

THE EQUIP INSTITUTE

Theme: Christian Story

Topic: Biblical Interpretation (Part 1)

Fall 2026

Introduction

The Equip Institute exists to equip members of Taylors First Baptist Church to think rightly about God and His Word for the sake of living rightly before God in His world. Our theme for this fall is Christian Story. Tonight is the first of two sessions on biblical interpretation.

Biblical Inspiration, Authority, and Truthfulness

As Christians, we believe that the Bible is **inspired**: it is literally God's words in written form. We also acknowledge that the Bible was written by dozens of different authors over a period of about a thousand years. Unlike every other book that has ever been written, the Bible is both a thoroughly divine book and a truly human book. God inspired the very words of every part of Scripture, not just the concepts conveyed by those words. Inspiration is thus *verbal* and *plenary*.

We further believe that the Bible is **authoritative**: when the Scripture speaks, God speaks, and thus those written words carry His divine authority. As such, we should submit ourselves to the teaching of Scripture as our supreme authority in all matters. When we obey the Scriptures, we are obeying God. When we disobey the Scriptures, we are disobeying God.

Because the words are God's words, they also reflect God perfectly holy character. God does not lie, so the Scriptures he inspired are **trustworthy**. The final form of the OT and the original manuscripts of the NT are without error in matters of fact. Modern translations are thus also without error to the degree they accurately convey the earliest and best available manuscripts. English Bibles are *virtually inerrant* and should be treated as fully trustworthy.

The Baptist Faith & Message (2000), Article I: The Scriptures

The Holy Bible was written by men divinely inspired and is God's revelation of Himself to man. It is a perfect treasure of divine instruction. It has God for its author, salvation for its end, and truth, without any mixture of error, for its

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Meaning and Interpretation

In the field of biblical hermeneutics, there is a debate about who determines the meaning of the text. Some argue that the author or authors decide what the text means. We call this view **authorial intention**. Others argue that the reader decides what the text means. We call this view **reader response**. Authorial intent is the default view of the average “man on the street” who is asked about meaning, while reader response is the most popular view among literary scholars.

Christians believe that every word of Scripture is dually authored. Furthermore, the purpose of the Bible is to communicate God’s truth to human readers in written form. For these reasons, most Christians reject reader response and affirm authorial intention. Our ultimate goal as interpreters is to understand what the divine Author is communicating through the human authors whom He inspired to write the Scriptures.

Throughout history, Christians have debated whether a text can have more than one meaning. There are two extreme positions. One extreme claims that every text has one literal meaning and that there is no place for any additional layers of meaning. This treats all of Scripture as if it is historical narrative and can undermine prophetic and poetic language that is meant to point us to Jesus. The other extreme claims that a text can mean many different things, with some meanings more literal and some more spiritual. This treats all of Scripture as if there is some deeper meaning hidden away that only the really holy readers can find. This latter extreme was common throughout the Middle Ages, when various allegorical interpretations were often considered far more important than what the text actually said.

Our goal as interpreters is to find whatever meaning is already present in the text. Often, there is only one straightforward meaning. But at times, there are layers of meaning. For example, a few OT passages are intended to be read allegorically. A good study Bible can help us to figure out when this is the case. However, far more common than allegory is **typology**, when an OT passage is intended by the author to foreshadow realities that are only fully understood in light of Jesus. In a broader sense, all of the OT is typological because all of it foreshadows Jesus. As Augustine said, “The new is in the old concealed, while the old is in the new revealed.”

Here is a good rule of thumb: allegory tries too hard to find *hidden* meanings in mundane details, while typology focuses on understanding *intended* meanings in biblical concepts ultimately fulfilled in Christ. Remember: as interpreters, we are not looking for hidden truths in the Bible intended only for the *really* spiritual readers, but rather are asking the Holy Spirit to reveal truths that have always been there and are intended to be known by all believers.

Application and Interpretation

It is one thing to know what the Bible meant to its original readers. It is another thing to know how to apply the meaning of the Bible to our contemporary contexts. Effective preachers and Bible teachers not only explain what the text means, but they show you various ways to apply that text to your life. Meaning without application can lead to “head knowledge” divorced from “heart knowledge.” Application divorced from meaning is just spiritual self-help advice or religious “life hacks.”

Six principles about the role of application in interpretation:

1. A text can only mean what the author intended (this is a review of the above)
2. Though a text can only mean what the author intended, there might be any number of applications that can be drawn from the text
3. While some applications apply to all people (e.g. obeying God’s moral commands), other applications might vary from person to person depending upon their circumstance
4. The text’s meaning plus our particular context provides the boundaries for the potential range of appropriate applications
5. We should never confuse our applications of the text with the meaning of the text, or we make the Bible primarily about our felt needs rather than God’s written revelation of Himself to humanity
6. Our application should always aim toward our faithfully obeying the Cultural Mandate (Gen. 1:26–28; 9:1), the First and Second Greatest Commandments (Matt. 22:34–40; Mark 12:28–31) and the Great Commission (Matt. 28:18–20; John 20:21–23; Acts 1:8)

Recommended Resources

Kevin DeYoung, *Taking God at His Word: Why the Bible Is Knowable, Necessary, and Enough, and What That Means for You and Me* (Crossway, 2016).

Matt Rogers and Donny Mathis, *Seven Arrows: Aiming Bible Readers in the Right Direction* (Rainer Publishing, 2017).

J. Scott Duvall and J. Daniel Hays, *Grasping God’s Word: A Hands-On Approach to Reading, Interpreting, and Applying the Bible*, 4th ed. (Zondervan, 2020).

Robert L. Plummer, *40 Questions about Interpreting the Bible*, 2nd ed. (Kregel Academic, 2021).