

20 Hermeneutic Principles

by Phil Myers, [1994, rev 2020]

1

IV. Twenty Principles of Biblical Interpretation

8 most important are at the top

- 1) non-contradiction
 - 2) context
 - 3) compare Scripture with Scripture
 - 4) literal/grammatical/historical
 - 5) only one interpretation
 - 6) same author
 - 7) clear verses & unclear verses
 - 8) T.B.D.S.
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- 9) genre
 - 10) progressive illumination
 - 11) dispensational approach
 - 12) historical orthodox position
 - 13) parables
 - 14) audience
 - 15) cultural background
 - 16) accommodation
 - 17) types of Christ
 - 18) weight of the doctrine
 - 19) mysteries
 - 20) devotional

Principle #1: Non-Contradiction, no Scripture contradicts any other portion of Scripture

The Word of God has not one statement or verse which abrogates or contradicts any other verse. No part of the Bible may be interpreted so as to countermand another part of the Bible. The Christian presupposes the inerrancy and harmony of Scripture as necessary. Proper application of hermeneutical principles will resolve apparent conflicts.

Principle #2 The Principle of Context

All Scripture hangs together. Context includes 4 basic elements:

- a. surrounding paragraphs, preceding and following [*may include location within the book as well as the Testament*]
- b. the speaker
- c. the audience
- d. the historical time period [*Abraham? Moses? kings? Jesus? Church? Future?*]

Principle #3: Comparing Scripture with Scripture: clear vs unclear partial vs complete near vs far [*fulfillments of prophecy*]

God did not reveal any important doctrine in just a single, ambiguous passage. All essential doctrines are fully and clearly explained; howbeit, sometimes requiring many hours of cross-referencing. When engaged in "topical Bible study and preaching" there are three essential 'rules':

- 1) the context of the two passages must be the same
- 2) unclear passages are always understood in the light of clear passages.
- 3) the closer the cross-reference, the better
 - a) same chapter
 - b) same book
 - c) same author, different book
 - d) same testament
 - e) same context in different testament

Principle #4: The Literal-Grammatical-Historical Sense Principle [*sometimes called the Common Sense Principle*]

We take the Bible at face value.

The golden rule of interpretation is: "When the plain sense of the Scripture makes sense, seek no other sense." Therefore, the first step is to take every word at its primary, prevalent, usual meaning, "literally, unless the context clearly mitigates against it."
anon

This is Ockham's Razor: among competing hypotheses, the one with the fewest assumptions tends to be preferred.

The study of definitions, grammar, and syntax of the original languages is important for a proper understanding of Scripture. We cannot lift statements off a page without carefully considering the whole sentence. That would disparagingly be called "proof texting" [*finding any text at all to support your erroneous assumption or bias*].

Even figures of speech the Bible are based on the literal meaning of the words of the text; thus the literal meaning is foundational to any symbolic or allegorical meaning, taking into account cultural elements, metaphores, and parables.

Principle #5: Only One Interpretation is Correct, the Meaning(s) God had in mind. Applications may be many.

Every verse in the Bible has only one interpretation—one meaning. Many verses may have several applications to our daily lives. The one correct interpretation(s) is that which mirrors the intent of God and the inspired writer. This automatically negates the opportunity to ask "What does it mean to me?"

STATEMENT: Joseph is sold to Egypt.
meaning: Joseph is sold to Egypt

APPLICATIONS:

- We can trust God in tough times.
- Even people we know can betray us, don't be surprised.
- Regardless of what people intend, God can use it for His glory.
- Joe didn't gripe—neither should I!

Principle #6: The Same Author Principle

Not all writers use every word in exactly the same way as other writers, e.g. "The Last Trumpet."

- a. Matthew's last trumpet occurs at the **end** of the Tribulation Matthew 24.31
- b. Paul's last trumpet occurs at Rapture, **before** the Trib I Cor 15.52
- c. John's last trumpet occurs in the **middle** of the Tribulation Rev 11.15

When in question about a word or phrase, see if the author of the book uses the identical word [*in Greek or Hebrew as well as English*] in another place with the same context.

APPENDICES

- A. 10 Presuppositions
- B. Applications of Herm.
- C. Some Vocab Definitions
- D. 11 Common Mistakes
- E. Why We Make Mistakes
- F. 2 Errant Schools of Interp.

