

124 Hermeneutics

HOW TO STUDY THE BIBLE



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Hermeneutics 1

Asian Christian University
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Purpose of this class:

Hermeneutics is the skill and art of interpretation and is especially applied to the Bible. Any teacher of God's word should know the fundamentals of proper Biblical interpretation. The student will learn the proper methods of interpreting Scripture.

Course Objectives:

1. The student will demonstrate an understanding of the basic rules and principles of Biblical hermeneutics.
2. The student will demonstrate knowledge of the different literary genres of Scripture.
3. The student will demonstrate knowledge of figures of speech in the Bible.

Course Requirements:

Students are required to attend class. Three unexcused absences will render the student ineligible to pass this course. Weather, work, illness, and church activities are bases for an excused absence. An open-note, take-home exam will be given mid-term and at the end of the semester. Students who miss classes are responsible for reading the distributed material.

A 5-6 page paper is required, containing no less than ten resources in addition to the Bible. Sources must include no less than five of the books cited in the Recommended and Additional Reading. The student should demonstrate that he/she understands the hermeneutic principles pertaining to the topic of the paper. A list of suggested topics is included in the syllabus. Papers should be done according to Chicago standards.

Class Schedule:

6/22	Introduction to Hermeneutics (1-5)
6/25	Basic Principles of Hermeneutics (6-8)
6/29	Periods of Bible History (9-10)
7/2	Understanding Context
7/6	Can We All Understand the Bible Alike
7/9	Understanding History and Narratives;
7/13	Understanding Poetry and Wisdom
7/16	Understand the Writing Prophets
7/20	Understanding the Gospels
7/23	Understand the Parables
7/27	Understanding the Epistles
7/30	Understanding Apocalyptic Literature

8/3	Distinguishing the Cultural from the Eternal
8/6	Biblical Typology
	Mid-term Exam given out
8/10	The Restoration Plea
8/13	Patterns for the Church
8/17	The Silence of the Scriptures
8/20	Hermeneutic Principles in Deuteronomy
8/24	Jesus and Obedience
8/27	Command, Example, and Necessary Inference I
9/5	Command, Example, and Necessary Inference II
9/8	Generic and Specific Commands
	Term Paper due
9/12	Expediency and Tradition
9/15	Salvation Issues
9/19	A Guide to Biblical Exegesis
9/22	Figures of Speech
9/26	Scripture Twisting
	Final Exam
9/29	Exegetical Fallacies

Recommended Reading:

- Dungan, D. R. *Hermeneutics*. Delight, Ark.: Gospel Light Publishing, n.d.
- Lockhart, Clinton. *Principles of Interpretation*. Delight, Ark.: Gospel Light Publishing, 1915.
- Kearley, Furman F., Myers, Edward P. and Hadley, Timothy D., eds. *Biblical Interpretation Principles and Practice*. Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker, 1986.
- Thomas, J. D. *Harmonizing Hermeneutics*. Nashville: Gospel Advocate, 1991.
- Thomas, J. D. *Heaven's Window*. Abilene, Tex.: Biblical Research Press, 1974.
- Thomas, J. D. *We Be Brethren*. Abilene, Tex.: Biblical Research Press, 1958.
- Hightower, Terry M., ed. *Rightly Dividing The Word: General Hermeneutics*. Moore, Okla.: National Christian Press, 1993.
- Warren, Thomas B. *When Is An Example Binding?* Jonesboro, Ark.: National Christian Press, 1975.

Additional Reading:

- Carson, D. A. *Exegetical Fallacies*. Grand Rapids: Baker, 1984.
- Kaiser, Walter C. and Silva, Moises. *An Introduction to Biblical Hermeneutics*. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1994.

- Ramm, Bernard. *Protestant Biblical Interpretation*. Boston: W. A. Wilde, Pub., 1956.
- Corley, Bruce; Lemke, Steve; and Lovejoy, Grant I. *Biblical Hermeneutics*. Nashville: Broadman and Holman, 2002.
- Terry, Milton S. *Biblical Hermeneutics*. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1974.
- Mickelson, A. Berkley. *Interpreting the Bible*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1963.
- Virkler, Henry A. *Hermeneutics: Principles and Processes of Biblical Interpretation*. Grand Rapids: Baker, 1981.
- Fee, Gordon D. *New Testament Exegesis*. Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1983.
- Fee, Gordon D. and Stuart, Douglas. *How to Read the Bible for All Its Worth*. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1982.
- Marshall, I. Howard, ed. *New Testament Interpretation: Essays on Principles and Methods*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1977.
- Witherington, Ben III. *Reading and Understanding the Bible*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2015.

Suggested Term Paper Topics:

Lifting Hands in Prayer

How Many Containers Should We Use in Communion?

Should Christians Partake of Communion Every First Day of the Week?

Generic and Specific Authority

The Sin of Nadab and Abihu

May Churches Be a Sponsoring Congregation for a Missionary?

May Churches Provide Benevolence for Non-Members of the Church?

Greeting One Another with a Holy Kiss

Why We Do Not Use Instrumental Music

Why We Do Not Have Roasted Lamb as Part of the Lord's Supper

Introduction to Hermeneutics

Ezra 7:10 For Ezra had set his heart to study the law of the Lord and to practice it, and to teach His statutes and ordinances in Israel.

Nehemiah 8:8 They read from the book, from the law of God, translating to give the sense so that they understood the reading.

Acts 17:11 Now these were more noble-minded than those in Thessalonica, for they received the word with great eagerness, examining the Scriptures daily to see whether these things were so.

2 Tim. 2:15 Be diligent to present yourself approved to God as a workman who does not need to be ashamed, accurately handling the word of truth.

Definitions:

1. **Hermeneutics** deals with the principles of interpretation.¹ Some call it the science of interpretation; others prefer to speak of it as the art of interpretation. Bernard Ramm said, “It is a science because it is guided by rules within a system; and it is an art because the application of the rules is by skill, and not by mechanical imitation.”² The word hermeneutics is derived from “Hermes,” the Greek god who brought the messages of the gods to the mortals, and was the god of science, invention, eloquence, speech, writing, and art. Hermeneutics involves determining the correct interpretation of the Bible.
 - Milton S. Terry notes: “The word is usually applied to the explanation of written documents and may therefore be more specifically defined as the science of interpreting an author’s language. This science assumes that there are divers modes of thought and ambiguities of expression among men, and accordingly, it aims to remove the supposable differences between a writer and his readers, so that the meaning of the one may be truly and accurately apprehended by the others.”³
 - Henry A. Virkler said, “It [hermeneutics] is considered an art because communication is flexible, and therefore a mechanical and rigid application of rules will sometimes distort the true meaning of a communication. To be a good interpreter one must learn the rules of hermeneutics as well as the art of applying those rules.”⁴
 - D. R. Dungan said, “Sacred hermeneutics is the science of interpreting the Scriptures. Exegesis...means to lead out. It is the application of the principles of hermeneutics in bringing out the meaning of any writing which might otherwise be difficult to understand.”⁵
2. **Exegesis** is applied hermeneutics. Exegesis seeks an historical investigation into the meaning of the Biblical text. Exegesis answers the question, “What did the Biblical author mean?” It has to do both with what he said (the content itself) and why he said it at any given point (the literary context). Furthermore, exegesis is primarily concerned with intentionality: What did the author

¹Walter C. Kaiser and Moises Silva, *An Introduction to Biblical Hermeneutics* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Zondervan, 1994), p. 15.

²Bernard Ramm, *Protestant Biblical Hermeneutics* (Boston: W. A. Wilde Co., 1956), p. 1.

³Milton S. Terry, *Biblical Hermeneutics* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Zondervan, 1968), p. 17.

⁴Henry A. Virkler, *Hermeneutics: Principles and Processes of Biblical Interpretation* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker, 1981), p. 16.

⁵D. R. Dungan, *Hermeneutics* (Delight, Ark.: Gospel Light Publishing Co., n.d.), p. 1.

intend his original readers to understand?⁶ Exegesis is the methodological approach to a Scripture, so that one may come to understand what the passage meant as the author wrote it and as the original readers understood it. Exegesis implies that the explanation of the text has arisen from careful, detailed analysis. Exegetes pay attention both to the language of the text and the specific historical, cultural circumstances from which it arises.

Some Presuppositions of Christian Hermeneutics

1. *God has spoken in the Holy Scripture.* Our faith rests in the certainty that God has inspired the Biblical text; and, as a consequence, that text partakes of the inerrancy of His very nature.
2. *The Scriptures are capable of being understood (**the perspicuity of Scripture**).* While there are some passages hard to understand (2 Pet. 3:16), the authors give every indication that they largely intended to be understood (Luke 1:1-4; Eph. 3:1-4; 2 Pet. 1:12-19).
3. *The primary need of hermeneutics is to ascertain what God has said and to determine the meaning of the Word of God.*
4. *The best means of understanding Scripture properly is to ascertain what the authors intended the readers to know.* In order to do this, the interpreter must have some knowledge of the language the authors used and the historical and cultural circumstances which influenced each document. Further, interpreters must have some knowledge of the different kinds or genres of literature contained in the Bible.
5. *The sixty-six books of the Old and New Testament have been demonstrated to be the true content of Sacred Scripture.*
6. *Interpreters must not add or take away from the Word of God but must determine what was the original wording of Scripture.* Interpreters must have some understanding of textual criticism, the means by which scholars determine what actually came from the pens of the original authors.
7. *God has not revealed some things to us, and some things we will not know in this life (Deut. 29:29).*

Qualifications of an Interpreter

1. Faith (Heb. 11:6)
2. Love for the Truth (2 Thess. 2:10)
3. Honesty (Prov. 23:23; Eph. 4:25; 1 Pet. 2:22)
4. Humility (Jer. 9:23-24)
5. Common Sense
6. Willingness to study (Acts 17:11; 2 Tim. 2:15).
7. Spiritual Purity (Titus 1:13-16; John 8:44-45)
8. Willingness to listen to God first (2 Tim. 4:1-5; 1 Sam. 15:1-25)

Needs of an Interpreter

1. A correct translation is necessary for reliable exegesis.

⁶Gordon Fee, *New Testament Exegesis: A Handbook for Students and Pastors* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1983), p. 21.

2. An understanding of language. Good interpreters find out the meaning of words, study grammar, and investigate the historical, geographical and cultural circumstances surrounding any text. They also acquaint themselves with the means to understand various literary forms.
3. Knowledge of logic or correct thinking.

Things That Hinder Correct Interpretation

1. A desire to please the world (James 4:4)
2. Arrogance
 - The belief that all one needs is the Bible to understand the Bible
 - The belief that correct interpretation belongs only to the elite
3. Reading the text without expecting or intending to understand it. Almost anything that men want to do, they can find support in some text of Scripture (if they do not care how they use the Bible).
4. Efforts to harmonize the Bible with science or contemporary culture.

Why Men Differ in Understanding the Bible⁷

Laziness: Some do not study; they assume what they think the Bible should say based on poor knowledge. (2 Pet. 3:16-18; Ezek. 34:1-10; Hosea 4:6)

Wishful thinking: Some want it to say something so badly they assume it does say it and reject other views--this is especially true of doctrines surrounding salvation. (1 Cor. 6:12-20; 1 Tim. 1:3,4; Matt. 7:21-23)

Personal Prejudice: Some hold a doctrine because they have been taught it; the Pharisees held to the tradition of their fathers and put it before the Law or Jesus. (John 7:47-49; 9:28-34; Mark 7:1-13)

Unteachable because of pride: Some are unwilling to admit they are wrong and are unapproachable. (2 Pet. 2:10-20; 1 Tim. 6:3-5; Matt. 6:3)

Emotional Bias: Some hold such a love for a teacher that they not consider that their mentor could possibly be wrong. Some have "Preacheritis!" There was only one Jesus Christ. (1 Cor. 1:10-13; Mark 3:1-6; 3:22-24)

Vested Interest: Some teach what they are paid to teach, whether it is right or not. Titus 1:10-11; 1 Tim. 6:3,4; 2 Tim. 4:3,4

Dishonest: Some have no integrity or regard for truth, so they handle the Bible dishonestly. (1 Tim. 4:1-5; 2 Thess. 2:8-12; 2 Pet. 2:1-3; 2 Cor. 11:13-15)

Faulty Logic: Some people do not reason correctly; they may miss the point; they may reach conclusions before they get all the facts; or they may not see the need for sound reasoning. (2 Pet. 3:16; Mark 6:14-16; Luke 6:6-11; 1 Tim. 6:20-21)

Lack of Thoroughness: Many people do not fully explore a subject before they form a doctrine in their mind. There is a difference between a truth and the whole truth. (John 7:40-44; Matt. 22:23-33)

Regard for Human Authority: Some favor a teacher, a commentary, a church council, or a creed book over plain Bible truths. (Matt. 15:1-14; Gal. 1:6-9; John 12:48)

Self-deception: People when they select their beliefs have filters to keep out things they do not wish to believe. If one tells oneself a lie long and loudly enough, one will believe it. (2 Thess. 2:8-12; 2 Tim. 4:3,4)

⁷ (J. D. Thomas, *Heaven's Window*, pp. 66-71.)

Basic Principles of Hermeneutics

Correctly understanding the Scriptures means that there are certain, basic rules that must be followed. The Bible must speak for itself and should never be made to say things that were never intended by the writers. Solomon urges us to "Buy the truth and do not sell it, Get wisdom and instruction and understanding" (Prov. 23:23). The Lord expects us to "be diligent to present yourself approved to God as a workman who does not need to be ashamed, handling accurately the word of truth" (2 Tim. 2:15). Listed below are some basic instructions in how to understand the Bible correctly.

1. *Familiarize yourself with the sixty-six books of the Bible.* The Bible is actually a library of books. Note that there is an Old Testament and a New Testament, which are written to different audiences. The OT addressed the nation of Israel or the Jews, while the NT is addressed to Christians, both Jews and Gentiles. The books of the Bible are written in different styles of literature: history, narrative, poetry, wisdom, prophetic, exhortation, and apocalyptic. The Bible was written over a period of 1600 years by forty different authors who lived in a variety of places. Each book has its own historical and cultural setting.
2. *Select good Bible study helps.* It will help you greatly to acquire a Bible dictionary, a Bible atlas, and a concordance. These tools will help you define people, places and things that may be unfamiliar to you. The concordance will give you the passages, which have the key terms you are studying.
3. *Read each individual passage in its context.* Each passage of each book has a context in which it is to be read and understood. Many passages are misunderstood because the reader has never taken time to investigate the context of the Scripture he is reading. Some questions he must ask of the passage:
 - Who is writing the passage?
 - To whom is the author writing? Not everything in the Bible is written to every person. The OT was written to Jews, and the NT was written to Christians.
 - When was the passage written?
 - What was the author's intent and purpose in writing? The direct or literal sense of a sentence is the meaning of the author, when no other is indicated; not any figurative, allegorical, or mystical meaning.
 - What circumstance may have prompted the writer to give rise to this lesson?
 - What kind of literature is he using to make his message known?
 - What are the historical and cultural circumstances that bear on this passage?
 - What would this message mean to its original recipients?
4. *Learn to draw out the meaning of a passage; do not read into the passage anything that was not originally there.* There is a difference between **exegesis** and **eisegesis**. **Exegesis** is the drawing out of the meaning of the passage. **Eisegesis** is the reading into the passage things that were never there. Those who study the Bible must be careful not to read into it their own personal prejudices or concepts that they think ought to be in the Bible. One must read God's Word with

an open mind to learn what He has said and to understand the Bible for what it says for itself. The Bible is always its own best interpreter.

5. *Let the Bible explain itself.* A difficult prophecy in Joel 2 finds its fulfillment in Acts 2. On the day of Pentecost, Peter said, "This is that which was spoken of by the prophet Joel" (Acts 2:16). In Eph. 4:4 Paul says that there is "one body"; this body is defined as the church (Eph. 1:22,23). In Rev. 1:20 John explains that the seven stars are angels or messengers and the seven golden lampstands are the seven churches. There is no further need of wondering. The Bible is indeed its own best interpreter. A plain, clear passage should always be used to make the dark and abstruse passages clear. A difficult passage never denies or contradicts the plain teaching of the Scripture.
6. *The Scriptures admonish us not to add or take away from what is revealed* (Deut. 4:2; 12:32; Prov. 30:6; John 8:31,32; 2 John 9; Rev. 22:18,19). We must learn to stay within the teaching and observe the teaching carefully, completely, lovingly and accurately.
7. *The Scriptures do contain a law of inclusion and exclusion.* We must do all that God commands us to do (Matt. 28:19,20), yet we must also realize that specific commands exclude substitutes and additions. When God told Noah to build an ark of "gopher wood," this excluded all other kinds of wood. When God gives us an instruction in general terms, He allows us to use our common sense to fulfill that command in a variety of ways. For instance when God tells us to "go into all the world," He allows us to walk, run, swim, take a car, take a boat, take a plane, ride horseback, use a motorcycle, use a bicycle, or any other way that we choose. The good Bible student knows how to distinguish between general instructions and specific instructions. He accurately observes the specific.
8. *Take all that the Scriptures teach on any subject.* All the truth on any one subject is not usually in one passage. There is a difference between a true statement and the whole truth of a matter. John 5:24 says, "Truly, truly, I say to you, he who hears My word, and believes Him who sent Me, has eternal life, and does not come into judgment, but has passed out of death into life." It is true that we are saved by faith, but that is not the whole truth. Faith apart from repentance or baptism will not save (Luke 13:3; Acts 2:38).
9. *Recognize figures of speech.* There are many figures of speech in the Bible. Many problems occur because uninformed students interpret a passage literally when they should interpret it figuratively. "It may truly be said that most of the gigantic errors have their root and source, either in figuratively explaining away passages which should be taken literally, or in taking literally what has been thrown into a peculiar form or Figure of language: thus, not only falling into error, but losing the express teaching, and missing the special emphasis which the particular Figure was designed to impart to them." (E.W. Bullinger, *Figures of Speech*, p. xvi.).
10. *One must come to the Word of God with the right attitude.* Open-mindedness and humility are essential to good Bible study. The point of view that a miraculous event can't possibly have happened will lead one to endless speculation. One must have a good and honest heart if one is to bring forth fruit with patience (Luke 8:15). Christians are to "buy the truth and not sell it"

(Prov. 23:23) and so hold a high view of the truth. Christians must also come with a willingness to apply what they learn to themselves.

11. *Apply the message of the Bible to your life.* We ought to bring the message of the Bible home by responding to the passage with our hearts and lives. Here are some questions we can ask the Scriptures that will help us apply them to our lives:

- Does this command something I'm not doing?
- Does this suggest a change in my behavior?
- Does this reflect a spirit or an attitude I'm not manifesting?
- Does this confirm a belief I already hold?
- Does this suggest further study or a change in my beliefs?
- Have I accepted this promise and trusted God to fulfill it?
- Have I seen this promise fulfilled in my life?
- How would it change matters if everyone obeyed this command?
- What would Jesus do in my place?

One has failed to bring home a passage if one has applied the truths of the Scripture to everyone else and neglected to apply them to oneself (Matt. 7:1-5).

Eight Rules of Interpretation

"...the *Eight Rules of Interpretation* used by legal experts for more than 2500 years.

1. **Rule of Definition.**
Define the term or words being considered and then adhere to the defined meanings.
2. **Rule of Usage.**
Don't add meaning to established words and terms. What was the common usage in the cultural and time period when the passage was written?
3. **Rule of Context.**
Avoid using words out of context. Context must define terms and how words are used.
4. **Rule of Historical background.**
Don't separate interpretation and historical investigation.
5. **Rule of Logic.**
Be certain that words as interpreted agree with the overall premise.
6. **Rule of Precedent.**
Use the known and commonly accepted meanings of words, not obscure meanings for which there is no precedent.
7. **Rule of Unity.**
Even though many documents may be used there must be a general unity among them.
8. **Rule of Inference.**
Base conclusions on what is already known and proven or can be reasonably implied from all known facts.

Fifteen Periods of Bible History

Names	Events	Time Span	Character	Scripture Involved in Each Period
Antediluvian	from Creation to the Flood	1,656	Adam	Genesis 1-5
Postdiluvian	from the Flood to the call of Abraham	427	Noah	Genesis 6-11
Patriarchal	call of Abraham to Egyptian bondage	215	Abraham	Genesis 12-45; Job
Egyptian bondage	descent to Egypt to Exodus	215	Joseph	Genesis 42 – Exodus 11
Wilderness Wanderings	from Exodus to crossing Jordan	40	Moses	Exodus 12; Leviticus; Numbers; Deuteronomy
Conquest of Canaan	crossing Jordan to time of Judges	51	Joshua	Joshua 1-24
Judges	from Judges to the Kingdom	305	Samuel	Judges 1 - 1 Samuel 8; Ruth
United Kingdom	From crowning Saul to the dividing of Kingdom	120	David	1 Sam. 9 - 1 Kings 11; 1 Chron. 10 - 2 Chron. 9; Psalms; Proverbs; Ecclesiastes; Song of Solomon
Divided Kingdom	from division of Kingdom to the fall of Israel (Samaria)	253	Elijah	1 Kings 12 - 2 Kings 20; 2 Chron. 10-32; Joel; Isaiah; Micah; Amos; Hosea; Jonah; Obadiah
Kingdom of Judah	from fall of Israel to the fall of Judah	135	Josiah	2 Kings 21-25; 2 Chron. 33-36; Jeremiah; Nahum;
Babylonian Captivity	from fall of Judah to the return to Jerusalem	50	Daniel	2 Kings 25:8-21; Daniel 1-8; Ezekiel; Lamentations;
Restoration of the Jews	from return to Jerusalem to the end of Old Testament history	92	Ezra	Ezra, Nehemiah, Haggai, Zechariah, Esther, Daniel 9-12; Zephaniah; Malachi
Between the Testaments	from close of Old Testament to opening of New Testament	400	Judas Maccabeus	No Scripture. History comes from Maccabees, Josephus, other sources.
Life of Christ	from birth of Christ to Ascension	34	Jesus	Matthew, Mark Luke, and John
The Church	from Ascension to close of New Testament history	70	Paul	Acts to Revelation

The Periods Connected to Scripture

Bible Period	Scripture Involved in Each Period
Antediluvian	Genesis 1-5
Postdiluvian	Genesis 6-11
Patriarchal	Genesis 12-45; Job
Egyptian Bondage	Genesis 42 – Exodus 11
Wilderness Wanderings	Exodus 12; Leviticus; Numbers; Deuteronomy
Conquest of Canaan	Joshua 1-24
Judges of Israel	Judges 1 - 1 Samuel 8; Ruth
United Kingdom	1 Sam. 9 - 1 Kings 11; 1 Chron. 10 - 2 Chron. 9; Psalms; Proverbs; Ecclesiastes; Song of Solomon
Divided Kingdom	1 Kings 12 - 2 Kings 20; 2 Chron. 10-32; Joel; Isaiah; Micah; Amos; Hosea; Jonah; Obadiah
Kingdom of Judah	2 Kings 21-25; 2 Chron. 33-36; Jeremiah; Nahum;
Babylonian Captivity	2 Kings 25:8-21; Daniel 1-8; Ezekiel; Lamentations;
Restoration of the Jews	Ezra, Nehemiah, Haggai, Zechariah, Esther, Daniel 9-12; Zephaniah; Malachi
Between the Testaments	No Scripture. History comes from Maccabees, Josephus, other sources.
Life of Christ	Matthew, Mark Luke, and John
The Church	Acts to Revelation

Pretexting? by Jack P. Lewis

The old saying that "a prooftext is often a pretext" may be used as a starting point—to ask those of us who preach and teach whether we are expounding to our audiences the revelation of God or whether we are hanging our own ideas on convenient Scripture passages. The temptation to pre-text is ever present in a community which feels that there must be a Biblical base for all that is done in work and worship. We are not always clear about what falls in the necessary inference category for which no explicit Scripture statement is needed. The result is that we are tempted to try to find proof where none exists.

The exegetical methods of the rabbis were systematized with stateable rules, but in general can be called "hanging mountains by strings." To give only one example, later codifiers, out of a saying like, "You shall not boil a kid in its mother's milk" (Ex. 23:19; 34:26; Deut. 21:24), arrived at the prohibition of eating milk and meat at the same meal.

The Qumran community found the prophets describing conditions that community had to face. Their exegetical method to some extent reminds one of that of modern interpreters who find cars, airplanes, tire rationing, and Middle Eastern political problems in Scripture. The more resourceful the exegete, the more clever combinations he can come up with to impress his audience. None of it is what the Biblical writers had in mind when God spoke through them.

The early Church Fathers had the Messianic interpretation as the magical key with which to unlock all Old Testament passages. Amos's statement "in that day the sun will go down at noon" was a prediction of the darkness at the crucifixion [Irenaeus, *Haeresies* 4.33.12 (ANF I.500)]. In

that and every age since, the allegorical interpretation of Scripture has been a means by which men claimed a Scripture base for ideas they had otherwise accepted. Augustine expounded the parable of the Samaritan as giving a picture of human history. According to him, mankind started down the road of life but fell into sin which beat him and left him helpless in the ditch. The Law of Moses came and also passed him by. Finally the good Samaritan, Jesus, bound up his wounds and brought him into the inn of safety—the church. While the basic outline of Augustine's case is true, the parable of the Samaritan does not teach it when legitimately exegeted. Augustine hung his ideas on the parable he did not derive them from it.

A speaker, shortly back, urging the need of congregations to follow the leadership of the elders, came up with the clever turn on Judg. 5:1: "When the elders lead and the people follow, we will praise the Lord." The situation he described is to be desired; but I wanted to ask him if he meant to leave the impression that he was giving a legitimate exegesis of his proof passage or if he meant it as an example of his cleverness? If one has to twist a passage to support the truth he is expounding, would it not be better to omit the passage and just to expound the idea on its own merits?

An informed speaker, wishing to expound the idea that there is something mysterious about the appeal that wickedness has in the lives of a modern people, took as his proof text 2 Thess. 2:6—"the mystery of iniquity." Anyone can see that there are aspects of wrong doing that are not to be explained. One may know the truth and then not do it; one may know the consequences of the life of sin but live it anyway. Who can explain it? A doctor spoke to us on the dangers of drug abuse; but doctors who know what drugs will do are often offenders in the abuse. Knowing the right and the wrong does not give one the will to choose the right and to reject the wrong. It is a puzzle to all of us—but that is an entirely different ball game from what Paul was expounding in 2 Thess. 2. If one has a valid idea, is a pretext necessary?

A speaker, wanting to expound his concept of providence of God, insisted that God put base men in governmental positions and then out of the wickedness accomplished His purpose. He insisted that Hitler was a base man whom God put over the Germans. Stalin was a base man put over the Russians. The speaker failed to observe that he had misunderstood his Bible and had fallen into the trap laid by the change in meaning of English words. "Base" in 1611 meant "humble" or "lowly," and Daniel 4:17,25, 32; 5:21 say that God puts "lowly men" on the throne—not "base men" in the sense meant by the epithet "Mean Joe Green." The text chosen had become only a pretext.

Almost two thousand years of Christian history and of the various ways the minds of men have turned in those years attest the complexity of the task of understanding the Word of God. As a general rule of thumb one can say that when one asks a passage a question that the writer was not intending to answer, he is likely to persuade himself that the passage teaches what he already accepted before he came to it.

One man comes to Matthew 10 and asks how Jesus sent out his disciples. He gets the answer that they went out in poverty two by two. Another man asks that passage how the church should be organized for its mission work and concludes that going out in poverty two by two is the divine plan. In my opinion, one of these men was asking the question the writer was answering; the other was not.

One man asks Romans 13 what the role of the government in God's system is and finds that it is a servant of God for good. Another man asks the passage what his role in the government should be—a question Paul was not discussing. Is it any wonder that the two cannot reach a meeting of the minds?

Another rule of thumb worth noting is that an interpretation that can only be supported by a turn of phrase peculiar to one English translation has a good chance of being a mere pretext. This is all the more true when it rests on italicized words like "*unknown tongue*" (1 Cor. 14), "*unto him*" (John 3:36), and "*spiritual words*" (1 Cor. 2:13).

Clever turns have a certain appeal to men's minds. We respond to them. "I never saw that in that passage before." One of the reasons we have not seen it there may be that it was never there to start with. It is much more laborious task to fascinate men with sound exposition of God's Word; but perhaps the challenge the Lord gave Jeremiah should be contemplated seriously by us all:

"If you utter what is precious and not what is worthless, you shall be as my mouth" (Jer. 15:19).

(Jack P. Lewis, *Harding Graduate School of Religion Bulletin*, Vol. 27, Nos. 1 & 2, Jan/Feb, 1986.)

Understanding Context

Read each individual passage in its context. Each passage of each book has a context in which it is to be read and understood. Many passages are misunderstood because the reader has never taken time to investigate the context of the Scripture he is reading. Some questions he must ask of the passage:

- Who is writing the passage?
- To whom is the author writing? Not everything in the Bible is written to every person. The OT was written to Jews, and the NT was written to Christians.
- When was the passage written?
- What was the author's intent and purpose in writing? The direct or literal sense of a sentence is the meaning of the author, when no other is indicated; not any figurative, allegorical, or mystical meaning.
- What circumstance may have prompted the writer to give rise to this lesson?
- What kind of literature is he using to make his message known?
- What are the historical and cultural circumstances that bear on this passage?
- What would this message mean to its original recipients?

To interpret a passage and not regard its context is to misinterpret it; to interpret it contrary to its context is to teach falsehood for truth. The meaning of a word or phrase in a later book of Scripture is not to be transferred to an earlier book, unless required by the context. There are four circles of context:

The Historical-Cultural Circle of Context. Many concepts are not properly understood when one does not think about the customs of the people and the historical circumstances of the time. Further, since the OT was written originally in Hebrew and Aramaic and the NT was written in Greek, the sense of a sentence, and the relation of one sentence to another, must be determined according to the grammar of the language in which it is written.

A wide variety of historical and cultural situations affected the people and events in the Bible. When we are aware of these situations, we have a much better chance of interpreting the passage correctly. They include such things as recent historical events, civil government, royal customs, economic practices, types of dwellings, modes of travel, marriage customs, farming

procedures, metalworking capabilities, prevalent thought patterns, astronomical concepts, calendar systems, ways of expressing the time of day, clothing, etc.

The Biblical Circle of Context. Because the whole Bible is the product of inspiration, no two passages of Scripture conflict or contradict one another. No two passages should be thought to teach contrary doctrines. Often the problem is that the reader has not studied enough to see how the passages harmonize with each other. The meaning of NT words and phrases are often influenced by the OT and should be determined in harmony with OT usage; not by Greek against Hebrew usage.

