

## 09.05.2020 WHY IS INTERPRETATION NEEDED?

***But without faith it is impossible to please Him, for he who comes to God must believe that He is, and that He is a rewarder of those who diligently seek Him. Hebrews 11:6***

The Bible is God's Word written down. It was written mainly in Hebrew and Greek which most people are not familiar with today. It is essential that the Bible be interpreted accurately and clearly to know what God says in the Bible. As students of the Bible, we should be keen to get the accurate message of the Bible. As human beings we are not infallible, but the Bible is infallible.

### **Why Interpretation is Important**

"Hermeneutics" is the technical name given to the science of interpreting Scripture

How do we know we are reading and interpreting the Bible aright?

God has given us 3 helps:

1. The Enlightenment of the Holy Spirit
2. The Christian's own personal Bible study in dependence on the Holy Spirit.
3. The Church

God has given us also principles to guide us in interpretation of the Bible. We will look at these in coming weeks.

Three helps:

#### The Enlightenment of the Holy Spirit

If the Biblical authors spoke from God, not on their own impulse but as they were moved by the Holy Spirit (2 Pet. 1:21), it is the Holy Spirit who can interpret what He caused them to speak. The best interpreter of every book is its author, since he alone knows what he intended to say. So God's book can be interpreted by God's Spirit alone.

1. The Holy Spirit enlightens the Christian i.e. one who is born-again – see 1 Corinthians 2:14
2. The Holy Spirit enlightens the humble – Matthew 11:25, 26, Psalm 119:18, Ephesians 1:17-19
3. The Holy Spirit enlightens the obedient – John 7:17;
4. The Holy Spirit enlightens those who communicate what they have learnt – Mark 4:21-25

#### The Christian's own personal Bible study in dependence on the Holy Spirit

As the Spirit enlightens us we are to use our reason/mind to study God's word conscientiously and regularly.

God is not pleased with ignorance due to lack of industry or using our common sense – see Luke 12:57, 1 Corinthians 10:1; 12:1.

God wants us judge what we are taught (1 Corinthians 10:15), to eat the words (1 John 4:1), to be fully convinced in our own minds (Romans 14:5), to be mature enough to judge between good and evil (Hebrews 5:14).

We should not approach Bible with pride and without prayer. Neither should we be lazy and undisciplined about Bible study.

#### The Church

God uses the pastoral and teaching ministry in the church to help us interpret Scripture. Pastors and teachers are gifts given to the Church by the risen Christ – Ephesians 4:11, 12.

*Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly in all wisdom, teaching and admonishing one another...Colossians 3:16*

## Our Sinful and Fallen Nature

We must never forget that, even after conversion, we are ‘miserable offenders’ because of our sinful, fallen, self-centred and selfish natures.

That is why we need to come to the Word with prayer and an attitude of humility, confessing our need of the Spirit’s illumination of God’s revelation.

*“Because you say, ‘I am rich, have become wealthy, and have need of nothing’—and do not know that you are wretched, miserable, poor, blind, and naked— I counsel you to buy from Me gold refined in the fire, that you may be rich; and white garments, that you may be clothed, that the shame of your nakedness may not be revealed; **and anoint your eyes with eye salve, that you may see.**” Revelation 3:17, 18*

## Presuppositions

Presuppositions are preconceived ideas or assumptions that we hold either consciously or unconsciously.

Our human presuppositions and assumptions are unreliable because of our sinful human nature.

It is therefore essential that we depend on the Spirit’s illumination to interpret Scripture correctly.

For example, many Christians assume that the first 11 chapters of Genesis are only legend. Such an assumption denies that God is the author of the entire Bible and denies God as Creator. It denies the institutions of Sabbath and Marriage.

When we read the Bible, we do it on the presupposition that God exists and God communicates to man through the Scriptures.

*But without faith it is impossible to please Him, **for he who comes to God must believe that He is, and that He is a rewarder of those who diligently seek Him.** Hebrews 11:6*

## Translation and Interpretation

Every serious Bible student must train himself to understand the language of the Bible.

Today most of us read a translation. **The best translations are careful, accurate, scholarly translations** such as the King James Version, or revisions of the KJV such as the New King James version, Revised version or Revised Standard version. The Good News Bible is reliable and has simple, easy to understand language. Paraphrases such as The Message or the Living Bible should only be regarded as additional helps.

**A good analytical Concordance** like Strong’s is very valuable because it gives the original Hebrew or Greek of the English words and then gives their meaning as well.

