
THE KISS* PRINCIPLES OF SCRIPTURE INTERPRETATION

By Susan A. Massey, M.Div.

*Keep It Simple, Saints!

1. Believe and apply the Bible as it is written. The simplest interpretation is probably the right one.
2. Assume miracles happened just like the Bible says they did. Don't try to explain them away in terms of modern science or psychology. If it says Jesus cast out demons to heal, there were demons.
3. You don't need to have a seminary degree to interpret scripture. Simply use a website with multiple Bible translations to compare scripture passages and look at footnotes. You will get a good idea of the meaning of the passage by doing this. Try to understand it on your own first and hear from the Holy Spirit before checking Bible commentaries to see what others think about it.
4. If you don't understand something, ask God to explain it to you. "But if any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask of God, who gives to all generously and without reproach, and it will be given to him."
(James 1:5)
5. Stay away from semantic word studies and theological arguments--unless Bible interpretation, preaching, or teaching is your spiritual calling. Such arguments and explanations will only cause confusion, division, and a religious spirit instead of a deepening relationship with Jesus. Take what the Bible says at face value, and don't build a doctrine on what you think it might mean. For example, if Jesus said to eat bread and drink wine in remembrance of his broken body and shed blood, then a doctrine claiming that during such a ritual memorial meal the wine actually turns into his blood and the bread actually becomes his body is a little hard to swallow.
6. If two scriptures seem to contradict each other, at least one is probably contextual instead of universal in interpretation. That is, one or more of them were written to address a particular historical situation rather than as general principles that apply to everyone for all time.
7. If there seems to be an error in a scripture translation, remember that the Bible was transmitted over time by scribes making manual copies on scrolls before the invention of printing presses. The fact it has been so well and accurately preserved through thousands of years with so little human error is a miracle. If some scribe fell asleep on his scroll and made an inadvertent ink blot, that mistake is now recorded by scholars in detailed comparisons of hundreds of carefully preserved scrolls. There is a footnote in many Bible translations to let us know there is a variant reading of that passage between copies of ancient manuscripts. It's no big deal. Your faith shouldn't rest on somebody's ink blot. Look at the big picture and trust God to guide you in the important truths.
8. The Bible is how we get to know God and his will for us. Use it for that purpose. KISS the Word!