



TRAINING TRACK

PART ONE:

SYSTEMATIC THEOLOGY



Westlake Church Lausanne
Rooted in the Gospel & Radical Transformation

Section Two

The Bible: Its Interpretation

Memory Verse:

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.

2 Timothy 2:15

Key Texts:

RC Sproul, *Knowing Scripture* (IVP: 2nd edition, 2009) Chapters 3 and 4.

Robert L. Plummer *40 Questions About Interpreting the Bible* (Kregel: 2010) Questions 10, 11, 16 and 21

1. General Principles for Interpreting the Bible

Read Plummer 95-107.

- What part does prayer play in your study of the Bible currently? What changes (if any) do you need to make in this area?

2. Hermeneutics: Understanding the Message

Read Sproul 51-64

Sproul sets out for us three primary principles of interpretation:

1. The analogy of faith
2. The literal sense
3. The grammatical-historical method

- Define the *Analogy of Faith* (Sproul 51-3)

- What does this principle rest upon?

- What does it mean to interpret the Bible *literally*? (Sproul 53-4)

Read Plummer 185-9

- Why is it important to pay attention to *genre*? (Sproul 54-9)

- What was the *Medieval Quadriga*, and why was it wrong? (Sproul 60-2)

Consider the following statement by RC Sproul (Sproul 62):
“Though a scriptural passage has one meaning, it may have a host of applications to the wide variety of nuances to our lives.”

- How does this approach differ from the *Quadriga*?

- What is the grammatical-historical method? (Sproul 62-4)

To summarize, Sproul states:

“The three primary principles of interpretation are aids to our personal enrichment. (1) The analogy of faith keeps the whole Bible in view lest we suffer from the effects of exaggerating one part of Scripture to the exclusion of others. (2) The literal sense offers a restraint from letting our imaginations run away in fanciful interpretation and invites us to examine closely the literary forms of Scripture. (3) The grammatical-historical method focuses our attention on the original meaning of the text lest we ‘read into Scripture’ our own ideas drawn from the present.”

3. Practical Rules for Interpreting the Bible

Sproul highlights eleven practical (and helpful) ‘rules’ for biblical interpretation:

Let’s examine these in more detail:

Rule 1: Read the Bible like any other book

Read Sproul 69-71

- What does Sproul mean (and not mean) by this rule?

- What is the role of prayer in helping us understand Scripture?

Rule 2: Read the Bible existentially

Read Sproul 71-6

Sproul means by this, 'that as we read the Bible, we ought to get passionately and personally involved in what we read.'

- How might this influence our reading of Scripture?

- Why did Luther think this a helpful approach?

Rule 3: Interpret the historical narratives by the *didactic*

Read Sproul 76-83

- What is meant by the *didactic*?

- Briefly explain the balanced way in which the Reformers used this rule.

- Consider the examples of Christ being circumcised and celibate (Sproul 79-80). Why are these helpful examples of the *didactic* interpreting the historical narrative?

- Why is it important to understand the use of *phenomenological language* in the Bible? (Sproul 81-3)

- Briefly summarize why building doctrine from narratives alone is a 'dangerous business.'

Rule 4: Interpret the implicit by the explicit

Read Sproul 83-7

- What should be the relationship between what is implied by a text, and what is explicit elsewhere? Why is this important?

Rule 5: Determine carefully the meaning of words

- Why is it important to understand that a word may have multiple meanings, and that context is crucial in determining that meaning?

Rule 6: Note the presence of parallelisms

Read Sproul 95-99

- Why can understanding parallelisms help us understand the meaning of a text?

Rule 7: Note the difference between proverb and law

Read Sproul 99-101

- Why can it be dangerous to mistake a proverb for a law?

Rule 8: Observe the difference between the spirit and the letter of the law

Read Sproul 101-5

- How might this principle help us grasp that there is more to sin than external acts?

Rule 9: Be careful with parables

Read Sproul 105-8

- Did Jesus teach in parables to make his teaching clearer or to obscure it?

- Why is looking for one main point in a parable a good rule of thumb?

Rule 10: Be careful with predictive prophecy

Read Sproul 108-11

- Why can it be said that the New Testament treats Old Testament prophecy both by the letter and more flexibly?

Rule 11: Interpret the Bible with a spirit of humility

Read Sproul 111-13

- Why is this an important rule to follow?

4. The Holy Spirit and Biblical Interpretation

Read Plummer 143-9.

- Summarize the role of the Holy Spirit in our interpretation of Scripture.

Memory Verse:

Review the memory verse:

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2 Timothy 2:15