

**Institutes of Theology—Session 12**  
**Bible Study for Every Christian – Part 3**  
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Tonight, we come to the next phase in Bible Study for Every Christian. Most of us understand the principle of personal and pastoral interpretation. That is, that as individuals, we have a responsibility to interpret the Scripture, and God has given pastor teachers, elders, the responsibility to do that when it comes to feeding the flock. Now, the reason we have that understanding is because the influence of the Protestant reformers after the darkness of Roman Catholicism in the Dark Ages. Because of the influence of the Roman Catholic Church in the 16th century, the idea we're talking about right now was a revolutionary idea. Here's what the Council of Trent said on personal and pastoral interpretation.

“To check unbridled spirits, it's, that is, this Council decrees, that no one relying on his own judgment shall in matters of faith and morals pertaining to the edification of Christian doctrine, distorting the Holy Scriptures in accordance with his own conceptions. [Here's the key] No individual shall presume to interpret them contrary to that sense which the Holy Mother Church, to whom it belongs, to judge of their true sense and interpretation has held or holds, are even contrary to the unanimous teaching of the fathers, even though such interpretations should never at any time be published.”

So you don't have to write a book with your strange interpretations. As long as you disagree with them, it's wrong. In other words, what the Catholic Church was really saying in the Council of Trent, the Catholic response to the Protestant Reformation was this, the Magisterium. Now, in the Catholic Church, the Magisterium is the oral tradition passed down through the leadership of the Church, the Pope in conjunction with the Cardinals and the writings of the Church. The Magisterium has the right to interpret the Bible and only the Magisterium.

In fact, here's the Catechism of the Catholic Church. This is the modern Catechism, “The task of interpreting the Word of God authentically has been entrusted solely to the Magisterium of the Church, that is, to the Pope and to the Bishops in communion with him.” In other words, you have no right to come to the Bible and interpret it. You must rely solely on what the Church says it means. That's the Catholic Church position. And that was the issue at the core of the Protestant Reformation. That's why Martin Luther said, and you heard Nathan, for those of you who were at the breakfast on Saturday, you heard Nathan quote this, Martin Luther at the Diet of Worms in 1521 said, “Unless I am convinced by the testimony of the Scriptures or by clear reason [and by that he meant reason taking off of the Scripture] for I do not trust either in the pope or in councils

alone, since it is well known that they have often erred and contradicted themselves. I am bound by the Scriptures I have quoted, and my conscience is captive to the word of God. I cannot and I will not retract anything, since it is neither safe nor right to go against conscience. And then it's reputed to have said, here I stand, God help me.”

The presupposition behind personal and pastoral—and I'm using that of individuals and the leaders of the church—but behind their interpretation of the Scripture, the presupposition is that God has given us a book that we can understand. Now, don't misunderstand where we're going here. The fact that I can and am responsible to interpret the Scripture, the fact that you have a responsibility to interpret the Scripture in your own study, doesn't mean that everything is easy to understand. No, I mean, Peter admits that some things that Paul writes are hard to understand. It doesn't mean we don't have to study. The Westminster Confession says through the use of ordinary means is how we gain an understanding of the Scripture, meaning reading, hearing it read, hearing it taught, and our own personal study. Through the use of ordinary means, we have to come to an understanding of the Scripture.

It also doesn't mean that we can come to a right knowledge of the Scripture or grasp it in all of its richness in true faith without the illumination of the Holy Spirit. In other words, Bible Study only goes so far. The Holy Spirit has to open your understanding and your mind to the Scripture, whether you're listening to someone teach or whether you're studying it yourself. That's why we always begin, as we started this whole study, with preparing your heart. And that starts with the recognition, “I am ignorant and in need of a teacher.” As you cry out to God to give you insight. Nor does what we're talking about with interpretation mean that you can come up with your own sort of unique interpretation. Charles Hodge writes, “If the Scriptures be a plain book, and the Spirit performs the function of a teacher to all the children of God, it follows inevitably that they must agree in all essential matters in their interpretation of the Bible. And from that fact, it follows that for an individual Christian, to dissent from the faith of the universal church, that is the true body of believers, is tantamount to dissenting from the Scriptures themselves.” You know what Hodge is arguing? He's arguing that if you sit down and study, and you come up with your own conclusion, and you can't find other people in the history of the church who come to that conclusion, beware, because the Holy Spirit has been teaching his people for 2,000 years the New Testament, and for 3,000 plus years the Old Testament. And if you're the first one to come to that conclusion, it's a bad conclusion. Because as one person once said, “Don't expect that the truth will suddenly dawn on your balding pate.”

No, the Holy Spirit has been teaching believers for 2,000 years. So don't expect that. So what are we talking about when we talk about personal and pastoral interpretation? What we deny is that Christ has appointed any person or any group to whose interpretation we are bound to submit as the final authority. The Catholic Church is dead wrong. We don't have to submit to the interpretation of the magisterium. But the fact that we reject what Rome teaches doesn't mean that a church can have, like our own church, can have a shared understanding of God's Word, and

insist that the elders of that church hold to that shared understanding. How's that different? Because in that scenario, they aren't saying that before God, you must embrace their interpretation. They're simply saying that if you want to be a part of the leadership in that church, you must embrace their shared understanding of God's Word. That's a wholly different thing. So, let's look at some arguments for personal and pastoral interpretation. Why is this true? Why is it right that I, as an elder of this church and the other elders of this church and you, as an individual believer, have a responsibility to interpret the Scripture? Let's look at some arguments.

First of all, the obligations for faith and obedience are personal, and judgment will be personal. Think of Psalm 1, talking about the righteous man. And what's true of the righteous man? "He delights in God's word, and he meditates in it day and night." Read Psalm 119, and how often does the psalmist, an individual, cry out to God for understanding? "Teach me your word." "Teach me your statutes." And so, the Scripture is clear that there is an individual responsibility. Jesus, again and again, says, as we'll see in Matthew, "Have you not read?" What's the implication of that? They had read. So it was a question that wasn't really a question, right? He knew they had read. What was he saying? He was saying, really, "You've read the Scriptures, and you missed this? You didn't interpret it correctly? You misunderstood it?" What does that imply? They had an individual responsibility to interpret the Scripture.

Secondly, the Scripture is almost always addressed to the people and not merely to the leadership. I said almost always. There are the pastoral epistles, but most of the New Testament writings are addressed to the people of God. The prophets in the Old Testament constantly said, "Hear, O Israel," not Hear, O leaders. And "listen, all you people," again and again, you have the prophets saying that. Their words were addressed to individuals in the nation. Christ taught the multitudes. And most of the epistles in the New Testament were addressed to the congregation. A third argument is that people are called upon to study the Scripture personally and to teach it to their children. Deuteronomy 6, right? "This book of the law shall not depart from you but shall remain on your heart." What does it say? It's to be on your heart. It's to be something you teach officially and formally to your children. It's to be something you talk about when you're involved in life, and you're to apply it. What does all that imply? If you're teaching your children the Scripture, what does that imply? That you have sought to understand the Scripture, you're now giving them that understanding of the Scripture.

Fourthly, people are called upon and praised for evaluating what they hear taught against, what they hear taught, rather, against the teaching of the Scripture. Deuteronomy 13, in Deuteronomy 13, in fact, turn there with me. This is a monumental text in the Old Testament. Deuteronomy 13 and verse 1, "If a prophet or a dreamer of dreams arises among you and gives you a sign or a wonder, and the sign or the wonder comes true," Okay? So think about this now. Somebody shows up, they say, listen, I'm from God, and I can do miracles, I can do a sign or a wonder. And it appears to be exactly right. It appears to be a real miracle. "Concerning which he spoke to you saying," but while he's doing the miracle, he's saying, "Let us go after other gods whom you've

not known and let us serve them. You shall not listen to the words of that prophet or that dreamer of dreams. For Yahweh, your God is testing you to find out if you love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul.” What is he calling the people of Israel to do? He's saying, I want you to listen. When somebody comes along and says, I speak for God, even if they can work miracles, evaluate their teaching against previous revelation. And if it doesn't match previous revelation, even if they can do miracles, throw them out on their ear. Why? Because the Holy Spirit doesn't contradict himself. He doesn't reveal one thing now and something different in the future. So if his message isn't consistent with previous revelation, then even if he appears to work a genuine miracle, don't listen to him. What's that calling the people to do? It's calling them to evaluate what they understand and the Scripture to teach against what he's saying and to say, it doesn't match.

