

ABUNDANTLY SUPPLYING KNOWLEDGE

I corresponded with a fellow once who said, "NO MAN can really understand the Bible, although many insist they do. God cannot require understanding because man is simply too limited in knowledge to understand ANYTHING!" Ironically, though, Paul said, "understand what the Will of the Lord is" (Ep 5:17), and God "made known to me the mystery (as I wrote before in a few words, by which, when you read, you may understand . . .)" (Ep 3:3-4a).

Does it make any sense to you that God would give us a book that He knew we could not understand? It sure doesn't to me; I don't believe God indulges in such folly!

In fact, one of the major points of Second Peter is to stimulate diligence on our part, not on God's part, to obtain knowledge: "Grow in the . . . knowledge of our Lord . . ." (3:18).

An indication of this being one of Peter's major points is the reference to knowledge about 33 times in just 61 verses; Peter evidently knew the miraculous knowledge, which was incomplete to each person to begin with, would give way to the complete revelation (1st Cr 13:10-13 & Ep 4:13-15).

The two main Greek words Peter used for knowledge were *gnosis* and *epignosis*.

Gnosis denotes partial/progressive knowledge, while *epignosis* denotes complete/true knowledge.

Both of these terms are used in First Corinthians 13:12b: "Now I know in part (*ginosko* [*gnosis*]), but then I shall know (*epignosomai* [*epignosis*]) just as I also am known."

Let's consider Peter's introduction to his second letter.

In the very first verse he introduced the origin of faith.

Peter began by saying, "To those who have obtained like-precious faith with us by the righteousness of our God and savior—Jesus Christ" (1:1).

By allowing the Bible to interpret the Bible, we find Paul said in Romans 1:17, "In it [the Gospel of Christ, v. 16] the righteousness of God is revealed from faith to (*eis*—to produce) faith."

Where's the righteousness of God found? It's found in the Gospel of Christ which produces faith!

Peter went on to say, "Grace and peace be multiplied to you by the knowledge (*epignosis*) of God—Jesus Christ our Lord" (1:2).

Epignosis is complete/true knowledge and here refers to the complete revelation of the Gospel.

"Grace and peace" can only come through the Gospel of Christ.

This *epignosis* (or Gospel) here is the concept, not the written Gospel as we tend to think of it; however, since we have the written *epignosis* of Christ today (Ep 4:13), we'll speak of it in that light anyway.

My correspondent, from whom I quoted earlier, also said, "Faith MUST come from God as an UNMERITED GIFT"; in other words, it must come through some kind of direct intervention.

This reminds me of Abraham's statement in Luke 16:31: "If they do not hear Moses and the prophets, neither will they be persuaded though one rise from the dead."

How could Peter command us to "grow in the . . . knowledge of Jesus" (3:18) if it weren't something which depended on our diligence and labor?

Faith cannot come except through knowledge!

And since, as we previously noted, direct revelation has ceased, it can only come through God's written Word today!

We must study it, for God desires all "to come to the knowledge of the truth" (1st Tm 2:4).

Peter went on to declare, "As His divine power has given to us all things which pertain to life and godliness, through the knowledge (*epignoseos*) of Him Who called us by [His] glory and virtue" (1:3).

"Power" here refers to the Gospel of Christ, "for it is the power of God" (Rm 1:16).

"*Epignoseos*" here (again) refers to the Gospel of Christ as well.

"Glory and virtue," as Arnt implies, describes God's power; so "glory and virtue" correspond to "power" which in turn refers to the Gospel of Christ.

Peter, therefore, continued to say, "By which have been given to us exceedingly great and precious promises, that by these (glory and virtue) you may be partakers of the divine nature, having escaped the corruptions of the world through lust" (1:4).

The Gospel of Christ, then, furnishes us with a calling (v. 3), knowledge (vv. 2-3), faith (v. 1), grace (v. 2), peace (v. 2), godliness (v. 3), and promises (v. 4).

Let's consider Peter's encouragement to hastily and abundantly supply knowledge (*gnosis*) within our faith (1:5 & 10).

What did Peter mean by *gnosis*? And why did he change and use two different words? Remember . . .

Epignosis denotes complete knowledge, while *gnosis* denotes partial/progressive knowledge.

So it's actually rather logical why Peter changed words: if we already had complete knowledge of the Gospel of Christ, Peter couldn't have said, "grow in *epignosei* (complete knowledge)."

