

WHAT WE BELIEVE

A SURVEY OF CHRISTIAN DOCTRINE

LESSON #5 – The Scriptures

The Baptist Faith & Message Article 1

MEMORY VERSES

11 I have treasured Your word in my heart so that I may not sin against You. 12 Lord, may You be praised; teach me Your statutes. 13 With my lips I proclaim all the judgments from Your mouth. 14 I rejoice in the way [revealed by] Your decrees as much as in all riches. 15 I will meditate on Your precepts and think about Your ways. 16 I will delight in Your statutes; I will not forget Your word (Psalm 119:11-16, HCSB).

INTERPRETATION

How do we interpret the Bible accurately? How can we read and study the Bible with spiritual profit to our souls?

I. Why Study the Bible?

- A. Bible study is essential to GROWTH (1 Pet. 2:2)
- B. Bible Study is essential to spiritual MATURITY (Heb 5:11-14)
- C. Bible Study is essential to spiritual EFFECTIVENESS (2 Tim. 3:16-17)

II. Why Is Bible Interpretation Important?

- A. It is essential for understanding and teaching the Bible properly. We must know the meaning of the Bible before we can know its message for today.
 1. There are three main steps in the hermeneutical process
 - i. Observation - What does it say?
 - ii. Interpretation - What does it mean?
 - iii. Application - How does it apply?
 2. All of these steps are essential:
 - i. Trying to interpret without first knowing what the Bible says is futile.
 - ii. The other extreme is to not apply what one understands the Bible to be saying. This is the equivalent of a spiritual stillbirth.
 - iii. Omitting the interpretation step leads to a distortion of Scripture (2 Cor. 4:2; 2 Pet. 3:16)

EXAMPLES:

1. John 10:28 – “No man plucks them out of my hand,” Eternal security? Or can a believer pluck himself out of Christ’s hand?
2. Col 1:15 – Christ the firstborn over all creation - does this mean he was created? Or the heir?
3. Luke 10:25-37 – The parable of the good Samaritan - do the two coins represent the two ordinances; the inn the church?

Descriptive or prescriptive?

4. polygamy - Abraham had more than one wife
 5. baptism for the dead (1 Cor. 15:29)
 6. snake handling (Mark 16:18)
- B. It is essential for moving beyond observation (e.g. a mechanic or doctor’s diagnosis).
1. Too often people skip directly from observation to application without properly interpreting.
 2. Observation is vital first step, but it not the only step.
 - i. What color is sin? (Isa 1:18 but cf. 1 John 1:5)
 - ii. Is it wrong for Christians to drink milk? (Heb 5:11 but cf. 1 Pet. 2:2)
 3. A surgeon may observe a problem - loose blood, a growth, etc. But what does it mean? He had better interpret correctly what he observes!
- C. Biblical interpretation is essential for applying the Bible properly
1. Interpretation should build on observation and lead into application. If we fail to apply the Scriptures, we cut short the entire process and have not finished what God wants us to do (cf. John 5:39-40; Col. 1:28; 1 Pet. 2:2). But application based on improper interpretation is equally deadly.
 - i. Example: “we shall not all sleep, but we all shall be changed” (1 Cor. 15:51) on the door of a nursery.

III. Terms

Hermeneutics: It is the science and art of interpretation. It is a science because it is guided by rules within a system; it is an art because the application of the rules is by skill, and not by mechanical imitation. It determines the methods, techniques, rules, or principles which will best serve in getting at the proper interpretation of any part of the Bible.

In the Hebrew, the word interpret is "pathar" Gen 40:8; 41:15. Most of the usages in the Old Testament refer to the interpretation of dreams.

In the Greek: Hermes (the winged messenger) was the God who interpreted the message of the gods to mortals. He was the god of science, invention, eloquence, speech, writing, and art.

hermeneia - interpretation (1 Cor. 12:10; 14:26), hermeneuo "to interpret" (John 1:38, 42; 9:7; Heb. 7:2), diermeneuo "to interpret, explain" (Luke 24:27)

Exegesis: the application of methods to the text so as to bring out the actual meaning. Exegesis (reading out of the text) is to be distinguished from eisegesis (reading into the text).

Hermeneutics is the rule-book to the game of exegesis.

Exposition: Bible exposition is the actual communication of the meaning of the text to an audience in oral or written form. Exegesis is the study in private; exposition is the presentation to the public.

