

Biblical Interpretation



**Fundamental Principles for
Understanding and Applying the Bible**

Charles Speer

SUNSET BIBLE STUDY LIBRARY

Biblical Interpretation

by
Charles Speer



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articles and reviews, including translation.

This book is dedicated to

Cara

my beloved wife and constant companion and
encourager in ministry since the day we met.



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and their family

for making the printing of this book possible.

Preface to the Sunset Bible Study Library

Since 1962 Sunset International Bible Institute has been a leader in teaching God's Word, training local church leaders and preparing preachers and missionaries for effective ministry. Developed in the laboratory of preacher training and proven in the crucible of practical ministry, the Sunset curriculum has grown to forty core courses used both in our resident school and distance learning applications. In 1989 the Sunset Video Studio was inaugurated to record each course of study in a professional format. Those courses, each with a companion study guide, have been used to teach thousands of individual students and develop a world-wide network of video satellite schools in local congregations and mission fields.

Now in printed form that same library of trusted Bible study material is available through Sunset Institute Press for an even wider circle of Bible students, thanks to a benevolent God, an excellent editorial staff and a number of faithful supporters who believed in the project.

This book is the result of a multi step process which began with a videotaped course. The voice track of the videotape was first transcribed then formatted and edited from spoken to written style. The goal of the editorial process has been to produce a readable document while protecting the course content and the style and personality of the teacher. We believe the goal has been achieved and that each of the forty books planned for the Sunset Bible Study Library will

likewise achieve that goal.

Special gratitude must be expressed to Cline Paden and Truman Scott who began the video course series in 1989, to Bob Martin, who directed Sunset Video Studio, to Virgil Yocham and the staff of Sunset External Studies Division who wrote the study guides, and to the staff of Sunset Translation Center who edited the manuscripts and to each faculty member of Sunset International Bible Institute who took extra time to prepare and present these courses in the studio.

In addition to the English version, this book and its companion volumes are being translated into the major languages of the world to produce a Bible study library which can be used on the mission fields of the world to mature Christians, train church leaders and grow churches that plant other churches.



A companion workbook on the study of Biblical Interpretation is available for purchase through Sunset International Bible Institute External Studies: 1(800) 687-2121 or extschool@sibi.cc.

Introduction

The history of biblical interpretation, sometimes called “Sacred Hermeneutics,” is not a straight road. From the allegorical methods of Pliny’s day to twentieth century historical-grammatical method, interpreters have not agreed on very much when it comes to how to ascertain meaning and determine application of the scriptures.

Currently in the world of Christendom, churches are dealing with the effects of post-modernism. Individual interpretations dominate the scene. If there are no absolutes, no standard upon which to base one’s “truth,” then the biblical meaning is up for grabs. “My interpretation is as good as yours,” so it goes.

Churches of Christ are not immune to the invasion of dangerous philosophical approaches to interpretation. The application of command, example, and inference has in some quarters relegated to antiquated methodology. Some have said that such an approach has led us to improper conclusions as to what is true and encouraged us to disfellowship those with whom we disagree in interpretation. Abuse of this hermeneutic has indeed rendered illogical conclusions and interpretations, but properly used, this hermeneutic can benefit our attempts to live godly lives today. To employ this hermeneutic to determine right from wrong, correct versus incorrect, pleasing versus displeasing to God is helpful. To abuse might lay heavy burdens on others that the Lord did not intend. There is a difference between determining what is right and wrong and what determines fellowship with God and fellow-Christians.

In this book we will investigate both the exegetical and the hermeneutical processes. Exegesis determines what the text meant to the author, and hermeneutics helps apply the text to modern day parallels. Relying primarily on repeatedly reading

the text, the whole biblical book, looking at it from a particular perspective each time, we will attempt to exegete the text. Having determined the meaning, we are better equipped to apply certain hermeneutical guidelines to the text's principles, commands, examples, and inferences. In so doing, the biblical student can best determine what is right and how the text impacts his life today.

Biblical interpretation is a very important science/art! If indeed the Bible constitutes God's one written revelation to all mankind (and this book accepts that premise), any interpreter must proceed humbly and with caution. Yes, we can determine the meaning of the text. Yes, we must attempt to modernize the applications. However, in all we do, we need to be poor in spirit and loving toward those with whom we disagree in exegesis or hermeneutics.

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BIBLICAL INTERPRETATION

INTRODUCTION

The topic for this book is “Biblical Interpretation.” The more technical name for this subject is “Sacred Hermeneutics,” which is the study of the methods to determine the meaning of biblical text or interpreting the Bible. Some people might ask, “Why should we study such a topic?” Others might ask, “Does not the Holy Spirit within a person give him understanding of Scripture? If that is so, then why do we even need a methodology, as it were, to help a person decide what the text means?” This theory is called **illumination**.

Others might suggest, “Experience shows us that everyone has his own interpretation and that is as it should be. Therefore, we do not need a standardized hermeneutic because it simply will not work.” This sounds like **existentialism**. Still others might comment, “Why bother? The Bible is just too hard to understand, anyway.” This person has simply given up and, therefore, sees no benefit in such a study. This view is simply an attitude of **despair**. I would like for us to look at each one of these to see if they are valid arguments.

Questions Concerning Interpretation

The Question of Illumination

Illumination is the first theory we noted (claiming to possess special knowledge or enlightening, Ed). Calvinism declares that a man is totally depraved, which means that he is incapable of doing good in and of himself. In fact, man is even

incapable of understanding Scripture by himself. Therefore, the Holy Spirit must force such an unregenerate person to accept the gospel initially (otherwise known as irresistible grace). But then the Spirit must continue to enlighten such a one even after he becomes a Christian; that is known as illumination. This doctrine simply is not true. A passage sometimes cited in support of illumination, but one which actually speaks against that particular view is 1 Corinthians 2:14-16:

“The man without the Spirit does not accept the things that come from the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him, and he cannot understand them, because they are spiritually discerned. The spiritual man makes judgments about all things, but he himself is not subject to any man’s judgment: ‘For who has known the mind of the Lord that he may instruct him?’ But we have the mind of Christ.”

The context of this passage does not say that individual Christians will have power from the indwelling Spirit to discern the meaning of Scripture. Paul was talking about individuals in the first century who had miraculous spiritual gifts that allowed them to reveal the mind of God and discern when the mind of God was being spoken. Because Christians today do **not** have miraculous spiritual gifts, we must rely on other means for interpreting the Scriptures. It is not done by illumination, in fact, it is more like perspiration (hard work) that yields a correct interpretation of Scripture. If illumination were true, everyone who is a Christian would be able to interpret all passages alike. Who will admit that is a reality? It is not. The essence of what we see then, is that illumination is not correct.

The Question of Existentialism

What about existentialism? (Existentialism is a philosophical theory emphasizing the existence of the individual person as a free and responsible agent determining his or her

own development, Ed.) Yes, experience does teach that people come up with different interpretations, however, that does not necessarily mean or imply that any person is welcome to his own interpretation of any passage of scripture. Reason does not allow such a conclusion. If that were true, we would end up with no absolutes. God could not define what is authoritative in Scripture because there would be no authority in Scripture. No book, including the Bible, is written without an **intended meaning** in the mind of the author. Ask yourself these questions: “Did God write a book to man? Did He write it to communicate certain ideas that He had in His mind and in His will?” If so, then we must come to know God’s mind and His will. When He wrote a passage, He had one thing in mind. If not, then each person becomes his own authority, his own interpreter, instead of God giving His authoritative will in the Scripture. Each person becomes the authoritative interpreter of those words for his own life. That is anarchy! That makes self the god of one’s life.

The Question of Despair

The last theory deals with the attitude of despair. Indeed, some parts of scripture are difficult to understand. I think most of us would agree that Revelation, Ezekiel, and Zechariah are difficult books, and there are other parts of scripture that are hard to understand. Peter said that some parts of Paul’s letters were very hard to understand: “. . . *His letters contain some things that are hard to understand, which ignorant and unstable people distort, as they do the other Scriptures, to their own destruction*” (2 Peter 3:16). And if Peter, an inspired apostle, had some difficulty with Paul’s letters, then what about us who are uninspired?

This view of despair implies that God gave us a book because He wanted to communicate some things to man concerning love, salvation, husband-wife relationships, and many other things, but He composed that book in such a way that it was too hard for man to understand. If this book is too

hard for man to understand, then man is in trouble. That says either God is not capable of accomplishing such a feat or God is capricious (given to unpredictable behavior, Ed.) and sadistic (the enjoyment of cruelty to others, Ed). Both of these assumptions challenge the true nature of God. God is all powerful, so. He can accomplish anything. His character is **not** such that He would try to play a bad joke on man or be cruel in any way. Neither one of these assumptions can be true. When Paul wrote to the Corinthians, he said:

“But God has revealed it to us by his Spirit. The Spirit searches all things, even the deep things of God. For who among men knows the thoughts of a man except the man’s spirit within him? In the same way no one knows the thoughts of God except the Spirit of God. We have not received the spirit of the world but the Spirit who is from God, that we may understand what God has freely given us. This is what we speak, not in words taught us by human wisdom but in words taught us by the Spirit, expressing spiritual truths in spiritual words” (1 Corinthians 2:10-13).

This passage indicates the following process: God’s Word was revealed by His Holy Spirit when the Spirit searched the mind of God taking the thoughts which were beyond man’s understanding (because those thoughts were eternal), and putting those thoughts into words which a man could understand. Once those men, who were apostles and prophets, understood these words by revelation, they were controlled by the inspiration of the Holy Spirit to speak and write those things in spiritual words which man could understand.

Reasons Why Men Can Understand the Bible Alike

God Calls Upon Man to Understand

If the theories of illumination, existentialism and despair are not true, then it must be true that God **did** give man a book, the Bible, which he can understand, and all men can understand it alike. That does not mean every man will always understand it alike, but it does mean that it is possible to do so. So the question arises, can men really understand the Bible alike? I have asserted that they can, but I have not yet proven that they can. I think they can, but the fact is, they do not; and that has caused some people to say they cannot.

Why do men understand the Bible differently? Does God expect men to understand the Bible alike? I am persuaded that God has written the Bible in such a fashion so as to allow men to understand it and to understand it alike. Further, I believe He expects you and me to understand it very much alike. I would like to suggest some of the reasons that I think we should understand the Bible alike.

First, the usage of the word “understand” in Scripture implies that men **can** understand the Bible alike. One of the great songs in Scripture is Psalm 119. This is the longest passage of Scripture in the Bible, and it is interesting that in this particular psalm in the Old Testament there is so much emphasis given to the Word of God, our attitudes toward it and our dependence on it. This passage expresses the dependence on the Word and also reveals some interesting insights into hermeneutics. This passage reveals some ways in which we can understand the Bible alike. Notice these three verses in particular: *“Give me understanding, and I will keep your law and obey it with all my heart. . . . Your hands made me and formed me; give me understanding to learn your commands. . . . Your statutes are forever right; give me understanding that I may live”* (Psalms 119:34, 73, 144). The psalmist was

pleading with God for understanding. He realized that he could not totally understand by himself, but he believed the Lord could help him understand. Therefore, with God's help, all men can understand His Word.

God Expects Man to Understand

What is necessarily implied by or inferred from the verses in Psalm 119 is that without understanding the reader cannot do what is right. He cannot obey. How can he keep God's law if he does not understand the way God made it to be understood? The psalmist pleaded with God for understanding. God's children need to be able to understand the Word today as well.

If you go to the doctor it is usually because you are hurting or you have some ailment. The doctor may do the necessary tests and diagnose an infection. He may write a prescription to be taken to the pharmacist to be filled. The doctor has written a prescription for an antibiotic, but what if the pharmacist does not understand the doctor's writing? The pharmacist reads the prescription, but understands the doctor's writing to say the doctor has prescribed a laxative instead of an antibiotic. The doctor **intended** the prescription to be for an antibiotic, but that is not what the pharmacist understood. The pharmacist did not understand what the doctor meant so the prescription is filled wrong. The pharmacist must understand the **intended meaning** of what the doctor wrote or he does not understand at all. The **intended meaning** of the doctor's prescription is the **authority** in this matter. The fact that the pharmacist says he understood the prescription to be for a laxative does not change the fact that the prescription is wrong. The prescription of a laxative is not going to stop the infection. In the same way, if man is going to understand the Bible, he must understand it as God, the author, **intended** for it to be understood. Man must understand it God's way or else he does not understand it at all.

Second, all men are expected by God to understand the Bible alike because God has always expected the people to know what He spoke, how He spoke it, and to obey His

intention, not just any interpretation they might come up with. There are many examples to substantiate this point, but we are only going to look at two specific ones.

Walls of Jericho

The walls of Jericho collapsed because the Israelites did exactly as God said. God gave Joshua some very specific instructions that included marching around the city once a day for six days. Then, on the seventh day, they marched around the city seven times. God gave specific instructions on what to hold in their hands, when to be quiet, when to shout, and when to blow the trumpets. If God gave such specific instructions, do you think that God really expected Joshua and the people to understand those instructions? Did God expect the people to follow through with those instructions so that the walls of Jericho would fall down? Could they have said, “Well, this is the way I understood it . . .” and that would be correct? Absolutely not! They needed to understand what they needed to do as God intended it to be done. If they had not understood it the way God intended and followed through the specific instructions, the walls would not have fallen down.

Noah in the Ark

Noah was also given very specific instructions concerning how to build the ark. God gave Noah a specific length, width, and height to build the ark. There were specific instructions for the window, the door, and how to put the pitch on the outside and the inside of the ark. To build the ark, Noah had to build it according to the way that God intended for him to. If Noah had not followed God’s instructions specifically, he and his family would not have been carried to safety from the flood waters. He did obey exactly what God intended for him to do, and they were saved as a result.

Salvation from sin and the hope of heaven are determined on the basis of faithful obedience. That means that man must understand the instructions in the Bible as God really intended

for them to be understood. In other words, man must understand as God understands and as He wrote His instructions in His Word. God will not tolerate disobedience on the basis of ignorance or the claim to understand it in a way that He never intended. Man's salvation depends on knowing the truth. Knowing the truth demands that man should and can understand what truth is. Jesus Himself said, *"Then you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free"* (John 8:32). First of all, this scripture says that there **is** a truth. Next it says that **the truth** is what saves you. The truth is capable of saving man from his sin. **The truth** is reality as defined by God, and **not** as it is defined by man. God's definitions of what is true and what is not true are the only basis for truth. Nothing else is really true. That implies that man **can** and should know the truth. Salvation from sin depends on man's ability to know **the truth** as God intended it and to obey it as God intended it to be obeyed.

Unity Is at Stake

Third, man needs to understand the Bible alike because different interpretations destroy the unity among believers. If someone were to read the New Testament simply looking for the theme of unity, he could find it. Unity is important and essential, as expressed in New Testament writings. There are numerous examples in the New Testament that teach the importance of unity. We are going to look at two specific ones.

Number one, the Lord Jesus prayed for unity. He had already prayed for His apostles, and then He prayed: *"My prayer is not for them alone. I pray also for those who will believe in me through their message, that all of them may be one, Father, just as you are in me and I am in you. May they also be in us so that the world may believe that you have sent me"* (John 17:20-21). Jesus prayed for the disciples that would come after Him. He was praying for those who would become believers in the centuries to come. He was praying that all Christians today would be united just as He and the Father were

– “*that all of them may be one.*” He was praying that the unity of His followers would show the world that God had indeed really sent Him.

Number two, unity among the believers was such an important thing that Jesus instilled this same desire in the minds of His apostles before He left to go back to heaven.

Paul wrote to tell the Ephesians that Jesus was the Christian’s peace. He said:

“For he himself is our peace, who has made the two one and has destroyed the barrier, the dividing wall of hostility, by abolishing in his flesh the law with its commandments and regulations. His purpose was to create in himself one new man out of the two, thus making peace, and in this one body to reconcile both of them to God through the cross, by which he put to death their hostility. He came and preached peace to you who were far away and peace to those who were near. For through him we both have access to the Father by one Spirit” (Ephesians 2:14-18).

Through His peace, Christ destroyed all the barriers between Jews and Gentiles. Through the cross, it is as if Jesus tears down all the walls that divide any two groups of people that are at war. The cross of Jesus Christ intended to bring unity to all peoples so that all peoples could become members of the same body, which is the church. It was only through the tearing down of that dividing wall that all people could be united by the sacrifice of Jesus on Calvary.

The Basis

The apostle Paul declared that the Ephesians needed to “*Make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace*” (Ephesians 4:3). He followed that declaration with an explanation of why he believed that unity should be preserved and how it can be preserved. He said: “*There is **one***

body and one Spirit – just as you were called to one hope when you were called – one Lord, one faith, one baptism; one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all” (Ephesians 4:4-6).

No one who believes in the Bible denies that there is one God and one Lord and one Spirit. **If** there is one God, one Lord, and one Spirit, then in the same way there is one body and one faith and one baptism. If man looks at the Scriptures alike, there is one church and one body. If man looks at this any differently, then he has violated this passage. There is one faith and there is one way of looking at **the faith**. There is one baptism and there is only one way to look at that one baptism. There is **only one God** and **only one way** to look at God. **One way** is the only way that can bring unity. Men must be united on these particular doctrines (issues) for there to be unity.

Paul’s Appeal for Unity

Paul wrote the following appeal to the Corinthians: *“I appeal to you, brothers, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that all of you agree with one another so that there may be **no divisions among you** and that you may be **perfectly united in mind and thought**”* (1 Corinthians 1:10). Paul would not have appealed to the Corinthians for them to be united unless he expected them to be united. Corinth was a church that was divided in many respects. He wanted them to come to a position of unity. Some of the things that he talked about in 1 Corinthians were attempts to bring them to unity. He did not want there to be any divisions among them.

Reasons Why Men Do Not Understand the Bible Alike

All men can understand the Bible alike. More specifically, God expects all men to understand the Bible alike if they are to be saved. Because not all men understand the Bible alike, some

conclude that they cannot understand it alike. Surely God would not bind something upon us that we are incapable of doing. Why do men not understand the Bible alike? We should, but we do not. I would like to briefly suggest three reasons why men do not understand the Bible alike.

Because of Ignorance

The **first reason** people do not understand the Bible alike is due to ignorance. They lack a full knowledge of the Word. Although people buy more Bibles than any other book, it seems that the contents of this book means nothing to the majority of people. Perhaps that is because people are distracted in their lives with a multitude of things. Schedules are full and take away from the time that people would have to study the Scriptures. The result of this is that they rely too heavily on what other people say, on what preachers preach, and on what teachers teach. People do not make the time to study the Bible so they do not have full knowledge of the Word of God.

Because of Prejudice

The **second reason** people do not understand the Bible alike has to do with the fact that they bring preconceived notions to the Scriptures. People may have different backgrounds that cause them to think in different ways. They may have prejudices that they bring to the Scripture. It is so important for people to come to the Scripture without these prejudices so that each one can get away from viewing the Scripture through rose colored glasses or preconceived notions.

Because of an Improper Hermeneutic

The **third reason** people do not understand the Bible alike is because they come to the Word of God with an improper hermeneutic. This is the very essence of this book – to give each person a methodology to use to determine the meaning of the biblical text. That is called hermeneutics. Everybody has a hermeneutic. Each person views the Scriptures a certain way.

He may not be able to articulate it, but he has certain rules that he applies to interpretation. These rules may be good ones or they may be faulty. If they are faulty, he may come away with false concepts that he thinks the Scripture is saying. There is a correct hermeneutic. The purpose of this book is to help each one discover the correct methodology.

Conclusion

There are **three possibilities** to consider when interpreting Scripture. **First**, God could not give us a book that we can understand. **Second**, God could give us such a book, but He did not. **Third**, God did give us a book that we can and should understand.

The first possibility – that God could not give us a book that we can understand – limits the power of God. If He is omnipotent (all powerful, Ed.), surely He could give us a book in words and concepts that we can understand. The second possibility – that God gave us a book, but He does not allow us to understand it – indicts God as unjust and unfair. God has said that we are going to be judged by His book (cf. John 12:48; Romans 2:12). Surely, He must have given us a book that we can understand. That is the third possibility – that God has given us a book that we can all understand alike. Indeed, God has given His children a book that can be understood. That being true, it will be our task to find out how to understand God's will from His Word.

We will begin by looking at the importance of a good attitude. The Bible was meant to be understood. May God bless each one with the understanding in order to grow closer to Him through the study of His Holy Word.

Psalm 119:130 – *“The unfolding of your words gives light; it gives understanding to the simple.”* Matthew 24:15 – *“... let the reader understand...”* Matthew 13:9 – *“He who has ears to hear, let him hear.”*

DISCUSSION

1. If unity is to be found in the body, (as Christ wants), what doctrines must we agree on and why?
2. As far as the way to salvation, are there any passages that are hard to understand? (Where a person would not know how to come into a saved relationship with God.) If so what are they and why do you think they are hard to understand?

THE PROPER ATTITUDE FOR GOOD BIBLICAL INTERPRETATION

Introduction

In the first chapter we introduced this book by discussing whether the Bible could and should be understood alike. Some people have said that because people do not understand it alike, we should not think that we ever can understand it alike. However, if God could deliver a book to man in which He reveals His will and His plans for man, then that same God is powerful enough to make it so that men can understand that book alike. If we do not understand it alike, it is not God's fault.

In this chapter we want to talk about the proper attitude of a good biblical interpreter. Our attitude toward the Bible and toward God's Word is crucial. It is imperative that we believe that God demands we understand His Word, and that we have a good attitude toward Him.

The Bible: A Peerless Book, And the Reasons for Its Peerless Nature

The Bible is a peerless book, meaning it has no equal. The Bible is such a uniquely wonderful book that it has no peers in the literary field. It stands alone. Someone has said,

“**The Book** contains the mind of God, the state of man, the way of salvation, the doom of sinners, and the happiness of believers. Its doctrines are holy. Its precepts are binding. Its histories are true, and its decisions are immutable. Read it to be wise, believe it to be saved, and practice it to be holy. It contains light to direct you, food to support you, and comfort to cheer you. It is the traveler’s map, the pilgrim’s staff, the pilot’s compass, and the soldier’s sword, and the Christian’s charter. Here Paradise is restored, heaven opened, and the ways of hell disclosed. Christ is its grand object, our God its design, and the redemption of man, its end. It should fill the memory, rule the heart and guide the feet. It is a mine of wealth, a paradise of glory, a river of pleasure. It is given you in life and will be opened in the judgment and be remembered forever. It involves the highest responsibilities, will reward the greatest labor and condemn all who trifle with its sacred contents.”

Even some of our best-known presidents have expressed a very healthy respect for the Bible. For instance, John Adams, Thomas Jefferson, and Theodore Roosevelt have spoken well of it. Note these quotations: George Washington said, “It is impossible to rightly govern the world without God and the Bible. He is worse than an infidel who does not read his Bible and acknowledge his obligation to God.” Abraham Lincoln, one of our best-known presidents, said, “I am profitably engaged in reading the Bible. Take the entire book you can upon reason and then the balance by faith, and you will live and die a better man.” Woodrow Wilson, in this century, declared, “I have a very simple thing to ask every man and woman in this audience. That from this day on, they will realize that part of the destiny of America lies in their daily perusal of this great book.” The Bible is, indeed, peerless.

