

How to Study the Bible 10: Interpretation – Keys That Unlock the Text, Part 1

Introduction:

- David realized that apart from understanding the meaning of the text, there can be no application of God's Word to his life.

***Psa 119.34** Give me understanding, that I may keep your law and observe it with my whole heart.*

- God always opens the door of understanding to the one who knocks on it with persistence and prayer.
- Interpretation is the step where we ask the question: What does it mean?
- Here are the keys that unlock the meaning of a text.

1. The _____ of the text.

- The details discovered in the step of observation will determine the interpretation of a text.
- The more time you spend in observation, asking "What do I see?", the less time you will need to spend in interpretation asking, "What does it mean?".
- The more accurate your observation is, the more accurate your interpretation will be.
- The less accurate your observation is, the less accurate your interpretation will be.

2. The _____ of the text.

- That which goes before a text and that which comes after a text will shape the meaning of the text.
- A lot of doctrinal error can be corrected by simply reading the context, or comparing another passage of Scripture.

2 Tim 2.15** Do your best to present yourself to God as one approved, a worker who has no need to be ashamed, **rightly handling the word of truth.

- **EXAMPLE:**

***Phil 2.12** work out your own salvation with fear and trembling,*

- If you take that statement by itself, then you will wrongly be led to think that you can be saved by working really hard to please God.

- **You must read that verse in its context:**

***Phil 2.13** for it is God who works in you, both to will and to work for his good pleasure.*

- **EXAMPLE:**

***Acts 1.8** But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth.”*

- **Knowing the context helps us know how big of an impact these words had on the disciples.**

- **EXAMPLE:**

***1 Cor 11.27–29** Whoever, therefore, eats the bread or drinks the cup of the Lord in an unworthy manner will be guilty concerning the body and blood of the Lord. **28** Let a person examine himself, then, and so eat of the bread and drink of the cup. **29** For anyone who eats and drinks without discerning the body eats and drinks **judgment** on himself.*

- **The context reveals the meaning of the word “judgment” as discipline, not eternal condemnation.**

***1 Cor 11.32** But when we are judged by the Lord, we are disciplined so that we may not be condemned along with the world.*

- **EXAMPLE:**

***Matt 18.19** Again I say to you, if two of you agree on earth about anything they ask, it will be done for them by my Father in heaven.*

- **People think that if they can simply get a few people to agree with them about their prayer request, then God will automatically give it.**

***Matt 18.20** For where two or three are gathered in my name, there am I among them.*

- **That is often quoted to mean that Jesus’ presence is always in our gatherings and prayer meetings.**
- **But the context for both of those verses was church discipline.**

***Matt 18.15–19** “If your brother sins against you, go and tell him his fault, between you and him alone. If he listens to you, you have gained your brother. **16** But if he does not listen, take one or two others along with you, that every charge may be established by the evidence of two or three witnesses. **17** If he refuses to listen to them, tell it to the church. And if he refuses to listen even to the church, let him be to you as a Gentile and a tax collector. **18** Truly, I say to you, whatever you bind on earth shall be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven. **19** Again I say to you, if two of you agree on earth about anything they ask, it will be done for them by my Father in heaven.*

- Whenever you study a verse, a paragraph, a chapter, or even a book of the Bible, always look at what comes before and after.

3. _____ the text with other texts

- The best explanation of a Scripture is another passage of Scripture.

Acts 17.10–11 *The brothers immediately sent Paul and Silas away by night to Berea, and when they arrived they went into the Jewish synagogue. 11 Now these Jews were more noble than those in Thessalonica; they received the word with all eagerness, examining the Scriptures daily to see if these things were so.*

- Never establish a doctrine on only one verse of Scripture.

- **EXAMPLES:**

Mark 16.17–18 *And these signs will accompany those who believe: in my name they will cast out demons; they will speak in new tongues; 18 they will **pick up serpents** with their hands; and if they **drink any deadly poison**, it will not hurt them; they will lay their hands on the sick, and they will recover.”*

Acts 2.38 *And Peter said to them, “Repent **and be baptized** every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ **for the forgiveness of your sins**, and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.*

- Never establish a doctrine on a hypothetical statement.

- **EXAMPLE:**

1 Cor 13.1–3 *If I speak in the tongues of men and of angels, but have not love, I am a noisy gong or a clanging cymbal. 2 And if I have prophetic powers, and understand all mysteries and all knowledge, and if I have all faith, so as to remove mountains, but have not love, I am nothing. 3 If I give away all I have, and if I deliver up my body to be burned, but have not love, I gain nothing.*

- All doctrine should be based on the main point of multiple passages of Scripture.

- How to compare Scriptures correctly:

A. Whenever you compare two Scriptures, be sure you have carefully studied both of them.

B. Look for the relationship between the verses.

1. Is one verse referring to or quoting the other?
2. Are they talking about the same subject?
3. Is one verse the fulfillment of something predicted in the other?
4. Do they use common symbols, comparisons, or similar words?

C. Remember that words can have different meanings in different passages.

○ **EXAMPLE:**

***Ex 14.30** Thus the LORD **saved** Israel that day from the hand of the Egyptians, and Israel saw the Egyptians dead on the seashore.*

***Acts 16.31** And they said, "Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be **saved**,*

○ **EXAMPLE:**

***James 2.24** You see that a person is **justified** by works and not by faith alone*

***Gal 3.11** Now it is evident that no one is **justified** before God by the law, for "The righteous shall live by faith."*

D. Be sure you're aware of who's speaking.

- **EXAMPLE:** People often quote from the speeches of Job's friends to support their theological positions, but God rebukes Job's friends for their error at the end of the book.

E. If you read a text that seems to contradict other texts, you can safely assume that you do not have a complete understanding of the truth that is being studied.

- **Scripture never contradicts itself.**
- **Only one understanding can be the correct one.**