

How to Study the Bible

And

The Rules for Interpretive Bible Study



By: David A. Sargent

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To discover the interpretation of a passage of the Bible a text must be understood by certain things pertaining to language and how thoughts are formed into words. For this we **MUST** grasp an understanding of some basic principles for interpretation. Before we get started it is important that the reader understand that these “rules of thumb” are not to supersede in any way the Revelation of God, but to bear witness to it or vindicate it. Without these principles the Bible teacher stands to teach incorrectly, erroneously, fabrications, out and out LIES or worst Heresies and / or Blasphemy! Under the heading of “Equipping the Saints”; here are **The Rules for Interpretive Bible Study**:

- 1) Interpretation
 - a) Contextual
 - i) A Text without a Context is a Pretext. A pretext is a red herring or a con, ploy or ruse.
 - ii) A Verse in the Biblical Text does not stand Alone: to disjoin a verse to another verse location without considering both contexts is to practice to deceive. This is the con used by all heretics.
 - iii) Contextomy: Contextomies are stereotypically intentional, but may also occur accidentally if someone misinterprets the meaning and omits something essential to clarifying it, thinking it non-essential. Arguments based on this fallacy typically take two forms:
 - (1) As a straw man argument, which is frequently found in politics, it involves quoting an opponent out of context in order to misrepresent their position (typically to make it seem more simplistic or extreme) in order to make it easier to refute.
 - (2) As an appeal to authority, it involves quoting an authority on the subject out of context, in order to misrepresent that authority as supporting some position.
 - b) Comparative
 - c) Typological (as, like, etc.)
 - i) Similitudes
 - ii) Metaphors
 - iii) Parables
 - iv) Images
 - v) Allegories
 - vi) Symbols
 - vii) Comparisonisms
- 2) Applications

- a) Doctrinal
 - b) Prophetical
 - c) Historical
 - d) Personal or Practical
 - e) Reverse Historical or Histrophetical or Prophistorical.
 - f) Spiritual
 - g) Devotional
- 3) Illumination: the discernable implication of a particular passage and how it is applied and its multiple applications pertaining to it. This deals with the ability of logic, reason, understanding and discernment none of which supersedes Revelation from God who gives the Illumination.

Interpretation: Genesis 40:8b, "...Do not interpretations belong to God?..." 2 Peter 1:20, "Knowing this first, that no prophecy of the scripture is of any private interpretation." A Proof Text's Text taken Out of Context is a Pretext. When Applied to another Text is to misappropriate a Text.

To appropriate dishonestly for one's own use is to embezzle. Misappropriation is the fraudulent appropriation of funds or property entrusted to your care but actually owned by someone else.

Embezzlement, peculation, defalcation, misapplication all happen when an attempt by Bible teachers to defraud their students by misappropriation of the text, that is: by taking a text OUT of its context. This is an act of plundering the words entrusted to us and stealing them from others. It is larceny, stealing, theft, thievery and thieving. This is the act of taking something from someone unlawfully: Stealing God's words. Jeremiah 23:30, "Therefore, behold, I am against the prophets, saith the LORD, that steal my words every one from his neighbour."

This misappropriation is the wrongful borrowing, borrowing without asking, wrongful adoption of - the appropriation (of ideas or words etc.) from another source and placing it where it does NOT belong.

Consider context first at all times: this means simply reading the text for what it SAYS: IN it's context. Now, is it understandable or not. If not we may need more information about the subject mater: and it would not hurt even if we understood the text, to glean from other passages about the same topic for a better and clearer picture of the subject text. But the rule of thumb is: a TEXT without a CONTEXT is a PRETEXT. A pretext is what is "read between the lines" so to speak: which could be very dangerous if you are not equipped with a through understanding of the complete Biblical Text on that subject. Remember, a pretext in English is a con, ploy or ruse. This is where many have run the ship a ground, by assuming the text means something that it doesn't. Especially an unclear text: even in its context. The Bible is self-interpreting as long as you allow for that, never assuming the Bible is WRONG, on the contrary; the Bible student must always VINDICATE the truth by substantiating and validating its words as absolute truth written by God himself. 1 Thessalonians 2:13, "For this cause also thank we God without ceasing, because, when ye received the word of God which ye heard of us, ye received it

not as the word of men, but as it is in truth, the word of God, which effectually worketh also in you that believe.”

