



## 7 PRINCIPLES OF INTERPRETATION

### Introduction

“It is properly required of the theologian (whether with a small t or capital T) that he both understand and expound the Scriptures. This is the *distinctive* field in which he serves.”

“The unrevoked *anathema* which rests upon all who pervert the Gospel of divine grace (Gal. 1:8-9) may be deemed, to some degree, to be true concerning the misrepresentation of all divine revelation. In view of...” this fact, “...the uncompromising student will do well to give indefatigable study to the Sacred Text and demand of himself that right relation to God which insures the priceless divine guidance into all Truth. The conclusions of other men should be given due respect. It is the student’s task...” however, “...to advance these assured results of scholarship *beyond* the attainments of past generations, striving to be as humble and true as the fathers have been. 2 Timothy 2:15 does enjoin ‘**study**’ which is the application to, and the investigation of, the text of Scripture itself and not merely the perusal of the writings of other men about the text. The word *ereunao*- ‘to search, to examine;’ used six times in the NT... is three times related to an exercise on the part of men by which they *examine* the Bible with utmost care.” Chafer, *Systematic Theology*, Vol. I-- *Bibliology*, pp. 114-115 \* Brackets, parentheses & italics mine.

### **Some Methods:**

1. Consider the purpose of the Bible as a whole.

The Bible is not a treatise on natural science or ancient history. It is an unconditional declaration from God concerning Himself and His works; especially as those works relate to the eternal welfare of the human race.

2. Note the distinctive character and message of each book.

Noting the differentiating characteristics of each book is essential, since a vital factor in any particular truth is its place in a certain book, and in the light of that book’s specific message.

3. Ask to whom a given Scripture is addressed.

An accurate interpretation of any given passage depends quite often on a distinction being made between its primary and secondary applications. A *primary* application is made when a given passage is recognized as pertaining directly to those to whom it was addressed. A *secondary* application is made when a given passage is recognized as *not* applying directly to a certain person or class of people, but its moral and spiritual principles are appropriated by

them. False doctrines and theological systems are sustained more by their confusion of primary and secondary applications of the Word than by any other factor. No feature of interpretation demands more discernment than this! The Apostle Paul's plea for 'diligence' in 2 Timothy 2:15 is also a warning; for the **"Word of Truth"** will not be 'handled *accurately*' apart from arduous study.

4. Consider the *immediate* context.

The character and scope of the truth under contemplation at any point is to be discovered, primarily, by the surrounding context. E.g., in 1 Corinthians 9:27 the Greek word *adokimos*, translated **"disqualified"** and meaning- *not standing the test*; cannot mean loss of salvation in a context which deals only with eternal rewards for Christian service.

5. Compare all Scripture on any given theme or doctrine.

A correct interpretation will also depend predominantly on an induction being made of *all* that the Bible presents on a particular subject. The statement of a doctrine or theme of the Word of God will be true to the mind of God only as all He has said on that theme is brought into view. The *necessity* of a full and comprehensive induction is indicated when the principle of progressive revelation is acknowledged.

6. Ascertain the exact meaning of the determinative words in the text.

A knowledge of the original languages *can--* not necessarily *does--* lead to more precise conclusions and accurate insight into what a difficult passage teaches. The study of both Hebrew and Greek, to the extent that worthwhile exegesis is undertaken, is *paramount*, and most definitely belongs to the preparation of the Bible expositor. To be utterly dependent on the findings of other men is somewhat discouraging since the requisite authority in communication is lacking.

7. Avoid personal prejudice and preconceptions.

To twist or mold the Bible to make it conform to one's preconceived notions is no less than **"adulterating the word of God"**-- 2 Corinthians 4:2-- and is worthy of judgment from Him whose Word has been abused and distorted. At no point is it more important to exercise the conscience and seek the mind of God than when delving into the precise meaning of the Word and then teaching those findings to others.

