

## Lesson 8

# Interpretation How can we read it right?

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**'That's just you're interpretation' - the common mantra quickly quoted when someone dares to point to the Scriptures as being objectively true. So are there multiple meanings and how can we learn to read it right? Today we find out.**

### Reader Response Theory

Instead of asking "*WHAT does this MEAN?*", the reader asks, "*What does this mean TO ME?*"

**Reader-Response doesn't work in real life.** In real life, most authors actually MEAN something when they write, so it is the author's intent that matters most, not the reader's response. Examples include: STOP sign, bills we owe, written rules, etc.

Some texts are obviously written to communicate important messages to their readers.

**To ignore the author's intention destroys the reason why the author wrote in the first place!**

Sadly, in our day and age where personal preferences often rule over truth, this mindset has filtered into the church and our view of the Scriptures.

✿ Woman having an affair. When confronted she said God had told her to divorce her husband and marry the other man. God told her to do this as she read **Colossians 3:9** "***put off the old man.***"

✿ A man said God had told him he was to marry one of the worship leaders. Her name was 'Grace'. He explained that God had spoken to him from Scripture as he read from the KJV, "***Grace be to you.***" Paul opens with this in 3 of his letters: 2 Cor. 1:2, Gal. 1:3 & Eph. 1:2.

**Now, how could this happen?**

1. Intentionally twist the text to deflect the conviction, OR
2. Genuinely think this is how Scripture is to be read.

A few weeks ago we encouraged you to read **1&2 Timothy & 1&2 Peter**. Multiple warnings are given to hold to good teaching, confront false teaching, & live the message of Jesus.<sup>1</sup>

**Paul's Challenge to Timothy**

**2 Timothy 2:15 (ESV)**

<sup>15</sup> Do your best to present yourself to God as one approved, a worker who has no need to be ashamed, **rightly handling the word of truth.** [NET: teaching the message of truth accurately]

As we learned last week, it is wise to take a look from multiple translations. **Rightly handling** and **accurately** are translated from a Greek word *orthos*, ("straight"), the same word from which we build words like *orthopedic* and *orthodoxy*.<sup>2</sup> Timothy was to teach & live God's truths without deviating or diluting the truth.

<sup>1</sup> 1 Tim. 1:3-4; 18-20; 4:1-4, 13-16; 6:1-5; 20-21; 2 Tim. 1:13-14; 2:1-4; 14-18, 24-26; 2 Timothy 3:10-4:5; 1 Peter 5:1-9; 2 Peter 1:20-2:3;

<sup>2</sup> R. Kent Hughes and Bryan Chapell, 1 & 2 Timothy and Titus: To Guard the Deposit, Preaching the Word (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 2000), 209.

Obviously, Paul is aware of those who interpret, handle, teach, & live out the gospel message **WRONGLY**.

Sadly, in our day there is **MUCH** teaching that has veered off the straight path. Again, there are only 2 reasons for this:

- 1) intentionally twist the Scripture OR
- 2) Don't know how to read it right.

To those people, we, as Timothy was charged, kindly say...**YOU'RE DOING IT WRONG**.  
That's really tough when WE realize...that person is ME.

### **Why does sound doctrine matter?**

#### **2 Timothy 4:1-4 (NIV)**

<sup>1</sup> In the presence of God and of Christ Jesus, who will judge the living and the dead, and in view of his appearing and his kingdom, I give you this charge: <sup>2</sup> Preach the word; be prepared in season and out of season; correct, rebuke and encourage—with great patience and careful instruction. <sup>3</sup> For the time will come when people will not put up with sound doctrine. Instead, to suit their own desires, they will gather around them a great number of **teachers to say what their itching ears want to hear**. <sup>4</sup> They will turn their ears away from the truth and turn aside to myths.

Check what other people say compared to what the Scriptures say.

And how can we make sure we **read the Scriptures right**? First & foremost...

#### **Never read a Bible verse.**

**Read the entire chapter or writing** - before and after.

The chapter & verse references/addresses we have today were added almost 1500 years after the New Testament was written (1551).<sup>3</sup> This is a great TOOL when many people have personal Bibles, but it can also be DANGEROUS when we lift a verse out of context instead of reading it as part of a letter.

So, let's apply our principle - **Never Read a Bible Verse** - to the story about the lady who quoted '**put off the old man**' (from Col. 3:9) and see what happens.

### **Catch the Context**

#### **Colossians 3:4-8 (NET)**

<sup>4</sup> When Christ (who is your life) appears, then you too will be revealed in glory with him.  
<sup>5</sup> So **put to death whatever in your nature belongs to the earth: sexual immorality, [there are other sins mentioned here, but note the first one mentioned] impurity, shameful passion, evil desire, and greed which is idolatry.** <sup>6</sup> Because of these things the wrath of God is coming on the sons of disobedience.<sup>7</sup> You also lived your lives in this way at one time, when you used to live among them. <sup>8</sup> But now, **put off** all such things as anger, rage, malice, slander, abusive language from your mouth.

