

The History and Significance of Premillennialism

Lesson #4 The Use of a Proper Hermeneutic ⁰⁶⁴¹

I. Introduction

The Scriptures are a message from God. All of them are a message from God. The difficulty in our responsibility before God is to receive His message correctly, accurately, and obediently! Often this is a simple and inherently intuitive task.

But, it must be understood that there are some difficulties before us in interpreting some important Scripture passages correctly and thus receiving the message that God intended. Clearly we must understand that most Christians in the history of Christianity have to some degree failed in this task. This includes for discussion, most of:

- The Roman Catholic Church and its members.
- The Eastern Orthodox Church and its members.
- Liberal Protestantism and its members.
- Heretical denominations such as Deism, Unity, Jehovah's Witnesses, Mormons, etc.
- Evangelical churches with weak teaching (edification of the saints) including:
 - Arminian churches.
 - Charismatic churches.
 - Most main stream conservative churches.
 - Etc., etc.
- Evangelical, born again Christians who refuse to be edified and to do the work.

And in truthfulness, we all occasionally make a mistake (of relative insignificance), but that is no excuse to treat the interpretation of God's Word as a serious matter and that we would apply serious effort to learn it and get it right! To give up trying to interpret difficult passages correctly is nothing more or less than unfaithfulness towards God.

II. Article: Eight Rules on How to Interpret the Bible

The following article gives 8 rules regarding proper interpretation of Scriptures. This is very short and concise and is certainly not intended to replace a book (suggested in Section III. below) on Hermeneutics.

HERMENEUTICS: HOW TO INTERPRET THE BIBLE ⁰⁷⁵³

2 Pet 1:19-20 *And so we have the prophetic word made more sure, to which you do well to pay attention as to a lamp shining in a dark place, until the day dawns and the morning star arises in your hearts. But know this first of all, that no prophecy of Scripture is a matter of one's own interpretation.*

We can't have a "sure word" about the meaning of Scripture (or anything else) unless we have a sure method to interpret the words.

The following eight rules are the center of all grammatical interpretation. They have been accepted and used by scholars from Socrates to the present. While my hope is that they will be used to "rightly divide the word of truth" of the Holy Bible, they are equally applicable to legal, historical, and other such language.

Since the [Bible](#) teaches that God is not the author of confusion [[1 Cor. 14:33](#)], how can the many disagreements today between Christians and the proliferation of the cults be explained since all, or nearly all, claim to use the Bible as the basis of their doctrines?

Nearly all false doctrines taught today by Christians and cultists alike can be traced to the distortion of the meaning of Biblical words. These eight rules are prayerfully offered in the hope that they may help many come to the truth of what God says in His Word.

The Rev. Guy Duty said in his book *Divorce & Remarriage*:

"When two interpretations are claimed for a Scripture, the construction most in agreement with all the facts of the case should be adopted. When all the facts of an interpretation are in agreement they sound together in harmony, like notes in a chord. Biblical interpretation is more than knowing a set of rules, but it cannot be done without the rules. So, learn the rules, and rightly apply them...." (*Divorce & Remarriage*, Minneapolis: Bethany House, 1967)

Here are the eight rules:

1. The rule of **DEFINITION**: What does the word mean? Any study of Scripture must begin with a study of words. Define your terms and then keep to the terms defined. The interpreter should conscientiously abide by the plain meaning of the words. This quite often may require using a Hebrew/English or Greek/English lexicon in order to make sure that the sense of the English translation is understood. A couple of good examples of this are the Greek words "allos" and "heteros". Both are usually translated as "another" in English – yet "allos" literally means "another of the same type" and "heteros" means "another of a different type."

[**Examples:** from which we get the English words – heterosexual as opposed to homosexual; heterodoxy vs. orthodoxy; heterography; heteromorphic; heteronym; etc.]

