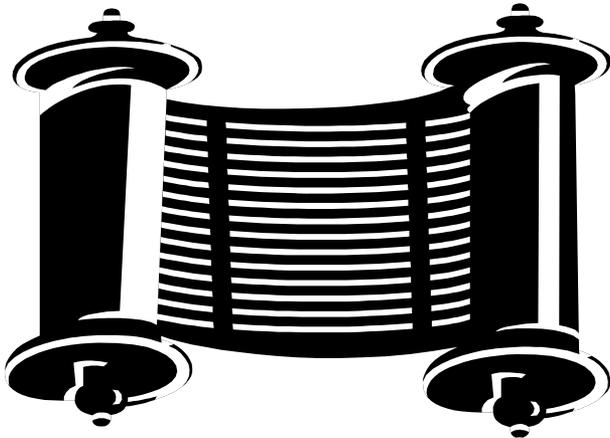


# KNOWING SCRIPTURE



*I shall give thanks to Thee with uprightness of heart, when I learn Thy righteous judgments. I shall keep Thy statutes; do not forsake me utterly! How can a young man keep his way pure? By keeping it according to Thy word. With all my heart I have sought Thee; do not let me wander from Thy commandments. Thy word I have treasured in my heart, that I may not sin against Thee. Blessed art Thou, O LORD; teach me Thy statutes.*  
Psalm 119:7-12 (NAS)

Liberty Christian Church  
lccut.org

Information contained in these notes is based on the video series *KNOWING SCRIPTURE* by R. C. Sproul, and can be studied in conjunction with the videos. However, while the booklet does follow the video series I have in various places added my own comments and Bible references.

The book and video series *Knowing Scripture* by R. C. Sproul can be obtained through Ligonier Ministries at their website: [ligonier.org](http://ligonier.org)

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Study to show thyself  
approved unto God, a  
workman that needeth not to  
be ashamed, rightly dividing  
the word of truth. But shun  
profane and vain babblings:  
for they will increase unto  
more ungodliness.

2 Timothy 2:15-16

# KNOWING SCRIPTURE

## Volume 1

### Section 1

#### Why Study The Bible?

Consider the significant difference between owning, reading, and studying the Bible.

Owning—Possession.

Reading—Peering.

Studying—Personal diligence as one seeks the meaning of Scripture.

**Two primary reasons given for why people don't study the Bible:**

1. The Bible is not relevant.
2. The Bible is too difficult.

Arguments given to support these two excuses:

1. Not Relevant
  - a. Non-scientific
  - b. Non-technical
  - c. Too old
2. Too Difficult
  - a. Unclear

Answers pertaining to the two reasons given for why people do not study Scripture.

- Failure to properly interpret the Bible.
- The Perspicuity of Scripture.

The word “**Perspicuity**” was used by the reformers to describe the clarity of the Bible.

As it pertains to the Bible **Perspicuity** is defined as: The clarity of Scripture regarding the essentials.

In one sense it is a self defeating act of foolishness for those who profess to believe in God to conclude that the Bible is not relevant and unclear. The Bible is the Word of God (2 Timothy 3:16). Can not the Almighty God of creation speak in His Word in such a way that it is always relevant to all people of all times? What element of creation constrains God that He cannot speak in His Word in such a way that it is always relevant to all people of all times? Is He bound by time, technology or culture? Does the Holy Spirit of God Who authored the written Word of God (2 Peter 1:20-21) and Who is the Master Teacher (John 14:26; 1 Corinthians 2:10-13; 1 John 2:27) lack the ability to speak clearly enough so that His students understand and learn from His words? Is there anything too difficult for God?

Furthermore, since God holds His people accountable to His Word (2 Timothy 2:15 and many other texts) it also stands to reason that His Word is relevant and clear.

