

03 – THE BIG FOUR

2 Tim. 2:15 – “Study to show yourself approved unto God, a workman who has no reason to be ashamed, **rightly dividing** the word of truth”

- ✓ If it's possible to rightly divide the Word of Truth, then it's *also* possible to wrongly divide it. (Other translations use the word “interpret” instead of “divide”.) When you *wrongly* interpret the Word of Truth ... you no longer have Truth – you have error. That's why we need to learn to interpret the Word of God correctly.

What Does It Mean to “Interpret” the Word?

- ✓ At some point, you've probably heard someone say (usually sarcastically), “Well, that's just your interpretation”. As if the word “interpret” means, “make the verse mean anything you *want* it to”. (That's not what “interpret” means.) When we interpret Scripture, our job is to discover the author's original intent. What was the author trying to communicate? (What *you and I* want it to mean doesn't matter. What did *Paul* mean?)

2 Peter 3:16 – “... just as our dear brother Paul wrote to you. He speaks of these things in all his letters. **Some parts of those letters are hard to understand, ...**”

- ✓ If you've ever thought the Bible is hard to understand, you're in good company. Even *Peter* struggled with some of the things that Paul wrote.

2 Peter 3:16 – “Some parts of those letters are hard to understand, and those who are untaught and unstable **twist, distort and misinterpret them**, just as they do the rest of the Scriptures.”

- ✓ Notice, the difficult parts of Scripture can be twisted, distorted and misinterpreted. (Remember what we said earlier? When you misinterpret the Word of Truth, you no longer have truth. That's why there's so many wrong teachings out there! It comes from people twisting God's Word.) Who's in danger of twisting the Word?

Peter mentions two groups of people. The “untaught” and “unstable”. (It's easy to see how unstable people might twist the Word. But they're not the only group that Peter mentions. He also mentions the “untaught”.)

- ✓ If we haven't been taught how to correctly interpret Scripture, there's a chance that we'll unintentionally twist the Word, and come out believing something that the Bible doesn't say. The fact is: **Churches need to teach their people how to interpret the Word of God.** (Many don't.)

The Author's Original Intent

- ✓ Remember I said that the goal of interpretation is to discover the author's original intent? Look at the same verse from another translation: “*People who don't know better have twisted his words around to mean something quite different than Paul intended.*” (I can imagine Paul looking down from Heaven and yelling, “Nooooo! That's not what I meant!”)
- ✓ Our job, as twenty-first century readers, is to walk away from the passage with Paul's intended meaning intact. I can't express how important that is! To help us do that, there are several “rules of interpretation” that we can follow.
- ✓ It might seem strange that we'd approach the Bible with a set of rules. It sounds like I'm about to take all the *fun* out of reading the Bible! It sounds like I'm about to turn reading the Bible into *work*. The truth is: There *is* work involved! That's why Paul called us “workmen”. (“A *workman* that doesn't need to be ashamed”.) It *is* work. But don't worry. None of these principles are difficult. These “rules” are just things we need to keep in mind, every time we read the Bible.

The “Big Four” Rules of Interpretation

1. Keep It in Context

- ✓ The “context” of a verse refers to the verses that come before and

after it. (The word “context” comes from two Latin words: “Con” meaning “together with” and “textus”, which means, “woven”. You can’t pull out a single verse and try to determine its meaning. Every verse in the Bible is “woven together with” the verses that precede and follow it. The meaning can’t be determined apart from that context.)

- ✓ If you pull verses out of context, you can make the Bible say anything you want it to. You can “prove”:

a.) That Santa Claus is Real – Zech. 2:6 – “Ho, ho, Come forth from the Land of the North”. (Who *else* would say “Ho, ho” and come from the land of the North?) There’s Santa Claus in the Bible!

b.) If You Eat in Restaurants, You’ll Go to Hell – 1 Cor. 11:34 – “If any man hunger, let him eat at home, lest he come into condemnation.”

- ✓ The context limits what meaning you can give to the passage. (A pastor was counselling a woman who had decided to leave her husband. She believed God had given her permission because in one of Paul’s letters, he told us to “put off the old man” and to “put on the new man”. Those are both Scriptures. But that’s clearly a violation of both context and the author’s intent.)

