

I. **METHODS OF INTERPRETATION.**

A. The Need for a Method.

1. The Bible is a normal message even though God is the author.
2. The Bible is original in its message.
3. God revealed His thoughts through men in the Bible.
4. The message of the Bible is written in everyday, human language that can be understood.
5. To interpret the Bible is to explain its meaning or message.
6. The Bible must never be misinterpreted.

B. Harmful Methods.

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| 1. Mystic Method. | To discard the literal for the spiritual. |
| 2. Allegorical Method. | To teach by symbols and figures. |
| 3. Superstitious Method. | Having zeal but not according to knowledge. |
| 4. Ecclesiastical Method. | "Let the church authorities tell us." |
| 5. Dogmatic Method. | To proof-text or to eisegete. |
| 6. Rational Method. | This is "to treat logic as the only tool." |
| 7. Literal Method. | To "make every text have only one literal meaning." |

C. The Deductive Method.

1. This means to begin with the general facts and instances and then drawing conclusions.
2. God has revealed His message to mankind in two ways:
 - a. General revelation (nature, the creation).
 - b. Specific revelation (the Bible).

II. **RULES OF INTERPRETATION.**

- A. Every passage has one meaning, never two contradictory ones.
- B. The most simple and obvious meaning of any passage is usually the correct one.
- C. Always allow the author's own explanation of a passage stand.
- D. Always interpret a passage in harmony with the context.
- E. An interpretation of a passage should always conform to the environment of the author.
- F. Each passage must be in harmony with all other passages.
- G. Allow one passage to help explain another passage.
- H. A passage must be interpreted in harmony with any idioms it contains.
- I. All passages on any given subject must be studied for a full understanding of that subject.
- J. Observe the proper balance of scriptural truth.
- K. Let plain passages help determine the meaning of difficult ones.
- L. Rightly divide the book, the dispensations, the covenants and the settings.
- M. Rightly divide the language.
- N. Know the meanings of the words in the sentences.
- O. Know the limits of divine revelation.

III. PRINCIPLES OF INTERPRETATION.

A. (1) Original Languages.

1. We must remember that the OT was given by God in the Hebrew language, and the NT was given by God in the Greek language.
2. Some might wonder why it is important to be mindful of these facts as they interpret the Scriptures. The reason is simply this: the original languages are the ultimate authority, not the various translations. God inspired the original writers, but not the manuscript copiers or translators. This is not to say that the word of God has not been preserved and translated accurately for all practical purposes.

B. (2) Infallible and Authoritative.

1. A vital principle: The Bible is the infallible, and divinely inspired, word of God. We must have true faith in the supreme authority of the Scriptures. God's word must be the final authority in our lives. See 2Tim. 3:16,17.

All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, thoroughly equipped for every good work.

2. If the Bible isn't divinely inspired, then it is not the word of God. If this is the case, we are without any absolute, objective standard for living, and there is no ultimate authority to regulate human behavior. Without such, mankind is ruled by subjective feelings of what is right and wrong.

C. (3) The Law of Rationality.

1. We must abide by the law of rationality; that is, we must only draw conclusions that are warranted by the evidence.
2. It is undeniable that human reasoning is necessary to draw proper conclusions (1Th. 5:21; 1Jn. 4:1).

(1Th 5:21) Test all things; hold fast what is good.

(1Jn. 4:10) Beloved, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits, whether they are of God; because many false prophets have gone out into the world.

3. Human reasoning or logical thinking is not be exalted above the authority of God's word. We need to be logical, rational, and consistent as we examine the evidence of the Scriptures and apply it to our lives.
4. We must always remember, however, that logic is merely a tool. It does not provide content. The Bible is--and always will be--the content.

D. (4) Understandable.

1. Let us give attention to an important, related principle: We must accept the scriptural fact that God gave the Bible to mankind to be understood, believed, and obeyed, and He will hold us responsible for our actions (or lack thereof). It is possible to know the truth; thus, it is understandable (Jn. 8:31,32).

Then Jesus said to those Jews who believed Him, 'If you abide in My word, you are My disciples indeed. And you shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free.'

2. Man can understand the Bible, and must strive to understand it through diligent study. We must believe God's word, and we must obey it.
3. Why? Because we will all be held accountable for our thoughts and actions! We will be judged by the word of God (Jn. 12:48).

