**BASIC PRINCIPLES OF INTERPRETATION**

This lesson contains 10 basic principles or truths that will help you interpret the Bible properly. If you remember each of them as you study, you will make a good beginning in understanding what the Bible teaches. You will also avoid some of the errors which have led people to misunderstand what the Bible means or to misapply what it says.

**10 PRINCIPLES**

**The Bible is Without Error and is Our Only Trustworthy Guide for Faith and Life.**

Because the Bible is the inspired Word of God, it is without error. It is also the final authority for what we should believe and how we should live. Though we can learn many things from other books and teachers, there is no other teacher or book or writing which can ever take the place of the Bible.

“All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in

righteousness.”

2 Timothy 3:16

“

The Scripture cannot be broken.” John 10:35

**The Bible is Its Own Best Interpreter.**

Since the Bible has only one primary Author (the Holy Spirit), each part of the Bible is consistent with every other part. We should therefore interpret every passage in the Bible in the light of other Biblical passages on the same subject. Though we can learn much about the Bible from studying other books and by listening to godly pastors and teachers, our best aid to understanding the Bible will always be the Bible itself.

“I tell you the truth, until heaven and earth disappear, not the smallest letter, not the least stroke of a pen, will by any means disappear from the law until everything is accomplished.”

Matthew 5:18

“Your Word is truth.”

John 17:17

**The Entire Bible is Centered around Jesus Christ.**

Though not every passage in the Bible refers to Jesus Christ directly, the entire Bible is centered around Him. The Old Testament foretells and foreshadows His coming in many different ways, and the New Testament tells us about His life, ministry and the church which He founded. Jesus Christ is the heart and center of the entire Bible.

“You diligently study the Scriptures because you think that by them you possess eternal life. These are the Scriptures that testify about Me.”

John 5:39

“Beginning with Moses and all the Prophets, He [Jesus] explained to them what was said in all the Scriptures concerning Himself.” Luke 24:27

**The Message of the Bible is Redemptive.**

Though the Bible gives us helpful information on a variety of subjects, it is not written as a textbook on history or science or philosophy or psychology. Its purpose is to teach us about the God of creation and His saving work in history through Jesus Christ. By studying the Bible we may learn how to receive the gift of eternal life through faith in Jesus and how to live a life of gratitude and obedience to God for that gift.

“From infancy you have known the holy Scriptures, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus.”

2 Timothy 3:15

“These are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in His name.”

John 20:31

**The Message of the Bible is Progressive.**

Since the Bible was written over the course of several centuries, it represents a gradual unfolding of God’s message to us. Everything the Bible says from the very beginning is true, but God’s later revelation often provides additional information or new insights which go far beyond the truths revealed earlier. In the Old Testament, for example, we learn that God is willing to forgive the sins of those who sincerely repent and trust Him for forgiveness. In the New Testament we learn about the tremendous sacrifice God Himself made to make that forgiveness possible.

“In the past God spoke to our forefathers through the prophets at many times and in various ways, but in these last days He has spoken to us by His Son [Jesus].”

Hebrews 1:1-2

“...the Gospel He [God] promised beforehand through His prophets in the Holy Scriptures...”

Romans 1:2

**The Message of the Bible is Historical.**

The Bible describes what really happened to real people who lived in real places at specific times in history. It is not a book of legends or myths or fairy tales. Much of the material is dated carefully and precisely. It is a sober historical account of what God did and will yet do to redeem the world and bring man back into fellowship with Himself.

“Not one word has failed of all the good promises He gave through his servant Moses.” 1 Kings 8:56

“Many have undertaken to draw up an account of the things that have been fulfilled among us, just as they were handed down to us by those who from the first were eyewitnesses and servants

of the word...I myself have carefully investigated everything from the beginning...so that you may know the certainty of the things you have been taught.”

Luke 1:1-4

**The Message of the Bible is Understandable.**

The purpose of the Bible is to reveal, not to hide. One does not have to have an advanced degree or years of theological study in order to understand what the Bible is all about. Its highest wisdom and deepest truths can be learned and understood by the simplest believer who studies it prayerfully under the leading of the Holy Spirit.

“The unfolding of Your words gives light; it gives understanding to the simple.” Psalm 119:130

“But the Counselor, the Holy Spirit...will teach you all things and will remind you of everything I [Jesus] have said to you.”

John 14:26

**Some Biblical Truths are Beyond Our Understanding.**

Though we can readily understand all we need to know for salvation and holy living, there are some things in the Bible which we accept simply by faith. For example, we will never fully be able to understand everything the Bible reveals about God–His eternal being, His infinite love, His amazing grace, His perfect justice or His sovereign will. God’s ways will always be higher than our ways and His thoughts will be higher than our thoughts. We should never limit God or His ways to our own understanding.

“‘For My thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways My ways,’ declares the Lord. ‘As the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways and My thoughts than your thoughts.’”

Isaiah 55:8-9

“Oh the depth of the riches of the wisdom and the knowledge of God! How unsearchable His judgments and His paths beyond tracing out!”

Romans 11:33

**The Message of the Bible is Life-Changing.**

The Bible was not given primarily to inform us but to transform us. It was given as God’s perfect guideline for our lives–to help us know what to believe and how to live. If we learn many things about the Bible but are not changed by it, our study will do us very little good. We must study in order to learn and learn in order to live!

“If I have the gift of prophecy and can fathom all mysteries and all knowledge...but have not love, I am nothing.”

1 Corinthians 13:2

“Knowledge puffs up, but love builds up. The man who thinks he knows something does not yet know as he ought to know. But the man who loves God is known by God.”

1 Corinthians 8:1-3

**The Message of the Bible is Personal.**

Though the Bible reveals to us eternal truths about an infinite God and His work of creation and redemption, it also speaks to us personally. God is concerned not only about the nations of the world but also about every individual in the world. The Bible is God’s message to YOU.

“God our Savior...wants all men to be saved and to come to a knowledge of the truth.” 1 Timothy 2:3-4

“The Lord...is patient with you, not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to

repentance.” 2 Peter 3:9