



*INSTITUTE OF  
SPIRITUAL FORMA-  
TION*

**Fall Semester - 2009**

**HOW TO INTERPRET THE BIBLE**

**INTRODUCTION, OVERVIEW, AND GENERAL PRINCIPLES**





## INTRODUCTION

### Course Outline and Instructions

1. **General Introduction and Basic Overview.**
2. **Nine General Principles for Interpreting the Bible.**
3. Eight Grammatical Principles for Interpreting the Bible.
4. Three Historical Principles for Interpreting the Bible.
5. Four Theological Principles for Interpreting the Bible.
6. Practical Bible Study Tools.

**Reading Assignments:** Please feel free to read the book Knowing Scripture by R. C. Sproul at your own pace. We will eventually touch on the various topics found in the book but not necessarily in the order Sproul discusses them. My goal is to supplement your reading with additional material during the class time and in this way give you a broader exposure to the information. Do not get “hung up” or confused about something in the book. If you find something Sproul says is confusing or difficult to understand, go ahead and read it but push it aside and go on to the rest of the book. Some parts of the book are more technical and others are more practical. **DON’T MISS THE PRACTICAL SIMPLY BECAUSE YOU STOPPED READING DUE TO THE TECHNICAL!** Plus I will try my best to explain the technical.



**Questions About Your Reading or Class Teaching:** Questions from your reading or from the class itself can be given to me via email. Go to our church's Web page: ([www.cpcgoodyear.org](http://www.cpcgoodyear.org)) - at the bottom of the home page you will find a button "Sermons and More." Click that button and on the extreme right hand of the page you will find a section reserved for the Institute of Spiritual Formation. Each week we will put the lecture audio there plus the study sheets. If you miss a night you can go to the Web site and listen to the week you missed and the study notes with fill-in the blanks will be there!

Click on the "Have an ISF Question" button and fill out the form. Be sure to follow the directions at the bottom of the page and hit the "send message" button. Your question will go into a special folder that I will check regularly and reply to you either by email or at the beginning of the next class. Using this method for your questions will ensure that your questions to me do not get pushed into my "junk mail" or get lost in the many emails I already receive. This method will only provide me with ISF questions. I will let you know that I received your question.



**GENERAL INTRODUCTION AND BASIC OVERVIEW**

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1. The Bible is \_\_\_\_\_.
2. This story involves four aspects:
  - a. \_\_\_\_\_
  - b. \_\_\_\_\_
  - c. \_\_\_\_\_
  - d. \_\_\_\_\_
3. Two technical but very important words: “exegesis” and “hermeneutics”
  - “Exegesis” deals with what the text \_\_\_\_\_ when it was written.
  - “Hermeneutics” deals with what the text \_\_\_\_\_ today or how it is \_\_\_\_\_.
4. Take heart: you \_\_\_\_\_ learn to properly interpret the Bible!
5. Five important assumptions that will guide our study in this course:
  - The Bible is \_\_\_\_\_.
  - The Bible contains its own \_\_\_\_\_ of interpretation that will guide you to the correct \_\_\_\_\_ of a given passage.
  - The primary goal of Biblical interpretation is to discover the author’s original \_\_\_\_\_.
  - There is one basic \_\_\_\_\_ of a text but hundreds of \_\_\_\_\_.
  - Language can \_\_\_\_\_ spiritual truth.
6. Four basic questions to ask as you read and study the Bible:
  - What does it \_\_\_\_\_?
  - What does that \_\_\_\_\_?
  - How does this relate to the \_\_\_\_\_ of what the Bible says?
  - What does it mean \_\_\_\_\_?



7. Simple Suggestions for reading and studying the Bible:

- Find a \_\_\_\_\_ place where you can regularly go for reading and studying the Bible.
- Secure a good \_\_\_\_\_ translation of the Bible:

--I recommend any of the following for study:

The \_\_\_\_\_

The \_\_\_\_\_

The \_\_\_\_\_

The \_\_\_\_\_

--For “easy” reading I recommend *The Message* by Eugene Peterson—but don’t use this one for study except to check out a possible reading of a verse that seems unclear.

- Schedule your \_\_\_\_\_ on your daily calendar—allow adequate time.
- Here is a formula for you to strive for: Read the Bible \_\_\_\_\_; study it \_\_\_\_\_ or at least \_\_\_\_\_.
- Pick a book and start at the \_\_\_\_\_ and read straight through to the \_\_\_\_\_. [This you may do a chapter a day; then go back and study it more in depth]

8. Requirements for a proper \_\_\_\_\_ of the Bible:

- A genuine \_\_\_\_\_.
- A desire to \_\_\_\_\_.
- An \_\_\_\_\_ heart.
- Some \_\_\_\_\_.
- A \_\_\_\_\_ heart.



