

Understanding And Applying the Scriptures

A Class for Sunday Schools

Bible interpretation is probably the *most important skill* a Christian can develop.

Just what is at stake? We are found guilty by virtue of what we can see around us (Romans 1:19) and we are saved **only** by the Word of Christ (Romans 10:17)!

But there's more:

In order to practice mercy we must *know* mercy – from the Bible.

In order to be a generous giver we must *know* giving – from the Bible.

In order to be wise, we must *know* the fear of the Lord – from the Bible.

There are reasons why Bible interpretation seems to be a most elusive skill to know and practice.

Many weird pictures (floating axe heads – 2 Kings 6:5-7)

Many different English versions (50 versions at my count)

Many different types of books (Daniel vs. Lamentations)

Many sinful tendencies! (Jeremiah 17:9)

Whatever the issues, they must *all* be overcome – the stakes are high and our responsibilities are grave. When we think of the Bible, we often remember Paul's words to Timothy in 2 Timothy 3:16-17 about the **inspiration** and **role** of the Scriptures:

All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction and for training in righteousness that the man of God may be competent, equipped for every good work.

The **context** of those verses is worth considering as well.

3:1 – “difficult times will come”

3:2-6 – Men will be evil in many ways (he lists 19 different ways!)

3:7-9 – they will never know the truth (like Jannes and Jambres, Pharaoh's magicians of Exodus 7-8)

3:10-17 – to avoid being as they are, we must know the Word

In order to stand up to the evil of the last days (the church age) and to have the joy of our salvation as God intends, we must find a *method* and the *will* to study the word.

We will be looking at a simple method that will help us progress through any kind of passage to fruitful application. The three elements of this method are Approach, Assimilate, and Apply.

Introduction to Systematic Bible Study.

APPROACH

The first element to systematic Bible study is our APPROACH.

Consider an analogy: *a stoplight at a busy intersection*. When we see the light or the sign for the light at a distance, what do we do? We begin to slow down, we check our mirrors, we consider if we'll turn or stay straight – in other words, we become aware and alert to many details related to that stoplight.

How many of us have come up to a light and suddenly and violently realized it was there? You slam on the brakes, tense all your muscles, pray that other cars were more alert than you were and it takes time to make good follow-on decisions.

- Our approach to the light will determine how we act once we get there.
- Our view of and approach to the Bible will likewise determine what we do with the text.

First, our approach to the Bible must be **grave**. It is God's own word and He intends it to change us. Isaiah 55:11 reads:

So shall my word be that goes out from my mouth; it shall not return to me empty, but it shall accomplish that which I propose, and shall succeed in the thing for which I sent it

Second, our approach to the Bible must be **humble**. It is at this point where all Bible study can go awry. We cannot approach the study of God's in any way that sounds like:

1. We already know what we're going to find
2. We aren't willing to heed what we read
3. We won't let the text tell us what to do
4. We tell the text what we're going to do.
5. This can't really be right
6. Science has disproved this
7. Psychology won't allow this
8. This doesn't feel right

It would make an interesting study to consider all the major heresies of church history to find a common root cause. It could be done. At some point, a man or a woman looked at the word of God and said "that can't be" and set out on a different path.

ASSIMILATE

The second element to systematic Bible study is ASSIMILATE.

Reading Paul is not like reading John Grisham! Bible study takes time and work. There are principles of good study that have been developed and used throughout the centuries that will greatly help us to know God and His word.

Study takes time and commitment. In our day and age, we want our Bible study to be as easy as our TV watching! We get frustrated when we fail to understand something completely or we hear of some friend who seems to always know what it says! But, how

many of us prefer homemade peach cobbler to frozen out of the freezer?! It takes time to make homemade **but it is worth it!**

APPLY

The last element is APPLY.

The chief end of Bible study is application. Always look to application. Failures to make application are why so many Christians' Monday's are so different than their Sunday's!

We will review simple questions that you can ask the text to help you make the intended jump from text-to-life. Without this step in the process, all of our study has profited us little – it would be like driving up to the gas station and failing to put the gas in the car!

STEP 1: APPROACHING THE SCRIPTURES.

The approach to the study of the Bible is about attitude. At this stage, we do little actual work on the Scriptures, instead the work is in our hearts. We may only have to return to this step periodically when we find ourselves adrift in confusion.

Here we ask ourselves two questions:

1. Do I really think the Bible matters?
2. Am I coming to it humbly for it to change me?

The Bible matters.

Christians are made and not born. How?

“...these have been written so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God; and that believing you may have life in His name” (John 20:30-31).

The Word of God *makes* Christians. We would agree with this. But, the Word of God also *grows* Christians. Yet, a video taken of our Bible study habits (or our home libraries) may indicate we don't believe this!

- By the time many of us spend, we apparently don't see much value in the continued study of and reading of the Bible.

We take time on those things that really matter to us, don't we? We definitely learn how to cook or iron or drive, don't we?

If you ask 10 church people how much time they spent in the last seven days reading and studying the Scriptures, you may be surprised! A key to our approach of the Scriptures is that they matter.