Theology: literally, the "science concerning God." There are three different types of theology:

1. Biblical: The study of the historically conditioned progress of the self-revelation of God as deposited in the Bible.
2. Historical: Historical theology, or the History of Christian Doctrine, is the study of various doctrines which have come into discussion and formulation at different points during the nineteen centuries of the developing church.
3. Systematic: It is the compilation of all that we know of God, His creatures, and His plan from Scripture. It is topical in nature and arrangement.

IV. Necessity of Hermeneutics

- A. The Primary Need: To ascertain what God has said in Scripture: to determine the meaning of the Word of God. There is no profit to us if God has spoken and we do not know what he has said.
- B. The Secondary Need: To bridge the gap between our minds and the minds of the Biblical writers.

VI. Qualifications of an interpreter

If spiritual things are spiritually discerned, only the spiritual man can discern them (1 Cor. 2:14-15; cf. Eph. 2:1-2).

- He must be born again: (John 3:3,5,7)
- He must have a healthy involvement in the local church (Heb. 10:25)
- He must have a passion to know God's Word (Josh. 1:8; Psa 1:1-3; Prov. 1:24-32; 2:3-5; Acts 17:11; 1 Pet. 2:2)
- He must be teachable (Ezra 7:10; Acts 17:11; 2 Tim. 2:15)
- He must have a deep love for God (Prov. 1:7; John 4:24; 2 Tim. 3:15)
- He must be humble (Isaiah 66:2; Micah 6:8; Matt 18:4)
- He must submit to what he sees in the Scripture (John 7:17; 14:21; 1 Thess. 2:1-12; 1 Tim. 3:2-3; Jam. 1:22)
- He must have an utter dependence on the Holy Spirit to guide and direct (Psa. 119:18, 125; Matt. 13:11-16; Rom. 8:6; Eph. 1:17-18; Col. 3:16)

The Steps of Bible Study

I. Observation

This has been called the "art of awareness." Here, the Christian must respond to the question, "What does the Scripture 'say'?" He probes deeply into the text for what? who? when? why? where? how? and so what?

A. The Value of Observation

Psalm 119:18 - a prayer for the powers of observation. What makes one person a better Bible student than another is simply that one can see more than the other. Seeing is not the same as observing.

B. Ten Effective Reading Strategies

1. Read Thoughtfully. Thoughtful reading involves study (2 Tim. 2:15; Ezra 7:10).
2. Read Repeatedly. Read the Scripture over and over again, and you'll still see things that you've never seen before.
 - i. Read entire books at one sitting
 - ii. Start at the beginning of a book
 - iii. Read the Bible in different translations
 - iv. Listen to audio recordings of Scripture
 - v. Read the Bible out loud
 - vi. Follow a schedule or plan for Bible reading
3. Read Patiently. Don't run to secondary sources too quickly. Secondary sources are fine, but only after you have drenched your mind with what the text actually says.
 - i. Work with one book for one month
 - ii. Zoom in and zoom out
 - iii. alter your approach
 - iv. Two principles of patience: with the text and with yourself.
4. Read Selectively. Know what kind of questions to use.
 - i. Who? What? Where? When? Why? How? So what?
5. Read prayerfully
 - i. Don't try to imitate other Christians.
 - ii. Do turn Scripture into prayer
6. Read imaginatively. Use other translations and paraphrases. Put yourself in the place of the narrative.
7. Read Meditatively. (Joshua 1:8; Prov. 23:7; Psalm 1:2-3; Psalm 119:97; Psalm 19)
8. Read Purposefully. Purposeful reading looks for the aim of the author.
 - i. Purpose through grammar structure.
 - ii. Purpose through literary structure.
9. Read Acquisitively. The goal is to retain what we read. This involves personal involvement in what we hear.
10. Read Telescopically. The final strategy involves viewing the parts in light of the whole.
 - i. Look for the connectives: "But," "and," and "therefore" link the text together.

- ii. Pay attention to the context: Whenever you study a verse or a paragraph, always consult the neighbors of that verse or paragraph to find out what the broader context is.
- iii. Evaluate the passage in light of the book as a whole.
- iv. Look at the historical context of the book.

