HOW TO INTERPRET THE BIBLE

Primary Ways

- **The Words**
  - We take the plain meaning, unless there is an internal reason not to.
  - Words – original & translated; the meaning is meaning at time of the author (*"paradise"*); hyperbole (Matthew 5.29) How does the Bible use the word? – John 1ff.
  - Sometimes a word/words are missing or translation is in doubt – KJV italics
  - Grammar and style matter.
  - What kind of literature is it? Prose, Poetry (*Psalms; Philippians 2; Genesis 1-2 & Psalm 104*); Apocalyptic, *Revelation*; Narrative, *The Gospels*
  - It it a real occurrence or story? *Good Samaritan (Luke 10.30-35), Job, Jonah*
  - Logic (Biblical writer’s vs. ours) - Magisterial vs. Ministerial use of logic.

- **Context**
  - The context sheds light on the understanding of the passage – Exodus 21.24

- **Scripture interprets Scripture**
  - We believe that the Bible does not contradict itself. - *Ephesians, James*
  - cross-references – re: hell; start in 1Peter 3.18-22, Matthew 25.31-46.
  - parallel accounts – put them together; compare/contrast them
  - The clear passage/s interpret the more difficult
  - We do not base doctrine on something mentioned only once in the Bible. - *James 5.14,15*

- **The “Sitz im Leben”**
  - “The situation in life”
  - parable of unforgiving steward, *Matthew 18.21-35*
  - parable of hidden treasure, *Matthew 13.44-46*

- **Consistency with the Overall Message of the Bible** (The Analogy of Faith)

- **Faith**
  - With faith we discern deeper, richer meaning to the message

- **The Holy Spirit**
  - Jesus promised the Spirit and that he would help – *John 14.25*

- **Levels of Meaning**
  - Much of the Bible has multiple layers of meaning: Example – The Prodigal Son, *Luke 15*
• Allegorically
  - A Biblical incident in which the characters (or incident) point to/represent a deeper, underlying meaning – Example: *Galatians 3,4*

• Christ
  - Christ in the *Psalms* – John Saleska; Christ everywhere!

• Type/Anti-Type
  - Abraham or Moses or David compared with Jesus

• Law/Gospel
  - Law: words of God that tell us what to do (curb; mirror; rule)
  - Gospel: (“God-spell”) Good News from God in Jesus

Secondary
• *Septuagint* (LXX - “70”) – Hebrew OT → Greek

• Bible Versions (different translations)

• Sermons, lectures, magazine and journal articles, etc.

• Study Bibles
  - a great variety of Bible versions and study Bibles
  - If you want a study Bible, it will say “Study Bible” on it and it will be a bigger book. Most often the notes are in small print at the bottom of the page. Those notes are like an abbreviated commentary. They don’t deal with everything.

• Commentaries (ancient and contemporary)
  - Ancient: Church Fathers et al.
  - Today – You can find commentaries in any Bible book store. Concordia Publishing House (and other publishers) have 2 kinds: one for pastors and scholars, the other for use in the congregation and home.

• Not all interpretations of the Bible are correct. (*1 Timothy 4.1ff; 2 Peter 2.1ff., 3.14ff.*

• Our goal ought to be to express, learn and take to heart nothing more and nothing less than the Bible/God says.

*Remember that any commentary is still someone’s opinion and *not* the final word! Most everyone reflects the author’s “leaning” and background, and it may even have an “agenda.” That’s why it’s important to know for yourself how to interpret the Bible!*