Questions to ask about the Context:

1. Who
2. What
3. Where
4. When
5. Why
6. Which
7. How

Second the student of the Bible should then compare other passages in the Bible that would be cross-references: this is comparing Scriptures; with Scriptures. This is a vital part of understanding the mind of Christ. This is: 1 Corinthians 2:13, “Which things also we speak, not in the words which man's wisdom teacheth, but which the Holy Ghost teacheth; comparing spiritual things with spiritual.” Comparing Scriptures with Scripture we are gathering more information of a particular topic. Also when we do this type of comparison we find passages that are NOT the same even though they appear the same, we are too rightly DIVIDE these passages. 2 Timothy 2:15, “Study to shew thyself approved unto God, a workman that needeth not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth.”

The third part of interpretation is Typology: dealing with types, similitudes, metaphors, and parables: designated by the words: “as” or “like” or tells you that this is a parable. (Some things are just obvious, and needs a little common sense.) This is a comparison of what we see as physical things to what we can not see that are spiritual. Typology is not consistent, some types are more consistent than others while this may be true, you can not follow any type out 100% because it is not THE THING, it is a TYPE of THE THING. The THING Spiritual is NOT the TYPE that is representative PHYSICALLY! Being LIKE a little child is a TYPE of what happens when we are BORN AGAIN. The type does not supersede cross references, and nether of those supersede clear passages and their context. Hosea 12:10, “I have also spoken by the prophets, and I have multiplied visions, and used similitudes, by the ministry of the prophets.” Christ spoke in parables in many passages: in that case the very context would be a guide in understanding the truth.

Application: Isaiah 1:18, “Come now, and let us reason together, saith the LORD: though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they be red like crimson, they shall be as wool.” There is a REASON! We reason out the application of scriptures: Thus giving us the understanding: 1 John 5:20, “And we know that the Son of God is come, and hath given us an understanding, that we may know him that is true, and we are in him that is true, even in his Son Jesus Christ. This is the true God, and eternal life.”

There are seven applications of scripture: 1. Doctrinal; 2. Prophetical, 3. Historical; 4. Personal or Practical; 5. Reverse Historical or Prophetical; 6. Spiritual and 7. Devotional.

1. Doctrinal: 2 Timothy 3:16-17, “All scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness: That the man of God may be perfect, throughly furnished unto all good works.”

The list shows this progression: Doctrine: Correct Teaching: Doctrinally Sound; Reproof: for when someone is NOT teaching Correct Doctrine; Correction: to get back to the Doctrinal Sound or Correct Teaching; Instruction in righteousness to make the man of God PERFECT, throughly furnished UNTO all good works; not throughly furnish to DO all good works! There is a difference. So, Doctrinally Sound teaching is very much the ultimate in Biblical understanding: however, some passages that have a doctrinal slant in one direction can be used in a Spiritual or Devotional application when preaching. Sometimes a Prophetic application for a passage IS the Doctrinal application; and sometimes the TYPE IS the Doctrinal application: while in other places the Historic application IS the Doctrinal application; or the personal practical application of US in the church IS the Doctrinal application. Things ASSUMED should NOT be taught for Doctrine; because an assumed thing even when based on Scriptures is still ASSUMED with no actual proof. True Bible Study leaves NO ROOM for ASSUMPTIONS. However, when dealing with a subject mater that has been exhausted of text, context, comparative text and typology, with no real results; there might be room for assumptions, but all within the confines of the text, context, comparative text and typology involved.

2, Prophetic: 2 Peter 1:19-21, “We have also a more sure word of prophecy; whereunto ye do well that ye take heed, as unto a light that shineth in a dark place, until the day dawn, and the day star arise in your hearts: Knowing this first, that no prophecy of the scripture is of any private interpretation. For the prophecy came not in old time by the will of man: but holy men of God spake as they were moved by the Holy Ghost.” Lots of the Bible is prophetic, and many of these passages run right in line with a Historic application. Unless certain prophecies have been shown or are fulfilled they may still be hidden from popular application of a passage. Popular application would be what most Christians view a certain passage to teach. Historic application ranges from the skewed views of antiquity of the Roman Cat-holic cultish teachings to the false protestant Calvinistic cultish teachings. Nevertheless, just because someone pointed out a historic application of a passage does not mean it is the doctrinal meaning of the passage. The same can be said of any application. Many passages have duel applications: and some have multiple applications that could include all the above.

