

THE INTERPRETER AND THE GOAL OF INTERPRETATION

1.1 WHO IS QUALIFIED TO BE A BIBLICAL INTERPRETER?

- A CHILD OF GOD

But to all who believed him and accepted him, he gave the right to become children of God (John 1:12 NLT).

- ABSOLUTE FAITH IN GOD

And it is impossible to please God without faith. Anyone who wants to come to him must believe that God exists and that he rewards those who sincerely seek him (Heb 11:6 NLT).

- OBEDIENT CHILD

Not everyone who calls out to me, 'Lord! Lord!' will enter the Kingdom of Heaven. Only those who actually do the will of my Father in heaven will enter (Matt 7:21 NLT).

- SPIRITUAL EMPOWERMENT

But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes upon you. And you will be my witnesses, telling people about me everywhere-- in Jerusalem, throughout Judea, in Samaria, and to the ends of the earth" (Acts 1:8 NLT).

- BELIEF THAT THE BIBLE IS GOD'S MESSAGE FOR HIS CHILDREN

All Scripture is inspired by God and is useful to teach us what is true and to make us realize what is wrong in our lives. It corrects us when we are wrong and teaches us to do what is right (2Tim 3:16 NLT).

1.2 WHO IS UNQUALIFIED TO INTERPRET THE BIBLE?

- Whoever does not meet the 5 criteria above.
- One should never listen or read the works of anyone, no matter how highly educated, who claims to know the Bible and or can interpret it but denies the existence of God and or that God inspired it.

Now we have received not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit that is from God, so that we may understand the gifts bestowed on us by God. And we speak of these things in words not taught by human wisdom but taught by the Spirit, interpreting spiritual things to those who are spiritual. Those who are unspiritual do not receive the gifts of God's

Spirit, for they are foolishness to them, and they are unable to understand them because they are spiritually discerned (1Cor 2:12-14 NLT).

2.0 DEGREES OF PROFICIENCY IN BIBLICAL INTERPRETATION

- An uneducated follower of Christ but who has all the qualifications listed in 1.1 can comprehend the central truths from the Bible. She can live a victorious Christian life by applying those central truths in her daily life.
- A follower of Christ with say a secondary school (high school) education who is willing to study the Bible using tools like commentaries, concordances and Bible dictionaries can understand most passages of the Bible.
- A follower of Christ who has seminary training in biblical studies, biblical languages, history and theology can explain virtually the meaning of almost all verses of Scripture.
- A follower of Christ with advanced training in biblical languages, theology, History, Geography and Archeology can translate the original Hebrew, Greek or Aramaic texts into English or other modern languages. Only such a scholar has the specialized skills to shed light on both biblical and non-biblical texts of the ancient times, write commentaries and prepare concordances and dictionaries.

3.0 PRESUPPOSITIONS

Every person reads a biblical text with a set of assumptions. If one is indeed a follower of Christ, he should have the following presuppositions or underlying assumptions or preconceived ideas in order to make an accurate interpretation of a biblical text:

- The Bible is a Spirit-word document (i.e., the Bible is divinely inspired).
- The Bible is the only authority for followers of Christ.
- The Holy Spirit guided the compilations, translations and selection of books that formed the Canon.
- No Scripture is of private interpretation (A faithful interpretation requires utilization of correct interpretative techniques or methods).
- God's word from Genesis to Revelation is in agreement. Therefore, any interpretation that interjects a contrariness is false. It must be rejected because God is not an Author of confusion.

4.0 PREUNDERSTANDINGS

Interpreters bring their preunderstandings to the task of hermeneutics. Preunderstanding "may be defined as a body of assumptions and attitudes which a person brings to the perception or interpretation of reality or any aspect of it."¹

¹ Klien, *Introduction to Biblical Interpretation*, 227.

- Meaning of text: An interpreter's preunderstandings do not determine the meaning of the text; but they could colour it.
- Informational: The first time you read the Bible, you had information that coloured how you understood the text.
- Attitudinal: You had biases or prejudices or predispositions before you read your first biblical text.
- Those baggage of preunderstandings (education, family background, culture, church tradition, etc) can be an asset if you are aware of your biases.

Don't copy the behavior and customs of this world, but let God transform you into a new person by changing the way you think. Then you will learn to know God's will for you, which is good and pleasing and perfect (Rom 12:2 NLT)

- Our behaviour before coming to the Lord were like those who have not yet believed.
- Even after we became Christians, because we have been exposed to teachings by our churches and denominations, we have prejudices that could hinder us from making an accurate interpretation of a biblical text.
- Some of those teachings in our churches and denominations have inbuilt prejudices. Otherwise, we wouldn't have so many churches and denominations.
- An interpreter who wants to understand the meaning of a text must be willing to jettison those preunderstandings that are in conflict with texts of the Scriptures.

