EDITOR’S NOTE: Here is the final installment in our four-part series dedicated to helping our readers develop sensible traits and habits of understanding the Bible.

PART FOUR OF FOUR
Five points to consider when studying Scripture:

1) The meaning of any word is itself not the final determination as to what that word might mean. You might tell a friend that when you went to a gathering of old friends, you had a ball. You might be watching a baseball game and the umpire calls a pitch a ball. While playing a game of golf you might be looking for a lost golf ball. You may read the story of Cinderella to your child or grandchild, describing how she went to a ball. In each case, the context of the word itself determines the meaning of the word.


3) Remember that the applications and teachings of some passages are timeless and universal, while others are local and culturally bound. We do not believe we MUST greet each other with a kiss but we intuitively harmonize with Jesus when he instructs us to love our neighbor and to treat them as we would have them treat us.

4) Remember that while the central truth of the Bible (Jesus) is actually true, not everything in the Bible is literally true. The Bible says that God the Father has a hand, fingers, mouth, a nose, ears and feet. Is this literally true, or are such passages speaking metaphorically? Jesus taught that if our right hand offends us we should cut it off and throw it away (Matthew 5:30). Not everything in the Bible is literally true—but points to the truth.

5) When studying unclear or obscure passages, always ask what this passage means from a Christ-centered perspective, and how this passage might be more easily understood by clear, unambiguous passages addressing the same or a similar topic. This process is often spoken of as allowing the Bible to interpret itself —looking for all passages on a particular topic rather than confining your study to just one or two.

When the entire Bible is studied from a Christ-centered perspective, then many obscure passages will remain somewhat obscure—but we will see that while we might speculate on obscure passages, they are peripheral to the primary teachings of Scripture—which is Jesus and his gospel. When we understand that Jesus is the focus and theme of the Bible, then the clear and plain teachings about him are obvious. From a Christ-centered perspective, we can say that the plain things of the Bible are the main things and the main things are the plain things.

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