

# Rules of Exegesis and Interpretation

1. We are dealing with the Bible, God's Word. This is more important than the thoughts, dreams, ramblings or anecdotes of any pastor or commentator. This, along with the guidance and leading of the Holy Spirit (which is almost completely misunderstood) is all that we have in this world. We go first and foremost to God's Word for guidance and spiritual growth. The bulk of what is given in the church service should be the study of God's Word. A pastor who tells you how he feels, who gives you little happy thoughts and inspiration apart from the careful exegesis is stealing reward from you and makes a mockery of Jesus Christ. Any church which does not does not carefully teach God's Word is in apostasy.
2. You must have an accurate translation to understand much of what is being said in God's Word. Certain things, like the gospel, can be understood in any translation (e.g., John 3:16: "For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son that whoever believes in Him will not perish but have eternal life.") However, there are a lot of things in Scripture which make far more sense when given a literal translation.
  - a. An accurate translation is not voted upon. That is, just because you have eight side-by-side translations, you don't necessarily pick the translation which occurs to most often. We have had illustrations where only Young gives us a correct translation and every other translation was wrong.
  - b. You do not have to personally be a scholar in the field of Greek or Hebrew. It is the job of the pastor-teacher to provide this information for you. You need only to come and listen.
3. Scripture was written and spoken for the people of those times. Therefore, every verse has meaning primarily for the audience of that verse.
  - a. The very words and sentence structure of a verse must be examined. We must know exactly what is being said in order to properly interpret any given verse. We have seen several words in the Hebrew which are routinely mistranslated (e.g.,  $q\hat{a}ra^b$  (קָרַב) [pronounced *kaw-RA<sup>B</sup>V*] means *come near, approach* whereas, it is often mistranslated *to bring, to offer*. However, there is no way one can get that meaning from (see Gen. 12:11 and Ex. 14:10). BDB supports this by not giving *offering* as one of their primary definitions. BDB #897 Strong #7126.
  - b. The historical context in which a verse is found is essential to its understanding. We must know what the people of that time thought and did in order to understand why these things were said to them.
  - c. This may seem like an unusual thing to say, but whatever was said should make sense to the reader or listener. Perhaps not to all readers or listeners, as some will be so covered in scar tissue as to preclude the grasps of spiritual information. However, enough people would understand what is being said or written in order to warrant its being said or written in the first place.
  - d. Often, information in the Bible is taught several times. As a teacher, I have found out that I cannot teach everything the same way year in and year out. Charlie Brown might understand one way of explaining a mathematical concept, but John Smith does not. Therefore, I repeat what I have taught, but in different words or with a different slant or with a view to different background of the listener.
4. Since Scripture is the mind of Christ (I Cor. 2:16) and God's eternal word, it should have future application.
  - a. Whatever is said should often have meaning to those who follow. That is, whatever is said should generally not be generation-specific. This is God's Word—why would God record in His eternal Word information which apply only to a very limited population?
  - b. Information on the Millennium allows us to look forward to what is to come, understanding what has been promised us. This further gives us information concerning God's character.
5. We can only begin to understand God's Word through the filling of the Holy Spirit while being taught by a pastor-teacher. For to us God revealed through the Spirit; for the Spirit searches all things, even the depths of God. For who among men knows man except [through] the spirit of man which is in him? Even so with God—no one knows except the Spirit of God. Now we have received, not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit Who is from God, that we might know the things freely given to us by God (I Cor. 2:10–12).
6. Information which occurs a great deal must be examined thoroughly. For instance, the gospel of Christ's sacrifice for our sins and our appropriation of forgiveness through believing in Him is attested to throughout Scripture from Genesis to Revelation. Therefore, we should understand this doctrine as an absolute and interpret other Scripture in that light.
7. You may not understand all of Scripture. I cannot take a fifth grader and teach him Calculus. I can take a properly trained Sophomore in high school who is in the midst of Algebra II and teach him Calculus, however. Background is the key. We begin with the gospel and our salvation and work upwards from there.

