

**Xenos Christian Fellowship
Christian Ministry Light Unit 2
Using Your Bible
Week 1 – Interpreting and Applying the Bible**

Introduction to Christian Ministry 2

(David Garrison) “Missionaries experienced in Church Planting Movements would never admit to sacrificing orthodoxy (sound Bible teaching) for the sake of rapid reproduction. Instead they have learned to build the theological controls into the DNA of each church rather than trying to continually reinforce them from the outside.”¹

(Acts 20:20) “...I did not shrink from declaring to you anything that was profitable, and teaching you publicly and from house to house, 21 solemnly testifying to both Jews and Greeks of repentance toward God and faith in our Lord Jesus Christ.”

(2 Timothy 4:2) “...preach the word; be ready in season and out of season; reprove, rebuke, exhort, with great patience and instruction.”

How do I go about learning & understanding such a big body of information?

- Learn the _____.
- Know and follow sound rules of interpretation (hermeneutics).
- Learn the _____.
- Learn the _____.
- Learn how to discern the *structure* of books & think _____.
- Read all of it.

What kind of response unleashes its power?

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(James 1:22) “And remember, it is a message to obey, not just to listen to. If you don’t obey, you are only fooling yourself.”

Can the Bible be understood?

"We should rely on the clergy/experts to tell us what the Bible means."

"People have always disagreed about the meaning of the Bible. That’s why there are so many different denominations."

¹ David Garrison, Church Planting Movements (Midlothian, Virginia: WIGTake Resources, 2004), p. 196.

"The Bible has been used to justify everything you can think of. You can make it mean anything you want it to mean."

"That's just your interpretation." "It's impossible to determine the original author's meaning, rather, as we read it, we create our own meaning for the text."

e.g. In a home Bible study someone says *"What this passage means to me is..."* And then someone else says, *"That's great. But I got a different meaning (and his meaning is contradictory)."* And everyone concludes by saying *"Praise God for all the great insight we're getting!"*

Perspicuity

Definition of biblical perspicuity:

John 20:31

2 Tim. 3:14,15

(R.C. Sproul) "The Bible is basically clear and lucid. It is simple enough for any literate person to understand its basic message. This is not to say that all parts of the Bible are equally clear or that there are no difficult passages or sections to be found in it. Laymen unskilled in the ancient languages and the fine points of exegesis may have difficulty with parts of scripture, but the essential content is clear enough to be understood easily."²

Responses to attacks on Biblical perspicuity

1. "The Bible is so complicated. Who could understand it?"

Response:

(James Sire) "When it comes to the central core of the Christian faith . . . the biblical evidence is overwhelming. The deity of Christ, the triune nature of God,

² R. C. Sproul, *Knowing Scripture* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1977), p 15.

the creation of the world by God, the sinfulness of all humanity, salvation by grace through faith, the resurrection of the dead—these and many other such matters are clearly taught in scripture."³

2. "If it's so easy to interpret, why are there so many denominations?"

Response:

“If that’s the case, then why do ‘Christian’ groups disagree on essential doctrines?”

Response:

RELIGIOUS TRADITION:

NEW "SCRIPTURES":

"KEYS" TO BIBLICAL INTERPRETATION:

SKEWED TRANSLATIONS OF THE BIBLE:

ALIEN PRESUPPOSITIONS:

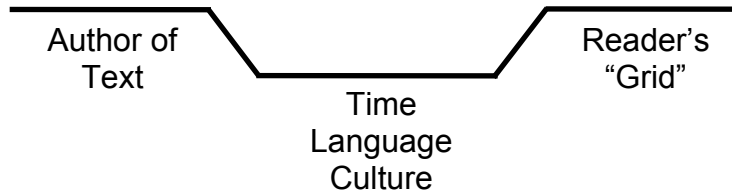
3. "We're too far removed in time and culture from the original authors. Therefore, we could never understand what they intended."

Response:

People are always engaged in interpretation:

³ James Sire, *Scripture Twisting* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1980), pp. 12,13.