Certain passages form the background for other passages. For example, the events in Exodus, Leviticus, and Numbers supply the background for Moses' reminders and commands in Deuteronomy. Some of the historical books of the Old Testament (1 Kings through Nehemiah) form the background for the prophets (Isaiah through Malachi). And the book of Acts forms the background for most of Paul's epistles (Romans through Philemon).

The Specific Author and Specific Book Circle of Context. Words and phrases sometimes take on a particular meaning whenever they are used often in the same book or by the same author. This particular meaning may not be normally understood if found used in another book or by another author.

The Immediate Context. The most important context for understanding any verse of Scripture is the verses before and after it. The final determinate of the meaning of any word is the way that it is used in its immediate context.

Parallel Passage Context. This includes passages from other books in the Bible which discuss the same events or ideas. For example, most of the events recorded in one gospel are also recorded in other gospels. Many of the events in 2 Samuel and 1 and 2 Kings are also recorded in 1 and 2 Chronicles. And doctrinal passages on the same topic are often found in two or more of the New Testament epistles.

One Correct Interpretation

Any passage, *examined in context*, will have one correct interpretation, not several. When context is ignored, it is easy to assign a variety of meanings to a statement. For example, you can easily imagine several possible meanings for the statement "The chair doesn't fit." This statement could mean that the chair is too wide to fit into a narrow space, or that the chair is the wrong shape for me (it's uncomfortable), or that the chair is the wrong style to go with other pieces of furniture, or that the chair is too expensive to fit my budget. Only when we see the context do we realize that the statement had only one meaning from the start. Here's the statement in its context: "Everything else in the room is French in style, but the chair is Early American. The chair doesn't fit." The context actually defines the word "fit" and thus limits the meaning of the statement to a single meaning.

We should be *careful not to confuse interpretation and application*. While a statement can have many applications, it has only one interpretation when properly understood in its context. Many biblical statements (particularly warnings, commands, and exhortations) can be applied by many different people at widely separated times, in different cultures, in varying situations. The fact that a statement can have thousands of applications does not change the fact that the meaning or interpretation of the statement is still singular.

You'll remember John the Baptist said in John 3:30, "He must increase, but I must decrease." The correct interpretation of this passage reflects John's understanding that his ministry must decline, while the ministry of Jesus must grow. However, every faithful Christian can apply this statement to his own life. Interpretation and application are not the same thing.

The notion that each statement has a single meaning makes sense when you remember that the interpreter's task is to grasp the mind of the writer. Every communication involves two minds: the mind of the sender (writer/speaker) and the mind of the receiver (reader/listener). It's easy to imagine five different receivers coming up with five different interpretations, especially if they neglect the context. But it is not so easy to imagine the sender intending to convey five different meanings in one statement. As you know from your own experience, whenever you make a statement, you intend to express a certain idea. You may even go out of your way to clarify your statement so that those receiving it will understand exactly what you mean.

So, when there are three different interpretations of a certain statement, at least two of them are incorrect. And if the statement relates to basic Christian doctrine, the incorrect interpretations are no small matter. We do not take an ecumenical approach to interpretation. It really does make a difference whether or not we are able to discover the meaning intended by the biblical writers.

When we are interpreting a biblical passage, we are dealing with truth and meaning. Some people want to approach these the same way they approach beauty, but that is a mistake. Beauty is in the mind of the beholder. In other words, a particular item (scene, object, etc.) may be beautiful to one person, beautiful in a different way to a second person, merely utilitarian to a third person, and downright ugly to a fourth person. The beauty (or ugliness) is valid for each person even though it differs from the others. There is no beauty inherent in the item itself. Rather, beauty is an attribute, which individuals ascribe to items.

But truth is not so subjective. When truth exists in the mind of a writer, and that writer expresses that truth in a statement, that statement (the full statement, including the context) objectively contains a particular meaning. The interpreter's task is to discover that single meaning and thus understand the original truth. While there may be many interpretations of any given statement, only one is valid.

Don't confuse meaning and meaningfulness. Granted, different individuals will find varying degrees of meaningfulness or significance in a certain truth, and have different levels of appreciation for that same truth. But in this paper we are concerned with meaning and especially with the situation in which one person interprets a biblical statement differently than another. Unlike beauty, truth is objective. Of course, we want to make it subjective by understanding each biblical statement and applying each truth personally. But the search is never merely for *a* meaning. Rather, the search is for *the* meaning.

Interpretation and Application

The purpose of Biblical interpretation is to make the writer's meaning and message clear to today's readers. The goal of Biblical interpretation is to bring the exact meaning of the text for its original recipients to the understanding of today's readers—to translate what it meant into what it means.⁸ The word interpretation occurs in both Testaments. The Hebrew word *pathar* means "to

⁸ J. D. Thomas, "Vital Principles and Practices in Hermeneutics," *Biblical Interpretation Principles and Practice*, eds. F. Furman Kearley, Edward P. Myers, and Timothy D. Hadley (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker Book House, 1986), p. 313.

interpret,” and *pithron* means an interpretation. Most of the uses of these terms refer to the interpretation of a dream. “Interpretation” occurs in many forms in the New Testament (*hermeneia*, interpretation; *hemeneuo*, to interpret; *diermeneuo*, to interpret, to explain; *methermeneuomai*, to interpret, to translate; *dysermeneutos*, difficult to interpret; *diermeneutes*, interpreter; *epilysis*, interpretation). These words usually refer to translations from Hebrew or Aramaic into Greek. Hermeneutics is the science of the correct interpretation of the Bible.⁹ Biblical hermeneutics seeks to formulate those particular rules that pertain to a correct understanding of the Divinely revealed text of Scripture.

An oft-repeated anecdote places a number of people in the same room discussing a Scripture. Some suggest there will be as many interpretations of the selected passage as there are people in the room. Perhaps there are as many perceptions as there are people, but are there really as many interpretations? Further, if there are multiple interpretations, is each one valid? That differences exist, no one doubts; but buying the truth demands discernment. While it may be polite to count every view as equally valid, belief in everything yields conviction in nothing. One can hardly imagine the apostles, who died for their faith, taking back Jesus’ bodily resurrection or suggesting baptism is “because of” the forgiveness of sins. If every view were valid, there would be no such thing as heresy. The suggestion “it does not matter what one believes” may delight Satan, but it can never delight God.

The goal of interpretation is to find truth, a process that demands skill and discernment. Those who approach Scripture often bring preconceived notions and prejudices to the text, but one should not imagine that men are incapable of understanding these notions and prejudices and by critical examination alter their views. Bill Flatt said, “The interpreter may be tempted to read his own prejudgments into the text. Instead, he should use sound, consistent, sober, and honest principles and processes. His attitude should not prompt him to make exegetical conclusions with more certitude than are supported by his knowledge.”¹⁰

It costs pride in self and sometimes relationships to buy the truth. Bearing the cross today, as in every generation, will offend (2 Tim. 3:12). No one likes conflict, but unwillingness to stand on revealed truth in order to maintain relationships will separate one from God. Friendship with the world is hostility with God (James 4:4).

Traditional interpretation has centered upon the meaning of the writer’s message. In recent years this emphasis has shifted to how the reader perceives what the writer means. For some, real spiritual truth is manufactured in the perceptions of the reader rather than in the revelation of God. The belief is that since all men approach Scripture with preconceptions, that any understanding of Scripture can hardly be accurate. They further assert that since no one can fully, accurately know Scripture, then no one can assert only one view is correct. Such a conviction plunges Christians into a morass of uncertainty and denies Jesus’ fundamental teaching, “you shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free” (John 8:32). When the reader’s perceptions override the author’s meaning, no truth is sacred and free from perversion.

⁹ Bernard Ramm, *Protestant Biblical Hermeneutics* (Boston: W. A. Wilde Company, Publishers, 1956), p. 11.

¹⁰ Bill Flatt, “The Function of Presuppositions and Attitudes in Biblical Interpretation,” *Biblical Interpretation Principles and Practice*, eds. F. Furman Kearley, Edward P. Myers and Timothy D. Hadley (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker Book House, 1986), p. 61.

Examples of Interpretations that Violate the Context

A. Psalm 14:1 and 1 Corinthians 8:4 — God's Existence

Direct quotation: “There is no God”

One interpretation: The Bible explicitly states that no God exists.

Context: In both of these passages, the direct quotation is not even a complete sentence. In Psalm 14:1, David is making the point that *the fool* says there is no God. In 1 Corinthians 8:4, if we merely look at the rest of the clause, we see that Paul says there is no God *but one*. Obviously these passages, as well as the rest of the Bible, teach the exact opposite of the “one interpretation” cited above.

B. 1 Corinthians 15:32 — Resurrection and Afterlife

Direct quotation: “Let us eat and drink, for tomorrow we die.”

One interpretation: Live it up now because there is no afterlife with rewards or punishments.

Context: Here again the quotation is part of a longer sentence which begins by posing a hypothetical condition, “If the dead are not raised ...” In essence, Paul is saying that, if it were true that there is no afterlife, then go ahead and live it up. But elsewhere in the immediate context Paul makes it clear that there is an afterlife, a resurrection from the dead (see verses 4-8, 20, 42-44, and 51-52).

The immediate context, verses 29-32, shows the absurdity of the idea that there is no afterlife. In verse 29 Paul shows the inconsistency of someone claiming that there is no afterlife, but also being baptized for the dead. (By the way, this is not meant to recommend the practice of being baptized for the dead. Rather, it merely shows how ridiculous it is for someone to claim that there is no resurrection, then turn around and be baptized for the dead to better their condition in their afterlife. Even here it is the context, which straightens out our interpretation.) In verses 30-32 Paul is pointing out how he put his life on the line for others, based on his strong conviction that there is an afterlife. If there is no afterlife, Paul wasted his time and took unnecessary chances, all to gain nothing. If there is no afterlife, he would have been better off living it up. His point? There is an afterlife.

C. Mark 3:21-22 — Jesus' Mind and Motivation

Direct quotation: “He is out of his mind.” and “He is possessed by Beelzebub! By the prince of demons he is driving out demons.”

One interpretation: Jesus was under the control of Satan.

Context: In narrative passages it is important to know who is speaking. We find from the context that the first quote is spoken by Jesus' family (verse 21) and the second quote is spoken by the Jewish teachers of the law (verse 22). Jesus shows how ridiculous the second statement is by raising questions about how long Satan's kingdom would stand if it were divided against itself (verses 23-27).

The Bible often records incorrect statements, beginning with the statement of the serpent (“You will not surely die,” Genesis 3:1-5) and continuing with statements from disobedient Israelites, false prophets, Pharisees, Sadducees, false teachers, and the like. It is the context which both informs us who is speaking and whether or not the statement is correct. The fact that the Bible records a statement does not mean that it affirms the statement. The historic Christian doctrine of inspiration guarantees an accurate Bible. But that accuracy may involve accurate records of false

statements. Regarding the Bible's infallibility: the Bible is accurate in everything it records; true in everything it affirms.

By the way, it would be possible to combine the cited misinterpretation of this passage with the cited misinterpretations of the three passages in the first two examples to form a coherent system of belief. This system would claim that there is no God, no afterlife, and that Jesus was out of his mind. If we were to force this system on the rest of the Bible, we would have to reinterpret all other references to God and the afterlife. We would also have to discount all of Jesus' teachings. This illustrates the danger of locking into a system too early then interpreting every other passage according to that system. It is obvious that the above system, based on only four passages, is directly opposite the general teachings of the Bible. However, the problem may not be so obvious when a system is based on a hundred or a thousand passages. Such a system may be widely accepted, or may even have the weight of history on its side. Nevertheless, we must remember that every theological system is a human invention and as such it is subject to our human tendency to generalize and jump to conclusions. *All too often we interpret a Bible passage in the "context" of our theological system instead of allowing that passage's own context to be the principal guide to its interpretation.* We must let the Bible speak for itself and not systematize too quickly. (Systematic theology must be based on biblical theology.)

D. Philippians 4:13 — I Can Do All Things

Direct Quotation: I can do everything through him who gives me strength.

One interpretation: God gives me all talents and all abilities.

Context: There is an obvious problem with the above interpretation. If it were true, there would be no room for Paul's teaching elsewhere (1 Corinthians 12, Romans 12) regarding spiritual gifts. In those passages Paul explains that some believers have some gifts (or abilities to minister) while other believers have others (see especially 1 Corinthians 12:21). But the above interpretation would make every believer fully gifted. When we look at the context of Philippians 4:13, we see that the focus is not on abilities at all, but on money.

Verse 13 is part of a discussion in verses 10-19 of the Philippians' generosity to Paul. In verses 10-14 Paul states how glad he is that the Philippians have been able to give to him again, even though he has learned to get along either with or without adequate supply. In verses 15-16 Paul reminds them that in the past they had given to Paul when others had not. In verses 17-19 Paul explains the reasons for his happiness, which focuses on the benefits the Philippians receive for giving.

In particular, verses 11b-13 all relate to one idea — that Paul has learned to be content in all financial circumstances. In verse 12 he points out the extremes he has learned to live with: need and plenty, being well fed or going hungry, having plenty or wanting. There is nothing in the context about Paul's talents or abilities. Everything relates to the adequacy of Paul's provisions. Certainly the "I can do everything" of verse 13 means "I will be content whether I have enough provisions to meet my needs or not."

Can We All Understand the Bible Alike? The Perspicuity of Scripture

There are a number of popular beliefs being taught about the Bible that we need to explore--perhaps you have heard people say some of them:

- The Bible is not meant to be understood.
- The Bible says different things to different people
- What is important is not so much what the Bible says but what the Bible says to me.
- The New Testament addressed the culture of the first century and really doesn't speak to us.
- It doesn't matter what you believe as long as you are sincere.
- You can make the Bible say anything you want it to.

One idea that seems to keep floating around is, "Take a passage of Scripture and read it to a group of people. There will be as many interpretations of that passage as there are people in that room." Is this really true?

- Was the Bible meant to be understood?
- Was the Bible intended to be understood alike?

Men Can See the Bible Alike

The Bible Was Written To Be Understood

Deut. 30:11-14 the word is not out of reach.

- 31:9-13 to be read to men, women, children every seven years, an enduring process
- It was to all Israel: smart, dumb, conservatives, liberals
- those who didn't know it were expected to learn it

Luke 1:1-4 Luke carefully investigated the life of Jesus that you might know the certainty of the things you have been taught.

2 Cor. 1:13 Paul wrote no other thing but what you can understand.

Eph. 3:3-4 Paul wrote so that "you can understand when you read."

1 John 2:21 John said Christians can know the truth and can distinguish a lie.

God Intended For Men to Understand the Bible Alike

Gal. 1:6-9 There is one gospel and no other. Eph. 4:4-5 There is one faith--system of belief. 1 Cor. 1:10 We are to be of the same mind and judgment.

The commands of obedience to Jesus Christ are universal. (Acts 17:30; 1 Tim 2:3,4). God desires all to come to a knowledge of the truth. God expects all men to come to the same understanding of Jesus Christ and to be obedient to the gospel.

- John 8:24 Jesus is the Messiah, and our salvation is dependent upon our believing the right thing about him.
- Gal. 5:1-4 Some fell from grace and were severed from Christ because they bound the Law in addition to gospel.

What kind of God says, "be of the same mind" and composes a Bible that says different things to different people? If we say that God cannot communicate clearly, what are we saying about God? A simple math lesson teaches the principles of addition; all that are in the class are expected to arrive at the same, correct answer. We assume that normally intelligent people would arrive at the same answer if they understood the principles. If someone came up with a wrong answer, we do not assume the book is wrong, but that the person needed further teaching. So it is with the Bible.

Understanding History and Narratives

The Bible contains more “narrative” literature than any other type; over 40 percent of the Bible is narrative. Narratives are stories. Biblical narratives are God’s story—a story that is utterly true, crucially important, and often complex. Biblical narratives not only tell us what happened, they also show God at work in His world and among His people. These stories glorify God and give us a picture of His providence and protection. From these stories we learn to appreciate Him and to understand how He deals with mankind. These narratives also provide meaningful illustrations about life with God. These stories are for our learning and give us hope (Rom. 15:4; 1 Cor. 10:11).

What Narratives Are Not:

1. OT narratives are not just stories about people who lived in OT times. They are first and foremost stories about what God did to and through those people. The Bible is composed especially of divine narratives. God is the focus of the story and the hero.
2. OT narratives are not allegories or stories filled with hidden meanings. Some aspects, to be sure, are not easy to understand. The ways that God works in history, the ways He influences human actions, and the ways His works His own will through humans are not always comprehensible. We are often not told precisely what God has done in a certain situation that caused it to happen the way the OT reports it. Even when we are told what He did, we are not told *how* or *why* He did it. Narratives do not tell us all we want to know about many matters. They are limited in their focus and give us only one part of the overall picture of what God has done in history. We must learn to be satisfied with what we know. We must be careful not to read into (eisegesis) the story what is not there.
3. OT narratives do not always teach directly. We can learn valuable lessons of life and morality by reading the stories of events and experiences of others. The OT is spiritual history. One can learn through other’s experiences what God desires. One does not have to commit adultery to realize the terrible consequences of such behavior (2 Samuel 11).

Principles for Interpreting Narratives

1. An OT narrative usually does not directly teach a doctrine. An OT narrative usually illustrates a doctrine or doctrines taught propositionally elsewhere.
2. Narratives record what happened—not necessarily what should have happened or what ought to happen every time. Therefore, not every narrative has an individual, identifiable moral of the story.
3. What people do in narratives is not necessarily a good example for us. Frequently, it is just the opposite. Most of the characters in the OT are far from perfect, and their behavior is not exemplary.
4. We are not always told at the end of a narrative whether what happened was good or bad. We are expected to be able to judge that on the basis of what God has taught us directly and categorically already in the Scripture.
5. All narratives are selective and incomplete. Not all the relevant details are always given (cf. John 21:25). What does appear in the narrative is everything that the inspired author thought important for us to know.

6. Narratives are not written to answer all our theological questions. They have particular, specific, limited purposes and deal with certain issues, leaving others to be dealt with elsewhere in other ways.
7. Narratives may teach either explicitly (by clearly stating something) or implicitly (by clearly implying something without actually stating it). Implicit means that the message is capable of being understood from what is said, though it is not stated in so many words. If you are not able confidently to express to others something taught implicitly, so that they can understand it and get the point too, you are probably misreading the text. What the Holy Spirit has inspired is of benefit for all believers. Discern and relay what the story recognizably has in it—do not make up a new story (2 Pet. 1:16).
8. God is always the hero of Biblical narratives.

Five errors to avoid:

1. *Allegorizing*. Instead of focusing on the clear meaning of the Scripture, some relegate the text to another meaning beyond the text.
2. *De-contextualizing*. Ignoring the full historical and literary contexts, and often the individual narrative, people concentrate on small units only and thus miss the larger picture and often the point.
3. *Selectivity*. This involves choosing specific words and phrases to concentrate on, ignoring the others, and ignoring the overall sweep of the passage. Instead of balancing the parts and the whole, it ignores some of the parts and the whole entirely.
4. *False Combination*. This approach combines elements from here and there in a passage and makes a point out of their combination, even though the elements themselves are not directly connected in the passage itself. (An example: our enemies are in the church rather than outside the church because in Psalm 23 David says he will dwell in the house of the Lord forever and that God has prepared him a table in the presence of his enemies.)

Redefinition. When the plain meaning of the text does not reflect what people want to hear, they often are tempted to redefine it to mean something else.

Interpreting Poetry and Wisdom

One third of the Old Testament is poetic, and it is crucial to learn how to read and interpret this form of literature. The poetry of the Old Testament is not poetry of rhyme or of rhythm, as we generally regard poetry. Scholars suggest that a text is poetic when it is written in an elevated style that exhibits terseness (short and abrupt) and a high degree of structure. Short lines of text that are related to one another characterize OT poetry. It is the interpreter's responsibility to understand the relationships between the lines of poetic text. This involves learning how to read poetic texts by focusing on the structure and sounds of the poetic lines and the image used by the poet.

The Lack of Poetic Rhythm

Much modern poetry has standard measures of identifiable rhythm, as in the poem "Mary Had A Little Lamb." With the Hebrews, however, the art of poetic rhythm was of secondary consideration. Some suggest that it is not likely that the Hebrew poets had standard measures, worked out and carefully defined. Again, their focus was on "thought rhyme," not "word rhyme."

The Use of "Thought Rhyme" or "Parallelism"

Thought rhyme involves arranging thoughts in relation to each other. This is done without a concern as to whether certain words rhyme with each other (as found in most modern poetry). In the Psalms, we find several different kinds of thought rhyme:

- *Synonymous parallelism* - The thought of first line is repeated in the second line, expressed in different words for the sake of emphasis. (Psalm 119:105)
Psa 24:2... For He has founded it upon the seas,
And established it upon the waters. (same idea, reworded)
- *Antithetical parallelism* - The truth presented in one line is strengthened by a contrasting statement in the next line. (See Prov. 10:1-22:16)
Psa 1:6... For the LORD knows the way of the righteous,
But the way of the ungodly shall perish. (note the contrast)
- *Synthetic parallelism* - The first and second lines bear some definite relation to each other (such as cause and effect, or proposition and conclusion).
Psa 119:11... Your word I have hidden in my heart, (cause)
That I might not sin against You! (effect)
- *Progressive parallelism* - There are several varieties of this form, the most common being:
Stair-like - *Composed of several lines, each providing a complete element of the aggregate or composite thought.*
Psa 1:1... Blessed is the man... Who walks not in the counsel of the ungodly, Nor
stands in the path of sinners, Nor sits in the seat of the scornful; (note the
progression)

Climatic - Here the principal idea in the first line is repeated and expanded to complete the thought.

Psa 29:1... Give unto the LORD, O you mighty ones (give what?)

Give unto the LORD glory and strength. (the answer)

- *Introverted parallelism* - The first line is closely related in thought to the fourth, and the second to the third. This is similar to "chiasm" (A, B, B, A)

Psa 91:14 Because he has set his love upon Me, (note line 4)
therefore I will deliver him; (note line 3)
I will set him on high, (note line 2)
because he has known My name. (note line 1)

It is often fascinating to note how creative the Hebrew poets were as they composed their poetry using "thought rhyme" rather than "word rhyme". In some cases it even helps in interpreting difficult expressions or phrases.

Three Significant Rhetorical Patterns:

1. *Inclusio*. An inclusio is the repetition of a significant phrase or word at the beginning and ending of a section of text. The inclusio acts as a parenthesis around the text. It is a lens through which the reader looks at the text and often states the theme of the text.
"Vanity of vanities," says the preacher,
"Vanity of vanities! All is vanity" (Eccl. 1:2)
"Vanity of vanities," says the preacher, "all is vanity!" (Eccl. 12:8)
2. *Merismus*. Merismus places two extremes side by side in order to express a totality. In Eccl. 3:2-8, fourteen pairs of opposites, each of which could be described as a merismus, are placed side by side. Notice also Amos 9:2-3 (Sheol and the heavens, height and depth).
3. *Chiasmus*. Chiasm derives its name from the Greek letter chi, which is written as "X." Therefore, the parallel lines are in reverse order (A,B, -B, -A).
 Isa. 40:28-31
 Do you not know? Have you not heard?
 The Everlasting God, the LORD, the Creator of the ends of the earth
 Does not become **weary or tired**. His understanding is inscrutable. (A)
 He gives **strength to the weary**, And to him who lacks might He increases power. (B)
 Though youths grow **weary and tired**, And vigorous young men stumble badly, (C)
 Yet those who wait for the LORD Will gain new **strength**; (-B)
 They will mount up with wings like eagles,
 They will run and not get **tired**, They will walk and not become **weary**. (-A)

The Use of Figurative Expression

The Psalms are filled with figurative expressions, and as such it is important to keep certain principles of interpretation in mind...

1. The figure must be accepted and dealt with as a figure of speech, not as a literal statement
- Psa 18:31, the Lord is called "a rock." He is like a rock, but not one literally.
- In Psa 51:4, David says "Against You, You only, have I sinned." Yet he is confessing his sin of adultery with Bathsheba, in which he sinned not only against the Lord, but against his wife, against Uriah, and many others. David was speaking figuratively for the sake of expressing his

deep grief in sinning against God, and we must allow for figurative expressions including hyperbole in poetic writings.

- One needs to be careful and not develop doctrinal beliefs upon what may be figurative expressions not intended to be taken literally.
2. The figure must be interpreted in light of its meaning in the setting in which it was used.
- Psalms 23:4, we find the well-known phrase: "the valley of the shadow of death." It is not uncommon to hear the phrase applied at funerals to the act of dying. In the setting of the psalm, however, it refers to a treacherous place (such as a steep valley, where deep shadows can easily cause a misstep resulting in death), where the guiding hand of a shepherd would be very helpful to sheep to avoid death. It is therefore applicable to any time one is in perilous straits and in need of God's guiding hand.
 - Poets think in images.
 - similes and metaphors. See Psalm 1:3-4.
 - metonymy and synecdoche. See Josh. 24:15; Psalm 45:6.
 - Personification. Giving human personality to inanimate objects or abstract notions. Psalm 98:8. Proverbs 2,8,9, and 31 personify wisdom as a woman.

The Authors Of The Psalms

- *David* - Commonly thought to be the author of the book of Psalms, but he actually wrote only about seventy-three (73), less than half.
- *Asaph* - The music director during the reigns of David and Solomon (1 Chr 16:1-7). He wrote twelve (12) psalms.
- *The Sons of Korah* - These were Levites who served in the Temple (1 Chr 26:1-19). They wrote twelve (12) psalms.
- *Solomon* - At least two (2) psalms are attributed to him (Psa 72, 127). That he wrote many more is stated in 1 Ki 4:29-32.
- *Moses* - As indicated above, he wrote the earliest psalms; one is included in Psalms (Psa 90).
- *Heman* - Contemporary with David and Asaph, and is known as "the singer" (1 Chr 6:33). He wrote one psalm (Psa 88) that has been preserved.
- *Ethan* - A companion with Asaph and Heman in the Temple worship (1 Chr 15:19). He wrote one psalm (Psa 89).
- *Anonymous* - The authorship of forty-eight (48) of the psalms is unknown.

The Arrangement of the Psalms

The Psalms were originally collected into five "books", apparently according to the material found within them.

- Book I (Ps 1-41)
- Book II (Ps 42-72)
- Book III (Ps 73-89)
- Book IV (Ps 90-106)
- Book V (Ps 107-150)

Kinds of Psalms:

- *Alphabetic or Acrostic* - These psalms have lines which in Hebrew start with words whose first letters follow a certain pattern. For example, in Psa 119 the first eight lines start with words beginning with the Hebrew letter ALEPH, the second eight lines with words beginning with BETH, etc. This may have been done to aid in the memorization of the psalm.
- *Ethical* - These psalms teach moral principles. A good example is Psa 15. Hallelujah - These are psalms of praise, beginning and/or ending with "hallelujah" or "praise Jehovah". Psa 103 is one such example.
- *Historical* - Psalms which review the history of God's dealings with His people. A good sample would be Psa 106.
- *Imprecatory* - These psalms invoke God to bring punishment or judgment upon one's enemies. Consider Psa 69 as an example.
- *Messianic* - Psalms pertaining to the coming Messiah. For example, look at Psa 2 or Psa 110.
- *Penitential* - These are psalms expressing sorrow for sins that have been committed. A classic example is David's psalm in Psa 51.
- *Songs Of Ascent* (or Songs Of Degrees) - These psalms were possibly sung by pilgrims on the way to Jerusalem to observe the feasts. They are grouped together as Psa 120-134.
- *Suffering* - These psalms are cries of those suffering affliction. Psa 102 is a typical example.
- *Thanksgiving* - Psalms of grateful praise to Jehovah for blessings received. For example, take a look at Psa 100.

The various "styles" of the psalms:

- *Didactic* - Psalms of teaching and instruction (e.g., Psa 1).
- *Liturgical* - Responsive readings, for use in special services (e.g., Psa 136).
- *Meditation* - The ancient Hebrews were given to meditation, which spirit finds expression in many of the psalms (e.g., Psa 119).
- *Praise and Devotion* - Psalms of joyful praise (e.g., Psa 148).
- *Prayer and Petition* - Psalms which were sung in an attitude of prayer (e.g., Psa 51).

Guidelines for Interpreting Hebrew Poetry

1. Determine where the thought unit of poetry begins and ends. If you are dealing with a single verse, remember to put it into context. To determine the various sections in a psalm, for example, it is important to pay attention to the indicators that help divide the psalm into units of thought.
2. Evaluate the poetic lines that make up each section of thought in order to determine the type of parallelism and wordplay, which might enrich the overall emphasis of the poet.
3. Focus on the imagery in the text. Look for the intent of the images. Psalm 23 opens with a metaphor (the Lord is my shepherd), which controls all the content in verses 1-4. Psalms speak to the mind through the heart and are intended to express emotions. One needs to be careful not to find special meanings in the text where none is intended.
4. Be aware that correctly reading poetic literature impacts theology. Isa. 53:5 suggests that spiritual healing not physical healing is in view.
5. It is always important to remember that psalms were musical poems, songs. Each of them is a literary unit and is to be treated as whole. Verses in psalms should be understood in context.

Wisdom Literature

Wisdom Literature is a kind of writing featuring wise sayings and astute observations. These writings teach how to live according to such principles as intelligence, understanding, common sense, and practical skills. With regard to the Bible, the term refers to the books of Job, Proverbs, and Ecclesiastes. Portions of other biblical books—such as Esther, Psalms, Song of Songs, and Daniel—can also be classified as Wisdom literature. Ancient Egypt and Babylon also produced Wisdom literature, but biblical Wisdom literature is unique, teaching that the fear of God is the foundation of true wisdom (Prov. 9:10) and ultimate success (Ps. 25:12–13; Eccles. 8:12–13).¹¹

The wise men employed several literary devices as aids to memory. The most frequent device was the use of poetic parallelism of either a synthetic (*e.g.* Pr. 18:10) or antithetic (*e.g.* Pr. 10:1) type. Comparisons are common (*e.g.* Pr. 17:1), as are numerical sequences (*e.g.* Pr. 30:15ff.).¹²

The primary setting for biblical Wisdom literature is the home, although at some point wisdom teaching seems to have become more formalized. Many wisdom passages explicitly mention the role of father and mother (Prov 1:8; 10:1; 15:20; 20:20; 23:22, 25; 30:11, 17; 31:1). Additionally, the proverbs are often addressed to “my son”—a word which sometimes means “disciple” in addition to “son” (Prov 1:8, 10, 15; 2:1; 3:1, 11, 21; 4:10, 20; 5:1, 20; 6:1, 3, 20; 7:1; 19:27; 23:19, 26; 24:13, 21; 27:11).¹³

Vocabulary. A distinctive vocabulary is common to biblical Wisdom books. These words, which are also used outside Wisdom literature, albeit less frequently, include:

- “wisdom” (חֵכְמָה, *chokmah*)
- “understanding” (בִּינָה, *binah*)
- “cunning” (עָרוּם, *arum*)
- “stupid” (כֶּסֶּיל, *kesil*)
- “scoffer” (לוֹץ, *luts*)
- “fool” (אֲוִיל, *ewil*).¹⁴

Proverbs

A proverb is a short saying found on long experience containing a truth. It is full of meaning and provocative and expects careful thought. Proverbs are usually generalizations (such as Proverbs 22:6).

