

AVOIDING MIS-STEPS

The journey of understanding the Bible begins with observation, follows with interpretation, then with application, and leads to transformation. Read the content of Scripture in the context of the Bible. You seek to understand what the original Author meant for the original audience, then apply it to your life. Follow the principles of interpretation common to all literature, to begin to understand the Bible.

Believers have the distinct advantage of the Holy Spirit, who is not only the Author of Scripture, but also its interpreter. We must rely on the Holy Spirit, but not presume upon the Holy Spirit. 1Corinthians 2:10 says, "*as it is written, what God has revealed to us through the Spirit in words not taught by human wisdom, but taught by the Spirit. The natural person does not accept the things of the Spirit of God, for they are folly to him, and he is not able to understand them because they are spiritually discerned.*" Let's look at some of the numerous mis-steps that can trip you up as you seek to understand the Bible.

1- Avoid BLINDNESS - Most people can intellectually grasp the Bible, but without the Holy Spirit they cannot believe it and apply it for true life transformation. This is a major ministry of the Spirit of God. Why? Sin. 2Corinthians 4:4 says, "*the minds of unbelievers are blinded by the god of this world.*" Those who have not been born again from above by the Holy Spirit still live in the darkness of sin, are subject to the lies of the world, flesh and devil, and do not choose to follow God's truth and light. Spiritually blind.

2- Avoid MYSTICISM - the error supposing you get special esoteric knowledge directly from God. No, God wrote it all down for everyone alike. We can be mistaken, though the Holy Spirit conveys God's truth. Theologians don't always agree. Someone is wrong. The Holy Spirit is not divided; the Author of Scripture is responsible for its one true interpretation. Don't assume you get it right away. Avoid **EISEGESIS**, reading your ideas into Scripture, as opposed to *exegesis* which is reading God's ideas out of Scripture. Times are different, you say? BH Edwards notes, the work of teaching and preaching is like an emissary bringing a message across a time-bridge from one culture to another. Contextualization helps us grasp that what God said and meant then is what He means now, and how we can apply it to our situation.

3- Avoid SUBJECTIVISM - this error thinks Scripture actually "means" what you want or need it to mean for you. No, God's word is objective truth, unchangeable truth, the same for all people in all times and all places. Scripture is not subjective, pliable for your convenient personal interpretation. Avoid **RELATIVISM** as though God's Word could actually "mean" something different to you than me, or something different in some other place or time. No, God's Word is objective, emanating from the holy and eternal character of God Himself. Avoid **PRAGMATISM**, as though Scripture "means" whatever works in your life or culture. No, the Bible doesn't "mean" whatever some person or group wants it to mean for them. The Bible means what its Author says it means, objectively, to His original audience, and applicable for all people.

4- Avoid CONTRADICTIONS - The Bible contains mysteries but not contradictions. God reveals His truth as "progressive revelation" through history "*line by line, precept by precept*" (Isaiah 28:10). You must read the whole Bible to get the whole story. No particular passage by itself is complete revelation. It is true and inerrant, but the whole Bible is the whole written Word of God. Context sorts out difficulties from setting one verse against another. Principle: "the clear enlightens the obscure," to identify the Author's meaning.

5- Avoid "REVELATIONS" - because God has already told us, He doesn't need to reveal "new" truth. Rather, God "illuminates" the Bible, what He already wrote down for all people in all times in all places. The Bible is complete, a closed canon. J.Newton said, "The Holy Spirit has not promised to reveal new truths, but to enable us to understand what we read in the Bible; if we venture beyond the pale of Scripture, we are upon enchanted ground, exposed to all the illusions of imagination and enthusiasm."

1Corinthians 4:6, "*learn by us apostles not to go beyond what is written.*" Deuteronomy 29:29, "*the secret things belong to the LORD our God, but the things that are revealed belong to us and to our children forever, that we may do all the words of this law.*" WA Grudem notes the principle of the "sufficiency of Scripture" is "the Bible contained all the Words of God that He intended His people to have at each stage of redemptive history, and it now contains everything we need God to tell us for salvation, and for trusting and obeying Him perfectly." God equips His people to both hear and to heed His written Word.

6- Avoid LAZINESS - God enlightens the understanding of those who are regenerated by the Holy Spirit and come to personal faith in Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior. The Holy Spirit illuminates and interprets Scripture. But it's not automatic or magic. It takes work. Christians have different understandings of the Bible, some right, some wrong. Sin makes it hazy. 2Timothy 2:15, "*Do your best to present yourself to God as one approved, a worker who has no need to be ashamed, rightly handling the word of truth.*"

Using the tools of hermeneutics and exegesis, we can understand God's message, and act upon it, all by the Holy Spirit. There is one divine Author, so there can be only one true interpretation of Scripture, His, with many appropriate "applications." That's what we'll explore next time. Meantime, read your Bible! ☐