

FOUNDATION OF FAITH!
THE BIBLE
DOES IT REALLY MATTER?
PART 3

This morning we are continuing in our series Foundation of Faith and for the past year or so we have been looking at foundational truths of the Christian faith. And the reason we embarked on this was because of the heresy that has crept into the church and is now really just flowing into the church. People don't know what the truth is any more. And so I believe this is an important series for us to learn and grow by.

We are presently looking at the Bible and specifically we are in part 3 of a section I have titled, "Does It Really Matter?" In other words, does it really matter what we believe about the Bible? Does it really matter if it is the words of God or the words of man that is written in the Bible? Well, the fact of the matter is that it truly does matter. It truly is vital for our spiritual life, our spiritual growth. How can we know God apart from His Word? We can't and thus, we need to understand why this book we hold in our hands we believe is the Word of God, breathed out from the mouth of God to us!

One writer put it like this in regards to the Word of God and he does sum it up very well for us. He wrote,

This Book is the mind of God, the state of man, the way of salvation, the doom of sinners, and the happiness of believers. Its doctrines are holy, its precepts are binding; its histories are true, and its decisions are immutable. Read it to be wise, believe it to be safe, practice it to be holy. It contains light to direct you, food to support you, and comfort to cheer you. It is the traveler's map, the pilgrim's staff, the pilot's compass, the soldier's sword, and the Christian's character. Here paradise is restored, heaven opened, and the gates of hell disclosed. Christ is its grand subject, our good its design, and the glory of God its end. It should fill the memory, rule the heart, and guide the feet. Read it slowly, frequently, prayerfully. It is a mine of wealth, a paradise of glory, and a river of pleasure. Follow its precepts and it will lead you to Calvary, to the empty tomb, to a resurrected life in Christ; yes, to glory itself, for eternity.

- Source Unknown

You see, the reason people are so confused about what is right and what is wrong, what is moral and what is immoral is they don't have a standard outside the Bible that is a constant. Man's standards keep changing while God's standards remain the same. Man's standards tend to satisfy the flesh, God's standards will bless us!

If you don't believe that, listen to what Paul tells us in Galatians 5:19-21, "**Now the works of the flesh are evident, which are: adultery, fornication, uncleanness, lewdness, idolatry, sorcery, hatred, contentions, jealousies, outbursts of wrath, selfish ambitions, dissensions, heresies, envy, murders, drunkenness, revelries, and the like; of which I tell you beforehand, just as I also told you in time past, that those who practice such things will not inherit the kingdom of God.**"

You see, these are the works of the flesh and man tends to downplay those areas that he himself is indulging himself in. Thus, it is man who sets the standards, it is man who makes the rules and the focus is the satisfying of the flesh. But then why is man not satisfied? Because there is no satisfaction apart from Christ!

On the other end of the spectrum is God's standards for us to live by and God gave them to us because they are what is best for our lives! Listen to what David tells us in Psalm 1 about those that obey the Words of the Lord. He wrote, "**Blessed is the man Who walks not in the counsel of the ungodly, Nor stands in the path of sinners, Nor sits in the seat of the scornful; But his delight is in the law of the Lord, And in His law he meditates day and night. He shall be like a tree Planted by the rivers of water, That brings forth its fruit in its season, Whose leaf also shall not wither; And whatever he does shall prosper. The ungodly are not so, But are like the chaff which the wind drives away. Therefore the ungodly shall not stand in the judgment, Nor sinners in the congregation of the righteous. For the Lord knows the way of the righteous, But the way of the ungodly shall perish.**" Psalm 1:1-6.

Notice how David is contrasting two different lifestyles. One is focused on satisfying the flesh and the other is obeying the Lord. You see, blessed or happy is the man who does not follow down this destructive path of disobeying the Lord because true happiness, true joy is found in obedience to His Word as we meditate on the Word of God.

Joshua 1:8 says, **“This Book of the Law shall not depart from your mouth, but you shall meditate in it day and night, that you may observe to do according to all that is written in it. For then you will make your way prosperous, and then you will have good success.”** The word **“mediate”** means to chew the cud, so we are not to just casually read the Word, but digest it throughout the day.