The Word of God is *relevant* to life and living. It *speaks* to us. It is open to our *inspection* and God *invites* us to it. It contains the material that the Spirit of God uses to build our joy and us.

The Psalmists regularly bring us back to it. Consider Psalm 119:

119:1, “How blessed are those whose way is blameless, who walk in the law of the Lord.”
For Blessing

119:9, “How can a young man keep his way pure? By keeping it according to Your word.”
For Purity

119:25, “My soul cleaves to the dust; revive me according to Your word.”
For Revival

119:33, “Teach me, O Lord, the way of Your statutes, and I shall observe it to the end.”
For Knowledge

119:41, “May Your lovingkindnesses also come to me, O Lord, Your salvation according to Your word.”
For God’s Love

119:49, “Remember the word to Your servant, in which You have made me hope.”
For Hope

119:73, “Your hands made me and fashioned me; give me understanding, that I may learn Your commandments.”
For His Glory

Like this Psalm, the Proverbs promote wisdom after our approach to our Creator and Lord “the fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge; fools despise wisdom and instruction” (1:8).

We have no hope of living with wisdom or joy apart from living by the Word. The Bible matters.

Presuppositions matter.

Let’s see how we do!

John 3:16

Ephesians 5:22

Exodus 10:24-27

Judges 11:29-30, 35

In these examples, <i>what</i> do you think? <i>Why</i> do you think it?

We do not come to the study of the Bible as a blank slate. We all bring many things in our thinking and commitments to God’s word. You can often trace what a person believes about God back to a single influential incident in his life. God uses these events-turned-to-principles to help us work through His word and He uses His word to help us change these things as needed.

Are we willing?

In our approach to the Word, in humility we should be willing to have our minds changed on any issue to be in conformity to His word. Our foundational commitments – which we most likely saw in our understanding of the passages above – must be analyzed and scrutinized by the Bible. Many times our most fundamental beliefs are so assumed

as to be hidden from our consideration. But, God’s word is the lamp and light and in it we see our heart’s darkest areas lit.

Historically, our tradition uses the 5 “solas” of the Reformation to discuss the central doctrines of salvation. They indicate to us how God works and how we appropriate that work in our lives. Let’s use those same “solas” to lay out an appropriate set of presuppositions in approaching the study and application of the Scriptures. In other words, our attitude should be that God acts....

By Grace Alone.

When we come to the Word, we come because He has drawn us near to Him. I was once dead but now I am alive (Ephesians 2:1). I was once a child of Satan and wrath and now I am a child of God (Ephesians 2:4-5). He has begun the work in our lives and He continues to pursue it (Philippians 1:6). Grace will teach us how we must live before Him (Titus 2:11-12). How can I know Him? Grace alone.

By Scripture Alone.

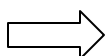
God testifies to the Bible’s sufficiency for our lives in several places. Paul in 2 Timothy 3:16-17. Peter in 2 Peter 1:3. The Bible authors believed the words they wrote were God’s own sufficient to guide and direct His people.

- The Bible contains every **necessary** thing not every *single* thing.
- The Bible speaks comprehensively to God’s people, not exhaustively.

Are we looking to the Word for our help in all areas of our lives? Do we believe that He knows us and has revealed to us what we need to know?

The sufficiency of the Scriptures could be the **single greatest reason** why we aren’t better students and listeners to the Scriptures.

Does God not speak authoritatively to our emotional condition? To our physical condition? To our eating habits? To our communication difficulties and conflict resolution? To parents? To husbands? To wives? To children? To politicians and scientists? To business conduct?



Your answers to these questions may be reflected in your Bible study habits and / or use of the Scriptures in your life.

With Faith Alone.

We don’t always see what we want when we want it. This could be why we think our prayers go unanswered or why we so quickly reach for the latest self-help book. Or why we think God just doesn’t care or can’t help in our situation.

We don’t always understand the Word before us. We may see great and grand promises of God that seem outrageous and unreachable to us! **What do we do?** Paul commands Timothy to “fight the good fight of faith” (1 Timothy 6:12) and the author of Hebrews tells us that without faith it is “impossible to please Him” (Hebrews 11:6). Like the man whose son was possessed by an evil spirit, we cry, “I believe, help my unbelief!” (Mark 9:24).

<p>Sola – <i>Gratia</i> <i>Scriptura</i> <i>Fide</i> <i>Christus</i> <i>Deo Gloria</i></p>

For Christ Alone.

The Bible is about Christ – we cannot approach passages of Scripture without understanding that at every level, Christ has fulfilled (Matthew 5:17) or will fulfill what is written. Luke 24:44-47 testifies to Jesus’ own view of the end for which the Scriptures were created (see also Matthew 22:41-45). As far back as Genesis 3:15, those things written were for the hope that God’s people would have in His saving acts on their behalf.

