

THE INTERPRETATION OF SCRIPTURE

Outline:-

1. The Reality of God's Truth and the Danger of Man's Opinion.
2. (a) How may we know?
(b) When is a passage to be taken Figuratively? and similar questions.
3. Thoughts on 1 Corinthians 2, and Psalm 25, and on the misuse of Truth.
4. Meaning of John 7.17.
5. The Right Attitude toward those who differ and yet who seem to love the Lord.

. . . .

Do not interpretations belong to God? With this thought in our mind, we humbly approach our subject. God has been pleased to give us a precious book, a book which is all absolutely inspired, a book which contains, in its original form, no error. Now we believe this with a heart-belief which is intensely practical. Often times a man's condition and wishes affect his belief. We want our belief to affect our condition and wishes, that, recognising GOD has spoken these things, we may ACT upon the word of the living God as if it were what it is - that it may be to us a reality, a miracle of Divine revelation! Thus shall we have no hesitation, but with happy devotedness, ACCEPT the Scriptures, and in the power of Spirit of God frame our life according to them. I suppose we all recognise that Truth is considerably affected by that which is placed in between ourselves and it, and by our own condition. This is as to everything. In front of you there is something which is very excellent, but let us suppose you do not look at it, you look at the reflection of it in a mirror made of bad glass, you do not see the original. There are certain defects as a result - you get the general outline, but you say, the defects somewhat hinder a full perception. A "translation" is a mirror. If it be a good translation, it is fairly good glass; if it be a bad translation, it is like some window-panes which distort everything. It may even be like to a broken mirror. I go a step further - men will tell us they can

only believe what they can see. I cannot believe all that I do see. I have seen conditions among the heavenly bodies which I know do not exist. My eyes have falsified what I know to be there. I cannot trust my eyes, and I pity the man who DARES to depend on his eyes. So is it with Scripture. You have the original, you look in the mirror of the translation - at least, some are seeking by grace to put that mirror a little on one side and to go straight to the original: but still to some extent we all use the translation, and thank God for it. Yet we feel there is a further defect - our eyesight. Give me a poor mirror and good eyes, and I shall get along better than with a good mirror and eyes which distort. Now, if you and I are not walking with God our eyes distort the Truth, and we see what is not there, and we do not see what is there. I suppose many of you can sympathise with me. You have seen appearances among the heavenly bodies which you know are not there, and yet you have seen them; and there are plenty of people who behold things in Scripture which are not there, but they have seen them, and they are quite convinced that they are there. The fault is in their eyes, and the need is that something should be done for their eyes. While their eyes are wrong, they will continue to pervert the Scriptures. Absolute Truth is not realised by any of us in an imperfect condition. When we reach glory, we shall all be surprised at its fulness. I think you will understand what I mean, if I put it thus - You believe what you think Scripture sets forth. If what you think Scripture sets forth IS what Scripture sets forth, you believe what Scripture sets forth, but in proportion as your thinking and your perceiving fall short; so your believing falls short. There is not a single man who can dare to say without presumptuous pride, "I take the Scripture exactly as it stands", in THIS sense of the expression. I am quite aware that in another context that SHOULD be our attitude - and indeed it should be our desire as to everything, but in this context we feel that all of us reduce the Scripture, and LOSE some of its force, before we believe it. We need to be humbled because we do not realise all that is there. Nevertheless, Truth exists. Oh, let us rejoice in this fact, beloved friends, there is such a thing as Truth. All the transcriptions and translations and realizations and interpretations do not alter the fact, THERE IS TRUTH. We are not dealing with that which is a

