



Provided by the Church of the Lutheran Confession - Board of Missions

How to Understand and Interpret the Bible (Hermeneutics)

Lesson #3

How to Overcome Our Difficulties in Understanding the Bible

The most important point to remember is that God Himself is our Teacher. Only He can give us the right understanding of the Bible. Since God speaks to us in the Bible, we understand the Bible better the more we read it and study it and think about it. Just as babies must begin by drinking milk, so new Christians need to begin with the simplest and plainest teachings of the Bible before going on to the meatier portions that are harder to understand. Our Lord has supplied His Church with pastors and teachers to help us grow in our understanding of Scripture. For example, God used Philip to help a traveler from Ethiopia understand a passage from the book of Isaiah (Acts 8: 26-39).

Every skill is improved by continued practice. No one becomes a skilled physician without long training under able instructors. So also, a better understanding of the Bible comes through prolonged and patient study of the very words of God in the Bible. Accurate translations of the Bible are also the Word of God, and it is essential that we first study the Bible in our own native language. Those to whom God gives the special gift of languages should learn the original Bible languages of Hebrew and Greek. **“Blessed is the man”** whose **“delight is in the law of the LORD, and in His law he meditates day and night”** (Psalm 1:1-2).

Martin Luther once said that the only way to become a Bible teacher is through prayer, meditation, and temptation or struggle. The basis for Luther’s statement is the longest psalm, Psalm 119. In this psalm these three elements appear again and again. For example, we have *prayer* in Psalm 119:26-27: **“Teach me Your statutes. Make me understand the way of Your precepts.”** *Meditation* is mentioned in Psalm 119:15: **“I will meditate on Your precepts, and contemplate Your ways.”** *Temptation and struggle* arrive in various ways and drives us to God’s Word: **“Trouble and anguish have overtaken me, yet Your commandments are my delights”** (Psalm 119:143).

The more we read and study the Bible, the better will we be able to let the Bible interpret the Bible. When we come to a difficult passage, we will not be led to misinterpret that passage if we already know a clear Bible passage that helps us to understand the difficult one. For example, we will not think there are two physical resurrections of the dead in Revelation 20 when we remember that Jesus clearly taught that there is only one in John 5:28-29: **“The hour is coming in which all who are in the graves will hear His voice and come forth – those who have done good, to the resurrection of life, and those who have done evil, to the resurrection of condemnation.”**

Questions

1. In what way is God Himself our Bible teacher?
2. What gifts has God given to His Church to help us understand the Bible?
3. How soon should we expect to become good Bible teachers?
4. Read Psalm 119 carefully and find as many references as you can to prayer, meditation, and temptation/struggle.
5. What do we mean when we say that the Bible interprets the Bible?