

THE CLARITY OF SCRIPTURE: Reading the Bible "Literally!"

The Basic Principle is "SCRIPTURE INTERPRETS SCRIPTURE."

Determining meanings.

1. Not all passages of Scripture are equally clear.

The Confession of faith says: "All things in Scripture are not alike plain in themselves, nor clear unto all: yet those things which are necessary to be known, believed and observed for salvation, are so clearly propounded, and opened in some place of Scripture or other, that not only the learned, but the unlearned, in a due use of the ordinary means, may attain unto a sufficient understanding of them." (WCF I.VII)

2. The clearer passages should interpret the less clear passages.

In general: *New Testament interprets Old Testament*
 Epistles interpret Gospels
 Systematic passages interpret incidental and narrative passages
 Universal passages interpret more "local" passages
 Didactic (Instructive) interprets symbolic, types, parables.

3. The teaching of the whole Bible determines interpretations of specific passages.

This is the principle of the analogy of faith. Specific passages may not contradict the total teaching of Scripture.

4. There is one meaning per passage and per word.

"Interpretation is one, application is many."

There cannot be a number of allegorical meanings in a word, connotations, plural meanings. However, the meaning may apply to a variety of issues and applications.

5. Meaning should be "literal" (the plain sense) unless shown to be otherwise.

*interpretation uses the natural or usual construction
and implication of a writing or expression;
and following the ordinary and apparent sense of words.*

This is not a "wooden letterism" that leaves no room for figures of speech or that underestimates the structure and complexity of language. Meaning in Scripture is communicated in the same way that meaning is communicated in any verbal communication, based on the same rules and principles of language.

6. The final authority of competent interpretation must be the original languages.

See WCF I.Viii. This does not forbid or undermine study of the English translations, but cautions us about "finalizing interpretations" apart from the Greek and Hebrew texts.

7. It is the Bible as a whole, and not the church or any authority outside of Scripture that has the final authority.

Thus: "The infallible rule of interpretation of Scripture is the Scripture itself: and therefore, when there is a question about the true and full sense of any Scripture (which is not manifold, but one), it must be searched out and known by other places that speak more clearly" WCF I.iX.