Also, in Isaiah 55:11 we are told, **“So shall My word be that goes forth from My mouth; It shall not return to Me void, But it shall accomplish what I please, And it shall prosper in the thing for which I sent it.”** The result of that kind of lifestyle, loving and applying the Word of God to ones life is spoken of in verse 3 of Psalm 1 and the focus is this. Your life will be fresh because of the living water you are taking in. As the unsaved are barren, as they are dry, they should see us like an oasis in the desert and we should share with them the living water that is only found in Jesus Christ. And you will produce fruit; you will prosper, not because of you, but because of Him! Again, there really are only two ways of life, those that love the Lord and are obedient to His Word or those that hate the Lord as evident by their works of the flesh, their disobeying the Lord!

So the Word of God is important for us today as it was when it was written because it will affect the way we live out our faith. It will affect our view of who God is. It will affect our view of ourselves! And the Word of God is powerful and is able to transform our lives as this story illustrates for us. We are told,

Many years ago in a Moscow theater, matinee idol Alexander Rostovzev was converted while playing the role of Jesus in a sacrilegious play entitled Christ in a Tuxedo. He was supposed to read two verses from the Sermon on the Mount, remove his gown, and cry out, "Give me my tuxedo and top hat!" But as he read the words, "Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are they that mourn, for they shall be comforted," he began to tremble. Instead of following the script, he kept reading from Matthew 5, ignoring the coughs, calls, and foot-stamping of his fellow actors. Finally, recalling a verse he had learned in his childhood in a Russian Orthodox church, he cried, "Lord, remember me when Thou comest into Thy kingdom!" (Luke 23:42). Before the curtain could be lowered, Rostovzev had trusted Jesus Christ as his personal Savior.

- J. K. Johnston, Why Christians Sin, p. 121

You see, it is as Paul said in Romans 1:16, "**For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ, for it is the power of God to salvation for everyone who believes, for the Jew first and also for the Greek.**" God's Word is living and it is powerful and it can transform our lives if we allow it to. That is why this is so important for us to understand and be able to trust that what God has said in His Word to us is truth, and it is!

Now, in our previous two studies on this subject we looked at some words that are used in regards to the Bible and granted, this may not seem important to you, but it truly is. You see, people will use these words when they speak about the Bible but many times they have different ideas of what they mean and we need to understand what they mean biblically speaking so if people speak wrongly regarding these words, we will know how to correct them or show them why what they are saying is wrong.

Let me just give you a quick review of the words we looked at in our previous studies and then we will finish up with the last two this morning. We have looked at the word **“revelation”** and we said that this word speaks of God making Himself known to us. And He does this through general revelation or through nature. As we look out into this world, even though it has been tainted by sin, we still see the hands of God, the creator of the Heavens and Earth, in it! But general revelation only shows us that there is a God, there is a Creator, there is a Designer, it does not show us who He is!

And that is where special revelation comes in and here it is God speaking to us through His Word, the Bible. And you can read from Genesis through Revelation God’s love for man, His creation and what He did to redeem man from the sin He was in. This special revelation shows us who God is and who we are and thus, why we need God in our lives.

We have also looked at the word, **“inspiration”** and this is speaking of the Holy Spirit working through the different writer’s personalities and literary styles and gave them these words to write down. It was not dictation, but the Holy Spirit moved these men to write these things and they did so in their own styles of writing. And thus, the Scriptures are the final authority for our faith and practice.

In this section we also dealt with two other words that deal with inspiration of the Scriptures. You see, the Scriptures have been referred to as being verbal and plenary in regards to inspiration. And what that means is this. When it speaks of verbal it is speaking that the words themselves are inspired by God and plenary takes it even farther and speaks of every part of the words and all they teach or imply are inspired by God! The Bible has been breathed out of the mouth of God to us. In other words, just as God created the Heavens and the Earth by the very words He spoke, so to do we see the Bible come into existence by God breathing these words out to man! And this inspiration extends to every part of the Scriptures, from Genesis through Revelation!

