inviting, when I was in junior high, some of my friends to church. They made it about halfway through the service and said, "I'm getting outta here!" and they ran out of that church. I never got them to go back. They go, "What in the world was going on there? That was crazy! What was that lady doing on the floor?" You know, and they'd say, "Oh, she's 'slaaaaain in the Spirit'"

Where in the Bible is that? It's not. It's not in the Bible. They say, "Well, when they came to arrest Jesus in the Garden of Gethsemane and said, 'Who are you looking for?' They said, 'Jesus of Nazareth,' He said, 'I am He,' and they all fell backwards to the ground." So, yeah, that one story about these Roman soldiers falling back to the ground, and you're going to have that going on in your church and build a doctrine on that? It's not taught in the Bible.

I'm going to talk a little bit about: Did Jesus teach it? Was it practiced in the book of Acts? Was it taught in the epistles? Obviously, Jesus didn't teach "slain in the Spirit." Obviously, it wasn't something practiced in the book of Acts, and it certainly not talked about or taught or explained or commanded in the epistles, which are didactic, or doctrinal, where we get our instruction for how we should do church. You don't judge the Bible by your experience, you judge your experience by the Bible.

There was a guy named Rodney Howard-Browne, years ago, and I'm old enough to remember that. He started this new thing where they would get "drunk in the Spirit" and laugh. They'd all start laughing, "drunk in the Spirit." Where is that in the Bible? Can you imagine being at church and you leave church and you're "drunk in the Spirit"? A cop pulls you over, "Have you been drinking?" "No, I'm full of the Holy Ghost." I don't think so. Nowhere does the Spirit of God take away self-control, it gives you self-control. But it is just simply not in the Bible. Here's what they do, "Yeah, but I saw it." "Yeah, but I experienced it." "Oh, it happened to me." I just kind of, "Well, groovy doovy, but what do you want me to do about it? Big deal. Can you show me that in the Bible? Is it biblical?" No. If it's not, then you're opening a Pandora's box and you have to accept anyone's experience as being valid and from God. How do we know it's from God unless it is substantiated by Scripture.

I love 2 Peter 1:16-21 where Peter with James and John and Jesus and Moses and Elijah were on the Mount Transfiguration. They heard God speak from heaven, "This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased." They saw with their eyes Jesus transfigured, Moses and Elijah, and

they were with them on that mountain. Peter says at the end of that section, "We were with him. We heard the voice. We saw His glory, but 'We have . . . a more sure word of prophecy,'" a more sure prophetic word. The Scriptures are more sure than what I see, what I hear, and what I experience. That's all subjective. It's so very important.

Here's the fourth, biblical examples are authoritative only when supported by a command. Biblical examples are authoritative only when supported by a command. Again, I don't have any real wonderful examples, but they can come in the negative or positive. You know, if somebody wants to, they can actually read the life of David, the king of Israel, and say, "David was a man after God's own heart, and David committed adultery, so no big deal if I do," or "David had multiple wives, so I can have multiple wives."

Just because someone in the Bible did something, doesn't mean you should do it. Just because someone in the Bible sinned, doesn't mean it's okay. There are times in the narrative of a passage when a nonbeliever in the context speaks and says things that are unbiblical and unscriptural and wrong. The devil talks in the Bible, right at the beginning of the Bible, "Did God really say that? The day you eat it you shall surely die," and "Your eyes will be opened, and you'll be like God." That's a lie from Satan. You've got to take into consideration who's speaking, what they're saying, and is it biblical? Is it something the Scriptures command us to do?

And, a positive example, you know if you take Jesus, Jesus our example. Jesus never got married, so you could actually say and interpret, "Oh, if you really want to be a super Christian, if you really want to be a super saint, if you really want to be like Jesus, you shouldn't get married. He stayed single." So, if I really want to be like Jesus, I should wear a robe and I should wear sandals and I should ride a donkey and never have a car and never own a house because, man, I'm like Jesus." No, those are examples that are descriptive, but they're not commanded or prescribed for me to keep in God's Word. So, a biblical example can verify what you believe God is leading you to do, but you can't tell someone else that they have to do it.

