

# Study Notes - Principles of Bible Interpretation

by Walter Beuttler

---

*The sermon emphasizes the importance of understanding the Bible and its principles of interpretation, highlighting the need for a correct approach to hermeneutics.*

**Scripture:** John 17:17, Acts 17:11, Romans 12:3, 1 Corinthians 2:9, 2 Timothy 3:16, Hebrews 4:12, Hebrews 6:1, Hebrews 7:1, 2 Peter 1:19, 2 Peter 3:16

**Topics:** "Bible Interpretation", "Scripture Study"

---

## Description

Walter Beuttler preaches on the importance of understanding the Word of God, emphasizing its nature, veracity, essence, and power. He highlights the Word as a foundation, criterion, substance, stabilizer, light, chart, bread, and fire in the life of a believer. Beuttler introduces the Bible, discussing the inspiration of scriptures, biblical writing, and authenticity of the Old and New Testaments. He delves into the causes of ignorance of the Scriptures and the requisites for acquiring scriptural knowledge, including a desire for the Word, humility, willingness to obey, searching the scriptures, revelation of the Spirit, instruction by teachers, ability to understand, singleness of heart, and responsiveness of heart.

---

## Transcript

### A. THE WORD OF GOD

#### 1. Nature of the Word of God

(1) As to its voice - The Bible is the voice of God, 2 Tim. 3:16, speaking through men as his own words, Ex. 4:12; Jer. 1:9, as though God himself had uttered these words, Acts 3:21; Ex. 4:15-16

(2) As to its veracity - The word of God is truth, John 17:17, not subject to change, Num. 23:19, neither to abrogation, 1 Pet. 1:23-25, nor to addition or subtraction, Rev. 22:18-19

(3) As to its essence - The word of God differs from that of man in that its essence is spirit and life, word-clothed spirit, John 6:63, and so differs in quality from that of man, Jer. 23:16, 28-32

(4) As to its power - In contrast to the impotence of man's words, God's word is powerful, Heb. 4:12, in that it recreates, Ezek. 37:1-10; divides, Heb. 4:12; Matt. 10:34-39; discerns, Heb. 4:12, 1 Cor. 14:23-25; and is effective in its working, Isa. 55:10-11

#### 2. Importance of the Word of God

- (1) A foundation - It is a foundation upon which rests the whole superstructure of Christian faith and practice, Heb. 6:1-2; Luke 6:47-49
- (2) A criterion - It is our permanent standard, 2 Peter 1:19, by which all doctrines, true or false, can be evaluated, Matt. 22:29; Gal. 1:6-9 and the enemy exposed and defeated, Matt. 4:1-11
- (3) A substance - As a substance the word of God is a subject matter of teaching, Acts 18:24-25, which one must first have in order to impart it to others, 1 Tim. 1:7; 2 Tim. 2:2
- (4) A stabilizer - It is a means by which the believer is enabled to maintain a doctrinal and spiritual equilibrium, 2 Tim. 3:16-17; Eph. 4:11-14
- (5) A light - The word of God is a light to show man his way, Psa. 119:105, to expose his need, John 3:19-21, and to reveal God, Jer. 23:23-26; 9:23-24
- (6) A chart - "Holding a straight course in the word of truth," 2 Tim. 2:15, R.V., margin. This is nautical language and suggests the course of a ship
- (7) Bread - As spiritual bread it nourishes, Jer. 23:28, and is more important than natural bread, John 6:57-58; Job 23:12
- (8) Fire - As a fire the word of God convicts, Jer. 23:29; kindles the truth in our hearts, Luke 24:32; and inspires in ministry, Jer. 20:9

## B. INTRODUCTION TO THE BIBLE

### 1. Inspiration of the Scriptures

- (1) Extent - Inspiration extends to every part of the Bible, 2 Tim. 3:16-17, whether the subject matter was revealed as in Gen. 1:1-31, or already known as in Deut. 1:1-3:29
- (2) Nature - Inspiration is the moving of the Holy Spirit upon the faculties of men whereby they are prompted to communicate truth to others and guided in the employment of words so as to preserve them from any mixture of error as well as from any addition or omission
- (3) Restriction - The claim to infallible inspiration is necessarily restricted to the original writings and extends to the translations only insofar as they are correct

### 2. Biblical writing

- (1) Text division - Originally, the books were not separated into chapters and verses which are sometimes quite faulty in their division, e.g., John 7:53 and 8:1. The first complete Bible in which these divisions were used was the Latin Vulgate in 1555
- (2) Italics - Italics, words in slanted letters, are used to indicate words not found in the manuscripts. They are inserted to make the meaning of the text clear, e.g., Titus 1:4; 2 Cor. 13:1
- (3) Punctuation - At first words were written without spaces and punctuation. These were introduced later, which means that punctuation is not inspired and may sometimes be misleading, e.g., Psa. 121:1-2

### 3. Authenticity of Scripture

(1) Old Testament - The authenticity of the Old Testament is amply confirmed by:

a. The testimony of Christ - Twelve times Jesus recognized the entire Old Testament, e.g., Luke 24:44, and also endorsed it in one sweeping statement, Matt. 23: 35

b. The testimony of the apostles - The writers of the New Testament likewise confirmed the Old by its quotation and use, e.g., Rom. 11:9; Acts 28:23

(2) New Testament - Paul's writings are regarded as scripture on a level with "the other scriptures," 2 Pet. 3:15-16. Luke's gospel was acknowledged by Paul as "scripture," 1 Tim. 5:18 and Luke 10:7. Besides, "all scripture is given by inspiration of God," 2 Tim. 3:16

### C. KNOWLEDGE OF THE SCRIPTURES

#### 1. Causes of ignorance

(1) Wilful ignorance, Matt. 13:14-15 - A lack of knowledge which is intentional because of unwillingness to know, and resistance to the truth, Zech. 7:8-12