3. Historical: Someone said once that History in the Bible is His Story! There is a lot of truth to that. The first five books of the Old Testament are history; Joshua through Job is all historic. Many places there are prophecies within the history and you can make practical application using a spiritual or devotional or personal application depending on the class that you are teaching, the study itself and what you are trying to get across to your students, to who you are teaching, etc. Because the Bible is historic, and even Matthew through Acts is history, you can do a verse by verse study, and get as many applications from passages as possible. 1 Corinthians 10:11, “Now all these things happened unto them for ensamples: and they are written for our admonition, upon whom the ends of the world are come.” Historically then we have examples in the Old and New Testament we are to know about them for our benefit.

4. Personal or Practical: For the Body of Christ this would mean for Doctrine we are Pauline. Which would be the practical application; However, a practical or personal application can be made of passages that are NOT Pauline and not Doctrinal perse for the Church proper. Romans 15:4, “For whatsoever things were written aforetime were written for our learning, that we through patience and comfort of the scriptures might have hope.” While this historically applies to the Old Testament; we today can apply this to the whole Bible because we have the finished revelation of the Lord Jesus Christ. This means taking a passages that doctrinally applies to Israel in the Old Testament and making application with this for US the Church, which would be a spiritual application: thus making it practical for you students. Example: Notice: Romans 1:17, “For therein is the righteousness of God revealed from faith to faith: as it is written, The just shall live by faith.” Compared with: Habakkuk 2:4, “Behold, his soul which is lifted up is not upright in him: but the just shall live by HIS faith.” This “his” in Greek is assumed. So here you have Paul making practical application from an Old Testament passage.

5. Reverse Historical or Prophetic: The best way to explain this is to give an example: Isaiah 14:12-14, “How art thou fallen from heaven, O Lucifer, son of the morning! how art thou cut down to the ground, which didst weaken the nations! For thou hast said in thine heart, I will ascend into heaven, I will exalt my throne above the stars of God: I will sit also upon the mount of the congregation, in the sides of the north: I will ascend above the heights of the clouds; I will be like the most High.” This is a prophetic passage of a PAST event. While most prophecy is future from the event of the prophetic statement, reverse prophecy takes place before the prophetic statement, and usually about an event that and in this case has no story in Genesis that relates to it. However, there are other such passages that also relate to which we compare with: Ezekiel 28:12-19, “Son of man, take up a lamentation upon the king of Tyrus, and say unto him, Thus saith the Lord GOD; Thou sealest up the sum, full of wisdom, and perfect in beauty. Thou hast been in Eden the garden of God; every precious stone was thy covering, the sardius, topaz, and the diamond, the beryl, the onyx, and the jasper, the sapphire, the emerald, and the carbuncle, and gold: the workmanship of thy tabrets and of thy pipes was prepared in thee in the day that thou wast created. Thou art the anointed cherub that covereth; and I have set thee so: thou wast upon the holy mountain of God; thou hast walked up and down in the midst of the stones of fire. Thou wast perfect in thy ways from the day that thou wast created, till iniquity was found in thee. By the multitude of thy merchandise they have filled the midst of thee with violence, and thou hast sinned: therefore I will cast thee as profane out of the mountain of God: and I will destroy thee, O covering cherub, from the midst of the stones of fire. Thine heart was lifted up because of thy beauty, thou hast corrupted thy wisdom by reason of thy brightness: I will cast thee to the ground, I will lay thee before kings, that they may behold thee. Thou hast defiled thy sanctuaries by the multitude of thine iniquities, by the iniquity of thy traffick; therefore will I bring forth a fire from the midst of thee, it shall devour thee, and I will bring thee to ashes upon the earth in the sight of all them that behold thee. All they that know thee among the people shall be astonished at thee: thou shalt be a terror, and never shalt thou be any more.” These two passages are about the same being who fell from his standing. At any rate, this is reverse prophecy about an historic event. We have TEXT, CONTEXT, and COMPARATIVE TEXT, thus with 2 or 3 witnesses: 2 Corinthians 13:1b, “...In the

mouth of two or three witnesses shall every word be established.” See: Deuteronomy 17:6; Deuteronomy 19:15; Matthew 18:16; 1 Timothy 5:19; and Hebrews 10:28 for a comparison of texts.

