

# Theology Series

## Understanding What God Said



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I have heard it said that trying to lead people into a desire and habit of reading God's Word is like trying to herd cats. Yet we serve a God who herded all kinds of disparate animals into one boat, and in the Doers class, I have witnessed firsthand the power of the Holy Spirit move among his children and accomplish just that. They have sought, and have been brought, into the refuge of Christ through the ark that is His Word.

I lift up thanksgiving for my wise and godly wife, Cecilia, who takes on so many things caring for me, and our household, so I can devote my time to studying, writing, and teaching God's Word.

Lastly, I want to dedicate this book specifically to Misha. I have not seen your equal in your love for books. You exhibit your mother and father's humility and great discernment. May this book inspire you, and guide you, into the preeminence of the sixty-six books God wrote for you.



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## 1

## God Sanctifies Believers by His Word

There is a national crisis among evangelical churches today. Various denominations, fellowships, and independent churches are struggling to impact their communities by making mature disciples of Jesus. This fact, combined with the influence American churches have on Christianity around the globe, should cause pastors to reconsider their ministry philosophies, and cause believers to return to the priority of Christian growth—or their sanctification.

The following criticism is not meant to slander the bride of Christ in any way but is meant as a wakeup call for all churches to understand the fundamental issue at hand. Simply put, biblical illiteracy among believers is increasing in our churches out of a lack of delight in knowing Jesus and desiring to become like Him. To become Christ-like requires a disciplined effort in the face of so many distractions and the cares of the world. To understand this issue better, I researched a few polls taken in 2020 by Pew Research and LifeWay Christian Resources.

Let us begin viewing the poll statistics by comparing them to a portion a portion of what Jesus prayed to the Father in the most beautiful prayer man has ever known. We will then be able to compare the desires of Jesus with the desires of many evangelical church members.

*But now I come to You, and these things I speak in the world, that they may have My joy fulfilled in themselves. 14 I have given them Your word; and the world has hated them because they are not of the world, just as I am not of the world. 15 I do not pray that You should take them out of the world, but that You should keep them from the evil one. 16 They are not of the world, just as I am not of the world. 17 Sanctify them by Your truth. Your word is truth. 18 As You sent Me into the world, I also have sent them into the world. 19 And for their sakes I sanctify Myself, that they also may be sanctified by the truth.*

*20 “I do not pray for these alone, but also for those who will believe in Me through their word; 21 that they all may be one, as You, Father, are in Me, and I in You; that they also may be one in Us, that the world may believe that You sent Me. 22 And the glory which You gave Me I have given them, that they may be one just as We are one: 23 I in them, and You in Me; that they may be made perfect in one, and that the world may know that You have sent Me, and have loved them as You have loved Me. ~ John 17:13–23*

Pew Research Center statistics show that 43% of members belonging to the Southern Baptist Convention (SBC) do not attend church once per week. Even though Jesus fully expressed His

desire that believers should be one together and one in the Godhead itself (v. 21–23), and even though Jesus suffered the wrath of God on behalf of His church, a full 43% of SBC members have higher priorities in life than to care for what Jesus thinks or desires about this most important matter, His church.

Additionally, among SBC members, 37% do not read their Bible once per week. More than one-third of those who identify as Christians in the SBC do not care about the truth of God in their lives and are unconcerned about being sanctified in the truth (v. 13–20), which Jesus refers to as the Word of God (v. 17). This sanctification has to do with being increasingly set apart from the world in order to become more godly, more mature in the faith, and empowered for the joy of serving Jesus. According to Jesus, this only happens by being immersed in the Scriptures.

Of course, it is impossible to please God if one's delight is not in the Law of the LORD (the Scriptures). According to King David, the only way to avoid walking in the counsel of the wicked, or standing in the path of sinners, or sitting in the seat of scoffers is to be taking delight in God's Word while meditating day and night on what was read.

*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,  
 2 But his delight is in the law of the Lord,  
 And in His law, he meditates day and night.  
 3 He shall be like a tree  
 Planted by the rivers of water,  
 That brings forth its fruit in its season,  
 Whose leaf also shall not wither,  
 And whatever he does shall prosper.  
 4 The ungodly are not so,  
 But are like the chaff which the wind drives away.  
 5 Therefore the ungodly shall not stand in the judgment,  
 Nor sinners in the congregation of the righteous.  
 6 For the Lord knows the way of the righteous,  
 But the way of the ungodly shall perish. ~ Psalms 1*

Among SBC members, a whopping 53% do not even meditate on God's Word once per week. Verse 4 describes such people as ungodly. How should we respond to these statistics? Does the sorrow and fear of the Lord begin to grip our hearts? Do we allow ourselves to feel the shame of being so apathetic towards such a minimal desire to know and follow Jesus? Do we respond by yearning with the Holy Spirit to turn from our worldly lusts and pursue Jesus with our entire being? Or do we harden our hearts and continue to worship God with what seems right in our own eyes (Deut 12:8)?

It only makes sense that a self-proclaimed people of God, that shows so little love for His Word—to hear what God says and shows such ingratitude for what Jesus did for us, would also devalue the Scriptures as not being literal. True to form, 39% of SBC members believe the Bible should not be taken literally; with a small percent believing it is not even God’s Word.

Many other Christian groups practice this same biblical degeneracy, either formally or practically, in both legalistic and lawless church settings. Both superimpose their will above the authority of the Scriptures. The legalists will treat as sin those things that they cannot prove as such in the Bible, and the lawless will treat as liberties those things the Scriptures command to be holy. The outcome of such degeneracy, in keeping with church history, will either tend towards a strict legalism that degrades the ability of a gospel-given grace to humble an undeserved people to serve Christ, or it will tend towards a lawlessness that degrades the ability of a gospel-given freedom from sin to serve Christ. Both paths are marked by their decrease in service of being salt and light to their communities and to each other.

Generally, the SBC is experiencing lawlessness with 43% of SBC members not believing in absolute standards of right and wrong. This statistic agrees with David’s assessment of the ungodly in Psalms 1. Of SBC members polled, 30% believe that abortion should be legal in all or most cases. Also, 30% believe that homosexuals should be accepted into the membership of SBC churches. Last, but certainly not least, 22% of SBC members support same-sex marriage.

From all these statistics, however, the greatest impact is the stain upon the gospel of Christ. It amounts to a betrayal of His ultimate suffering that supplies us with His grace of humility and His freedom from the bondage of sin. The good news is that Jesus paid all our debts so that we can be one with God, yet the fact that so many only offers lip-service, not caring to truly know Him, makes the gospel look worthless to the community around us. Most of what America now sees from the church is a man-made, entertaining, Christian culture and white-washed tombs (Matt 23:27–28). Jesus refers to such people as hypocrites, or actors, and He refers to their worship of God as worthless.

*Hypocrites! Well did Isaiah prophesy about you, saying:*

*8 “These people draw near to Me with their mouth,*

*And honor Me with their lips,*

*But their heart is far from Me.*

*9 And in vain they worship Me,*

*Teaching as doctrines the commandments of men.” ~ Matthew 15:7–9*

On the flip side, the more regular the Bible reading habit is, the more likely Christians are to say they deeply miss that reading time with God if it does not happen. LifeWay Christian Resources has found that 65% of those who read the Bible everyday agree with this assessment. Of those that read the Bible a few times per week, only 32% agree. From there it declines just as rapidly. For those who read the Bible once per month, only 13% agree, and for those who read it less than once a month, only 6% agree.

The takeaway is that the benefit of reading God’s Word can be seen in how much readers miss it. Those who read God’s Word daily miss it; while those that don’t—don’t! For those that deeply miss it, the Bible is certainly living and powerful, but isn’t this what the Bible says about itself?

*7 ... “Today, if you will hear His voice,  
Do not harden your hearts.”*

*12 For the word of God is living and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing even to the division of soul and spirit, and of joints and marrow, and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart. 13 And there is no creature hidden from His sight, but all things are naked and open to the eyes of Him to whom we must give account. ~ Hebrews 4:7, 12–13*

These horrible statistics may point to failures among several factors including a lack of discernment in the preaching from the pulpits, improperly prioritized church ministry philosophies behind making disciples, a refusal of Christians to grow up in the faith of Jesus, and the accommodation of a large portion of church membership rolls consisting of unregenerate people. Yet, the only way for the ~~statistics~~ people to change is to grasp the good news that Jesus accomplished on our behalf and pursue the life He has given us by listening to what He has to say, in His Word, daily.

This book is meant to encourage believers to listen to God correctly and reverently every day. This should not happen in isolation but among a community of believers, in the local church, that hold each other accountable to the task. It is also meant to give hope to beginning Bible readers that they can understand God’s Word even though it may seem difficult, and that God’s Word will sanctify them according to Jesus’ prayer in John 17:17. Lastly, this book is meant to equip believers in how to discern the Scriptures and put them to use in their everyday lives and in the lives of those around them.

## 2

## The Perspicuity of Scripture

The starting point for any believer to discern God's Word is to know that we can understand His Word. The word, "perspicuity", just means "clarity". The doctrine of the perspicuity of Scripture simply means the Scriptures are clear to all believers, and this doctrine is implied in many places throughout the Scriptures (Deut 6:4; Ps 119:105; Mk 12:37; Acts 17:11; Eph 1:1; 2 Tim 3:14–15a; 2 Pet 1:19a; etc.). This doctrine may come as a great shock to any believer who has struggled to understand many areas of Scripture they have read and studied. Yet, if God did not make His words clear to us, then how can we trust anything we think we know about Him, how to worship Him, or how to serve Him? The first step in interpreting Scripture is for the believer to have confidence that the Scriptures are clear and can be understood.

### THE PERSPICUITY OF SCRIPTURE DEFINED

When we say the Bible is clear to all believers, we must understand what is meant by "clarity" and how it relates to God and us. The *Westminster Confession of Faith* does a great job in defining the biblical doctrine of the perspicuity of Scripture with great precision.

*All things in Scripture are not alike plain in themselves, nor alike clear unto all; yet those things which are necessary to be known, believed, and observed for salvation, are so clearly propounded, and opened to some place of Scripture or other, that not only the learned, but the unlearned, in a due use of the ordinary means, may attain unto a sufficient understanding of them.*

~ *Westminster Confession of Faith 1.7*

While the doctrine of the perspicuity of Scripture means that the Scriptures are clear to all believers, not every passage of the Scriptures has the same level of clarity and not every believer possesses the same ability to see the Scriptures as clearly.

Yet everyone can understand the Scripture's presentation of how to get saved by understanding the gospel, our hopeless need for the gospel, and the atonement and resurrection of Christ. Where various points of the gospel may be confusing in one passage, you will find them to be clearly understood in another passage.

Educated and uneducated alike can understand the Scriptures through "ordinary means". This does not mean that we can understand Scripture just by opening it up and simply reading it. Ordinary means consist of prayer to help us understand the passage. Ordinary means consist of the local church's pastors and teachers who have been especially gifted by God to proclaim and

explain the Scriptures. Lastly, ordinary means is not putting complete responsibility for Scriptural upon the pastors and teachers. We should all be studying it for ourselves.

*It is written, "Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God." ~ Matthew 4:4*

### **THE ATTRIBUTES OF GOD DEMAND THE PERSPICUITY OF SCRIPTURE**

The very nature of who God is demands that He is always glorified within His own triune nature and among His creation. For God to be glorified from mankind, He must provide clear revelation concerning Himself. After all, people cannot give glory to someone they don't know. We will look at just five attributes of God to understand how they demand clarity of the Scriptures.

#### **Clarity and the Transcendence of God**

The transcendence of God refers to His limitless character. He is both eternal and infinite in all His characteristics and ways. God exists outside the universe's limits of time and space which He created. Our finite human minds cannot fathom the limitless character of any being that transcends this creation. How can anyone know such a Being so far beyond us (Job 11:7-8)?

#### **Clarity and the Immanence of God**

While God is transcendent, He is also immanent. The immanence of God refers to God's closeness or His action within His creation to sustain and care for it. The only way mankind, in his finite state, can know anything about a transcendent God is if that God is also immanent with us and reveals Himself clearly to us.

Our immanent God has revealed himself in two ways. First, God has revealed Himself through His creation. Just look at all the orderly design in nature and of our bodies. God also created all people to have a conscience to know right from wrong. This form of revelation is called general revelation because it can be seen by all people past, present, and future. This revelation speaks of a God who creates, designs, is supremely powerful, is ethical, is rational, understands beauty, who must have existed before all His creation, etc.

Second, God has also revealed Himself through His Word. This is referred to as special revelation because, only in His Word, He has specifically revealed the fall of mankind into sin and revealed His plan to redeem the world from it. Outside of God's special revelation to us, there would be no way to have relationship with Him. Neither reason nor experiences through our physical senses could ever replace God's special revelation in the Scriptures to us. The immanence of God is the starting point for understanding how a transcendent God can specially reveal Himself to His finite people in a way that we can understand Him.

#### **Clarity and God's Sovereignty**

Effective communication requires clarity. If we speak to people and it is not clear, then we have not really communicated to them what we want to say. Likewise, if God wants to speak to human beings, and He has through the Word of God, then His communication must be clear to

say what is in His own mind. If God has not spoken clearly, then He has not communicated with humans much at all.

Some may ask how an infinite God can communicate clearly to a human race which is limited by its human language. In other words, can human language contain God's thoughts when God is incomprehensible, having His thoughts beyond our thoughts, and having His ways beyond our ways?

We should not take God's incomprehensibility to mean that the Scriptures are full of errors or inadequacies, however. Our sovereign God can overcome the gap between His language and our language. God can say what He really thinks and communicate it to our human mind.

People in the Bible understood God's Speech. God communicated with Adam, and Adam understood God's command not to eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil (Gen 2–3). Adam did not disobey because he misunderstood God. God spoke clearly to Adam, and Adam knew that in the day he ate of it, he would surely die.

God then spoke with Eve, God spoke with Cain and Abel, God spoke with Noah, God spoke to Abraham and so on. The whole matter of the Bible is God speaking and human beings responding. Sometimes humans respond in a good way, and sometimes in a bad way, but man's response is never an issue of the clarity of God's Word. If a person disobeys God's Word, it is because the human is rebellious and sinful and turns away from what God has said.

So, the Bible must be clear because it comes from a sovereign God, a God who is powerful and in control. If there are difficulties in understanding the language, God overcomes any difficulties, so the message comes through clearly.

Remember though that everything God says is not equally clear to everybody. We will discuss that when we discuss the nearness of God in His community.

*God comes to us in a sovereign way. He speaks a word which has power to clear away all the obstacles and get His Word into the lives of all His people.*

*~ John M. Frame*

### **Clarity and God's Authority**

Clarity becomes an ethical concept when it is considered in relation to the authority of God. When God speaks through His Word, He intends to speak as the authority, as one who governs our thinking, and the one who governs our lives. God communicates the absolute standard of ethics we are to obey.

It may help to understand what ethics and morals are and how they relate to each other. Simply put, while ethics is an absolute standard from God that defines "oughtness"—what we "ought" or "ought not" to do, morals is what we actually do. Simply put, our morals (what we do) should follow the absolute standard of ethics (what we ought or ought not to do). To clear this up even less, listen to what Paul had to say on the matter!!

*For what I am doing, I do not understand. For what I will to do, that I do not practice; but what I hate, that I do. 16 If then, I do what I will not to do, I agree with the law that it is good. 17 But now, it is no longer I who do it, but sin that dwells in me. 18 For I know that in me (that is, in my flesh) nothing good dwells; for to will is present with me, but how to perform what is good I do not find. 19 For the good that I will to do, I do not do; but the evil I will not to do, that I practice. 20 Now if I do what I will not to do, it is no longer I who do it, but sin that dwells in me. ~ Romans 7:15-20*

In other words, Paul struggled to keep his morality (what he did) in line with his ethics (defined by “the law” in verse 16). The will to do the law (God’s absolute standard of ethics) was present in Paul, but due to the sin that dwelt in him, he experienced moral failures of which he hated. Paul goes on to restate this conflict through an understanding of the two natures in the believer. The “inward man” who delights in the law of God, and the “outward man” who lives according to the flesh in sin. He then resolved the conflict, that warred between his two natures, through the deliverance that comes “through Jesus Christ our Lord!” One’s morals can never line up to God’s absolute standard of ethics. Jesus was the only righteous person to achieve that, and through His atoning sacrifice on our behalf, He imputes this righteousness to all His children.

Today, our culture views ethics and morals as two words describing the same thing. What has happened is that our culture has eliminated ethics, or the sense of “oughtness”, and replaced it with what we do or how we live. In other words, how our culture acts (morality) then become the standard that people live by (ethics). When a society’s morality replaces its ethics, then their absolute sense of “oughtness” (ethics) decays into a majority opinion by that society. This elimination of ethics, whose source is God, is the primary source of moral decay in any society.

Yet God, through His authority, established the absolute ethical standard through the Scriptures so we can understand our need for His righteousness and become God’s moral agents reflecting the holiness of God into a darkened society.

So, we can say that the Bible is clear in that it leaves us no excuse for our disobedience. If God’s Word was unclear, and we did something wrong, we could say to God, “God, you didn’t speak the Word clearly to us in a way we could understand it. So naturally, we went our own way.” But God spoke his Word clearly to us as one who is authoritative, as one who judges our behavior, and as the one who leaves us without excuses. Through this understanding of the clarity of the Scripture, are you beginning to understand that mankind is in great trouble?

We first see God’s authority in the Garden of Eden. God commanded Adam to not disobey His command by eating the forbidden fruit, and Satan attacked in two ways. First, Satan questioned whether God had even spoken authoritatively at all on the matter, and second, Satan attacked the clarity of God’s words saying, “God won’t give you the death penalty if you eat this fruit... you will not surely die.”

Was God's words not clear, so Adam and Eve could have an excuse and say to God, "We didn't understand what you said when it came to this particular circumstance, so we went our own way as best we could?" Or were God's words supremely clear so Adam and Eve had no excuse in their disobedience?

There is no authority higher than God's authority, and God has always given mankind His Word as our supreme authority. Adam and Eve sinned because they attributed to Satan's words a higher authority than God's Word.

*To say that Scripture is clear is to say that it does not leave us with any excuses at all when we hear the Word of God. ~ John M. Frame*

### **Clarity and God's Presence**

In various ways, God is present with His Word and makes it clear to us.

#### *The Word is Near*

Look what God said through Moses in Deuteronomy 30:11–14:

*For this commandment which I command you today is not too mysterious for you, nor is it far off. 12 It is not in heaven, that you should say, 'Who will ascend into heaven for us and bring it to us that we may hear it and do it?' 13 Nor is it beyond the sea, that you should say, 'Who will go over the sea for us and bring it to us that we may hear it and do it?' 14 But the word is very near you, in your mouth and in your heart, that you may do it.*

In other words, God's nearness to Israel was His nearness in His written commandments. The "heights of Heaven" and "across the sea" are metaphors that refer to difficult places to travel requiring us to do all the work. It would be like us having to climb our way into Heaven, or us having to cross a huge dangerous sea to be able to ask God what His Word means. But Moses said it is not like that, instead God says His Word is near us. It is with us.

#### *God is Near*

Throughout the Scriptures, we see that God is transcendent—being up in Heaven, ruling over everything. We also see that God is immanent—He comes down into time and space. He comes into close relationships with people. He made a covenant with Israel, and He made a covenant through Jesus for those who repent and put their trust in Him.

God was immanent when He gave the Ten Commandments of the Law to Israel. God wrote it on material accessible to Israel—stone. God was not only the speaker of the Ten Commandments; He was the publisher. The Ten Commandments were placed in God's Holy sanctuary, so Israel would be near God and be able to worship Him and to hear those commandments read to them.

So, there is closeness and nearness between God and His people. This is what God promised Israel in Deut. 30. "You don't need to bridge the gap between yourself and me to find out what

I'm saying to you." The Word is near you; the Word is in your Heart; the Word is in your community; the Word is in the Temple; and the Word is right where you are.

