

Based on these observations we conclude that if we meet the qualifications, **it is possible for the average Christian to properly interpret Scripture**. God wants His people to carefully and accurately understand His word.

However, this does not mean the average Christian will actually be able to do this and, based on observations we have made, we are of the opinion that the “average” Christian will not be given to the kind of study and hermeneutical discipline required for proper Biblical interpretation.

QUESTION #7 – What role does the Holy Spirit play in a person being able to accurately interpret the Bible? **John 14:26; I Cor. 2:10-13; I John 2:27**

The question boils down to this—how does the Holy Spirit guide and direct a person in the interpretive process of the Word of God? There are sixteen thesis truths we want to observe:

(Truth #1) - The Spirit’s ministry **does mean** we cannot grasp truth without Him. **I Cor. 2:14**

No person without the Holy Spirit will ever be able to properly interpret Scripture, no matter how much they read it or study it.

(Truth #2) - The Spirit’s ministry **does mean** we cannot grasp truth by normal human methods without Him. **John 14:26; I Cor. 2:13-14**

As John said, the Holy Spirit is who guides us into all truth (**John 16:13**). This cannot happen without Him. Academic courses invented by humans apart from the Holy Spirit will never come to terms with the deep truth of God. Bible study does follow certain study rules, but no rules can replace the need of the Holy Spirit in Bible study.

(Truth #3) - The Spirit’s ministry **does mean** the Holy Spirit knows all truth perfectly. **I Cor. 2:10-11**

The Holy Spirit knows all truth about God perfectly; we do not. We will need to depend on Him as we carefully study the Scriptures to learn and grow. He does not need more knowledge, we do. He does not need to change, we do. For us, understanding God’s word is a process.

(Truth #4) - The Spirit’s ministry **does mean** we must be properly related to Him if we are to grasp truth. **Ephesians 4:30; I Thess. 5:9**

In order to study the Bible and grow in truth, we must be properly related to the Holy Spirit, since He is so critical to our development. What this in part practically means is that we do not quench the Holy Spirit (I Thess. 5:9) and we do not grieve the Holy Spirit (Eph. 4:30). We must be spiritually-minded and not fleshly-minded and be properly related to Him. Dr. Roy Zuck said, “a Christian who is living in sin is susceptible to making inaccurate Bible interpretations because his heart and mind are not in harmony with the Holy Spirit” (*Basic Bible Interpretation*, p. 24).

(Truth #5) - The Spirit's ministry in interpretation **does not mean** He gives new revelation.

God's Spirit will always work within the framework of the written inspired Scriptures and will never go beyond it either by way of addition or subtraction (i.e. Rev. 22:18-19). Our goal is to carefully and accurately understand what the Holy Spirit actually inspired in writing from Genesis to Revelation.

(Truth #6) - The Spirit's ministry in interpretation **does not mean** one's interpretation is infallible.

When the Holy Spirit inspired the original manuscripts, He guarded them in such a way that they were without error (inerrancy) and incapable of error (infallibility).

When it comes to interpretation, the Spirit will guide one into truth, but He does not automatically guard against infallibility. For example, the Roman Catholic Church claimed that it was the only group who could understand and interpret the Bible in an infallible way. We totally reject this. Every person has a right to try and privately interpret the Bible, but that does not mean that the private interpretation is accurate or true.

Just because someone believes something about a Bible verse, does not make it true. If the qualifications are not met for true interpretation, it is highly probable that the interpretation will be faulty.

A key is to be sensitive to the Holy Spirit in our own life and be very honest and accurate with the text. The text is infallible, but we are not.

(Truth #7) - The Spirit's ministry in interpretation **does mean** one who has a true Spirit gift of Pastor/Teacher should be able to see and understand truths beyond the level of many.

A spiritual gift is a supernatural enablement that enables a believer to excel in a spiritual area way above and beyond the average. A truly gifted minister should excel far above and beyond the average believer in the ability to understand God's truth.

We must be very careful on this point because any Pastor or religious leader may claim that the Spirit has permitted him to see something that may not be God's Spirit at all. Some of the guidelines for one truly gifted are:

1) Usually if a careful interpreter thinks he has unlocked something from God's word, other skilled interpreters will have observed the same truth. God teaches us that Scripture is not a matter of "one's own interpretation" (II Pet. 1:20). This does not mean we may not discover some new things, but they will be confirmed by others.

For example, this teacher was carefully analyzing the Greek text of I Peter and observed that the parsing of the verb which charges us to “be holy” is passive, not active (1:15). This point completely changes the emphasis for victory. We must be the recipient of the action, not the source of it. Since very few had actually spotted this key grammatical point, I wondered if I had parsed it wrong. I immediately went to other Greek scholars to determine if I were seeing it correctly, which I was.

2) If an interpreter presents discovered truth to God’s people, others who are serious, dedicated students and teachers of the Bible will see it, sense it and embrace it. There will always be a certain spiritual ring to God’s truth presented to God’s spiritually-minded people.