For many centuries scholars were not able to recognize the kind of Greek in which the New Testament was written. It was neither classical Greek nor modern Greek. Some thought it was made up specially for the purpose. They even called it “the language of the Holy Ghost.” But towards the close of the last century, in the dry sands of Egypt, archaeologists began to discover large quantities of ancient papyrus rolls. They were mostly secular and non-literary documents. They were written in common or everyday Greek, known as ‘*koine*’ or common language Greek.

In reading the words of the Bible, we should look first for their obvious meaning...‘the plain ordinary meaning of the words’.

**The Bible is best read as a book**, not as a digital version, but there are some instances when the internet is helpful. [www.biblegateway.com](http://www.biblegateway.com) introduces us to many translations and paraphrased versions of the Bible in many languages.

Strong’s Concordance is available free on the internet from sites such as <https://www.blueletterbible.org/>

Some limitations of internet versions:

1. Please note that internet versions of the Bible may not have the cross references seen with the printed versions (these are helpful aids in Bible study).
2. Some digital versions of the Bible are inaccurate, with verses or passages truncated or deleted,

## The Bible and Culture

Since God's revelation through the Bible writers was given at a particular time in history and in a particular location, this meant it had a particular cultural setting.

Are we to reject Biblical teaching when it is culturally outdated? John Stott has some helpful advice on this...

'We should neither reject the teaching because it is culturally dated nor try to invest it with permanent validity. **It would be better to accept the Biblical instruction as permanently binding, but to translate it into contemporary cultural terms.**'

He addresses the issue of women's status, behaviour and dress:

A more difficult example of the tension between the permanently valid and the culturally dated concerns the status, behaviour and dress of women. Are we to retain all the detailed biblical requirements, or—in deference to many voices in the "Women's Lib" movement—jettison the lot? Again there seems to be a wiser middle course. Consider the question of the veiling of women, to which Paul devotes half a chapter in First Corinthians (11). He insists that it is dishonourable, even disgraceful, for a woman to pray or prophesy in public with her head unveiled. He appeals to reason, nature, ecclesiastical custom and his own apostolic authority in support of his teaching. What are we to make of this? Perhaps the commonest and most superficial reaction is to suppose that the apostle's requirement is met if women wear hats in church. But eastern veils and western hats are entirely different, theologically as well as culturally! One of the crucial statements of Paul's argument occurs in verse 10 where, in referring to a woman's duty "to have a veil on her head" (RSV), he actually writes that she ought to wear "authority" (RSV margin and New International Version) on her head. This is the point. In those days the veil a woman wore was a symbol of her husband's authority over her. Not only does a woman's hat not have this significance today, but some modern modes appear to symbolize the exact reverse—liberation, not submission. What is permanently valid in Paul's teaching is the authority of the husband, for he grounds it on unchanging theological truths concerning creation. What is culturally dated is the veil. We must find other social customs which express a woman's acceptance of the authority which God has given to man. In addition, we must be very careful how we interpret the husband's "authority." The word is by no means a synonym for authoritarianism. Nor can it be taken to express any "superiority" of the male or "inferiority" of the female. For—centuries in advance of his time—Paul emphatically declared that in Christ "there is neither ... male nor female" (Gal. 3:28). He also drew a profound analogy between the relationship of husband and wife in marriage and the relationship between the Father and the Son in the Godhead (1 Cor. 11:3). This suggests that the husband's "headship" over his wife is not incompatible with their equality, any more than is the Father's "headship" over Christ. Perhaps the husband's authority should be understood in terms rather of responsibility than of autocracy, the responsibility of a loving care. **It is essential to recognize that the purpose of "cultural transposition" (the practice of transposing the teaching of Scripture from one culture into another) is not to avoid obedience but rather to ensure it.**

## Conclusion:

'In your study of the Word, lay at the door of investigation your preconceived opinions and your hereditary and cultivated ideas. You will never reach the truth if you study the Scriptures to vindicate your own theories. Leave these at the door, and with contrite heart go in to hear what the Lord has to say to you. As the humble seeker for truth sits at Christ's feet, and learns of Him, the Word gives him understanding. To those who are too wise in their own conceit to study the Bible, Christ says, "You must become meek and lowly in heart, if you desire to become wise unto salvation."

Do not read the Word in the light of former opinions. Do not try to make everything agree with your creed. With a mind free from prejudice, search the Word carefully. If, as you read, conviction comes, and you see that your cherished opinions are not in harmony with the Word, do not try to make the Word fit these opinions. Do not

allow what you have believed or practiced in the past to control your understanding. Open the eyes of your mind to behold wondrous things out of the Word.' *Signs of the Times 03.10.1906*

***I will meditate on Your precepts, and contemplate Your ways. I will delight myself in Your statutes; I will not forget Your word. Psalm 119:15, 16***

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