### *Jesus Comes Near*

Look what God said through Paul in his letter to the Romans:

*But the righteousness of faith speaks in this way, "Do not say in your heart, 'Who will ascend into heaven?'" (that is, to bring Christ down from above), 7 or "'Who will descend into the abyss?'" (that is, to bring Christ up from the dead). 8 But what does it say? "The word is near you, in your mouth and in your heart" (that is, the word of faith which we preach): 9 that if you confess with your mouth the Lord Jesus and believe in your heart that God has raised Him from the dead, you will be saved. 10 For with the heart one believes unto righteousness, and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation. ~ Romans 10:6–10*

Paul is quoting our previously mentioned passage in Deuteronomy 30 and gives the final reason we do not have to go up into the heavens or down into the abyss to be able to understand God's Word.

Christ bridged the gap and came down to our level. As fully God, He became a man and dwelled with His people—His community—to establish an intimate relationship through His Word. Today, we reflect not only the commandments that God gave to Israel, but also the words Jesus gave to His apostles.

So, we have a community that is unified by God and based on the Word of God. If we do not understand the Word ourselves, we can pray to the Holy Spirit within us, we can ask a Spirit-gifted teacher or pastor, or we can ask someone else from this community that God has appointed to give us help. So, as the local church is empowered by the Holy Spirit's presence, we can be sure of what God says in His Word.

## **DEALING WITH APPARENT UNCLARITY**

Who has not opened the Bible and said, "I don't understand this?" I do not understand the books of Leviticus and Revelation. How can the Bible be clear when there are so many things I cannot understand?

Remember the Bible must be clear because: God is sovereign in speaking His Word; God speaks His Word with authority, so we have no excuse for not obeying Him; God is present with us through His Word; and His Holy Spirit seeks to help us understand Him.

Let us discuss why believers may have difficulty in understanding the Scriptures.

### **We Are Not God**

The Bible is the Word of God, and we are not God. Isaiah says God's thoughts are above our thoughts, and His ways are above our ways. He is far beyond us in His attributes, so there are

going to be things we are not currently able to understand or figure out. Consider that God is infinite, yet we are finite, and God has a perfect mind, yet we have an extremely limited mind.

Because of this, we need to have humility when trying to understand the problems we have of grasping the Scriptures.

### **God is a Mystery**

Of course, God intended to reveal Himself to us clearly in His Word, yet while God comes to us with words about Himself, those words are about the profound mystery of who God is. There are many attributes of God that our minds cannot even begin to comprehend. While we have the fullness of the clear revelation from God about Himself, this does not mean that God revealed everything about Himself. God's children will be living with Him for eternity while constantly learning more about who He is. The depth of our God is a great mystery to us.

### **There Are Differences in Clarity between People**

There are many reasons why God might not intend to speak to one person as clearly as He speaks to another person. God gives us His Word not to satisfy our curiosity, but to equip us for service in His kingdom. He desires to equip us to be disciples of Jesus with particular gifts for diverse responsibilities.

#### *There are Differences Between People Because Human Knowledge is Progressive*

God does not expect a four-year-old child to understand the Word as well as a teenager or an adult. Not only are people finite in knowledge, but our knowledge is also progressive. Our knowledge grows from one age to another age. An older person can understand more than a younger person can, and a spiritually mature believer can also understand more than a spiritually immature person can.

#### *There are Differences Between People Because there are Differences in Vocation*

In Rom. 12:4–8 and 1 Cor. 12:4–11, Paul says that members of the body of Christ have different gifts. Some are apostles, some are teachers, some speak to one another, some are evangelists, and some help other people in many ways.

Some are called to be professional teachers and preachers. Of course, they need to have a deep understanding of the Bible to be able to correctly communicate to others who do not have the same level of spiritual maturity. Someone who provides food for church gatherings does not necessarily need to have the same level of understanding of all the doctrines of Scripture that a professional teacher should have.

The Scriptures are clear enough to equip us to carry out our responsibilities before God. They are also clear enough so when we do not carry out our responsibilities, we cannot claim that it was because the Scriptures were not clear.

Because of this, do you see the relationship between the need for Scriptures and the carrying out of our responsibilities in how we are gifted to serve? Our doing starts with being in God's

Word. Our differences in vocation, to some extent, account for the differences in the clarity with which we perceive the biblical text.

### **The Form God Chose to Reveal Himself**

God does not always give us His Word the way we would like Him to give it to us. If we are theologians, we would like for God to give us a set of dogmatic propositions—truth statements—that we can list in our notebooks to give to people in our classes.

Yet God has not given us a set of dogmatic propositions, He has given us a story. He gave us a literal history of redemption, and the doctrines we believe are doctrines we learn from that story.

As we read the story, we say, “Well God did this, so God has this attribute.” Or we say, “God acted in power to deliver Israel, so God is a powerful God.”

We need to consider the form of the Word of God that He gave us, and that sometimes makes it hard for people to understand.

### **CONCLUSION**

So, if you are expecting God to speak to you one way, He speaks to you another way that can be difficult to your understanding, but it should not be. We ought to be accepting and adjusting ourselves to the form God has given His Word in. This requires instruction, diligence, discipline, and prayer.

If you need help, there are people, in the church, with different gifts than you that you can get help from. That is using ordinary means, given by God, to understand His Word. When you use the ordinary means God has given for you to understand His Word, you’ll have a Word you can be confident in, you will have no excuse for not obeying, and you will receive as sovereign, as authoritative, and as clear while God comes near to you to speak the Word that He’s placed on the page.

## 3

## Introduction to Biblical Hermeneutics

Now that we have confidence that all believers can understand the Scriptures—at least in theory for those who have yet to put it to the test—we can now move on to learning how to interpret the Scriptures we are reading.

Biblical hermeneutics is the art and science, or principles, of Bible interpretation. Interpretation of the Bible cannot be done entirely by an individual. The perspicuity, or clarity, of Scripture demands that the Bible is clear to believers that rely upon the Holy Spirit acting through the ordinary means of prayer, the local church, and personal discipline. In the local church, God has gifted teachers and pastors to diligently work at properly handling the Scriptures. These ordinary means also include learning from the writings of fellow saints that have gone before us and gifted us with the fruits of their diligent study of the Scriptures. Many of them used their gifting diligently and have left behind resources, tools, and commentaries that we would be arrogant to reject as aids and as ordinary means of understanding the Scriptures.

There are many hermeneutic systems (principles of interpretation) for the Bible that exist among believers; some are formal in their principles, and some have no formal principles at all. Some approach the Bible based on how other religions approach their sacred texts; while others use interpretive systems based on the latest secular scholarly approach. Some believers use an interpretive system that assumes the Bible was written to the modern reader, or others may treat the Bible as a sacred fortune cookie, opening it only in a time of desperate need in order to provide immediate short-term assistance.

The fact that God's living Word was given to the church and is inspired, inerrant, and thoroughly equips us for living out our faith, means that we cannot treat it like an ordinary book (2 Tim. 3:14–17). We must approach it alongside the local church with all reverence, humility, and diligence in order understand every detail of what God desires to communicate. Just as a young man, who is away at war, is sure to read, reread and hang on every word in a love letter from his new wife back home, believers should love to always be in God's Word. Just as the young man desires to fully, and correctly, interpret every detail in the context of what his wife desired to say so he can know and understand her very heart; believers should also strive to understand the heart of God revealed in His Word. There is only one way to understand the heart of God, and that begins with being active readers of God's Words to us, who reside in this foreign land, in order to serve Him more faithfully.

*12 I write to you, little children,*

*Because your sins are forgiven you for His name's sake.*

*13 I write to you, fathers,*

*Because you have known Him who is from the beginning.  
I write to you, young men,  
Because you have overcome the wicked one.  
I write to you, little children,  
Because you have known the Father.  
14 I have written to you, fathers,  
Because you have known Him who is from the beginning.  
I have written to you, young men,  
Because you are strong, and the word of God abides in you,  
And you have overcome the wicked one. ~ 1 John 2:12–14*

The goal of this book is to encourage disciples of Jesus into a proper perspective and priority of the Scriptures in their lives so they may increasingly understand the heart of God resulting in living lives worthy of their calling for King Jesus.

### **WORSHIPPING GOD TOGETHER WITH ONE MIND AND ONE MOUTH**

If Christianity is based on the Bible, why are there so many varying views about it that lead to so many different kinds of churches, denominations, religions, and even cults within Christendom? Any differences can be categorized according to their order of importance to the Christian faith.

#### **Right Beliefs and Right Fellowship Leads to True Unity**

Primary differences, that involve matters of the gospel, occur between those who share in the fellowship of the Holy Spirit and those who do not. All who share in the primary doctrines of the gospel enjoy unity in the body of Christ where all are people are equal—rich or poor, free or slave, Jew or Gentile, male or female (Gal 3:28). Those who reject any of the core primary doctrines of the gospel can have no fellowship with those who accept them. Regarding matters of primary differences, there can be no fellowship (2 Cor 6:14; 1 Jn 2:15).

Secondary differences, that involve doctrines affecting church polity (government) and other lesser denominational differences, occur between believers who share love and unity in the primary doctrines of the gospel but would benefit from being separated into churches that uphold similar secondary views. In this way, each church, or denomination, can enjoy unity in being like-minded with each other.

Tertiary views, that involve less important individually held doctrines, can occur between members of the same church that is united on primary and secondary issues.

Among all believers, however, Jesus Christ is the common denominator. Without Him, there is no unity between Christians, but with Him, all believers in the gospel of Christ are unified in Jesus forever more. Because of this, we need to realize that we are no more perfect than other believers of whom we may have secondary levels of theological disagreement. God has given every believer to Jesus as a reward and to His glory. So, any walls, built to maintain unity among those with shared secondary views, should not be built up to the heavens where they can never

be crossed. Instead, any necessary walls should remain about knee-high, enabling those who share in the gospel of King Jesus to be able to step over and unite for the work of the gospel of Christ in their communities.

While the following sections give explanations for a great many differences regarding the Scriptures, it will also be shown that believers can be confident in their ability to understand the truths of Scripture and worship Jesus correctly in spirit and in truth (Jn 4:24).

### **A Love versus a Disregard for Truth**

One characteristic of every true believer is a love for truth and an ability to understand it. Anyone who loves and seeks truth will find it through hearing God's Word (Mt. 7:7–12; Rom. 10:5–17), will love Jesus and His righteousness (Jn. 14:6; Rom. 3:22), will abide in the truth through the local church (2 Jn. 1:9–11), and will be spiritually fruitful (Rom. 8:9, 29–30; Prov. 12:12; Jer. 17:7–8; Mt. 7:17–19; 12:33; 13:23; Lk. 6:43–44; Jn. 15:5; Rom. 7:4).

On the other hand, unbelievers are characterized for their disregard for truth concerning God. Those who die in unbelief hate the Light of truth (Jn. 3:19–21), do not love Jesus or His righteousness (Jn. 6:60, 66; Rom. 2:12–16; 1 Pet. 2:8a), and will not abide in any truth they have been given (Mt. 13:1–30; 18:15–20; 2 Jn. 1:9–11).

### **Why Theological Diversity Exists**

Theological differences between churches center on how the Word of God is handled. As a starting point, the proper interpretation of God's Word requires believers to adhere to what God, through His Word, has claimed about His Word. The Bible is authentic as it claims to be fully inspired (Deut 18:18; Jer 1:9; 1 Cor 2:12–13; Gal 3:8; 2 Tim 3:16a; 2 Pet 1:20–21), infallible and inerrant (2 Sam 22:31; Ps 12:6; 19:7; Prov 30:5; Isa 55:11; Heb 6:18; 1 Pet 1:19), sufficient (Heb 4:12; 2 Tim 3:15–17; Col 2:8; Jude 1:3; Gal 1:8; Ps 19:7–14; Jn 10:27), and clear (Ps 119:105; 2 Pet 1:19a; Deut 6:4; Mk 12:37; Eph 1:1; 2 Tim 3:14–15a; Acts 17:11). Some theological diversity exists because these biblical self-claims about God's Word are denied.

Typically, self-claims are never sufficient as a proof of anything. Would a person's claim, as a sole witness, that he saw his dog jump over his house, be sufficient proof concerning his dog? Likewise, are God's self-claims concerning His Word, sufficient proof we can rely on?

The reason self-claims are thought to be insufficient is due to the sinful and fallible nature of any human who makes such a claim. Therefore, God always requires two to three witnesses to decide judgment on a matter (Deut 17:6; 19:15; Matt 18:16; 2 Cor 13:1; 1 Tim 5:19; Heb 10:28; 1 Jn 5:6–13; Rev 11:5).

Jesus even alludes to the idea of self-claims in John 5:31–32, yet He would go on to present two arguments for the truthfulness of His self-claim. Both arguments rely on the fact that His claims supersede the claims of any fallen and fallible man.

*If I bear witness of Myself, My witness is not true. 32 There is another who bears witness of Me, and I know that the witness which He witnesses of Me is true.*

*~ John 5:31–32*

The first argument occurs when Jesus claimed He is the light of the world in John 8:12, and the Pharisees refused His self-claim (v. 13). Jesus countered that because He is the Son of God, in the service of the Father, then He and the Father bear witness to His claims (v. 14–18). This argument fulfills the Law of having two to three witnesses and proves Jesus's claim to be true.

*12 Then Jesus spoke to them again, saying, "I am the light of the world. He who follows Me shall not walk in darkness but have the light of life."*

*13 The Pharisees therefore said to Him, "You bear witness of Yourself; Your witness is not true."*

*14 Jesus answered and said to them, "Even if I bear witness of Myself, My witness is true, for I know where I came from and where I am going; but you do not know where I come from and where I am going. 15 You judge according to the flesh; I judge no one. 16 And yet if I do judge, My judgment is true; for I am not alone, but I am with the Father who sent Me. 17 It is also written in your law that the testimony of two men is true. 18 I am One who bears witness of Myself, and the Father who sent Me bears witness of Me."*

Jesus presents a second argument a few verses later in John 8:46.

*But because I tell the truth, you do not believe Me. 46 Which of you convicts Me of sin? And if I tell the truth, why do you not believe Me?*

In other words, since Jesus is God (8:18), then He was without sin (cf. Jn 8:46) and is infallible. Therefore, His self-claims can be trusted. Likewise, the self-claims from Scripture were authored by the sinless and infallible Holy Spirit and can therefore be trusted as well.

The takeaway is that Christians should not teach what seems right in their own eyes, but as messengers, should be unified in the business of proclaiming and explaining the Scriptures alone. God's Word is our only authority, and believers can only have authority when properly proclaiming God's Word. No spiritual gifting or office in the local church bestows inherent authority upon any individual. A pastor only has authority inasmuch as he is correctly proclaiming the Bible. When this happens, then He becomes God's mouthpiece for the local church. Outside of this, he is not imbued with any other kind of authority.

#### *Reasons for Deviation from Sound Doctrine*

There are only two reasons that believers deviate from sound doctrine. The first is any denial of the authenticity of the biblical text—this includes denial of the inspiration, infallibility, inerrancy, sufficiency, or clarity of Scripture. When handling Scripture in such a way, they

cannot enjoy full trust and reliability concerning the revelation and promises of God as they ought; so, in order to try to worship God, mankind adds, subtracts, or twists certain meanings in the Scriptures and does what is right in their own eyes. This leaning upon their own limited “common sense” understanding defies God’s command to:

*Trust in the Lord with all your heart,  
And lean not on your own understanding.  
In all your ways acknowledge Him,  
And He shall direct your paths. ~ Proverbs 3:5–6*

The second reason believers deviate from sound doctrine is due to misinterpretations of the biblical text that arise as a failure to abide by the science, or principles, of hermeneutics. The principles of hermeneutics establish the boundaries for how a proper interpretation finds the correct meaning of a passage in the Bible. The Bible, correctly interpreted, yields sound doctrines for the faith of all believers.

#### *Reasons for Diverse Interpretations of the Same Biblical Text*

Of course, the fallibility of man prevents believers from obtaining perfect understanding of the totality of Scripture. No one person can ever claim perfect understanding of all of Scripture. Bias, such as presuppositions, or preunderstanding, are pressed into the text obscuring the true meaning. These can include theological, mythological, or cultural biases. Additionally, important facts that are required for a proper interpretation may be outside the realm of a person’s purview causing a misunderstanding of the text.

Also, at some point, all interpreters will desire for some passage to mean a certain thing that it may not mean; so that thing is read into the text (*eisegesis*) rather than read out of the text (*exegesis*). This can happen for two reasons:

For theological reasons many desire the Bible to confirm their beliefs rather than to allow their beliefs to be molded by the Bible. Forming a system of correct beliefs takes a lot of work, over the course of many decades, and since our beliefs are interconnected with all our other beliefs, it is easy to become rigid in these beliefs rather than remaining malleable to the Holy Spirit’s leading in the Word. When the Scriptures do reveal that one of these sacred beliefs are not entirely correct, other interconnected beliefs may also be called into question; so that our theological tapestry may start unravelling and become in need of repairs. Then what? Do we humble ourselves before the Truth of Scripture and repair the work, or do we hold rigidly to what we have built for ourselves?

For antinomian (lawless) reasons, a Christian who is living in sin is susceptible to making inaccurate Bible interpretations because his heart and mind are not in harmony with the Holy Spirit. This is often seen when people twist the meaning of Scripture allowing them to indulge their sinful desires.

In either case, faithful interpreters must allow the Scriptures to speak for themselves no matter how much work it takes to reformulate personal theological positions or how much sacrifice it requires of us to submit and humbly follow the Lord Jesus.

Regarding the outcome of understanding truth in the Scriptures, there is no difference between an unintentional misinterpretation of a passage and an intentional rejection of what the Bible says. Both miss God's truth. Believers must therefore treat God's words with all reverence, diligence, and care as our sole source of authority. All believers are responsible for understanding God's Word and obeying them.

### **THE SCRIPTURES REQUIRE BIBLICAL HERMENEUTICS**

Many believe they can just read the Bible relative to their own lives and come to their own conclusions of what Christianity is about. In this way, they decide how they'll do church, or how they'll live out their life in general. This is not the way to biblical truth at all. The Bible is the Word of God, and because God has given believers His Holy Spirit, direct access to God in prayer, and the local church for the understanding and working out of His Word, then there are certain principles needed to appropriate God's truths correctly. The truths of Scripture do not vary with the individual; they are absolute and meant to be ascertained and followed corporately. Here are some other reasons that the Bible needs to be approached with all reverence following correct principles in order to understand it.

#### **The Bible Requires the Highest Activity of Our Mind**

The Bible is not to be approached out of a sense of mindless duty in order to check a spiritual box. God created us to have wonderful minds that can have understanding by systematically connecting pieces of our world together into a vivid picture that represents our reality. There is no better medium to promote this level of understanding than when we read. Such a detailed and vivid understanding from reading is why so many people who have read certain books reject the movies based on them. This ability to gain understanding through reading is why God chose to reveal Himself to us in written form. The word "Scriptures" means the writings.

When we read God's Word, we should be piecing together who God is, how He interacts with the world, and what is required of us. The following statements give reasons why our minds should be fully engaged in experiencing the Scriptures:

- Because the Bible is the fullness of God's complete revelation that He chose to reveal to us about Himself, we must understand who God is to worship Him correctly.
- Because the Scriptures are inerrant and infallible, we must strive to understand the coherence of the truths it contains.
- Because the Bible is the sole source of Authority as our rule of faith, we must study it correctly to properly submit our lives to it.
- Because the Bible is necessary and sufficient for righteous living, we must rely upon correctly interpreted truths.

- Because the Bible is clear to believers using “ordinary means”, we must understand it corporately within the bounds of the local church.

### **The Bible is Completely Alien to Us**

Consider how alien the Scriptures are to us. The language was written in the now dead foreign languages of Hebrew, Aramaic, and Greek. The setting takes place in foreign lands more than 2000 years ago. The biblical people are a foreign people with a foreign culture. Just the fact that God is perfect, infinite, and eternal makes His thoughts and ways beyond our limited thoughts and ways (Isa 55:8–9; Eph 3:14–21).

### **The Bible is Our Sole Source of Authority and Nourishment**

The following statements summarize some of the implications from the Bible being the believer’s sole source of authority and nourishment. They are based on the following passages.