(2) Preference for darkness, John 3:19-21 - Delighting in darkness because it corresponds to men's evil deeds and does not expose them

(3) Preference for tradition, Mark 7:8-9, 13 - Preferring the opinions, doctrines, customs, and practices transmitted from former generations above the word of God

(4) Insincerity, Luke 20:1-8 - Making a false pretense of desiring the truth, often with ulterior and even hostile motives, Matt. 22:15-22

(5) Unteachableness, Acts 7:51 - The incapability of being taught which may be due to outright hostility as in Acts 7:51-58, Jer. 18:18, or to a wrong attitude such as disdain, Psa. 50:17

(6) Unbelief, Luke 24:25 - Failure to accept "all that the prophets have spoken" especially concerning the supernatural, Luke 24:21-24

(7) Prejudice, Matt. 13:54-58 - An unwarranted bias of mind and attitude which is a cause of unbelief and so prevents knowledge of the truth, John 6:27-66

(8) A hardened heart, Mark 6:45-52 - A state of heart made impervious to the truth by unbelief, rationalization, and failure to respond to the truth, Mark 8:17

(9) Immaturity, John 16:12 - A spiritual state insufficiently developed for the reception of deeper truths, 1 Cor. 3:1-8

#### 2. Requisites for Acquiring Scriptural Knowledge

(1) A desire for the Word, 1 Peter 2:1-2 - A hunger for the knowledge of the word of God as essential for life, Matt. 4:4; Jer. 15:16

(2) Humility of mind, Matt. 11:25 - Manifesting an attitude of inferiority, dependence, and unworthiness, with a joyful receptiveness of the Word, Mark 12:37

- (3) Willingness to obey, John 7:17 - A readiness to act in obedience to the demands of the truth, John 4:40-41
- (4) Searching the scriptures, Acts 17:11-12 - A diligent application in the honest and persevering study of the word in search of truth, Prov. 2:1-5
- (5) Revelation of the Spirit, 1 Cor. 2:9-16 - The illumination of the mind of man by the Holy Spirit enabling him to comprehend spiritual truth, Eph. 1:17-18; John 6:45
- (6) Instruction by teachers, 1 Cor. 12:28 - The imparting of a knowledge of the Word by those especially called and equipped by God for that work, Eph. 4:11-12
- (7) Ability to understand, John 8:43 - An ability which necessitates hearing, John 8:43. This hearing is receiving the truth, John 9:27, and is conditioned on a right relationship to God, John 8:47
- (8) Singleness of heart, John 5:44 - A heart which seeks only the approbation of God, even though the smile of God will cost the frowns of those who are out of touch with God
- (9) Responsiveness of heart, 2 Cor. 3:12-16 - A turning of the heart to Christ as Lord which is demonstrated by a personal response to him in practice, and not merely by an acceptance of his teaching, John 5:39-40

#### D. BIBLICAL HERMENEUTICS

##### 1. Nature of Hermeneutics

- (1) Hermeneutics - The term "hermeneutics" is derived from a Greek word signifying "to interpret" or "to explain." It denotes the science which establishes and classifies the principles, rules, and methods by which the meaning of an author's language is ascertained
- (2) Biblical Hermeneutics - Biblical Hermeneutics is hermeneutics limited to the interpretation of the Bible and denotes, therefore, the science which establishes and classifies the principles, rules, and methods by which the meaning of the scriptures is ascertained
- (B) Exegesis - Exegesis is the application of hermeneutical principles to the Bible in order to obtain its correct meaning. Hermeneutics is a science, exegesis is an art

##### 2. Necessity of Biblical Hermeneutics The necessity of Biblical Hermeneutics arises from numerous factors, some of which are due to the Bible's:

- (1) Language - The languages in which the Bible was written, namely, Hebrew, Greek, and Aramaic, differ widely from the English in grammatical construction as well as in idiomatic usage and present the interpreter with many philological problems
- (2) Mentality - The Bible is an oriental book and, as such, many passages are strongly colored with the imagination of the inhabitants of the East and their figurative style of expression, e.g., 2 Sam. 22:8-9; S. S. 2:8
- (3) Ancientness - The Bible is an ancient book. Therefore it contains references to manners and customs some of which have long ago disappeared, e.g., Ruth 4:7

(4) Compositeness - The sixty-six books of the Bible were written by about thirty-six authors. These authors differed in occupation, personal characteristics and environments, the circumstances under which they wrote, and the periods in which they lived. These and other differences affected their writings and must be taken into consideration in order to ascertain a writer's own meaning of his words.

(5) Translation - The English version of the Bible is at best only a translation and many of the special rules in Biblical Hermeneutics are needed because of the difficulties involved in translating, especially from the Hebrew and Greek manuscripts.

(6) Mutability - The Bible was written at various times throughout a period of about fifteen hundred years and the meaning of words is constantly changing. It is, therefore, to be expected that even the books written at different periods in the same language would naturally contain some variations in the use of words. Likewise, the meaning of some words in a translation will change with the passing of time. This is markedly true of the King James Version, e.g., "suffer" (permit), Luke 18:16; "charity" (love), 1 Cor. 13:1; "letteth" (hinder), 2 Thess. 2:7; "precious" (unusual), 1 Sam. 3:1; "prevent" (precede), 1 Thess. 4:15; "conversation," (walk, life), Eph. 2:3.

## E. BEGINNING OF HERMENEUTICS

### 1. Jewish Hermeneutics

The first compilation of the sacred writings seems to have been made by Ezra. From this time, a scribe became a copyist and an authorized expounder of the sacred writ. This was the beginning of hermeneutics.

