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**“WHAT rules should be used for the interpretation of the Bible. What answer would you give to the person who says, “How can you be sure that your interpretation is right”?”**

We shall start, as usual, by defining our terms and illustrating by example how the definition is related to Bible teaching. One of the Greek words used in the N.T. is HERMENEUO from which we have the English word HERMENEUTIC which means ‘of interpretation’. It denotes to explain, interpret, and is used of explaining the meaning of words in a different language, e.g. in John 1:38 we read, “Jesus said, What seek ye? They said unto him, Rabbi, (which is to say, being interpreted, Master) where dwellest thou?” The same word is used in Heb. 7:2 concerning Melchisedec, “first being by interpretation King of righteousness, and after that also King of Salem, which is, King of peace”. In Luke 5:41 we have the record of the healing of a damsel by Jesus, and this provides us with an example not only of the interpretation of a name, but also of a sentence, for we read, “And he took the damsel by the hand, and said unto her, TALITHA CUMI; which is, being interpreted, Damsel, I say unto thee, arise”. These examples show us that this type of interpretation, from one language to another, is usually done for us in the Bible and should not cause us any trouble.

Another word which sheds some light on the subject is DIERMENEUO and this signifies to explain fully, to interpret fully, to expound. An example of this is recorded by Luke and involves interpretation by Jesus to the two on the road to Emmaus. In this passage we read; “And beginning at Moses and all the prophets, he expounded (he interpreted, R.S.V.) unto them in all the scriptures the things concerning himself” Luke 24:27. There are several points to notice here; (1) in Moses and ALL the prophets, ALL the things concerning Jesus were in ALL the scriptures (2) the two to whom Jesus was talking had not detected and had certainly not understood these things, (3) they needed to have these things explained to them. We shall return to the implications of these points. A further example of the use of this word is found in the teaching of Paul to the Church at Corinth concerning the speaking in tongues. Paul lays down fairly stringent rules regarding this and expressly states that if there is no one present to interpret then speaking in tongues should not take place. We know that speaking in tongues was limited to the early days of the church, but the point is well made that if anything was said without there being full understanding on the part of the hearers then this was virtually useless for edification. See 1 Cor. 14 (it is well to read the whole chapter).

#### **How Specific is the Bible?**

We have commented at some length on the foregoing in order to show that we are not always clear in our use of the word interpretation. If we mean by interpretation of the Bible that we are allowed to put our own construction on the words contained therein, then it seems to me that we are on extremely dangerous ground. Religious groups down the ages have done just this and we have ended in the spiritual morass in which we now find ourselves. God intended that the Bible should be the specification of His Will and His alone. The ones who delivered God’s message were not allowed to put their own construction upon the ‘God-breathed’ they wrote. See 2 Peter

1:20,21. Could it reasonably be otherwise? When an interpreter translates from one language to another does he take the liberty of changing the message? If he did then we would not have the original but rather what the interpreter's opinion was of the original. Isn't this what has happened because of so-called interpretations of the Bible? God is His own interpreter. Isn't this why Jesus came, and why he always insisted that the things he said and did were commanded by the Father?.

#### How Discerning are We?

Jesus said to the Jews of his day, "Search the scriptures; for in them ye think ye have eternal life: and they are they which testify of me". John 5:39. This is perhaps our most important rule. We must search, and search diligently. We must be like the Bereans of old. They were nobler than those of Thessalonica because they searched the scriptures daily Acts 17:11. But the warning of Jesus is a sobering thought for us. They searched the scriptures. They knew about the Messiah. But with all their searching **THEY DID NOT IDENTIFY JESUS OF NAZARETH AS THE MESSIAH.** I wonder why this was? Could it be that their minds were prejudiced? This might be our second rule when we come to God's Word. We must come with a ready and unprejudiced mind. We must not use the Bible to support previously held and long-cherished opinions. Opinions are a pestilence. They generally seek to satisfy the ego rather than God. The truth of God is ratified in the blood of Christ. it is revealed in the pages of God's Holy Word. We have to find it. We have to agree upon it. The phrase 'we must agree to disagree' makes a mockery of that for which Christ died because it seeks to perpetuate disagreement in the Body of Christ and this, I am sure, God finds intolerable. We come to the Bible and we employ what I call the 'skim and dip' method; we skim over much of what we ought to understand and dip in for the bits that strengthen our own particular theories and ideas. This will not do. History has proved this to our detriment. A third rule that we might want to remember when we study the Bible is that God is unchanging, and His counsel to man throughout the different dispensations is also unchanging. The God of the old covenant is also the God of the new. We don't change God's from Malachi to Mathew, and I feel sure our study will be better if we appreciate this fully.

#### What is Right and Wrong?

When I first attended a gospel meeting in an assembly of Christ I revolted because the message came across loud and clear that 'they' were right and I was wrong, whereas I understood the message as something DIFFERENT to what I had heard before. Surely, this is the idea, isn't it? When we study denominationalism we see differences of what we call interpretation, but these differences are not differences in the Word but rather they are differences of opinion about the word. The tragedy is that our opinions lead us into entrenched positions from which we find difficulty in withdrawing, when really we ought to be searching the Bible together for the definite message that God has put therein. Right and wrong are emotive words. If someone asked me how I was sure that my interpretation was right I think I would answer; "Well friend (or brother) we see things differently. Let us open the Bible, search it with open mind and not leave it until we are agreed about what it is saying". I am sure that this would be more profitable than expending our ammunition across a spiritual no-mans land and engaging ourselves in an internecine struggle.

#### An Example

We can conclude by giving an example of what we have been considering. We know the controversy that has raged over the statement by Jesus in Matt. 16:18 "I say unto thee, that thou art Peter, and upon this rock I will build my Church". Applying our rule of searching the scriptures we find that Andrew brought his brother Simon Peter to Jesus who said unto him, "Thou art Simon the son of Jona:

thou shalt be called Cephas, which is by interpretation, a stone" John 1:41, 42. Now in the Matt. 16:18 passage two of the important words used are PETROS which is the Greek word for Peter and which denotes a stone that might be thrown or easily moved; and PETRA which denotes a mass of rock such as might be used for a foundation (for the nature of this see Matt. 7:24,25). So the question is posed. Is Christ to build his church on a stone that can be easily moved; or on a mass of rock which cannot be moved? When we continue our study with unprejudiced mind we learn that Paul speaks about foundations to the church at Corinth, "For other foundation can no man lay than that is laid, which is Jesus Christ" 1 Cor. 3:11. It was Peter himself who stated the true nature of Christ; "Thou art the Christ the Son of the living God". Wasn't it the same Peter who quoted the prophecy of ISAIAH (1 Pet. 2:6) and wasn't it the same Isaiah who had prophesied so many years before, "Therefore, thus saith the Lord God, Behold, I lay in Sion for a foundation a stone, a tried stone, a precious corner stone, a sure foundation" Isaiah 28:16. The sincere and open-minded searcher would soon learn that it is Christ on whom the Church is built and not Peter.

Isn't it amazing how simply God interprets His will, and how confused we make the issue when we put our own construction on His words. Perhaps we shall learn to do better in the future, by His help.