

How to Interpret the Bible - Lesson One

October 2nd, 2011

Studying God's Word

A. The foundation of faith

Presuppositions play a big role in Bible interpretation. The foundations on which we build will largely determine how solid our building is. In this lesson we will look at some of the foundations Scripture lays for us as we seek to interpret the Bible.

Read John 3:16.

Can an unbeliever interpret and understand these words?

Read 1 Corinthians 2:14.

1. What does Paul say about an unbeliever's ability to understand God's Word?
2. Compare both of your answers so far. How can we say that unbelievers can understand God's Word and then say that they cannot understand God's Word?
3. Agree or disagree: Unbelievers can interpret God's Word just as well as Christians.

B. The foundation of keeping Christ at the heart of Scripture

How Christians view the importance of Jesus Christ will largely influence how they interpret Scripture.

Read John 20:31.

1. Why did God give us his Word?
2. Dave loves to read his Bible. In it he finds everything he needs to live by. The Old Testament commandments give him guidance for life. Jesus' words about love help Dave in his relationships. The epistles present many fine rules to live by. But Dave has missed the heart of Scripture. Christ. How might this lead to faulty interpretations?

C. The foundation of faith in the inspiration of Scripture

How people view the source and nature of Scripture will largely determine how they interpret it.

Read 2 Timothy 3:14-17.

1. What are some of the uses of Scripture?
2. While taking a required college course in ancient literature, Julie had learned that the Bible is like any other great book, a creation of human genius. She respects the Bible as such. However, she is unwilling to let it determine her course of action, particularly because she wants to divorce her husband. Julie wonders why she should be corrected by someone who lived many years ago in a different culture. She interprets many of the Bible's statements as outmoded thoughts of an ancient culture. How do Julie's preconceptions influence how she interprets Scripture?

3. Why will Christians want to be serious and honest about how they interpret Scripture?

Read John 10:34-37.

Consider the words *and the Scripture cannot be broken*. What is Jesus saying about the truthfulness of Scripture?

D. The foundation of believing that the Bible means what it says

Who would argue with the title of this section? The fact is, though, that many people don't believe that the Bible means what it says.

For example: when Martin Luther was training to become a priest in the Catholic church, his teachers interpreted the Scripture using the allegorical method—all verses of Scripture contain symbolical meanings. Verses could be made to say just about anything the interpreter wanted them to say.

Scripture itself teaches us to look for the single, fundamental meaning of a passage.

Read Matthew 2:3-6.

When the Jewish leaders wanted to know where Christ was to be born, they turned to the prophet Micah and found the answer. Compare their way of handling Scripture with the way Luther's teachers handled it.

Read Acts 2:24-33.

How does Peter approach Scripture in these verses?

Read Romans 6:8.

How does Paul interpret David's words?

Read John 6:30-33.

How did both Jesus and the Pharisees interpret Moses' account of the miracle of the manna?

Summary

How we interpret Scripture is influenced by our presuppositions. An unbeliever can interpret what Scripture says. The words of Scripture are clear, and they mean what they say. These words can lead an unbeliever to faith.

In practice, however, a Christian will be able to offer a more solid interpretation. Christians know that Christ is at the heart of Scripture. They believe that every word in Scripture comes from God himself, so they are careful about how they interpret it. Because Christians consider Christ their greatest treasure, they are willing to spend the necessary time to study Scripture carefully so their interpretation is well thought out. Christians will approach Scripture with the humble faith that it says what it means.

During the week: pick a book of the Bible and begin reading it, taking notes while you read, and praying before and after you read.