

Interpretation III – Getting Good At Deciding What The Text Meant

How to Study the Bible Like a Pro – Week 6

Introduction

- Key question
 - Have you ever been puzzled trying to figure out what a text meant? Or
 - Have you ever wrestled between two different ideas of what a text meant and wondered, “How do I know if “a” or “b” is right?”
- Decision-making
 - Rarely do most of us take time to analyze how we make decisions, we just make them. However, there is a _____ we all go through (which doesn’t have to be the same process for all of us) whenever we make a decision, we just do it intuitively/by auto-pilot.
 - For example, let’s say it’s Tuesday afternoon at 4:00 p.m. and you have ten things left on your to do list for the day, how do you decide which of the ten to do next? What goes on in your brain to make that choice?

“In the same way, faith by itself, if it is not accompanied by action, is dead.” James 2:17

- The same thing happens whenever you’re interpreting anything (conversation, article, book, etc.).
 - For example, let’s say you’re at church and you spot someone who doesn’t like you talking with one of your good friends. How would you interpret that conversation?
- Interpretation is the process we use to make decisions about what something _____ (and, in the case of biblical interpretation, what something meant)
 1. It is a process
 2. It is about making decisions
 3. It’s about meaning
- What’s important to realize about those three parts of the process of interpretation is that it’s possible to be good, great, poor, average or terrible at each or all of them. However, your goal (and mine) should be to become great at all three in order that we can become really good at _____ what something means (or meant).

“Don’t you know that you yourselves are God’s temple and that God’s Spirit dwells in your midst? If anyone destroys God’s temple, God will destroy that person; for God’s temple is sacred, and you together are that temple.” 1. Cor. 3:16-17

- A few quick reminders
 1. Interpretation = what the text meant (to the original audience)
 2. Application = what the text _____ today (for you or others)
 3. The goal in accurate interpretation isn’t to be a certain knower but a responsible interpreter. Certainty is an illusion. _____ is a reality.
 4. The hermeneutical spiral should always remind you to be _____
 5. There are four steps to studying the Bible like a pro (ORIA)
 - Observation (“What do I see?”)
 - Research (“What could this mean?”)
 - Interpretation (“What did it mean?”)
 - Application (“What does this mean for me?”)
 6. The Bible is an _____ document, not a systematic theology

7. _____ reigns as king in interpretation (the first of 14 principles of interpretation we discussed in week two)
8. Genre can significantly influence the meaning of a text
9. We all have scotomas (blind spots) that make it hard for us to both see and observe
10. _____ is the enemy of observation
11. The best kept secret of the pros is _____
12. Without doing _____, you reduce your chances of making a good responsible interpretive decision about a text

I. Master The Process of Good Solid Responsible Interpretive Work

1. Re-read the text

- a. Good interpretation always _____ with reading the text _____, observing what it actually says (not what we think or want it to say)
- b. Review your observations (circles, underlines, boxes, questions, lines, etc.)
- c. Who? What? When? Where? Why? How?
- d. What's the literary _____?

"By the grace God has given me, I laid a foundation as a wise builder, and someone else is building on it. But each one should build with care. For no one can lay any foundation other than the one already laid, which is Jesus Christ. If anyone builds on this foundation using gold, silver, costly stones, wood, hay or straw, their work will be shown for what it is, because the Day will bring it to light. It will be revealed with fire, and the fire will test the quality of each person's work. If what has been built survives, the builder will receive a reward. If it is burned up, the builder will suffer loss but yet will be saved – even though only as one escaping through the flames." 1 Cor. 3:10-15

"Do not deceive yourselves. If any of you think you are wise by the standards of this age, you should become "fools" so that you may become wise. For the wisdom of this world is foolishness in God's sight. As it is written: "He catches the wise in their craftiness"; and again, "The Lord knows that the thoughts of the wise are futile." So then, no more boasting about human leaders! All things are yours, whether Paul or Apollos or Cephas or the world or life or death or the present or the future – all are yours, and you are of Christ, and Christ is of God." 1 Cor. 3:18-23

- e. What's the genre?
- f. What's the tentative argument being made/outline?
- g. What _____ did I need to find answers to?

2. Review your research

- a. What did I learn from my research? Note: especially, what you've written on your observation sheet (meaning your handwritten version of the text if you're following my process)
- b. What answers did I uncover?
- c. Which _____ am I still uncertain about?
- d. What did the commentator say that I was unaware of?

"And so it was with me, brothers and sisters. When I came to you, I did not come with eloquence or human wisdom as I proclaimed to you the testimony about God." 1. Cor. 2:1

- e. What's the _____ and cultural background?
- f. Are there any geographical markers that matter?
- g. What words did I discover definitions for?

h. What does the grammar say?

