

Interpreting the Bible 7 – Basic Principles For Interpreting The Bible (Part 1)

1. Approach the Bible in Prayer

- a. Psalm 119:18 -- *Open my eyes, that I may behold wondrous things out of your law.*
 - i. Ephesians 1:16–18 *I do not cease to give thanks for you, remembering you in my prayers, ¹⁷ that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give you the Spirit of wisdom and of revelation in the knowledge of him, ¹⁸ having the eyes of your hearts enlightened, that you may know . . .*
 - ii. 1 Corinthians 2:10
- b. Psalm 119:34-36 -- *Give me understanding, that I may keep your law and observe it with my whole heart. ³⁵ Lead me in the path of your commandments, for I delight in it. ³⁶ Incline my heart to your testimonies, and not to selfish gain!*

2. Read the Bible as a Book That Points to Jesus

- a. John 5:39-40
- b. Luke 24:25-27
- c. Plummer: "If we study or teach any part of the Bible without reference to Jesus the Savior, we are not faithful interpreters."¹
- d. Example: How does Deuteronomy 23:10-11 point us to Jesus Christ?

3. Let Scripture Interpret Scripture

- a. Plummer: "If we believe that all the Bible is inspired by God and thus noncontradictory, passages of Scripture that are less clear should be interpreted with reference to those that are more transparent in meaning. Cults and heretical groups often seize upon a few obscure texts, ascribe to them questionable meaning, and then interpret the remainder of the Bible through these aberrant lenses. Another dimension of letting Scripture interpret Scripture means listening to the full panoply of texts that touch upon a subject."²

¹ Robert L. Plummer, *40 Questions about Interpreting the Bible*, ed. Benjamin L. Merkle, 40 Questions Series (Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel Academic & Professional, 2010), 96–97.

² *Ibid.*, 97.

b. Example: Romans 5:18; 2 Corinthians 5:19. Do they teach *universalism* (the doctrine that *all* will ultimately be saved)?

i. Questions to ask:

1. How do these verses seem to imply that everyone will be saved? What words or ideas in the text give that impression?
2. Does "all men" in Romans 5:18 mean *every single human being without exception*? Does "world" in 2 Corinthians 5:19 mean *every single human being in the world without exception*? Why or why not?

ii. Clarifying principles and passages:

1. *Principle #1*: Biblical words can mean different things in different contexts. In this case of *universalism* (the belief that all the world will be saved based on a few select texts), "all" and "world" cannot mean literally *every single person on earth* because *other passages clearly* teach that not *everyone* will be saved.
2. *John 3:16-18*. Note "whoever believes" and "whoever does not believe." *Revelation 20:15* - *unbelievers* will be cast into the lake of fire.
3. *Romans 1:8*. How is "world" used and to be understood in this verse? As a reference to every nation, people group, geographical area, and every individual person? Did Paul really think that word of the Roman Christians' faith had reached people as far west as the Americas or as far east as China? So then "world" doesn't always mean *every place or person on the planet*.
4. *Principle #2*: The words "all" or "world" in the context of redemption rarely *if ever* mean all people without *exception* (i.e., *every single individual on planet Earth*), and almost *always* mean all people without *distinction* (i.e., *every kind* of person regardless of ethnicity, language, culture, geographic location, gender, age, etc.)

c. Example: Deuteronomy 6:4 - Does it deny the doctrine of the Trinity? (see 2 Corinthians 13:14; Matthew 28:19; 1 Corinthians 8:3; 1 Peter 1:1-2)