### 2. Deterioration of interpretation

The scribes of the period succeeding Nehemiah not only copied the sacred books and explained their meaning, but also set a value on every letter and counted their number. While this guarded against interpolations and changes, the attaching of a numerical value to each letter led to the imposing of fantastical meanings on plain historical statements. For example, the letters of the name "Eliezer" have a numerical value of 318. (Jewish letters are also used for numerals). In Gen. 14:14 we are told that Abraham had 318 trained servants. This was made to indicate that the value of Eliezer, the steward of Abraham, Gen. 15:2, was equal to the value of Abraham's servants.

### 3. Origin of Jewish tradition

The interpretations of the scribes became the traditions from which was constructed the oral law. They became more and more comprehensive and complicated as new legends and allegorical expositions were added by one teacher after another.

Thus originated the Jewish legal and homiletical exegesis which was given an authority equal to that of the sacred books. The substance of these traditions is preserved in the Talmud.

### 4. Indictment of Jewish tradition

(1) Attitude of Christ - Christ condemned the current Jewish traditions of the elders, which emphasized externalities and nullified the commandments of God, Mark 7:1-13.

(2) Attitude of Paul - Paul, like Christ, denounced the Jewish fables and commandments of men, Tit. 1:14, as turning them from the truth instead of bringing them to it and reproached the believers for continuing in "the commandments and doctrines of men." Col. 2:20-23

(3) Implications - The implications of the attitude of Christ and the apostle Paul toward the Jewish traditions are that the Scriptures alone are the fountainhead of truth and criterion for all religious matters

## F. HISTORICAL METHODS OF INTERPRETATION

### 1. Development of various methods

When the Old and New Testaments assumed canonical form and authority and became the subject of study, they furnished a most inviting field for literary research and theological controversy. Hence, in the course of the ages, a variety of methods of interpretation have appeared between the third and the eighteenth centuries

### 2. Nature of these methods

(1) The allegorizing method - This method, of which Origen was an exponent, denies the literal meaning of certain accounts in scripture and regards them as mere stories illustrating some truth as in Gen. 3:6-7; 28:10-21

(2) The mystical method - This method aimed to exhibit the obscure meanings of scripture not obtainable by ordinary means of acquiring knowledge. In this manner the stones of Jacob's pillow, (Gen. 28:11), were interpreted as being spiritual intelligences which conveyed knowledge of a certain character to him

(3) The authoritarian method - This method claims the authority of the church to interpret the scriptures for the people. Tradition, the decisions of the councils, and the edicts of the popes greatly interfered with personal liberty to interpret the scriptures

(4) The logical method - The principle of this method, which was likewise promulgated by Origen, is that the Bible must be rigidly explained according to its own language by the aid of logic and analysis, and that the same exegetical laws should be observed as those in the interpretation of any other book

(5) The pietistic method - According to the pietistic mode of exposition, the interpreter claims to be guided by an "inward light," received as an "unction from the Holy One." The rules of grammar, and the common meaning and usage of words, are disregarded as the "internal light of the Spirit" is held to be the abiding and infallible "Revealer"

(6) The rationalistic method - This method subjects interpretation to the sovereign sway of reason and interprets supernatural phenomena as being mere accommodations to the superstitious notions and ignorances of the times in which they occurred

(7) The naturalistic method - The main difference between the rationalistic and the naturalistic method is that the naturalists went farther in their rationalism than the rationalists. The naturalistic method aims to deny the value of the scriptures and rejects all supernatural agency in human affairs

(8) The moral method - This method introduced by Immanuel Kant, held that, since the scriptures were primarily given for the moral improvement of man, each verse should be explained or, if necessary, bent or forced to teach some profitable moral lesson and this without regard to its historical meaning

3. Effects of these methods (1) Of the allegorizing and mystical methods - The intolerable and lawless excesses in interpretation to which these methods inevitably led, emphasized the need for sounder methods of interpretation. Therefore, Lucian, Jerome, and Diodorus of Antioch introduced a more scientific and profitable system of Biblical study by following grammatical rules which put a check to the allegorical and mystical interpretations so popular at the time in which they lived (2) Of the authoritarian method - The effort of the church to standardize interpretation and guard against the wild excesses of individual interpretations by the authoritarian method made the cure worse than the evil.

Since the Roman Church usurped the sole right to interpret the scriptures, individual examination and interpretation became unnecessary and was not only discouraged, but also forbidden Under the dominion of such a system, the Bible fell into disuse among the common people, and by the clergy was perverted to suit the passions and interests of the chiefs of a corrupted church. The few who dared to interpret the scriptures for themselves, and to make their interpretations public, were hunted like wild beasts, tortured, put to death, and burned as heretics As a further result, the authoritarian method, which had placed a legislative body between the soul and its God, led to the Reformation which completely overthrew the authority of the church and hence its arbitrary method of interpretation.

With the Reformation, new hermeneutical principles were introduced among which the most important were: a. Emphasis of the inspiration of the scriptures - Giving the fact of the inspiration of the scriptures a much more exalted place than it had been given heretofore b. The analogy of faith - The rule that each passage of scripture should be interpreted in conformity with the whole tenor of revealed truth c. The comparative study of scriptures - Interpreting scripture by comparing a passage with every other passage which might have a bearing on the subject under consideration (3) Of the logical method - Notwithstanding the great advances made in logical interpretation, one extreme again followed another.

In their effort to counteract unsatisfactory methods of interpretation, the interpreters allowed the intellectual tendency of the period to gain the ascendancy to the neglect of the aesthetic element in the scriptures, thus making interpretation rigid and cold Furthermore, they did not take proper note of the fact that the Holy Spirit is the Author of this same book, thus making it a class by itself and requiring the illumination of the Holy Spirit to understand it. Therefore, their interpretation was inadequate to meet man's spiritual need (4) Of the pietistic method - This "inward light" led them to many divergent and irreconcilable interpretations among themselves.

