

How to Study the Bible – Part 3

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R.C. Sproul: “Knowing Scripture”

Practical Rules for Biblical Interpretation

#1: Read the Bible Like Any Other Book

- Remember the historical-grammatical method - Sensus literalis – a verb is a verb, a noun is a noun, etc.
- In saying this, we are not discounting the value of prayer or the necessity of the Holy Spirit.
- But through prayer, the Bible does not change basic literary patterns of interpretation.
 - Luckydipping – a person prays for divine guidance and lets the Bible fall open randomly.

#2: Read the Bible Existentially

- We do not mean an existential method of interpreting Scripture where words have subjective meaning.
- We should be passionately and personally involved in what we read.
 - Example: Lev 10:1-3
- Understanding why God does things – according to Scripture – will help us overcome difficulties we may have with Scripture.
- What are some examples of troublesome passages where, unless we fully understand what is going on, we may hold prejudice against what it says?

#3: Interpret the Historical Narratives by the Didactic

- Didactic – to teach or instruct
- This is a general approach to Scripture that says, in general, the emphasis in the Gospels is found in the record of events, while the Epistles are more concerned with interpreting the significance of those events in terms of doctrine, exhortation, and application.
- Consequently, the general application is that the Epistles should interpret the Gospels rather than the other way around.
- This does not give less authority to the Gospels than to the Epistles
- Example: observing Christ’s behavior in the Gospels does not create a manual of required Christian behavior:
 - We do not have the same mission as Jesus – we are not sent into the world to die for the sins of our people.
 - We do not drive out corruption with a whip
 - We do not fulfill all the laws of the Old Covenant
 - We do not remain unmarried necessarily
 - The teachings of the epistles clarify what it means to imitate Christ – they are part of Christ’s command to obey whatever I have instructed you.
- We must be careful when extracting doctrine from narrative:

Example: Gen 22:11-12 But the angel of the LORD called to him from heaven and said, "Abraham, Abraham!" And he said, "Here am I." (12) He said, "Do not lay your hand on the boy or do anything to him, for now I know that you fear God, seeing you have not withheld your son, your only son, from me."

- Does this passage suggest that God did not already know what Abraham was going to do?

Example: Phenomenological language – describes things as they appear to the naked eye.

Num 21:11 And they set out from Oboth and camped at Iye-abarim, in the wilderness that is opposite Moab, toward the sunrise.

Scripture speaking of a sunrise does not teach that the earth is flat or the center of the universe – no more so than a meteorologist speaking of sunrise. It is descriptive of how things appear – also consider the four corners of the earth.

#4: Interpret the Implicit by the Explicit

We must be careful with assumptions that do not come from the text.

Example: Mar 12:25 For when they rise from the dead, they neither marry nor are given in marriage, but are like angels in heaven. **Question: Are angels sexless? Will we be sexless like they are?**

Example: Joh 20:19 On the evening of that day, the first day of the week, the doors being locked where the disciples were for fear of the Jews, Jesus came and stood among them and said to them, "Peace be with you." **Question: did Jesus' body now have the ability to float through closed doors?**

Rule: When an implication is drawn that is contradictory to what is explicitly stated, the implication must be rejected.

Example: Joh 3:16 *"For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life.* **Question: can we imply universal ability to believe from this passage? Answer: Joh 6:65 *And he said, "This is why I told you that no one can come to me unless it is granted him by the Father."* The context of John 6:65 demonstrates that the answer to our question is "no", as Jesus states in verse 64: "there are some of you who do not believe".**

#5: Determine Carefully the Meaning of Words

Define the following terms: cute; scan; web; mouse; stomach disorder

Consider the will of God. Anytime we see the usage, we must ask whether we are dealing with:

1. The precepts God has revealed to His people
2. God's sovereign action by which God brings to pass whatever He wills to happen
3. That which is pleasing to God, that which he delights in.

2Pe 3:9 The Lord is not slack concerning his promise, as some men count slackness; but is longsuffering to us-ward, **not willing that any should perish**, but that all should come to repentance. (KJV)

Consider the word for "saved"

1Ti 2:15 Yet she will be saved through childbearing--if they continue in faith and love and holiness, with self-control.

Question: are there 2 ways of salvation – one through faith, and one through childbearing?

Consider the word "holy"

1Co 7:14 For the unbelieving husband is made holy because of his wife, and the unbelieving wife is made holy because of her husband. Otherwise your children would be unclean, but as it is, they are holy.

Question: Are there 3 ways of salvation – one through faith, one through childbearing, and one through the coattails of someone else?

Context, and a careful study of how words are used in Scripture, can help us to understand the author's use of a particular word in a particular place.