

Rule 1: The Bible Is to Be Read Like Any Other Book

- This does not mean that the Bible is like other books.
- The Bible is inerrant and inspired, but it does not take on special magic; a noun is still a noun and a verb is still a verb.
- If the Bible is to be read like any other book, how does prayer and divine illumination fit in? We can earnestly ask for clear mind and pure heart to overcome our prejudices.
- Have a system of reading the Bible. Do not use the “Luckydipping” method.
- Example: Judas, Song of Songs
- Have a balance reading diet of Old & New Testament

Rule 2: Read the Bible Existentially

- Does NOT mean we use the modern form of existential interpretation where words are taken out of historical context for subjective meaning. (What is God saying to me *here and now.*)
 - Without historical context, Jesus becomes merely a symbol
- Reading existentially is getting involved personally and passionately in what we are reading!
- DOES mean we get passionately involved in what we read. Ex.: Abraham sacrificing Issac.
- "Reading between the lines" can be healthy—ask "Why?" and "What is really happening here?" and "Why does God do this?" and "What are the Scriptures truly teaching here?"

Rule 3: The Historical Narratives are to be Interpreted by the Didactic

- Didactic literature teaches or explains. (For instance, Paul's writing in the epistles, is didactic.)
- The Gospels are a record of what Jesus did; the emphasis is on events. The Epistles interpret the significance of what Jesus did. They are more concerned with interpreting the significance of those events in terms of doctrine, exhortation, and application to the believer's life.
- Reformers want us to remember that the Epistles came after the Gospels. This doesn't mean that one has more superiority over the other.
- A helpful hint: The Epistles should interpret the Gospels rather than the Gospels interpreting the Epistles.

Rule 3: The Historical Narratives are to be Interpreted by the Didactic

- The importance of this rule is to avoid drawing too many inferences from what people do.
- WWJD vs. What would Jesus have me do?

Rule 4: The Implicit is to be Interpreted by the Explicit

- Determine what is being said and what is being left unsaid (though possibly implied). Do not confuse the two!
- Interpret the "obscure" in the light of the "clear" that you are reading—that way you will be avoiding confusion and distortion.
 - Example: Mark 12:25 “When the dead rise, they will neither marry nor be given in marriage; they will be like the angels in heaven.” Are angels sexless? Will we become sexless in heaven?
 - Example: John 20:19 “On the evening of that first day of the week, when the disciples were together, with the doors locked for fear of the Jews, Jesus came and stood among them and said, “Peace be with you!” Did Jesus dematerialize and floated through the door?

Rule 5: Determined Carefully the Meaning of Words

- By understanding the individual words used in the Bible, we will be able to better understand the total message of the Scripture.
- Knowing and understanding the etymology (root meaning or how it was derived) of the key words helps.
- Knowing and understanding the context of a word's usage also helps. Usage can change over time.
 - Romans: 3:28 “For we maintain that a man is justified by faith apart from works of the Law.”
 - James 2:24 “You see that a man is justified by works, and not by faith alone.”

Rule 5: Determined Carefully the Meaning of Words

- 2 Peter 3:9 (KJV) God is “not willing that any should perish”

Does this mean:

(1) God has legislated a precept that no one is allowed to perish; it is against the law of God for us to perish;

(2) God has sovereignly decreed and effects most certainly that no one will ever perish

(3) God is not pleased or delighted when people perish

- 2 Peter 3:9 (NIV) “...He is patient with you, not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance.”

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Rule 6: Note the Presence of Parallelism in the Bible

- Recognizing parallelism greatly aids our understanding of scriptures.
- Parallelism—a relationship between two or more sentences or clauses that correspond in similarity or are set with each other.
 - Synonymous Parallelism – different lines or parts of a passage present the same thought in a slightly altered manner of expression.
A false witness will not go unpunished,
And he who tells lies will not escape. (Prov. 19:5)
Come, let us worship and bow down;
Let us kneel before the LORD our Maker. (Ps. 95:6)
 - Antithetic Parallelism – two parts are set in contrast to each other:
Poor is he who works with a negligent hand,
But the hand of the diligent makes rich. (Prov. 10:4)
 - Synthetic Parallelism – when first part of the passage creates a sense of expectation which is completed by the second part. It can move in a progressive “staircase” movement to complete the thought.
Ask, and it shall be given to you;
seek, and you will find;
knock, and it shall be opened to you. (Matt. 7:7)

Rule 6: Note the Presence of Parallelism in the Bible

- The ability to recognize parallelisms can often clear up apparent difficulties in understanding a text.
- Example: The Lord's Prayer –
“Do not lead us into temptation,
but deliver us from evil.” (Matt 6:13)

Does God tempt man or entice him to sin?

