

LET THE BIBLE INTERPRET ITSELF

Interpret scripture with scripture. To understand what the Bible says on a given subject, we must study the passages relating to it. Many errors of interpretation occur when people use only certain related passages and ignore the others. Our teaching must always be checked by consulting other passages in the Bible. Jesus said, "The Scripture cannot be broken" (John 10:35). That means Scripture does not contradict itself. It is improper to make a doctrine from one verse isolated from the rest of Scripture. Cults do this while ignoring the larger picture, and as a result they lead many astray. For instance, some teach that one must be baptized to be saved, basing their teaching on one or two passage of Scripture (Acts 2:38; 22:16). When the whole Bible is considered, we see the Bible is clear on the matter of salvation. See John 3:16-18; 3:33; 5:24; 10:28-29. Acts 16:30 records the only time in the Bible the question is asked, "What must I do to be saved?" The answer is given in the very next verse, "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and you will be saved..." (Acts 16:31). If one continues to read the remainder of the chapter it is easily determined that after a person is saved he or she is to profess faith in Jesus by being baptized (16:33). Baptism is a profession of faith in Christ. People were baptized immediately (or as soon as possible) after they were saved in the New Testament. Baptism is an outward picture of an inward reality (Romans 6:1-4). This is in harmony with the rest of the Bible on the subject of salvation.

Another error is to make a doctrine from the Gospels or Acts without considering the Epistles. Sound doctrine must be formed by considering all of Scripture. It is good to look for parallel passages. For instance, in the gospels many events are recorded in more than one gospel. Here it is important to compare the passages, understanding that each gospel was written by a different writer with a different purpose. Concerning the epistles, I Thessalonians 4:13-17 may be compared with I Corinthians 15:52 for parallel teachings on the rapture of the church. Paul also used parallel passages in Ephesians and Colossians to teach on the crucified life and on the family. For best results we should study both books on the subjects. When something is taught in the Gospels, in the Book of Acts, and in the epistles, it is safe to build a doctrine on it.