

## **Rules for Interpreting Scripture**

*A Summary of the Rules taught by S. Greijdanus*

1. **Be objective.** Empty your mind of pre-conceived ideas (as much as possible) and then search diligently for what *God* is saying in the text, not what *we* would like Him to say. Remember that the human heart by nature does not want to hear what God says (Jer 17:9). We depend on the Holy Spirit to guide us into an accurate understanding of His Word (1 Cor 2:14), so our study must be *saturated with prayer* for His guidance.
2. **Interpret Scripture in its totality and according to its various parts.** No skipping “undesirable” texts. Also, treat history as history, prophecy as prophecy, parable as parable etc. Search for meaning within *context* of chapter, book, testament, whole Bible and not in isolation.
3. **Acknowledge Scripture as God’s Word.** This requires true faith and results in bowing to the authority of Scripture no matter what our preference might be.
4. **Scripture is God’s Word in two senses:**
  - a) *Formal* – The content of Scripture is historically reliable, but not all things are normative for our lives (eg. the devil’s words/actions; sinful actions of man).
  - b) *Material* – Most of Scripture is God’s Word to us with regard to how we are to believe and act. It is thus normative for our lives (eg. God’s law, instruction and example of Christ).
5. **Understand that all things in Scripture are connected to Christ.** The whole Bible points to Christ to show us His necessity, His work, and His glory. Ask: how does this passage relate to Jesus Christ?
6. **Scripture is its own and best interpreter.** Often times parts of the OT are interpreted within the NT and this needs our careful attention.
7. **The truth of Scripture does not need to be confirmed by outside sources.** The Bible stands above, for example, archaeology, historical investigation, science, math, etc. and does not depend on them for its own truthfulness. They must bow to the Bible.
8. **Keep in mind the unfolding, developing progress of God’s revelation.** “*The Old opens up the new, while the new was hidden in the old.*” Eg. the Trinity is implicitly present in the OT but only comes to light in the NT (see *Belgic Conf.* Art. 9).
9. **Keep in mind the distinct times and dispensations (eras) of God’s revelation.** God’s covenant is constant throughout Scripture, but it is administered in different ways at different times – under Adam, under Abraham, under Moses, under Christ.
10. **Distinguish between the particular and the general.** A general teaching is often revealed in a particular, concrete instance. We must discern which elements belong to the particular moment of history and which belong to the general meaning for all times.
11. **Pay careful and specific attention to the details of a text** – ask basics like Who? What? When? Where? Why? Why are things worded in such a way? Why are certain elements included?
12. **Compare Scripture with Scripture** and interpret the less-clear portions of Scripture by those more-clear.
13. **Scripture never contradicts itself,** so our interpretation of one part must never contradict any other part of Scripture. *E.g.* God is love (1 John 4:8) can never be understood to mean that God is incapable of wrath (Romans 2:5) and punishment (Matt 10:28). All His attributes and characteristics fit together perfectly in the One Triune God.