C. What to observe

1. Things that are emphasized: There are several different ways to discern the Bible's emphasis at a given point.
 - i. Amount of space the writer devotes to a given subject.
 1. Genesis gives much more space to four people (Gen 12-50) than to events (Gen 1-11). Two chapters describe the creation, but over fourteen chapters are devoted to Abraham's life.
 2. Ephesians has an intriguing balance between theology (Eph. 1-3) and practice (Eph 4-6); in Romans the ratio is 11:5.
 - ii. Stated purpose of the author in writing the book.
 1. Proverbs 1:2-6
 2. John 20:30-31
 3. 1 John 5:13
 4. Titus 1:1
 - iii. Order. This comes before or follows that.
 1. E.g., work (Gen 2:15) comes before the curse (Gen 3:17-24).
 2. Luke 3 in Christ's baptism He is approved by God; in His temptation (Luke 4) He is tempted by Satan.
 3. Why is Judas listed last in Luke 6:14-16?
 - iv. Movement from lesser to the greater, and vice versa. 2 Sam 11-12 provides a climax in the life of David (the murder of Uriah and the sin with Bathsheba). Everything before those chapters leads up to them; everything afterwards goes down from them. In Acts, everything grows out of chapter 2.
 - v. Climax (a progression of events or ideas that climb to a certain high point before descending) Exod 40:34-35; 2 Sam 11; Mark 4:35-5:43.
 - vi. Explanation or reason: The presentation of an idea or event followed by its interpretation (Dan 2,4,5,7-9; Mark 4:13-20; Acts 11:1-18)
 - vii. Interchange: (When the action, conversation, or concept moves to another, then back again) Gen 37-39; 1 Sam 1-4; Luke 1-2
 - viii. Introduction and Summary: Opening and concluding remarks on a subject or situation (Gen 2:4-25; Josh 12; Matt. 6:1)
 - ix. Pivot or hinge: A sudden change in the direction or flow of the context; a minor climax (2 sam 11-12; Matt 12; Acts 2)
2. Things that are repeated. Repetition aids learning. Repetition isn't merely because the writers couldn't think of anything else to say - it's their way of pointing out matters of crucial importance.

- i. Terms, phrases, and clauses - Psalm 119 word of God mentioned in every verse
 - ii. Characters – Melchizedek
 - iii. Incidents and circumstances - Judges begins each section with "Then the sons of Israel did what was evil in the sight of the Lord" (cf. 21:25).
 - iv. patterns - parallels between the life of Joseph and the life of Christ; similar verb forms in the same passage (Eph 5:19-21)
- 3. Things that are related
 - i. movement from the general to the specific (Gen. 1:1-2 followed by 1:3ff; James 2 general principle followed by specific illustrations)
 - ii. Questions and answers - Job 38:3; Malachi 3
 - iii. Cause and Effect. Key words/phrases: therefore, so then, as a result (Psalm 1)
 - iv. Context - Rev 2-3 a given fact about one church fits the overall sweep of Christ's appeal to His churches.
- 4. Things that are alike
 - i. similes (John 3:8,12)
 - ii. Metaphors (John 15:1)
- 5. Things that are unlike
 - i. but - Matt 5 "but I say unto you"
 - ii. metaphors - Luke 18 - unjust judge
 - iii. irony - Luke 8
- 6. Things that are cultured
 - i. Words that need historical data: commentaries, lexicons, dictionaries, encyclopedias
 - ii. Manners and customs (ex. white stone; lukewarm water Rev 2)
 - iii. Geographical references: locale, distance, terrain, climate, vegetation, etc.
- 7. Things that are true to life: The issue here is authenticity. What does the passage tell you about reality?

II. Interpretation

A. Relationship between observation and interpretation

After observation (in which the Christian responds to the question, "What does it say?") comes interpretation ("What does it mean?"). He comes to this by a proper use of the raw materials of observation - what he has seen. He arrives at answers to the right questions based on what he has seen, thus being in a position where he can formulate what the passage might mean. While this may start off slowly, the skillful, experienced interpreter may integrate and correlate in a flash!

In order to get at the meaning of a passage, you must (a) ask questions, and (b) look for answers. This will come from the observation process. This is why the more time you spend in observation, the less time you will need in interpretation, and the more accurate will be results.

B. Principles of interpretation

(1) The Clarity of Scripture. This means that Scripture is clear and it can be properly interpreted. God has spoken in order to be understood.

(2) Necessity of Literal Interpretation. The goal of any biblical interpretation is to discover the original meaning and intention of the text by means of exegesis (leading the meaning out of the text) rather than eisegesis (bringing a meaning to the text). Literal interpretation is the natural, usual, customary sense of the terms in the culture or the most sensible meaning that is natural. We move away from a strict literal sense only if factors of context, cross-reference, wordy study, etc., provide a good evidence to see a another idea that makes good sense. This is the normal practice in interpreting any kind of literature, and all secondary meanings depend on a literal foundation.