Matt 28:18; 1 Cor 11:3; 15:23–28 cf. Jn 16:13–15; Matt 28:19–20; 1 Cor 2:12–13; Acts 20:27; 2 Pet 1:2–4, 10–15; 2 Tim 3:16–17; 1 Jn 1:3–4; 2 Pet 1:16, 19–21; Gal 1:6–9, 11–12; Jn 12:48; Rom 2:16; Jude 3; Gal 1:8–9

- The Bible gives nourishment to us. It feeds our mind and our soul. It keeps our mind on the right path in following our Lord and fills our soul with the hope and joy we have in Jesus.
- The Bible is our sole authority given by God so we can glorify Him. It is what we are to measure every inch of our lives against. When the word “Canon” is used about the Scriptures, it means what our faith is measured up against. The word “canon” means measuring stick.
- The clarity of Scripture leave’s people without excuse for disobedience to their present duties. Since the Bible is a set standard which cannot be altered or contradicted, it is the standard by which we will be judged.
- There is no continuing revelation from God with which we can seek out. We have the fullness of God’s intended revelation about Himself and His redemptive plans for the world.
- Of all the spiritual disciplines, the Bible is the priority in our spiritual growth. It is the Holy Spirit’s tool and our food. It is the means of sanctification (Jn 17:17–19).

*All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, thoroughly equipped for every good work. ~ 2 Timothy 3:16, 17*

*Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God. ~ Matthew 4:4*

*Our lives are controlled by our convictions. As the truth of God's Word begins to occupy our minds and shape our thoughts, it will produce principles that we desire not to violate. This is what sanctification is about — being inwardly compelled to obedience. ~ John MacArthur*

### **Characteristics of Biblical Hermeneutics**

Again, biblical hermeneutics is the art and science of interpreting the Bible. Hermeneutics is a science because it operates under fixed rules, called the “principles of hermeneutics”, which will be detailed later. Because these fixed rules determine the interpretation of Scripture, and the Scriptures are our sole source of doctrine, hermeneutics is therefore the science behind all doctrine.

Hermeneutics is an art because it requires the skilled application of the hermeneutic principles to interpret more difficult passages. This art cultivates procedures for interpretation.

#### *Perspicuity of Scripture – God Made His Revelation Clear*

God revealed himself clearly so we can know how to glorify Him. This great doctrine is known as the perspicuity of Scripture. Because the Bible is clear, what God intended to say to us can be known through diligence and the discipline of hermeneutics.

#### *Authorial Intent*

Hermeneutics looks for the sole meaning from the author's intended communication to the intended audience. It should be noted that the Bible was not written *to* us today; it was written *for* us.

Authors of the Bible: God and His inspired human authors

Audience of the Bible: The historical recipients of the writing

### **The Hermeneutic Standards from God**

God has set basic minimum requirements so believers can understand His own heart behind the words of Scripture. Those that wish to discover God through the Bible must be believers, must submit to biblical hermeneutics with all diligence, and must commit their life to every component of being in God's Word.

#### *The Natural Man Cannot Interpret Scripture*

While unsaved people can understand the words of Scripture and mentally understand what it is saying, they have no ability to welcome and appropriate its spiritual truths.

*But the natural man does not receive [warmly welcome] the things of the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him; nor can he know [experience] them, because they are spiritually discerned. ~ 1 Corinthians 2:14*

Biblical truths are not welcome by those lacking the indwelling of the Holy Spirit because it strikes at the core of their sinfulness (1 Cor 2:14a). Contrast this with the Bereans who “received [welcomed] the word with all readiness” (Acts 17:11).

Because the unsaved do not welcome the spiritual truths, they cannot experience God's Word. The Greek word for "know" in 1 Cor 2:14b is *ginōskō* and refers to knowing through intimate experience as opposed to knowing by intellectual comprehension.

*Those Who Do Not Submit Themselves to the Science and Principles of Interpreting Scripture with Diligence Cannot Interpret Scripture*

More than regeneration is necessary to experience God's words. Reverence for, and interest in, God and His Word are essential to interpreting the Bible properly.

*Be diligent to present yourself approved to God, a worker who does not need to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth. ~ 1 Timothy 2:15*

While handling the Word accurately requires diligence, or hard work, not handling the Word accurately leads to being ashamed before God. This verse rules out any acceptance of laziness or playing loose with the Scriptures. The Scriptures should be treated as holy (2 Tim 3:15).

Understanding the meaning of the Word also requires a great amount of work from pastors. The local church is then the beneficiary of the pastor's work since the church receives the clarity of Scripture from them. God gives preachers and teachers to the church so its members can understand His Words.

*Let the elders who rule well be counted worthy of double honor, especially those who labor in the word and doctrine. ~ 1 Timothy 5:17*

The interpreter should approach the Bible prayerfully, with humility, and a willingness to obey it. There is a possibility that the interpretation one has found is incorrect. Understand that other Christian readers throughout the centuries have struggled to find the meaning as well and may have found insights into that portion of Scripture. We are fallible and need to be humble enough to subject our interpretation to better insights rather than holding on to our own findings as sacred cows that prevent true obedience in worship to God.

*Believers Must Commit to Four Components of Being in the Word of God*

The first commitment to being in God's Word is the hearing of the Word which occurs during the preaching of the Scriptures in the local church.

*But on this one will I look: On him who is poor and of a contrite spirit, and who trembles at My word. ~ Isaiah 66:2*

*Then He said to them, "Take heed what you hear. With the same measure you use, it will be measured to you; and to you who hear, more will be given. ~ Mark 4:24*

*But He said, "More than that, blessed are those who hear the word of God and keep it!" ~ Luke 11:28*

*But be doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving yourselves. ~ James 1:22*

The second commitment is to the daily study of the Word. Individuals must give priority to their daily spiritual feeding.

*Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God. ~ Matt 4:4*

The third commitment is to the meditation of the Word. Believers should consider the Word as they live out their lives. Daily meditation simply follows the daily study of God's Word. Meditation is the considering of God's Word concerning our lives and the situations we encounter throughout the day.

*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; 2 But his delight is in the law of the Lord, and in His law, he meditates day and night. ~ Psalms 1:1-2*

*But the wisdom that is from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, willing to yield, full of mercy and good fruits, without partiality and without hypocrisy. 18 Now the fruit of righteousness is sown in peace by those who make peace. ~ James 3:17-18*

Lastly, memorization of the Word provides the tools necessary to war against sin. We are to have God's Words ready for use by the Holy Spirit. Before Jesus began His earthly ministry, He was led up to the wilderness to be tempted by Satan. Jesus showed us that the key component to standing up against temptation was to rely upon the truths of memorized Scripture. After forty days and nights of seeking God through fasting, Jesus was extremely hungry. Satan attempted to use Jesus' weakened state by tempting Him to create bread out of the nearby stones which would cause Jesus to seek after His own desires rather than the leading of God. Jesus responded in Matthew 4:4 by quoting Deuteronomy 8:3.

*But He answered and said, "It is written, 'Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God'." ~ Matthew 4:4*

King David had also found it necessary to memorize Scripture to be able stay on the righteous path.

*How can a young man cleanse his way? By taking heed according to Your word. 10 With my whole heart I have sought You; oh, let me not wander from Your commandments! 11 Your word I have hidden in my heart, that I might not sin against You. ~ Psalms 119:9-11*

Remember that while we face many physical hardships in this world, the underlying reality is that everything we face is spiritual warfare.

*Finally, my brethren, be strong in the Lord and in the power of His might. 11 Put on the whole armor of God, that you may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil. 12 For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against principalities,*

*against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this age, against spiritual hosts of wickedness in the heavenly places. 13 Therefore take up the whole armor of God, that you may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand. ~ Ephesians 6:10–13*

### **THE FLOW OF WELCOMING AND EXPERIENCING THE SCRIPTURES**

Just as every field or discipline has its own words, or language, to allow for effective communication about ideas specific to that field, the field of biblical studies also has words that will help to convey ideas concerning how we are to welcome and experience the power of God through His Scriptures so we can become better disciples of Jesus.

Many people in Bible studies today stop to observe the biblical text, but then they jump straight into application by stating what the text means to them personally. This sloppy method completely ignores the proper flow of interpretation, can miss the point of the author, and can lead to false beliefs and wrong worship.

To truly experience the Scriptures, Christians must understand what concepts are necessary and how these concepts relate and flow together. The flow moves from hermeneutics to exegesis and ends with exposition, with every step being bathed in prayer to God. Let's look more closely at each one of these steps.

#### **Hermeneutics Defined**

Again, hermeneutics is the art and science by which the meaning of the biblical text is determined.

The English word “hermeneutics” comes from the Greek verb *hermēneuō* and the noun *hermēneia*. These words point back to the wing-footed messenger-god, Hermes, in Grecian mythology. He was responsible for transmuting what is beyond human understanding into a form that human intelligence can grasp. He is said to have discovered language and writing and was the god of literature and eloquence, among other things. He was the messenger or interpreter of the gods, and particularly of his father, Zeus (cf. Acts 14:11–18). Thus, the verb *hermēneuō* came to refer to bringing someone to an understanding of something in his language (requiring explanation) or in another language (requiring translation).

The English word “interpret” at times is used to mean “explain” and at other times “translate.” Of the 19 times *hermēneuō* and *hermēneia* occur in the New Testament, they are more frequently used in the sense of translating.

In Luke 24:27 the verb *dihermēneuō* is used: “And beginning with Moses and all the Prophets, He *explained* to them what was said in all the Scriptures concerning Himself.”

When Jesus spoke to Simon, in John 1:42, He said, “You will be called Cephas’ (which, when *translated*, is Peter)”.

The word “translated” renders the Greek word, *hermēneuō*. In a sense a translation is an explanation, explaining in one language what is conveyed in another language. Thus, the overall concept of interpretation involves making something that was unclear or unknown as clear and intelligible through explaining or translating.

Biblical hermeneutics provides the principles that determine whether an interpretation is correct or incorrect. Without a proper sense of the principles of hermeneutics, communication could not exist, as it would be near impossible to understand the meaning from anyone. What if everything a speaker said could have multiple meanings? What if at any time it was always unknown whether the speaker was being literal or not, etc.? What if no one could ever know what was being emphasized in the communication versus what existed as just supporting points? How could people communicate properly under such circumstances? While hermeneutics is not the actual act of interpreting, it does provide the guidelines for the act of interpreting.

Think of the flow of welcoming and experiencing the Scriptures in terms of baking a cake. Just as a cake has a recipe that provides guidelines to make a cake, hermeneutics provides the principles that also must be followed. Hermeneutic principles are equivalent to the recipe. Just as it is important to follow a good recipe to produce a delicious cake, only good hermeneutic principles will deliver the tasty meal God intends to feed us with.

### **Exegesis Defined**

Exegesis means to “lead out of” and is the determination of the meaning of the biblical passage in its historical and literary contexts. Exegesis is the act of interpreting the biblical passage.

Exegesis is a process that happens in private in which the student of the Bible examines the context, historical backgrounds, words, and sentence structure to understand the meaning the author intended to his audience. The meaning found through exegesis should uphold all the principles of hermeneutics.

While hermeneutics consists of the principles by which the meaning is determined, exegesis is the actual interpretation of the Bible. Again, think of these words in terms of baking a cake. While hermeneutics is like the recipe, exegesis is like the work of preparing and baking the cake. Exegesis is where all the technical work happens but is not the end goal. Exegesis is the step towards the end goal of “exposition”.

### **Exposition Defined**

Exposition is the communication of the meaning of the text along with its relevance and application to present-day hearers.

An effective expositor (person performing the exposition) is first an effective exegete (person performing the exegesis) since exegesis comes before exposition. While exegesis encompasses the private, technical work of finding the intended meaning of the biblical passage, exposition takes place by publicly communicating, either behind a pulpit, in leading a Bible study, or even in one-on-one evangelism, the meaning and relevance of the passage that was found privately

through exegesis. Exposition communicates the meaning of the text in its original setting and then applies the meaning of the text for modern hearers.

The work of exegesis typically leaves behind an exhaustive number of notes, facts, and data. Yet it would not be wise to present all that work to your audience. The presenter, or expositor, must summarize, in a concise way, the results of the exegetical work in a Christ-centered way. An artist of any kind does not desire for people to focus on all the fine technical details of his work and how it was prepared and created; rather he desires others to see the whole of the finished work and how the various parts of it are related in order to savor the beauty of what is being expressed. Likewise, not all the details found during exegesis should be shared publicly, during the exposition, as it would cause an overload of confusion and diminish the main thrust of the passage itself.

If hermeneutics is the cookbook to make a cake, and exegesis is the technical work of making the cake, exposition is the practical serving of the cake to the people for them to taste, experience, and consume.

This concludes the introduction to biblical hermeneutics. It is the hope of this author that the reader understands the great importance that hermeneutics has for gaining a proper understanding of the Scriptures, which guides all the other spiritual disciplines so we can become more like Christ in our being and in our work.



## 4

## Principles of Biblical Hermeneutics

The principles of hermeneutics are what guides a proper analysis and interpretation of a biblical text. Without hermeneutical principles, God's literal-historical redemptive plan in the Scriptures becomes meaningless and confused causing mankind to lean on their own foolish understanding and doing what is right in their own eyes in order to please God with their carnal worship (Jdgs. 2:7–23; 17:6; 21:25).

The principles of hermeneutics are based on two self-evident truths, or axioms, concerning the Bible: The Bible is a divine book (from God), and the Bible is a human book (to God's created images). Because God created mankind in His image (Gen 1:26–28; Rom 8:28–30; Eph 4:24; Col 3:10; 2 Cor 3:18) there is correspondence between God and man in which God chose to reveal Himself through Jesus and the written Word. Because the Bible is a human book, mankind can come to know and understand God through basic literary principles. While we will explore seven of the most important principles, there are many more for advanced exegetes.

### **THE SINGLE MEANING PRINCIPLE**

All texts of Scriptures have one, and only one, interpretation, of what the author intended to mean to the intended audience. The single meaning principle is the foundation that allows all human communication to make sense.

#### **Single Meaning and Application**

Applying the truths of Scripture to the modern reader should only happen after the proper meaning of the text is found. The contemporary reader should never place themselves in the text since the text was not written to him or her. Instead, once the meaning is found, then and only then should the reader apply the meaning to themselves or others in a similar way in our modern setting. There is always only one meaning, yet the application of that meaning may be many.

#### **Single Meaning and Eisegesis**

Biblical exegesis means “to lead out of”. It is an interpretation brought out of a passage based on careful objective analysis. Exegesis diligently handles the text by attempting to understand the passage's point at the expense of the interpreter's desires. Exegesis also relies upon an interpreter's unbiased approach of Scripture.

On the other hand, biblical eisegesis means “to lead into”. It is an interpretation placed into a passage based on subjective, nonanalytical, and imaginative reading. Eisegesis is a mishandling of the text by attempting to make an interpreter's point at the expense of the passage's context or meaning of words. Eisegesis also relies upon the interpreter's biased approach (also called presuppositions, or preunderstanding) of Scripture.

### Single Meaning and Allegory

There are typically three reasons why the Bible can be taught or spoken of incorrectly. Most commonly, it is due to the passage being taken out of context. Less commonly it is due to a poor translation of the original language behind the passage. Lastly, it is because the passage is allegorized. To say that a passage is allegorized means that the original meaning of what the author intended to say is either ignored altogether or deemphasized and replaced with another more spiritual meaning. It should be noted that allegorical interpretations occur not by what the text says, but what the interpreter desires for it to say. The allegorical interpretation then uses eisegesis to add in yet another, or multiple other, meanings to the same passage.

More will be explained about the use of allegory, but it is sufficient to explain that the author's meaning in the text is the only meaning that the Holy Spirit inspired the author to write to his intended historical audience. Without the single-meaning principle, anyone can make the Bible say anything they want it to say, effectively shutting down God's message to us.

## THE LITERAL PRINCIPLE

Scripture must be interpreted according to real history and real people using normal language. We will now discuss the difference between normal language and anomalous language.

### Normal Language

While normal language does not consist of allegory, it does consist of analogy, metaphors, simile, symbolism, and illustrations. Here are definitions and examples of some figures of speech used in the Bible:

**Analogy** – A comparison between two things for the purpose of explanation or clarification. Here is an example: "Finding that dog will be like finding a needle in a haystack." What is being expressed is that finding the dog will be extremely difficult. There are many analogies used in the Scriptures, including all the parables spoken by Jesus. Parables are fictional stories that use analogy to convey an actual truth.

**Anthropomorphism** – Describing a transcendent Deity in human terms. "For the eyes of the Lord run to and fro throughout the whole earth, to show Himself strong on behalf of *those* whose heart *is* loyal to Him." (2 Chron 16:9). The "eyes of the Lord run..." communicates the concept that the Lord sees everything that is happening in the hearts of all people.

**Euphemism** – Substituting an unobjectionable word for a possibly harsh or more objectionable one. Here is an example: "Adam knew Eve his wife" (Gen 4:1). This phrase means that they had sexual intercourse. "Bow down over her" (Job 31:10) also refers to sexual relations.

**Hyperbole** – Intentional exaggeration. Here is an example: "If your right eye causes you to sin, pluck it out and cast it from you" (Matt 5:29). This exaggeration highlights the serious need to avoid sin at all costs.

**Irony** – The literal meaning is contrasting or opposite of the real meaning. Here is an example: "You have reigned as kings without us—and indeed I could wish you did reign, that we

also might reign with you!" (1 Corinthians 4:8). The Corinthians viewed themselves as prominent members of God's kingdom. Here, Paul critiques this attitude of superiority and entitlement, showing that everything the Corinthians possess has been given to them as a gift. Their attitude does not reflect the instruction they originally received—hence Paul's comment that this happened "...without us."

**Metaphors** – A type of figure of speech in which a word or phrase is applied to an object or action to which it is not literally applicable. Here is an example: "He is the black sheep of the family." While the man is not a sheep, what is being communicated is that the man has a reputation of standing apart from his family in a negative manner. A biblical example is when the psalmist exclaims in Psalms 18:2, "The Lord is my rock and my fortress and my deliverer; my God, my strength, in whom I will trust; my shield and the horn of my salvation, my stronghold."

**Personification** – Personal qualities assigned to an object. Here is an example: "The mountains skipped like rams, the little hills like lambs." (Psalm 114:4). This verse poetically references the mountains of Sinai, and the surrounding smaller hills, shaking with joy when acknowledging the presence of the supremely powerful God, Yahweh, before Moses and the people of Israel.

**Simile** – The comparison of one thing with another thing of a different kind, used to make a description more emphatic or vivid. Here is an example: "as brave as a lion." A biblical example is Jesus' command in Matthew 10:16, "Behold, I send you out as sheep in the midst of wolves. Therefore, be wise as serpents and harmless as doves."

**Symbolism** – The use of symbols to represent ideas or qualities. Here is an example: "The dove is a symbol of peace." A biblical example can be seen in the way that leaven (yeast) represents influential sin in the Bible. Mark 8:15 refers to Jesus talking to His disciples, "Then He charged them, saying, take heed, beware of the leaven of the Pharisees and the leaven of Herod." Interestingly, the next verse shows that the disciples misunderstood what Jesus said because they did not represent "leaven" symbolically as Jesus had meant it. Here is their reply to Jesus in v. 16, "And they reasoned among themselves, saying, 'It is because we have no bread'."

**Words of association** – One word stands for something else. Here are examples: "sword" for all weapons (Rom 8:35); "Circumcised" meaning the Jewish people (Gal 2:9).

It should also be noted that images of biblical prophecy always convey reality in a symbolic way. Daniel 8:20–21 prophesies a future event between a ram, with two horns, and a goat with one horn. These are symbols with the ram of two horns symbolizing the united strength of the kings of Media and Persia, and the goat with one horn representing the Greek king, Alexander the Great.

### **Anomalous Language**

Allegory consists of anomalous, or out of the ordinary, language. When this is done, the plain reading of the text becomes superseded by a spiritualized meaning or some mystical interpretation of a text.

Allegory is a figure of speech in which abstract ideas and principles are described in terms of characters, figures, and events. It can be employed in prose and poetry to tell a story, with a purpose of teaching or explaining an idea or a principle. The objective of its use is to teach a moral lesson. Allegory also comprises a complete narrative, or story, where every character, action, or item represents abstract ideas or events. Allegory, by contrast, tends to be book—or feature—length. Every character in an allegory represents a different moral or political concept or viewpoint, and the true meaning of the story is left for the reader to interpret, and different readers interpret the true meaning differently.

If you were to use the terms, “parable” and “allegory” interchangeably, you wouldn't be the first, and most people wouldn't call you out on it. However, the truth is that a parable is not an allegory. Allegory and parables are distinguishable literary entities.

