



Handout #3

INTRODUCTION

Psalm 119:34 (KJV)

³⁴ Give me understanding, and I shall keep thy law; yea, I shall observe it with *my* whole heart.

Step #1 in Bible Study is Observation and it answers the question, What Do I See? The ability to see is a developed process. The more we see in observation, the easier the next step will be – Interpretation which answers the question, “What Does it Mean?”

In observation, we excavate, in interpretation, we erect. The more substantial your foundation of observation is, the more solid your structure of interpretation will become. As one author put it, “the quality of your interpretation will always depend on the quality of your observation.

When we speak of interpretation, we are saying that every book of the Bible, every paragraph of the Bible, every verse of the Bible has a message, and it can be understood.

There is only one interpretation of a passage, yet many applications. The original meaning, what it meant to the author is the one and only right interpretation. The intended meaning of the text writer will also be the intended meaning of the Holy Spirit who inspired him to write. “The text cannot mean what it never meant.”

THE P_____ OF INTERPRETATION

- M_____ of the text

Faulty Interpretation – Money is the root of all evil. (1 Timothy 6:10)

- D_____ of the text

2 Peter 3:16 (KJV)

¹⁶ As also in all *his* epistles, speaking in them of these things; in which are some things hard to be understood, which they that are unlearned and unstable wrest, as *they do* also the other scriptures, unto their own destruction.

Faulty interpretation - Work is a curse from the Lord. (Genesis 3:17)

- R_____

This is what the Bible is saying to me. Some people believe the Bible changes in meaning over time. Some people when interpreting 1 Corinthians 15, change the meaning of Paul from a bodily resurrection to a spiritual resurrection.

- C_____ the text

Genesis 3:1-4 (KJV)

¹ Now the serpent was more subtil than any beast of the field which the LORD God had made. And he said unto the woman, Yea, hath God said, Ye shall not eat of every tree of the garden?

² And the woman said unto the serpent, We may eat of the fruit of the trees of the garden:

³ But of the fruit of the tree which *is* in the midst of the garden, God hath said, Ye shall not eat of it, neither shall ye touch it, lest ye die.

⁴ And the serpent said unto the woman, Ye shall not surely die:

THE P_____ OF BIBLE INTERPRETATION

2 Timothy 2:15 (KJV)

¹⁵ Study to shew thyself approved unto God, a workman that needeth not to be ashamed, rightly dividing (cutting straight) the word of truth.

- C_____

When we are examining the content of the passage, we are examining terms, we are asking questions, like who, what, where, when, why, wherefore? The Bible student looks for things that are repeated, emphasized, related, true to life, things that are the same, and things that are not same.

Read the text for its plain and obvious meaning.

We need to identify the kind of literature the text is for insight into its meaning.

Bible scholars call this the *genre* of the text. That means the general form the text takes—narrative, prophecy, poetry, history, gospel, epistle.

*****Note:** The checklist for observation that I passed out last week (Handout #2) relates to this first discipline of examination. You should be able to have a basic understanding of what the author is saying.

- C_____ (that which comes before and that which comes after)

There is a verse context. There is a paragraph context. There is a book context. There is a Bible context.

Context is always the ultimate determiner of meaning.

Is the context a millennial passage?

Is the context Christ speaking to the disciples, or to the Pharisees?

Is the context speaking to an individual or a group?

Is the context one of rebuke or encouragement?

Is the context a book where Paul is writing from prison?

Does the context indicate that this is a prophetic passage?

Is the context a salvation passage, or a passage that is dealing with the church?

Does the context reveal that the author is speaking to Jews or Gentiles?

Is the context speaking about Israel or the Church?

Is the context prophetic in genre?

Is the context speaking of physical Israel or spiritual Israel?

Is the context dealing with moral, ceremonial, or civil law?

What did this author know about God?

What is the geographical context of this book/passage?

What was the relationship of the readers to God in this book/passage?

How much Scripture did the writer/audience have access to?

What other religions were influential upon the author/audience?

Where does this passage fit in the chronology of the Bible?

Is this passage a passage dealing with Israel's in captivity or coming out of captivity?

****Every major cult is built on a violation of the principle of context.**

- C _____

In comparison, we compare Scripture with Scripture. We interpret the unclear passages by the clear passages of Scripture. This is key to safely interpreting the Scriptures.

