



*INSTITUTE OF  
SPIRITUAL FORMA-  
TION*

**Fall Semester - 2009**

**HOW TO INTERPRET THE BIBLE**

**GRAMMATICAL PRINCIPLES**





## INTRODUCTION

### Course Outline and Instructions

1. General Introduction and Basic Overview.
2. Nine General Principles for Interpreting the Bible.
3. **Eight Grammatical Principles for Interpreting the Bible.**
4. Three Historical Principles for Interpreting the Bible.
5. Four Theological Principles for Interpreting the Bible.
6. Practical Bible Study Tools.

**Reading Assignments:** Please feel free to read the book Knowing Scripture by R. C. Sproul at your own pace. We will eventually touch on the various topics found in the book but not necessarily in the order Sproul discusses them. My goal is to supplement your reading with additional material during the class time and in this way give you a broader exposure to the information. Do not get “hung up” or confused about something in the book. If you find something Sproul says is confusing or difficult to understand, go ahead and read it but push it aside and go on to the rest of the book. Some parts of the book are more technical and others are more practical. **DON’T MISS THE PRACTICAL SIMPLY BECAUSE YOU STOPPED READING DUE TO THE TECHNICAL!** Plus I will try my best to explain the technical.



**Questions About Your Reading or Class Teaching:** Questions from your reading or from the class itself can be given to me via email. Go to our church's Web page:

([www.cpcgoodyear.org](http://www.cpcgoodyear.org)) - at the bottom of the home page you will find a button "Sermons and More." Click that button and on the extreme right hand of the page you will find a section reserved for the Institute of Spiritual Formation. Each week we will put the lecture audio there plus the study sheets. If you miss a night you can go to the Web site and listen to the week you missed and the study notes with fill-in the blanks will be there!

Click on the "Have an ISF Question" button and fill out the form. Be sure to follow the directions at the bottom of the page and hit the "send message" button. Your question will go into a special folder that I will check regularly and reply to you either by email or at the beginning of the next class. Using this method for your questions will ensure that your questions to me do not get pushed into my "junk mail" or get lost in the many emails I already receive. This method will only provide me with ISF questions. I will let you know that I received your question.



**GRAMMATICAL PRINCIPLES FOR  
INTREPRETING THE BIBLE<sup>1</sup>**

**PART 1**

**Institute of Spiritual Formation  
Fall Semester – 2009**

Grammatical principles deal with the very words of the biblical text. How should you understand the words and sentences of the Bible? What are some basic ground rules to keep in mind as you attempt to interpret the Bible? We will discuss eight grammatical principles that will help you in your work of interpreting the Bible.

**PRINCIPLE # 1 – SCRIPTURE HAS ONLY \_\_\_\_\_ MEANING AND SHOULD BE  
TAKEN \_\_\_\_\_.**

- Every communicator desires what he says [or writes] to be taken at \_\_\_\_\_ value and not be understood as having a diversity of \_\_\_\_\_.
- What do you think I mean when I say “there are thousands of hungry people living in the Sudan?”
- If you don’t take a passage literally, all sorts of fanciful \_\_\_\_\_ will result.
- Even in those cases where the text uses metaphor or speaks figuratively you must still look for the literal \_\_\_\_\_ of the metaphor or figure. [Example: Jesus said: “I am the door.” We are not to think that Jesus has a door knob and hinges! But we are to understand that Jesus is to and for us what a door is to and for us—Jesus is the \_\_\_\_\_ in and the \_\_\_\_\_ out. He is the door out of sin and the entrance into salvation, among other things.]



- When you are tempted to question a passage being literal in meaning, ask yourself two questions:
  - a. Am I questioning this passage being taken literally because I \_\_\_\_\_ want to \_\_\_\_\_ it?
  - b. Am I questioning this passage being taken literally because it does not fit with my preconceived \_\_\_\_\_ bias?
- So, carefully determine what the natural, usual, ordinary sense of the word or sentence would be and accept it as the correct meaning unless the \_\_\_\_\_ demands otherwise.

**PRINCIPLE # 2 – INTERPRET THE WORDS IN THE BIBLE IN \_\_\_\_\_  
WITH THEIR MEANING IN THE \_\_\_\_\_ OF THE AUTHOR.**

- This is not as difficult as it may seem since we have many excellent \_\_\_\_\_ of the Bible that can help us. And if we are still unclear, there are good Bible \_\_\_\_\_ and \_\_\_\_\_ that will guide us.
- Sometimes the Scripture itself will interpret the meaning of a word for us – example: John 2:14-21.
- Since the meaning of words \_\_\_\_\_ with time, be careful that you don't interpret a word according to its \_\_\_\_\_ meaning of that word – example: “conversation” and “my heart is fixed, O God.”



**PRINCIPLE # 3 – INTERPRET A WORD IN RELATION TO ITS \_\_\_\_\_ AND \_\_\_\_\_ .**

- Let's use the word "faith" as an example to understand this rule:
  - a. Galatians 1:23 – The word "faith" as used in this verse means \_\_\_\_\_ .
  - b. Romans 14:23 – The word "faith" here means the \_\_\_\_\_ or \_\_\_\_\_ that this is what God \_\_\_\_\_ you to do."
- Consider 1 Corinthians 7:1 – The meaning of "touch" here is \_\_\_\_\_ .
- It is also important for you to know that the ancient manuscripts had no punctuation marks: no periods, commas, paragraphs, verses or chapters. The \_\_\_\_\_ may not always be contained within a couple verses or even a chapter. You may have to look at verses or the chapters \_\_\_\_\_ and \_\_\_\_\_ to get the full context.