20 Hermeneutic Principles

2

Principle #7 Understand the Unclear Verses in the Light of the Clear Verses

When we come to passages which seem to have many interpretations, it is imperative to focus on the clear teachings concerning those topics.

No important doctrine stands alone. When God speaks, He doesn't stutter, but we all have to admit that we wish He had said some things more crisply. Continually return to the passages which have the fewest distractions.

This is exceptionally important with such doctrines as false doctrine, and issues like remarriage.

[See my blog on Remarriage.](#)

n.b. We deny that all passages of Scripture dealing with redemption carry equal weight. We affirm that that NT teachings make salvation clearer than OT refs [e.g., Eph 2.8,9 1 John 5.13 Titus 3.5].

Principle #8: T.B.D.S. The Bible Doesn't Say

It is imperative to remember that God didn't intend to answer every question that you and I might ask. We must be careful not to "read into" any verse or paragraph items which are not there.

We need to be content that our Heavenly Father had said all He intended to say when He finished writing.

Principle #9: The Genre [*zhahn-ruh*] Principle

Genre is a term having to do with the category or "species" of literature. Proper interpretation must take the literary category of any given passage into consideration: poetry, prose, narrative, didactic, polemic, or prophecy, e.g.,

Whose turn is it to speak in Job?

Is the speaker in Job biblically correct or incorrect?

Does God have feathers? [*Ps 91.4*]

The concomitants of figures of speech, innuendos, similes, metaphors, and anthropomorphisms must be considered here also.

Principle #10: The Progressive Illumination [*revelation*] Principle

The relationship of the Old Testament to the New Testament is like a flower unfolding its petals to the morning sun. God did not reveal His truths all at one time. "The Old Testament is the New Testament concealed, and the New Testament is the Old Testament revealed." *Augustine in Novum Testamentum AD 500*

All classroom teachers apply this principle as they build upon past lessons. Multiplication never precedes addition. Division follows subtraction. Whole numbers come before fractions.

EXAMPLE: No, the 2nd grade teacher did not lie when she said, "Johnny, you can't subtract 7 from 2. You can't take 7 oranges away if you only have 2 oranges." But three grades later the same teacher will readily admit "2 minus 7 is -5."

There was a proper time to reveal new truth.

"Mysteries" are another principle, but could easily be included here.

Principle #11: Dispensational Approach to Revelation

This system identifies between 3 and 9 epochs in which God dealt differently with man; specifically and importantly pertaining to the content of the message of salvation [*i.e. Adam, Noah, Abraham, Moses, Church, Tribulation, Millennium*]. All men were saved by faith alone, but Adam obviously didn't know about the death and resurrection of Christ.

[See my blog on Dispensations](#)

I clarify 4 precepts which must be adhered to when dealing with future things.

Principle #12: Historical Orthodox Position

Isaac Newton was asked how he accomplished so much so quickly in his life. He answered that it was because he stood on the shoulders of the giants before him.

Millions of believers have read the Scriptures. Many of them were serious students of the Word and diligently applied themselves to understand some of the hard parts. Yet they arrived at different conclusions.

Be very cautious before embracing any variation from the orthodox position of many thousands of godly theologians. Be willing to stand on their shoulders and read their books.

See my explanation of humankind's six almost-unshakable intrinsic biases.

[See APP # E "Why Do We All Make Hermeneutic Mistakes?"](#)

The story is told of an old country deacon who handed the new preacher a Bible before his first sermon. He said, "Don't you never preach nothin' that ain't been preached before!" Those were very wise words.

God's overarching purpose is to reveal, not conceal His thoughts to us. Look for the obvious. His intention is that most of His children understand what He said. It will take years of studying to be able to fit all 1,000 pages of His Word together seamlessly. But it's worth it. Your pastor's sermons should help.

If you ever get a brand new interpretation of a portion of Scripture, you had better be quite sure why you believe all other Bible teachers for 2,000 years missed something which you discovered all by your little self. Maybe you've put too much emphasis on one word or phrase. You must understand how your interpretation compares with a host of scholars.

Better look at the Nicene Creed, the Athanasian Creed, and the Apostles' Creed which are a thousand years old before you convince yourself that this new conclusion of yours is better than every other Bible teacher's.

Principle #13: The Principle of Parables

Parables are made up stories with punchlines. We assume they may incorporate elements from several actual incidents.

