

# How To Study the Bible

*Part 1 – The Need to Interpret*

## The Introduction

[Intro Videos]

As you can see, the world is quickly and boldly pushing God into the mythological realm and declaring Christianity a “brainwashing” tool for political gain.

And while their blindness and ignorance are definitely to blame, I do not believe that 100% of the burden of responsibility lies on their shoulders. To some extent, the reason the world no longer fears God or sees the Bible as the voice of authority because, in some small part, the church no longer does either. When Jesus called us to be light, he also added that we were to be salt. In the context of his day, salt acted primarily as a preservative against decay since refrigeration was not a reality. The parallel in His teaching was that we, as the church, do not just act as light for the lost, but also as a preventative agent against sin by being the voice of conscience to the world. And if that voice is lost, or becomes “softened,”... what good are we? I believe Jesus put it this way... “If the salt loses it’s saltiness, what is it good for? Nothing, but to be thrown out with the trash.”

If you told me that I had months to live, and had just enough time to teach one more course... this would be the one. For me, because of how God has created me and the passion He has instilled in me, there is no more important course I could teach than this one.

All the other topics are good ones, and essential ones. But unless you know how to handle the Word of God and interpret it for yourself... you are at the mercy of the speaker and unable to know whether the content hitting your ears is of God or not. The old saying goes, ‘Give a man a fish, you feed him for a day... teach a man to fish, you feed him for a lifetime.’ This course does not give you a fish... it teaches you to fish.

## The Problem

The problem is that not everyone likes fishing. And the same can be said of Bible Study. While everyone here loves God, we don’t all like to study.

[Pictures of James & Cristen studying]

But to those of you in that camp, you need to know that you will be getting no mercy from me whatsoever.

Dallas Willard puts it this way:

*“The person without study is only a spiritual romantic who wants relationship without effort.”*

I agree. And as anyone knows who has ever been in a relationship, especially married people... a lack of effort simply means you are counting the days until it dissolves.

The first premise of this course is that you need to be an interpreter of the Scriptures. Along side of needing to be an intercessor... along side of needing to be an evangelist... alongside of needing to be a missions-minded person... you need to be an interpreter of the Scriptures.

Now... whether you know it or not... by sitting in this church you are already consenting to that whether you knew it or not. This is not a Catholic Church. So that means that, by default, we are either Protestant, or a cult. The good news is that I think we can safely call ourselves a “Protestant” church.

What does that mean? To be “Protestant” does not just mean that you are not Catholic. The term defines a set of beliefs that we hold. When a certain reformer known as Martin Luther broke from the Catholic Church in the 1500’s teaching doctrines that the Catholic Church would not allow, an ever-expanding group of followers rose to “protest” the Roman Catholic authority which was telling people they could not read or study what was coming to be called “Lutheranism.” That’s where the term “protestant” comes from... it means “ a protester.”

But protest to what?

- Luther’s view that the Scriptures belonged in the hands of the laity.
- It was not something that only the clergy could interpret.

So, by being “Protestant,” you are saying that you believe the Bible is something God wants in your hands and for you to interpret.

*“In matters of faith, which affect the nature and will of God and our salvation, we must close our eyes, ears, and other senses and listen solely and intently to what and how scripture speaks about these things. We must wrap ourselves simply in God’s Word and be directed by it. We may not attempt to follow our own insights or measure scripture by them.”*

Martin Luther

So what we are starting off her tonight with is that you are an interpreter of Scripture... not just a reader, or listener. But my goal is not that you simply be an interpreter... but that you be a good interpreter... no, a great interpreter.

And for that to happen, there are certain things you have to understand.

## **I. The Two Opposing Ends of Interpretation**

### **a. The Bible Does Not Need to Be Interpreted**

To some extent... these people have case. There are places in the Scriptures where the problem is not a lack of study, but rather a lack of obedience.

Philippians 2:14<sup>NIV</sup> – “Do everything without complaining or arguing.”

## **b. The Bible Cannot Be Interpreted**

To some extent these people have a case, too. Otherwise, why would God give the teaching gift to the church? But this statement more likely reflects the problems of...

- i. Preachers who seek uniqueness
- ii. Teachers who seek authority

The goal is a balance in the middle that seeks to obey what is clear, learn from teachers on what is not, and be an interpreter of the rest.

*“Proper interpretation is when the text brings relief to the mind as well as the prod to the heart.”*

Douglas Stuart  
Gordon Fee

So the goal is good interpretation that seeks to find the plain meaning of the text. But before we can throw open a Bible and start studying, there is more to learn.