variable quantity. I was speaking to a Jewish man the other day, and he said, "I believe in PARTS of Scripture". I reminded him he was just taking the position which we have in the book of Genesis. The temptation to Eve was, You shall be as gods knowing good and evil, you will be the deciding ones, you will have the knowledge; he took the devil's bait, he wanted to be the deciding one, he accepted those parts of Scripture which agreed with what he thought. Now there are some people who read Scripture to criticise it: others who, by the grace of God, read it that the Lord's truth may criticise them. There are some who go to the Scripture in order that they may arrange it in accord with their wishes: others, by the grace of God, go to it that they may arrange their wishes according to it, and in the power of the Holy Spirit we want to be like those who are willing to be brought into line with the Truth, not to try and bring it into line with us. Every denial of the infallibility of Scripture tends to an emphasis on the fallibility of a man, or at least to human pride and self-confidence. Every emphasis on the infallibility of Scripture is itself humbling, and even in this connection, as a practical part of Truth, it is very precious and useful. We cannot be humbled too much, but it is easy to be humbled too little. We rejoice therefore, beloved friends, that God has brought us to accept the precious thought, and to confess that He has given His Truth which He means us to know. As Prov. 1.6 puts it - "to understand the proverb and the interpretation, the words of the wise and their dark sayings". By the way, "the interpretation" may also mean "the sweetness". Surely, by the grace of God, we can enter into the spiritual meaning of this, "How sweet are Thy words" may be our prayerful and happy thought, If God's book of Truth has a real meaning, if it is not something to be twisted any way we like, but if it has a real meaning and we believe that God has given it, that we may understand, we enter into a forceful statement, "Who is wise, and he shall understand these things, prudent and he shall know them". And again our mind recollects the statement, "All the words of my mouth are righteous, there is nothing froward or perverse in them; they are all plain to him that understandeth, and right to them that find knowledge". God does not wish His children to be in the dark, He expects that we will listen to His invitation, "My son, if thou wilt receive My words, and hide My commandments with thee..if thou

criest after knowledge..if thou seekest her as silver and searchest for her as for hid treasures; then shalt thou understand the fear of the Lord, and find the knowledge of God, for the Lord giveth wisdom". We are told, "So many man, so many opinions". But there is one God and one Truth. We do not wish to walk as men, we desire that our opinions, as our other sins might be laid low and confessed. There are some people who are afraid to be DEFINITE. They seem to think that this firmness is unattainable. Beloved friends, we need grace to get out of this error. Truth us set before us that we may KNOW the things which are freely given us of God. Believers are not to be occupied with "I think" as to doctrine, any more than the "I hope" as to being saved. God has given His Word that we may know - KNOW a Person, and KNOW the Truth. Is it not clearly written, "These things have I written unto you, that ye may KNOW" and again, "Ye shall KNOW the Truth, and the Truth shall make you free?" Let us be very careful, however, that we seek grace to avoid both human extremes. One extreme is, SELF'S dogmatism, and the other extreme is self's uncertainty. Scripture is clear, and we shall see it more fully a little later. "If ye continue in My word, then are ye My disciples indeed, and ye shall know the Truth". You cannot jerk into a knowledge of the will of God. "If ye CONTINUE in My word". "CONTINUE thou in the things which thou hast learned and hast been assured of, knowing of Whom thou hast learned them". The apostle said to Timothy, "Be in these things that thy profiting may appear to all". If we are to have the interpretation of Scripture, we must be in a right CONDITION. And so this leads us on to our second point, "HOW may we know?"

I feel that points 2 and 3 somewhat overlap, and I should like to take 1 Cor. 2 and Ps. 25 in this connection. HOW may we know? 1 Cor. 2 declares to us that "We have received not the Spirit of the world, but the SPIRIT WHICH IS OF GOD, that we may know the things that are freely given us of God. Which things we speak". Beloved friends, here is a definite statement - "That we may know the things which are freely given us of God". The apostle, in chapter 1 says the wisdom of this world is cast on one side, and then in chapter 3 "He taketh the wise in their own craftiness". We have received a wisdom, not of this age, nor of the princes of this age, who are coming to