And the last word we looked at was the word *“inerrancy”* and it is very simple. This word is telling us that the Bible is without error in the original manuscripts! And if you don’t believe this you have a big problem. You see, if you can’t trust the Bible in one area then how can you trust it at all? You can’t!

So let’s finish up looking at these last two words that relate to the Bible, *“illumination”* and *“interpretation”*, and then we will rap this section up.

4. ILLUMINATION

Now when we speak of illumination we are speaking of what the Holy Spirit is doing in our lives as we read and hear the Word of God. It is one of the ministries of the Holy Spirit to illuminate the Word of God to us. And thus, this word can be defined like this. Illumination is that which happens when a truth of Scripture is made understandable by the Holy Spirit to the individual. In other words, it is the proper interpretation of the Scriptures as the Holy Spirit shines His light upon it.

Now in saying that you may be wondering what is the difference between inspiration and illumination? And there is a difference. You see, inspiration has to do with the influence upon the authors or writers of the Scriptures as God spoke to them which led them to write down those words. Illumination is a gift you might say, given to every believer by the Holy Spirit to interpret God's Word, His revelation to us. And let me be clear on this. This is not something that the unbeliever has; they can't interpret God's Word because they do not have the Holy Spirit in them. Yes, they may intellectually understand what the Bible says and think it is foolish, but most of the time they misinterpret what the Bible is saying because there is no illumination given to them by the Holy Spirit! In fact, one writer makes this statement about illumination and I think it is important that we understand it. He wrote, "The Spirit's work in interpretation is not to change the sense [of scripture] but to restore us to our senses." In other words, when you put this together with inspiration, he is saying that the one who inspired scripture cannot contradict himself when he illumines it. How important that is for us to understand!

You see, there are many today who make their own interpretation of what the Scriptures are saying and most of the time they are way out in left field on it. Don't you think that the one who wrote the Scriptures would be able to tell us what they mean? Of course He can and of course He will and of course He does!

So we are going to spend a little time looking at what the Holy Spirit is doing in our lives, how He desires to open up the Word of God to us, to shed light upon it so we might understand it. And to put it simply, illumination in the spiritual sense is "turning on the light" of understanding and specifically, the understanding of God's Word to us.

Listen to what Paul tells us in I Corinthians 2:6-16, **“However, we speak wisdom among those who are mature, yet not the wisdom of this age, nor of the rulers of this age, who are coming to nothing. But we speak the wisdom of God in a mystery, the hidden wisdom which God ordained before the ages for our glory, which none of the rulers of this age knew; for had they known, they would not have crucified the Lord of glory. But as it is written: ‘Eye has not seen, nor ear heard, Nor have entered into the heart of man The things which God has prepared for those who love Him.’ But God has revealed them to us through His Spirit. For the Spirit searches all things, yes, the deep things of God. For what man knows the things of a man except the spirit of the man which is in him? Even so no one knows the things of God except the Spirit of God. Now we have received, not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit who is from God, that we might know the things that have been freely given to us by God. These things we also speak, not in words which man's wisdom teaches but which the Holy Spirit teaches, comparing spiritual things with spiritual. But the natural man does not receive the things of the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him; nor can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned. But he who is spiritual judges all things, yet he himself is rightly judged by no one. For ‘who has known the mind of the Lord that he may instruct Him?’ But we have the mind of Christ.”**

Paul is speaking here of illumination or that the Holy Spirit is opening up to us the Word of God so that we can know what God desires of us. And Paul’s point is that the natural eye cannot see the things of God, the natural ear cannot hear the things of God, and the natural heart cannot know the things of God, the wisdom of God!

The reality is, I can't even know what another person is thinking let alone Almighty God! Then how can we know God? Because His Spirit will reveal the deep things of God to us, to those who love Him, to those who are searching for Him with their whole heart, to those who call upon Him! In other words, He will turn on the lights so that we can see what God is saying to us!

Now please understand that we can't know everything about God but He will reveal to us the things we do need to know as we read the Word of God and the Holy Spirit opens up the Word of God to us. But what about the things we don't know? In Deuteronomy 29:29 we are told, "**The secret things belong to the LORD our God, but those things which are revealed belong to us and to our children forever, that we may do all the words of this law.**" We have so much that God has told us, so much that He has shown us and thus, we need to apply those things to our lives instead of worrying about what we don't know!

