

How to Read & Understand What the Bible Really Says

In this video teaching, in just a short amount of time, I want to give you some tools on how to read and understand the Bible so that you will arrive at the proper understanding of what the writers of the various books in the Bible are saying, so that you'll get the correct "take-away"—what the author intended for you to know.

Sometimes, we can so over think or complicate such a simple message. We have pastors, teachers and theologians looking for hidden meaning when sometimes the real meaning is staring them right in the face.

What I will be teaching you today has a fancy name and it's known as **Hermeneutics** which is the study of the methods and principles for interpreting the Bible. Paul writes to Timothy who is a young pastor, and he tells him to "Do your best to present yourself to God as **one who is approved**, a worker who . . . **correctly handles the word of truth**" (2 Tim. 2:15). For our purposes here today, I want to zero in on the phrase "**correctly handles the word of truth.**" In other words, if Paul has to exhort Timothy to "correctly" the word of truth, then you can also handle the word of truth, or the Bible, in an incorrect manner. In which case, you would NOT be approved by God.

In this lesson, we'll look at some of the incorrect ways that are used to study the Bible, which inevitably lead to the wrong conclusion and error and even false doctrine.

Stay with me now....this is such an important lesson. You'll be so thankful to learn what I want to teach you today because it will assure that you're reading the Bible and understanding it the way God intended. So let's begin.

Principle 1: Study the Bible in context.

When we take verses out of context, it often leads to misunderstanding. There are pastors and teachers who read just one or two verses in the Bible and then build their entire sermon based on those one or two verses. When we take text out of their context we are stripping the meaning of the verses and give them a different, and usually a wrong meaning.

Here are just a few examples of verses that we hear so often, but they're taken out of context and we're missing the intended meaning:

- **Matthew 7:1 "Judge not, that you be not judged."** Now, let's look at the entire verse in context to see what Jesus is really saying. **Matthew 7:1-5 (ESV)**
 - ¹ "Judge not, that you be not judged.
 - ² For with the judgment you pronounce you will be judged, and with the measure you use it will be measured to you.
 - ³ Why do you see the speck that is in your brother's eye, but do not notice the log that is in your own eye?
 - ⁴ Or how can you say to your brother, 'Let me take the speck out of your eye,' when there is the

log in your own eye?

⁵ You hypocrite, first take the log out of your own eye, and then you will see clearly to take the speck out of your brother's eye."

This verse is so often used to keep us from ever making any kind of judgment whatsoever. This is a favorite with those who are unbelievers. They may not know the Bible, but most people know this verse and use it frequently. However, Jesus is not telling the listeners to **not judge** but to judge others ONLY after they have repented of their own faults and sins.

It's like a Christian who's having an adulterous affair with his neighbor's wife, judging someone who has just told a lie. He's right that telling a lie is a sin, but how can he even judge someone else when he himself is committing adultery.

Jesus is not saying that we should never judge others. He is saying that we can ONLY judge another person after we get our own house in order. We need to repent of our own sins and clean up our act before we try to tell someone else what they're doing wrong.

- **Philippians 4:13 "I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me."**

This verse is misused to get us to believe that we can do or accomplish anything we want to do. It's kind of like positive thinking. Coaches who have never read the Bible or prayed use this verse to tell their team that we can win this game with God's help, but that's not what this verse means when you read it in context. Let's start at v. 11.

Philippians 4:11-13 (ESV)

¹¹ Not that I am speaking of being in need, for I have learned in whatever situation I am to be content.

¹² I know how to be brought low, and I know how to abound. In any and every circumstance, I have learned the secret of facing plenty and hunger, abundance and need.

¹³ I can do all things through him who strengthens me.

Paul is in prison as he writes these words and he's not saying that you can do anything that you want, but only that which is God's will. And being in the will of God there in prison, Paul can rightly affirm that "I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me." God will see him through whatever comes his way because he is being led by the Spirit of God. In other words, you can be hungry and freezing cold while doing God's will, and you can say along with Paul, "I can do all things through Him who strengthens me." This verse is not about winning games or acing a test in school or getting a gold medal—it's about doing whatever needs to be done in order to see Christ glorified in your life and a particular situation.

- **God is love. 1 John 4:16.** Everyone knows this verse, "God is love." You may never have darkened the door of a church, and may know nothing about Jesus or even consider yourself an atheist, but you know, "God is love." It's our "get out of jail" card or "Get out of Hell" card. When this is quoted, it's usually with the understanding that "I don't have anything to worry

about. I can live my life any ol' way I want because "God is love" and He'll love me and accept me when I die."

