

Gospel Truth

Biblical Instruction and Encouragement
for the Mission Field Worldwide.

RIGHTLY DIVIDE THE WORD

Study to shew thyself approved unto God, a workman that needeth not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth. —2 Timothy 2:15

The Word of God is a light and a guide to show us the way of salvation and how God wants us to live. Yet there are many different churches, and contradictory doctrines are being taught as truth. Traditions, customs, and creeds are developed and often taught as foundational truth based on seemingly scriptural support. Many claim to be right, but Jesus taught us that there is only one narrow way. How then do we navigate this confusion to know and understand what is actually truth?

Paul instructed Timothy to study and to rightly divide the word of truth. This is imperative not only for ministers but for all of God’s children. We must be grounded in the Word. Doctrinal truth must rest on rightly interpreted Scripture; even true doctrine is weakened when Scripture is misapplied or taken out of context.

We do not need a school or seminary to stamp us into a religious system. However, that must never become an excuse for careless study. If the Bible is our rule of faith and practice, then we must be earnest students of the Bible. We should study with carefulness and diligence with the guidance of the Holy Spirit. We should all be growing in our understanding of Scripture as we refine how we study and apply the Word of God.

To keep our steps secure, we must keep truth anchored in the right place. Truth is not

inherited, nor does it stand because of who taught it in the past. Ministries, movements, and fellowships are fallible, and human writings can change, but the truth of God’s Word is unchanging and fixed. We must not confuse heritage with authority. Truth is discovered in the Word of God.

In the Church of God, there is no creed but the Bible. While there is a proper place for personal standards and safeguards in the lives of God’s children, we must be careful not to teach as Bible doctrine that which Scripture does not teach. True doctrine comes from Scripture, rightly divided—not from agreed-upon practices, customs, or traditions.

Christ is the center of all truth, and we must never be afraid to point people to the Word of God. If greater care were given in the handling and preaching of God’s Word, there would be much less confusion and far fewer inconsistencies among professing Christians. Truth does not need our opinions to strengthen it. It needs to be understood, believed, obeyed, and proclaimed.

“Lord, help us lay our opinions and thoughts at the foot of the cross and humbly receive the written Word without adding to it or taking away from it. Help us to be faithful as we study and grow in Thy truth, that we may be conformed more fully to the image of Christ.”



“Doctrinal truth
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Rightly Divide the
Word

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Understand the Terms

Interpreting Scripture with honesty, care, and submission to the Word of God

This issue deals with biblical hermeneutics: the proper interpretation of Scripture. Since the Bible is our rule of faith and practice, it must be handled carefully, honestly, and in harmony with itself. Rightly dividing the Word requires more than quoting verses; it requires understanding exactly what God has spoken in the text.

Three words are foundational to this study:

A. Hermeneutics (hur-muh-NOO-tiks)

Definition: The disciplined study of the principles and methods by which Scripture is interpreted.

Core Question: How should this passage be understood?

What it Governs: Our approach, our method, and the boundaries for interpretation.

Focus: Hermeneutics deals with how Scripture should be handled before deciding what a specific passage means.

B. Exegesis (ek-suh-JEE-sis)

Definition: The careful drawing out of the meaning that God placed in the text.

Core Question: What does this passage mean?

Focus: Meaning is discovered, not created. Faithful exegesis submits itself to the text instead of forcing the text to submit to man's ideas.

C. Eisegesis (eye-suh-JEE-sis)

Definition: Reading one's own ideas, assumptions, or conclusions into the text.

This Occurs When: Conclusions are formed first, Scripture is used to support a pre-decided idea, and context is ignored.

Reality: This is the exact opposite of exegesis.

AT A GLANCE

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| Hermeneutics | How should the passage be understood? |
| Exegesis | Drawing God's meaning out of Scripture. |
| Eisegesis | Putting man's ideas into Scripture. |

The Clear Distinction:

Exegesis draws truth out of Scripture; eisegesis puts man's thoughts into Scripture. Sound hermeneutics leads to faithful exegesis. Poor hermeneutics results in eisegesis.

The Letter and the Spirit

*"...for the letter killeth, but the spirit giveth life."
—2 Corinthians 3:6*

The Spirit of God will never lead contrary to the Word of God. No claim of spiritual leading should be accepted if it adds to, takes from, or contradicts the written Word.

When Scripture is removed from its context, handled without understanding, or used only to prove a point, it does not minister life as God intended.

The Word must be rightly divided, and the heart must be open to the Spirit of God. Only then will truth be understood, received, and obeyed.

*"Meaning is discovered, not created."
Faithful interpretation submits to the text.*



The Final Authority...