- near context is more determinative of meaning than far context.
- didactic (teaching) passages take priority over descriptive (narrative) passages.
- explicit teaching is more significant than supposed implications of the text.
- clear passages are more determinative than symbolic ones
- later passages reflect a fuller revelation than earlier.
- repeated passages should be given greater weight than a single passage.

(3) The single-meaning of Scripture (in any one text). This means that a biblical text has one basic, proper meaning or interpretation, not two or three. The one essential meaning of a text is that meaning which is arrived at by a faithful, proper use of context, word study, cross-reference, knowledge of manners and customs, historical background and other hermeneutical rules. Beware of meanings that are strained, arbitrary, or artificial (exegesis vs. eisegesis).

While there is a single meaning, there can be different facets or aspects of meaning. Ex. seed Gen 12:3 can be corporate Israel and singularly referring to Christ (Gal. 3:16). It is like layers of an onion, not four onions. The same word, if it is used in more than once in the same context may change meaning - e.g. John 4:24. There can be many applications of the single meaning.

(4) Context is of utmost importance. The word "context" comes from the Latin term contextus, meaning "to join together." When we are dealing with literature, the term refers to "the part of a text or statement that surrounds a particular word or passage and determines its meaning."

Why is context important? Example, "world" Does it mean earth? the whole created universe? mankind? condition of life? a system opposed to God? adornment? "faith" - trust? faithfulness? a body of truth? intellectual assent? "salvation" - safety? physical health? Israel's deliverance? Judicial deliverance from the penalty of sin? eternal deliverance from the presence of sin? "law"? principle? Pentateuch? the entire OT except the prophets? the Mosaic system?

Example: Col 3:15. Does this verse teach "having a peace about it" method of personal decision-making and knowing God's will? Examine the context.

(5) It is important to identify the proper genre. C.S. Lewis stated that the first qualification for judging any piece of workmanship from a corkscrew to a cathedral is to know what it is - what it was intended to do and how it is meant to be used. Before launching into a study of a biblical book (or passage), the student needs to know what the book's author meant it to be.

Examples of Genre: exposition - Straightforward explanation of a body of truth. Gospels - Not biographies in a normal sense. They are both doctrine and narrative, intending to teach about the person and work of Jesus Christ. History, Legal, Narrative, Parable, Poetry, Prophecy, wisdom literature.

(6) It is important to check secondary sources. This simply means that while we are individual interpreters of Scripture, we are also a part of a wider interpretive community (the church of the past 2000 years). God has raised up teachers for the church, and if you hold a view that is contradicted by most of the rest of the church, you ought to take a closer look at the reasons for your view!

(7) The Authority of Scripture. We must submit to the authority of Scripture in our lives, even over experience. This is violated when we allow obscure passages, uncertain interpretations or minor biblical emphases to prevail over clearer passages or more pervasive teaching. This can also be violated when a logical deduction from Scriptural teaching is treated as infallible truth.

(8) The unity of Scripture. Although the Bible has approximately 40 human authors, its single, superintending divine Author (2 Tim. 3:16) and its nature as the revelation of God and His plan implies that we will see a unity flowing through it. This means obscure passages must give way to clearer passages and the whole Scripture interprets individual Scripture.

(9) Progressive Revelation. It does not mean that there was an "evolutionary" move from falsehood to truth or from imperfection to perfection. Nor does it mean that the OT is less inspired or less clear than the NT. What it does mean is that from the vantage point of the NT, we can look back and see the way in which God progressively revealed truth from the OT to the NT.

(10) The Analogy of Faith. This is very similar to the unity of Scripture. there is one legitimate difference. The analogy of faith says that there is one unified, consistent, harmonious system of faith (belief) in the Bible. This principle can be abused. If a particular system of theology is imposed upon Scripture rather than derived from it, then passages which fit the system will be favored over those which do not, and passages which do not fit will often be subjected to torturous interpretations.

III. Application

Cf. James 1:22. The Christian asks, "How does it relate to me? To others? To God?" Here is where the facts discovered are lived out!

A. Definition of application.

There is a difference between putting down some principle we have gleaned from a passage and actually making an application of that principle to our lives.

Principle	Application
Here I simply state a fundamental or general truth, that is, a norm, rule, law, or ground of action or conduct.	Here, I bring the truth specifically to focus upon personal behavior so that it is in direct contact with some actual attitude, action, word, or situation in my life or the life of another person.
God is light; therefore, I am to live in a manner consistent with that light (1 John 1:5)	Mary, a Christian, is hard-pressed to find a job and earn money for college. She lands a job making phone calls for a magazine sales outfit, not being careful about checking into it. After making a few calls and giving a canned pitch, she becomes painfully aware that she is being used to misrepresent things to potential subscribers. She is part of a lie. She is under conviction because she thinks of 1 John 1:5, God is light. She applies this to her life in an on-the-spot way, confesses her sin to the Lord, and is forgiven and cleansed. She tells the boss that she is leaving. (Mary has taken a principle and made an actual application of it to her life).