They magnified a blind, emotional faith and rapidly deteriorated into a superstitious mysticism and extravagance Although conceding the sanctity of the scriptures, their so-called principles and rules of interpretation were lawless and irrational and could lead only to confusion-- away from the truth instead of toward the truth (5) Of the rationalistic method - This method developed as a remedy for the degenerating effects of the pietistic method, but took on a very destructive form.

The rationalists mutilated revelation and denied the scriptural teaching respecting miracles, vicarious sacrifice, the resurrection, eternal punishment, and existence of angels and demons (6) Of the naturalistic method - This method sought to destroy the supernatural element in the scriptures and explained the miracles of Jesus as acts of kindness or exhibitions of medical skill recorded in a manner peculiar to the age as an accommodation to the superstitious notions of those times, e.g., Jesus walking on the sea.

Jesus, according to the naturalists, was actually walking on the shore so that, when Peter jumped into the sea, Jesus could reach out his hand from the shore and rescue him (7) Of the moral method - The

historical part of the Bible was regarded as being unable to contribute anything to make man better and was therefore to be treated with indifference and disposed of at pleasure. This method led to the discrediting of the divine origin of the Bible and to contend against, rather than for, the faith once delivered unto the saints

#### 4. Lessons from these methods

- (1) The human mind is inclined to swing like a pendulum from one extreme to another
- (2) Development of the emotions to the neglect of intellectual growth tends to lead to fanaticism, error and deception
- (3) Development of intellectuality to the neglect of the Spirit leads to rationalism, legalism, and infidelity
- (4) There is a danger of yielding to the novelties of subtle speculations and fanciful analogies by ignoring the grammatical meanings of the text
- (5) It is necessary to find and apply the only correct principles and methods of interpretation
- (6) Only when God's two witnesses, the Word and the Spirit, are allowed to speak unhindered, can we hope to understand the word of God aright

### G. QUALIFICATIONS OF THE INTERPRETER

#### 1. Intellectual qualifications

- (1) Adequate intelligence - Since there are things in the Bible which are "hard to be understood," 2 Peter 3:16, an interpreter should possess adequate intelligence and independent judgment to weigh his own propositions and form his own conclusions, if only to find confirmation for what has already been declared by others. Many have been led astray by merely accepting someone else's interpretation. A good interpreter does not do this
- (2) Sound imagination - The faculty of the mind to conceive and form images is especially necessary because of the supernatural and mysterious in the Bible, e.g., S. S. 5:2-8. Since an excess of imagination is more to be feared in the study of the Bible than in any other book, the imagination needs to be tempered with calm deliberation and good judgment
- (3) Complete impartiality - A qualified interpreter needs to be free from intellectual and emotional prejudices, traditional attitudes, the fear of man, the desire to please, and too much regard for his own reputation. He seeks the truth regardless of how he, or others, might be affected by it

#### 2. Educational qualifications

- (1) Studious habits - Since an interpreter is a "workman" laboring in the word and doctrine, he should equip himself with the essential tools for his work, viz., a good concordance, a good dictionary and at least some good reference books. His library, which need not necessarily be large, should enable him to do some research work. It is better, however, to have a small good library than a large one which is unused and unusable

(2) Diligent application - Diligence and thoroughness in the study of the Bible are indispensable qualities of an interpreter. Lack of these qualities causes many interpreters to stop short of clear and definite ideas of truth. The superficial mind and the slothful worker is satisfied with too little clearness and therefore avoids the necessary labor and diligence. Finding it more convenient to accept traditional interpretation, he stops short of a clear and well-defined interpretation instead of satisfying himself by conscientious study and thorough analysis

(3) General knowledge - The interpreter's knowledge should not be limited to strictly religious subjects, but include acquaintance with secular subjects and sciences. This is especially necessary to an intelligent understanding of certain portions of scripture which relate to secular subjects, e.g.,

a. Geography, e.g., Joshua 1:4; 1 Sam. 3:20

b. History, e.g., Dan. 7:6; Isa. 45:1-4; Zech. 9:8

c. Astronomy, e.g., Job 26:7, 13; 38:32; Amos 5:8

d. Botany, e.g., Luke 17:6; S. S. 3:6; Jer. 48:11

e. Zoology, e.g., S. S. 2:15; Hab. 3:19; Deut. 8:15

f. Customs, e.g., Psa. 56:8; S. S. 4:1; Jer. 48:11

g. Geology, e.g., Deut. 8:9; Gen. 19:24

h. Archeology, e.g., Jer. 50:26; Ezek. 26:4; Nah. 3:8

### 3. Moral Qualifications

(1) A love for the truth - In order to find the truth, we should have a love for it. This means that we prefer the truth to our own ideas and theories; that we are ready to divest ourselves of all pre-conceived opinions and accept the truth for the very truth's sake, regardless of how we, or others, may be affected by it

(2) Deep feeling - It is evident that the scriptures were written as much for the heart as for the intellect. This makes it necessary for the interpreter to have a heart which is susceptible to deep feelings; otherwise, his conception of the Bible can never be real, and his interpretation cannot appeal to the human heart. Furthermore, many passages can be truly understood only on condition of their being felt, e.g., Matt. 23:37-39 (3) Intellectual humility - A man who is devoid of intellectual humility will not easily renounce his own opinions, even though they be proved false. Many think they know because they do not know enough to know that they don't know. Those who are the most dogmatic and absolute in their assertions are frequently the least informed

### 4. Spiritual qualifications

(1) Faith - Faith is a fundamental attitude toward the word of God without which an interpreter is totally disqualified. This faith must not be a mere intellectual faith, but also a faith of the heart which involves a commitment of ourselves to that which we believe, John 7:17