“Do not conform to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God’s will is – his good, pleasing and perfect will.” Rom. 12:2

i. What do other _____ say that are relevant to this one?

3. Make an initial decision (as to what you think the author meant)

a. The key question you want to ask and answer is,

- i. “What do I think this author _____ when he said this to this group of people?”
- ii. Remember, interpretation is always about what the text meant, not what it means to you today.

b. Decision-making always requires _____. In this case, use your interpretation principles (like, “A text can’t mean what it never meant” or “Biblical examples are only authoritative when there’s a command attached to them,” or “Interpret your experience in light of scripture, not the reverse,” etc.) to help you process through what the text might have meant.

- i. Note: One of your goals should be to internalize the principles in this course so they’re second nature

c. Make sure your decision follows the _____ being made

- i. Authors always write for a purpose/reason.
- ii. Make sure your interpretation fits with the argument they’re making

d. _____ (Note: the following are questions/steps for a normal decision-making process)

- i. What am I trying to decide?
- ii. What are the criteria?
- iii. What are the facts/data?
- iv. Is there something _____?
- v. Do I need more information?
- vi. What are the _____?
- vii. What are the implications of making this decision? Note: This could be where you make a pro/con list
- viii. What’s the risk/reward and/or _____ analysis?
- ix. What’s the best/most probable decision I can make?

“Then Jesus entered a house, and again a crowd gathered, so that he and his disciples were not even able to eat. When his family heard about this, they went to take charge of him, for they said, “He is out of his mind.” And the teachers of the law who came down from Jerusalem said, “He is possessed by Beelzebul! By the prince of demons he is driving out demons.”

So Jesus called them over to him and began to speak to them in parables: “How can Satan drive out Satan? If a kingdom is divided against itself, that kingdom cannot stand. If a house is divided against itself, that house cannot stand. And if Satan opposes himself and

is divided, he cannot stand; his end has come. In fact, no one can enter a strong man's house without first tying him up. Then he can plunder the strong man's house. Truly I tell you, people can be forgiven all their sins and every slander they utter, but whoever blasphemes against the Holy Spirit will never be forgiven; they are guilty of an eternal sin."

He said this because they were saying, "He has an impure spirit." Mark 3: 20-30

4. Check your initial decision

- a. Am I being _____ with the text and letting it speak or am I infusing it with the meaning I want it to have? This is the difference between exegesis and eisegesis.
- b. Does this fit with the literary context?
- c. Does this fit with the _____ I know for this genre and/or figure of speech?
- d. Does this fit with the _____ and cultural context?
- e. Does this fit with the progress of theology up to this point?
- f. Does this fit with what else this author has said?
- g. How does this fit with other passages that address this same issue?
- h. How does this fit with everything else I know about the Bible and _____?

5. Make your final decision

- a. As a _____ interpreter (not a certain one)
- b. Remain humble and open to other ideas (because you could be wrong)
- c. Yet feel confident to say, "This is what the Word of God says ..."

II. Observe the Process in Real Time – 1 Peter 3:1-7

1. *"Wives, in the same way submit yourselves to your own husbands so that, if any of them do not believe the word, they may be won over without words by the behavior of their wives,*
2. *when they see the purity and reverence of your lives.*
3. *Your beauty should not come from outward adornment, such as elaborate hairstyles and the wearing of gold jewelry or fine clothes.*
4. *Rather, it should be that of your inner self, the unfading beauty of a gentle and quiet spirit, which is of great worth in God's sight.*
5. *For this is the way the holy women of the past who put their hope in God used to adorn themselves. They submitted themselves to their own husbands,*
6. *like Sarah, who obeyed Abraham and called him her lord. You are her daughters if you do what is right and do not give way to fear.*
7. *Husbands, in the same way be considerate as you live with your wives, and treat them with respect as the weaker partner and as heirs with you of the gracious gift of life, so that nothing will hinder your prayers."*

Making It Real

1. Think through the process of how you make decisions. Would you add or subtract or change the wording on the process we discussed today?
2. How would you evaluate yourself as an interpreter on a scale of 1-10 (high)? _____ Why?
3. Where do you struggle whenever you're trying to interpret a text?
4. What do you think would make you a better interpreter of the biblical text?
5. Take the remainder of chapter 3 (1 Peter 3:8-22) and work through the process so far (observation, research and interpretation) as you prepare for next week's study.
6. With whom will you share what you learned from this session in the next 48-72 hours?

Who: _____ When: _____

"Not many of you should become teachers, my fellow believers, because you know that we who teach will be judged more strictly." James 3:1