If we recognize this to be a synonomous parallelism, we will recognize the two parts are saying the same things. To be led into temptation is to be exposed to the onslaught of the evil one.

Rule 7: Note the Difference Between Proverb and Law

- A proverbial saying does not bear the weight or force of a moral absolute, or a law, in Scripture.
- A proverb is a "catchy" little saying designed to express practical truisms. They reflect principles of wisdom for godly living.
- Example: Do not answer a fool according to his folly, or you will be like him yourself. Answer a fool according to his folly, or he will be wise in his own eyes. Proverbs 26:4-5
So...How do you answer a fool? What is the law here?
- Apodictic law expresses absolutes: "Thou shalt" or "Thou shalt not." Casuistic law expresses in the "if...then" form. A conditional statement, sometimes called "case" law.
 - Example: Ex. 23:4 – “If you meet your enemy’s ox or his donkey wandering away, you shall surely return it to him.”

Rule 8: Observe the Difference Between the Spirit and the Letter of the Law

- Legalist destroys the spirit of the law.
- Antinomian (one who holds that under the gospel dispensation of grace the moral law is of no use or obligation because faith alone is necessary to salvation) destroys the letter of the law.
- God is concerned with the letter and the spirit of the law, which are inseparably related.
- Matthew 5:17-20: the spirit is added to the importance of the letter, the law.
 - Do not think that I came to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I did not come to abolish, but to fulfill. For truly I say to you, until heaven and earth pass away, not the smallest letter or stroke shall pass away from the Law, until all is accomplished,

Rule 9: Be careful with Parables

- While often considered the easiest style of literature to read in the Bible, Jesus gave us a different idea in Mark:10-12.
- Look for one basic central point in a parable, if possible.
- A parable is a short fictitious story that illustrates a moral attitude or religious principle, concrete stories based on life situations.
- Why are parables difficult to interpret? What is the original intent? Are the parables used to elucidate or to obscure Jesus' teachings?
- Even disciples did not understand and asked for explanation
- Mark 4:10-12 ...while seeing, they may see and not perceive; and while hearing, they may hear and not understand lest they return again and be forgiven.

Rule 9: Be careful with Parables

- Although parables are not meant to be riddles, they do have elements of concealment. The disciples asked for explanations about them, and there were other who were infuriated by what they have heard. But to the impenitent, they do not understand when they hear.
- Not all, indeed many, of the parables are not to be interpreted as allegory. If we do, Jesus' teaching will become a mass of confusion.
- Allegory: the expression by means of symbolic fictional figures and actions of truths or generalizations about human existence; *also* : an instance (as in a story or painting) of such expression
- Avoid allegorizing, but to find a central point in the parables. Good commentaries are helpful here.

Rule 10: Be careful with Prophecy

- Handling prophecy in both the Old and New Testaments is one of the most abused and distorted forms of biblical interpretation!
- One important key to interpreting images in the Bible (Revelation is full of them!) is to seek the general meaning of such images in the Bible itself.
- Apocalyptic literature uses a high degree of symbolic imagery that is sometimes interpreted for us, and sometimes left uninterpreted (Daniel, Ezekiel, Revelation).
- We must approach prophecy very carefully, and with a sober, proper attitude.

Notes

- These practical rules for interpreting Scripture do not cover every technical problem that we will encounter in Scripture. They are simply aids and guidelines for our study. They offer no magic formula for perfect success in understanding each text of the Bible. They should help in recognizing special problems in the Bible and in resolving them as well.
- *"The Scriptures were not given to increase our knowledge, but to change our lives."* —D.L. Moody