

EXEGESIS 1—the first principles of biblical interpretation

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The first principle of biblical exegesis and interpretation is that a text of the Bible can never mean what it never meant to its original audience. This is the principle of the **author's intended purpose** in communicating to his original audience in their original socio-cultural context. Any inherent meaning for us contained therein must be rooted in and based on the foundation of what the original author is saying to the original audience. Do not ask, "What does this text mean to me?" until you have asked and faithfully ascertained, "What does this text mean?" In order for us to properly determine what a passage of Scripture means to us, we must first have a sufficient understanding of what it meant to them.

The second and third principles of biblical exegesis are (2) **Scripture interprets Scripture** and that (3) out of the mouth of **two or three witnesses** is every word established. By the second one I mean that I generally depend on a doctrine being taught in at least two places in Scripture for me to think of it as essential. For example, 1 Corinthians 11 is the only place the head covering is taught. You would think that if this was essential it would be mentioned in more than one place in all of our 66 books and 40 authors? However, the Word itself says that "out of the mouth of two or three witnesses every word shall be established."

A fourth principle is about how God teaches us is found in Isaiah 28:9-10.

"Whom will he teach knowledge?
And whom will he make to understand the message?
Those just weaned from milk?
Those just drawn from the breasts?

For precept must be upon precept, precept upon precept,
Line upon line, line upon line,
Here a little, there a little."

A fifth principle is the principle of **foundations**. This one is from my head and is not usually taught. There is a related principle which is commonly taught, and that is the principle of "first mentions" The foundations principle is the that first time something is mentioned in Scripture, it is being emphasized in such a way that God is really trying to get our attention. Now to me, this implies that there are foundations in the Bible, such as Genesis chapters 1 through 11 and how those chapters lay down foundational knowledge for everything else in the Bible that follows, and how the Old Testament, although not all parts are now binding on us, all parts are scripture and do provide a foundation for the law of Christ in the New Testament and for knowing the heart of God who is the one revealed in Jesus Christ. 2nd Timothy 3:16 states that all Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for doctrine, reproof,

rebuke, instruction in righteousness, equipping the man of God for every good work and making us complete.

I would also add that everything else that is essential and really central and foundational to the Christian faith follows these principles of being taught in more than one place in the Bible or by more than one person.

However, some things that are not really central (the gospel, deity of Christ, new birth, etc.) are taught follow the second "line upon line, precept upon precept" principle. For example, praying in the Holy Spirit/praying in tongues. We are admonished in several places to pray in the holy Spirit, but only Paul in 1st Corinthians 14 tells us that that refers to praying in an unknown tongue, at the hearing of which our minds are unfruitful but our spirits are edified. A few things about interpretation, first this is not a command. The command is repeated several times in different places. This passage provides more information about the command that builds upon lines and precepts found elsewhere throughout the New Testament, something that is a very common theme--tongues, not something that is nowhere else mentioned such as wearing a head covering. Secondly, Paul's teaching in 1st Corinthians 14 on tongues is very clear, whereas the teaching on the head covering in 1st Corinthians 11 is obscure, and the latter is followed by a qualifier "we have no such custom nor the Churches of God," something completely lacking in 1st Corinthians 14.

So, this brings me to a second principle after "Scripture interprets Scripture," and that is that clear scriptural passages shed light on (or illuminate) obscure passages, not the other way around.

It's a mistake to take something difficult to understand in Scripture and make that a lens or rubric through which to explain other passages which appear to be crystal clear by just reading it. Rather, we know and familiarize ourselves with the clear teachings of scripture and with the messages that benefit from multiple attestation, and we thereby you better understand and make sense out of passages that are more difficult to understand, knowing both the entire message of the scriptures, including the message and theme of that particular Testament and that particular book of the Bible no, and knowing that all scripture is coherent and cohesive. It's does not contradict itself, but it all compliments the overall, broader message and all agrees together and supports each other.

So clear passages illuminate obscure ones. Those two principles are why I looked to other passages of Scripture first to shed light on our passage in 1st Corinthians 11.