

A thick black L-shaped frame surrounds the text. The top horizontal bar is on the left, the left vertical bar is on the left, and the bottom horizontal bar is on the right.

# THE RELIABILITY AND USABILITY OF SCRIPTURE IN OUR PRESENT AGE

Session 5: Literary Approach and Basic  
Methodology In Bible Interpretation Summarized

# A Literary Approach

- Literature does not mean Fiction Some equate a literary approach with college classes entitled “Bible as Literature,” which are essentially a nonreligious approach to studying the Bible. This makes the Bible something less than it is.

“Those who talk of reading the Bible ‘as literature’ sometimes mean, I think, reading it without attending to the main thing it is about...But there is a saner sense in which the Bible, since it is after all literature, cannot properly be read except as literature; and the different parts of it as the different sorts of literature they are.” C.S. Lewis

“a literary approach to the study of Scriptures does not imply, as some might think, a belief that the Bible as a whole is story, not history, or that it speaks of another world and not the real world of time and space.” Tremper Longman III, *Literary Approaches to Biblical Interpretation*, 102

# The human author's point IS God's point

“If literature is an act of communication, then meaning resides in the intention of the author. The author has encoded a message for the readers. Interpretation then has as its goal the recovery of the author's purpose in writing.” Tremper Longman 135

“The narrator always speaks truthfully and authoritatively because he is a prophet, God's inspired spokesman. The implied author's omniscience and omnipresence, apart from modern demands of documentation, are due to his heavenly inspiration, not his purely fictitious inventiveness. Nevertheless, the inspired author probably exercised his authorial right to represent what a character of the story, including God, said in his own terms, while being faithful to the historical reality.” Waltke, *An Old Testament Theology* 101

# Nature of Scripture according to B.B. Warfield:

“And there is the preparation of the men to write these books to be considered, a preparation physical, intellectual, spiritual, which must have attended them throughout their whole lives, and , indeed, must have had its beginning in their remote ancestors, and the effect of which was to bring the right men to the right places at the right times, with the right endowments, impulses, acquirements, to write just the books which were designed for them.

[The modern cynic]...the human characteristics of the writers must, and in point of fact do, condition and qualify the writings produced by them, the implication being that, therefore, we cannot get from man a pure word of God...so any word of God which is passed through the mind and soul of a man must come out discolored by the personality through which it is given, and just to that degree ceases to be the pure word of God.

[Orthodox Reponse] ...But what if this personality has itself been formed by God into precisely the personality it is, for the express purpose of communicating to the word given through it just the coloring which it gives it? What if the colors of the stained-glass window have been designed by the architect for the express purpose of giving to the light that floods the cathedral precisely the tone and quality it receives from them?”

# Form “Criticism”

- Form Criticism- focuses on the period of oral transmission. Traditionally, this method of analyzing the Bible looks for the original form of a text. It devalues the final form, citing a cynical view of later compilers who added or shaped the story for their agenda. ‘

- How would we respond to this?

*1:1 Inasmuch as many have undertaken to compile a narrative of the things that have been accomplished among us, [2] just as those who from the beginning were eyewitnesses and ministers of the word have delivered them to us, [3] it seemed good to me also, having followed all things closely for some time past, to write an orderly account for you, most excellent Theophilus, [4] that you may have certainty concerning the things you have been taught. (Luke 1:1-4 ESV)*

# Source Criticism-

- Source Criticism- is the attempt to establish the sources a biblical author used to construct the narrative. Why do some stories in the Bible seem to be alternative versions or “borrowed” versions of myths/stories from other cultures? Does Genesis borrow from the Mesopotamian myth Enuma Elish? Is Noah’s flood an adaptation of the Babylonian Epic of Gilgamesh? Should this trouble us?
- “Inspired by the Holy Spirit, the biblical authors stripped the ancient pagan literatures of their mythological elements, infused them with the sublimities of their God, and refuted the pagan myths by identifying the holy Lord as the true Creator and Ruler of the cosmos and of history.” Bruce Waltke

For a helpful guide to seeing just how biblical authors used sources (often for the purposes of taunting!) see John Currid, *Against the Gods: The Polemical Theology of the Old Testament*