Consider the context. Is Jesus' audience argumentative or receptive? Believers or unbelievers? Each parable has one central theme. We don't expect that every phrase contributes to the analogy in a major way.

Often Jesus makes a contrast to what His hearers incorrectly perceived. Several parables in a row [*Matt 13*] give new information about the Kingdom. Find the common thread.

Principle #14: The Audience Principle

Each book of the Bible had a first readership. Some parts were copied soon afterward and distributed widely and quickly—the Torah. Distribution of others took much longer.

Epistles were written to specific local churches, group of churches, or individual. They addressed particular issues [*Philemon, Timothy, & Titus*] then reached wider audiences—local churches.

Promises made to the nation Israel are not to be claimed by those living in heaven after the Great White Throne. Promises made to the Church universal were not granted to Abraham [*i.e., indwelling Holy Spirit, joint-heir with Christ*]. Song of Solomon is an intimate love poem not a treatise on God's compassion.

Each of the Gospels appeals to a slightly different audience. Matthew quotes lots of OT books, another portrays Jesus' humanity clearly. Others emphasize Jesus' deity more, or His miracles, or His theological lectures.

All Bible writers expected that the first readers would include mostly believers, although they were aware there might be resistant hearts, disobedient people or apostates.

Principle #15: Cultural Background Principle

The Bible was composed in specific cultures at particular points in time. While they are universal in application, the truths in the Bible can most fully be realized only when taking the surrounding cultures and histories into account.

For example, when Jesus is called "the first fruits" (1 Corinthians 15:20), we have some understanding of this appellation from the Old Testament, but a study of Jewish religious practice in the first century will provide a much deeper understanding.

A study of culture also reveals the tidbit that over a period of 2,000 years that the "talent" varied between 10 lbs and 100 lbs in different countries.

Cultural context counts.

Principle #16: The Accommodation Principle

The Bible is to be interpreted in view of the fact that it is an accommodation of Divine truths to human minds in human language. God the infinite is communicating with man the finite.

God is not our literal Father in the same sense our earthly father is. God is not a lion, lamb, or mother hen. We have to admit that some biblical concepts are "hard" for God to explain in human language: glorified bodies, Shekinah glory, Hades, and the difference between soul and spirit.

But He has given us as much light as we can grasp.

Principle #17: "Types of Christ" Principle

In many Bible student's understanding, a "Type" of Christ only occurs when the OT specifically connects the OT incident in the NT: e.g. lamb, sacrifice, Melchizedek, Jonah's 3 days & 3 nights, high priest, prophet, priest, and king.

Not all agree.

Principle #18: The Weight of the Doctrine Principle

Most of the more important aspects of theology are repeated in many books of the Bible, and in each time span: i.e. sin, salvation, the Savior, eternity, God's attributes, love, obedience, and consequences of sin. Additional details follow.

- also called the principle of repetition
- also called the principle of volume
Many teach that God's holiness is His most significant attribute. I agree, however, it is not cited the most frequently in Scripture. It seems His love and justice are seen more often.

One way to help you determine how much importance [*or weight*] you personally place on any particular doctrine is to divide the 50 most common doctrines into 4 categories.

The following exercise is absolutely one of the most helpful tasks I ever gave myself to sharpen my skills as a theologian.

I. Fundamentals / Essentials

Beliefs for which you would literally die.

II. Major doctrines

Orthodox tenets of the Church. In this category, if there are doctrines which other believers have twisted, it is necessary to reject the teachers as well as their teachings. You must separate fellowship. You are strongly encouraged to look for a biblical example of separation, or a direct command not to associate with specific teachings. *

III. Minor doctrines

You know godly men who have disagreed over these items for years, but you would not consider them hardened to the Spirit.

IV. Opinions

Issues on which you have strong feelings, but would have to admit the Scriptures are not crystal clear.

* for examples and commands

[See my blog: Separation: from whom? & why?](#)

Principle #19: The [NT] Mystery Principle

"Mysteries" in the New Testament are most often connected with the changes made when the Church was born.

Believers are never mentioned as being the Body of Christ in the OT. Nor does any writer of the OT mention replacing the nation of Israel with the Church, a new organism made of both Jews and Gentiles.

Thus, there are no signs or even hints in the Old Testament pertaining to the Rapture of the Church. These are all "mysteries" but not riddles.