Now what if you are lacking wisdom, the wisdom of God, what should you do? It is simple, just ask for it and God will freely give to each of us what we need, just ask and trust in God's Word, apply His Word to your life. And think about this, you have direct insight into the mind of God through the Spirit of God! Thus, as we are taught, we can teach others what God has given to us!

It is as Jesus said of the Holy Spirit in John 16:13, “**However, when He, the Spirit of truth, has come, He will guide you into all truth; for He will not speak on His own authority, but whatever He hears He will speak; and He will tell you things to come.**” You see, what the Spirit of God teaches us is always “truth” and we do not need to worry or try to figure out if it is right or if it is wrong, it is always truth, even when we don’t like it!

Now what about the person who is not saved? Paul does speak of that person here in I Corinthians chapter 2 and he calls him the “**natural man**” which comes from the Greek word, PSUCHIKOS (psoo-khee-kos’) and it speaks of a material person, one who lives for the day, it speaks of unregenerate man!

Thus, to go to a Bible study is foolish when they can have fun or go to work or do this or do that, because they just don’t get it! It is not only that they don’t want the things of God, but they also can’t understand them because they are spiritually discerned! The Psalmist understood this and said, “**Open my eyes, that I may see Wondrous things from Your law.**” Psalm 119:18. May that be our prayer as we open the Word of God!

In regards to the Word of God and the Holy Spirit, listen to what these men had to say:

Martin Luther said: “The Bible cannot be understood simply by study or talent; you must count only on the influence of the Holy Spirit.”

John Calvin said: “The testimony of the Spirit is superior to reason. For . . . these words will not obtain full credit in the hearts of men until they are sealed by the inward testimony of the Spirit.”

Also, Vance Havner gives to us this insight on the subject:

“The wise Christian wastes no time trying to explain God’s program to unregenerate men; it would be casting pearls before swine. He might as well try to describe a sunset to a blind man or discuss nuclear physics with a monument in the city park. The natural man cannot receive such things. One might as well try to catch sunbeams with a fishhook as to lay hold of God’s revelation unassisted by the Holy Spirit. Unless one is born of the Spirit and taught by Him, all this is utterly foreign to him. Being a Ph. D. does not help, for in this realm it could mean ‘Phenomenal Dud!’”

And Paul drives home this point regarding the natural man in verse 15 as Paul is saying that the natural man is not equipped to judge a spiritual man, he has no basis. That is not to say that the spiritual man is above criticism, for Paul is dealing with errors within the Corinthian church in this letter. The thing is the natural man does not see things as they should be, he says that good is evil and evil is good and thus, for a unsaved person to recognize something wrong with a saved person means that their sin is so blatant that even the unsaved recognize it and that is truly sad when that happens!

As Paul finishes up this teaching on illumination he is quoting from Isaiah 40:13 which is speaking of the mind of the Lord or the mind of *YAHWEH*. Interestingly enough Paul inserts Christ for “**LORD**” because, even though the Jehovah Witnesses disagree, Jesus is *YAHWEH*! Folks, we can know the mind of God because the Spirit of God can be understood by each and everyone of us. By Christians who take the time to study it, listen to teachers and are obedient to what the Holy Spirit is showing them, what God has already given to us. It is the Spirit of God that turns the light on so that we may see and understand what God is saying to us through His Word!

We also see this spoken of in Ephesians 1:17-18, “**that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give to you the spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of Him, the eyes of your understanding being enlightened; that you may know what is the hope of His calling, what are the riches of the glory of His inheritance in the saints.**”

Paul prays that they would know God. How important it is for us to understand that God is in control of our lives, that we understand God’s will for our lives. Paul is praying for them and us that we may know God, intimately, deeply, not a superficial knowledge of God! That the Holy Spirit would turn on the light so we may understand His Word for us! That the eyes of our understanding can be open so we can see God’s purposes in our lives!