*“In the end, it is the canonical text that is authoritative, not the process, nor the selfunderstanding of the interpreter.” Brevard Childs*

# Genre

- God wants to us to understand his word. He uses multiple styles of writing that are familiar to us: stories, songs, letters, legal documents, and artistic/symbolic poetry.
- Genres are the categories of types of literature by one or more traits they have in common. Grouping biblical books or passages by genre is essential for interpretation. We first have to know how a text means before we can understand what it means. You always come to a reading with certain expectations. Like different kinds of games have different rules and shape your expectations (you shouldn't need shoulder pads to play chess), so genres shape your expectation of getting at the authors meaning.
- Types of genres in the Bible:
  - *Narrative,*
  - *epistolary,*
  - *poetic,*
  - *wisdom,*
  - *law,*
  - *parable,*
  - *prophetic,*
  - *apocalyptic literature.*

# A Basic Method Summarized: Prayer For Illumination (not to be confused with revelation)

- Our affections will largely help or hinder our interpretation in so far as we are willing to submit to God. Only God can create in us such a disposition that is genuinely willing to hear God's voice as He speaks through His Word. "Create in me a clean heart O God! And then read as if you have never read it before, suspending judgement on its meaning until an analysis is done (see below).
  - *Eph 1:6 I do not cease to give thanks for you, remembering you in my prayers, 17 that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give you the Spirit of wisdom and of revelation (e.g. give you the The Holy Spirit) in the knowledge of him (in greater knowledge of God), 18 having the eyes of your hearts enlightened, that you may know what is the hope to which he has called you, what are the riches of his glorious inheritance in the saints, 19 and what is the immeasurable greatness of his power toward us who believe,*



# A Basic Method Summarized: Access to Several Translations (Versions)

- Notwithstanding the relative trustworthiness of most English translations, the “inspired” text (non translated/interpreted) is in Hebrew, Greek and some Aramaic. All translations therefore involve interpretive decisions that can sometimes obscure the original intent. Different translations reflect different translation theories. (Literal, dynamic, free, etc.) Furthermore, there are two major sources for the Biblical text itself. (Textus Receptus (one manuscript) and Eclectic (a compilation of many ancient manuscripts) Whereas you will not be able to escape these extra-Biblical realities, you can at least minimize their implications if you work with the following texts:
  - *1. So as to have access to the Textus Receptus text, secure a New King James. (The text of the New Geneva Bible)*
  - *2. So as to have access to a more literal translation based on an eclectic text, you will want to have access to a New American Standard Bible.*
  - *3. So as to have access to a dynamic equivalence translation based on an eclectic text, you will want to have an Revised Standard (or New Revised Standard) or New International Version) or ESV (English Standard Version) I would make this my primary text,*

# A Basic Method Summarized: The advantage of different translations: Illustrated

- Rom. 2:17 But if you call yourself a Jew and rely on the law and boast in God
- Rom. 2:23 You who boast in the law dishonor God by breaking the law.
- Rom. 3:27 Then what becomes of our boasting? It is excluded. By what kind of law? By a law of works? No, but by the law of faith.
- Rom. 4:2 For if Abraham was justified by works, he has something to boast about, but not before God.
- Rom 5;2 Through him we have also obtained access by faith into this grace in which we stand, and we rejoice in hope of the glory of God. 3 Not only that, but we rejoice in our sufferings, knowing that suffering produces endurance,
- 1 More than that, we also rejoice in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have now received reconciliation.
- Note also, grammatical decision such as the genitive case in Greek often translated “of” could just as well be

# A Basic Method Summarized: The advantage of using different Translations Illustrated in the use of Cases (Nominative, Genitive, Dative, Accusative)

