

The Bible (Unmuted) Transcript**Episode 3****How to Read the Bible Faithfully: Three Things to Keep in Mind****February 27, 2023****Teacher: Matthew Halsted****Episode Summary:**

In this episode, Matthew talks about reading the Bible faithfully. What things should we keep in mind when we read Scripture? Does a person need to know the original context? If so, how does the original context relate to the interpreter's modern context? Can we read Scripture without bringing our presuppositions to it? Does applying Scripture to our unique situation play a role in our understanding of Scripture? In many ways, this episode only scratches the surface when it addresses these (and other) questions. But it provides listeners a launching point for thinking about how to read Scripture rightly, carefully, and faithfully.

If you like this podcast, consider subscribing and sharing with your friends.

+ + +

If you like this podcast, consider becoming a Patreon supporter. You can do so by visiting: <https://www.patreon.com/TheBibleUnmuted>

Don't forget to subscribe to the podcast and share it with others!

www.matthewhalsted.com

Transcript:

0:35 The Bible is a fascinating book. Passed down through the ages, the Bible is a reliable guide for the church's faith and practice. But the Bible is more than a guide, right? It's also Holy Scripture. It's that fount of truth, that wellspring of life; it's a source of nourishment for everybody who reads it. Now, if the Bible is Holy Scripture, and if the Bible is God's word, then it follows that Christians should take care to read it faithfully. But how do we do this? How can we read the Bible faithfully? Are there some principals that we can employ to help us? Because after all, the Bible can be fairly difficult to understand. And as a matter of fact, even sincere Christians disagree among themselves about what some biblical texts may mean. So how can we read the Bible rightly? What principals could we employ to help us read the Bible rightly and faithfully? Well, there's a lot of things I can say – a lot of answers to that; but what I want to do today is to offer just three brief things to you that would help you, I believe, in your own endeavor to read the Bible faithfully.

1:52 The first thing to remember is this: know the text. Now that might sound obvious, but I'm not sure it's always taken seriously. You see people often approach a biblical passage without ever considering the original context in which that passage belongs. They don't know the text, they don't know the context of the text. And yet, it's super important that you do. It's super important that you interpret a Bible verse in light of its context. And the reason is simple, the words, the phrases, and verses derive the meaning from the surrounding words, phrases and verses. In other words, each Bible verse must be interpreted in light of the larger passage, and each passage must be interpreted in light of surrounding passages, and so on. The reverse is also true as well. The larger passages are to be interpreted in light of the smaller ones. One important component of knowing the text and its context, is to keep in mind the text's genre.

So what do I mean by genre? When I say genre, I mean the type of text you are interpreting. So for example, when you read a Bible verse from say, Proverbs. You need to know that this is a verse from

part of the wisdom genre of the Bible. If you forget this, or you don't know this, then your interpretation will almost certainly be skewed. So, let's take Proverbs 22:6, for example. You are probably well acquainted with this verse:

6Train up a child in the way that he should go and when he is old, he will not depart from it.

Now a lot of people take that as a promise and not a proverb. And if you do that, you're going to end up in despair, right? I mean after all, it's simply not the case that every child, though he or she was brought up in a Christian home, will remain faithful to the Lord. So, is Proverbs 22:6 false? By no means. If we understand Proverbs 22:6 in light of its *genre* then we are going to understand that it did not intend to make a promise that is universally true, only an assertion that is generally true. Namely, the assertion that a child that is raised up in a godly home will, all things being equal, remain faithful to the Lord. That's a general truth. It's not always true. But it's generally true. The Bible is full of many different genres. It's full of prose, and poetry, wisdom, prophecy, letters, and even apocalyptic literature. And each genre must be interpreted on its own terms. One should not even dare to interpret a poetic text as if it were literal prose. That could lead to some problems. And if we are to interpret the Bible faithfully, then we need to dig beneath the text, paying close attention to the important question of genre. Okay, so that's the first thing. Let get to the second thing.

