

Scripture Interprets scripture

Hermeneutics is about how to proceed when you need to figure out what a passage is saying, and this principle is one of the first ones to apply when you encounter a difficult passage.

Scripture in general helps you interpret any obscure passage. Most passages are not obscure. As you increase your knowledge of the Bible, you build understanding to help you sort out difficult passages. Passages obscure to us in modern times are often interpreted by clear passages in the broader context of all of the Bible. If you understand something clearly taught in a passage not hard to understand, you can be sure that no other passage teaches something contradictory.

For example, 1 John 1:8-10 clearly says that a mark of a Christian is that he does not deny that he sins and he continues to confess his sin (agree with God about it). Therefore, a more obscure passage (1 John 3:9) cannot mean that a Christian never sins. It says: *"No one who is born of God practices sin, because His seed abides in him; and he cannot sin, because he is born of God."* Doing a little bit of homework will help you understand that the Greek verb tenses make it clear that 3:9 says that a Christian cannot **continue** in sin—he confesses and repents.

Essential truth is not tucked away in some incidental remark in Scripture, nor is it found in some passage that remains ambiguous even after very thorough research. God has made His revelation knowable to us; He doesn't keep us in the dark by hiding important truth in obscure places.

Mark Twain is known for saying something like "It isn't the parts of the Bible I can't understand that give me problems—it's the parts I **can** understand that worry me." While he was no theologian, Twain inadvertently proclaimed the significance of this principle of hermeneutics.

Another example of the usefulness of this principle is the interpretation of 1 Corinthians 15:29: *Otherwise, what will those do who are baptized for the dead? If the dead are not raised at all, why then are they baptized for them?* Your Mormon friends use this to justify baptizing by proxy for those who have died. **But** other scriptures rule out that possibility. In its own context (sound teaching about resurrection), this verse is merely one of several illustrations Paul used of people who believe in resurrection. Without approving the practice and without commanding it, Paul mentions it as an example of some people who obviously believed in life after death—so much that they foolishly baptized for them.