Acts 17:11. Be like the Bereans, right? “Those in Berea were more noble than those in Thessalonica.” In that what? “They searched the Scriptures daily to see if these things were so.” I'm always struck by that verse because who was teaching those things that they were evaluating? Paul. And Paul's traveling companion and personal physician writes the book of Acts and praises them for going to the Scripture and checking Paul against the Scripture. What does that imply? There's the capacity to understand the Scripture individually. Galatians chapter 1 verses 8 and 9 implies, you remember, there it says that, you know, if somebody comes to you preaching another gospel, a different gospel than what we preach to you, let him be accursed. It implies, as RC. Sproul pointed out, that the people had a right to evaluate the teaching of an angel or apostle. He says, if I come, or if an angel from heaven comes, if the apostle Paul stood here tonight, and we could verify it's the apostle Paul, or an angel from heaven, if Gabriel stood here tonight, and we could verify it was Gabriel, we're not just supposed to listen to their message, we're supposed to compare it against previous revelation, just like Deuteronomy 13. And if it doesn't match, then he says, let that person, the apostle Paul or Gabriel, let him be damned. That again implies that responsibility. They had a right to evaluate the teaching of an apostle or an angel, and they had an infallible rule to use in that evaluation. What was the rule? Not themselves, the Scripture. The Scripture.

Hodge writes, “If then the Bible recognizes the right of the people to judge of the teaching of apostles and angels, they are not to be denied the right of judging of the doctrines of bishops and priests.” Absolutely right. 2 Corinthians chapter 4, turn there with me. Paul says in 2 Corinthians 4:1, “Therefore, since we have this ministry, as we have received mercy, we do not lose heart. But we have renounced the things hidden because of shame.” And here he talks about his ministry of the word. We're not walking in craftiness, or adulterating the word of God, but here's my ministry of the word, he says. “But by the manifestation of the truth, commending ourselves to every man's conscience in the sight of God.” He says, I display the truth. I put the truth out there, and in so doing, commend myself and the teaching of that truth to every man's conscience in the sight of God. To evaluate that teaching against the word of God, against the Scripture.

Again, Hodge writes, “The Bible is a plain book. It is intelligible by the people, and they have the right and are bound to read and interpret it for themselves, so that their faith may rest on the testimony of the Scripture, and not on that of the church.” You know, why do you think every Sunday when I or some other person stands in our pulpit and teaches God's word, why do you think we constantly call your attention to the Scripture? Why do you think we walk through the Scripture? It's because we don't want your faith in the truth to rest on what I say. I want you to be able to look in the text and say, “Yep, I see that. I see that makes sense. Okay, I'm following. That makes sense. I track with that.” Or, “I don't think so. I think that's what that says.” That's our responsibility. That's where we are. Those are the arguments for personal or individual and pastoral interpretation.

We are in the process of learning how every Christian can study the Bible for himself. Although there is a high value set on teachers in the New Testament church, it doesn't do away with the responsibility of every Christian to study the Bible individually. Now, I have reduced the process of study, we call it inductive Bible study, it's really what we are talking about, to these six steps. Preparation, you prepare your heart and your surroundings. Observation, that's the heart of our study, that's where exegesis takes place, where you are dealing with the words and the grammar of the text. Meditation, that's where you are now reflecting on what you have learned and what you have studied. And tonight, we come fourthly to interpretation. Interpretation, and we are also going to look in the second hour at evaluation and application. So, in this hour, we are going to look at interpretation.

Let's start with the importance of interpretation. The importance of interpretation. Why is it so important? Because only the true meaning of the passage is in fact the Word of God. Peter makes this point so clearly in 2 Peter 3. Listen to what he writes. “Our beloved brother Paul, according to the wisdom given to him, wrote to you, as also in all his letters, speaking in them of these things.” now watch what he says about Paul's letters, “in which are some things hard to understand, which the untaught and the unstable distort, as they do also the rest of the Scriptures, to their own destruction.” What is he saying? He's saying you can use the Bible and end up in hell. You can end up destroyed. Why? Because you distort the truth. You interpret the Scripture wrongly. Only what the author intended to communicate is the Scripture. And when we misinterpret a text, our interpretation isn't the Scripture. It's our own ideas. Because the meaning of the Scripture is the Scripture. For example, if you look at Mark 16, the long ending of Mark, verse 18, it talks about those who—Well, let's look at it. It's the section that talks about miracles, which by the way, even if the long ending truly belongs in our Bibles, all of these things are taught elsewhere about the apostles. Just not the way the charismatics interpret them. But notice verse 18, they will pick up serpents, those who follow him. Well, does that happen in our Bibles? Yeah, the end of Acts, right? The Apostle Paul shakes off a snake, a poisonous snake, and is unaffected. But snake handlers maintain that all Christians ought to be able to handle snakes because of this text. Is that the Bible anymore? No, that's not the Bible. Their distorted

interpretation is now completely different than the truth. Or take John 1:1. You know, if you have a Jehovah's Witness come by your house, knock on your door, a couple of them, they'll want to take you to John 1:1. The moment you say, Jesus is God, they'll say, well, let me show you something. They'll take you to John 1:1, and they'll say, "Look at this. It says, in the beginning, and in the Greek text," which none of them know Greek, "but in the Greek text," they'll say, "It says he is a god, not the god." When they argue that Jesus is only a god, they have distorted the Scripture. By the way, just a little Greek tip, the Greek text often omits an article, even when the thing is indefinite. I often ask the guy who's telling me that, I say, "Well, okay, well, what's the beginning there? So, oh, that's the beginning of the world, in the beginning, before everything was created." I say, "well, how do you know that?" "Well, it's in the beginning." I say, "Well, that doesn't have an article either. Literally, in the Greek text, if you want to play your game, it's in a beginning. So, how do you know when it's the and when it's not?" And he doesn't know because he doesn't understand the language. But the bottom line is, it's a terrible argument. But the moment he's done that he has distorted the Scripture. And it's not the Scripture anymore. It's his own error that he's teaching.

Same thing with 3 John 2, which talks about the prosperity of our souls in context, and prosperity gospel preachers love using that text to say that God wants all Christians to be financially prosperous. In every case. They're using the words of Scripture, but they're not arriving at the meaning of Scripture, which means they're not teaching the Bible, they're teaching error, because the meaning of the Scripture is the Scripture, what the original author intended. That's the Scripture, not using the words in whatever way you choose. So, that's the importance.

Let's move on to the meaning of interpretation. What are we talking about? Bible study ultimately has 3 objectives. To answer the question, what does this text say? And the process of discovering that is exegesis. Secondly, what does this text mean? And the science for determining the meaning of a passage is called hermeneutics. You've used that or heard that expression used this semester. Let me just tell you where it comes from. It comes from the name of the Greek god Hermes. The Greek god Hermes was the messenger of the gods. Hermes was responsible to explain what the gods were saying to human beings. So, we borrowed that word, and hermeneutics is the process through which we determine the meaning of the passage, the word of God. The third question, so what does it say? What does it mean? Third question, what should I do with it? We call this application.

Exegesis is the heart of Bible study. It's discovering what the author says and what he meant by what he says. Hermeneutics has to do with the principles or rules by which we approach the Scripture. It's the rule book by which we do exegesis. And when we use those rules, we interpret the meaning of Scripture. Interpretation is just the process of, here it is, deciding what the passage actually means. First, you have to study it, using the steps we learned in observation. Then you have to meditate on it. We talked about last time. Then you're ready to interpret it. Now

you are ready to make a decision about what this text actually means. So here is a definition of interpretation.

Interpretation is the proper use of generally accepted principles to determine the one divinely intended meaning of the passage. That's all so important. The proper use of the generally accepted principles, we're going to talk about that in a minute. And the goal is to determine the one divinely intended meaning of the passage. What God intended to say in that passage. Now the finer points of interpretation are more like an art, but the real work of interpretation is really primarily a science. There are rules and guidelines, hermeneutical rules that we use to help us in deciding exactly what a passage means, what it doesn't mean, what it can never mean. So let's move on then to the principles of interpretation. Now I'm going to give you a summary.

