

Understanding Scripture Introduction to the Teacher

All of us as teachers have presented to a class our understanding of what a passage of scripture means. It may have been "Blessed are the poor in spirit" or "Cut off your hand," or "repent and be baptized." And certainly an important part of what a teacher should do is to explain to others what various passages mean.

Perhaps an even more important task we could take on, however, is to teach students how to find the meaning of passages for themselves. This will not only make better Bible students of them, but it will also help them to be in position to think for themselves and to become teachers of others.

There is much agreement but some disagreement in the area of how to understand scriptures. Most Bible students would have great agreement on most principles of Bible study. Every one would agree, for example, that a study of the context of a passage is very important or that we need to consider word meanings. All agree that history and archaeology can contribute to understanding a passage. There would be less agreement, however, on how to use an example or how the Old Testament applies to us.

A word often used to describe this field of "how to interpret" is "hermeneutics." The term is actually a Bible word which means "to explain" or "to interpret" or "to translate." Some use the term "hermeneutics" to cover the principles by which we seek to understand scripture. Others use "hermeneutics" to speak only of the step of applying scripture to our own circumstances once its meaning has been determined, and still others use the word to cover both understanding and application. Since there are different theories of hermeneutics, we will be seeking to let the Bible lead us as much as possible as we come to learn both the principles of how to interpret and how we should apply these principles to a particular passage. Often we will be looking at how one Bible writer understands and applies something written by another Bible writer. While they had the inspiration of the Spirit in understanding other passages, their method of interpreting often provides guidance we can use.

We will study ten fundamental principles for interpreting scripture. These are really principles that we would use in understanding any communication from others. The Bible, and the New Testament in particular, was written in the language of the common people and they were expected to understand it much as they would have any writings. As we shall see, there really are not special rule for understanding Scripture, although each different piece of writing requires a little of its own adaptation of the principles. We will also practice in using some of the common helps to Bible study.

As a result of this study, we hope your students will be able to do the following:



1. list and explain ten principles of Bible study.
2. use the ten principles in discovering the meaning of a passage of scripture.
3. use standard tools for Bible study such as a concordance, a Bible dictionary, a commentary, historical and archaeological sources and the internet.

We will suggest assignments for you to give the students and some evaluations which you can use to encourage them to learn outside of the class meetings. Your class will be more likely to reach the objectives stated above if you will use the evaluations suggested for each class session. If students expect some evaluation in class over the previous lesson, they will spend some time reviewing and that will mean they will learn more.

For many in your class, this study will really be beneficial. Encourage them and help them keep a focus on the benefits of this study.

If you want to see some additional studies of passages that would lend themselves to class study, go to my Web site at www.oc.edu/stafford.north. There you may look under articles and find several studies of particular passages that would give you additional samples to use for the class if you have more than just the 13 lessons. One of these, on The Silence of the Scriptures, would make a very good addition to the lessons provided.

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