

**“How To Wield God’s Sword – Part 3”**  
**May 16, 2010 \***

I. Why do we need to learn how to interpret the Bible properly?

A. Anyone who reads the Bible, \_\_\_\_\_ it.

B. If I don’t learn these principles, I will be vulnerable to \_\_\_\_\_.

C. It makes sure I will live this life \_\_\_\_\_.

**TEN PRINCIPLES OF GOOD INTERPRETATION**

I. Know the \_\_\_\_\_ of interpretation.

A. And what is this?

To understand the \_\_\_\_\_ author’s meaning in writing to the \_\_\_\_\_ readers.

B. Is the point of Bible reading to come up with a clever explanation? Is it to discover ‘what the Bible means to me’?

II. Know the \_\_\_\_\_.

A. Getting this right means paying attention to...

1. The particular \_\_\_\_\_.

2. The \_\_\_\_\_.

3. How the verse is translated in other \_\_\_\_\_.

III. Know the \_\_\_\_\_.

A. Which means what?

B. “Wives, submit to your husbands.” What do we learn from other verses about this?

IV. Know the \_\_\_\_\_ & \_\_\_\_\_.

A. What ‘sin’ are you women committing right now?

V. Know your \_\_\_\_\_.

A. What are some examples of these?

VI. Know your place on \_\_\_\_\_.

A. How is the Bible one big story?

B. How does this help us with interpretation?

VII. Know your \_\_\_\_\_.

A. What does Revelation 19:10 say and mean?

B. How does this help us?

VIII. Know what’s \_\_\_\_\_.

A. Are there parts of the Bible ‘weightier’ than others?

IX. Know that no new \_\_\_\_\_ is coming.

A. What did Jesus warn us not to do?

X. Know your \_\_\_\_\_.

A. What do we mean by this?

## “How To Wield God’s Sword – Part 3”

May 16, 2010 \*

I. Why do we need to learn how to interpret the Bible properly?

A. Anyone who reads the Bible, interprets it.

B. If I don’t learn these principles, I will be vulnerable to spiritual deception.

C. It makes sure I will live this life well.

### TEN PRINCIPLES OF GOOD INTERPRETATION

I. Know the goal of interpretation.

A. And what is this?

To understand the original author’s meaning in writing to the original readers.

B. Is the point of Bible reading to come up with a clever explanation? Is it to discover ‘what the Bible means to me’?

Liberal scholars have been falling over themselves the past 15 to 20 years to see who can come up with a way to make the Bible approve of things like adultery, or premarital sex or homosexuality. I would just love to hear one of these so-called scholars say, “You know, there’s just no reinventing this. The Bible endorses heterosexual, monogamous, lifelong, married sexual relationships. If you want find God’s approval for other types of sexual behavior, then you’re going to have to go outside the Bible to find it. Because the Bible’s message is clear.” Sorry if this sound crass, but it really doesn’t matter what it means to you. What matters is what it means to God and the author he inspired. The better question to ask would be, “So what do you think this passage’s meaning is?” Now there may be multiple lessons to be learned from a passage. There may be multiple layers to that passage’s meaning. The Bible is like a beautifully cut diamond. Turn it one way, and you’ll see one thing. Turn it another way, you’ll see something else. But that doesn’t mean you can twist the

Bible into saying anything you want it to say. Your job as a student of God’s Word is to let the Bible speak for itself.

II. Know the text.

A. Getting this right means paying attention to...

1. The particular words.

2. The grammar.

3. How the verse is translated in other English versions.

III. Know the context.

A. Which means what?

We mean, know the material surrounding the passage you’re studying. A saying I learned in seminary is *a text without a context is a pretext*. Pretext means ‘before text’ – you come to the text with a preconceived notion of what it says. So then rather than reading out what the passage is saying, you’re reading in to the passage what you want it to say. Context is everything.