The Bible must have the final word for every individual, congregation, and minister. Traditions, writings, accepted teachings, and long-held practices may help when they agree with Scripture, but they must never stand equal to or above the Word of God. No group or movement is kept safe by history alone. We are kept safe only as we remain submitted to Scripture. We should never fear returning to the Bible and asking, "What has God spoken?" Truth is not weakened by honest examination. If a doctrine is of God, the Word will bear it out. If it cannot be established by Scripture rightly divided, we must honestly acknowledge that and not teach it as doctrine. Careless study produces weak doctrine; careful study and right interpretation through the Holy Spirit produce sound doctrine and solid saints.

Michael W. Smith

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Core Principles of Biblical Interpretation

Foundational Guidelines for Hermeneutics and Exegesis

These principles are given as safeguards for careful, honest, and consistent study of Scripture. Truth is preserved when the Word of God is rightly divided and allowed to speak for itself.



Principle 1: Scripture Has One Intended Meaning

Every passage has a single, definite meaning intended by God, anchored in the words of the inspired writer.

The meaning of Scripture is not left to the personal feelings or imagination of the reader. God gave His Word with purpose, and the words of Scripture have definite meaning. Our responsibility is not to create meaning, but to discover and submit to the meaning God intended.

Many today read the Bible as if a verse can mean one thing to one person and something entirely different to another. This creates confusion and false doctrine. The Holy Spirit may apply Scripture personally to the heart, but the meaning remains fixed in the text. A passage may have many applications to different people and circumstances, but the meaning is consistent and unchanging.

Recognizing this principle safeguards the church against subjective interpretation. If meaning is controlled by feeling, opinion, or tradition, truth

becomes unstable. When meaning is anchored in the text, the child of God can stand firmly on what God has spoken. Therefore, we must read the Bible with intellectual and spiritual honesty, willing to lay aside our opinions and receive the truth as God gave it.

In some cases, Scripture itself reveals a fuller prophetic fulfillment. God gave His Word through inspired men, and at times revealed more of His purpose as His plan unfolded. Hosea 11:1 speaks historically of God calling Israel out of Egypt, yet Matthew 2:15 shows it was also fulfilled in Christ: "Out of Egypt have I called my son." Prophecy is fulfilled according to God's purpose, whether in past history, present events, or things yet to come. History may give evidence of that fulfillment, but any interpretation of fulfillment must agree with Scripture and must never contradict, override, or redefine truth already established in the Word of God.



Principle 2: Context Determines Meaning

Scripture must be interpreted in its immediate, literary, and biblical context.

One of the most common ways Scripture is misused is by taking a verse out of context. A verse may be true, but when separated from the passage around it, it can be made to support something Scripture never intended. Context shows who is speaking, who is being addressed, and what subject is under consideration. The surrounding verses govern the meaning of an individual verse.

Isaiah 14:12 is often quoted by itself: "How art thou fallen from heaven, O Lucifer, son of the morning!" When isolated, many conclusions have been drawn from it. Yet the chapter itself gives the setting. Isaiah 14:4 says, "thou shalt take up this proverb against the king of Babylon." Later in the same passage, the subject is called "the man that made the earth to tremble." The context identifies the passage as a proverb against the king of Babylon, rather than a historical text explaining the origin of Satan.

Isaiah 31:1 gives another helpful example. "Woe to them that go down to Egypt for help..." This is not a condemnation of horses, chariots, or earthly resources. Israel used such things at times. The issue was that they trusted in chariots and horsemen but did "not look unto the Holy One of Israel" nor "seek the LORD." The sin was trusting in Egypt and human strength instead of the Lord. Context keeps the verse from being applied beyond its meaning.

Doctrine must not be built by ignoring the subject and setting Scripture gives. Context restores order and keeps Scripture in harmony with itself. Before using a verse to prove a point, the passage must be read in its setting. What is being discussed? Who is being addressed? What do the surrounding verses say? When context is honored, Scripture is protected from misuse, and God's intended meaning becomes clear.



Principle 3: Historical and Cultural Context Must Be Considered

Audience, customs, and circumstances explain expressions but never redefine truth.

The Bible was written in real places, to real people, under real circumstances. Historical and cultural context helps us understand the setting, customs, and everyday expressions of the people in the text. It does not alter or weaken Scripture but protects us from making an ancient custom a binding doctrine for the church today.

A plain example is the New Testament command to “greet one another with an holy kiss” (Romans 16:16; 1 Corinthians 16:20). In that culture, a kiss was a common greeting among family and close friends. It was a sign of welcome and affection, much as a handshake or warm embrace may be today.

