

Basic Hermeneutics: "General Principles"

Robert L. Plummer writes about some general principles that are important guidelines for those that would like to interpret the Bible.¹ Reading the Bible is one thing; understanding what you are reading is an entirely different matter. A few of these principles are presented to help the interpreter to carefully approach the Bible as a reader.

1) Prayer. The Bible is not an ordinary book. It is a spiritual book that is both unique and extraordinary in its scope and in its presentation to the masses. Without prayer, the would-be interpreter has little chance at understanding the complexities of how to interpret the Bible.

Stablish thy word unto thy servant, who *is devoted* to thy fear. (Ps. 119:38)

In the first year of his reign I Daniel understood by books the number of the years, whereof the word of the LORD came to Jeremiah the prophet, that he would accomplish seventy years in the desolations of Jerusalem. And I set my face unto the Lord God, to seek by prayer and supplications, with fasting, and sackcloth, and ashes: (Dan. 9:2-3)

2) The Bible Points to Jesus. Jesus Christ is the central figure of Scripture. He is the key to understanding the only message that can save man from his sins. The Old Testament prophets, inspired by God, predicted a coming messiah. The New Testament gospel writers, through the spirit of revelation, clearly disclosed that Jesus was the predicted messiah.

For had ye believed Moses, ye would have believed me: for he wrote of me. (Jn. 5:46)

Philip findeth Nathanael, and saith unto him, We have found him, of whom Moses in the law, and the prophets, did write, Jesus of Nazareth, the son of Joseph. (Jn. 1:45)

3) Let Scripture Interpret Scripture. The Bible was meant to be understood, but there are also scriptural passages that are difficult to interpret. When a passage is a challenge to understand, it must be compared to passages that are much more easily understood. We must allow the Bible to explain itself. There is a unity in its narrative that is consistent and non-contradictory.

All scripture *is* given by inspiration of God, and *is* profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness: (2 Tim. 3:16)

4) Meditate on the Bible. Plummer says, "The Bible is not a book for superficial reading."² The Interpreter must spend time reading and meditating on the scriptures, which means to *ponder*

¹ Plummer, Robert L. *Understanding the Bible: A Guide to Reading and Enjoying Scripture*. Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel Publications, 2013.

² Plummer, 20.

or to *converse with oneself*. It is important to really stop and ponder to grasp the grand themes and doctrines of the Bible.

I will meditate in thy precepts, and have respect unto thy ways. (Psa. 119:15)

I have more understanding than all my teachers: for thy testimonies *are* my meditation. (Psa. 119:99)

5) Approach the Bible in Faith and Obedience. Faith and obedience are foundational themes. The interpreter must be spiritually qualified. He cannot be a good interpreter without faith in God and faith in the inspired scriptures. Also, he cannot be qualified if he is disobedient to God's word. The interpreter must respect and fear God. Those that feared God, obeyed God.

But without faith *it is* impossible to please *him*: for he that cometh to God must believe that he is, and *that* he is a rewarder of them that diligently seek him. (Heb. 11:6)

By faith Noah, being warned of God of things not seen as yet, moved with fear, prepared an ark to the saving of his house; by the which he condemned the world, and became heir of the righteousness which is by faith. (Heb. 11:7)

6) Genre. It's important to be able to identify genre. Genre is defined as a "literary composition characterized by a particular style, form, or content."³ Plummer says, "The study and application of interpretive guidelines for various genres is sometimes called the field of special hermeneutics."⁴ The Bible has several genres for the interpreter to deal with, such as: historical narrative, poetry, apocalyptic language, and symbolism.

To understand a proverb, and the interpretation; the words of the wise, and their dark sayings. (Pro. 1:6)

7) Historical and Cultural Background Issues. The interpreter must understand that there are gaps that block or hinder interpretation. Understanding the historical setting and understanding the culture of the original audience is important. To bridge these gaps we must study to familiarize ourselves with the world of the text.

Study to shew thyself approved unto God, a workman that needeth not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth. (2 Tim. 2:15)

³ Merriam-Webster

⁴ Plummer, 24.