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QUESTION #15 – What is the system of rules that must be followed to arrive at a true understanding and application of God’s written word?

There are six steps that must be followed to accurately interpret and apply God’s word:

Step #1 - Observation - observing what the text actually says.

Step #2 - Interpretation - deciding what the text actually means.

Step #3 - Summarization - determining the main point of the text.

Step #4 - Evaluation - Evaluating the text to determine key material for people today.

Step #5 - Application - Applying the text to make an application to life today.

Step #6 - Actualization - Actually working and applying and implementing the text to our life.

QUESTION #16 – What is Observation?

Observation is the act of seeing a Biblical text as it really is and seeing what is actually there in the text. One looks at a text and observes and notices carefully what is really and exactly there in a text. **Seeing what is there means also not seeing things that aren’t there or seeing things we think should be there.** Observation analyzes specific things to determine the exact meaning of God. Learning to see exactly what is in a text takes thought, training and time.

There is a great Biblical illustration of this very important step given by God Himself in regard to His prophet Amos. In **Amos 8:1-2** God asks Amos what he observes or sees and Amos simply observes what is actually there. He does not add nor subtract. That is observation.

The purpose of observation is to see the text in regard to what God has actually written and revealed. Our responsibility is to see what is there and not invent things that aren’t there or see what we think should be there. As Dr. Zuck said, “...the goal of Bible interpretation is to determine the original meaning of the text” (*Basic Bible Interpretation*, p. 63).

Robert Traina, in his book *Methodical Bible Study*, said there are three prerequisites for making accurate observations (pp. 32-33):

Prerequisite #1 - One must have the will and desire to make accurate observations.

When Jesus taught His own disciples about receiving good things from God, He taught them that if “you seek you will find” (Matthew 7:7-8).

Prerequisite #2 - One must desire to observe exact data and details.

In any course of study, seeing what is exactly and precisely there is a key to determining truth.

Dr. Traina said he knew of a prominent physician who always taught his medical students to observe details. He said in a lecture that a bottle on his desk contained a sample for analysis and by testing it they could determine the disease of the patient. Then he put his finger into the fluid and then into his mouth. Then he said I am going to pass around this bottle. Each of you taste the contents as I did and see if you can diagnose the case. After all of his students had passed the bottle and tasted it, he retrieved the bottle and said, “Gentlemen now you will understand what I mean when I speak about details. Had you been observant you would have seen I put my index figure in the bottle, but my middle finger into my mouth.”

His point was his medical students needed to be exact in their observations and details. We need to be the same way in handling God’s word.

Prerequisite #3 - One must be persistent to discover the exact meaning of a text.

Often times we will discover exact meaning of a text after looking at it over quite an extended period of time. It does not come quickly.

Each passage is in the text to communicate something and the job of the interpreter is to determine and observe what is communicated.

QUESTION #17 – What observations do we need to make to accurately interpret the Bible?

There are several very important observations we need to make regarding a text:

Observation #1 - We need to observe the context.

J. Robert McQuilkin writes: “**Context is king**” (*An Introduction to Hermeneutics*, p. 123).

We define context as the parts which precede and follow a word or text that affects its true meaning and true interpretation. Dr. Roy Zuck said, “Disregarding the context is one of the greatest problems in Bible Interpretation” (*Basic Bible Interpretation*, p. 76). If one does not analyze context, one can say a text of Scripture means anything one wants it to mean. There are at least five contextual observations that must be made:

(Contextual Observation #1) - In every passage there is an immediate context surrounding the verse or text that needs to be carefully examined.

Mr. Miles taught us to always read ten verses before a verse and ten verses after a verse.

Dr. Lewis Sperry Chafer makes a key point on this when he writes: “The student must learn to establish context boundaries regardless of the mere mechanical chapter and verse divisions” (*Systematic Theology*, Vol. 1, p. 117).

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He gives a great illustration from Matthew 16:28. If a person reads the Bible and comes to Matthew 16:28, it is the last verse of chapter 16. But if the careful student looks at context, he will see the immediate connection to chapter 17 because verse one says that six days after Jesus made that statement, three of the Apostles saw it. This moment was specifically referred to by the Apostle Peter who was there and saw it (II Peter 1:16-21).

(Contextual Observation #2) - In every passage there is an intermediate context that surrounds the immediate text.