Reasons for Its Peerless Nature

It Is Literary Excellence

There are reasons why the Bible is a peerless book. **First**, it is excellent literature. A professor at Yale University has said that the Bible exceeds the excellence of all other books throughout the ages. No man is truly educated until he knows the Bible. The book of Luke is written in excellent Greek. The Acts of the Apostles and The Chronicles are histories beyond compare. Psalms is beautiful, wonderful poetry! Proverbs are well worded wise sayings from people of old. Ruth, Exodus, and the gospels are great stories and great literature. Ezekiel, Revelation, and Zechariah are books that employ figurative language that few people could match, even if they tried. The Prophets were some of the greatest preachers ever known! They will certainly get your attention.

It Is Truth

Second, the Bible, in terms of its peerless nature, is full of truth. It **is** truth. It **is the truth**. It contains the truth that saves (cf. John 8:31-32). It holds the secret of contentment (Philippians 4:10-13). It holds the truth about God's nature, man's tendencies, and life in general. It is as deep as you **want** to go and **can** go.

It Is Accurate

Third, the Bible is peerless because it is unfailing in terms of what is right. In other words, it is accurate in that it says just exactly enough. It is not intended to be a science book, but when God speaks through a man by inspiration, there is not even a scientific error found in the pages of Scripture. Even though this book was written in a time of ignorance and superstition, it is never wrong. Even though it is only intended to speak about eternal and spiritual things, it is not wrong about other things, either. How many books this old do you read?

How many of them have errors? How many of them have things in them that are wrong? All of them. However, the Bible itself contains no errors.

It Is Complete

Fourth, the Bible is peerless in that it is complete. It might not have been intended as a science book, but it is a comprehensive book on God: His nature, His character, and His workings. It also is a book about man: his nature, his future, where he came from, and what he is doing here. The apostle Peter wrote, *“His divine power has given us everything we need for life and godliness through our knowledge of him [this knowledge is gained through the Word of God] who called us by his own glory and goodness”* (2 Peter 1:3). Jesus told His apostles, *“All this I have spoken while still with you. But the Counselor, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, will teach you all things and will remind you of everything I have said to you”* (John 14:25-26). Paul affirmed, *“All scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, so that the man of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work”* (2 Timothy 3:16-17). The Bible is peerless in that it is complete for everything that man needs on this earth in terms of his spiritual life.

It Is Relevant and Fresh

Fifth, the Bible is peerless in terms of its relevance and freshness. Someone has commented that he thought the Bible was fresher to him the thousandth time he read it than the first time he read it. That is an incredible quality that the Bible has. A person could read it at one stage of his life, and then read it later, and it would still be fresh, even though you had gained so much from the first time. There is much to gain from a multiple reading, because it is always fresh and relevant every time.

When an uninspired man writes a book, its relevancy, application, and freshness seems to be lost in time. When I was

growing up, I read the book 1984 by George Orwell. But the year 1984 is past, and George Orwell's book seems to have lost its relevance and freshness. A little later, as I was growing up, the book Future Shock by Alvin Toffler came out. It was a great book and had great relevance and freshness, but it has lost that freshness and relevance, too. The Bible, however, is always fresh. That is because it deals with the unchanging nature of life. It deals with that which is true for all men, in all cultures, in all ages, and in all situations. There is such a diversity of culture and age and kinds of people, yet the Bible is relevant and fresh to every single one of those people in every single situation. It reaches down and grabs the inner feelings and inner spirit of every single person every time. It challenges and instructs. It aids the whole man. It talks to the body. It talks to the soul. It talks to the emotions and the spirit.

It Is Powerful; It Reveals Christ in the World

Sixth, the Bible is indeed peerless in terms of its power. It was powerful enough to take a man bent on the destruction of Christians – Saul of Tarsus – and turn him into the ablest preacher of the gospel – otherwise known as the apostle Paul. What could possibly persuade Gentiles and Jews to decide to enter the same building and worship together and embrace each other when their cultures and their histories had only bred hatred between them? It was the Word! It was the Christ revealed in the Word. What gives comfort and power to those that have lost a loved one? Of course, it is the Word. What equips a small, perhaps limited talent person, to make a difference in people's lives? Is it not the Word? What brings joy to the sad heart when trials surround? It is the Word. What contains enough power and enough wisdom to cause us to want to read it over and over and over? It is the Word, and it is because the Word is so powerful. It is the Word of God, and only the Word of God that can accomplish all this.

It Is Indispensable

Seventh, the Bible is peerless because it is indispensable. We cannot do without this book. We have to have it to survive in this world. Our spirits need the eternal principles taught in it so that we might survive. We have to have it to cope with the things of this world which are too hurtful and too intimidating for our minds and our hearts to take. We have to have it to find out how to please God, how to be saved, and how to have a close relationship with Him. The Bible is indeed indispensable.

It Is God's Own and Only Book

Eighth, it is peerless because it is God's own book, and it is His only book. We do not need any other so-called revelations because there are not any. The Bible is it. It is the only revelation.

Proper Attitudes Toward God and His Word

The Bible demands my all when I study it. Psalm 119 is full of descriptions of the right kind of attitudes and the right kind of methods of how to study and retain the Word of God. What are the attitudes that every person needs toward God to be a good biblical interpreter?

The Desire to Seek God

First, everyone needs a great desire to seek God with their whole hearts. Psalm 119:2 says, "*Blessed are they who keep his statutes and seek him with all their heart.*" Later in the same chapter the psalmist said, "*I seek you with all my heart; do not let me stray from your commands*" (Psalm 119:10). Seeking God is important above all else. The people to whom Jesus spoke in John 5 thought they were seeking God, but they were only seeking the words on the page. They were not seeking the God who was revealed through the words of the page. Jesus

said to them: *“You diligently study the Scriptures because you think that by them you possess eternal life. These are the Scriptures that testify about me, yet you refuse to come to me to have life”* (John 5:39-40).

The thought behind seeking God is to **know** Him, to want to have a relationship with Him, to want to be owned by Him, to love Him, and not just to know the black and white words on a page. Jeremiah 9:23-24 says,

“This is what the LORD says: ‘Let not the wise man boast of his wisdom or the strong man boast of his strength or the rich man boast of his riches, but let him who boasts boast about this: that he understands and knows me, that I am the LORD, who exercises kindness, justice and righteousness on earth, for in these I delight,’ declares the LORD.”

The greatest priority of a Christian’s life is coming to know God. And, of course, the main way that is done is by studying His revealed will, which is made known through the Word, keeping the thought in mind that he is doing this to come to know Him. But under this same attitude, there must be an attitude of wanting to know God and His Son, Jesus. Jesus said, *“Now this is eternal life: that they may know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom you have sent”* (John 17:3).

A Christian cannot let the Word become an end within itself lest he becomes a Bible worshiper rather than a God worshiper. The song¹ writer in our hymnals has said it well: “Beyond the sacred page I seek thee, Lord. My spirit pants for thee, O living word.” This search for God and Jesus is done with not only a seeking heart, but also a whole heart. This is an often repeated phrase in Psalm 119: *“all my heart.”* Here are several

¹See Alton H. Howard, Ed., Songs of Faith and Praise (West Monroe, LA: Howard Publishing Company; 1994), 431, “Break Thou the Bread of Life” written by Mary Artemisia Lathbury in 1877.

examples: *“I seek you with **all my heart**; do not let me stray from your commands”* (119:10); *“Give me understanding, and I will keep your law and obey it with **all my heart**”* (119:34); *“Though the arrogant have smeared me with lies, I keep your precepts with **all my heart**”* (119:69); *“I call with **all my heart**; answer me, O LORD, and I will obey your decrees”* (119:145).

This search for God must be a wholehearted attempt. I hear people say, “I want to know God.” But then somehow their entire heart does not seem to be part of it. Without the whole heart, they are not going to come to truly know Him. If we really want to know another person and all we have are letters from that person, we must really study those letters to come to know that person. It is no different with the Lord. We have His book. We must study that book to come to know Him.

A Desire to Seek Understanding From Him

Second, the attitude that must be shown toward God is a desire to seek understanding from Him. Psalm 119:18-19 says, *“Open my eyes that I may see wonderful things in your law. I am a stranger on earth; do not hide your commands from me.”* In other words, there must be a strong sense of need for and dependency upon God. We need to know God’s Word because God tells us how to preserve life and how to have life in the Word of God. In Matthew 4:4 Jesus said to the devil, *“It is written: ‘Man does not live on bread alone, but on every word that comes from the mouth of God.’”* Psalm 119:40 says, *“How I long for your precepts! Preserve my life in your righteousness.”* The psalmist also wrote, *“Teach me knowledge and good judgment, for I believe in your commands”* (119:66). There must be a strong sense of dependency, and a strong sense of expectancy about what I will receive from this relationship with God through the Word.

Psalm 119:18 says, *“Open my eyes that I may see wonderful things in your law.”* I have heard people say, “The Bible is boring!” I must admit I fume a little bit when I hear that. It is just that they do not know the nuggets of truth in the

Bible, or maybe they just do not know how to mine those nuggets. Psalms 119:98-99 says, *“Your commands make me wiser than my enemies, for they are ever with me. I have more insight than all my teachers, for I meditate on your statutes.”* There must be an air of expectancy about our study. When I come to the Bible, I want to know, “What will He tell me today? What will I learn about my Father today? With what problem will He give me help today?”

Knowing my God through His word is exciting because it brings joy and peace, because His way works, and because of the hope that it gives. Consider these words by the psalmist: *“Because I love your commands more than gold, more than pure gold . . . I rejoice in your promise like one who finds great spoil”* (Psalm 119:127, 162). These attitudes toward God are so significant to us that if we have them they will bring great rewards to us.

A Reverent Awe of God

Third, there must be an attitude of reverent awe toward God, a healthy respect for God: *“Rulers persecute me without cause, but my heart trembles at your word”* (Psalm 119:161). When He speaks, I listen in fear: *“My flesh trembles in fear of you; I stand in awe of your laws”* (119:120). Do you recall how the writer of Proverbs begins his book? He said, *“The fear of the LORD is the beginning of knowledge, but fools despise wisdom and discipline”* (Proverbs 1:7). Then later, he said, *“The fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom, and knowledge of the Holy One is understanding”* (Proverbs 9:10).

Before I approach the word of God, there must be a healthy respect for God, an awe, a holy trembling. I must tremble when He speaks, just like Moses did at Mount Sinai when he saw the burning bush (cf. Exodus 3:6), just like Daniel did when he heard the messenger of God speak to him and he fell prostrate upon the ground (cf. Daniel 8:17), or as John did in the book of Revelation as the angel came to show him the grandeur of God’s heavenly abode and the plans for the future

(cf. Revelation 1:17). Just because the words on the page in the Bible are in black and white and not speaking loudly, it is still the Lord speaking. It is still thunder. It is not a magazine. It is not a math book. It is not a TV special. It is God speaking, and He says, *“Take off your sandals, for the place where you are standing is holy ground”* (Exodus 3:5). We cannot afford to treat this book or our relationship with God as if we can take it or leave it. If this is the Word of God, then we must treat it with respect. The proclamation of God the Almighty is to be treated with respect. This is from the same Lord that is an avenging God on those who obey not the gospel (cf. 2 Thessalonians 1:7-9). This book is from a God who is a consuming fire (cf. Hebrews 12:29). He is a holy God (cf. 1 Peter 1:16). I will be judged by His word. Jesus says that there is a judge for the one who rejects Him and does not accept His words: “. . . *that very word which I spoke will condemn him at the last day*” (John 12:48). Psalm 119:120 says, *“My flesh trembles in fear of you; I stand in awe of your laws.”*

Submissive Attitude

The **fourth** attitude toward God is a submissive attitude. Psalm 19:8 says, *“The precepts of the LORD are right, giving joy to the heart.”* Psalm 12:6 says, *“And the words of the LORD are flawless, . . .”* The LORD is always right. The psalmist had learned to trust that God was always right, and therefore he was willing to submit. God always knows what He is saying. The psalmist knew that was right. God did make this world; He did make us. So it stands to reason that He knows the ins and outs of everything about which we would want to know. Thus, we must trust implicitly that He is telling us the truth, and that if we obey the truth, everything will be as He has said.

That means that we must approach God with openness in relation to His Word, just as we do in prayer. There must be openness to God. If the Word is to have its effect, cutting like a sharp sword, penetrating even to the dividing of soul and spirit, judging the thoughts and intents of the heart (cf. Hebrews

4:12), then I must be rid of all prejudice and preconceived notions. This attitude accepts His word as authoritative, as a “thus saith the Lord.” Paul said in Romans 3:4, *“Let God be true and every man a liar.”* That expresses the difference between man and God. We must, therefore, make a decision to trust Him and to trust His Word.

Thanksgiving and Praise

In thinking seriously about our attitudes toward God, there must be an attitude of thanksgiving and praise. Psalm 119:7 says, *“I will praise you with an upright heart as I learn your righteous laws.”* Psalm 119:14 states, *“I rejoice in following your statutes as one rejoices in great riches.”* The psalm continues in 119:62, *“At midnight I rise to give you thanks for your righteous laws,”* and says in 119:164, *“Seven times a day I praise you for your righteous laws.”* The psalmist was so joyful over the spoil that he obtained from his study of God’s Word and his relationship to God that he even arose at midnight to praise and thank God for His Word. I cannot help but be impressed with his devotion and appreciative attitude.

Conclusion

It is interesting to note that Psalm 119 is 176 verses long, the longest chapter in the Bible, and its theme is the Word of God. It is as though the author cannot say enough to extol the merits of the Law of the Lord and the Lord Himself. He wrote in 119:175, *“Let me live that I may praise you, and may your laws sustain me.”* Praising God. That is what it is all about.

All of the attitudes I have spoken of so far have to do with the attitudes toward God Himself. But did you notice that so often in those verses there was a parallel between one’s attitude toward God and one’s attitude toward the Word? We could go through the psalm and see the same attitudes toward God that are repeated that should be our attitude toward the Word itself.

Remember that our attitudes toward God are the starting place for our study of His word. If our attitudes are not in

harmony with those expressed in Psalm 119, then the rest of what we have to say in this study will not be as meaningful as it needs to be. Read Psalms 119:1-176. Study it personally to get in place any attitudes that might be out of place in terms of what is needed toward God and His Word.

DISCUSSION

1. Discuss the proper attitudes toward God and His word from Psalm 119.
2. Discuss what some people add to or take away from the Bible and why.
3. Why would someone think the Bible is not complete? Why do some think it is indispensable?

BASIC ASSUMPTIONS OF BIBLICAL INTERPRETATION

Introduction

Up to this point, we have talked a good deal about proper attitudes toward God Himself and toward His Word. The Word is the vehicle through which He reveals Himself and aids us in coming to know Him personally. In this chapter we want to continue that investigation of a proper attitude toward the Bible. We will be investigating basic assumptions that underlie good biblical interpretation. Before we look into the specifics, consider the diversity of the overall views that people hold of the Bible.

Diversity of Views of Inspiration

Many Revelations Given Bible Contains Truth

Some people believe the Bible is not the only revelation from the Supreme Being or beings. Some believe that there is more than one revelation, and that the Bible is only one of many revelations from Supreme Beings. Others believe that the Bible contains **the truth** from God, but it is not necessarily totally true in every single part. The Bible needs to be stripped of the fallacious trappings of men. The myths which were placed within the Bible by the men who wrote it originally or by those

who copied the text, need to be removed. Many believe that we could strip away everything except the golden nuggets of truth, and then truth might be discovered or recaptured for us today.

Errors in Manuscripts Who Were the Writers?

Some people believe that the supposed multitudinous errors that have crept into the manuscripts over thousands of years of copying render the composite original language or manuscript of today as unreliable. That makes just about anything in scripture questionable of actually being the original words of the writer. Still others question the validity of the supposed authors. In other words, did the Apostles really write those books? Or did their close associates (who might be called prophets) really write those books? This view challenges the Book's credibility. This view obviously questions Scripture's inerrancy and infallibility.

It's Not Worth Submission

In a more practical vein, many people just choose to negate the authoritative nature of Scripture, and therefore feel no sense of responsibility to submit to its teachings. They say, "Oh, it is a good guide book, but it is not all-authoritative in my life." This is called the "practical atheist." He will say he believes in God, but the practice of Christianity is not something that interests him. The whole of what we will study in the rest of this book is pure rubbish if one accepts any one of the preceding views. Why bother to interpret that which is error-ridden, not authoritative, and not worthy of submission?

Basic Assumptions of Biblical Interpretation

The following basic assumptions **must be accepted** before we proceed any further with our methods of Biblical interpretation.

God Has Spoken

Number one of the basic assumptions of sacred hermeneutics is that God has spoken. Creation demands there be a creator. But the question arises, “Has that creator spoken to man through other means besides creation’s beauty and design and through the judgments of His wrath on evildoer?” The Deist, who believes that the God of creation created everything, and then left it alone, denies any involvement from the Lord since the time of creation. This belief leaves no way for Him to reveal His will in words or even to interrupt or interfere in the affairs of men and His universe. The Deist’s god is a silent God. He is there, but He is not involved at all.

Man did not beg God to speak to him. God took the initiative to speak first. He spoke first because He knew man would not make the effort to be in fellowship with Him. Scripture says, “He has spoken.” The Bible uses the phrase “*Thus saith the Lord . . .*,” or something like that over five thousand times. Therefore, the biblical claim throughout the Bible is that the God of creation has spoken many words in many ages to many individuals and groups and nations which ultimately, of course, is meant for us today. Peter tells his readers, “*Above all, you must understand that no prophecy of scripture came about by the prophet’s own interpretation. For prophecy never had its origin in the will of man, but men spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit*” (2 Peter 1:20-21). That scripture says that men spoke for God, therefore God has spoken through men of His choosing to be able to speak to the rest of mankind. God has not been silent. He has indeed spoken.

The Bible Is God’s Revelation of His Will

Number two of the basic assumptions of sacred hermeneutics is the Bible is God’s Word. It is the revelation of His will. This was certainly implied by the first assumption that

God has spoken. When God spoke, the Scriptures revealed the will of God through verses like “*Thus saith the Lord, . . . Let my people go, . . .*” (Exodus 5:1, KJV). Peter said:

“And we have the word of the prophets made more certain, and you will do well to pay attention to it, as to a light shining in a dark place, until the day dawns and the morning star rises in your hearts. Above all, you must understand that no prophecy of Scripture came about by the prophet’s own interpretation. For prophecy never had its origin in the will of man, but men spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit” (2 Peter 1:19-21).

God’s revealed Word resides in the Bible. Peter claims that what is written secures our faith in what actually happened because it is all recorded in the Bible. Paul told Timothy, “*All scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, . . .*” (2 Timothy 3:16). God has revealed Himself to man in Scripture. It is all God-directed and God-breathed. His Spirit inspired men to speak and to write. Paul told the Corinthians:

“But God has revealed it to us by His Spirit. The Spirit searches all things, even the deep things of God. For who among men knows the thoughts of a man except a man’s spirit within him? In the same way no one knows the thoughts of God except the Spirit of God. We have not received the spirit of the world but the Spirit who is from God that we may understand what God has freely given us. This is what we speak, not in words taught us by human wisdom but in words taught by the Spirit, expressing spiritual truths in spiritual words” (1 Corinthians 2:10-13).

Paul was saying that the Spirit searched the mind of God and took the concepts which were from an eternal deity and

gave them to men in a form that they could understand them. Then, the Spirit of God inspired and helped those men to choose the words to speak or write so that those words would convey God's will to all men. When Paul wrote to the Ephesians, he said:

“Surely you have heard about the administration of God’s grace that was given to me for you, that is, the mystery made known to me by revelation, as I have already written briefly. In reading this, then, you will be able to understand my insight into the mystery of Christ, which was not made known to men in other generations as it has now been revealed by the Spirit to God’s holy apostles and prophets”
(Ephesians 3:2-5).

Paul claims that by reading what he has written — he has written about the Gospel of Jesus Christ — they can understand what he understands about the Gospel. The writer of the book of Hebrews said: *“In the past God spoke to our forefathers through the prophets at many times and in various ways, but in these last days he has spoken to us by His Son, whom he appointed heir of all things, and through whom he made the universe”* (Hebrews 1:1-2). In pre-Christian times, God spoke to men through what He called *“prophets.”* These men were inspired of God by the Holy Spirit to speak the words that God wanted them to speak. These men included Moses, Samuel, David, Isaiah, and Amos. They were men who spoke to the people during their own time. They spoke the Word of God by revelation from God to the people of that day. Their words have been written down for our use (cf. Romans 15:4).

All Christians today are subject to Christ's words rather than to the Old Testament. The New Covenant consists of the Words of Jesus. However, His words are not just the words that have been recorded in Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John — the Gospels, as we call them. Jesus said that He gave the words He

had received from the Father to His apostles. When Jesus was praying, He said:

“For I gave them the words you gave me and they accepted them. They knew with certainty that I came from you, and they believed that you sent me. . . . I have given them your word and the world has hated them, for they are not of the world any more than I am of the world” (John 17:8, 14).

The words that Jesus was able to give to His apostles came to them through the inspiration of the Holy Spirit (cf. John 14:25-26; 15:26-27). Jesus knew that He was going back to the Father. He comforted His apostles by telling them:

“I have much more to say to you, more than you can now bear. But when he, the Spirit of truth, comes, he will guide you into all truth. He will not speak on his own; he will speak only what he hears, and he will tell you what is yet to come. He will bring glory to me by taking from what is mine and making it known to you. All that belongs to the Father is mine. That is why I said the Spirit will take from what is mine and make it know to you” (John 16:12-15).

These men spoke and wrote the words of Jesus. Paul claimed, *“If anybody thinks he is a prophet or spiritually gifted, let him acknowledge that what I am writing to you is the Lord’s command”* (1 Corinthians 14:37). Paul knew that when he wrote his letters to the Christians in various places, he was writing the commands of Jesus. He told the Thessalonians, *“So then, brothers, stand firm and hold to the teachings we passed on to you, whether by word of mouth or by letter”* (2 Thessalonians 2:15). The New Testament writers claim inspiration by the Spirit to speak and to write the things that they speak or write. What they have written are, therefore, as

much Jesus' words as the words that came from His own mouth while He was on the earth and the words that are recorded in the four Gospels.

Our Manuscripts Are Close to the Originals

Number three of the basic assumptions of sacred hermeneutics is that the original text has been passed on to us in good form. This assumption takes into account two areas: canonicity and transmission. "Canonicity" is the study of the genuineness of the individual books that we have in our Bible. Canonicity asks, "Does it belong in the total text?" The concept of "transmission" is concerned not with whether the individual book belongs there, but it deals with the text of the Book itself in the original language of writing. Higher criticism in the area of canonicity is the first thing that is considered under this assumption. After almost 150 to 200 years of attacks on the authorship of many New Testament and Old Testament books, most of the arguments in this area have been settled. There is considerable agreement among conservative scholars that what we have in the Bible today is exactly what is represented — it is the writings of people which God intended to become the written Word.

