

How to Study the Bible – Part 1

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From R.C. Sproul's "Knowing Scripture"

Biblical Hermeneutics: The science of interpreting Scripture.

Rule #1: The Analogy of Faith: letting Scripture interpret Scripture

- No Scripture can be interpreted in conflict with what is clearly taught elsewhere in Scripture
- The inerrancy of Scripture pre-supposes this. Apparent contradictions are just that – apparent.

Example:

Rom 3:28 For we hold that one is justified by faith apart from works of the law.

Jas 2:24 You see that a person is justified by works and not by faith alone.

Rule #2: Interpreting the Bible Literally-the Bible should be interpreted according to its literal sense

- Litera – meaning “letter” – we must pay attention to the words being used
- A noun is a noun; a verb is a verb; historical narratives are historical narratives; etc.

Genre analysis: poetry, historical narrative, hyperbole, personification, metaphor – we must also consider the type of writing – saying we interpret the Bible literally is dangerous if we are not also considering the genre of writing.

Examples:

Job 34:13 Who gave him charge over the earth, and who laid on him the **whole world**?

Col 1:6 which has come to you, as indeed in the **whole world** it is bearing fruit and growing--as it also does among you, since the day you heard it and understood the grace of God in truth,

1Jn 2:2 He is the propitiation for our sins, and not for ours only but also for the sins of the **whole world**.

Does whole world always mean every person in the world, or does context, genre analysis, and the analogy of faith help us to determine what is meant?

Joh 6:48 I am the bread of life.

Joh 6:56 Whoever feeds on my flesh and drinks my blood abides in me, and I in him.

Num 22:28 Then the LORD opened the mouth of the donkey, and she said to Balaam, "What have I done to you, that you have struck me these three times?"

Alternate view of translation:

Quadruga – a fourfold method examining each text for four meanings: literal, moral, allegorical and anagogical

- Literal – the plain and evident meaning
- Moral – instructing humans how to behave
- Allegorical – the content of faith
- Anagogical – expressing future hope – an ultimate destiny -a spiritual interpretation of events

Example: Jerusalem

- Literal – the capital of Judea
- Moral – the human soul
- Allegorical – the church
- Anagogical – heaven

Instead of assigning different meanings to the same text, the literal view of interpretation seeks to find a singular meaning – and context, literary type, etc. can help us to determine that single meaning.

From the Chicago Statement on Biblical Hermeneutics: “We affirm that the meaning expressed in each biblical text is single, definite and fixed. We deny that the recognition of this single meaning eliminates the variety of its application.”

Rule #3: The grammatical-historical method – focusing attention on literary forms, grammatical constructions, and historical contexts

- understanding the grammatical structure of Greek or Hebrew can help to determine whether words are questions, commands, or declarations.

Example:

Rom 1:1 Paul, a servant of Christ Jesus, called to be an apostle, set apart for the gospel of God,

Question: concerning the “gospel of God”, does Paul mean “gospel about God” or “God’s gospel”?

Answer: the Greek structure denotes possession, so “the gospel of God” is “God’s gospel”.

- Historical analysis – consider the setting and situation in which books of the Bible were written
- Source criticism – we should consider why an author is writing

Example: Luke is crafting an historical narrative in writing his Gospel appealing to a wide audience

Luk 1:1-4 Inasmuch as many have undertaken to compile a narrative of the things that have been accomplished among us, (2) just as those who from the beginning were eyewitnesses and ministers of the word have delivered them to us, (3) it seemed good to me also, having followed all things closely for some time past, to write an orderly account for you, most excellent Theophilus, (4) that you may have certainty concerning the things you have been taught.

Authorship and Dating are important to interpretation

- Did Isaiah write Isaiah 700 years before Christ?

Summary from R.C. Sproul:

The three primary principles of interpretation are aids to our personal enrichment. (1) The analogy of faith keeps the whole Bible in view lest we suffer from the effects of exaggerating one part of Scripture to the exclusion of others. (2) The literal sense offers a restraint from letting our imaginations run away in fanciful interpretation and invites us to examine closely the literary forms of Scripture. (3) The grammatical-historical method focuses our attention on the original meaning of the text lest we “read into Scripture” our own ideas drawn from the present.

Sproul, R. C.. Knowing Scripture . InterVarsity Press. Kindle Edition.