Principle #20: The Devotional Approach

The devotional school of thought emphasizes the edifying aspects of the Scriptures and their usefulness, with the goal of developing one's spiritual life. The Spirit is constantly seen as calling us to Himself. It is a wonderful approach for our daily Bible reading.

This approach is not exactly a principle of hermeneutics. When it used as one's only Bible tool, it would be erroneously used.

6 Appendices

APP # A: My 10 Presuppositions

1. We believe in the precept of non-contradiction. No part of the Bible may be interpreted so as to contradict another part.
2. We believe that there is only one "right" interpretation(s) of any given Biblical passage - the meaning(s) God intended when He "breathed" His Word into the ear of the human writer, and this interpretation applies to all cultures in all ages.
 - a. "No prophecy of the Scripture is of any private interpretation." II Peter 1:20
 - b. It is invalid to ask the question, "What does this passage mean to me?". It is, however, legitimate to ask, "How can I use or apply this passage personally?"
 - c. Although it has only one *correct understanding*, a particular passage may have many *applications*.
3. We believe proper interpretation comes through effort, i.e. rightly dividing [*correctly discerning*] the Word of Truth [II Tim 2.15]. Not all parts of Scripture are easily understood. 2 Peter 3:15-16
". . . even as our brother Paul. . . hath written unto you. . . some things which are hard to be understood which they that are unlearned and unstable wrest, as they do also the other Scriptures."

We must follow the pattern of the noble-minded Bereans in Acts 17.11 who diligently "searched the Scriptures," seeking to learn if the Gospel Paul was preaching to them was true. We do not believe that God is pleased with sloppy theology.

4. The role of the Holy Spirit is critical in illuminating the Scriptures to us. The unsaved man cannot understand some biblical material. I Cor 2.14
"the Natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God for they are foolishness unto him, neither can he know them because they are spiritually discerned."
 - a. "The key role of the Spirit in our understanding of Scripture, is not to add information, or to give special translating abilities, but to soften our hearts." *Don Clossom*
 - b. Heb 11.6 "Ye shall seek Me and find Me when ye shall search for Me **with all your heart.**" Jer 29.13
 - c. The unsaved man who seeks truth is enabled by the Spirit to understand a lot of the Bible, but he must "believe that He is, and that He is a rewarder of those who diligently seek Him."
 - d. The Holy Spirit's work with the unsaved is to open the eyes of the spiritually blind.
5. We believe God didn't write in code. He wrote to reveal His heart and mind. His thoughts are recorded in human grammar and accommodated to human language. God the Infinite communicates with man the finite. *Robert Hommel*

6. We believe the entire Word reveals and speaks of Christ. Luke 24.27 (on the road to Emmaus) "*beginning at Moses and all the prophets He (Jesus) expounded unto them in all the Scriptures the things concerning Himself.*"
7. We believe the Bible was written in a specific culture - the ancient Jewish or "Semitic" culture of the near East. Our culture is sometimes similar and other times vastly different from that of the writers of Scripture.
8. We believe progressive illumination [*sometimes called Progressive Revelation*] is the process by which God reveals information at critical moments in history in which He had intentionally not revealed in the Garden: i.e. [*at least these 10*] Abrahamic Covenant, Davidic Covenant, the Law, NT "Mysteries," the Church universal, the setting aside of Israel, the Messiah, the Millennium, the fulfillment of the Law by Jesus, and finally the Rapture. He opened some windows more gradually than others to let in more light.
9. We believe meditation and contemplation, not just scholarship, is necessary. Scripture is mostly designed to help us as average believers to grow in grace [*not just knowledge*]. II Pet 3.18
Ps 119.97 "O, how I love Thy Law. It is my mediation all the day."

* commands to obey	* errors to avoid	* examples to follow
* sins to shun	* promises to remember	* attitudes to correct
* attributes of God to embrace	* ways to pray	* ways to praise
10. We believe there is no accurate "feminist [*or gender neutral*] hermeneutic," or "ecological hermeneutic," or "twenty-first century hermeneutic," or "western culture hermeneutic," et al. The outcome of diligent examination must depend on objective use of principles, not biases or predetermined conclusions.

I am cautious about recommending study Bibles such as—
the Woodsman's Bible
the Athlete's Bible
the Teenager's Bible
the Businesswoman's Bible

Sensitive applications for groups are wonderful. We all must apply Scripture to our daily lives, but I fear that a fixation on application may be sought at the expense of cautious observation and careful interpretation. I've heard preachers speak of Mary's pregnancy insisting that she must have been a teenager.