In fact, in what may be in the top 10 beautiful prayers ever written, Paul writes:

“For this reason, I bow my knees before the Father...that He would grant you...to be able to comprehend with all the saints what is the breadth and length and height and depth of the love of Christ”

Knowing the centrality of Christ deeply in our own hearts is at the heart of Paul’s prayer for the church. He states to us that this knowledge and understanding that comes from the Word is the power for abundant Christian living (John 10:10).

To the Glory of God Alone.

For what reason do we study? To receive from the Lord - it may be strange to approach the Scriptures with a “grace alone” mindset, but having this frame takes us to the Lord with open hands. We approach the Word humbly and expectantly.

Yet, the Bible is not a resource for me to use to get what I want. It is the testimony of God in getting what He wants: glory.

The Bible matters and our presuppositions matter. The Approach step in Bible study is where we “come clean” with the Lord before we come to His word. Remember our questions:

1. Do I really think the Bible matters?
2. Am I coming to it humbly for it to change me?

STEP 2: ASSIMILATING THE SCRIPTURES.

“Anyone who goes too far and does not abide in the teaching of Christ, does not have God; the one who abides in the teaching, he has both the Father and the Son.”

2 John 9

“And this is love that we walk according to His commandments.”

2 John 6

As the verses above make clear, our efforts at “hearing” and “obeying” are essential. Armed with our commitments to the sufficiency of the Bible, to study it diligently and a good Bible¹, what overarching interpretative principles do we need to have in hand?

In high school, I played soccer in South America for a short season. Once, our team was loaded on a charter bus traveling from the interior of Brazil (Sao Paolo) to the coast for a series of games. To pass from the interior to the coast meant climbing a more mountainous area. The actual mountain road took us all by surprise – we “discovered” it

¹ See Appendix for more information on this issue.

because we were literally being thrown left and right as the driver swerved around cars and corners!

It was a *very* harrowing experience – I was convinced that I would die several times. Yet there were two constants the whole time: the mountainside on the left and the guardrails on the right. If either were absent, then our journey’s danger would have increased exponentially.

Likewise in understanding the Bible, there are certain guardrails or principles that will keep us following the intent of the writers and allow us to apply the Word successfully. If we deviate from principles such as these, then the result may be a distorted understanding and inadequate application.

Some general comments, first.²

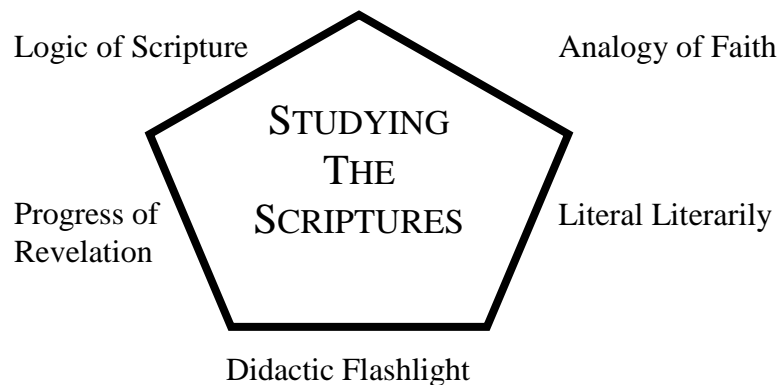
“Unique interpretations are usually wrong.”

Sometimes the proper understanding and application of the text will seem **new** to us – maybe even unique. That doesn’t mean it is wrong. Uniqueness as a goal, however, will lead us astray.

“The test of a good interpretation is that it makes good sense of the text.”

“The Bible is God’s Word given in the words of [people] in history.”

We cannot forget that there is always a tension between historical particularity and enduring relevance.³ Scripture is connected to history – there are reasons why we look to history. What a passage **meant** helps us understand what it **means**. The specific principles that we will be discussing surround the work that we will do with each kind of Bible book and genre. These are the foundation of assimilation. Consider the diagram:



These principles form the protective boundaries around our actual work with the Word. They keep us from interpreting or applying the Scriptures against their intent.

² These comments all come from Gordon Fee and Douglas Stuart, *How to Read the Bible for All It’s Worth* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1993), 14.

³ See Isaiah 7:14 and 8:3 and Matthew 1:23.

Principle #1: The Logic of Scripture.

When we discuss the logic of Scripture, we are talking about the very characteristics and consistent facts about the Bible. Four very important ones are the Scripture's inerrancy, its inspiration, its coherence and its sufficiency.

Inerrancy. "Utterly true in all it says"

God's Word is true (Psalm 19:9). The stories found there, the facts relayed there, the principles enumerated there, the descriptions of humanity, the prophecies of the future, the reaping results – are all true. Inerrancy doesn't mean no spelling errors or impeccable grammar or scientific or historical research methodology.⁴ Rather, that all God says is utterly and incontrovertibly true.

Inspiration. "Not dictated but mediated"

The classic verses here are 2 Timothy 3:16-17 and 2 Peter 1:20-21. Even our Catechism for young Children is helpful here: "Q. 15. Who wrote the Bible? A. Holy men who were taught by the Holy Spirit." Inspiration means that God moved in the personalities and circumstances of certain men to write His message.