¹¹ David K. Stabnow, “Wisdom Literature,” ed. Chad Brand et al., *Holman Illustrated Bible Dictionary* (Nashville, TN: Holman Bible Publishers, 2003), 1677.

¹² D. A. Hubbard, “Wisdom Literature,” ed. D. R. W. Wood et al., *New Bible Dictionary* (Leicester, England; Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1996), 1245.

¹³ Stephen J. Bennett, “Wisdom Literature,” ed. John D. Barry et al., *The Lexham Bible Dictionary* (Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press, 2012, 2013, 2014).

¹⁴ Stephen J. Bennett, “Wisdom Literature,” ed. John D. Barry et al., *The Lexham Bible Dictionary* (Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press, 2012, 2013, 2014).

Understanding the Writings of the Prophets

The Meaning of Prophecy – The primary difficulty for most modern readers of the prophets stems from an inaccurate understanding of the words “prophet” and “prophecy.” The word prophet refers to one who *tells forth* (or proclaims), as well as one who foretells.²⁵⁷ But we often limit the meaning of prophecy to foretelling the future, so many Christians refer to the prophets only for predictions about Christ’s first coming, or his second coming, and the end times as though prediction of events far distant to their own day was their main concern.

Less than 2% of Old Testament prophecy is messianic. Less than 5% specifically concerns the New Covenant age. And less than 1% concern events still future to us. The prophets did indeed announce the future. But it was usually the immediate future of Israel, Judah, and the surrounding nations they announced – not our future. One of the keys to understanding the Prophets, therefore, is to recognize that for us to see their prophecies fulfilled, we must often look back on times that were still future to them, but for us are past.

To see the prophets as primarily predictors of future events is to miss their primary function, which was, in fact, to *speak* for God to their contemporaries.

Historical Distance – Another matter that complicates our understanding the prophets is the problem of historical distance. By the very nature of things, we will have a harder time understanding the words of the prophets than the Israelites who heard those same words in person. We are far removed from the religious, historical, and cultural life of ancient Israel, and we simply have trouble putting the words of the prophets in their proper context. It is often hard for us to see what they are referring to and why. Things clear to them tend to be opaque to us.

The Spoken Nature of the Prophets – Finally, the spoken nature of their prophecies causes many of our difficulties in understanding.

For example, of the hundreds of prophets in ancient Israel in Old Testament times, only 16 were chosen to speak oracles that would be collected and written down into books. We know that other prophets, such as Elijah and Elisha, played a very influential role in delivering God’s Word to His people and to other nations as well. But we know more *about* these prophets than we do of their actual words. What they *did* is described in far greater length than what they *said* -- and when we are told what they said, it is placed very specifically and clearly in the context of the narratives in which they appear. Generally, in the narrative books of the Old Testament, we hear *about* prophets and very little *from* prophets. In the prophetic books, however, we hear *from* the prophets and very little about the prophets themselves. That single difference accounts for most of the problem people have making sense of the prophetic books.

The prophetic books, especially the longer ones, are collections of spoken oracles, not always presented in their original chronological sequence, often without hints as to where one oracle ends and another begins, and often without hints as to their historical setting. On top of that, most of the oracles were spoken in poetry.

The Function of the Prophets

Covenant Enforcement Mediators – To understand what God would say to us through these inspired books, we must first have a clear understanding as to the role and function of the prophet in Israel. The prophets spoke for God to His people. They functioned to call Israel back to God,²⁶⁰ which meant a call back to faithfulness to their Covenant relationship with God; i.e., back to the

Law of Moses. In accomplishing this primary purpose, they confronted Israel's sin and demanded repentance. Simply stated, the prophets were "covenant enforcement mediators." There was a covenant relationship between God and His people. This covenant contained not only the rules which they were to keep, but it describes the sorts of punishments that God will necessarily apply to His people if they do not keep the Law, as well as the benefits He will impart to them if they are faithful.

Moses as a Model – Moses was the mediator of God's Law when he first announced it, and thus is a model for the prophets. They are God's mediators, or spokesmen, for the covenant. Through them, God reminds people in the generations after Moses that if the covenant is kept, blessing will result, but if not, judgment will come.

Blessing and Cursing – The kinds of blessings that come for faithfulness are found in Leviticus 26:1-13, Deuteronomy 4:32-40, and Deuteronomy 28:1-14. Generally, these may be categorized as life, health, prosperity, agricultural abundance, respect, and safety. But these blessings are announced with a warning of curses (punishments) if Israel is not obedient and faithful to the covenant. The curses are found in Leviticus 26:14-39, Deuteronomy 4:15-28, and Deuteronomy 28:15-32:42. Generally, these may be categorized under ten "D's": death, disease, drought, dearth, danger, destruction, defeat, deportation, destitution, and disgrace.

The prophets did not invent the blessings and curses they announced. They reproduced *God's Word*, not their own.

Statistically speaking, a majority of the prophets announce curse because in the time of their prophecies (generally 800 - 587 BC), the Israelites (north and south) were heading for punishment. After the destruction of both kingdoms, i.e., after 586 BC, the prophets were moved more often to speak of blessings rather than curses because once the punishment of the nation is complete, God resumes His basic plan, which is to show mercy. Deuteronomy 4:25-31 gives a nutshell description of this sequence.

The Context of Their Writings

The prophetic books require time and study. People often approach these books casually, as if a surface reading through the Prophets will yield a high level of understanding. This isn't done with textbooks in our ordinary schooling, and it doesn't really work with the Prophets either. Specifically for understanding and interpreting the Prophets, one must be willing to consult outside resources, such as Bible dictionaries and commentaries, which can shed light on the background information so we will be able to catch the point of what a Prophet conveys. God's Word came through the prophets to people in particular situations. Its value depends partly on our ability to appreciate those situations so we can in turn apply them to our own.

Historical Context – It is interesting to note that the 16 prophetic books of the Old Testament come from a rather narrow band in the whole panorama of Israelite history. Why is there such a concentrated writing down of prophetic word during the time between Amos and Malachi? It is probably because this period in Israel's history called especially for *covenant enforcement mediation*, which was the task of the prophets. That is along with the evident desire of God to record for all subsequent history the warnings and blessings that those prophets announced on His behalf during those pivotal years.

Those years were characterized by three things: (1) unprecedented political, military, economic, and social upheaval; (2) an enormous level of religious unfaithfulness and disregard for the original Mosaic covenant; and (3) dramatic shifts in populations and national boundaries. In

these circumstances, God's Word was needed anew. God raised up prophets and announced His Word accordingly.

The Books of 1 and 2 Kings and 2 Chronicles provide the biblical context of the writing prophets leading up to the Babylonian exile. There we see that by the time the writing prophets come on the scene, Israel was a nation permanently divided by a long ongoing civil war. The northern kingdom's disobedience to the covenant had far outstripped anything yet known in Judah, and Israel was slated for destruction by God because of its sin. Amos, beginning around 760, and Hosea, beginning around 755, announced the impending destruction. God raised up the Assyrians as the new superpower at that time and the instrument of judgment on Israel. In 722 BC, Assyria sacked the capital city of Samaria and thus conquered Israel.

Figure 1: Chronology of the Writing Prophets

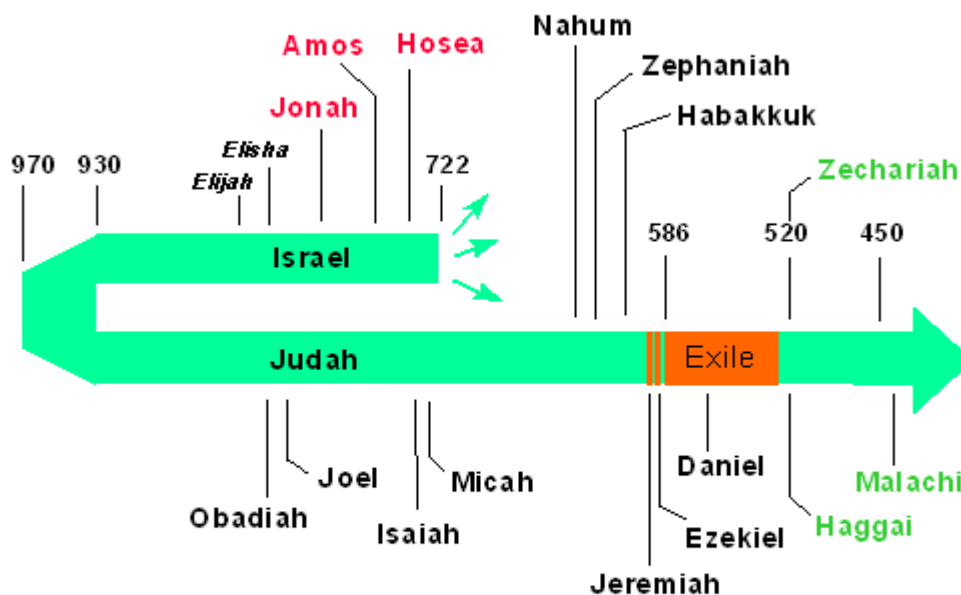


Figure 1: Chronology of the Writing Prophets

The people of Judah witnessed the destruction of the northern kingdom, as did Isaiah and Micah, who warned that they were not immune to God's wrath and were, in fact, on the same road to destruction. Thereafter, the mounting sinfulness of Judah and the rise of another superpower, Babylon, became the subject of the prophets Nahum, Habakkuk, and Zephaniah, as well as Jeremiah and Ezekiel. Judah, too, was destroyed for its disobedience and carried off into exile. Perhaps this is where an example of the importance of historical context can be best illustrated.

The Babylonians rose up and defeated the Assyrians (612 BC), and then defeated the Egyptians at the battle of Carchemish in 605 BC to become the number one power in the civilized world. Following the defeat of the Egyptians, Nebuchadnezzar headed south into Judah and entered Jerusalem as conqueror. Then begins the exile. When we think of the exile, however, we need to know that there were actually *three* deportations. The first occurred in 605 BC when Daniel was

taken to Babylon. The second deportation occurred in 597 BC when Nebuchadnezzar returned to quell a resistance movement; this is when Ezekiel was taken to Babylon (during all this, Jeremiah remained in Jerusalem). The final deportation occurred in 586 BC when Jerusalem was finally destroyed by Nebuchadnezzar.

Now take, for example, the writings of Jeremiah and Ezekiel: Both prophesied before and after the destruction of Jerusalem in 586 BC. The Book of Jeremiah was written before the destruction. Jeremiah, an eyewitness to the destruction, wrote Lamentations afterward. Ezekiel's prophecies in chapters 1-32 were given in Babylon before the fall of Jerusalem. Chapters 33-48 were prophecies given after. The focus of the prophet's ministry changes with respect to that event. Before the destruction of Jerusalem, they spoke mainly of judgment. After the destruction, they begin to talk more of restoration. If you know the historical context, it is easier to understand why they said what they did.

After the exile, when the people were allowed to return to Jerusalem, Haggai, Zechariah, and Malachi announced God's will for the rebuilding of the temple, the rebuilding of the nation, and the reinstitution of orthodoxy.

Unless we know these events and others within this era too numerous to mention here, we probably will not be able to follow very well what the prophets are saying.

Literary Form

A. *They Spoke in Oracles* – When we come to the actual study of the prophetic books, the first thing we must learn to do is to *think oracles* (just as we must learn to think paragraphs in the epistles or narrative sections of the Bible). This is not always an easy task, but to know the difficulty and the need to do this is the beginning of some exciting discovery. For the most part, the longer prophetic books are *collections of spoken oracles*, not always presented in their original chronological sequence, often without any indication as to where one oracle ends and another begins, and often without hints as to their historical setting. To top it off, most of the oracles were recorded in poetic form.

Literary Form of the Oracles – Since the isolation of individual oracles is one key to understanding the prophetic books, it is important to know something about the different forms the prophets used to compose their oracles. Just as the Bible as a whole is composed of many different kinds of literature and literary forms, so also the prophets employed a variety of literary forms in their divinely inspired messages. The commentaries can identify and explain these forms. Perhaps the three most common forms are the *lawsuit oracle*, the *woe oracle*, and the *promise oracle*.²⁶⁴ They each have different literary features. Understanding the features of these prophetic literary devices helps one to comprehend the message of God more accurately. I'd like to take the time to look at some examples to show you what I mean.

The Lawsuit Oracle – Let's turn to Isaiah 3:13-26, which constitutes an allegorical literary form called a "covenant lawsuit." In this God is portrayed imaginatively as the plaintiff, prosecuting attorney, and judge in a court case against the defendant, Israel. The full lawsuit form contains a summons, a charge, evidence, and a verdict, though these elements may sometimes be implied rather than being explicit. In Isaiah 3, the elements are incorporated as follows: The court convenes, and the lawsuit is brought against Israel (verses 13-14a). The indictment or accusation is spoken (verses 14b-16). Since the evidence shows that Israel is clearly guilty, the judgment sentence is announced (verses 17-26). Because the covenant has been violated, the sorts of

punishments listed in the covenant will come upon the people of Israel: disease, destitution, deprivation, and death.

The Woe Oracle – Through the prophets, God makes predictions of imminent doom using the device of the “woe,” and no Israelite could miss the significance of the use of that word. Woe oracles contain, either explicitly or implicitly, three elements that uniquely characterize this form: an announcement of distress (the word “Woe,” for example), the reason for the distress, and a prediction of doom. Read Habakkuk 2:6-8 as an example of a woe oracle spoken against Babylon.

The Promise (or Salvation) Oracle – Another common prophetic literary form is the promise or “salvation” oracle. You will recognize this form whenever you see these elements: reference to the future, mention of radical change, and mention of blessing. Amos 9:11-15, a typical promise oracle, contains these elements. The future is mentioned as “In that day” (verse 11). The radical change is described as the restoration and repair of “David's fallen tent” (verse 11), the exaltation of Israel over Edom (verse 12), and the return from the exile (verses 14, 15). Blessing comes via the covenantal categories already mentioned (e.g., life, health, prosperity, agricultural abundance, respect, and safety).

B. They Were Poets – God spoke through His prophets largely in poetic form. People were used to poetry, and they could remember it much better than prose. The prophets often used what may be called “poetic prose,” a special, formal style employing the same characteristics as poetry, though less consistently. Because it is so much more regular and stylized than colloquial prose, it too was better remembered.

Examples of “Pedagogy (Teaching) in Biography” in the life of Ezekiel – A striking example is found in Ezekiel 4:1-13. He was instructed to take a brick, lay it on the ground, and inscribe the word Jerusalem on it. Making believe the brick was “Jerusalem,” he was to build a siege wall, pitch toy camps around it, and place battering rams against it on all sides. The reason for this is given in verse 3. It was to be a sign to the house of Judah. This was prior to the final invasion of Nebuchadnezzar in 588, which lasted until 586 when the city was breached. Ezekiel’s prophecy took place between 592 and 589 BC.

In addition, Ezekiel was commanded to lie on his left side for 390 days (apparently beside his little model of the city under siege) to bear the iniquity of the house of Israel, and when that was completed, he was to lie on his right side and bear the iniquity of the house of Judah for 40 days. For nourishment, he was to eat only peasant’s food cooked over cow dung. All this was to symbolize the pollution with which Israel and Judah had defiled themselves.

A second good example is seen in chapter 12:3-7. God commanded Ezekiel to dig a hole in a wall, to gather the baggage of an exile by day, throw it over his shoulder, and to go out through the wall in the evenings like an exile leaving his city. He was apparently to do this over and over so the people would ask him what he was doing. He was to say, “I am a sign to you. As I have done, so it will be done to them (in Jerusalem). They will go into exile, into captivity.”

Other Examples of “Pedagogy in Biography”:

Hosea is another example of pedagogy in biography (Hosea 1:2-9). God had Hosea experience the heartbreak of an unfaithful wife as both a picture of Israel’s unfaithfulness to Him and a preparation of Hosea for his prophetic ministry.

Isaiah went about barefoot and naked as a sign for the Lord. “Even as My servant Isaiah has gone naked and barefoot three years as a sign against Egypt and Cush, so the king of Assyria will lead away the captives of Egypt and the exiles of Cush” (Isaiah 20:2-4).

Jeremiah became a participant in the technique of “Pedagogy in Biography” when God commanded him to make a yoke for his neck and then to walk around wearing it (Jeremiah 27:2-3). This was to illustrate God’s prophecy that Judah was to soon come under the yoke of Babylon. And since this was God’s judgment, Jeremiah told them to submit to Babylon rather than resist.

What Does It Mean to Us?

The task of interpretation is to set the Prophets within their own historical contexts and to hear what God was saying to Israel through them. Once we hear what God said to them, even if our circumstances differ considerably, we will often hear it again in our own settings in a rather direct way, which brings us to the area of application. In thinking about application of the prophets to us today, we can make some observations:

(1) *The ungodly society in Israel and Judah in the days of the prophets is certainly similar to the ungodly society of our day; i.e., we see the similar self-indulgence, materialism, sexual promiscuity and perversion, pluralism, humanism, rampant ungodliness, etc. Does that in itself not suggest that there is a message in the prophets for us today?*

(2) *We see through the prophets that God is serious about His covenant with Israel. Does this not suggest He is just as serious about His New Covenant through Jesus Christ? Does this not imply that there is a message in the prophets for the church today?*

- “What was the goal of the prophetic ministry?”
- “What was it the prophets were seeking in their ministry?”

You might say *restoration*, i.e., a restored covenant relationship with God. Yes, that may properly be understood as the ultimate goal. But what was it the prophets actually sought? The prophets sought *repentance*. Restoration was the goal, but repentance is what they hoped to see from the people.

Thus says the Lord of Hosts, turn from your evil ways and doings,” (Zechariah 1:4). The message of the prophets was a call for repentance. Walt Kaiser said, “Preaching from the prophets can have a great contemporary application if we recognize repentance as the condition for experiencing God’s favor.”

Understanding the Gospels

John said, “Many other signs therefore Jesus also performed in the presence of the disciples, which are not written in this book; but these have been written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God; and that believing you may have life in His name” (John 20:30-31 NASB).

The four gospel accounts are more than mere spiritual teaching. They claim to present a factually accurate picture of Jesus as the Christ, the Son of the living God. Every indication is that the writers expected their statements to be taken as historical (cf. Luke 1:1-4; John 19:35; 2 Pet. 1:16). The writers, however, had more in mind than merely reporting facts. They wanted to change the lives of their readers. The historical trustworthiness of the Gospels is not to be described in terms of modern historiography, which stresses clear and strict chronological sequence, balanced selection of material, verbatim quotations, and so on. Nor should we think of the four gospel accounts as a biography; that was not their purpose. The gospel writers were preachers, and the four gospel accounts might be considered as expanded biographical sermons. Inspired by the Holy Spirit, they selected the events of Jesus’ life and his teaching in order to bring about faith and commitment to Jesus. The gospel writers are both historians and theologians.

The gospel writers do not give us every detail we wish to know, but they give us all that God wanted us to know. Our source of authority is not the bare facts of history but rather the inspired presentation of those facts in the Bible. Some look through the gospel accounts in order to see the historical events but miss what is written there for itself. God gave us four gospel accounts, even though there is much overlap among them. The life and message of Jesus is so rich that we need more than one account. When the four writers differ, we should not overlook that they are trying to give us an additional lesson. Let us appreciate what each writer is telling us (see for instance Matt. 5:3-12 and Luke 6:20-23).

Bible students must deal with what the scholars call the “Synoptic Problem.” This phrase describes the problems created by the first three gospel accounts as to their similarities and their differences. While there are some matters in the gospels that are hard to understand, we can affirm that the four gospels are inspired and inerrant. We have never witnessed one proven contradiction between them.

The Differences in the Synoptic Gospel

*Here are some examples of **supposed** contradictions in the accounts of historical events by the four gospels.*

1. Why do Matthew and Luke differ in the order of Christ’s temptations? (Matt. 4:1-11; Luke 4:1-13)
2. When the centurion’s servant was ill, who actually came to Jesus, the centurion (Matt. 8:5-13) or the servant himself (Luke 7:2-11)?
3. In Jesus’ commissioning of the twelve disciples, were they or were they not to take a “staff” (cf. Matt. 10:10; Mark 6:18).
4. Did Judas kiss Jesus when he betrayed him? (Matt. 26:48,49; Mark 14:44,45; Luke 22:47-49; John 18:1-4). A critic said:
 “Ask yourself, did Judas kiss Jesus to betray Him or not? Mark and Matthew say that Judas kissed Jesus. But Luke says that Judas tried to kiss Jesus and did not make it. For John, there was no betrayal kiss at all. And John underlines his point of view by adding that Judas kept standing with the crowd.”

5. How many did Christ heal of blindness, and was it when He was entering Jericho or leaving it? (Matt. 10:29ff.; Mark 10:46ff. and Luke 18:35ff.)

Matthew 10:29ff.

And as they were going out from Jericho, a great multitude followed Him. And behold, two blind men sitting by the road, hearing that Jesus was passing by, cried out, saying, "Lord, have mercy on us, Son of David!"

Mark 10:46ff.

And they came to Jericho. And as He was going out from Jericho with His disciples and a great multitude, a blind beggar named Bartimaeus, the son of Timaeus, was sitting by the road. And when he heard that it was Jesus the Nazarene, he began to cry out and say, "Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me

Luke 18:35ff.

And it came about that as He was approaching Jericho, a certain blind man was sitting by the road, begging. Now hearing a multitude going by, he began to inquire what this might be. And they told him that Jesus of Nazareth was passing by. And he called out, saying, "Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me!"

6. At what hour was Christ crucified? (Mark 15:25 third hour; John 19:14 about sixth hour)

Important General Observations in dealing with supposed contradictions:

1. As long as there is a plausible or possible explanation that brings two statements into harmony, the critic has not proven a contradiction within the Bible.
2. Simply because the believer cannot present an absolutely irrefutable solution to every alleged discrepancy or contradiction does not mean there is not a real, harmonious explanation for the problem.
3. Attitude is usually the key factor in determining whether a person finds harmony or conflict in statements by another. Usually after a careful investigation, the truth of the matter is that when the other person's statements are taken in their full context, the whole matter turns out to be a misunderstanding. Critics who reject the Biblical authors or at least despise the standards they call for men to live by take their words out of context and constantly find conflicts. Love covers a multitude of problems, but enmity lays bare every difficulty and even invents some.
4. Charges of contradictions have been unsuccessfully hurled at the Bible for over twenty centuries. None have ever been successfully sustained.
5. Many difficulties and discrepancies charged against the Bible in the past have been solved by the great work of archaeology.
6. After many years of study of the problem of alleged contradictions, many gospel preachers have never read an objection or contradiction presented by critics to which they could not present a plausible solution.

Understanding Parables

A parable is a figure of speech that compares an everyday event of life to a Divine, spiritual truth. The word “parable” refers to “placing alongside.” It is an illustration to describe or define a spiritual truth. It is a metaphor or simile drawn from nature or common life. Luke has the most parables and John has the least, if any. Jesus reveals His intention in using parables in Matt. 13:11-17; Mark 4:10-12; and Luke 8:8-10. Jesus wanted to teach disciples who had ears to hear but to hide the truth from those who were unresponsive. Parables tested the hearts of the hearers as to their responsiveness, as to whether they would follow Jesus.

Four Elements in a Parable:

1. A parable speaks of some commonly known *earthly* thing, event, custom, or possible occurrence. It is this concrete picture that makes parables such remarkable instruments for instruction.
2. Beyond the earthly element is the spiritual lesson, or divine truth, that the parable intends to teach.
3. The earthly element bears an analogy to the spiritual element. It is this relationship that gives the parable its ability to illustrate or to persuade.
4. Each parable has two levels of meaning, one earthly, and the other spiritual.

Principles for Interpreting Parables:

1. Determine the historical occasion and aim of the parable. (See Luke 15:1-2 as it pertains to the three parables in 15:3-32).
2. Make an accurate analysis of the subject matter, and observe the nature and properties of the things employed as imagery.
3. Determine how much of the parable is interpreted by the Lord himself.
4. Do all you can to determine what customs and cultural expectations are assumed within a parable. For instance, understanding the wedding customs of the time greatly helps one interpret Matthew 25:1-13. Understanding that kings usually provided wedding garments to guests helps one interpret Matthew 22:2-14.
5. Determine whether there are any clues in the context concerning the parable’s meaning. In Luke 16:14 the Pharisees understood that the parable was aimed at them.

Jesus Taught with Authority (Mark 1:22; Matt. 7:28-29).

Jewish teachers and scribes in their teaching usually would pit the opinions of leading men against each other and sometimes without a clear resolution to the question. Jesus’ approach was quite different; His authoritative approach made a significant impression on those who heard. Because of the Pharisee’s error in following man-made traditions (the oral Torah or Law), they tended to relax the divine standard. Those who follow Jesus, however, can never be satisfied with that approach (Matt. 11: 28; 23:19).

Interpreting the Epistles

Paul's Epistles and the General Epistles make up 21 of the 27 books of the New Testament. Each book has its own background, reason for existence, and message. It is important to understand that each of the letters was a document arising out of a set of circumstances from a specific occasion, i.e., they were *occasional documents*.

At times we hear these 21 books called letters, and at other times they are called epistles. These words are not interchangeable but refer to two distinct forms of literature. A letter was a more personal message and not meant for the public and posterity; it was meant for the person or persons to whom it was written. An epistle, on the other hand, is much like a tract or a theological treatise. Epistles are a literary production that looked somewhat like letters but were meant for universal publication and wide readership. Realistically, each of the 21 contains some elements of both kinds of literature.

Ancient letter usually followed a standard form. Thousands of letters have survived from ancient times, and most of them follow a form exactly like those found in the New Testament. A good example of an ancient letter might be found in Acts 15:23-29. The form consists of six parts:

1. name of the writer
2. name of the recipient(s)
3. greeting
4. prayer wish or thanksgiving
5. body of the letter
6. final greeting and farewell

Paul's letters and the general letters show great variety. One group of scholars has classified ancient letters into ten categories. The New Testament documents have elements of letters and elements of epistles within each of them. Sometimes the prayer wish or thanksgiving is missing, as it is in Galatians; or the thanksgiving becomes a doxology (an expression of praise to God), as it does in 2 Corinthians, Ephesians, 1 Peter, and Revelation. Though Paul wrote letters to Colossae and Ephesus, he meant for them to be passed on to other churches (Col. 4:16). These are cyclical epistles, written for public reading in the churches. While many of the books have personal messages as a letter, they also contain commandments and exhortations, as an epistle. Consequently, it is hard to describe the 21 books as either purely letters or purely epistles.

Since these documents are *occasional*, we often have a problem interpreting them. In each of the 21 books we have what the author says, but we do not always know what situation is that he is addressing. We have the answers but not always the questions. One challenge all Bible students face is to try to understand what circumstances call for the writing of the letter. These letters contain theology, but it is *task theology*. It is truth about God and His will for the specific circumstances within the document.¹⁵

Students do well to take note of the important facts in each letter they undertake to understand. First, they need to ask who the recipients are and what is really important about them. Are they Jew or Gentile? Are they slave or free? What problems do they have? What attitudes do they possess?

¹⁵ We should realize that the full truth on a subject is often found by studying many passages. The Scriptures as a whole are truly all-sufficient and present to us the whole truth, just as Jesus promised (John 16:12-13). Task theology as presented in one book should always be interpreted in the light of other passages on the same subject. To interpret a passage in such a way that it contradicts or ignores the fuller truth in other plain passages will surely lead to error.

Second, they need to look at the attitude of the author. What relationship does he have with the recipients? What is the general tone of the letter?

Third, take note of any specific things or events mentioned which lead to the writing of the letter. Understanding as much as we can about the historical circumstances surrounding the letter or epistle will help us to understand why the author is speaking the way he does.

Fourth, students should pay close attention to the natural, logical divisions of the book. Paragraph divisions often help students to divide the book logically.

Some Suggestions for Interpreting the Epistles:

1. Read the whole epistle at one sitting. Many epistles were written to read in church to the whole congregation at one time. Reading the whole letter will help the interpreter understand the context of the letter. What is not clear in one part of the letter may become clear later (1 Cor. 11:4-5; 14:33-37).
2. A text cannot mean what it never could have meant to its author or his readers. We must always work to learn the original intent of the author. We must hear what God wanted the first readers to understand. In most cases, the writer makes a principle clear.
3. Whenever we share comparable particulars (i.e., similar specific life situations) with the first-century setting, God's Word applies to us just as it did to them. (Rom. 3:23; 6:3-7; Eph. 4:4-6). It is important that we understand the historical circumstances surrounding the writing of the letter. When situations differ, look for the universal principle behind the teaching, which still applies to us.

How can we tell the difference between the archaic and the timeless?¹⁶

1. No text can be dismissed as irrelevant simply because it carries things related to ancient cultures but not related to ours today. Even though we are not struggling over the issue of eating meat offered to idols (1 Cor. 8:1-11:1), the principles behind Paul's arguments are universal, and they can be applied in a variety of contexts where liberty and legalism clash. We must always look for the principle behind the cultural practice. While the practice may change, the principle remains the same.
2. Culturally informed texts often deal with a problem indigenous to that region and time (although the custom could be quite widespread and last for many centuries). For example, it was evidently a shameful thing in Corinth for men to wear their hair long (1 Cor. 11:14).¹⁷ For Jews keeping the Nazarite vow (as Elijah and John the Baptist), long hair was honorable, symbolizing holiness (Num. 6:5). Paul took every precaution to protect the reputation of the churches in their community (1 Thess. 4:12; 1 Cor. 14:23), at times correcting behavior so as not to offend neighbors (1 Cor. 6:5-7; Rom. 15:1-2). Paul's admonition to Timothy to drink a little wine for his stomach's sake was addressed only to Timothy (1 Tim. 5:23). Nothing is stated here about unsafe water.
3. Moral codes were not limited to a particular culture but were universally recognized. Paul and Peter used familiar vice lists without explanation (Gal. 5:19-21; 1 Pet. 2:1; 4:3). Therefore, Paul could use an exasperated tone, pointing out to the Corinthians what is obvious to everyone (1

¹⁶ This material adapted from Bruce Corley, Steve W. Lemke, and Grant I. Lovejoy, *Biblical Hermeneutics* (Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 2002), 338-339.

¹⁷ We are not suggesting here that Corinth in the first century is the only time or the only place long hair on men was held to be shameful.

