

Class Series – Sharing the Gospel in Us

Top Ten Rules for Interpreting the Bible

This handout sheet, the audio links, and the videos are posted at:

<http://WWJDtoday.com/20s30sClass>

Video Extracts/Samples --

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The Ten Rules --

1. AIM - Author's Intended Meaning.
2. Context is king.
3. A passage cannot mean what it never meant.
4. Meaning is not in words or sentences, but in paragraphs.
5. A word means what the author intended it to mean.
6. The first commentary on any biblical text is the author himself.
7. Your theology ends with the text with which you began.
8. The best translation of the bible is...the one you read.
9. If your application exceeds the author's intention, then it ceases to have God's authority.
10. The Holy Spirit is not only interested in being an author.

Top Ten Rules for Interpreting the Bible

Commentary by the Crawfish (<http://bibleforums.org/forum/tags.php?tag=rules>)

1) AIM - author's intended meaning.

Any scripture must be grounded in the meaning for which it was intended. This is not always easy - cultural context, writing style, history, parallel scriptures, etc. must often be taken into account to discover the true meaning.

2) Context is king.

How often have you had some verse quoted to you for a certain purpose, only to find that if you read the verse in context of the passages around it you find that it cannot possibly have that purpose? It is easy to support a theology by finding individual verses, or parts of verses, that seem to defend your opinions; but if their in-context meaning conflicts with that usage, then it is being misused.

3) A passage cannot mean what it never meant.

Things can mean different things in different cultures. When we try to read scripture from our own cultural context, we will apply meanings that the ancient Hebrews could not possibly have meant. The only way we can see scripture in its true sense is to subtract our sense of culture and read it as closely to its original culture as possible.

4) Meaning is not in words or sentences, but in paragraphs.

A word can mean just about anything. A sentence limits the meaning of the word. A paragraph limits the meaning of the sentence. As was implied by #2, we must apply meanings based on their full context. A verse itself might be nice by itself, but by itself it is irrelevant to our usage. It can often mean too many different things. Only in context of the surrounding text does it have meaning.

5) A word means what the author intended it to mean.

Words can have varied meanings. If I say, "Wow, the weather is cool today!", what does the word "cool" mean? It could mean at least two different things: one, that it is the opposite of "warm", or two, that it is "great weather for what we are planning to do". What is the true meaning? Obviously, the one I intended, and if you take the other meaning you are misinterpreting me.

6) The first commentary on any biblical text is the author himself.

When interpreting scripture, we often turn to commentaries to understand what is being said. The best commentary comes from scripture itself - parallel passages. If you want to know what I believe, the best person to ask is me. Scripture is the same way; when studying a subject, you should use other scripture on the same subject to interpret what it is trying to say.

7) Your theology ends with the text with which you began.

You should always let the bible drive your theology; NOT let a theology drive your study and interpretation. It is very easy to justify a lot of bad theology by picking the theology and then finding scriptures to prove it. It is difficult to set aside our traditions and histories when studying the bible and approach it fresh, but that is the only way we can be pure in ensuring that it is scripture speaking to us and not our background.

8) The best translation of the bible is...the one you read.

Controversial to some, I believe this is an important point. For some people the KJV speaks to them best; some, the NIV. Others, other translations. Even though individual words meanings can be lost, in the light of #4 (meaning is in paragraphs), paragraph meanings are very much easier to translate.

9) If your application exceeds the author's intention, then it ceases to have God's authority.

It is common for us to read a passage and to see a specific application to our life circumstances. This is good, and is a proper way to read; however, we must ALWAYS remember that the personal applications are not inspired and not applicable to others. When we start forcing our personal faiths on others, we move away from God's word.

10) The Holy Spirit is not only interested in being an author.

This one is the biggest challenge to restoration churches. The Holy Spirit speaks directly to us and works through us, outside of scripture. How do we determine if it is the HS talking to us? Well, it won't contradict scripture.