

ELEVEN PRINCIPLES OF THE LITERAL METHOD OF INTERPRETING SCRIPTURE.

I. FOLLOW THE CUSTOMARY USAGES OF THE LANGUAGE.

A. The Bible makes statements that are to be taken literally.

B. Often the Bible does use figurative speech.

-In 2 Peter 3:8, Peter says that one day is as a thousand years and a thousand years as one day.

C. The rule is this: "Always accept the literal meaning of the words of the passage unless there is strong evidence to do otherwise." - "If the literal sense makes sense, seek no other sense."

D. The Importance of Syntax in Interpreting Scripture. verb, noun, adjective, adverb, part of speech. It also seeks to decide the tense, mood, voice, and case of a word.

E. Following the Customary Use of the Words. When God used a particular word He did so to convey a particular meaning.

II. COMMIT NO HISTORICAL OR CULTURAL BLUNDERS.

To arrive at the correct meaning of a passage you must consider when the statement was made and the historical and cultural situation surrounding the passage.

A. Interpreting God's command in the Old Testament to stone false prophets: Deuteronomy 13:5 deals with false prophets in Israel.

B. The historical setting of the Book of Daniel: In interpreting the Book of Daniel, one would have to consider that Daniel was a captive in Babylon which would be essential in understanding the Book of Daniel.

C. Another example that could be confusing is the use of the names "Judah" and "Israel." Historically, the twelve tribes of Israel divided after the death of King Solomon

III. MAKE CHRIST CENTRAL IN ALL INTERPRETATIONS.

In John 5:38, Jesus said, "Search the Scriptures for in them ye think ye have eternal life: and they are they that speak of me." The whole Bible is about the Lord Jesus Christ, and Christ is central in all Scripture.

A. Theophanies, Christophanies, Messianic Content

B. "Angel of the Lord" occurs 52 times in the Old Testament and 27 times the appearance of the Lord is recorded by the phrase "the LORD appeared."

IV. BE CONSCIOUS OF CONTEXT

A. Scripture Interprets Scripture!

B. The context of a text or verse refers to its setting within a larger portion of Scripture.

-Words -> Sentences -> Paragraphs -> Books -> Bible

C. 1 Corinthians 15:32: The verse ends with the words, "let us eat, drink for tomorrow we die."

D. Many false teachings and beliefs can be traced to ignoring of the context of a passage.

- The Mormons quote 1 Corinthians 15:29, to support the practice of baptizing the living for the dead.

E. "A text without a context is only a pretext." "Pretext" - false reason/motive put forth to hide the real one.

F. We must consider the following aspects of context in researching a passage.

1. Immediate Context - means the verses just before and after the verse
2. Broad Context - the verse's place within the chapter and the entire book
3. Parallel Context - refers to other places the word or text is found (Temptation of Christ, Justification)
4. Historical Context - consulting history to find the setting of the statement (Acts 17)
5. Analogical Context - a passages resemblance or similarity with the rest of the Bible

V. INTERPRET BY THE ANALOGY OF THE FAITH.

A. The Bible does not contradict itself. If a passage of Scripture seems to contradict other Scriptures the problem is not in the Bible but with the interpreter. The Bible cannot be contradictory if it is Inspired.

B. The term "Inspiration" is the theological term taken from the Bible which expresses the truth that the Bible is God's Very Word. To understand inspiration we must look at two classic Scripture verses:

1. The first passage is 2 Tim. 3:16. "All scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness:"
2. The word "inspiration" can be literally interpreted "God-breathed."
3. The next passage is 2 Peter 1:21, "For prophecy came not in old times by the will of man but holy men of God spoke as they were moved by the Holy Spirit."
4. Inspiration is the process by which the Holy Spirit supernaturally moved on the writers of Scripture and what they wrote was not their words,
5. Heb. 1:1 says, "God, who at sundry times and in divers manners *spoke* in time past unto our fathers."
-David said, "The spirit of the Lord spake by me and his word was in my tongue" 2 Sam. 23:2.

C. In theological terms the doctrine that God wrote the Scriptures and that every word of Scripture is inspired of God is called, "verbal plenary inspiration."

1. Definitions of the words are: VERBAL = "WORDS" and PLENARY = "FULL". It means that God-breathed the very word of God in full expression of His thoughts in what the writer of Scripture wrote.
2. God guided them in the choice of every word and expression. This does not mean God did not allow for personality and cultural background of the writer to be used in expressing God's Words.
3. This is why we must conclude the Bible is without error. God wrote it and preserves it and not man.
4. If your passage appears to be a contradiction then your course of action is to continue studying until you arrive at the correct interpretation.