(2) Religious experience - A good interpreter must have entered experimentally into a real Christian experience. While much of the word of God can be understood without this experience, much of it will

necessarily remain hidden

(3) The anointing of the Holy Spirit - The importance of the anointing of the Holy Spirit in the interpretation of the Bible must not be overlooked. He is said to be the Spirit of truth, John 14:17, for he reveals and guides into new truth, John 16:13

## H. HISTORICAL CIRCUMSTANCES

### 1. Personal circumstances of the writer

(1) Education - The style of the Bible is marked with the educational training, or the lack of it, of the writers of the Bible, e.g., Luke 1:1-4 and Amos 7:14-15

(2) Personality - The characteristics of a writer's personality are reflected in his writings, e.g., James 1:26, 3:6 and 1 John 2:1-2, 5:21

(3) Profession - The full meaning of some passages can only be ascertained by an acquaintance with those occupations to which he makes reference, Luke 9:62; Isa. 28:23-29

(4) Environment - A recognition of the environment of the writer often throws light on the meaning and reason for what he said, e.g., 2 Tim. 1:6-8

(5) Religions - There are frequent references to heathen religions and heresies, a knowledge of which sheds light on these references, e.g., 1 John 2:26-27; Gal. 3:1-3

(6) Politics - Political conditions have much to do with the meaning of a passage, e.g., the Roman rule over Palestine, John 6:15 and Matt. 22:17

### 2. Historical setting of books

(1) Order of books - A knowledge of the order in which different books are written, makes certain passages very plain, e.g., 2 Cor. 2:4-11 and 1 Cor. 5:1-5

(2) Time of writing - A knowledge of the time of writing sometimes shows the reason and propriety for the things said and gives a passage a color not otherwise possible, e.g., Jer. 1:1-19 and 2 Chron. 34:1-33

(3) Occasion for writing - The circumstances which brought about the writing of a book affects its meaning. Such a meaning will become much clearer when the occasion can be ascertained, e.g., Psa. 3 and 2 Sam. 15:1-18:33

(4) Object of writing - This refers to the position taken by the writer with respect to the occasion for writing. While the language in itself may be perfectly clear, a consideration of the purpose will give a passage its correct application, e.g., Paul's letter to the Galatians

(5) Circumstances of the people addressed - Consideration of the circumstances of the persons addressed may save the interpreter from a misapplication of scripture, e.g., Acts 15:19-21

## I. COMPARATIVE STUDY OF SCRIPTURE

### 1. Nature of comparative study

(1) Basis of comparative study - The comparative study of the Bible rests upon the basis that:

a. The entire Bible possesses unity of design and teaching and therefore cannot contradict itself, 2 Tim. 3:16-17

b. The Bible is a self-interpreting book and no single statement or obscure passage can be allowed to set aside a doctrine which is clearly established by many passages, e.g., 1 Sam. 2:25b

(2) Comparative study - By this is meant that:

a. Every passage being interpreted should be compared with every other passage that might modify its meaning, e.g., Job 7:9 and John 5:29

b. Seeming contradictions are to be resolved by comparative study, e.g., Gal. 6:2 and 6:5. Any interpretation which makes the Bible self-inconsistent must rest on false premises

c. A doctrine should be based upon a combination of every passage concerned with the subject and not upon the isolated position of a single statement, e.g., Eph. 1:5 and John 3:16; 2 Peter 3:9 and Rev. 22:17

## 2. Prerequisites to comparative study

(1) Perspective of divine truth - To interpret a passage consonant with the general tenor of scripture, it is necessary that the interpreter possess a perspective knowledge of the whole scope of scripture, 2 Peter 1:20

(2) Freedom from predelection - An interpreter should seek only the precise thought in the mind of the writer. No meaning should be elicited but that which a fair and honest interpretation yields, 2 Peter 3:16

## 3. Recognition of emphasis

(1) Nature of emphasis - In the use of language, cases arise where the ordinary signification of a word receives a certain augment which such a word does not have of itself. This affects the extent or weight of its meaning. Such accession of force is, in the sacred originals, secured in various ways such as:

a. By declaration, Matt. 23:23

b. By exhortation, Matt. 6:33

c. By contrast, Isa. 40:8; John 10:10-12

d. By use of numbers, 1 Cor. 12:28

e. By reiteration, Gal. 5:21

f. By repetition, Jer. 7:4

g. By certain expressions, Matt. 16:16 ("the"); Heb. 2:1 ("therefore")

(2) Inspiration of emphasis - Emphasis must be observed in interpretation and recognized as an integral part of the inspired text. Disregard of emphasis results in a distortion of truth and even error

(3) Diverse importance of doctrine - Although all scripture is equally authoritative, not all truths contained in scripture are equally important, Matt. 5:29-30. Where doctrines are of diverse importance, they must receive only their proportionate weight, e.g.

a. In the diversity of ministries, Rom. 12:3-6; 1 Cor. 12:12-30; 3:1-8

b. In the purpose of signs, John 20:30-31; Acts 8:5-8

c. In the relative value of the spiritual and the material, Matt. 6:33

d. In sanctification and healing, 1 Cor. 11:27-32; 5:5

e. In fruit relative to gifts, Matt. 7:21-23; 1 Cor. 13:13

f. In the use of power, Luke 1:17 and John 10:41; Luke 7:26-28

g. In the word of God in relation to miracles, Luke 3:2-6; 1 Cor. 12:28

#### 4. Specific considerations

In determining the meaning of a word or statement, the interpreter may need to consider:

(1) To whom written - Not all promises in the Bible apply equally to all people, e.g., Gen. 17:6-8; Phil. 4:19