Interpreting the original message and applying to our lives



- **The reader's "grid":**
- **The nature of Scripture:**

“Although his self revelation is addressed to every man of every age and every country, each part of it was addressed in the first instance to a particular people of a particular age in a particular country. Therefore the permanent and universal message of Scripture can be understood only in the light of the circumstances in which it was originally given.”⁴

Grammatico-Historical Hermeneutics

“Hermeneutics” is the _____.

Grammatico-Historical hermeneutics is a method of interpretation that takes into account common rules of _____ AND the author's _____ context.

The difference between interpretation and application

Interpretation:

Application:

While there may be _____ valid APPLICATIONS of a text, there is only _____ valid INTERPRETATION.

(Matthew 12:31) “You shall love your neighbor as yourself.”

1. Interpret GRAMMATICALLY

⁴ John R.W. Stott, *Understanding the Bible* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan, 1999) pp. 192-193.

Take the normal meaning of the words, phrases and sentences unless it is impossible to do so. The interpretation must correspond to the words and grammar in the text in a reasonable way.

e.g. Allegory

(Deuteronomy 14:6) “You may eat any animal that has a split hoof divided in two and that chews the cud.”

Allegorical interpretation: “Cleave unto those that fear the Lord, ...with those who know that meditation is a work of gladness and who chew the cud of the word of the Lord. But why that which divides the hoof? Because the righteous man both walks in this world and at the same time looks for the holy world to come.” – Epistle of Barnabus, 14:35-45⁵

Qualifications:

a.

Psalm 91:4 “He will cover you with his feathers, and under his wings you will find refuge; his faithfulness will be your shield and rampart.”

Luke 22:19 “...this is my body...”

Colossians 1:15 “...the first-born of all creation...”

b.

Revelation 1:9-20

Revelation 7:14

2. Interpret HISTORICALLY

Take into account the historical background of the author and the recipients.

⁵ Example adapted from John Stott, *Understanding the Bible* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan, 1999) pp. 189-190.

- Situation:
- Style:

(Proverbs 22:6) Train up a child in the way he should go, Even when he is old he will not depart from it.

(Proverbs 15:1) A gentle answer turns away wrath, But a harsh word stirs up anger.

- Culture:

e.g. Jewish attitudes towards Samaritans in the parable of the Good Samaritan (Luke 10:25-37).

e.g. The Pharisees' teaching on the relationship between illness and sin in Mark 2:1-12.

e.g. The significance of monetary values (300 Denarii in John 12:3-5; 50,000 Drachma in Acts 19:19).

e.g. Genesis 15:7-21 – “Cutting a covenant” solemnized a contract between two parties. It was normally bilateral (both parties walked through), but in this case only God goes through.

e.g. 1 Corinthians 11:4-6 – Shorn hair was typical of Aphrodite priestess-prostitutes; shaven heads were typical of convicted adulteresses (v. 5).

The IVP Bible Background Commentary: Old Testament, by John H. Walton, et al.

The IVP Bible Background Commentary: New Testament, by Craig S. Keener.

Interpreting Critically

1. Interpret in light of the _____ of the passage (which author? book? passage?).

e.g. **(Matthew 16:28)** "Truly I say to you, there are some of those who are standing here who shall not taste death until they see the Son of Man coming in His kingdom."

e.g. **James 1:6-8**

2. Interpret in light of _____.

(Heb. 1:1,2) "God, after He spoke long ago to the fathers in the prophets in many portions and in many ways, in these last days has spoken to us in His Son, whom He appointed heir of all things, through whom also He made the world."

(Heb 8:13) "When He said, 'A new covenant,' He has made the first obsolete. But whatever is becoming obsolete and growing old is ready to disappear."

(Ex. 20:8-10) "Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy. Six days you shall labor and do all your work, but the seventh day is a Sabbath of the LORD your God; in it you shall not do any work, you or your son or your daughter, your male or your female servant or your cattle or your sojourner who stays with you."

(Col. 2:16,17) "Therefore let no one act as your judge in regard to food or drink or in respect to a festival or a new moon or a Sabbath day – (17) things which are a mere shadow of what is to come; but the substance belongs to Christ."