Therefore, he would have had to say, and indeed did say, "grow in *gnosis* (knowledge)."

What's included in the phrase, "the knowledge of Christ"? This knowledge includes everything found in the Bible; just as the phrase "preaching Christ" in Acts 8:35 included preaching baptism as well as explaining Isaiah 53 to the Ethiopian, so the phrase "knowledge of Christ" includes all of God's Word, since it all revolves around Jesus.

Thus we need to abundantly supply within our faith a continually growing knowledge of the Bible!

Why should we abundantly supply *gnosis* within our faith? (We'll only look at the reasons supplied by Second Peter.)

"There will be false teachers among you" (2:1).

They will walk "according to their own lusts" (3:3).

"By covetousness they will exploit you with deceptive words" (2:3).

They will "despise authority" and be "presumptuous, self-willed and will speak evil of dignitaries" (2:10).

They will deliberately forget and be ignorant of truths (3:5).

They will cause "the way of truth to be blasphemed" (2:2).

They will be slaves of Satan (2:19).

"Many will follow" them (2:2).

They will be destroyed (2:3).

On the other hand, we will be growing towards "the *epignosei* of Jesus Christ" and will finally be brought into His everlasting kingdom because of it (1:8 & 10).

"Therefore, beloved, . . . be diligent that you may be found by Him in peace, without spot and blameless. . . . You therefore, beloved, seeing you know these things beforehand (cf. 1:9), beware, lest you also, being led away with the error of the wicked, fall from your own steadfastness. But grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior—Jesus Christ" (3:18).

How do we abundantly supply *gnosis* within our faith?

There are three basic ways to supply knowledge within our faith.

Read the Bible continually: Paul told Timothy, "Give attention to reading" (1st Tm 4:13); someone once said, "Read your Bible, because it fights truth decay."

Meditate on the Bible continually: David wrote, "Blessed is the man who walks not in the counsel of the ungodly, nor stands in the path of sinners, nor sits in the seat of the scornful; but his delight is in the law of the Lord, and in His law he meditates day and night. He shall be like a tree planted by the rivers of water, that brings forth its fruit in its season, whose leaf also shall not wither; and whatever he does shall prosper. The ungodly are not so, but are like the chaff which the wind drives away. Therefore the ungodly shall not stand in the judgment, nor sinners in the congregation of the righteous. For the Lord knows the way of the righteous, but the way of the ungodly shall perish" (Ps 1).

Study the Bible continually: James said, "He who looks into the perfect law of liberty and continues in it, and is not a forgetful hearer but a doer of the work, this one will be blessed in what he does" (Jas 1:25); the phrase "looks into" means "to bend down and observe, study closely."

However, discovering the truth through reading, meditating, and study comes much easier if we have some knowledge of sacred hermeneutics.

Hermeneutics is the science of interpretation.

There are "general hermeneutics" which are general principles applicable to the interpretation of all types of literature.

There are also "special hermeneutics" which are devoted to the explanation of particular classes of writings, such as historical, poetical, philosophical, and biblical; "sacred hermeneutics," then, are principles devoted to the explanation of the Bible.

There's a need today for the study and application of sacred hermeneutics.

Paul told Timothy to "correctly handle the Word of God" (2nd Tm 2:15), and from a study of the original language here, one will see this simply means to correctly teach God's Word.

Since the written Word is all we possess and all we need, we must study it by use of rules of interpretation (whether consciously or unconsciously), because we cannot correctly teach what we don't correctly comprehend.

There are many characteristics of a good interpreter, such as intellectual, educational, and spiritual; we only have time to mention a couple of points under the "spiritual" heading.

A good interpreter must have faith in the inspiration of the Bible.

A good interpreter must also desire to know truth which expresses itself in enthusiasm and reverence for God's Word.

Before we consider some of the rules of sacred hermeneutics . . .

Let's briefly consider the subject of logic.

Logic is the science of thought and the science that investigates the process of thinking, while thinking is the intellectual act by which knowledge is obtained.

We don't know a fact until we think it, that is, until the mind sets it in proper relation to the other parts of its experience and then comes to understand its true meaning. For example . . .

We make a distinction between hearsay and our own conclusions: "I've heard," we say, "that Tom is dishonest, but I don't know it." In other words, this fact hasn't been reached as a result of my own reasoning and therefore can't be knowledge; I would only really know it when I have reached conclusions as a result of my own reasoning. So essentially . . .

Logic is the science of reasoning out thoughts which we've heard or read.