The other aspect of canonicity is the lower criticism, which is sometimes called textual criticism. Textual criticism attempts to establish the text. Many of the arguments in this area are still being debated. There are many critics who still question whether certain readings, particularly in the words that are recorded in the Gospels that Jesus might have said. "Do these really belong there?" they ask. However, though there are thousands of variant readings on variant passages in the various manuscripts that we have of the Bible, scholars who deal in the text itself are very confident that we have a close imitation of the original writings. These scholars assert that 99% of the text that we have is unquestionable and that no major doctrinal belief is affected by the variances.

We can rely on our Hebrew and Greek texts from which

our translations are made and from which we read in the English or other vernacular languages. For example, the King James Version was translated into English in 1611. In the ensuing 350 years, we have found many excellent manuscripts to add to what they had when they translated that particular version of the Bible. They did not have access to these new manuscripts, but our modern translations, which are made from many manuscripts, agree remarkably well with the King James Version. We are secure in believing our text is reliable.

The Bible Has Been Accurately Translated

Number four of the basic assumptions of sacred hermeneutics is the Bible has been accurately translated. Some people might wonder about the accuracy of the translations. Unlike the critics, their knowledge of the original language is nonexistent or limited, at best. They may wonder, “Is what I am reading close enough to the original?” They are not quite sure, and so, translations that read differently in the vernacular language are sometimes questioned. Questions arise, “Are they accurate? Can I ascertain God’s will for me by reading translations into my own languages since I don’t know the original language?” The answer is unequivocally, “Yes!” Translations are usually done by a committee of linguistic scholars, people who know the original languages of scripture. They also know the language into which it is being translated. By knowing the original and knowing the language into which it is to be translated, they can put together an accurate translation.

Did you know that forty-seven men translated the King James? One hundred and one scholars got together to translate the American Standard Version? Other translations with which you might be more familiar boast a similar contingent of scholars. What this insures is that the biases or the prejudices and persuasions of one person or group is usually excluded from the wording of the translation. It means that there is a bigger pool of knowledge to draw from to be able to properly

translate a passage. It is a good method of checks and balances. It is similar to the Jewish copyists of old; when they copied the Old Testament, they took great pains to assure the accuracy of their transcriptions. So these scholars have taken great pains to accurately translate the Scripture.

That does not mean there are no errors in the different translations. There are errors in all translations. Some translations are better than others, but there are errors in even the best ones. Some minor things may be lost when going from the original language to another language. Any translation has some inherent problems. Because the English language is so complex and so large in vocabulary, the exact word equivalent from the Greek to English is very hard to find sometimes. Translators of one translation may choose a slightly different philosophy of translation. For example, the American Standard Version translators chose the philosophy of a word-to-word translation. They tried to give an exact word in the English translation for what it meant word-to-word in the Greek.

Another method of translation is called “dynamic equivalent.” This is the method that the New International Version translators used. It attempts to capture the thought more than a word-to-word method. The word-to-word method is better, but that translation usually suffers from the stiffness of how it reads and communicates concepts. The dynamic equivalent may capture the concept better, but it loses something by eliminating words. The best way to study the Bible for someone who does not know the Greek and Hebrew is to compare several translations. This method enables the student to ascertain a clear meaning in almost all cases. We can trust our translations to give us a good rendering of what God says in His Word.

The Bible Is Inerrant and Infallible

Number five of the basic assumptions of sacred hermeneutics is the Bible in inerrant and infallible. The Bible has been inspired by the Holy Spirit. Read the references for 1

Corinthians 2:10-13 and Ephesians 3:2-5 again. There are a host of other passages that establish this same thing.

The passage in 1 Corinthians speaks of “verbal and plenary” inspiration. That means that each word was chosen by the Holy Spirit. Some have suggested the concept of a “thought-only” inspiration, but that denies an individual word inspiration. Thoughts can only be expressed exactly by an exact choice of words. If the thoughts are inspired, then so are the words. Because the individual words are inspired, the Bible is free from error. It is inerrant and infallible in the original writings. Since our transmission of those original writings has been good, and since our translations into other languages are good, we have a copy today, in our hands and at our disposal, that is the inerrant and infallible Word of God. We can trust it.

Bible Is Complete, Final, and Sufficient

Number six of the basic assumptions of sacred hermeneutics is the Bible is complete, final, and sufficient. When Jesus rose from the grave, He was triumphant over death itself. There was no need for a sequel. He had been raised once for all (cf. Romans 6:10). That was sufficient. In the same way, the Bible is **IT!** There is no need for a sequel. It is complete in every respect. We should not expect to find any more chapters of Romans. We should not expect any new books to be unearthed by the archeologist’s spade. We have all that God intended for us to have. It is not only complete, but it is final. Jude wrote, “*Dear friends, although I was very eager to write to you about the salvation we share, I felt that I had to write and urge you to contend for **the faith** that was once for all entrusted to the saints*” (Jude 3). By the end of the first century, revelation was over. “*The faith*” refers to the body of the teachings that had been given to mankind and written down **for all time**.

The Apocrypha and the Pseudepigrapha have been repeatedly rejected. No serious scholar considers them to be the same quality with what is in the Bible. Be aware that there have

been no new revelations since 100 A.D. Joseph Smith, Ellen G. White, Charles T. Russell, and the rest have not been inspired prophets. They add nothing to Scripture. It is complete. It is final.

The Bible is sufficient. Paul told Timothy: “*All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, **so that** the man of God may be **thoroughly equipped** for every good work*” (2 Timothy 3:16-17). The apostle Peter also wrote about the sufficiency of God’s Word. He said:

*“His divine power has given us **everything** we need for life and godliness through our knowledge of him who called us by his own glory and goodness. Through these he has given us his very great and precious promises, so that through them you may participate in the divine nature and escape the corruption in the world caused by evil desires”*
(2 Peter 1:3-4).

These passages tell us that the Bible is sufficient — it is all we need. That means that we have sufficient knowledge from God to be able to secure our salvation without anything else. We have enough for our salvation and our spiritual growth until Jesus comes.

Bible Is Intelligible and Understandable

Number seven of the basic assumptions of sacred hermeneutics is the Bible is intelligible and understandable. We have already discussed students who think the Bible is too hard to understand. Alexander Campbell said, “God has spoken by man to men for men.” If God made man and created the languages of the earth, then surely He is capable of communicating His mind to us in words of His choosing. Surely if He wanted to communicate His love for us, He could. Actually, He did! He did so in a language that we can all

understand with some effort. Even the term “revelation” (which means “uncovering”) indicates that we can understand. The Lord refers to His Word in Scripture as “revelation.” God is **uncovering** secrets about salvation in the Bible that had previously been unknown. However, if the Bible is unintelligible or cannot be understood, it would not be revealing anything at all.

The Bible Is Authoritative in Religious Matters

Number eight of the basic assumptions of sacred hermeneutics is the Bible is authoritative in religious matters. Since it is from God, and since He is Lord, His Word is authoritative. Since it is inerrant and infallible, it is authoritative. Everything about Scripture demands a response. The Bible is full of commands, examples, and exhortations to be followed. They do not just apply to the recipients to whom they were written initially. Many apply to us today, and we will study later how to determine the distinction between those which do apply and those which do not. All of Jesus’ sayings surely demand a response. You cannot read the Gospels and say, “ho-hum!” Jesus says:

“There is a judge for the one who rejects me and does not accept my words; that very word which I spoke will condemn him at the last day. For I did not speak of my own accord, but the Father who sent me commanded me what to say and how to say it. I know that His command leads to eternal life. So whatever I say is just what the Father has told me to say”
(John 12:48-50).

A person must accept Jesus and His Word as authoritative or he rejects Him. On that basis — whether he accepts or rejects Jesus — every person will be judged. In a classroom, if the teacher says, “This textbook is what you are to read, and you will be tested on it at the end,” then surely the student

understands that textbook is the standard by which he will be graded at the end of the class. It is the same with the Bible, God says, “This is the Book by which everyone will be judged at the end of time.”

Conclusion

Having accepted these basic assumptions, we are now ready to proceed with the methodology of biblical interpretation. Look back over the eight basic assumptions, and make sure that you accept them. If you do not, then we cannot proceed beyond this point. Once these basic assumptions have been accepted, we can proceed to a very good method that will help you understand more Bible perhaps than you have ever understood and it will thrill your life.

DISCUSSION

1. What would give people the idea that there are many revelations given to us?
2. To get to the truth that God has given us should we demythologize the Bible? Why? Reason it out.
3. Do we really have what was written by the original writers of the Bible? And if so is there enough for us to understand what God wants and expects from us?

SUCCESSIVE READINGS WITH AN ANGLE

Introduction

Review

So far in our first three chapters, we have introduced the need for a good method and application of biblical interpretation. We have also scrutinized our attitudes toward God and toward His Word with special emphasis in the last chapter on some basic assumptions that must be accepted before we can proceed any further in the quest to understand Scripture.

Definitions

The remainder of this book can be broken down into two parts: exegesis and hermeneutics. **An exegesis** is the study of what the Scripture meant in its day to those to whom it was written initially. **Exegesis** is studying what the text meant in the past. This is not to say that the text does not mean the same things today, but first we are seeking the original meaning and application. That is our first priority. Out of that first understanding of what it meant to the people it was written about or to, we can decide what it means today. What did the Roman letter mean to the Roman Christians to whom Paul wrote it initially? What did Jude mean when he wrote to the people he initially wrote his letter to? The first step is to get the original meaning out of the text — that is **exegesis**. The word **exegesis** is from a Greek word, part of which is the word “*ek*,” which means “out of.” We want to get “out of” the text what it meant to people initially.

The second part in biblical interpretive method is **hermeneutics**. Literally this means the study of biblical interpretation. We can include the concept of exegesis in the study of **hermeneutics**, but we will restrict its definition and its use here. We are going to relegate a narrower connotation to the term **hermeneutics** then it usually takes on for the purpose of this book. In Homer's Odyssey, Hermes is the Greek god who is primarily the messenger for the other gods but especially for Zeus. As a messenger he was to speak and interpret the message to the recipient. **Hermeneutics** is the study of the interpretation of a message from the gods. In this case, it is Jehovah God's message as He reveals Himself in the Bible.

In this book, **hermeneutics** is the meaning of the biblical text to the present day as it applies to today's people, today's situations, and today's culture. It sounds simple, and sometimes it is very simple, but not always. For example, the Corinthian Christian women were told by Paul to wear the traditional veil (cf. 1 Corinthians 11:3-10). This was done to show that they were in submission to the men. Should we enforce that same command today? If someone surveyed the churches in the western world, he would find that very few women wear a veil. Very few women in today's western culture even wear hats. If the veil was supposed to be worn by the Corinthian Christian women, then why is it that we choose not to enforce that command today? Why do we believe that some commands in Scripture apply to the situation today and some do not? We will try to answer those questions in the second part of this book. The first part in this book is going to deal with different ways of **exegesis**.

Typical Bible Study Methods

Arbitrary Reading

Most Bible reading is done for devotional purposes. We wake up in the morning. We think we need something from

God, so we open the Bible. Maybe it is to do a schedule type of reading, or maybe we just decide to let the Bible fall open to some passage for an inspirational thought for the day. We hope that will feed our souls sufficiently. When we read to receive some message from God, but we do not read with a particular purpose in mind, we are just reading the Bible to be reading it. This kind of reading has its own value, but it will not facilitate what we are calling **exegesis**.

Incomplete Reading

Rarely does anyone read all the books of the Bible at one sitting or even read one single book of the Bible all the way through at one sitting. Usually people read a chapter a day, and then another chapter tomorrow, and so on. When a person reads like that, he tends to lose some of the continuity of the book. This method of reading prevents the perception of an overall view of a book of the Bible. The continuity and flow of the book are lost, and any **exegesis** is hindered.

Cursory Reading

Most people do not read their Bible with pen and paper close at hand. It is important to take notes so that thoughts and observations will not be forgotten. Most readers will forget what was in the previous chapter by the time they have finished the chapter for the day. Sometimes it is hard to remember what was in the previous verse.

Commentator Study

Much of what people have learned in terms of specific information has come from commentators. We learn what one particular man has to say about a certain book. We read a passage and reach for a commentary book in our library. This is the method most commonly used to decide what a verse means rather than doing our own study.

Successive Readings with an Angle

The method that I am going to suggest to begin our study in **exegesis** is called successive readings with an angle. I know that what I am suggesting as a method is hard and not something that will be easy to persuade any student to do. Successive reading with an angle means that the student must read through an entire book at one sitting. The fruits of your labor in this method will make this all worthwhile.

First Reading: Mood and Atmosphere

Reading a whole book at one sitting is not an easy task, but it is a necessary one. I suggest that the student begin with a small book, so that he will readily see the fruits of his labor. Once the student has seen success in the smaller books, he will be more willing to attack the bigger books in his study of God's Word. The first reading is for mood and atmosphere. Begin this reading in two ways.

Read Aloud

First, begin by reading the entire book aloud. This is a method of reading that most people are not accustomed to especially if there are other people around. We do not read aloud for fear of embarrassment. However, in New Testament times, the Scripture was read aloud in the assembly. Maybe there was only one copy, and that is how it was heard initially, and that is how it was first interpreted — from hearing it read aloud. Paul told Timothy, *"Until I come, devote yourself to the public reading of Scripture, to preaching and to teaching"* (1 Timothy 4:13). We do not do this very often today. I suggest that this first reading needs to be done aloud and without pen and paper, so can listen to how it sounds. Try to read interpretively — read it as if you knew just exactly how the

writer was saying it. Try to sense the mood and atmosphere as you read aloud.

Read Quickly

Second, read it quickly. The reason I say read it quickly and rapidly is to avoid giving attention to details. In this first reading you are not looking for details, a theme, an outline, or specific little things the author says. Avoid the temptation to slow down and focus on details or analysis. We often look for logical steps, reasoning, or how this writer puts things together in a package. I suggest that first of all you read aloud and quickly to allow your mind to be clear of all those considerations. Do not try to read this first time analytically.

Questions For Consideration

There are some questions to consider as you read through the book for the first time. **First**, is the language of the book fast-paced. Is it quick and moving? Or is it rather slow and methodical? The answers to these questions will help you sense the mood of the author and perhaps the atmosphere for the recipients.

Second, are there a lot of friendly references in the book? Is the man who was writing this book close to his audience or was it a distant relationship? Near the end of some books, Paul addressed many close friends. Even though he had never been to Rome, Romans 16 shows that Paul had many close friends in that area. He addressed friends by name. This chapter is a very friendly, accepting, gentle, and tender address to people he knew even though he had never worshiped with the church in Rome.

Third, is the tone of the book hard-driving or is it personal and tender? Galatians is a very hard-driving book. On the other hand, Philippians, is a very personal and tender book.

Fourth, is the book tense and intense? Or is it laid back and gentle? Galatians is very intense, very tense. The reader does not have to read very far into the book of Galatians to

discover that it is a tense book. It is easy to see that somebody is very intense and upset. On the other hand, Philippians is very laid back and gentle, even quiet.

Fifth, is the book written on an intellectual level? In other words, is it logical, is it reasoning, is it a mind endeavor? Or, is it a book written on a feeling level? Maybe it is not a book that deals with a lot of doctrinal or teaching matters. But maybe it deals with the emotions and the feeling. You can sense that with this first quick and aloud reading.

Sixth, how does the book make you feel? How did you feel when you were reading it? Did it make you tense? Did it make you contemplative? Maybe you had a warm feeling. Did it make you angry? Did it scare you? Did it make you feel jubilant and joyous or did it make you sad? Often your own personal emotional reaction to a book as you read it will reveal the tone and the mood of the author. How you feel can help perceive some of the things that you need to know about the letter and its recipients.

Every New Testament Book Was Written to Someone Specifically And Addressed A Specific Need

Every New Testament book was written to someone specifically, and the author wished to address a specific need for those recipients. Sometimes the need that was addressed was within the author. So the mood may immediately give an inkling into the situation at hand.

For example, when someone reads Galatians there is a lot of obvious tension in the book. Paul was upset with the Christians in Galatia. Something was really amiss there in the Galatian churches. That comes through very poignantly in the first few verses. Paul said,

“I am astonished that you are so quickly deserting the one who called you by the grace of Christ and are turning to a different gospel — which is really no gospel at all. Evidently some people are throwing you

into confusion and are trying to pervert the gospel of Christ. But even if we or an angel from heaven should preach a gospel other than the one we preached to you, let him be eternally condemned! As we have already said, so now I say again: If anybody is preaching to you a gospel other than what you accepted, let him be eternally condemned! Am I now trying to win the approval of men, or of God? Or am I trying to please men? If I were still trying to please men, I would not be a servant of Christ” (Galatians 1:6-10).

That is tense, hard-driving writing! Anyone hearing that message would automatically sense the tension in Paul’s message.

A different example would be the Philippian letter which has a very upbeat warm feeling. It was written by the same author who wrote Galatians, but listen to how he addressed this group of people. Paul said: *“It is right for me to feel this way about all of you, since I have you in my heart; for whether I am in chains or defending and confirming the gospel, all of you share in God’s grace with me. God can testify how I long for all of you with the affection of Christ Jesus”* (Philippians 1:7-8). In Galatians, Paul was driving home points that the church must accept. He was admonishing the church in Galatia. In the Philippian letter, his words were like an embrace of love; he was sending them a love letter. This would indicate a different situation and group of people who were receiving the two letters.

Kind of Literature

It is also important in this first reading to note the kind of literature the Holy Spirit has chosen through which to communicate this particular message. The Bible is replete with varieties of literary styles. The Spirit did not choose one particular style of writing to write the whole Bible. Consider the

following different styles:

A Treatise: The book of Romans is what we might call a treatise or lecture. That is the kind of book that builds blocks of logical reasoning, and straightforward thinking. Why did the Spirit choose that particular kind of literature?

Apocalyptic: Revelation, Zechariah, and Ezekiel are what we call apocalyptic literature. They are symbolical literature that is full of pictures. These are books, not of logic or of treatise, and not even of sermons. The writer says, “Look at this picture.” The picture makes an impression on you. It makes an impression on you for what purpose? The Spirit chose that kind of literature because that particular audience needed that kind of literature to receive the intended message.

Poetry: Psalms is filled with beautiful poetry to express the nature of God, the loneliness of a writer, or the beauty of a personal relationship with God. Proverbs is also poetry. Song of Solomon is lovely poetry written to express the love between a man and a woman in the marriage relationship. How else could it be expressed so well except through poetry?

Sermonic: Sermons are part of Scripture also. Amos is a book of great sermons delivered by the prophet, Amos. The Gospels are filled with the sermons of Jesus.

History or Narrative: A narrative or history recounts a specific event which have some real, significant meaning in the plan and purpose of God. Genesis, 1 and 2 Samuel, the Gospels and Acts are all books of history.

Technical: Literature like Leviticus, Deuteronomy, and Exodus are technical books. These books talk about the details of the sacrifices and the specific things that need to be done to bring those sacrifices about. They also have instructions on how to build the tabernacle.

Epistles: These are the letters that were written to personal people, to friends, and to churches, letters like Galatians and Philippians.

The type of literature and literary devices that were chosen

by the Holy Spirit were chosen to convey moods, whether it be intellectual, emotional, exhortive, or sharing. If someone tries to perceive the mood as he reads, it will help him to determine what is going on in the book. Here is a warning, though. Most people are not particularly adept at this kind of reading, because they look for too many details. Do not overlook the value of this kind of reading as a starting place for the correct interpretation of Scripture.

Chart 4-A: Example of Jude

Mood and Atmosphere of Jude

The major mood of Jude is negative and discouraging. The greeting is upbeat, but unfortunately, it is short. The greeting is a bit of sunshine that is quickly covered up by gray clouds, and then the rainy season begins. It rains and rains and rains and rains. Just when you are about to drown in the gray, a glimmer of hope comes through again near the end of the book. Jude is a tense book and not exactly recommended bedtime reading material for young children. If it was a musical score for a movie, most of it would be a funeral march or at least ominous sounding music.

Second Reading: Recipients

Written To Real People

The second reading is done to determine the recipients of the book. The books of the Bible were not written specifically to Christians in the twenty-first century, but they were written to real people. The goal of the second reading is to determine to whom the book was written. Who were the recipients of the book? What were they like? This reading is much more meticulous than the first reading. Look for specific details.

Two Kinds of Information To Look For

First, look for the **stated material**. Read the book looking for what the text actually says about the people. Where do they live? Are they Christians? Does the author talk about them being materialistic? Are they hardhearted? Look for details within the text.

Second, look for things that are implied or can be inferred about the recipients. The stated material is much easier to see, but the implied is very important. Ask the question, “Why would the author include this particular material?” Paul did not write the same things to the Philippians that he wrote to the Romans. Why was that? Both letters were written to churches. The implication is that the Roman brethren did not need the same things that the Philippians needed. If Paul was writing what the recipients needed to hear, what does the text imply about them? Heed this warning as you read: Make sure to distinguish between what is specifically stated about the recipients and what is implied. Do not go too far with the implied material. Conclusions can go to the extreme if you are not careful.

Record the Material

When you begin this second reading, have a pen and paper to record both the stated and the implied material. Look for **locations**. Ask the following questions: Where do these people live? The people who live in Galatia do not think the same way the people in Philippi do. The people in Asia Minor live in a different culture than the people in Rome. They have different backgrounds and the situations going on around them will also be different.

Consider the **environment** the recipients live in. Are the people being persecuted or are they at peace? What kind of conditions affect their lives? This can include the climate, the ruling authorities, the surrounding areas, or any situations that might affect their lives. Next, consider the **culture** of the recipients. What are the customs, values, and morals of their

society? Reading the book of 1 Corinthians reveals the culture of the city of Corinth. The book of Galatians reveals a lot about the culture of Galatia.

Reading the books Paul wrote to Timothy and Titus reveals their **character**, their **past** and **present lives**, as well as the culture they were living in at the time. Titus 1:12 reveals, *“Even one of their own prophets has said, ‘Cretans are always liars, evil brutes, lazy gluttons.’”* This verse reveals the kind of people to whom Titus ministered. The **language** of the Philippian letter tells a great deal about the people who lived there. They were transplanted Romans who were well-educated. They were upstanding people by their nature and character. All of this can be revealed in the text.

Look for any **strengths** that might be stated or implied. Notice what Paul wrote to the Thessalonians: *“Now about brotherly love we do not need to write to you, for you yourselves have been taught by God to love each other. And in fact, you do love all the brothers throughout Macedonia. Yet we urge you, brothers, to do so more and more”* (1 Thessalonians 4:9-10). The Thessalonians were strong in their love, and that is specifically **stated material**. Sometimes what is not stated may also indicate the recipients’ strengths because the writer may not have seen the need to establish that.

One of the key things to look for is the **weaknesses** of the recipients. Most of the time, the weaknesses will reveal why the letter was written. Sometimes this will be specifically stated. A good example of this is the letter Paul wrote to the Corinthian church. He said:

“... there is sexual immorality among you, ...”

(1 Corinthians 5:1).

“If any of you has a dispute with another, ...”

(1 Corinthians 6:1).

“... each man should have his own wife, ...”

(1 Corinthians 7:2).

“Now about food sacrificed to idols: ...”

(1 Corinthians 8:1).

“Am I not free? Am I not an apostle? . . .”

