BIBLIOLOGY:

DEVELOPING A LOVE FOR GOD'S WORD

WEEK 6: ILLUMINATION AND INTERPRETATION

INTRODUCTION TO THE SERIES

- **Class Schedule:**
  - September 13: Introduction and General/Special Revelation
  - September 20: Inspiration and Authority
  - September 27: Inerrancy and Infallibility
  - October 4: Canonicity and Clarity
  - October 11: Necessity and Sufficiency
  - **October 18: Illumination and Interpretation**

ILLUMINATION

Definition

- The Holy Spirit's ministry of helping believers to understand and apply the truths of the Word of God
- It is that operation of the Holy Spirit whereby He makes known to regenerate men the spiritual content, significance, application, and truth of the Bible
- Since only God knows the things of God, it is essential that the Spirit of God instructs the believer

- Illumination is different than revelation and inspiration.
  - **Revelation** relates to its content or material
  - **Inspiration** to the method of recording that material
  - **Illumination** to the meaning of the record for all believers.

Luke 24:44-45 ~ *"Now He said to them, 'These are My words which I spoke to you while I was still with you, that all things which are written about Me in the Law of Moses and the Prophets and the Psalms must be fulfilled.' Then* ***He opened their minds to understand the Scriptures****"*

- **Content is already available:** Special **Revelation**.
- The content was given supernaturally: **Inspiration**.
- The content is made clear and convicting: **Illumination**.
- This is a ministry of the Holy Spirit to convict people so that they
  - see the relationship between the text and themselves,
  - and believe and act accordingly

The Need for Illumination

- We need to know what it means and live accordingly.
- Illumination enables man to comprehend the Word of God. Without it we cannot truly do so because:

1. **Knowledge Gap:** The differences between God and man prevent us from entirely comprehending him
   - God goes beyond our categories of understanding and can never be fully grasped within our finite concepts or by our human mind
   - Correlated with God's transcendence is man's finiteness
   - Man cannot formulate concepts which are consistent with the nature of God

Job 5:9 *~ Who does great and* ***unsearchable things****, Wonders without number.*

Job 11:7-9 *~ Can you discover the depths of God? Can you discover the limits of the Almighty? "They are high as the heavens, what can you do? Deeper than Sheol, what can you know? "Its measure is longer than the earth And broader than the sea.*

Job 21:22 *~ Can anyone teach God knowledge, In that He judges those on high?* ***See also Job 38-42***

Isaiah 40:13-14 *~ Who has directed the Spirit of the LORD, Or as His counselor has informed Him? With whom did He consult and who gave Him understanding? And who taught Him in the path of justice and taught Him knowledge And informed Him of the way of understanding?*

Romans 11:33-34 *~ Oh, the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are His judgments and unfathomable His ways! [34] For WHO HAS KNOWN THE MIND OF THE LORD, OR WHO BECAME HIS COUNSELOR?*

Colossians 2:3 *~ Christ Himself, in whom are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge*

2. **God's Book:** Because the Bible is God-breathed and therefore in an entirely different dimension from any other literature, it is necessary that man receives God-given help in understanding.

2 Timothy 3:16 *~ All Scripture is* ***inspired by God*** *and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training in righteousness*

Hebrews 4:12 *~ For the word of God is living and active, sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing to the division of soul and spirit, of joints and marrow, and discerning the thoughts and intentions of the heart.*

3. **Our Sin:** Unregenerate man's sin-darkened mind cannot comprehend and apply spiritual truths

Romans 1:21 *~ For even though they knew God, they did not honor Him as God or give thanks, but they became futile in their speculations, and their* ***foolish heart was darkened****.*

Ephesians 2:1-3 *~ And you he made alive, when you were* ***dead through the trespasses and sins*** *in which you once walked, following the course of this world, following the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that is now at work in the sons of disobedience. Among these we all once lived in the passions of our flesh, following the desires of body and mind, and so we were by nature children of wrath, like the rest of mankind.*