Jonathan's already taught through this some, but let me just give you, if you want to study these principles a little more, let me recommend a couple of resources to you. "How to Read the Bible For All It's Worth" by Gordon Fee and Douglas Stewart is a good resource. "Knowing Scripture" by R.C. Sproul. "Biblical Hermeneutics, The Principles By Which You Interpret a Text" by Henry Verklér is good. "Grasping God's Word" by Duval and Hayes, a book some of you guys, most of you I hope, are reading through. And then "Protestant Biblical Interpretation" by Bernard Ram is kind of a classic work, even though he himself ended up walking away from the faith. The work he did on that is a very helpful work. Now, what I want to do in this session is to synthesize the guidelines that you will read in those resources in as simple a way as I can. Because you're not going to remember every fact of every page you read in those resources. So how do we boil down the guidelines for interpreting a text into simple, graspable, memorizable statements? Here they are. Three main principles of interpretation.

Principle number one, interpret based on authorial intent. Interpret based on authorial intent. The author's intended meaning is the Scripture. You know, many Christians come to the Bible as if it were a Ouija board. Because they come looking for personal messages that they find in the words and letters. Now this approach, and forgive me if I'm stepping on some toes here, but this approach, this sort of Ouija board approach to the Bible, takes two forms. Some look in the Bible for hidden messages for them that have no relationship to the context. For example, they read Ezekiel 8:5. They're trying to make a decision about what job to take or what ministry to take, and they read Ezekiel 8:5, and Ezekiel 8:5 says, "Son of man, raise your eyes to the north." They go, huh, there it is. God's given me to, I'm not making this up, guys. This happens. And they say, that's it. God in his providence has led me to this text to tell me that I'm supposed to take the job to the north. That's ridiculous. That's a Ouija board approach to the Bible. Another form that it takes is beginning with the personal application before you know the meaning of the passage. And you know the most famous statement out there on this is, "What does the Bible mean to me?" Who cares what it means to you? What does it mean? What did it mean when the author wrote it? What did it mean to the original audience? You got to get there before you can decide what it means to you, because it ought to mean to you what it meant to them. If you want to take

that approach, by the way, with the Bible, you can do that with any document. Forgive me, I've told this story before, maybe even with this group of men, but I love this story because it illustrates it so well.

When my kids were growing up, I wanted to teach them that they couldn't do this to the Bible. And so one morning for our Bible time, you know, after breakfast, I said, listen, girls, you don't need to bring your Bibles this morning. I actually found a really meaningful article in the Dallas Morning News this morning that I want to share with you. It's got some really great spiritual insights. And so literally, we didn't bring our Bibles, and I brought the newspaper. And of course, my girls are trusting. They respect their dad. And so initially, they're sitting there kind of eager. Okay, what are we going to learn? And I just picked an article at random from the front of the Dallas Morning News. As it turns out, it was an article about, I think it was the Eagles playing at the American Airlines Center, an aging rock group, you know, playing at the Airlines Center. And I just walked through the article, sentence by sentence, paragraph by paragraph, making spiritual observations out of this article that had no relationship to the article. I mean, it just was me playing around.

And at first, they're sitting there, and they're listening, they're shaking their heads, and then, you know, they get these quizzical look on their face, quizzical looks on their face. And pretty soon, I see my oldest daughter sort of looking over at her sisters going, what's going on? What's with dad? And so that happened another minute or two. I kept waxing eloquent going through this article, and eventually, I stopped and looked at my oldest daughter. I said, what's the matter? She said, "Well," and she's speaking for the others, as she often is prone to do. She said, "Well, well, Dad, I don't think that's what that means." Which is exactly what I wanted her to say. And I said, "Well, that's what it means to me!" And then, of course, I was able to make the transition and say, what I just did to the newspaper is what a lot of Christians do to the Bible. They come to the Bible completely outside the context of what they're reading, and they make it say what they want it to say because it somehow gives them spiritual goosebumps. But, guys, Scripture only has one meaning.

Any given passage of Scripture only has one meaning. And what is that meaning? It's not the meaning you give it as the reader. We are not postmodernists. It's the meaning of the original author. And that's your job as a Bible student, to try to discover the mind of the original author. What was he saying? And I mean by that both the human author, but, of course, ultimately the Holy Spirit who inspired that human author to write. Henry Verkler writes, "The primary presupposition of hermeneutical theory must be that the meaning of a text is the author's intended meaning." And, guys, this is just the way it works. This is the way life is. If you receive a letter, you don't look in that letter for different meanings. You want to understand what the person who wrote it meant to say to you. In the same way, the biblical text only has one single unchangeable meaning, and that's determined by the intent of the author. And how do you find that meaning? Not in some mystical search, not in some Ouija board approach to the Bible, but rather in words



and phrases and clauses, the same way you learn meaning anywhere else. Jesus and the writers of the New Testament affirmed this principle of interpretation. Matthew 22:29, Jesus answered and said to them, “You are mistaken not understanding the Scriptures.” He said, look, the Bible means what it means. You can't make it say what you want it to say. You're mistaken. You don't understand the Scriptures. The same thing, you know, Jesus, thinking about it this way, Jesus was essentially saying, You've misunderstood what the Scripture writer intended to communicate. And in saying that, he is affirming both that a given passage has one meaning, because if there are multiple meanings, who's to say they're wrong?

And he's affirming that that single truth can be understood by the mind. John 5:39, you search the Scriptures, probably best understood as a command. Search the Scriptures. Jesus was telling them, keep searching the Scriptures. Why? Because so far, you missed the intention of a number of passages. This passage is about me. Second Peter 3, we read it a moment ago. Peter's arguing that Paul's letters are to be interpreted. How? In keeping with authorial intent. What did Paul mean? And to come to any other conclusion than what Paul intended is to distort the Scripture. And the result of that distortion is your own destruction. One famous sentence of John Calvin's explains our approach to the Scripture when he wrote this, “It is the first business of an interpreter to let the author say what he does say instead of attributing to him what we think he ought to say.” How many times, guys, have we come to the Bible and we've come to a conclusion about what the text says because we make it say what we think it ought to say rather than really being serious about understanding what it was the author intended to say.

Jim Shaddix in his book “The Passion-Driven Sermon” writes this. He says, “Several years ago, one of the great Bible expositors of our day was teaching a pastor's training school on the value of using various Bible study tools. During a discussion time, a young man posed an important question to him. Sir, he asked, don't you think it's important for me just to get alone with God and find out what the Holy Spirit is saying to me? The preacher's answer was shocking. “Young man,” he replied, “I'm not interested in what the Holy Spirit is saying to you. In fact, you may be surprised to know that I'm not interested in what the Holy Spirit is saying to me.” And then he explained, “All I'm interested in is what the Holy Spirit is saying, and the Holy Spirit has been saying the same thing through a passage of Scripture since the day he inspired it, and I'm going to use every available means that I have to find out what that is.” That's exactly right. This is so foundational, guys. Here's the heart of our job as Bible students, to discover what the Biblical author intended to communicate.

I'll tell you that one of the great motivations of my life and why I don't mind spending so many hours every week for 20 years of my ministry, I taught two different sermons on Sunday, which meant I invested every week for 20 years, 30 hours a week studying. 30 hours a week, now it's more like 18 to 20 from the one message that I preach, and then I do other study for things like this, etc. But I never want, either because of my own laziness or because of carelessness or because of a lack of effort, I never want to say a passage teaches what God never meant that

passage to say. The correct meaning of Scripture is the Scripture. So interpret based on authorial intent. So as you're studying the Bible, don't make it say what you want it to say. Don't say, ooh, that sounds good. You know, if I use this definition of this word, then it makes this text say what I like. I don't so much like that. Who cares what you like? What did the author mean to say? That's your goal.

