

WHERE DO I BEGIN?

Overview: In order to be a better student of the Bible, one must understand the basic principles of Biblical interpretation. In this lesson, we will examine the basic principles that will be the foundation of learning how to study the Bible.

PRINCIPLE #1 – Consider your presupposition.

A presupposition is what you presuppose to be true. For example, if you do not believe that God exists, then your view of the existence of God will affect your interpretation of the Bible. You may believe that God exists, but do you believe that the Bible is the complete Word of God and that it is completely accurate without any error? The way you view the Bible will affect how you study the Bible.

PRINCIPLE #2 – Choose your hermeneutic.

Hermeneutics is basically the science of Biblical interpretation. It is how you approach and interpret the Bible. There are many different types of hermeneutics, however, there are basically two main types that shapes the various theological schools of thought we see today.

1. Allegorical Interpretation

Allegorical Interpretation takes the assumption that the Bible has many levels of meaning. It tends to focus on the spiritual sense as opposed to the literal sense. (Ex. The church is 'spiritual Israel'. There are no more dealings with the actual nation of Israel.)

The theology that comes from allegorical interpretation is *Covenant Theology*. In Covenant Theology, we find three basic covenants: the covenant of works, the covenant of redemption, and the covenant of grace. It uses the concept of the covenant as the overall organizing principle for theology.

Calvinism (reformed theology) historically uses covenant theology as its framework for Biblical study or the structure through which scripture is organized. This all stems from an allegorical hermeneutic.

2. Literal Interpretation*

A Literal Interpretation of scripture has as its premise that every passage of scripture must be interpreted in its most literal, grammatical, historical, and cultural sense.

The theology that comes from literal interpretation is *Dispensational Theology*. This theology approaches the Bible in light of various dispensations of time through which God brings about His redemptive work. (Ex. Israel and the Church are two separate entities in God's dealings with mankind through which God has worked, is working, and will work in various periods of time)

*Literal Interpretation is the approach that we take in this study.

PRINCIPLE #3 – The Golden Rule of Biblical Interpretation

When the plain sense makes common sense, seek no other sense.

John Phillips writes, “God says what He means and means what He says. We are to read the Bible just as we would read any other piece of writing, not trying to force some allegorical, mystical, or figurative meaning into its plain statements. That does not mean that spiritual lessons cannot be derived from a passage of scripture, even from a passage dealing largely with narrative. Nor does it mean that a passage has no deeper lessons than those lying at the surface. The Bible is the Word of God and is therefore inexhaustible. We must, however, apply to the Bible the same principles of common sense we would use in examining any other writing. We must look for the plain sense of what has been written. Once we have determined that, we can mine beneath the surface for hidden treasure.” (Phillips, John *Bible Explorers Guide* p. 15)

How does this work:

1. Interpret Literally

We should always seek the most literal meaning possible. Only when a literal interpretation proves to be either absurd or completely out of harmony with context of theme should we accept a figurative interpretation.

Literal does not mean every word is to be taken literally. For example, there is poetry and figures of speech, just like we use in our language, that is not to be taken literally, yet it is spoken to convey a literal message.

2. Interpret Grammatically

To come to the most literal interpretation possible, we must also consider the actual words of scripture and the grammatical structure. Using Bible concordances and dictionaries is helpful in such study.

3. Interpret Historically

As we examine a passage of scripture, we are to take into account the historical nature of the passage. To whom was it written, when was it written, why was it written, what are the historical events in that time period, etc.

4. Interpret Culturally

The men that God used to write the words of scripture lived and worked within the culture of their day. Their writings, therefore, reflect the culture that they lived in. Therefore, it is important to understand the culture of the time in which the text was written.

PRINCIPLE #4 – Understand Interpretation terms

1. REVELATION = The informing, or unveiling. Divine disclosures of things that could not be known otherwise.
2. INSPIRATION = The imparting process. The act of the Holy Spirit working in, on, or through the prophets, apostles, and writers enabling them to preach and write in a trustworthy manner the truth they receive from God.
3. INTERPRETATION = The science of discovering the meaning of the Holy Scriptures.
4. ILLUMINATION = The function of the Holy Spirit to enlighten and make the Christian capable of comprehension and understanding the interpretation of the Bible.
5. PRINCIPALIZATION = Rule of thumb to make a decision.
6. APPLICATION = Obedience. Do it now!
7. EXEGESIS = Bring the meaning of the text to the surface.
8. EISEGESIS = Reading our ideas into the text.

PRINCIPLE #5 – Let the Holy Spirit speak

As we keep the other basic principles of Biblical interpretation in mind, we must understand fully the work of the Holy Spirit in guiding us in the truth. The more we yield to the Spirit, the greater understanding of scripture we will have. We must learn to pray for His guidance and filling as we approach our study of the Bible

CONCLUSION

*I love the dear old Bible
The Word of Christian Life
For it's my shield and buckler
And sword in mortal strife
It tells me of my Savior
And shows the path to go
It tells me of God's heaven
And much I want to know
It is my boon companion
A keeper by my side
It is my daily comfort
And never failing guide
I'll cherish it and love it
Until I see the Lord
And tell men of its message
God's will within His Word.*

- E.J. Morgan

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