nought,- the hidden wisdom which God ordained before the ages, the wisdom of God in a mystery, which none of the princes of this age knew, for had they known, they would not have crucified the Lord of glory. Here then we see that if we are to KNOW God's teaching, it must be by the Spirit of God. Human intelligence fails. You may be the cleverest man in the world, and yet make the gravest mistakes. We have illustrations of this again and again. I recollect as a boy, when examined on Matt. 13 how a most learned examiner strongly objected to the interpretation that leaven was evil. I suppose I lost marks at the examination on this account. But how many there are who are exceedingly clever, and yet have no perception of the parts of Truth which cut against worldliness, and cut against the admixture with the things of this ruined age. Their intelligence is Hebrew grammar, their intelligence is Greek syntax, their intelligence is a brain full of vocabulary, but their intelligence is not the mind of God. It is most important that we should know Scripture in a truly spiritual way by being WITH God. I would speak to myself and plead with others, that we may have the leading of the Spirit of God, and that we may be LED of the Spirit - if we have been BORN of the Spirit, for it is the birthright of God's people thus to be led. But, beloved friends, let us remember, the leading of the Spirit of God is not an excuse for our own ideas and our own carelessness. If we label our own opinions "the leading of the Spirit", we are bringing that solemn sacred privilege into disrepute. The Pharisees asserted that the work of the Spirit of God was in the power of demons. It is not the same thing, but it is very serious, and in some respects similar, sin for us to attribute our own wishes to the Spirit of God, and to claim that we are guided by Him, when we are having our own way. If we are truly led by the Spirit of God, He will lead us IN THE SCRIPTURES. It is deeply important we should have an inner acquaintance of God's book. Before you go to a town, you may study the map, and know a fair amount about the locality. When you get there, you feel the arrangements are somewhat different from the map. You do not feel at home there; you know the names of the streets, you know just where you want to go, whereas in a part of London you may not know the names of the streets, but you know where you are and you know how to find your way about. There is a great difference between the two forms of knowledge. There are some people who know the names of the streets of the Bible. They know

the Bible facts - I have not a word to say against that, but they cannot find their way about spiritually, because they have never lived there. There are others who have lived there, sometimes they are, alas, careless and do not know the names of the streets (I should think as they live there, they might look up and notice the guide posts, and they might know a little more, that they might direct other people about) - but it is deeply important FIRST that we live there. Again, there are some people who have a grammar-and-vocabulary-knowledge of the Scriptures, even as some of us have learned languages. We know a number of words, but we could not speak grammatically. We know a number of words, but we cannot use the language, and there are many people who know a great deal of Scripture, and they can never use it because they do not possess it as their own language they have not used it. I believe, beloved friends, the more we use the Scriptures in our daily life, the more we shall know what they mean. The more we translate them into practice, the more shall we understand them. We must work the machinery to know just how it is arranged, not simply look at a picture of it. We need to bring the things of God into our daily life, and thus we shall obtain a wonderful key.

"If any one will to do His will, he shall know of the doctrine". I suppose that here we have the important thought of doing the will, and the way in which by grace we become accustomed to the meaning of Truth. But there is a tremendous force on "WILLING to do His will". It is not merely that we do it because we think we ought, or that we do this with a sense of religious pride, but because we are WILLING to do His will, and thus by the grace of God we are brought into harmony with the Writer of Scripture. The Lord Jesus Christ said, "Ye are My friends, if ye do WHATSOEVER I command you". Now the friend is WITH the friend, and knows the STANDPOINT of the friend, and takes the same view as the friend, and He says, "I have called you friends. All things that I have heard of My Father, I have made known unto you". There are some very strange things which people say, very strange things, and they are reported, and you hear them, at least you have an opportunity to hear them, from a third person, and when you hear them they seem extraordinary statements, and the one who informs you tells you what strange

beliefs such and such a person has. If you listen to this mode of conversation, (I am not sure that it is wise; rather I am sure it is unwise) - if you listen to it, you can oftentimes quickly answer, "I know he does not hold that belief, because he is a friend of mine, and I know his standpoint, and understand just what he means". Thus you say to the objector, "No, I can see just what mistake you have made. You have left one word out here, or altered one word there. I know just what he would say, because I am always with him". So it is with the things of the Lord. If you are with the other, you will know just what he means from the standpoint of fellowship. To approach Scripture from any other standpoint is to court failure. We need to be with the Author, we need to be in communion with the Author.