- Example: The Genitive Case-- (often translated "of" but could mean different things:
  - *Attributive Genitive- Luke 18:6 'judge of unrighteousness' = 'unrighteous judge'*
  - *Possessive Genitive- Matt 26:51 'his ear' Matt 26:51 'slave of the high priest' Heb 11:25 'the people of God'*
  - *Partitive Genitive Rom 11:17 'some of the branches' Rom 15:26 'the poor of the saints'*
  - *Genitive of Apposition- John 2:21 'temple of his body' Rom 4:11 'sign of circumcision'*
  - *Genitive in Simple Apposition- Col 1:18 'the body, the church' Titus 2:13 'Savior, Jesus Christ'*
  - *Descriptive Genitive - Rom 13:12 'armor of light' John 2:16 'house of merchandise' 2 Cor 6:2 'day of salvation'*
  - *Genitive of Comparison- Matt 6:25 'is not your life worth more than food?' John 14:28 'Father is greater than I'*
  - *Etc.*

# A Basic Method Summarized: Do a Book Review/Study (e.g. Get a Bible Encyclopedia or commentary)

This is very important– and is why I prefer expositional series through whole books at a time so as to not exempt this very important step in exegetical method– a step that takes quite some time so as to be hard to do every week or so... You will want to answer questions like:

1. *Who wrote the book and the persons significance/role in the bigger story*
- 2 *What where the historical circumstances? I.e. when, where, how, why, etc.*
  - What were the political factors?
  - What was the cultural issues of that day?
  - To whom was the book written?
  - Was there a controversy that is being addressed?
3. *What is the general theological themes emphasized in this book?*
4. *Look for key words often repeated and discern their "technical" use by the author.*

C.f. A Biblical Survey/Introduction

- *-New Testament: A Survey of the New Testament, Gundry*
- *- Old Testament: Introduction to the Old Testament, Harrison*

# A Basic Method Summarized: Define Your Passage

The fundamental unit of all language is not a single word, not even a single sentence, but the unit (paragraph or series of related paragraphs with a discernible start and finish) Look for the beginning and end of an argument, story or poetic piece of scripture. A "self-contained unit" may consist of a single sentence in the case of a proverb or perhaps several chapters of Scripture in the case of an historical story. (as in Genesis for instance)

# A Basic Method Summarized: Define Your Passage Illustrated

How would it change your lesson if

■ The passage was define like this (1–19):

*Eph. 1:15 For this reason, because I have heard of your faith in the Lord Jesus and your love toward all the saints, 16 I do not cease to give thanks for you, remembering you in my prayers, 17 that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give you the Spirit of wisdom and of revelation in the knowledge of him, 18 having the eyes of your hearts enlightened, that you may know what is the hope to which he has called you, what are the riches of his glorious inheritance in the saints, 19 and what is the immeasurable greatness of his power toward us who believe, according to the working of his great might*

■ Or Like This(15-23):

*20 that he worked in Christ when he raised him from the dead and seated him at his right hand in the heavenly places, 21 far above all rule and authority and power and dominion, and above every name that is named, not only in this age but also in the one to come. 22 And he put all things under his feet and gave him as head over all things to the church, 23 which is his body, the fullness of him who fills all in all.*

***E.g. How does the Holy Spirit bring to us Illumination and power?***

***Option 1: Individualistically/Subjectively***

***Option 2: Communally/Confessional***

# A Basic Method Summarized: Discern the Immediate Context

1. Given a general outline of the book of the Bible you are studying, where is your passage?
2. What is the main point before and after your passage?
3. How does the author make the transition to your passage? Notice the key transitional words: - *therefore, moreover, but, otherwise, since, etc.*

# A Basic Method Summarized: Discern The Literary Genre

What Genre is your book and how does this impact the way you interpret it:

- See next several lessons on Genre specific interpretation:
  - *Prophets and Apocalyptic*
  - *Narratives*
  - *Sermon on the Mount*
  - *Gospels*
  - *Epistles*
  - *Wisdom*



# A Basic Method Summarized: Discern Meaning of Significant Words

You will want to make sure you understand the significant words in your passage. Don't assume you know the meaning. See how the word is used in the same book of the bible you are studying, by the same author of other books of the Bible, in the Bible itself.

*a. You will then want to discern the "range of meaning" and then see which best fits the immediate context of your passage. (Imagine a X were your word shows up in other passages and fill in what the context suggests it means)*

*c. You will want to be particularly careful to notice how the word is used by your author.*

*d. Consult a good "lexicon" (dictionary) if you can discern the Greek or Hebrew word in it.*

# A Basic Method Summarized: A Warning About Word Studies

*Warning:* Don't rely on "Root Word" Studies (such as the use of Strongs Concordance)—its all about semantics (the fluid and evolving use of words in a given cultural/historical context) vs. a static and technical use based on the origin of the word.

