

LESSON 8: PRINCIPLES OF BIBLICAL INTERPRETATION

1. There are many important areas of study that should be brought to your attention as a young Christian; however, some of these must wait their turns because you might become bewildered or discouraged at the quantity of material. You might think this lesson falls into the category of being able to wait its turn. I believe, however, it is vital to your Christian development. Thus, this lesson is included for your consideration and hopefully for your edification.

2. What is Biblical interpretation? The word "interpret," according to Webster, means "to explain the meaning of." Thus, Biblical interpretation means explanation of the meaning of the Scriptures.

(Question):

A. Define Biblical interpretation.
_____.

3. Two other closely allied terms which are important for a correct understanding of the Scriptures are hermeneutics and exegesis. Hermeneutics is defined as the science of interpretation; exegesis means to lead out. Exegesis, then, is the application of the principles of hermeneutics in bringing out the meaning of a passage or, in other words, it is sound Biblical interpretation.

(Question):

A. Sacred hermeneutics and exegesis pertain to the principles of interpretation of Scripture. **True or False**

4. A proper understanding of principles of Biblical interpretation is essential if you are to speed your spiritual growth and prevent mistakes (some of which could be fatal). Some, however, contend that Christians do not have the right or power to interpret the Scriptures.

(Question):

A. A proper understanding of the principles of Biblical interpretation is important because it
_____.

5. This erroneous conclusion is based on a misunderstanding of II Peter 1:20-21. Note what Peter said: "Knowing this first that no prophecy of scripture is of any private interpretation. For the prophecy came not in old time by the will of man: but holy men of God spake as they were moved by the Holy Spirit."

(Question):

A. This erroneous conclusion is based upon the writings of whom?
_____.

6. Some interpret the above passage to mean that the masses of mankind cannot understand the Scriptures for they are "of no private

LESSON 8: PRINCIPLES OF BIBLICAL INTERPRETATION

interpretation." Consequently many believe that the masses must come their church for the proper instruction.

(Question):

- A. Some believe that the average man cannot interpret the Bible. **True or False**

7. Let us examine this passage closely to see what Peter is really teaching. He does not say that any of the Scriptures cannot be understood or interpreted by individuals. Peter was not speaking of the study of the Scriptures but of how the Scriptures came into existence.

(Question):

- A. Peter is discussing _____ the Scriptures came into existence.

8. He identifies the portion of the scripture under consideration as the "prophecy of scripture." Then he proceeds to show how the prophecy came to be – "...not...by the will of man: but holy men of God spake as they were moved by the Holy Spirit."

(Question):

- A. How did the prophecy come to be?

9. If the individual cannot interpret the Scriptures, why is he 1) commanded to study the

Scriptures (II Tim 2: 15), 2) called "blessed" when he reads the Scriptures (Revelation 1: 1), and 3) God would be responsible for us if we were lost if He had given instruction that we cannot understand.

(Question):

- A. Man has a responsibility to interpret the Scriptures? **True or False**

10. Failure to understand these principles of Biblical interpretation has caused (and will continue to cause) divisions in Christendom. This may be the root cause of division and disunity in the religious world! Surely a few moments of study on these principles is worthwhile if Christian unity is and can be affected by them.

(Question):

- A. A misunderstanding of the principles of Biblical interpretation has resulted in _____ in Christendom.

11. Sound hermeneutics will improve your effectiveness as a teacher of the Bible. After a reasonable period of time, you should grow in knowledge to the point that you can teach others. Thus, these are tools which will help you be a more effective teacher and better Christian once they are understood.

(Question):

LESSON 8: PRINCIPLES OF BIBLICAL INTERPRETATION

- A. Sound hermeneutics will improve your effectiveness as a Bible teacher. **True or False**

12. There are several things which are conducive to an understanding of God's word. First, employ good common sense. God has given His word to all men. It is arranged in an orderly, easy to understand manner. Even so, many people are confused by it because they do not use good common sense as they study. Application of good common sense to study the Bible will go a long way toward a proper understanding.

(Question):

- A. One important thing which is conducive to an understanding of the Bible is _____.

13. Another important thing which is conducive to an understanding of God's word is a desire to learn. In fact, you will not learn or understand much of the Bible until you develop the desire to learn it. Your study will be unprofitable if you do it merely out of sense of duty.