By understanding the historical setting, we see that the Holy Spirit was not establishing a formal ritual for all saints in every age. The custom explains the expression, but it does not remove the truth. God’s

people are still to greet one another with sincere, holy, and unfeigned Christian love.

This principle also helps explain Matthew’s wording compared with Mark and Luke on divorce and remarriage. Matthew records Christ’s words in a Jewish setting, where questions about putting away a wife were commonly debated. Mark and Luke state the same moral truth more directly for a broader audience. The cultural context explains why that wording was used but does not change the absolute moral truth Christ taught.

We must be careful not to mistake a cultural custom for Bible doctrine. Neither should we use culture as an excuse to lay aside truth. When the original setting is considered, Scripture becomes clearer, and the reader is protected from careless misuse.



Principle 4: Genre Governs Interpretation

Scripture must be interpreted according to its literary form (history, doctrine, poetry, parable, prophecy).

Different portions of Scripture communicate truth in different ways. Historical narrative, doctrine, poetry, parables, and prophecy are all inspired Scripture, but they are not written in the same form. The form helps us understand how a passage should be read. A psalm may use poetic language, a parable may teach through a story, and prophecy may use symbols.

This is especially important when interpreting parables. In Luke 18:1, Christ gave a parable “that men ought always to pray, and not to faint.” The parable is not given to teach that God is like an unjust judge. Rather, Christ shows that if even an unjust judge responded to persistence, how much more should God’s children continue in prayer to a righteous God. The widow’s continued coming illustrates the need to keep praying and not faint. Parables teach spiritual truth, but not every detail has a separate spiritual application. The main point must govern the

interpretation. When details are forced beyond their intended purpose, the meaning can be distorted.

The same care is needed with symbolic prophecy. Books such as Daniel and Revelation use symbolic figures to communicate truth. These symbols are not meant to be read the same way as historical narrative. Recognizing the form helps us avoid forcing a literal meaning onto imagery God gave in symbolic form. Symbols communicate truth, but they do not redefine it.

Genre does not make Scripture uncertain. Rather, it helps us read Scripture as God gave it. When the literary form is honored, history is read as history, doctrine as doctrine, poetry as poetry, parables as parables, and symbolic prophecy as symbolic prophecy. This protects the Word from careless handling and clarifies the meaning.



Principle 5: Language Must Be Understood in Its Normal Sense

Words and sentences must be understood according to their plain, grammatical meaning unless the text clearly indicates a figure of speech or symbolic language.

God gave His Word in human language, and language has meaning. Words do not stand alone; they are joined into sentences by grammar and context. Scripture should be received in its normal sense unless the passage clearly shows that a figure, symbol, or comparison is being used. We should not make a passage symbolic because the plain meaning is uncomfortable, nor force a literal meaning where the text is figurative.

Jesus said in John 10:9, “I am the door.” Christ was not saying He was a physical door. The sentence is plainly figurative. He was using a figure of speech to teach that He is the way of entrance into salvation and safety. The plain meaning is not lost because the language is figurative. Rather, the figure helps us understand the truth being taught.

The opposite mistake is also possible. When Jesus said, “Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up” (John 2:19), the Jews thought He meant the literal temple building. John explains, “But he spake of the temple of his body” (John 2:21). The words had meaning, but the passage showed that the language was also figurative.

This principle guards against carelessness on both sides. It keeps us from making everything symbolic or treating figurative language as though it were literal. Sound interpretation pays attention to words, grammar, sentence structure, and figures of speech. Scripture must be allowed to speak according to the normal meaning of the language God gave.



Principle 6: Scripture Interprets Scripture

Clear and related Scriptures must be used to interpret other Scriptures; no verse stands alone.

The Word of God speaks with unity and harmony. Since God is the author of Scripture, His Word does not teach contradictory doctrines. There is unanimity in Scripture; every part agrees with the whole. Apparent contradictions are not solved by ignoring one passage or forcing another, but by understanding each passage in harmony with the whole counsel of God.

This principle is sometimes called canonical interpretation. Every passage must be understood in light of the whole body of Scripture, not as an isolated statement detached from the rest of God’s Word. Scripture explains Scripture. Clear passages help us understand less clear ones, and no verse should be used in isolation.

A clear example is found in the promises made to Abraham. Because those promises were first given to Abraham and his descendants, many have understood them through natural descent. Yet Paul explains by inspiration that the promise was not

ultimately fulfilled in many “seeds,” but in one: “thy seed, which is Christ” (Galatians 3:16). He then shows that those who belong to Christ are “Abraham’s seed, and heirs according to the promise” (Galatians 3:29). Scripture itself determines how earlier promises are to be understood. The fulfillment is Christ and those who belong to Him.

