

## **6 Hazards To Avoid While Interpreting**

1. Misreading the text - you'll never gain a proper understanding of Scripture if you don't or can't read the text properly.
  - If Jesus says, "I am the way" (John 14:6), but you read it as, "I am a way," you are misreading the text.
  - If Paul writes, "For the love of money is a root of all sorts of evil" (1 Timothy 6:10), but you read it as, "Money is the root of all evil," you are misreading the text. This is why we've got to learn to read.
2. Distorting the text - making the text say what you want and not what it actually says.
  - It's one thing to struggle with difficulties in interpretation, it's another thing to distort the meaning of God's Word. That's serious. So we need to be careful to learn how to interpret Scripture accurately, practically, and profitably.
3. Contradicting the text - this error is worse than textual distortion. It amounts to calling God a liar.
  - The classic illustration is Satan in the Garden of Eden: He said to the woman, "Did God really say you must not eat from any tree in the garden?" The woman said to the serpent, "We may eat fruit from the trees in the garden, but God did say, You must not eat fruit from the tree that is in the middle of the garden, and you must not touch it, or you will die." "You will not surely die," the serpent said to the woman. (Genesis 3:1-4).
  - That's a direct contradiction of God's express Word. No wonder Jesus called Satan a liar and the father of lies. He has been lying from the beginning, and he is still lying today by encouraging people to contradict the biblical text.
4. Subjectivism - many Christians tolerate a form of mysticism in reading their Bibles that they would allow in no other realm. Their Bible is totally subjective or influenced by personal taste.
  - As mentioned before, the meaning of the text is in the text, not in our subjective response to the text.
5. Relativism - some people approach Scripture assuming that the Bible changes meaning over time. The text meant one thing when it was written but something else today. Its meaning is relative.
  - When we get to application, we will see that a passage can have numerous practical implications. But it can only have one proper interpretation, one meaning – ultimately, the meaning it had to the original writer. We must reconstruct his message if we want an accurate understanding.
6. Overconfidence - in Bible study, as in life, pride goes before a fall. The minute you think you've mastered a portion of Scripture, you are setting yourself up for a tumble. Why? Because knowledge puffs up. It can make you arrogant and unreachable.
  - Some of the worst abuses of doctrine occur when someone sets himself up as the ultimate authority on the text. Some of us have been studying Scripture all of our lives. Yet no human being can ever master more than one book of the Bible.
  - Just keep in mind that the process of Interpretation never ends. You can never come to the end of your study and say, "Well, I've got that one. I know that passage."

## *REAL TALK FROM THE WORD*

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### *The Right to Disagree*

In light of all these dangers, is it really possible to come up with an accurate interpretation of the biblical text? **Yes it is** and in the lessons ahead, we will find out.

- Even though a Bible passage ultimately has only one correct interpretation, you'll always find Christians who disagree about what that interpretation ought to be. It's frustrating, but it's inevitable.
- Two people can watch the same bank robbery, but in court they'll describe it in completely different terms.

Differences in interpretation are fine as long as we keep in mind that the conflict is not in the text, but in our limited understanding of the text. God is not confused about what He has said – even if we are.

We also need to preserve the right to disagree with each other, along with the responsibility to be as faithful and accurate to the text as we know how.

- In 2 Timothy 2:15, Paul encourages us, “Do your best to present yourself to God as one approved, a workman who does not need to be ashamed and who correctly handles the worth of truth” (NIV).