T.B.D.S. The Bible simply does not demand that she was even under 30 years old. Now, if you ask for my OPINION, I guess she was close to age 20. But that guess is based on my knowledge of the culture, not Scripture.

6 Appendices

APP # B: Practical Application of Hermeneutics

Most Christian organizations form a Statement of Faith, sometimes called a Doctrinal Statement. The followers list the most important elements of their belief system, using Scripture to support each point. *

Not all groups put the same emphasis on a passage, or even use the same hermeneutic principles to interpret Scripture.

- a. Some put enormous weight on the miraculous.
- b. Others start with the assumption that man is basically good, and God is grandfather-like and passes over sin easily.
- c. Some begin with the perception that the Bible is mostly true, and therefore may have mistakes. And it doesn't bother them at all.
- d. I have a friend who raised her four kids with a principle she believed came from the Bible: "The Lord helps those who help themselves."

In the same way a master mechanic could guess accurately in what order a particular machine was put together, an expert in the field of hermeneutics has the ability to understand why a particular group of people embrace certain non-orthodox doctrines. He can produce a list of the *[hermeneutic]* principles which the organization used in order to come to their conclusions.

The mechanic can also tell what mistakes were made if the machine does not operate as it should. Likewise, the trained Bible student can learn to analyze what principles a group neglected or abused in order to embrace, include, or exclude certain items such as: *eternal security, tongues, "faith without works," the deity of Christ, inspiration, repentance, etc.* What a group excludes is almost as important as what it includes.

To the untrained observer, church splits seem to be based on personality differences, but many hinge on violating one or more of the 20 principles we are examining in this booklet.

- * The two Jewish sects in Jesus' day [*Sadducees & Pharisees*] divided company because they used different principles to interpret Scripture.
- * The two major sects of Islam today [*Sunni & Shiite*] clash primarily because of different hermeneutics concerning Muhammad's teachings.

See my blog: [Statement of Faith, pjm](#)

APP # C: Some Vocab Definitions

Inspiration The Holy Spirit superintended the writing of the Bible. God used the personality, experience, vocabulary, and writing style of each author. Inspiration is divine guidance, not dictation [*but close to it*]. God breathed His spirit into the authors as they wrote. He ensured that His revelation was recorded accurately and without error with precisely every word He wanted included.

A classic example of inspiration is that the writers recorded the feelings and even the silent thoughts of men who had lived hundreds [*or thousands*] of years prior, and wrote them as facts. They did not present them as stories passed down through scores [*or hundreds*] of generations, embellishing them as they wrote. This is evidence of the Holy Spirit's guidance.

Inerrancy The Scriptures contain no error, no self-contradiction, and nothing contrary to historical or scientific fact. Minor contradictions [*misspellings, omitted or added words, etc.*] are due entirely to copyists' errors in transcribing, or even intentional errors by unbelievers.

Revelation The act of the Holy Spirit's revealing [*uncovering or unveiling*] truths that man— through his own intellect, reason, and investigation—cannot discover for himself.

Interpretation The prayerful discernment of the meaning of a passage by exposition and exegesis using good principles of Bible study, i.e. hermeneutics.

Exposition To "expose" or explain the meaning of a text.

Exegesis To "draw out" of the text, to show the way, to critically analyze, to explain.

6 Appendices

Eisegesis To “read into” a text my opinions or presuppositions.

Bad, very bad.

Hermeneutics Principles—like a referee’s rulebook. The rule book is not the same thing as the game. Hermeneutics are the rules to tell how to find the proper meaning. The rulebook explains how to avoid mistakes in calling a play. Exegesis and/or exposition is the process of applying the rulebook to a text of Scripture.

Genre Types of literature or writing styles.

- *poetry *[including wisdom literature]*
- *narrative *[stories, history]*
- *legal *[laws, rules, mandates, commands]*
- *polemic *[argument, defense]*
- *logical discourses *[discussions]*
- *apocalyptic *[predictive, prophetic, futurist] including near-&-far prophecies,*
- *epistles *[letters]*
- *parables, stories with only one meaning, don’t press too hard, every detail may not be significant
- *warning passages
- *figures of speech: similes, metaphors, innuendos, hyperbole, understatement, et al

Illumination The act of the Holy Spirit in enlightening and convicting the reader of the truth contained in Scripture, and leading the reader to an understanding of the truth of God’s Word. One aspect of the convicting role of the Spirit is to prepare the heart.