"He who rejects Me, and does not receive My words, has that which judges him--the word that I have spoken will judge him in the last day."

E. (5) Context.

1. We must make proper use of the context of any statement of Scripture. When we pull a text out of its proper context in an effort to prove a point, we are "handling the word of God deceitfully" (2Cor. 4:2; cf. 2Tim. 2:15).

(2Cor 4:2) but we have renounced the things hidden because of shame, not walking in craftiness or adulterating the word of God, but by the manifestation of truth commending ourselves to every man's conscience in the sight of God.

(2Tim 2:15) Be diligent to present yourself approved to God as a workman who does not need to be ashamed, accurately handling the word of truth.

2. Rules of the Setting (or of Context).
 - a. Who is doing the speaking or the writing?
 - b. To whom is the command or observation given?
 - c. About whom is the passage speaking?
 - d. When was the passage in question spoken?
 - e. Where was the speaker when the message was given?
 - f. What were the circumstances about the statement spoken?
 - g. Why is the passage included in its context?
3. It is unfortunate that a large percentage of religious error today is caused by someone who takes a few of his favorite verses of Scripture, ignores many other vital passages on the subject, and presses them to an extreme position which conflicts with other points of truth.

F. **(6) A Proper Attitude.**

1. The Bible is understood by spiritual receptivity as much as by intellectual effort and scholarship.
2. We must strive to reach a balance regarding this important principle. We must have minds and hearts that are willing to receive what the Bible teaches, and we must exercise intellectual effort. It takes both to fully understand God's wonderful word.
3. Those with an improper attitude toward the Bible (i.e., those who are not spiritually receptive) will not understand God's word properly. This principle explains why many who are well-educated (by worldly standards) have not learned the truth. And, it also explains why many who are poorly educated (by worldly standards) have learned the truth and obeyed it.
4. Where does knowledge begin? With a proper attitude toward the Lord--namely, an attitude of deep reverence and humility. A superior intellect is not a requirement to learn God's truth and become wise (Prov. 1:7).
The fear of the LORD is the beginning of knowledge, but fools despise wisdom and instruction."
5. But, how can we develop a proper spiritual attitude? Notice the following:
 - a. We must be noble ("fair-minded") enough spiritually to receive "the word with all readiness", examining "the Scriptures daily" (Ac. 17:11).
 - b. We must humble ourselves as "little children" as we hear and study God's word. Otherwise, God will hide His truth from us (Mt. 18:1-4; 11:25,26). Those who are wise in their own estimation, thinking they know better than God, will not find His truth.
 - c. We must have a good heart (Lk. 8:9-18).
 - d. We must love the truth. Those who do not love the truth are susceptible to believing lies (2Th. 2:8-12).
 - e. We must hunger and thirst after God's word (Mt. 5:6). We must desire to study and learn.
 - f. We must be diligent to rightly divide the Scriptures (2Tim. 2:15).
Our goal should be to present ourselves approved to God, not men!

G. **(7) Meditation.**

1. We must meditate on the word of God daily.
2. Meditation upon the Scriptures is critical to successful Christian living and to arriving at a proper interpretation of the biblical text. The Bible is a storehouse of treasures. Some never discover these treasures because they have not learned to look past the cover. In order to obtain the precious gems contained in God's word, we must search fervently and continually--as if we were searching for gold!
3. Notice the following passages on the importance of meditating on God's word:

- a. Joshua 1:8.
"This Book of the Law shall not depart from your mouth, but you shall meditate in it day and night, that you may observe to do according to all that is written in it. For then you will make your way prosperous, and then you will have good success."
- b. Psalm 119:97-100.
"Oh, how I love Your law! It is my meditation all the day. You, through Your commandments, make me wiser than my enemies; for they are ever with me. I have more understanding than all my teachers, for Your testimonies are my meditation. I understand more than the ancients, because I keep Your precepts."
- c. 1Timothy 4:13,15 .
"Till I come, give attention to reading, to exhortation, to doctrine... Meditate on these things; give yourself entirely to them, that your progress may be evident to all."
- d. Philippians 4:8.
"Finally, brethren, whatever things are true, whatever things are noble, whatever things are just, whatever things are pure, whatever things are lovely, whatever things are of good report, if there is any virtue and if there is anything praiseworthy--meditate on these things."

