

How should we interpret our Bibles?

I. From what we have learned so far:

- A. God has revealed Himself and His truth to Humanity
- B. God authorized agents to put some of that **revelation** (what the Bible is) down in writing for the people of God through the ages—prophets for the OT and apostles and their close associates for the NT.
- C. The Spirit superintended their writing so that, while preserving and utilizing their individuality and historical particularity (a confluence between the Spirit and the author), they composed and recorded without error His message to humanity in the words of the original writings (**inspiration** and its implications).
- D. The Spirit has guided God's people to recognize, collect, preserve and submit to the teaching of those books (the **canon**) until Christ returns.

II So how should we interpret this Bible?

- A. Are these the right approaches?
- B. How do the People of God approach the Bible?
 - Moses: Deut 6:1-3
 - Paul: 2 Tim 3:14-17
 - Jesus: Matt 4:4
- C. Note Who controls meaning!

The reader's job is to _____ and _____. The reader does not determine meaning but _____ it. What the _____ intended to say is the meaning of the text.

III. How do we listen well to the author?

- A. Warning (and a reason to pay attention to how we read our Bibles): Just because you know Christ does not mean that you will listen well. Christians are not immune from _____ what the Scriptures say.
- B. Practices Consistent with what the Bible is
 - Come Humbly

Engage Prayerfully

Read Carefully

Witness Faithfully

Apply Discerningly

Respond Willingly

C. An Example Bible Study from James 2:1-13

Read Carefully: Looking at James as a whole, he is writing to small gatherings of believers who are undergoing real adversity. They are refugees fleeing persecution. As they face their troubles, James points them to the only real resource they have to navigate this difficult time. His central claim is that God is good and everything they need for this moment and all of life comes down from him (1:16-18). He urges them to maintain an undivided devotion to God (1:12). As he works through his letter, he takes up situations going on in these gatherings and teaches them how they should be responding if they believed in God's goodness and looked to him for guidance and help. In our passage, he is rebuking them for treating powerful, rich people who curse Christ as their saviors. They are elevating them to positions of honor in their assemblies to suck up to them. At the same time, they are hustling their poor (in this world's goods) brothers and sisters to the cheap seats. Instead of turning to God together with their brothers and sisters in this time of crisis, they are abandoning God's ways and his people and looking to the godless for guidance and relief. James rebukes and corrects their perspective.

A Faithful Witness to the author's message: "honor" [give places of prominence in gatherings to] poor brothers in a manner appropriate to their status in God's eyes. James also appeals to some broader principles to get to his message: "do not show favoritism"; "love your neighbor as yourself". James is applying these larger principles to the specific situation of the congregations he is addressing. (As you consider responding to what James teaches, it helps to ask questions like: Is there a command to obey, example to follow/avoid, promise to claim, warning to heed, truth to believe, teaching to act on?)

Apply Discerningly: Note the original situation (rich landowners exploiting the poor in a time when Christian communities are vulnerable in the face of persecution). Discover the parallel situation in the contemporary context (migrant workers/farmers; sweat shops/ garment industry; poor generally/rich & powerful; etc.). Decide whether to apply at the specific and/or general level

IV. From what we have learned so far:

- A. In the Bible God tells us about who he is, who we are, his loving purposes for all people and the world he created and he _____ people into a life-giving relationship with him despite their rebellion against him.
- B. The meaning of the Bible is what _____ intends for it to say.
- C. The goal of interpretation is to _____ and _____ out what God requires of us for our blessing, protection, & mission in our moment!
- D. It _____ today and every day until Christ returns!

V. Group Prompts:

- A. Be sure to share prayer requests and pray for each other.
- B. Talk among yourselves about how you are (or aren't) reading your Bible. Share any helpful plans you have found for reading or what you are doing now. What has worked for you to consistently read your Bible and benefit from it?
- C. From the sermon today, what would you like to have discussed further?
- D. If you have some time in your group (or for later this week), take the material from James 2:1-13 and develop some specific applications. Press it down to life. Here is an acronym for developing good applications. Make the SMART applications:
 - Specific (not vague; something you can do and know you have done it),
 - Measurable (what will use to assess your progress?)
 - Attainable (is it realistic?),
 - Relevant (to you or those you may bring this message to), and
 - Time-bound (set a time period to accomplish your response to the passage).