Cor. 6:9-10). Vices and virtues could be listed as common knowledge in those days and are still acknowledged today.

Distinguishing the Cultural from the Eternal

Some Important Principles Dealing with this Issue:

1. Rom. 12:1,2 God expects us to live transformed lives, not conformed to this world. There are but two realms: that which belongs to God and that which belongs to the world (1 John 5:18,19). We must be careful not to confuse "culture" with worldliness.
2. Compromise is the act of settling the differences of two conflicting points of views by each group making concessions. This denies that God's will is good and perfect.
3. Acts 19:18-20 Conversion to Christ means a separation from false religions and superstitions
4. William Inge: "He who marries the spirit of the age will soon find himself a widower."
5. Christians are to be the light of the world and the salt of the earth. They are to influence their society, or they are worthless. The gospel is to change the culture to conform to God's will; culture is not to change the gospel to conform to society's pleasure.
6. God's will has never been determined by opinion polls. Jesus was not ever concerned with being politically correct in the eyes of this or any culture.
7. We must be careful lest we insult God, thinking that He needs an editor or advisor on our culture and our time. We must never be ashamed of our faith or presume that we can become more righteous than God by correcting Scripture.
8. God knew about all people in all places in all times when He revealed His gospel and will.

The Once-for-All Nature of the Faith, the Teaching of Jesus Christ

1. John 16:12,13 the Holy Spirit to lead the apostles into all truth
2. Acts 20:27 Paul declared the whole counsel of God
3. 2 Tim. 3:16,17 Scripture able to make the man of God complete, furnished to every good work
4. 2 Pet. 1:3 we have all things that pertain to life and godliness through the Word
5. 2 John 9-11 we must not go beyond the teachings of Christ
6. Jude 3 the faith was once for all delivered time to the saints; Eph. 4:5 one faith
7. Matt. 24:35 the teachings of Jesus will never be destroyed
8. 1 Pet. 1:23-25 the word of God abides forever
9. Rev. 22:18,19; Deut. 4:2; 5:32; 12:32 men are not to add or subtract from God's Word

Distinguishing the Cultural from the Eternal

1. Look for the principle. Often specific details are applications of a principle.
2. What is the point of the passage? What is being condemned or commended?
Deut. 14:21; Ex. 23:19: "You shall not boil a kid in its mother's milk" refers to a Canaanite, idolatrous practice that savored of magic. This was done to procure the fertility of the fields, which were sprinkled with the broth from the kid. The point here is that an idolatrous practice is wrong. This command is a specific application.
3. Eternal principles are binding for all time in all places. Eternal principles do not change. Cultural applications of eternal principles do change with time and circumstance.
4. Cultural practices are derived from traditions of men (Col. 2:6-8, 16-23).
5. There are practices of the Old Testament that are no longer binding on New Testament Christians, such as the Sabbath, fasting, holidays, animal sacrifices, etc. Jewish Christians of the first century maintained some of these practices during that time, but they are not binding on Gentile Christians of the twentieth century.

Some Examples of Cultural Observances:

1. Eating vegetables only and observing days (Rom. 14:1-6,22).
2. The observing of holidays among Christians was borrowed from pagan practices.
3. Pray, lifting up hands (1 Tim. 2:8)
4. Greeting with a kiss (Rom. 16:16)
5. Wearing a veil (1 Cor. 11:8-16)

The Problem of Cultural Commands and Local Customs

Are local customs binding upon us today?

1. The Problem of the Veil and Long Hair.

The practice of wearing a veil is regarded by Paul as a "custom" (1 Cor. 11:16) that was widespread in his culture and time. The custom of wearing veils does not have the same meaning today that it had at that time. An uncovered woman was regarded as immoral, shaming not only herself but also her husband. Prostitutes may have been compelled to keep their hair short or may have been used to shearing their heads. For a woman to cast aside her veil also indicated she was behaving like a man, who is not obligated to cover his head. The Scriptures have always considered dressing or appearing as another gender as immoral (Deut. 22:5). Women were encouraged to dress modestly as women professing godliness (1 Tim. 2:9ff.; 1 Pet. 3:1-6). The specifics of culture often dictate what is immoral and what is out of gender. One may laugh at a Scottish kilt, but men still wear them. They are not feminine. On the other hand, the homosexual community has lauded transgender clothing. Consequently, Christians would not want to dress as prostitutes or transvestites do today.

2. The Problem of the "holy kiss."

- Rom. 16:16; 1 Cor. 16:20; 2 Cor. 13:12; 1 Thess. 5:26; 1 Pet. 5:14 (kiss of love).
- Greeting another with a kiss had been the custom among people of the Near East for many centuries. Notice Moses and Jethro (Ex. 18:7); Simon the Pharisee (Luke 7:45); the father of the prodigal son (Luke 15:20); Judas (Matt. 26:48); Paul and the Ephesian elders (Acts 20:37).
- Generally given on cheek or forehead—usually man to man or woman to woman. Kisses were often accompanied with great emotion, embracing, bowing and weeping.
- This command was not given to initiate a new practice but to regulate what they were already doing. Judas' kiss was deceptive and cruel, while the sinful woman kissed Jesus' feet out of reverence and gratitude (Luke 7:38). Prov. 27:6 speaks of the "kiss of an enemy."
- By means of a "holy kiss" Christians expressed the intimate fellowship of the reconciled community. In later years it developed into a liturgical form ("the kiss of peace") in the Eastern Church. The earliest reference to the kiss as a regular feature of Christian worship is in Justin's *Apology* 1.65, where he reports that in Eucharistic worship, "when we have ceased from our prayers, we greet one another with a kiss." According to E. G. Selwyn, "by the middle of the second century it was in regular use in the liturgy at the conclusion of the prayers and immediately before the offertory" (*First Epistle of Peter* [1946], p. 244).
- Clement of Alexandria wrote of some abuses. "Love is judged not in a kiss but in good will. Some do nothing but fill the Churches with the noise of kissing" (*Paed.* 3.11). Thus the practice

was regulated (*Apost. Const.* 2.57.12) and gradually died out in the West after the 13th century.¹⁸

- Kissing was not the only means of greeting in the ancient world. Greetings also involved embracing and giving the “right hand of fellowship” (Gal. 2:9). Shaking hands here suggests agreement and confirmation over the matter (cf. 2 Kings 10:15; Ezra 10:19; Ezek. 17:18).
- It is poor reasoning, which suggests that giving a “holy kiss” is the only acceptable means of greeting brothers and sisters in Christ.

3. The Problem of Footwashing

- Footwashing was a local custom of that culture, when the primary form of transportation was walking. Washing the feet was an act of hospitality (Lev. 19:34).
- The necessity to wash the feet, for comfort and cleanliness, resulted from the dusty roads, and foot-washing was a sign of hospitality, generally performed by the lowest slave (1 Sa. 25:41 ; Lk. 7:44 ; Jn. 13:5 ; Acts 13:25). Removing one’s dusty sandals was a sign of respect (Ex. 3:5) and of mourning (Ezk. 24:17).
- To turn this act of hospitality into an act of worship, because Jesus washed the disciples' feet at the same time He instituted the Lord's Supper, is an abuse of Scripture. In John 13:15 Christ is not instituting an ordinance of foot washing, but is showing an example of humility. He does not command us to perform this act, but to acquire the attitude that this activity displays.¹⁹

5. The problem of lifting hands in prayer

- A custom of that day was to lift one's hands, palms up, when one prayed (1 Tim. 2:8). See also Psalm 38:2; 134:2; Deut. 32:40; Luke 24:50.
- The command to "lift up" hands was not to institute a new practice but to regulate a customary practice. Paul's point was that they should lift up "holy" hands without wrath or disputing.
- People prayed in many postures: bowing down (Psa. 95:6); falling on the face (Num. 16:22; Josh. 5:14; 1 Chron. 21:16; Matt. 26:39); kneeling (2 Chron. 6:13; Psalm 95:6; Luke 22:41; Acts 20:36); spreading out the hands (Isa. 1:15); and standing (1 Kings 8:22; Mark 11:25). The phrase "lifting up" of hands in time became synonymous with praying, just as we might say, "bow your head."
- It is an error to demand people lift hands as they pray or to suggest that they have failed to do God's will if they do not lift their hands when they pray. It is an error to pray with wrath and disputing; hands lifted to God need to be holy.

¹⁸ D. K. McKim, “Kiss” in *The International Standard Bible Encyclopedia*, Geoffrey Bromiley, ed., vol. 12, p. 276.

¹⁹ *KJV Bible Commentary*. Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1997, c1994. Jn 13:15.

Apocalyptic Literature

A type of Jewish and Christian religious writing that developed between the OT and NT and had its roots in OT prophecy. The word *apocalyptic*, derived from the Greek word *apokalypsis*, means "revelation" or "unveiling" (Rev 1:1), and is applied to these writings because they contain alleged revelation of the secret purposes of God, the end of the world, and the establishment of God's kingdom on earth.

After the days of the postexilic prophets, God no longer spoke to Israel. The prophetic forecasts of the coming of God's kingdom and the salvation of Israel had not been fulfilled. Instead of God's kingdom, a succession of evil kingdoms ruled over Israel: Medo-Persia, Greece, and finally Rome. The apocalypses were written to meet this religious need. Following the pattern of canonical Daniel, various unknown authors wrote alleged revelations of God's purposes that explained present evils, comforted Israel in her sufferings and afflictions, and gave fresh assurances that God's kingdom would shortly appear. Many modern critics place Daniel in these times, but there are valid reasons for an earlier date.

The importance of these apocalyptic writings is that they reveal first-century Jewish ideas about God, evil, and history, and they disclose Jewish hopes for the future and the coming of God's kingdom. They show us what such terms as the "kingdom of God," "Messiah," and the "Son of Man" meant to first-century Jews to whom our Lord addressed his gospel of the kingdom. This mentality, which "unveils" the future, was called by its Greek name, *αποκαλυψις* (*apokalypsis*), which literally means "unveiling".

Apocalyptic arose as a literature of crisis. Suffering folk turned to future hope in an effort to rectify their present hardship. So, when we read apocalyptic literature we need to put ourselves in the mindset of people who suffer oppression, hardship, or persecution. Revelation, the most famous apocalypse, was composed to assist those who were suffering under the persecution of Domitian, emperor of Rome at the end of the first century AD. What all these writings have in common is the fact that they were written to help folk look to the future rather than now.

In studying apocalyptic literature, one is well served to look at the message as a whole rather than trying to determine the meaning of every little detail. Sometimes details are added to emphasize the main points.

Characteristics of Apocalyptic Literature

- The presence of a hostile force suppressing the people of God.
- Assumption that the efforts of men alone could not ensure that release and thus that Divine intervention was required.
- Belief that God has ordered the events of this life and has revealed that information to his prophets.
- Reports of visions. (Similar to those of the prophets)
- Symbolic language. (Similar to that of the prophets)
- Encouragement of the faithful by emphasis on the salvation and deliverance of the righteous and the punishment of the wicked. This and #5 indicate apocalyptic literature to be produced during a time of crisis when encouragement and secrecy were needed.
- Increasing emphasis on resurrection of the dead or some form of afterlife which will ensure final justice.
- Increasing expectations of Christ's return (Rev. 22:21).

Some Defined Symbols in Revelation

1:20	Seven stars	Angels
4:5	Lamps	Seven spirits of God
5:6	Eyes	Seven spirits of God
5:8	Bowls	Prayers (incense)
12:9	Red Dragon	Satan
17:9	Heads	Mountains
17:12	Ten Horns	Ten Kings
17:15	Waters	People
17:18	Woman	Great City
19:14	Fine Linen	Righteous Deeds
20:14	Lake of Fire	Second Death

Symbols in Numbers in Jewish thought:

- one (1) means unity or independent existence (Deut. 6:4)
- two (2) means strength, energy, courage (Eccl. 9:4)
- three (3) refers to Deity, divinity, heaven, God
- 3 ½ or ½ of 7 refers to the incomplete, imperfect [3½ years, 42 months, 1260 days] restless longings
- four (4) the world (four corners, four winds, four angels, four horsemen)
- five (5) the perfect, well-rounded man with all members intact
- ten (10) the number of completeness, ten commandments
- seven (7) [3 + 4 = 7] suggests heaven and earth and means completeness
- twelve (12) [3 x 4 = 12] organized completeness, 12 tribes and 12 apostles.
- six (6) evil, a sinister number; since it is short of seven, not great enough. (Somewhat like 13 would be to us today)
- 1000 is a great number, unlimited
- Multiples indicate intensive characteristics.
 - 666 is ultimate evil
 - 144,000 (12 x 12 x 1000) refers to all the people of God

A Study of Biblical Typology

by Wayne Jackson

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One of the most fascinating areas of Bible study is that of typology - the study of Scripture "types."

One of the most fascinating areas of Bible study is that of typology - the study of Scripture "types." Few Christians have made any sort of in-depth investigation of biblical types. As a matter of fact, this field of study has fallen into disrepute in recent years and this can probably be accounted for on two bases:

First, the extravagant speculations of earlier typologists have left a bad taste for the study in the minds of many; they feel it has been discredited.

Second, the spirit of religious liberalism has silently assaulted the thinking of some. They thus tend to dismiss the supernatural elements of the Scriptures, and since typology relates to prophecy, it has been similarly discarded. The Bible itself, however, makes it quite clear that "types" are a vital component of Jehovah's redemptive plan.

The Term Defined

Exactly what is a type? Theologically speaking, a type may be defined as "a figure or ensample of something future and more or less prophetic, called the 'Antitype'" (E. W. Bullinger, **Figures of Speech Used in the Bible**, p. 768).

Muenschler says a type is "the preordained representative relation which certain persons, events, and institutions of the Old Testament bear to corresponding persons, events, and institutions in the New" (quoted in: M. S. Terry, **Biblical Hermeneutics**, p. 246).

Wick Broomall has a concise statement that is helpful. "A type is a shadow cast on the pages of Old Testament history by a truth whose full embodiment or antitype is found in the New Testament revelation" (**Baker's Dictionary of Theology**, p. 533).

We would, in summary, suggest the following definition, which we paraphrase from Terry. A type is a real, exalted happening in history which was divinely ordained by the omniscient God to be a prophetic picture of the good things which He purposed to bring to fruition in Christ Jesus.

New Testament Terms

There are several words used in the Greek New Testament to denote what we have just defined as a type. First, there is the term *tupos* (the basis of our English word "type"). Though this word is variously employed in the New Testament, it is certainly used in our present sense in Romans 5:14 where Paul declares that Adam "is a figure (*tupos*) of him that was to come", i.e., Christ.

Second, there is the word *skia*, rendered "shadow." In Colossians 2:17, certain elements of the Mosaic system are said to be "a shadow of the things to come" (cf. Heb. 8:5; 10:1).

Third, there is the term *hupodeigma*, translated "copy," and used in conjunction with "shadow" in Hebrews 8:5 (cf. Heb. 9:23).

Fourth, the Greek word *parabole* (compare our English, "parable") is found in Hebrews 9:9, where certain elements of the tabernacle are "a figure for the present time" (cf. Heb. 11:19).

Finally, one should note the use of *antitupon*, rendered "figure" (KJV) or "pattern" (ASV) in Hebrews 9:24, and "like figure" (KJV) or "true likeness" (ASV) in I Peter 3:21. This word, as used in the New Testament, denotes "that which corresponds to" the type; it is the reality which

fulfills the prophetic picture.

Avoiding Extremism

One must be very cautious in his study of Bible types. There are some dangerous extremes to be avoided. On the one hand, as indicated earlier, some deny the use of biblical types altogether. Obviously, this is a radical view contrary to the teaching of the Bible itself.

Others, though, feel that the use of types in the Scriptures is quite limited. Accordingly, one can only identify a type when the New Testament specifically does so. This is an extreme position. If one followed a similar line of reasoning, he might assert that there are no prophecies in the Old Testament save those which are specifically quoted in the New Testament.

Still another extreme is the notion that virtually every little detail of the Old Testament system was typical of some New Testament circumstance. Thus, even the cords and pegs of the tabernacle were seen by some commentators as representing significant antitype New Testament truths. The truth is to be found between these extremes.

There are several interpretative principles that one should keep in mind as he begins a study of this subject.

1. It must be recognized that types are grounded in real history; the people, places, events, etc. were deliberately chosen by God to prepare for the coming of the Christian system. An old writer has wonderfully described it:

“God in the types of the last dispensation was teaching His children their letters. In this dispensation He is teaching them to put the letters together, and they find that the letters, arrange them as they will, spell Christ, and nothing but Christ.”

2. It must be clear (on the basis of reasonable evidence) that the type was designed by God to preview its fulfillment in the New Testament.

3. There is a graduation from type to antitype; of the lesser to the greater; from the material to the spiritual; the earthly to the heavenly.

4. One must distinguish what is essential in the type and what is merely incidental. A failure to do this can lead to some serious errors. Broomall notes, for example, that “Jonah’s expulsion from the great fish typifies Christ’s resurrection (Matt. 12: 40); but Jonah’s restoration to the land does not necessarily typify Israel’s restoration to Palestine” (Baker’s Dictionary of Theology, 534). We are now ready to consider several different categories of Old Testament types.

Typical Persons

A number of Old Testament people, due to some character or relation which they sustain in redemptive history, serve as types.

- a. Adam is a type of Christ in that as the former introduced sin into the world, even so, through the latter a system of righteousness was made available for mankind (Rom. 5:19).
- b. Melchizedek, who was both king of Salem and a priest of God - *at the same time* (Gen. 14:18-20), was a type of Christ - who, at his ascension, began to reign on David’s throne and to simultaneously function as our high priest (cf. Ps. 110:4; Zech. 6:12,13; Heb. 5:5-10; 6:20; 7:1-17). This point, incidentally, is disastrous for millennialism. If Christ is not yet king (as premillennialism asserts), then he is not yet a priest and we are *yet in our sins*!
- c. Moses, in his noble role of prophet, leader, and mediator for Jehovah’s people, was typical of the Lord Jesus who functions in a similar, though more exalted, capacity (cf. Deut.

18:15; Acts 3:22; 1 Cor. 10:2; Gal. 3:27; Gal. 3:19; 1 Tim. 2: 5).

Typical Places

Several prominent places emphasized in the Old Testament appear to have a typical significance. Egypt represents a state of bondage such as holds the sinner prior to his conversion (Gal. 4:2; Rom. 6:17; 1 Cor. 10:1ff); Jerusalem or Zion typifies the church and finally heaven (cf. Gal. 4:25,26; Heb. 12:22; Rev. 21:2); and Babylon, which held God's people captive in the Old Testament, pictures the condition of an apostate church that has departed from the simplicity of the New Testament pattern (Rev. 11:8; 14:8; 16:19; 17:5; 18:2ff).

Typical Things

Certain Old Testament objects preview New Testament truths. For example, Jacob's ladder, with the angels ascending and descending upon it (Gen. 28:12), apparently pictured Christ (cf. John 1:51), who provides both communication from the Father (John 1:18; Heb. 1:1-2) and access to heaven (John 14:6).

The brazen serpent, lifted up in the wilderness, through which the people found physical healing (Num. 21:8) was a type of the lifted-up Christ (John 3: 14; 12:32), through whom spiritual healing comes (Isa. 53:5).

As indicated earlier, the tabernacle and many of its features were typical of the present time (cf. Heb. 9:8-9). As the tabernacle was designed to be a "house of God," and since He is "Lord of heaven and earth" (Acts 17:24), it was proper that the tabernacle be composed of two compartments; one representing God's heavenly dwelling place and the other His earthly dwelling place. Accordingly, the Most Holy Place of the tabernacle represented Heaven (Heb. 6:19,20; 9:8,24), while the Holy Place was a type of the church (Acts 15:16,17; 1 Cor. 3:16; 1 Tim. 3:15).

Typical Events

Several Old Testament events seem to represent things to come. The creation of light on the first day of Earth's history (Gen. 1:3) suggests the coming brilliant illumination of the gospel of Christ (cf. 2 Cor. 4:6).

The Flood of Noah's day (Gen. 6-8) typified the sudden destruction of the world yet to come at the end (Matt. 24:37-39).

The miraculous water from the rock in the wilderness (Ex. 17:6) was a preview of the life-sustaining water provided by our Lord (John 4:14; 1 Cor. 10:4).

The manna from heaven in the wilderness (Ex. 16:14-16) was a type of that spiritual Bread who came down from heaven to nourish humanity (John 6:32).

The deliverance of Noah's family from a corrupted world, by means of "water," prefigured our salvation, through baptism, from the power of darkness into the kingdom of Christ (cf. 1 Pet. 3:20-21; Col. 1:13).

Typical Offices

There were three offices in the Old Testament characterized by an anointing. Prophets (1 Kings 19:16), priests (Ex. 28:41), and kings (1 Sam. 10:1) were anointed in anticipation of the coming of the Anointed One (cf. Dan. 9:25,26) who is Prophet (Acts 3:22), Priest (Heb. 3:1), and King (Rev. 17:14).

We too, as Christians, have an anointing from God (2 Cor. 1: 21) and we function as prophets

(not miraculously, but simply as “forth speakers” of the Word of God - cf. I Cor. 11:4,5), priests, and kings (cf. I Pet. 2:9; Rev. 1:6). The anointings of the Old Testament thus prefigured both the work of Christ and our service to Him.

Typical Actions

Certain ceremonial actions of the Old Testament system typified the atoning work of the Messiah. For instance, on the annual Jewish day of Atonement, amidst numerous other rituals, the High Priest presented two goats before the door of the tabernacle. After the casting of lots upon these animals, one was sacrificed as a “sin-offering” and the other was “set alive before Jehovah” (Lev. 16:9,10).

The blood of the slain goat was taken into the Most Holy Place where it was sprinkled upon the Mercy Seat. This, of course, was typical of the sacrificial death of Christ (Heb. 9:11,12). The High Priest then took the living goat, laid hands upon him and confessed over him all the iniquities of the people. Subsequently, by an appointed servant, the animal was led away into the wilderness (Lev. 16:21,22).

The two goats were, so to speak, two sides of the same coin; both constituted the solitary offering of Christ. The one signified his death and the atoning effect of his blood; the other his resurrection (cf. Rom. 4:25) and the complete removal of our sins (cf. Isa. 53:4,6; John 1:29). Note also the similar ceremony in connection with the cleansing of the leper (Lev. 14:4-7). Two birds were selected; one was killed, and the other was dipped in its blood and let loose alive.

Typical Institutions

Many institutions of the Old Testament era were prophetic shadows of good things to come. The Passover, for instance, with its spotless lamb (Ex. 12:5) which was slain “between the two evenings” (12:6, ASVfn), i.e., between 3:00 and 5:00 P.M., without any bones being broken (12:46). It was a type of the death of Jesus (cf. I Cor. 5:7), who was without spot or blemish (I Pet. 1:19), who died at about 3:00 P.M. (Matt. 27:46), and who had none of his bones broken (John 19:33ff).

The feast of the firstfruits (Lev. 23:10), i.e., Pentecost, was a celebration in which the initial produce of the harvest was offered to God as a token of the full crop to follow. This ritual typified:

- a. the early influx of the Jews into the church of Christ (Rom. 11:16); and,
- b. the resurrection of the Lord Jesus as God’s pledge of the general resurrection to ultimately come (I Cor. 15:20, 23).

The feast of the tabernacles was instituted to commemorate Israel’s sojourn in the wilderness (Lev. 23:43). But it was also designed to remind us that we are but sojourners on this earth (I Pet. 2:11), and that someday we will lay aside this earthly tabernacle (2 Cor. 5:1; 2 Pet. 1:13,14) for a more permanent abiding place (cf. Heb. 11:9-13).

There are numerous other Old Testament types which cannot be discussed in the scope of this brief study. Surely, though, the reader can see from this limited survey what a thrilling area of biblical investigation this can be. Yes, it must be approached with judicious caution, but abuses should not deter the careful student from exploring such rich material. God intended for us to learn valuable lessons from Bible typology.

Note Paul’s statement after discussing the experiences of Israel in the wilderness of Sinai. “Now these things were our examples (*tupoi*), to the intent we should not lust after evil things, as they also lusted” (I Cor. 10:6; cf. 10:11).

The Restoration Plea

The restoration principle pleads for a return to a standard, a norm. It involves the belief that going backwards to the source of truth can make progress. Specifically, it means going back to the Bible as the voice of authority in Christianity. It pleads for the recognition of the New Testament Scriptures as the guidebook of the church. In recent years people have questioned whether the idea is a valid one and whether we can restore the New Testament church? We mean by that restoring the ideals and patterns that God wills and can be found in the New Testament.

Some are saying that we ought to be like Christ but that it is not necessary to restore the church today to the ideals presented in the books of Acts and the epistles.

Examples of Restoration in the Old Testament

- 2 Kings 18:3-6 Hezekiah restored Israel's worship of God, by destroying the idols, cleansing the temple and keeping the Passover. The Passover had not been kept fully since the time of Solomon. Hezekiah's father was the wicked Ahaz. (8th Cent. B.C.)
- 2 Kings 22:8-11 Josiah, in the 18th year of his reign, read a copy of the Law, found by Hilkiah the priest, while they were repairing the Temple. Josiah instituted sweeping changes, ending idolatry, and restoring worship and the Passover according to the Law! (7th Cent.)
- Jeremiah 6:16 Jeremiah called for the people to return to the old paths and walk in them. (7th Century)
- Ezra 7 Ezra by the grace of God went back to Jerusalem because "he had set his heart to study the law of the Lord, and to practice it, and to teach His statutes and ordinances in Israel" (7:10).
- Anytime men stray from the will of God, there is the necessity of restoration!

Jesus Pointed To The Need To Do God's Will

Jesus emphasized the changeless nature of the Word of God by saying, "It is written." (Matt. 4:1-11). In his discussions He often said, "Have you not read?" Or "Is it not written...?" Or "What is written in the Law?" Jesus' Sermon on the Mount was a kind of "restoration" sermon pointing people back to God's will rather than popular religion.

The New Testament Warns of Departures from the Faith

1. Acts 2:42 The apostles, disciples were at first steadfast in their devotion
2. Acts 20:28-31 Paul warned the Ephesian elders
3. 1 Timothy 4:1-2 some will abandon the faith to follow deceiving spirits and things taught by demons
4. 2 Timothy 4:1-5 Paul's warning to Timothy of false teachers
5. 2 Peter 2:1-3 Peter's warning of false prophets

Some of the Departures of Men

Men began teaching unscriptural doctrines and practicing things, which were completely different from the church one can read about in the New Testament. It was different in name, in doctrine, in worship, in organization, and in mission.

Some innovations: (new practice not found in the Bible) include: Holy Water (113 A.D.); Lent (140 A.D.); Penance (157 A.D.); Infant Baptism (185 A.D.); Intercession of Saints (240

A.D.); Sprinkling for Baptism (250 A.D.); Sacrifice of Mass (370 A.D.); Celibacy of Priests (425 A.D.); Purgatory (230 A.D.); Confession to Priests (500 A.D.); Pope (606 A.D.); and Instrumental Music (670 A.D.). Human creeds, traditions, and the laws of men came to be as authoritative as the Scriptures.

The Reformation Came About when Men Sought Change

Tired of Roman rule, people throughout Europe began thinking about going back to the Bible as the sole authority for their faith. Martin Luther said: "To reform the church by the (early church) fathers is impossible; it can only be done by the Word of God." Huldreich Zwingli and John Calvin: "insisted that nothing should remain in the church which was not expressly authorized by Scripture.

As time went by many different Christian groups began springing up, each with different names, creeds, organizations, and forms of worship.

- Martin Luther (1530) Lutheran Church/Lutheran catechism
- John Calvin (1536) Presbyterian Church/Westminster confession of faith
- Henry VIII (1552) Episcopal Church/Book of Common Prayer
- John Smyth (1607) Baptist Church/Standard Manual
- John Wesley (1729) Methodist Church/Methodist Discipline

As men came to America, seeking religious freedom, they began to want something other than the denominational and sectarian faiths they found. They wanted two things: (a) to go back to the Bible alone; and (b) unity among Christians.

The Restoration of the New Testament Church

Men began to say: "Let us cast aside all denominational names, creeds, doctrines and practices which divide the Christian world and just wear the name 'Christian' and be only members of the New Testament church." Their plea: "Where the Scriptures speak we speak; and where the Scriptures are silent, we are silent." They sought to go back to the New Testament and practice only those things taught there. They believed the Bible was the seed of the Kingdom (Luke 8:11), which would produce only Christians, members of the Lord's church, as it had done in the first century. We are born again by the incorruptible seed of the Word (1 Peter 1:23-25). What the seed produced in the first century, it would produce "in like kind" in any century.

Why the Restoration Is A Valid Concept

1. The Eternal Nature of the Gospel.

- Matthew 28:18-20 making disciples of Christ till the end of time
- Matthew 24:35 Christ's Words will last beyond this life
- Jude 3 the faith was once for all time delivered to the saints

2. The Teaching of Christ Demands Obedience

- John 8:31-32 abide in word to be true disciples
- John 12:48 we will be judged by the teachings of Christ
- Matthew 7:21 not everyone who claims to be a Christian will be saved
- Galatians 1:6-9 those who teach a different gospel will be condemned
- 2 John 9-11 we are not to fellowship those who teach false doctrines

3. God Expects His People to Come Out of Sin When They Learn the Truth--Repentance!

- Revelation 2:14-16 Church at Pergamum commanded to repent of their doctrinal error and toleration
- Revelation 2:20-23 the church at Thyatira commanded to quit tolerating the false teaching of Jezebel
- Titus 3:9-11 we must reject a factious man (i.e., one who teaches a heresy to the dividing of the church)
- Romans 16:17-18 we must mark and turn away from those who cause dissensions and teach deceptive things
- Titus 1:9-11 elders have responsibility to keep church pure and free from those who oppose the truth

Restoration is actually repentance from doctrinal error.

Have We Restored the New Testament Church Today?

Generally speaking, in those doctrines and practices that are most essential, we have gone back to the New Testament patterns and followed them. To the extent that we are following the New Testament teaching, we have restored the church today!

The question arises, "Can we know the truth?" The Bible everywhere assumes that men can know the truth and can believe and practice it (John 8:31,32). We have the promise that we will be guided into all truth (John 16:12,13).

Are we perfect? No! Do we have a corner on truth? No! Are there things we must still repent of? Yes! Are there things we could do better? Yes! Once people have become New Testament Christians by obedience to the gospel and seek to practice the will of God, they have begun the journey of restoration--they are Christians and in God's kingdom. Obviously all of us can mature and grow in our knowledge of the will of God.

Restoration in many ways is a process. As we learn what is true and that we are to change, so must we change. Restoration is repentance, and as we repent from wrong thinking we restore truth. Churches of Christ say, "Tell us what the Bible teaches and where we are deficient, and we will listen."