Coherence. "All the pieces fit and follow"

We can go to the Scriptures at any point and find the proper interpretation of that passage will precisely support the main themes that run throughout the Bible. An example of this is that all prophecies lead to fulfillments. This is another way of saying that the Scriptures don't contradict themselves.

Sufficiency. "All that is necessary"

We looked at this principle above. The Bible doesn't contain all things we would ever want to know but all that we need to know. "Comprehensive not exhaustive" is good shorthand for this.

Principle #2: The Analogy of Faith

"Scripture interprets scripture."

Based on the logic of Scripture, we would expect that no part of the Bible would stand in opposition to another part; that verse A wouldn't render verse B incorrect. The "Analogy of Faith" is the historic understanding of the nature of the Scriptures. It is closely related to the coherence of the Bible, yet at this point it is expanded to include meaning.

For the interpreter, then, "no part of Scripture can be interpreted in such a way as to render it in conflict with what is clearly taught elsewhere in Scripture."⁵

For example, 2 Samuel 24:1 and 24:10 present a challenge of understanding. Add to these two the parallel in 1 Chronicles 21:1 and it becomes even more challenging.

⁴ The Scriptures were written in cultures and in tongues that don't adhere to the standards of our day. Greek, Hebrew and Aramaic are not English! Oral cultures have unique ways of passing on traditions that "writing" cultures don't share. Consider our time a writing culture: books, newspapers, internet, blogs, etc. – by and large we are not a nation of storytellers!

⁵ R.C. Sproul, *Knowing Scripture* (Downers Grove: IVP, 1977), 46.

However we conclude on these passages, they must correspond to verses such as James 1:13 and 17.

Our inability to produce a harmony between passages like these doesn't render the Scriptures in error – we're the finite ones, remember?

Principle #3: Literal literarily.

“What it says according to its genre.”

Martin Luther called this *sensus literalis*. Sproul says that “to interpret the Bible literally is to interpret it as literature. That is, the natural meaning of a passage is to be interpreted according to the normal rules or grammar, speech, syntax and context.”⁶

Ecclesiastes 5:1 vs. 6:3-4 vs. 7:6

We would be incorrect to think that *Lamentations* and *Exodus 20* can be approached and studied in exactly the same way. When one comes to poetry, for example, he should expect images, pictures, metaphors and allusions. When one comes to didactic or teaching passages like the 10 Commandments, we should understand the language to be much different.

“Literal, literarily” is simply a way of saying that whatever genre of passage we are considering, we will allow it to direct how we interpret it.

Principle #4: The Didactic Flashlight.

“Appeal to the clear to understand the unclear.”

Sometimes, in order to fully understand the point of *historical* or *descriptive* material it will be necessary to look to related clearly *teaching* passages. Narrative or historical material will describe or illustrate principles. In them, there will be legitimate application, however, as they describe, we must be careful to draw out norms and rules from them.

Should all churches have 12 elders (Matthew 10)?

Should pastors be celibate like Christ?

Should pastors ride only donkeys?

David and Solomon had many wives yet Paul says in 1 Timothy 3:2 that the elder must be the “husband of one wife.” How do we evaluate David and Solomon? Do we look to Paul's writings and say he's wrong (violating coherence) or do we look at David and Solomon *in light of Paul* for a conclusion?

The principle is that God intends us to have one wife so when we look to the stories of Bible characters and see their many wives, at times, we have to understand those facts in this light (see 1 Kings 11:1-8).

Principle #5: The Progress of Revelation

“The latter completes the former.”

The book of Hebrews clearly illustrates this principle. Hebrews 7 says that Genesis 14 introduced Melchizedek so that Christ could be introduced later. Hebrews 8 says that

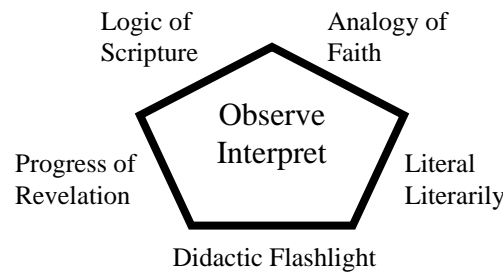
⁶ *Knowing Scripture*, 48.

the high priest of Israel did what they did so that Christ’s ministry could be better understood. That chapter also looks to the progress of the covenants from “old” to “new.”

God has always sufficiently revealed Himself to His people. At every stage of redemptive history, we have had exactly what we needed. Moses’ time enjoyed the Pentateuch (the 1st 5 books); David’s time had this plus some Psalms and other historical writings; Ezekiel had this entire plus many of the prophets and we have all of this to completion.

THE HEART OF ASSIMILATION: OBSERVATION AND INTERPRETATION

The five principles that we have studied provide the handrails for us to move forward in our study of the Bible. We take these principles and fill in our study method. The steps to our study are purposefully progressive: observation to interpretation.



OBSERVATION: SMALL TO LARGE.