A Bible concordance or a study Bible with cross references is helpful with comparing Scripture with Scripture.

2 Peter 1:20-21 (KJV)

²⁰ Knowing this first, that no prophecy of the scripture is of any private interpretation.

²¹ For the prophecy came not in old time by the will of man: but holy men of God spake *as they were* moved by the Holy Ghost.

Faulty Interpretation of James 2– Man is saved by good works. (James 2:20-26)

Let's compare the verses in James with other clear passages of Scripture regarding salvation – Gal. 2:16; Romans 4:5; Ephesians 2:8-9; Titus 3:5;

- C _____

All of the words of Scripture are written within a historical setting, with a cultural setting, within a geographical setting.

For instance, the book of Romans was written during the reign of Claudius who persecuted Christians. Persecution was such that no Christian was ever safe. Emperor worship was the rule of the day. And all of Rome had to submit to Caesar.

If Christians were stopped by Roman soldiers and could not produce a certificate so stating they worshiped the Emperor, they were taken to court where they were given to opportunities to deny their faith in Christ, if not

they were ordered to execution. Christians who managed to escape would flee to a catacomb. Roman soldiers because of superstition would never enter a catacomb.

- C

Consultation involves the use of other sources beside the Bible.

****Note:** The subpoints under the process of interpretation have been taken from Howard Hendricks' book, *Living by the Book*.

Resources to Consult

Bible Concordance

Strong's Concordance

Young's Analytical Concordance

Complete Word Study Old & New Testaments by Spiros Zodhiates

Bible Dictionary

Vine's Complete Expository Dictionary

Eerdmans' Bible Dictionary

Exhaustive Dictionary of Bible Names

Zondervan Illustrated Bible Dictionary

The KJV Dictionary

Bible Encyclopedia

International Standard Bible Encyclopedia (ISBE) by James Orr

Way of Life Encyclopedia by David Cloud

Baker Encyclopedia of the Bible

Bible Handbook

World's Bible Handbook

The New Unger's Bible Handbook

Wilmington's Bible Handbook

Nave's Topical Bible

Bible Atlas

Macmillan Bible Atlas

Baker Bible Atlas

Rose Book of Bible Charts, Maps, & Timelines

Then & Now Bible Maps (Pamphlet)

Bible Commentaries

Matthew Henry

Warren Wiersbe

Albert Barnes

Jamieson/Fausset/Brown

Adam Clark

Matthew Poole

Harry Ironside

John Butler

John Phillips

David Sorenson

Background/Survey Books

Explore the Book by J. Sidlow Baxter

New Testament Survey by Robert Gromacki

OT Survey by Irving Jensen

Wilmington's Guide to the Bible by Harold Wilmington

THE PRINCIPLES OF BIBLE INTERPRETATION

We approach the Scripture with the presupposition that God cannot contradict himself and the Bible is 100% truth, and that we can put 100% of our faith in what God has said in the Bible.

- Context is the overriding principle of interpreting words and passages.
- We interpret unclear passage of Scripture by the clear passages of Scripture – i.e. Acts 2:38
- We interpret the Bible by a plain, literal, grammatical, and historical method of interpretation.

Dr. David Cooper said, “When the plain sense of Scripture makes common sense, seek no other sense, but take every word at its primary literal meaning unless the facts of the immediate context clearly indicate otherwise.

If we do not interpret the Bible in the plain, literal sense, then no one can be certain of the Bible’s meaning.

- We must allow the Bible to interpret itself – its symbols, figurative language, etc.
- We do not build doctrine on one passage or on a parable.
- God’s revelation is progressive throughout Scripture, meaning that God gradually reveals His truth as the Scriptures.

Charles Hodge said, “The progressive character of divine revelation is recognized in relation to all the great doctrines of the Bible.

- The Four Gospels and the book of Acts are transitional books.
- We don’t build doctrines on God’s silence.

Deuteronomy 29:29 (KJV)

²⁹ The secret *things belong* unto the LORD our God: but those *things which are revealed belong* unto us and to our children for ever, that *we may do all the words of this law.*

I.e. – the supposed gap theory between Genesis 1:1-2