Conclusion:

Can We Restore the New Testament Church? Yes! And by all means we should restore it to the ideals Christ demands. Restoration begins with each individual converted to the Lord and willing to put Him first in every respect. Are there things in your life you need to restore?

Patterns for The Church?

The New Testament is God's written revelation for the church. While it is not written in "legal" language, it does contain the will of God in its commandments, in its teachings, and in its examples. It does reveal to us how we should live, work and worship so as to please God in every respect (Col. 1:9,10). These instructions can be regarded as patterns to be observed by the church in all places and at all times. The New Testament embodies "the faith that God has once for all entrusted to the saints" (Jude 3). We work with patterns every day. Clothes are made from patterns; food is prepared from recipes; and concrete is set in forms. A pattern is a rigid requirement that demands exactness. The patterns of the New Testament are sometimes detailed and sometimes in principle. "There has to be pattern commands to which obedience can be given, since men cannot respond to a revelation amorphously" (i.e., not having any form).

The Old Testament teaches that God is often interested in exactness of detail.

- Gen. 6:15,22; 7:5 God told Noah how to build the ark, and Noah did according to all that God commanded him.
- * Ex. 25:9,40; 26:30; 39:32,42,43 Moses built the tabernacle according to the pattern he was shown on the mountain. Moses went so far as to examine all the work to see if had been done just as it was commanded.
- Lev. 10:1,2 Nadab and Abihu were killed because they offered a strange fire that the Lord did not command.
- 1 Chron. 13:7,10 Uzzah perished when he touched the Ark of the Covenant, which David brought to Jerusalem on a cart. David learned that God expected him to do things the right way (1 Chron. 15:2,12-15).

The New Testament encourages Christians to hold to the patterns that were delivered to them:

- 2 Tim. 1:13 "What you heard from me, keep as the pattern of sound teaching, with faith and love in Christ Jesus." A pattern is a "model," a "determinative example," a "standard."
- Rom. 6:17-18 "But thanks be to God that, though you used to be slaves to sin, you wholeheartedly obeyed the form of teaching to which you were committed. You have been set free from sin and have become slaves to righteousness." A "form" is a mold or a norm. The concept of a mold indicates an exact pattern, to which one who submits to God willingly shapes his life. There is a pattern of teaching in the Bible which reveals God's requirements for salvation.
- 2 Thess. 2:15 "So then, brothers, stand firm and hold to the teachings (traditions) we passed on to you, whether by word of mouth or by letter." (teaching = tradition)

The New Testament Teaches the Importance of Correctness in Doctrine:

- 2 Tim. 2:15 "be diligent to present yourself approved to God as a workman who does not need to be ashamed, handling accurately the word of truth."
- Luke 5:14 And He ordered him to tell no one, "But go and show yourself to the priest, and make an offering for your cleansing, just as Moses commanded, for a testimony to them."
- John 12:50 "And I know that His commandment is eternal life; therefore the things I speak, I speak just as the Father has told Me."

- John 15:10 "If you keep My commandments, you will abide in My love; just as I have kept My Father's commandments, and abide in His love.
- 1 Cor. 11:2 Now I praise you because you remember me in everything, and hold firmly to the traditions, just as I delivered them to you.
- 1 Thess. 4:1 Finally then, brethren, we request and exhort you in the Lord Jesus, that, as you received from us {instruction} as to how you ought to walk and please God (just as you actually do walk), that you may excel still more.
- 2 John 6 And this is love, that we walk according to His commandments. This is the commandment, just as you have heard from the beginning, that you should walk in it.
- 2 John 9-11 those who go beyond the doctrine of Christ are without God; we must not support false teachers
- Rev. 22:18,19 not adding or taking away from the prophecy; this is an echo of Deut. 4:2; 5:32; 12:32

What does it mean when God tells us?

- to do the will of my Father Matt. 7:21
- to observe the word of God Luke 11:28
- to abide in my word John 8:31
- to keep my commandments John 14:15
- to hear my voice John 18:37

Wise men do God's will; foolish men do not. (Matthew 7:24-27)

Patterns are found in Scripture sometimes in principles and sometimes in specific statements. If the New Testament was not written to instruct the Christian in how to live the Christian life, then for what possible purpose could it have been written?

If every leaf on every tree has a pattern, and if every cell in every person has a DNA pattern, and if the whole universe is laid out in a set pattern, why should it seem so strange that the church our Lord built and died for should have a pattern?

The Silence of the Scriptures

When Christians speak of the silence of the Scriptures, they need a clear picture of the kind of silence they're dealing with. It is not the silence of an empty tablet, for our God has spoken to this world. He has spoken to us in His Son, and the New Testament, which records His words, are not empty pages. Jesus promised in His word that men could truly be His disciples, that they could know the truth, and that the truth would make them free (John 8:31,32).

Nor is the silence of the Scriptures the silence of a vacuum, as if God had neglected or forgotten to say something, which left a hole in His record. When God spoke, He said all the things necessary for us to know. God's word is all sufficient and complete. Nothing is lacking. God has spoken all He intends to say, and Jesus said that the message given by the Father through the Holy Spirit would guide them into "all the truth" (John 16:12-13).

The "silence of the Scriptures" of which we speak is perhaps better spoken of as the silence *after* the Scriptures. Since God has spoken all He intends to speak about all we need to know spiritually to go to Heaven, we hold that when He finished speaking, He purposefully hushed. "He added no more" (Deut. 5:22). God has intentionally hushed in order to give greater emphasis to what He has already spoken.

For any man to speak when God has purposefully hushed is presuming to do what God does not do. God has already shown that He condemns such presumption in the false prophet (Deut. 18:21,22) and in those who bind human traditions (Malt. 15:1-14).

The emphasis throughout Scripture is to hear, to listen truly to, what God has said and to hold fast to that message (1 Cor. 15:1-3). Man is far too prone to speak when he should listen. Our counseling friends have shown us the great need for cultivating good listening skills. It may be that listening is the most difficult skill to achieve in all of life. Man prefers to speak in youth when he should listen to his elders. He prefers to speak when he ought to listen to his spouse. He prefers to speak when he ought to hear his children. Our most important task at home is to hear and understand.

So it is with God. We must hear what He has said so as to understand what He desires for our lives. Whether the subject God speaks about is moral, practical or doctrinal, our task is to listen and perceive His will. It is not to load the message with our own preconceived preferences or to filter out what we do not like. This task takes a deep sensitivity to our listening procedures and good methods of exegesis. It demands that we hear all of what God has said without coloring it to agree with our prejudices.

Like His words, God's hushed silence is also significant. He finished the message when and where He intended it to be complete. We become presumptuous if we think we can or need to improve on it. His purposeful, hushed silence is not meant to detract from what He has clearly spoken. Nor should we think that His hushed silence has opened a door for us to invent our own practices and beliefs. God finished revealing His will, and His revelation is perfect. One cannot add, subtract, or change what is perfect without corrupting the message. God finished speaking, and His self-imposed silence emphasizes for all time what He said.

Some have preferred to listen to what God did not say or what they think He should have said. By so doing, they have failed to understand what He did say. God has told us once for all what He wants—all of what He wants. God's revelation is sufficient to accomplish His purposes and our salvation (John 16:12-13; 2 Tim. 3:16-17; 2 Pet. 1:3; Jude 3). There are no gaps in the Word of God, and its Author does not need an editor. To dwell on what God has not said, since

He has finished speaking, is to miss the point. To teach a doctrine or establish a practice on the basis of what *God has not said* (thinking His silence is permissive) is to speak and act after God has silenced Himself. It is to go beyond God's intentions. That behavior arrogantly and presumptuously says to God that His words are not sufficient and need improvement.

For more than a century those within the Restoration heritage have been discussing the maxim, "Where the Scriptures speak, we speak; and where the Scriptures are silent, we are silent." This book addresses at length what this saying is all about. In recent years, renewed interest in this doctrine and its implications has challenged us to rethink what the Bible itself teaches on this matter.

James Baird in the 1986 Oklahoma Christian College Lectureship pointed out two maxims that all who believe the Bible agree upon.

First, if God requires any action, it is essential.

Second, if God forbids any action, it is never acceptable.

It is a third area in which there is much disagreement. One group holds that if God is silent, then every man is free to hold, express and practice his own opinion. On the other hand, some believe that one must have scriptural authority for all one believes or practices. The question of this book is to ask which approach pleases God.

Some have argued that the silence of the Scriptures means that whatever is not forbidden or violates Scripture is permissible to teach or to practice. Since the Scriptures are silent on the matter of instruments of music in Christian worship, it is permissible to use them. This will be called "permissive silence" throughout this book.

In contrast, others have steadfastly opposed using instruments of music in Christian worship. They understand the silence of the Scriptures to mean that God has fully revealed His will and that that men are prohibited to go beyond the authority' of the Word of God in using them. This will be called "prohibitive silence" throughout this book.

Some people will no doubt consider this whole discussion unimportant. They will regard it as insignificant in light of the greater importance of the grace of God and the blood of Christ. Some preachers are now boasting that they do not wish to waste their time on such matters. But such a question is not moot; it lies at the very heart of what it means to lovingly obey God. It is a discussion of how we are to respond to the voice of our God. It is a discussion of how we are to regard the authority of God's written revelation. It is a discussion of how to distinguish right from wrong. For these reasons, this discussion can never be regarded as a mock exercise for a schoolboy. It is eternally serious.

That this question is crucial for this time is no accident. There are many influences that have caused those of us in churches of Christ to renew our interest in this subject and speak out. These influences have made us ask ourselves what we believe.

First, our age has been plagued with the questioning of authority--all authority. We have asked on what basis things are right or wrong. In many cases, the younger generation has been appalled at the hypocrisy of human authority. Their spirit of rebellion has carried over into their approach toward religion. Since the 1960's some have been searching for self-expression in their worship, and this search has brought them in conflict with a strict adherence to the Scriptures. This questioning of authority has flavored not only our view of the bible but our view of God as well.

Second, for one and a half centuries liberal theologians have made serious attacks on the belief in verbal inspiration. They have alleged that Biblical narratives are humanly devised myths. They have questioned whether miracles are possible. They have ignored God's involvement in the writing of Scripture, seeking to provide a human origin for its laws and teaching. They have pointed to (supposed) contradictions, denying that the authors were divinely influenced. Although most members of the church of Christ have steadfastly maintained a belief in verbal plenary inspiration, some have questioned whether what we have in Scripture is God's will or how men perceived God to speak to the problems at hand. They believe that since the epistles are "occasional" documents, they show more how the church addressed problems than what God revealed. This lack of confidence has had a subtle effect on us. We are not as sure of what we believe as we used to be.

Third, we are not as sure of the all-sufficiency of the Bible as we used to be. Some are even saying that the Bible does not teach its own all-sufficiency. Recent emphases on counseling, church growth and other practical disciplines have caused some to unconsciously question whether the Bible really has all the answers. Liberal theology, higher criticism and even textual criticism have left questions in our minds if we really have all that God intended for us to have. If we question unconsciously the all-sufficiency of the text, we wonder if we can be so sure about what we believe. Some are further wondering what we mean by all-sufficiency and how far we are to apply that term to Scripture.

Fourth, we are living in a pluralistic society, which promotes tolerance for opposing views. J. I. Packer in the 1987 volume of *The Best of Theology* regards religious pluralism as "normal" and "healthy." The predominance of this concept has subtly influenced many to believe that there are many acceptable, conflicting alternatives in the framework of truth. For some unity is possible only within a framework of pluralism. They no longer speak of the "right way" but speak of "right ways." Looking at our national government, some have regarded the church as a democracy. They have forgotten that the church is a kingdom. The church has a King and Lord.

Fifth, our renewed interest in grace has caused some to think that the teaching and instructions of Christ do not matter. There is no doubt that some in the past neglected the Scriptural teaching about grace. This extreme has led some in recent years to go to the other extreme and act as if our obedience to the teaching had no bearing on our salvation.

Sixth, there is currently a movement among some denominational churches and churches of Christ to unite. This desire for fellowship, especially with groups that share historical similarities, has caused thousands to refocus their attention on the silence of the Scriptures. The several unity forums throughout the United States have prompted great interest in this subject.

Seventh, there has been a renewed desire among some in the churches of Christ to use instruments of music. Some have openly said that its use is "just a matter of opinion." This controversy has prompted preachers to dust off old sermons and preach out against the instrument. Not everyone has been willing to accept the "traditional" argument churches of Christ have used to support their beliefs. Some have openly challenged churches of Christ to come up with some new arguments, because they frankly will not listen to the old ones. This critical attitude toward the older arguments coupled with the desire to use the instrument has demanded some fresh thinking about the silence of the Scriptures.

Hermeneutics in Deuteronomy

1. The Principle of an All-Consuming Love

Eleven times Israel is commanded to love God.²⁰ One kept the commandments carefully as a means of showing loving commitment and pure devotion to the Lord. One who possesses an all-consuming love for God will by nature seek to please and to serve Him. Jesus validates the natural connection between loving and keeping the commandments and between lovelessness and lawlessness.²¹

2. The Principle of Fearing God

Deuteronomy emphasizes the need to "fear God" 15 times.²² Fearing the person of God naturally led to a pious respect for His statutes, ordinances and commandments. The phrase "fear of God," loses altogether its emotional character and rather applies to the natural life of piety toward the laws and statutes.

3. The Principle of Carefulness

The observance of God's commandments were not to be done half-heartedly or irreverently; rather love and reverence led to a natural conscientiousness and zealously to please. The concept of carefulness is derived from the Hebrew verb, *shamar*, which is found 44 times in Deuteronomy. John E. Hartley in the *Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament* describes the term:

The basic idea of the root is "to exercise great care over." This meaning can be seen to underlie the various semantic modification seen in the verb: In combination with other verbs the meaning is "do carefully or diligently." Deut. 11:32, "Be careful (i.e., perform carefully) all the statutes and ordinances," and in Num. 23:12, "speak carefully and faithfully." Secondly it expresses the careful attention to be paid to the obligations of a covenant, to laws, statutes, etc.²³

The careful, conscientious, observance of the laws was an attitude Israel was to manifest in the actual doing of the commandments, statutes and ordinances. It was not considered legalism but loving to be zealous in keeping the laws. The words of the law were to be pressed upon their hearts.²⁴ Careful obedience in the context of loving God is emphasized in 6:3-5; 11:22;

²⁰Deut. 5:10; 6:5; 7:9; 10:12; 11:1,13,22; 13:3; 19:9; 30:6, 16.

²¹John 14:15,21,23; 1 John 5:2,3 shows the natural link between loving God and keeping the commandments. In Matt. 15:1-14 and Mark 7:1-13 Jesus shows the link between "hearts far from" God and the rejection of God's commandments to keep legalistic traditions.

²²4:10; 5:29; 6:2,13,24; 8:6; 10:12,20; 13:4; 14:23; 17:19; 25:18; 28:58; 31:12,13.

²³John E. Hartley, "shamar," *TWOT* II:939.

²⁴Taking the commandments to "heart" is commanded four times in Deuteronomy: 4:39,40; 6:5-9; 11:18; 32:46. The word "heart" is found 46 times in Deuteronomy. The phrase "with all your heart" occurs nine times: 4:29; 6:5; 10:12; 11:13; 13:3; 26:16; 30:2,6,10.

30:15,16. It is significant that this same concept of carefulness can be seen in the vocabulary of Jesus and other New Testament passages.²⁵ Bertram, speaking of *phulasso* in the New Testament sees the parallel between the scrupulous observance of the Law "as the final and supreme content of piety" with the "faithful keeping of given precepts the fulfilling of Christian piety." The reference in the New Testament is not to the Law but rather to God's Word.²⁶ Another New Testament term that stands in the tradition of *shamar* and may be considered a synonym of *phulasso* is the Greek term *tereo*, which Bauer translates "observe, fulfill, pay attention to."²⁷ This word is used in the New Testament especially with reference to doctrine or commandments or precepts. Here again, the keeping of the commandments is the means by which one shows his love toward God.²⁸ "Keeping the commandments" in John's writings was essential to any vital Christianity.

4. The Principle of Accuracy

The vocabulary of Deuteronomy also shows that God expected His people to act just "as the Lord commanded." The Pentateuch uses the phrase 69 times, 12 of which are in commandments. The remaining 57 uses are confirmations that the people of God did as they were instructed.²⁹ Moses instructs the people seven times in Deuteronomy to do "just as the Lord commanded."³⁰ This persistent emphasis on precision can be seen in Deut. 24:8: "In cases of a skin affection be most careful to do exactly as the Levitical priests instruct you. Take care to do as I have commanded them."

The emphasis on keeping the specific details carefully and exactly is not to be overlooked when one considers the kind of response God desires from His people. The priests were instructed in how to respond to leprosy in Leviticus 13-14. Moses' instruction in Deuteronomy was to exhort the people to "diligently observe" the legislation already in existence.³¹ It is

²⁵Bertram, "phulasso," *TDNT* IX:239,40. For a further study of this point see Phil Sanders, *Let All the Earth Keep Silence* (Ft. Worth, Tex.: Star Bible, 1989), pp. 17-33.

²⁶*Ibid.*, p. 240.

²⁷Bauer, "tereo," p. 815.

²⁸Harald Riesenfeld, "tereo," *TDNT* VIII:144.

²⁹Ex. 7:6,10,20; 12:28,50; 16:34; 34:4; 39:1,5,7,21,26,29,31,43; 40:19,21,23,25,27,29,32; Lev. 8:4,5,9,13,17,21,29,31; 9:7,10,21; 16:34; 24:23; Num. 1:19; 2:33; 3:16,42,51; 36:10; Deut. 1:19; 6:25; 10:5; 34:9. In addition to the phrase "just as the Lord commanded," are the confirming statements "so they did": Ex 7:10; 12:28; 16:34; 39:43; Lev. 16:34; Num. 1:19; 8:20,22; 9:5; 17:11; 20:9; and "thus they did": Ex. 7:6; 29:35; Lev. 8:36; 24:23; Num. 1:54; 2:34; 17:11. See also Lev. 8:36; 9:16; 10:7.

³⁰Deut. 4:5; 5:12,16,32; 12:21; 20:17; 24:8. Other Pentateuchal passages include Ex. 29:35; 34:18; Lev. 10:15,18; Num. 26:4.

³¹Craigie, *Deuteronomy*, p. 308.

significant that Jesus in cleansing the leper instructed him to show himself to the priest and to make an offering as a testimony to them, "just as Moses commanded."³²

Another significant phrase in Deuteronomy is the phrase "according to" the instruction, commandment, ordinance, statute or word of the Lord. This phrase is found 43 times in the books of Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers and Deuteronomy.³³ A passage which demonstrates the precision God desires can be found in Deut. 17:9c-11:

When they have announced to you the verdict in the case, you shall carry out the verdict that is announced to you from that place that the Lord chose, observing scrupulously all their instructions to you. You shall act in accordance with the instructions given you and the ruling handed down to you; you must not deviate from the verdict that they announce to you either to the right or to the left.

Carefulness and accuracy in keeping the verdict of the priests was important. Disregarding that instruction was a presumption which carried the death penalty (17:12,13). If the presumptuous disregard for human verdicts carried a death penalty, how much greater offense in God's eyes was the presumptuous disregard for His own statutes and laws.

The phrase describing going "to the right or to the left" is found five times in Deuteronomy and is built upon the example of Israel's promise to King Sihon of Heshbon to "keep strictly to the highway, turning off neither to the right or to the left."³⁴ Four times Moses exhorts the people to stay within the revealed commandment in order to avoid entanglement with idolatry.³⁵ The people could not survive on the land should they forsake God by deviation:

Be careful, then, to do as the Lord your God has commanded you. Do not turn aside to the right or to the left: follow only the path that the Lord your God has enjoined upon you, so that you may thrive and that it may go well with you, and that you may long endure in the land you are to possess. (5:29,30 JPS)

Other phrases which attest this same concept include "walk in His ways,"³⁶ "turn from the way,"³⁷ and "turn aside from the commandment."³⁸

³²Luke 5:14. Cf. Matt. 8:14; Mark 1:44.

³³Ex. 17:1; 29:35; 31:11; 36:1; 38:21; 39:32,42; 40:16; Lev. 5:10; 9:16; 10:7; Num. 1:54; 2:34; 3:16; 4:37,41,45,49; 8:20; 9:3,5,12,14,20,23; 10:13; 15:24; 29:18,21,24,27,30,33,37,40; 36:5; Deut. 1:3; 17:11; 24:8; 26:13,14; 30:2; 31:5. See also Josh. 1:7,8.

³⁴Deut. 2:27; 5:32; 17:11,20; 28:14. See also Josh. 1:7; 23:6,7; 2 Sam. 14:19; 2 Kings 22:2; Prov. 4:26,27; Isa. 30:18-22; 2 Pet. 2:15; Matt. 7:13,14; Luke 13:23,24. Cf. Wilhelm Michaelis, "hodos," TDNT V:42-114, esp. 51,52.

³⁵Craigie, p. 338.

³⁶Deut. 5:33 (NIV); 8:6; 10:12; 11:22; 13:5; 19:9; 26:17; 28:9; 30:16.

³⁷Deut. 9:12,16; 11:28; 31:29 (in association with idolatry).

³⁸Deut. 17:20

Another phrase of significance is first found in Deut. 4:2: "You shall not add anything to what I command you or take anything away from it, but keep the commandments of the Lord your God that I enjoin upon you." The phrase is repeated in 12:32 (13:1 in JPS). The intent of this commandment was to urge that God's laws be taken "with utmost seriousness, and that we are not at liberty to adjust them to suit our own selfish, thoughtless or misguided, whims and schemes."³⁹ The commandment was to be observed as it was given; omissions and additions weakened the commandment.

Conclusion

In the renewal of the covenant, Moses sought for Israel to fulfill its promise to Yahweh by an all-loving, reverent, careful and accurate response to the stipulations of the covenant relationship. God wanted their hearts to be set upon following Him. Their love "with all their heart, soul and might" would lead them into a reverent regard for Him and His word. Whole-hearted service would not tolerate deviance from the ways of God, which would lead to seeking other gods. These timeless principles of Deuteronomy should be considered in any approach to the teachings of God. All hermeneutics begin with listening to what God has said and taking the message to heart. Carefulness, out of love and reverence, must guide the interpreter in the observance and application of the teaching. God revealed His word so that we might know how to love Him. Conscientious, precise obedience can never be considered as unloving. It is rather when the teaching is ignored, annulled or amended by the whims and speculations of men that love for God has grown cold.

³⁹David F. Payne, "Deuteronomy," in *The Daily Study Bible Series (OT)*, ed. John C.L. Gibson (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1985), p. 28.

Jesus and Obedience

How Did Jesus Obey His Father's Instructions?

For those of us who look to Jesus as our example and by whose blood we have entered into a new covenant, it is necessary to ask about Jesus' attitude toward the silence of the Scriptures. Surely Jesus must have dealt with the same problem facing men today. How did Jesus obey the Father? How did Jesus address the problem of His Father's authority? Did Jesus act only with authority or did He feel free to practice whatever the Father had not forbidden? How did Jesus act toward the hushed silence of the Father?

Jesus noted what the Father taught Him and placed parameters on His obedience to the Father. He lovingly, carefully, diligently, completely, and accurately submitted to the will of His Father. His self-restrictive example is significant. His conscious choice to do what His Father willed and no more is significant.

Passages for Study:

John 4:34 Jesus said to them, "My food is to do the will of Him who sent Me, and to accomplish His work.

John 5:19 Jesus therefore answered and was saying to them, "Truly, truly, I say to you, the Son can do nothing of Himself, unless it is something He sees the Father doing; for whatever the Father does, these things the Son also does in like manner.

John 5:30 "I can do nothing on My own initiative. As I hear, I judge; and My judgment is just, because I do not seek My own will, but the will of Him who sent Me."

John 5:36 "But the witness which I have is greater than that of John; for the works which the Father has given Me to accomplish, the very works that I do, bear witness of Me, that the Father has sent Me."

John 7:16-18 Jesus therefore answered them, and said, "My teaching is not Mine, but His who sent Me. If any man is willing to do His will, he shall know of the teaching, whether it is of God, or whether I speak from Myself. He who speaks from himself seeks his own glory; but He who is seeking the glory of the One who sent Him, He is true, and there is no unrighteousness in Him."

John 8:26-32 "I have many things to speak and to judge concerning you, but He who sent Me is true; and the things which I heard from Him, these I speak to the world." They did not realize that He had been speaking to them about the Father. Jesus therefore said, "When you lift up the Son of Man, then you will know that I am He, and I do nothing on My own initiative, but I speak these things as the Father taught Me. And He who sent Me is with Me; He has not left Me alone, for I always do the things that are pleasing to Him."

As He spoke these things, many came to believe in Him. Jesus therefore was saying to those Jews who had believed Him, "If you abide in My word, then you are truly disciples of Mine; and you shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free."

John 12:48-50 "He who rejects Me, and does not receive My sayings, has one who judges him; the word I spoke is what will judge him at the last day. For I did not speak on My own initiative, but the Father Himself who sent Me has given Me commandment, what to say, and what to speak. And I know that His commandment is eternal life; therefore the things I speak, I speak just as the Father has told Me."

John 14:10,31 "Do you not believe that I am in the Father, and the Father is in Me? The words that I say to you I do not speak on My own initiative, but the Father abiding in Me does His works. ...but so that the world may know that I love the Father, I do exactly as the Father commanded Me. Get up, let us go from here.

The Teaching and Example of Jesus

Matthew 7:21-28

Matt. 12:48-50; Mark 3:32-35

Luke 11:27-28

Matt. 8:3,4; Mark 1:44

Matthew 15:1-14

The example of Jesus is convincing: those who act without authority do what Jesus never dared or wanted to do. Those who seek freedom to do as they please must find their example in someone other than Jesus, for Jesus was consumed in doing the will of God. Jesus never contemplated variance from the appointed message or work He was sent to accomplish. He lost Himself in the doing of what He was instructed and authorized to do. Such commitment to pure obedience must be realized by both Christian churches and churches of Christ if they are to identify themselves as genuine disciples and to fulfill the prayer of Christ for unity.

The example of Jesus is not silent about the purposeful hushed silence of the Father. In Jesus one sees perfect obedience that is loving, careful, complete, diligent and accurate. He never once acted without authority, never once innovated, never once sought to do His own will. Jesus never fought for innovations beyond the expressed will of God. Jesus never depended on the silence of the Father to justify His own desire. Jesus never excused himself from obedience by saying, "Well, my Father didn't say I couldn't." Jesus was never presumptuous, even though as the Son of God He could have claimed His place as Deity. No, He emptied Himself out, took the form of a servant, and was obedient to the point of death (Phil. 2:5-8).

Jesus respected the hushed silence of His Father in heaven. He would neither add to His Father's commandments nor take away from them. Men today would do well to follow His example of obedience. Let each one do all God says to do carefully and diligently. Let each one observe the commandments just as God gave them, going neither to the right nor to the left. Let each one follow the Lord and love Him with all His heart, soul, mind and strength. To do otherwise is to fail to follow in the steps of Jesus.

It should be noted here that the Holy Spirit, in like manner, was never presumptuous so as to go beyond the stated will of the Father. Cf. John 14:26; 16:12-15. No man ever rises above the example of obedience set for us by Jesus Christ and the Holy Spirit.

1 *Lit and as the Father...so I do*

COMMAND, EXAMPLE AND NECESSARY INFERENCE

by Stafford North

The expression "command, example, and necessary inference" is one heard often these days. Some are saying it is a "flawed hermeneutic" which has characterized the Restoration Movement while others are saying it involves the use of human reasoning to understand scripture and, therefore, cannot be trusted.

So is "command, example, and necessary inference" a valid approach to interpreting scripture? Is it an invention of our Restoration Movement? Has it led us into doctrinal or moral error? These are important questions for us to answer.

Introduction

First, let us lay a foundation for examining this question. The study of this topic necessarily involves the subject of hermeneutics, the science of interpretation of scripture. Writers employ the term hermeneutics in three different ways. Some use it to describe the principles of exploring what a passage meant to those who first received it. Others use it to describe the process of applying a passage, once understood, to our present circumstances. Others use the term to include both of these. The last of these, considering hermeneutics to cover both understanding and application, is the most common. Recognizing this distinction is important because some have accused our brotherhood of using "command, example, and necessary inference" as our entire hermeneutic and have suggested that we need to broaden it to include other principles such as context, word study, greater use of the Old Testament, and looking at the "big picture" of the Bible.

Actually, of course, we have never used the method of "command, example, and necessary inference" as our complete set of hermeneutic principles. While Thomas Campbell, in his Declaration and Address, says we should use command and example to understand what God would have us do, Alexander Campbell, in his Christianity Restored, spends a hundred pages on hermeneutical principles and never mentions "command, example, and necessary inference."

The truth is, then, that "command, example, and necessary inference" has never been the complete hermeneutic among our fellowship. We have always used many other principles in seeking to understand a passage. Alexander Campbell, in his discussion, for example, speaks about determining word meanings, interpreting figures, using context, determining the dispensation, understanding the conditions which prevailed when the book was written, noting who speaks and to whom, and coming within an "understanding distance" of things written long ago.

Some have proposed that we should use the term "statement" rather than "command." They suggest that there are statements in scripture from which we learn what God wants us to do that are not actually commands. There is, no doubt, some validity to this point. If, however, we understand "command" to mean whatever is directly commanded or any other statement from which we learn what God would have us to do, then we may continue to use the common expression of "command, example, and necessary inference."

Another recent proposal comes from F. LaGard Smith in his book, The Cultural Church. He proposes three different terms: purpose, principle, and precedent. First, he says, we must understand the purpose the original author had in mind. Then we must determine whether there is

principle which should apply to us. Finally, we ask whether there is a precedent. This latter term he uses to suggest something a bit more restrictive than example since many examples are not binding. There is merit to Smith's proposal, but if "command, example, and necessary inference" are properly understood and utilized, the outcome would be the same as his purpose, principle, and purpose.

But more important than what the Campbells and others have written is the question of whether the concept of "command, example, and necessary inference" should be a part of our hermeneutic today. Are these valid methods of finding God's will for our lives? This paper will propose that such an approach is valid, when properly used, and will approach this question through three propositions: (1) the use of "command, example, and necessary inference" are inherent functions in our mental processes and have been since human beginnings, (2) the scriptures themselves expect us to use such approaches for understanding their meaning, and (3) the use of "command, example, and necessary inference" in discovering God's will for us are valid if we have first used other basic principles to understand a passage.

Discussion

1. "Command, example, and necessary inference" are inherent functions of our mental processes and have been since human beginnings. Although not always under these particular terms, the concepts of "command, example, and necessary inference" are used in many fields today and have been so used for centuries. In law, for example, a lawyer or judge first asks whether there is a statement of law on the books that should be applied to a given case (command). Then he will ask, "Are there precedents from other cases that have been determined which should apply" (example)? Then he will ask, "Are there conclusions that may logically be drawn from the evidence that will apply to this case" (necessary inference)?

