

10 Guidelines for Interpreting Scripture

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Use these 10 guidelines to help you interpret Scripture and discover how it can apply to your life:

1. Live in harmony with the Author of the Book. Be Spirit-filled, then Spirit-led (**John 7:17; John 14:21**).
2. Interpret the Scripture with Scripture. The Reformation began when Martin Luther came to a totally new insight about the Bible; no Scripture verse or passage can be interpreted so as to be in conflict with what is clearly taught elsewhere in the Bible.
3. First interpret the Bible literally. Accept the understood meaning. On the other hand, know the type of literature you are reading. Parables, prophecy, proverbs, poetry – all should be approached a bit differently. When Jesus said, “**I am the true vine**” (**John 15:1**), He obviously didn’t mean that He was literally a green vine! Our Lord illustrated different aspects of His character by using word-pictures.
4. Erase the culture gap. What is the historical background of the book or passage? Where did the author live? What approximate year was it?
5. Keep in mind that a verse has one interpretation, one meaning, but multiple implications. The verse’s meaning has implications for today. For example, the commands in **Ephesians 5:18**, “**Do not get drunk with wine... but be filled with the Spirit,**” imply a principle that we shouldn’t be controlled by anything else, not just wine. Look for the simplest interpretation.
6. Interpret a verse or a word by its context.
7. Define the meaning of a word by its first usage in a passage. For example, the first use of repentance in **Hebrews 6:1** means repentance from dead works. This defines the meaning of repentance when it is used later in **verse 6**.
8. Read from multiple translations. Give priority to the original languages; use any Greek or Hebrew helps you can. Make friends with a large concordance like Strong’s Exhaustive Concordance. Or find the most complete concordance in a Bible computer program of your favorite translation.
9. Find the root meaning of key words. For example, the meaning of repentance is a change of attitude or mind. Repenting produces a change in direction in us.
10. Don’t put God in a box. Our earthly frame of reference is inadequate to fully understand the eternal. We “**see in a mirror dimly**” (**1 Cor. 13:12**). God has reserved secrets (**Deut. 29:29**). For example, can you imagine the streets of gold in heaven that are like glass (**Rev. 21:21**)?