(1 Corinthians 9:1).

“For I do not want you to be ignorant . . .”

(1 Corinthians 10:1).

Romans 12 and 13 tell about the implied weaknesses in the Roman church. Paul talked about gifts, love, and their relationship to the government. Look at the text and try to find the practical applications. Look for specific things that were said to the people it was written to. These things will imply where their weaknesses are and why the book was written.

Consider the **knowledge level** of the people the author is writing. Are they immature? Are they new converts? Are they longtime Christians? Have they been well-taught and grounded in the faith? Have they forgotten what they had been taught? Are they first generation or second generation Christians? Try to decide what the is the **political situation** in the area. Was there persecution from the government or were they experiencing a time of peace? Consider **who** taught the recipients of the book initially and who has taught them since they were converted.

Others things to consider are: What is the **economic level** of the people the author is writing to? Are they slaves or upper class? How does that work among the people? What kind of **leadership** do they have? Were there any elders? Were there strong men and women to be the leaders? What was the **heterogeneous** (differences in characters, Ed.) or **homogeneous** (all the same type of people, Ed.) population? Were there more Jews than Gentiles or was there a mixture? Was there a mixture of slaves and freedmen?

It is important to obtain all of this data/details, look at it, review it, and analyze it. Then you should be able to decide a **“personality profile”** of the people the author addressed his letter to. The “personality profile” will help you to decide what those people were like. If the letter was written to a

congregation, this information will help portray a picture of the church. That is the goal — get to know the people so that it feels like you have been to one of their worship assemblies. Know their strengths and weaknesses. Know their past and their present.

Chart 4-B will serve as an example of how to collect the data and details from a particular book. The verse or verses that the details were gathered from are shown in the left column. The information that has been gathered is in the center column. Decide whether the information was implied or stated and place that information in the final column. I sometimes place a question mark out to the side to indicate whether something has been implied and may need to be taken into consideration when I am forming my opinions about the book. Notice what I have done and see the method I used. In the verses that are presented, I have labeled what was specifically stated or what was specifically implied. From that, I have reached a **conclusion**. I reviewed the information, analyzed it, put it all together, and came up with a **conclusion statement**, which is at the bottom of the chart below.

Chart 4-B: Recipients

<u>Recipients of Philemon</u>			
Verse/s	Comment	Implied	Stated
1	Knew Paul and Timothy	I	
	Named Philemon		S
	“ <i>dear friend</i> ” of Paul’s	I	
	“ <i>fellow worker</i> ” of Paul’s	I	
	Worked with Paul in gospel preaching, perhaps in Colossae, or in supporting him in his work there		
2	Had mutual friends with Paul in Colossae		S
	Implied that Paul had been there	I	
	Married to Apphia	I	
	Worked closely with the local preacher	I	

	Hosted the church in his home		S
	A man of some wealth	I	
5	A man of notable and commendable Christian character		
	A man of “ <i>faith</i> ”		S
	A man with love for the saints		S
	Benevolent spirit in reference to the use of his funds for the church	I	
6	Lacks activity in soul-winning	I	
7	Reinforces what vs. 5 says about the way he has helped brethren; perhaps specifically in the way of taking care of traveling brethren—He’s a Barnabas	I	
9	Motivated more by a loving brother than by an order from an apostle. Indicates a willing spirit, not a grumpy, hard to motivate person.	I	
11	Had slaves		S
13	Helped Paul while in prison, probably through the donations of money	I	
14	Can be trusted to do what is right when he learns it, does not need to be ordered, nagged, or brow-beaten	I	
15	Understood and appreciated God’s workings in the world and in people’s lives to bring about the salvation of people	I	
16	Had slaves		S
	Appreciated the relationship brothers in Christ have to one another	I	
17	Loves Paul as a partner in the work of the gospel		S
19	Probably converted by Paul	I	
17-20	The kind of man/brother/friend upon which one could call for a big favor without feeling put out and inconvenienced	I	

21	An obedient spirit	I	
	A generous spirit who usually does more than asked		S
22	Hosts Paul when he stays in town	I	
	Man of prayer for Christians, especially preachers		S
23-24	Other preachers know him well and I love him, too. He has probably taken care of them as well		

Conclusion Statement:

Philemon was quite a man! He may have been a wealthy man when Paul converted him. We wonder if that happened in Ephesus (cf. Acts 19:9-10). Perhaps his business brought him there. His wealth was apparently not a stumbling-block to him. He did not place his trust in his wealth.

This new Christian grew in the Lord and became a man of great faith. Of special note is his love for the brethren. This love for the church is seen in several ways. **First**, he hosted the church in his home, and we do not think that this was just because he had the biggest house among the brethren. **Second**, he seemed to be a benevolent man with his money. Many saints, especially the ones in Colossae and his companions, were the recipients of his financial help. **Third**, he loved preachers and what they did. Paul had received support from him while he was in chains in Rome. This love for preachers was because they win the lost. He had not forgotten what preachers had done for him.

The other most notable characteristic of Philemon was his genuine and willing spirit to do what was right. He was the kind of person that when he learned what was right, he did it. That kind of character and inner spirit was what Paul relied on for Philemon to act properly in this circumstance. Paul knew that he merely had to suggest the right thing, and Philemon would do it.

One weakness to notice was Philemon's inattention to sharing the gospel with the lost himself (if the NIV has translated verse five and six correctly).

We would say that this man knew how to be a good friend. It is not just in the money for Paul. Paul knew that their relationship was strong enough to call on Philemon to do him a big favor — one that would be hard to do. Only a special kind of relationship could bring that to pass.

Chart 4-C **Recipients**

Recipients of the Epistle of Jude

Verse/s Comment

1	Knows of James	Jewish church near Jerusalem?
	Christians	Have been a faithful church?
	-Called	
	-Loved	
	-Kept	
	-Saints	
3	<i>"Beloved"</i>	Close friends
5	<i>"Already know"</i>	Knowledgeable of Israelite and traditional history
		Jewish church?
12	<i>"Love feasts"</i>	A Worshiping and fellowship group
12	"Feeding (shepherding) themselves	Organized church w/elders
		Bad leadership
8-13	Jewish stories and legends	Jews?
17	<i>"remember what the apostles . . . foretold"</i>	Knew apostles' teachings
		Apostolic church?
20	<i>"build yourselves up in ... faith"</i>	Weak in faith or "the faith"
		Undiscerning

- | | | |
|-------|---|--|
| 21 | <i>“keep yourselves in God’s
as you wait for and hope?”</i> | History of being a people of
love
eternal life |
| 22-23 | <i>“Be merciful ... snatch
... hating”</i> | Capable of over-reacting? |
| 24 | <i>“Keep you from falling”</i> | Vulnerable, in danger |

Conclusion Statement:

We would surmise this to be a Jewish church, perhaps near Jerusalem because of their familiarity with Jude, James, and the apostles. They seem to be an “older” church, ordered and organized with a leadership, possibly elders (v. 12). As to their character, we judge them to be lovable because of Jude’s expressions of affection (vs. 3, 17, 20), and his reference to staying in God’s love (21). These are good people who understand the wonder and beauty of God’s salvation through Jesus (v. 3). They have been taught well in the past and knew the Old Testament (and perhaps the lessons of those stories) and the apostles’ doctrine (v. 17). So they are educated in spiritual and religious things. However, they seem to be undiscerning or tentative: Undiscerning as to the nature, motives, and teachings of these evildoers, or tentative in that they recognize the falsehood and don’t discern the inevitable consequences of allowing such to go on and therefore are tentative about standing up against them. Perhaps their tentativeness, timidity, is egged on by a false sense of well-being. After all, they are a worshipping, fellowshiping group (v. 12)! There is happiness and love among them. What they don’t realize is that a person who has cancer can often smile and feel and look fine on the outside while dying on the inside!

Chart 4-D Recipients**Recipients of 2 Peter**

Verse/s	Comment	Implied	Stated
1:1	They have a faith like unto the apostles because of the righteousness of God.	I	
1:5-9	They lack growth in the Christian graces.	I	
1:10	They needed confirmation in their faith.	I	
1:12-15	They are not fully knowledgeable of the things they need to know.	I	
1:16	They may be enamored by teachers who tell stories rather than being grounded in the knowledge of Christ	I	
2:3	Confirms 1:16 comment		
3:1	They needed reminding of previous revelations	I	
3:11	They needed bolstering up in their holiness or of distortion and alertness.	I	
3:15-16	They might be subject to misunderstanding of some of Paul's writings.	I	
3:17-18	Two problems reflect their condition. a. Not alert b. Not growing	I	

Conclusion Statement:

This would seem to be an older church, a Jewish church (maybe near Jerusalem), that knew the apostles well (cf. 2 Peter 1:1). They seem to be “lazy in the faith.” They are not growing in the knowledge of Jesus. Therefore they are not alert to the dangers of false teachers. Because of their poor discerning ability they are beginning to listen to the “stories” of

teachers instead of listening to the word.

This is the **FIRST STEP**. These are the first two readings in our *hermeneutical* method. It will help to review these steps over and over again. Read for the **mood and atmosphere**. Then read for the **recipients**. I hope you are beginning to understand the *hermeneutical* method. I hope you will try it on some short books.

DISCUSSION

1. Why would we read for the mood and atmosphere?
2. What do you hope to gain from this reading?
3. As we read about the recipients, how does knowledge about them help us in understanding the Bible and what God is saying to us?

SUCCESSIVE READINGS

PART II

Introduction

The topic in this chapter is called “*exegesis*.” “*Exegesis*” is the determination of what the scripture meant to its original writer and its original recipients. That is the **first step**. Before deciding how the text applies to people today, it is important to know what the text meant to the people to whom it was written. This particular method of exegesis is called “Successive Readings with an Angle.” This is reading a whole book at one sitting with a particular angle in mind. The first two readings were for information about the mood or the atmosphere and the recipients.

Third Reading: “Occasion” and “Purpose”

The third reading has to do with the “Occasion” and “Purpose” of the book. In other words, what is happening in this book, and why was it written? Occasion and purpose go together and can be deduced from the same reading. However, if this becomes too difficult, then split this particular reading into two separate readings.

Occasion: What Is Happening?

Whatever is **happening** in the text is really twofold. **First**, it is good to know what the situation was with the writer. Was the writer in prison? Was he far away from the people to whom he was writing? Was he coming soon? Was he sick? What was happening with the writer? The purpose of the letter might be

related in part to the condition of the writer himself. He might want to explain his condition. He might want to explain his intentions to certain hearers or recipients.

Second, what was the relationship between the author and the recipients. Was there tension between the writer and the people to whom he was writing? For example, were the recipients of the Galatian letter being persecuted? No, the Galatian people were just being stubborn. They had been led astray by false teachers. That was the cause of the tension. This fact is important. John wrote the book of Revelation to a group of people while he was exiled on the Isle of Patmos. That was what was happening to John. However, in the main part of the book, the student learns that John was writing to the churches all over Asia Minor that were being persecuted by the Roman empire.

It is also important to consider the demeanor, the outward behavior, of the recipients. Were they lazy or indifferent? Were they materialistic? Were they in danger of doctrinal apostasy? Paul wrote to warn his young protégée, Timothy, about the false teachers that were in Ephesus in the book of 1 Timothy. Paul had left Timothy in Ephesus to “... *command certain men not to teach false doctrines any longer*” (1 Timothy 1:3). Paul knew that there were false teachers there. That is the “occasion” in the church in Ephesus. Paul had warned the elders of the Ephesian church, “*I know that after I leave, savage wolves will come in among you and will not spare the flock*” (Acts 20:29). When he wrote to Timothy, he knew that the false teachers were already there. The same is true for the church in Corinth. When Paul wrote 2 Corinthians 10-13, it is clear that he was defending his ministry against the false teachers. Paul was concerned about the Corinthian church for this reason.

Once again there may be **two sources of information** when the student is looking for the occasion of the book. The information may be **stated** or **implied**. The stated facts are relatively easy to find. For example, when Paul wrote to the Corinthians, he said that a man was living in sexual immorality

(cf. 1 Corinthians 5:1). He also mentioned Christians taking one another to court to resolve conflict rather than using the church leaders (cf. 1 Corinthians 6:7). These examples are **stated**.

The **implied** examples are not as easy to find. They tell the occasion, too, but they are harder to discern. They usually come from what is implied in the specific applications or exhortations that are in the book. These imply that the recipients had weaknesses in the areas being written about. Otherwise, you would have to conclude that the exhortations are general, and they should have been made to all peoples in all situations. That does not happen. What Paul wrote to the Romans, he was not addressing in his writing to the Philippians. The exhortations from the New Testament writers are not generally for every church because the exhortations are not always the same in every letter. This implies that different churches had different needs. Each book was written to a particular recipient with a particular need or problem in mind.

Jude is a good book to work with as an example. The **occasion** of Jude is perceptible from several different verses in the book of Jude. Notice that verses 1, 3, 17, and 20 show that Jude had a very close relationship with the people he was writing to — he called them “*dear friends*.” These “*dear friends*” were being influenced by certain men who had secretly slipped in among them (cf. Jude 4). These godless men may have even been leaders or teachers in the church (cf. Jude 8-12). It seems that the people Jude was writing to were trusting these men, fellowshiping with them, and allowing them to be a part of the public assembly for worship (cf. Jude 12). These men were causing divisions among the people who were Jude’s friends and who by nature were a loving people (cf. Jude 19-21). Jude was apparently even afraid that they were in danger of falling away (cf. Jude 24).

Based on all of this information, I have drawn the following **conclusions**: There was an urgent situation which had arisen in this church with whom Jude had close ties. Jude had heard about this situation and because he loved them, and I would

assume they loved him, he had planned to write a letter of joy and rejoicing in the gospel. You do not do that with just any brother or church. Over a period of time a group of men had gained access to influential positions in the church by secretly slipping in so that it was not evident at first that they were causing a problem(cf. Jude 4). After gaining positions of authority, perhaps in the eldership, they began to influence the congregation through their teaching and lifestyle. The church was in grave danger, but they did not seem to know the situation. If they did know, they were confused and tentative about what needed to be done. This is the **occasion** for Jude's book.

Discovering The Purpose

Why did Jude write this book? The **occasion** that was happening with the church dictated the need for the letter. That is the **purpose** of the book. Sometimes the writer will openly state his purpose. In 1 John, John said:

“My dear children, I write this to you so that you will not sin. But if anybody does sin, we have one who speaks to the Father in our defense — Jesus Christ, the Righteous One. He is the atoning sacrifice for our sins, and not only for ours but also for the sins of the whole world” (1 John 2:1-2).

John clearly stated why he wrote the book of 1 John. He did that throughout the book. He said, *“I write to you, dear children, because your sins have been forgiven on account of his name” (1 John 2:12)*. Near the end of his book, he said, *“I write these things to you who believe in the name of the Son of God so that you may know that you have eternal life” (1 John 5:13)*. When Paul wrote to Titus, he said, *“The reason I left you in Crete was that you might straighten out what was left unfinished and appoint elders in every town, as I have directed you” (Titus 1:5)*. Apparently, Titus had not followed through

on some of the directions that Paul had given him. Paul wrote to Titus to urge him to finish the tasks he had given him to do on the island of Crete.

When Paul wrote to Timothy, he **clearly stated the purpose** for writing to Timothy when he said, *“Although I hope to come to you soon, I am writing you these instructions so that, if I am delayed, you will know how people ought to conduct themselves in God’s household, which is the church of the living God, the pillar and foundation of the truth”* (1 Timothy 3:14-15). Paul wanted Timothy to know that as the evangelist in Ephesus, it was his responsibility to teach the church how they needed to behave themselves. When Luke wrote to Theophilus, he clearly stated the purpose of his book by saying, *“Therefore, since I myself have carefully investigated everything from the beginning, it seemed good also to me to write an orderly account for you, most excellent Theophilus, so that you may know the certainty of the things you have been taught”* (Luke 1:3-4).

In other books the student may have to decide for himself the purpose of the book. If the recipients and the author both knew the situation and the needs, then the writer may not have felt the need to specifically state the purpose for his writings. In this case the purpose would be implied by the contents of the book. Discerning the **implied purpose** of a book may require more work from the student so that he can make a decision about the purpose of this type of book.

For example, a purpose is not specifically stated in Romans, but as the student reads through the book, he will learn that this church in Rome was experiencing bad feelings between members. The threat of division was along Jew-Gentile lines. Paul wrote to them to say, “I want you to choose to be united so that when I come to you, my ministry will be successful.” Paul wrote the book of Romans to promote unity among the brethren.

Jude is one of the writers who stated his purpose specifically. He said, *“Dear friends, although I was very eager*

*to write to you about the salvation we share, I felt I had to write and urge you to **contend for the faith** that was once for all entrusted to the saints”* (Jude 3). He specifically stated why he was writing to the recipients at that time. The original text emphasizes the fact that Jude felt this was a necessity — “. . . *I felt I **had** to write and urge you to **contend for the faith** . . .*” He felt it was necessary to stir them up emotionally. There was a sense of urgency stated in his purpose. Jude did not write his book for the purpose of contending for the faith. He wrote to urge his recipients to be the ones who were contending for the faith. He wanted them to defend the faith against the false brethren who had secretly crept in and were undermining the faith of the brethren Jude was addressing. God’s faithful children need to choose to fight for the truth. Jude wrote to convince them that there was a need to fight.

Fourth Reading: “Special Emphases” and “Theme”

The Approach

The fourth reading is called “Special Emphases” and “Theme.” I have combined two angles or subjects into one reading. If you cannot do them both in one reading, split them up, and make them separate readings. However, like “Occasion” and “Purpose,” “Special Emphases” and “Theme” seem to go together. If you get one, you get the other. They are closely related to each other. Just as “Purpose” is dependent upon “Occasion,” so in this case there is a dependency of “Theme” on “Special Emphases.”

The definitions of these terms will help in your reading. The **theme** is the one main point or thrust of the book. It is usually one theological truth. The Holy Spirit has chosen a particular theme to accomplish the purpose. The writer/author can state his purpose, but how is he going to convince the people he is writing to that this is what they need to do? The theme is

chosen as a method to accomplishing the purpose. The situation in the Roman church was the disunity between Jews and Gentiles. Paul's purpose was to create unity again in the church. How did Paul accomplish that purpose? How did he prepare the way for his coming and ministry among the Gentiles there? The overall proposition for which the writer is arguing is called the **theme of the book**. If the recipients accept it, the writer will have accomplished his purpose and the problem will indeed be solved.

What are the "special emphases?" How do they relate to the theme? **Special emphases** are the topics of importance that receive considerable space, time, and discussion in the writer's presentation. These are not just one-time honorable-mention things. These are topics in the book that are relatively developed. When strung together in a book, in a particular way designed by the Holy Spirit, these special emphases develop, prove, and present the theme.

The book of Romans covers one topic in the first three chapters, another topic in the next two chapters, and another topic in the next three chapters. These topics are the special emphases. They are the building blocks of the theme. If the recipients have a problem they must first be convinced of a particular doctrinal theme before they can be motivated to make a change. The writer cannot simply state the theme. He must present it argumentatively to get the job done. He must exhort the people in such a way that they will see the need to change.

How To Proceed

The best way to begin is to look for the **special emphases** first. List the blocks of material on one particular subject as you go through the book on a piece of paper. Once you have listed the special emphases, go back and analyze the data you have written down. From looking at the special emphases data, decide what theme is being presented through the special emphases you have noted. What thought is or thoughts are

being presented when you consider all the special emphases together.

Some examples are provided in Chart 5-A. Notice the verses in each book and the specific things that are mentioned in those verses. There is a description and position of blessings of the Christian. There are verses that talk about the faith. There is a description of false brothers and the judgement that will come for evildoers. There is a discussion of the results of tolerating evil and the mercy that is given to unsuspecting brethren. There are verses that talk about the greatness of God. And there are verses that refer to building up one's own faith. When I looked at the book of Jude in this way, here is the theme I came up with based on the analysis of the special emphases: God has always and will always condemn those whose lifestyle and teachings do not conform to the truth."

Chart 5-A

Main Emphases and Theme

Main Emphases and Theme of Jude

<u>Part of Text</u>	<u>Main Emphases</u>
1-4	Introduction: Need to fight the false teachers.
5-7	God has always damned the disobedient and unbelieving.
8-19	These false teachers are similar and will receive the same judgement.
20-25	These are the ways to fight for the faith.
THEME:	God has always and will always condemn the ungodly.

Main Emphases and Theme of Haggai**Part of Text****Main Emphases**

1:2-11	The Lord has not blessed the building up of your own personal gains because you have failed to put the building of the Lord's house as a priority. The blessings will follow if the priorities are straight.
1:12-15	When the leader, Zerubbabel, and the people repented and began to build the Lord's house, the Lord blessed them. Repentance leads to blessings.

THEME: Build the house of the Lord, and God will bless you now and in the Messianic Kingdom.

Fifth Reading: “Paragraphing and Outlining”

Use and Limitations of Paragraphing and Outlining

Once the student has an overall view of the writer, recipients, and the content of the book, the next step is to analyze the smaller units of the book. Scripture is logically presented. Most people have been taught to think logically and analytically. This step of paragraphing and outlining can help bring Scripture into a form that will help our minds to assimilate it better. Our goal is to make a logical outline of the book. Not all Scripture was meant to be outlined, paragraphed, and analyzed. For example, the Psalms and Proverbs from the Old Testament were not meant to be outlined. They were meant to be read and impressed upon us. However, most Scripture can be put into an outline form without perverting it. I have combined these two items because they go together. The outline depends on the paragraphing.

How to Paragraph the Text

Find a King James Version Bible that has no paragraph divisions or you might want to type out your favorite translation in a block form, leaving out all the paragraph divisions. If you have access to a Bible program on a computer, you can print out the book of Jude without any paragraphs.

Try to decide where the paragraphs should go on your own. Do not let the translators influence your decision — they could be wrong. My experience is that translators usually have too many paragraphs and different translators disagree about where the paragraph divisions should be. Some translators of Jude make thirteen paragraphs out those 25 verses. People do not usually write or speak that way.

Chart 5-B

Paragraph Divisions

Below is a printout of the book of Jude in block style from the New American Standard Version. All the paragraph and verse divisions have been taken out. In this text, look for units of thought. Each unit of thought is a paragraph. A unit of thought will often begin with a **thesis sentence**. A thesis sentence is a single statement of what is in each paragraph. It will tell the **theme** of that paragraph — not the theme of the book or a section of the book — it will just be the **main thought** of each paragraph. The first step is to find the thesis sentences, then look at the text and decide what sentences go together to make a paragraph. Finally, put parentheses around each paragraph in the block style text to form the paragraph divisions.

