

Rule 1: No Contradictions

August 10, 2019 · <https://letgodbetrue.com/sermons/2019/rule-1/>

Hermeneutics: How to Read and Understand the Bible

RULE #1: There are no contradictions in the Bible.

- I. No part of the Bible is to be separated from or against the Bible's overall teaching (II Pet 1:20).
 - A. This rather plain and very direct text is a great blessing from God, yet rarely expounded.
 - B. Prophecy. An inspired utterance flowing from the revelation and impulse of the Spirit.
 - C. Private. Separate, alone, individual, personal, peculiar, particular, or special.
 - D. No portion of the Holy Spirit's revelation in Scripture can be separated from the rest to stand alone for some individual, personal, peculiar, particular, or special interpretation.
 - E. Our interpretation of the text is proven clearly by the immediate context (II Peter 1:21).
 1. There are no personal or peculiar interpretations of Scripture, because the singular Holy Spirit and not the wills of plural writers gave what was written.
 2. All Scripture is inspired by the Holy Spirit (II Timothy 3:16), even though it may have been written by a number of men. Since the Holy Spirit is the singular Author of the Bible, then it cannot and does not disagree internally.
 - F. No writer intended a personal or private interpretation, and no reader should find one.
 - G. Though God the Holy Spirit used all sorts of men with various backgrounds writing with different styles by various literary forms, there is only one Author and one constant, certain, absolute form of doctrine taught from beginning to end of the Bible.
- II. This is easily the first and chief rule to follow when interpreting Scripture. Start with it always.
 - A. We are expressly told to know this first when heeding the more sure word (II Pet 1:20).
 - B. The study of any text should always be limited to those possible solutions remaining after excluding all impossible solutions failing this rule.
 1. We don't create truth from any text. We enter the text with truth established.
 2. Regardless of the difficulty of the words, we exclude all ideas contrary to truth.
 3. If the impression from reading the words is some new or false doctrine, reject it!
 - C. The single greatest restraint on misinterpretation of Scripture is this rule to make every individual passage agree in doctrine with the overall teaching of the Bible.
 - D. If any other rule of interpretation is placed before this one, we run into severe problems.
 1. We contradict the Holy Spirit's instruction that this rule is to be applied first.
 2. We open ourselves up to every possible interpretation with new and crazy ideas.
 3. We destroy the value of the lesser rules, which must be subordinate to this one.

- E. This rule properly applied will force you to seek other rules to determine the positive sense of a text; for by itself, it only rejects interpretations that cannot possibly be true.
- III. If this rule is not followed, it is possible to teach anything from the Bible, as many have done.
- A. Sodomites find David describing Jonathan's love as exceeding that of women and have spasms rushing to make these two heroes of the faith lovers (II Samuel 1:26).
 - B. British Israelites find Jesus calling Jews the children of the devil and have spasms concocting an anti-Semitic fantasy that Eve had Cain by sex with Satan (John 8:44).
 - C. The Temperance Movement and its Pharisaical descendants had spasms of joy over finding a few texts they could pervert to condemn all alcohol (De 29:6; Pr 20:1; 23:31).
- IV. The application of the rule should be considered carefully to understand its proper use.
- A. All texts pertaining to a subject must be reconciled to determine the proper sense by which they all should be interpreted individually. Rather than emphasize one group of passages to the neglect of another group, it is our duty to reconcile the passages to where they both fit overall Bible doctrine and each other. Neither can we question the authenticity of a passage by its apparent disagreement with passages assumed to be genuine. We must reconcile them. Martin Luther hated and rejected James, because it didn't fit his interpretation of justification by faith taken privately from Romans.
 - B. This results in a two-step approach to Bible study. First, rule out impossible interpretations by comparison with the rest of Scripture: any interpretation that contradicts other passages must be rejected. Prove what a text cannot mean before trying to determine what it does mean. Second, assume any interpretation that is left, and subject it to the remaining rules. The other rules are applied only after narrowing down the possible interpretations by their complete agreement with the rest of the Bible.
 - C. This rule requires diligent labor by honest men to carefully consider all texts on a given subject to determine the overall teaching of the Bible. It is far easier to choose those texts that fit one's presuppositions and ignore the rest. But it is this fatal choice that leads straight to heresy. And it is this fatal choice that guides most men in the Bible.
 - D. We strictly deny that Scripture contains any froward or perverse contradictions in it, otherwise God the Holy Spirit, the singular Author, is a confused Inspirer (Prov 8:8-9).
 - 1. The context of our first rule teaches that it is the **more sure** word (II Pet 1:19).
 - 2. Our KJV Bibles are perfect and cannot be broken with lies (Jn 10:35; I Jn 2:21).
 - 3. If there appears to be a contradiction, the problem is with us, not the Bible.
 - 4. The thorniest difficulties can and have been solved by careful, believing study.
 - 5. We believe God wrote a perfect Bible, or our whole ambition is insanely absurd.
 - 6. Do not forget the importance of our assumptions at the beginning of the study.
- V. The illustration of this rule gives examples of popular texts not possibly teaching what many want them to teach and use them to teach.
- A. Genesis 15:18-21 cannot teach that God must still fulfill promises to the Jews of literal land in the Middle East (Joshua 21:43-45; Acts 7:5; Hebrews 11:8-16).
 - B. II Kings 8:26 and II Chronicles 22:2 cannot teach two different ages for Ahaziah at the same event (II

Kings 24:8 cp II Chron 36:9; I Kings 16:7-8 cp II Chr 16:1).

