

The key to correct Scripture interpretation

When interpreting Scripture, it is very important to begin with basic assumptions and premises that are self-evident, universally accepted, and consistent with common sense and logic.

I personally would begin with the existence of a Creator God who is the first cause of everything that exists. Additionally, God, by definition, must exist outside of the created space-time universe. In order to exist outside the boundaries of the physical universe, the creator must be a spiritual and not a physical being. I would also have to believe that God is good, not evil. I believe this because it is universally believed by virtually all mankind, except for a few whom most would consider mentally unbalanced. The truth of God's goodness is attested in the sacred scriptures of virtually every world religion. Because the creator is obviously greater than any created being, He must possess the highest and noblest qualities of human character to a greater degree than any human being. It is universally agreed upon by almost everyone that these qualities of character include love, kindness, justice, mercy and forgiveness. God is therefore more loving, kind and just than any human being.

Our belief in the truth and validity of the Christian Scriptures must be based on the above self-evident truths, and not on any internal claims made by the Scriptures themselves. The doctrine of Scriptural inerrancy is not self-evident. The Scriptures are a compilation of man-made stories and opinions about God. They were not written by the direct hand of God. The truths contained in the Bible come to us through the filter of imperfect human understanding. Because the Bible is an imperfect document, great care must be taken when evaluating and interpreting the truths contained in it. For example, we shouldn't believe God is good because the Bible says so. Instead, we should believe the Bible when it describes God as being good. If one of the Bible characters or narratives portrays God as unloving, unfair, or unjust, then we must reject that teaching or dig a little deeper to see if that is what the writer is really saying.

It has been argued by Christian fundamentalists that if the entire Bible is not completely true, accurate and inerrant in every respect, then none of it can be trusted. The claim is made that if the Bible contains a mixture of truth and error there would be no way to authoritatively determine which parts to believe and which parts to reject. The problem with this line of reasoning is that by all objective scientific, historical and logical standards of evaluation, the Bible is full of errors and contradictions. Separating truth from error in the Scriptures, however, is not as difficult as you might expect. Those teachings which are consistent with what we know to be the true character of God, as described above, may be accepted. Those teachings which are inconsistent with the true character of God must either be rejected or reinterpreted in ways that would resolve the discrepancies.

The Christian Bible may absolutely be relied upon as a source of information about the nature of God and how we may relate to him, but it must be studied and interpreted with respect to the historical, linguistic and cultural context in which it was written. Unfortunately, due in no small part to mistranslations in the text and a misguided belief in literal inerrancy, modern Christian evangelical theology is full of blatant contradictions relating to the nature and character of God.

When properly understood and interpreted, however, the Bible contains the highest expressions of truth about God ever written, culminating in the life and teachings of Jesus Christ.