Principle number two. Interpret Scripture with Scripture. This principle is also called the analogy of faith. The reformers put it this way. "Scripture interprets Scripture." Now in that sentence, Scripture is used in a double sense. The first time it occurs, it means the total Scripture. The second time it occurs, it means any part of Scripture, such as a passage or verse. So let's restate the principle then, in light of that. "The entire Scripture is the context and guide for interpreting any particular passage of Scripture." In other words, you can't pull a verse out of its larger biblical context. You have to interpret it in its larger context. I mean, the Bible teaches this about itself. I mean, think about the Bible. It was written over a period of 1,500 years, from Moses in 1,445 BC when he wrote the first five books of the Old Testament, to the Apostle John in around 95 AD. And he wrote the Book of Revelation. It was written by over 40 different authors. But at the same time, then, it's the product of one mind, the mind of the Spirit, the Spirit of God. And that's why you read the famous passage, 2 Timothy 3:16, all Scripture is inspired or literally breathed out by God. It is the product of the breath of God. That book you hold in your hand, every word, Jesus said, "Man lives by every word that proceeds out of the mouth of God." And here we learn that all Scripture proceeds out of the mouth of God. It is God-breathed. Every word of that book you hold in your hand is the product of the breath of God, as truly as my words right now are the product of my breath. And therefore, it's "profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training in righteousness." And the mind of God was communicated to us through the human authors in 1 Corinthians 2. In fact, turn there with me.

Look at 1 Corinthians 2 and verse 10. He's just been talking about revelation, and he sort of summarizes it in verse 10, the revelation of God in his word. "For to us, God has revealed these things through the Spirit; for the Spirit searches all things, even the depths of God. For who among men knows the thoughts of a man except the Spirit of the man, which is in him? [Your Spirit knows your thoughts.] Even so, the thoughts of God no one knows except the Spirit of God. Now, we have received not the Spirit of the world, but the Spirit who is from God, so that we may know the things freely given to us by God." Now watch verse 13. This revelation from God through the Spirit comes to the apostles, how? "Which things we also speak not in words taught by human wisdom, [it's not about you and me now, he's talking about the apostles] we speak these things not in words taught by human wisdom, but in words taught by the Spirit." The Spirit works in us, he says to combine spiritual thoughts, the thoughts of the Spirit, with the words of the Spirit.

Every word is the product of the mind of the Spirit through the human authors. That's what Peter says, look over at 2 Peter, 2 Peter chapter one, verse 20, he says, "But know this first of all, that

no prophecy of Scripture is a matter of one's own interpretation.” Now, you say, wait a minute, does that mean we don't have the right to interpretation? The way this is phrased in the original and some of the versions capture it, some of your study notes will say this. It's talking about the source. No individual prophecy is the source of some individual. “For [because] no prophecy was ever made by an act of human will.” Prophecy didn't originate with the human, “but men moved by the Holy Spirit spoke from God.” And moved by is the same word that's used in the book of Acts for that runaway ship that was driven by the wind. The Holy Spirit drove the writers of Scripture to what they wrote.

So this is why we know that while there are 40 different authors and 66 books, there is really only one author. And because that one author is God the Holy Spirit, he knew everything he wanted to communicate before he moved Moses to write the first letter of Genesis. And that also means that since the Spirit is truth and doesn't contradict himself, all 66 books are what? Totally consistent. One passage will not contradict another passage but complement them. So, you can interpret one passage outside the context of the rest of what the Scripture teaches about that issue. The implications of this are very clear. Don't interpret a text in isolation with the rest of Scripture, and the clear should be allowed to interpret the obscure. That's the second principle. So, interpret according to authorial intent, that's number one. That's your job to make a decision about what the text means by considering what the author intended. Number two, interpret allowing the Scripture other passages to help you understand and interpret the one you're looking at.

And then finally, interpret literally. This means that in trying to determine the meaning of a passage in the Bible, listen carefully, the word literal can get in the way. Some guys say, oh, you know, does that mean like there are no figures of speech in the Bible? I mean, literally? And they kind of mock it like, like, oh, you literalists. No, no, listen, what we mean by that is you follow the normal rules of interpreting any literature. That's what we mean by literally. You examine the language, the grammar, the words, the culture, the geography, the history. This is called the grammatical historical method. It doesn't mean there aren't figures of speech or allegories or symbols or word pictures in the Bible. Of course there are. But those things exist in other literature as well. So as with other literature, notice this statement on the slide, we must interpret the Bible in the simplest, most literal sense, unless there is an indication in the context not to do so. Just like with anything else you read. You don't assume that something you read on a web page is an allegory, unless what? There is a clue in the context that it's an allegory. Same thing is true in Scripture. So the implications of this context always rules in your interpretation. You pay attention to the words, the syntax, the culture, the history.

And as you're interpreting the Bible, you also pay attention to genres. What do I mean by that? Well, the different kinds of writing in the Scripture, you have to be careful to how you interpret them. For example, if you go to the law, you go to portions of the first five books of the Old Testament, where there's law. How do you interpret that as a New Testament believer? Well, you

look at it through the lens of the New Testament in the sense that you understand that in that law, in the Mosaic law, there are portions of it that are timeless, that are based on the character of God. We call that God's moral law. It's established and summarized in the Ten Commandments. Jesus summarizes it further as, "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart. You shall love your neighbor as yourself." That's timeless, never goes away, reiterated in the New Testament.

On the other hand, there are laws that are clearly civic laws. That is, they determine the inner actions of the nation, like the penalties on certain crimes. Witches, for example, were to be killed. Should we kill witches today? No, when you look at the New Testament, we learn that the responsibility for that civil law that was in Old Testament Israel, the nation of Old Testament Israel, that's now the responsibility of whom? Romans 13, it's the responsibility of government. Just like it was the responsibility of that government, now it's a responsibility of our government. And we're left to make those decisions, just like they did in the first century with Nero and Rome.

The third category of law is their ceremonial law. All those sacrifices and all those feast days, what does the New Testament say about that? Those things were pictures that pointed forward. They were the shadow, Colossians 2, and the body is Christ. And now that the body has arrived, don't worry about the shadows. Don't let anyone judge you in respect to those things. So as you read the law, you have to keep that in mind.

Narrative. Narrative is not normative. Now, if the author of the book praises or judges the behavior of the biblical character, then it's legitimate to apply the truth taught. But if the author of narrative neither praises nor judges, then you should interpret that narrative in the light of the teaching sections of the rest of Scripture. So be careful with narrative.

Poetry. Poetry is, Hebrew poetry is built on two basic, two basic sort of forms. The first is parallelism. That is, the second line in some way either contradicts, amplifies, or is synonymous with the line that comes before it. And fills it out. So you need to understand that when you're studying poetry.

Proverbs. Know the difference between a proverb and a clear promise? A proverb is a truism, meaning it's generally true, but it's not an ironclad promise. You know, a lot of Christian parents read, "Train up a child the way he should go, and when he is old, he will not depart from it." They think that's a promise. No, it's a proverb, meaning that it's generally true, but doesn't mean it's true in every case. That's the nature of proverbs.

Prophecy. You have to read it in the light of the already not yet. Some things have been fulfilled. We're going to talk about the kingdom of God is it hand, Jesus says, but he also says, "I will sit down with you in the kingdom of God" in the future. The already not yet part of prophecy.

Parables. Parables by and large have one primary point. You don't press all the details. So as you, and in epistles, of course, you have the indicatives, the truth, and then you have the imperatives, the commands that are built on those indicatives. So as you read the different genres, you have to keep those things in mind. And there's more you're reading about in the book you're reading. So I don't need to go further into that, but those are those are key.

So the key, the three main principles of interpretation. And if you keep these in mind, they'll keep you on the straight and narrow. Interpret based on authorial intent, interpret Scripture with Scripture, and interpret literally or normally, like you would any other piece of literature.

So what are the dangers of interpretation? There are several common dangers of trying to interpret a passage of Scripture. And I've adapted these primarily from two sources, Dick Mayhew's book, "How to Interpret the Bible for Yourself," and Gordon Fee's book, "How to Read the Bible for All It's Worth." Here are some dangers of interpretation. First of all, allegorizing, adding levels of meaning to the narrative when that isn't intended. For example, you know, the story of David and Goliath. It's like, well, and a local pastor talked about this. You know, well, David is Christ, and Goliath, it depends on how you interpret it, but Goliath is either sin or Goliath is some great problem in your life, some habit you struggle with, and the five stones, well, they are, and, you know, it's like, no. There's nothing in the text that leads you there. That's just imagination. Nobody anywhere in the Bible says those things mean those things. Now, there may be legitimate principles you can draw. You can say, you know, David, he was able, with God's power, to defeat God's enemies, and Christ, with God's power, defeated God's enemies. Okay, that's legitimate, but don't allegorize the text. Secondly, spiritualizing or moralizing. Giving a text a deeply spiritual point that the original author never intended.