This does not mean the New Testament cancels the Old Testament. Rather, later revelation clarifies earlier revelation and shows the fullness of God’s purpose in Christ. The Bible is not a collection of disconnected statements, but one united revelation centered in God’s truth.

This principle protects us from building doctrine on isolated verses. When Scripture interprets Scripture, truth remains consistent and error is restrained. Doctrine must rest on the united testimony of God’s Word, allowing Scripture itself to explain how truth is to be understood.



Principle 7: Clear Scripture Governs Obscure or Symbolic Scripture

Obscure, symbolic, or prophetic passages must be understood in harmony with the clear, didactic passages of Scripture.

Not all passages are equally plain. Some portions of Scripture, especially symbolic and prophetic passages, contain visions, figures, time periods, and imagery that are difficult to understand. These passages are still inspired and profitable but must not be used to overturn clear teaching. Sound hermeneutics does not silence prophetic interpretation; it safeguards it by requiring symbolic and prophetic passages to agree with the plain teaching of God's Word.

Clear teaching must govern symbolic teaching. Apocalyptic books such as Daniel and Revelation contain beasts, horns, dragons, horses, and other symbols. These figures communicate truth but must not be used to create doctrine apart from the plain instruction of God's Word. Symbolic passages must agree with what Scripture teaches clearly.

A helpful example is the kingdom of God. Jesus taught plainly, "My kingdom is not of this world" (John 18:36).

This statement must govern prophetic language about kingdoms, battles, and power. Symbolic passages in Daniel and Revelation must not turn Christ's kingdom into an earthly, political system. The kingdom of God is spiritual and operates by the authority and reign of Christ, not by the power and methods of this world.

Therefore, symbolic prophecy must align with Christ's clear instruction, not reinterpret it. When symbolism is elevated above plain teaching, error follows. Clear Scripture anchors interpretation, and symbolic Scripture illustrates truth in harmony with it.

This principle keeps difficult passages in their proper place. We begin with what God has spoken plainly, especially through Christ and the apostles, and interpret obscure or symbolic passages in that light. Careful handling does not weaken Scripture; it protects the truth God intended to reveal.



Principle 8: Biblical Words Must Be Understood According to Their Original Usage

Individual terms must be evaluated based on their original language and their specific function within the text of the inspired writer.

This principle is not about sentence structure or figures of speech, but about individual biblical terms, their original-language meaning, and how they function within the passage. Careful Greek and Hebrew word study can help clarify what the text actually says, not create doctrine.

Words must never be pulled out of their setting and made to carry a meaning the passage does not support. A word may have a range of meaning, but context determines how it is used. Sound word study is governed by the sentence, the passage, and the teaching of Scripture as a whole.

A helpful example is the word "repent." Jesus preached, "Repent: for the kingdom of heaven is at hand" (Matthew 4:17). Repentance is not mere regret or sorrow. The word carries the thought of a change of mind that turns the heart and life toward God. Careful study shows that repentance is inward and spiritual yet also affects the direction of life.

Another example is the word "hell." In translation, different original words may be rendered by the same word. Scripture uses words such as *Sheol*, *Hades*, and *Gehenna*. These words do not all carry the exact same meaning. *Sheol* and *Hades* may refer to the grave or the realm of the dead, while *Gehenna* points to final judgment and punishment. Word study shows that a translated word must be understood according to the original term and context.

It is a blessing that the Bible can be read in many languages, but the meaning of a biblical word can be flattened or misunderstood in translation. Original-language study can restore clarity when handled carefully and humbly. We do not impose definitions on Scripture; we discover how Scripture uses its own words.



Principle 9: Interpretation Must Be Distinguished from Application

Interpretation discovers the text's objective meaning; application determines how that meaning is lived out.

The meaning of Scripture is fixed. A passage must first be understood before it is applied. Application may reach many lives and circumstances, but it must flow from the true meaning of the text. When interpretation and application are confused, Scripture can be misused even when the verse itself is true.

Isaiah 53:5 says, “with his stripes we are healed.” This verse is often applied to physical healing, but Scripture itself gives the primary interpretation. Peter writes that Christ “bare our sins in his own body on the tree,” and then says, “by whose stripes ye were healed” (1 Peter 2:24). Peter applies Isaiah’s words to sin, righteousness, and the healing of the soul through Christ’s sacrifice. Meaning is fixed by Scripture itself, not by experience, emphasis, or desire.