Example: "Sick" means???

1. *Root Word Study of Sickness: from Old English seocnesse.*

- seoc - probably from Proto-German \*seukaz – unwell
- ness - suffix of action, quality or state, attached to an adj. or pp. to form a noun, from O.E. -nes(s) and ultimately from Proto-German

2. *Today's Uses: great, amazing, awesome, crazy, cool, insane*

# A Basic Method Summarized: Discern the Sentence Structures

You want to notice the relationships between *clauses* (not verses, or sentences, since these may be artificial anyway)

- 1. Try to distinguish between supporting clauses and main clauses. (Notice particularly the verbs--main verbs vs. supporting verbs)*
- 2. Try to distinguish the various relationships between clauses in your passage. (see attached)*

# **A Basic Method Summarized: Discern the Redemptive- Historical/Covenantal Context (see above on R/H or Covenantal Method)**

*A redemptive historical orientation is not some kind of dispensable exegetical luxury. At stake is nothing less than the right way of interpreting Scripture. At issue here is simply the fundamental principle that the text is to be interpreted in the light of its context. In the case of Scripture, the redemptive-historical structure or framework established by Scripture itself is the contextual factor having the broadest bearing on a given text.*

*(Gaffin, p.xxii)*

- 1. Step One: To relate the text to its immediate theological horizon. (immediate covenantal context)*
- 2. Step Two: To understand the text in light of God's total revelation especially as ultimately revealed in the New Covenant.*

# A Basic Method Summarized: Discern Main Point, and Confessional Context

- **Main point:** Attempt to summarize the plain meaning of your passage, taking into consideration all the above. IF possible write it down in one sentence. This is called the “doctrine” of your passage.
- **Confessional Context:** Compare your “doctrine” to what the church consensus about what the scriptures principally teach about that doctrine. (e.g Compare to Westminster Confession of Faith, or Heidleburg Confession) See above on Confessional/Communal Reading of the Bible

# A Basic Method Summarized: Theme Comparison

- Where do you see the theme of your passage elsewhere in scripture—e.g. Compare and contrast.

1. *Is your passage derived from another passage in the Bible?*

*Sometimes your bible will actually help you some by noting in the margins cross-references.*

2. *If you locate an cross-reference that your author has intentionally used, you will want to go back and understand the OT passage in its original context and meaning. Often times, the author will intend to import the whole contextual meaning of the previously revealed text merely with the use of an abbreviated phrase taken from that passage.*

*Often times, you will discover that your passage assumes knowledge of previous revelation-- the prophets will assume familiarity with the Mosaic law for instance (especially Deut.), NT writers will assume familiarity with both prophets and Moses. But rarely will they directly quote from previous books. You will there need to see if key phrases or even words are used in other portions of the bible.*

3. *How does your passage compare with the cross-references? Are words used in similar ways? If there is variance, what does it accentuate so as to provide a theological emphasis?*

# A Basic Method Summarized: Discern *Related Significance* (“Take Home”)

You will want to carefully limit your application to only that which naturally and genuinely may be derived from the mainpoint. In some cases, your text may have "secondary" points, but they will related to the mainpoint in an obvious way. Your "application" then ought to be governed by the mainpoint. Also remember that many passages will not have a "to do" application. It may be informative in so far as you better understand the nature of your salvation such that you will be more thankful, for instance.

- Some questions you may want to ask are, although not always intended to be answered by your text:
  - *1. What does the mainpoint infer about your relationship to God?*
  - *2. What duty does this passage teach in your relationship to God, to people?*
  - *3. How might I change my understanding of God, His ways, redemption, etc. so as to "grow in spiritual understanding?"*
  - *4. How does this passage challenge assumptions in my culture?*
  - *etc.*

# Further Reading:

- Fee and Stuart, How to Read the Bible for All Its Worth
- Tremper Longman, Literary Approaches to Biblical Interpretation