But there are other questions which rise up in the mind. A believer says, "How may I know to whom this passage is addressed?" Let us be careful in this connection, beloved friends. Do we agree that stealing is wrong, even if it is stealing Scripture? When a man of the world steals Divine statements which belong to those who are children of God, we say "This is terrible, he claims that God is his Father, it is most sinful". But if you and I claim a part of Truth which is not addressed to us, we are making a grave mistake. You would not open a letter addressed to someone else. You would not assume that a message written to someone else must be written to you because it came to your house; it might come to another member of the family; and there are parts of Scripture which are meant for other members of the family. True, we may be able to read the letter with them, we may be able to enjoy the facts. I suppose you have sometimes heard of arrangements which have been very encouraging to the one who has received the letter, and he has told you about them, he had read the letter to you, you have enjoyed with him that which is stated, and you have noticed that it means you have a share in his joy and a share in what is said to him, but you cannot say the whole letter belongs to you, and you cannot say the whole of Scripture promises belong to you. You must see to whom they are addressed. How can we tell? I suppose, beloved friends, the great thing is to be simple enough, and to be quiet enough, to know what God has set forth. You look to God's arrangements on Mount Sinai. "God spake all these words". He addressed them to Israel. "I am the Lord thy God which brought thee up out of the land of Egypt".

Now, you know very well that there are those in this land (and I beseech you, beloved friends, to treat it seriously), who will quote those verses, and ask God immediately after in prayer to incline their heart to keep that law, and all the time they KNOW that they never keep the seventh day, which God has marked out. They have no thought of keeping the seventh day which God has marked out. Indeed the seventh day does not belong to us in the present dispensation, but the attempt to apply a portion of the earlier Scriptures in a WRONG way produces this untruthfulness before God. At the present time we have seen many who take hold of parts of Scripture concerning earthly arrangements of vengeance, and they call upon believers to carry them out today. They will not look to whom the Scripture was addressed. There are those who, by grace, have their eyes open to see this error, but they will equally take hold of passages which speak of musical instruments, and plead for them at the present time among the Lord's people, whereas if a ritualist comes forward in favour of elaborate clothing, and brings forward a passage from the earlier Scriptures, they say, that belongs to the old dispensation. Let us be consistent. Let us see to whom the parts of Truth are addressed, and where we are definitely mentioned or implied. I suppose we are all aware that Scripture PRINCIPLES apply to all dispensations. The apostle, referring to the arrangements in a christian assembly makes the statement, "Saith not the law the same also"? But every part of the law reaches us as the law of Christ. Nothing has reached us of blessing, and nothing reaches us as a commandment except IN Christ. "If ye love Me keep My commandments" - that is the law IN which we are. In general, whatever is ^{an} unveiling of God's will in any dispensation applies to saints in other dispensations unless it is localized. God Himself shows where there is a limitation, just as we have seen in connection with ISRAEL and Exodus 20 the limitations as to us. But if you take all the other nine commandments, they are ALL brought before us in the New Testament as part of the law of Christ, but the fourth commandment is never thus brought before us. All the others are emphasized to show they are a transcript of that which is in accord with the character of God for all His people in all ages. The ONE "fourth commandment" is