5:05 The second thing you have to keep in mind is this: you have to know yourself. Every interpreter comes to the Bible with preconceived notions and presuppositions. Every interpreter is the product of their culture, family, their family background, their personal history, and so on. And these realities have shaped *us* into the particular people that we are today. And everyone who reads the Bible, reads the Bible from a certain perspective, from a particular angle, and point of view. As finite creatures, we obviously lack a God's eye point of view. We are always going to interpret Scripture from an angle; from our own presuppositions. And yet this does not mean that we can't *know* biblical truth. And it doesn't imply that the Bible can mean just *anything* we want it to mean. What it does mean though, is that have to be mindful of those assumptions that we bring to the biblical text and submit them to the truth contained in the biblical text. Now while it's true that we can't free ourselves from having presuppositions, we can, none the less, work to adopt presuppositions that are conducive, or useful for a faithful interpretation of the Bible. And to do that, a person might consider asking questions such as: what were the core assumptions of the biblical authors? How did they approach the biblical text? And if could be so bold to say, perhaps we modern interpreters could learn a thing or two from St. Paul on how to interpret the Old Testament. And if you are interested in that...this is a shameless plug, I admit, but I've written a book on this that's called, ***"Paul and the Meaning of Scripture"***. You can find it on Amazon. Go check it out. Or shoot me an email if you have questions about that. But my point here is just simply to say that if we want to become really good interpreters, let's look to the biblical authors themselves, particularly those in the New Testament for guides and helps for interpreting the Scripture itself. I mean, after all, the NT writers didn't invent things out of the vacuum. They were drawing on the rich tradition of the OT and they were often interpreting the OT; and they help us to do that when we pay attention to how they did it.

Okay, so number one we recall is that, to read the Bible faithfully and to interpret it faithfully, you have to know the text. The second thing is, you have to know yourself and your own presuppositions. You have to keep them in mind. So let's get to the third thing.

7:55 Here's the third thing to keep in mind. If you want to read the Bible faithfully, you have to bridge the gap. So here's what I mean. You've got to bridge the gap between the world of the text in its ancient context, and the world of the interpreter and the interpreter's modern context. That's you, that's me. You have to bridge the gap between the two. It's important to recognize that God's word has something significant to say to our context. And you've got to bridge the gap between the ancient world, the ancient biblical author's world, and your own situation in life. And that's what it means to read the Bible faithfully. It entails reading it from the standpoint of faith and faithfulness to God in the present time. As it's often said, 'One

should not read the Bible merely for information, but for transformation. That's the goal of interpretation. It's to link the original context of the Bible to the local context of the everyday person living today. And this is a deeply personal endeavor, right? I mean, at times, the application of a biblical verse will look different for different people.

So take for example, the fundamental Christian belief that Jesus is Lord and Savior. This comes from Romans 10:9, Philippians 2:11. Jesus Christ is Lord. He is Savior. Now this historic Christian claim is pretty straight forward. It means that Jesus, very God of very God; the one savior through whom all things were made, He is the loving, supreme master of all things and of all people. So when this truth is flushed out in real life, it may look different for each person. So for instance, if a Christian sister is suffering from low self-esteem due to the harshness of her authoritarian employer, then this truth that Jesus is Lord and savior of all would provide an immense amount of comfort for her. It would exalt her to a fresh awareness of her true worth in Christ. It would remind her that God Himself loves her and cares for her and is her savior. And yet, if this same truth were sincerely received by the harsh employer, it would have the opposite effect. It would humble, not exalt him to reinterpret what his own authority means in light of a higher authority. It would lead him to humble repentance. So here's my point. To truly understand the scriptural text, you have to apply it to your life specific and unique context. And all of this requires that we baptize our own readings in prayer. And this is the most important thing I can say. Because it's going to allow us to adopt a posture of humility when we approach Scripture reading with prayer, then by default we adopt a posture of humility and submission before God. And what I would dare suggest, is that, that sort of posture, that humble posture before God, that's a necessary posture if we want to read the Bible faithfully.

11:14 So let's recap real quick. To read the Bible faithfully, you have to do three things. The first thing you have to do, is you've got to know the text. You've got to get familiar with its context. You've got to get familiar with its ancient, cultural, religious, social context. You've got to know everything about that text and the text author and the world of the author, if you want to understand the text. You gotta do all that. So you've got to know the text. That involves historical background work, cultural background work, reading commentaries, or whatever. So know the text. Number two, you have to know yourself. You've got to be aware of your own presuppositions. You've got to be aware of your assumptions. You've got to be aware of your pre-conceived notions. See, all too often we run to Scripture with preconceived notions and already established beliefs. But really what we need to do is keep those in check as best as possible and get our beliefs from Scripture, too. And we need to understand that sometimes our pre-conceived notions, our assumptions – are not good ones, right? And we need to trade them out for good assumptions. So the question we might want to ask is, what sort of assumptions do we need to bring to the text that are helpful for understanding it? And the third thing is that we need to bridge the gap between the ancient text that we're reading and the modern context from which we are reading. And when we do that, I think we are keeping an eye toward our Father, and we are looking for ways flush out His word, His truth in our lives today. You keep those three things in mind and that will get you off to a good start to reading the Bible faithfully.

13:05 That's the end of today's episode. And thanks again for listening to The Bible Unmuted. If you like this podcast, consider rating it on your podcast platform, subscribing to it, and sharing with your friends. You can also support the podcast by becoming a patreon member. Go to: <https://www.patreon.com/TheBibleUnmuted> - or simply find the link in the description of this episode. Thanks for listening. Until next time, friends.