3. Interpret scripture in _____ with other scripture.

(Acts 2:38) And Peter said to them, "Repent, and let each of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins; and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit."

4. Interpret the unclear in light of the _____.

(1 Cor. 15:29) "Otherwise, what will those do who are baptized for the dead? If the dead are not raised at all, why then are they baptized for them?"

God's part and man's part in interpretation – 2 implications

1. Rely upon the _____.

(1 Corinthians 2:14-16) But a natural man does not accept the things of the Spirit of God; for they are foolishness to him, and he cannot understand them, because they are spiritually appraised. (15) But he who is spiritual appraises all things, yet he himself is appraised by no man. (16) For WHO HAS KNOWN THE MIND OF THE LORD, THAT HE SHOULD INSTRUCT HIM? But we have the mind of Christ.

(Psalm 119:18) "Open my eyes that I may see the wonderful things in your law."

(George Whitfield) “I began to read the Holy Scriptures upon my knees, laying side all other books, and praying over, if possible, every line and word. This proved meat indeed and drink to my soul. I daily received fresh life, light and power from above.”⁶

2. Diligently _____.

(2 Timothy 2:15) Be *diligent* to present yourself approved to God as a workman who does not need to be *ashamed*, *handling accurately* the word of truth.

"Be diligent" implies:

"Ashamed" implies:

"Handling accurately" implies:

(D.A. Carson) "Almost twenty years ago I rode in a car with a fellow believer who relayed to me what the Lord had 'told' him that morning in his quiet time. He had been reading the KJV of Matthew; and I perceived that not only had he misunderstood the archaic English, but also that the KJV at that place had unwittingly misrepresented the Greek text. I gently suggested there might be another way to understand the passage and summarized what I thought the passage was saying. The brother dismissed my view as impossible on the grounds that the Holy Spirit, who does not lie, had told him the truth on this matter. Being young and bold, I pressed on with my explanation of grammar, context, and translation, but was brushed off by a reference to 1 Cor. 2:10b-15—spiritual things must be spiritually discerned—which left little doubt about my status. Genuinely intrigued, I asked this brother what he would say if I put forward my interpretation, not on the basis of grammar and text, but on the basis that the Lord himself had given me the interpretation I was advancing. He was silent a long time, and then concluded, 'I guess that would mean the Spirit says the Bible means different things to different people.'"⁷

- “Judge for yourselves.” (1 Cor. 10:15 and 11:13)
- “Test the spirits.” (1 John 4:1)
- “Let each be fully convinced in his own mind.” (Romans 14:5).
- Mature Christians have “trained themselves to discern good and evil” by “constant use” of the Word. (Hebrews 5:15)

⁶ *George Whitfield's Journals*, first published between 1738 and 1741 (Banner of Truth edition, 1960), p. 60 quoted in John Stott, *Understanding the Bible* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan, 1999) p. 180.

⁷ D. A. Carson, *Exegetical Fallacies* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House Co., 1984) p. 13.

Striking the right balance

(Daniel 10:12) "Do not be afraid, Daniel. Since the first day that you *set your mind to gain understanding* and to *humble yourself before your God*, your words were heard, and I have come in response to them."

(2 Timothy 2:7) "*Reflect* on what I am saying, for *the Lord will give you insight* into all this."

Bible Reading Plans

Discipleship Journal Bible Reading plans:

<http://www.navpress.com/Magazines/DJ/BibleReadingPlans.asp>

M'Cheyne Reading Plan: <http://hippocampusextensions.com/mcheyneplan.html>

Carson, D.A., *For the Love of God: A Daily Companion for Discovering the Riches of God's Word* (Wheaton, Illinois: Crossway Books, 1998).

Outlining books

"Journaling"

Memory Verses

2 Timothy 2:7* Promises God's illumination of scripture, and also says we must exercise our minds to understand it.

2 Timothy 2:15* We must invest effort to interpret accurately, and we should be ashamed if we can't do this.

Assignment

Complete the *Messianic Kingdom Assignment*.