

“Herman Who?!”

Manifesting God’s Word

Compiled by Paul R. Blake from Bible Matters Sources

Introduction:

- A. We recognize that the Bible commands us to study it
 - 1. 2Tim. 2:15; 2Peter 3:18 - It is not enough to simply read the Bible, but we must labor to understand it
- B. Part of gaining that understanding is to read the text and make sense of it
 - 1. Even at the basic level of understanding, interpretation is involved
- C. Hermeneutics is a big word to explain the process of interpreting a text
 - 1. Interpretation must be predicated on rules or not at all
 - 2. These guidelines are not explicitly spelled out in the Bible, but show how people in the Bible interpreted the Bible
 - 3. The self-righteous preacher who said: “Herman who?!”

I. LITERAL INTERPRETATION

- A. The first guideline of interpretation is to interpret the text literally unless there is some compelling reason to do otherwise
 - 1. Accepting the text at face value is the most basic way to understand it
 - 2. Example: Jesus wept - John 11:35
 - a. We can accept this text at face value, because there is no reason to try to interpret this any other way
 - 3. Gen. 1:1 - The text is clear and plain and really does not have a compelling reason to interpret it in any other way
- B. However, we must not hesitate to interpret in a different way if compelling reasons exist
- C. Figurative language
 - 1. Metaphor, simile, parable, hyperbole, metonymy, synecdoche, or other ways, when the text uses figurative language, we must interpret it accordingly
 - 2. Matt. 16:26 - Since no one can literally have the whole world, we know this is exaggeration, or hyperbole
 - 3. John 15:5 - Jesus is not literally a grape vine; it is a metaphor
 - 4. Matt. 13:3-8 - While a parable is a slice of real life, Jesus uses the imagery of sower and seed to describe a preacher and the Gospel
 - 5. 1Cor. 11:26 - Since no one literally drinks the cup, we know that Paul uses the cup to refer to its contents; it is a metonymy
- D. Context requirements
 - 1. Likewise, if the context demands a non-literal reading, we should not read literally
 - 2. Daniel 7 - While we believe Daniel literally saw the vision he records, the beasts are not literal and refer to something else
 - 3. Rev. 9:17 - Fire-breathing horses

- E. Absurd or Contradictory Readings
 - 1. Likewise, if a reading would be absurd literally, or would contradict another passage if taken literally, we need to make our understanding of the text consistent
 - 2. Matt. 12:29 - Since it is absurd for Jesus to be advocating binding strong men and plundering their houses, we understand that He is not giving a literal instruction for us to follow
 - 3. Isa. 1:10-18 - Since we know that God commanded sacrifices and festivals, we know not to interpret His anger as against the worship itself, but the hypocrisy and inconsistency of those involved
- F. Passages should be interpreted literally unless there is a compelling reason to do otherwise

II. THE SUM OF THE BIBLE IS TRUTH

- A. Another guideline of interpretation is understood from Psalm 119:160 - "The sum of God's Word is truth."
 - 1. Every part must harmonize with every other part
 - 2. When all parts are combined, the whole truth is discerned
- B. Example: predestination
 - 1. Some read Ephesians 1 and believe God specifically chooses individuals for salvation
 - 2. But Romans 2:11 states that God shows no partiality, and 1Timothy 2:4 and 2Peter 3:8 indicate that God desires all men to be saved
 - 3. If God desires all men to be saved, then God does not predetermine who will be saved and condemned
 - 4. Ephesians 1 teaches that God foreknew who would be saved or condemned, but did not predetermine it
- C. Example: baptism
 - 1. Many people will focus on passages speaking of the need to believe, or to repent, and consider that is all that is necessary to be saved
 - 2. In so doing, they exclude other relevant scriptures (Acts 2:38; 1Peter 3:21; Rom. 6:16-23) that manifest how baptism and obedience are necessary for salvation
- D. Focusing on a part to the exclusion of the whole leads to an erring perspective of what God approves
 - 1. We must consider the sum of God's Word when interpreting

III. LET THE BIBLE INTERPRET THE BIBLE

- A. Another principle is to allow the Bible to interpret itself whenever possible
 - 1. There is no need to re-interpret what God has interpreted for you
- B. Example: Matthew 13, parable of sower
 - 1. While we might be tempted to interpret the parable for ourselves, Jesus explained the parable to the disciples
 - 2. It is not necessary to interpret where the interpretation is given

IV. CONSIDER THE CONTEXT

- A. May be the most important principle of understanding the scriptures
- B. Example: "Great is Diana of the Ephesians!"
 - 1. That is what the Scripture says in Acts 19:28
 - 2. Does this mean that we should think that Diana is great?
 - 3. When we look at the context, however, we see it is said by the Ephesians in a demonstration against Paul
- C. Example: The gift of the Holy Spirit, John 14:16-18
 - 1. Many look at this passage and say that we should receive the gift
 - 2. The context, however, demonstrates that Jesus is making a specific promise to the Twelve that is fulfilled specifically (John 13; Acts 2)
 - 3. Understood in context, we see that is not good interpretation to apply this promise to ourselves
- D. Context is critical to proper interpretation
 - 1. One of our well-meaning practices has led to a decline in our understanding of context, that is, verse by verse studies
 - 2. The Bible was never written in verses; they were added by interpreters 1450 years after the Bible was written
 - 3. Verses are not stand-alone, individual instructions. Treating them that way leads to a loss of the context, and thus a loss of understanding of the text.
 - 4. I have sat in countless Bible classes throughout my life listening to brethren make points from passages never intended by the context, and simultaneously overlooking the writer's point by losing the context.
 - 5. The Bible was written in the form of letters, essays, official documents, historical treatises, and sermons. Read and study it that way. Only poetry and proverbs were written in verse form

Conclusion:

- A. These are but a few of the guidelines to follow when interpreting the Bible
 - 1. We must interpret literally whenever possible
 - 2. Recognize that the sum of God's Word is truth
 - 3. Let the Bible interpret the Bible
 - 4. Always consider the context
- B. These are the guidelines people in the Bible used to understand the scriptures