Now, I may be, again, about to kill a sacred cow here, but the Song of Solomon, there's no indication anywhere in Old or New Testament that it depicts the love between Christ and his church. Now, I get it. You know, the church is his bride. In that sense, maybe there's some loose connection, but there's no indication anywhere in the Bible that it's to be interpreted that way. I love Spurgeon, but wow, I have to skip those days in morning and evening when he's dealing with the Song of Solomon, as if that's our relationship to Christ. The Song of Solomon is a celebration of the joys of married love. Pretty clear. So don't spiritualize or moralize.

Thirdly, don't proof text. Stringing together verses to make a point without regard to their meaning in the context. You know, you've heard the extreme example, of course. "Judas went out and hanged himself." "Go and do likewise," and what they'll do is do quickly. You can't just grab phrases in the Bible and piece them together out of context and regarding their meaning. The remedy is just to make sure that you know what each verse says in its context.

Number four, using narrative as normative. My favorite example here is Gideon's Fleece. Well, I'm just going to put out a fleece and see if this is what God wants me to do. You know what I want to say to people who say that? Have you ever read the story of Gideon? Go read it and see

if God was happy with Gideon's response and the fleece. And the answer is he wasn't. Spoiler, he wasn't happy. It's not something you ought to be doing. And we don't use narrative that way. If you're going to use Gideon that way, why not, you know, and I mean this really as a satire, not as something you should go do. Go kill your daughter when she comes in. If in fact that's what Jephthah does, I know there's a lot of debate about that. But you get my point. Don't go to narrative and make it say what you want it to say.

Nationalizing, reading one's own country into passages and promises distinctly given to Israel. You know, I love our country. I appreciate what God has given us. But I don't see America in every passage that is talking about Israel. You know, when 2 Chronicles 7:14 says, "If My people who are called by My name humble themselves and pray and seek My face and turn from their wicked ways, then I will hear from heaven and will forgive their sin and will heal their land." Read that passage in its context. It's not America. Now, again, it's legitimate to say, there is an underlying principle there that when people humble themselves and cry out to God, God hears and forgives. Okay, yeah, but that doesn't mean America is in that passage. Psalm 33:12, "Blessed is the nation whose God is the Lord, the people whom he has chosen for his own inheritance." Again, I hate to say this, guys, that's not the US. Look in context, don't nationalize Scripture.

Cultural Backloading. This is when you take a view that's popular today in our culture and you attempt to read it back into the Bible and make the Bible say what is popular today. For example, reading theistic evolution into Genesis 1 and 2, that's cultural backloading. There's no evidence in Genesis 1 and 2 of theistic evolution. The approval of homosexuality into Genesis 18 and 19. You know, those who champion homosexuality, look at that passage, and some of them just reject it out of hand, but others who want to say they accept the Bible will say, "Well, the real issue there was not the homosexuality. It's not why God destroyed those cities, Sodom and Gomorrah. He destroyed them because of their lack of hospitality." I'm serious as I can be. Or reading self-esteem back into Jesus' command to love your neighbor as yourself. "Well, Jesus said, 'love your neighbor as yourself,' so that means I got to love myself more." That is not what he said. You love yourself plenty, and so do I. Reading newspaper headlines into biblical prophecy. There are guys on the radio who make a lot of money reading biblical prophecy into newspaper headlines. The role of women in marriage and in the life of the church. You can't read our culture back into the Bible. You have to come to the Bible and let it say what it says.

Literalizing. This is making a figure of speech literal. The most famous of these in the Bible is John 6, "Eat My flesh and drink My blood." Catholic Church has made a lot of hay saying that that's what happens in the Lord's table. Transubstantiation. The elements of the bread and the wine become, they say, the actual body and blood of Christ. Well, read the context. The context says the words which I am speaking to you, Jesus says, are spiritual words and they are life. That text has nothing to do about the Lord's table. It's an invitation to accept Christ as Savior and Lord. Read it.

Another example, or another danger, rather, is dogmatizing. Forcing a text's meaning to fit your theological system. We're all tempted to do this. You know, we conclude that there's a systemic understanding of the Scripture. Whatever you are, you fill in the ism. Whatever you are, it's easy to come to that text and try to force that text into your system. Don't ever do that. Let the Scripture shape and fashion your general understanding of the Scripture, not the other way around.

And then finally, individualizing. By that, I mean arriving at an interpretation that is unique to you. Beware, men, if you think you've discovered something nobody else has seen in the Bible. You should immediately say it to yourself, "I'm being proud and arrogant, because the Holy Spirit has spoken to 2,000 years of Christians before me, and I'm wrong." That's what you should say to yourself.

Alright, so let's come back to it, and just remind ourselves where we are. We're coming to the last section of Bible Study for Every Christian. And just to remind you, the process of inductive Bible study are those six steps. Preparation, observation, meditation. We just covered interpretation, where you conclude what does this really mean, looking for the author's intended meaning. And that brings us to two additional steps, the fifth and sixth steps, evaluation and application. So let's look at them together.

First of all, what is evaluation? What do we mean by that compared to the other steps? Here's a summary of those six steps. Preparation is preparing your tools and your heart for study. Confessing your sin, asking for the Lord's help, making sure you got the right tools around you for study. Then comes observation. This is observing the details of the text to determine what it really says. This is exegesis. This is the hard work of observing and looking into the grammar and looking into the words and looking at the cross-references. Then comes meditation. That's thinking deeply about the text to understand it and to plan how to do it. We talked about that last time. Those two ideas, choosing to think deeply about the passage you're studying, forcing your mind to stay there in order to better understand what it means and to say, what am I supposed to do with this? Interpretation that we just looked at is using generally accepted principles to decide what the text actually means. Landing. This text means X.

Now we come to evaluation. Evaluation is comparing your interpretation against the interpretation of others. Now, what's the biblical basis for this step? Well, we've already talked about it. There's only one divinely intended meaning for every text, and that meaning has never changed. The Holy Spirit has always been helping other believers to understand the meaning of the Scripture. Therefore, it's highly unlikely, read impossible, that you will be the first to understand that passage. So it's important then to check your interpretation against those who are either more skilled than you are, more godly than you are, or both. So how do you go about evaluating your interpretation of the Scripture?

First of all, the process means you compare your interpretation against several good study Bibles. This is the first sort of basic level of evaluation. And guys, it's an absolute necessity. Don't conclude that you know what the text means until you've at least checked yourself against a couple of good study Bibles. "The MacArthur Study Bible," I had the privilege of being involved in that project. I had the opportunity, many of you know this, to write the initial notes out of John's sermon notes for Romans and Revelation, an oversight team that did a good portion of the rest of the New Testament. So I'm a little partial, but I will say, I still think even if I hadn't been involved, it's overall the best study Bible in the market. The ESV is a good study Bible but do beware of the fact that they're trying to reach a broad audience. So they'll give you pretty divergent views of what a text means. And then there's the "NIV Study Bible," which is a decent one as well.

I would recommend that it would be ideal to have all three, but at least two of them. Why? So you can cross check them with each other. See if one touches on a verse, the other one doesn't. See if they disagree with each other and evaluate their arguments, make them argue with each other. That's a good thing. So check your interpretation where you've landed after your study against several good study Bibles.