B. “Wives, submit to your husbands.” What do we learn from other verses about this?

Take that little verse all by its lonesome, you can make the Bible crush a woman, turn her into a doormat, and sadly, there are churches that make such an idea the company line. But add one little verse of context to it, like the preceding verse, verse 21 which says, “Submit to one another out of reverence for Christ,” and that changes everything. Sadly, most English versions when they divide the chapter up into neat and tidy sections for you, they lop off verse 21 from verse 22. As though they don’t belong to each other. Oh, but they do. And by not keeping the verse in its context, you miss the meaning of what a Christian marriage ought to be, a king and queen, co-regents, ruling their home together in mutual submission under the kingship of Christ. No doormats in this marriage.

IV. Know the history & culture behind what you are reading.

A. What 'sin' are you women committing right now?

1 Corinthians 11:6 – “If a woman does not cover her head, she should have her hair cut off; and if it is a disgrace for a woman to have her hair cut or shaved off, she should cover her head.” What’s Paul saying? Women ought to be wearing veils in church. And he goes on at length about it for another ten verses. Yet I don’t see anyone here wearing a veil. Why not? The Bible says to wear a veil. The Taliban is right after all! Not so fast. We have determined that this is a cultural form of worship that no longer applies to our place and time. These were rules or customs for public worship practiced by the churches in the first century Middle East. This is maybe the one thing that makes the Bible most difficult for us to understand – it’s filled with historical and cultural references that just go right over our heads. God establishes a covenant with Abraham – what’s that? David is allowed by God to have multiple wives. Why’s that? Nehemiah completed the rebuilding of the walls on the 25<sup>th</sup> of Elul. When’s that? Daniel had a vision by the river Tigris. Where’s that? Often times, understanding this context will help us more accurately to get at the meaning of a text.

V. Know your tools.

A. What are some examples of these?

It begins with having a good study Bible. One of the best in the business is the NIV study Bible, where each page provides helpful, explanatory notes for things that the modern reader might find confusing. Other tools to have: a concordance for finding other verses in the Bible related to things you’re reading about. Commentaries where you can find scholarly verse by verse analysis of whichever book you’re reading. Maps, to find Waldo, or Jonah or anyone else.

VI. Know your place on God’s timeline.

A. How is the Bible one big story?

A casual reader might not get this, especially since the Old and New Testaments are so different from each other. But the Bible is all one big story of God rescuing the human race, every tribe, tongue and nation, from its sin and rebellion and bringing them

back into a relationship with himself. And the story is all centered on the promise God gives us that he will one day send a great Deliverer to earth, a Christ, a Messiah, who will initiate this rescue. This rescue plan had several stages to it. Stage 1 was preparing the earth for his Messiah, and for this role, God raised up one nation among mankind to serve as his forerunner. The Jews would prepare their world for the Messiah, by giving the world God’s laws, and God’s Word, and God’s promises. Stage 2 was the Invasion itself. The Messiah comes and launches his great rescue mission. Stage 3 is the Occupation, as the Messiah’s followers continue his work, taking his good news to the ends of the earth. Stage 4 is the Consummation, as the Messiah returns to bring all things together under his leadership, and usher in the fullness of his kingdom. While God himself never changes, the way in which he has dealt with the human race over the years has changed, and it’s all dependent on what place he was at on this timeline. This is especially helpful when reading the Old Testament where not everything that went on there carries over once Jesus came.

B. How does this help us with interpretation?

One of the things that puzzles and disturbs many Bible readers is how Israel is commanded by God to eradicate, to kill certain pagan nations which occupied the holy land before the Jews came. It sounds to our ears like jihad or genocide. Once we understand where we’re at on God’s timeline when we read these stories, we are helped to understand them. God has always reserved the right to exercise judgment over the earth. He did so in the time of Noah, using the flood to literally wash the slate clean of our wickedness and rebellion. He did so with Sodom and Gomorrah, literally destroying these wicked cultures. When we see God commanding Israel to wipe out the nations occupying the Promised Land, this is the one time in all of human history when God used his own people as his rod of judgment. It was never meant to be an ongoing pattern. It was never meant to be a template for God’s people throughout time. It doesn’t give Jesus’ followers permission today to use violence of any kind in serving their Lord. And in fact, we have our Lord’s clear instructions about loving our

enemies. But at this time and place, God asked this of his people. It was part of his timeline.