Proper application means that a person makes sure that his application arises out of a solid and sound set of observations and a right use of principles for interpretation. He avoids "angling" for a blessing or a "message from God" at the expense of the literal thought in a passage.

B. Dangers of application.

When it comes to application, there are two opposite dangers that must be avoided and both pitfalls involve separating interpretation from application. Christians tend to give either too little attention to application (by stopping their work at interpretation) or over-emphasizing application (by moving to this stage prematurely, before spending adequate time in observation and interpretation).

1. Not applying Scripture

Hearers, not doers. James 1:22ff. The Word does work if it's received (Jas 1:21) On Sunday, the issue is not "What did the preacher say?" but "What are you going to do as a result of what he said?" Jam 1:23-25.

Instead, we must make the truth attractive. Tit. 1:1; 2:10. Attractive truth is applied truth. You may get into the Word but does the Word get into you?

2. Misapplying Scripture. If the first extreme is guilty of interpreting without applying, this extreme is guilty of applying without interpreting. The Bible becomes a sort of sacred rabbit's foot; rub it a certain way, so to speak, and expect it to say what you want it to say for a given situation. It is like a good luck charm.

C. Arriving at proper applications.

Most Christians are like poor photographs - overexposed and underdeveloped. Spiritual growth is a commitment to change, and yet the human heart resists nothing as strongly as it resists change. There is a fourfold step/process one must follow in arriving at proper applications:

Four wrong substitutes for application:

We substitute interpretation for application. We settle for knowledge rather than experience. To know and not to do is not to know at all. (Matt. 2:1ff; Jam 4:17).

We substitute superficial application for substantive lifechange.

Here, we apply biblical truth to areas where we're already applying it. (ex. Eph 4:25 on honesty to his wife and children and coworkers, but not to his competitors).

We substitute rationalization for conviction. When truth gets too close, an alarm goes off, and we start to defend ourselves. (ex. man who ripped off \$500 in taxes from the government gave to missions.)

We substitute an emotional experience for a volitional decision. There is nothing wrong with emotion, but that dare not be our only response.

Step #1: Interpretation. The point here is that application must be based on legitimate interpretation.

Step #2: Principalization. A principle is a succinct statement of universal truth; moving from the specific to the general. Principles should correlate with the general teaching of Scripture. Principles should speak to the needs, interests, questions, and problems of real life today. Principles should indicate a course of action. Caution: Distinguish between what the Bible records and what it approves, particularly in narratives.

Step #3: Meditation. Meditation has become a lost art. True meditation is pondering the truth with a view to letting it help and readjust our lives. Rely on the Holy Spirit for guidance in making proper application (Rom. 8:14; Gal. 5:18). Relate the Scripture to your new life as a believer (2 Cor. 5:17).

Step #4: Application. Scripture was not written to fatten geese but to train athletes and soldiers.

General guidelines: Make sure you live out the truth; you haven't applied it until you do (Jam 1:22-27; Matt 7:24-27). Make the application immediately before we forget or the urgency we

have felt fades. Make a list of specific ways to put a truth into practice (Phil 2:12). Make the application in balance, coordination and consistency with other applications.

Homework assignment

Make fifteen observations about Acts 1:8: "But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be my witnesses both in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria, and even to the remotest part of the earth (NASB)."

1. Start with terms. The word "but" is the most important word that I see in this context. It is a contrast, which indicates a change of direction in the passage. It also forces us back into the context, and since this is in the beginning of Acts, let's go back to the beginning.

2. Who are the people involved? "You" - observe this term is repeated - "You shall receive power; you shall be witnesses." Who are these people? v.2 tells us that they are apostles.

3. Watch for cause-effect relationships: "When the Holy Spirit comes upon you." The power won't come until the Holy Spirit comes (cause-effect). It also answers the question of time - the receiving of power will happen when the Holy Spirit comes upon them.

4. Who is the Holy Spirit. Write down what you know about the Holy Spirit. He's the Person linked with the Power.

5. Define terms: What is a "witness?" What does "both" mean?

6. The importance of place.

7. What is the meaning of "to the remotest part of the earth"? What does that tell us about the extent of Jesus' command?

8. Relate the verse to the book as a whole.

9. There is no limit to observation.