- a. A person must be a believer to gain even a glimmer of retainable divine viewpoint as found in God's Word. **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 (I Cor. 2:14).**
  - b. Anyone who does not understand the cross and our means of attaining salvation will understand little or nothing of anything else in God's Word.
  - c. Next a person must understand God's grace and His righteousness and that we may obtain his grace because of the cross. A fellow believer pointed out to me that Bob Thieme's default setting was grace (he didn't use that terminology, as he was not computer literate). Whenever a particular verse was difficult to understand, he would default to God's marvelous grace. However, this was never done in such a way to compromise God's righteousness.
  - d. Key to interpretation of God's Word is dispensations. Unless you can distinguish clearly the church from Israel, the Millennium from the Church Age, Abraham's tent from the tabernacle from the temple from our church buildings, you cannot grasp 70% of the Bible. If you have not heard the phrase *dispensation* or *God's economy*, as a reference to God's particular program for a particular people during a particular period of time, then you will find yourself disoriented to most Scripture.
8. The meaning of a word is determined by its useage in Scripture.
    - a. Some pastors ignore the fact that different writers of Scripture have different vocabularies and come from different eras. Even though God the Holy Spirit is the Author of Scripture, no author subjugated his thoughts, vocabulary, feelings, and personal standpoint to the Holy Spirit to where these things would be lost.
    - b. Some words have technical spiritual meanings. They began in a language meaning one thing and were taken by a writer of Scripture to have a slightly different meaning.
  9. NEVER NEVER NEVER ignore the context in which a Scripture is found. One of the most blatant examples of this is Heb. 4:9: There remains therefore a Sabbath rest for the people of God. I recall seeing the very persuasive, dynamic public speaker Gardner Ted Armstrong quoting this verse on television and saying, "There is is, read it for yourselves in your own Bibles. God's people are still to keep the Sabbath."
  10. Other context's are important as well:
    - a. Historical context of the verse. Do not think that the government of early Israel is the ideal government and that we should aspire to it tenets. God was the ruler of Israel and Israel has been the only nation on this earth to be ruled by God. Therefore, while there are many things found in the Torah which would make for an outstanding government, this does not mean that all of the governmental structures and mandates found in the Mosaic Law should be instituted today. We have seen that the leaders of government do not have to be believers (Rome in the first several centuries) and that Christianity can flourish under democracy (the United States) and under an Autocracy (Germany, prior to the world wars<sup>1</sup>). We have seen that even where Communism flourished, the gospel has gotten a stronghold and many have been saved throughout what was previously the Soviet Union.
    - b. The context of the life and thoughts of that particular writer of Scripture. Peter and Paul's vocabulary were not identical; therefore, once and awhile, they may use the same word with a slightly different slant.
    - c. The context of the vocabulary and useage of specific words. We continually go back into the original language and jump from Scriptural useage to Scriptural useage to determine the meaning of various words.
    - d. The context of the dispensation during which a Scripture was written or spoken is key to interpretation of that passage.
  11. God the Holy Spirit is the ultimate Author of Scripture. Therefore, you can look underneath the surface to see the divine context of any passage. As we have seen throughout Deut. 22–24, as a for instance, Moses seems to jump from topic to topic without any apparent connection between them. However, when we look at our application to today and what God the Holy Spirit expects us to grasp from any given passage, it becomes clear that there is a progressive movement of context and a logical thought process by God the Holy Spirit.
  12. With a view to the point above, do not attempt to spiritualize everything to the point where it means nothing to those to whom it was originally spoken. The first and foremost interpretation has a cultural, linguistic and historical context which cannot be ignored.

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<sup>1</sup> In fact, Germany was home to so many spiritual giants, that Satan personally moved to Germany in order to launch a counter attack, and he likely indwelt Adolf Hitler

13. Do not attempt to make any passage allegorical unless there is every indication that was the original intent of that passage. Some people, because they have been brainwashed, do not like the idea that God restored the earth in six literal days. Therefore, they attempt to *allegorize* or *spiritualize* the first chapter of Genesis. Just because you disagree with God's Word doesn't mean you get to *allegorize* it.
14. Allow Scripture to interpret Scripture.
  - a. Some people are confused because they think that they must interpret a particular doctrine or Scripture as either A or Z—as though there is not middle ground. We have seen that problem with the hyper-Calvinists and the Armenians. The hyper-Calvinists ignore the true doctrine of free will, interpreting everything in terms of God's sovereignty, whereas the Armenians hold man's free will as supreme, to the exclusion of God's sovereignty. Therefore, you have no choice whatsoever in salvation according to a hyper-Calvinist; according to an Armenian, on the other hand, your salvation is held by a thin thread which could snap at any time, depending upon your volition. However, man does have free will and God is sovereign. There is a middle ground where we can go to understand God's Word in this regard. Paul explain much of this in Rom. 8:29–30.
  - b. If the bulk of Scripture points toward salvation by grace through faith in Christ (I have put together roughly four type-written pages of Scripture which confirms this), then two or three Scriptures which appear to contradict this are being improperly interpreted. Don't let one or two verses determine the meaning of twenty or thirty verses.
15. Do not allow your own personal prejudices to interfere with the interpretation of Scripture. You may have been brought up to think that long hair is acceptable on a male, that capital punishment is barbaric and does not belong in the 21st century, that all military forces everywhere should be disbanded, that sex outside of marriage is acceptable to God, that homosexuality is a valid choice for one's lifestyle, etc. It doesn't matter what you think. It may take you years before you shed all of your previous prejudices, but eventually you will. If you think that you and God should see eye-to-eye on most everything, then you do not have the first clue as to your own old sin nature, nor do you have a clue that it is Satan's plan to delude and brainwash you. When you choose your viewpoint over God's Word, you are being arrogant beyond belief.
16. Just because something occurs historically and is recorded in the Bible, that does mean that is a mandate for our lives. Solomon had three hundred wives and seven hundred concubines; David obtained his right woman through murder and adultery; Paul was not married. These facts of history, which are recorded in God's Word, not examples for us to follow.
17. You do not even have to read your Bible. There is no call in Scripture to do this. God has provided for you a speaker who will teach you God's Word. However, if that speaker does not spend the bulk of his time in God's Word, then you are in the wrong place.