D. Example: I Peter 3:19 appears to say that Christ after His crucifixion went into Hell and preached salvation to the lost pre-flood peoples giving them a second chance for salvation.

1. If you consider the verse in the analogy of the faith, this alerts you to the problem! Does this interpretation contradict other Scripture? Yes.
2. Consider the other principles of interpretation. Principle #4, "Context," reading in context would show you that Peter is writing about Christ's suffering and death for the sins of the world. (See verse 18) Verse 20, gives us the time of the preaching to the pre-flood people. It says, "When once the long-

suffering of God, waited in the days of Noah." So the verse tells us this preaching was done in the days of Noah, not at the death of the Lord Jesus.

E. The rule is a simple one: In interpreting Scripture you must always consider the fact that the Bible does not contradict itself. If a proposed interpretation conflicts with other Scripture then your interpretation is not correct. You then must continue your study and arrive at an interpretation that is not contradictory.

VI. RECOGNIZE THE PROGRESS OF REVELATION.

A. In the proper interpretation of Scripture it must be understood that God gave His revelation, the Bible, to man over a long period of years. This is the doctrine of "Progressive Revelation." (Biblical Theology)

B. "I will put enmity between thy seed and her seed it shall bruise thy head, and thou shalt bruise his heel."

C. The canon of Scripture was completed, about 90 AD to 95 AD, God had completely revealed all that man needed to know to be saved, and live for God.

D. The Old Testament is valid today

1. The Law is not invalidated by grace (Antinomianism). The Law says we are to "have no other God before thee." (Deut. 5:7) That is a true now as it was then.

2. The Bible's principles do not change in time. Customs, culture, political situations may change and this in turn may change the way the principle is applied, however the principle itself does not change.

3. For an example, in Deut. 7:1f, God instructs Israel to be separated from the wicked peoples of Canaan. In 2 Cor. 6:14, the same principle is being applied to the Christians being unequally yoked with unbelievers. In both passages, God is teaching us the Doctrine of Separation.

E. Scripture can only have one meaning or interpretation, but in different circumstances can have different applications.

VII. GRANT ONE INTERPRETATION TO EACH PASSAGE.

A. When the words of Scripture were penned they had only one meaning. We should search for that one meaning.

B. Note that we are talking about interpretation and not about application. A passage can have several applications.

VIII. CHOOSE THE SIMPLEST ALTERNATIVE

In a very few instances the correct interpretation is not clear. This is a rare occurrence.

-There is a classic example of this found in Judges 11:30-40. Is this condoning human sacrifice, or is there another meaning? When it is not clear would should remain silent or honestly admit the meaning is not clear.

IX. NEVER INVENT EXPLANATIONS TO SILENT AREAS OF SCRIPTURE

A. Simply stated it means do not make up explanations to areas of Scripture that are silent and where God has not given us all the information about some topic of Scripture.

B. For example, the Bible does not say where Heaven is, Jesus said, only the Father knew when He would return, etc. If God is silent then we need to be silent!

X. NEVER THEORIZE TO ACCOMMODATE MAN'S VIEWS OR MODERN SCIENCE.

A. When a man begins to speculate he is in fact trying to second guess God and this casts a shadow over the credibility of the Bible and our faith. It does not convince the doubters and only brings confusion. The best approach is not to invent explanations, but honestly say we do not know!

B. Examples of man trying to harmonize science and the Bible is seen in the theories such as "Theistic Evolution" and once popular "Gap Theory. If science disagrees, then science is wrong! Science is the product of man's wisdom which is often proven faulty. The Bible is the very Word of God who is never wrong!

C. We look at the world through the Bible. It is the ONLY true standard. It is the only pure source of truth on earth.

D. We should never invent supposed scientific solutions areas where the Bible is silent.

XI. NEVER BASE A DOCTRINE ON ONE PASSAGE OF SCRIPTURE.

-No doctrine should be built on only one passage or verse of Scripture. Any true doctrine of God will be found in many places in the Bible. The Mormons base their doctrine of baptisms for the dead on only one verse in the Bible. (I Cor. 15:29) No where else is the practice even mentioned. If you cannot find other places in the Bible that teach the doctrine this should alert you to a problem.