Allegory Attaching artificial symbolic meanings to events in history. This is the belief that meanings are subjective. That is the reason why we believe it is incorrect to allegorize unless Scripture specifically affirms the new meanings.

Here are two biblical examples of God’s using allegory Himself.

1. Gal 4.22-31 Hagar = Sinai
2. I Tim 5.18 “do not muzzle an oxen” means pay the pastor. (oxen = elder)

APP # D Eleven Common Exegetical Errors

1. Taking Figurative Language Literally When Jesus says that He is the “door,” few would take Him literally. Some, however, take figurative language, such as Jesus “sitting at the right hand of the Father,” to mean that the Father has a literal right hand (*and thus, a physical body*). Nor is Jesus sitting on one of three thrones in heaven. (cf Heb 10.12 & Rev 3.21) Rather, it signifies a position of authority. We do not woodenly take every word in the Bible literally, but rather that we approach it as we would any literature.

Aberrant usages of the literal meaning include:

- ◇ Jesus is first born
- ◇ the test of faith is moving the Rockies into the Pacific through prayer
- ◇ cut off hand, pluck out eye
- ◇ “drink this *[glass, paper, plastic]* cup, all of you.” *[communion]*
- ◇ God gave king Saul a new cardiac heart
- ◇ Prayer of faith always heals. . . you never need a hospital or medicine again
- ◇ (*implied suicide*) fat people “put a knife to your throat” for gluttony” Prov 23.2

2. Over-Contextualizing Isaiah tells us that God doesn’t know anything about any other gods [44:8].

Well, how do we know that’s not actually what He meant? God does indeed know about demonic “gods.” There is no warrant for taking an absolute statement and *confining* it to immediate context. Context does not limit His statement, any more than the Great Commission is limited only to the disciples who heard Jesus speak it.

We would make the same mistake if we believed that the newspaper editor is ignorant since he publishes the time of “sunset” each evening. Silly editor, the sun never really “sets.” Doesn’t he know that?

6 Appendices

3. Allowing the Implicit to Explain or pre-empt the Explicit We don't generally allow all meanings which might be possible to explain the clear and certain statements.

Jesus is called "firstborn" on several occasions in the New Testament. Many non-Trinitarians see in these verses evidence that the Son of God was a created being and that Jesus was not God Himself. He was the first creation of Jehovah.

Trinitarians argue that the "firstborn" passages must be viewed in light of John 1:3 and Colossians 1:16, and thus must be a figurative title or the title of pre-eminence.

Mormons explode four obscure words [*"baptism for the dead"*] into a billion dollar a year item which is placed in the budget. "Baptism for the dead" [1 Cor 15:29] is not endorsed in the Scripture [*though not refuted explicitly*], not explained, nor practiced in sound churches in the early church. But the Mormon church carries on these baptisms in each multi-million dollar golden-spired Tabernacles in 144 cities.

4. Modern Day Revelation It is incorrect to claim that God continues to reveal Himself regularly in various ways to hundreds of thousands today who consider themselves to belong to an elite cadre of spiritually mature and/or gifted individuals, the way he did to a couple dozen recorded in the Bible—Moses, Elijah, Paul, Peter, et al.

Some, like Latter Day Saints [Mormons], believe that this modern day revelation has produced new Scriptures. Others believe that "hearing a Word from God" is infallible, and that it is the same kind of revelation that God gave to biblical writers. They believe that esoteric knowledge has as much authority as any passage of Scripture. We deny this.

- a. The Holy Spirit does not add "special revelation" today. *cf Rev 22.18*
- b. This belief is perilously close to Karl Barth's neo-orthodox position which affirms that the Bible only becomes the Word of God through my experiences. *The Word as Event, p.242*

5. Harmonization by Denial The Bible declares that Jesus was a man [John 1:14; 1 Timothy 2:5; etc.]. Hosea states [11:9] that He is not man.

Non-Trinitarians who hold to the principle of the harmony of Scripture, believe these verses present an apparent contradiction, thus they deny the fully Deity of Christ. Scripture tells us the Christ is both Man and God. We should allow these truths to shape our view of Christ's nature, rather than deny one or the other.