Listen carefully to what Spurgeon wrote regarding this idea of illumination because I would agree with him, that this is something that is lacking today. People don't take the time to seek God, they have their own preconceived ideas about things and they don't listen to God and in the end, they are in the dark because they refused to allow the light of the Holy Spirit to show them the truth of God's Word, what God has for them. Spurgeon wrote this,

We would be abler teachers of others, and less liable to be carried about by every wind of doctrine, if we sought to have a more intelligent understanding of the Word of God.

As the Holy Spirit, the Author of the Scriptures, alone can enlighten us rightly to understand them, we should constantly ask His teaching and His guidance unto all truth. When the prophet Daniel sought to interpret Nebuchadnezzar's dream, what did he do? He set himself to earnest prayer that God would open up the vision.

Therefore, if, for your own and others' profiting, you desire to be 'filled with the knowledge of His will in all wisdom and spiritual understanding,' remember that prayer is your best means of study. Like Daniel, you shall understand the dream, and its interpretation, when you have sought God.

You may force your way through many barriers to understanding with the leverage of prayer.

Thoughts and reasoning's are like the steel wedges which give a hold on truth but prayer is the lever which open the treasure hidden within."

- C. H. Spurgeon

Therefore, it is through the illuminating ministry of the Holy Spirit that each believer is able to grow in his faith and mature in his faith because he is able to properly interpret the Word of God! Apart from this work of the Holy Spirit in our lives, we are in the dark! May we be open to what the Holy Spirit is showing us and keep in mind that the ultimate purpose of the teaching ministry of the Holy Spirit is to glorify Jesus! That is what illumination is all about!

5. INTERPRETATION

When we are talking about interpretation we are speaking of the correct understanding of the Scriptures, the correct meaning of what God is saying to us. Illumination sheds the light on the Scriptures and applying it to our lives. When we speak of interpretation we are talking about the reader seeking to understand the meaning of Scripture. In other words, when we read a biblical story, we need to understand the context of that passage and then, out of that the Holy Spirit opens it up or enlightens us to the application, which is the illumination part. Both illumination and interpretation are closely related but let me just give you several ways to help you as you read and study the Scriptures so that you will have a correct understanding of them and we will look at them in a minute. First, let me just expound a little more on this idea of interpretation.

One of the great needs today is determining what the Bible really teaches. Obviously that is important. You see, if the Bible is the Word of God and God's revelation to man, then surely God would not give us His revelation without a way to accurately discern what He meant. Think about it. If God did not give us a way to interpret the Bible and He left the interpretation of Scripture to human wisdom, that is at best faulty. To have the interpretation of Scripture rest on man's wisdom is to have "flesh" interpreting that which is spiritual.

So let's look at this for a minute. First of all the word "interpretation" means to arrive at the original meaning the writer intended when he penned the words. The original meaning the author intended is the interpretation and must be found before you can understand, apply or make the application of the passage. A faulty interpretation will produce a faulty application and therefore it is vital to correctly interpret the Scriptures.

Here lies the problem. Man has for various reasons misinterpreted God's word and left many in a state of confusion. Some out of ignorance teach erroneous doctrines. Others, who claim to teach God's word, are dishonest and use the Bible for their personal gain. Their purpose is not to teach truth, but rather to use it to deceive and influence men for their purposes. These false teachers deceive many people, but not those who make the effort to correctly know what God has said. It is my belief that the leaders of false churches and cults know they are in error, but are afraid the truth would destroy their churches or groups and they would lose power, influence and the money that they would receive. You see, false doctrine is very profitable. The Jehovah Witnesses are good at this. They will not let their people read anything but their material, no Christian teaching, why? Because the truth will set them free from the lies they believe!

Also, it is easy to see then, that many different sects of “Christendom” use the Bible to prove contradictory teachings. Paul Lee Tan, in his book *Literal Interpretation of the Bible* says, “Apparently the Bible can be made to prove almost anything.”

Considering all the contradictions in the various teachings all supposedly based on the Bible, one must ask the question, “Who is right?”

Surely, God is not teaching, for example, that one is saved by earning salvation by good works and also teaching man is saved by God’s Grace without works. God cannot contradict Himself nor can He lie. The question is then can God’s truth be determined with absolute certainty? Hanging in the balance is the very souls of men and their eternal destiny.