God's attribute of love is only one aspect of who God is. He is also called the Righteous Judge, the Holy & Awesome One, the Judge of the Living and the Dead, the King over all the earth, the Lord of both the Living and the Dead, The Lord Your Redeemer, the Most Holy God, and the list goes on and on. But let's read this verse in context to really understand what it's saying:

1 John 4:7-11 (ESV)

⁷ Beloved, let us love one another, for love is from God, and whoever loves has been born of God and knows God.

⁸ Anyone who does not love does not know God, because God is love.

⁹ In this the love of God was made manifest among us, that God sent his only Son into the world, so that we might live through him.

¹⁰ In this is love, not that we have loved God but that he loved us and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins.

¹¹ Beloved, if God so loved us, we also ought to love one another.

¹² No one has ever seen God; if we love one another, God abides in us and his love is perfected in us.

¹³ By this we know that we abide in him and he in us, because he has given us of his Spirit.

¹⁴ And we have seen and testify that the Father has sent his Son to be the Savior of the world.

¹⁵ Whoever confesses that Jesus is the Son of God, God abides in him, and he in God.

¹⁶ So we have come to know and to believe the love that God has for us. God is love, and whoever abides in love abides in God, and God abides in him.

When you read v. 16, "God is love" in context, what's really being said is that if we truly know God and love God, and if God's love resides within us--then we will love one another because God is love. If we hate our brother, then the love of God does not reside in us and we do not know God.

Taking "God is love" out of context will lead us to believe that God's love is greater than all his other attributes. We arrive at a false conclusion. There are many verses that not only say "God loves" but also "God hates." As we read scripture in context, which is what we're really doing in the Firm Foundation series, we're starting in Genesis and working our way through the Bible chronologically so that we get a full and complete picture of who God is, his many attributes, and his will and purpose for mankind.

If you read the Scripture in context and that usually means reading several verses that come before a certain verse as well as those that follow. But it also means reading preceding chapters before and after a certain verse because the writer is putting forth an argument and you can't really understand what he is saying that plucking a verse or two out of context.

It is not difficult to point out places that seemingly contradict other portions of Scripture, but if we carefully look at their context and use the entirety of Scripture as a reference, we can understand the meaning of a passage. "**Context is king**" means that the context often drives the

meaning of a phrase. To ignore context is to put ourselves at a tremendous disadvantage and lead us to the wrong conclusions and even doctrinal error.

Principal 2: The Bible should be interpreted literally. We are to understand the Bible in its normal or plain meaning, unless the passage is obviously intended to be symbolic or if figures of speech are employed. The Bible says what it means and means what it says. For example, when Jesus speaks of having fed “the five thousand” in [Mark 8:19](#), the law of hermeneutics says we should understand *five thousand* literally—there was a crowd of hungry people that numbered five thousand who were fed with real bread and fish by a miracle-working Savior. Any attempt to “spiritualize” the number or to deny a literal miracle is to do injustice to the text and ignore the purpose of language, which is to communicate.

Some people make the mistake of trying to read between the lines of Scripture to come up with esoteric meanings that are not truly in the text, as if every passage has a hidden spiritual truth that we should seek to decipher.

Principal 3: One original interpretation. A fundamental belief in hermeneutics is that there is one original interpretation. When the author of a book recorded history, or wrote their letter(s) or gospel, they had a single intended meaning attached to what they wrote. For example, when a person writes a letter, they are not thinking of how they can write it so that the receiving person either cannot understand it or ends up with many different interpretations.

Instead, there is a particular meaning in what was written. The interpretation is restricted by the writer’s intentions. Therefore, when rightly dividing the word, we should always be aware of what the author’s intended meaning was. This should guide and direct our study as well as safeguard against interpretations that do not fit the thought or meaning that the writer is trying to put across.

It should be noted that although there is a single interpretation to be found in each passage, there can be more than one application.

Let me give you a couple of examples --Let’s read together

Romans 6:1-8 (ESV)

¹ What shall we say then? Are we to continue in sin that grace may abound?

² By no means! How can we who died to sin still live in it?

³ Do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death?

⁴ We were buried therefore with him by baptism into death, in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too might walk in newness of life.

⁵ For if we have been united with him in a death like his, we shall certainly be united with him in a resurrection like his.

⁶ We know that our old self was crucified with him in order that the body of sin might be brought to nothing, so that we would no longer be enslaved to sin.

⁷ For one who has died has been set free from sin.

⁸ Now if we have died with Christ, we believe that we will also live with him.

In v. 3, Paul writes, “Do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? We were buried with him by baptism into death, in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too might walk in newness of life.”

As you read this, putting aside all that you may’ve heard about baptism, is Paul talking about something symbolic? Does anything that you’re reading here sound like symbolism? As I read it, I see Paul talking about a spiritual reality, something that really happens when we go down into the waters of baptism.

In fact, let’s read this passage again and insert symbolic as an adverb, and see if it changes what Paul is saying:

³ Do you not know that all of us who have been *symbolically* baptized into Christ Jesus were *symbolically* baptized into his death?