not only left out in the epistles, but we distinctly read that if believers keep the seventh day they are in danger of losing at the judgment seat of Christ. It is a sin to keep religiously, as an ordinance, the seventh day at the present time; just as it is a sin now to be circumcised, whereas in the olden days it was to risk judgment not to be circumcised. But God makes clear when anything is put on one side. Arrangements are very definite as to circumcision and the sabbath being put away. So is it with animal sacrifices. We may rest assured God indicates His will somewhere in the Scripture. Here is a most important principle. In 1 Corinthians 2 you have "Comparing spiritual things with spiritual". We need to be simple enough to accept the Scripture as it stands. We need to be thorough enough to compare Scripture with Scripture. That is the key. So is it with respect to figurative passages. There are some dear children of God who will say "How can we know what is figurative?" Easily, in a number of passages. God in the context, or somewhere else, indicates what is a figure. I think that we reach a Divine principle and touchstone in this way. SOMEWHERE God explains everything else. It may not be on the same page. Abraham told a lie - we are not told it as a sin on that page, but elsewhere we are told of the sinfulness of a lie. God's servant Paul preached, mingling some confidence in human words, on Mar's hill - we are not TOLD there it was a sin, but elsewhere we are. Comparing Scripture with Scripture is important. If there is anything which is against God's teaching for us elsewhere we may be sure the command applies to someone else, or that we have misunderstood it, or that it is revealed to be figurative when we have taken it otherwise. God often says in the very passage, it is a figure, and as for example, where we have a "sign" set before us in Revelation, or the word "This is like" in so many of the picture-stories in the gospels. God indicates His own teaching. May I plead for the avoidance of pulling verses out of their context in this connection? Undoubtedly it is enjoyable to examine pearls individually, but be very careful that you do not cut the pearl in two, and remember that if you have the pearl necklace, if you pull one out of the context, you may break the necklace, and God means that we should be ADORNED WITH this kind of decoration. The book of Proverbs says so. We read of a Divine necklace there, and believers may have as many adornments of THIS character as they choose - and it is well to choose them. There are some

dear children of God who grasp hold of a verse like "He shall direct thy paths", and they leave out the first part, "In all thy ways acknowledge Him". They remember, "Lo, I am with you alway", and they forget "Teaching them to observe all things, whatsoever I have commanded you, AND, lo, I am with you alway". They take the expression "The blood of Jesus Christ cleanseth from all sin", but they forget "If we walk in the light as He is in the light we have fellowship one with another, AND the blood of Jesus Christ cleanseth us from all sin". Let us be careful to take verses in their setting, and thus we shall oftentimes be helped. I suppose every one is conscious of the fact that the devil tries to make us have some FAVOURITE opinions. Sometimes we think we have a little light which other people have not attained, and we are so glad about a certain point which we think we see. We emphasize it. Let me illustrate what I mean. I had a letter this morning which sought to interpret Matt. 24, The letter is from one whom I highly esteem in the Lord. The statement is made that the Lord's coming with power and might is the coming with His people because THEY are His power and might, and therefore they must be with Him first, that He might come with them. Now you will quite realize there is a form of interpretation which is very difficult to answer. It is easy to answer arguments, but it is VERY hard to answer assumptions. That has long been realised - assumptions are the most difficult to answer, and people can bring these forward and state them with the authority of Truth, and one does not know HOW to deal with them best. The only thing we can do is to ask them to prove where any Scripture says that the Lord's people are His power and might, and that this passage has such an allusion. By the way, it is not the word "power and might" in the passage, but "power and glory". You see the thought. One has a certain interpretation in the mind, and then having fixed that there, draws an inference and builds another storey in the house when the foundation has nothing on which to stand. INFERENCES are very precious, beloved friends, but be sure you have the foundation first. The inference from nothing is nothing. Be careful as to that. This has often led dear children of God astray, particularly when they are so glad they have reached some further thought that no one else has. There is always a measure of joy when we think we see something which

