

Proper Biblical Interpretation

Sound Biblical Interpretation must be:

- 1. Historical**
- 2. Grammatical**
- 3. Theological**

Historical

Since the books of the Bible were written at certain times over a 1550-year period of history and at certain places on earth and for various purposes and groups of readers, biblical interpretation must be historical. Accordingly, the exegete must carefully consider the historical circumstances under which each Bible book was written, as well as the the historical contents of each book.

Grammatical

Rule #1 - Since the books of the Bible were written by men in certain ordinary, human languages, no interpretation of Scripture is to be accepted which does not agree with the established rules of grammar. Here the term grammar is employed in a broad sense, signifying the study of all aspects of language.

Rule #2 - An interpreter's primary and chief aim should be to ascertain the meaning of words according to the meaning in actual popular usage (*usus loquendi*).

The etymological meaning of a word may or may not have been retained in popular usage.

Rule #2b - The meaning of a word according to the meaning it most generally carried in common/popular usage (*uses generalis*) is to be preferred, unless there are sufficient reasons to compel the exegete to accept some other meaning.

We must assume that a speaker or writer would use his words in that sense in which those to whom he speaks or writes are accustomed to use them.

Rule #3 - A special meaning of a word (uses specialis), differing from the uses generalis, is often found in certain circles or with certain classes of men. At times a writer employs various words altogether or preponderantly in a certain sense, different from the uses generalis. The exegete must take into consideration an usus specialis in his exposition of a biblical text; also any variations within the usus specialis, as used in a broader or narrower sense.

Rule #4 - The exposition of a passage must agree with the context, immediate and remote. The immediate context is the more important and usually decisive.

Rule #5 - Every word in holy scripture can have only one intended meaning in any one place and in any one relation. The intended sense is one (sensus literalis unus est).

This rule enunciates a fundamental law of human communication, without which intelligent communication would be impossible.

Rule #6 - The literal meaning (sensus literae) of a word should in all cases be accepted as one intended sense (sensus literalis), unless sufficient reasons prompt the interpreter to accept figurative use of a word, or figurative speech.

The reason for departing from the literal meaning of words is usually provided in the immediate context.

In this connection, the literary genre of a Bible book should be taken into consideration; this at the outset of this study will help the exegete decide whether to interpret a passage literally, figuratively or symbolically.

Theological

Rule #1 - Because the Scripture is of divine origin and is the verbally inspired Word of God, it is wholly without inconsistency of thought or speech, without contradiction, without the slightest error (in the original manuscripts).

The Bible is the inscribed Word of God, and as such presents the truth in ordinary language in all matters of which it treats. The kind of truth the Bible claims for itself is correspondence to reality (the correspondence theory of truth)

Rule #2 - Scripture (not human reason, personal feeling, church, or tradition) is the sole source and norm of true doctrine in the sphere of religion and theology.

This is the Sola Scriptura Principle of the Lutheran Reformation

Rule #3 - The less clear or plain passages of scripture **MUST** be interpreted in the light of the clearer passages.

This method must **NEVER** be reversed.

Scripture interprets scripture.

Rule #4 - All biblical interpretation must take cognizance of, and be guided by, Scripture's self-announced purpose - to make people wise unto salvation and to train them in holy living. All interpretation must be edifying.

2 Tim. 3:15 and how from childhood you have been acquainted with the sacred writings, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus. 16 All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, 17 that the man of God may be competent, equipped for every good work.

Rule #5 - To rightly understand and interpret Scripture is to necessarily distinguish between Law & Gospel elements in the text and then properly relate the former (law) to the latter (gospel). Justification by grace through faith in Christ is the res (main subject) of all true biblical and Christian theology.

The interpreter **MUST** see to it that his interpretation of the text has **CHRIST** as its center, teaches **HIM**, and glorifies **HIM** as Savior and Lord.

1Tim. 1:8 Now we know that the law is good, ***if one uses it lawfully.***

John 5: 39 You search the Scriptures because you think that in them you have eternal life; and it is they that bear witness about me, 40 yet you refuse to come to me that you may have life.