Ephesians 4:18 *~ being* ***darkened in their understanding****, excluded from the life of God because of the ignorance that is in them, because of the hardness of their heart;*

- ***2 Corinthians 4:4*** *~ in whose case* ***the god of this world has blinded the minds of the unbelieving*** *so that they might not see the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God.*

Biblical Evidence for Illumination

- The primary passage addressing the issue of illumination is 1 Corinthians 2:6-16

Vs. 6-8

- The "mature" = not those who are more advanced in their faith but **those who are saved** –
  - i.e. those who are redeemed and completely trusting in Christ
- The gospel is wisdom… only among **true believers**
- This wisdom, previously a "mystery," has been prepared by God in eternity past – this refers to nothing other than salvation through His Son
- But those who are of the world do not receive this wisdom because it is not humanly discovered
- This is evident from the fact that they crucified Christ (vs. 8)

Vs. 9

- This verse is not referring to *the wonders of heaven* as many assume it is but rather to *the wisdom God has prepared for believers*
  - The natural eyes, ears, and hearts of men cannot know or comprehend His wisdom
  - Wisdom is prepared only for those who love Him
  - Natural man cannot discern divine truth through their natural senses such as seeing and hearing

- This mystery is now revealed and the only way they could know this was by the Spirit who knows and reveals these deep things of God about salvation.
- True wisdom is divinely revealed
  - In Revelation – vs. 10-11
  - In Inspiration – vs. 12-13
  - In Illumination – vs. 14-16

Vs. 10-11 (in Revelation)

- The HS is the Trinity's agent of transmission and communication – He knows the mind of God perfectly and is able to make it clear to us
- Paul illustrates this by pointing out that nobody can fully fathom the thoughts of anyone else – our innermost thoughts are known only to ourselves
- In a similar way, only God's own Spirit can know Him intimately
- It is the HS, who knows the depths and thoughts of God, whom God has sent to reveal His own wisdom to those who believe

Vs. 12-13 (In Inspiration)

- God's truth cannot be discovered by man; it can only be received…the Bible is the Spirit's vehicle for bringing God's revelation
- The **"we" and "us"** of these verses do not refer to Christians in general but to **Paul himself**
- God's Word is for all believers but was **revealed only to the apostles** and other writers of Scripture
- Only those men can be said to be inspired (God's words through them)
- The promise of John 14:26 is for the benefit of all believers, but was given only to the apostles: John 14:26 ~ But the Helper, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in My name, He will teach you all things, and bring to your remembrance all that I said to you.
- The apostles recorded what God gave them

Vs. 14-16 (In Illumination)

- **The unregenerate man:**
  - Since only spiritual people are able to receive spiritual truths, it follows that the man without the Spirit, an unregenerate person, would not and could not receive the message of wisdom regardless of his intellectual abilities.
  - In fact, it is **all foolishness to him** for he cannot understand them because they are not known to him
  - It is possible to read the Bible and yet not understand it (i.e. Pharisees)
  - The natural man CANNOT know or understand the things of the Spirit of God – his problem is not an intellectual problem but a spiritual one
  - Luther: "The Bible cannot be understood simply by study or talent; you must count only on the influence of the Holy Spirit"
  - Calvin: "The testimony of the Spirit is superior to reason. For…these words will not obtain full credit in the hearts of men until they are sealed by the inward testimony of the Spirit"
  - God's truth is truly only available to those with a regenerate spirit in whom His Spirit dwells, for only the Spirit can illumine Scripture
- **The Believer:**
  - But when the HS changes a man's heart, he is **able to "see" with the eyes of His heart**
  - The believer now has a **resident truth teacher** to enlighten him about all the things of God he needs to know
  - This is what it means: "But he who is spiritual appraises all things"
  - The man possessing the Spirit is
    - **guided by Him** and
    - **able to evaluate and apply** all things the Spirit reveals
    - since **he has the mind of Christ**
    - and therefore **able to respond in obedience**.
  - Unlike God's revelation and inspiration which were given to the biblical writers, His illumination is for all Christians
  - The Holy Spirit takes God's Word and illuminates it for those in whom He dwells
  - This is what John referred to in 1 John 2:27 ~ As for you, the anointing which you received from Him abides in you, and you have no need for anyone to teach you; but as His anointing teaches you about all things, and is true and is not a lie, and just as it has taught you, you abide in Him.