#### VII. Know your God.

A. What does Revelation 19:10 say and mean?

“For the testimony of Jesus is the spirit of prophecy.” A true interpretation of a given Scripture will line up with what we know of the character and love of Jesus Christ. It’s like using WWJD as a litmus test when we read the Bible.

B. How does this help us?

Abraham once heard God command him to sacrifice his son Isaac. God asked this of him at a time when child sacrifice was deemed culturally permissible. God had not fully revealed himself or his will to the world yet, so Abraham had no inner objection to this command. God could still test him in this way. But if I heard a voice in my head commanding me to sacrifice my daughter, I would know at once it was not from God. Because God has fully revealed himself to the earth through Jesus now, and such a command is in complete contradiction to the spirit of Jesus. By having read the entire Bible, and growing in my knowledge of God’s character and values, I am better prepared to understand and interpret God’s truth.

#### VIII. Know what’s important.

A. Are there parts of the Bible ‘weightier’ than others?

Jesus rebuked the Pharisees for scrupulously obeying “smaller” aspects of God’s Word while conveniently overlooking the “more important matters of the law – justice, mercy and faithfulness” (Matt.23:23-24). He also argues that there are “greater” commandments than others (Matt.22:37-40). Why all Scripture is inspired by God, not all Scriptures are equally important. Genealogies are important (for supporting the lineage of Christ, for example) but some so-called believers in the early church were developing entire teachings around genealogies and missing the boat of what Christianity was supposed to be about (see 1 Timothy 1:3-6). The more I read the Bible and walk with God and learn his “heartbeat”, the more I will be able to discern the weightier matters of faith that deserve most of my attention.

IX. Know that no new revelation is coming.

A. What did Jesus warn us not to do?

In Revelation 22:18, Jesus issues a stern warning not to add anything to “the words of the prophecy of this book” or “take words away” from it. While this specifically applies to Revelation, it is a fit warning for the entire Bible. The “canon” of Scripture is now closed. No new books will be added to the Bible. Jesus is God’s final revelation. “For in Christ all the fullness of the Deity lives in bodily form, and you have come to fullness in Christ” says Colossians 2:9. Jesus is the First and the Last (Rev.1:17). And we have his promise that he will return to finish the work he began. This automatically rules out every new religion that has come on the scene since his death and resurrection: Mohammed, Joseph Smith, Charles Russell, and everyone else who has come along claiming to hold a new revelation from God is deceived.

X. Know your limits.

A. What do we mean by this?

We have to have the humility to acknowledge when we might be mistaken about an interpretation we have drawn. There are many doctrines which are clearly black and white in Scripture. And there are specific theological hills we must be prepared to die on. But that doesn’t mean all doctrines are black and white. While Christ’s physical, visible second coming to earth is indisputable, *how* he will return or *when* are open for discussion. That God is Father, Son and Holy Spirit is non-negotiable truth. But if anyone comes along saying they understand every nuance of the Trinity, they are deceiving themselves. “Beyond all question, the mystery of godliness is great,” Paul wrote (1 Tim.3:16). We must recognize that often there are numerous ways a given Scripture might be interpreted, and we should develop the instinct for respecting the reflection a believer may give to an area of teaching. “Be narrow in doctrine, but broad in fellowship,” the great preacher Charles Spurgeon said. In other words, know why you believe what you believe and be able to defend it, but...when push comes to shove, have your arms open wide and be prepared to embrace others who made see things differently than you. We need to let the cross of Christ be our one true dividing line that separates us from others (1 Cor.1:23; Gal.1:8; 1 John 5:1, etc.).