A parable is usually much shorter than an allegory, with a moral message readily apparent to the reader. The most famous parables are given by Jesus. He used simple stories to illustrate complex moral and theological concepts concerning the kingdom of God. The Prodigal Son and The Good Samaritan are two of the better-known parables. In these parables, not every item has a symbolic or deeper meaning to it, as is typical for an allegory.

Allegory can also be defined as secret spiritualized or mystic hidden meanings not contained in normal everyday language. Writers use allegory to add different layers of meanings to their works that make their stories and characters multidimensional to stand for something larger in meaning than what is literally written. Allegory is a wonderful literary tool used in great works, such as John Bunyan's *Pilgrim's Progress* and C. S. Lewis' *The Chronicles of Narnia*, to tell stories that are underlain with rich spiritual Christian truths. For example, in Lewis' *Chronicles of Narnia*, the hidden, or deeper, truth behind the literal character of Aslan the lion is that he represents Christ, even though he is never explicitly said to be Christ. In allegory most of the characters and events are meant to symbolically portray a whole array of different meanings.

However, there are no allegories in the Bible. In other words, there are no hidden, secret, spiritualized, or mystical meanings in the Bible. The use of allegory violates the literal and single meaning principles and opens a door to any kind of interpretation for a given passage.

To demonstrate God's plan of redeeming the world and expressing God's moral absolutes, the Bible comprises and depends upon being rooted in actual, literal history. Being rooted in actual history, the Bible is unlike all the writings of ancient pagan religions such as Hinduism and Buddhism, that must rely upon allegory at its core. The Bible is the record of God working out His redemptive plan for mankind throughout history until its prophesied fulfillment. To impress allegory onto such a literal-historical record undermines what God has done and what He has promised to do.

*History of Allegorical Interpretation*

While the use of the allegorical method to interpret Scripture finds its origins in Greek antiquity, the original method of interpreting Scripture was literal and straightforward. There was a time, before the Greeks introduced the use of allegorical interpretation to Jewish philosophers and religious scholars, when the literal approach to Scripture was all there was. Jewish people interpreted the Hebrew Scriptures literally. The prophets would cry out that the people were facing judgment because they had stopped worshipping God and had departed from the Law of Moses. The prophets expected the people to uphold the Law in a literal fashion. There was no concept of spiritualizing different meanings of the Law or treating the Law mystically (both are allegorical forms). Daniel realized from Jeremiah's writings that the captivity of Judah into Babylon would literally last seventy years. In the Scriptures we see that one prophet would write something, and another prophet would interpret it literally. Written revelation from God was always interpreted in a normal, literal fashion.

Meanwhile, debate was occurring in ancient Greece over how to interpret the writings of the philosopher, Plato (c. 427-347 BC), regarding his famous Theory of Forms (or Ideas). Plato's theory posits that behind every imperfect physical thing, exists a perfect representation of it in the transcendent spiritual realm of the "eternal forms". For example, this theory explains why, when someone draws an imperfect circle by hand, other people recognize immediately that it is supposed to be a circle. Because everyone already has in mind what a perfect circle is to begin with, they can relate the imperfect hand-drawn form to the ideal form in their mind. Plato calls this realm of perfect ideal forms the realm of eternal forms, where all physical things have their ideal. While this is just a crude and limited example of Plato's theory, one can see that this theory seems to be almost an allegory in itself—having a hidden, ideal, spiritualized meaning behind what is seen in the imperfect, material reality. Plato rejected this notion of interpreting his theory, but the allegorical interpretation took hold anyways, and all sorts of unintended meanings were derived from Plato's theory.

Plato's students, including Aristotle (c. 384-322 BC) and the rest of the Academy, meanwhile, rejected the allegorical meanings of Plato's philosophy and was hostile to the group who did not read Plato's works literally. Instead, Aristotle assigned the need for allegorical interpretation to be used in understanding all the stories concerning the pagan Greek myths and their gods. He thought the myths to be originally conjured up for the use of explaining various philosophical ideas before the more learned Academy of philosophy existed. So, to Aristotle, there were hidden meanings behind the Greek myths that concerned philosophical truths.

As interest in Plato spread from Athens to Alexandria and other cities across the Mediterranean, there was a turn from the direct literal interpretation used by the Academy. From the first century BC onwards, the followers of Plato, referred to today as the 'Neo-Platonists', were the most vigorous advocates of the allegorical interpretation of Plato. Thus, the allegorical approach to reading Plato became the norm.

During this time, a Jewish philosopher, named Philo of Alexandria (c. 20 BC-AD 50), used this Greek allegorical method to interpret the Hebrew Scriptures. Alexandria, Egypt was founded

by Alexander the Great and was therefore greatly influenced by Greek culture and philosophy (*Hellenism*). Philo thought the doctrines in Plato's work and the Jewish Scriptures were so similar that Plato must have certainly studied the teachings of Moses and borrowed his philosophy from the Jews. Philo even went so far as to allegorically tease out Plato's philosophical doctrines from the Torah in order to show that this philosophy existed in the Hebrew Scriptures even before Plato had founded them. Today, we would say that Philo ignored the direct, literal meaning of Scripture and interpreted Scripture in fanciful ways in order to find Plato's philosophical concepts in them. This is what allegorical interpretation does. After Philo, allegorical interpretation of the Old Testament would become a popular method among the various rabbinic schools.

When Jesus came to earth in the "fulness of time" (Gal 4:4), He had to contend with some of these allegorical interpretations that had become the basis of man-made traditions in the Jewish religion. Jesus's disciples were accused by the Pharisees of eating with unwashed hands. Yet we see in Mark 7:1–23 that the disciples were not being accused of violating any law of Scripture; instead, the Pharisees were accusing them of violating their man-made traditions (see verses 3 and 4). This tradition, concerning the washing of hands, was spelled out in minutia throughout one entire written volume, that was not inspired by God, which was motivated solely by the imaginative allegorical interpretations of religious rulers. Even their Mishnah, or supposed oral law, devotes thirty chapters concerning the ceremonial washing of pots and pans. What great burdens are to be carried when religious people refuse to heed God's Word literally and instead, heed the allegorical meanings of men!

Before the second century AD, the earliest church fathers, such as Clement of Alexandria, Ignatius, and Polycarp, followed a moderate, straightforward path between literalism and allegorism in their interpretation of the Scriptures. With such direct readings, various doctrines, such as the premillennial view of the return of Christ, were maintained.

It was not until the third century that another church father, Origen of Alexandria (AD 185–c. 254), would have a great impact on how the Bible should be interpreted. Origen, known as a great theologian, but also known today for holding unorthodox Christian views, developed and popularized his own allegorical method of interpretation. For Origen, giving a deeper spiritual meaning was valued more highly than finding the literal meaning of a biblical text. His allegorical method took a moralistic, rather than redemptive, approach to biblical interpretation, even though the whole of the Bible concerns God's redemption of a fallen mankind in a fallen world. After all, the main distinctive between Christianity and all other world religions is that it is the only one that fully deals with sin. The Bible starts with no sin and ends with no sin—everything in between deals with the redemption plan from sin.

Origen's allegorical method of interpretation influenced other great theologians like Ambrose of Milan and his student, Augustine of Hippo (AD 354–430). It also impacted, and dominated, Christian thought and medieval culture throughout the Middle Ages and is still used today in Eastern Orthodox, Roman Catholic, and in liberal theology found in modern mainline Protestant denominations.

Although in the minority of their time, there were other great men, between the time of Origen and the Protestant Reformation (AD 1517), who continued to advocate a literal interpretation of the Bible in opposition to what they regarded as the excesses of allegorical interpretation. These include such prestigious men as Jerome (c. AD 347-419), who translated the Latin Vulgate Bible, Thomas Aquinas (1225-1274), John Wycliffe (c. 1328-1384), Jan Hus (c. 1372-1415), and John Colet (1467-1519).

False teachers throughout church history have also relied upon allegorical interpretations to twist the inspired biblical author's intended meaning to gain mass appeal, power, and money. In the name of worshipping God, these allegorical interpretations drive people away from the gospel of Christ while forcing them to chase after their own works of salvation that are based on the religious traditions of men.

With the Protestant Reformation of the 16<sup>th</sup> century, the Reformers (primarily Calvin and Luther), led the new Protestant church away from the allegorical approach. Since that time, there was a flurry of activity in undoing all the previous allegorical interpretations and interpreting the Bible in a literal-historical and contextual way. After so many centuries, the Bible became alive to people again! Believers could understand its straight-forward meaning and understand how to worship and serve Christ in truth. People could understand and rely upon the promises of God literally. Most importantly, the burden of working for one's salvation, and not being certain it was achieved, was lifted. Christ literally performed all mankind's saving work in His substitutionary death and resurrection, and by putting one's trust in the work of Jesus, and following Him, one could be assured of their salvation.

While the Reformers returned the church to the literal meanings of the Bible, they struggled in understanding its passages of eschatological and apocalyptic symbolism. Many refer to these passages of the Bible as covenant promises and prophecies. Today, the Reformed tradition still maintains the allegorical interpretive meanings concerning these kinds of passages. The outcome yields such doctrines as covenant theology, replacement theology—that sees the church as having replaced Israel in receiving the promises of the Old Testament, amillennial or post-millennial views concerning the return of Christ, etc.

Others, however, have continued the untangling of the meaning of Scripture from the allegorical methods used in the eschatological and apocalyptic literature of the Bible. Such straight-forward renderings of these passages maintains that the future promises for Israel will still be fulfilled for a faithful Jewish remnant, but that right now, the church is reaching the lost—both Jew and Gentile—with the light of Christ. The prophetic fulfillment for Israel will occur when Jesus comes back and establishes His 1000-year world reign from the literal, earthly throne of King David in Jerusalem. This is known as the premillennial view. More will be said about this in the following section.

Hopefully, one can readily understand one major source for so many theological positions, held throughout Christendom today, falls on how the Bible is interpreted, based on either an allegorical approach or a literal, straightforward approach.

The keepers of the allegorical method, including those of modern Rabbinic Judaism, Roman Catholicism, Eastern Orthodox, and prosperity gospel teaching, lay heavy burdens upon people's shoulders that they are unwilling to help move (Matt 23:4). We have already seen how this occurred in Jesus's day, and it is no different in our contemporary time as well. They all commit their adherents to the massive burden of works and rituals in order for them to have any chance of salvation—of which they will never have confidence in obtaining. Likewise, their leadership claims power over the laity as being the sole keepers of the interpretations of the Bible.

Today, believers desire for God to speak to them personally. Christianity is supposed to be a relationship with God, through Christ, after all. We know that we speak to God in prayer, and we hear God speak to us, by the Holy Spirit, through His Word. By these means of grace, we hope God will guide us through all of life's big decisions that affect our worship and service for Him—like taking a job, changing where we live, dating, buying an automobile, etc. While we want the Bible to be relevant to our lives, and it is, the danger comes when we read a meaning into a passage (*eisegesis*) that was never intended for us. In other words, we read our current situation into the Bible and give it a spiritual meaning behind the text that suites our needs. This allegorical interpretation misses the truth of God's Word and what He wants to say to us.

#### *Cultural Christianity and Denominational Use of Allegorical Interpretation*

Here are more examples of using an allegorical approach to Scripture that are popular with the present state of American church culture. This section will cover spiritualization of the text, social justice interpretations, divining God's Word, and treating prophecy as allegory. These examples are given so the student of the Bible can better recognize different forms of allegorizing passages and avoid them.

*Spiritualization of the text.* This can be found in many superficial evangelical Bible studies. A popular example is the spiritualization of the account of David and Goliath found in 1 Sam 17. Those who want to slay their giants often allegorize David's five stones to refer to five spiritual things like faith, prayer, obedience, etc. Yet in the narrative, not only did David use real stones, but he did not rely on those stones for his success. Verse 45 says he only relied on the name of the Lord. In this case, real stones are being allegorized as points of spiritual discipline and miss the meaning that is the saving work of God alone. Superficial Bible studies, that take place out of ignorance, in even the best of churches, should be avoided by the faithful student of God's Word.

*Social justice interpretation.* This method of interpretation comes from progressive, protestant theology out of Germany in the middle of the nineteenth century. Such handling of the Bible is called higher criticism, and it is deeply intertwined with the secular philosophies of rationalism and naturalism that de-historizes Scripture. Such a treatment of Scripture denies the historical redemptive setting of the Bible, and limits Scripture into only moral and philosophical meanings. The scholarly field of higher criticism of the Bible, which results in liberal theology, spread across Europe, England, and the United States by way of mainline protestant, Roman Catholic, and Anglican denominations. Up until today, higher criticism continues to evolve in how it allegorizes the Scriptures into spiritualized, moral ways. Its main purpose has become a desire to uphold progressive social views, such as feminism, liberation theology, critical race

theory, queer theory, and social justice platforms with a form of godliness. Such a treatment denies original sin, and the historical, substitutionary, atoning work of Christ and His resurrection as the only means by which God's righteousness can be experienced in our fallen world.

In other words, higher criticism is a foolish scholarly vehicle of mankind's rebellion against God, His laws, and His justice. Justice in its purest form is just called "justice", and it is always centered on the absolute, perfect, and righteous identity and character of God. Any form of justice that demands that an adjective be placed before it (e.g., "social" in social justice) is man-centered by its very name and reflects a perverse justice from the fallen and depraved nature of mankind.

*But know this, that in the last days perilous times will come: 2 For men will be lovers of themselves, lovers of money, boasters, proud, blasphemers, disobedient to parents, unthankful, unholy, 3 unloving, unforgiving, slanderers, without self-control, brutal, despisers of good, 4 traitors, headstrong, haughty, lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God, 5 having a form of godliness but denying its power. And from such people turn away! 6 For of this sort are those who creep into households and make captives of gullible women loaded down with sins, led away by various lusts, 7 always learning and never able to come to the knowledge of the truth. ~ 2 Timothy 3:1-7*

*Divining God's Word.* Because the Bible is God's revelation to us, and God is perfect in even the smallest detail, then some believe that the Bible must not only be perfect in every detail but must also represent every last detail about life and this world. This sounds good, but what path does this belief lead us to?

To that end, there are many who believe that God's Word has infinite coded meanings that if studied will provide past, present, and future messages that concern every life or world event. This method of understanding what God has said is actually a practice of divination being forced onto the Bible. Zechariah said the following concerning the use of divination:

*For the idols speak delusion;  
The diviners envision lies,  
And tell false dreams;  
They comfort in vain.  
Therefore, the people wend their way like sheep;  
They are in trouble because there is no shepherd. ~ Zechariah 10:2*

Unfortunately, there are many popular "Christian" books that practice such divination. In the end, believers who follow such methods are led away from the truth of Scriptures that would have led to their growth and sanctification, and instead, they appear to be sheep that have lost their way. Remember that God has revealed every truth for our benefit in plain language so we

can understand what he requires for us to follow in order to glorify Him alone. Specific examples of such divination are listed below:

- Numerology: Uses supposed number patterns in the Bible to decode the meaning of a passage, or to predict a person's character or their prophetic future.
- Textual patterns: Looks for secret meanings by inspecting certain spacings between every letter, or word, in the Bible to determine if certain words or phrases can be formed. For example, a computer may be used to spit out every 7<sup>th</sup> letter of the bible, or every 40<sup>th</sup> word of the Bible, to see if a secret inspired coded message is revealed.
- Random passages: Randomly opens the Bible to get an immediate Word from God. This mystical approach is typically used by people who do not know the Scriptures and are looking for a message from God concerning a certain immediate situational need. The resultant interpretation forces a passage to be meaningful for their own specific situation regardless of what the passage is about. Such wrong, but well-intentioned, treatment is many times accompanied by moments of crisis, or at other times, by a strong desire to understand God's plan for the person's life in the face of making a great decision..

*Treating prophecy as allegory.* This method of interpretation deals mostly with prophecy and replaces literal prophetic claims with spiritualized meanings. Allegorical interpretation of the Bible gained ground from Origen, Augustine, the Roman Catholic church, and throughout the medieval age until the Reformation period. Great men of the Reformation, such as John Calvin, desired to correctly handle the Scriptures the way the Apostolic Fathers did and rejected the use of allegorical interpretation in favor of the older literal-historical method.

Handling the Scriptures in this way took great diligence in untangling the meanings that such a long period of allegorizing had caused upon doctrine. Unfortunately, while the Reformers rightly systematized the greatest doctrines by use of the literal-historical method (e.g., the penal substitutionary atonement of Christ), they were largely inconsistent in their hermeneutic approach because they still treated biblical prophecy with allegorical methods.

The greatest example of such inconsistency can be found regarding how many of those Reformers, and their resulting denominations today, treat the meaning of God's covenant promises He made with people. These covenants are written as literary legal genre that must be taken in a literal sense. In fact, all agree that God's first covenant—with Noah, called the Noahic Covenant (Gen 8:20–9:17), should be understood as having a literal meaning.

While most treat God's first covenant promises literally, there are many who allegorize great portions of God's second covenant promises, called the Abrahamic Covenant (Gen 12:1–3; 15:8; 17:4–7, 16) or the Covenant of Circumcision (Acts 7:8). Rather than handling all of God's legal covenants in the same literal sense, much of God's second covenant promises are spiritualized by some reformed churches. The conclusion is that what the second covenant says is really not what God literally means. The result is a completely different interpretation of most of prophecy throughout the Scriptures. Literally, God promised His blessings to the circumcised children of

Abraham, known as Israelites. Many reformed denominations allegorize these promises to be spiritual blessings for the church instead. Because of this, they believe there are no future, prophetic, literal blessings coming to literal Israel from God; rather the promises are already being fulfilled spiritually and mystically with the church.

Such inconsistent and misguided interpretation also confuses a true understanding of the times Christians live in today. God's covenant with David, called the Davidic Covenant (2 Sam 23:5; 2 Chron 7:18; 13:5; Ps 89:3; Jer 33:21), promised an eternal establishment of the literal throne of David. By spiritualizing this covenant, many miss the times the Bible claims we are now living in. Because of the Davidic covenant, we know that the times of the Gentiles mentioned in Luke 21:24, began when there were no longer heirs of David sitting on the throne and ruling over Israel. This literally happened when Babylon sacked Jerusalem in 586 BC and carried away the Jewish people as captives. Since then, Israel has never had any literal heir of David sitting on a throne. The apostle Paul even said:

*For I do not desire, brethren, that you should be ignorant of this mystery, lest you should be wise in your own opinion, that blindness in part has happened to Israel until the fullness of the Gentiles has come in. 26 And so all Israel will be saved, as it is written:*

*“The Deliverer will come out of Zion,  
And He will turn away ungodliness from Jacob.  
27 For this is My covenant with them,  
When I take away their sins.” ~ Romans 11:25–26*

We can clearly see that the times of the Gentiles, of which we now live, will end when Jesus, the Son and eternal heir of David (2 Sam 7:12–16; Matt 1; Lk 3; Rom 1:3), returns and establishes David's throne and fulfills His literal covenant with literal Israel as described and hoped for in Psalm 72.

God's promises written in legal form should be treated literally, and consistently, as there is nothing written in the Scriptures that tells us to treat them otherwise. God has made plain His promises; so, all His people can understand them. To claim that any of God's promises do not mean what they say does great harm in understanding how to follow God with the correct hope He has given to us.

There are many other examples of how various groups in Christendom allegorize the Bible, but these examples should be sufficient for understanding and avoiding the setting that the American church finds itself in today.