Where then is the problem? Paul tells us in I Corinthians 14:33, “**God, is not the author of confusion.**” So the problem is not with God, but with finite men. Clearly, men have gone to great lengths in interpreting what the Bible says to fit what they want it to say and not what God is trying to tell us. God did not give us His written word to be a source of confusion or contention. God gave us His word in written form, whereby it would be available so that everyone could know His truth.

Further, He wrote it in such a way as to be clear and not be complicated or misleading. He said in 2 Peter 1:20, “**Knowing this first, that no prophecy of the scripture is of any private interpretation.**” That simply means that no one person, church or group has a lock up on the God’s Word. The Scriptures can be understood by all. This answers the important question, “What church is right?” The answer is the ones that correctly interpret, understand and live by God’s Word. That is what I hope to help you with as we look at this list of how to interpret the Scriptures.

SIX RULES FOR BIBLE INTERPRETATION

1. DEFINITION

When I speak of definition I am talking about what the word means. And this can be a little tricky because the Greek language has more words than our English language. For instance we have one word for “love” in the English language while in Greek there are at least three and they are each specific and not general as we see with our word.

Now don't let this scare you because for the most part, words have a limited meaning. For instance, if you come across the word “mountain” in the Bible it is not going to mean tree or bird or fish, it is some geographical mound or hill. Using a dictionary or Greek/English lexicon may help us to understand words like “love” and their meaning.

And don't come to the conclusion that everything is an allegory or a metaphor because then you start taking away the events that have occurred, they are a fairy tale to expound on some kind of spiritual truth. No, the Bible is very clear when it is using allegories or stories to show something, but the majority of the Bible is to be taken literally except when the passage is using a metaphorical language. Think of it like this, “If the literal sense makes sense, seek no other sense.” I like that and it is a good way to remember this one, definition!

Let me give you one example before we move on. In Revelation 20:6 we are told, **“Blessed and holy is he who has part in the first resurrection. Over such the second death has no power, but they shall be priests of God and of Christ, and shall reign with Him a thousand years.”** Now there are those that are saying that this is just a figurative number, it really is not a 1,000 year reign of Christ. But let me ask you this, why would God inspire John to write this when this is not what He meant? That would make no sense.

And if it does not mean 1,000 years then how in the world are we going to determine what the real meaning is? When you leave the literal method of interpreting Scripture you have no means to determine what the passage says! And thus, it is left up to each person to determine for themselves what it means and you can have a wide variety of interpretations then, and we do see that today! And what does this bring about? It brings about confusion and God is not the author of confusion, so that can not be right. God says what He means and means what He says.

Let me give you one more example and I will show you what I mean on how people mishandle, misinterpret the Scriptures. We are told that,

When the preacher’s car broke down on a country road, he walked to a nearby roadhouse to use the phone. After calling for a tow truck, he spotted his old friend, Frank, drunk and shabbily dressed at the bar. “What happened to you, Frank?” asked the good reverend. “You used to be rich.”

Frank told a sad tale of bad investments that had led to his downfall. “Go home,” the preacher said. “Open your Bible at random, stick your finger on the page and there will be God’s answer.”

Some time later, the preacher bumped into Frank, who was wearing a Gucci suit, sporting a Rolex watch and had just stepped out of a Mercedes. “Frank.” said the preacher, “I am glad to see things really turned around for you.”

“Yes, preacher, and I owe it all to you,” said Frank. “I opened my Bible, put my finger down on the page and there was the answer - Chapter 11.”

- Reader's Digest, March, 1993, p. 71

Obviously that is the wrong way to interpret the Scriptures and sadly, many resort to things like that today! God never intended us to interpret them for our own personal ideas or gains, but has a specific message in mind for all of us and it is not Chapter 11! You see, definition will show us what is meant as we look at the words we are reading.

