

6 Solid Principles for Letting Holy Spirit Interpret When You Read the Bible

“Likewise, no one knows the things of God, except the Spirit of God” (1 Cor. 2:11b).

Have you ever heard someone say, “Well, that’s just your interpretation of the Bible”? It’s as if that little phrase disproves everything that’s been said. But it really doesn’t disprove anything.

There are right ways and wrong ways to interpret Scripture. Here are six principles of interpretation that are accepted just about everywhere.

1. You need faith and the Holy Spirit to interpret Scripture. The Bible doesn’t make sense to non-believers. It is God’s love letter to believers. When an unbeliever reads the Word, he is reading someone else’s mail. The Bible is a spiritual book that must be understood by spiritual people. The Bible says in 1 Corinthians 2:11, “Likewise, no one knows the things of God, except the Spirit of God.”

2. The Bible is its own best commentary. Scripture interprets Scripture. Practice this principle by getting a Bible with cross-references in the margin. By looking up cross-references, you’ll get a much bigger and clearer picture of what God has said in all of his Word, not just that one context.

3. Read the Old Testament with the New Testament in mind, and read the New Testament with the Old Testament in mind. The New Testament is hidden in the Old Testament. The Old Testament is revealed in the New Testament.

4. Always interpret unclear passages in the light of clear passages. Look at the full counsel of God in Scripture to get a clear understanding when you find a passage that seems contradictory or confusing. For example, 1 Corinthians 15:29 has a very obscure reference to baptism for the dead. It's the only time the idea is mentioned in Scripture. Paul isn't condoning this. Nothing in Scripture condones it. Let clear passages about salvation and baptism interpret this unclear one, not vice versa.

5. Don't form a doctrine based solely on a historical event. Take historical passages of the Bible for what they're meant to be: good lessons. Don't build your doctrine upon them. For example, in Mark 1:35, the Bible says Jesus got up very early, went to a place of solitude and prayed. Does that mean you must get up every morning at 4 a.m., leave your house and go somewhere to pray? Of course not. God may convince you that it's a good idea, but it's not a command. Base doctrine on doctrinal passages. Use narratives to teach lessons.

6. Never interpret Scripture based on your own experiences. The point of Bible study is not to shape Scripture to agree with your subjective opinions or your experiences. Feelings lie. Emotions lie. Instead, discover God's timeless truth, and let it shape your life. Study the Bible with an open heart and invite God to conform you to his will.

God doesn't want to leave you in the dark when you study Scripture. Following these basic rules of Bible study can help to ensure you read the Word from God's perspective.

Talk It Over

- With these points in mind, re-read a passage from one of your quiet times this past week. What new insight does God reveal to you?
- Are you open to letting the Holy Spirit work in your

life? How do you keep an open mind and heart when interpreting Scripture so the Holy Spirit can direct your thoughts?

- How does your perspective change when you understand that the Bible does not make sense to non-believers?
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