⁴ We were *symbolically* buried therefore with him by baptism into death, in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too might *symbolically* walk in newness of life.

⁵ For if we have been *symbolically* united with him in a death like his, we shall certainly be *symbolically* united with him in a resurrection like his.

Now, that really changes the meaning, doesn’t it? Of course! And that’s pretty much how we change the meaning of what Paul’s written when we baptize people and repeat the baptismal formula, “Baptism is symbolic of the death, burial and resurrection of Christ.” It takes all the power and truth of what Paul is saying—about something that is a reality and turns it into dead symbolism. Paul’s talking about something that really happens, and when we baptize new believers, we need to baptize them into this reality, not something symbolic!! Does that make sense??

Let’s look at another passage of scripture that is used to prove that the gifts of the Holy Spirit are no longer needed today. This aberrant teaching comes from the late theologian C.I. Scofield and has been popularized by Dallas Theological Seminary, Moody Bible Institute and by noted Greek scholar, Kenneth Wuest. Read with me **1 Corinthians 13:8-12 (ESV)**

⁸ Love never ends. As for prophecies, they will pass away; as for tongues, they will cease; as for knowledge, it will pass away.

⁹ For we know in part and we prophesy in part,

¹⁰ but when the perfect comes, the partial will pass away.

¹¹ When I was a child, I spoke like a child, I thought like a child, I reasoned like a child. When I became a man, I gave up childish ways.

¹² For now we see in a mirror dimly, but then face to face. Now I know in part; then I shall know fully, even as I have been fully known.

Some, like those aforementioned, read this passage and when it says in v.10, “..when the perfect comes, the partial will pass away,” they interpret that to mean that the impartial is the gifts of the Spirit such as prophecies, tongues, words of knowledge—will all pass away. And they go on to teach that the perfect is the New Testament which we now possess and hold in our hands. So now because we possess the New Testament, we have a full revelation of God’s will, and those childish things like speaking in tongues,

prophesying , healing, or words of knowledge are no longer needed today because we have grown up and we're no longer like little children. Gee...it sounds like it could be right, until you read the entire passage in context.

v. 12 says now we see through a mirror dimly, but then face-to-face. Wait a minute, even possessing the New Testament, can we honestly say that we're seeing God face-to-face. Of course not. The writer goes on to say, "Now we know in part, but then we shall know fully, even as we have been fully known." Can anyone of us honestly say that even possessing the New Testament, that we know God fully even as He knows us? Of course not! So then, what is the writer talking about? What is that which is Perfect that is coming? The Perfect is obviously referring to Jesus Christ at his second coming.

Now read the verse and insert Jesus for perfect. ¹⁰ but when Jesus comes, the partial will pass away.

¹¹ When I was a child, I spoke like a child, I thought like a child, I reasoned like a child. When I became a man, I gave up childish ways.

¹² For now I see in a mirror dimly, but then face to face. Now I know in part; but then (when I see Jesus face-to-face) I shall know fully, even as I have been fully known.

When you read this verse in context, it can't be referring to anything other than Jesus at his second coming, and that changes the meaning of everything else. It means that we still need childish things like speaking in tongues, prophecy, and all the other gifts of the Spirit because we still see through the mirror dimly, and we only know in part. In other words, we need all the help we can get from the Holy Spirit and that's why God poured out these gifts of the Spirit on the church, to equip and better enable us to do the work of the ministry.

Principal 4: Scripture is always the best interpreter of Scripture. For this reason, we always compare scripture with scripture when trying to determine the meaning of a passage. For example, let's look at the scripture known as the Great Commission to see several things that are overlooked, ignored, or taught in error because all too often, this passage is taken out of context.

Matthew 28:16-20 (ESV)

¹⁶ Now the eleven disciples went to Galilee, to the mountain to which Jesus had directed them.

¹⁷ And when they saw him they worshiped him, but some doubted.

¹⁸ And Jesus came and said to them, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me.

¹⁹ Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit,

²⁰ teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age."

Here we have Jesus' last words to his disciples before he ascends into heaven, so you better believe that the disciples were paying close attention and hanging onto every word that came out of Jesus' mouth. He tells them to "go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, Son and the Holy Spirit..."

Now let me ask you this question: From what Jesus commands the disciples, do you think baptism is optional? Is it something that you can take or leave? Is it really necessary? And regarding baptism, does

it mean to be sprinkled? What kind of baptism is Jesus talking about? Finally, what did Jesus mean when he said “...baptizing them in the name of the Father, Son and the Holy Spirit.”