- ✓ We do the same in the songs we sing. I remember a worship leader encouraging us to “lift Jesus higher” in Praise, because He declared, ‘if I be lifted up from the earth, I will draw all men unto Me.’ He said, “We want the world to be drawn to Jesus, so let’s lift Him up in praise!” Unfortunately, the passage has nothing to do with praise. (But Pastor Ron! He’s quoting Scripture! The verse said, “if He’s lifted up”!) Well, what does “lifted up” mean?

John 12:31 – “Now is the judgment of this world: now shall the prince of this world be cast out. And I, if I be lifted up from the earth, will draw all men unto me. He said this to indicate what kind of death he was about to die.” (The Cross)

- ✓ We were expecting people to get saved, because the Bible promised

they would, if we praised Jesus! (But the Bible *didn’t* promise it!)

- ✓ Another example of a song out of context would be “Blow the Trumpet in Zion”, taken from Joel chapter two. “They rush on the city, they run on the walls. Great is the army that carries out His Word.” We’d sing that song and shout! What we didn’t realize is this: The army that was “rushing on the city” and “running on the walls” was also “climbing in the windows like a thief”, murdering, raping, and pillaging. There’s two armies in that chapter – God’s army and Antichrist’s army. It’s the Antichrist’s army that’s rushing on the city, bringing destruction. And we sang a song about it! Context matters!

2. Read the Words

- ✓ I mean every, tiny, seemingly insignificant word. Sometimes missing one tiny word changes your understanding of the passage.

Matt. 7:23 – “And then will I profess unto them, I never knew you ...”

- ✓ Jesus didn’t say that He *once* knew them, but they’d lost their salvation. He said that He never, at any time, knew them.
- ✓ Then, too, watch for small words, like the word “if”. “If” implies a condition. “If” you do something, the Lord will do something in response. (The “ball” is in your court. It’s your move.)
- ✓ It’s important that you understand the meaning of certain words. For instance, the “earth” and the “world” are not the same thing. The “earth” is the planet, but the “world” refers to this world system that’s currently in the hands of the enemy. The words “spirit” and “soul” aren’t interchangeable either. Words matter.

3. Let Scripture Interpret Scripture

- ✓ When you see symbolism in Scripture, you can’t just assign it “any old meaning you want to”. When you find symbolism in the Book of Revelation, if the immediate context doesn’t explain what the

symbol means, (Rev. 17:15 – “The waters you saw represent people, nations and tongues), then John is borrowing symbolism from the Old Testament. (It’s borrowed from Daniel, Zechariah, etc.)

4. Limit Yourself to What Is Written – (Don’t Make Stuff Up)

- ✓ We’ve talked to you before about two “Bible School” words that you should be familiar with. Exegesis is “bringing out” of the passage what’s written there. Eisegesis is “reading into” the passage details that AREN’T there.

The Jezebel Scripture – (What’s Actually There)

“Notwithstanding I have a few things against you, because you allow that (your) woman Jezebel, which calls herself a prophetess, to teach and to seduce my servants to commit fornication, and to eat things sacrificed unto idols. And I gave her space to repent of her fornication; and she didn’t repent.”

“Jezebel Spirit” Books – (What’s NOT There)

- ✓ We can’t even say *for sure* that she has a “spirit”, because the word “spirit” isn’t there. Let’s look at some quotes from Christian books.
- *“Jezebel was a witch, and her spirit of witchcraft is still in operation in the church today.”*
- *“The Jezebel spirit seeks to hide itself, seduce, intimidate, manipulate and trade in human souls.”*
- *“The Jezebel spirit targets you to make you a eunuch.”*
- *“Jezebel is a high-ranking principality / needs to be brought down.”*
- *“Jezebel undermines godly spiritual authority.”*
- ✓ None of those thoughts come from the passage. “Well, maybe they come from Old Testament Jezebel.”
- ✓ Why do we take those two passages, combine them and assume the two women share attributes? We don’t do that with any other Bible characters! (Jesus’ “father” Joseph and Old Testament Joseph.)