

PRINCIPLES OF BIBLICAL INTERPRETATION

1 The Lord speaks to human beings in imperfect speech, in order that the degenerate senses, the dull, earthly perception, of earthly beings may comprehend His words. Thus is shown God's condescension. He meets fallen human beings where they are. The Bible, perfect as it is in its simplicity, does not answer to the great ideas of God; for infinite ideas cannot be perfectly embodied in finite vehicles of thought. Instead of the expressions of the Bible being exaggerated, as many people suppose, the strong expressions break down before the magnificence of the thought, though the penman selected the most expressive language through which to convey the truths of higher education. Sinful beings can only bear to look upon a shadow of the brightness of heaven's glory. (Letter 121, 1901).

2 The significance of the Jewish economy is not yet fully comprehended. Truths vast and profound are shadowed forth in its rites and symbols. The gospel is the key that unlocks its mysteries. Through a knowledge of the plan of redemption, its truths are opened to the understanding. Far more than we do, it is our privilege to understand these wonderful themes. We are to comprehend the deep things of God. Angels desire to look into the truths that are revealed to the people who with contrite hearts are searching the word of God, and praying for greater lengths and breadths and depths and heights of the knowledge which He alone can give. (COL 133)

3 Faithful teachers should be placed in charge of the Bible classes, teachers who will strive to make the students understand their lessons, not by explaining everything to them, but by requiring them to explain clearly every passage they read. Let these teachers remember that little good will be accomplished by skimming over the surface of the word. Thoughtful investigation and earnest, taxing study are required in order for this word to be understood. There are truths in the word which, like veins of precious ore, are hidden beneath the surface. The hidden treasure is discovered as it is searched for, as a miner searches for gold and silver. The evidence of the truth of God's word is in the word itself. Scripture is the key that unlocks scripture. The deep meaning of the truths of God's word is unfolded to our minds by His Spirit. (8T 157)

All who handle the Word of God are engaged in a most solemn and sacred work; for in their research they are to receive light and a correct knowledge, that they may give to those who are ignorant. Education is the inculcation of ideas which are light and truth. Everyone who diligently and patiently searches the Scriptures that he may educate others, entering upon the work correctly and with an honest heart, laying aside his preconceived ideas, whatever they may have been, and his hereditary prejudices at the door of investigation, will gain true knowledge. But it is easy to put a false interpretation on Scripture, placing stress on passages, and assigning to them a meaning, which, at the first investigation, may appear true, but which by further search, will be seen to be false. If the seeker after truth will compare Scripture with Scripture, he will find the key that unlocks the treasure house and gives him a true understanding of the Word of God. Then he will see that his first impressions would not bear investigation, and that continuing to believe them would be mixing falsehood with truth. (TDG 43)

4 Scripture is the key that unlocks Scripture. The suppositions of men are worthless. Great care is to be exercised, lest human fallacies be brought in. Every student is to be educated to give a clear exposition of the Word, according to the example Christ has given in His teaching. He said nothing to gratify curiosity or to stimulate selfish ambition. He did not deal in abstract theories, but in that which is essential to the development of character, that which will enlarge man's capacity for knowing God, and increase his power to do good. He spoke of those truths that relate to the conduct of life, and that unite man with eternity. we read that the common people heard Him gladly. The people "were astonished at his doctrine: for his word was with power" (Luke 4:32).

We need not tax our minds for some farfetched explanation of the words of Scripture. Thus the Jewish teachers did. They quoted the ideas and traditions of the rabbis, confusing the minds of their hearers. They taught for doctrine the commandments of men. We are not to seek for revelations that have not been made in the Word of God. In the simplicity of Christ we are to present the plain teaching of the Bible. Men in high positions of trust in the world will be charmed by a plain, straightforward, scriptural statement of truth. (UL 86)

5 Jesus spake as never man spake. He poured out to men the whole treasure of heaven in wisdom and knowledge. He had not come to utter uncertain sentiments and opinions, but to speak truth established on eternal principles. He could have made disclosures in the sciences that would have placed the discoveries of the greatest men in the background as utter littleness; but this was not His mission or His work. He had come to seek and to save the lost, and He would not permit Himself to be turned from His object. He revealed truths that had been buried under the rubbish of error, and He freed them from the exactions and traditions of men, and bade them stand fast forever. He rescued truth from its obscurity, and set it in its proper framework, that it might shine with its original luster. What wonder that crowds followed in the footsteps of the Lord and gave Him homage as they listened to His words!