#### *An Example of Wrong Interpretation That Uses Allegory*

Martin DeHaan, founder of the daily devotional, *Our Daily Bread*, allegorizes Genesis 2:18–25, the passage that concerns creating Eve out of Adam's side, with the following interpretation:

*While Adam slept, God created from his wounded side a wife, who was part of himself, and he paid for her by the shedding of his blood.... Now all is clear. Adam is a picture of the Lord Jesus, who left His Father's house to gain His bride at the price of His own life. Jesus, the last Adam, like the first, must be put to sleep to purchase his bride, the Church, and Jesus died on the cross and slept in the tomb for three days and three nights. His side too was opened after He had fallen asleep, and from that wounded side redemption flowed.*

DeHaan is rather imaginative with his connections between this text and the death of Christ. Although DeHaan is trying to be Christ-centered in his preaching, he is doing so at the cost of missing the meaning of the text. DeHaan's meaning has been read back into the text (*eisegesis*) rather than developed from the text (*exegesis*). It has nothing whatsoever to do with the biblical author's intended message, and sadly:

*In the process of allegorizing the text, its real message is left behind. For the text is about God in the beginning making a partner for the lonely man. The author's message for Israel is about God's wonderful gift of marriage. Since Israel lived in a culture where polygamy was normal and where women were not valued as true partners, this message of God's original design for marriage taught Israel about God's norm for marriage. That message should have been preached, for it is still good news for women and men today. And it could have been reinforced by Jesus' own teaching based on this passage, "Therefore what God has joined together, let no one separate" (Mk 10:9). ~ Sidney Greidanus*

So, by trying to find a deep, "spiritual" meaning in Genesis 2, DeHaan ignores the context of the chapter and misses an important teaching about marriage. God's message to us on marriage is a spiritual message, and we do not need to search our imaginations for some strained connections to the death of Christ to make this passage relevant. Everything DeHaan says about the significance of Christ and his death is true. Christ did die for his bride, the church, and redemption does "flow" from his side. However, simply because one understands the significance of Christ's death does not mean that he or she understands Genesis 2. We do not evaluate interpretations of Genesis 2 merely based on correct New Testament theology. We evaluate it based on whether we have evidence that it is the intended meaning that the Holy Spirit has placed in the passage. "Jesus died on the cross to save sinners like me" is an important biblical truth. However, that does not qualify it to be the meaning of every Old Testament text.

One way to avoid such allegorical treatments of the Bible is to not use daily devotionals at all. Believers can spend the same amount of time reading the Scriptures for themselves rather than reading the thoughts of others concerning the Scriptures.

### **THE HISTORICAL PRINCIPLE**

For authorial intent, we must reconstruct the historical context (culture, geography, politics, religion, city conditions, etc.) of the author's writing to the intended historical audience. This

principle is what makes the Bible feel alive and transports the reader into the historical time and setting of the author and audience.

### THE GRAMMATICAL PRINCIPLE

The language, syntax, words, word order, repetition of words, etc. were written by the author for a purpose. Jesus said that meaning of a passage influenced by even the most minor details of grammar are important enough to find perfect fulfillment.

*For assuredly, I say to you, till heaven and earth pass away, one jot or one tittle will by no means pass from the law till all is fulfilled. ~ Matthew 5:18*

A jot and a tittle refer respectfully to the smallest letter and pen stroke used in Hebrew script. In this verse, Jesus is not just emphasizing the eternal nature of God's Word, but He is also emphasizing its accuracy to the smallest detail. Such a fulfillment of His Word demands our trust and loyalty in it.

While the original manuscripts of the Bible, known as the *autographs*, are no longer in existence, there are many thousands of reliable copies of those manuscripts written in the original languages, of Hebrew, Greek, and Aramaic, that our English Bibles are translated from.

While the English translations are generally good for understanding the meaning of most passages, the ultimate source of meaning is derived from the original languages. Therefore, many Bible teachers and pastors learn these languages in order to understand the words and the grammar of these writings. For the majority, who are English-only speakers, some English translations are sufficient when supplemented with original language word studies.

Suffice it to say that whether the reader is using the original languages or using a translation, word meaning by itself does not determine the meaning of a passage. We must understand the grammar of how those words are used to understand the idea that the author was trying to communicate.

### Syntax

Syntax is the arrangement of words and phrases into sentences that convey the author's intended meaning. A skillful interpreter fully examines the syntax of a passage under investigation. This requires the interpreter to be able to diagram sentences into their respective parts of subject, verbs, pronouns, adjectives, adverbs, etc. in order to understand how the words relate to each other to form the author's meaning.

At the very minimum, a Bible reader should become disciplined to recognize who the subject(s) of the passage is, what are the verbs being used (verbs carry the action of a sentence), what tense the passage is written in (past, present, or future), and what repeated words, if any, are employed to emphasize something.

As readers becomes disciplined in utilizing these minimum, or basic levels of syntax, they should always strive to continue in their understanding of increasingly advanced levels of syntax.

The two greatest means of understanding a passage is to understand its context the passage is in and to understand the grammar used in the passage.

### Word Studies

Aside from learning the original languages of the Bible, English-only students are encouraged to look up words in the original language to understand the fuller meaning of the authors intent in using that word. Sometimes, the translation of the original language into the English language can cause a degradation in the emphasis, or the meaning, that the author intended. More will be stated on the proper way to engage a word study (see “Word Studies” in the chapter, “Performing Biblical Exegesis”).

### THE SYNTHESIS PRINCIPLE

**Tool: *New Treasury of Scripture Knowledge*, 1992 by Thomas Nelson.**

The term “synthesis” refers to the combination of ideas to form a systematic idea. Interpreters should not find the meaning of a verse in the Bible isolated from the immediate context of the passage it is in, nor should the meaning found contradict Scripture anywhere else. Simply put, Scripture must always interpret Scripture. We must interpret a passage from within the context of the whole passage. If needed, an interpreter may have to consider the context of the whole book, all the books written by the same author, or even the entirety of Scripture.

In searching for truth, any contradiction presents itself as a lie. Since God has spoken that He cannot lie, Scripture will never contradict itself, and the interpreter can find confidence in the any interpretation by analyzing comparable passages.

*...in hope of eternal life which God, who cannot lie, promised before time began... ~ Titus 1:2*

*Thus God, determining to show more abundantly to the heirs of promise the immutability of His counsel, confirmed it by an oath, 18 that by two immutable [unchangeable] things, in which it is impossible for God to lie, we might have strong consolation, who have fled for refuge to lay hold of the hope set before us.  
~ Hebrews 6:17–18*

### THE PRACTICAL PRINCIPLE

This regards the implication of the truth. It answers, “*what propositional truth does the meaning imply?*” Implication is not interpretation that answers “*what was the author communicating to the audience in his day?*”. Implication is also not application that is individualistic and answers, “*What do I do now?*” It is the Holy Spirit’s job to make the application for the individual once the meaning is found. Implications are objective truth claims, derived from the interpreted meaning of a passage that are true for everyone.

Here is an example of an interpretation, and implication:

*And Jesus came and spoke to them, saying, “All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth. 19 Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, 20 teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age.” Amen. ~ Matthew 28:18–20*

Interpretation: The twelve disciples were commanded by Jesus, through His power and authority, to make disciples of Jesus everywhere through conversion and through teaching.

Implications:

- Disciples desire to obey Jesus.
- Those who do not make disciples of Jesus are not disciples of Jesus because they do not follow Him.
- To make disciples “of all nations”, the disciples would have to make disciples in an ongoing constant fashion.
- This disciple-making was to happen in an assembly of disciples where there would be baptism and the teaching of obedience of Jesus (the existence of the local church).
- Only those who are disciples receive water baptism.
- Adding a disciple to the assembly of disciples, through baptism, entails belief in the Trinity (Father, Son, and Holy Spirit).
- Jesus’ disciples cannot make disciples from their own human power.

### **THE APPLICATION PRINCIPLE**

An application of a passage may be made only after the correct interpretation, by exegesis, has been made according to principles of hermeneutics. Therefore, proper discernment is needed about what application is and what it is not. Application answers the modern reader’s question “*what do I do now that I know the meaning?*” Only after exegesis is performed on a text, and its meaning and implications are found, can that question be asked and properly answered in a way that bridges the meaning from its historical context to our modern, western cultural and personal setting. The result is that while there is one, and only one, meaning of a passage, there can be multitudes of applications relative to the circumstances or conditions of the life of each person. In the section, “The Flow of Welcoming and Experiencing the Scriptures”, it was shown that application resides within the step of exposition regarding the passage.

The Holy Spirit aids in this work by applying truth straight to the needs of the heart of the individual. This is why the Scripture compares the Word of God to the bread, or nourishment of the believer. Application is also the means of grace by which a believer’s mind is transformed to see God, himself, and the world the way God sees Himself, the believer, and the world.

We must also understand what application is not. Application is not a product of any bias, or preunderstanding, of the passage. Interpreters should always prayerfully humble any bias to faithfully understand what God is wanting to say through His inspired author to the historical audience. Only after we have sought God's truth in the text, can His truth impact us through the proper application of it.

Application is also not exegesis, nor is it the meaning or the implication of the text. In superficial Bible studies, many students and even teachers read a passage of Scripture and immediately say something like, "What the passage means to me is...". This statement misrepresents the interpretation of the text as being an application relative to the reader. It skips any interpretation and goes right to a personal application for the modern reader. This is a mishandling of the Scripture, and such superficial Bible studies should be avoided by believers.

Statements of interpretation should be distinguished from statements of application. A statement giving the proper interpretation of a passage is always in the past-tense and should mention the author and the audience. If asked what the following verse means, the student should formulate the meaning as follows:

*In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. ~ John 1:1*

Author: John

Audience: Ephesians

Meaning: The apostle John explained to the Ephesian Gentiles that Jesus was the eternal God.

The meaning, or interpretation, should therefore be stated in the past-tense as, "The apostle John explained to the Ephesian Gentiles that Jesus was the eternal God."

However, a statement of application is always in the present-tense and should mention the modern individual or group that the meaning applies to. One proper statement of application of John 1:1 would be, "Jesus is our eternal God, and we should give Him all the glory with our lives."

## CONCLUSION

This concludes the basic, and most foundational, set of biblical hermeneutic principles that all disciples of Jesus must submit to if they are to understand what God has said in the Bible. There are other advanced principles that should also be pursued but do not need to be expounded on in this book.

The reader should be aware that this book relies on the classical usage of terminology and concepts related to the field biblical hermeneutics. As if modern academia has not already complicated the field of hermeneutics used to properly derive truth from God's Word, many newer books on hermeneutics have been written by evangelical scholars who are now redefining the meaning of the classical words, concepts, and core principles in this field. This has resulted in more modern interpretations of some biblical passages. Such new interpretations have called

into question many traditional doctrinal stances that have previously been supported over the last two thousand years of Christian history, such as the role of women in church leadership, and many others.

May this book serve the Christian pilgrim well in knowing they can stand firm in the trials of this world by having the correct, and most straightforward, principles that are needed to understand the Bible and increase their faith and boldness in the service of the Lord.



5

## Performing Biblical Exegesis

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### CONTEXT

asdadasdasdasd

#### Literary Genre

Go over literary genre and how they affect meaning

#### Historical-Cultural Context

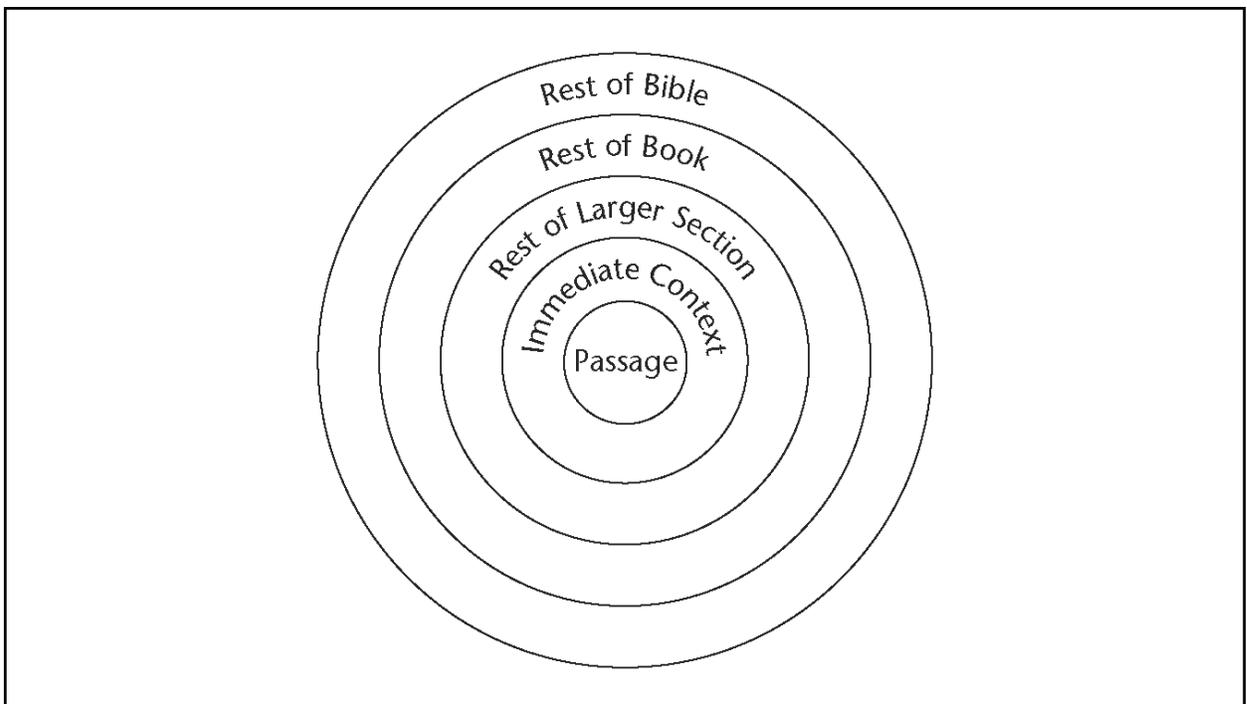
#### Surrounding Biblical Context

Dfgsdfgdf

*How to identify surrounding context*

1. Identify how the book is divided into paragraphs or sections
2. Summarize the main idea of each section in a dozen words or less
3. Explain how the target passage relates to the surrounding sections

Talk about the concentric circles below



NOTE: Contextual priority is given to the immediate context and decreases as the context is broadened outwardly to the rest of the Bible.

### *Immediate Context*

Understanding the immediate context of a passage is critical to a proper interpretation of a passage. This section will serve to give four examples of common passages that many Christians use out of context. Hopefully, the result is readily seen that when used out of context, the passages mean something quite different than the author intended. Remember that intentionally twisting the truth of Scripture or unintentionally misinterpreting Scripture are both the same in that they miss the truth God wants to say in His Word.

Passage 1: *Cast all your care upon Him, for He cares for you. ~ 1 Peter 5:7*

Just by itself, what do you think Peter is saying in the passage above? This is the popular verse many Christians use to tell people not to worry and rely on God instead, but is this the meaning Peter was intending to convey to his audience? Let us zoom out from the passage above to its immediate context and see if the meaning above fits what Peter is saying.

Immediate Context: 1 Peter 5:5–11

*Likewise, you younger people, submit yourselves to your elders. Yes, all of you be submissive to one another, and be clothed with humility, for*

*“God resists the proud,  
But gives grace to the humble.”*

*6 Therefore humble yourselves under the mighty hand of God, that He may exalt you in due time, 7 casting all your care upon Him, for He cares for you.*

*8 Be sober, be vigilant; because your adversary the devil walks about like a roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour. 9 Resist him, steadfast in the faith, knowing that the same sufferings are experienced by your brotherhood in the world. 10 But may the God of all grace, who called us to His eternal glory by Christ Jesus, after you have suffered a while, perfect, establish, strengthen, and settle you. 11 To Him be the glory and the dominion forever and ever. Amen.*

In the immediate context we can readily see that the passage is not about worry at all. It is about people being submissive and humble to their elders, each other, and to God even in the face of grievances. In other words, it is about not putting yourself first so that in due time God will be the one exalting you. We can all agree that is a vastly different meaning that will have far different applications for life of each believer.

Passage 2: *Behold, I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears My voice and opens the door, I will come in to him and dine with him, and he with Me. ~ Rev 3:20*

Revelation 3:20 is commonly used to describe Jesus' promise to unbelievers who might accept him as Savior and Lord; that is, it is seen as an evangelistic promise: "If you will open the door of your heart, Christ promises to enter."

Immediate Context: Rev 3:14–22

*And to the angel of the church of the Laodiceans write,*

*"These things says the Amen, the Faithful and True Witness, the Beginning of the creation of God: 15 'I know your works, that you are neither cold nor hot. I could wish you were cold or hot. 16 So then, because you are lukewarm, and neither cold nor hot, I will vomit you out of My mouth. 17 Because you say, "I am rich, have become wealthy, and have need of nothing"—and do not know that you are wretched, miserable, poor, blind, and naked— 18 I counsel you to buy from Me gold refined in the fire, that you may be rich; and white garments, that you may be clothed, that the shame of your nakedness may not be revealed; and anoint your eyes with eye salve, that you may see. 19 As many as I love, I rebuke and chasten. Therefore, be zealous and repent. 20 Behold, I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears My voice and opens the door, I will come in to him and dine with him, and he with Me. 21 To him who overcomes I will grant to sit with Me on My throne, as I also overcame and sat down with My Father on His throne.*

*22 He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches.'"*

But the promise in immediate context of Revelation 3:14–22 is from the risen Christ to a congregation of "lukewarm" Christians. He assures these disobedient believers that he is ready and waiting to renew fellowship with them (standing at the door knocking) if they will repent (open the door). This verse applies directly to Christians living out of fellowship with Christ. As a believer, have you ever strayed so far from Christ that you wondered if he would ever take you back? Revelation 3:20 promises that he loves you and is waiting to restore you if you will repent.

Passage 3: *For where two or three are gathered together in My name, I am there in the midst of them. ~ Matt 18:20*

Matthew 18:20 is commonly quoted to remind everyone that group prayer is especially effective.

Immediate Context: Matt 18:15–20

*Moreover, if your brother sins against you, go and tell him his fault between you and him alone. If he hears you, you have gained your brother. 16 But if he will not hear, take with you one or two more, that "by the mouth of two or three witnesses every word may be established." 17 And if he refuses to hear them, tell it to the*

*church. But if he refuses even to hear the church, let him be to you like a heathen and a tax collector.*

*18 Assuredly, I say to you, whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven.*

*19 Again I say to you that if two of you agree on earth concerning anything that they ask, it will be done for them by My Father in heaven. 20 For where two or three are gathered together in My name, I am there in the midst of them.*

We must stop to think about what we are saying with the interpretation given above. Such an interpretation implies that Jesus is only with us when we are with other Christians. If this were true think of the great hardships and lack of hope many believers would face. How would such a teaching impact the elderly shut-ins for example?

The immediate context of Matthew 18:15–20 shows how a church ought to pursue discipline of its members who are committing sin that can cause harm to the faithful flock.

Passage 4: *Flee also youthful lusts; but pursue righteousness, faith, love, peace with those who call on the Lord out of a pure heart. ~ 2 Tim 2:22*

2 Timothy 2:22 is a favorite verse used to encourage the fighting off from sexual temptation.

Immediate Context: 2 Tim 2:14–26

*Remind them of these things, charging them before the Lord not to strive about words to no profit, to the ruin of the hearers. 15 Be diligent to present yourself approved to God, a worker who does not need to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth. 16 But shun profane and idle babblings, for they will increase to more ungodliness. 17 And their message will spread like cancer. Hymenaeus and Philetus are of this sort, 18 who have strayed concerning the truth, saying that the resurrection is already past; and they overthrow the faith of some. 19 Nevertheless the solid foundation of God stands, having this seal: “The Lord knows those who are His,” and, “Let everyone who names the name of Christ depart from iniquity.”*

*20 But in a great house there are not only vessels of gold and silver, but also of wood and clay, some for honor and some for dishonor. 21 Therefore if anyone cleanses himself from the latter, he will be a vessel for honor, sanctified and useful for the Master, prepared for every good work. 22 Flee also youthful lusts; but pursue righteousness, faith, love, peace with those who call on the Lord out of a pure heart. 23 But avoid foolish and ignorant disputes, knowing that they generate strife. 24 And a servant of the Lord must not quarrel but be gentle to all, able to teach, patient, 25 in humility correcting those who are in opposition, if*

*God perhaps will grant them repentance, so that they may know the truth, 26 and that they may come to their senses and escape the snare of the devil, having been taken captive by him to do his will.*

In contrast to the interpretation above, how does the surrounding context define “evil desires of youth”? Paul is writing to Timothy, who is facing the problem of false teachers within the leadership of the church at Ephesus. The previous unit (2:14–19) makes it clear that Timothy must resist the false teachers. This is supported by an analogy from the household (2:20–21). Likewise, 2:23–26 speaks of false teaching. In verse 22 Paul tells Timothy to run away from foolish discussions, arguments, and theological novelties so attractive to young ministers (i.e., “evil desires of youth”) and to run instead after righteousness, faith, love, and peace with the true people of God. Much to the surprise of some, this verse has little (if anything) to do with sexual temptation.