Questions Regarding Illumination

1. To what degree can non-Christians understand the Scriptures?

2. Can a believer know all there is to know about God and His Word?

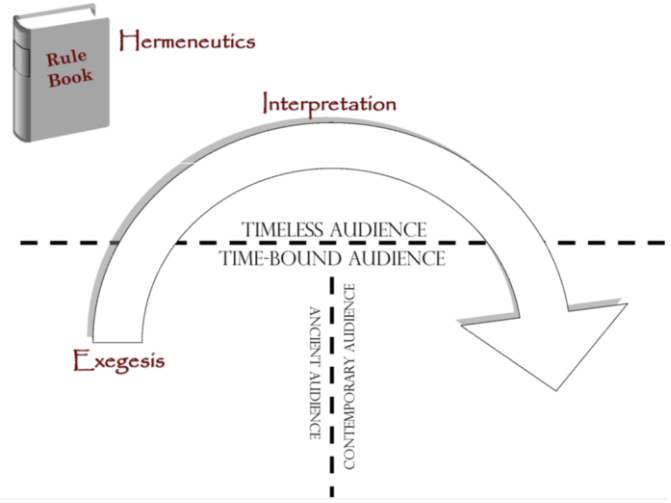
3. Does this mean believers have no responsibility to study?

INTERPRETATION

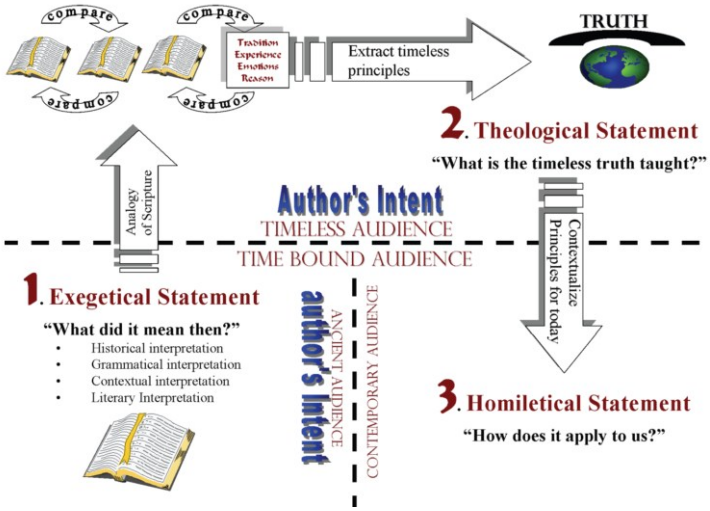
- Deuteronomy 31:12 ~ Assemble the people, the men and the women and little ones and the sojourner who is within your gates, so that they may **hear** and so that they may **learn** and **fear Yahweh** your God and **be careful to do all the words of this law**.

- **How can we know that we understand what the Bible says?**
- There are four main models for understanding the Bible:
  1) the proof-text method -The reader makes a claim and finds something to support that claim
  2) the historical-critical method -The reader investigates the history of how the text came to be using source criticism, form criticism, and redaction criticism
  3) the reader-response method -The reader subjectively inserts personal expectations, experiences, and intuitions into the text, *inserting one's own* intended meaning
  4) the historical-grammatical method -The reader studies the author's intended meaning and significance

- **Historical-Grammatical Hermeneutics:** The theory of hermeneutics which seeks to interpret the Scriptures by studying the text in its original historical-grammatical context in order to discover what the author's original intent was so that timeless principles can be discovered and applied to a contemporary setting.