Take Jesus again. He got up early in the morning and He prayed. But, do you know the Bible doesn't command us that we all have to get up early in the morning, "The Bible says you have to be up before 5:30 and pray." No, it doesn't say that. Jesus did it, so it's okay and it's a good pattern, example, but you can't tell me I have to do that. That's imposing your own idea on that example. It can verify what I believe God's calling me to do.

Mormons have tried to support polygamy—having multiple wives—by some of the patriarchs having multiple wives in the Bible to the neglect of God's clear instruction even in Genesis and in the New Testament that a man leaves father and mother, cleaves unto his wife, and the two become one flesh. The Bible is clear on the teaching of marriage.

Here's the fifth, correct interpretation is essential before you can make correct application. I love this. Being a pastor that seeks to properly interpret the Word and teach it and apply it to life, correct interpretation must be essential before we can make correct application because if

you don't know what a text means—what it says, what it means—then you can't know how it should be applied. You can't just jump to a text and run with it. Like the old silly thing where the guy says, "Lord, I want You to lead me and guide me," and he just took his Bible and said, "Lord, lead me," closed his eyes and played Bible roulette and stuck it on a verse, "God, just speak me." He looked down at the verse and it said, "Judas went out and hung himself." "No, Lord, not yet. Not that. Give me a better verse, Lord." He puts his finger down and the verse says, "Go and do likewise." No, that's not what I want.

You've got to be careful how you impose your ideas upon the Scriptures. You must properly interpret a passage before you can apply it. I forgot what it was, Jeremiah 29:11, the thoughts of you I have that are great, and the plans, and all that stuff. I didn't get it in my notes for tonight. It was Jeremiah during the captivity in Babylon speaking to Israel. The little companies that make the refrigerator magnets found that verse and got rich putting those little Jeremiah verses on everybody's refrigerator and bumper stickers, and it's wonderful, but you can draw a principle that God has plans for you and God's plans are good; but He's not talking to you, He's talking to the nation of Israel and Babylon during the captivity of what their future was through the prophet Jeremiah. You have to understand who's talking to whom and why, and properly interpret, and then properly be able to apply those passages.

There's a lot of verses being claimed from the Word of Faith, positive confession healers, that if you had enough faith you'd be healed from verses that are taken out of context. They are twisted and used for their own ideas.

Let me give you another example, Acts 16:31. Just recently I've been asked this question about this verse a couple times where in Acts 16:31 Paul was with Silas in prison in Philippi, and the Philippian jailer said, "What must I do to be saved?" He said, "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and you and your family will be saved." So, they conclude from that statement there that if you believe in Jesus, you're guaranteed by that verse that every one of your family members is going to be saved. That's not what that verse is teaching. That verse is basically just a description of what was going on in Philippi and Paul was saying, "They will be saved, your family members, if they believe on Jesus, not just because you believe on Jesus." God has no grandchildren, only children. So, they twist that Scripture and say, "Wow, if you're a Christian, this verse promises everyone in your family is going to be saved." That's not what that verse, Acts 16:31, is saying or doing.

Years ago, in a church service in San Bernardino where I pastored, there were some people that came into the church service and sat in the front row. During worship and during my sermon, they would yell and clap and screaming, jumping up and down, going crazy. After the service was over, we spoke with them and said, "We're glad you're in church, we're glad you're here, but when we're teaching the Word of God, even worshiping, you shouldn't be screaming and yelling and drawing attention to yourself and distracting people." I mean, we're singing worship songs and they sound like they just got hit by a Mack Truck or something. It's like, "Oh, a heart attack up there, what's going on?"

When I spoke to them about it, they said, “Well, we are ‘lively stones.’” I said, “What?” “Yes, bruthah, we’re ‘lively stones.’” Of course, I’ve obviously never forgotten this. I said, “Where is that in the Bible?” They opened their Bible to 1 Peter 2:5. Unfortunately, in the King James, this old English says, “. . . as lively stones,” but the problem is it’s not even in the context. A better translation is “living stones,” not “lively stones” to give you permission to yell and scream and jump up and down and shout in church. I think it’s great to show emotion when you worship God, but not if it distracts others from their worship of God or brings attention to you and not to the Lord. That’s not the Holy Spirit. But taking that verse and using a faulty rendering of the word led them to bizarre behavior, so we need to be careful on how we interpret Scripture.