A doctor, likewise, will follow similar procedures. "Is there a general principle that governs a case such as I am now treating?" "Are there other instances of patients with similar circumstances which will bear on this case?" "Are there logical conclusions I can draw from my experience that would help me in treating this case?"

An architect will ask, "Are there principles or rules of construction that should guide me in the design of this building?" "Are there other buildings from which provide precedents that will help me design of this one?" "Are there conclusions I can reasonably draw to help in my design?"

And such thinking processes are not new at all. God gave a command to Adam and Eve they were expected to keep and, when they disobeyed, He asked, "Have you eaten from the tree of which I commanded you not to eat?" (Genesis 3:12) The process of drawing conclusions by reasoning also stems from very early times. Cain, for example, used such an inference when God told him he would be a wanderer. He said, "Whoever finds me will kill me." He was reasoning like this. Anyone whom God condemns to be a wanderer will be rejected and killed. I shall be such a wanderer. Therefore I will be rejected and killed (Genesis 4:13-14). And Abraham and Sarah concluded from examples they had seen that no one at their age bore children.

Many more cases like these could be given from ancient times. Commands from those in authority were expected to be obeyed. Asking if there were examples or precedents has always been a way to learn. And the process of drawing conclusions through the process of reasoning has been part of

man's mental equipment since the beginning of time. While our use of these in regard to understanding God's revelation to us needs to be approached carefully, the concepts of obeying commands, learning through example, and drawing conclusions from inference are as old as mankind.

2. The scriptures expect us to use "command, example, and necessary inference" in determining God's will for us. Even a brief look at scripture will reveal that "command, example, and necessary inference" are deeply imbedded in God's will.

A. First, that God gives commands and expects them to be obeyed is evident to all students of scripture. In Matthew 15:4, for example, Jesus accused the scribes and Pharisees of transgressing the commandment by their tradition of "corban." In John 14:15, Jesus says "If you love Me, you will keep My commandments." And the great commission, according to Matthew, says "teaching them to observe all that I commanded you" (Matthew 28:20). In I Thessalonians 4:2, Paul speaks of the "commandments we gave you by the authority of Jesus Christ." Surely no one can doubt that we are obliged to keep the commandments God has given us.

As we shall discuss later, we do have to interpret properly these commands. Did God intend for a given command to apply to us? What is the exact meaning of the commandment? What is included or excluded by the command? But that God has given commands in scripture He expects us to keep surely can be doubted by no Bible believer.

B. The Bible is also replete with cases of using examples as a means of determining God's will. In Matthew 12:1-8, Jesus demonstrates to the Jewish leaders that an exception to the Sabbath command is allowed when a higher command is to be obeyed. To do this He use two examples as precedent. David, He said was allowed to eat the showbread and priests "profaned the Sabbath and are guiltless." Thus, he says, the Sabbath command should be interpreted in light of approved examples of certain flexibility in keeping the ordinances. In I Corinthians 10:6 and 11, Paul states that we are to learn from the examples of the Old Testament as he says that their punishment for disobedience "happened to them by way of example; and they were written for our admonition, upon whom the ends of the ages are come."

Several times, Paul calls on the example of "approved practice" in other churches to demonstrate how a congregation should conduct its activities. In I Corinthians 4:17, for instance, Paul tells Timothy he was sent to tell the Corinthians what Paul taught "in every church." Again, Paul sought to have a common practice on essential matters as indicated by I Corinthians 14:33b where he says, "as in all the churches, let the women keep silent." This, he says, is the practice of other churches, and he uses this as a basis of arguing that the Corinthian church should do the same. Again, in I Corinthians 16:1, Paul says he wants the Corinthians to follow the instruction he gave to the Galatians about contributing on the first day of the week. Paul, then, used approved practice of one congregation a precedent for others to follow.

Some of what God wants us to know, then, He has put into example form rather than a command. As we shall discuss in more detail later, we have to use care, of course, in interpreting examples. Does this example present an abiding and eternal principle or one restricted to a particular dispensation? Is the practice incidental or intended to present an lasting principle to follow? What were the circumstances which prevailed that affect our following the example?

Yet, that God has used the example method of revealing what He wants us to do is clearly established. Just as He used commands to instruct us of His will, He also uses "approved practice" as a means of delivering His will to us.

C. The scriptures also clearly suggest the use of inference or "drawing conclusions from a premise" as a means of interpreting what they mean. First a word about the nature of inference. Inference means drawing a conclusion from what has been implied in a statement. The validity of the conclusion, of course, depends both on the strength of premises in the statement and the method by which the conclusion is drawn. These are called "material" and "formal" validity. Both the information (material) and the "form" of the argument must be correct.

Thus we look at a premise: "All men are mortal." Since we accept that as universal, when we recognize that "Socrates is a man," we conclude that "Socrates is mortal." Such a conclusion is clearly implied in the two premises and is, therefore, a valid conclusion. Had the original statement been "Some men are tall," "Socrates is a man," we could only conclude that Socrates might be tall but could not be sure. Since this premise implies less, the conclusion, therefore, is not as certain.

We use inference many times a day. If, for example, I know the length of one side of an equilateral triangle, I can reason to the length of the other two. Again, one might think, "If this product is sold at Wal-mart, it will be good and be inexpensive." This product is sold there. Therefore it will be good and inexpensive. Or one might say "Whatever ____ says cannot be trusted. This is what ____ said. Therefore it cannot be trusted. (You fill in the blank.) Doctors use inference to diagnose patients, baseball managers use inference to plan their strategy, engineers use inference to design a bridge. Even the gift of flowers from a boy to a girl has an built in implication from which the giver hopes the receiver will draw an inference.

A "necessary" inference is one where the implication in the premises is so strong that the conclusion is considered sure. For example, "Only American-born persons may become president of the United States." Tony Blair is not American-born. Therefore, Tony Blair may not become president of the United States. Since the premises are certain, this conclusion is also certain. Again, someone might propose that "Only those who have held previous political office can be elected president." John has not held previous political office. Therefore, John cannot become president. While there is strong evidence to suggest that a previous political office is certainly the common way of rising to the presidency, this statement does not have the same certainty as the first.

Having explored something about the meaning of inference, let's look at the Bible's use of it. Jesus, in Matthew 22:29-31, provides a clear use of inference in interpreting scripture. He tells the Sadducees that in the passage recorded in Exodus 3:6 God said, "I am the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob." From this, Jesus concludes that there is life after death. But how did He come to that conclusion? God used the present tense, "I am" the God of these men long after they had died. If, Jesus suggests, He was still their God after their deaths, then they must, in some sense, still be alive. His reasoning went like this. If God can say I "am" someone's God long after they are dead, then they must, in some sense, still be alive. God did so speak. Therefore, they must, in some sense, be alive after death. Jesus recognized what was implied in the language and drew an inference from it which He considered to be certain.

To give another case, in Romans 10:13-14, Paul gives a long series of inferences. Starting with Joel 2:32, which says "Whosoever shall call on the name of the Lord shall be saved," Paul says we infer

that before one could "call," he would first "believe;" and before such belief we infer that there must have been "preaching," and from the fact that one has preached, we infer that there must have been "sending." Thus, what is implied, we may infer.

Again Paul uses inference when he interprets scripture in I Corinthians 15:27. Here he quotes Psalm 8:6: "He put all things in subjection under his feet." He comments, however, that "it is evident that he is excepted who did subject all things unto him." The word "evident" indicates an implication from which we are to infer. So, he says, we infer that God, the one doing the subjecting, is excluded when He subjected everything else to Christ.

In Ephesians 4:8-10, Paul again uses inference. Psalm 68:18 says "He ascended." But, says Paul, one may infer that if one has ascended, he must first have been lower. There was first, then, he says, a descending. His reasoning is like this: All who ascend are included in those who have first been lower. Christ ascended. Therefore Christ must first have been lower.

But not only do Bible writers use inference in interpreting other scriptures, they also often use inference in their discussion and expect us to follow it. In Matthew 7:11, Jesus uses the common logical device of "from lesser to greater." This approach says that if something of lesser significance is true, then that which is greater than it certainly will be true. So, says Jesus, "If ye, being evil, know how to give good gifts unto your children, how much more shall your Father who is in heaven give good things to them that ask Him?" He never finishes out the steps in the argument because he expects us to be able to do that.

Jesus uses that same type of reasoning in Luke 13:15 and 14:6 when he says if it is proper to care for animals (the lesser) when they need assistance on the Sabbath day, then surely it is proper to care for humans (the greater) on the Sabbath day.

Paul uses the form of a hypothetical syllogism in I Corinthians 15:17 when he says "If [and only if] Christ be not raised, then your faith is vain." He expects the reader mentally to add, "My faith is not vain, and, therefore, Christ is raised."

Hebrews 7:7 gives another instance of a Bible writer's using inference and expecting us to follow it. "But without any dispute the less is blessed of the better." Based on that, the writer expects us to accept that Melchizedek is greater than Abraham. In verse 12, he adds another: "For the priesthood being changed, there is made of necessity a change also of the law." In paraphrase, he says, if the priesthood is changed, it is a necessary inference that the law with which it is associated is changed. In a more precise statement, his argument is this: All laws whose priesthood is changed must be changed in other respects too. The priesthood of the Law of Moses was changed. Therefore, the Law of Moses must be changed in other respects too.

But not only do Bible writers use inference in interpreting other Bible writers, and not only do they make inferences which they expect us to follow, Bible writers expect their readers to use inference to draw conclusions of their own. In John 20:30-31, for example, the writer says he recorded the signs Jesus did so those who read them would believe (by necessary inference) that Jesus is the Christ. In fact, the whole premise which lies behind the miracles of the New Testament is that God expected the people who saw them to draw an inference. Nicodemus, for example, says to Jesus "We know that you are teacher who has come from God; for no one can do these signs you do, except God is with him" (John 3:2). Nicodemus has done exactly as God intended: he has inferred

from Jesus' miracles what is implied in them: that Jesus is sent from God. The former blind man makes a similar statement in John 9:33: "If this man were not from God, he could do nothing."

Paul certainly the Corinthians to use some "common sense" logic in understanding his statement "not to have company with fornicators." In I Corinthians 5:9-11, he told them they should have known that he was referring to fornicators in the church and not outside. But how could they have come to such a conclusion? He had intended for them reason like this: If I am to avoid all contact with fornicators outside the church, I must isolate myself from society. I cannot isolate myself from society (because I must seek to convert them to Christ). So I cannot avoid all fornicators outside the church.

God clearly, then, expects us to draw an inference from the miracles Jesus and the apostles were empowered to do. And Paul expected his readers to use common reasoning to understand his message. God knows there is an innate sense of reasoning in the human mind. Aristotle did not invent it, although he helped to codify it, nor is induction something invented by theologians or John Locke. Long before these, God knew how the human mind worked and he took advantage of that to present certain information from which He expected us to draw conclusions.

The scriptures themselves, then, are clear that God wants us to follow the commands God gives for us, that He wants us to learn from examples, and that He expects us to follow inferences made in scripture and to draw some of our own.

3. The use of "command, example, and necessary inference" are a valid method of applying a passage after we have used other principles of hermeneutics to understand its meaning. Writers in the Restoration Movement who have spoken of "command, example, and necessary inference" have never intended these to be our total hermeneutic. There are two basic steps in hermeneutics: (1) determining what the passage meant to those who first received it and (2) determining what God wanted me to do as result of what that passage meant to those who first received it.

To understand what a passage meant to those who first received it we must use such principles as the following: (1) learning from history, archaeology, culture, and geography about the conditions under which these words were spoken, (2) defining words that need to be explored, (3) studying the syntax of the passage, (4) recognizing the type of literature are we dealing with, (5) discovering who said these words to whom, (6) learning from the context around the passage, (7) interpreting the figures of speech in this passage, (8) learning from other passages about the passage we are studying, and (9) finding out what the "big picture" about dispensations and theology presented in the Bible tell us as we fit this passage into it.

Only after we have explored the original meaning of a passage through such means as this are we ready to ask the question, "Now what does God want me to do as result of what this passage meant to those who first received it?" To answer that question, we use "command, example, and necessary inference."

A. If we have understood a passage correctly and that passage has in it a commandment which God intended the people of our dispensation to obey, then we must obey that command. God's command to Noah to build an ark, obviously, was limited to a particular time and circumstance. The commands of the Law of Moses were not given to Gentiles or to those living under the Christian dispensation. We do, however, live under the law of Christ (Romans 7:1-7), and Jesus left

commandments for us to follow (John 14:15). So we find commands that apply in our dispensation: believe in Jesus (Acts 16:31) and repent and be baptized for the forgiveness of sins (Acts 2:38). We have commands to worship, to put away sinful deeds, and to care for the needy.

We must, of course, ask certain questions about a command before knowing just how we are to follow it. Is there, for instance, some other command that might limit or clarify it? Romans 13:1-7, commands us to obey the government, but Acts 4:19 teaches us, by the example of Peter and John, that if man's law contradicts God's command, "we must obey God rather than men."

Also we must understand that inherent within any command is a level of specificity which determines what is allowed and what is prohibited. When God specified, for instance, how priests were to obtain the fire they were to use at the altar of incense, getting fire in any other way was excluded. So in Leviticus 10:1, when Nadab and Abihu got their fire from some other source, they used a method God "had not commanded." When He commanded one way to get fire, all other ways were "not commanded" and thus excluded. The NIV says they used "unauthorized fire." When God commands one out of several possibilities in a category, then, the other possibilities in that category are in the "not commanded" category and, thus, are unauthorized.

The same lesson is seen in other passages. I Chronicles 15:13-14 reports that when David moved the ark after the time when Uzza died, he said, "we sought him not according to the ordinance." This second time, the Levites carried the ark "as Moses commanded." When God selected one out of many possibilities for moving the ark, other means of moving it were excluded.

When Saul was impatient because Samuel was late, he ignored the fact that when God specified that priests were to offer a sacrifice, any one else was excluded from offering them. In I Samuel 13:14, Samuel told Saul "you have not kept what the Lord commanded you." But God did not command those of the tribe of Benjamin not to offer sacrifices. He only commanded that those of Levi could. Yet, when Saul, of Benjamin, offered a sacrifice, he violated the commandment. So, to do what is excluded is just as much a violation of the commandment as to fail to do what is commanded.

Paul makes the same point in I Corinthians 11:20-34. Here Paul condemns the Corinthians church for not observing the Lord's Supper just as he had commanded them to do. He says, "I received of the Lord that which also I delivered unto you." Thus, Paul says, I told you how to take the Lord's Supper and you are doing it some other way and, in the process, you are "eating and drinking damnation" and are "guilty of the body and blood of the Lord." When Paul told them how to take the Lord's Supper, other ways were excluded.

We understand this principle of exclusion in everyday life. When a song leader says turn to number 412, he does not have to name all the songs to which we are not to turn. When a doctor prescribes a particular medicine, the pharmacist does not fill it with another medicine and say, "The doctor didn't say not to use this one." When the architect specifies a particular type of window, the builder does not say, "He didn't say not to use another type so I'm sure it will be OK." When the teacher specifies a due date for a paper, the student shouldn't say, "He didn't say I couldn't bring it on another date." When one of a set of possibilities is specified, other equivalent possibilities are excluded.

Some have used the terms "generic" and "specific" in describing various commands. They often illustrate by saying that if God had told Noah to build an ark of wood, this generic command would have allowed Noah to choose any wood he wished. But when God used a specific command for gopher wood, this limited Noah from using any other type. Thus, naming one possible wood out of many, excluded other types of wood.

We apply this principle of exclusion in many ways. Unleavened bread and fruit of the vine are commanded for the Lord's table, and we understand that Christ did not have to specify all that we should not use on the table. Other foods are clearly excluded. Voluntary contributions are commanded and so we do not practice other ways of raising money for the work of the Lord. Baptism is commanded as the means for getting "into Christ" which excludes getting into Christ by signing a card, prayer, or some other means. We are told to pray in the name of Jesus and surely do not need a list of those in whose names we are not to pray.

In the same way, we are told to sing as an offering of music in our worship to God (Colossians 3:16; Ephesians 5:19; I Corinthians 14:15). If we were commanded to offer "music" to God, we could follow this command and use any type of music we wished. Since, however, the command is more specific in naming vocal music, the principle of exclusion applies. God does not have to tell us all the types of music not to use. By specifying singing, other types of music are excluded just as other types of food on the Lord's table are excluded by the naming of fruit of the vine and unleavened bread.

It is true, of course, that while a command is exclusive, it is also inclusive. That is, while a command eliminates doing other equal actions, it also allows doing those actions, which are incidental to carrying out the command. Thus, while the command to use unleavened bread excludes other types of bread for communion, its silence about the manner of distributing the bread leaves that open. Similarly, while the command to use vocal music in worship excludes the use of instrumental music, its silence about how to make the words known leaves open the use of printed words, projected words or memorization.

So we seek to interpret commands carefully and if they apply to us, must understand them and follow them, recognizing that each command both excludes and includes.

B. If we have understood a passage correctly, we must also ask whether the passage contains an example from which God wants us to learn. Not everything any New Testament Christian did becomes a precedent, which we must follow. About examples we must ask such questions as these: (1) is this practice incidental or was it intended to establish a precedent? (2) is this practice one that was consistently followed by early Christians? (3) is the practice one which has apostolic approval? (4) is this practice the result of what appears to be an underlying command or principle? (5) are there exceptions to this practice which had the approval of the apostles?

We know the common practice of early Christians was to walk wearing sandals but there is no underlying principle or command that is evident in their footwear. Early Christians sometimes met in upper rooms, but since they also met in other places as well, there no precedent is established by these times they met in upper rooms. The Christians in Jerusalem "had all things in common." But this was to meet a particular emergency there and is never mentioned as being practiced by Christians anywhere else. These, then, are cases of examples that are not binding.

On the other hand, there are some practices that clearly do meet the above criteria. In all of the recorded cases of conversion in the book of Acts, people were baptized. This clearly, then, was a regular, consistent practice and also corresponds with commands that are given. Thus, both command and example show that baptism for forgiveness of sins is God's teaching to us.

We have no command, however, about the particular day in which Christians are to meet to take the Lord's Supper. Yet we seek to know God's will about when to take it. We know, both from scripture and from history, that the practice of the early church, under apostolic guidance, was to meet on the first day of each week and, at that time, to take of the Lord's Supper. Thus, we have a clear precedent as to the day for Christians to meet and observe the communion. We can observe the supper on that day and know we are within what will please God. To observe it on some other day is to venture into the territory of not being assured it will please God.

There is, likewise, no command for churches to have elders as their shepherds, but such was clearly the approved, common practice of the early church. And since all of these cases indicate that there was a group of elders and not just one, we practice having more than one elder in each congregation.

By example we know what the early Christians did when they came together: they prayed, one or more than one spoke to the assembly, they contributed their means, they took the Lord's supper, and they sang. These things we can do knowing we are following the approved example of the early church. Other forms of worship that are not commanded and for which there is no example, would clearly be excluded. The use of instruments in Christian worship, for instance, is neither commanded nor is there an example. To use instruments for worship, then, is both to do what is not commanded and to do that for which there is no apostolic precedent. For those who are committed to the apostolic plan, then, the use of such instruments would be excluded.

C. If we have understood a passage properly, we also ask whether there is an implication in the passage from which we are to make a necessary inference. Some say we should not use this method because it is based on human logic. But following commands requires the use of the mind to understand language and the use of examples is based on the mental ability of establishing a precedent from cases (a form of reasoning by generalization). So to eliminate basic functions of the mind for reasoning and for language would leave us with no ability to use scripture. As shown earlier, reasoning is part of the mental capability God gave us and, as seen in scripture, He clearly intends that we use it in understanding His Word.

There are many examples of the use of inference in our study of scripture. The strength of the inference, of course, depends on the certainty of the premises. When Matthew 3:16, for example, says that after Jesus' baptism he came "up out of the water," we may correctly infer that He went down into the water. Thus, His baptism was by immersion. We reason the same way about the nature of baptism in the case of the Ethiopian in Acts 8:38-9: "and they both went down into the water, both Philip and the eunuch; and he baptized him. And when they came up out of the water, the Spirit of the Lord caught away Philip." If they both went down into the water and both came up out of the water, then the baptism was by immersion for in no other method of baptism do people enter the water. We draw this conclusion through inference. Concluding that baptism is by immersion because it was a burial (Romans 6:4) is also making a necessary inference.

Nowhere in scripture are we told specifically that the Sabbath provision has been taken away. When we read, however, that Christ has "blotted out the bond written in ordinances" (Colossians 2:14), we understand that the Sabbath provision would be included in what is blotted out. In another case, the Bible teaches that elders are to be the husband of one wife. From this we infer that only men can be elders because only men can be husbands.

The interpretation of figures of speech almost always involves inference. We first know that figurative language is being used because we reason that a more literal interpretation would be impossible or unlikely. Since, for example, the Bible teaches us to respect our bodies and care for them, we believe Jesus is using hyperbole when he says to "pluck out your eye." The reasoning goes like this: if what Jesus asks us to do contradicts other Bible teaching, He must be making His point through a figure of speech. "Pluck out your eye" does contradict other teaching. Therefore, He must be using a figure.

To give another case, when John speaks of "antichrists" in I John 2:18-22, he says that there will be many, that they had already started coming in his day, and that their identifying characteristic would be to deny that Jesus is the Christ. From these statements we infer that John's use of "antichrist" is not a prediction of a great political ruler who comes shortly before the end of time.

Again, if there are no contradictions in the Bible, then Paul and James must have used the word "works" in a different sense when they said different things about works. Our inference is that since the Bible does not contradict itself, then Paul and James are in harmony and therefore they use the word works in a different sense.

If we were denied the use of inference, we would have great difficulty in applying the message of scripture to our lives today. An inference is only as good as the premises on which it is based and one must take other cautions in making the inference to be accurate, but to say that we cannot reason to conclusions based on scripture would be to take away the intelligence with which God expects us to come to scripture.

Conclusion

So what is our conclusion? Many important principles must be used in interpreting the meaning of scriptures. The use of "command, example, and necessary inference," however, is an important tool for making application of scripture to our own lives once we have determined what the passage meant to those who first received it. The use of "command, example, and necessary inference" were not invented by the Restoration Movement or by any theologian. They are processes of thought common to man and which God expects us to use as we come to scripture. Like all processes of interpretation, they must be used carefully and one can use them to come to right conclusions or misuse them and come to wrong ones. Because they can be abused, however, we must not cast them aside. We must use them correctly for should we fail to do so, we would not understand God's will for us today.

The Classification of Bible Commands

by Wayne Jackson

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The Bible contains a variety of literature types. It has, for example, historical narrative. Genesis 1-2 (and related contexts) is the only reliable account of the origin of the Universe and of mankind in existence. The Scriptures contain lofty poetry and powerful prophecy.

All of that aside, however, every honest student must also admit that the Bible is a book of law (cf. Isa. 2:2-4; Jer. 31:33; 1 Cor. 9:21; Gal. 6:2). It contains commands that are to be obeyed. A consideration of various classifications of biblical commands can be a helpful study.

Moral and religious commands

Commands may be classified as either moral or religious. Moral commands have to do with man's relationship to his fellows, whereas religious laws involve humanity's reconciliation to the Creator.

Commandments like, "You shall not steal," and "You shall not commit adultery," are moral in thrust, and they are designed to create the kind of healthy, happy environment which facilitates man's service to Jehovah.

Laws such as those which involve the offering of sacrifices (Old Testament) and baptism (New Testament) are religious obligations which are intended to test man's loyalty to God. Is one willing to do precisely what the Lord says as a demonstration of his trust, i.e. faith, in his Maker?

Positive and negative commands

Another classification is that of positive and negative commands. Positive commands enjoin a responsibility, and negative commands prohibit wrong-doing.

When Jesus instituted the Lord's supper, He said: "This do in remembrance of me" (cf. 1 Cor. 11:24). This was a positive command. Those who neglect the observance of the communion upon the first day of the week (Acts 20:7) have violated one of the Savior's positive commands.

When the inspired writer declared, "Lie not one to another" (Col. 3:9), he gave a negative command. In this day, being "negative" is disdained in the theories of modern psychology. But perhaps it might be well to remind ourselves that eight of the Ten Commandments were negative. Jehovah's thoughts do not necessarily harmonize with modern trends (Isa. 55:8-9).

Generic and specific commands

Generic commands enjoin a general obligation, the implementation of which is left to the judgment of the individual. When Jesus said: "Go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel to the whole creation" (Mk. 16:15), the imperative "Go" (a participle used in the imperative sense - cf. Friberg) is generic, thus granting evangelistic options.

One may “go” personally (by means of plane, automobile, etc.), or he might “go” indirectly (literature, recordings, support of others, etc.).

Specific commands declare the precise manner of implementing the divine ordinance. On the day of Pentecost, Peter did not command the believing Jews to “make some application of water;” rather, he commanded “be immersed,” and the specificity of that injunction contains no authority for either the sprinkling or pouring of “baptismal” water.

Universal and limited commands

Not all commands recorded in the Bible were for the whole human race. The command to observe the Passover feast annually (Ex. 12:14) was never an obligation to any but the Hebrew nation. On the other hand, the call to repent of personal sin is a requirement of all men everywhere (Acts 17:30). Christ once issued this directive: “Tarry ye in the city, until ye be clothed with power from on high” (Lk. 24:49). That obligation was certainly not universal, but only to the apostles. However, the responsibility to be immersed in order to receive salvation is as universal as the ability to believe in the Lord (Mk. 16:15-16).

One must carefully consider the context of Bible commands to know whether or not the individual injunction is required of him or her.

Temporal and permanent commands

Not all commands listed in the Scriptures were intended to last forever. The divine command, “Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy” (Ex. 20:8) was operative only so long as the law of Moses was in effect. The Mosaic system was a “schoolmaster” to prepare the Jewish nation (and through them the Gentiles as well) for the coming of the Messiah. When Christ had accomplished His holy mission, that law (hence, the sabbath command) expired (Gal. 3:24-25). Those who attempt sabbath observance today are looking in vain to an obsolete law.

The imperative, “Desire spiritual gifts” (1 Cor. 14:1), would surely not be applicable in this age, since spiritual gifts have long since passed from the church’s possession (cf. 1 Cor. 13:8ff).

On the other hand, when Jesus, with reference to marriage, charged: “What therefore God hath joined together, let not man put asunder” (Mt. 19:6), He issued a prohibitive that would be binding throughout the Christian era. New Testament marriage regulations are designed to last as long as the institution itself prevails.

Some have alleged that water baptism was only a temporary requirement which became obsolete by the time the book of Acts had been completed, but Matthew 28:18-20 contains the implication that the ordinance would be an obligation unto the end of the world.

Commands of the Bible must be carefully analyzed. When it is determined that they apply to us, we must humbly submit to them.

Generic and Specific Authority

When we talk about generic and specific authority we are saying that the Bible contains both statements that are general and statements that are more specific. Generic authority is simply the realm of unspecified options that a command may or may not give us, depending on the language of the command. In a command, God may be specific about “who”, “what”, and “how”, but leave the “where” and “when” general. For example in *Matthew 28:19* “*Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations,*” the method of going is generic. Therefore we can walk, ride, take a plane, ship, and so on, all these unspecified options are in the general command to “go.” On the other hand, the “who” is specific: those who are Christians (*Acts 8:4*). And “what” is also specific: convert people and then teach them further (*28:20*). Then again, the “method” of teaching is generic. The generic options for “make disciples” and “teaching them” (*28:20*) could include sermons, lecture, classes or men and women, classes for various ages, filmstrips, radio, overheads, lesson books, handouts, and all other methods of teaching.

“How can the church remain current and yet still be the church of the first century?” In addition, generic and specific authority also addresses the question, “How could God write the Bible in such a way as to give us everything we need in this age (*2 Peter 1:3*; *2 Timothy 3:16-17*), without being so cumbersome and massive that it would be impractical?” “How could God let us know what are options, without having to detail every possible option?” “And how could God let us know that our options have been greatly limited or excluded to one choice, without having to specifically forbid every possible option that someone might select?”

Generic and Specific in the Old Testament

- Noah and the Ark: *Genesis 6:14-16*

Virtually every command in the Bible has both general and specific elements. The more specific the statement or instruction, the fewer options we are being given. The more general the command, the more options man is being given. We need to view commands as a hallway, in which some doors are opened and some are closed. Some things are bound and some are loosed (*Matthew 18:18*). In reference to the Ark: The type of wood was specific, “gopher wood” excluded all other types of wood, yet the location from which the wood was to be gathered is unspecified. The precise dimensions of the ark exclude any other size or ratio. Noah would have been disobeying God, if he had built the ark with different dimensions, but based on the same ratio between height, width and length. It had to have a door, but the placement of the door in the side still gave Noah the option of choosing the exact location on the side. The word “make” (*6:14*) is general, and includes all the tools, scaffolding, and everything needed to complete the task.

When God specifies something that excludes everything else in the same realm (that is, “gopher” wood excludes all other varieties of wood). Therefore, a thing does not have to be specifically forbidden in the Scriptures to be wrong. We can never accept the argument, “Well the bible does not say that I can't do it”, as the final factor in determining if something is lawful. We must always first ask, “What did the command say?” “Are we dealing with a realm of specific or generic authority?” In addition, something does not have to be specifically stated, in order for it to be lawful. Noah could have used whatever tools he needed to build the ark, even though tools are not specifically mentioned in the command, they are authorized by the general command “make”.

- The Passover Lamb: *Exodus 12:5*

“Unblemished” excluded diseased animals, and yet left some human judgment for choosing between a number of prime specimens. “A male” naturally excludes a female.

- Uzzah and the Ark of the Covenant: 2 Samuel 6:3-6

Later David will point out that in placing the ark on a new cart, the priests had not followed God's specific instructions concerning how the ark was to be moved (*1 Chronicles 15:2* “*No one is to carry the ark of God but the Levites*”). Even though no command said, “The tribe of Judah shall not carry the Ark”, when God specified Levi as the proper tribe, that specific statement excluded all other tribes (*Deuteronomy 10:8; Numbers 4:15*). David now understood this truth, because this is what God had written (*1 Chronicles 15:15*). God did not accept the argument that we can keep the God's Law, yet at the same time ignore or change the details in the law. God's actions on this occasion clearly establish the point that when He gives specific instructions, He expects us to obey.

- Nadab and Abihu: Leviticus 10:1-3

Maurice notes, “It was not that God had specifically forbidden them the fire they used, but rather he had specified what fire they must use. They used fire from another source. *Leviticus 16:12* specifies that God wanted them to use fire for the incense from the altar of burnt offering. God did not have to go down a list of other sources of fire, specifically forbidding each source, for them to know what fire to use” (p. 16).