The Book of Jude in Block Form:

Jude, a bond-servant of Jesus Christ, and brother of James, to those who are the called, beloved in God the Father, and kept for Jesus Christ: May mercy and peace and love be multiplied to you. Beloved, while I

was making every effort to write you about our common salvation, I felt the necessity to write to you appealing that you contend earnestly for the faith which was once for all delivered to the saints. For certain persons have crept in unnoticed, those who were long beforehand marked out for this condemnation, ungodly persons who turn the grace of our God into licentiousness and deny our only master and Lord, Jesus Christ. Now I desire to remind you, though you know all things once for all, that the Lord, after saving a people out of the land of Egypt, subsequently destroyed those who did not believe. And angels who did not keep their own domain, but abandoned their proper abode, He has kept in eternal bonds under darkness for the judgment of the great day. Just as Sodom and Gomorrah and the cities around them, since they in the same way as these indulged in gross immorality and went after strange flesh, are exhibited as an example, in undergoing the punishment of eternal fire. Yet in the same manner these men, also by dreaming, defile the flesh, and reject authority, and revile angelic majesties. But Michael the archangel, when he disputed with the devil and argues about the body of Moses, did not dare pronounce against him a railing judgement, but said, "The Lord rebuke you." But these men revile the things which they do not understand; and the things which they know by instinct like unreasoning animals, by these things they are destroyed. Woe to them! For they have gone the way of Cain, and for pay they have rushed headlong into the error of Balaam, and perished in the rebellion of Korah. These men are those who are hidden reefs in your love feast when they feast with you without fear, caring for themselves; clouds without water, carried along by winds; autumn trees without fruit, doubly dead, uprooted; wild waves of the sea, casting up their own

shame like foam; wandering stars, for whom the black darkness has been reserved forever. And about these also Enoch, in the seventh generation from Adam, prophesied saying, "Behold, the Lord came with many thousands of His holy ones, to execute judgment upon all, and to convict all the ungodly of all their ungodly deeds which they have done in an ungodly way, and of all the harsh things which ungodly sinners have spoken against Him." These are grumblers, finding fault, following after their own lusts; they speak arrogantly, flattering people for the sake of gaining an advantage. But you, beloved, ought to remember the words that were spoken beforehand by the apostles of our Lord Jesus Christ, that they were saying to you, "In the last time there shall be mockers following after their own ungodly lust." These are the ones who cause divisions, worldly-minded, devoid of the Spirit. But you, beloved, building your selves up on your most holy faith; praying in the Holy Spirit; keep yourselves in the love of God, waiting anxiously for the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ to eternal life. And have mercy on some, who are doubting; save others, snatching them out of the fire; and on some have mercy with fear, hating even the garment polluted by the flesh. Now to Him who is able to keep you from stumbling, and to make you stand in the presence of His glory blameless with great joy, to the only God our Savior, through Jesus Christ our Lord, be glory, majesty, dominion and authority before all time and now and forever. Amen.

Once you have found the paragraphs, make a **parallel chart** and list the verse divisions as you have divided the block text into paragraphs. For example, you may decide that verses 1 and 2 of Jude should all be in one paragraph. After you have listed all the paragraphs from the text you are working on, use the other translations to fill in the chart that will show you how different translators divided the same text that you were

working from. Compare your paragraph divisions with the comparisons that were made by translators and arrangers. They have done this before and it is important to consider their expertise. Once you have compared your divisions with others, then it is time to make a final decision as to where the paragraph divisions should be.

Chart 5-C

Paragraphing Comparisons in Translations in Jude

SPEER	NIV	NAS	RSV	ASV	NEB	FINAL
1-2	1	1-2	1-2	1-2	1	1-4
3-4	2	3-4	3-4	3-4	2	5-7
5-7	3-4	5-16	5-7	5-16	3-4	8-13
8-19	5-7	17-23	8-13	17-23	5-7	14-19
20-23	8-10	24-25	14-16	24-25	8-9	20-23
24-25	11		17-23		10-11	24-25
	12-13		24-25		12-13	
	14-16				14-15	
	17-19				16-18	
	20-23				19-21	
	24-25				22-23	
					24-25	

Obtaining the Outline

Once you have made a final decision about your paragraph breakdown, do what I call a “**Block Paragraph Chart.**” Write down the **thesis sentence** of each paragraph and leave enough room after the thesis sentence for the verses that belong in that paragraph. **Draw a block** around each of the theses sentences. You are going to end up with a number of blocks on a piece of paper with room in between the blocks. Leave enough spaces between the blocked sentences to write the outline for the text. An example is provided below:

Chart 5-D

Box Diagram of Paragraphs

Surveying the Blocks

Look at the blocks that contain the thesis sentences and the verses that belong together within each block and decide if several paragraphs go together. Do some of the paragraphs combine to develop a bigger topic or thought? Consider the thesis sentence and verses that make up a paragraph in each one of the blocks and make a decision as to whether the paragraph stands alone or whether they combine with other paragraphs to make a major point. If a paragraph stands alone, then it is going to be a Roman numeral all by its own. If there is more than one paragraph that combines together for a major point, then combine the paragraphs **under the heading of one Roman numeral**.

Wording the Outline

When making an outline, the Roman numeral is going to have a phrase beside it that will appear above the first paragraph. Word the phrase in such a way that it conveys the main thought from the paragraph. Do this with each paragraph. If there is more than one block under the same Roman numeral, these paragraphs will be the sub-points of your outline. These will become the A and B and the 1 and 2 within the outline. The goal is to fill out the rest of the outline.

Chart 5-D**Final Outline of Paragraphs of Jude****INTRODUCTION (1-4)**

Introductory Matters – Address, Purpose, Occasion, Theme

1. CONDEMNATION OF EVILDOERS – OLD AND NEW ALIKE (5-19)**A. OLD TESTAMENT EXAMPLES FOR NEW TESTAMENT LIKENESS (5-7)**

The Old Testament examples of God's condemnation of evildoers are examples.

B. NEW TESTAMENT EVILDOERS WILL RECEIVE THE SAME (8-13)

Because these people's character is similar, their condemnation is to be the same also.

C. NEW TESTAMENT EVILDOERS WERE PROPHESED (14-19)

Their existence and plight were predicted by Old Testament and New Testament prophecy.

D. PREVENTION OF A FALL (20-23)

You are to bolster your spiritual lives and help the weak if you are to survive.

CONCLUSION (24-25)

Conclusion and Doxology: God is able to deliver you from danger.

Example of Jude

This is how I did the book of Jude: I thought that the first block was the **INTRODUCTION**. This includes the introductory material of the Address, the Introduction, Purpose of the Letter, Occasion, and the Theme (verses 1-4). Then I decided that the next three paragraphs are under one major thought. That will be **Roman Numeral I**.

I. CONDEMNATION OF EVILDOERS — OLD AND NEW ALIKE (verses 5-9). The next three paragraphs are developed under this one point of **CONDEMNATION**. First there is

- A. **Old Testament examples for New Testament likeness** (verses 5-7). The Old Testament examples of God's condemnation of evildoers serve as the example of what He does. Then,
- B. **New Testament evildoers will receive the same condemnation because these peoples' character are similar** (verses 8-13). And finally,
- C. **New Testament evildoers were prophesied** (verses 14-19). Their existence and plight were predicted by the Old and New Testament.

II. PREVENTION OF A FALL (verses 20-23). The main thought within this block that falls under **Roman Numeral II** is "You are to bolster your spiritual lives and help the weak if you are to survive."

I decided that the **CONCLUSION** and the **Doxology** were not really a Roman numeral, so verses 24-25 of Jude both fall under the **CONCLUSION** statement: "God is able to deliver you from this impending danger."

In longer books, the **special emphases** may be the Roman numerals from the overall outline of the whole book. Within these special emphases sections, it may be necessary to do the same kind of paragraph and outline analysis that I have shown here in Jude. You may need to do sections of the book before you can outline the whole book.

Chart 5-E**Final Outline of Jude**

Theme: God has always and will always judge the evildoer.

I. Introduction (1-4)

Jude introduces himself and the recipients, as well as tell the purpose and occasion for the letter (1-4)

II. Condemnation of Evildoers – Old and New (5-19)

A. Old Testament examples of God's condemnation (5-7)
The Old Testament examples of God's condemnation of evildoers is an example of what He does (5-7)

B. New Testament evildoers will receive the same condemnation (8-13) Because these people's character is similar, their condemnation is to be also (8-13)

C. New Testament evildoers were prophesied (14-19)
Their existence and plight were predicted by Old Testament and New Testament prophesy (14-19)

III. Prevention of a Fall (20-23)

You are to bolster your spiritual lives and help the weak if you are to survive (20-23)

IV. Conclusion and Doxology (24-25)

God is able to deliver you from this impending danger (24-25)

Conclusion

This concludes our successive readings with an angle part of the *exegesis*, but that is really only **step one** in our *exegesis*. Now it is time for a more detailed study. Steps 2 and following will deal with some of that detail. It is a good idea to keep

trying step one. Start with small books and then move forward to the larger books. I am sure that you will be pleased with the fruit of your labors.

DISCUSSION

1. What difference would it make if we read the letter (book) in one reading or several?
2. Why would knowing the recipient's demeanor be of value to us?
3. If the text is already paragraphed in your Bible, why redo it to your thinking after experts did the version you have?
4. Can we really outline a letter or book and understand? Does it apply to us today?

Further Steps in the “Exegesis” Process Interpreting Whole Bible Books

Introduction

This chapter is entitled “Further Steps in the ‘**Exegesis**’ Process.” This study is the process of looking at a method whereby a student of the Bible can see the overall thrust of each of the books of the Bible. The purpose of this method is to help each student look at a whole book and be able to know basically what the total book says to people today. A lot of people know bits and pieces of the Bible, but sometimes they do not have a good concept of what a whole book says or what the real purpose of the whole book is.

Step Two Review the Secondary Literature

Up to this point in this study, we have read the text of a book in the Bible five times. Each time we were looking for a different angle in the book. Now we are ready to peruse some extra biblical literature for the **first time** in our approach. Before this we have let only the Bible speak to us without letting any other source material influence our thinking. Step One was the successive readings of Scripture. Step Two is called “Review the Secondary Literature,” because we are going

to look at the **Introductory Material** in commentaries or other related source material.

Possible Resources

There are **Bible Encyclopedias** such as the International Standard Bible Encyclopedia (better known as the ISBE). There are also good **dictionaries** put out by a number of different publishing companies (Zondervan and Smith). These resources focus on the books of the Bible and will give a great deal of background information on each book. There are also books written which contain **general introductions** to the Bible. Donald Guthrie has written an excellent book in this category entitled New Testament Introduction. R.K. Harrison's Introduction To The Old Testament and Everett F. Harrison's Introduction To The New Testament are both good resources to use. Merrill Tenney has written a good book which covers the introductory material of the New Testament called New Testament Survey. These are general introduction books that focus on the background materials of the Old and New Testaments. Most commentaries on a particular book in the Bible will also have introductory materials.

What Is to Be Gained? What Questions Do You Ask?

I suggest that you choose three or four different sources to gather materials. Choose an encyclopedia, a commentary, and a survey book. **First**, begin by looking for what each source has to say about **who** wrote the book. There is some discussion among critics about who wrote certain books of the Bible. Become familiar with what different ones have to say. Some critics questions the authenticity of the proposed authors, and therefore, challenge the place of those books in the canon of Scripture (Canon, in its general sense denotes a collection or list of books accepted as an authoritative rule of faith and practice, Ed). Some books like Jude, 2 Peter, and James have been challenged through the centuries in regard to authenticity. I am convinced that these books do belong in the canon, but it is

good to know the arguments relating to their canonicity.

Second, be aware of what the different sources say about the **date** for when the book was written. **Third**, know the place to which the book was written. This is called the **destination**. **Fourth**, know to whom the book was written by knowing its **recipients**. **Fifth, sixth, seventh, and eighth** involves checking the resource materials to find out the **occasion, purpose, theme, and spiritual emphases** in the book. Good introduction and background source books will have this kind of information. **Ninth**, determine what **style of writing** the author of the book used. **Tenth**, does the book contain any **unusual features**? The methods of research in Step One may have already given you much of this information. That will help convince each student of the importance of this exegetical method.

Suggested Procedure

Use one sheet of paper for each of the **ten** categories mentioned above. As you read a source, note what that particular author says about each of the topics. Always note the source of the recorded material so that when you look back over this material you will know where your information came from. As you read additional sources of material, add only the **new thoughts** to the data you have already collected. Each additional source book you read may say the same thing as the first source. There is no reason to re-record the same material. If the source says something different, then put that on your sheet under the particular category that you are considering and note who said it. Once you have collected the data, read over it and draw your own conclusions. Write your conclusions at the bottom of the piece of paper on which the source material was gathered.

What Do You Do With The Materials?

Once you have gathered this information from the resource material, compare what other researchers have said with your own research. How do these authors' observations compare

with what you discovered about the different topics? It is a good idea to save these sheets of paper and add to them when you read new source material in subsequent studies of the book. This can become an ever-growing list of significant data about the book.

Examples Using The Book of Jude

Chart 6-A

Secondary Literature – Author

1. Jude is the brother of James, who is the brother of the Lord Jesus. That makes Jude also the brother of Jesus (**Lenski**).
2. The brothers of Jesus did not believe in the Messiahship of Jesus until after the resurrection of Jesus (John 7:5; Acts 1:14) (**Blum, Expositor's Greek N.T.**).
3. Jude is Thaddeus, the apostle listed in Matthew 10:3. He is also mentioned in John 4:21-22 and sent with Paul, Barnabas, and Silas to Antioch in Acts 15:22 (**Another commentator**).
4. Clement of Alexander, Eusebius, Origen, Athanasius, and Jerome attest to Jude being the author.

Summary: Although there are varying thoughts among the scholars of the identity of Jude, the consensus seems to be that Jude is the fleshly brother of the Lord Jesus and also the brother of James.

The material in **Chart 6-A** relates to the **author** of the book of Jude. Notice some of the information gathered. For instance, Lenski, who is a commentator and has written commentaries on the New Testament books, has stated that Jude was a brother of James and the brother of the Lord. Many other commentators agreed with that view, but since Lenski was the first one I read, he is the author I noted.

The second thing to notice is that Blum did not think that Jesus' brothers believed in the Messiahship of Jesus. Jude was

one of Jesus' brothers who did not believe in His Messiahship until after the resurrection. Another commentator thought that Jude was Thaddeus, the Apostle from Matthew 10:3 and added other information about him. Some researchers have said that Clement of Alexander, Eusebius, Origen, Athanasius, and Jerome attested to Jude as the author of the book of Jude.

The first part of **Chart 6-B** describes the unusual features of the book of Jude. Jude is one of the few books that quotes from an apocryphal book, which is a book that has not been included in the canon or the Old Testament. Jude quoted from the book of Enoch. Lenski and other commentators note this fact. This book focuses on the identity of false teachers and what those people are like. It also talks about the relationship of Jude to 2 Peter 2.

Chart 6-B (Part 1)

Unusual Features of Jude

1. The quotation from the book of Enoch (**Lenski**).
2. Identity of these particular heretics (**Blum, Expositor's Greek N.T.**).
3. Relationship of Jude to 2 Peter 2 (**Lenski, Blum, Barnes' Notes**).

A final sheet of paper should contain a **summary of secondary literature**. After you have gathered all this material, write a summary of all the information you have gathered from the secondary literature. The second part of Chart 6-B contains what I gathered on the book of Jude. The **author** is Jude, the Lord's brother. Albert Barnes disagrees with this, but he is in the minority. The key to finding the **date** for when Jude was written is in 2 Peter. Different researches have different opinions — whether it was written before or after 2 Peter. Most likely it was written between 40 and 80 A.D. The conservative scholars believe Jude was written near the end of 60 A.D. or sometime just previous to the destruction of Jerusalem in 70 A.D.

The **destination** of Jude is uncertain. This may have been an encyclical book — one that was circulated among a number of churches in an area. The **occasion** of the book was that heresy had come into the church. Some people believe the heresy was because of the gnostic background. The **canonicity** of the book is accepted because Origen, Jerome, Tertullian, Athanasius, and Clement of Alexandria accepted Jude as the author. Eusebius did not agree, but the church fathers had varying views. The **nature** of the book is very similar to 2 Peter chapter two.

Chart 6-B (Part 2)

Summary of Secondary Literature

Author:	Jude, the Lord's brother, is the consensus, but with some dissent.
Date:	Range of dates is from 40-80 A.D. or even into the second century by liberal scholars. The date is keyed to 2 Peter, whether or not it is pre or post 2 Peter.
Destination:	Unknown, perhaps a letter meant to be circulated among several churches.
Occasion:	Heresy among the people, perhaps gnostic antinomianism.
Canonicity:	Origen, Jerome, Tertullian, Athanasius, and Clement of Alexandria accept Jude as belonging to the canon, but Eusebius dissents.

Step Three— Establish the Text

Our Limitations

When I say, “Establish the text,” I mean the original language of the text. Most students of the Bible do not have a working knowledge of the original language; but for those who do, this is a worthwhile step to take. For those who do not have

a working knowledge of Hebrew and/or Greek, this is a step you may bypass.

The Procedure

This step involves studying the text from the standpoint of **variants**. Variants are the varied readings from the different copies of the original writings of the Bible. Many copies have been made of the Old and New Testaments through the centuries. The problem is that these copies do not always agree with each other. If you are a skilled linguist and know something about the background of these manuscripts — where they came from and what their characteristics are — then you can make a decision as to what the correct reading of the text is. Once those decisions have been made on your part, then you have what you believe is the closest to the original text. This is called “the autograph.” If you are able to take this step, and you do come up with a preferred original language text, save it for the next step. Or, you may want to translate it into English for the next step of this exegesis process.

Step Four — Rewriting the Text

Step Four is a step that everyone can take whether they know the original language or not. It is called “Analysis of Sentence Structure” or “Rewriting the text.” Do not let this intimidate you. This is a process that is not that difficult.

The Progression

Once we have done the **overall view** exercises which have preceded this one (the successive readings), it is time to become more analytical in our approach. I would like to illustrate it this way. When someone goes into an art gallery, he looks at the paintings on the wall. The first thing an art student wants to do is to back away from a picture and get an overall view of a particular painting. This will give an **overall impression**. Once he has the overall impression, the student may want to examine

the picture more closely. He may even examine the details of the painting with a magnifying glass to look at the brush marks or the colors that have been used. In this study of exegetical methods, we have already looked at the overall view of the Bible by viewing the “art work” of Scripture from a distance. We have obtained an overall impression — “the big picture.” With that in mind, move in for a closer look at some of the details, but without forgetting the overall view that you have.

Analysis of Sentence Structure (Rewriting the Text)

The technical name for rewriting the text is **syntax**. This deals with how the sentences in the text fit together. If you are trained in the original language of the text, it is possible to do this step **in** the original language or in your native language. There are several ways to approach this step. The one I use is much like diagraming sentences. I call it **thought diagrams**. Rather than breaking down the words or phrases of a sentence, break down the language in terms of thoughts. Breaking down the text into smaller units of thought will make the text more easily digestible and easier to understand. Instead of looking for grammatical relationships, look for thought relationships.

The Method for Thought Diagram

Notice the main words, names, phrases, or particular clauses in the text around which there may be supporting descriptions. **First**, denote each thought as an independent thought **if** it is a thought that can stand alone. Write each independent thought in **red ink** on a line that begins at the left margin of the paper. **Second**, below each independent thought or clause, there may be dependent clauses or supporting phrases and names. Write the dependent thoughts, phrases, or names in **blue ink** on a line that is indented from the left margin of the paper. Draw a line that connects the independent and the dependent phrases together. If there are two independent thoughts that are closely related or parallel, place the two equal

thoughts at the same position on the left margin of the paper and connect them with a dotted line.

Chart 6-C

Format for Rewriting the Text

Independent thought, name, phrase (in red)

Independent thought (in red)

Independent thought (in red)

Related

Independent thought (in red)

Independent thought (in red)

Dependent thought, names, or phrases (in blue)

Dependent thought, names, or phrases (in blue)

Independent thought (in red)

Dependent thought, names, or phrases (in blue)

Independent thought (in red)

Independent thought (in red)

Dependent thought, names, or phrases (in blue)

Dependent thought, names, or phrases (in blue)

Dependent thought, names, or phrases (in blue)

Chart 6-C is the format example for a text. When two independent thoughts are **related together in thought**, they

need to be connected by a dotted line on the left side of the page. When there is an independent thought with a dependent thought, the independent thought is at the left margin of the page in red ink, but the dependent thought is placed on the line right below it, indenting from the left margin, and written in blue ink. Connect the independent phrase and the dependent phrase with a slanted line. If there is more than one independent thought, the two phrases are connected by a dotted line if the two thoughts are equal. Then connect the dependent thoughts to the independent thoughts by a solid line.

The Example

Chart 6-D

Rewriting the Text – Jude (NIV)

JUDE (red)

a servant of Jesus Christ (blue)

a brother of James (blue)

TO THOSE (red)

who have been called (blue)

who are loved by God the Father (blue)

kept by Jesus Christ (blue)

MERCY, PEACE, LOVE (red)

be yours (blue)

in abundance (blue)

DEAR FRIENDS (red)

I WAS EAGER TO WRITE TO YOU (red)

about the salvation we share (blue)

I FELT I HAD TO WRITE (red)

urge you to contend (blue)

FOR THE FAITH (red)

once for all entrusted to the saints (blue)

FOR CERTAIN MEN (red)

whose condemnation was written about long ago
(blue)

secretly slipped in among you (blue)

THEY ARE (red)

godless men (blue)

who change the grace of our God into a license for
immorality (blue)

deny Jesus Christ our only Sovereign and Lord (blue)

Chart 6-D contains an example of **rewriting the text** of the first four verses of Jude. The text begins with “*Jude, a servant of Jesus Christ and a brother of James,*” (Jude 1). Note that I thought the word “*Jude*” was an independent thought. Below that first independent thought are two descriptions of Jude — they are dependent phrases that describe Jude. He was: “*a servant of Jesus Christ*” and “*a brother of James.*” Jude is the main independent thought with two dependent phrases that describe the author.

The next phrase in the text is “*to those who have been called and are loved by God the Father and kept by Jesus Christ*” (Jude 2). The word “**those**” seems to stand out. They are described in three ways: “*those who . . .*” (1) “*have been called,*” (2) “*who are loved by God the Father,*” and (3) “*kept by Jesus Christ.*” I decided that “*to those*” was the independent

thought and the three descriptions were dependent phrases that support that independent thought. In the next phrase, I placed what Jude wanted to be given to the recipients of this book as the independent thought. He wanted three things to be given to the reader: “*Mercy, peace and love . . .*” The supporting phrases for mercy, peace, and love are “*be yours*” and “*in abundance.*”

The benefit after you have done this exercise is that you can see at a glance the **significant names, words, and thoughts**. By arranging the text in this manner you can see what thoughts go together. I think this will help you to see the writer’s development of his argumentation. Rather than seeing only bits and pieces, you should be able to see the logical development of the author’s presentation.

Step Five: Analysis of Significant Words

Limitations of Word Studies

An exegesis does not consist solely of word studies, but they can be very useful. A word of caution — sometimes the gleanings from word studies become the focal point of interpretations, as if to build the interpretation of the text around what the word studies reveal. The **significant points** and illustrations of the text and other things that come from word studies are simply meant to **enhance** the interpretation of the text. These tools are meant to **illustrate** the interpretation that comes from the text, not to replace contextual interpretation.