Christ presented to men that which was entirely contrary to the representations of the enemy in regard to the character of God, and sought to impress upon men the love of the Father, who "so loved the world, that He gave His only-begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in Him should not perish, but have everlasting life." John 3:16. He urged upon men the necessity of prayer, repentance, confession, and the abandonment of sin. He taught them honesty, forbearance, mercy, and compassion, enjoining upon them to love not only those who loved them, but those who hated them and treated them spitefully. In all this He was revealing to them the character of the Father, who is long-suffering, merciful, and gracious, slow to anger, and full of goodness and truth. (CT 29-30)

6 The Saviour had not come to set aside what patriarchs and prophets had spoken; for He Himself had spoken through these representative men. All the truths of God's word came from Him. But these priceless gems had been placed in false settings. Their precious light had been made to minister to error. God desired them to be removed from their settings of error and replaced in the framework of truth. This work only a divine hand could accomplish. By its connection with error, the truth had been serving the cause

of the enemy of God and man. Christ had come to place it where it would glorify God, and work the salvation of humanity. (DA 287-288)

7 The Bible is not given to us in grand superhuman language. Jesus, in order to reach man where he is, took humanity. The Bible must be given in the language of men. Everything that is human is imperfect. Different meanings are expressed by the same word; there is not one word for each distinct idea. The Bible was given for practical purposes.

The stamps of minds are different. All do not understand expressions and statements alike. Some understand the statements of the Scriptures to suit their own particular minds and cases. Prepossessions, prejudices, and passions have a strong influence to darken the understanding and confuse the mind even in reading the words of Holy Writ.—1SM 20

8 The Bible is written by inspired men, but it is not God's mode of thought and expression. It is that of humanity. God, as a writer, is not represented. Men will often say such an expression is not like God. But God has not put Himself in words, in logic, in rhetoric, on trial in the Bible. The writers of the Bible were God's penmen, not His pen. Look at the different writers.

It is not the words of the Bible that are inspired, but the men that were inspired. Inspiration acts not on the man's words or his expressions but on the man himself, who, under the influence of the Holy Ghost, is imbued with thoughts. But the words receive the impress of the individual mind. The divine mind is diffused. The divine mind and will is combined with the human mind and will; thus the utterances of the man are the word of God.-- Manuscript 24, 1886 (written in Europe in 1886). (1SM 21)

9 There is variety in a tree, there are scarcely two leaves just alike. Yet this variety adds to the perfection of the tree as a whole.

In our Bible, we might ask, Why need Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John in the Gospels, why need the Acts of the Apostles, and the variety of writers in the Epistles, go over the same thing?

The Lord gave His word in just the way He wanted it to come. He gave it through different writers, each having his own individuality, though going over the same history. Their testimonies are brought together in one Book, and are like the testimonies in a social meeting. They do not represent things in just the same style. Each has an experience of his own, and this diversity broadens and deepens the knowledge that is brought out to meet the necessities of varied minds. The thoughts expressed have not a set uniformity, as if cast in an iron mold, making the very hearing monotonous. In such uniformity there would be a loss of grace and distinctive beauty. . . .

The Creator of all ideas may impress different minds with the same thought, but each may express it in a different way, yet without contradiction. The fact that this difference exists should not perplex or confuse us. It is seldom that two persons will view and express truth in the very same way. Each dwells on particular points which his constitution and education have fitted him to appreciate. The sunlight falling upon the different objects gives those objects a different hue. (1SM 21-22)

10 Through the inspiration of His Spirit the Lord gave His apostles truth, to be expressed according to the development of their minds by the Holy Spirit. But the mind is not cramped, as if forced into a certain mold.-- Letter 53, 1900. {1SM 22.2}

11 Christ had many truths to give to his disciples, of which he could not speak, because they did not advance with the light that was flashed upon Levitical laws and the sacrificial offerings. They did not accept the light, advance with the light, and follow on to still greater brightness as Providence should lead the way. And for the same reason, Christ's disciples of 1898 do not comprehend important matters of truth. So dull has been the comprehension even of those who teach the truth to others, that many things can not be opened to them until they reach heaven. This ought not to be. But as men's minds become narrow, they think they know all, when they have only a glimpse of truth. They close their minds, as if there were no more for them to learn; and should the Lord attempt to lead them on, they would not accept the increased light. They cling to the spot where they see light, when that which they see is only a glimmer of the bright beams they might enjoy. They know very little of what it means to follow in the footsteps of Christ. (RH, July 2, 1908)