However, we do not have to rely merely on reason to know the Bible is not obscure. God says His Word is a lamp to our feet and a light to our path (Ps. 119:105) and its teaching is light (Pr. 6:23). He says it is not crooked or perverted but straightforward (Pr. 8:8-9). God’s Word is perfect and restores the soul. It is sure and makes wise the simple. The Word is right and rejoices the heart and pure, enlightening the eyes (Ps. 19:7-8). God’s Word is profitable to equip His people for every good work (2 Tim. 3:16-17).

## **Two Reasons Why We Study Scripture**

- **1. It is our duty** (Deut. 6:4-9; 29:29; 2 Timothy 2:15)
- **2. It is our privilege.**(John 10:10; 6:63, 68; Hebrews 4:12; Ps. 119:7-11)

## Section 2 Private Interpretation

The most common, two-word phrase used to dismiss Biblical truth is “**private interpretation**”.

What is most often meant by the phrase “private interpretation” when it is used today is, “Everyone has his or her own interpretation.”

Three additional ways this statement is commonly worded.

1. “Whatever it means to you is fine.”
2. “You see it one way. I and others see it another way.”
3. What works for me is true.

This kind of interpretation is known as **Subjectivism**. **Subjective interpretation does violence to the meaning of God’s Word because it ties the meaning of God’s Word to whoever is interpreting the Word.**

**Ultimately, this leads to the message of the Bible being shaped to fit the pride and prejudice of whoever is reading the Word.**

**Subjectively interpreting** the Bible results in:

1. The collapse of the authority of God’s Word—The Word has no jurisdiction.
2. Truth becoming relative—The Word has no meaning.
3. The Word of God being slain—The Word has no power.

**The first principle of private interpretation is: There is only one correct interpretation of any Biblical text, but there may be a**

multitude of applications, and the significance of a passage may be virtually beyond bounds.

**Truth is non-contradictory. God's Word is truth. Therefore God's Word is not contradictory.**

The problem with the following statement, "Contradiction is the hallmark of truth" is the fact that it presents truth as being unknowable, and exalts sin as an act of obedience while an individual pursues truth by contradicting God.

**An understanding of the definitions and differences of the following terms will assist in correctly interpreting Scripture.**

**Contradiction-**

A violation of the law of non-contradiction. It is impossible to resolve either by mortals or by God, either in this world or the next.

**Paradox-**

An apparent contradiction that under closer scrutiny yields resolution.

**Mystery-**

Something unknown to us now, but which may be revealed.

*"Private interpretation is not a principle upon which is to be established subjectivism or relativism. The right of private interpretation carries with it the responsibility of correct interpretation."* R. C. Sproul

**The right of private interpretation put interpretation into the hands of the people, but it did not give people the right to interpret Biblical text irresponsibly.**

**Private interpretation is the right to interpret the Bible individually. It is not the right to individual interpretations.**

Neither the perspicuity of Scripture nor the right to privately interpret Scripture negates the spiritual gift of teaching. Instead, Scripture affirms all three:

- Perspicuity of Scripture (Ps. 119:105; Pr. 6:23; 8:8-9)
- Privately Interpret Scripture (Acts 17:10-12; 2 Tim. 2:15; 3:16-17)
- Gift of teaching (Rm. 12:6-7; 1 Cor. 12:28; Eph. 4:11-13)

As a person studies the Bible he or she is to properly **exegete** the text. When a person exegetes Biblical text he or she is **drawing the meaning out of the text**. This is the opposite of **eisegesis** which is **reading meaning into the text**.

**Correct Interpretation- Exegesis**- Drawing meaning out of the text.

**Incorrect Interpretation- Eisegesis**- Reading meaning into the text.

### **Section 3** **The Science of Interpretation**

**This section examines foundational principles and concepts of the science of Biblical interpretation.**

When interpreting the Bible we are seeking **God's** mind-- what **He** was communicating to His people.

Scripture has **objective meaning** as opposed to **subjective meaning**. This significance makes all the difference in the world as to how one interprets the Bible. Those who see the Bible as having **objective meaning** study the Bible attempting to draw the meaning out of the text (**exegete**). Those who view the Bible as having **subjective meaning** study the Bible reading meaning into the text based on their own bias or desire (**eisegesis**).