(Question):

- A. A desire to learn is a prerequisite to understanding the Bible. **True or False**

14. The time to develop this desire is immediately after your conversion. Do it while

you are still enthusiastic then guard against a waning of that desire.

(Question):

- A. Developing a lax attitude towards Bible study should be created immediately after conversion. **True or False**

15. Faith in the inspiration of the Scriptures is a third thing which is conducive to an understanding of the Bible. The Bible did not originate in the human mind; rather it originated with God and was given to man as God divinely inspired holy men to write. Paul told Timothy, "All scripture is given by the inspiration of God." (II Timothy 3:16).

(Question):

- A. Faith in the inspiration of the Scriptures is one the things which assist in understanding the Bible. **True or False**

16. The statement of Peter referred to earlier (recorded in II Peter 1:20, 21) corroborates the idea that God is the author of the Bible. He said, "...holy men of God spake as they were moved by the Holy Ghost."

(Question):

- A. The Bible was originated by man. **True or False**

LESSON 8: PRINCIPLES OF BIBLICAL INTERPRETATION

17. Since we must look to God for instructions concerning our salvation, we must have faith that He inspired men of old to write as He guided them. Without this faith and trust, a proper understanding of the Bible will not be possible. Select the three things in the following list that are conducive to an understanding of the Scriptures.

- A. A desire to please friends: fulfill duty:
desire to learn: faith in the inspiration:
common sense: desire to gain
knowledge.

18. All the things discussed above are important for a proper understanding of the Bible, but without due diligence, they are futile. We must apply ourselves to know the will of God.

(Question):

- A. Due diligence is not necessary to understand the will of God. **True or False**

19. Our effort of due diligence should be like the Bereans: "These were more noble than those in Thessalonica, in that they received the word with all readiness of mind, and searched the scriptures daily, whether those things were so." (Acts 17:11).

(Question):

- A. The _____ indicate the correct attitude of due diligence regarding the scriptures.

20. The Bereans searched the Scriptures; they applied themselves mentally to properly understand. You can do the same and as a result be "more noble."

(Question):

- A. Why were the Bereans more noble than those of Thessalonica?
-

21. There are many things which can hinder an understanding of the Bible. Let us note three primary reasons. First, a desire to please the world. If we have this desire, surely it will be a hindrance to our understanding. (The inordinate desire to please the world).

(Question):

- A. The desire to please the Lord will hinder us from understanding the Bible? **True or False**

22. If we are a friend of the world in that we try to please and partake of the things of the world, James says we are the enemy of God. "Ye adulterers and adulteresses, know ye not that the friendship of the world is enmity with God? Whosoever therefore will be a friend of the world is the enemy of God." (James 4:4).

LESSON 8: PRINCIPLES OF BIBLICAL INTERPRETATION

(Question):

A. How do we become God's enemy?

23. We must desire to please and serve God rather than man. God must have first place, others second and self last. The apostles exhibited the right attitude in Acts 5:29 when they told the chief priests, "We ought to obey God rather than men."

(Question):

A. Our primary or first allegiance belongs to _____.

24. Another thing which hinders understanding is using the Bible to prove doctrines. If we have our minds made up before we consult the Bible, why consult it all? One can wrest and twist the Scriptures to prove almost anything, e.g., the Bible records that "Judas went and hanged himself" (Matthew 27:5), "Go, and do thou likewise" (Luke 10:37).

(Question):

A. One can wrest and twist the Scriptures to his destruction. **True or False**

25. Thus, it is extremely important to approach the Bible with an open, unbiased mind and truly search out the meaning of each passage. Let us not "put words in God's mouth," rather let us go

to the Bible for our opinions instead of with our opinions.

(Question):

A. Another thing which hinders understanding is using the Bible to _____

26. Then, the third thing which hinders understanding is reading without expecting to understand it. You can't read any book with this attitude and understand it. You must read expecting to understand. The Bible is not too difficult to understand. God gave it for our salvation; let us read it fully expecting to understand.

(Question): Name three things which hinder Biblical _____ understanding.