(2) Who said it - The Bible does not lie but it records some lies that have been uttered, as well as wrong sentiments that have been expressed, e.g., Gen. 3:4; Job 2:9

(3) Under what circumstances - A consideration of the circumstances under which certain things were said may completely alter their meaning, e.g., 1 Kings 19:14

(4) For what purpose - A consideration of the purpose of writing may altogether alter the sense of words from what it would appear to be without such consideration, e.g., 1 Cor. 15:32

(5) With what tone - The intonation of a word, by means of the modulation of the voice or indication in the writing has much to do with its meaning, e.g., Jer. 7:4; Rom. 6:17

(6) At what time - The time in which a statement was made, or an action performed, may supply the key to a proper understanding and so guard against misinterpretation, e.g., Acts 1:15-26; (Gal. 1:1; Rev. 21:14)

(7) In what place - The place of the writer, when making a statement, may determine the thought he has in mind, e.g., Eph. 6:20; (Col. 3:14) ; Lam. 3:53-57; (Jer. 38:6)

(8) With what feeling - The feelings with which a passage was originally uttered are often a vital part of the message itself and, therefore, necessitates consideration by the interpreter, e.g., Hosea 2:5; 3:2; 14:1-2

## J. GRAMMATICAL PRINCIPLES

### 1. General rules

(1) Although every language has many words which admit of several meanings, there is only one true sense attached to any word. This sense is indicated by the connection of the words employed, by the subject matter and by the design of the speaker or writer, or by some other adjunct, unless any ambiguity

be purposely intended. The same is true of the scriptures, which would never be comprehended if a multiplicity of senses were admitted

(2) Since it is the purpose of interpretation to render in our own language the precise thought of the mind of the writer, it is evident that our interpretation, to be correct, ought not to affirm or deny any more than the inspired writers affirmed or denied at the time they wrote

(3) The interpretation of scripture must be in accordance with the rules of grammar, viz., with the principles that govern the correct use of language

(4) Although the force of particular words can sometimes be derived only from etymology, too much confidence must not be placed in that frequently uncertain science; because the primary signification of a word is very often different from its common meaning

(5) The usual signification of a word is to be retained unless weighty and necessary reasons require that it should be abandoned, viz.

a. When such meaning contradicts any doctrine revealed

in scripture, such as the justice of God in I Sam. 2:25

b. If a certain passage requires a different explanation from that which it appears to present, e.g., Mai. 4:5-6 compared with Matt. 11:14 and Luke 1:17

c. Where a word has several significations in common use, the intended meaning must be selected in harmony with the passage in question, e.g., the meaning of "blood" in Heb. 9:12 and Acts 17:26

(6) General terms are sometimes used in their whole extent, and sometimes in a restricted sense. Whether they are to be understood in the wider or in the narrower sense must depend upon the context, e.g., the term "live" in 2 Thess. 3:8

## 2. Use of the context

(1) Context defined - The context is that part of scripture which immediately precedes or follows a word, phrase, sentence, or any portion under consideration

(2) Importance of context - If we analyze the words of an author and take them out of their proper setting, they may be so distorted that they can be made to mean anything but what he intended them to mean. Words have several meanings, and consequently can be taken in various acceptations. A careful consideration of the context will enable us to determine that signification which is best adapted to the passage in question and so ascertain the meaning intended by the writer

(3) Rules for employing the context

a. The entire passage should be examined with minute attention - Sometimes a verse will require a whole chapter, or several of the preceding or following chapters, for a context, e.g., Heb. 4:1. Before the meaning of the passage in question is determined, the whole context must be minutely studied

b. No explanation must be admitted but that which suits the context - In direct violation of this principle, the church of Rome makes Matt. 18:17 to mean that the doctrinal decisions of the Roman Catholic Church are

infallible

c. Where no connection is to be found with the context, none should be sought - This rule applies almost entirely to the Proverbs of Solomon, which are mostly composed of separate maxims having no verbal connection

d. Notice should be taken of parentheses - Sometimes the grammatical construction with which a sentence begins is interrupted by another thought. This is especially true in the writings of Paul, who, after making numerous digressions, returns to the topic which he had begun to discuss, e.g., Heb. 3:7-11. Only the sense of a passage can determine when it is parenthetical, e.g., Gen. 24:10; Rom. 9:1-11:36

### 3. Figurative language

(1) Reasons for figurative language - In the early ages of the world, the most ancient mode of instruction was by figures of speech. The sacred writers could impart divine truth best by employing terms borrowed from sensible and material objects most suitable to the Oriental mind. Hence, the language of the Bible contains many figures and images drawn from almost any subject that presented itself to the imagination of the writer

(2) Purpose of figurative language - Without the aid of these figures, which present truth to the mind in picture form and delight while they instruct, it would be impossible for us to form any reasonably adequate conception of the essence and attributes of God. Therefore, the writings of David, Solomon and others abound with animating figures and images

4. Categories of language In order to understand the scriptures aright, it is necessary to recognize and understand the various forms of language used in the Bible, namely:

(1) Historical language - Simple statements of fact concerning past events and to be taken literally, Ex. 2:1-10

(2) Poetical language - Truth conveyed in the language of the imagination and the picturesque, S. S. 4:12-5:1, in which the Bible abounds

(3) Phenomenal language - Statements of fact conveyed from the appearance of a spectator and not in the language of scientific accuracy, Matt. 5:45; Joshua 10:12-13

(4) Symbolic language - Truth conveyed by means of emblems or signs, the meaning of which is inherent in the symbol, Dan. 2:31-38

(5) Proverbial language - Truth formally stated as a maxim, but not to be taken literally, Prov. 26:17

(6) Cultural language - Truth based upon, and belonging to, the culture of another time, although its principles are valid for all time, John 13:14