If we take the view that the Bible has objective meaning then we need to look at interpreting the Bible as a science.

**The science of Biblical interpretation is Hermeneutics.**

“Hermeneutics is a science in that it can determine certain principles for discovering the meaning of a document, and in that these principles are not a mere list of rules but bear *organic* connection to each other. It is also an *art* as we previously indicated because principles or rules can never be applied mechanically but involve the skill (*technē*) of the interpreter.”<sup>1</sup>

Biblical **Hermeneutics** consists of at least three elements that should govern our attempts at interpreting the Scriptures. They are:

1. **Scientific Rules** “Grammar”
2. **Methods** “Historical”
3. **Principles** “Scripture interprets Scripture”

**Three common methods of hermeneutics.**

1. **Grammatico-Historical**
2. **Religious-Historical evolving**
3. **Existential**

- **Grammatico-Historical**

The **Grammatico-Historical** method is the **classical orthodox method of Biblical interpretation**. This method studies the **historical** situation in which the Bible was written. This involves the use of **grammar, syntax, language**, and other factors, in use at the time the documents were written. In his book, *Protestant Biblical Interpretation*, Bernard Ramm noted that, “Words and sentences occur in the context of a conversation, in the context of language, and in the context of a culture. Their meaning depends in a large part to these contexts in which they occur and without that

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<sup>1</sup> Bernard Ramm, Protestant Biblical Interpretation, (Baker Book House, Grand Rapids, MI.) 1970, p. 11.

context it is either difficult or impossible to know the meaning of the words or sentences.”<sup>2</sup> It is because the grammatical-historical or historical-grammatical hermeneutic takes into principle account the grammar and historical circumstances occurring at the time each book of the Bible was written that it is the classical orthodox method of biblical interpretation.

Studying **word meanings** of the first century before coming to an understanding of the original meaning of the text is also part of the **Grammatico-Historical** method.

Two reasons this method is considered the proper approach to Biblical interpretation is because it:

1. Seeks the **objective** meaning of the past.
2. Applies the meaning to the present day.

Thus it bridges the gap between the first and twentieth centuries.

**Two other methods mentioned are:**

- **Religious-Historical Method:** The premise of this method is that religion is evolutionary. It maintains that religion grows from simple to complex.
- **Existential Method:** This method is not concerned with history. The existential method is a vehicle of one’s own interpretation. **The meaning is not in the document but in the interpreter.**

These two methods lead to relativism which says there are no absolutes or abiding principles. Consequently, one ends up with a Jesus who goes through as many changes as the interpreters.

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<sup>2</sup> Bernard Ramm, Protestant Biblical Interpretation, (Baker Book House, Grand Rapids, MI.) 1970, p. 99.

## Section 4

### Literal Interpretation

The common misconception generated by the statement “We should interpret the Bible literally” is “We should interpret everything in the Bible in an absolute literal fashion.”

“**Sensus literalis**” is Latin for “literal sense”.

When Luther said we should come to the Bible and look for its **literal sense**, he meant we should look for its **plain sense**. This means we should interpret the Bible according to its **LITERARY FORMS**.

The fact that **the Bible is the inspired Word of God** does not eliminate the necessity of using human means to derive the meaning of the text. This is because the Biblical documents use **grammar, syntax, language**, and other factors. In the Bible a noun is a noun, a verb is a verb, a subject is a subject, and so on.

The phrase “**There is to be no spiritualistic interpretation to Scripture**” does not mean that we are not to be spiritual. Interpreting the Bible in a spiritualistic manner is a form of **subjectivism**. An example of this kind of interpretation is when a person acts on a verse upon which his or her finger lands when arbitrarily dropped onto the page (Lucky dipping). Thus, removing the verse from its context and then deriving its meaning from the circumstance which the individual is experiencing.