12 All whom God has blessed with reasoning powers are to become intellectual Christians. They are not requested to believe without evidence; therefore Jesus has enjoined upon all to search the Scriptures. Let the ingenious inquirer, and the one who would know for himself what is truth, exert his mental powers to search out the truth as it is in Jesus. Any neglect here is at the peril of the soul. We must know individually the prescribed conditions of entering into eternal life. We must know what is the voice of God, that we may live by every word that proceeds out of his mouth. We cannot allow these questions to be settled for us by another's mind, or another's judgment. We must search the Scriptures carefully with a heart open to the reception of light and the evidences of truth. We cannot trust the salvation of our souls to ministers, to idle traditions, to human authorities, or to pretensions. We must know for ourselves what God has said. We are laborers together with God, and we want to know, and must know, what conditions are resting upon those who are to be heirs of salvation, or we shall die in our sins. It is not to be our study as to what may be the opinion of men, or of popular faith, or what the Fathers have said. We cannot trust to the voice of the multitude, but we want to know what is the voice of God, what is his revealed will. He has left us his own statements, and we must search for the truth as for hidden treasures. We must put away all skepticism, all exaltation of our own ideas. We must humble our hearts by repentance and with contrition of soul, praying for true enlightenment. We must be diligent and thoughtful. We must be constant learners in the school of Christ, then we shall be meek and lowly of heart as was our Saviour. The Lord positively demands of every Christian an intelligent knowledge of the Scriptures. He must dig for the truth as he would dig for hid treasures. He must search the Scriptures, comparing scripture with scripture; for he must be a laborer together with God. Individually, we are to work out our own salvation with fear and trembling. It is God who works in us, and by us, and through us. God's word is the sword of the Spirit, and with a knowledge of revealed truth, which is our spiritual weapon, we must go to work, laboring to pull down the strong-holds of the enemy. The truth must be spoken in love. We must show that we are Christ's followers

and that we have learned of Jesus. We must approach the people in the spirit of kindness and affection. (RH, March 8, 1887)

13 The light of the glory of God must fall upon us. We need the holy unction from on high. However intelligent, however learned a man may be, he is not qualified to teach unless he has a firm hold on the God of Israel. He who is connected with Heaven will do the works of Christ. By faith in God he will have power to move upon humanity. He will seek for the lost sheep of the house of Israel. If divine power does not combine with human effort, I would not give a straw for all that the greatest man could do. The Holy Spirit is wanting in our work. Nothing frightens me more than to see the spirit of variance manifested by our brethren. We are on dangerous ground when we cannot meet together like Christians, and courteously examine controverted points. I feel like fleeing from the place lest I receive the mold of those who cannot candidly investigate the doctrines of the Bible. Those who cannot impartially examine the evidences of a position that differs from theirs, are not fit to teach in any department of God's cause. What we need is the baptism of the Holy Spirit. Without this, we are no more fitted to go forth to the world than were the disciples after the crucifixion of their Lord. Jesus knew their destitution, and told them to tarry in Jerusalem until they should be endowed with power from on high. Every teacher must be a learner, that his eyes may be anointed to see the evidences of the advancing truth of God. The beams of the Sun of Righteousness must shine into his own heart if he would impart light to others. (RH, February 18, 1890)

14 The Bible is its own expositor. Scripture is to be compared with scripture. The student should learn to view the word as a whole, and to see the relation of its parts. He should gain a knowledge of its grand central theme, of God's original purpose for the world, of the rise of the great controversy, and of the work of redemption. He should understand the nature of the two principles that are contending for supremacy, and should learn to trace their working through the records of history and prophecy, to the great consummation. He should see how this controversy enters into every phase of human experience; how in every act of life he himself reveals the one or the other of the two antagonistic motives; and how, whether he will or not, he is even now deciding upon which side of the controversy he will be found. (Ed 190)

15 The apostle says, "All scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness: that the man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works." [2 Tim. 3:16, 17.] The Bible is its own expositor. One passage will prove to be a key that will unlock other passages, and in this way light will be shed upon the hidden meaning of the word. By comparing different texts treating on the same subject, viewing their bearing on every side, the true meaning of the Scriptures will be made evident. (CE 85)