Do you see how Paul is using '**put off**' in this passage? It's imagery for taking off sinful actions & attitudes like you would take off dirty clothes.

<sup>3</sup> Robert Stephanus divided the verses for his Greek New Testament. It was published in 1551. The first entire Bible in which these chapter and verse divisions were used was Stephen's edition of the Latin Vulgate (1555). \* see more: [https://www.blueletterbible.org/faq/don\\_stewart/don\\_stewart\\_273.cfm](https://www.blueletterbible.org/faq/don_stewart/don_stewart_273.cfm)

## Put off the old man?

### Colossians 3:9-12 (NET)

<sup>9</sup> Do not lie to one another since you have **put off the old man with its practices** <sup>10</sup> and have been **clothed with the new man** that is being renewed in knowledge according to the image of the one who created it. <sup>11</sup> Here there is neither Greek nor Jew, circumcised or uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave or free, but Christ is all and in all. <sup>12</sup> Therefore, as the elect of God, holy and dearly loved, **clothe yourselves** with a heart of mercy, kindness, humility, gentleness, and patience,

WE don't DETERMINE the meaning, we DISCOVER the meaning.

The question isn't "*What does it mean TO ME*", but "**What does it MEAN?**"

The meaning is the same for the Colossians 2000 years ago, as well as for us, and that lady. The very thing she claims God said through the Bible is actually saying the EXACT OPPOSITE!

**Putting off the 'old man' or 'old self' is about getting rid of sin...sexual immorality is the first thing mentioned in the passage!**

We see this clearly because we have applied the principle:

**Never read a Bible verse.**

DON'T ASK: "What does this mean TO YOU?"

DO ASK: "**What does this MEAN...and how should you apply it to your life?**"

## The truth will set you free

### John 8:31-36 (ESV)

<sup>31</sup> So Jesus said to the Jews who had believed him, "If you **abide in my word**, you are truly my disciples, <sup>32</sup> and **you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free.**"

<sup>33</sup> They answered him, "We are offspring of Abraham and have never been enslaved to anyone. How is it that you say, 'You will become free'?" <sup>34</sup> Jesus answered them, "Truly, truly, I say to you, everyone who practices sin is a slave to sin. <sup>35</sup> The slave does not remain in the house forever; the son remains forever. <sup>36</sup> So if **the Son sets you free**, you will be free indeed.

When we read the passage and not just a verse, when we consider the context, look how the words of Jesus flow together in vv.31-32 & 36!

This is not a promise that telling the truth will get you out of trouble.

**Jesus is the TRUTH. His words are TRUTH. Those who follow HIM will be set free!**

We discover this meaning because we apply the principle to

**Never read a Bible verse.**

Have YOU been set free from your sin or are you still a **slave to sin**? Life change isn't about WHAT you know and WHAT you do, but WHO you know & WHY you do what you do. Are you a disciple of Jesus or just intrigued by Jesus? Are you a FAN or a FOLLOWER?



Here are some questions I want you to ponder this week:

1. John 3:16: Who had Jesus just been talking to and what was it about?
2. Jer. 29:11: Who is being written to and how will God prosper [read chapter]?
3. Phil 4:13: Often quoted, but what is the surrounding passage about?
4. Matt. 18:20 says "For where two or three are gathered in my name, there am I among them." What is that passage all about?

## **Mother Stashes Baby In Trash Can**

**When you only hear a PIECE of the story, you might not get the POINT of the story.**  
The same is true of the Scripture, so...

**Never read a Bible verse.** Read the entire chapter or writing - before and after.

## **DISCUSSION QUESTIONS**

These open-ended questions are designed to help you LIVE what you LEARN with your Family, Friends, or Small Group.

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1. How did the stories like 'put off the old man', 'grace be unto you', and 'Mother Stashes Baby In Trash Can' help you see the importance of context & why we should **never read a Bible verse**?
2. Should it frustrate us if someone who took a 'Reader Response' approach to something you wrote or said - if they dismissed your intent and even redefined the words you used? How might you respond to that?
3. Why is it that many people don't gently correct another when he/she misuses the Scriptures?
4. **Read 2 Timothy 4:1-4.** Why does sound doctrine (correct beliefs & teaching) matter?
5. Today's **BIG TRUTH** was: **Never read a Bible verse.** How does this challenge to read a chapter or entire letter frustrate or excite you? Explain your answer.
6. **FEET2FAITH CHALLENGES.**
  - Have you been reading? What questions/insights have come up? How have you been impacted? Who are you accountable to talk with this week (John 3:16, Jer. 29:11, Phil. 4:13, & Matt. 18:20 in context)?
7. Share prayer thanks & needs. Then pray for one another.