(7) Spiritual language - Language conveying truth essentially belonging to the incorporeal, the realm of the Spirit, 1 Cor. 13:1-8

(8) Anthropomorphic language - Language which reveals the nature and activity of God in terms of human conceptions, e.g., Ezek. 3:14; Neh. 2:18

(9) Figurative language - Language employing words which are deflected from their ordinary meaning and used in another sense, e.g., Acts 15:10; Gal. 5:1

(10) Typological language - New Testament truth given in the language of the Old Testament types, e.g., 1 Peter 2:5

(11) Parabolic language - Language which presents truth in the form of a parable, e.g., Luke 15:8-10

(12) Doctrinal language - Language which sets forth principles of belief forming the dogma of the church, Rom. 5:1

5. Figures of speech (1) Allegory a. Allegory defined - An allegory is an extended metaphor which presents a spiritual truth in symbolical narrative, Ecc. 12:1-7 b. Allegory and parable differentiated (a) The personages in the parable are representative, e.g., Matt. 13:1-23, while those of an allegory are symbolical, e.g., Ecc. 12:1-7 (b) The meaning of the parable is to be sought apart from the imagery of the story, while the meaning of the allegory is implied in the symbolical use of the words (2) Apostrophe - An apostrophe is an address to the absent as though present, e.g., Jer. 15:10, or to the inanimate as if human, e.g., Psa. 148:3 (3) Fable - The fable is a story in which nature and the brute creation are endowed with reason and made to speak and act contrary to the known laws of their being, e.g., Judges 9:8-15 (4) Hyperbole - A hyperbole is a figure of speech consisting of an obvious exaggeration not intended to deceive, but to add force to a statement, e.g., Psa. 6:6 (5) Interrogation - An interrogation is a figure of speech in which an affirmation is expressed in the form of a question, e.g., Job 11:7; Jer. 32:27 (6) Irony - Irony is a figure of speech in which the very opposite of what is intended is said, e.g., Job 12:2.

It is ridicule transparently disguised as compliment (7) Litotes - Litotes is a figure which suggests its intended idea by negating the opposite, e.g., Acts 21:39. It is an understatement in contrast to the hyperbole which emphasizes by overstatement (8) Metaphor - A metaphor is an implied comparison in which a transfer of the qualities of one object to another is made so that an identity is established between them, e.g., Matt. 5:13 (9) Metonymy - Metonymy is a figure of speech by which one word is put for another because of an association of ideas, e.g., Luke 24:27 (10) Onomatopoeia - Onomatopoeia is the use of words whose sound suggests the sense, e.g., Matt. 24:51 (11) Parable a.

Nature of a parable - A parable is a story which consists of a continued narration of a fictitious event, which might reasonably have happened, applied by way of simile to the illustration of some important truth, e.g., Luke 15:8-10. It is an extended simile, but is always confined to reality. In order to be a parable, the story must be true to the facts and experiences of a human life b. Peculiar utility of parables - Instruction by way of parables carries with it a force and conviction which are almost irresistible.

By laying hold on the imagination, a parable insinuates itself into the affections; and by the inter-communication of the faculties, the understanding is made to apprehend the truth which was proposed to the fancy. Among its specific merits, the following may be mentioned: (a) Instructions by way of parable is naturally adopted to engage the attention (b) It is easily comprehended and suited to the meanest capacity (c) It opens the doctrines which it professes to conceal without alarming our prejudices and passions (d) It communicates unwelcome truths in the least disagreeable manner and insinuates reproof with less offense and with greater efficacy than open rebuke, e.g., 2 Sam. 12:1-9 (12) Paradox - A paradox is a figure of speech which is seemingly self-contradictory or absurd, yet expresses a truth.

It is a statement that is contradictory if taken at its face value, but which has a deeper meaning than is readily apparent, e.g., 2 Cor. 12:10 (13) Personification - Personification is a figure by which intelligence or life is attributed to inanimate objects, e.g., Num. 16:32 (14) Riddle - The riddle is a proposition put in ambiguous language intended to puzzle or perplex the hearers and requiring the exercise of ingenuity in order to discover its meaning, e.g., Judges 14:14.

The Hebrew noun for "riddle" signifies to "twist" (15) Simile - A simile is a comparison between two fundamentally different objects for the purpose of bringing out some point of resemblance. Similes are usually introduced by words such as "like" or "as," e.g., Jer. 23:29 (16) Symbol - A symbol is an object, animate or inanimate, standing for, or representing something, moral or intellectual as an idea or a quality, e.g., Rev. 5:5 (17) Synecdoche - A synecdoche is a specialized type of metonymy in which the whole is put for a part, e.g., Luke 2:1; or the part is put for the whole, e.g., Acts 27:37 (18) Type a.

Type defined - A type in scripture is a preordained representative relation which certain persons, offices, institutions, etc. of the Old Testament hold to corresponding persons, offices, institutions, etc., of the New Testament, e.g., Heb. 7:1-3 b. Essential characteristics of a type (a) Notable points of analogy - There must be some notable point or points of analogy between the type and its antitype. In addition, there must also be striking points of contrast; and the antitype is always higher and nobler than the type, e.g., 1 Cor. 15:45-49 (b) Evidence of divine designation - There must be evidence that the type was divinely designated and appointed to represent the person or thing typified.