2. USAGE

Who was the Bible written to? Yes, all of mankind but specifically, the Old Testament was written by Jews to the Jewish people and thus, to understand it you have to understand the usage or practice or customs of the Jewish people. You can't approach the Scriptures with a western mindset because you will come up with the wrong interpretation. Look at the Feasts of Israel and as you understand what they were about you will have a better picture of Christ and the work He came to do. Look at the Tabernacle and its furnishings and as you do you will have another beautiful picture of Christ and the work He came to do. You see, you can't separate the Scriptures from its Jewish roots or you will miss what they are trying to say! Usage is important, the customs, the practices of the people that the Lord wrote to and through!

3. CONTEXT

When you buy a house the key to selling it is, “Location, location, location!” Well, when it comes to interpreting Scripture it all boils down to this, “Context, context, context!” In other words, every word you read must be understood in light of the words that come before and after it. If you don’t look at the context you can come to a faulty or wrong conclusion and sadly, many do this to prove their point, but that does not make them right because what they are saying was taken out of context!

One person put it like this, “Seeking the biblical author’s intended meaning necessitates interpreting Bible verses in context. Every word in the Bible is part of a verse, and every verse is part of a paragraph, and every paragraph is part of a book, and every book is part of the whole of Scripture. No verse of Scripture can be divorced from the verses around it. Interpreting a verse apart from its context is like trying to analyze a Rembrandt painting by looking at only a single square inch of the painting. The context is absolutely critical to properly interpreting Bible verses.”

A good rule to follow is this, “A text without a context is only a pretext.” In other words, it is speaking of a false reason or motive put forth to hide the real one! And thus, it is impossible to understand any statement without considering its context!

Also, we must keep in mind that the interpretation of a specific passage must not contradict the total teaching of Scripture on a point. Individual verses do not exist as isolated fragments, but as parts of a whole. The exposition of these verses, therefore, must involve exhibiting them in right relation both to the whole and to each other.

Scripture interprets Scripture. Thus, ***CONTEXT, CONTEXT, CONTEXT!***

4. HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

This one also can go along the lines of context and that is the historical background of what you are reading. In other words, you have to have some awareness, some knowledge of life during that period of time in which it was written. That is not to say when the Bible speaks of scientific things it will be wrong, but understand the culture of the day, that is important! And yes, the spiritual principle will be timeless and is timeless, but don't negate the background in which it was written.

You see, the Christian faith is based upon historical fact, it rests, for instance on the historical Jesus and not just some story! Let me give you an example so you can see what I mean. When Paul wrote to the Corinthian church, he was writing to a group of people that were living in a very immoral society and some of that came into the church and Paul was correcting them on this. To understand what was going on in Corinth at that time helps us to understand why Paul said what he did! Yes, we can take what Paul wrote and apply it to our day but don't forget that letter was written to the Corinthian church even though it has a spiritual application for us! So looking at the historical background is important for us to understand what was happening then and it is then we can make the spiritual application for us because the Holy Spirit wrote this through Paul and the other writers of the Bible with all of us in mind, He can illuminate it for us. Historical background, don't lose sight of it!

5. INTERPRET WITH A CONNECTION TO OUR FAITH

The next one is simple; we need to interpret the Scriptures with a connection or correlation to our faith. In other words, the Bible does not contradict itself. If you read in the letters of Paul that our salvation is based on grace alone through faith alone in Christ alone, that is clear. But, when you read the letter of James it seems to be saying that we are saved by works and not by faith. So who is right? Is this a contradiction in the Bible, a big one? No not at all. Paul is speaking of the means of our salvation, that it is based in grace alone by faith alone in Christ alone. While James is writing about how we live out our faith, that our faith is not dead but it is active. You see, James is not contradicting what Paul has said, he is expounding on it and making it applicable to our faith, how we live out our faith!

Here's the thing. If one portion of Scripture seems to contradict another, the problem is not the Bible but the interpreter! And I truly believe as you read the Bible, as you pray and ask the Holy Spirit to open a passage up to you, He will help you to interpret it correctly. You see, if God wrote these words for us, or more correctly breathed them out to us, then God cannot lie and thus, what He has said is true and He will not contradict Himself!