- C. Mark 16:16; John 3:5; Acts 2:38; and Acts 22:16 cannot teach baptismal regeneration (John 1:13; Ephesians 2:1-9; Titus 3:5; I Peter 3:21; etc.).
- D. Luke 2:48 and John 6:42 cannot teach Joseph was Jesus' father, though Christ rejecters would love to use them that way (Matt 1:18-25; Luke 1:34-35).
- E. I Corinthians 4:15 cannot teach gospel regeneration, though it may sound like it to a novice (Romans 9:16; I John 5:1; John 1:13; 3:8).
- F. I Corinthians 15:29 cannot teach the Mormon doctrine of baptism for physically dead relatives (Psalm 49:6-9; John 1:13; Hebrews 9:27; I Peter 3:21; etc.).
- G. Galatians 3:28 cannot teach sexual equality in practical relationships (Gen 3:16; I Corinthians 11:3-16; 14:34-35; Ephesians 5:22-33; I Peter 3:1-7).
- H. Galatians 5:4 cannot teach losing one's salvation, though Campbellites quote it dogmatically (Psalm 89:29-37; Rom 8:29-39; 11:29; John 6:39).
- I. Ephesians 3:9 and Hebrews 1:2 cannot teach eternal sonship, even if they sound like Jesus was the Creator (Matthew 1:21; Luke 1:35; John 1:1-3).
- J. II Peter 2:1 cannot teach universal redemption (Ps 89:29-37; John 6:39; Rom 8:28-39).
- K. I John 2:27 cannot teach that teachers are vain (Eph 4:11-16; II Timothy 2:2; Heb 5:12).

VI. The abuse of this rule occurs when a private interpretation is assumed for a text and the resulting false premise is used to wrest contradicting passages of Scripture into agreement. An attempt is made at reconciliation, but it is based and furthered on a false premise.

- A. Those who teach baptismal regeneration as shown above will argue that "filth of the flesh" in I Peter 3:21 means "dirt of the body." They are trying to reconcile this text by forcing a foolishly literal interpretation of its words, for they must get rid of its easily understood sense. It and others sound the death knell for Alexander Campbell's heresy.
- B. Those who teach that water baptism causes church membership from a private interpretation of Acts 2:41 will assume authoritatively against all evidence that the Ethiopian eunuch became a member at Jerusalem or Samaria by his baptism.
- C. Those obsessed with God's love of all men from a private interpretation of John 3:16 will modify Romans 9:13 to mean that God just didn't love Esau as much as Jacob.
- D. If all texts pertaining to any of these subjects were considered, the truth is easily found.

VII. Some observe that this rule requires strong presuppositions about the rest of Scripture in order for the rule to work. This is true – honest Bible study does indeed require knowledge of all of Scripture. The concern over these presuppositions is answered with several considerations.

- A. Most presuppositions are the inheritance we receive from parents and previous religious training i.e. children born and raised Methodists are likely to remain Methodists and children born and raised Buddhists are likely to remain Buddhists.
 - 1. What can we say? God's sovereign choices carry enormous consequences, which should lead us to cry out with humble thanksgiving for His great mercy.
 - 2. The importance of parental training is seen here (Deut 6:1-9; Psalm 78:1-8; Joel 1:1-3; Ephesians

6:4; II Timothy 3:15).

3. The importance of ministerial faithfulness can hardly be emphasized too much (I Timothy 4:13-16; II Timothy 2:2; 4:1-5; Titus 1:5-11).
4. The implication of election in families is also seen here. As Israel only had the truth under the Old Testament, and much of the world is blind under the New.

- B. Much of our faith is built on presuppositions that are assumed by faith. We believe the existence of God, the canon of sixty-six books, the King James Version, and the creation of all things by a combination of internal faith and circular reasoning (Psalm 119:128; Romans 4:18-21; Hebrews 11:1-6).
- C. There are sufficient obstacles in Scripture to destroy false presuppositions, if the reader constantly observes this primary rule of interpretation and maintains a mind submissive to learning. By identifying, considering, and comparing all the texts related to a subject, an honest student will find defining doctrine that will save him from false assumptions.
- D. God's providence, the foundation for our lives and sanity, will provide sincere seekers of truth with a teacher or other source of guidance for the proper presuppositions (Job 32:8; Psalm 25:14; 119:18; Jeremiah 29:13; Acts 8:26-35; 10:1-6; I Timothy 1:12).
- E. Were the personal qualifications given above stressed too much? God forbid!
- F. Those rare men who are willing to maintain the spirit of "I do not know what to do" will be delivered with a supernatural deliverance (II Chronicles 20:12-17).

VIII. While this rule eliminates most false interpretations and creates limitations for all possible interpretations, the following rules are necessary to help identify the true interpretation from among the approved possibilities. This rule by itself negatively determines what a text cannot mean, and the following rules help to positively identify what a text does mean.

← Qualifications

Rule #2 →