startles us, which is so attractive, and which may be an apparently spiritual thought. It may be right in itself, but NOT an interpretation of the passage we have in front of us, and therefore we read into the passage an interpretation which may be made the basis for another misinterpretation and that in its turn becomes the basis for another misinterpretation. We can hardly realise where the error will end. In this connection, let me plead for much care as to the use of types. Where the Holy Spirit says "This IS that", I believe this is that, but where a dear christian brother comes along and says "This is that", I say, I will accept it, if you give me a Scripture that illustrates. But the types, thus applied, confirm; they are not foundations. They confirm what is revealed elsewhere. If you say, "this is a beautiful picture of such and such things", but you cannot find those things in Scripture, I doubt you. Do you find them elsewhere in the Scripture? If you can find them elsewhere in the Scriptures, and the type can illustrate and emphasize, I rejoice in the type, I rejoice in the parable; but if you are saying "Here is a picture of this" or, "Here is a picture of that", without any authority from the Lord, there is grave danger. Some dear children of God have brought forward the case of Enoch. They have said, "Enoch was caught up without dying, before the flood, therefore children of God will be caught up before the tribulation". But, first of all, care will be needed as to saying that the flood is a picture of the tribulation. In the light of Matthew 24, I think they will find it hard to prove that the flood is a picture of the tribulation. Secondly, Enoch was caught up several hundred years before, because his son Methuselah died in the year of the flood, and he was nine hundred and sixty-nine years old, and Enoch was translated when his son was only three hundred years - so that we have brought before us a considerable period. No, beloved friends, when we have a case like that, have we any evidence that Enoch was put before us a type of the Lord's people caught up as to TIME and CIRCUMSTANCES and ARRANGEMENTS? Scripture does not say so, nor should we assume the type, and then say "Therefore". Give me Scripture statements and then let the types illustrate it. Let us be very clear upon this point. You obtain a book with some pictures in it. You look at the pictures, and you write the story to fit the pictures. Then you read the story which the pictures were to illustrate - they are not the same. You can understand what I mean if I put it in

that simple way. Be very careful about writing the book from the pictures. You may have some points right, but you will have some points wrong. Beloved friends, we are just taking this in a very simple homely way, but I do trust by the grace of God, we shall be kept from being led astray and from leading other people astray, because that is a very serious thing. To cause any one else to stumble in practice is wrong, to cause any one else to stumble in doctrine is wrong. We need grace to keep to the Truth, for our own sake, for the sake of others and for the sake of the Lord's glory.

Now at the end, we remember there are var children of God who differ. There are those we come across who seem to be children of God, and they do not agree. How shall we treat them? Coldness is always out of place. Love belongs to children of God. Love is the characteristic of children of God, but love is the most hating thing in the world. If we love intensely, we shall hate definitely. The mark of the believer is to hate evil, to hate that which is against God. Now, that being the case, we must hate every error WHEREVER it is found. If we have seen our own errors, we need to see them with horror and with repentance, not simply the thought, I have learned something fresh, but I have UNlearned something that was corrupt. It is a mercy to be delivered from our errors, and I know the Lord wants us to rejoice in the fresh teaching He gives us. THE LORD does not wish His people to be miserable, they are to have the joy of the Lord as their strength, and to learn something more, but we should rejoice with trembling when we realize that we have held error, and perhaps spread error, and we need grace to walk very softly all our days, knowing how easy it is to be deflected from the will of the Lord. And, therefore, if we hate error in ourselves, we should hate error, in others, and if there are differences among children of God, there should be a seeking to come together to deal with those differences, that believers may come to oneness of mind.

Question. Did you not intend to take Psalm 25?

Answer. Psalm 25 says, "The meek will He guide in judgment and the meek will He teach His way". Link that with

the contrasted expression "They waited not for His counsel". Here is a deeply important thought. "They waited not for His counsel". If we are not meek, if we are not quiet before God we shall lose His instruction, we shall lose the guidance which He waits to give.

oOoOo

(c) 2026 heshallcome.com All Rights Reserved