6. DEPENDENCE UPON THE HOLY SPIRIT

The last one we will look at this morning is our dependence upon the Holy Spirit and we touched on this one briefly with our last section. If you try to approach the Scriptures with the wisdom of man, your intellect, then that is what you will get out of it, man's wisdom, which is nothing compared to our all knowing God! I realize that some have a hard time with this because we think we can figure it out, but we can't.

Listen to what Jesus said in John 16:12-15, **"I still have many things to say to you, but you cannot bear them now. However, when He, the Spirit of truth, has come, He will guide you into all truth; for He will not speak on His own authority, but whatever He hears He will speak; and He will tell you things to come. He will glorify Me, for He will take of what is Mine and declare it to you. All things that the Father has are Mine. Therefore I said that He will take of Mine and declare it to you."**

Listen carefully to what Jesus is saying here. First of all these men were going to need further instructions; they were not ready for all that Jesus had for them at this time. But when the Holy Spirit comes, He will teach them all truth, He will give to them the things that they will need, and He continues to teach us today! He gives to us all truth and where is truth found? It is found in the Word of God and it is the Holy Spirit that not only illuminates the Word of God to us but also interprets it for us!

And notice the function of the Holy Spirit, to reveal Jesus to us and that is done through the Word of God, the exercise of the gifts, and-so-on. The truth tester is simple, does it agree with God's Word and is it revealing Jesus to us! That is the work of the Holy Spirit! In other words, it is the Holy Spirit's function to throw light upon the Word of God so that the believer can understand the meaning that is intended and then we can act upon it. Faith put into action!

I believe the Scriptures are very clear on this. To fully understand the Word of God it is going to be impossible without the prayerful dependence upon the Spirit of God. And think about this for a minute. He is the one who inspired the Word and thus, He is the supreme interpreter!

Now in saying that let me also make these couple of points. First of all, the Holy Spirit is not going to guide us into interpretations that contradict each other or fail to have a logical consistency to them. Secondly, the Holy Spirit is not going to give us new doctrine that is not already contained in the Word of God. In other words, the Holy Spirit makes us wise in what is written and not beyond what is written! The Holy Spirit does not communicate to us new truth but illuminates what is revealed in the Scripture already! I hope that is clear! And thus, we need to have a dependence upon the Holy Spirit as we interpret the Scriptures!

So we have seen that in ***Revelation*** God reveals Himself to us, through creation that there is a God and through the Word, who He is! We have seen in ***Inspiration*** that God's Word, the Bible has been breathed from the mouth of God to us, the 66 books that make up the Bible. There is no new inspiration! We have seen in ***Inerrancy*** that these 66 books are without error in their original manuscripts and what we have today is very accurate, there are no major doctrinal changes in the manuscripts that have been found and we will look at that more as we look at the texts of the New Testament and the Old Testament!

And this morning, as we have looked at ***Illumination***, which speaks of the Holy Spirit shedding light upon the Scriptures so that we can see clearly what God is saying. And then in ***Interpretation*** how we must follow what the Scriptures are saying for they are not for our own private interpretation, but God has a specific meaning to what He is showing us!

As we look at the Scriptures and try to determine what they are saying, we have certain guidelines you might say to help us and more importantly we have the Holy Spirit because the best interpreter of the Scriptures is the one who wrote them, God Himself!

Let me close with this. We are told,

In certain spots the contour of hills gives a tremendous illusion that the law of gravity is askew. Near Los Angeles is a hill where thousands of motorists stop their cars, shut off the engines, release the brakes and seemingly roll up hill. But a plumb level placed on the ground where the cars "roll up hill," will be shown immediately that the cars are actually rolling down hill. The eye can be deceived; the level cannot.

God has given us a similar apparatus - the Bible. When my situation in life is placed next to the Word of God, the Holy Spirit immediately establishes the true aspects of the situation and reveals whatever unevenness or distortion there is. It is not safe to form judgments on the basis of our sense or our emotions – we must prove all things, test all things (I Thessalonians 5:21).

- Donald Grey Barnhouse, Timeless
Illustrations for Preaching and Teaching, p. 9

May we never lose sight of the treasure that God has given to us in His Word and may we not only read it, but apply it to our lives to help us to grow in Christ, to be more like Him. God has given us His Word so that we may grow, how are you doing?