

“How Can I Understand The Bible For Myself?”

2 Timothy 2:14-18

Sermon Series: “The Bible Questions”

Introduction: Have you ever experienced someone twisting your words, taking something you said out of context, only sharing part of what you said, or adding to what you said? Do you find it frustrating? How do you think God feels when we do that to His Word?

The Main Idea: We will have to answer to God for how diligent and accurate we are in our handling of His Word.

A Foundational Conviction: The Bible is the Word of truth. Here are some theological truths that accompany this conviction and provide the basis for our approach to interpretation:

1. All Scripture is inspired (literally God-breathed) by God (2 Timothy 3:16-17, 2 Peter 1:21).
2. Therefore, all Scripture is God’s Word, which means it is the authority for our lives.
3. Therefore, all Scripture is truth (John 17:17).
4. Therefore, all Scripture is consistent with every other part of Scripture (1 John 2:21). It has a single Mind behind it (a perfect mind, nonetheless) so one part agrees with and does not contradict another part. As a result, Scripture interprets Scripture.
5. However, Scripture does have a dual authorship. It was inspired by God through people and written in human language.
6. Interpretation is correctly reading out the God-intended meaning of any text. It is accomplished through the illuminating ministry of the Holy Spirit (John 14:26). There has been no new normative revelation for the Body of Christ since the completion of the New Testament (with the writing of the book of Revelation around 96 A.D.) [note Revelation 22:18-19], but God still speaks today to us through His Holy Spirit. The way He does this is by giving us understanding of Scripture and how it applies to our lives. Through the Bible, the Holy Spirit teaches, convicts, guides, encourages, and reveals God to us. Please note that God only speaks based on and in agreement with His written Word. That is the test for any supposed leading of the Holy Spirit.
7. There is only one correct interpretation but many different applications. It means what God intended it to mean and what it always has meant.

Some Logical Implications:

1. **We base our beliefs on Scripture and reject empty and false teachings.**
2. **We work hard to know, understand, and apply Scripture.**
3. **We rightly divide the Word of truth.** What does this mean and how do we do it?

Practical Applications: Paul is writing directly to Timothy as a pastor, but it applies to every Christian as we study God’s Word. Kent Hughes writes, “Being one who ‘correctly handles’ {or “rightly dividing” in the New King James translation} the Word requires getting it straight and giving it straight. ‘Correctly handles’ has as its basis the Greek word *orthos* (‘straight’), the same word from which we build words like *orthopedic* and *orthodoxy*. The exact charge to

Timothy is to ‘impart the word of truth’ *without deviation, straight, undiluted.*” Here it refers to the straight, precise, careful communication of the word of truth, the gospel.” Kenneth Wuest writes, “Rightly dividing is *orthotomeo*, from *temno*, ‘to cut,’ and *orthos*, ‘straight,’ the compound verb meaning ‘to cut straight.’ Molten and Milligan suggest that it might be a metaphor derived from the stone mason’s art of cutting stone fair and straight, to fit into their places in a building. They quote Sophocles, a Greek writer, using it to mean, ‘expound soundly.’ Vincent defines the word, ‘to cut straight,’ as paths, ‘to hold a straight course, to make straight, to handle rightly.’...Robertson suggests, ‘handling aright.’ He quotes Theodore as explaining it to mean ‘ploughing a straight furrow.’...He adds his own comment, ‘Since Paul was a tent-maker and knew how to cut straight the rough camel-hair cloth, why not let that be the metaphor? Certainly plenty of exegesis is crooked enough (crazy-quilt pattern) to call for careful cutting to set it straight.’” **Basically, we are saying that interpreting Scripture is rightly dividing it, which means we are understanding what God said and what it actually means as opposed to infusing our own meaning into it.** How do we do that? Here are some suggestions from a book by John Stott, called Understanding The Bible.

1. We have 3 teachers.

A. The Holy Spirit (1 Corinthians 2:10-13). Stott writes, “Our foremost teacher is the Holy Spirit Himself. ‘Hermeneutics’ is the technical name given to the science of interpreting Scripture, and it should be obvious that a truly Biblical hermeneutic will be consistent with the nature of the Bible itself. If, then, the Biblical authors spoke from God, not on their own impulse but as they were moved by the Holy Spirit, it is the Holy Spirit who can interpret what He cause them to speak. The best interpreter of every book is its author, since He alone knows what He intended to say. So God’s book can be interpreted by God’s Spirit alone. The work of the Holy Spirit in communicating God’s truth to man is now seen to have two stages. The first and objective stage is ‘revelation,’ the disclosure of the truth in Scripture. The second and subjective stage may be called ‘illumination,’ the enlightenment of our minds to comprehend the truth disclosed in Scripture. Each process is indispensable. Without revelation we have no truth to perceive, without illumination no faculty with which to perceive it.” The Holy Spirit teaches:

-Believers (1 Corinthians 2:14).

-The Humble (Matthew 11:25-26). We can humbly ask for understanding (Psalm 119:18).

-The Obedient (James 1:22)

B. Our disciplined study. We are not to presume upon the Spirit.

C. The church. This does not mean that church creeds and confessions of faith take precedence over Scripture but that we do not read the Bible in a vacuum. We learn from others. We test our beliefs by the teaching of the church. We should be wary of coming up with any brand new interpretation of Scripture.

2. We have 3 basic principles of interpretation.

A. The Natural Sense-the principle of simplicity

B. The Original Sense-the principle of history

C. The General Sense-the principle of harmony

Conclusion: There is an old saying that goes like this, “Give a man a fish-feed him for a day. Teach a man to fish-feed him for a lifetime.” I want us to learn how to feed ourselves spiritually by knowing how to cut straight the Word of truth so we can be spiritually healthy for the rest of our lives.