6. Problems Relating to Literary Genre A proverb is not a promise - those who approach the book of Proverbs otherwise, are likely to be disappointed when the expected promise is not fulfilled.

Narrative literature records people telling lies. It is inaccurate to extrapolate that since Rahab, a baby believer, told a lie and God protected the spies, that God approves of lying.

That there are imprecatory Psalms, does not automatically condone all the ill will we may feel toward everyone who has wronged us.

7. Embracing All Narrative Events as Normative Singular phenomenal occurrences in Scripture are not to be expected by the hoi-poloi. Miracles are not to be expected commonly. There are only a hundred miracles mentioned in the entire Bible and they occurred by the hands of only a score of people [*plus the 70*]. To the trained Bible student the reasons for most miracles is implicit. Some individual churches today claim that they have experienced more miracles in their church than in the thousands of years of biblical history. I doubt it.

The use of "tongues" is only recorded 3x in Scripture, but rebuked in a whole chapter for its misuse [1 Cor 14], then it disappeared for 2,000 years of Church history. Luther had no idea of its existence in his day after the 1st century. The present practice of "tongues" does not conform to the Bible narrative.

8. Numerology to Excess The significance of God's use of numbers is moot point. While there is a similarity of purpose with several numbers a couple dozen times collectively [*notably 3, 6, 7, & 40*] some preachers practice a slavish adherence to numeric repetition. It is indisputable that there is no number in Scripture which usually indicates a same specific quality or precept like: completion, perfection, grace, man, judgment, or holiness.

Six is actually the only number that has a specific biblical connection, (Rev 13.18).

The number seven (7) appears 18x in The Revelation. Seven rarely gives a sense of perfection or completion. Why do some people say seven means perfection? or completion? After all, the world was "complete" after 6 days, not 7.

6 Appendices

○ **9. Point-and-Read** The expectation that God’s plan for the day will be revealed if believers just open their Bibles at random and read a verse. One day I hope they will open their Bibles and claim I Chronicles 26.18 as their marching orders for the day. “At Parbar westward, four at the causeway, and two at Parbar.”

God wrote a book, not a collection of Post-It Notes to be read without context. I also have written many things . Who would think it proper to open something I’ve written and point to the middle of a sentence at random, and deduce properly what I meant? Don’t do it with God’s Word, either.

10. The First Mention Principle It has often been declared loudly that the first time a topic or theme is presented it is significant. The so-called “first mention” precept seems to have no significant validity in a better understanding of the Word.

It is assumed by some that this is a legitimate principle of interpretation. A cursory study of this idea reveals that there is almost no agreement among adherents as to what we should glean from the first time an item occurs: feet, bed, personal greetings, friend, north, snow, snails, or river.

Pleasantly, the first occurrence of blood sacrifice is one with which most Bible teachers wholeheartedly agree: the blood sacrifice in the Garden pre-pictures the sacrificial offerings and the blood atonement by Christ. Of course we heartily endorse this observation, but not because it is mentioned first.

After that introductory outing, the ensuing list of typical “first mention” teachings disintegrates: farming, suffering, idolatry, kings, prayer, laws, creation, language, firstborn, tithes, firstfruits, clothing, Moses, Satan, shoes, ad nauseum. The first time any of these are mentioned does not impress me as being solidly foundational in shedding light on the topic.

11. Selective Extrapolation

Many well meaning teachers have propounded that they have a right to use a figure of speech to their own advantage. To claim that an unclear snippet of a verse such as, “a thousand years is as a day,” means [by extrapolation] the world will last for 7 thousand years and then eternity begins, this is to misuse this figure of speech.

Many Bible teachers believe [as I do] that creation occurred about 6,000 years ago. We also believe there will be 1,000 years of Jesus reign on earth; however, we cannot demand that the Rapture will occur within the next 500 years or even 2,000 years.

○ Sidebar: the same passage [Ps 90.4] which declares “a thousand years in Thy sight are as a day. . . ,” also includes “. . . [a thousand years is] as a watch in the night.” No one is preaching this part of the verse.

Selective manipulation is not “rightly dividing the Word of God” no matter how many people believe it.

When we face a difficult passage, we do not flip a coin, choose the conclusion of our favorite expositor, or take the most logical and practical explanation we can think of. . .

. . .we diligently apply hermeneutic principles.

6 Appendices

APP # E: Why Do We All Make Hermeneutical Mistakes?

