

What Do We Believe ... About Interpretation?

Having established the Bible as our authoritative standard for what we believe and how we conduct our lives, the question arises, “*How are we to interpret the Bible?*” One may simply listen to a sermon on the same passage by different preachers and easily see that they differ. Reading commentaries on the same passage might uncover other differences between these writers. If you ask a group of people, “*What does this verse mean to you?*” it is likely that you will get a variety of answers.

1. “*How can we be certain our interpretation is correct?*”

I would suggest that your purpose in reading these words is to grasp the meaning which I have given to them. This is how we would read an email, a facebook post, or a letter from the IRS. We seek to interpret them according to the author’s encoded meaning!

To that end, the committee proposes addressing this issue by adding a statement in Section 1,

We believe the Holy Scriptures should be interpreted using the *literal, grammatical, historical method.* (2 Timothy 3:16-17; 2 Peter 1:20-21; 3:15-16; Matthew 5:18; John 16:12-13).

2. *How many author’s does the Bible have (2 Peter 1:21; 2 Timothy 3:16)?*

Some scholars have counted at least forty different men that God used to write the various works which are collected into this book, from Moses to David to Paul to John. We know from 2 Peter 1:21 that holy men wrote what we can read today.

“... no prophecy was ever made by an act of human will, but men moved by the Holy Spirit spoke from God.”

But it is also clear that each work has a second author, God the Holy Spirit. This is confirmed not only by Peter, but also by Paul in 2 Timothy 3:16,

¹⁶All Scripture is inspired by God ...”

3. *From the idea of dual authorship, how would you approach discovering a meaning that is true to the human author and to God’s meaning?*

4. *Can we interpret the Scripture to mean what we think it means to us (2 Peter 1:20)?*

5. *Why should we go to the trouble of interpreting Scripture this way?*
2 Timothy 3:16-17

Matthew 5:18

2 Peter 3:16

6. *What aids do we have in getting the meaning of Scripture?*

Our present constitution does make a statement about *interpretation* in Section 15 on *Dispensationalism*:

We believe in the dispensational view of Bible interpretation, but reject the extreme teaching known as “Hyper-Dispensationalism” such as that teaching which opposed either the Lord’s table or water baptism as a Scriptural means of testimony for the church in this age. (Matthew 28:19-20; Acts 2:41, 42; 1 Corinthians 11:23-26; Matthew 13:49; Ephesians 3:2).
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7. *What two things does this statement say about interpretation?*

8. *What is dispensationalism (Ephesians 1:10; 3:9; Matthew 13:49; 28:20)?*

9. *If that’s so, then what would “hyper-dispensationalism” be?*

For a good summary of this consult: <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hyperdispensationalism>.

10. *How would you refute this using Acts 2:41-42; 10:47; and 1 Corinthians 11:23-26?*