**NINE GENERAL PRINCIPLES FOR INTREPRETING THE BIBLE**

**PART 1**

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1. PRINCIPLE # 1 – THE BIBLE IS THE FINAL AUTHORITY IN WHAT WE ARE TO \_\_\_\_\_ AND HOW WE ARE TO \_\_\_\_\_.

- Historically there have been three sources of authority for understanding spiritual truth:
  - a. There is \_\_\_\_\_
  - b. There is \_\_\_\_\_
  - c. There is \_\_\_\_\_
  
- Authority in the Bible is expressed in various ways:
  - a. A person acts in an authoritative way and the passage tells us whether their actions were \_\_\_\_\_ or \_\_\_\_\_.
  - b. A person acts in an authoritative way but the passage does not \_\_\_\_\_ approval or disapproval.
  - c. God, an angel, or one of his prophets or apostles states the \_\_\_\_\_ of God.

2. PRINCIPLE # 2 – THE \_\_\_\_\_ IS ITS OWN BEST INTERPRETER; THAT IS, SCRIPTURE BEST INTERPRETS \_\_\_\_\_.

- Matthew 1:23 explains or interprets Isaiah 7:14.



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- When the New Testament quotes the Old Testament, we need to read the whole content \_\_\_\_\_ of the passage being quoted.
- Basic principles to keep in mind:
  - a. One passage of Scripture cannot \_\_\_\_\_ another passage of Scripture.
  - b. Each part \_\_\_\_\_ of the Bible has a contribution to make to the complete understanding of the \_\_\_\_\_, but taken by itself is incomplete and may even be misleading.
  - c. Interpret the obscure and unclear passages by the \_\_\_\_\_ passages; and the partial and incomplete by the more \_\_\_\_\_ one.
  - d. Use the Old Testament as the \_\_\_\_\_ and preparation for understanding the New Testament. Interpret the Old Testament in light of the \_\_\_\_\_ and its fulfillment in Christ.
  - e. Remember that \_\_\_\_\_ is the central message of the Bible.

### 3. PRINCIPLE #3 – PERSONAL \_\_\_\_\_ AND THE \_\_\_\_\_ ARE REQUIRED TO PROPERLY UNDERSTAND AND TO CORRECTLY INTERPRET THE BIBLE.

- Four Passages of Scripture that support this principle:
  - a. 2 Corinthians 4:4 - -
  - b. 1 Corinthians 2:14 - -
  - c. 1 Corinthians 2:12 - -
  - d. John 16:13 - -
- Seeing things from God's \_\_\_\_\_ is specifically the work of the \_\_\_\_\_.



- Being a Christian and having \_\_\_\_\_ is no guarantee that you will accurately interpret every passage in the Bible, but it is \_\_\_\_\_ for properly understanding spiritual truth.



**NINE GENERAL PRINCIPLES FOR INTERPRETING THE BIBLE**

**PART 2**

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1. PRINCIPLE # 4 – INTERPRET PERSONAL \_\_\_\_\_ IN THE LIGHT OF SCRIPTURE AND NOT \_\_\_\_\_ IN THE LIGHT OF PERSONAL EXPERIENCE.

- Example: The New Testament does not teach that because Jesus rose from the dead He is therefore the Son of God. Rather, because He is the Son of God, He rose from the dead.
- “Because I have had this experience, the following must be true...” is \_\_\_\_\_ sound procedure in interpreting the Bible.
- Though you and I learn from experience, we do not \_\_\_\_\_ the Bible on the basis of these experiences.
- Allow Scripture to interpret and shape your \_\_\_\_\_ rather than interpreting \_\_\_\_\_ from your experiences.

2. PRINCIPLE # 5 – BIBLICAL EXAMPLES ARE AUTHORITATIVE ONLY WHEN THEY ARE SUPPORTED BY A \_\_\_\_\_.

- As you read the Bible it becomes clear that you are not to \_\_\_\_\_ the \_\_\_\_\_ of every person you meet there. [Examples: Moses gets angry and disobeys; King David is filled with lust and commits adultery; Peter loses courage and denies Christ.]
- Where the Bible is silent then Christians have \_\_\_\_\_ to make up their own minds to do or abstain from doing. [The Bible sets boundaries on what cannot be done, not on what can be done. A good Biblical principle is that all things are lawful unless specifically prohibited.]



