

## **That's Just Your Interpretation**

*Mark Larson*

“That’s just your interpretation!” How many times has someone said that to you when you attempted to teach them the truth from the Scriptures? Rather than take the message of truth to heart, it is quickly dismissed as merely your opinion and not taken seriously at all.

If you have ever heard this before, you know that it is sort of like “hitting a brick wall.” Further discussion of the truth with such a person can be very difficult. The potential for meaningful Bible study is not very promising.

**What Is Your Interpretation?** The best way to begin in your response to someone who says, “That’s just your interpretation” is to simply ask for their interpretation. An interpretation in Bible study is just an explanation of the meaning of a particular passage of Scripture. Rather than be discouraged and give up, make this offer instead: “I am willing to hear your interpretation and correct my own position if I am wrong.” This demonstrates fairness as well as humility, both which are necessary for Bible study (Prov. 18:12-13). Be open-minded and willing to hear any evidence that they might have for their beliefs and practices. Just as we hope for positive change in the people we teach, we too must demonstrate a willingness to change our own beliefs and practices when we are corrected.

**Speak in Terms of Evidence.** When making the offer to listen to other people’s interpretation of Scripture, be sure to include this request: “Can you please show me the evidence for your interpretation?” Before allowing an exchange of interpretations to take place, it is important to come to a mutual agreement that true, saving faith is based on the evidence or the teaching of the Scriptures. “So then faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the word of God” (Rom. 10:17).

We must speak of the importance of providing book, chapter, and verse for the beliefs that we hold (1 Pet. 4:11; Col. 3:17). We must emphasize that a fair hearing must be given to all that God has said on the matter to get a proper understanding of God’s will. Passages must be examined in its proper context. Concordances and Hebrew or Greek Bible dictionaries are also helpful to gather even more evidence.

**Will Any Interpretation of Scripture Do?** Many people, in response to the multitude of religious groups and doctrines, conclude that almost any interpretation will do. Rather than rule out certain religious beliefs on the basis of Scripture, there is the desire to respect every belief as equal in merit or legitimacy. Many people want to “just get along” and do not want to debate or discuss their differences. The preferred “solution” of many is to just choose the interpretation that personally suits you best and call that “the truth.” This may be nothing more than a cop out for true study and an indication that the person doesn’t want to accept the truth.

Finding the truth requires a recognition that there is ultimately only one right interpretation of the Scriptures. There is only one faith (Eph. 4:5; Jude 3) or one truth (John 8:32; 17:17) that God has revealed to us. God has promised us that we can know what the truth is (1 Tim. 2:4; Eph. 3:4). One who truly wants to know the truth and obey the truth will recognize this fact and search diligently for the correct interpretation of Scripture.

**So how do you decide which interpretation of Scripture to choose?** To sift through all possible interpretations and decide on only one requires that we accept the interpretation that is most plausible, probable, or credible. Rather than foolishly accept just any interpretation of Scripture, let us choose the one that provides the most evidence (e.g., true to the context of the passage, in harmony with parallel passages on the same subject, true to the actual meaning of Bible words, etc.). “So then do not be foolish, but understand what the will of the Lord is” (Eph. 5:17).

**God Provides Us with Rules for Interpretation.** Thankfully, God provides us with some assistance on how to interpret the Scriptures right in the Word itself. The Lord gives us the help we need to determine the truth for what we are to believe and practice in religion. There are four major rules He provides: (1) Direct statements or commands we must obey (e.g., John 14:15; 2 Pet. 3:1-2); (2) Divinely approved examples we are to follow (e.g., 1 Pet. 2:21; Phil. 3:17; Acts 2:42); (3) Necessary implications, meaning conclusions we can make from what is implied in Scripture (e.g., Mat. 22:41-46); (4) Respect for the silence of God, meaning we restrict ourselves to what God has revealed in the Scriptures to determine His will (Deut. 29:29). We do not add to it nor take away from it (Rev. 22:18-19).

As we search for the truth, let us all be true to God and respect His word in the interpretation of the Scriptures.