**PRINCIPLE # 4 – INTERPRET A PASSAGE IN HARMONY WITH ITS \_\_\_\_\_ .**

Four important questions to ask that will help:

- How does the passage relate to the material \_\_\_\_\_ it?
- How does the passage relate to the \_\_\_\_\_ of the book and its \_\_\_\_\_ ?
- How does the passage relate to the \_\_\_\_\_ as a whole and its \_\_\_\_\_ ?
- How does the passage relate to the \_\_\_\_\_ and \_\_\_\_\_ in which it was written? [We are going to talk about this in greater detail in a later class time].

---

<sup>1</sup>Information in this study is adapted from A Layman's Guide to Interpreting the Bible by Walter Henrichsen, Zondervan Publishing House, 1985.



**GRAMMATICAL PRINCIPLES FOR  
INTREPRETING THE BIBLE<sup>1</sup>**

**PART 2**

**Institute of Spiritual Formation**

**Fall Semester – 2009**

**PRINCIPLE # 5 – WHEN AN INANIMATE OBJECT IS USED TO DESCRIBE A LIVING BE-  
ING, THE STATEMENT IS TO BE CONSIDERED \_\_\_\_\_.**

- The great “I AM” Statements illustrate this rule:
  - a. “I am the *bread* of life” – John 6:35 [However, what bread is for us Jesus is for us].
  - b. “I am the *light* of the world” – John 8:12 [What light does for us Jesus will do for us].
  - c. “I am the *door* of the sheep” – John 10:7
- Consider Psalm 92:12 – “The righteous will flourish like a palm tree . . .”
- Or look at The Lord’s Supper account in Matthew 26:26-28: “This is my body; this is my blood.”

**PRINCIPLE # 6 – WHEN A STATEMENT IS OUT OF \_\_\_\_\_ WITH THE  
THING DESCRIBED, THE STATEMENT SHOULD BE \_\_\_\_\_  
FIGURATIVELY.**

- Philippians 3:2-3
- Luke 13:32
- John 1:36
- Caution: A figure may be used with different meanings in different places in the Bible:  
See 1 Peter 5:8 – Who is the lion in this passage? \_\_\_\_\_  
See Revelation 5:5 – Who is the lion in this passage? \_\_\_\_\_.
- Two important points to remember:
  - a. A word cannot mean \_\_\_\_\_ than one thing at a \_\_\_\_\_. In other words  
it cannot have a \_\_\_\_\_ and \_\_\_\_\_ meaning at the  
same time.



**PRINCIPLE # 7 – PARABLES NORMALLY HAVE \_\_\_\_\_ SO LOOK FOR THE CENTRAL OR MAIN \_\_\_\_\_ OF THE PARABLE AND DON'T GET SIDETRACKED BY THE \_\_\_\_\_.**

- Do not try to find spiritual lessons in the various \_\_\_\_\_ of the parable. This is one of the main ways in which a parable \_\_\_\_\_ from a metaphor. [But be careful here since there are some parables where the various parts do have important meaning that must be observed before the main message can be understood.]
- Here are some very basic and simple guidelines to remember:
  - a. Seek to determine the \_\_\_\_\_ or main \_\_\_\_\_ of the parable.
  - b. Strive to explain the different \_\_\_\_\_ of the parable in accordance with the main message of the parable.
  - c. Use the main or principle parts of the parable to \_\_\_\_\_ the message.

**PRINCIPLE # 8 – INTERPRET THE WORDS OF THE PROPHETS IN THEIR USUAL, LITERAL AND HISTORICAL SENSE, \_\_\_\_\_ THE CONTEXT OR MANNER IN WHICH THEY ARE FULFILLED INDICATES THEY HAVE A \_\_\_\_\_ MEANING. THEIR FULFILLMENT MAY BE IN \_\_\_\_\_ EACH FULFILLMENT BEING A \_\_\_\_\_ OF THAT WHICH IS TO FOLLOW.**

- Prophecy should be interpreted \_\_\_\_\_ unless the \_\_\_\_\_ or some later \_\_\_\_\_ in Scripture indicates otherwise. [Example: Malachi 4:5-6 and Matthew 11:13-14; Matthew 17:10-13].
- Sometimes we may not know that a passage is prophetic but the New Testament will tell us it was. [Example: Hosea 11:1 with Matthew 2:15].
- Sometimes \_\_\_\_\_ a prophecy is \_\_\_\_\_ fulfilled in one generation with the \_\_\_\_\_ to be fulfilled at another time. [Examples: Joel 2:28-32 with Acts 2:15-21; Isaiah 61:1-2 with Luke 4:17-21 - notice what Jesus left out of his quote of Isaiah].

<sup>1</sup>Information in this study is adapted from A Layman's Guide to Interpreting the Bible by Walter Henrichsen, Zondervan Publishing House, 1985.

## NOTES

## NOTES