When the spiritualistic approach of interpreting Scripture is used it reduces the Bible to a book of magic. Using the Bible as a tool of magic is equivalent to using a Ouija board.

**The spiritual person on the other hand, compares Scripture with Scripture as he or she searches out the objective meaning of the text (1 Corinthians 2:13).**

**The plain sense of Scripture is the basis on which the Holy Spirit gives us a correct understanding and application of Biblical text.**

Before someone can interpret the Bible literally and accurately it is necessary to recognize the **literary forms** in which Scripture comes to us.

A few of those forms are poetry, historical narrative literature, didactic literature, wisdom literature, and apodictic literature.

**The disbelief of Scripture does not give a person the right to reinterpret the Bible!** This is a normal practice of cults that not only reinterpret Scripture, but in some cases even go so far as to provide their own translation.

*“The ideal of distorting the Bible by mistreating its literary form is a pitfall that is shared both by the liberal and by the conservative.... if we’re really going to interpret the Bible literally, we will be careful not to ignore the literary forms in which the Bible is written.”*

R.C. Sproul

“To interpret Scripture literally is not to be committed to a “wooden literal-ism,” nor to a “letterism,” nor to a neglect of the nuances that defy any “mechanical” understanding of language. Rather, it is to commit oneself to a starting point and that starting point is to understand a document the best one can in the context of the normal, usual, customary, tradition range of designation which includes “facit” understanding.”<sup>3</sup>

“How do we resolve the competition among the various allegorical schools of interpretation? There is really only one way:

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<sup>3</sup> Bernard Ramm, Protestant Biblical Interpretation, (Baker Book House, Grand Rapids, MI.) 1970, p. 121.

grant the prior right to literal interpretation of Scripture, and the right of literal interpretation to act as judge and umpire of any proposed allegorical or mystical interpretation of Scripture.”

“To rest one’s theology on the secondary strata of meanings is to invite interpretation by imagination. That which supplies the imagination with its content is unfortunately too often non-Biblical ideas or materials. The only sure way to know the meaning of Holy Scripture is to anchor interpretation in literal exegesis.”<sup>4</sup>

## **KNOWING SCRIPTURE**

### **Volume 2**

### **Section 5**

### **Literary Forms Part 1**

The following are literary forms that are used in the Bible.

**Phenomenological Language:** Descriptive of the way things appear to the naked eye.

Biblical example: The Sun rising and setting (Ps. 50:1; 113:3).

**Use of round numbers:** Rounding numbers.

Biblical example: The feeding of five-thousand (Matt. 14:13-21).

**Hyperbole:** Intentional exaggeration to make a point.

Biblical example: All Judea and the district around the Jordan was going out to John (Matthew 3:5).

### **Metaphor and Figurative Language**

Using figures of personification to illustrate a point.

Biblical example: The Father a farmer, Jesus a vine and disciples being branches (John 15:1-5).

**Anthropomorphic Language:** Describes God in human terms.

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<sup>4</sup> Bernard Ramm, Protestant Biblical Interpretation, (Baker Book House, Grand Rapids, MI.) 1970, p. 125.

Biblical example: God's hand, back, and face (Psalm 139:10; Exodus 33:23)

Then Moses said, "I pray Thee, show me Thy glory!" And He said, "I Myself will make all My goodness pass before you, and will proclaim the name of the LORD before you; and I will be gracious to whom I will be gracious, and will show compassion on whom I will show compassion." But He said, "You cannot see My face, for no man can see Me and live!" Then the LORD said, "Behold, there is a place by Me, and you shall stand there on the rock; and it will come about, while My glory is passing by, that I will put you in the cleft of the rock and cover you with My hand until I have passed by. "Then I will take My hand away and you shall see My back, but My face shall not be seen." Exodus 33:18-23 (NAS)

## **Section 6**

### **Literary Forms Part 2**

Additional literary forms:

**Anthropopathism:** Describes God as if He had human emotions.

Biblical example: Genesis 6:6 (sorrow); Exodus 20:5 (jealous); Psalm 77:9 (anger).