The Observation step is the *patient digging into the details of the text*. This is a time-consuming step but the critical one en-route to application.

In the Observation step, we are looking at the passage from its smallest element to its largest. One definition of observation says, “The general function of observation is to enable one to become *saturated* with the particulars of a passage so that one is thoroughly conscious of their existence and of the need for their explanation.” Starting with the smallest element of the passage, the words, we’ll work to the largest element, the section.

This is not the interpretation phase yet – here, we must be diligent to make detailed observations and begin to form interpretations. If we charge ahead to interpretation before we complete observation, **we will miss something!**

We will be observing:

The Words.

- | | |
|------------------------------------|----------------|
| Unknown words | Narrated words |
| Contrasting words | Speakers |
| Descriptive words | Audience |
| Quoted words | Scenery |
| Repeated words | Places |
| Words “out of place”
or unusual | Times |

Be specific! Don’t leave even relevant “the,” “but” or “and” un-noted!

The Verbs.

“Follow the verbs” because the intention is most often carried on by the verbs.
Note the different “kinds” of verbs: singular, plural, active, passive, gerunds⁷

The Phrase.

Where does the phrase end?
Connected to other phrases?
Related words in the phrase?

The Sentence.

Where does the sentence end?
Connected to other sentences?
Does the thought continue after the sentence or stop?

The Paragraph.

Have you identified the “limits” of the thought?
Where does the paragraph end?
Does the thought continue after the paragraph or stop?

The Chapter.

Are these thoughts and words found throughout the rest of the chapter?
Are there any connections between this passage and others in the chapter?

The Book.

Do these words or concepts seem familiar from other parts of the book?

At end step of this observation, we will need to record the details of the text. Using the category and questions above, we will be able to list and catalog all of the particulars that will help us to interpret and apply.

OBSERVATION: “SMALL TO LARGE”

Passage: **Judges 10:6-16; Romans 1:18-32; Titus 3:1-11, Philippians 3:1-16, Jude**

Verse	Word, Verb or Phrase	Definition or Note	Connecting Thoughts ⁸

⁷ Verbs ending in -ing.

⁸ Other words, verses, books or interpretative ideas

INTERPRETATION: INSIDE TO OUTSIDE.

The Interpretation step is *reflecting on the details of the text to determine what the author meant*. God has a specific intent with each passage thus each biblical author had a specific intent with each passage. **Each passage**, according to the Logic of Scripture, has a role and a purpose.

Even though we must approach the text with humility (it is God's word), we must do so relentlessly: we *have* to know his point, so that we can take his point and make it applicable to our situation and time.⁹

- If we miss **his original meaning**, we will mistakenly interpret and apply the text in our lives.

In this phase, we look first at the passage's meaning on the "inside." In other words, the author's point based on what **he's** written (here and in other places). Next, we will look at the passage's meaning on the "outside." In other words, the author's point in company with **other** authors who make the same point.

Inside.

1. Meaning of the passage (words, phrases, sentences, paragraphs): e.g., 1 John 1:9
 - Look up unusual words, places or names for understanding
 - Ask questions of the text:
 - Who** was here and how is that related?
 - What** does this mean?
 - When** is this – does that matter?
 - Where** was this – does that matter?
 - Why** did he say this and in this way?
2. Meaning in near context: e.g., 1 John 1
 - What does this contribute to this larger section?
 - Why does he need this passage to make this point?
3. Meaning related to the book: e.g., 1 John
 - Is this a key passage or a supportive passage for the book's message?
4. Meaning consistent with the author: e.g., Gospel of John, 2 John, 3 John, Revelation
 - Is this material familiar from another of his books?
 - Do similar materials from other books help us understand this?

⁹ Historically, the technique that we are studying is called the grammatical-historical method of interpretation. Simply stated, the grammar (words, structure) and the context or setting of the verse leads us to what the author meant. We presume nothing about the meaning of the text unless the author leads us there.

<p style="text-align: center;"><u>Meaning of Passage</u></p> <p>Unusual words, places or names:</p> <p>Who:</p> <p>What:</p> <p>When:</p> <p>Where:</p> <p>Why:</p> 	<p style="text-align: center;"><u>Meaning in Near Context</u></p> <p>What point does this contribute?</p> <p>Why does he need this passage?</p>
	<p style="text-align: center;"><u>Meaning Related to Book</u></p> <p>Is this a key passage? What is the theme?</p> <p>Is this a supportive passage? What does it contribute to the larger point?</p>
	<p style="text-align: center;"><u>Meaning Consistent with Books</u></p> <p>Have we seen this before? Where?</p> <p>How will that material help us understand this?</p>

What does the text mean? What is the author's point?

Remember: we must know what it MEANT so we can know what it MEANS to us.

Outside.

1. Authors in that genre: e.g., General Epistles (Hebrews, James, Peter, Jude)

- Do we find this point in any other same-genre authors?
- How is their point different?
- How is their point the same?
- How does it broaden the scope of our point?

