

Getting all we can from Scripture - Part 1

Disciplines that help us understand the Bible

Believers through the centuries have witnessed the voice of God in the Bible. Sometimes, though, it is our own voice we hear—we read into the text what we want it to say. There are seven simple disciplines that help us **Get all we can from Scripture**, i.e., read God's ideas out of the biblical text.

Discipline #1

Prepare my heart

Do I open myself to hear God in the text?

eg. Am I willing to be confronted by God—to learn that I am wrong? Or am I only willing to have the Bible say what I already want to do or think?

Discipline #2

Consider the context

Does what is written before and after the text shed light on the text?

eg. Acts 16:33 *...jailer took them and washed their wounds; then immediately he and all his family were baptized.* This is often used as support for infant baptism. Yet "family/household" did not include babies in verses 32 and 34; so probably not in verse 33 either.

Subpoint: Don't put every meaning of a word into that word every time it is used. With few exceptions, a word has but one of its meanings each time it occurs; the context will tell us which one.

eg. The Greek word *sarx* can mean "our physical body" (1 Cor 15:39) or "human nature as controlled by sin" (Gal 5:19). It's clear that John only had in mind one of those meanings when he said "*The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us.*" Just because a word can have a particular meaning does not mean it does.

Discipline #3

Consider the author's situation

Are there any historical or cultural facts that help explain the text (facts left unspoken in the text because both author and audience already knew them)?

eg. When Jesus said "you are the salt of the earth," his original audience would have been thinking of salt's preserving qualities, not about salt bringing out taste or flavor.

Subpoint: Many commands in the Bible were not

intended to apply to us and our culture. In those cases we discern the (timeless) principle behind the specific (timebound) instruction and how to best express that principle in our culture.

eg. Deut 22:8 - *When you build a new house, make a parapet around your roof so that you may not bring the guilt of bloodshed on your house if someone falls from the roof.* (In biblical days, roofs were flat; after the sun was down and the evening breeze up, people used them like we do a patio or deck.) The principle behind this law is that we have the responsibility to help protect people from harming themselves on our property. (The mother of all safety regulations!)

Discipline #4

Consider the genre

Do expectations the original audience had as they read poetry, apocalyptic writings, etc. guide us as we read such genre?

Discipline #5

Consider parallel passages

Have we compared our text with other similar texts?

eg. 1 John 2:27 ("*the anointing you received from him remains in you, and you do not need anyone to teach you*") seems to imply that we do not need teachers. We know this interpretation is wrong because God gives teachers to the church (1 Cor 12:28, Eph 4:11, 1 Tim 5:17).

Discipline #6

Listen to the church

What do brothers and sisters say about the text?

Discipline #7

Do what we read

Have I obeyed?