(Truth #8) - The Spirit’s ministry in interpretation **does mean** that the unsaved person may be able to comprehend statements in the Bible but cannot appropriate them properly to their own faith system and life.

There are many unbelievers who have understood historical facts of the Bible. In fact, some have undertaken archeological digs based on their geographical understanding of Biblical facts. Most unsaved people have cognitively grasped certain Biblical data, such as information about the birth of Jesus Christ and even His death and resurrection. However, the unsaved person has no capacity to be able to properly apply these truths to their lives or to the Biblical faith system.

This is precisely why one can actually know that Jesus Christ died on the cross and rose again, but also believe that to get to heaven he must do the work.

(Truth #9) - The Spirit’s ministry in interpretation **does not mean** that only Bible scholars can understand the Bible.

We have previously addressed this point; however, we must realize that the Bible was given by God to be accurately understood and if the previous mentioned qualifications are being met, one may come to a great level of understanding.

(Truth #10) - The Spirit’s ministry in interpretation **does coincide** with the real spirituality of a person.

A worldly or carnal Christian, not yielded to God, will not ever be able to grasp God’s word fully at a meat level (I Cor. 3:1-3; Heb. 5:13). As we already mentioned, the Christian whose life is full of sin is very susceptible to inaccurate interpretations of Scripture. A truly spiritually-minded believer has a far greater depth level and discerning ability which is actually produced by the Spirit of God.

(Truth #11) - The Spirit's ministry in interpretation **does not mean** one must not diligently study.

Bible study is wonderful work but it is also tedious work and not many realize this. Most people who read the Bible do not do so with the goal of accurately understanding a text in its context. But that is what Bible study is. Nothing will ever replace careful, diligent study of the Word of God. The Holy Spirit works as one carefully studies the Scriptures. As an interpreter carefully studies a passage and meditates on it and then consults other careful works, God's Spirit begins to unravel His truth.

It has been wisely observed that the desire to publically perform means nothing without the desire to privately prepare.

(Truth #12) - The Spirit's ministry in interpretation **does not mean** the interpreter has no need to consult study helps, commentaries, theologies, Bible dictionaries, etc.

We have previously addressed this; we may add that it is often asserted by "pseudo-devout" people that they can understand the Bible on their own without any help. This is nothing more than "veiled egotism." To think that one is at such a remarkable level that he/she can bypass all godly learning and scholarship from all ages is very foolish, prideful and dangerous.

In the book of Proverbs a wise person is challenged to "make your ear attentive to wisdom" and "incline your heart to understanding" (Prov. 2:2). Now what this means is that we need to sit under good teachers, who know God's word and we need to listen and learn from them. Today, we have the privilege through books of sitting under some of the greatest Biblical teachers God used in history.

God's sovereignty has preserved the writings and the commentaries of some of the most dedicated men of God who ever put a Bible into their hands. Men like Luther, Calvin, Spurgeon, Scofield, Morgan, Chafer, and many others. Some laid down their own lives defending Jesus Christ and defending the Word of God. To think that we can bypass them because of our elevated knowledge level is pure ignorance and arrogance.

(Truth #13) - The Spirit's ministry in interpretation **does not mean** the interpreter can ignore common mental sense and logic.

There are many admonitions in Scripture that teach us we are to develop and have sound minds. Clear systematic thinking is the kind of thinking the Spirit of God uses. The more the interpreter thinks clearly about Biblical history, geography, culture and grammar, the more accurate will be the interpretation.

For example, if one reads a text that says, “he went up to Jerusalem,” it may mean he went up in from a lower elevation to a higher elevation or it may mean he went up in a north direction. A wise interpreter will discern which it is because that will be a key to truth.

There will always be perfect harmony between clear, concise thinking based on careful research and the work of the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit is typically not at work in mindless emotion, but in careful, prayer mental investigation.

(Truth #14) - The Spirit’s ministry in interpretation **does not typically** give sudden flashes of instant, intuitive insight into the true meaning of Scripture.

To have insight into Scripture requires careful study, thought and analysis. The Holy Spirit does not usurp careful verification and validation; He works in harmony with it. Often times in what is called Bible study, people go around the room and share pooled ignorance. For someone to walk into a Bible study and think they will get some instant flash of wisdom that will enable them to bring out a truer or deeper meaning is faulty thinking.

(Truth #15) - The Spirit’s ministry in interpretation **does not mean** all parts of the Bible will be equally easy and clear in meaning.

II Peter 3:16 says that some things are “hard to understand.” Some things require years and even lifetimes of study.

(Truth #16) - The Spirit’s ministry in interpretation **does not mean** it is possible to understand everything about God comprehensively and completely.

There are some things that we will not know until we see our Savior “face to face” (I Cor. 13:12). Some of the mysteries of God we will not know until we get to heaven.

To sum up we conclude that the Holy Spirit is critical to our ability to properly interpret the Bible. He will work in harmony with our spirituality and mind in enabling us to come to a true and accurate understanding of the written word. It is very wise to always ask God for wisdom in being able to rightly divide the word of truth.