Logic is derived from the corresponding adjective to the Greek word *logos* (as used in 2nd Tm 2:15 & Jn 1:1) which signifies a complete thought and the word which expresses that thought.

Logic finds the products of thinking expressed in words and may be said to be connected with the meanings of words, sentences, and arguments.

Logic consists of three ingredients. **[Put up Logic Chart.]**

A Relevant—evidence that tends to prove a matter at issue.

A Reasoning—formulating ideas on facts using the power of judgment.

A Conclusion—the necessary consequence of two or more arguments.

Let's look at the two methods of logic at work.

1. The Inductive Process reasons from the specific to the generic, and is accomplished by using specific cases or instances to formulate conclusions: explanations, contentions, and conclusions are derived from examples, analogies, and their rational dimensions. For example . . .

a. Reasoning From Signs: Jesus said, "When it is evening you say, 'It will be fair weather, for the sky is red'; and in the morning, 'It will be foul weather today, for the sky is red and threatening.' Hypocrites! You know how to discern the face of the sky, but you cannot discern the signs of the times" (Mt 16:2-3).

b. Reasoning From Causal Inferences: Jesus said, "Whoever hears these sayings of Mine, and does them, I will liken him to a wise man who built his house on the rock: and the rain descended, the floods came, and the winds blew and beat on that house; and it did not fall, for it was founded on the rock. Now everyone who hears these sayings of Mine, and does not do them, will be like a foolish man who built his house on the sand; and the rain descended, the floods came, and the winds blew and beat on that house; and it fell. And great was its fall" (Mt 7:24-27).

c. Reasoning from Examples: James wrote, "What does it profit . . . if someone says he has faith but does not have works? Can faith save him? If a brother or sister is naked and destitute of daily food, and one of you says to them, 'Depart in peace, be warmed and filled,' but you do not give them the things which are needed for the body, what does it profit?" (Js 2:14-17a).

d. Reasoning from Analogies of which there are two types.

The Literal Analogy is comparing two things which are alike in class: the Gospel saved people in Palestine, so it will save people in other parts of the world as well.

The Figurative Analogy is comparing two things which are different in class: "The kingdom of Heaven is like a grain of mustard seed" (Mt 13:31).

2. The Deductive Process constructs a progression of ideas which begin with the statement of a general principle leading to the formation of a conclusion; this is rendered as a syllogism.

Major Premise: God is the God of the living (Mt 22:32).

Minor Premise: God is Abraham's God (Mt 22:32).

Conclusion: Abraham is still alive today!

So for logical conclusions, simply gather all relevant evidence; determine which method is best to most effectively obtain a conclusion; then formulate a deduction. Finally . . . **[Put up the Generic Rules Chart.]**

Let's consider some generic rules of interpretation.

1. Read the Bible like any other book.

The only difference should be in our attitude toward its infallibility.

The Bible doesn't take on some special magic which changes basic literary patterns of interpretation; in other words, a verb is still a verb, and a noun is still a noun.

Words should, therefore, be understood in their literal sense unless such interpretation involves an obvious contradiction.

2. Read the Bible existentially.

This just means to get personally involved in reading by crawling into the skin of the characters.

We usually do this automatically due to necessary implication; for example, when the Bible speaks of Christ's crucifixion, we attempt to place ourselves in His skin to feel what He felt.

3. Always attempt to use Scripture to interpret Scripture.

a. Narratives are to be interpreted by teachings.

For example, we're taught to imitate the life of Christ (2nd Pt 2:21).

As we read the narrative of His life, we discover He remained unmarried, yet we learn from Paul's teaching (1st Cr 7:8-9) that we're allowed to marry; Paul said that even he, as an apostle, could marry (1st Cr 9:5).

b. Interpret the obscure in the light of the clear; the implicit is to be interpreted by the explicit.

Some people, for example, claim angels are without gender, citing Mark 12:25 where Jesus said that we'll be like the angels who don't marry. However . . .

Although this teaches that angels don't marry, it does NOT teach, it does not necessarily imply, that they're genderless. (In fact, to the contrary, Revelation 12:7 speaks of Michael, the arch angel, as a male.)

c. Find and make use of all parallel passages when studying any subject or text.

4. Distinguish the difference between laws and proverbs.

Proverbs are catchy little couplets designed to express practical truisms; they reflect principles of wisdom for godly living, not moral laws to be applied absolutely to every situation.