**Topical Preaching:** *should this be here?*

**Danger of taking verses out of context in order to support the topical theme.**

## OBSERVATION

Active reading requires good observation of the text. Learning to see details is a skill that does not come naturally but must be developed. Many people are passive readers of literature and accomplish reading with minimal interaction of the text. Good interpretation requires active reading that interacts with the text being studied.

What situations might provoke normally passive readers into being active readers? Consider a young man who has just met a girl that he has wanted to meet for a considerable time, and for whatever reason, he had to move far away. One day a letter from her is delivered to him. He takes the letter and hurries to a private location so he can spend time focusing on what she is about to say to him. He opens the envelope and unfolds the stationary. He starts reading, “Dear Steven...”. He thinks to himself, “What does she mean by ‘dear’? does she address everyone that way, or was she greeting me in a special way? I have to read more to find out!” Steven reads and rereads the letter many times looking for clues that will help understand this young lady more and help him understand everything she is desiring to communicate with him.

We need to approach and study God’s Word the same way. Only then can we understand more about God and exactly what truths He desires to communicate in any given text. To do this, we must become increasingly better observers of the Scriptures. We will discuss how to observe sentences, paragraphs, larger text structures, context, and word studies.

### Things to Look for in Sentences

**Give some overview**

*Repetition of words*

**Write Stuff**

*Contrasts***Write Stuff**

Proverbs 14:31 ~ He who oppresses the poor reproaches his Maker, but he who honors Him has mercy on the needy.

*Comparisons***Write stuff**

Proverbs 25:26 ~ A righteous man who falters before the wicked is like a murky spring and a polluted well.

*Lists***Write stuff**

- Is there a list of itemized things?
- Does the list contain any order in it?
- What similarities do listed items share with each other?
- What differences do listed items have with each other?
- What is the significance of the list?

*Cause and Effect***Write stuff**

Proverbs 15:1 ~ A soft answer turns away wrath, but a harsh word stirs up anger.

*Figures of Speech***Write stuff**

Psalms 119:105 ~ Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path.

*Conjunctions***Write stuff**

And, But, Or, Nor, For, Yet, Therefore, Since, Because, etc.

*Verbs*

Verbs contain the action of the sentence.

What is the verb tense (past, present, or future)?

Does the verb have continuous action (e.g. "I am going" or "I will be going")?

Is the verb active or passive?

- Active verbs have the subject doing the action (Bill hit the ball).
- Passive verbs have the subject being acted upon (Bill was hit by the ball).
- Many times, action verbs show what we do vs. passive verbs that show what God has done for us.

Col 3:1 ~ If then you were raised [passive] with Christ, seek [active!] those things which are above, where Christ is, sitting at the right hand of God.

*Pronouns*

**Write stuff**

You, ye, those, them, our, us, etc.

Always identify to whom or what the pronoun refers. This includes knowing whether “you” is being used as a singular or a plural pronoun?

**Exercise**

Find a minimum of thirty observations from Acts 1:8, and list them on a sheet of paper. Do not perform any interpretation or application.

But you shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you;  
and you shall be witnesses to Me in Jerusalem,  
and in all Judea and Samaria,  
and to the end of the earth.

## Things to Look for in Paragraphs

Give some overview... Include following author's line of reasoning.

*General and Specific* – Is the author speaking generally or specifically?

- *Moving from general to specifics*: Note how Paul makes a general statement in Romans 12:1 then moves to specifics in 12:9 that continue all the way into chapter 15.
- *Moving from specific to general*: Note how Paul gives specifics in 1 Corinthians 13:1–12; then he summarizes the main point in 13:13.

*Questions and Answers* – Is the text built on a question and answer format?

*What shall we say then? Shall we continue in sin that grace may abound? 2 Certainly not! How shall we who died to sin live any longer in it?* ~ Romans 6:1–2

*Dialogue* – Conversation between two or more people.

- Who are the participants?
- Who is speaking to whom?
- What is the setting?
- Is the dialogue an argument, a discussion, or a lecture?
- Is the dialogue friendly?
- Some dialogues are hard to spot (see Habakkuk's question in Hab 1:1–4 and God's answer in 1:5–11)

*Purpose/Result Statements* – Describes the reason, the result, or the consequence of some action. They are often preceded by the following words: That, in order that, so that, so, etc.

*For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life.* ~ John 3:16

*Means by Which Something is Accomplished*

*... but if by the Spirit you put to death the deeds of the body, you will live.* ~ Romans 8:13

*Conditional Clauses* – Clauses that present the conditions whereby some action, consequence, reality, or result will happen. It usually begins with an “if” statement.

*If we say that we have fellowship with Him, and walk in darkness, we lie and do not practice the truth.* ~ 1 John 1:6

- Condition: “If we say that we have fellowship with Him, and walk in darkness”
- Result: “we lie and do not practice the truth”

*The Action/Roles of People and the Action/Roles of God*

*Therefore, be imitators of God as dear children. 2 And walk in love, as Christ also has loved us and given Himself for us, an offering and a sacrifice to God for a sweet-smelling aroma.*

~ Ephesians 5:1–2

- What does God do in the passage

- How is God identified in the passage (Father, Son, or Holy Spirit)?
- What do people do in the passage?
- Is there any connection between what God does and what people do?
- See Ephesians 5:1–2

*Emotional Terms* – The Bible is not a book about technical information. It is a book primarily about relationships between God and people. Emotions play a large role in relationships. Observe words that have emotional overtones and convey feelings such as: father, mother, child, daughter, and son (see Galatians 4:12–16 and Jeremiah 3:19–20).

*Brethren, I urge you to become like me, for I became like you. You have not injured me at all. 13 You know that because of physical infirmity I preached the gospel to you at the first. 14 And my trial which was in my flesh you did not despise or reject, but you received me as an angel of God, even as Christ Jesus. 15 What then was the blessing you enjoyed? For I bear you witness that, if possible, you would have plucked out your own eyes and given them to me. 16 Have I therefore become your enemy because I tell you the truth? ~ Galatians 4:12–16*

*Tone* – Is the tone angry, scolding, sorrowful, pleading or just unimpassioned explanation?

*But I said:*

*“How can I put you among the children  
And give you a pleasant land,  
A beautiful heritage of the hosts of nations?”*

*And I said:*

*“You shall call Me, ‘My Father,’  
And not turn away from Me.  
20 Surely, as a wife treacherously departs from her husband,  
So, have you dealt treacherously with Me,  
O house of Israel,” says the Lord. ~ Jeremiah 3:19–20*

**Exercise**

Perform paragraph level observations of Colossians 1:3-8 by writing down as many observations as you can. Do not perform any interpretation or application.

3 We give thanks to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, praying always for you,

4 since we heard of your faith in Christ Jesus and of your love for all the saints;

5 because of the hope, which is laid up for you in heaven, of which you heard before in the word of the truth of the gospel,

6 which has come to you, as it has also in all the world, and is bringing forth fruit, as it is also among you since the day you heard and knew the grace of God in truth;

7 as you also learned from Epaphras, our dear fellow servant, who is a faithful minister of Christ on your behalf,

**Things to look for in Structure**

Structure between 2 or more paragraphs

1. How does the passage connect to the one before and the one after it?
2. Shifts in the story/pivots: Is the passage being used to present a dramatic shift or pivot in the story?
3. Interchange: Does the passage shift back and forth between 2 scenes or characters?
  - a. 1 Sam contrasts 2 families:
    - i. Eli was described as a lazy priest with two disobedient sons
    - ii. While Hannah dutifully put her trust in God and had an obedient son, Samuel
  - b. Book of Acts shifts from Peter to Paul
4. Parallelisms
5. Chiasms
  - a. Mt 23:12
  - b. Ps 76:1

## Word Studies

Describe and inform that this requires tools.

### Fallacies

XXXXXXXXXX

*English-only fallacy.* Because the Bible was not originally written in English, it must be translated into English from the original biblical languages, Hebrew and Greek. This fact can complicate word studies for students who do not know the original languages. Here are two examples of problems that may develop when only considering the English words of the passage.

Example 1: You may not realize that a word in Hebrew or Greek is often translated into English by a number of different English words. For example, the Greek word *paraklēsis* is translated in the NIV with the following English words: “comfort, encouragement, appeal, be encouraged, consolation, encourage, encouraged, encouraging message, exhortation, greatly encouraged, preaching, urgently.” You will immediately notice that English words like “comfort” and “exhortation” can mean different things depending on the context.

Example 2: English-language students may not be aware that different words in Hebrew or Greek can be translated into English using the same English word. For instance, the NIV uses the word “comfort” to translate these different Greek words: *parakaleō*, *paraklēsis*, *paramytheomai*, *paramythia*, *paramythion*, *parēgoria*.

The English-only fallacy occurs when you base your word study on the English word rather than the underlying Greek or Hebrew word and, as a result, draw unreliable or misleading conclusions. If a certain word seems to carry weight in a passage, find out what the corresponding Greek or Hebrew word is and what it means.

*Root fallacy.* One of the more common fallacies is the notion that the real meaning of a word is found in its original root (i.e., in the etymology of the word). Think about how silly this can be even in English. Is a *butterfly* a *fly* that has lost control and crash-landed into a tub of *butter*? Is a *pineapple* a certain kind of *apple* that grows only on *pine* trees? What in the world is a *sawhorse*?

Switching from English to the biblical language does not automatically change things either. Just because someone can spout off the component parts of a Greek word, as was done in the English examples above, does not mean that he or she has discovered the “real meaning” of the word. It is true that a word’s individual parts *may* accurately portray its meaning, but only if the context supports such a meaning. Give context priority over etymology, and you will be on solid ground.

*Time-frame fallacy.* This fallacy occurs when we latch onto a late word meaning (usually a meaning popular in our own time) and read it back into the ancient times of the Bible, or when we insist that an early word meaning still holds when in fact it has since become obsolete. You will encounter the first instance of this fallacy far more than the second. D. A. Carson uses the

English word “dynamite” and the Greek word *dynamis* (sometimes translated “power”) to illustrate a particular form of the time-frame fallacy:

*I do not know how many times I have heard preachers offer some such rendering of Romans 1:16 as this: “I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the dynamite of God unto salvation for everyone who believes”—often with a knowing tilt of the head, as if something profound or even esoteric has been uttered. ... Did Paul think of dynamite when he penned this word? ~ D. A. Carson*

Most certainly Paul was not thinking of the English word *dynamite* when he wrote the Greek word *dynamis* since the English word, and dynamite itself, originated many centuries later. The two words may sound alike (a temptation many preachers find irresistible), but they are two words with very different meanings. Confusing the two-word meanings is misleading and dangerous. Do we really want to read this late word meaning back into the New Testament and conclude that God’s power destroys like a terrorist bomb when Paul himself says in this very verse that God’s power leads to salvation for everyone who believes? Carson concludes: “Of course, what preachers are trying to do when they talk about dynamite is give some indication of the greatness of the power involved. Even so, Paul’s measure is not dynamite, but the empty tomb.”

*Overload fallacy.* Most words can mean several different things. The overload fallacy is the idea that a word will include all those senses every time it is used. For example, the English word “spring” can refer to a season, a metal coil, an act of jumping, or a source of water. You would be overloading “spring” (pun intended) to assume that in every passage in which it occurs, the word carries not just one, but *all* those meanings. Which meaning for “spring” does the context demand in the sentence, “Spring is my favorite season of the year”? If you said “all of the above” or even if you chose any meaning except a season of the year, you would be guilty of the overload fallacy.

*Word-count fallacy.* We make this mistake when we insist that a word must have the same meaning every time it occurs. For example, if we are confident that a word carries a certain meaning in seven of its eight occurrences in Scripture, we might be tempted to conclude that it must have that same meaning in its eighth occurrence. Yet, as Darrell Bock maintains, “word meanings are determined by context, not word counts.”

For example, let us look at the word translated “suffer,” which seems to carry the sense of a negative experience every time it is used in Paul’s letters, with one possible exception.

*Have you suffered so many things in vain—if indeed it was in vain?~ Galatians 3:4*

Galatians 3:4 provides the only context where the word refers to a positive rather than a negative experience and should be translated “experience” (rather than “suffer”). All this is to

say that the word's immediate context should take priority over secondary contexts (how the word is used everywhere else) in determining the meaning of the word.

*Word-concept fallacy.* We fall prey to the word-concept fallacy when we assume that once we have studied one word, we have studied an entire concept. If, for example, you want to discover what the New Testament says about the church, you should certainly study the word translated "church" (*ekklēsia*). Yet it would be a mistake to conclude that once you have studied *ekklēsia*, you will know all that the New Testament teaches about the church. A concept is bigger than any one word. To see what the New Testament says about the church, you need to broaden your study to include other ideas like "body of Christ," "temple of the Holy Spirit," and "household of faith." The concept of church is much broader than the one-word *ekklēsia*.

*Selective-evidence fallacy.* When we cite just the evidence that supports our favored interpretation or when we dismiss evidence that seems to argue against our view, we commit the selective-evidence fallacy. This error is particularly dangerous because here we are intentionally tampering with the biblical evidence whereas in other fallacies the mistakes may be quite unintentional. Although we want the Bible to support our convictions in every case, there will be times when its message confronts us for our own good. When that happens, we should change our view rather than twist Scripture to advance our own agenda. Before you begin studying a word in the Bible, make up your mind to accept *all* the evidence.

### *Performing Word Studies*

We have discussed seven common word study fallacies. These mistakes are easy to make but being aware of them will help you to avoid them. Now it is time to learn how to do a word study. The process consists of three steps: choosing your words, determining what the word could mean, and determining what the word does mean in the immediate context.

*Choosing words for word studies.* Doing a word study properly takes time. Be realistic and admit that you cannot possibly study every word in your passage and still have any time for your friends or family. In fact, you don't need to study every word. Most biblical passages are filled with words whose meaning is clear and plain to the average reader. But some words do demand more in-depth study, and you need wisdom to know which ones. What should you do at this point? Use the following guidelines to help you choose the words you need to study.

1. Look for words that are crucial to the passage. Everything in the passage depends on the meaning of these words. They are loaded with historical or theological significance. They bear the weight of the passage. Often the crucial words in a passage will be the key nouns and/or verbs.

Example: **EXPLAIN THIS BETTER**

**1 Cor 2:13–3:3**

2:13 These things we also speak, not in words which man's wisdom teaches but which the Holy Spirit teaches, comparing spiritual things with spiritual. **14 But the natural man does not receive the things of the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him; nor can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned.** 15 But he who is spiritual judges all things, yet he himself is rightly judged by no one. 16 For "who has known the mind of the LORD that he may instruct Him?" But we have the mind of Christ.

3:1 And I, brethren, could not speak to you as to spiritual people but as to carnal, as to babes in Christ. 2 I fed you with milk and not with solid food; for until now you were not able to receive it, and even now you are still not able; 3 for you are still carnal. For where there are envy, strife, and divisions among you, are you not carnal and behaving like mere men?

1 Cor 2:14 ~ *14 But the natural man does not receive [warmly welcome] the things of the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him; nor can he know [by experience] them, because they are spiritually discerned.*

Biblical truths are not received (Grk: *dechomai* means to warmly welcome) by those lacking the indwelling of the Holy Spirit because it strikes at the core of their sinfulness (1 Cor 2:14a). Contrast this with the Bereans who "received [welcomed] the word with all readiness" (Acts 17:11).

Because the unsaved do not welcome the spiritual truths, they cannot experience God's Word. The Greek word for "know" in 1 Cor 2:14b is *ginōskō* and refers to knowing through experience rather than intellectual comprehension.

So, what is the cause of any kind of division or strife in any type of relationship between two or more believers?

- Not receiving, or loving and warmly welcoming the things (come from the Word of God) that are opposite of "foolishness"
  - Wisdom
  - Order
  - Unity
  - Seeking wisdom in your own cultural thinking: prioritizing our own ways above the unity God has given in our lives based on His ways.
  - Bringing relationships to destruction
- Not knowing, or experiencing, the things of God that would make any relationship between two or more believers flourish
- Paul accuses the immature, carnal Corinthian believers as acting like unbelievers, in order that they might repent and turn towards the things of God.

2. Look for repeated words. Usually, the author will signal theme words by repeating them, so pay close attention to words that are repeated (e.g., "comfort" in 2 Cor. 1:3–7, "blessed" in Matt. 5:1–12, or "remain" in John 15:1–11). Study these words for sure.

3. Look for figures of speech. Here words are used not in a literal sense but as word pictures or images. When you read Jesus' statement "I am the gate" (John 10:9) or read about trees "clapping their hands" (Isa. 55:12), you are looking at figures. Since the meaning of many figures or images is not automatically obvious, you may need to study them further. For example, the image of a lion refers to Jesus Christ in Revelation 5:5 and to Satan in 1 Peter 5:8.

4. Look for words that are unclear, puzzling, or difficult. Perhaps you don't understand the English definition of a word. Or you may find that English translations differ widely when it comes to this particular word. Or a writer may be using a word in a technical or specialized sense. A good rule of thumb here is that "the most important words are those that give you trouble," and if a word gives you trouble, study it some more.

*Determine what the word could mean.* Why do we need to determine what the word could mean before we decide what it does mean? Because most words can mean several different things (e.g., "spring"), but will usually carry only one of those meanings in the immediate context. By clarifying what a word could mean, we will not confuse the various meanings of a word when interpreting a particular passage of Scripture.

Consider this scenario. If, in the dead of winter, your friend says, "It's so cold, I can't wait until spring gets here," he would be referring to the arrival of the much warmer season that immediately follows winter, not the arrival of a metal coil or an improved jumping ability. Imagine the absurdity of the statement, "It's so cold, I can't wait until my jumping ability improves." You might begin to wonder if the cold had dulled your friend's mental capacity.

*Determine the word's semantic range.* Once we see all the possible meanings of a word—what we refer to as a word's range of meaning or semantic range—we will be in a better position to decide what the word actually does mean in a specific context. For example, let's look at the semantic range of the English word "hand." To find the range of meaning for an English word, just look it up in a standard English dictionary (also called a lexicon). A glance at the dictionary entry for "hand" reveals a range of meaning that looks something like this:

- The terminal part of a vertebrate forelimb (my right hand)
- A personal possession (it fell into the hands of the enemy)
- A side (on the one hand or on the other hand)
- A pledge (I give you my hand in marriage)
- A style of penmanship (this letter was written in my own hand)
- A skill or ability (she tried her hand at sailing)
- A unit of measure (the horse is fifteen hands high)
- Aid or assistance (please lend me a hand)
- Cards in a card game (I was dealt a bad hand)

- One who performs a particular work (they employ over fifty hands)
- Workmanship or handiwork (the work of the master's hand)

*Determine the word's context.* We need to narrow in from the semantic range of a word to its context. What if you are studying the word “door” in the context of 2 Corinthians 2:12, where Paul says, “Now when I went to Troas to preach the gospel of Christ and found that the Lord had opened a *door* for me”?

In a concordance the Greek word “door” (G/K 2598—*thyra*) is translated “door”, “doors”, “gate”, “entrance”, “doorway”, “gates”, and “outer entrance.” But in 2 Corinthians 2:12 it is obvious that when Paul uses this word here, he is talking about an opportunity for ministry, not a physical door. In this case, even though the concordance tells you the word is translated “door”, the meaning is not what it appears. The only way to determine what Paul means by “door” here is to look more carefully at the immediate context.

#### *Tools for Word Studies in the Old Testament*

Here is a list of concordances that are useful in performing word studies. They are listed for beginners and for advanced users.

##### *Beginners*

*Hebrew-Greek Key Study Bible*, Spiros Zodhiates. I highly recommend every beginner have this tool. It is a Bible whose main words are number referenced to a Hebrew-Greek concordance included in the back. This study Bible can be purchased in various translations (KJV, NKJV, ESV, NASB, and CSB).

*Strong's Exhaustive Concordance to the Bible*, 2009 by Strong.

##### *Advanced: Old Testament*

*The New Brown-Driver-Briggs-Gesenius Hebrew and English Lexicon with an Appendix Containing Biblical Aramaic*. Peabody, Mass.: Hendrickson, 1979. Coded to Strong's numbers and set in a format that may prove difficult for the English-only reader.

