

Interpretation is for everyone

In the sixteenth century the Reformation liberated the Bible. No longer were ordinary people dependent on official Church interpretation; they could study the Bible themselves and experience the teaching of its author, God the Holy Spirit (John 16:13, 1 Corinthians 2:10). But how can we be sure that we are coming to grips with the meaning intended by the author? There is an accepted process which is explained in the book *Living By The Book** by Howard G. Hendricks and William D. Hendricks.

Prayer

We should first pray for understanding —Give me understanding, and I will keep your law and obey it with all my heart (Psalm 119:34).

Content or What Does The Passage Say?

Ask the questions who, what, where, when, and why. Look for things that are emphasised, repeated, related, alike, unlike, and true to life. Look for terms, structure, literary form, and atmosphere. ‘The more time spent observing the less time will need to be spent in interpretation, and the more accurate your interpretation will be’—Hendricks.

Context: What Goes Before and What Follows

What kind of literature are you reading? What was happening at the time? What was the culture, the geography, and the writer’s and the hearers’ knowledge and view of God?

Comparison

Scholar Donald Grey Barnhouse says, ‘You very rarely have to go outside of the Bible to explain anything in the Bible.’ A helpful tool as you compare parts of the Bible with other parts of the Bible is a concordance—either in book form or in a computer programme. This is an extensive list or means of searching for the occurrences of words in the whole Bible. It will help you compare what is said about a topic. You can also find every reference to people, like Moses, who turns up in a dozen books.

Culture

What was the historical background and the factors that led to the writing of a particular passage? What influences did these factors have on the writing of the text, and what happened as a result of the message?

Consultation or Using Other People’s Work

Others have studied before us and have left valuable helps: concordances, Bible dictionaries and encyclopaedias, atlases, commentaries. A simple study kit might comprise a study Bible, companion concordance, and a one-volume commentary.

Don’t Stop Now!

The Bible is meant to change our life! Here are nine questions to ask that will help this to happen.

1. Is there an example for me to follow?
2. Is there a sin to avoid?
3. Is there a promise to claim?
4. Is there a prayer to repeat?
5. Is there a command to obey?
6. Is there a condition to meet?
7. Is there a verse to memorise?
8. Is there an error to note?
9. Is there a challenge to face?

When we have interpreted our passage, we should share our discoveries and our application with someone else, perhaps in a group. This will bless us and them, and help keep ourselves from falling into error.

—Sandy Fairservice

**Living By The Book* by Howard G. and William D. Hendricks, Moody Press, ISBN 0-8024-0743-9.