Secondly, compare your interpretation against conservative, meaning theologically conservative, non-theologically liberal commentaries. In other words, they believe the Bible, they're orthodox in what they teach. You say, well, how do I know that? Well, how to choose helpful commentaries. Sproul recommends the "New Bible Commentary." There have since been several others that have come out, including there's the MacArthur one-volume commentary, which is just basically the study Bible notes in one volume. There's one other, Lance, in this case. You remember, there's one other newer one. If it comes to you, let me know. But I think we might even carry it in our bookstore. So, a one-volume is a good start. So, good study Bibles, then a one-volume commentary. In other words, one book that says something about all of Scripture. But multi-volume commentary series can be helpful. Like Keil & Delitzsch on the Old Testament. It's a little heavy sledding at times, but an intelligent person can work their way through it. You'll get there. The Tyndale series on the Old and New Testament gives you short summaries and comments on many of the passages. William Hendrickson on the New Testament. He did a large portion. He was a Presbyterian commentator, so beware, there will be places you disagree with as you go through it. But he's also a very careful expositor. He did many of the books on the New Testament, and another man finished it out after his death, Kistemaker. Personally, I don't think those are as good as Hendrickson's, but regardless, that can be a good set for you to have. So you might get a whole set of commentaries. The MacArthur multi-volume set on the New Testament, very helpful resource.

You can also get individual commentaries on particular books. Honestly, in the long run, this is the best path for you to go. It's eventually to begin saying, I want to study this book. What are the best commentaries on that book? And pick up individual commentaries. How do you discover



what those are? Well, there are lists of recommendations in various places. For example, there's an appendix in Gordon Thieves, "How to Read the Bible for All It's Worth." I think this is still available. "Commentaries for Bible Biblical Expositors" by Jim Roscoe. I think it's been republished, but I'm not positive. Our own bookstore. Go to our bookstore. We're not letting things in there that are going to destroy your faith. So go look for the commentaries that are in our bookstore, and then be careful, because not all the recommendations are helpful on this site, but it can at least serve as another place, [bestcommentaries.com](http://bestcommentaries.com) You'll have guys who will say, these are what I think are the best commentaries on Matthew, and they're rated, and they're ranked by different styles, technical commentaries that are more driven by the original language versus devotional commentaries, etc. So you can do your research there, or you can just ask one of us on the pastoral staff as well. That's another resource that you can use.

Now, how do you use commentaries? Well, three ways. They provide good models of interpretation. A good commentary is going to help you, like a good teacher, is going to help you learn how to go through the Bible and interpret it for yourself. They're going to walk you through their thinking, their rationale. They're going to show you how this verse is connected to the verse before and to the verse after. So they're going to provide a good model of interpretation. They're also going to help you with difficult passages. Sometimes you're studying and you come to a passage and you're like, what does that mean? I have no idea. And that's where a good commentary is going to help you. They're going to say, okay, this is a hard passage. This is one of the hardest passages in the New Testament. There have historically been five views of what this passage means. And here's each view and here's why people say they're the view. So they're going to help you walk through those. They also provide a check against novel or erroneous interpretations. In other words, think of commentaries and study Bibles like guard rails on your study. They keep you from going over the edge and killing yourself spiritually. They keep you on the straight and narrow of what Christians throughout the history of the church have believed that text means. So they provide protection.

How not to use helpful commentaries? I would urge you; these are the warnings. I would urge you never to use them in place of your own study. In other words, don't just listen to some guy. He's just a teacher. So do your own study. Let teachers contribute, but don't let them be all that you think about the Scriptures. Never use them before your own study. Be diligent. Show yourself a workman with the Scripture. You know Paul wrote to Timothy. You need to do that even as an individual. Do your own study. Don't accept their authority as the final authority. In other words, commentaries are, they are flawed men. And they are often wrong. So that's why it's good to have a couple, two or three.

Or I have like, going through Matthew, I think I have 10 or 12 on my shelf. And I'm letting them argue with each other as I'm sorting through a text. And this guy says it means this, and this guy says, no, it never means that. It means this, and here's why I would say that. And so I'm watching them argue with each other, and I'm evaluating their arguments. I'm the judge and jury

going, yeah, that's a good argument. That one's hard to beat. No, that's a bad argument. That doesn't stand up. So don't accept their authority as the final authority. Be a Berean even when it comes to the experts. Remember, Luke praised the Bereans for checking on Paul. I would say he was an expert. Avoid the merely devotional commentaries. You can get your own devotional thoughts if you can understand the meaning of the text. Get commentaries that drive you to the meaning, to deal with the actual what's said in that text. And then watch out for their guesses and conjectures. They do this. Commentaries are great, but sometimes they'll just say, it means this and there's no evidence for it. You're like, I don't think so. Where's the evidence for that? So watch out for their guesses and conjectures. Again, make them prove themselves. Be a Berean.

Now once you've done your evaluation, once you have looked at your, you've said, okay, this is what I think the text means. I've studied it, I've meditated on it, I've decided. I think the text means this. Now I'm gonna check my interpretation against other Christian interpretations and see if I'm in, I'm straight and narrow. I'm in the guardrails. Now you're ready finally to move to application.

To application, the sixth and final step. What is application? Application is planning what you should do in response to the text. That's application. Planning what you should do in response to the text. The consistent message of the Scripture is that God intends the teaching of his word be applied. Guys, this is such a danger for men. I'll tell you one of the most knowledgeable, biblically knowledgeable men I ever met. I met when I was a seminary student. Every Saturday night, I would go to the prison nearby, about an hour away, and I would preach there every Saturday night for many years, a number of years. And one of the most biblically knowledgeable men I ever met was in that prison for murder. He killed his mother-in-law. So don't assume Bible knowledge is holiness. Don't assume theological understanding is Christlikeness. You need to apply what you learn. John 13:17. "If you know these things, you are blessed [what?] If you do them. If you do them."

We're going to get to Matthew 7, where Jesus tells the parable of the two men, one who built his house on the sand, the other who built his house on the rock. And you know the story. The storm comes, and the house built on the sand is destroyed. The house built on the rock stands. I love asking this question. So what is the rock in that parable? And like nine men out of 10 will say, it's Christ. No, read what Christ says. He doesn't say it's Christ. He says, the one who builds on the rock is the one who hears these words of mine and does them. The one who builds on the sand is the one who hears these words of mine and does not do them. In other words, it matters what you do with what you know. True disciples obey Christ. That's why in the parallel passage in Luke, chapter six, I think it's verse 46, he says, "Why do you call me Lord, Lord, and not do the things which I say?" Doesn't even make sense. So it matters that God's words applied.

Romans 15:4. Look at it with me. Paul talks here about the value of the Scriptures. He says, verse four of Romans 15, "Whatever was written in earlier times was written for our instruction,

so that through perseverance and the encouragement of the Scriptures, we might have hope.” It's written for our spiritual benefit to apply those truths.

Go over to 1 Corinthians chapter 10, 1 Corinthians 10 and verse 11, talking about the things that happened during the wilderness wanderings, Israel and the wilderness wanderings. Paul writes, “Now these things happened to them as an example, and they were written for our instruction upon whom the ends of the ages have come.” And in context, he says, listen, it's a lesson in running your Christian liberty out to the edge where you fall off. So it's supposed to be applied. James 1:22, “Prove yourselves doers of the word and not merely hearers who delude themselves.” Johann Albrecht Bingle captured the thrust of the Scripture when he wrote this in the 1700s. “Apply yourself wholly to the text.” That's study. Apply yourself wholly to the text. And then he says, “Apply the text wholly to yourself.” That's great advice. Study, apply yourself wholly to the text, and then apply text wholly to yourself.

Now, how do we do this? How do we do legitimate application? Well, the framework for application comes from the familiar text we looked at a moment ago, 2 Timothy 3, verses 16 and 17. All Scripture in its entirety, and in context, by the way, he's clearly referring to both what we call the Old Testament and to the New Testament. In the pastoral epistles, he quotes both and calls them Scripture. So all Scripture, Old and New Testament, is breathed out by God. It's the product of his breath, and therefore, notice, it is profitable. First of all, it is profitable for teaching. So as you're looking to apply a passage, you're asking, what does the passage teach? To whom did it or does it apply? Has it been changed by subsequent revelation, like the laws of sacrifice or the food laws or whatever? What's it teaching? Secondly, you're looking at reproof. Does this passage confront errors in my beliefs? Does this passage confront errors in my thinking or my behavior? Correction: does this passage identify changes I should make in my beliefs? Does this passage identify changes I should make in my thinking or in my behavior? And then finally, training and righteousness. Are there instructions in this passage, to me as God's child, that I'm to put into practice as I grow into maturity? That's what you're looking for. That's the framework for application.