(These 2 charts taken from *The Theology Notebook – Bibliology and Hermeneutics* found at http://bible.org/assets/ttp/bh_notebook(2005).pdf)



GENERAL PRINCIPLES OF INTERPRETATION

1. The Inspiration of Scripture:

- **Definition**: The Holy Spirit wrote through the biblical writers using their own languages, culture and individual personalities, resulting in God's Word without error in the original.
- To say that the Scriptures are "inspired by God" then, means that they contain the very breath or words of God
- Inspiration emphasizes that Scripture is the product of the breath of God.

2. The Clarity of Scripture:

- **Definition**: The Bible is written in such a way that its teachings are **clear enough for the common person to understand**
- The Word of God is intelligible, understandable, easy to comprehend
- The Bible is an understandable book such that every Christian, guided by the Holy Spirit, can comprehend in its pages all that is necessary for salvation and holy living (Ps 19:7-9; 119:130)

3. Accommodation of Revelation:

- **Definition**: Scripture is the truth of God **accommodated to the human mind** so that it can be understood
- God stoops down so that we can understand an infinite God though we are finite beings.
- He unfolds its meaning through the use of illustrations, analogies, anthropomorphisms, etc.

4. Progressive Revelation:

- **Definition**: God does not reveal Himself all at one time but does so gradually over the course of time
- As the books of the Bible were written, God progressively revealed more truths about many subjects
- This does not mean that the Old Testament is inferior to the New Testament or that the Old Testament doesn't contain any mature ideas
- Rather, it points to the general trend that while there were truths that were only partially revealed, discussed, or developed in the Old Testament, in the New Testament those truths have been more completely understood
- Themes in the Bible become clearer the farther we move from Genesis to Revelation

Hebrews 1:1-2 ~ *God, after He spoke long ago to the fathers in the prophets in many portions and in many ways, in these last days has spoken to us in His Son, whom He appointed heir of all things, through whom also He made the world.*

- Progressive revelation means that some commands were changed later
  - Circumcision, given to Abraham as a sign of the covenant (Gen 17), was later rescinded (Gal 5:2)
  - The law of Moses has been superseded (2 Cor 3)
- We must be careful to not read the NT back into the OT; to not force NT meanings into the OT

Scripture Interprets Scripture (The Cross-Reference Principle)

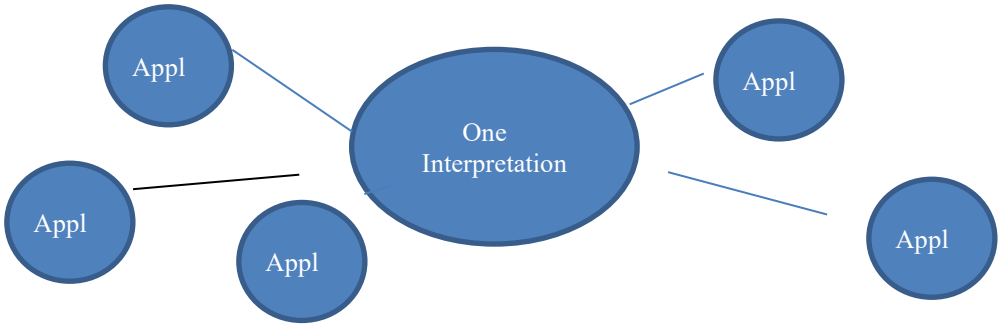
- **Definition**: One or more Scripture passages help interpret the right meaning in another text
- Or another way to say it: Obscure passages in Scripture must give way to clear passages
- We may rest assured that God did not reveal an important doctrine in a single, ambiguous passage
- **All essential doctrines are fully and clearly explained** - either in the immediate context, or somewhere else in the Bible
- Two important principles of Scripture interpreting Scripture can be noted:
    1. A difficult or obscure passage should never be interpreted in a way that contradicts a clear or easily understood passage
    2. A complex, novel, or ingenious interpretation for a passage should not be given preference over a more simple or natural explanation of the passage