The Procedure for Word Study

Use the **rewritten text** from Step Four. There are four **significant word/words** in the Jude text which are circled. Another way to describe these words might be “**non-routine words.**” These are words that are difficult to understand, or words that you may not be familiar with. They can also be

words that have a profound meaning such as “justification” or “sanctification.” These are the kind of words that you need to do a word study on. They will be non-routine words that are crucial to the text or words that are frequently used in the text. If you have been doing this as a handwritten exercise, you can circle the **significant words** (see the examples in Chart 6-D). If you have been doing these exercises on the computer, the words can be highlighted in bold print or a different color.

Once you have circled or **highlighted** the **significant word/words**, the next step is to use several word study sources to obtain the basic meaning of these words. There are many good word studies available and word study resources that can be found on CD Rom. Check the bookstores and computer software outlets (A list is included in the bibliography at the end of this book). Look for the basic root meaning of the word and check the range of meanings in all the uses in the New or Old Testaments. Focus on what one particular word or words mean in the context of the passage you are working with. If it is available, you might want to check out the use of the word in other literature which was written at the same time that your scripture was written. This can be a good source to tell you what it means in Scripture. Anything that is **not** obvious in the translation you are using should be noted in your word study. Meanings are sometimes lost in the translation. Find the best word or words to convey the correct meaning. After you have recorded the information you have obtained from the word studies, draw any conclusions about the use of the word to develop the meaning which you think best applies in the text.

Chart 6-E *Word Study on “Contend” from Jude*

ANALYTICAL GREEK NEW TESTAMENT

1. The word is ἐπαγωνιζεσθαι (epagonizesthai).
2. It is present infinitive passive or middle (same form in Greek).

NEW TESTAMENT GREEK GRAMMAR by: Ray Summers

1. Infinitive is a verbal (function in usage or meaning)
noun (function in the sentence).
2. Here, it acts like a verb and can have one of the following connotations:
 - a. Express purpose of the main verb
 - b. Express result of the main verb
 - c. Express temporal ideas:

“before”	+ infinitive
“while”	+ infinitive
“after”	+ infinitive
 - d. Express cause + infinitive
3. Infinitive as a noun: not used that way here.

ENGLISHMAN’S GREEK CONCORDANCE

It is a **HAPAX**, meaning that this particular form of the word only occurs here in Jude in the New Testament.

ARNDT AND GINGRICH GREEK LEXICON

This and other lexicons refer to its uses in classical Greek that have it referring to athletic contest, warfare, etc.

SUMMARY OF FINDINGS FOR Step Five

1. This word is used only one time in the New Testament — only used here in Jude. Its uniqueness is to be attributed to its place in Jude, the need to make a very strong emphasis. The preposition on the front of the word “*epi*” ties the word to the dative that follow — that is “*for the faith.*” It is obvious that these people — the Christians Jude is writing to — are to “*contend for the faith*” and not less important things. This word focuses on the Christian’s effort for “*the faith.*”
2. Putting together the word studies from all the sources, it appears that the word and its root words are very similar in meaning and connotation in most places in the New

Testament — all have the same idea. These words were used when referring to the participants, who were well trained and prepared for the athletic games in the Greek stadiums, when they fought well or ran well in a race. Wrestling, boxing, and running seem to be the three events noted in the New Testament uses. Either of these could be in view with Jude's usage. Built into the word's meaning is effort, labor, struggle, and agony. It is a very intense activity on the part of the participant which would not involve a lazy attitude or effort.

3. Its infinitive form ties it to the preceding verb form. Jude is exhorting these Christians to "*contend*."
4. It is clear that these Christians are to build themselves up in the most holy faith (in preparation and training) in order to be able to fight, contend, strive, struggle, and agonize to keep the faith pure, and purely presented, in the church. Jude was urging them to face up to false teachers with the truth and not to be intimidated or driven away from the truth by smooth sounding arguments. They were to teach the ones who had already accepted these false, damning doctrines and teach the doubters so that they would return to believe in (trust) the basic doctrines of the gospel. He was saying to them, do not give up. Suffer for the sake of the gospel and the lifestyle that results from salvation.

Step Six: Commentary

This step involves doing a verse-by-verse commentary of the text. Whether or not the student does this step depends on how much depth he wants to go into. I suggest that you take the research that has been done so far and put it all together. One way to do that is to use the collected material to write a verse-by-verse commentary on the text — include the basic meaning of the text, the thought development, and the word

studies. Once you have done that, leave some space at the bottom of the page and read some commentaries with the intention of focusing on the interpretation of the text. Fill in the blank space with what the commentaries have to say. Try to read two or three commentaries, and then you will have collected information not only from your own research but also from the research of others.

Chart 6-F

Examples From Parts of a Commentary

“Jude, a servant of Jesus Christ and brother of James to those who are called, beloved in God the Father and kept for Jesus Christ”

Verse 1:

a. Expositor’s – page 387.

The author is Jude. There are eight different men named Jude in the New Testament, but by the process of elimination probably the Jude of this letter was the brother of Jesus and James (cf. Matthew 13:55; Mark 6:3). He called himself a “servant (*‘doulos’* which literally means “slave”) of *Jesus Christ*.” It probably implies that he is about what his master wants him to say. Linking himself to his brother, James, makes sense if the brother was well known to the recipients. This James is one of six persons with that name in the New Testament. He was the author of the epistle of James.

The readers are “*the called*” (“*kletois*”) which is synonymous with “*a Christian*.” (Kelly, page 243). They are “*loved by God the Father*” (which literally means “*beloved in God the Father*” in Greek. Those to whom Jude was writing are “*kept by Jesus Christ*.” There is no “*by*” in the Greek text. As the text stands, it could be translated “*kept for Jesus Christ*,” as God the Father preserves the Christian for His Son (cf. Jude 24-25; John 17:15).

- b. Tyndale, – pages 155, 156, 157.

We can learn a great deal about a man by listening to what he has to say about himself. Jude makes two significant claims about himself. First, he is a servant of Jesus Christ. Both Jude and James, it seems were the brothers of Jesus and made a point of calling themselves His bondslaves. What a change from the days before the resurrection, when His brothers did not believe Him, but thought Him deranged (cf. John 7:5; Mark 3:21, 31). Now Jude's aim in life was to be utterly at the disposal of the Messiah Jesus. A paradox of Christianity is that in such glad devotion a man or woman finds perfect freedom.

- c. Charles Speer's Commentary

Verses one and two comprise the salutation. The Expositor's Commentary says that there are eight different men called Jude in the NT. Barclay notes that there are five people called "Judas." They are Judas of Damascus, Judas Barsabas, Judas Iscariot, a second Judas in the apostolic band and Judas, the brother of Jesus. "*A servant of Jesus Christ*" — Jude uses his relationship to Jesus as being a servant instead of that of a fleshly half-brother. This is an attitude of humility and of acceptance of his older brother after his initial disbelief. Jude is relaying the message of his master. "*And brother of James*" — this link is what helps define who the author is. This is the only Jude and James brothers in the flesh mentioned in the New Testament. James was well known in the church and so this connection would give more acceptance of the letter.

Step Seven : a Presentation

The final step that I would like to suggest you do in your exegesis process is that you prepare a presentation by working up a lesson or a sermon. Use all the material you have gathered up to this point. After following all of these steps, you should

have a great deal more knowledge than before beginning this study. Use this overflow to present a lesson that others can benefit from.

Conclusion

These are the steps of exegesis. This is really the end of the process of exegesis. The next part of this study will be the **hermeneutics**. Since you know what the book meant in its original text, the next step is to find out how the book applies to people today.

DISCUSSION

1. Why would we want to go back to the original text when studying a book? Are we limited in doing so?
2. What would be involved in this procedure from the stand point of variants?
3. How do you think that rewriting the text will help you personally? In your studies with other people?

FUNDAMENTAL RULES OF INTERPRETATION OF A PASSAGE

Introduction

The first six chapters have been spent describing a method the Bible student can use to decide what the original text meant to its original recipients. This method is called “**exegesis**.” The following chapter will deal with “**hermeneutics**,” which is a method for determining what the Bible says to us today. Some might think because of that statement that I do not believe the Bible means the same thing today that it meant then. Not so!! I believe the Bible is age-lasting, that it is culturally transferable, and that it is relevant to all people of all nations at all times! A good illustration of ongoing relevancy is found in Jude 5-8. The writer cites a number of “old days” incidents that are recorded in the Old Testament, and one of the references is to a non-biblical event. Jude says that these incidents serve as examples of a principle that is still applicable in his day. The principle is: God holds evildoers responsible and will punish them if they do not repent. I believe that if Jude believed that principle held for his day then it still holds for us today.

It does take good interpretive methods to properly apply the biblical principles, commands, examples, and inferences from the silence of Scripture. In other words, to apply biblical things to our modern day situations we are going to have to have some help. It is not always a simple thing to determine

what applies and how it applies. We need some good guidelines and a good methodology supported by technology to do well in the interpretation and application of Scripture. The second part of Biblical Interpretation will include some general rules of biblical interpretation.

General Rules of Biblical Interpretation

Number One:

Every Passage of Scripture Has but One Meaning

When God says something by inspiration of the Holy Spirit through a chosen speaker or writer to a particular audience, those words have a particular meaning. It makes no sense to say otherwise. (Modern theories of inspiration include “thought inspiration” and “truth included inspiration.” “Thought inspiration” says that only the thought itself is inspired and not the words specifically. “Truth included” inspiration says that truths are there, but not all of it is truth.) The recipients have needs, and the writer was addressing those particular needs. To write a message that can mean multiple things does not fit that occasion. The Lord expects and intends for the church of today to be able to determine His intended meaning. Rule number one is that every passage of scripture has but one meaning.

In the essentials of the Christian faith, the recipients’ salvation depended upon their correct interpretation. The same is true for Christians today. We must understand the **essentials of salvation** and **spiritual growth** the way God intended for it to be understood. The essentials do not change. They are the same today as they were in the first century. The way people were saved in the first century is the same way people are saved in the twenty-first century. There is one meaning. Yes, there may be multiple applications, but that is not the same as multiple meanings. There is still just **one meaning**. There may be typologies in the Old Testament, but there is still just one meaning. When any of these situations are present, there is still one basic meaning for the recipients. When we accept this, we

can see that the allegorical approach, which has been popular through the centuries, goes against this particular rule of biblical interpretation. And the Existentialist who says, “Whatever it means to me and what feels good is the right interpretation,” is wrong also. In existentialism you have multiple interpretations depending upon how many people there are. That goes against what God intended for the text to mean originally.

Number Two: The Simplest Is Often the Best

Rule number two is the simplest and most obvious meaning is usually the correct one. Call it common sense if you want, but remember these biblical books were written by farmers, shepherds, and fishermen. They wrote to people like themselves — simple folks, who were normal people like you and me. Do you think that God was trying to hide what the people really needed to know for their salvation and spiritual growth? Certainly not! That is not our God. He was not trying to hide vital truths in the garb of vague or unrecognizable language to fool the recipients of any day and time. The Bible was written to be understood from a public reading of the book without all the commentaries that we have today. During Old Testament times the law of Moses was read to the people publicly once a year. It was to be understood from a public reading because the people did not have their own personal copy. The people did not have commentaries either! All they had was a public reading of Scripture, and God intended for them to understand it from that reading. The same thing is true of the New Testament. Paul tells the Christians in Colosse to pass the letter that he wrote to them on to the Laodicean church. The church in Colosse was instructed to read the letter Paul had written to the church in Laodicea (cf. Colossians 4:16). New Testament books were to be read publicly and meant to be understood.

There is figurative language in Scripture at times. The Lord chose to use this kind of literature to express Himself. At times the Lord said He intended to keep the meaning a secret.

Revelation relies heavily on Old Testament language even though it was written to New Testament Christians. The Old Testament language was used to keep the message of Revelation a secret from hostile Romans who might have persecuted the Christians had they known that book was a presentation of their downfall. John revealed that the book was written in figurative language in Revelation 1:1-2. Thus we know right away this book may be difficult to understand. The churches in the first century would have understood the language being used because they were people who knew the Old Testament.

Daniel did not understand the prophecy God was giving, so the Lord told him, “. . . *the words are closed up and sealed until the time of the end. Many will be purified, made spotless and refined, but the wicked will continue to be wicked. None of the wicked will understand, but those who are wise will understand*” (Daniel 12:9). God did not want the meaning of His prophecy told at that time. However, He said it would be understood in time. We should not assume something is difficult to understand and try to use an interpretive posture. There are cultural differences between the Old and New Testament times and today. Those differences can get in the way of the interpretive process, but we do not need to make it harder than it really is. William Ockham, a reformer who predated even Luther, called this the “Law of Simplicity.” Do not make it harder than it is unless the text indicates that it may be difficult. Obviously, Zechariah and Ezekiel will be a little more difficult because of the figurative language involved.

Number Three:

A Writer’s Own Interpretation Predominates

Rule number three is to always allow a writer’s explanation of a passage to be the primary one. When considering the Bible, the student should let the person who wrote the text tell him what it means. Allow Paul to explain what he means by a concept or word. Although he may use the same terms, do not

go to the book of James to find out what Paul meant when he used the word “works” or “faith” or “law.” Another author should not be the primary interpreter of another author’s work. The Holy Spirit inspired all Scripture (cf. 2 Timothy 3:16), but the Holy Spirit did not necessarily choose to use the same word in the same way every time. We should not assume the Spirit always intended the same meaning for terms used by different writers in different books.

Sometimes the same writer may use the same words to mean slightly different things in the same book. John did not mean exactly the same thing when he used the word “*belief*” or “*faith*” that Paul or James did. Sometimes in his own gospel, John attributed a different connotation to the same word in a different part of the book. It served a different purpose in that section of the book. Look for a specific explanation of one particular concept or word that may be revealed in the text. Jesus would often tell a parable and explain its meaning because even his disciples did not understand the parable without His explanation. Throughout the centuries these parables have been interpreted in many different and incorrect ways. It is best to let Jesus explain what the parables mean or allow the context of the gospel itself to explain the meanings.

Number Four: The Context

Rule number four is always interpret a passage in light of, and in harmony with, its context. Some call this the first and most important rule of interpretation: “Context! Context! Context!” It is probably the most violated rule of biblical interpretation. It is also called the “rule of analogy of faith.” Any interpretation should agree with the context. What is the context? It is the subject matter that surrounds the text being considered. There are several different kinds of contexts. **First**, there is an “overall context” of a book. That is the occasion, purpose and theme of the whole book. **Second**, there is the “bigger context.” This is the focus of any special emphasis

section in the book. It may be the focus of several chapters within the book. **Third**, there is the “immediate context.” This may be a paragraph within which the text appears, or it may be the ten verses preceding and succeeding the text. The “immediate context” is a smaller part of a special emphasis section in the book. Before giving an interpretation to a particular passage, the student needs to know what precedes and follows that passage. This kind of analysis will prevent the student from improperly using a text as a proof text concerning some modern day applications. A passage cannot be taken out of context to establish whatever is needed to make a point. It is important to consider how the passage fits into the context surrounding it. What does the passage mean in the context it is in? This is true biblical interpretation.

Number Five: The Circumstances of a Text

Rule number five is to find out as much as possible about the circumstances surrounding a text. This is akin to number four and will help to determine the focus of the immediate context. Ask yourself the following questions: What **kind of literature** is the author using? **Who** is the writer? **To whom** was it written? **Who** is speaking? **To whom** was it spoken? An example would be the quote from Genesis 3:4: “*You will not surely die.*” God did not say that. Adam did not say that. The Devil said that; it is important to know who said it to be able to properly interpret it. In Job 2:9, the words, “*Curse God and die!*” are recorded. This was neither God nor Job speaking. It was Job’s wife who spoke those words.

It is important to know who spoke the words and to whom they were spoken. In Luke 7:34 someone said, “*Here is a glutton and a drunkard, a friend of tax collectors and sinners.*” Jesus did not call himself a drunkard, but his enemies were guilty of speaking those words concerning Him. John 9:31 is another misunderstood passage because of this kind of problem in interpretation. It says, “*We know that God does not*

listen to sinners. He listens to the godly man who does his will.” Because of this verse, some people have said, “God does not hear the prayers of people who are not Christians.” That is not true. The person who made that statement in the text was not inspired. The scripture is simply recording his words. The writer, John, was inspired in recording the statement. We need to know who spoke the words and to whom they were spoken to be able to properly interpret the passage.

It is also important to know **about whom** the passage is speaking. Is the speaker or the author speaking about God, about the recipients, or about a third party? From **where** was it spoken or written? Did Paul write it from a Roman prison or was he speaking to the Ephesian elders from Miletus? It is also important to know **when** it was spoken or written. Some passages might be a record of what was spoken in another context. How was it spoken or written? What is the tone and the mood of the passage? It may be necessary to read the passage out loud to discern these things. Finally, determine what is actually said. What is the content of the passage? This is called the **historical and contextual setting**.

Number Six:

Keep Other Scriptures In Mind

Rule number six urges the student to keep other scriptures in mind when he is doing his interpretation. Suppose someone is building a house. He cannot draw the floor plan of that house simply by looking at the frontal view. The whole house must be considered. When the student looks at Scripture, he must consider everything the Bible has to say rather than choosing a partial view. It is important to obtain the whole truth on a topic. Different authors may use identical terminology to explain different concepts.

Same Material — Different Author

This does not mean that the Holy Spirit contradicted Himself from one passage to another. The Holy Spirit did inspire **all** Scripture (cf. 2 Timothy 3:16). He might be giving different connotations to a word or subject, but this does not mean they contradict each other. All passages on a particular subject should be consulted to learn the whole truth about that subject matter. Should the student ever go to another book to decide what Paul meant by “such and such” concept? Paul may not be saying exactly the same thing that James and John said in their books, but they are related. The relationship between their meanings should be determined to obtain the whole truth.

Same Material — Same Author

This principle is called the “Sum of the Word.” This principle can be illustrated by Ephesians 3:18: “. . . *to grasp how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ.*” To be able to understand the “*breadth, and length, and depth, and height*” (Ephesians 3:18, KJV) of Christ’s love, man needs to study all the passages on the subject of the love of Christ. Paul wrote about the subject of the observance of the Law in Romans, but he also wrote about that same subject in the book of Galatians. The two books are very similar. Galatians will help you understand Romans and vice versa. The same subject may be discussed by other authors. Paul wrote about the topic of faith and works in Romans, but James also wrote about those two topics. This is **related material**. To be able to reach the totality of the truth on these topics, you need to study all the passages on a particular topic.

Same Time Settings

It is important to know the time settings of the book itself. For example, Paul wrote at least four books from prison. These books are very similar in some characteristics. Knowing that he was in prison helps us to understand what he was talking about. He said some of the same things because he was writing from the same time setting context. It is also important to know the cultural setting of a book. Corinth and Rome were probably

alike. Reading the Corinthian letter, can help us understand the Roman letter. Psalm 119:160 says, “*The sum of thy word is truth . . .*” (ASV).

Number Seven:

Plain Passages Predominate

The plain passages in the Bible need to be used to explain the obscure ones. When there is a plain passage and a passage that is not as clearly stated on the same subject, allow the plain scripture to dominate the interpretation process. Just because a passage is not easily understood does not mean that the meaning has been hidden. Everything that is essential to salvation and Christian living has been clearly revealed in Scripture. Do not make hasty decisions concerning tough passages. It may be a cultural problem, a personal prejudice, or lack of knowledge that hinders the interpretation.

Figurative language can be hard to understand and interpret. The Lord used a great deal of figurative languages in Scripture to illustrate and enhance literal expressions of truth. Look at the literal passages first and interpret them. Then, let the figurative passages on the same subject add to the literal passages. There is danger in allowing a figurative passage to become the basis for false beliefs. The doctrine of premillennialism is one example of using apocalyptic language to establish false doctrines. Another example of using hard to understand scriptures to justify error is seen when the reference “*baptism for the dead*” (1 Corinthians 15:29) is used to justify the practice of living people being baptized for the sake of the dead. That was not what Paul had in mind.

Number Eight:

Handle the WORD Well

Paul told Timothy to “*rightly*” divide “*the word of truth*” (2 Timothy 2:15). He was telling Timothy to handle the Word in the right way. It is important to know the sections of Scripture according to various **parameters**.

The Scriptures Are Divided by “Covenants”

It is important to know which section of Scripture a passage is located. Is the passage related to the covenant made with **Noah** in the book of Genesis? Does it relate to people that are under the Covenant God made with **Abraham**? Is the passage concerning people who were part of the **Mosaic covenant**? Does it have to do with the **new covenant** under which Christians live? Does the scripture relate to certain promises that God has made in His word? Was the promise made to Abraham or the Levitical priests in the Old Testament? It is important to know under what promise, covenant, or dispensation the particular passage is under.

The Scriptures Are Divided by “Dispensations”

There are basically three dispensations in Scripture: the Patriarchal age, the Mosaic age, and the Christian age. Every scripture fits into a dispensation because God had different laws and commands under each age. It is important to know which age the passage relates to.

The Scriptures Are Divided by “History and Culture”

It is good to know the historical and cultural setting of the passage. The more background information the student has the more help there will be in the interpretation process. Cultural applications in the text need to be recognized. Knowing the history of Palestine and the world will help in understanding the scenario related in Scripture.

The Scriptures Are Divided by “Language”

It will help to know the kind of literature that was used. What kind of book is it? What language was used to write the section of scripture being considered? Was it Greek? Was it Hebrew? All of these things will help especially in the exercises to re-write the text.

Number Nine: Be Logical

Isaiah quotes the Lord in Isaiah 1:18, *“Come now, let us reason together.”* God did give each one of us a mind that is

capable of interpreting Scripture. It is important to use logic and good sense. This is not an attempt to reduce all Scripture to “constitutional” or “propositional” laws that can be put into syllogisms. Interpreting scriptures needs to be done with care because our common sense is affected by the cultural background. Scripture is logical; it has common sense about it. Humanity is sometimes illogical. Man does not always use scriptural common sense, which is what he needs to interpret Scripture properly.

Number Ten: Know God’s Limits on Revelation

It is important to know the limits of divine revelation. Let God have some secrets and let Him set some limits. There is a limit to our human understanding of an infinite, immortal God. Who dares to think that they can understand fully the vastness and completeness of the mind of God?! It is impossible for those of us who are human beings. Deuteronomy 29:29 says, *“The secret things belong to the Lord our God, but the things revealed belong to us and to our children forever, that we may follow all the words of the law.”* Do not make more of Scripture than is there for you to make. We are warned in Scripture not to add to or to take away from the word of God (cf. Revelation 22:18-19).

Conclusion

This chapter has been an attempt to bridge the gap between the studies of exegesis and hermeneutics. These basic rules of interpretation of Scripture will relate to both processes. They will help us determine what it meant to those people in that time, and it will also help us determine what it means to us today.

DISCUSSION

1. How people were saved in the first century is how they are saved today, or has culture changed this?
2. Why should we try and understand how a word is used in context? Do not words always have the same meaning?

TOOLS OF THE TRADE

Introduction

The previous chapters have emphasized the importance and results of successive readings of the text from the scripture being studied. These successive readings were done without looking at outside sources or secondary literature until the text had been read a number of times. Only then was background information obtained from other sources besides the Bible. The extra source materials can be very helpful by adding information from various authors to the primary knowledge a student can gain from the text. These sources may suggest other possibilities to be compared with the interpretation the student himself has made. These books should not become interpretations that hinder the interpretation that can come from reading the text first. The first impressions received from successive readings of the text alone are very important. Do not allow outside sources to spoil those first impressions.