Here’s the sixth, a doctrine cannot be considered biblical unless it sums up and includes all that the Bible says about it. Got that? Now, ask these questions: Did Jesus teach it? Is it practiced in the book of Acts? Is it taught in the epistles? Write down those three questions: Did Jesus teach about this? Is it practiced anywhere in the book of Acts, the early church? Is it taught in the epistles? I’d love to spend more time on this point, but I can’t believe how long this has taken me to get through this stuff. The question is whether or not a text is descriptive, which is what you have many times in the gospels or in Acts, which is historical, narrative, or prescriptive where it’s telling us that it’s something that we should do.

I’ve run into many people that have doctrines that they’ve taken from the book of Acts that are nowhere taught or commanded in any of the epistles of the New Testament. Whether they’re Pauline epistles or general epistles, it’s not there. You shouldn’t build a doctrine unless you have solid biblical reason for doing that and ask yourself what the genre is. The Bible has history, the Bible has poetry, the Bible has prophecy, and the Bible has didactic literature in the epistles or instruction.

Here’s the seventh, interpret the passage in light of its context. This is perhaps one of the most important of all ten. Always take a passage or a text in its context. Context, context, context, context, context is king. Never take a verse of Scripture out of the context of what is being taught or going on there. This is again one of the great problems of the Word of Faith teachers. They’ll talk about Abraham in Galatians, “We’re being children of Abraham, Abraham was rich, therefore we should be rich.” What it means is that we’re saved by faith and grace and justified by faith alone in Christ. It’s not talking about money or cars or those kinds of things.

Here’s the eighth, a Scripture has only one meaning, and it should be taken literally. A Scripture has only one meaning, not multiple meanings—“What does it mean to you, what does it mean to you, what does it mean to you,” and that’s all great. No, what does it mean to the original author? The goal of Bible study is to find the meaning of the text in the mind of the original author. What was Paul trying to say? What did Paul mean? Don’t spiritualize or allegorize the text. Be careful for types. When is a type a type? When the Bible says it is. Be careful how you handle parables and figures of speech. The Bible talks about the hand of God, the eyes of God, the ears of God. God doesn’t have hands. God doesn’t have eyes. God doesn’t have hands. Those are what’s called anthropomorphisms. They are human descriptions of God so that we can understand, “God sees,” or “God helps,” or “God hears,” but

God doesn't have hands, ears, eyes, and nose. Don't spiritualize or allegorize.

The ninth, almost there, when two doctrines are clearly taught in the Bible, yet appear to be contradictory—appear to be contradictory to us with our limited knowledge and understanding—accept both as scriptural in the confident belief that they resolve themselves in a higher unity. I know that's a lengthy definition. I'll tell you what we'll do. I'm going to get these points typed out on a card for you, so next Wednesday night they'll be available, or Sunday. How's that sound? Okay, all ten of these points will be made available to you. The Trinity we don't understand, but we believe. The hypostatic union, two natures of Christ, we don't understand, but we believe. The sovereign election of God, choosing who will be saved and man having free will we don't understand, but we believe are taught and that they reconcile in a higher unity.

The tenth, the primary purpose of the Bible or Bible study is to change our lives not increase our knowledge. Jesus said, "Search the scriptures; for in them ye think ye have eternal life: and they are they which testify of me. 40 And ye will not come to me, that ye might"—be saved. Two things by way of application to your study of the Word: you need to know, you need to learn what the Bible teaches about God, Jesus, the Holy Spirit, humanity, sin, salvation, the Church, and future things; but then you need to do, which should be, repent, believe, grow, and love God with all your heart and love your neighbor as yourself.

When you read the Bible, ask yourself, "Is there a promise to claim, a sin to forsake, or commandment to obey." Got that?