In The New Testament

- Mark 7:1-8:

“What Scripture did the Jews violate when they insisted on the washing of hands before eating? Could they have rightfully argued that the Law did not say not to? The Law did not specifically forbid the practice, but the Law did not authorize it either, and that's the point” (*Barnett p. 27*).

- Ephesians 5:19:

The only realm of music authorized by this or other passages in the New Testament is "singing". If God had simply said, “praise God with music” then any form of music would have been authorized, yet the category to “make music” is not found in the N.T. The specific category is to sing psalms, hymns and spiritual songs. At the same time the verse has a number of options concerning singing: number of songs, order of songs, chromatic scale, chant, four-part harmony, volume-tempo, song leader, and songbooks. It is easy to forget the "freedom" that is found in generic and specific authority. Maurice notes, “The verbs "speaking" and "teaching and admonishing", are active voice. This requires action for all those addressed. The tense of the verbs is present participle, showing action in progress. The word translated "one another" is reciprocal action taken by two or more with "one another"” (p. 28). He points out that this is a verse that can't be fulfilled when singing all by yourself.

- Hebrews 10:24-25:

The command not to forsake the assembly implies that Christians are commanded to assemble, which in turn authorizes a place to assemble. The place is generic, which would give us the options or choices of a rented hall, purchased building, leased office space, and so on. It also authorizes the things needed when people assemble for worship, such as a place to sit, restrooms, lighting and so on.

How God Does Not Authorize

God does not authorize:

1. upon the basis of my personal likes and dislikes.
2. upon the basis of erroneous conclusions which I may reach.
3. upon the basis of my opinions or the opinions of others.
4. upon the basis of what is popular.
5. upon the basis of what may be the consensus of some group.
6. upon the basis of what some well-known and highly respected brother teaches or may have taught.
7. upon the basis of human traditions.
8. upon the basis of my inability to "see any harm in it."
9. upon the basis of long-standing practices.
10. upon the basis of the silence of the Scriptures.

Anti-ism	Liberalism	Postmodernism
Makes laws that God did not make	Denies God's laws	Dismisses God's authority; unwilling to make any judgments
Treats matters of opinion as if they were matters of faith	Treats matters of faith as if they were matters of opinion	Treats matters of faith and opinion as relative—there are no absolutes.
Seeks to bind where God has not bound	Seeks to loose where God has bound	Tolerance of all views; unwillingness to judge any view; each man is his own authority.
<p style="text-align: center;">John 8:31-32; Matt. 15:1-14; 2 John 9-11; Rev. 22:18-19; Gal. 1:6-9</p>		

Insufficient Standards
Kippy Myers, Freed-Hardeman University

As the bank returns a hot check stamped "insufficient funds," so one day God will turn away our self-serving standards of morality and practice as insufficient. Have you heard or used one of these phrases to justify something lately?

I like (Jer. 10:23)
I feel (Gal. 5:16-21)
I want (Acts 8:18-24)
I think (2 Kings 5:1-15)
They do it (1 Sam. 8:4-8)
It seems right (Prov. 14:12)
I am sincere (2 Sam. 6:6.7)
I am always right (2 Cor. 13:5)
No one will see me (Prov. 15:3)
It is for a good cause (Rom. 3:8)
I don't see why not (Acts 5:1-11)
The preacher said so (Gal. 1:6-9)
Others do worse things (Matt. 7:5)
God didn't say not to (Lev. 10:1-2)
God doesn't mind (1 Cor. 2:10-13)
It isn't against the law (Acts 5:26-29)
It hurts no one but me (1 Cor. 8:12-13)
Most people think it is okay (Matt. 7:13-14)
My parents and grandparents did it (Gal. 6:5)
It doesn't bother my conscience (Prov. 30:20)
We have done it this way for years (Josh. 5:2-9)
It's all right if we do it in God's name (Matt. 7:21-23)
God doesn't expect us to be so technical (1 Thess. 5:21-23)

Expediency and Tradition

There are many things commonly practiced among churches, about which the New Testament says nothing. There is no mention in Scripture of church buildings, Bible schools, orphans' homes, baptisteries, public address systems, printing presses, television evangelism, electric lights, overhead projectors, video projectors, and many other such things. Those who have heard the argument from silence often point out the apparent inconsistency of using twenty-first century conveniences in the pursuit of Biblical Christianity. Is one speaking in the silence of God by using modern conveniences to do the work of the church? Is there a realm of freedom for man in doing the will of God? Are we totally confined to doing first century things?

That men should keep safe and multiply copies of the Scriptures is certainly the will of God, but no precept can be found in Scripture as to how the copies should be multiplied, in what languages they should be translated, or how they should be distributed. We are taught to assemble as a church (Heb. 10:25), but no precept in the New Testament can be found for building, buying or possessing meeting houses. Nor is there any precept for what other purposes a meeting house can fulfill. We are taught to baptize (Matt. 28:19), but we have no precept concerning baptisteries. We are taught to remember the Lord's death by partaking of the Lord's Supper (Matt. 26:26-29; 1 Cor. 11:23-26); yet we have no precept whatsoever about tables, trays, containers for the fruit of the vine, or at what hour during the first day of the week we should partake. We are taught that marriage is honorable (Heb. 13:4), but "whoever read a verse on the manner in which this most important of all social institutions is to be performed?"⁴⁰

What is An Expedient?

An expedient is that which aids, helps or profits one in keeping God's instructions. When God requires or authorizes an action, He permits men to use their good judgment to find the most beneficial means of accomplishing that action. Expediency is not a license to perform unauthorized actions; it can only expedite what has already been authorized or required. Expedients are appropriate in the fulfillment of unspecified or generic commandments. Some examples of expedients include:

1. **Gen. 6:14-16.** What tools did Noah use to build the ark or to apply the pitch? Noah did all that God commanded him (7:5).
2. **Ex. 32:1-6.** Bezalel and Oholiab were given gifts by God to construct the tabernacle in the pattern that God showed Moses. We are not told what tools they used to work with wood, metal and various other materials, but we know they did exactly what God commanded them to do (Ex. 39:32,43).
3. **Acts 16:9-12.** Paul obeyed the Macedonian call by taking a ship across the Aegean Sea. Though a ship is not specifically mentioned, Paul used good judgment and concluded that he should go to Macedonia.

Expedients are not additions. Expedients carry out that which has been commanded or authorized. Expedients carry out that which is lawful. Additions go beyond the law to actions different from that specified in the instruction. Expediency can offer the freedom to use good

⁴⁰Alexander Campbell, *The Christian System*, see pages 71-75.

judgment in doing that, which is specified, but expediency can never authorize new and different instructions.

Expedients are lawful when the command is unspecified or generic. To obey God one must do what God has said, in the way or manner in which He says do it, and for the reason, or reasons, that He gives for doing it. If God has specified what to do and how to do it, it must be done exactly the way He has specified. If God has specified what to do but not how, or when, or where to do it, the “how” or “when” or “where” is left to one’s better judgment. It is wrong to loose where God has bound, i.e., when He has been specific. It is equally wrong to bind where God has not bound, i.e., when He has not been specific.

The Difference between Expedients and Additions

Expedients Help Fulfill the Instruction, but Additions Change the Instruction.

Bible Example	Expedient Lawful and Authorized	Addition Unlawful and Unauthorized
Noah’s Ark Gen. 6:13-22	Tools to cut, join, and to spread pitch	Larger size, additional windows, additional woods
Tabernacle Ex. 25:9,40; 26:30 Ex. 39:32,42,43	Tools to work silver, gold, and wood in making the tabernacle and its furniture.	Making ark of covenant out of both acacia and pine wood
Lord’s Supper Bread and Fruit of the Vine	Trays and Cups to hold bread and fruit of vine	Roast Lamb
Baptize, Be Baptized	Baptistery, pool, river, lake, or bathtub	Sprinkle and pouring Are different actions.
Singing Eph. 5:19; Col. 3:16; Heb. 13:15	Songbook, pitch pipe, to aid singing in unison	Piano, Organ Different kind of music (not speaking, not with lips) Different means of praise

What is a Tradition?

1. The word "tradition" comes from the Greek term *paradosis*, which means "handing down or handing over." This refers to a belief or a practice that has been handed down from an authority and is to be observed. Webster defines the term as "a long-held belief or practice passed down from one generation to the next."
2. Today people often refer to a practice as a tradition, not meaning that one *must perform it*, but meaning that *we routinely do it that way*.
3. Whenever the New Testament speaks of "tradition," it uses the word in such a way that it is in the minds of those who practice it morally wrong to go against it. When the Pharisees accused Jesus of not observing the “tradition of the elders,” they were accusing Him of sin (Matt. 15:1,2; Mark 7:1-5).

Biblical Use of the Word “Tradition”

1. **Apostolic Tradition.** These are things God demands of us

- a. **1 Cor 11:2** The word "deliver" is the verb form of "tradition." In 1 Cor 11:23 the Lord's supper is a divine tradition that we must keep if we are to please the Lord. 1 Cor. 15:1-3 speaks of the gospel as a "received" and a "delivered" message—a tradition.
 - b. **2 Thess. 2:15.** Traditions taught by mouth or in an epistle.
 - c. **2 Thess 3:6.** The apostolic tradition has the force of a command
2. **Human Traditions.** These are beliefs and practices *men have judged* that one must do in order to be pleasing to God.
- a. **Matt 15:1-14** The Pharisees regarded unwritten tradition ("oral law") as no less binding than the written Law in the Old Testament.
 - Jesus by not washing his hands "according to the traditions of the fathers" was being accused of a "heavier guilt" than if he had sinned against the revealed law of Moses.
 - Jesus' response is a condemnation of man-made laws 15:8-9,13-14
 - b. **Col. 2:8** Traditions of false religions and philosophies; these are not mere opinions but idolatrous religions.
3. **The Modern Use of "Tradition"**
- a. The Modern use of the word "tradition" is a broader term than that used in the Bible in that it refers to habitual practices or routines or customs (things that are usually practiced but not sinful if left undone).
 - b. Some examples of things we "traditionally" do:
 - Times of Services
 - Three Songs and a Prayer
 - Invitation Hymn
 - Gathering Contribution with Lord's Supper
 - c. These are expedient, helpful practices that we have continued to do because they work

An expedient becomes a human tradition only when men have judged that belief or practice as morally necessary in order to be pleasing to God. Most traditions begin as expedients, but an expedient is not a human tradition until men presumptuously take it upon themselves to bind it. Simply because something is done routinely does not make that practice a "tradition." It is when men claim that this expedient must be practiced in the humanly prescribed way or sin occurs that the expedient becomes a human tradition. If a routine practice may be changed without consequent sin, then it is not a tradition. *If a routine practice may be changed without the loss of fellowship, then it is not a "tradition" in the Biblical sense.*

People today should be careful not to bind an expedient and thus make it a human tradition; and people should be careful not to break fellowship with other Christians over expediency. Wise and good Christian men will often disagree as to what is the best course of action. In matters of opinion and expediency, the law of love and liberty must prevail.

Salvation Issues

Of all things, nothing comes so precious as salvation. Even though it was a gift to us, our salvation comes at the price of the blood of an unblemished Lamb, the blood of Jesus Christ our Lord. Our Father has determined that our souls are worth more than the whole world. Jesus asks, “what will a man give in exchange for his soul” (Matt. 16:26)? Salvation matters because our souls matter. We must never trivialize that which the Lord values so greatly. While salvation by the grace of God is free, it is not cheap.

Some are saying that Jesus Christ did not die on the cross over the instrumental music issue. They claim that the centrality of the cross to our salvation leaves no place for such unimportant things. They are suggesting that what we believe on peripheral issues do not matter. “Jesus did not die over instrumental music.” They believe that the kind of music we use, whether singing or instrumental, is a “non-salvation issue.” They place the instrument issue as a matter of expediency and tradition. While they “prefer” not to use the instrument but to maintain “our” tradition, they do not believe the issue has anything to do with the salvation of the soul.

Is instrumental music a “salvation” issue?

We must be careful not to answer this question too quickly. We desire neither to condemn the innocent nor to excuse the guilty. We desire neither to restrict unnecessarily nor to give false assurance. We wish neither to support human tradition nor to neglect the Divine tradition (2 Thess. 2:15). In asking this question, other important matters must first arise and be answered. What is sinful? Does one sin by adding an instrument to His worship in song? Is adding to the teaching or practice of New Testament Christianity sinful? Does the Lord expect us to obey all His commandments with equal force and consequences? Has God been specific enough in His instructions that we might truly know His will? If indeed we know His will, are we obligated to keep all of it? Can we continue in “trivial” error and still be saved? Do we have any example of others innovating and being lost? Are there any commandments which we can dismiss, ignore or reject and still remain pleasing to Him?

Ultimately the question comes down to understanding the balance between the grace of God and the obedience God expects from those who follow Him. There are some questions we cannot answer with regard to salvation. We may ask, “How far can one continue in sin and not lose his salvation?” Only God can answer that question. Persisting in willful sin *will* cause one to lose his soul (Heb. 10:26-29), but we dare not suggest we know where that line is. An issue of “sin” is not identical to an issue of “salvation,” since one may repent of sin and so change the state of his salvation. The more accurate question is whether the use of the instrument in worship is sinful.

Some have decided simply to dismiss the issue, thinking that the grace of God covers any doctrinal sin practiced in ignorance. Some are even suggesting that while moral sin demands repentance, one may continue to practice doctrinal error in ignorance with impunity. They reason that people, after all, are judged only by what they understand. If people do not understand the instrument is sinful, then they will escape any judgment for its use in Christian worship. They believe what they do ignorantly without express instruction from God is still pleasing to God. Ignorance of the law, however, does not excuse. Satan blinds men to the truth and leads them into error. Paul’s ignorant persecution of the church still required enlightenment, repentance and forgiveness. He could not remain ignorant and please God. Paul said he lived in all good conscience, but as the chief of sinners he stood in need of the grace of God (Acts 23:1; 1 Tim. 1:12-16). Indeed a blind man who follows a blind leader will fall into a pit with him (Matt. 15:13).

David acted ignorantly by bringing the ark of the covenant up from Kiriath-jearim with an oxcart rather than by means of the Levites (1 Chron. 13:7-12). When Uzzah touched the ark at the threshing floor of Chidon, God's anger burned against him. God struck Uzzah down for his act of irreverence (2 Sam. 6:7) in touching the ark. Fearfully and too late David asked, "How can I bring the ark of God home to me?" Because David failed to ask how to transport the ark in the first place, he set up the circumstances that led to Uzzah's death. Ignorance did not excuse David or Uzzah. Interestingly, David grew angry at God over the matter.

David's anger at the Lord for this outburst (1 Chron. 13:11) is typical of many today who do not want to face the fact that their practice is unacceptable. No one wishes to hear that he is doing wrong. Human pride blinds one to the truth, and men will go to great lengths to excuse their errors. David couldn't see why the Lord acted so harshly over such a small matter. So very human, David could not see as God sees. What is little or "picky" in man's eyes may not be little or "picky" to God. God is not petty, and it is often our ignorance that regards things important to God as if they were petty. God "burned" with anger over this irreverence. He demands the obedience in all things which proclaims Him as holy. We must be careful not to make peripheral those things that are not peripheral at all. Whether we obey God's instructions is never trivial or peripheral.

David learned from this experience to avoid presumption. We cannot presume that we can act as we please in things related to God. Permissive acts fail to ask what the will of God is. Their sin is that they ignore what God says to pursue their own ends. David failed to ask what God desired in the transporting of the ark and ignorantly presumed⁴¹ that his own way was all right. He learned the hard way that God is offended by such presumption. In Psalm 19:13 David prayed to God, "keep back Thy servant from presumptuous sins; Let them not rule over me; Then I shall be blameless, And I shall be acquitted of great transgression." Presumption is great transgression because it ignores the authority of God and His word (cf. Psalm 19:7-12). It assumes that it can act outside the written will of God and accomplish its own desires.

God is not glorified, however, by presumptuous acts. He considers them irreverent. We may convince ourselves that we are doing God a service, as David did, when in fact we are offending Him by acting outside His expressed instructions. When there is no instruction, what was meant to serve God may turn out to offend God. No God-loving servant seeks to do that. When David saw that his service to God was displeasing, He sought out the will of God and became obedient. He learned that the Levites were to carry the ark upon their shoulders--and none but the Levites (1 Chron. 15:2). David acted presumptuously when he failed to do precisely what God prescribed in the matter.

Sin condemns, and any discussion of salvation must include sin. Before we can determine whether or not using instruments in musical worship is a salvation issue, we must ask whether or not their use is sinful. John defines sin as "the transgression of the law" (1 John 3:4) or simply "lawlessness." Sin is indeed a frame of mind that encourages acting outside the law of God and doing as one desires. Sin sets aside the commandments and instructions of Christ, determining that its own will is more important than the will of God. Sin is personally offensive to God, because it

⁴¹ We are speaking here of presuming without authority, not the defiant rebellious sin mentioned in Numbers 15:27-31. Whether one acted in ignorance or in defiance, both acts are sinful. Even the ignorant or unintentional sin required atonement. The term in Psalm 19:13 reflects an act of pride or insolence, whereas the term in Numbers 15 reflects a defiant attitude for which there is no forgiveness. God considers acting without His instruction as a prideful or arrogant act.

denies Him His place as the one and only Ruler of all. Some want a Christianity without rules, but there can be no reigning King and Lord if there are no laws or rules.

Jesus speaks of the necessity of yielding to the will of God and His displeasure with lawlessness in Matthew 7:21-23,

“Not everyone who says to Me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the kingdom of heaven; but he who does the will of My Father who is in heaven. Many will say to Me on that day, 'Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in Your name, and in Your name cast out demons, and in Your name perform many miracles?' And then I will declare to them, 'I never knew you; depart from Me, you who practice lawlessness.'”

Jesus further defines doing the will of the Father by contrasting those who obey His words with those who do not (Matt. 7:24-27). He calls “wise” the person who listens to His words and acts *upon them*. This man does what he has been instructed. The “foolish” man, on the other hand, has heard what God says but *fails to act upon those words*. The wise man stands God’s test, but the foolish man fails and falls greatly. God’s wrath will come upon all who act upon their own will and ignore His words.

To this day, no one has shown in the New Testament that Christians worshipped God acceptably with instruments of music. There is no instruction to the church that God desires worship with an instrument. There are no commands, no examples, and no implications in the New Testament that the early church used them or even wanted to. Considering that Jews and pagans of the first century regularly worshipped with instruments, this silence about them among Christians speaks out loudly. Christians did not use them. Their decision to avoid instruments was not an accident or a coincidence. The vehement opposition in later centuries to instrumental music as pagan and morally corrupting is well-documented.

God instructs us clearly to sing psalms and hymns and spiritual songs from the heart with our lips (Eph. 5:19; Col. 3:16; Heb. 13:15). The Lord was interested in men worshipping Him in spirit and in truth (John 4:24). The New Testament emphasizes the heartfelt singing of meaningful words, offering up the fruit of the lips as a sacrifice. The New Testament instruction is silent with regard to the use of instruments of music in the worship of Christians. To justify their use, instruments must be “read into” the text. Adherents of the instrument must redefine words or look into other dispensations to find justification for their desires. They do this in spite of the fact that the early Christians never had such understandings. Foolishly, they are not acting upon the words of Jesus; and the consequence of this presumption is a great fall. Presumption is sin, and any sin can affect our salvation.

Is instrumental music a “salvation” issue?

If presumption is great sin and brings destruction as a consequence, then to act presumptuously by playing an instrument of music in worship is sinful and can cause one to be lost. It can become a salvation issue, when people ignore the holiness of God and persist in self-made religion. It is no sign of maturity or spirituality to risk one’s soul and the souls of others to do as one pleases.

Note Appendix

Stafford North, *"What Hermeneutic Does the Bible Teach for Itself,"* 1990 OCC Lectureship, pp. 14-17.

A Guide to Biblical Exegesis

Exegesis

A systematic process by which a person arrives at a reasonable and coherent sense of the meaning and message of a biblical passage

Goal

- to explain what the text meant to its original audience and in its original historical setting to explain what the text means for today

Three Steps to Biblical Exegesis

Observation: "What does the author say?"

Begin by reading the passage, perhaps a few times

- use a good translation; it may help to read a few translations
- be sure to take account of the translation methodology
- read the larger context; the chapter or letter or book

Determine the limits of the passage

- where does the writer begin/end the thought / story?

Note your specific observations concerning the passage

- what key words, images, symbols are used?
- where else are key words used by the same writer? By other biblical writers? Outside the Bible
- what characters appear and what are their relationships?
- what issues are addressed in the passage?
- are there any variant readings noted in the footnotes?
- is there a particular literary form (genre) to take note of (e.g., letter; healing; parable)?
- are there any structuring devices used in the text (e.g., parallelism; proofs)?
- what emphases does the writer place on the text?
- are there any parallel texts inside or outside of the Bible
- is there any independent confirmation of the events recorded?

Ask yourself what cultural assumptions you might be making; e.g., economic, health, family

Use commentaries, dictionaries, atlas, etc. only when necessary

Interpretation: "What did the author mean?"

Socio-historical context: What is the author's and audience's situation?

- politics; geography; topography; demographics; customs
- use a good Bible dictionary, atlas, encyclopedia
- for whom was it written?
- what issue(s) does the passage address?

Literary context

- interpretation goes along with genre
 - is the passage narrative, poetic, parable, etc.?
 - should it be interpreted literally or figuratively?
- focus on significant words, phrases, statements

- what is its meaning (definitions; contextualize)?
- what is its significance in the passage?
- what is implied by the use of this term or phrase or grammatical structure?

Rhetorical context: what is the significance of the progression in the thought pattern?

- what was the author trying to convey to the audience - e.g., theological truths, practical advice?
- what types of responses did the author expect on the basis of writing this passage?

Concisely summarize the primary ideas of the passage; what is the author trying to convey?

Application: "What does it mean for me?"

This step involves the move from text to sermon or Bible study

This is the point at which hermeneutics comes to the fore

- moving from one social context to another
- that is, moving from the ancient world to our own world(s)

What was the author's purpose in writing this passage?

Did the author accomplish this purpose?

Does the passage contain "universal truths" (applicable in all ages) or "contextual truths" (applicable for a certain period of history)? Know how and why you make the distinction between these two "truths"

How does the passage fit with the whole message of the Bible?

Ask yourself the following questions:

- what am I to believe?
- what am I to do (actions, attitudes, sin)?
- what do I learn about relationships?
- what is the good news for me?

Now ask "how would that be initiated in my life?"

Beware of reading twenty-first century cultural norms into a passage.

Ask how you can address your particular audience

- how can you best explain the original meaning of the text?
- how can you help others connect with the truths of the text?

Be sure to understand your audience as best you can.

Use a format appropriate for your audience (e.g., sermon/homily; Bible study; case study; drama).

Exegesis of Acts 8:26-40

26 But an angel of the Lord spoke to Philip saying, "Arise and go south to the road that descends from Jerusalem to Gaza." (This is a desert road.) And he arose and went; and behold, there was an Ethiopian eunuch, a court official of Candace, queen of the Ethiopians, who was in charge of all her treasure; and he had come to Jerusalem to worship.

28 And he was returning and sitting in his chariot, and was reading the prophet Isaiah.

And the Spirit said to Philip, "Go up and join this chariot." And when Philip had run up, he heard him reading Isaiah the prophet, and said, "Do you understand what you are reading?"

31 And he said, "Well, how could I, unless someone guides me?" And he invited Philip to come up and sit with him.

32 Now the passage of Scripture which he was reading was this: "HE WAS LED AS A SHEEP TO SLAUGHTER; AND AS A LAMB BEFORE ITS SHEARER IS SILENT, SO HE DOES NOT OPEN HIS MOUTH. IN HUMILIATION HIS JUDGMENT WAS TAKEN AWAY; WHO SHALL RELATE HIS GENERATION? FOR HIS LIFE IS REMOVED FROM THE EARTH."

34 And the eunuch answered Philip and said, "Please tell me, of whom does the prophet say this? Of himself, or of someone else?"

35 And Philip opened his mouth, and beginning from this Scripture he preached Jesus to him. And as they went along the road they came to some water; and the eunuch said, "Look! Water! What prevents me from being baptized?"

37 And Philip said, "If you believe with all your heart, you may." And he answered and said, "I believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God."

38 And he ordered the chariot to stop; and they both went down into the water, Philip as well as the eunuch; and he baptized him.

And when they came up out of the water, the Spirit of the Lord snatched Philip away; and the eunuch saw him no more, but went on his way rejoicing. But Philip found himself at Azotus; and as he passed through he kept preaching the gospel to all the cities, until he came to Caesarea.

Observation: "What Does the author say?"

- Where does the writer begin/end the thought story?
- What key words, images, symbols are used? (Isa. 53:7-8)
- Where else are key words used by the same writer? other Biblical writers?
 - Lamb (John 1:29; 1 Pet. 1:18-19)
 - Baptism
 - Spirit of the Lord
- what characters appear and what are their relationships?

Ethiopian Eunuch, treasurer of Queen Candace. The primary meaning is 'court officer'. In Hebrew a secondary meaning is found, namely, a 'castrate' or 'eunuch'. From Herodotus we learn that 'in eastern countries eunuchs are valued as being specially trustworthy in every way' (8. 105, Selincourt). Such persons were frequently employed by eastern rulers as officers of the household. Hence, in the East it is sometimes difficult to know which of the two meanings is intended or whether both are implied. Potiphar (Gn. 39:1), who was married (7), is called a sārîs (LXX eunouchos): the meaning 'court officer' may be best here. In the New Testament the word eunouchos is used, and may be derived from eunēn echō ('to keep the bed'). Like its counterpart sārîs, it need not denote strictly a castrate. In Acts 8:27 both meanings may be intended.⁴²

Philip the evangelist (see Acts 6:1-7; 8:5-13; 21:8-10)

- what issues are addressed in the passage?
 - Can a person understand Scripture without the help of a preacher? (1 Cor. 1:21)

LXX Septuagint (Gk. version of OT)

⁴²Douglas, J. New Bible Dictionary. electronic ed. of 2nd ed. Wheaton, IL: Tyndale House, 1982; Published in electronic form by Logos Research Systems, 1996. Page 356.

- are there any variant readings noted in the footnotes?

Acts 8:37 is inserted by late manuscripts. The earliest known manuscript that contains the words dates from the sixth century (E). However the tradition of the Ethiopian's confession of faith in Christ was current as early as the latter part of the second century, for Irenaeus quotes part of it (*Against Heresies*, 3.12.8). The formula, "I believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God," was doubtless used by the early church in baptismal ceremonies, and may have been written in the margin of a copy of Acts. Its insertion into the text seems to have been due to the feeling that Philip could not have baptized the Ethiopian without securing a confession of faith, which needed to be expressed in the narrative.⁴³

- is there a particular literary form (genre) to take note of (e.g., letter; healing; parable)? narrative.
- did the passage have a source? do we have access to that source? Luke, inspired of the Holy Spirit

Interpretation: "What did the author mean?"

Socio-historical context: What is the author's and audience's situation?

Luke originally wrote this story for Theophilus to describe the beginnings of the church. Theophilus is a Greek name and means "God-lover."

Literary context

- focus on significant words, phrases, statements
"preach" (evangelize) Jesus
baptized (immersed)
believe (what it means to believe)
- what is its meaning (definitions; contextualize)?
The Eunuch, learning the true fulfillment of Isaiah's prophecy and wanting to follow Jesus, believed and followed Jesus
- what is its significance in the passage?
The example of a preacher preaching and a convert's response

Application: "What does it mean for me?"

This step involves the move from text to sermon or Bible study

This is the point at which hermeneutics comes to the fore

- moving from one social context to another
- that is, moving from the ancient world to our own world

What was the author's purpose in writing this passage?

Does the passage contain "universal truths" (applicable in all ages) or "contextual truths" (applicable for a certain period of history)?

How does the passage fit with the whole message of the Bible?

⁴³ Bruce Metzger, *A Textual Commentary on the Greek New Testament*, UBS, 359-360.

Ask yourself the following questions:

- what am I to believe?
- what am I to do (actions, attitudes, sin)?
- what do I learn about relationships?
- what is the good news for me?

Now ask "how would that be initiated in my life?"

Ask how you can address your particular audience

- how can you best explain the original meaning of the text?

Figures of Speech

There are many figures of speech in the Bible. Many problems occur, because uninformed students interpret a passage literally when they should interpret it figuratively. "It may truly be said that most of the gigantic errors have their root and source, either in figuratively explaining away passages which should be taken literally, or in taking literally what has been thrown into a peculiar form or Figure of language: thus, not only falling into error, but losing the express teaching, and missing the special emphasis which the particular Figure was designed to impart to them." (E.W. Bullinger, *Figures of Speech*, p. xvi.).

"Figurative language is a pervasive feature of human discourse. It lends vivacity to expression and adds depth of meaning. In order to understand any figure, one must of course first recognize the literal meaning and then, by reflecting on the relevant points of similarity, interpret the significance of the figure."

How can we know the language is figurative?

- The sense of the context will indicate it.
- When the literal meaning of a word or sentence involves impossibility.
- If the literal makes a contradiction.
- When the Scriptures are made to demand that which is wrong.
- When it is said to be figurative.
- By the use of common sense.

Important Figures of Speech:

Simile: a comparison of two things in one or more aspects, usually employing the words "like" or "as." Example: "Is not my word like a fire?" declares the Lord, "and like a hammer which shatters a rock?" (Jer. 23:29; cf. Isa. 53:6; Matt. 10:16; 17:2; 23:27).

Metaphor: the comparison of two things without the use of "like" or "as." Example: "You are the salt of the earth" (Matt. 5:13; cf. Gen. 49:27; Matt. 5:14; 7:15; Jude 12,13).

Parable: a comparison, an extended simile; a short, supposed story from real life that points to a moral or spiritual truth. Examples: The Good Samaritan (Luke 10:29-37); The Prodigal Son (Luke 15:11-32); The Ten Virgins (Matt. 25:1-13).

Allegory: an extended metaphor. An allegory differs from a parable, in that a parable typically keeps the story distinct from its interpretation, while an allegory intertwines the story and its meaning. Examples of allegories: the Christian armor (Eph. 6:10-20); the true vine (John 15:1-17); and Paul's allegory of Ishmael and Isaac (Galatians 4).

Fable: an illustration story made by attributing human qualities to animals, plants, and inanimate things. Unlike the parable, which uses characters that are true to life, the fable uses actors that are unreal. There are only two fables in the Bible: Jotham's fable (Judges 9:6-21) and Jehoshaphat's fable (2 Kings 14:9). (The NT uses "fable" as a translation of the word "myth" (μῦθος), which may be

defined as a religious story that has no connection with reality and contrasted with an eyewitness (cf. 1 Tim. 1:4; 4:7; 2 Tim. 4:4; Tit. 1:14; 2 Pet. 1:6).