Other Authors

2. Related to other authors directly: e.g., forgiveness in 1 John 1 to forgiveness in Ephesians 4

- Do other authors make the same point?

Other Authors – Same Issue

3. To other genres: e.g., forgiveness in 1 John 1 to the parable of the unmerciful servant in Matthew 18:23-25

- How do other genres make the point?

Other Genres – Same Issue

To the other Testament: e.g., forgiveness in 1 John 1 to forgiveness in Genesis 45:4-5

- How does the OT deepen our understanding of this NT point?
- How does the NT fulfill our understanding of this OT point?

Other Testament

4. Commentators and almanacs viewpoints on the text and meaning¹⁰

Commentaries, Almanacs

Any changes to our understanding of the text's meaning?

What does the text mean? What is the author's point?

¹⁰My practice has always been to let commentators input in consideration after I've struggled with the text.

STEP 3: APPLYING THE SCRIPTURES.

For all but a very new Christian, one cannot go through observation and interpretation without also seeing points of application. As many teachers of Bible application note we cannot go fully into application without fully understanding the text itself.

At the application stage, we are taking our observation-based interpretation, and *making it tell us what to do*. There are many ways to do this. The most effective may be to consider application in light of our relationships.

In other words, God made us relational. That is, as soon as we are born, we are in at least four different relationships: with God, with other humans, with creation and with the spiritual hosts.

He experiences the First Relationship (Father-Son-Spirit) and made us to be in relationships with Him and with each other. The Bible text we're studying then should be viewed in light of our relationships:

- **With God** (Father, Son and Holy Spirit)
- **With each other**
- **With creation**
- **With the spiritual hosts**

OK, I know what you're thinking. "Why go through all of this trouble? This whole exercise has already taken me a long time. Do I really need to go through this? Isn't this just for guys like you?"

Fair enough.

Here are some of the reasons why I believe you should follow a Bible study format like we've presented in this class.

1. The nature of the Bible is that it is deep and God intends it to go deep in our hearts (Hebrews 4:12).
2. We are more wicked and rebellious than we know (Jeremiah 17:9; Romans 7:15).
3. Our most important relationship (with God through Christ) is our most mysterious one because it is by faith (Hebrews 11:6).
4. We are naturally lazy, easily satisfied and quickly idolatrous (1 Corinthians 10:7).
5. We are tenaciously oriented toward self and not God (Philippians 2:3; James 2:1).
6. We are told to be intoxicated with the Spirit (Ephesians 5:18).
7. We think more highly of our condition than we ought (1 Corinthians 10:1-13).
8. We think too lowly and meanly of Christ (Revelation 2:4) and our need for the Gospel (1 John).
9. Are we mature enough to forsake serious study (Hebrews 5:11-14)?

10. If you ask yourselves (and the Lord) about your study of Scripture, is it yielding fruitful progress in:

- The knowledge of, hatred for and repentance from your sin
- Joy in your salvation
- Your worship of Christ
- Your love for the brethren

If, after you consider these points above, you believe you're "good" where you are – then be patient with the rest of us!

What does the message of this text mean for me?

This is the big question we're asking at this point in our study. Jesus gives us stern warnings about what will happen to the one who hears and does not do (Luke 6:47-19; Matthew 7:24-27).

As we said above, our application follows four relational trajectories. Texts will always have application in light of our relationship to God and to others. There may also be relevant application vis-à-vis creation and the spiritual hosts.

GOD

What does this tell me about God (Father, Son or Spirit)?

- That He did...
- That He is...
- That He will...
- That He requires...

What about the Gospel?

- Whom do I trust?
- Does it reveal who I'm living for or what I value?
- Have I forgotten what He has done?
- Have I forgotten who I am?
- Have I forgotten what He is doing for me (Hebrews 7:25)?

What action is required of me?

- Confession of sin
- Repentance for sin
- New / renewed belief about Him
- Prayer
- Worship
- Giving

OTHERS

What does this tell me about me?

What does this tell me about others?

What action is required of me?

- Confession of sin
- Overlook offenses (Prov. 10:12; 1 Peter 4:8)

Reconciliation with others
Confrontation of another because of sin
Service

What does this tell me about my enemies (flesh, world, and devil)?

What action is required of me?

Change my practices (TV, internet, shopping)

Journal my thoughts, struggles

CREATION

Does this text show me how to fulfill the Creation Mandate (Genesis 1:28)?

Am I treating creation as God instructs?

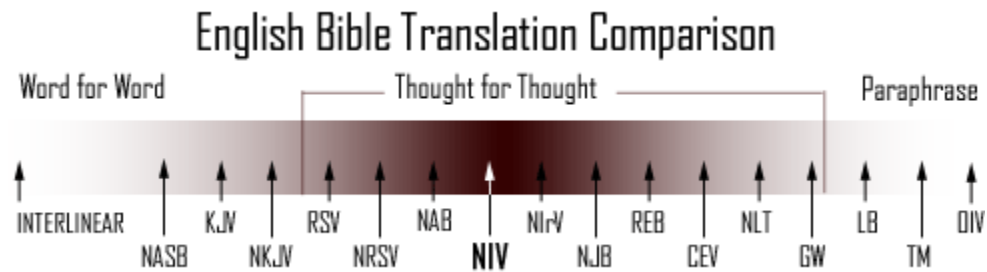
SPIRITUAL HOSTS

How does this text inform my view of spiritual warfare?