4.1 THE ROLE OF PREUNDERSTANDINGS IN INTERPRETATION

- Preunderstanding can be an asset. It is an asset if you keep an open mind and allow the text to speak to you with the aid of the Holy Spirit. It is an asset if you are seeking to know the meaning of the text and not to prove a point of view you hold based on church or denominational affiliation.
- Preunderstanding can a liability. It is a liability if you have a closed mind--you inject your biases or prejudices into the text. In effect, you are working from the answer to the question. You have already decided. You just want to use the text to prove your point of view.
- Because of inbuilt biases, I do not recommend Bible schools or denominational seminaries for anyone whose desire is to interpret biblical texts accurately. They all have points of view (points of view that often lead to closed minds) that could mislead a sincere seeker of meaning.
- I also do not encourage anyone to go to churches where the pastor or general overseer is controlling. He knows it all and forbids his members from reading Bible commentaries and using concordances to search out meaning for themselves. No one knows it all except the Holy Spirit.

5.0 THE HERMENEUTICAL SPIRAL

Hermeneutic spiral defines the continuous process of interactions of a biblical text with our presup understandings. The more the interaction, the more the increase of our understanding of a text.

- You gain more and more understanding of a text the more you interact with that text with the aid of the Holy Spirit (2Tim 2:15; Josh 1:8).
- With more understanding you are able to distinguish what God meant in the text not just in the context of that generation that first heard the message but also what it means for your own generation.
- You will find yourself jettisoning those customs and behaviours of the world and even the biases and wrong teachings you have been hearing in your church and or which you may have even taught others.

6.0 OUR GOAL IN INTERPRETATION SHOULD BE:

- Understand meaning in the context of the first hearers
- Re-contextualize (bring that meaning to our present context) in order to accurately explain that text to our generation.

7.0 ASSIGNMENT

1. Can you spot the differences in the translations?
2. Do they affect your understanding of the meaning of those verses?

A) But as it is written: "Eye has not seen, nor ear heard, Nor have entered into the heart of man The things which God has prepared for those who love Him." 10 But God has revealed them to us through His Spirit. For the Spirit searches all things, yes, the deep things of God.11 For what man knows the things of a man except the spirit of the man which is in him? Even so no one knows the things of God except the Spirit of God. 12 Now we have received, not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit who is from God, that we might know the things that have been freely given to us by God. 13 These things we also speak, not in words which man's wisdom teaches but which the Holy Spirit teaches, comparing spiritual things with spiritual.14 But the natural man does not receive the things of the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him; nor can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned. 15 But he who is spiritual judges all things, yet he himself is rightly judged by no one. 16 For "who has known the mind of the LORD that he may instruct Him?" But we have the mind of Christ (1Cor 2:9-1 NKJV).

B) But, as it is written, "What no eye has seen, nor ear heard, nor the human heart conceived, what God has prepared for those who love him"-- 10 these things God has revealed to us through the Spirit; for the Spirit searches everything, even the depths of God. 11 For what human being knows what is truly human except the human spirit that is within? So also no one comprehends what is truly God's except the Spirit of God. 12 Now we have received not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit that is from God, so that we may understand the gifts bestowed on us by God. 13 And we speak of these things in words not taught by human wisdom but taught by the Spirit, interpreting spiritual things to those who are spiritual. 14 Those who are unspiritual do not receive the gifts of God's Spirit, for they are foolishness to them, and they are unable to understand them because they are spiritually discerned. 15 Those who are spiritual discern all things, and they are themselves subject to no one else's scrutiny. 16 "For who has known the mind of the Lord so as to instruct him?" But we have the mind of Christ (1Cor 2:9-16 NRSV).

C) That is what the Scriptures mean when they say, "No eye has seen, no ear has heard, and no mind has imagined what God has prepared for those who love him."10 But it was to us that God revealed these things by his Spirit. For his Spirit searches out everything and shows us God's deep secrets. 11 No one can know a person's thoughts except that person's own spirit, and no one can know God's thoughts except God's own Spirit.12 And we have received God's Spirit (not the world's spirit), so we can know the wonderful things God has freely given us. 13 When we tell you these things, we do not use words that come from human wisdom. Instead, we speak words given to us by the Spirit, using the Spirit's words to explain spiritual truths. 14 But people who aren't spiritual can't receive these truths from God's Spirit. It all sounds foolish to them and they can't understand it, for only those who are spiritual can understand what the Spirit means. 15 Those who are spiritual can evaluate all things, but they themselves cannot be evaluated by others. 16 For, "Who can know the LORD's thoughts? Who knows enough to teach him?" But we understand these things, for we have the mind of Christ (1Cor 2:9-1 NLT).

D) However, as it is written: "No eye has seen, no ear has heard, no mind has conceived what God has prepared for those who love him"-- 10 but God has revealed it to us by his Spirit. The Spirit searches all things, even the deep things of God. 11 For who among men knows the thoughts of a man except the man's spirit within him? In the same way no one knows the thoughts of God except the Spirit of God. 12 We have not received the spirit of the world but the Spirit who is from God, that we may understand what God has freely given us. 13 This is what we speak, not in words taught us by human wisdom but in words taught by the Spirit, expressing spiritual truths in spiritual words. 14 The man without the Spirit does not accept the things that come from the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him, and he cannot understand them,

because they are spiritually discerned. 15 The spiritual man makes judgments about all things, but he himself is not subject to any man's judgment: 16 "For who has known the mind of the Lord that he may instruct him?" But we have the mind of Christ (1Cor 2:9-16 NIV).