6. Spiritual: This designation for application purposes is to take a spiritualized approach to an otherwise doctrinal passage meant for a different dispensational time. Where sometimes good preaching is not good doctrine, and good doctrine is not always good preaching, certain passages can be spiritualized for that purpose. A good example of this is: Revelation 3:20, “Behold, I stand at the door, and knock: if any man hear my voice, and open the door, I will come in to him, and will sup with him, and he with me.” This makes for a great salvation message: but doctrinally is NOT about that at all. There are many applications for the seven churches, however doctrinally this applies to the tribulation church; but used now for preaching offers a great picture of Christ outside of the heart of man, and knocking on the heart’s door with the offer of the gospel of Christ which is a spiritual application of the passage.

7. Devotional: This application can be confused with the spiritual application however, the devotional application can be a compilation, of spiritual with personal, and is a summarized version of these applications or in a condensed form. A devotional application can include any of the other applications, and is usually not a stand alone application and because of its abbreviated nature, usually is not a good match with a doctrinal topical application. A devotional application can also be taken out of context as does some spiritual application. There are some groups that make it their doctrinal stand and standard to promote only devotional materials and making this their doctrine; and others that do the same for spiritual applications. This can be very dangerous when teaching for doctrine: the commandments of men and make the word of God of none effect. This leads to philosophical tendencies: making assumptions and down right lying about what the passage is really saying. Too much devotional teaching leads to apathy in the churches especially where they are NOT feeding on much doctrine if any at all.

Identifying Applications leads to Illumination: We gain this by three things:

The two types of Logic, Reason and Understanding: ONE is RIGHT: the OTHER is WRONG!

Inductive Bible Study like Inductive reasoning or Inductive thinking is always a bad idea: This teaching is to take all Scriptures and apply them to YOU: even if it doesn’t apply doctrinally: you can spiritualize it to make it apply doctrinally to you. This type of teaching also allows for any and all versions of the Bible, and makes the Greek and Hebrew the primary location for absolute truth. Inductive means to multiply upon, and comes from a misapplication of the scriptures: Isaiah 28:10-13, “For precept must be upon precept, precept upon precept; line upon line, line upon line; here a little, and there a little: For with stammering lips and another tongue will he speak to this people. To whom he said, This is the rest wherewith ye may cause the weary to rest; and this is the refreshing: yet they would not hear. But the word of the LORD was unto them precept upon precept, precept upon precept; line upon line, line upon line; here a little, and there a little; that they might go, and fall backward, and be broken, and snared, and taken.”

Verse 10 is used to promote Inductive Bible Study by many groups; however, the context shows that people using this do so, "...that they might go, and fall backward, and be broken, and snared, and taken." Verse 13b. Something is drastically wrong with "Inductive Bible Study".

Deductive Bible Study like Deductive reasoning or Deductive thinking is always the BEST way to understand anything especially the Bible: 2 Timothy 2:15, "Study to shew thyself approved unto God, a workman that needeth not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth." The Bible teaches deductive study; which means to divide properly. The Bible has proper divisions: which without these divisions will make a mess when formulating your personal theological understanding of the Bible. Thus the reason for dividing how to study the Bible giving applications and substance to what is in the words of life: these words are GOD'S WORDS! God is an exactor of words: Luke 4:4, "And Jesus answered him, saying, It is written, That man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word of God." Cross reference to this is: Deuteronomy 8:3. Proverbs 30:5, "Every word of God is pure: he is a shield unto them that put their trust in him." And lastly: 1 Thessalonians 2:13, "For this cause also thank we God without ceasing, because, when ye received the word of God which ye heard of us, ye received it not as the word of men, but as it is in truth, the word of God, which effectually worketh also in you that believe."

Appendices:

The Three Rules for Interpretive Bible Study:

1. Context (A Text Without a Context is a Pretext)
2. Compare (Compare Scripture with Scripture)
3. Typology (as, like, etc. – Similitudes, Metaphors, Parables, Images, Allegories, Symbols, Comparisonisms)

The Seven Questions to Ask for any given Context:

1. Who; 2. What; 3. Where; 4. When; 5. Why; 6. Which; and 7. How

The Seven Applications of Scripture:

1. Doctrinal; 2. Prophetical, 3. Historical; 4. Personal or Practical; 5. Reverse Historical or Prohistorical; 6. Spiritual and 7. Devotional

The End