3. PRINCIPLE # 6 – THE PRIMARY PURPOSE OF THE BIBLE IS TO \_\_\_\_\_ OUR LIVES,  
NOT JUST INCREASE OUR \_\_\_\_\_.

- Two primary ways we learn: from \_\_\_\_\_ experience and from the experiences \_\_\_\_\_ . Therefore, when we read the Bible we should seek to learn from others whose lives are recorded there for our benefit.
- Important questions to ask when you read Scripture:
  - a. Is there some \_\_\_\_\_ I need to \_\_\_\_\_ ?
  - b. Is there some \_\_\_\_\_ I need to \_\_\_\_\_ ?
  - c. Is there some \_\_\_\_\_ I need to \_\_\_\_\_ ?
  - d. Is there some \_\_\_\_\_ I need to \_\_\_\_\_ ?
  - e. Is there some \_\_\_\_\_ I need to \_\_\_\_\_ ?
  - f. Is there some \_\_\_\_\_ I need to \_\_\_\_\_ ?
  - g. Is there some \_\_\_\_\_ I need to \_\_\_\_\_ ?
  - h. Is there some \_\_\_\_\_ I need to \_\_\_\_\_ ?
  - i. Is there something for which I need to \_\_\_\_\_ / \_\_\_\_\_ God?
- ALWAYS REMEMBER: Correct \_\_\_\_\_ of the passage is necessary before you can make a correct \_\_\_\_\_ of its message!



**NINE GENERAL PRINCIPLES FOR INTREPRETING THE BIBLE**

**PART 3**

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1. PRINCIPLE # 7 – EACH CHRISTIAN HAS THE RIGHT AND RESPONSIBILITY TO \_\_\_\_\_ AND \_\_\_\_\_ THE WORD OF GOD FOR HIM/HER SELF.
- This was one of the critical undergirding foundations of the Reformation because for hundreds of years people had depended on the \_\_\_\_\_ to do the studying and interpreting of the Scriptures for them. There were no translations of the Bible in the language of the people.
  - This is called the Principle of \_\_\_\_\_ Interpretation.
  - Remember: When your own interpretation leads you to a conclusion \_\_\_\_\_ from the historic meaning men of God have given to the passage, then you know you are in error.
  - Also, one part of the Bible cannot \_\_\_\_\_ another part of the Bible.
2. PRINCIPLE # 8 – THE CHURCH DOES NOT DETERMINE WHAT THE BIBLE \_\_\_\_\_; THE BIBLE DETERMINES WHAT THE \_\_\_\_\_ TEACHES!
- History was not meant to be decisive in the interpretation of Scripture, for there have been times when the \_\_\_\_\_ has not been true to the Word of God.
  - However, we still must not overlook the \_\_\_\_\_ of church history. It can provide a \_\_\_\_\_ and \_\_\_\_\_ for you in your own study of the Bible.  
[Charles Spurgeon once said “It seems odd that certain men who talk so much of what the Holy Spirit reveals to them should think so little of what He revealed to others.”]



- There are three sources of authority in the Christian life: \_\_\_\_\_, \_\_\_\_\_, and \_\_\_\_\_. BUT when there is disagreement among the three types of authority, \_\_\_\_\_ must be the final court of appeal. Scripture is the \_\_\_\_\_ and \_\_\_\_\_ authority!
- Historical Note: Our Roman Catholic sisters and brothers hold two sources of authority in equal balance. Rome believes that \_\_\_\_\_ and \_\_\_\_\_ are equal sources for faith and practice. Reformed believers (i.e. those who draw their theological basis from the Reformation) believe that \_\_\_\_\_ Scripture is the final authority. [“As a result the Church, to whom the transmission and interpretation of Revelation is entrusted, ‘does not derive her certainty about revealed truths from the holy Scripture alone. **Both Scripture and Tradition must be accepted and honored with equal sentiments of devotion and reverence.**” *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, Part One, Article 2, “The Transmission of Divine Revelation,” II. The Relationship Between Tradition and Sacred Scripture, 82, bold print emphasis mine].

3. PRINCIPLE # 9 – INTERPRET THE \_\_\_\_\_ OF GOD WITHIN THE CONTEXT BEFORE YOU SEEK TO \_\_\_\_\_ THEM TO YOUR LIFE. [“In applying the promises of the Bible to our specific situations we need to exercise great care”—Bernard Ramm]

- The \_\_\_\_\_ here is that if we apply promises to ourselves that are not for us, we will no doubt suffer great disappointment with God or the Bible. Here are some guidelines to consider:
  - a. Notice if the promise is \_\_\_\_\_ in scope. A key word to look for here is the word \_\_\_\_\_.
  - b. Notice if the promise is \_\_\_\_\_. [Example: When God spoke to Paul, “Do not be afraid; keep on speaking, do not be silent. For I am with you, and no one is going to attack and harm you...Acts 18:9-10—that was a personal promise to Paul and may not be used generally. Now it may apply to your life and situation but it may not, so you have to be careful.]



- c. Notice if the promise is \_\_\_\_\_—and most are! [Examples: see James 4:8 and 1 John 1:9]
- d. Notice if the promise is for our \_\_\_\_\_. [Some promises were made to the Jews and do not apply to you and me today]



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NOTES