(I reluctantly include myself, here)

In my observation, here are the most common hermeneutical errors of godly men.

#1 **We're human.** As small children we believed everything our mothers ever said. She was omniscient, omnipotent, all-seeing, ever wise, and all loving. She dominated our lives for quite a while. **How could she be wrong** on such a thing as God, theology, ethics, morals, or _____? Dad came in second at the beginning, but later, for some of us, superseded mom as head theologian forever.

#2 The first outside-the-family theologian was your:

(choose one)

Pastor

Sunday School teacher

Youth Pastor

Bible college professor

Godly mentor

radio or TV preacher

Other _____

This person knew so much about God. surpassing even mom in several areas, whew! We began to step into the realm of logic, reason, polemics [*good and bad*]. We had no resistance to his/her well thought out explanations of anything. We swallowed it as readily as we had bought into mom's indoctrination.

#3 Moving on, some of us **forgot** important principles as soon as we sat under the teaching of that next persuasive speaker. He loved the Lord, and he was so knowledgeable about the Bible [*he must be right*]. He was wrong, but he sounded so right.

#4 We began to **think on our own.** [*Most atheists I've met clutch to the belief system they've endorsed, because they feel they are "able to think for themselves" now. Actually, they are ruminating somebody else's predigested ruminations.*] We make the same mistake. We are sophomoric [*wise-fools*] in our conclusions. And we're so humble about it, but we truly do love the Lord.

There are few intellectuals more foolish than the most knowledgeable sophomore [*high school, college, or even grad school—I know, I spent 13 years as a student in post-secondary education, and another 20 teaching there*]. Unfortunately, **we held too tightly** to our belief system mostly **because** it was "ours." We developed it. We polished it. And we believed it. *Ps-s-st, that doesn't make it true.*

It was the first and best original thinking we had done. We were actually unwilling to admit we were novices in our thinking. We were like the 16-year old with a two week old driver's license. We had misplaced confidence in our boxful of knowledge, but didn't know yet what other tools diligent believers had in their boxes.

#5 We **collided** with those who differed and **colluded with those who thought the same as we did.** They seemed so wise. It made us feel we were just as wise. Mistake!

#6 We were not following pernicious false teachers. The things we held were not dragging our souls into wickedness. We knew we were orthodox on much of what we believed. We had been careful with our hermeneutics. But **we put too much weight** on other's beliefs which did not have half the Scriptural strength of sound teaching.

#7 We cemented our beliefs too early, and were **too proud to rethink** them.

6 Appendices

APP # F: Two Errant Schools of Biblical Interpretation

1. The Allegorical Schools of Interpretation Scripture, particularly the Old Testament, is presumed as symbolic rather than factual. Augustine [*Clement of Alexandria, also Origen*] believed that every biblical passage contained four levels of meaning: literal, allegorical, moral, and eschatological. Each level becoming more “spiritual.”

The example of “Jerusalem”

[*Augustine’s allegorical perception*]

literal: Jerusalem = a city in Israel

allegorical: Jerusalem = the Church universal

moral: Jerusalem = the human soul

eschatological: Jerusalem = pointing to heavenly Jerusalem & eternal life

If his interpretation differed from many other believers, who then, could claim the right to be right? Everybody?

The Roman Catholic Church allegorically sees the catholic Mass:

- a) in the bread and wine of Melchizedek,
- b) in the manna in the wilderness,
- c) and in the oil in the diet of Elijah.

All RC commentators are bound to adhere to the understanding of the Church.

Luther called this method of interpretation “a scourge.”

“If Scripture is read as an allegory, then no two people would agree on much.”

Ellen Kavanough

2. The Liberal Schools of Interpretation Liberal theologians treat the Word as being no more “inspired” than Shakespeare, Tennyson, Beethoven, Christopher Wren, Stephen Spielberg, or Muhammad. One’s own intellect determines truth. One is unable to believe anything with certainty. Truth becomes relative and not absolute.

Conclusion

There is not much more to say. God Almighty is pleased with those who fall in love with His Son, the Lord Jesus Christ. He is also pleased with those who love His Word.

Keep your heart pure, your pride under the control of the Spirit, your head on straight and be diligent in pursuing truth. Your goal is not just to be right in your theology, but to please Him.

Amen.

Some of the works consulted [*positive & negative*]:

Augustine. Novem Testamentum

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[1992 rev 2017]