A good example of this is John 3:16. The immediate context of John 3:16 is a discussion Jesus is having with Nicodemus, who was a key Pharisee, ruler and teacher of Israel. In the discussion Jesus develops two lines of thought:

- 1) One must have a new spiritual birth in order to enter the Kingdom of God. 3:1-12
- 2) One must believe in Jesus Christ in order to have that new spiritual birth. 3:13-21

John 3:16 is surrounded by these contexts - immediate and intermediate. The immediate context is that the Son of Man, who came from heaven, must be lifted up on a cross to offer eternal life. The intermediate context establishes the necessity of the new birth and the necessity of believing in Jesus Christ to have that new birth. One of the things that motivated God to provide this system of salvation was His love.

(Contextual Observation #3) - In every passage there is a broad context that contains the intermediate context.

In the broad context of John 3:16, Jesus had gone up to Jerusalem and into the Temple at Passover time (John 2:13ff). He had blasted the false religion and one of the Pharisees saw Him and listened to Him and decided to go talk to Him.

(Contextual Observation #4) - In every passage there is a book context that contains all the contexts in that book.

Every passage of Scripture sits in a book of the Bible which means there is some connection that text has to that book. The Gospel of John is a book context that is clearly designed to show that Jesus Christ is God (John 1:1) so that people may believe on Him and be saved (John 20:30-31).

(Contextual Observation #5) - In every passage there is a Bible context which contributes to the whole Bible.

Floyd Barackman accurately observed, “The whole Bible is the ultimate context of any biblical passage” (*How to Interpret the Bible*, p. 26).

For example, John is part of the New Testament. It is one of the four Gospels. The Gospels reveal specific data concerning the life and ministry of Jesus Christ.

The specific point of the Gospel of John is to show that Jesus Christ is God, and that the only way to eternal life and eternal salvation is to believe on Him and be saved. Just as Matthew was designed to show that Jesus Christ is the Divine Messiah/King, John is designed to show Jesus Christ is the God/Savior. Everything in the book contributes to this.

Dr. Zuck said when we look at context, it includes several things:

- 1) It includes verse(s) immediately before and after a passage.
- 2) The paragraph and book in which the verses occur.
- 3) The dispensation in which it was written.
- 4) The message of the entire Bible.
- 5) The historical-cultural environment of that time when it was written (*Ibid.*, p. 77).

We would do well to remember Rudyard Kipling's questions that he said an honest person would be willing to ask to come to true conclusions:

1. Who?
- 2) What?
- 3) When?
- 4) Where?
- 5) Why?
- 6) How?

Dr. Roy Zuck gives a good illustration on this point. Let's say you read the sentence "That is some turkey." How would you know what is meant by that? The word turkey can refer to a strange person; a bird; three strikes in bowling; a failure of some theatrical production. To determine which of these was the intended meaning, we would need to examine context (*Ibid.*, p. 47).

In Jonah 2:9, Jonah is praying to the Lord from the belly of the fish and he says, "Salvation is from the LORD." To what salvation is he referring? Salvation in Scripture may refer to several things. We would need to carefully examine the context to determine which it was.

In Romans 5:3 Paul says that "tribulation" is something a believer experiences. To what tribulation is he referring? Context is critical to determine the meaning.

Observation #2 - We need to observe the grammar.

There are three closely related matters in grammatical context:

- 1) Grammatical observation observes the words in the text.
- 2) Syntax observes how the words relate to each other in the text.
- 3) Lexicology observes what the words actually mean or say in the text.

Dr. Rollin T. Chafer, the brother of Lewis Sperry Chafer, wrote this: “The first rule of Biblical interpretation is: Interpret Grammatically; with due regard to the meaning of words, the form of sentences, and the peculiarities of idiom in the language employed” (*Interpretation*, p. 203).

To properly interpret a passage one must follow the normal rules of language since God put His word in written form in written language. To come to a true conclusion about the text, one must analyze the words and the grammar to determine what is being communicated.

Observation of grammatical context means to observe what the words are, what the words mean and how the words relate to each other.

Henry Virkler gives a good illustration of the importance of examining words in the context. Suppose you read a statement that said, “the man was green” (*Hermeneutics*, p. 94). What would that mean? We certainly know what the word “man” means. We certainly know what the color “green” means.

