

SYSTEMATIC THEOLOGY

Video Lecture Series

by Robert D. McCurley, ThM

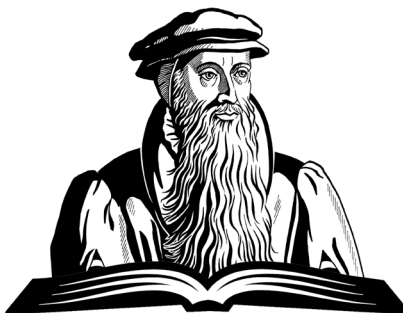
STUDY GUIDE

Module 1:

**INTRODUCTION and
THE DOCTRINE OF FIRST PRINCIPLES**

Lecture 9:

INTERPRETATION OF SCRIPTURE



The John Knox Institute
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Entrusting our Reformed Inheritance to the Church Worldwide

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Unless otherwise indicated, all Scripture quotations are from the Authorized King James Version.

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STUDY GUIDE

Module 1

Introduction, and The Doctrine of First Principles

Introduction:

1. Methodology
2. Creeds and Confessions

The Doctrine of First Principles:

3. Scripture
4. Revelation
5. The Inspiration of Scripture
6. Properties of Inspired Scripture
7. The Canon of Holy Scripture
8. Preservation and Translation of Scripture
- 9. Interpretation of Scripture**
10. The Continuity of Scripture

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Module 1:

THE DOCTRINE OF FIRST PRINCIPLES

Lecture 9:

Preservation and Interpretation of Scripture

Introduction

Communication is vital to all of us, but miscommunication happens all the time in our lives, whether deliberate or unintentional. If something is misinterpreted, it can cause a misunderstanding about what was communicated. A written document must be interpreted properly in order to be correctly understood as well. Therefore, it is important to learn some fundamental principles for interpreting the written word, especially when we approach the most holy and solemn book, the Bible.

Theme: *Fundamental principles of how to interpret Scripture.*

I. Scriptural Basis

“Knowing this first, that no prophecy of the scripture is of any private interpretation.”

—2 Peter 1:20

“Which things also we speak, not in the words which man’s wisdom teacheth, but which the Holy Ghost teacheth; comparing spiritual things with spiritual.”—1 Corinthians 2:13

1. The Bible itself tells us how we are to interpret the Bible.
2. We can have greater confidence in the Scriptures than in even very remarkable experiences.
3. The Lord has provided a beautiful, harmonious, perfectly-connected revelation within the pages of the Holy Scriptures.

Questions:

1. Where do we learn how to interpret Scripture?

2. Read and meditate on 2 Peter 1:20 in its context. Did Peter place his confidence in his own experience, or did he place his confidence in the Scripture? What does that teach us?

3. What truths can we draw from 1 Corinthians 2:13 regarding interpreting Scripture?

II. Doctrinal Overview

Summarized in *The Westminster Confession of Faith*, chapter 1, paragraph 9.

1. The rule of comparing Scripture with Scripture.
2. Interpret the more obscure passage in light of the more clear ones.
 - a. Interpret the historical narratives in light of the didactic (teaching-oriented) passages of Scripture.
 - b. Interpret the implicit passages in light of the explicit passages.
 - c. Interpret the earlier texts in light of the later texts.
 - d. Interpret figurative passages in light of more literal passages.
3. Good and necessary consequences are just as binding as statements that are expressly taught in Scripture, per *Westminster Confession of Faith*, chapter 1, paragraph 6.

Questions:

1. Please give a clear example from Scripture of interpreting a historical narrative in light of a didactic passage. Why should we hold to this hermeneutical principle?

2. Rev. McCurley gave us an example of interpreting an implicit passage in light of an explicit one. Can you find another example of this in the Bible?

3. Why should we interpret earlier texts in light of later texts? How does this principle help us understand the relationship between the Old and New Testaments?

4. What is the key to understanding and interpreting figurative texts?

5. What is the meaning of the phrase, “good and necessary consequences”? Why is this important for interpreting Scripture?

III. Polemical Exposition

1. There is an important difference between getting the true meaning out of the text, and reading our own meaning into the text.

2. Every heresy and every false doctrine seeks to support its position from Scripture.

Questions:

1. What is the difference between getting the true meaning out of a passage, and reading our own meaning into the passage? What must we avoid, and what should we promote?

2. Is it enough for a teacher or a preacher to merely quote Scripture? What more is required?

IV. Practical Exposition

1. Ministers of the gospel must give careful attention to the accurate interpretation of Scripture in their preaching and teaching.

2. It is essential to engage in a systematic habitual reading of the whole Bible.

3. The accurate interpretation of Scripture is essential for the believer's growth in Christian maturity, by strengthening our spiritual discernment.

4. It is only after we understand the accurate meaning of a Scripture passage that we can then go on to apply that passage and its implications to our own life and circumstances.

Questions:

1. Read and meditate on both Nehemiah chapter 8 and Acts chapter 18. What do these two Bible chapters say about the Christian preacher's work?

2. Why is a systematic habitual reading of the whole Bible absolutely necessary?

3. Where does spiritual maturity and discernment come from? What can we do to promote these graces in a prayerful way?

4. Why should we begin Scripture interpretation by asking the question, “What does this passage mean?” rather than asking, “What does this passage mean to me?” or “How does it apply to me?”

V. Self-Reflection

Now that you have gone through this lecture, have you found some error in the way you read and study the Scriptures? Does this lecture help you to better interpret the meaning of Scripture? We need to learn these principles by exercising them in our daily Scripture studies. Above all, we need to ask the Holy Spirit to help us better understand spiritual things.