This does not mean that Isaiah 53 has no connection to physical suffering or that Christ has no power to heal the body. Matthew 8:17 applies another line of the same prophecy to Christ’s healing ministry: “Himself took our infirmities, and bare our sicknesses.” Matthew is drawing from Isaiah 53:4, which speaks of griefs and

sorrows, infirmities and sicknesses. This fulfillment was seen in Christ’s earthly ministry as He healed the sick. Scripture itself shows how different lines of the prophecy are fulfilled.

This distinction matters. Isaiah 53:5 must not be blended with Isaiah 53:4 in a way that makes physical healing guaranteed in the same automatic way as forgiveness of sins. Neither should Isaiah 53:4 be ignored, as though Christ has no compassion, power, or care for the sicknesses and suffering of His people. There is healing power in Christ, but Scripture must be allowed to make its own distinctions.

Error occurs when verses are blended together carelessly, applications are transferred beyond what Scripture teaches, and application is elevated to interpretation. Interpretation asks, “What does this passage mean?” Application asks, “How does this truth reach my life?” Scripture must first tell us what a passage means before we decide how it applies.



Principle 10: Right Interpretation Leads to Right Application

The text must be understood correctly before it can be applied rightly.

The goal of interpretation is not merely knowledge, but obedience and faithful living. Right interpretation produces right application; wrong interpretation produces wrong application. A verse may be true, but if it is misunderstood, it can be applied in a way that God never intended.

Galatians 3:28 says, “There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither bond nor free, there is neither male nor female: for ye are all one in Christ Jesus.” The context of Galatians 3 is justification by faith and our standing in Christ. Paul is teaching spiritual equality before God in salvation. All who are in Christ have equal access to the promise and equal standing before God.

This verse is sometimes used to teach that all roles, distinctions, and responsibilities are erased in every

setting. That is not the purpose of the passage. Right interpretation keeps the verse within its context. Paul is not removing God-ordained distinctions in the family, church, or society; he is declaring the unity and equal standing of believers in Christ.

When this verse is rightly understood, it leads to right application. We treat every soul as equally valued before God. We reject prejudice, spiritual superiority, and partiality. We uphold the unity of believers in Christ without forcing the verse to say more than it says.

Truth must be understood correctly before it can be lived correctly. When Scripture is rightly interpreted, it gives safe direction for doctrine, worship, conduct, and daily life.

THE BEREAN STANDARD

“These were more noble than those in Thessalonica, in that they received the word with all readiness of mind, and searched the scriptures daily, whether those things were so.” —Acts 17:11



The Bereans provide the biblical pattern for how truth must be received. They listened to Paul’s teaching respectfully and did not blindly reject what they heard out of prejudice, even if it contradicted their prior beliefs. Yet they did not carelessly accept it without

verification either. They listened with an open, ready mind, followed it up with daily study, and measured everything they heard against the Word of God itself.

The child of God should approach Bible study with one purpose: to find out what God has spoken, not to defend an opinion, prove a tradition, or win an argument. When

Scripture is read without bias, it exposes long-held misconceptions. Our desire and purpose must be to know and understand pure, unadulterated truth. When every child of God handles Scripture with this level of honesty, truth is preserved within the church, error is exposed and avoided, and lives are genuinely transformed to please God.

A minister should study and preach so diligently and accurately that when people study the Bible for themselves, the message agrees with what they find in Scripture. The Word of God is not ours to bend, but ours to believe, obey, and proclaim. The text of Scripture must be handled so plainly and honestly that the most diligent searcher is convinced by the Word itself—not by human eloquence, personality, or church dogma.

Let us not fear what others say or do when we are honest enough to search the Word, careful enough to rightly divide it, and courageous enough to stand on what God has spoken.

Contact

The Gospel Truth
P.O. Box 2042
Nixa, MO 65714
USA

Email:
editor@thegospeltruth.org

HOLINESS UNTO THE LORD



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WEBSITE



CORE PRINCIPLES OF BIBLICAL INTERPRETATION

- 1 *Scripture Has One Intended Meaning*
- 2 *Context Determines Meaning*
- 3 *Historical and Cultural Context Must Be Considered*
- 4 *Genre Governs Interpretation*
- 5 *Language Must Be Understood in Its Normal Sense*
- 6 *Scripture Interprets Scripture*
- 7 *Clear Scripture Governs Obscure or Symbolic Scripture*
- 8 *Biblical Words Must Be Understood According to Their Original Usage*
- 9 *Interpretation Must Be Distinguished from Application*
- 10 *Right Interpretation Leads to Right Application*