Now let's go on to the guiding principles of application. Guiding principle number one. When you're looking to apply the Bible to yourself, this is number one, and you shouldn't be surprised by this. It should flow from authorial intent. In his book “Between Two Worlds,” John Stott makes the point that as Bible students, we live in two worlds. When you're studying the Bible, you live in two worlds. You live in the world of the Bible, and you live in the world of today, the biblical world and the modern world. And when it comes to these two worlds, there are two dangers.

First of all, the danger of starting with the modern world. What does this mean to me? The meaning of the Bible can only be discerned by first going back into the biblical world and understanding what the author was saying in his time. If you want to understand the Bible, you

got to get out of your time and go back into the biblical time to understand what it meant then when he wrote it to the people he wrote it to. That's the first danger, starting with the modern world instead of the biblical world.

The second danger is staying in the biblical world. In other words, never applying the word to today. God intended us to respond to his word personally. Now most of our study takes us back into the biblical world, but application is the bridge that moves us from the biblical world to the modern world. Now, when you're making application, think about this with me. That bridge that is application, sometimes the bridge between the biblical world and the modern world is obvious and short, like "love your enemies." Pretty short bridge from the biblical world to the modern world looks the same in both worlds, right? Other times, the bridge is long and high that leads from the biblical world to the modern world. The text first has to be converted to a timeless principle.

For example, what do you do with, "Don't boil a kid in his mother's milk?" Uh-oh, that's going to require a long bridge. What is that bridge? Well, you look at it in its original context, in the biblical world. What was it actually saying in the context in which it occurs? It was, don't participate in the idolatrous practices of the people around you. Okay, now the bridge isn't too long. Until you've answered the question, what does the text mean in the biblical world, you're not ready to answer the question, what does the text mean to me? Or better, how am I to apply this text in the modern world? How am I supposed to respond?

Now guys, don't miss this. If you missed everything else I say in this section, don't miss this. The most powerful application of any passage is always the one the Holy Spirit intended when he inspired that passage. So when you think about application, you should use every tool at your disposal to strive to discern exactly how the Spirit and the human writer intended his first readers to apply that passage. That's your goal. You're trying to think and say, okay, if I'm sitting in the pews, quote unquote, in Colossae, what did Paul want me to do with this verse? How did he want me and how did the Holy Spirit want me to respond if I'm sitting in the first century church of Colossae? And then what's the bridge that brings us to the modern world? As I said, the bridge at times is very short and obvious. It's exactly the same. Other times, there might be a little more of a bridge to walk. But you need to be looking for how did the author expect the original readers to respond to this passage? Was there thinking he wanted them to change? Was there commands he wanted them to obey? Were there examples he wanted them to follow? Were there sins he wanted them to confess and forsake? Were there errors he wanted them to avoid? Were there emotions he wanted them to feel? Were there promises he wanted them to believe? Were there ideas about God to praise?

You see, that's what you're looking for. How did he want the reader to respond? And that's how you're supposed to respond. Because that's what the spirit intended. Although every passage has only one meaning, it can have multiple legitimate applications. Take last Sunday, okay, we're

talking through the temptation. That means what it means. What was the temptation Jesus faced? What happened there? That means what it means. But there are a number of legitimate applications you can make from that meaning. But again, what's the best and most important application? The one closest to what the original author wanted us to get. That's why I ended yesterday, or Sunday rather, with the idea that he wanted us to see Jesus as God. He wanted us to see that Jesus is sinless, and he wanted us to see that there are very practical applicational ideas that grow out of Jesus' success over temptation. All right?

Second guiding principle of application is should distinguish between commands to specific individuals or groups and those universally given. For example, the command in Genesis 22. "Abraham, offer up your son." Is that a general command or a specific command to one individual? You need to discern that as you're looking at it. The command to Joshua to kill all the Canaanites. It's not a command for Christians to take the lives of the pagans around them. Those are obvious, but you get my point. It gets a little more difficult than that in other issues.

Thirdly, you should carefully distinguish between what the Bible records and what it approves. In other words, not, I mean, think about it. There are things Satan says in the Bible. It's not approving those things. It's recording them. So you need to distinguish carefully. Should be carefully made from narrative. I've already mentioned this, but application is a challenge in narrative sections. It's still legitimate, though. We saw in 1 Corinthians 10 and 11, the wilderness wanderings were a legitimate way to apply, running your liberty out to the edge and falling into sin. But how do we go about legitimately applying the Scripture in narrative sections? Well, there are a couple of tools that really help us. First of all, the comments of the narrator. If the narrator, the one writing it, says, this is good or this is bad, then you know it's good or bad from God's perspective. So, for example, in 2 Chronicles 16:12, when we read, "In the thirty-ninth year of his reign, Asa became diseased in his feet. His disease was severe, yet even in his disease, he did not seek the Lord but the physicians." You know that's a comment on a tendency of human beings to put their trust everywhere but God.

Look at the words of the main characters. Think about it. The characters in a narrative, obviously, said a lot more than is recorded in that narrative, but the author, under the inspiration of the spirit, has chosen what quotes to include. That means he considered those quotes very important to contributing to the point he's trying to make. My favorite example is 1 Samuel 17, where you just have the words of several people in the story of David and Goliath. And guess what those words betray? They betray the motives of their hearts. And as it turns out, they're the motives of everybody's hearts. Lived out in those four people, those four quotes that are in that text. And what's the motive of David's heart, a man after God's own heart? It's the glory of God. So you see in the words of the main characters, the point, the purpose of the entire book in which that thing occurs. 1 Samuel 17:16, a man after God's own heart, 17, David and Goliath.

What's it doing? What's the theme of the book? Well, the book is showing why there was a transition from Saul's dynasty to David's dynasty. I mean, when you have a king, first king, what's the whole point of a king? Who follows a king? His son. So, how did David end up being the second king? Well, guess what? If you're not in the palace, what are you likely to think as just a run-of-the-mill citizen? Hmm, must have been something going on there in the palace. David must have pulled off a coup, so Samuel writes to defend the change in dynasties.

God's direct assessment or application in the context, for example, 1 Samuel 15, when God rebukes Saul through Samuel, and God directly says, you are rebelling against My word. Other times, for example, John 12, the woman's offering a perfume, you remember, who comes in, Mary comes in and breaks the valuable perfume and anoints Jesus' feet and head, and Jesus praises her and says, what she has done will be told everywhere in the world. Well, guess what? You know, that was good. And something to be emulated. There's a lesson to be learned there to be followed.

That isn't true with The Widows' Mite. Famous story, but you don't see anything in that story that says this was good. No, it's a story about the religious system of Israel taking advantage of the poor and widows, taking their last bit of money that they had to live on. So, you're looking for God's direct assessment or application there in the context. As you apply, you should only embrace the promises made to us. Bernard Ram says, "Every promise in the book is mine," is one of the overstatements of the century." It's not true. Is the promise universal in scope? Some are.

Revelation 22, the spirit and the bride say, come, let the one who hears come, let the one who is thirsty come, let the one who wishes, take of the water of life without cost. But others are personal. Acts 18, the Lord said to Paul in the night by a vision, don't be afraid any longer, but go on speaking and not be silent, for I am with you and no man will attack you in order to harm you, for I have many people in the city. Does that mean no Christian will ever be attacked or harmed? No, it wasn't even true in Paul's life. Remember, he ended up with his head chopped off. It was for Paul, in that moment, in that place. Now, there are principles there. God protects his own. He doesn't allow anything to happen to them, that he isn't allowing for his own glory and their good, for the good of the gospel. But it's not a promise to everybody. John 14:26, "The helper, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in My name, He will teach you all things and bring to your remembrance all that I said to you.

I used to love that as a student. It's like, oh good. You know, the Lord's gonna bring to my mind those things I didn't study. No, that's not what it says, and it's not addressed to me. It's addressed to the apostles, that the Holy Spirit would help them in the writing of the New Testament. He would bring to their minds all that they heard Jesus teach. That's why John can write in 95 AD. And remember like it was yesterday, the things that happened during the life of Jesus and around his death in 30 AD. So pay attention to whom the promise is made. Is the promise conditional? Is

there a condition on it? James 4.8. “Draw near to God and he will draw near to you,” is the promise for our time. So be careful with promises.