Personification: representing an inanimate object or abstract idea as endowed with the personal attributes of a human being. Example: "tomorrow will be anxious for itself" (Matt. 6:34; cf. Num. 16:32; Prov. 8:1; Psalm 19:1; Isa. 55:12). The Lord Jesus uses personification in, "O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, killing the prophets and stoning those who are sent to you! How often would I have gathered your children together as a hen gathers her brood under her wings, and you would not!" (Matt. 23:37). The city of Jerusalem is here personified. Our Lord's concern was for its people, yet he addresses the city as if it were they.

Anthropomorphism: the representation or conception of God as having human attributes. Example: the Lord God "walking in the garden in the cool of the day" (Gen. 3:8; cf. Gen. 11:5; Psalm 8:3; Prov. 15:3; Isa. 59:1). God, of course, is spirit (John 4:24) and should not be considered as made of matter (Acts 17:22-30).

Irony: a method of criticizing or judging by seeming to praise or congratulate. Example: Elijah's mockery of the prophets of Baal (1 Kings 18:27; cf. 1 Cor. 4:8-13). The use of irony as a figure of speech, though it has a bite to it, often has its humorous side. Our Lord was using both effects when he said, "...how can you say to your brother, 'Brother, let me take out the speck that is in your eye,' when you yourself do not see the log that is in your own eye?" (Luke 6:42).

Euphemism: a soft or moderate expression for a more direct and perhaps shocking one. For example, those who are dead are called "asleep" (1 Thess. 4:13 cf. Gen. 15:15; 42:38; Judg. 3:24; 2 Sam. 18:32; John 11:11). Other phrases: "spreading the skirt" for marriage (Ruth 3:9); "them that are afar off" are Gentiles (Acts 2:39). To "uncover nakedness" is to have sex with (Lev. 18:6).

Hyperbole: the intentional use of exaggeration for effect. Example: "it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle, than for a rich man to enter the kingdom of heaven" (Matt. 19:24; cf. John 21:25; Psalm 6:6,7; Judg. 7:12).

Paradox: the assertion of two propositions as true which seem to be contradictory, but in fact are not contradictory. For example: "but whosoever hath not, from him shall be taken away that which he hath" (Matt. 13:12; cf. Matt. 5:5).

Metonymy: the use of one noun for another that it suggests. For example, 1 Cor. 11:27 speaks of drinking "the cup," a reference to the contents not the container. Or "they have Moses and the Prophets; let them hear them," the writings of Moses and the prophets not the men (Luke 16:29). John turned to see a voice speaking, a reference to the speaker (Rev. 1:12). God so loved the world, not the earth but the people who live in it (John 3:16). "The way of the fool is right in his own eyes..." (Prov. 12:15) where *eyes* represent the way he sees things, or his mental perspective. And, "...the tongue of the wise brings healing" (Prov. 12:18) in which *tongue* stands for what the wise one says, his words of wisdom.

Synecdoche: a form of expression where a part represents the whole or a whole represents a part. For example, "preach the gospel to every creature" would not include dogs and cows (Mark. 16:15). In Matt. 12:40 Jesus is to spend "three days and three nights in the heart of the earth," yet he

remains buried only about 39 hours, not 72. The apparent discrepancy is solved when one recognizes that in Jewish thought, any part of a day is counted as if it were a whole day. In Judges 12:7 we are told Jephthah was buried "in the cities of Gilead" (Hebrew) though actually only one of those cities is meant; in Luke 2:1 "all the world" is used to mean the world of the Roman Empire, in Deuteronomy 32:41 "if I whet the lightning of my sword" the word *lightning* is used for the flashing edge of the gleaming blade.

Riddle: a riddle is a concise saying which is intentionally formulated to tax the ingenuity of the hearer or reader when he tries to explain it. Samson's riddle is found in Judg. 14:12-20. The number 666 in Rev. 13:18 also contains a riddle.

Apostrophe: This is a strange but graphic figure which sounds as if the speaker were talking to himself in a sort of externalized soliloquy. For instance, David says to his dead son, "O my son Absalom, my son, my son Absalom! Would I had died instead of you, O Absalom, my son, my son!" (2 Sam. 18:33). What a moving expression of David's grief this is; no other mode of expression could be quite so expressive in this instance. Then there is the use of this figure in which the kings of earth address a fallen city, "Alas! alas! thou great city, thou mighty city, Babylon! In one hour has thy judgment come!" (Rev. 18:10). This figure of speech seems best adapted to the expression of deep emotion. As such, it readily grabs our attention and draws out our interest.

Scripture Twisting Methods of the Cults

by James Sire

In debating and discussions with non-Christians such as Mormons or atheist, I have found many areas of twisting of the Scriptures. In the book "Scripture Twisting," James Sire has a chapter devoted to each of the methods, and I have seen them ALL used from time to time.

1. Inaccurate Quotation: A biblical text is referred to but is either not quoted in the way the text appears in any standard translation or is wrongly attributed. Example: The Maharishi Mahesh Yogi says, "Christ said, 'Be still and know that I am God.'" Whereas this text is found ONLY in Psalms.

2. Twisted Translation: The biblical text is retranslated, not in accordance with sound Greek scholarship, to fit a preconceived teaching of a cult. Example: the Jehovah's Witnesses translate John 1:1 as "In [the] beginning the Word was, and the Word was with God, and the word was a god."

3. Biblical Hook: A text of Scripture is quoted primarily as a device to grasp the attention of readers or listeners and then followed by a teaching which is so non-biblical that it would appear far more dubious to most people had it not been preceded by a reference to Scripture. Example: Mormon missionaries quote James 1:5 which promises God's wisdom to those who ask him and, then, follow this by explaining that when Joseph Smith did this he was given a revelation from which he concluded that God the Father has a body.

4. Ignoring The Immediate Context: A text of Scripture is quoted but removed from the surrounding verses which form the immediate framework for its meaning. Example: Alan Watts quotes the first half of John 5:39 ("You search the Scriptures, because you think that in them you have eternal life"), claiming that Jesus was challenging His listeners' over emphasis of the Old Testament, but the remainder of the immediate context reads, "and it is they that bear witness to me; yet you refuse to come to me that you may have life" (verses 39-40), which shows that Jesus was upholding the value of the Old Testament as a testimony to Himself.

5. Collapsing Contexts: Two or more verses which have little or nothing to do with each other are put together as if one were a commentary of the other(s). Example: The Mormons associate Jeremiah 1:5 with John 1:2,14 and thus imply that both verses talk about the pre-mortal existence of all human beings; Jeremiah 1:5, however, speaks of God's foreknowledge of Jeremiah (Not his pre-mortal existence) and John 1:2 refers to the pre-existence of God the Son and not to human beings in general.

6. Over-specification: A more detailed or specific conclusion than is legitimate is drawn from a biblical text. Example: The Mormon missionary manual quotes the parable of the virgins from Matthew 25:1-13 to document the concept that "mortality is a probationary period during which we prepare to meet God." But the parable of the virgins could, and most probably does, mean something far less specific, for example, that human beings should be prepared at any time to meet God or to witness the Second Coming of Jesus Christ.

7. Word Play: A word or phrase from a biblical translation is examined and interpreted as if the revelation had been given in that language. Example: Mary Baker Eddy says the name Adam consists of two syllables, A DAM, which means an obstruction, in which case, Adam signifies "the obstacle which the serpent, sin, would impose between man and his Creator."

8. The Figurative Fallacy: Either (1) mistaking literal language for figurative language or (2) mistaking figurative language for literal language. Example of (1): Mary Baker Eddy interprets EVENING as "mistiness of mortal thought; weariness of mortal mind; obscured views; peace and rest." Example of (2): The Mormon theologian James Talmage interprets the prophecy that "thou shalt be brought down and speak out of the ground" to mean that God's Word would come to people from the Book of Mormon which was taken out of the ground at the hill of Cumorah.

9. Speculative Readings Of Predictive Prophecy: A predictive prophecy is too readily explained by the occurrence of specific events, despite the fact that the interpretation is highly dubious. Example: The stick of Judah and the Stick of Joseph in Ezekiel 37:15-23 are interpreted by the Mormons to mean the Bible and the Book of Mormon.

10. Saying But Not Citing: A writer says that the Bible says such and such but does not cite the specific text (which often indicates that there may be no such text at all). Example: A common phrase "God helps those who help themselves" is not found in the Bible.

11. Selective Citing: To substantiate a given argument, only a limited number of texts is quoted: the total teaching of Scripture on that subject would lead to a conclusion different from that of the writer. Example: The Jehovah's Witnesses critique the traditional Christian notion of the Trinity without considering the full text which scholars use to substantiate the concept.

12. Inadequate Evidence: A hasty generalization is drawn from too little evidence. Example: The Jehovah's Witnesses teach that blood transfusion is nonbiblical, but the biblical data that they cite fails either to speak directly to the issue or to adequately substantiate their teaching.

13. Confused Definition: A biblical term is misunderstood in such a way that an essential biblical doctrine is distorted or rejected. Example: one of Edgar Cayce's followers confuses the eastern doctrine of reincarnation with the biblical doctrine of being born again.

14. Ignoring Alternative Explanations: A specific interpretation given to a biblical text or set of texts which could well be, and often have been, interpreted in quite a different fashion, but these alternatives are not considered. Example: Erich Von Däniken asks why in Genesis 1:26 God speaks in the plural ("us"), suggesting that this is an oblique reference to God's being one of many astronauts and failing to consider alternative explanations that either God was speaking as "Heaven's king accompanied by His heavenly host" or that the plural prefigures the doctrine of the Trinity expressed more explicitly in the New Testament.

15. The Obvious Fallacy: Words like OBVIOUSLY, UNDOUBTEDLY, CERTAINLY, ALL REASONABLE PEOPLE HOLD THAT and so forth are substituted for logical reasons. Example: Erich Von Däniken says, "Undoubtedly the Ark [of the Covenant] was electrically charged!"

16. Virtue By Association: Either (1) a cult writer associates his or her teaching with those of figures accepted as authoritative by traditional Christians; (2) cult writings are likened to the Bible; or (3) cult literature imitates the form of the Bible writing such that it sounds like the Bible.

Example of (1): Rick Chapman list 21 gurus, including Jesus Christ, St. Francis and St. Theresa, that "you can't go wrong with." Example of (2): Juan Mascaró in his introduction to the Upanishads cites the New Testament, the Gospels, Ecclesiastes and the Psalms, from which he quotes passages supposedly paralleling the Upanishads. Example of (3): The Mormon DOCTRINE AND COVENANTS interweaves phrases from the Gospel of John and maintains a superficial similarity to the Gospel such that it seems to be like the Bible.

17. Esoteric Interpretation: Under the assumption that the Bible contains hidden, esoteric, meaning which is open only to those who are initiated into its secrets, the interpreter declares the significance of biblical passages without giving much, if any, explanation for his or her interpretation. Example: Mary Baker Eddy gives the meaning of the first phrase in the Lord's Prayer, "Our Father which art in heaven," as "Our Father-Mother God, all harmonious."

18. Supplementing Biblical Authority: New revelation from post biblical prophets either replaces or is added to the Bible as authority. Example: The Mormons supplement the Bible with the Book of Mormon, the Doctrine and Covenants and the Pearl of Great Price. Roman Catholics supplement the Bible with the Pope's *ex cathedra* declarations. Charismatics rely on inner feelings and supposed revelations in addition to the Scriptures.

19. Rejecting Biblical Authority: Either the Bible as a whole or texts from the Bible are examined and rejected because they do not square with other authorities - such as reason or revelation = do not appear to agree with them. Example: Archie Matson holds that the Bible contains contradictions and that Jesus himself rejected the authority of the Old Testament when he contrasted His own views with it on the Sermon on the Mount.

20. World-View Confusion: Scriptural statements, stories, commands or symbols which have a particular meaning or set of meanings when taken within the intellectual and broadly cultural framework of the Bible itself are lifted out of that context, placed within the frame of reference of another system and thus given a meaning that markedly differs from their intended meaning. Example: The Maharishi Mahesh Yogi interprets "Be still, and know that I am God" as meaning that each person should meditate and come to the realization that he is essentially Godhood itself.

NOTE: This material comes from the appendix of James Sire's *Scripture Twisting Methods of the Cults*, and summarizes his in depth treatment of each of these points.

Exegetical Fallacies⁴⁴

The root fallacy. This fallacy presupposes that every word actually has a meaning bound up with its shape or its components. The root meaning of the word *nice* is the Latin word *nescius*, meaning "ignorant." The *υπηρετης* (servant) in the New Testament is a servant, and often there is little if anything to distinguish him from *διακονος*. As Louw remarks, to derive the meaning of *υπηρετης* from *υπο* and *ερετης* is no more intrinsically realistic than deriving the meaning of "butterfly" from "butter" and "fly," or the meaning of pineapple from "pine" and "apple." The word apostle (*αποστολος*) is a cognate with *αποστελλω* (I send), but the New Testament use of the noun does not center on the meaning "the one sent" but on "messenger." Messengers are usually sent, but the word messenger calls to mind the message the person carries, and suggests he represents the one who sent him. An apostle, then, is a special messenger or special representative of the one who sends him.

Semantic anachronism. This fallacy occurs when the late use of a word is read back into earlier literature. While dynamite has *δυναμις* in its etymology, Paul had no reference to Mr. Nobel's explosive when he was writing Rom. 1:16 and speaking of the power of the gospel. God loves the cheerful giver (2 Cor. 9:7). The Greek word behind "cheerful" is *ιλαρον* (*hilaron*), but it is fallacious that God loves the hilarious giver.

Semantic obsolescence. This is a fallacy when an interpreter assigns to a word in his text a meaning that the word in question used to have in earlier, but that is no longer found within the later semantic range of the word. That meaning is semantically obsolete. The Greek word *μαρτυς* stands behind our English word *martyr*. The word went through stages of development somewhat like this:

- a. one who gives evidence, in or out of court
- b. one who gives solemn witness or affirmation (e.g., of one's faith)
- c. one who witnesses to personal faith, even in the threat of death
- d. one who witnesses to personal faith by the acceptance of death
- e. one who dies for a cause—a "martyr"

This development was certainly not smooth and often overlapping. The same person might use the word more than one way, depending on the context.

Psallo (*ψαλλω*) is a word that is used with a variety of meanings, and it is a semantic obsolescence to apply its original meaning to its later usages. Over time *psallo* has gradually changed in meaning. It first meant "to touch, twang, strike strings." Next it meant "to touch or play strings of harp." Later it meant, "to sing with the harp." At last it meant, "to sing praises." (without any thought of any instrument of music). The only time in the LXX that *psallo* meant play was when the instrument was specified in the context; otherwise it meant to sing (LXX, 150 BC). In the New Testament *psallo* is used four times. It meant

- "sing" Rom. 15:9; 1 Cor. 14:15; James 5:13
- "make melody or make music" in Eph. 5:19. The maker of the music or melody is to be the heart. No instrument is even considered here except the heart itself.

Everett Ferguson said of *psallo*, "If the precise meaning of certain verses may be in doubt, what is clear is that an instrument did not inhere in the word *psallo* in the Septuagint (the Greek translation

⁴⁴ D. A. Carson, *Exegetical Fallacies*, Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker Books, 1984.

of the Hebrew Old Testament, dating 150-250 BC). *Psallo* could translate a word meaning 'play' (*nagan*), or a general word (*zamar*). The meaning which would cover all occurrences is 'make melody.' This could include making melody on an instrument, but in the preponderance of occurrences it clearly refers to making melody with the voice."⁴⁵ F. F. Bruce said of *psallo* in Eph. 5:19, "Nor should the etymological force of the terms be pressed, as though *psalmos* inevitably meant a song sung to the accompaniment of a stringed instrument...while such plucking of the strings is the original sense of *psallo*...it is used in the NT with the meaning 'to sing psalms.'"⁴⁶ In confirmation of this view, the Greek Orthodox Church (who knows Greek better than anyone) has never used instruments of music in worship.

While some have abandoned the idea that *psallo* requires the use of an instrument, they today suggest that it permits the use of the instrument in Ephesians 5:19. If this were so, the first readers of the epistle of Ephesians and early churches did not know it. If Paul indeed was permitting the use instruments, we are at a loss to explain why early churches so adamantly and uniformly opposed them. Actually, no ancient writer ever made the argument that *psallo* and *psalmos* permitted the use of instruments in worship. In fact, George P. Slade⁴⁷ in 1878 was the first ever to argue that *psallo* or *psalmos* permitted the instrument even if the instrument is not mentioned. Early Christians never understood the context of Ephesians or Colossians to demand or permit instruments.

The first rule of hermeneutics in the study of words is that a word does not and cannot mean what the author and the first readers did not understand it to mean. Whatever the words *psalmos* and *psallo* meant to them, it could not have demanded or permitted the use of instruments. The universal opposition to the use of instruments among the early church fathers makes it clear they understood the epistles of Ephesians and Colossians to teach vocal music only.

"Since a special vocal use of *psallo* is first and most clearly attested in Jewish religious literature, and since the Psalms were recited without instrumental accompaniment in the synagogue services, a reasonable hypothesis may be suggested for the change in the usage of the word. The change in practice in the synagogue, so that the Psalms were used without the instrumental accompaniment that had characterized their use in the temple, produced a change in the meaning of the word, so that it meant 'to sing the Psalms.'"⁴⁸

Appeal to Unknown or Unlikely Meanings. Although some of the New Testament metaphorical uses of κεφαλη (head) could be taken to mean "source," all other factors being equal, in no case is that the required meaning; and in every instance the notion of "headship" implying authority fits equally well or better. Certainly there are sound exegetical reasons why "source" rather than "head" as authority will not fit the context of 1 Cor. 11:2-16.

C.E.B. Cranfield argued that νομος (law) sometimes means not Mosaic law or the Mosaic law covenant, but legalism (e.g., Rom. 3:21),⁴⁹ the fact remains that the primary defense of that position is not a rigorous linguistic evidence but the adoption of a certain structure of relationships between the Old Testament and the New. Walter Kaiser, Jr., has argued that νομος in 1 Cor. 14:34-36

³⁹ Everett Ferguson, *A Cappella Music in the Public Worship of the Church* (Abilene, Tex.: Biblical Research Press, 1972), 6-7.

⁴⁶ F.F. Bruce, *NICNT on Ephesians and Colossians*, 284.

⁴⁷ George P. Slade, "Psallo and Psalmos," *American Christian Review* 21, no. 4 (22 January 1878): 25.

⁴⁸ Everett Ferguson, *A Cappella Music*, pp 36-37

⁴⁹ C. E. B. Cranfield, "St. Paul and the Law," *SJT* 17 (1964): 43-68.

refers not to law but to rabbinic interpretation, rabbinic rules that Paul has come to reject. Paul, however, never uses *νομος* in this way anywhere else, even though the word is common in his writings; and therefore to that extent Kaiser's interpretation of the passage, in addition to its other weaknesses, appeals to an unlikely meaning. 1 Cor. 14:34-36 may easily be seen to parallel Gen. 2:20-24, a passage referred to by Paul in 1 Cor. 11:8-9 and 1 Tim. 2:13.

Edward Fudge in his book, *The Fire That Consumes*, argues an annihilationist view of hell. He believes that when a soul is cast into hell, it burns up and ceases to be. This is sometimes known as "conditional immortality."

How can Christians possibly project a deity of such cruelty and vindictiveness whose ways include inflicting everlasting torture upon his creatures, however sinful they may have been? Surely a God who would do such a thing is more nearly like Satan than like God, at least by any ordinary moral standards, and by the gospel itself. – Clark Pinnock

The Duration of Hell From Matthew 25:41, 46. The Greek adjective *aionion* used in these verses means "everlasting, without end." We should note, however, that in certain contexts the adjective *aionios* is not always used of eternity. In some passages it refers to an "age" or period of time. Luke 1:70, for example, says that God "spoke by the mouths of His holy prophets from of old (*ap aionos*)." Clearly, this cannot be a reference to eternity past. A similar construction is found in Acts 3:21.[47] On the other hand, the adjective is predicated of God (i.e., the "eternal God"), as in 1 Timothy 1:7, Romans 16:26, Hebrews 9:14, and 13:8. In these latter passages *aionios* means "eternal," as shown from their context and from the fact that God is the subject. Granting that the term may or may not refer to eternity, how can we be sure of its meaning in Matthew 25? What is particularly determinative here is the fact that the duration of punishment for the wicked forms a parallel with the duration of life for the righteous: the adjective *aionios* is used to describe both the length of punishment for the wicked and the length of eternal life for the righteous. One cannot limit the duration of punishment for the wicked without at the same time limiting the duration of eternal life for the redeemed. It would do violence to the parallel to give it an unlimited signification in the case of eternal life, but a limited one when applied to the punishment of the wicked. John Broadus, in his classic commentary on Matthew, states, "It will at once be granted, by any unprejudiced and docile mind, that the punishment of the wicked will last as long as the life of the righteous; it is to the last degree improbable that the Great Teacher would have used an expression so inevitably suggesting a great doctrine he did not mean to teach...."

See Rev. 14:9-11; 20:10. These texts describe the nature of the punishment as "torment." The words used in these texts are forms of the Greek word *basanizo*. As Thayer states, *basanizo* means "to vex with grievous pains (of body or mind), to torment." [49] Likewise, Arndt and Gingrich say that *basanizo* means "to torture, torment," and may apply to either physical or mental vexation.[50] When we examine the uses of the verb *basanizo* and its various noun forms throughout the New Testament, we see that great pain and conscious misery are in view, not annihilation or cessation of consciousness. For example, the centurion's sick servant is grievously tormented (*deinos basanizomenos*) by his palsy (Matt. 8:6). Revelation 12:2 uses the verb to describe the pains of childbirth. In 2 Peter 2:8, righteous Lot is described as tormented (*ebasanizen*) in his soul by the wicked deeds of the Sodomites. In Luke 16:23 and 28, the plural noun "torments" (*basanoi*) is used to describe the rich man's conscious suffering in Hades. Indeed, in verse 28 Hades is described as "the place of torment" (*ho topos tou basanou*).

In the most emphatic language possible, we are told that the torment is unending. When we considered Matthew 25:46 above, we noted that *aionos* can, in some contexts, qualify nouns of limited duration. (Though, as we also observed, the context of Matthew 25 demands that we take *aionios* in its unlimited signification there.) But here, we find the emphatic forms *eis aionas aionon* and *eis tous aionas ton aionon* ("unto the ages of the ages"). This construction is only used to describe unending duration. As Sasse points out, the "twofold use of the term [*aionios*]" is designed "to emphasize the concept of eternity." [51] The fact that the forms used are plural in number further reinforces the idea of never-ending duration. Speaking of the Greek construction in this verse, the great biblical commentator R. C. H. Lenski observes: "The strongest expression for our 'forever' is *eis tous aionan ton aionon*, 'for the eons of eons'; many aeons, each of vast duration, are multiplied by many more, which we imitate by 'forever and ever.' Human language is able to use only temporal terms to express what is altogether beyond time and timeless. The Greek takes its greatest term for time, the eon, pluralizes this, and then multiplies it by its own plural, even using articles which make these eons the definite ones." This same emphatic construction is found in Revelation 1:6; 4:9; and 5:3, where it refers to the unending worship of God. In Revelation 4:10 and 10:6 it is used to describe God's own endless life. And in Revelation 22:5 the construction is employed to characterize the everlasting reign of the saints.

Note also that the unending nature of the torment is shown by the fact that the expression "day and night" is used to describe its duration. The expression "day and night" is indicative of ceaseless activity. This same phrase is used of the never-ending worship of God in Revelation 4:8 and 7:15. By juxtaposing the words "day and night" with "forever and ever" in 20:10, we have the most emphatic expression of unending, ceaseless activity possible in the Greek language.

The Problem of Inferences

Some have asked if it is correct to make an inference binding upon men today. An inference is a deduction or a conclusion reached by human reasoning. Since men are fallible in their thinking, one should not ever make human reasoning binding upon the conscience of another. Moreover, they argue, men do not reason alike. Whose inferences, they ask, will become the standard of right and wrong?

The argument in opposition to inferences is based upon statements made by Thomas and Alexander Campbell. In Proposition 6 of “The Declaration and Address,” Thomas Campbell said: Although inference and deductions from Scripture premises, when fairly inferred, may be truly called the doctrine of God’s holy word, yet are they not formally binding upon the consciences of Christians *farther than they perceive the connection, and evidently see that they are so*; for their faith must not stand in the wisdom of men, but in the power and veracity of God. Therefore, no such deductions can be made terms of communion, but do properly belong to the after and progressive edification of the church. Hence it is evident that no such deductions or inferential truths ought to have any place in the Church’s confession.⁵⁰

Alexander Campbell further stated about inferences:

The inferences drawn by human understanding partake of all the defects of that understanding. . . These conclusions then, are always private property, and can never be placed upon a level with the inspired word. Subscription to them, or an acknowledgement of them, can never be rationally required as a bond of union.⁵¹

It is obvious that human understanding, reason, logic and inference have pitfalls. But the abuse of a thing does not argue against its valid use, and the abuse of reasoning does not argue against valid reasoning.

One has to wonder how the Campbells deduced that inferences could not be binding. Did they infer it from their study of Scripture? If so, then that inference is itself only private property and cannot be on the level of the inspired word. Further, the primary watchword of the Campbells, “Where the Scriptures speak, we speak: and where the Scriptures are silent, we are silent,” is a principle deduced from Scripture (correctly, I might add). Is it never to be ‘required as a bond of union’?

Reasoning from the Scriptures determines more than a few important doctrines of the church. It is by inference we partake of the Lord’s Supper each Lord’s day. By inference we rightly reject infant baptism. The clear teaching of baptizing believers implies that unbelievers and those incapable of belief are unqualified candidates for baptism. The clear teaching that baptism is immersion implies that sprinkling will not do. We teach against gambling by reasoning that it violates the Christian work ethic.

Further, Christians have a right to assume all that the word of God assumes and takes for granted. They have a right to infer whatever God has implied. D. R. Dungan in his book, *Hermeneutics*, says, “Things assumed in the Bible are to be regarded the same as those which have been stated.” Again he says, “Anything God takes for granted is true; hence, anything which He has

⁵⁰ Thomas Campbell, “Declaration and Address,” quoted by James DeForest Murch, *Christians Only* (Cincinnati, Ohio: Standard Publishing, 1962), 46.

⁵¹ Alexander Campbell, *Christian Baptist*, Vol. 2, 155.

assumed or taken for granted, we are bound to regard as true.”⁵² As an illustration of this principle, Dungan observes that God has everywhere treated man as if he could repent, that an honest heart is necessary to the reception of the truth, and that man has general wants.

In addition Thomas Campbell noted that fairly inferred deductions may be “truly called the doctrine of God’s holy word.” It seems inconsistent to state in one breath that a matter is the true doctrine of God’s holy word and in the next breath that the same matter can never be made into terms of communion. Again we ask, how did Campbell himself come to such a deduction? There is no explicit statement in Scripture that says all the fairly inferred conclusions of men from a Scripture premise have no binding force. Campbell must have reasoned that on his own. According to him, even if his deduction is true, it is not binding on anyone else. Why then does he ask others to agree with him in the matter? How can this self-contradictory maxim consistently be bound today?

Thomas B. Warren in his book, *When is an Example Binding?*, notes, “There are no explicit statements in the Bible which explicitly say that only explicit statements have binding force on today.”⁵³ It is self-contradictory to reason that the use of reasoning can never lead to the truth. Warren further says:

the fact that reasoning must be used in order to understand that the teaching applies to men living today does not, as some allege, render the conclusion human rather than divine doctrine. God demands that men reason validly in connection with the evidence which He has given to them. To hold that the use of reason (the principles of valid reasoning) renders a doctrine human rather than divine is obviously false. The reason that what is bound by implication is binding on men is not because men have *inferred it*, but because God has *implied it*.⁵⁴

God expects men to use their reasoning powers. Luke calls the Bereans noble for examining Paul’s preaching in the light of the Scriptures “to see whether these things were so” (Acts 17:11). Paul demands that Christians “examine everything carefully; hold fast to that which is good; and abstain from every form of evil” (1 Thess. 5:21,22). John urged the church to “test the spirits to see whether they are from God” (1 John 4:1); and Jesus applauded the Ephesians for doing so (Rev. 2:2). Commandments to “remember,” to “consider,” to “meditate,” are such that expect men to reason upon the word of God.

Sound arguments and fair deductions come from true premises and valid reasoning. Some reasoning is invalid but not all reasoning. Some premises are false but not all. Some conclusions are erroneous but not all. Jesus promised that we can know the truth He revealed. When we draw only such conclusions from the evidence of the Scriptures as are warranted, we can arrive at truth. Yes, we must do our exegetical work. We must study the language, the context and the background. We must consider all the evidence, but we can draw divine truth by reasoning from the Word of God.

To the credit of Thomas and Alexander Campbell, some current writers may be making more of this problem of inferences than the Campbells meant. Proposition 6 actually does not argue against all inferences. It argues against inferences that go “*farther than they perceive the*

⁵² D. R. Dungan, *Hermeneutics* (Delight, Ark.: Gospel Light Pub. Co., n.d.) pp. 92,93. Dungan also notes, “Of course great caution should be had in the use of this rule, that we may not at any time be mistaken as to what has been assumed.”

⁵³ Thomas B. Warren, *When is an “Example” Binding?* (Jonesboro, Ark.: National Christian Press, 1975), 92.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 65.

connection, and evidently see that they are so.” Dr. Robert Richardson in his book, *Memoirs of Alexander Campbell*, described a little more in detail what Thomas Campbell meant when he said “Where the Scriptures speak, we speak; and where the Scriptures are silent, we are silent.” He said:

Henceforth, the plain and simple teaching of the Word of God itself was to be their guide. God himself should speak to them, and they should receive and repeat His words alone. No *remote* inferences, no *fanciful* interpretations, no religious *theories* of any kind, were to be allowed to alter or pervert its obvious meaning [Emphasis mine].⁵⁵

If we allow this later statement to stand about the feeling of the Campbells about inferences, we have a completely different idea. Here the objection was not to all inferences but to “remote” ones, fanciful ideas, and theories. Certainly all men are correct to reject these as a basis for doctrine. But to reject all use of reasoning provides some very significant problems. Though some men may reject reason as a basis for finding binding truth, in practice all men use logic in their preaching. When they teach, explain and apply the Word of God to men today, they without exception use reasoning to get the correct sense of Scripture. Campbell’s suggestion of excluding inference in forming a belief system is impossible to implement.

⁵⁵ Robert Richardson, *Memoirs of Alexander Campbell*, pp. 235-38, quoted by James DeForest Murch in *Christians Only*, 40.