The Selection of a Good Bible

The first tool needs to be a good Bible. Everyone has different preferences. The Bible you choose to use to do this kind of study may not be the Bible you choose to carry with you to worship services or Bible studies. Some of the characteristics to look for in a good study Bible are: a Bible with large clear print that has a readable format. Some people prefer one column all the way across the page, while others prefer a two-column format. Look for a print with the text spread out rather than crowded onto the page. Look to see how much white space is between the lines so that your eyes can pick out the scriptures and so there is space for underlining. A Bible that has wide

margins gives the student a place to write notes on the side of each page for his own personal comments and future study.

Some Bibles have what is called “marginal readings” at the side of the text. These may contain variant readings from the original manuscripts that indicate a different way of reading the text so that the student can compare these to the translation. A cross reference column can also be helpful. Depending on the page style, these references will be located down the center of the page or on the right or left margins. These references allow you to compare what you are reading with scriptures that have related topics in other places in the Bible.

I prefer a durable leather cover that will last a long time. A limp cover will fold over in your hand when you are holding it. A hard cover may be fine for some people, but sometimes it will close before you are ready for it to. Look for a Bible that has heavy quality paper. India paper is not a good feature for a study Bible. The pages of a study Bible need to be thick enough to be easy to turn and durable enough to write on.

The Selection of Good Study Aids

Optional features in a good study Bible include maps, a concordance, dictionary, outlines, and summaries. **Maps** are really **essential** tools for any Bible student. It is important to know where the Bible scene is taking place. Being able to flip to a map to check the location and what is around that area can be very helpful.

The second feature is a **concordance**. There will not be a complete concordance in a Bible, but many study Bibles have small concordances that will allow quick references to a scripture passage or a word.

The third feature is a **dictionary**. A typical Bible dictionary is a large book or a set of books, so there will not be a complete dictionary, but a small one is a good reference tool. The fourth feature in many study Bibles is **an introduction and outline of each book in the Bible**. Some study Bibles will have a **harmony of the gospels**. Others have **commentary notes** at the bottom of the page and **articles on archeological findings**.

Read the commentary notes with care and be aware of the fact that archeological information will be out of date rather soon because of the rapid growth of knowledge in that field.

An additional feature that you may find in some Bibles is a **topical index of subjects**. This type of index will have the subject by topics (“faith,” “love,” etc.) and a list of scriptures underneath. **Thumb tabs** are also an optional feature in many study Bibles. Tabs will help you locate a particular book of the Bible quickly and are very helpful for those who do not know the books well. Some Bibles have a place for family history. You can find almost anything you want in a Bible.

Be aware of the fact that the more optional features there are in a Bible, the heavier and the larger it will be. Publishers charge for each one of the “extras” added. I suggest that many of these “extras” can be in other books which are designated for that particular kind of aid and you will have access to those at home when you need them. If you have them at home and in your Bible as well, then you will have paid for them twice.

Selecting a Good Translation

There is a lot of discussion and opinion concerning what translation of the Bible is the best. For those who do not know a great deal about translations, philosophies and procedures, or the original languages of the Bible, the question is, “How can I make a sensible decision about the best translation to use in my home?” This is not an easy question to answer, but there are some characteristics to look for in a good translation.

First, a good translation is one that has been done by a committee of people from a wide representation instead of a one-man translation which can sometimes carry the prejudices of that one man. With a wide range of people working on a translation, the prejudices of one person usually will not appear in the final text. **Second**, a translation needs to be accurate and true to the words, thoughts, and grammar of the original language. This is a difficult balance to attain. One translation may be very strong in the word-for-word translation and miss some of the thought translation because the word-for-word

translation does not always convey the complete thought of the original language. Other translations may convey the thought, but discard the word-for-word accuracy.

Third, a good translation needs to be easy to read. It is important that it flows and communicates well. All translations have errors and weaknesses. You can avoid the mistakes made in translations by employing your own skills. Use an interlinear translation or compare several good translations. Even if you do not know any of the original languages, you can compare what several good translations say and comprehend what the original language had to say.

Many people feel that the New American Standard (NAS) version is the best translation available right now because it sticks to the word-for-word translation very well. The word accuracy is very good based on the older American Standard Version (ASV) which is not used by very many people today. It is a version that is not easy to read because of the stiffness of its language. But the New International Version (NIV), which is very popular today, is often accurate in terms of the thought and not as accurate in the word-for-word correspondence. There needs to be a balance so choose a version that is best for you under the circumstances that you will be working in.

The Value of a Good Concordance

An interpreter's best friend along with his study Bible is a good concordance. There are different kinds of concordances and many uses. Some are particularly made for people who understand the original languages. There are special concordances for the Hebrew and Chaldee, for Greek, and also a concordance for the Septuagint which is a Greek translation of the Old Testament even though the original was written in the Hebrew and Aramaic language. The general make-up of a concordance is to list passages and phrases wherein each important biblical word is found. One of the earliest published English concordances was Merbeck's in 1550. There are three

English concordances that are commonly used. Each of these concordances has advantages depending on what you wish to use them for.

Cruden's Concordance

Cruden's Concordance was published in 1737. It has gone through dozens of revisions and has consistently been the most popular English concordance possibly because of its convenient size and price. It is designated as a "complete" concordance, but it is not meant to be an exhaustive concordance. It is not the best choice for a preacher or the more serious students of God's word.

Young's Analytical Concordance

Young's Analytical Concordance was put together by a man named Robert Young. This particular concordance is keyed to the King James Version (KJV) of the Bible. It lists almost all English words and every passage reference underneath in the biblical order they are found. The lists under each English word are different depending on the Hebrew or Greek words used in that scripture. For example, the page where the word "heaven" is listed has several words in Hebrew and Greek which are all translated in English as the word "heaven." If you are looking for a particular passage, you may have to go through several lists of original words to find the passage that you are looking for.

One benefit of this concordance is that it is easy to find a particular word in the original language. Another benefit is this concordance gives a list a proper names with their definitions in the alphabetical order rather than at the end of the concordance. This book also contains a lexicon which is the Hebrew and Greek dictionaries located in the back. This is the place to look for the original language word. This lexicon contains how the word is stated in English, how to pronounce it, and how it has been translated into English. Young's also has articles written concerning the canon of the scriptures. These are important

articles even though they are somewhat dated and may not have the information you are interested in.

Strong's Exhaustive Concordance

Strong's Exhaustive Concordance was compiled by James Strong and is very similar to Young's. It is also keyed to the King James Version (KJV) of the Bible and lists almost all English words in alphabetical order. The main difference is that each listing does not have the Greek and Hebrew word within the text in an alphabetical order. Young's listed the original words and Strong's does not. If you look up the word "heaven" in Strong's, you will find a long list beginning in Genesis through Revelation of every time the English word "heaven" occurs in the King James Version, but it does not have the original word in the main listing. Strong's has a Hebrew and Greek dictionary in the back portion of the book that contains the original Greek or Hebrew words and includes proper names. These words are keyed to the main part of the concordance by **numbers**. As you look in the main part of the concordance, each word has a number on the right side of the phrase that was used in scripture. These numbers are listed in **numerical order** in the section labeled either Hebrew and Chaldee Dictionary or Greek Dictionary of the New Testament. By finding the number of the word that is used in a particular passage you will be able to find that particular Hebrew or Greek word that was used in the original language.

Strong's has an interesting feature in the back section of the book that other concordances do not usually have. There are forty-seven "little" words that are not listed in the main part of the concordance. Words like "and," "the," "that," "theirs," "thou" etc.

What Can A Concordance Do for Us?

A concordance can help you study what a word means if you look up that particular word and study all the passages that contain that word. It can also help you study the different meanings between two words which are Greek synonyms but

are translated as the same English word. A good example is the word “*love*” in Scripture. The English word that is translated “*love*” has many different meaning in the original language. A concordance can help you compare the ways different authors use the same word. Paul uses the word “*faith*” one way and James uses exactly the same word in a different way.

A concordance is also helpful in gathering material for the study of a particular topic. Look up a particular word such as “*horn*” or “*judgment*” in a concordance and read all the passages listed. This is a good way to be able to draw your own conclusions on what the Bible says about a particular topic. Study all the passages that contain the words “*predestination*” and “*foreordained*” and make your own decision. A concordance is also helpful in doing character studies. If you want to know what the Bible says about “*Andrew*,” read all the passages where that name is mentioned. The most common usage for a concordance is when someone cannot remember where a particular passage of scripture is found, but he knows a word or phrase from that passage. A concordance enables the Bible student to look up one or more words and then find the passage.

Topical Bible

One tool that is similar to a concordance is called a topical Bible. There are several kinds of topical Bibles that can be very helpful. One is called Nave’s Topical Bible. A topical Bible categorizes the passages by topics in alphabetical order. For instance, the subject of “heaven” will not only list the scripture references, but they will be written out. A topical Bible will not list all the passages about each topic, but it will give you enough to do a credible job of studying a particular topic.

Bible Dictionaries and Encyclopedias

An English word dictionary is good to have when studying the Bible and reading commentaries especially if your vocabulary is lacking. Bible dictionaries and encyclopedias are both good resources to have. The Zondervan Pictorial Encyclopedia of the Bible is a five or six volume set that has been recently revised. This set allows you to search for a particular subject alphabetically. The Anchor Bible Dictionary is the best, most recent, and most thorough dictionary on the market. Some dictionaries and encyclopedias are more expensive than others so choose them with care. If you are interested in archeology, historical background, or the culture of a particular place in the Bible, you can find articles that will give information and references to other sources of information. Look for a bibliography at the end of the articles to research the subject further. One other dictionary of significance is the McClintock-Strong series. It is older than the Anchor Bible Dictionary set, but it is very thorough.

Greek Dictionaries for Word Study

There are Greek dictionaries or lexicons available for those who know a little more about the original language. The basic lexicon in this field is called Arndt and Gingrich Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament (Walter Bauer was the original author). This is a Greek-English lexicon of the New Testament. Open an Arndt and Gingrich lexicon to the word “*urinos*” and there is an extensive discussion on the Greek word for “heaven.” There are other Greek lexicons available. Liddell and Scott is one that relates to another place in time as far as the Greek language is concerned. Thayer’s Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament is one that is well known. There are also analytical Greek lexicons which allow you to look in the Greek text to find out what a word means. Another good resource for doing extensive word studies is Kittel’s Theological Dictionary of the New Testament. This is available in a one volume or a multi-volume set.

Hebrew Dictionaries

There are Hebrew lexicons and dictionaries available as well. The best known is called Gesenius. There is also a Hebrew-English lexicon by Brown, Driver, and Briggs. There are analytical Hebrew and Chaldee lexicons for the serious Bible language student.

Bible Atlas

A Bible atlas is worth the money you have to pay for one because a perception of the geography you are reading about gives a better perspective to the text. A good atlas usually has the basic maps as well as a discussion of the archeology and historical and cultural backgrounds of the people during that time period.

Commentaries — a Friend or Foe?

At the appropriate time in your research and exegesis, commentaries can be very helpful, but there is a tendency to use them too early in the process. Commentaries are helpful tools if you follow the rules for using one. **First**, precede the use of a commentary with your own research and thought. **Second**, use several different kinds of commentaries with different viewpoints. **Third**, respect and suspect the commentator's view. There are many benefits from using a commentary:

- They can help determine the proper reading of the text.
- They can supply meanings for the words in the text.
- They can give needed historical and cultural background and summarize the wisdom of the ages.
- They can present an honest presentation of the options in terms of the interpretations.
- They can present the conclusions of a particular person and his reasons for them.
- They can provide possible outlines for teaching and preaching purposes.
- They can show you how different passages fit into the context.

The tools used in intensive Bible study can be a great help

if you are careful to use them in the right way. Remember to use the tools to God's glory.

WHAT COMMANDS ARE BINDING TODAY?

Introduction

The purpose of this chapter is to look at the ways we determine what in the Scriptures applies to us today. What Scriptures are binding today? What is the authority in our lives today? This portion of study will be called “Special Sacred Hermeneutics.” Our goal is to look at the manner in which we determine the **specifics** that God speaks to and requires of us today. Someone might flippantly assert, “Well, the Bible is our authority. It all applies!” That is true to a degree, but it is an over simplification.

The New Testament Is Authoritative

Jesus Has All Authority

Jesus does have all authority. He Himself claimed all authority before He returned to heaven by telling his disciples, “*All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me*” (Matthew 28:18b). The Hebrew writer says, “*In the past God spoke to our forefathers through the prophets at many times and in various ways, but in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son, whom he appointed heir of all things, and through whom he made the universe*” (Hebrews 1:1-2). The Apostle Paul told the Ephesians, “*And God placed all things under his feet and appointed him to be head over everything for the church, which is his body, the fullness of him who fills everything in every way*” (Ephesians 1:22-23). The Apostle

Paul makes it clear that Jesus has all authority and that authority is for the sake of the church.

The New Testament Is Jesus' Authority

These questions arise: Where is Jesus' authority? Is it in His physical makeup? Is it in His muscles? Is that what applies to us today? Jesus' "*all authority*" is in His Word because that Word is the standard for our lives. It is the standard by which we will be judged on the last day. Jesus Himself said, "*There is a judge for the one who rejects me and does not accept my words; that very word which I spoke will condemn him at the last day*" (John 12:48). If you were in one of my classes and I showed you a textbook and said, "Now on the last day of this particular class, you will be tested over **this** textbook." That textbook would be the standard of judgment on how you did in that class. Jesus said the Bible — "my words as they are written in the Scripture" — is indeed the standard of judgment by which you will be judged on the final day.

All Authority Given to Apostles and Prophets

Jesus gave His **all authoritative Word** to the apostles and prophets that were inspired to speak and write the Word. If Jesus' Word is authoritative, someone might say, "Well, that just means the gospels, Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John, because those are the only records of Jesus' actual words." Before Jesus went back to heaven, He prayed in the garden, "*I have revealed you to those whom you gave me out of the world. They were yours; you gave them to me and they have obeyed your word. Now they know that everything you have given me comes from you. For I gave them the words you gave me and they accepted them . . .*" (John 17:6-8a). Jesus was saying that the Word that the Father had given to Him, He was in turn giving it to His apostles. How did the apostles receive His Word? Jesus was not going to be able to speak to them continually in the same way. Before He returned to heaven, He made some promises to His apostles. He said, "*But the Counselor, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my*

name, will teach you all things and will remind you of everything I have said to you” (John 14:26). Even though Jesus was no longer going to be able to speak to His apostles face to face, they would be able to know what He wanted them to say and they would remember the things that He had told them because the Holy Spirit was going to reveal the words of Jesus to them. Jesus told His apostles,

“I have much more to say to you, more than you can now bear. But when he, the Spirit of truth, comes, he will guide you into all truth. He will not speak on his own; he will speak only what he hears, and he will tell you what is yet to come. He will bring glory to me by taking from what is mine and making it known to you” (John 16:12-14).

Jesus promised the apostles that the Spirit would take His words and convey those words to the apostles even though He had gone back to heaven. They would know the words of Jesus and the Spirit would guide them into all truth. This was not the truth concerning non-spiritual matters. It is **the truth** about spiritual matters which Jesus would address Himself through them.

The apostles and prophets were going to do two things with the Words of Jesus given to them through the Holy Spirit; they were going to **speak** and **write** it by the inspiration of the Holy Spirit. Paul, in his writings to the Ephesians, made a very significant statement:

“Surely you have heard about the administration of God’s grace that was given to me for you, that is, the mystery made known to me by revelation, as I have already written briefly. In reading this, then, you will be able to understand my insight into the mystery of Christ, which was not made known to me in other

generations as it has now been revealed by the Spirit to God's holy apostles and prophets. This mystery is that through the gospel the Gentiles are heirs together with Israel, members together of one body, and sharers together in the promise of Christ Jesus" (Ephesians 3:2-6).

Paul said that by reading his letter, readers could understand what had been revealed to him by inspiration from the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit gave Paul, other apostles, and the prophets the words of Jesus. Paul told the Thessalonians, *"He called you to this through our gospel, that you might share in the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ. So then, brothers, stand firm and hold to the teachings we passed on to you, whether by word of mouth or by letter"* (2 Thessalonians 2:14-15). The things that the Spirit revealed to Paul by inspiration are the things that Paul either preached by word of mouth or in the letters that he wrote. Paul's letters are the evidence of his inspiration. By reading the New Testament, all people can understand the words of Jesus.

When Paul was writing to the Corinthians, he said, *"If anybody thinks he is a prophet or spiritually gifted, let him acknowledge that what I am writing to you is the Lord's command"* (1 Corinthians 14:37). The words that Paul was writing were not his own words. They were the Lord's. The Lord Jesus Christ gave the words to the Holy Spirit, the Holy Spirit revealed those words to the Apostle Paul by inspiration, and then Paul wrote those words down for all to read. When we read the New Testament, we are reading the words of Jesus. That is what makes the New Testament our guide — it is **the only authority** for the way we live our lives. Remember what Jesus said in John 12:48, *"... that very word which I spoke will condemn him at the last day."* Jesus' words will be the standard we are judged by in the final day. Jesus' words include much more than just the words he spoke here on this earth. Paul told

Timothy, “*All Scripture is God-breathed . . .*” (2 Timothy 3:16a). It is not just Jesus’ recorded words that will be our judge; it takes the whole New Testament because God inspired it all. God, the Father, is the One who wants His message to be heard by all men. The way He chose to do that was to give His Word to the apostles and prophets by the method we call “**revelation.**”

Revelation is God revealing His word to the apostles and prophets. **Inspiration** is the apostles and prophets writing and speaking the words that they have received by the inspiration of the Holy Spirit. The spoken and written word was passed on to the people who heard the apostles and prophets preach or by reading their written letters. Those letters have been printed and translated so that people in any generation or any country can read the very words that Paul and others spoke by inspiration of the Holy Spirit. Those words are still authoritative in our lives. They are still the words of Jesus Christ. These words will be our judge on the final day because they are infallible, inerrant, and the authoritative words of Jesus.

What Is Binding Today?

Direct Commands

It is important to know what commands are binding on us today. The commands within the New Testament are binding on us today. In this study of hermeneutics we will call these “**direct commands**” or “**express commands.**” These are the imperatives spoken by the Lord or one of the apostles or prophets. Look at the following examples:

Luke 17:3 — “*So watch yourselves. If your brother sins, rebuke him, and if he repents, forgive him.*”

This command was given by Jesus to His disciples. It is a command that still applies today.

Ephesians 5:25 — “*Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her . . .*” This

is a command from the Lord that Paul wrote to the Ephesians, but it is still authoritative today.

Revelation 2:10 — “. . . *Be faithful, even to the point of death, and I will give you the crown of life.*” This command was written by John to the church in Smyrna, but it applies to us as well.

The Dilemma

We need to answer the question: do we know these commands still apply to us today? Those commands were not spoken specifically to us. They were spoken to the people in the churches of Asia, to the church in Ephesus, and to the apostles and disciples to whom Jesus was speaking to at that time. We need to articulate the hermeneutic that permits us to apply those commands today. How can we take these commands and bind them on all people, particularly Christians today?

The Example

The principle of taking a command from the past, spoken in the past to somebody else, and applying it to another time, is something that Jesus and John the Baptist did. John the Baptist said, “. . . *‘It is not lawful for you to have her’*” (Matthew 14:4). John was telling Herod that he could not have a particular woman because the law of Moses that was given to the Jews in the Old Testament said you could not have another man’s wife (cf. Exodus 20:14; Leviticus 20:10). That commandment was written a long time before the time in which John was speaking, and it was written to some people to whom Moses was speaking. John was telling Herod that it still applied to him in that day. John took a command given to some people in the past and applied it to his day to say that it was still authoritative.

Jesus did exactly the same thing in Matthew 15:4. He said, “. . . *‘Honor your father and your mother’* . . .” We recognize this as one of the Ten Commandments (cf. Exodus 20:12) that was written a long time ago. How do we know it applies today? Jesus said it did. Jesus said even though it was written in the

past to someone else in a different time, it still applies to people of His day. In fact, he added the words, “. . . *and ‘Anyone who curses his father and mother must be put to death.’*” Jesus believed it applied to His day though spoken about fifteen hundred years previous.

Inference

In His day Jesus believed that the commands of old applied to the people at that time. Do the commands of Jesus apply to us today even though it is almost two thousand years later? The commands that He spoke and the commands spoken and written through inspiration by His apostles and prophets were given almost two thousand years ago. Jesus said, *“If you love me, you will obey what I command. . . . If you obey my commands, you will remain in my love, just as I have obeyed my Father’s commands and remain in his love”* (John 14:15, 15:10). Some may say Jesus expected only the people to whom He was speaking, the Apostles, to obey His commands. How do we know that these commands apply to us also? Jesus told His apostles, “. . . *‘Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to **obey everything I have commanded you**. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age’*” (Matthew 28:19-20). Once people are in Christ through the process of baptism, they are to be taught to observe **all** of Jesus’ commands. **Inference** (the action of coming to a conclusion from the facts given, Ed.) would demand that new Christians do all that Jesus commanded. An apostle might teach and baptize and then he would teach all the things that Jesus commanded. Jesus commanded that His disciples love Him. He commanded them to follow Him. The people that the disciples taught and baptized were to carry on the command to teach others.

The process of teaching others to *“obey everything I have commanded you”* was meant to be carried on and on into all generations. Therefore, the process continues to this day and

even though Jesus' commands were spoken almost two thousand years ago, they still apply to any and all people of today. Remember that Jesus' words make up the whole of the New Testament. His words are not just the words that He spoke while He was here on this earth. The New Testament as the new covenant is binding on us today for the authority under which we live. The book of the New Testament is not a book that is irrelevant today. It is not a book that no longer applies simply because it was not **spoken** directly to us today.

The Restricting Guidelines

Given Under Another Covenant

It is important to remember that there are some limiting or regulating factors of what is binding on us today. The **first question** to consider is, "Was the command given to someone who lived under a different covenant that is no longer binding on the Christian today?" There are commands given by God in Scripture that were given to those who lived under a different covenant relationship with God than the one that applies to the Christian now. For example, did you know that instrumental music was commanded by God through a prophet in the Mosaic covenant (cf. 2 Chronicles 29:25)? The Jews were commanded to use mechanical instruments of music in their worship under the old covenant — the Mosaic covenant.

We do not live under the Mosaic covenant today. That covenant does not define the kind of relationship we have with God. We do not offer sacrifices. We do not go to the tabernacle or the temple to worship. There is no Levitical priesthood. All of those things were a part of the Mosaic covenant. Instruments of music were strictly a Jewish covenant requirement between God and the Jewish nation, and Jesus nailed that covenant to the cross at Calvary (cf. Colossians 2:14). The commands to build a tabernacle or temple, the commands to offer animal sacrifices, the command to Abraham to offer his son Isaac, and the command to Noah to build an ark are all commands that do

not fit into the covenant relationship of which Christians are a part today. Because of that, these commands are not binding on Christians. They were given to people who did not live under the same covenant that we live in.

