

Rightly Dividing the Word

Week Three: Interpreting the Scriptures

You can have the correct observation and a right interpretation but the point is that your life would be changed by what you read! NEVER FORGET!

Don't get so mechanical in your study that the bible loses its life & freshness.

Above all, you must understand that no prophecy of Scripture came about by the prophet's own interpretation. For prophecy never had its origin in the will of man, but men spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit.

2 Peter 1:20-21 NIV

- God meant to say something when He authored the Bible. Here it says that the prophets didn't **reinterpret** it as they received the Word of the God but rather, they wrote as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit.
 - The point is that God meant to say something and in interpretation we cannot make the text mean something different than what God intended.
 - **The prophets didn't and we can't!**

Observation: *Opening Our Eyes* → Interpretation: **Opening our Minds**

Defining Hermeneutics

- **Hermeneutics** – the science or art of interpreting the Bible
 - Explaining in one language [and culture] what is conveyed in another language [and culture].¹
 - The art of moving the text from what it meant **then** to what it means **now**².
 - When I say that I don't mean that the scripture has different meaning now **but to convey the meaning of scripture today from Biblical culture to our culture we must interpret.**
 - Example: *Five times in the NT it refers to greeting others with a holy kiss*³. (Rom. 16:16; 1 Cor. 16:20; 2

¹ Roy Zuck, *Basic Bible Interpretation* 19

² Graeme Goldsworthy, *Gospel-Centered Hermeneutics* 27

Cor. 13:12; 1 Thes. 5:26; 1 Peter 5:14). **Then it spoke of greeting, friendliness and love to others. In our western minds it speaks of being creepy.**

- Thus the importance of Exegesis as a part of Hermeneutics
 - Begin with the process of exegesis of the text in order to understand what it originally meant to say. What was the author's intended meaning??
- Through Interpretation you begin to develop a Systematic Theology and Doctrine
 - Literal Hell
 - Women in Ministry
 - Homosexuality
 - The Gifts
 - **All these come from your hermeneutic**

Who Controls the Meaning?

When I say all these come from YOUR hermeneutic it might sound like you have control of what the text means. **But who really controls the meaning??**

The Author or The Reader?

- Story of the Wizard of Oz⁴ (L. Frank Baum 1900)
 - So Good over Evil or Political Satire?
 - Did the author intend it to be read as political satire?
 - Would there be something wrong if we understood it otherwise?
 - **Who determines the meaning?**
- This is what is hotly debated about the Bible. Who determines the meaning? The devotional reader? The team of Bible Scholars who write the notes at the bottom of your Bible or does God?

The answer lies in the nature of the Bible and how it communicates to us...

³ Roy Zuck, *Basic Bible Interpretation* 93

⁴ J. Scott Duvall & J. Daniel Hayes, *Grasping God's Word*, 175

Communication of the Author

- How we view the *communication of the text* decides how we determine who controls the meaning.
 - Example: E-mail from a loved one.
 - Imagine a young in love college student received a love poem e-mail from her boyfriend. **When the young woman reads the poem she will be trying to figure out what the author (boyfriend) is trying to say to her. What the author intended to say. How much does he love her...**
 - It has meaning to her but the meaning is controlled by the author
 - Let's say that it was such a good poem that she forwards it to her mom who forwards it to her work, which then after couple weeks it gets forwarded all over the world and you receive it. You don't know who wrote it or who it was written to. In this case you might not care what the author meant or intended. And you have the freedom to interpret it anyway you want.
- **Question is: Do you believe God authored the Bible and wrote it to you personally?**
 - If you, the reader, see the text as a communication between the author and yourself, then you should search for the meaning that the author intended.
 - *The Author's Intended Meaning.*
 - BUT if you read the Bible merely as great literature or for some suggestive moral guidance and not communication from God, then you will probably interpret the text anyway you choose.
 - *The Readers Response.*
 - Philippians 4:13 "*I can do all things through Christ...*"
 - I believe the Author's intended meaning to me is that I can make the NBA.
 - **Are there rules?**
 - Example: Parking Tickets & STOP signs.
 - Do we interpret those according to *reader response* or *authorial intent*?
 - Do we interpret it to mean: *slow down a little bit, look for cars and then gun it?*
 - How do police interpret it?

- **There are some texts that to ignore the author's intention will produce serious consequences for the reader.**
 - **John 3:16-18**
 - **Hebrews 9:27**

If we do not read and interpret the Bible as communication from God, then we will fall into the lie that we can interpret it anyway we choose.

- We must read the bible asking what the *text means to me*, **BUT** before we do that, because the bible is the *communication of God*, **our first interpretive question should be: What does this text mean to God. What is the meaning God intended in this text?**

In biblical interpretation, the reader does not control the meaning; the author controls the meaning. This conclusion leads us to one of the most basic principles of our interpretive approach: We do not create the meaning. Rather, we seek to discover the meaning that has been placed there by the Author⁵. –Grasping God's Word

- Typically in scripture a passage has only one meaning, unless the author says there is another meaning.
 - However, if a student of the Bible says that there is one intended meaning to a scripture doesn't mean that all interpreters will agree on that meaning.
 - Example: The Rapture (1 Thess 4&5). There are several different interpretations of this teaching but we won't divide over it...**not salvific in nature.**
 - **But we all agree the Author had one meaning in mind.**

So the Goal: To Discover the Intended Meaning

Principles of Interpretation (AKA Hermeneutics)

Principles for the Bible: The bible is from God (Holy Spirit), thus...