**Personification:** Use of personal forms of description for impersonal objects. Attributes human characteristics to inanimate things.

Biblical Example: Singing trees (Psalms 96:12).

**Parable:** Biblical method of illustrating a readily apparent spiritual truth or a moral point. Usually introduced as a parable.

Biblical example: Matthew 13:1-35

**Fable:** A literary form used to teach a moral lesson. Not necessarily Biblical.

Example: Aesop's fables

**Historical Prose:** Real historical events. Factual information.

Biblical example: Balaam and his donkey (Num. 22:22-35; 2Pet. 2:15-16).

**Four characteristics of Historical Narratives:**

1. The setting of real places, people, and time.
2. Conveyed by a prose style.
3. Presence of genealogies.
4. No obvious moral point.

**Section 7**  
**Reading The Bible Existentially**

The philosophical view of existentialism exalts the human experience. Those who would be characterized as being existential in their doctrine are properly considered to be subjective in their theology. As this video series has indicated, a subjective theology is an un-Biblical approach to knowing Scripture, and knowing God.

When R. C. Sproul says, “We ought to read the Bible existentially” he does so in the sense that we should read the Bible as people who are personally, passionately, and intimately involved in what we are reading.

We, as Believers should approach the Word of God as if it were addressed directly to us. We are to read it as if the letters were coming directly from God to us, for they are. However, we must remember that the meaning of Scripture is not based on our experience or the level of our involvement when we read it. The meaning is in the Word not in the reader. Our experience with the Word does not make God’s word more real, more alive or more applicable.

In addition to recognizing that the Word of God is addressed directly to us, we should also be aware of the reality of the lives of

the people of Scripture. They were real! They laughed and cried. They worked and played. They raised families and built empires. They sinned and they died. In short—they lived! In their human experience they were no different than people today.

Because the people of Scripture were real we should be careful:

- **Not to minimize the humanity of the persons of Scripture.**
- **Not to romanticize the persons of Scripture.**
- **Not to minimize their suffering and joy.**

While recognizing the reality of the lives of the people of Scripture, and experiencing the effective work of the living and powerful Word of God in our own lives, it is imperative to remember:

- **The Word of God is true regardless of our experience.**
- **Never interpret the Bible in the light of our experience.**

The video uses the phrase “read between the lines” in the sense that we are to recognize the humanity of the people of Scripture. **As already discussed we should properly exegete the text (draw out the meaning as opposed to reading meaning into the text) in our study of the Word.**

In the light of the problems surrounding existentialism it could be said, **“We are to read the Bible realistically.”**

## Section 8

### The Historical Narrative & Didactic Literature

One of the primary rules for interpreting the **historical narrative** literature of Scripture is:

1. **Historical narrative** literature must be interpreted by the **didactic** literature.
2. **Didactic literature** is teaching literature. The purpose of **didactic literature** is to teach.

The terms-- **historical narrative** and **didactic** are not absolute. Some Historical narratives of Scripture contain didactic literature (The Gospels). Some didactic portions of Scripture contain historical narratives (Galatians).

The following table gives examples of **historical narrative** literature and **didactic** literature.

<b>Historical</b>	<b>Didactic</b>
Genesis	Leviticus
Exodus	Romans
1 & 2 Kings	1 & 2 Corinthians
Matthew	James
John	1, 2, 3, John
Acts	Jude

A fundamental rule to remember when interpreting the Bible:

**The Bible interprets the Bible.**

In other words:

**The Holy Spirit is His own Interpreter.**

2 Timothy 3:16-17

*All scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness: That the man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works.*

<b>Historical Narrative</b>	<b>Didactic Literature</b>
Gospels/Acts	Epistles
Inspired Record	Inspired Explanation

**KNOWING SCRIPTURE**  
**Volume 3**  
**Section 9**  
**The Explicit and the Implicit**

The **Explicit** is what the Scripture says. It is forthright.