Thus more than resemblance is needed to constitute a truth a type. The correspondence must be intended by God. In other words, typology does not rest upon the capricious support of the imagination of the expositor, but upon the solid foundation of the word of God (c) Prophetic import - A type must prefigure something future. It is this feature which gives the type a prophetic character and makes it a shadow of things to come, e.g., Heb. 10:1

## 5. Interpretation of figurative language

### (1) General rules

a. The literal meaning of words must be retained more in historical than in poetical books. The style of narrative in historical books is simple and, generally, devoid of ornament; whereas, the poetical books abound with images

b. The literal meaning is to be rejected if it involves an impossibility. No proposition, which does violence to the principles of reason, can be the sense of any part of the word of God, e.g., John 10:9

c. The sense of a figurative expression is often known from the writer's own explanation of it. The inspired penmen of the Old Testament frequently subjoin proper literal terms to figurative expressions, and thus explain the meaning intended to be conveyed by the images they employ, e.g., Psa. 119:105

d. The sense of a figurative expression may sometimes be ascertained by consulting a fuller parallel passage when examining a brief mention of a figure, e.g., Obadiah 16 and Isa. 51:17-23

e. Consideration must be given to typological connections. This will often lead to the original of the figurative expression and consequently to the intended meaning, e.g., 1 Peter 2:5

f. An examination of the immediate context will often give a clue to the true meaning of a figure. Very frequently, some word precedes or follows that plainly indicates whether an expression is to be taken literally or figuratively, e.g., Lev. 19:8

g. A comparison which has but one view ought not to be extended too far. Neither should it be strained in order to make it agree in other respects, where it is evident that there is not a similitude of ideas, e.g., Rev. 16:15

#### (2) Interpreting parables

a. Rigid inquiry should be made into the circumstances in which the parable was first delivered, e.g., the parables in Luke 15 were prompted by the attitude of the Pharisees in verses 1-2

b. As every parable has two senses, the literal sense must be first understood in order that the correspondence between it and the mystical sense may be more readily perceived

c. Only the principal truth intended to be taught should be emphasized. Details, which are mainly accessory to the story, should not be pressed for a meaning. If any spiritual significance is attached to them, it should harmonize with the principal lesson and with New Testament doctrine. It must always be born in mind, that parables do not teach doctrine

#### (3) Interpreting types

a. Only the essential and obviously intended points of resemblance between the type and its antitype should be emphasized, e.g., Num. 21:4-9 and John 3:14-15

b. Only the essential and obviously intended points of contrast between the type and its antitype should be emphasized, e.g., Heb. 9:23-28

c. Types can be understood and interpreted only in the light of the antitype. Any interpreter who seeks to interpret types without first considering the anti-type will most likely reach untenable conclusions

### K. THE ANALOGY OF FAITH

#### 1. Nature of analogy of faith

(1) Definition - The analogy of faith is the harmony of the general teachings of scripture derived from those passages in which they are given in readily understandable language

(2) Basis - Since the Bible came from God, it cannot, when accurately translated, be at variance with itself. Therefore, the analogy of faith rests upon the basis that in the system of the scriptures all the various truths correspond with each other

#### (3) Degrees of the analogy of faith

a. Positive analogy - That analogy which is directly based upon explicit and unanimous statements of scripture, e.g., the existence of God

b. General analogy - That analogy which is based upon the implication of scripture rather than upon direct statements, e.g., the form of church government. A valid conclusion on subjects of this category can only be reached by a thorough study of all passages dealing with the subject

c. Deduced analogy - That analogy which employs a chain of reasoning based upon the positive teaching of scripture. It demands for this reasoning the same degree of authority as for the scriptures themselves, e.g., the supposed infallibility of the Roman Catholic doctrine. This reasoning is as follows:

- (a) God has given a revelation for the purpose of saving mankind
- (b) Therefore God watches over the preservation of this revelation and the church
- (c) Therefore Christ preserves the church from error
- (d) Therefore Christ has instituted a visible and infallible authority in order to prevent error
- (e) Therefore the pope and the bishops are the depository of this authority

This analogy takes for granted the infallibility of the reasonings which connect the consequences with their sources. The longer and more complicated the chain of reasoning, the greater is the chance of error because it leads away from the truth. Thus, as in the above instance, reasoning from a basic premise of truth may lead to complete error.

d. Imposed analogy - That analogy, so called, which is based upon the dogma of the church, rather than upon the scriptures, e.g., the diversity of church creeds. Imposed analogy rests upon the assumed authority supposed to inhere in the consensus of the opinions of Christianity. What is believed by many is doubtless worthy of serious consideration, but to use it as a method of interpretation is to substitute authority and unanimity for rational principles

## 2. General principles

The strength of the analogy of faith varies in four different ways, namely:

- (1) In number - Although divine certainty is attached to every declaration in the Bible, the importance of a subject may, to some extent, be judged by the frequency of its mention
- (2) In unanimity - The more unanimously a truth is mentioned, the stronger is its evidence
- (3) In clearness - Some subjects are treated in varying degrees of clearness. It may generally be assumed, that the importance of a subject is more or less proportionate to the clearness with which it is treated
- (4) In distribution - The analogy of faith, when deduced from several books, is stronger than when based upon one book only. Hence, the strength of a truth is governed to some degree by distribution

## 3. Position of the analogy of faith

- (1) It is self-evident that God does not act without a design in the system of religion any more than he does in nature
- (2) This design must be uniform, just as in the universe every part is proportioned to the whole and made subservient to it
- (3) Likewise, in the system of revelation, all the sixty-six individual books correspond with each other and are an integral parts of the whole

(4) Therefore, the entire Bible must be explained so as to be consistent with itself and in harmony with the end designed

---

Source: <https://sermonindex.net/speakers/walter-beuttler/study-notes-principles-of-bible-interpretation/>

# *Grow in Your Walk with Christ*

---

Listen and read messages that will stir your heart for Christ and point you to deeper repentance and devotion.

- 50,000+ Sermons from speakers past and present
- 3,900+ Classic Christian Books freely readable online
- 1,200+ Bible Translations and Commentaries
- Over 450k forum posts — Join our vibrant online Christian forum

**[www.sermonindex.net](http://www.sermonindex.net)**