Now, let’s get an answer to these questions that I’ve just asked. If we compare scriptures, do you think the disciples saw baptism as something that was optional? That you could take it or leave it? Let’s look at the sermon Peter preached on the Day of Pentecost. When all those gathered heard Peter’s sermon, the Bible says that they were cut to the heart. They were convicted by the Holy Spirit of their sins, and they asked Peter what they must do to be saved.

Acts 2:38-39 (ESV)

³⁸ And Peter said to them, “Repent and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins, and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.

³⁹ For the promise is for you and for your children and for all who are far off, everyone whom the Lord our God calls to himself.”

Peter tells them to repent and be baptized, everyone of them in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of their sins, and they shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. Peter is telling them to be baptized along with repentance. He didn’t tell them to pray a sinner’s prayer. Baptism was their sinner’s prayer. Baptism was their public acknowledgement of believing in Jesus and receiving Him. Then, Peter tells them to be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ. He doesn’t say, be baptized into the “Father, Son and Holy Spirit.” He says, be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ. Why? Because when you are baptized, you are baptized into Jesus, into His death, burial and resurrection. You’re not baptized into the Father, Son and Holy Spirit. The disciples who heard Jesus’ command , the Great Commission, before he ascended into heaven, heard him saying that to baptize in the name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit, was to go forth and baptize in the name of Jesus Christ. And that’s why, try as hard as you might, you can’t find a single passage of scripture where they baptized in the name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Every time, those doing the baptizing, baptized in the name of Jesus Christ, which they understood to be the all-encompassing name for the Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

Also, throughout the book of Acts, they don’t heal anyone in the name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit. They don’t cast out demons in the name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Healing and deliverance from demons is done in and through the name of Jesus Christ.

Again, you need to ask yourself, what did the disciples hear when Jesus gave them the Great Commission before he ascended into heaven. And how did they proceed to carry out his commands. We see time and time again, that they baptized, with the person going down into the water, and they baptized in the name of Jesus Christ. Remember that Jesus came to John the Baptist there at the Jordan River and John baptized Jesus, and it says that Jesus came up out of the water.

Also, as we compare scriptures, we see that every time people came to Jesus, the disciples would baptize them in water immediately. Even out in the desert, Philip and the Ethiopian eunuch who has just come to faith in Jesus after Philip shared the good news with him out of Isaiah 53—they suddenly come upon a pool of water out there in the desert. And every time I read this, I can’t help but think that God

put that water there for that very moment so the Ethiopian eunuch could be baptized and go back to Northern Africa with the instruction that you baptized all new disciples into Christ Jesus.

The difference between exegesis and eisegesis:

Let me close with a brief explanation of the difference between exegesis and eisegesis. And even as I just said these two Greek words, I can see your eyes are glazing over and you're ready to check out. But hang in there one more minute because there's a good chance that you're falling prey to the error of eisegesis.

Exegesis is the exposition or explanation of a text based on a careful, objective analysis. The word exegesis literally means "to lead out of." That means that the interpreter is led to his conclusions by following the text.

The opposite approach to Scripture is **eisegesis**, which is the interpretation of a passage based on a subjective, non-analytical reading. The word eisegesis literally means "to lead into," which means the interpreter injects his own ideas into the text, making it mean whatever he wants. The error of eisegesis occurs when we approach the Bible with our pet doctrines, with our minds already made up and we try to read our doctrine into what we're studying, rather than allowing God's word to speak to us. For example, when we looked at 1 Corinthians 13, the only way you could read the perfect as being the New Testament is if you are using eisegesis, approaching the scripture with your doctrine already firmly established and trying to make the passage of Scripture in 1 Cor. 13 say what you want it to say. In this case, Kenneth Wuest, C.I. Scofield and others have approached this passage in 1 Cor. 13 wanting to establish that gifts of the Spirit like speaking in tongues or prophecy, or word of knowledge, or healing are no longer for today.

They want to show that we are no longer children, but we have grown up and become mature because we have the New Testament and we no longer have any need for such childish things as speaking in tongues or prophesying. But, as you can see, they are so wrong. We need the gifts and the empowering of the Holy Spirit as much today as they did in the Book of Acts.

To sum it all up, we need to humbly approach God's Word and pray and ask God to give us open minds and hearts and to show us the truth in His word. If we are open to whatever God wants to show us, and we're applying the other principles of Hermeneutics such as reading it as the author intended without looking for hidden meaning or symbolism, and if we are reading it in context, and comparing with other scriptures, then chances are, we'll arrive at the meaning and understanding of the Scripture that God wants every believer to have. Don't ever try to twist or massage or spin scripture to make it say what you want it to say, and always be ready to repent and receive correction if God shows you that you've been wrong and that you've taught scripture in error.

I don't think any of us want to lead anyone astray. I suspect that you want to accurately handle God's Word just as Paul encouraged Timothy to do. If you follow these principles that I've outlined here today, then you'll be well on your way to understanding the truth of God's Word the way He intended.