Matthew 12:30 has Jesus saying, "He who is not with Me is against Me," while Luke 9:50 has Jesus saying, "He who is not against you is for you." In some cases, the lack of opposition means support, while in others the lack of support means opposition. Again . . .

Proverbs 26:4 says, "Answer not a fool according to his folly," while the next verse says, "Answer a fool according to his folly." When we find opposing proverbs we're being told that they were meant for different circumstances.

Law, on the other hand, falls into one of two categories.

There are casuistic laws which are conditional in nature ("If . . . then"): for example, Exodus 23:4 reads, "If you meet your enemy's ox or his donkey going astray, [then] you shall surely bring it back to him again." (Incidentally, although "ox" and "donkey" are specifically mentioned, by casuistic implication, any living thing belonging to one's neighbor is included.

There are also apodictic laws which are unconditional in nature: "You shall love your neighbor," and "You shall not bear false witness," no ifs, ands, or buts about them.

5. Distinguish the difference between the spirit and letter of the law.

First John 3:15, for example, reads, "Whoever hates his brother is a murderer, and you know that no murderer has eternal life abiding in him." Now, if we neither murder nor hate anyone, we obey the "letter" as well as the "spirit" of the law, but if we don't murder anyone but we do hate someone, then we've transgressed the "spirit" of the law while attempting to obey the "letter."

Jesus said, "You have heard that it was said to those of old, 'You shall not murder,' and whoever murders will be in danger of the judgment. But I say to you that whoever is angry with his brother without a cause shall be in danger of the judgment" (Mt 5:21-22a). See, God desires us to do the one—don't murder, while at the same time not leaving the other undone—love our brother (cf. Mt 23:23). Now . . . **[Put up Specific Rules Chart.]**

Let's consider some specific rules of interpretation.

1. Ask questions: *Who's the author? When was the passage written? Where was it written from? To whom was it written? Why was it written? What kind of text is it: poetic, parabolic, proverbial, sermon, etc.?*
2. Determine the correct meaning of each and every word by . . .
 - a. remembering that a word can have only one fixed meaning in its connection.
 - b. assuming, if a word is used in the same connection more than once, that it has the same meaning throughout that connection. (Exceptions to this are usually quite apparent, such as in Matthew 8:22 where Jesus said, "Let the dead bury the dead.")
 - c. always checking to see if the writer defined his own words or phrases. (In Hebrews 5:14, for example, the phrase "full age" is described as "those who by reason of use have their senses exercised.")
 - d. remembering that subjects and predicates mutually explain each other. (In **Romans 8:19-23**, for example, we know that "the creature" is the inanimate creation, because the predicates of the passage exclude everything else.)
 - e. choosing the broad or general meaning of a word or phrase unless it's necessarily restricted. (I believe there are hundreds of cases where brethren have missed the boat on this rule such as in 2nd Th 3:6 & 2nd Cr 6:14 where Paul simply applied general truths to special problems; the contexts don't unavoidably restrict these principles.)
 - f. watching out for tenses and their numerous changes.
3. Ascertain what is truly figurative, and interpret it correctly by . . .
 - a. knowing what the figure is and what it takes to constitute that figure.
 - b. remembering that the figurative force depends on the literal definition.
 - c. not taking the figure too far: for example, if someone is called something, such as when God is called "a rock" (Ps 18:2) or Herod is called "a fox" (Lk 13:32), as a rule only one likeness or characteristic is being referred to—God is steadfast as a rock, and Herod was as sly as a fox.
 - d. expressing the figure in a literal sense.
"God is love" equals "God always acts out of love."

In fact, a good rule of thumb is to *use the definitions of words in the place of the words*.

Conclusion

So since only through the Gospel of Christ can we have the promises of God, a calling to salvation, faith that leads to grace, peace, godliness, and steadfastness, we need to have a growing knowledge of it. We need to continue to "strive for perfection" (Hb 6:1), strive for the "complete knowledge" of the truths God desires us to understand.

So it isn't enough for a Bible student to merely read: he needs to study by logically applying rules of interpretation. Every rule should be often used and skill in its use should be acquired by careful discipline. And let's surely not forget to pray for wisdom, knowledge, and understanding (Js 1:5).

I think it'd be interesting to note as we're concluding that there are only two reasons for ignorance: a lack of knowledge or a wrong perception of available information. But, as Peter said, we have all things we need for life and godliness in the Gospel, so there's actually no excuse for ignorance or apostasy.