[**Example:** Mt 12:45, "other" *ἕτερος heteros* (**Str. 2087**) **98x**]

2. The rule of **USAGE**: It must be remembered that the Old Testament was written originally by, and for Jews. The words and idioms must have been intelligible to them – just as the words of Christ when talking to them must have been. The majority of the New Testament likewise was written in a milieu of Greco-Roman (and to a lesser extent Jewish) culture and it is important to not impose our modern usage into our interpretation. It is not worth much to interpret a great many phrases and histories if one's interpretations are shaded by pre-conceived notions and cultural biases, thereby rendering an inaccurate and ineffectual lesson.
3. The rule of **CONTEXT**: The meaning must be gathered from the context. Every word you read must be understood in the light of the words that come before and after it. Many passages will not be understood at all, or understood incorrectly, without the help afforded by the context. A good example of this is the Mormon practice of using [1 Cor. 8:5b](#): "...for there be gods many and lords many..." as a "proof text" of their doctrine of polytheism. However, a simple reading of the whole verse in the context of the whole chapter (e.g. where Paul calls these gods "so-called"), plainly demonstrates that Paul is not teaching polytheism.

[**Question:** *Tell us, when will these things happen, and what will be the sign of Your coming, and of the end of the age?* Mt 24:3]

[**Answer:** *But when the Son of Man comes in His glory, and all the angels with Him, then He will sit on His glorious throne. All the nations will be gathered before him; and He will separate them from one another, as the shepherd separates the sheep from the goats; and He will put the sheep on His right, and the goats on the left.* Mt 25:31-33]

4. The rule of **HISTORICAL BACKGROUND**: The interpreter must have some awareness of the life and society of the times in which the Scripture was written. The spiritual principle will be timeless but often can't be properly appreciated without some knowledge of the background. If the interpreter can have in his mind what the writer had in his mind when he wrote – without adding any excess baggage from the interpreter's own culture or society – then the true thought of the Scripture can be captured

resulting in an accurate interpretation. Oliver Wendell Holmes said, "Our only interest in the past is for the light it throws upon the present."

[**Example:** Rev 2:7b *To him who overcomes, I will grant to eat of the tree of life which is in the Paradise of God.* The New American Commentary on the book of Revelation, Vol. 39, pp. 89-91 discusses how this mention of the "tree of life" relates to this church in Ephesus. See also The Expositor's Bible Commentary by Frank E Gaebelien; Vol 12; pp. 435-436.]

5. The rule of **LOGIC**: Interpretation is merely logical reasoning. When interpreting Scripture, the use of reason is everywhere to be assumed. Does the interpretation make sense? The Bible was given to us in the form of human language and therefore appeals to human reason – it invites investigation. It is to be interpreted as we would any other volume: applying the laws of language and grammatical analysis.

As Bernard Ramm said:

"What is the control we use to weed out false theological speculation? Certainly the control is logic and evidence... interpreters who have not had the sharpening experience of logic...may have improper notions of implication and evidence. Too frequently such a person uses a basis of appeal that is a notorious violation of the laws of logic and evidence." (*Protestant Biblical Interpretation*, Boston: W. A. Wilde, 1956)

6. The rule of **PRECEDENT**: We must not violate the known usage of a word and invent another for which there is no precedent. Just as a judge's chief occupation is the study of previous cases, so must the interpreter use precedents in order to determine whether they really support an alleged doctrine. Consider the Bereans in [Acts 17:10-12](#) who were called "noble" because they searched the Scriptures to determine if what Paul taught them was true.
7. The rule of **UNITY**: The parts of Scripture being interpreted must be construed with reference to the significance of the whole. An interpretation must be consistent with the rest of Scripture. An excellent example of this is the doctrine of the Trinity. No single passage teaches it, but it is consistent with the teaching of the whole of Scripture (e.g. the Father, Jesus, and the Holy Spirit are referred to individually as God; yet the Scriptures elsewhere teach there is only one God).

[**Trinity Passages:** Gen 1:26; Gen 3:22; Ps 110:1; Is 9:6; Is 44:6; Mt 3:16-17; Mt 4:1; Mt 28:19; Mk 2:5-7; Lk 1:35; Lk 3:21-22; Jn 1:1-2; Jn 1:29-34; Jn 5:19-23; Jn 6:27; Jn 10:33b; Jn 10:38b; Jn 12:27-28; Jn 14:6-11; Jn 14:16; Jn 14:23-28; Jn 15:15; Jn 15:26-27; Jn 16:5-15; Jn 16:25-28; Jn 17:1-8; Jn 17:21-26; Rom 1:1-9; Rom 5:1-10; Rom 8:1-17; Rom 15:16 & 30; 1 Cor 11:3; 1 Cor 12:3-7; 1 Cor 15:22-28; 2 Cor 1:21-23; 2 Cor 13:14; Gal 4:6-9; Eph 3:14-17; Eph 4:4-6; Phil 2:9-11; Col 1:15-19; 1 Tim 6:13-16; Titus 1:4; Heb 1:1-14; Heb 9:14; 1 Pet 2:2-7;