The **Implicit** is what the Scripture implies.

The rule of interpretation regarding the **explicit** and the **implicit** is that:

**The implicit is to be interpreted by the explicit.**

**OR**

**The difficult is to be interpreted in the light of what is plain and clear.**

The implicit interpretation becomes a problem when it conflicts with the explicit. Doctrines should not be based on implicit interpretations.

**Our implications must be measured by and made subordinate to what the Scriptures explicitly teach.**

**When interpreting Scripture we need to be very careful of words.**

When interpreting **words**, they must be interpreted in the light of the **immediate context**, and in the light of **the whole context** of Scripture.

**Every particular passage of Scripture must be measured and interpreted against the whole of Scripture.**

**The reason for this is so that we will not be guilty of setting one part of Scripture over against another part of Scripture.**

## **Section 10 Parallelisms (Literary Parallelism)**

**Parallelisms are verses of Scripture that are set in close proximity to each other in some form of parallel fashion.**

Three common literary parallelisms that occur in Scripture.

### **Synonymous Parallelism**

**A case in the text where two lines (stanzas or verses) say the same idea but in slightly different ways or forms of speech.**

## **Antithetical Parallelism**

(Contrasting) Two lines contrast one idea with another.

## **Synthetic Parallelism**

Statements building upon one another (rising crescendo).

When we see parallelisms we should be aware that we are looking at **poetry**.

## **Laws & Proverbs**

**The first rule of interpreting Biblical laws, precepts, and principles is to remember to distinguish between different kinds of laws in the Bible.**

Three types of **precepts** or **principles** in the Bible with their style or the form in which they are presented in the Bible are:

### **Casuistic Law (case law)**

Precedent

“If this, then this.” A model or guideline for practical judgments in the law court.

Biblical Example: Deuteronomy 17:1-8; 22:1-3

### **Apodictic Law**

Universal

Moral absolutes. Direct form of address-- “You shall” or “You shall not.”

Biblical Example: Exodus 20:1-17-- The Ten Commandments

### **Proverbs**

Principles

Practical wisdom. Principles that can serve you daily.

Biblical Example: Proverbs 26:4-5

## Section 11 Scripture and Culture

Understanding things written at a different time and in a different culture, then applying those things in our lives is referred to as **Transculture Communication**.

When interpreting Scripture it is important to remember the difference between what is a **principle** and what is **culture**.

A **Principle** is a: teaching, admonition, or precept that is transculture. It applies to all people in all places at all times.

**Culture** involves local customs for a certain people, in a certain place, at a certain time.

*“It would be a very serious offense against God to take a principle that He has set down, that He intends to be normative for Christians of all ages and all places, and simply dismiss it as a local custom, having no bearing on us today. To treat a principle of God as something of only having temporary significance is to do violence to the authority of our Lord; And yet, at the same time, to take something that was only meant to be of temporary custom and impose it upon all people, and every age, is to do violence to the people of God...”*

R. C. Sproul

## Section 12

### Principle versus Custom

Four guidelines R. C. Sproul gives for determining the difference between what is principle and what is custom.

#### 1. Look for apparent areas of custom in the Bible.

a. **Language:** The Bible was written in more than one language.

b. **Styles:** Although various they are governed by the principle of modesty.

c. **Monetary systems:** Different currency is referenced throughout Scripture.

#### 2. Allow for Christian distinctions in the 1st century.

Do not impose the culture of Biblical times on the distinctions of Christianity.

#### 3. Be aware of creation principles.

Look for the historical root

#### 4. Practice humility. When in doubt—don't. (Romans 14:23)

1. Do not violate what may be a principle.
2. If in question the burden of proof rests on those who argue for culture. In this context it is better to error on the side of being overly obedient than disobedient.

**In addition to these four, remember to examine the didactic portions of Scripture to determine if the subject is stated clearly elsewhere.**

#### NOTES