After we obtain answers to our questions in these four relational trajectories, we need to make sure we have practical steps to implement the point of the text in our lives.

Appendix 1.

English Bible Translation Comparison



**This chart helps to “plot” where translations fall on a scale of philosophy.

"Greek Meaning Versus English Translation" OR "What is the Best English Translation?"

As people start reading the New Testament in Greek, there is always the question about how to translate certain words and idiomatic Greek constructions into English. It is important when learning Greek to understand that the "meaning of a Greek sentence" and "producing a translation into English" are two distinct ideas (or processes). Once the Greek meaning of a New Testament passage is understood, then an adequate English translation can be produced. First year Greek students should not be too concerned about producing a smooth English translation to start with. It is probably best to be too 'literal' at first to make sure you understand all the Greek nuances. Once the Greek is thoroughly understood, then you can work on producing a good translation.

Greek Meaning

What something means in Greek has to do with what the writer of the Greek is trying to convey. What is the Greek writer/speaker saying? In trying to decipher what the Greek sentence means, obviously you are required in some sense to translate it into the language you speak/think in. However, you should not be overly concerned about trying to create a 'polished' translation before you have a complete understanding of what the Greek sentence (writing) itself is trying to convey. There are many idioms, nuances, and emphases in Greek that need to be considered before the meaning of the writer is fully understood. You need to understand each verbal tense, the different possibilities of meaning for each word, and the relationships of the words to each other in this construction.

Once you have a thorough understanding of what you feel the writer was trying to convey, then you can go about trying to find the best English translation to fit that meaning. As much as possible, you want to convey the same meaning in English that was written in Greek.

Translating Into English

I have a real respect for people who are able to produce an accurate, yet easily readable, English translation from the Greek. There are many challenges in producing an English translation. Some have commented about wanting a 'word for word' translation of the Greek New Testament. Keep in mind that one language can never adequately translate another language with the same feeling, emphasis, rhyme, idiom, etc. Due to these and other factors inherent in language, doing a 'word for word' translation is not really that meaningful. This would only be a valid kind of exercise if there were two languages that corresponded so close in structure that the only difference in the two was their vocabulary. Then there would also be the requirement that each word in one language had one and only one word that exactly corresponded to it in the other language. There are no two languages that I know of that correspond to each other in grammar, rules of syntax, semantic structure, etc., especially not modern English and Koine (Biblical) Greek.

Because of these differences in language, producing a translation inherently means that there must be some interpretation on the part of the translator. There is no such thing as a completely 'unbiased' translation. However, as a translator consciously puts aside all intention of conveying certain doctrinal notions and preconceived ideas, then chances are he will produce a less-biased translation.

The 'Best' English Translations

(For a more complete answer and scholarly coverage of this topic, please see an extended answer by Daniel B. Wallace at <http://www.netbible.org/docs/soapbox/versions.htm>. - The whole document is quite informative, but if you want to read about merits of specific translations, scroll down to the section entitled "Which Translation Is Best?")¹¹

Many ask the question, "What is the 'best' or most 'correct' translation?" This kind of question is not really valid without asking back, "What are you wanting to use the translation for?" Each translation was made with a specific purpose and audience in mind. Some try to be more 'literal', trying not to add extra words or more interpretation than necessary (such as the old 1901 American Standard version or Rotherham's Emphasized Bible). These kinds of translations tend to be less readable, but more appropriate for study. Others try to convey the more subtle meaning of the Greek by focusing on the tense and aspect of Greek verbs (e.g. Wuest). Others use amplification and paraphrase to convey nuances of Greek that are difficult to bring out in English (e.g. Amplified or Weymouth). Some translations are more concerned about being easily understandable and therefore are forced to add more interpretation (e.g. NIV, J.B. Philips, and many of the recent contemporary translations). I own many kinds of translations and try to read them all depending on my need at the time. (A couple of my favorite Bibles for all-around use are the New American Standard and the New King James version. These tend to be fairly readable; yet don't take too many 'liberties' in interpretation.)

¹¹ Attached after this article.

If a person is trying to learn Greek, then using a [side-by-side Greek-English parallel New Testament](#) (or possibly a [Greek-English interlinear](#)) may be appropriate. It is surprising how much you can learn over time by being in meetings where someone is reading the English Bible and you following along in the Greek.

Another interesting New Testament to use for study is "The Precise Parallel New Testament" (by Oxford University Press). It includes the Greek text and seven different Bible translations on each page: Greek, King James Version, Rheims Bible, Amplified Bible, New International Version, New Revised Standard Version, New American Bible, and the New American Standard Bible.

