

## Interpretation

If Illumination is the work of the Spirit to help believers understand and apply Scripture, interpretation, broadly conceived, is the thought-through method we should follow in this endeavor. We have learned many aspects of how God's Word came to us. Now, we must put into practice what His Word teaches us. A key verse to prepare us for the interpretation of the Bible is II Timothy 2:15, "Study to show thyself approved unto God, a workman that needeth not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth." By looking at the principles, the types, and study of interpretation we as Christians can learn to have a better grasp of Scripture.

### I. Definition of Interpretation

- A. "The act of the servants/people of God whereby they pursue the explanation of the truth of the Word of God by normal standards of understanding of written language."
- B. **ἐπίλυσις** (epilysis)- meaning "a loosening, unloosing." Metaphorically means "interpretation" in II Peter 1:20.
- C. **ἑρμηνεύω** (hermeneúō)- meaning "to interpret" or "to translate what has been spoken or written in a foreign tongue into the vernacular." Found in John 1:38,42; Heb. 7:2.
- D. **ἑρμηνεία** (hermeneía)- meaning "interpretation (of what has been spoken more or less obscurely by others)." Found in I Cor. 12:10 and I Cor. 14:26.
- E. **רִשְׁפָּ** (pay'-sher)- meaning "solution" from Eccl. 8:1. Usually used to show the interpretation of dreams.

### II. Principles of Interpretation

- A. Grammatical Principle- The words of Scripture must be understood both in the Hebrew and Greek in order to discover the best interpretation of the passage. Focusing on syntax, word studies, and words in the sentences individually help the believer interpret the exact meaning and implication of Scripture. In order to achieve this, we study the words of a text in their historical context, the literary structure of a passage, its mood, and the kind (genre) of literature it is. Combined with this is the comparing of scripture with scripture (e.g., interpreting the obscure by the clear) and ultimately the teaching of the Bible as a whole.
- B. Contextual principle- Context must always be kept in mind when focusing on the interpretation of the Bible. Context places the verse in comparison and application in the immediate setting, with the whole Bible, with other foundational truths, and in the normal usage of culture. It helps in determining the overall theme of the passage and book. This would be categorized as understanding the historical manner which focuses on culture, geography, and the historical setting. (Warning - II Cor. 4:2).
- C. Progressive principle- We must also recognize the progressiveness of revelation. This progression shows how God revealed His message to man with changes in certain eras at certain times. (why we as believers are able to eat pork). One objection that arises to the literal interpretation of the Bible is the belief that the New Testament spiritualizes the Old Testament. Though every New Testament quote of the Old Testament is not taken literally, some are illustrative or rhetorical, never are they spiritualized or taken out of context.
- D. Practical/application principle- When interpreting Scripture, the end result of application must be focused on as well. We know what II Tim. 3:16 says, but there is a difference between application based on how the Bible is interpreted. Certain truths

were given to be applied to the Jews, while others are given specifically to be applied to today with Christians (Rom. 8:1). The correct interpretation will bring about the correct applications.

### III. Hermeneutics, Exegesis, and Eisegesis

- A. Hermeneutics—The study of the principles of interpretation; the science of interpretation which focuses on the art of interpreting literature and/or Scripture.
- B. Exegesis—Bringing out the meaning of a text for personal practice. Exegesis consists of the actual interpretation of the Bible, the bringing out of its meaning, whereas hermeneutics establishes the principles by which exegesis is practiced.
- C. Eisegesis—Interpreting a text by reading into it one's own ideas, presuppositions, or agendas. This understanding of Scripture reflects the personal ideas or viewpoint of the interpreter by reading something into a text that is not there.

### IV. Types of interpretation/hermeneutics

- A. Allegorical interpretation. This type does not understand the actual words in a literal sense but rather in a symbolic sense. It interprets biblical narratives as having a second level of reference beyond those persons, things, and events explicitly mentioned in the text. Usually, the interpreter chooses this type because the normal or literal sense of the passage is unacceptable to them.
- B. Semi-allegorical or semi-literal interpretation. The former is used by some because they believe the Bible has hidden and secret meanings to be found, and all figures of speech used cannot be taken literally. The latter is used by some especially in prophecy or end time teachings because they cannot accept all parts to be taken literal.
- C. Other interpretations:
  - 1. Moral- seeks to understand various parts of the Bible as teaching ethical lessons (in reality they are fitting general principles to particular cases).
  - 2. Anagogical- seeks to explain events or matters of this world so they relate to the life to come. (Crossing the Jordan River means crossing river of death)
  - 3. Analogical- no biblical interpretation is valid unless it conforms to the established teaching of a religious community, tradition, or church fathers.
- D. Literal interpretation. (the opposite of allegorical) Here the plain meaning and normal understandings of a passage are used being based upon the grammatical construction and historical context. However, the Bible does still use figurative language. This type of language is used in similes, metaphors, and other figures of speech. Literal hermeneutics and literal interpretation should be the accepted view of God's Word. There are also a number of proofs for literal interpretation:
  - 1. First, the purpose of language seems to require this type of interpretation. God gave man language to communicate with Him, and to use it in its normal sense among other people.
  - 2. Second, the need for objectivity is lost when the interpretation is changed from anything other than literal. Doing so results in contradictions of the Bible.
  - 3. Last, using the example of the Bible, we can know it should be taken literally. Prophecies tend to be taken allegorically or theologically, but Scripture shows their fulfillments are literal. Old Testament fulfillments (Micah 5:2) and New Testament fulfillments (Matt. 2:15) are all taken literally.