H. **(8) Classifying Actions.**

1. We must recognize that there are temporary and permanent aspects to consider regarding biblical authority. In other words, simply because an action was authorized at one time for a certain person or group does not necessarily mean that we have authority for that same action today.
2. If we examine all actions (or examples) found in the NT, we will see that there are five different types of actions, but only two of them are authoritative or binding upon us today. Let's look at each of these five classifications briefly and then draw an important conclusion:
 - a. The Bible records some actions that are sinful.
Judas as an example of this.
 - b. The Bible records some actions that were TEMPORARY and OPTIONAL.
Paul circumcised Timothy "...because of the Jews who were in that region, for they all knew that his father was Greek" (Ac. 16:3). This action was temporary in that it would not apply today. There are no circumstances today in which circumcision would be advantageous regarding the spread of the gospel. This action was optional in that it was not required. Paul circumcised Timothy, not because he had to, but because he thought it would make it easier for them to teach effectively among the Jews.
 - c. The Bible records some actions that were TEMPORARY and REQUIRED.
In 1Cor. 12:31, Paul commanded the brethren to "earnestly desire the greater [spiritual] gifts." They were required to desire the miraculous gifts in the first century. However, the age of miracles did not last much beyond the first century, and, therefore, this obligation was temporary. This obligation is not required of us today because for us to desire the miraculous gifts of prophecy, speaking in tongues, etc., would be foolishness since these miracles are no longer available for our use. God's word has already been confirmed (cf. Mk. 16:20; 1Cor. 13:8ff).
 - d. The Bible records some actions that are PERMANENT and OPTIONAL.
In 2Cor. 8:3, Paul writes that the Macedonian brethren gave "beyond their ability." They were not required to give beyond their ability, but they were allowed to do so. Thus, their action here was definitely optional, but we should realize that the principle of going the "second mile" (Mt. 5:41) is a permanent part of Christianity. We today would be wise to give beyond our ability, but such is not demanded of us.
 - e. The Bible records some actions that are PERMANENT and REQUIRED.
There are many examples in the book of Acts where men and women were required to obey the gospel to have their sins washed away. They heard the good news about the Christ,

which made it possible for them to develop faith. Their faith led them to want to repent from their sinful ways and walk in righteousness. They confessed their belief in Christ and submitted to baptism which washed away their sins and put them into Christ. They were required to do this to be saved, and this is a permanent part of Christianity since God's word has been completely revealed (cf. Jude 3). There is nothing in the NT that changed the plan of salvation seen time and again in the book of Acts. There are many other NT actions that are both permanent and required (e.g., the first-century Christians were required, as we are today, to observe the Lord's Supper; they were also required, as we are today, to give of their means; etc.).

4. Of these five classifications of actions, only the last two authorize anything for us today. Therefore, when we read of an action in the NT that is right within itself and relates to a permanent element of Christianity, we can conclude that we have the authority for imitating that action. Properly classifying actions is crucial if one hopes to correctly understand and apply God's word.

I. **(9) Difficult Passages.**

1. The last principle of Bible interpretation: We must acknowledge that there are some difficult things to understand in God's word.
2. All should agree that many things in Scripture are plain, simple, and easy to understand. However, that God has made some things hard to understand (2Pet. 3:15,16).
And consider that the longsuffering of our Lord is salvation--as also our beloved brother Paul, according to the wisdom given to him, has written to you, as also in all his epistles, speaking in them of these things, in which are some things hard to understand, which untaught and unstable people twist to their own destruction, as they do also the rest of the Scriptures"
3. God, no doubt, has a purpose in making some things in the Bible difficult to understand. Perhaps His intent is to cause us to study diligently to harvest the richest of spiritual blessings.
4. Although there are difficult passages in the sacred text, let us be assured that all those who earnestly seek will find the answers--they will find truth! See Mt. 7:7,8.
Ask, and it will be given to you; seek, and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you. For everyone who asks receives, and he who seeks, finds, and to him who knocks it will be opened."
5. Even if we don't understand everything in the Bible, everyone can understand sufficiently to be saved through obedience to God and by submitting to His plan of salvation. No matter where we are in our spiritual lives, let us all determine to keep on growing (2Pet. 3:18).
But grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. To Him be the glory both now and forever. Amen.