Harris, R. L., et al., eds. *Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament*. 2 vols. Chicago: Moody, 1980. Coded to Strong's numbers.

Jenni, Ernst, and Claus Westermann, eds. *Theological Lexicon of the Old Testament*. 3 vols. Peabody, Mass.: Hendrickson, 1997.

VanGemeren, Willem, gen. ed. *New International Dictionary of Old Testament Theology and Exegesis*. 5 vols. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1997. Coded to G/K numbers.

##### *Advanced: New Testament*

Balz, Horst, and Gerhard Schneider, eds. 4 vols. *Exegetical Dictionary of the New Testament*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1993.

Bauer, Walter, ed. *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*. 3rd ed. Revised and edited by Frederick W. Danker. Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 2000.

Louw, Johannes P., and Eugene A. Nida. *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament Based on Semantic Domains*. 2nd ed. 2 vols. New York: United Bible Societies, 1989.

Spicq, Ceslas. *Theological Lexicon of the New Testament*. 3 vols. Peabody, Mass.: Hendrickson, 1994.

Verbrugge, Verlyn D., ed. *The New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology*. Abridged ed. Grand Rapid: Zondervan, 2000. Coded to G/K numbers.

## MEANING

Again, the interpretation, or meaning, of a passage refers to what the inspired author intended to communicate through the text to the original audience in their time, language, and culture.

With respect to the perspicuity (clarity) of Scripture, you will remember that some passages are more difficult to understand than other passages. Remember that through the diligence of following proper hermeneutic principles and exegesis, prayer for the Holy Spirit's help, and through the ordinary means of using the local church as well as investigating other Christian sources such as commentaries, the meaning of a passage can be found.

It may be helpful to understand what mindset faithful readers of the Scriptures should have concerning difficult passages. The first mindset regards time and effort. Sometimes the meaning may be found right away, but at other times, the meaning can elude the reader for greater amounts of time of weeks or even months. The reader should not feel rushed under any circumstance to derive the correct meaning. Until the meaning is found, the reader should feel at ease to humbly admit that while they are pursuing what a passage means, they have not yet come to any conclusions at that time. Remember that the Holy Spirit guides believers into all truth (Jn 16:13), so always remain humble and teachable to accept the truth of Scripture He gives you.

Second, more difficult passages usually require more variables to be accounted for to gain a proper understanding of the meaning. Any increase in the complexity of a passage usually requires an increase in the knowledge and experience of the one performing the interpretation. Christians that study their Bibles daily using proper techniques will become better equipped over time to interpret more complex passages.

Once the reader believes they have found the meaning of a passage, the reader needs to qualify the interpretation that was found. Because the passage's meaning is tied to the author, it will be the same for all Christians. The reader does not determine meaning, nor does meaning change from reader to reader.

Qualification of the meaning occurs in two ways. The reader should qualify the meaning against the principles of hermeneutics. Does the meaning violate any principle of hermeneutics? If so, then the proper meaning has not yet been found. If not, then the next step of qualification can proceed.

The reader should qualify the meaning with other Scriptures, and if necessary, with commentaries or other sources from the church. This step ensures that the meaning does not contradict other truths of Scripture. By comparing the meaning found to the meaning given in commentaries or other church sources, the reader ensures that nothing "new" is being pressed into the passage. The beliefs and doctrines that comprise the Christian faith was written down into Scripture once and for all and delivered to the saints to hand down to each disciple according to Jesus' Great Commission of the church. Let's look at the Bible's claims concerning how the truths/meanings of Scripture have been given and are commanded to be passed on:

*Beloved, while I was very diligent to write to you concerning our common salvation, I found it necessary to write to you exhorting you to contend earnestly for the faith which was once for all delivered to the saints. ~ Jude 1:3*

*And Jesus came and spoke to them, saying, "All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth. 19 Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, 20 teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age." Amen. ~ Matthew 28:18–20*

From these two passages, it is evident that any new meaning from Scripture that was not handed down originally can serve to corrupt the DNA of the faith as it is handed down to teach new disciples. Such "new" meanings can eventually become church fads or even church traditions that other believers will blindly follow. Therefore, we must always be on our guard against not only blindly following church traditions, but against making new church traditions as well.

The qualification of the meaning of a passage concludes the exegetical task of interpretation, but it does not conclude the work of the reader. As readers, we need to respond to the meaning God has placed in the text. The Holy Spirit guides us into this task as He transforms us with His truth by applying it into the modern setting for each individual's various spiritual and physical needs. The result is that can better serve and worship Jesus. This application of the truth is not part of the exegetical process; rather it is a part of the next step of expositing (explaining) the text. Exposition will cover application and teaching.



## 6

## Performing Biblical Exposition

Remember that to become more Christ-like is to become increasingly concerned about others just as our Master, Jesus, was. The more believers are in God's Word, the more He builds them up for the service of others according to the truths He has taught us. In other words, what we learn in the Scriptures should not end with us. Our continual understanding and transformation God allowed us to receive from His Word is meant to be given to others.

In essence, biblical exposition is the proclamation, explanation, and application of God's Word to others. Such exposition can be found formally and informally in Bibles studies, street preaching, and in the preaching of the weekly assembly of believers in their local church. It can also be done to guide one's family into God's Word, to raise up a disciple who needs instruction from the Scriptures, and to provide biblical counsel for others. All believers should be able to exposit God's Word to others.

While the study of hermeneutics determined the principles that biblical interpretation must abide by, and the performance of exegesis was the individual's technical work to bring out the meaning of a passage, the last step in the **flow of experiencing God's Word** is the public exposition that communicates the meaning of the text along with its relevance to present-day hearers.

The primary distinction that should be made in the **flow of understanding God's Word** is that biblical exposition is always for others. Many believers miss this final step and assume that their daily Bible study is solely between them and God. The result is that they miss out on the teaching aspect that glorifies God by encouraging others into the truths that God gave to them. Every believer should be expositing Scripture to less mature believers. There is no better way to become faithful interpreters and wielders of God's Word than to teach it to someone else, and that is at the heart of fulfilling the Great Commission mentioned earlier.

Most believers have never been taught how to give a Bible study but may be called upon to do so at some point in their church. While this section is more focused on delivering a sermon, it can be especially useful for organizing and presenting the Word in a simple Bible study as well.

This section is also useful so believers can be more active listeners of the preaching they hear in their church's pulpit every Sunday.

### APPLICATION

*19 "A little while longer and the world will see Me no more, but you will see Me. Because I live, you will live also. 20 At that day you will know that I am in My*

*Father, and you in Me, and I in you. 21 He who has My commandments and keeps them, it is he who loves Me. And he who loves Me will be loved by My Father, and I will love him and manifest Myself to him.”*

*22 Judas (not Iscariot) said to Him, “Lord, how is it that You will manifest Yourself to us, and not to the world?”*

*23 Jesus answered and said to him, “If anyone loves Me, he will keep My word; and My Father will love him, and We will come to him and make Our home with him. 24 He who does not love Me does not keep My words; and the word which you hear is not Mine but of the Father who sent Me. ~ John 14:19–24*

People can know the Bible yet not grasp God’s Word. When we grasp God’s Word, we not only know the meaning, but we also take the final step to apply the meaning to our lives. Without applying the meaning to our lives, we can’t act on what we know; in other words, we will not be Doers of the Word, we will only be hearers of the Word, deceiving ourselves (James 1:22).

### **Meaning and Application**

Do you remember how the terms *meaning* and *application* were defined? *Meaning* refers to what the author intended to communicate through the text to the historical audience. Because a text’s meaning is tied to the author, there can only be one meaning. The contemporary reader does not determine meaning, nor does meaning change from reader to reader. As readers, however, we do need to respond to the meaning God has placed in the text.

We use the term *application* to refer to the response of the reader to the meaning of the inspired text. Application reflects the specific life situation of the reader that will vary from Christian to Christian; although it will still have boundaries influenced by the author’s meaning. While there can only be one meaning of a passage, there can be many applications of it.

Thus, we should ask, “What does this passage *mean* and how is it applied my life?” rather than “What does this passage mean to me?” The distinction and separation between meaning and application is an important one.

### **How to Apply Meaning**

The Bible is the living Word of God, and therefore, it is the job of the Holy Spirit to apply the application of the meaning of a passage to the reader. God knows the condition of each readers’ state and can apply the meaning right to the heart of each reader’s needs.

*For the word of God is living and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing even to the division of soul and spirit, and of joints and marrow, and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart. 13 And there is no creature hidden from His sight, but all things are naked and open to the eyes of Him to whom we must give account. ~ Hebrews 4:12–13*

Since applications may vary from reader to reader, we need a reliable method of making sure that the applications are within the boundaries established by the author's meaning. Here is one approach to applying biblical meaning once it is found. Consider the following verse, its meaning in point, *a*, and the steps of application in points, *b* and *c*.

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

1. Observe how the principles in the text address the historical situation.

Historical Element 1: Verse is about a Paul

Principle Element 1: Principle concerns Christians

Historical Element 2: Verse is about Paul being in prison because of his service in the cause of Christ

Principle Element 2: Because of following Christ faithfully, a Christian will experience a variety of trying circumstances that require strength to endure.

Historical Element 3: Christ gives Paul strength to endure any circumstance

Principle Element 3: Christ will give the faithful Christian strength to endure our circumstances in serving Him.

2. Discover a parallel situation in a contemporary context regarding a Christian today.
3. Make your application specific.

People need illustrations and examples of how the meaning might be lived out in real life. God wants his Word to sink deep into our hearts and minds and transform the way we live.

We study Scripture not just to learn more about God, but to know and love God more. He gave us his Word not just to fill our brains with biblical facts, but to change our lives. The plain intention of the divine Author is that we would grasp his Word by understanding it and applying it, or as Jesus said:

*He who has My commandments and keeps them, it is he who loves Me. And he who loves Me will be loved by My Father, and I will love him and manifest Myself to him. ~ John 14:21*

## INTRODUCTION TO EXPOSITORY PREACHING

*So, they read distinctly from the book, in the Law of God; and they gave the sense and helped them to understand the reading. ~ Nehemiah 8:8*

*Beginning with Moses and all the Prophets, he interpreted to them in all the Scriptures the things concerning himself. ~ Luke 24:27*

*Him we preach, warning every man and teaching every man in all wisdom, that we may present every man perfect in Christ Jesus. ~ Colossians 1:28*

**The need for every believer to teach.**

### **What is Preaching?**

Preaching is persuasive speech that calls for a response to the Word of God. The English Scriptures translate the Greek word *keruso* as “preach”, which refers to a herald who announces the gospel message that has been entrusted to them.

Here is a concise definition of preaching:

*Preaching is a God-called speaker delivering a Christ-centered message from a portion of the Bible, and in reliance on the Holy Spirit, bringing that message to bear upon his listeners with a goal of calling them to trust God. ~ Scott Wilson*

This definition of preaching involves the Trinity. God calls men to preach, and this call is recognized by the local church. It is Christ-centered because of the Messianic redemptive plan of the whole Bible. Lastly, the Holy Spirit leads the preacher in the truth of Scriptures, empowers the preacher to preach boldly, provides the preacher wisdom in his words, and convicts the hearers of their need to follow Jesus.

Preaching is never about the speaker. The goal of preaching is that people should trust God more after the sermon than they did before they heard it.

Expository preaching is not the only way to preach. For a period, topical preaching was popular. Rather than focus on a section of Scripture, topical preaching focuses on a single topic of the preacher’s choosing, is centered on a select primary passage concerning the topic, and then develops the fullness of the Bible’s teaching on that topic by jumping around to many other passages. Charles Haddon Spurgeon, the “prince of preachers”, delivered mainly topical sermons, and his sermons were highly effective.

While topical preaching can be especially useful for teaching about various Christian topics, it does not create a broad knowledge of the Bible among the church members. Topical preaching also runs the risk of making the preacher the authority on the topic based on how he has chosen to stitch scripture together on the topic. Lastly, when scanning across the Scriptures to find examples of a selected topic, the topical preacher may be impressing, or emphasizing, the chosen topic where the greater biblical context does not allow. The outcome of such a mistake is that the sermon emphasizes the mind and ideas of the pastor and not the mind and the heart of God as He intended from His Word.

The only logical response to a belief in an inerrant Scripture is to preach expositionally. This means that preaching is done in a way that the meaning of the Bible passage is presented entirely and exactly as it was intended by God.

Today, expository preaching has enjoyed a resurgence in many churches. Preaching through an entire text of Scripture allows the Bible to remain as the authority for what is to be

preached. It emphasizes the Word of God and creates a broad knowledge of the Bible among church members. Just as studying through the Bible everyday meets the needs of every individual believer, expository preaching, that goes through whole books of the Bible, meets the corporate needs of the congregation as well.

Expository preaching also takes away the anxiety of what to preach on that is typical of topical preaching. Even Charles Spurgeon suffered this anxiety in most of his sermon preparation while trying to find a topic that would be best for his church. Every Saturday, he filled his waste basket by selecting a topic and developing an outline only to trash it and start all over again.

Expository sermons that preach through entire books of the Bible also keeps the congregation and the pastor accountable. Everyone knows what Scripture the sermon is going to cover the following week, so they can study the text ahead of time, keeping the pastor accountable to the church members in his diligent preparation to preach that text.

### **THE STRUCTURE OF AN EXPOSITORY SERMON**

So, you have performed most of your exegetical work of a selected text of Scripture. Now you need to organize this information so you can deliver it to others in a way that makes them understand the text while also calling them to respond to the text.

There are many ways that preachers have done this

#### APPENDEX

- A. Talk about 2–3 allegorical controversies in the Bible
- B. Talk about the NT interpretation of the OT
- C. Example

#### Bibliography:

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Sidney Geidanus, *Preaching Christ from the Old Testament*



## Appendix A:

### Allegorical Controversies in the Bible

Dsdasd







## Appendix C:

### The Meaning & Application of 1 Cor 13:8–13

Let's put all the resources **described in chapter XXX** together to derive the meaning of a Biblical passage. The goal of this study is meant to provide an interpretation faithful to the biblical text, but it is also meant to show the steps taken to get to that interpretation. While many Sunday school students would not be up for the task of interpreting such a difficult passage as this one, this more detailed study can be used as a template to tackle much simpler passages.

*8 Love never fails. But whether there are prophecies, they will fail; whether there are tongues, they will cease; whether there is knowledge, it will vanish away. 9 For we know in part, and we prophesy in part. 10 But when that which is perfect has come, then that which is in part will be done away.*

*11 When I was a child, I spoke as a child, I understood as a child, I thought as a child; but when I became a man, I put away childish things. 12 For now we see in a mirror, dimly, but then face to face. Now I know in part, but then I shall know just as I also am known.*

*13 And now abide faith, hope, love, these three; but the greatest of these is love. 1  
Corinthians 13:8–13 NKJV*

In order to understand what God has said in this passage, we will now embark in the flow of welcoming and experiencing the Scriptures as described at the end of **Chapter x**. Remember that this flow was analogous to baking a cake. We must always start with the hermeneutic principles, which is like the cake recipe which cannot be violated. Next, we dive into exegesis, consisting of understanding the passage context, making observations, and finding the meaning of the text. This is like the preparation of the cake, that happens through the private diligent work of the individual putting together all the ingredients with all his tools and experience. The last step in this flow is the public presentation of the cake for the audience to savor and consume. This step is called exposition. It gives the meaning of the passage and applies it to a contemporary audience, in a concise way, in order for God's truths to transform the lives of the audience by the power of the Holy Spirit.

In short, we are going to use the C. O. M. A. method (**reference**); where Context, Observation, and Meaning is at the heart of Exegesis, and Application is at the heart of exposition.

## CONTEXT

### Literary Genre

### Historical-Cultural Context

### Surrounding Biblical Context

When viewing Paul's letter to the Corinthian church, we must begin by understanding the broader sense of what Paul is intending to say by looking at the "Rest of the Larger Section" as shown in the contextual concentric circles shown in **Figure xxx**. This section will cover chapters 12–14. Once the purpose of these chapters is understood, we will narrow in to the "Immediate Context" of chapter 13. Narrowing in from the larger section to the immediate context will then lead us into making observations to gain the meaning of the passage itself (1 Cor 13:8–13).

### Larger Section of 1 Corinthians 12–14

Paul addresses spiritual gifts in 1 Corinthians 12–14. Apparently, the Corinthians had written questions to Paul concerning the gifts. Paul writes to answer their questions and to correct their use and misuse of the spiritual gifts.

The immature Corinthian church had not set themselves apart from the carnal influences of their culture, and they prized the revelatory and miraculous gifts of the Spirit—especially the gift of tongues. While speaking in tongues was a genuine gift in the early church, as opposed to today, it was subject to abuse. In the Corinthian church it was a source of pride on the part of unspiritual people who exercised the gift, but who possessed little of spiritual power or holiness attending its exercise. Unfortunately, the same tendencies are sometimes observed today in those who claim to speak in tongues, but who make it a source of pride instead of an effective testimony for the Lord. It is not true, as often claimed, that speaking in tongues is a proof of either the filling of the Spirit or proof of spiritual power. There is no basis for pride in the exercise of such a gift. In 1 Corinthians 12–14, Paul attempts to set the record straight concerning what tongues was, why it was used, its ranking as the least of the gifts, and its lowliness as compared with the greatness and permanence of love.

In chapter 12, Paul begins with discussing the diversity of spiritual gifts and the unity of believers in the body of Christ. Chapter 13 stresses the importance of love in the exercise of the spiritual gifts. Paul concludes this section in chapter 14 by arguing for the preeminence of prophecy over tongues in edifying the church, and for the need of orderliness in public worship.

### Immediate Context of 1 Corinthians 13

In chapter 13, Paul develops his argument of the importance of love in three sections:

- 1 Cor 13:1–3 Paul shows the necessity of love in the exercise of spiritual gifts.
- 1 Cor 13:4–7 Paul describes the nature and character of love.
- 1 Cor 13:8–13 Paul concludes by underscoring the permanence of love in contrast with the temporary nature of the revelatory gifts.

It is the last passage above (vv. 8–13) that we give our diligent attention in order to properly understand the interpretation concerning the temporary nature of the revelatory gifts that is contrasted with the permanence of love.

## OBSERVATIONS

Make sure highlighted areas are in the right order according to the passage.