When you think of application, there are three varieties of application. There is the application that says, so what? You know, how do the truths of the passage apply to you? Focusing the claims of truth on our lives. Secondly, there is considering the ways and means to implement the truth. How do I go about doing this? Answers the question, how? And then there is the motivation, why? That's what you are looking for in application. Now, when you are looking to apply the text to yourself, ask these key questions.

This is really helpful right here, okay? Key questions of application. What did the author want the original readers to do in response to this passage? Number two, what am I supposed to do in response to this passage? Maybe the same, maybe very similar, maybe somewhat different, depending on the circumstances. Why am I supposed to do what this passage teaches? Why? And what are some practical ways or means that I can think of to do what this passage teaches? Now, folks, each one of those questions takes you further away from what God actually said and therefore is less authoritative. So be careful.

Let me give you an example. Let's look at Exodus 20 verse 14. “You shall not commit adultery.” All right, original readers. God expressly forbids his people to have a sexual relationship with someone who is not their spouse. But there's more than that involved. Jesus helps us know there's more than that involved. The authoritative intent is I may not enter, for me, I may not enter into a sexual relationship with anyone who is not my spouse, but it goes beyond that. I may not allow myself to desire, Jesus says, a sexual relationship with someone who is not my spouse. Those are, now we're still dealing with original authorial intent. Thus saith the Lord.

What's the motivation? Well, the first couple of verses of Exodus 20 say, because I am the Lord your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, because I am your redeemer, I'm your creator and redeemer, this is how I want you to respond. Ways and means. Now we're again, we're stepping farther away. I should not allow close relationships with members of the opposite sex who are not my spouse. Is that what it says in that text? No, but is that a legitimate ways and means to protect myself? Yes. Another ways and means. I should not be alone in potentially intimate situations with members of the opposite sex. Again, it's not what that verse says, but it's a means to keep myself from violating that command.

Now, all of that looks great, right? But with this comes dangers. Let me give you some dangers. Making the timeless principles that you derive from the text, or your application of the text have the same authority as God's explicit commands. This is so much a common problem, guys. Usually, it involves insisting that others live by your conclusions from the texts you've studied. Let me give you an example.

Deuteronomy 6, the biblical imperative there is clear. Parents are responsible to teach their children God's commands. No questions asked. That's legitimate. An application of that in our day might be, we've concluded that our family can best accomplish that responsibility by homeschooling. Okay, that's legitimate too. For you to say, okay, God requires that parents teach their children to God's word. And our family has concluded, we've applied that text to us by saying, we're going to homeschool because we think that's how we can best accomplish that goal. Nothing wrong with either of those.

Here's the problem. The next step becomes: therefore, every Christian parent should homeschool their children. You see the step that just took place there? You move beyond the meaning of the text itself and what the text commands. You move beyond even your own personal application of that to your life, where you're trying to make reasoned decisions about how to apply that to your life. And now, you're taking not the text of Scripture, you're taking your application, and you're imposing on everybody else around you. They should, when the Bible doesn't say, they should. See the danger here, guys? Be really careful.

This is how legalism happens. This is what happened with the Pharisees. The Pharisees started out with the best of motives, and that was to protect people from breaking God's law. And so they made rules to keep people from protecting God's law. No problem with that. They said, OK, God said you can't work on the Sabbath. That's in the law for the Old Testament Israel. You can't work on the Sabbath. So we want to help you keep God's law. So here's our application. If you're a tailor, if you sow for a living, then you can't carry a needle in your robe on the Sabbath. Because if you carry a needle, you might be tempted to use it. You might be tempted to sow on the Sabbath, and you're not supposed to sow on the Sabbath. Now, if an individual made that decision, nothing wrong with that. The problem comes when I enforce my application on the lives of others. And it's not, thus saith the Lord. And guys, this happens all the time. Be really careful. Stick with, thus saith the Lord, in terms of what you expect from yourself and what you expect from others. If you apply the truth beyond the clear statement of Scripture, fine. But just distinguish that. Make it clear in your own mind that's what you're doing. And don't hold others accountable to that.

A second danger is failing to distinguish between cultural commands and timeless commands. Foot washing would be a great example. That was clearly a culturally driven event. Why were there foot washings? Because that's what everybody did. You showed up at their house, you had sandals, the roads were dusty, and you had dirt on your feet. They didn't want you tracking that dirt through their house. And so the lowest slave washed your feet. Jesus used that to teach an important lesson. And that is we are to menially serve one another. He didn't say we're always through the generations to wash one another's feet. But the timeless principle there is, be willing to do the lowest service for your fellow Christians. But don't interpret a culturally conditioned command as timeless.



Number four, applying personal convictions rather than authorial intent. For example, you know, 1 Thessalonians 5, when I was growing up in fundamentalism in the world I grew up in, they loved 1 Thessalonians:5 22, which says, “Abstain from every form of evil.” That’s what it really says. But the King James said abstain from every appearance of evil. And so they love that. It’s like, look, if somebody thinks you’re doing something wrong, you can’t do it. So it literally is how I grew up. So you can’t go to a movie theater to watch a movie because people might think you’re going to see that really hellacious, R-rated, sexually explicit movie down the hallway and not that, you know, whatever, G-rated movie you’re going to see. And so you have to avoid from every appearance of evil, so don’t go. Well, that’s not what it says. And yet that was their conviction. They read it on everybody else. There’s a real temptation, guys, to take your convictions about things that are not chapter and verse and insist that everybody else live by your convictions. If you want to come up with your own ways and means, nothing wrong with that. Just be careful.

Number five, failing to apply the truth to your own life at all. James 1:22, “Prove yourselves to be doers of the word and not merely hearers only.” So do apply it. Do say, what am I supposed to do with this text as you’re studying it? RC. Sproul writes this. I love this. He says, “We fail in our duty to study God’s word, not so much because it is difficult to understand, not so much because it is dull and boring, but because it’s work. Our problem is not a lack of intelligence or a lack of passion. Our problem is that we are lazy. Newspapers [and in our day, I might add web pages, social media accounts] are easier to read than the Bible is to study.”

We just need to be honest with ourselves, guys. You do what’s important to you. If you are a March Madness guy, guess what you did over the last month? You found a way to work the games that mattered to you into your schedule. You found a way. And so the real question is, how important is the study of Scripture to us? Because if it’s important, you’ll find a way.

Let me end with Psalm 1. Go back to Psalm 1. This Psalm stands at the introduction of the Psalter. This is the gate of the Psalms. The Psalms are about a pattern of worship. You want to worship God? Then here’s the gate that you have to come through. Here’s the kind of person that God accepts. “How blessed is the man who does not walk in the council of the wicked, nor stand in the path of sinners, nor sit in the seat of scoffers.” In other words, he completely abandons every human way. Instead, he embraces only God’s way. Verse 2, “But his delight is in the law of the Lord, and in his law, he meditates day and night. [What’s he like?] He’s like a tree that’s been transplanted by streams of water, which yield its fruit and its season. [He has a fruitful life.] Its leaf doesn’t wither. [Even when times of drought come, he still flourishes. When hard times come, he flourishes.] And in whatever he does, he [spiritually] prospers.” That’s what happens when we are the righteous man who pursues our God in the book that he has given to us. That’s my passion for you, as it’s my own passion. Let’s pray together.

Father, thank you for our time together tonight. Thank you for these men, for their willingness after a long, hard day's work to come out and to sit here to think through these things. Father, I pray that you would use our study about the Scripture and studying it for ourselves to ignite in each of us a renewed desire to feed our souls. Lord, if we've neglected these things, if we have to admit honestly that your word hasn't been our delight, that it hasn't been our meditation day and night. Lord, help us to partially feel guilty for failing to do that, but even more so help us to feel hungry. This is how our souls are fed. Man does not live, as our Lord reminded us, by bread alone, by the physical needs of the body, but by every word that proceeds out of the mouth of God.

Father, give us a passion, like our Lord's passion, for the Scripture. Feed us, satisfy our souls with yourself, as we find you and your Son and your Spirit in the pages of this book you've given us. Remind us, O God, that we hold in our hands words that are the product of your own breath. Make us students, we pray. Make us mighty in the Scriptures, like Apollos. We pray in Jesus' name, amen.