

UNDERSTANDING the Bible

How do we understand and interpret the Bible?

The Seminar Series: The Bible

- **The VALUE of the Bible...***What value should we place on the Bible?*
- **The RELIABILITY of the Bible - Part 1...***Can we trust the Bible?*
- **The RELIABILITY of the Bible - Part 2...***Can we trust the Bible?*
- **APPROACHING the Bible ...***What attitude should we have as read the Bible?*
- **UNDERSTANDING the Bible ...***How do we understand and interpret the Bible?*
- **EXPERIENCING God in the Bible...***How do we experience God when we read the Bible?*
- **PERSEVERING in the Bible...***How do we experience God through the Bible for a lifetime?*

INTRODUCTION: The goal in studying the Bible is *transformation* **NOT** *information* **BUT** *information* is critical to *transformation*

"The heart cannot love what the mind does not know. Yes, it is sinful to acquire knowledge for knowledge's sake, but acquiring knowledge about One we love, for the sake of loving him more deeply, will always be for our transformation." - **Jen Wilkin, Women of the Word, page 31**

The Critical Need to Understand Rightly

Q: *What are some of the bigger challenges we face in understanding the Bible?*

...*God's Word wasn't written in the 21st Century*

...*We ALL read God's Word with a bias*

...*The beauty of Christ and our ability to see and enjoy the relevancy of the Bible is at stake*

Two assumptions as we seek to interpret & understand the Bible...

- *We can trust what we read...IT IS RELIABLE*
- *We can understand what we read...IT IS UNDERSTANDABLE*

The Doctrine of the Perspicuity (or Clarity) of Scripture

The Goal of Original Intent

A COMMON DANGER: *The danger of reading 'me' into the story*

Q: *What are the potential dangers of opening the Bible and first asking, 'What does this mean for me?'*

→ *We need to first ask, 'what this meant for them' BEFORE asking 'what this means for me'*

- **WHY? God's Word to us was *first* His Word to them**
- **The goal of interpretation is to discover the original intent of the author**

"Before you can hear it with your ears, hear it with theirs. Before you can understand it today, understand it back then."
- **Jen Wilkin, Women of the Word, page 63**

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→ *We must depend upon God and work hard as we seek to understand the original intent*

“So when you think about reading the Bible supernaturally, do not think the urgency and effort of reading the Bible naturally will be less than with any other book. All the human effort and skill that you can muster to construe the meaning of biblical passages will be called for. The glory is seen through the *meaning* of the text. And the meaning is found by reading and thinking. God is united to the man Jesus. The glory of God is united to the meaning of biblical texts. Therefore, when the miracle of seeing and savoring the glory of God happens, it is *in* the act of reading and thinking. We read. God reveals. God *gives* the supernatural miracle. We *act* the supernatural miracle...

...The ordinary aim of reading that I am commending is that we read to discover what the author intended to communicate. Which implies that meaning is outside of us. It is discovery, not creation. We do not bring it to the Bible. It is already there because the authors, with God’s guidance, put their words together so as to communicate what they intended. When we read the Bible, its meaning is not the ideas that come into our head that may be ‘meaningful’ to us. Those ideas may or may not be part of what the author meant. Rather, when we read the Bible we are digging for the gold of what inspired writers wanted to communicate. We are not creating meaning. We are seeking it...

...The Bible’s meaning is not something already in our head. It is what was in the author’s head and is now imbedded, by the wonder of language, in the words and their structure on the page. The ordinary aim of reading is to dig it out. It is a glorious work. The rewards are inestimable.”

- **John Piper, Reading the Bible Supernaturally, pages 234, 313**

The Principle of Context

1) _____ **CONTEXT**

“From Genesis to Revelation, the Bible is telling us about the reign and rule of God. This is the Big Story of the Bible, the purpose for which it was written. Each of its sixty-six books contributes to telling this Big Story—a story of creation, fall, redemption, and restoration. The Bible purposes to tell us this Big Story in a thousand smaller stories, from its first page to its last.” - **Jen Wilkin, Women of the Word, page 50**

“The Word of God is an exceedingly complex unity. The different items and the various kinds of material which make it up—laws, promises, liturgies, genealogies, arguments, narratives, meditations, visions, aphorisms, homilies, parables and the rest—do not stand in Scripture as isolated fragments, but as parts of a whole. The expositions of them, therefore, involves exhibiting them in right relation both to the whole and to each other.”

- **J.I. Packer, Fundamentalism and the Word of God, page 101**

Q: *What are the potential dangers of failing to interpreting the Bible in light of the big story of redemption?*

We must learn to ask, 'How does what I am reading fit into the big story of redemption?'

2) _____ **CONTEXT**

→ *Historical & Cultural Context*

PRACTICALLY...

- **Embrace 5 Archeological Questions of Context** - *Who wrote it? When was it written? To whom was it written? In what style was it written? Why was it written?*

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How do we understand and interpret the Bible?

→ *Literary Context*

'**Genres**' - *The Bible is filled with various types (genres) of literature that all affect how we understand it.*

'**Paragraphs**' - *The Bible is filled with words that form sentences and sentences that form paragraphs and paragraphs that form letters and books. This impacts how we understand the Bible.*

PRACTICALLY...

- Know what type of literature you are reading
- Read before & after the verses you are studying

To understand what God originally intended we must work to place the text within the big story of the Bible and within the original historical context and type of literature...

"Every text has its immediate context in the passage from which it comes, its broader context in the book to which it belongs, and its ultimate context in the Bible as a whole; and it needs to be rightly related to each of these contexts if its character, scope and significance is to be adequately understood."

- JI Packer, Fundamentalism and the Word of God, page 101

The Principle of Using Scripture to Interpret Scripture

PRACTICALLY...

- Look to more clear passages to shed light on more unclear passages
- Use 'Cross References' in your Bible to help you understand the passage you are reading

Everyone who reads the Bible interprets the Bible...the question is are we good interpreters? If, depending upon the Holy Spirit, we seek to lay aside our bias, set our sights on the original intent of the author, and seek to set the verse we are studying within the context of the broader passage and the story of redemption, we will find that the Bible will become more understandable and more profitable for our souls.

Where do I go from here?

→ **BE SOBERED** - Don't be paralyzed BUT rather sobered

→ **DEPEND ON GOD** - Depend on the Holy Spirit for understanding *AND* transformation

...It follows that the Christian must approach the study of Scripture in humble dependence on the Holy Spirit, sure that he can learn from it nothing of spiritual significance unless he is taught of God. Confidence on one's own powers of discernment is an effective barrier to spiritual understanding."

- JI Packer, Fundamentalism and the Word of God, page 112

→ **EMBRACE** mystery

→ **FALL FORWARD** - Commit to immersing yourself in the Bible more and more during this seminar. God wants to communicate to you!

The Psalm 119 experiment - read & pray through Psalm 119:97-120 this upcoming week

→ **LEARN** a method to help you interpret faithfully!