### Observe Sentences, Paragraphs, and Structure

Let's start our observation by listing out details and asking questions:

- This passage starts with the permanence of love (v. 8) and ends with the greatness of love (v. 13).
- In v. 8, Paul contrasts the permanence of love with the temporary nature of the gifts of prophecy, tongues, and knowledge.
- **What are the complete list of gifts, define each one, and list which ones are revelatory?**
  - **How/Why are the revelatory spiritual gifts given by the Spirit (1 Cor 2:13)?**
  - **How were the gifts given to others (prophets?) by the apostles?**
  - **Where do we see each revelatory gift used throughout the NT?**
- The great majority of the passage concerns the three gifts of prophecies, tongues, and knowledge in v. 8.
  - **What is the gift of prophecy?**
  - **Does prophecy always relate to telling the future?**
  - **What is the gift of tongues?**
  - **How is the gift of knowledge considered revelatory from God (see 1 Cor 13:2 cf. 2 Pet 3:1–3 and Jude 1:17–18)?**
- In v. 9, only two gifts are listed but in reverse order (knowledge and prophesy).
  - Could this be in a chiasmic form ascending in v. 8 and descending in v. 9? If so, tongues are missing in v. 9. Here is the possible chiasm:
    - (A) Prophecy (v. 8) – will fail
    - (B) Tongues (v. 8) – will cease.
    - (X) Knowledge (v. 8) – Will vanish
    - (X') Knowledge (v. 9) – Is only partial revelation.
    - (B') Tongues is missing (v. 9)
    - (A') Prophecy (v. 9) – Is only partial revelation.
  - Why are tongues not listed in v. 9?
- **Do tongues cease when the perfect comes or sometime before then (it uses a different verb)?**
  - Why are tongues not listed in v. 9?
  - **How is tongues still included even though it is missing in v. 9?**
  - **How do the gifts of prophecy, tongues, and knowledge refer to the 3 sections of gifts at the beginning of 1 Cor 12?**
- Knowledge and prophesy are considered only “in part” (v. 9)

- Paul connects vv. 9–10 to v. 8 with the word, “for”. Paul is going to give more explanation to the ceasing of the gifts. Paul explains why and when the gifts will depart in vv. 9–10.
  - How does the termination of the gift of prophecy relate to Rev 22:18–19?
  - Extrabiblical source showing prophecy to be done away (see Hippolytus (170–235) and John Chrysostom (347–407))
- Only when the perfect comes will those things listed “in part” be done away with.
- Paul uses the first-person plural form for “we” in v. 9 and 12a. “We” refers to Paul and the believers in the Corinthian church.
- Paul uses the first-person singular form for “I” in v. 11 and 12b. “I” refers only to Paul.
- Paul gives two parallel analogies in vv. 11–12 that seem to point to Paul’s explanation of the ceasing of gifts in vv. 9–10.
- Paul uses the word “for” to connect the 2nd analogy (v. 12) to the 1st analogy (v. 11).
- In the 1st analogy (v. 11), the “child” seems to point to the “in part” in vv. 9–10; while the “man” seems to point the “perfect” in v. 10. Only after Paul became a man, did he put away the childish things.
- In the 1st analogy (v. 11) Paul compares the speaking, understanding, and thinking of a child with those of a man. Is there a correlation between speaking, understanding, and thinking with the prophecies, tongues, and knowledge spoken of earlier in v. 8?
- In the 2nd analogy (v. 12), the dim mirror seems to point to the “in part” in vv. 9–10; while the “face to face” seems to point to the “perfect” in v. 10.
- Paul then seems to relate the mirror analogy to the state of knowledge he and others will have.
  - Does face to face, and hence the “perfect”, refer to the future time when the church will be resurrected and seeing Jesus directly, or does it refer to having the fulness of revelation God intended the church to have by means of the completed NT Scriptures?
  - Is the “perfect” explicitly a qualitative term or a quantitative term?
  - Is the “in part” explicitly a qualitative term or a quantitative term?
  - Can the “perfect” refer to quality if “in part” refers to quantity, or do they both have to refer to the same form in order to make sense as an opposite but equal type of contrast?
  - If the “perfect” refers to the complete NT canon, could Paul have had understanding that a complete NT would come and cause the gifts to cease?
- Paul ends the passage by contrasting the greatness of love over faith and hope (which are not spiritual gifts).
  - Why does Paul switch over to “faith, hope, love”?
- Tenses of time is clearly a major factor in understanding this passage. Below is a, accounting of the items listed in the passage according to the tenses of time relative to Paul and his Corinthian audience (not relative to today’s contemporary reader). While Paul spoke of being a child and a man in past tense, they also have a “before” and “after” connotation.

Before: Past/Present Tense	After: Future Tense
Love never fails (past, present, and future)	
Prophecies	Prophecies will fail
Tongues	Tongues will cease
Knowledge	Knowledge will vanish
We know in part	
We prophecy in part	
	When the perfect comes
	The partial will be done away
Paul was a child	
Paul spoke as a child	
Paul understood as a child	
Paul thought like a child	
	Paul became a man
	Paul put away childish things
Now we see in a dim mirror	
	Then [we will see] face to face
Now Paul knows in part	
	Then Paul will know
Paul is known	
Now abide faith, hope, love	
The greatest is love	

### Perform Word Studies (Contextual and Theological)

Let's continue with our observations by studying certain words that seem to have an impact on the text.

*Love (agapē, ἀγάπη)* — Chapter 13:x

Morphology: Noun, nominative, singular, feminine

Definition: Esteeming another higher than oneself.

This word is only used twice in this passage, but it is at the very heart of what the passage is about.

*Fail (katargeō, καταργέω)* — Chapter 13:x

Morphology: Verb, future, passive, indicative, third person, plural

Definition: To remove from the sphere of activity (TDNT).

This word does not apply to “Love never fails” in v. 8, which uses a different Greek word. It also does not apply to the ceasing of tongues in v. 8.

*Katargeo* is used 4x in the passage being translated with different English words:

13:8 – prophecies, they will fail.

13:8 – knowledge, it will vanish away.

13:9 – part will be done away.

13:11 – put away childish things

*Cease* (*ραιῶ, παύομαι*) — Chapter 13:x

Morphology: Verb, future, middle, indicative, third person, plural

Definition: To cease, stop (TDNT)

This is the word Paul uses in v. 8 in relation to the stopping of tongues.

*Prophecies* (*προφητεία, προφητεία*) — Chapter 13:x

Morphology: Noun, nominative, plural, feminine

Definition: An utterance inspired by God. 1 Cor 13:8 refers to the action of producing the inspired utterance rather than to the resulting verbal form of the utterances themselves (Louw-Nida).

*Prophecy* (*προφητεῖα, προφητεία*) — Chapter 13:x

Morphology: Verb, present, active, indicative, first person, plural

Definition: To speak under the influence of divine inspiration, with or without reference to predicting future events – ‘to prophesy, to make inspired utterances’ (Louw-Nida). See 1 Cor 13:9.

*Tongues* (*γλῶσσα, γλῶσσα*) — Chapter 13:x

Morphology: Noun, nominative, plural, feminine

Definition: Language, dialect, or speech (Louw-Nida). Tongues is a metaphor that points to the utterance itself and not the instrument, or organ, that produced it.

*Historical Context: Use of Tongues in Mystery Religions*

All throughout the ancient pagan world and into the Hellenistic cultural setting surrounding the Corinthian church, tongues played a highly regarded part in the presence of the divine with respect to the mystery religions. These tongues consisted of unintelligible gibberish that many times was associated with physical convulsions of the speaker showing the mysterious manifestation of the divine that had taken over the entirety of the speaker. While the pagan act of tongue speaking could be motivated by a frenzied desire to falsely act out, it was primarily regarded as the result of authentic demonic activity that was a counterfeit to biblical tongues.

The immature Corinthian church had not set themselves apart from the carnal influences of their culture, and they prized the revelatory and miraculous gifts of the Spirit—especially the gift of tongues. They were using the gift of tongues in the same pagan manner that they had used them before they became believers, and those in the church that practiced it viewed themselves as superior, or closer to the divine, than those not possessing the gift. Such attitudes caused fractures in the church and did not reflect the love they should be having for one another. In 1 Corinthians 12–14, Paul attempts to set the record straight concerning what tongues was, why it was used, their unimportance as compared to other gifts of the Spirit, and their lowliness as compared with love.

*Biblical Definition and Purpose of Tongues (Singular vs. Plural Forms)*

In the New Testament, tongues are only spoken of in three places in Acts and in 1 Corinthians 12–14. Paul explicitly states the purpose of tongues in 1 Corinthians 14:21–25 was to be a sign for the benefit of unbelieving Jews in order to authenticate the gospel message, by the empowerment of the Holy Spirit, through the speaker according to the prophecy of Isaiah 28:11–12:

*With men of other tongues and other lips  
I will speak to this people,  
And yet, for all that, they will not hear Me...*

While the gifts of the Spirit were meant to edify the church (1 Cor 14:12), tongues were meant to reach unbelieving Jews. In fact, Jews were present in all three instances in Acts where tongues were performed (Acts 2:4; 10:46; 19:6). As such, Paul speaks of tongues as having little value inside the church as compared with the other gifts. Paul explains this by giving two possibilities of the use of tongues in the church.

The first possible use is seen in 1 Corinthians 14:13–17, where Paul refers to those Corinthians believers that were currently speaking “in a tongue” through “my spirit”. Neither of these had been empowered by God. The use of “tongue” in its singular form represents the pagan ecstatic gibberish that was being spoken not by the Holy Spirit but by the human spirit, or will, of the speaker. The singular and plural forms for “tongue” will be further explained in the following sections. The takeaway is that the speaker concealed thoughts about God with his utterances that prevented edification of the church (vv. 14–17), disturbed the worship service (v. 33), and caused visitors to conclude the speaker was “out of [his] mind” or in a pagan trance (v. 23). The command of Paul to have an interpreter works as a corrective to wrong tongue speaking and upholds orderly worship.

Paul uses his own gifts of tongues (plural form) as the second example of the use of tongues in the church (1 Cor 14:18). Even though Paul is indeed gifted more than any Corinthian believer with the gift of tongues, as empowered by the Holy Spirit, he would rather use his gift of teaching instead so that the members of the church, as well as visitors, may be edified from His understanding of the Scriptures (vv. 18–19). The takeaway is that for believers, tongues used for their correct purpose, and in the correct way, still provided little edification compared with the other gifts. Again, Paul goes further to explain the reason for such little edification in church worship was due to the intended purpose of tongues to reach unbelieving Jews.

*Tongues as Human Language Only*

Clearly in Acts, tongues were not utterances of gibberish but were utterances empowered by the Holy Spirit through a speaker in known human languages of the listeners yet foreign to the speaker. This can be seen in Luke’s account of the Day of Pentecost where Jews and proselytes **from 15 language groups** heard the speaking in their own language (Acts 2:4–12). Luke also recorded that when Cornelius and his household believed, they also began speaking in tongues before Peter and the other Jews that accompanied Peter to Cornelius’ house (Acts 10:44–46).

Lastly, Luke records that in Ephesus, Paul found twelve Jewish followers of John the Baptist who had never known the gospel of Christ. Once they had accepted the gospel, they began speaking in tongues (Acts 19:1–7). In all three cases, Luke uses tongues the same way to refer to human languages known to the listener and not any kind of ecstatic gibberish.

There are many who believe that Paul describes a different kind of tongue in 1 Cor 12–14 than Luke describes in Acts. However, Luke, who journeyed with Paul (who provided the apostolic authority behind Luke’s writings), shares Paul’s biblical terminology and understanding for tongues when writing Acts around AD 60, approximately five years after Paul wrote his second epistle to the Corinthian church—we refer to this second letter as 1 Corinthians. That the tongues spoken of in the book of Acts are the same kind as is used in 1 Corinthians 12–14, namely that they are human languages understood by the listeners yet foreign to the speaker, can be understood through the following argumentation:

1. Luke identifies tongues in Acts 2:6, 8 as human language
2. In Acts 11:15, Luke links the tongues in Acts 10:46–47; 11:15 directly to the tongues in Acts 2, which was human language.
3. Luke mentions tongues in Acts 19:6 without any additional qualifiers, suggesting they are the same gift as previously mentioned in Acts 2 and 10.
4. Paul was present in Acts 19 to observe the gift of tongues, which was human language, and uses the same designation of “tongues” in 1 Cor 12–14.

Furthermore, Paul refers to “different kinds of tongues” in 1 Corinthians 12:10 by using the Greek word, *genos*, from which we derive the English word, “genus”, referring here to language groups. This plural form of “tongues” is identical to the application during Pentecost in Acts 2, where tongues were used to reach Jews through at least thirteen different languages.

Lastly, Paul does contrast two different kinds of tongues in 1 Cor 14. Paul speaks of the pagan influenced use of an ecstatic gibberish tongue (singular) to describe how the Corinthians were using it, and he describes the true gift of tongues (plural) according to the sign of the Holy Spirit. Paul distinguishes between the two kinds of tongues by referring to the gibberish use as “a tongue” in the singular form or by referring to the Holy Spirit’s gift as “tongues” in its plural form. The reason for this is simple. The gift of tongues refers to foreign languages, of which there are many, while gibberish is only ever just gibberish in a singular sense. When read with this understanding, chapter 14 becomes much easier to understand.

Interestingly, the translators of the 1611 King James Version, also understood Paul’s singular use verses the plural forms of “tongues” in chapter 14. Everywhere the singular form is used, the authors inserted the word “unknown” in italics, so that it reads as “an unknown tongue”. The italics identifies the word as not existing in the Greek manuscript.

Along this same vein, Paul speaks very sarcastically of anyone who would speak in “a tongue” by saying all he does is edify himself (1 Cor 14:4). In other words, the only outcome from speaking in “a tongue” was a puffing up from pride. Since the Corinthian church was

participating in such a way, Paul needed to address this, and this was the purpose Paul wrote chapters 12–14 in 1 Corinthians.

Given the purpose of tongues speaking were a sign to unbelieving Jews in order to authenticate the speaker and his gospel message, why would a gift of interpretation be needed at all if the tongue speaking was already in languages that the hearers understood in their foreign languages? First, Paul does command that tongues be interpreted if the tongues was going to be beneficial. This was satisfied by those who understood the tongues in their foreign language. Secondly, there were believers who had been given the gift of interpretation in order to edify other believers with the understanding of the language being spoken. By demanding interpretation Paul was being noticeably clear that the Holy Spirit's gift of tongues, as opposed to the counterfeit pagan use of tongues, was to be understood by everyone.

#### *Argument Against Tongues as Angelic Language*

See “tongues ... of angels” in 1 Cor 13:1. Some conclude that this verse supports that this particular gift of tongues is different than the gift of tongues used at Pentecost in Acts 2, which was clearly heard in known human languages. This use of tongues, they proffer, is a special, heavenly, unintelligible language spoken to God in prayer and, many believe, is still in existence for believers to practice today.

Yet this solitary text is presented as a hypothetical protasis in an intentionally exaggerated context. Paul presents the gift of prophecy in a parallel way in vv. 2–3. Just as no one could possibly claim that their gift of prophecy yielded an understanding of all mysteries and all knowledge, no one with the gift of tongues could actually speak in both the entirety of intelligible human languages and the heavenly language of angels as well. Paul is using maximal exaggeration to state that even if one could do these things in their entirety, which they clearly could not, then those gifts would still be meaningless if love was not present alongside them.

The verse in 13:1 hardly seems a conclusive basis for the supposition that the biblical gift of tongues is largely unintelligible angelic speech. Also, considering Acts 2, 10, and 19, is it even reasonable to maintain that all expressions of tongues today are tongues of angels rather than tongues of known human language? Thus, the basic, hermeneutical principle of discovering word meaning through a study of usage in context does not support this particular argument.

#### *The Modern Use of Tongues and Miracles*

Today, tongues are spoken publicly as either ecstatic utterances or as a private, unknown, prayer language to God. As already explained, neither method enjoys biblical support. It is surprising that the contemporary use of tongues is almost always ecstatic gibberish as compared with their intended use all throughout Acts as known human language. Also, there is a marked decrease of the use of tongues throughout the chronology in the book of Acts. In extrabiblical accounts, except for a few questionable cases, we do not see them in use from the first century until the beginning of the 20th century, with the beginning of the Pentecostal movement. This movement sought to bring about a second Pentecost, similar to the first, that would be manifested through the gift of tongues and followed by many miraculous gifts.

The gifts of healing, miracles, and tongues were all sign gifts meant to authenticate the messenger of the gospel to others (Acts 2:43; 5:12; Rom 5:18–19; 2 Cor 12:12; Heb 2:1–4). In the Bible, they were never done as an end unto themselves as they are performed today. The gifts of healing were extremely rare in the Old Testament, and even Paul did not possess this gift (2 Cor 12:7–10). Regarding miracles, Jesus did show power over the natural realm, which confirmed His identity and His message as being the true Messiah. **The only miracles the apostles performed was the casting out of demons.** This gift was ordained to them by Jesus (scripture?).

Prophecy, knowledge, and wisdom were considered to be revelatory and speaking gifts. The prophet would receive direct revelation from God whether through dreams, visions, or as spoken to them, and they would proclaim the revelation to the people in order to draw them to repentance and a closer relationship with God in the revealed truth concerning Christian living. Again, the practice of these gifts today is quite spectacular in how they draw the masses to follow these “prophetic” agents rather than to make disciples who follow Jesus.

Much can be said of the practice of the miraculous gifts after the apostles had passed away, as compared with the practice of gifts used in the early church described in Acts—the apostolic church. Philip Schaff, a highly regarded church historian, offers considerations about the character and quality of postapostolic miracles. These were supposed miracles that happened after the apostles had passed away and until the Nicene age (4th century).

1. They are of a “much lower tone” and “far exceed” biblical miracles “in outward pomp.”
2. They do not serve to “confirm the Christian faith in general.”
3. “The further they are removed from the apostolic age, the more numerous they are.”
4. The church fathers did not truthfully report all there was to know about alleged miracles.
5. The church fathers admitted that there were “extensive frauds.”
6. “The Nicene miracles [performed in the 4th century were] met with doubt and contradiction even among contemporaries.”
7. The church fathers contradicted themselves by teaching from the Scriptures that miracles worked through men no longer took place and then reporting the occurrences of actual miracles.

The miraculous gifts, as practiced today, were never handed down from the foundation that was laid by the apostles and the prophets, with Jesus as the chief cornerstone (Eph 2:20). The supposed miraculous gifts as practiced today come from the first wave of the Pentecostal movement and the second and third waves that followed during the last hundred years since. These charismatic waves deny that the foundation, by the apostles and the prophets, was laid

once and for all in the New Testament Scriptures, and instead they continue to lay the foundation through their own revelations of prophecies, visions, and dreams.

In order to confront the rise of liberalism on the one hand, which offered a spiritually dead form of Christianity that promoted the human intellect above the Scriptures by denying the miraculous and culminating in the false gospels of social justice, the Pentecostal movement moved into the opposite extreme by promoting exciting and emotional experiences of miraculous occurrences above the truths of Scriptures which culminated in the false prosperity gospel.

Both extremes place human desire as the source of authority over the Scriptures. In a very lawless way, they have rejected God's revelation that explains what pleases or displeases God, and how He is to be properly worshipped and followed. They have supplanted the ways of God by what they want to believe rather than humbling themselves to the knowledge and wisdom of God found only in the Scriptures.

*Knowledge (gnōsis, γνῶσις), Know (ginōskō, γινώσκω)* — Chapter 13:x

Morphology gnōsis: Noun, nominative, singular, feminine

Morphology ginōskō: Verb, present, active, indicative, first person, plural

Definition: The intelligent comprehension of an object or matter (TDNT).

13:8 – Where there is knowledge (gnōsis), it will vanish away.

13:9 – For we know (ginōskō) in part...

“Knowledge” in v. 8, and “knowing” in v. 9, refer to the same gift that was only given to certain members of the church. In other words, Paul is not referring to the knowledge which every believer receives through the illumination of the Holy Spirit. Certainly, there will never be a time when knowledge will vanish away; rather this special revelatory knowledge will vanish once the “perfect has come” (13:9) This is most likely related to “the word of knowledge” used by Paul in the greater context in 2 Cor 2:8 where Paul explains that certain people receive this kind of knowledge.

As a spiritual gift, knowledge was given by direct revelation from God through the Holy Spirit. There is great consensus among commentators that the gift of knowledge is also related to the revelatory gifts of a word of wisdom (12:8), prophecy (12:10), and apostleship (12:28–29). Whereas the “word of wisdom” pertains to newly revealed data coming directly from God, the spiritual revelatory gift of knowledge pertains to inspired application of that data to new situations such as 2 Pet 3:1–3 and Jude 1:17–18.

*Mirror (esoptron, ἔσποτρον)* — Chapter 13:x

Morphology: Noun, genitive, singular, neuter

Definition: A flat piece of highly polished metal used to reflect an image (Louw-Nida). To “see in a mirror” also means to “see prophetically” (TDNT). See 1 Corinthians 13:12.

*Dimly (ainigma, ἀίνιγμα)* — Chapter 13:x

Morphology: Noun, dative, singular, neuter

Definition: A riddle. Since the mysterious elements in religious utterances can also be interpreted and understood as riddles, there is a material link between the concept and oracular or prophetic pronouncement (TDNT). See 1 Corinthians 13:12.

Since the mysterious elements in religious utterances can also be interpreted and understood as riddles, there is a material link between the concept and oracular or prophetic pronouncement (TDNT). In Ezekiel 17:2, the word of the LORD commanded Ezekiel to prophesy to Israel in a riddle. In Numbers 12:8, the LORD himself contrasts the clarity of His direct revelation which existed between the riddles of prophets through visions dreams versus the plainly received face to face nature of revelation that God afforded Moses (cf. Ex 33:20, 23). Interestingly, the Hebrew word for “plainly” is mar’eh (מר’ה), which means to have clear sight or appearance (TWOT). Describing face to face as equivalent to having “clear sight” helps to also understand the similar phraseology that Paul communicates in the Greek to the Corinthians (1 Cor 13:12).

### MEANING

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### APPLICATION

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