

Faith-Colored Lenses
Seven Essential Principles for Christian Interpretation
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Objective interpretation is very hard to achieve, especially when you approach the Bible as a believing Christian. We do not approach the Bible to tear it apart or to examine it. We believe that God breathed every word of it into the hearts of its writers. In our methods we are objective; but in our purpose for studying we are subjective.

We approach the Bible as a revelation of God and a faith-building book. The lenses in glasses present us with our view. The lenses block our ability to see the text without a theological bias. We use non-negotiable interpretation principles that subjectively approach the data.

Context Is King

Reading any passage, chapter or book in the Bible requires understanding the context. There are different types of contexts that we must observe. First, we must discover the historical context.. What was happening at this time? What was this writer's world like? Do they use historical details refine the meaning? In reading the prophets, knowing the current King and key events in Israel's history bring deeper understanding of the message.

The next type of context we observe is literary context. We must understand what genre it is. Is it prophecy? Is it poetry? Is it legal code (i.e. the end of Exodus and Leviticus) knows was active when you know something really well in your mind you don't have to know chapter verse in this quote? Is it a narrative? This matters greatly to us because we react to an emotional poem differently than laws. Poetry strikes an emotional chord while narratives teach wisdom through example.

The next context is the book context. Where does the book fit within the Bible's grand scheme? For instance, Paul's letters often have a three-pronged approach. He begins by talking about the current situation. In the middle he explains the way things should be. Finally Paul explains how to get there. Most of his letters show the problem, the theological solution, and application. We must know where in the outline of the book our passage fits.

Finally, we must know the immediate context. What happens before and after the passage? Why did the writer choose this word? Why does this phrase fit here? Is this a theologically-loaded word? The arrangement of the word – phrase – sentence – paragraph – passage approach is critical to gaining insight into the author's intent and meaning. Without context, our passage

lacks original meaning. Without meaning, the eternal truth eludes us. Without the eternal truth, application is impossible.

Interwoven Testaments

The Old lays the foundation for the New; the New explains the Old. Without a firm understanding of the Old Testament, we cannot grasp Jesus as the Messiah, Jesus as the sacrificial lamb, or the feasts in the Gospels.

Without the New Testament complementing the Old Testament, we misunderstand the Messiah. We wonder how God's plan will be executed and accomplished. Much of the New Testament quotes or alludes to the Old Testament. Interpreting the old and new together enlightens our understanding and deepens its meaning.

Christological Interpretation

Christians continually search for Christ in each text. In the Old Testament he may be represented in foreshadows, like the sacrificial Lamb, the suffering servant of Isaiah, the kinsman Redeemer in Ruth. In the New Testament, everything after the Gospels looks back to Christ on the cross.

Every part of the Bible bears the marks of Jesus. Christians specifically look for Christ. Jesus taught this himself. He taught us to view the entirety of the Scriptures in light of his birth, ministry, death, burial and resurrection. In Luke 24:44 Jesus explicitly says that everything written about him must be fulfilled from Moses (Torah), the Prophets, and the Psalms. These three sections compose the Old Testament (Hebrew Scriptures).

As we follow Jesus we look for him in each section of Scripture. We see the Prophet greater than Moses. We eagerly await the Messiah the prophets envisioned and proclaimed. Jesus is to us the Victor and Hero of the Scriptures. We study them to find him.

Grammatical/Historical Approach

Although several approaches may be used to interpret Scripture, most Christians use the grammatical/historical method. To get to the root of the text and understand the authors original intent we study history, archaeology, language, culture and any helpful resource to gain insight into the original author and audience to apply it to our lives.

Subjective Analysis

Christians approach the Bible as a faith book. Because we understand it to be inspired by God through the hands of humans we approach it studying each word. We are not attempting to deconstruct the passage, to rip it apart and correct it, but to find the meaning of the text so that we might worship God. As such, we are subjective in that we have faith-colored lenses that ask

different questions than others. We are subjective in our purpose for studying the word but objective in our study method.

Divine/Human Inspiration

Christians approach the Bible differently because they believe in the inspiration of Scripture. Although completely outlining how God breathed the Bible into existence, we understand on a very basic level that God used human beings to establish his words through their perspective by the guidance of the Holy Spirit. Because of this belief when we approach the Bible, we see it as God's words to us. We hang on every word and phrase of the text listening for the Holy Spirit to reveal to us both its original meaning and its application for today.

Revelatory Approach

The Bible is laid out as a continual historical line of revelation from God to people. We learn more about God and his attributes as we continue to read from cover to cover. We know more about God in the New Testament than we do in the Old Testament. This revelatory device of writing requires interpreters to know what part of revelation the text fits. We are concerned with salvation history, the timeline through which God reveals his plan of redemption of the human race. We search the Scriptures to understand how God has saved humanity throughout human history.