(how we must look at the bible) ⁶

1. The Bible is inerrant
 - a. Without error in it's original form.
- **In interpretation** all it's record of history, prophecy, miracles and dialogue is free from error. If science or archeology doesn't side with it...just give it time!

⁵ J. Scott Duvall & J. Daniel Hayes, *Grasping God's Word*, 178

⁶ Roy Zuck, *Basic Bible Interpretation* 71-75

2. The Bible is authoritative

- a. It has authority over our lives and judges the thoughts and intents of the heart (Heb 4).
 - b. It has authority because it is from God and without error.
 - c. If the bible is authoritative it must be understandable.⁷
 - d. Because it has authority over people's lives, we must interpret it correctly!!
- **In interpretation** scripture is authoritative in doctrine and practice.
 - When we interpret historical accounts or events, often times they are not normative. Even if there is no report of God's disapproval.
 - Lot's daughters and their incest (Gen. 19:34)
 - Abraham's slaying of Isaac (Gen 22)
 - Because an event is recorded doesn't make it normative in Scripture.

3. The Bible is mysterious

- a. Because the bible is divinely from God, we must concede that there are parts that are hard to understand and parts that we just won't understand.
- **In interpretation** no one has a perfect hermeneutic but Jesus!
 - Prophecy (When is Jesus coming back...pre-trib...???)
 - Miracles (How can someone walk on water??)
 - Doctrine (Predestination, Free will?? The Holy Trinity??)

4. The Bible is unified

- a. Though recorded by approximately 40 human authors, the Bible is the Work of God Himself. Thus the Bible has unity. All parts fit together.
- b. Thus the bible will not contradict itself. So the passages that have discrepancies need to be interpreted in light of the harmony of the Scriptures.
- c. This is where we would apply the analogy of faith: scripture to interpret scripture.

⁷ Robertson McQuilkin, *Understanding and Applying the Bible* 87

- **In interpretation**, we can use scripture to interpret scripture because it's God's unified unfolding plan of redemption.
5. The Bible is trustworthy
- a. We can trust in its unity, in its inerrancy, in its authority.
- **In interpretation** we maintain the independent authority of scripture. It doesn't need our laws or our interpretation to be trusted in, powerful, authoritative or inerrant! It stands alone!

Principles for the individual interpreting the bible

(how we who interpret the bible must look)

1. Born Again: Redeemed
 - a. Bible is a spiritual book and it takes spiritual eyes to interpret it.
 - b. Unsaved person is spiritually blind and dead (2 Cor. 4:4, Eph 2:2)
2. Desire & Commitment
 - a. You must commit to place your life under the bible's authority and power. You must desire to want to rightly divide the word of God.
 - b. You can't be lackadaisical about the bible...it's God's holy word, and as a man of God you are held accountable to be one who is approved, rightly handling the word of Truth (2 Tim 2:15)
 - c. Bible interpretation takes time & work!!
3. Prayerful & Humble
 - a. There will be a temptation to lean on your intellect and want to plow through and study and read to know. If you don't stop and pray and humble yourself you make scripture about intellect and knowledge and maybe even about you or the people you are teaching...and not about Jesus. (John 5:39)
 - b. You are fallen and no interpreter is infallible. There have been amazing men of faith who have gone before you who have wrestled with difficult texts until their death...don't think you can figure it out in one afternoon because you read chapter 4 of basic bible interpretation! BE HUMBLE
4. Obedient and Dependent
 - a. If you are not willing to obey what you are studying, then don't study.

- b. "Absence of a reverence for the Word, lack of prayer, pride, or an unwillingness to obey the truths of Scriptures will hinder one's skill in comprehending what the bible says.⁸"
- c. Be dependent upon the Holy Spirit
- d. Live what you would ever endeavor to teach first!!!!

From Context to Interpretation

Context is King (Context Rules)

- First determine the purpose of the book
 - Ask the 5 W's and an H
 - Who, What, Where, When, Where, Why & How?
- Importance of Context in Interpretation
 - "Disregarding the context is one of the greatest problems in Bible interpretation. By disregarding the "total surroundings" of a Bible verse, we may completely misunderstand the verse. We need to take into consideration the sentences and paragraphs that precede and follow the verse and also to take into consideration the cultural setting in which the passage and even the entire book is written⁹."
 - Questions to ask about Context of the entire book...
 - Who wrote the book?
 - At what time was it written?
 - What prompted the author to write the book? (occasion)
 - What problems, situations, or needs was he addressing?
 - What is the book all about, what are/is the main subject?
 - To whom was the book written?
 - Who were the first readers of the book?

⁸ Roy Zuck, *Basic Bible Interpretation* 23

⁹ Roy Zuck, *Basic Bible Interpretation* 76-77

Interpreting the Bible through 3 Lenses

- Interpreting through Culture
- Interpreting through Grammar
- Interpreting through Genre

Interpreting this way we are trying to discover the **Literary Meaning**.

- “Literal Meaning” might seem too fuzzy in books like Revelation
- *Literary Meaning* reflects the type of literature used, the context, the historical background, the grammar, word meanings...¹⁰

Homework

- Basic Bible Interpretation Chapter 3
- How to Study Your Bible Chapter 7-9

*Don't interpret Philippians 3:10 yet...or at least you can start but not due until week 5.

¹⁰ J. Scott Duvall & J. Daniel Hayes, *Grasping God's Word*, 187