5. Analogy of the Faith (The Harmony of Scripture Principle)

- **Definition**: There is **one, unified, consistent, harmonious system of belief in the Bible** such that no point will contradict another when correctly understood
- This principle is similar to the previous one but there is a legitimate distinction - The analogy of faith is not the principle that Scripture interprets Scripture, but that ***all Scripture is in agreement*** *and will not contradict itself.*
- Even though the Bible was written over a period of 1500 years by nearly 40 authors, it agrees with itself
- In this principle, we see what the Scripture harmoniously teaches on some subject or on related facets with a total unified picture. Once we see this on the subject, we realize that there is overall agreement as the parts fit into the picture, each in its own contribution
- There is one system of truth contained in the Scripture and, thus, all doctrines must agree with each other
- Therefore, if two or three different interpretations of a verse are equally possible, any interpretation that contradicts the clear teaching of any other scriptures must be ruled out from the beginning
- Proper application of hermeneutical principles will resolve **apparent** conflicts
- This principle is the foundational assumption of *systematic theology!*

The Single Meaning of Scripture

- **Definition**: Although a text may have many different applications, it has only one meaning – the meaning intended by the original human author, moved by the Holy Spirit
- There is only one meaning to a passage of Scripture which is determined by careful study, but a given text may speak to a number of issues…"Interpretation is one, application is many"



6. Interpretation as Distinct from Application

- **Definition**: Though closely related, interpretation and application are not the same
- Many errors and wrong interpretations of God's Word have unfortunately occurred because of a failure to recognize the principle that *interpretation* and *application* are distinct
- The incorporation of application into the hermeneutical process leads inevitably to multiple meanings for a single passage
- Certainly, the application of the scripture is essential to the proper study of God's Word; indeed, the application of the Bible is the reason why God gave it to us; He did not intend for us to simply study His Word academically but never allow it to change our lives; on the contrary, we should be eager to change our thinking and behavior as a result of studying and hearing the Word; so, application is a very important part of Bible study
- But the **interpretation of the Bible is the foundation** upon which application can stand securely

7. Normal/Literal Interpretation

- **Definition**: When interpreting Scripture, assume the most natural, obvious meaning of a word or phrase taking into consideration the history, culture, and author
- Thus, we take the Bible at face value – we read the Bible following the reading practices we would consider normal for any other important document
- This is the commonsense approach since we generally take everyday things in life as literal or at face value

> **If I send my wife a note telling her that I would like to have dinner with her on Tuesday and that I would like to meet her at 7:30 pm at Walker Roadhouse, she does not read a mystical, secret meaning about spiritual appetite into it.**

- So, the golden rule of interpretation is: "When the plain sense of the scripture makes common sense, seek no other sense."
- This is the usual practice in interpreting literature and only in literal interpretation is there a control check, or curb on the abuse of Scripture by eisegesis
- Therefore, take every word at its primary, usual, meaning, unless the facts of the immediate context, studied in the light of related passages and fundamental truths, clearly indicate otherwise.