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____

27. Thus far in this lesson we have (1) defined what is meant by Biblical interpretation, hermeneutics and exegesis (2) we have learned some things which are conducive to an understanding of the Bible (3) we have noted three things that hinder an understanding of the Bible.

LESSON 8: PRINCIPLES OF BIBLICAL INTERPRETATION

28. In previous lessons we have learned that Christians are subject to the law of Christ or the New Testament. If we are to properly understand this "New Will," it is helpful to learn the three ways in which the Bible teaches. One of the most obvious ways is by direct commands.

(Question):

A. The Bible instructs by _____ methods.

29. By this method the Bible teaches most directly. Many examples of direct commands can be cited from the Bible. For example, "Repent ye, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins; and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit" (Acts 2:38).

(Question):

A. The above passage teaches by what method?

30. Another example of a direct command is found in Mark 16:15, "And he said unto them, Go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature." Or as Paul instructed the Corinthians (I Corinthians 6:20), "For ye are bought with a price, therefore glorify God in your body, and in your spirit, which are God's."

(Question):

A. The direct commands recorded above are examples of one way the Bible teaches.

True or False

31. Many times when a direct command is given, the method of execution of the commandment is not given. Consider, for example, the statement of Christ referred to in frame 30 and recorded in Luke 16:15, "Go ye..." Surely no one would dispute the directness of this command. Yet obviously the how of going is not specified; the method of execution then is left to man's judgment.

(Question):

A. When direct commands are given in the Bible, the method of execution is always given. **True or False.**

32. Another example of this principle is the command to bring up our children in the "nurture and admonition of the Lord" (Ephesians 6:4). The exact methods of execution are left to man.

(Question):

A. Man can use his opinion where God has not specifically instructed, i.e., concerning the method of carrying out the command. **True or False.**

33. On the other hand, some direct commands are accompanied by instructions regarding the method of execution. For example, the command

LESSON 8: PRINCIPLES OF BIBLICAL INTERPRETATION

to worship God in “spirit and truth” is accompanied by other instructions as to how this can be done acceptably. These were discussed in Lesson 6.

(Question):

- A. Some direct commands are accompanied by instructions regarding the method of execution. **True or False**

34. A second way the Bible uses to instruct is by approved examples. A very good example of this method is the account of the conversion of the Ethiopian eunuch recorded in Acts 8:35 – 39. Read these verses. Here the Lord uses an approved example in showing us the way he wants us to follow.

(Question):

- A. A second method by which the Bible instructs is _____.

35. Another approved example is found regarding the Lord’s Supper. In Acts 20:7 we note, “And upon the first day of the week, when the disciples came together to break bread, Paul preached unto them, ready to depart on the morrow; and continued his speech until midnight.” Here we learn, by example, that the practice was to eat the Lord’s Supper each first day of the week..

(Question):

- A. This is an example of teaching by **approved example** or **direct command**?

36. The story of the Ethiopian eunuch recorded in Acts 8: 35ff is instruction by what method?

- A. _____

37. The third way by which the Bible instructs is through the necessary inference. Notice the word necessary – not just any inference or conclusion but one that necessarily follows.

(Question):

- A. A third way the Bible teaches or instructs is by _____

38. The approved example of the Ethiopian eunuch referred to in the previous frame is also a good example of the necessary inference. Philip is said to have “preached unto him Jesus.” Notice the result of this preaching: “And as they went on their way, they came to a certain water and the eunuch said, See here is water; what doth hinder me to be baptized?” There is no specific indication that Philip instructed him to be baptized.

LESSON 8: PRINCIPLES OF BIBLICAL INTERPRETATION

39. However, from the response of the eunuch it is obvious that preaching Jesus included baptism. This is necessary inference.

(Question):

A. How do you know that preaching Jesus included baptism?

40. Thus, the Bible instructs effectively in three ways.

(Question):

A. What are the three ways that the Bible teaches?

41. In the tabulation below, match the example given with the type of instruction used in the New Testament, i.e., command, example or necessary inference

- A. Ethiopian Eunuch
- B. "Repent and be baptized" (Acts 2:38)
- C. Lord's Supper, "Upon the first day of the week"
- D. Bring up children in the nurture and admonition of the Lord

E. "Therefore, glorify God in your body"

F. "Sing"

G. "Teach"

42. The author has purposely used simple examples and illustrations in this study. Admittedly there are other examples in the Bible which are not so obvious, but if the basics of how the Bible instructs are mastered, then the more difficult examples can be understood with diligent effort. As you grow spiritually, you will be able to grasp the intended meaning through these principles of Biblical interpretation..