## **II. The Two Natures Involved in Interpretation**

### **a. The Nature of the Reader**

- i. The “baggage” you carry
  - 1. As we read, we assume that we are understanding the text just fine. We think that our understanding is the same as the Holy Spirit’s. But, what we are unaware of is that we bring to the text all that we are... our experiences, our culture, and our understandings of words and their meanings.
  - 2. We read a passage such as Phil. 2:14 and think we have the understanding of it until we meet someone else reading the same passage. It’s at that point that we realize that two different people will have two different opinions as to what “complaining” or “arguing” is. As such, they will each walk away with different opinions as to what they are being commanded to do (or not do).
  - 3. When we read 1 Cor. 11:18 “when you come together as a church,” we see them entering a building and coming into a sanctuary with chairs and a platform and a worship leader on the stage. The truth is, that is incredibly far from reality for Paul.
- ii. The text you choose
  - 1. You hold a “translation” of the Scriptures... not the actual Scriptures themselves.
  - 2. Your translation is a beginning point for you, but is an end result of scholarly work. You hold the product of what a team of translators felt were their best choices. (And sometimes it came to a vote!)

- a. Consider Prayer & Fasting passages
  - i. <sup>NKJ</sup> **Mark 9:29** So He said to them, "This kind can come out by nothing but prayer and fasting."
  - ii. <sup>NIV</sup> **Mark 9:29** He replied, "This kind can come out only by prayer."

iii. The church you attend

1. **1 Corinthians 14:34** <sup>34</sup> women should remain silent in the churches. They are not allowed to speak, but must be in submission, as the Law says.
2. **Acts 2:4** <sup>4</sup> All of them were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other tongues as the Spirit enabled them.
3. **Mark 16:17-18** <sup>17</sup> And these signs will accompany those who believe: In my name they will drive out demons; they will speak in new tongues; <sup>18</sup> they will pick up snakes with their hands; and when they drink deadly poison, it will not hurt them at all; they will place their hands on sick people, and they will get well."

b. The Nature of Scripture

- i. Divinely inspired (eternal relevance)
- ii. Humanly composed (historical particularity)

### III. The Two Keys to Interpretation

a. Genre

i. The types

- i. Narrative history
- ii. Chronicles
- iii. Law
- iv. Poetry
- v. Proverbs
- vi. Drama
- vii. Riddles
- viii. Sermons

ii. The rules

1. General – rules that apply to all of scripture
  - a. Look for God as the “hero,” and not a human.
2. Specific rules that apply only to a specific type of genre
  - a. Law – is it ceremonial or moral?

b. Context

i. God’s Word to us was **FIRST** of all His Word to them.

1. We need to hear the text in the way that the first audience heard it. They did not have chapter and verse divisions. They heard the text as a unit and as such, understood it’s context.
2. Example:

- a. Beach Patrol → “If the hurricane reaches Category 4 strength, we will be evacuating the island.” Except the new channel runs the story... “This is John Doe reporting for Channel 4 News in Ocean City, MD where things are really tense as Beach Patrol spokesman, Lane Douglas, told us... ‘We will be evacuating the island.’ ... Back to you Cindy.
- b. My Captain calls me.... “You want to explain to me why the Mayor is on Line 1 wanting to know since when was a Sergeant on the Beach Patrol in charge of making city-wide decisions?!”

I believe that at times many of the authors of the biblical text turn over in their graves when they hear us preach.

- ii. We have to hear what was said back **there and then** before we attempt to apply it to us **here and now**.

## IV. The Two Tasks of Interpretation

### a. The First Task: Exegesis

#### i. The Pun

1. Let’s get this clear... it is not “Exit Jesus”... it’s a cute play on words, but it is made at too high a cost. Sort of like calling “seminary” ... “cemetery.” Your making the insinuation that an intentional study of the Bible and that a disciplined approach to God’s Word is a bad thing.
2. You would never in a million years insinuate that you want your doctor to be untrained. When he or she tells you they went to Med School you don’t go “Oh, you mean ‘Dead School?!’” If you thought for one second that your doctor was untrained and simply making up his own rules and remedies you would run for the hills.
3. But only in Christianity is everyone the expert.

#### ii. The Particulars

1. Definition - < Gk *exégēsis* an interpretation, explanation, equiv. to *ex- EX-<sup>3</sup>* + (*h*)*égé-* (verbid s. of *hégeisthai* to guide)
2. Why use the English transliteration? I don’t know. Why do we say “Amen” rather than “So be it?”
3. By using the word... writings become clear to you:
  - a. “Satan is crafty in the extreme. He is a subtle exegete. He knows the raw content of the Bible.”

John Piper  
A Hunger for God

- iii. The Problems
  - 1. Most exegesis is too selective
  - 2. Most sources are not authoritative
- iv. The Process
  - 1. Historical Context
  - 2. Literary Context
  - 3. Content
    - a. *“even though we have known Christ according to the flesh, yet now we know Him in this way no longer.” 2 Cor. 5:16*
  - 4. Tools

## **b. The Second Task: Hermeneutics**

The Greek character “Hermes” was known as the “messenger of the Gods.” If ever there was confusion as to what the gods were saying, Hermes was expected to deliver the message and “clear up confusion.” Hence the Greek term, *herméneú(ein)* came to mean “to make clear,” and the field of “hermeneutics” was born meaning “to clarify and make clear” a text.

<sup>NIV</sup> **Nehemiah 8:8** *They read from the Book of the Law of God, making it clear and giving the meaning so that the people could understand what was being read.*

- i. Guideline #1 → A text cannot mean what it never meant
- ii. Guideline #2 → Authority rests in the community and not in the individual.