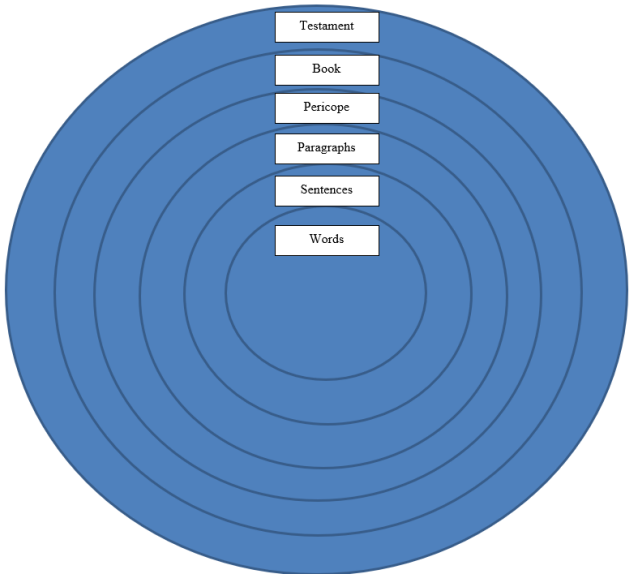
8. Genre

- **Definition**: Genre is a literary term having to do with the category or "genus" of literature under consideration
- Proper interpretation must take the general literary category of any given passage into consideration
- Are we dealing with poetry or prose? Are we dealing with history or prophecy?

9. Priority of the Original Language

- **Definition**: This principle simply means to consult the original Hebrew, Aramaic, or Greek to find first-hand what really is said and how. **Observe** the text, determine the **meaning** of the text.
- Part of the accommodation which God employed when He communicated His Word to mankind was the use of written human languages, including a specific vocabulary, grammar, and any of a number of literary devices
- You are probably well aware of the limitations of a translation - Whether it is a spoken translation or a written one, there are nuances of language and communication that are lost in a translation
- At this point we need to be careful not to give the impression that someone who does not understand biblical Hebrew, Aramaic, and Greek cannot interpret the Bible
- This is not true! - However, the depth, accuracy, and certainty of one's interpretation of God's Word can be greatly enhanced when one can read the Bible in the language in which it was originally written.

10.Context



- **Definition**: A text of Scripture is given its true meaning only when it is considered in relationship to the words around it
- "A text without a context is a prooftext"

Matthew 18:19-20 *~ Again I say to you, that if two of you agree on earth about anything that they may ask, it shall be done for them by My Father who is in heaven. For where two or three have gathered together in My name, I am there in their midst."*

Revelation 3:20 *~ Behold, I stand at the door and knock; if anyone hears My voice and opens the door, I will come in to him and will dine with him, and he with Me.*

Philippians 4:13 *~ I can do all things through Him who strengthens me*

11.Historical Appropriateness

- **Definition**: Since Scripture originated in a historical context, it can be understood only in light of biblical history; thus, we must interpret a passage in such a way that our treatment of it is fitting, appropriate, or in harmony with the historical situation at that point in Scripture
- The Bible was composed in a specific culture at a particular point in time…while they are universal in application, the truths in the Bible can most fully be realized only when taking the surrounding culture and history into account
- This principle is related to the principle of progressive revelation – what would they, given the light God allowed them to possess at that point, have most naturally understood a statement to mean?

12.Word Study

- **Definition**: To understand a passage of Scripture, key words within that passage must be defined accurately
- The detailed and thorough study of the individual words of a passage can yield amazing fruit in our understanding of a text
- Words are the most basic building blocks of communication
- Words themselves can communicate complex ideas or simple grammatical concepts, but one of the most important steps in understanding an author is to understand the meaning of the words he uses

13.Grammar and Syntax

- **Definition**: Grammatical interpretation deals with the arrangement of words into sentences, paragraphs, chapters, and books
- If words are the units of language, then sentences are the units of thought - a sentence is a complete thought, and when sentences are organized and arranged in a paragraph, very complex and profound thoughts can be expressed
- The human authors, by the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, have arranged the sentences, paragraphs, etc. in such a way that the exact meaning that God intends is found in the text
- Therefore, in order to understand the mind of God in the Scriptures, the grammar of the text must be understood correctly

14.The Checking Principle

- **Definition**: It is good for a student to check his understanding of a passage against the interpretations of Bible scholars.
- It is impossible for us to know all of the geographic, historical, and interpretational issues in a passage – information Bible scholars spend a lifetime accumulating
- Bible dictionaries, commentaries, and other Bible study tools can shorten that process considerably
- Notice that this principle is last on the list – there is a reason for that
- As a rule it is best to do your own study on a passage and then compare it with someone else's
- **If it has never been said before, it might be because it shouldn't have been said**.