8. The rule of **INFERENCE**: An inference is a fact reasonably implied from another fact. It is a logical consequence. It derives a conclusion from a given fact or premise. It is the deduction of one proposition from another proposition. Such inferential facts or propositions are sufficiently binding when their truth is established by competent and satisfactory evidence. Competent evidence means such evidence as the nature of the thing to be proved admits. Satisfactory evidence means that amount of proof which would ordinarily satisfy an unprejudiced mind beyond a reasonable doubt. Jesus used this rule when he proved the resurrection of the dead to the unbelieving Sadducees in [Matt. 22:23-33](#).

See also: [Discernment](#) — *the act or process of exhibiting keen insight and good judgment.*

Learning these eight rules and properly applying them will help keep any interpreter from making errors and will hopefully alleviate many of the disagreements unfortunately present in Christianity today. However, these eight principles are no substitute for the Holy Spirit which will, if you let Him, guide you

in the truth [[John 14:26](#)]. If you receive Christ into your heart, God will give you the Holy Spirit freely as a gift [[Acts 2:38](#)]. I urge you, if you have not already done so, to examine the claims and the work of Jesus Christ and to receive Him as your Savior.

This paper will close with some words from King Solomon, the wisest man who ever lived, excepting our Lord Jesus Christ:

Pr 1:5-6 *A wise man will hear, and will increase learning; and a man of understanding shall attain unto wise counsels: to understand a proverb, and the interpretation.*

<https://www.apologeticsindex.org/5846-biblical-interpretation-rules>

III. Suggested Hermeneutics Books for Lay Use

<u>Title</u>	<u>Author</u>	<u>Length</u>
• A Basic Guide to Interpreting the Bible;	Robert H. Stein;	202 pp.
• Basic Bible Interpretation;	Roy B. Zuck;	292 pp.
• 40 Questions About Interpreting the Bible;	Robert L. Plummer;	325 pp.
• Living by the Book;	Howard & William Hendricks;	340 pp.

Some Important Quotes

Fundamentally, the devil questioned the authority of the Word of God, and the devil's servants have been questioning it ever since. Questioning the authority of God's Word is tantamount to questioning God Himself, and questioning whether God's sacred Word contains errors is in fact questioning God's ability to do all things perfectly. If we question God's Word, we have set ourselves up as a higher tribunal than God and have declared ourselves judges of God and His Word. Nevertheless, as Bible-believing Christians, we must not simply refrain from questioning the truth of God's Word, and we must not merely believe that God's Word is true, but we must actually believe God's Word and submit to it in all of life as we live *Coram Deo*, before His face. **Burk Parsons**; from *3/15 Tabletalk*; p. 2

Just as the Bible was used to justify one philosophical school over another in the Middle Ages, in our day it is shaped like a wax nose to suit the latest fad. The problem is that this happens in churches that claim fidelity to the inerrancy of Scripture. The unfaithfulness is difficult to mark objectively, since there is a high view of Scripture in theory, whatever the practice. While liberals of various stripes undercut biblical authority by direct assaults, evangelicals of various stripes are today undermining biblical authority by claiming one thing in theory (the authority of an inerrant Bible) while in practice giving priority to secular disciplines and popular culture in defining and shaping the spiritual diet. Theology is considered irrelevant, whereas "practical" tips for success in business, marriage, child rearing, and personal self-fulfillment seem to suddenly be the Bible's major preoccupation. In other words, the Bible is meant to say things that it does not actually say and to be interested in things it does not actually show a marked concern for, and all the while it is still touted as inerrant and inspired. But after it has been made "relevant" to our "felt needs," it is no longer the Bible; it is actually our culture that is speaking in the guise of the Scripture. **Michael Horton**; from *The Coming Evangelical Crisis*; p. 253