But we would have to carefully analyze the words in the context to determine what that meant.

- 1) It could mean the person was green in the sense of inexperienced.
- 2) It could mean the person was green in the sense he looked sick.
- 3) It could mean the person was green in the sense that he was jealous or envious.
- 4) It could mean the person was green in the sense of color having green paint on him.

To determine what was meant by that written statement, we would need to carefully examine surrounding words and context. In other words, we would need to examine grammatical structure.

Since the goal of Bible interpretation is to determine exactly what a text says, we need, as Dr. Roy Zuck wrote, “to study His words and how they are associated in sentences. If we neglect the meanings of words and how they are used, we have no way of knowing whose interpretations are correct” (*Basic Bible Interpretation*, p. 99).

Grammatical observation means we observe several things:

- 1) We need to observe and identify the meaning of words.
- 2) We need to observe how the words are used to form the sentence.
- 3) We need to observe how the words of the sentence relate to the paragraph.
- 4) We need to observe how the words of the paragraph relate to the chapter.
- 5) We need to observe how the words of the chapter relate to the book.
- 6) We need to observe how the words of the book relate to the Bible.

One example we may cite is I John 3:9. In that verse it says concerning one born of God that he “cannot sin.” What in the world does that mean? Now to determine what John meant, there will need to be a careful examination of the grammatical context that surrounds that statement.

Observation #3 - We need to observe the historical context.

When any writer wrote an inspired book, he did so living in a real historical context. This obviously is something God wants us to consider because He reveals much about it. In fact, there are Psalms that specifically inform us of the historical context - Psalm 18, 51, 52, 54, 56, 57, 59, 63. It is clear that these are critical, historical, contextual moments that need to be considered when interpreting the text.

In Philippians 1:13-14 the Apostle Paul specifically brings up the fact that he is in prison. God obviously wants us to know about this historical context.

In I Timothy 2:1-2, Paul says we are to “pray for kings.” Obviously in that historical context it was a king rule.

To accurately handle a text, we need to carefully understand the historical context of the text.

Observation #4 - We need to observe the cultural context.

For example, there are many passages of Scripture that exhort slaves to be obedient to masters (Ephesians 6:5-8; Colossians 3:22; Titus 2:9).

The subject of washing feet shows up a total of 19 times in the Bible:

Genesis 18:4; 19:2; 24:32; 43:24

Exodus 30:19; 40:31

Judges 19:21

I Samuel 25:41

II Samuel 11:8

Song of Solomon 5:3

Luke 7:44

John 13:5-6, 8-10, 12-14

I Timothy 5:10

QUESTION #15 – To determine the exact meaning of the Holy Spirit in a written passage, what interpretive areas need to examine when it comes to words? examine

We do have a Biblical mandate to carefully observe words. When we say that we believe in “verbal inspiration,” we mean we believe the Bible is inspired to the very “word” or “words.”

When it comes to the words of the Bible, we have some very important inspired statements:

Psalm 12:6 says, “The words of the LORD are pure words; as silver tried in a furnace on the earth, refined seven times.”

Proverbs 30:5 says, “Every word of God is tested; He is a shield to those who take refuge in Him.”

Revelation 22:18-19 says we must not add nor subtract from the words of “the book of this prophecy.”

So words are critical to the written Scriptures.

In the Bible, as in all written literature, there are various types of words which are used. Collectively these words are called “parts of speech” or “parts of language.”

To understand a passage accurately, we need to be able to spot and identify these words because these words show up in the Bible and are the key to accurate understanding and interpretation:

There are different main kinds of words that are used in the Bible:

- 1) Nouns
- 2) Pronouns
- 3) Adjectives
- 4) Adverbs
- 5) Prepositions
- 6) Conjunctions
- 7) Articles
- 8) Verbs
- 9) Participles
- 10) Infinitives.

Now we will assume that you have forgotten everything you have ever learned about these different kinds of words and are going to go through these things from the ground up:

QUESTION #16 – What is a noun?

Biblical nouns are critical to the sense of any context.

A noun is a word used for a person, place, thing or idea.

A proper noun gives a specific particular name of a person, place, thing or idea.

A common noun gives a general name to a person, place, thing or idea.

A noun may be either singular or plural.

A noun may be either masculine, feminine or neuter.