DIFFERENT INTERPRETATIONS?

- What about people who interpret the Bible differently? How do I know that I am right?

We are not trying to defend what we think, or even what we think the text says, but what the author intended for the text to say.

What does it say and what does it mean? What are the words, and what do they mean. Observation and Interpretation. That's it.

The author is the *authority* in the meaning, not us. God's Word is the authority.

- Interpretation the process that the reader undertakes to make certain the author's intent.
    - As already stated, the interpretation method must be valid.
    - Without knowing the true meaning, there is no real significance.
    - Any additions or subtractions to the meaning, and we've told a good story.

What We Must Agree On

- All true believers and faithful local churches must believe the essential doctrines of Scripture. Those who don't are either another religion or a cult that proves their unbelief in the Son of God.
- True believers agree that:[1]
  (1) The Bible is God's revealed Word,
  (2) God is Triune (Father, Son, and Holy Spirit),
  (3) God is the Creator and Providential Lord over history,
  (4) mankind fell into sin and is incapable of extracting himself from it or its eternal consequences,
  (5) God chose Israel out from among the nations of the world to be a beacon of light and truth and to prepare the way for the coming of the Messiah,
  (6) Jesus is the virgin born, incarnate Second Person of the Trinity,
  (7) Jesus lived a sinless life of perfect obedience to the will of the Father,
  (8) Jesus died on a cross as the substitutionary sacrifice for sinners in order to make atonement for our transgressions,
  (9) Jesus rose bodily from the dead,
  (10) Jesus ascended to the right hand of the Father,
  (11) Jesus rules supremely over all of history,
  (12) salvation is based on the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ,
  (13) salvation is by grace and through faith in what Christ has accomplished for us,
  (14) Jesus Christ will return personally and physically to consummate his kingdom, and
  (15) all humanity will stand before God to be judged, the ultimate outcome of which is either heaven or hell.

[1] Sam Storms, https://www.crosswalk.com/faith/bible-study/why-are-there-so-many-different-interpretations-of-the-bible.html.

Reasons for Disagreement, Even Among Believers[2]

Despite the unity we have in Christ and by the spirit (Eph 4:5), and the indwelling Holy Spirt who guides and teaches, we are not perfect in our interpretation of the meaning of Scripture. Here are some reasons we may disagree:

(1) Sin. We are still tainted by sin and need to humbly approach God's Word.
(2) Unbelief. "Make-believers" are not born again, but carry the label "Christian." Jn 12:28-29
(3) Lack of Training. Shortcuts and poor study can result in erroneous interpretation (2 Tim 2:15)
(4) Poor Hermeneutics. Many Christians fall into common misinterpretations.
    a. Taking a verse out of context.
    b. Ignoring the author's purpose of in writing the book
    c. Applying modern meaning of words to old words
(5) Ignorance of the Whole Word of God. We must not study/apply/preach an incomplete message!
(6) Selfishness and pride. Personal bias and "reader-response" subjective reading, or "new perspectives"
(7) Failure to mature. Some Christians are affected spiritually because of their worldliness (1 Cor 3:2-3)
(8) Undue Emphasis on Tradition. Filtering interpretation through established tradition. ALL denominations must be aware of tradition bias and presuppositions when coming to the text!
(9) Difficult Passages. Some passages are more difficult to determine than others (2 Peter 3:16)

- Doctrinal differences between healthy churches are often over secondary items such as baptism, church leadership structures, and end times; or over tertiary items, such as head coverings, Bible translations, or worship service practices.
- Christianity is not a buffet where you can just pick each of the views you want. They come down to how you determine the meaning of each text.
- Humble Christians will realize God does not have 4 views on baptism or 5 views on sanctification, and will study hard to rightly handle to Word of God, determining what the Scripture says and how to live in line with it.

[2] "Why are There so Many Interpretations?", https://www.gotquestions.org/interpretations-Christian.html