

## Studying and Interpreting The Bible

**How you study and interpret God's Word matters to God.** Jesus saved some of his most scathing rebukes for teachers of the law and the Pharisees, leaders who were responsible for interpreting and communicating God's word to the people.

- *Luke 11:52 "Woe to you experts in the law! For you have taken away the key of knowledge. You did not enter yourselves, and you hindered those who were entering."*

### Pitfalls of Interpretation

- What it Means to Me – some people believe that reading the Bible is a matter of personal interpretation – a verse can mean one thing to one person and something else to another.
  - *Eph. 6:20 "...for which I am an ambassador in chains..."*
    - Person A: I believe Paul is in "chains" because he is in prison.
    - Person B: I believe Paul is helping people who are "chain" smokers.
    - Person C: I believe Paul is in "chains" (bondage) to some addiction.
- Doctrines on the Head of a Pin – some people build doctrines and practices on a few verses, often taken out of context or with little other Scriptural support.
  - *Eph. 6:12 "...we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the cosmic powers over this present darkness..."*
    - This verse has been widely interpreted to mean that Christians should take on dark angels and powers and principalities directly – binding, loosing and casting out demons and territorial spirits - as though in some cosmic sumo wrestling match.
    - This verse simply explains that our battle is not against human foes but against evil spiritual forces of great power. That is why Paul calls his readers to "*put on the whole armor of God, that you may be able to stand against the schemes of the devil.*" (v11) And the armor that is described is the armor that God supplies and the armor worn by the Messiah.
- Ignoring the Context – lifting a verse out of the context of what the original author intended to be understood by his original readers.
  - *Gal. 3:28 "There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is neither male nor female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus."*
    - This verse has been interpreted as abolishing any roles between men and women.
    - This verse, in context, is stating that men and women are joint heirs of salvation.

## Principles of Interpretation

- Interpret Scripture using the “grammatical-historical” method. The grammatical-historical method attempts to uncover the meaning intended by the original author and understood by its original readers.
  - What is the literal sense according to the normal rules of grammar, speech, syntax and context?
  - What is the historical context?
  - What is the literary form? (Historical, Poetry, Wisdom, Prophecy, Gospel, Epistle)
- The best interpreter of Scripture is Scripture
  - *1 Pet. 1:6-7 "...though now for a little while...you have been grieved by various trials, so that the tested genuineness of your faith—more precious than gold...may be found to result in praise and glory and honor at the revelation of Jesus Christ."*
  - *2 Cor. 4:17-18 "For this slight momentary affliction is preparing for us an eternal weight of glory beyond all comparison, as we look not to the things that are seen but to the things that are unseen. For the things that are seen are transient, but the things that are unseen are eternal."*
- That which is stated clearly should interpret verses that are not as clear.
  - *1 Pet. 3:21 Baptism, which corresponds to this, now saves you... through the resurrection of Jesus Christ..."*
  - *Eph. 2:8-9 "For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, not a result of works, so that no one may boast."*
- Distinction should be made between principles that are cultural and those that transcend culture (i.e. applies to everyone).
  - *Eph. 5:31-32 "'Therefore a man shall leave his father and mother and hold fast to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh.' This mystery is profound, and I am saying that it refers to Christ and the church."* (Roles in marriage in Eph. 5: 23-33 transcend culture; they are rooted in the Creation account before the fall.)
  - *1Cor. 11:4-5 "Every man who prays or prophesies with his head covered dishonors his head, but every wife who prays or prophesies with her head uncovered dishonors her head..."* (Cultural principles of showing honor or dishonor)
- Interpretation ends with application. There is only **one meaning**, but there are **many applications**.