43. Generally speaking, the New Testament is largely a book of principles. It is not a book composed mainly of "thou shall" and "thou shall not" It would take volumes upon volumes to record specifically all that God wants us to do. Yet many contend that we are free to practice whatever the Bible does not forbid. Is this right? No. Unless God has given authority for a practice, the silence of the New Testament indicates that such is not God's will.

(Question):

A. If God does not forbid a certain practice man is free to practice whatever he pleases. **True or False**

44. Much confusion has been wrought in the religious world over the principle of exclusion mentioned above. But the significance of the

LESSON 8: PRINCIPLES OF BIBLICAL INTERPRETATION

silence of the Scriptures is seen over and over. For example, God instructed Noah to build the ark of gopher wood. He did not specifically forbid the use of pine, oak, etc., yet it was excluded

(Question):

- A. Unless God has given us authority for a practice, the silence of the New Testament indicates that such is not God's will. **True or False**

45. The example of Cain and Abel is similar. God instructed them to make an animal sacrifice. The Bible is silent about vegetable offerings, but you know that God was displeased with Cain's sacrifice which was vegetable.

(Question):

- A. Why was it wrong for Cain to offer vegetable sacrifices?
- _____

46. Now we come to what some call the ABC's of Bible interpretation. To say the least, they are basic and helpful in understanding the Bible. They are in question form. 1) Under what dispensation is the event occurring? 2) Who is speaking? 3) To whom is the comment addressed? Let us discuss these ABC's of the interpretation individually.

(Question):

- A. What are the three ABC's of Bible interpretation?

1. _____

2. _____

3. _____

47. Under what dispensation is the event occurring? In Lesson 3, you learned about the three dispensations of Bible history. To review, they are as follows:

1. Patriarchal Age – 2500 years
2. Mosaic Age – 1500 years
3. Christian Age - ? years

(Question):

- A. There are _____ dispensations of time.

48. The importance of inquiring about the dispensation under which the event takes place can't be overstressed because God's instructions to man have varied depending on the age in which he lived. The Patriarchal Age was administered through the fathers (family religion), the Mosaic Age was administered through a nation of people (national religion), and the Christian Age is administered through Christ and is for all men.

LESSON 8: PRINCIPLES OF BIBLICAL INTERPRETATION

(Question):

- A. Knowing when an event takes place is unimportant. **True or False**

49. Who is speaking? Another important thing to notice when studying a passage is who is speaking. The Bible, of course, contains God's words; it also contains the quotations of the other good men and even Satan. Thus we should discern the speaker to be sure that the words are inspired and applicable to us.

(Question):

- A. Why is it important to note who is speaking?
-

50. This is not to infer that the Bible contains error for it does not; it is all true. God may quote the saying of someone accurately yet the content of the saying might be detrimental if followed. For example, the serpent told Eve "thou shalt not surely die" when God had really said "thou shalt die." The Bible records the event as it happened even though the serpent changed the word of God. There is, then, no contradiction in these comments.

51. To whom are the remarks directed? The "C" of Bible interpretation is to notice to whom the remarks are directed. The importance of checking this is evident because some remarks are made to Satan, some the Patriarchs, some to

alien sinners, some to Christians, etc. In addition, it is important to keep in mind the relation of the person to the cross, i.e., did the person live before or after the cross?

(Question):

- A. Why is it important to note to whom instruction is addressed?
-

52. A good understanding of the Bible will not come easily; a great deal of effort will be expended before you will have an intimate knowledge of it. Much prayer and study will be required.

(Question):

- A. Prayer has an important place in Bible study. **True or False**

53. The aim of this lesson has been to define and study the principles of Biblical interpretation. The main emphasis has been under the following categories.

(Question):

- A. Things which are conducive to an understanding of God's word.
B. Things which hinder understanding.
C. How the New Testament teaches.
D. The ABC's of Bible interpretation.