From http://www.ntgreek.org/learn_nt_greek/meaning_vs_translation.htm

V. Which Translation Is Best?

In this essay we've been looking at the differences in Bible translations. We have noted that the Greek text behind the King James NT is different from the Greek text behind most modern translations. We have seen that the discovery of the papyri at the turn of the century has shed much light on the meaning of biblical words. And we have found that Bible translations, by-in-large, are either word-for-word or phrase-for-phrase translations and that there are pros and cons with each of these. Today, we want to look briefly at five or six popular translations and discuss their values.

But before we look at these translations, I'd like to make *three* general comments. First, you might think there is *no* hope of ever knowing what the Word of God really says. There are so many translations that read so differently! How can anyone who does not know Greek or Hebrew really know what the Bible says? I am personally convinced that the Holy Spirit is sovereign over even the worst translations. Even in extremely biased or sectarian translations, all the major doctrines can be found. And if you know which translations are best, then you will be much better off!

Second, one of the best safeguards you can follow is to stay away from the sectarian translations or those done by an individual. The New World Translation, by the Jehovah's Witnesses, is the best known sectarian translation. We will speak about this translation a little later. Translations by individuals include Moffatt's, Weymouth's, J. B. Phillips, The Living Bible, Kenneth Wuest's Expanded Translation, and the Berkley *New Testament*. To be sure, there is much merit in each of these--especially the last four. But the idiosyncrasies and theological biases of a translation are far more apparent when it is produced by one man.

Third, to the question "Which translation is best?", there can be no singular answer. I suggest that every Christian who is serious about studying the Bible own at least *two* translations. He should have *at least* one dynamic equivalence translation (or phrase-for-phrase) and one formal equivalence translation (that is, word-for-word translation). In fact, it would be good to have *two* dynamic equivalence translations--because in this type

of translation, the translator is also the interpreter. If his interpretation is correct, it can only *clarify* the meaning of the text; if it is incorrect, then it only clarifies the interpretation of the translator!

Now, for the translations.

King James Version

The King James Bible has with good reason been termed, "the noblest monument of English prose" (RSV preface). Above all its rivals, the King James Version has had the greatest impact in shaping the English language. It is a literary masterpiece. But, lest anyone wishes to revere it because it was "good enough for St. Paul," or some such nonsense, we must remember that the King James Bible of today is not the King James of 1611. It has undergone three revisions, incorporating more than 100,000 changes! Further, there are over 300 words in the King James that no longer mean what they meant in 1611. If one wishes to use a Bible that follows the same Greek and Hebrew texts as the King James, I recommend the *New King James Version*.²

Revised Standard Version

The RSV was completed in 1952 and was intended to be, in part, a revision of the King James. Of course, it used the ancient MSS of the NT, resulting in the omission of several verses and words. But the wording was still archaic. The RSV attempts to be a word-for-word translation where possible. The NRSV follows the same principle of translation, though has now become more "gender-inclusive" in its approach. At times this is very helpful; at other times, it is misleading.

New American Standard

The NASB is something of an evangelical counterpart to the RSV. It, too, was intended to be something of a revision of the King James. There are three major differences between the RSV and the NASB: first, the NASB is less archaic in its wording. Second, its translators were more conservative theologically than the RSV translators. Third, because of the translators' desire to adhere as closely to the wording of the original, often this translation is stilted and wooden. Still, the NASB is probably the best *word-for-word* translation available today.

New English Bible

The NEB was completed in 1971, after a quarter of a century of labor. It marks a new milestone in translation: it is not a revision, but a brand new translation. It is a phrase-for-phrase translation. Unfortunately, sometimes the biases of the translators creep into the text. The REB (Revised English Bible) follows the same pattern: excellent English, though not always faithful to the Greek and Hebrew.

New International Version

The NIV was published in 1978. It may be considered a counterpart to the NEB. It is more a phrase-for-phrase translation than a word-for-word translation, and the scholars were generally more conservative than those who worked on the NEB. I personally consider it the best phrase-for-phrase translation available today. However, its major flaw is in its simplicity of language. The editors wanted to make sure it was easy to read. In achieving this goal, they often sacrificed accuracy (in particular, in the NT, sentences are shortened, subordination of thought is lost, conjunctions are deleted).

New World Translation

Finally, a word should be said about the *New World Translation* by the Jehovah's Witnesses. Due to the sectarian bias of the group, as well as to the lack of genuine biblical scholarship, I believe that the New World Translation is by far the worst translation in English dress. It purports to be word-for-word, and in most cases is slavishly literal to the point of being terrible English. But, ironically, whenever a sacred cow is demolished by the biblical writers themselves, the Jehovah's Witnesses twist the text and resort to an interpretive type of translation. In short, it combines the cons of both worlds, with none of the pros.

In summary, I would suggest that each English-speaking Christian own at least a NASB or RSV and an NIV. As well, I think it would be helpful to possess a King James and even a New English Bible. And then, make sure that you *read* the book!

Excerpts from Daniel Wallace's article on http://www.bible.org/page.asp?page_id=663