Selective Commands

The **second question** that needs to be considered is, “Is the command given to a certain person or group that makes it strictly applicable to that particular person or group and no one else including us today?” Paul told the Colossae brethren, *“After this letter has been read to you, see that it is also read in the church of the Laodiceans and that you in turn read the letter from Laodicea”* (Colossians 4:16). This was a command that was found in the New Testament, but it is not one that applies to us. It does not make sense for us to try to read the letter to the church of the Laodiceans because we do not have it. This was a command that obviously applied to the church in Colosse. There are other commands that were given in this letter to the church at Colosse that are binding on us today, but this is not one of them.

Paul wrote to Timothy and said, *“Do your best to come to me quickly, . . . When you come bring the cloak that I left with Carpus at Troas, and my scrolls, especially the parchments”* (2 Timothy 4:9, 13). This was a New Testament command, but it is not one that applies to us today. It was given to Timothy for that unique situation. These are really simple examples, but there are other things in Scripture which are not as easily discerned as just being able to apply the passage to the initial recipients. These examples illustrate the principle that if a command is given only to one specific group or person for a particular situation, then it does not apply to us today.

Cultural or Custom Only?

The **third question** to consider is, “Is the command in reference to a custom or a cultural item that would not be relevant to us today?” For example, *“Greet one another with a holy kiss. . . .”* (Romans 16:16). That was a command, but it

was a command that applied to the cultural way of greeting close friends. That specific command does not necessarily apply to the way it must be done in every culture today. Giving a greeting to close friends might be a handshake, a bow, or a hug. Therefore, does this command in Romans tell us that we should kiss only, and leave off these other methods of greeting one another warmly? No, the kiss was a **cultural way** of expressing a principle.

Jesus told the apostles, *“Now that I, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also should wash one another’s feet”* (John 13:14). This was a command that applied to the cultural way of showing brotherly love and hospitality. It was a particularly good method to use because of the dusty roads and open sandals that they wore. There was a real need for washing feet. Not only was it a part of their culture, it was also a way of showing hospitality and love. Don't, however, dismiss a command in Scripture too quickly just on the basis of it being culturally and not unilaterally binding on us.

Be sure to study any cultural command in the New Testament and look for the general command or principle from God that would apply to every day. The general command/principle behind *“Greet one another with a holy kiss”* (Romans 16:16a) is that brethren should show their love to each other whenever they meet. The principle behind foot washing is that brethren should be humble before each other. Any cultural way of showing this today is binding on us. The specific example of washing one another’s feet is not the binding command, but the principle of humbleness will always be binding.

Other Revelation on the Matter?

Another thing to consider when looking at commands in Scripture is whether there is **another** command that limits or clarifies the command that is being considered. Paul told the Roman Christians, *“Everyone must submit himself to the governing authorities, for there is no authority except that which God has established. The authorities that exist have been established by God”* (Romans 13:1). This command did not

mean that the Roman Christians had to be in submission to the governmental authorities **in all cases**. Peter's command in the book of Acts tells all Christians, "*We must obey God rather than men!*" (Acts 5:29b). When government's demands clearly conflict with biblical authority, we are not obligated to obey Romans 13:1 even though it is a command. Jesus was accused of violating the Sabbath regulations, but He said those commands were to be tempered by human need — the need for healing or the need for food (cf. Matthew 12:1-4).

Conclusion

Where does that leave us today? Where does that take us? What is binding on us today? In a general way we can say that if Jesus or His inspired apostles or prophets gave the command in the New Testament to the people of God as recorded, it is binding on us today unless it might be ruled out by one of these regulating or limiting principles: (1) It was spoken to people under a different covenant; (2) It was spoken to an individual or a church only in their situation, and obviously not applicable to us today; (3) It was simply a cultural way of that culture expressing how a principle was to be carried out; (4) It can be narrowed in application by another command in Scripture or limited by another command in Scripture which would say, "This is the way you do it under certain circumstances."

Even under these regulating or limiting circumstances, there are often general commands or principles behind the specific that can be and should be obeyed. Approach the commands of Scripture very carefully. Assume from the outset that they do apply, and then if there is a limiting factor, we can allow ourselves to be excused from the command. Be very careful about dismissing commands that appear to be cultural. We want to do what God wants. We want to obey what is binding on us today in terms of commands. Study the Scripture to know exactly what God says for you to do and be submissive to His will for that is what we will be judged by on the final day.

DISCUSSION

1. What is the authority in our lives today and why is it?
2. Can men, today, read and understand the Bible alike concerning how one receives salvation? If yes, how do you know?
3. Commands in the Bible were not spoken directly to us, so how do we bind these commands on all people today, especially Christians?
4. Do Christians submit to governmental authorities always? If yes, why? If no, why?

BIBLICAL EXAMPLES AS PRECEDENTS

Introduction

Hopefully, it is the desire of each Bible student to do exactly what pleases God. The only way to find out what does please God is to study the Bible. This is especially true of the instructions given to Christians in the New Covenant, which is the New Testament. It is important to know the guidelines to determine what parts of the New Testament should be adhered to. This chapter will look at the examples in Scripture and the ways to decide if those examples are binding on us today.

Preliminary Matters

First, it is important to have a definition for the word **“example”** used in this chapter. An “example” is an attitude or action of anything in Scripture. Any example that is binding on us today is an attitude or action of any Christian and/or church in the New Testament.

Examples Teach by Implication

The word “example” encourages and demands that we imitate or follow the example. An example teaches by implication. The New Testament, which is our covenant for today, employs this particular hermeneutic. Past incidents and attitudes teach by the example they set. For example, Jesus was in conflict with the Jews over a supposed Sabbath violation. To defend Himself, Jesus referred to David’s example of entering

the tabernacle, taking the shewbread, and eating it (cf. 1 Samuel 21). He said that incident served as an example of a principle that was binding on the Sabbath-keepers of His day (cf. Matthew 12:1-8). Something that had happened during Old Testament times was established by Jesus as a precedent for His own day.

At yet another time, when Jesus was in conflict with the Pharisees, He asserted that the original relationship between Adam and Eve served as a teaching example. He used the principle of one man and one woman in marriage for life and applied it to the people of His own day (cf. Matthew 19:4-6). Something that had happened thousands of years previously served as an example of how the people in Jesus' day were to view marriage, divorce, and remarriage. Principles through example that applied in Old Testament times also applied during Jesus' days.

Another excellent example is recorded in Jude. Jude cites a number of Old Testament incidents in which God punished the people who were doing evil and would not repent (cf. Jude 5-7). He said, "*In the very same way . . .*" (Jude 8) the false teachers of his day would be judged and condemned as God condemned the people who were disobedient in the Old Testament. The punishment that was given during the Old Testament served as an example of a principle that was still binding on the people of Jude's day. That principle was that God would judge and condemn the evildoer. This Old Testament principle was used by Jude to apply to the people during the New Testament times.

Examples Are Binding Today

Paul said, "*For everything that was written in the past was written to teach us, so that through endurance and the encouragement of the Scriptures we might have hope*" (Romans 15:4). Just as fathers attempt to teach their children by their own examples and by references to others' examples, so the heavenly Father attempts to teach His children today through the examples that have been recorded in Scripture. These examples are relevant. They teach relevant and binding

principles and practices for Christians today.

The New Testament writers used the Old Testament examples to show that certain principles from the Old Testament were still relevant to the Christians of that day. If those examples and principles were binding on the Christians of Jesus' and Paul's day, then they would still be binding on Christians today. The new revelation and examples recorded in the New Testament are the covenant that is relevant and binding today.

Kinds of Examples

Condemned Examples

Condemned examples are attitudes or actions which are **not** to be imitated by anyone. If these negative examples were followed by Christians today, condemnation would be the result just as it was during the Old and New Testament times. Jude said, *"They serve as an example of those who suffer the punishment of eternal fire"* (Jude 7b). The examples that Jude presented were of people that behaved in unacceptable ways.

Paul used another New Testament example of condemned actions. He told the Corinthians, *"In the following directives I have no praise for you, for your meetings do more harm than good"* (1 Corinthians 11:17). He went on to tell them that the way they were treating the Lord's Supper was unacceptable to the Lord. In other words, Paul was saying that no one should follow the example of the Corinthian brethren in the way that they did the Lord's Supper at this time.

Ananias and Sapphira presented an unacceptable offering of money to the Lord's people by selling a piece of land, giving the money to the apostle, and deceiving them. Peter rebuked them and told them they had *"... not lied to men but to God"* (Acts 5:4). Ananias and Sapphira thought they had deceived the apostles by telling them that the money they had given was all that they had received. Their example was condemned because of their lies.

Approved Examples

The approved examples are patterns, attitudes, and/or behaviors that are acceptable for more than just the original practitioners. These are not necessarily binding on all Christians today. Daniel made a habit of praying on his knees three times a day (cf. Daniel 6:10). That is an excellent example of how to pray. It is worthy of imitation, but it is not binding on Christians today.

Another approved example is the method Paul used in Ephesus of a training school. He used that method to evangelize the whole area (cf. Acts 19:10). The School of Tyrannus was an excellent example of a tool of evangelism and edification, but it is not the only possible method or example we can find in Scripture.

Paul preached until midnight while he was in Troas (cf. Acts 20:7), but that is not an example that most brethren would want their own preacher to follow. This would be an approved example, but it is not one that is binding on Christians today.

Approved and Authoritative Examples

Approved and authoritative examples might also be called **binding examples**. These examples display behaviors and thoughts which Christians today must adopt to become pleasing to God. These examples are **not** optional! Some people will say that there are no examples that are binding on us today meaning that in reality it is only the principle behind the example that is binding. The behavior or the way in which the principle is fulfilled and carried out is the only thing that is binding. This is really a matter of “semantics” (relating to meaning in language, Ed.). Both the principle and the practice of the example are binding in some cases. The emphasis on looking more for the principle than just focusing on the practice itself merits our consideration, but not at the expense of dispensing the specific way in which God desires the principle be put into practice.

There are some specific examples that are approved, authoritative, and binding on Christians today. The Lord’s

Supper “*on the first day of the week*” (Acts 20:7) is a good example of a practice that the New Testament church was involved in which is also binding upon the church today. Another example from the book of Acts is the practice of evangelizing the whole world. The church spread out and evangelized as they went. This is an example that is binding on the church today. The example of disciplining an impenitent and immoral brother is also binding on Christians today (cf. 1 Corinthians 5). The church cannot allow its members to do whatever they want.

Guidelines to Determine When a Example Is Binding

The following questions arise: When are the examples binding and what makes them binding today? On what basis can we definitively say an approved, authoritative example is binding on Christians today? How do we determine when an example is not just approved and when it is approved and authoritative or binding? How do we decide that practicing an example is essential? Is an example binding in all circumstances, or is it simply incidental? Is it just one way of fulfilling God’s will but not the only way? Or, is it limited to being binding in only certain circumstances?

The General Rule of When an Example Is Binding

If the practice or the example was required of all Christians in New Testament times in all circumstances, then it is binding on Christians today. Paul told the Corinthians that Timothy would “ . . . *remind you of my way of life in Christ Jesus, which agrees with what I teach **everywhere in every church***” (1 Corinthians 4:17). Later in the same letter, Paul said, “*As in **all the congregations of the saints**, women should remain silent in the churches. They are not allowed to speak, but must be in submission, as the Law says*” (1 Corinthians 14:33b-34). This was to be practiced in “***all the congregations of the saints.***” Paul also told the Christians in Corinth, “*Nevertheless, each*

one should retain the place in life that the Lord assigned to him and to which God has called him. This is the rule I lay down in all the churches" (1 Corinthians 7:17). Christians today are required to do the same things that all the churches were required to do in the first century. If it was required of all the Christians in all circumstances in the first century, then it is only natural that it would be required of all Christians in all circumstances today.

An Example Is Optional When Specific Conditions Are Present

An example is optional when it applies to specific conditions that applied only in that day. Paul talked to the Corinthians about the fact that he was a single man. He said, "*I wish that all men were as I am*" (1 Corinthians 7:7a), but he qualified his own example by saying, "*Because of the present crisis, I think that it is good for you to remain as you are. Are you married? Do not seek a divorce. Are you unmarried? Do not look for a wife*" (1 Corinthians 7:26-27). The present crisis was persecution and rampant immorality in their particular society. Paul was telling them that his own example and admonition was optional for them. It would also be optional for Christians today, but his advice would be wise for those under similar circumstances.

An Example May Be Optional When It Is Cultural

The infant church in Jerusalem was composed of Christians who had been displaced from distant home settings (cf. Acts 2:5, 41; 4:4). The new converts had come to Jerusalem to celebrate a Jewish feast, but instead they were converted to Christianity. As new Christians there was a necessity for them to stay longer in Jerusalem than they had planned so they could be taught more about the Christian faith. The new converts brought about the necessity of providing for the physical needs of a large group of new Christians. The resident Christians who lived in and around Jerusalem began to sell their possessions and gave the money to the apostles to take care of the financial

needs of those who had only been visiting Jerusalem (cf. Acts 2:44-45; Acts 4:32-37). This method of being together and having everything in common was an approved example, but it would be optional for Christians today.

When Is an Example Binding or When Is It Not Particularly Binding?

An example that reflects a cultural application of a binding principle is not binding on Christians today. Paul encouraged the Corinthian women to continue to wear the veil when they were in public because this was a public sign of their submission to men (cf. 1 Corinthians 11:5-6). Perhaps some of them had misinterpreted their new-found freedom in Christ and citizenship in the kingdom and the blessing of the miraculous spiritual gifts. Some of these women may have thought they were on the same level with men in terms of who was in submission to whom. They were removing their veils in rebellion against the old traditional way of showing submission to men. Paul urged them to retain the **cultural way** of expressing submission in addition to God's way of showing submission — the relatively longer hair that women have in relation to men in a culture. That was called the “natural covering” (cf. 1 Corinthians 11:14-15).

The point is that **if there are similar customs in our society today**, then the veil becomes binding. There are certain societies in our world today where the veil is still worn by women to show their submission to men, and in those societies the veil should still be worn. However, the veil is not used to show submission in the American culture, and so, therefore, it is not binding on American Christians. The Christian woman is to follow the principle that best expresses submission by the culture in which she lives.

There is an exhortation given by Paul to the Christians in Rome, Corinth, and Thessalonica, “*Greet one another with a holy kiss. . . . Greet all the brothers with a holy kiss*” (Romans 16:16a; 1 Corinthians 16:20b; 1 Thessalonians 5:26). Even though this is in the form of a command, it also implies the

existence of a certain cultural practice in the early church. Apparently, the Greeks practiced this method of greeting in many parts of the Roman world and among the Jews also. This cultural way of showing affection among brethren is not binding on us today, but the principle of showing affection is. The ways in which the American culture expresses the principle of showing affection are hugs, smiles, handshakes, and words of affection. Other cultures may still use the kiss and others bow before each other. The principle is to show affection to one another.

Another cultural example is seen in foot-washing. After Jesus washed His apostles' feet, He encouraged them to wash one another's feet as a response to His example. Jesus was the Master who humbled Himself by washing His servants' feet. The principle that is shown through this example is the principle of humble service to other people. The manner which Jesus used to show this example was cultural. Christians today need to find a parallel cultural application of that principle and use it in their Christian lives. The action of foot-washing itself is not binding, but the principle of humble service must be expressed in the Christian's life.

When Is an Example Always Binding?

A Parallel Cultural Practice

When there is a parallel situation today with exactly the same cultural applications of the underlying principles, then the example is always binding. If the traditional way of showing submission to men is for a woman to wear a veil today, then Christians should follow that example.

A cultural and parallel practice

When the example or the application has nothing to do with culture, but the situation is parallel today, then the example is always binding. Such an example is Jesus' exhortation to the rich young man. He told the rich young man to sell all that he had, give it to the poor, and follow Jesus. The point is that if

money has become a god to us — if we cannot part with it and it stands between us and salvation — the solution is to do exactly what the rich young ruler should have done. If our possessions or money hinders us from following Jesus, we should give it to the poor. This example should not be dismissed as a one-time example. The example of sharing our goods and selling things to share with those in need (cf. Acts 2:4) is an example that would be binding in similar circumstances today.

A cultural practice of ethics and worship

When the example or practice has nothing to do with culture and reflects a binding principle of Christian ethics or worship, then the example is always binding. We need to look for the command or the principle behind the example or the practice. It may be stated simply, or it may be implied. For example, the apostles disobeyed the ruling authorities when the ruling authorities tried to forbid their preaching of Jesus. The example is that they continued to preach Jesus, but there is a command behind the example. Peter said, *“We must obey God rather than men”* (Acts 5:29).

Baptism was not a cultural, an incidental, or an individualistic example in the New Testament, because behind all the examples of people being baptized into Christ, there are specific commands (cf. Acts 2:38; Acts 22:16). The commands behind the example of being baptized strongly imply that baptism is binding on us today.

The partaking of the Lord’s Supper upon the first day of the week is seen as an example in Acts 20:1-7 and 1 Corinthians 11:17ff. There is not a specific command worded to say that we should partake of the Lord’s Supper every first day of the week, but there is an implied command. Jesus said, “. . . *This is my body given for you; do this in remembrance of me. . . . This cup is the new covenant in my blood, which is poured out for you*” (Luke 22:19-20). Then when Paul was writing to the Corinthians, he quoted Jesus, “. . . *‘This cup is the new covenant in my blood: do this, whenever you drink it, in remembrance of me.’ For whenever you eat this bread and*

drink this cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until he comes" (1 Corinthians 11:25-26). The examples in Acts 20 and 1 Corinthians 11 and 16 imply that the command was for every Sunday. When the saints met on the first day of the week they were to remember Jesus' death, burial, and resurrection until He returned.

Long Term Reasons

When an example has long-term reasons given for its keeping, then the example is binding for all times. If the reasons given in the text for following the example have long term consequences rather than cultural or short term consequences, then the example will be binding in all times. The reason Paul told the Corinthians that women needed to keep silent in the assemblies was "*as the Law says*" (1 Corinthians 14: 34). Paul was referring to the Law of Moses implying that this practice was not just a cultural matter in Corinth. When Paul wrote to Timothy concerning the woman's role in the church, he said, "*A woman should learn in quietness and full submission. I do not permit a woman to teach or to have authority over a man; she must be silent. For Adam was formed first, then Eve. And Adam was not the one deceived; it was the woman who was deceived and became a sinner*" (1 Timothy 2:11-14). Paul's reasoning for a woman remaining silent in the assemblies went as far back in history as the Garden of Eden. The role of submission for a woman is long-standing, age-lasting, and earth-lasting.

A Theological Principle Is Imbedded in the Practice

When the example cannot be separated from the theological principle which lies in the example, the example is binding for all time. In other words, if there is no other way to follow the principle or carry it out except the pattern that is revealed in Scripture. The elements of the Lord's Supper strongly suggest a connection between the unleavened bread and the meaning of the principle. Only unleavened bread is used because of the representation it has to the body of Jesus. Only the fruit of the

vine is used in the Lord's Supper because of the representation it has to the blood of Jesus. These "core" elements cannot be substituted for steak and ice cream or coke and water. Their usage is tied to the theological principle that is involved.

The theological principle behind the mode of baptism implies that the examples of baptism will always be binding. Paul reminded the Roman Christians, *"But thanks be to God that, though you used to be slaves to sin, you wholeheartedly obey the **form** of teaching to which you were entrusted. You have been set free from sin and have become slaves to righteousness"* (Romans 6:17-18). The teaching which they obeyed in "**form**" was the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus. The manner in which they obeyed was baptism or immersion in water. Their obedience could only be seen through their immersion into water. Paul said, *"Or don't you know that all of us who were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? We were therefore buried with him through baptism into death in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, we too may live a new life"* (Romans 6:3-4). Sprinkling or pouring water cannot possibly convey the same "**form**" of teaching that immersion into water does. When the example cannot be separated from the theological principle behind the example, then the example is always binding on Christians today.

Conclusion

What can we say or add to or take away from the biblical examples when considering what is binding on us today? In principle, the answer is nothing. Read the following scriptures:

"Do not add to what I command you and do not subtract from it, but keep the commands of the Lord your God that I give you" (Deuteronomy 4:2).

"Do not add to his words, or he will rebuke you and prove you a liar" (Proverbs 30:6).

These scriptures say not to add to or take away from the words of the Bible. With all the extenuating (lessening the seriousness of a situation, Ed.) circumstances that have been considered, we do not intend to violate the sacredness of the Scripture's commands or examples. There are some guidelines for deciding whether a New Testament example is binding on us today. Please take care when you read the Bible. Ask yourself, "Does this example apply to us today?" Do not simply dismiss it. Do not push it aside, but ask yourself, "Is this a cultural example? Are there other extenuating circumstances that make it non-binding on me today, or is it really binding on me today?" God bless you in your study of His word.

DISCUSSION

1. The Lord's supper, an implied command, is to be taken every first day of the week. Some people are teaching that we can take it any day of the week or as we wish, monthly, quarterly or yearly? Is this logical, or Biblically based? How would you teach them?
2. In reference to baptism, how could you prove to another person that this is necessary for salvation and to have a relationship with God and other Christians. (Do not just throw out a bunch of Scriptures or opinions, prove it logically using God's word).
3. Concerning the woman's role in the church, due to our culture and the times we live in, are women now allowed to take a leadership role in the worship service, such as song leading, waiting on the table, public reading in worship service, or teaching an adult mixed class?

THE SILENCE OF SCRIPTURE

Introduction

There is an apparent inconsistency which causes a dilemma in the interpretation of scriptures. In 1809 Thomas Campbell, a transplanted Presbyterian preacher from Scotland and Ireland to America, stated the following: “That rule (which we must follow) is this: Where the Scriptures speak, we speak; and where the Scriptures are silent, we are silent.” Perhaps he was trying to state a part of his hermeneutic, which after all sounds a lot like 1 Peter 4:11a, *“If anyone speaks, he should do it as one speaking the very words of God.”* or Romans 12:6, *“... If a man’s gift is prophesying, let him use it in proportion to his faith.”* Certainly Thomas Campbell’s attempt to articulate a major tenet of good hermeneutics is to be commended, but, unfortunately, it is too simplified. If it is applied unilaterally, it does not always work! For instance, the Bible says little about the method of going into all the world and preaching the gospel (cf. Matthew 28:19), but we usually say a lot about it and feel we are allowed to do that. We assert that the person can go by train, plane or boat. So, we do speak where the Bible is silent. We have concluded that silence in this case permits the freedom of speech and action. On the other hand, the Bible is silent in specifically permitting polygamy, but we believe silence forbids that practice.

Our task is to determine where to draw the lines and on what basis do we draw the lines regarding when silence of Scripture permits and when silence of Scripture forbids. This

point of silence is often the center of different interpretations. One person or group will contend that silence prohibits while the other argues for freedom in the same cases. It is an obvious difference in hermeneutical approach. Hopefully this lesson will shed some light of consistency upon this matter. I use the word **consistency** because usually both points of view apply both rules of silence—prohibition in some cases and allowance in some cases. I do not find that anyone unilaterally prohibits when Scripture is silent, and I do not find that they unilaterally permit when Scripture is silent. If that is the case, we need to make a concerted effort to discover when it is that Scripture does prohibit and when it does allow.

Authority Pattern Diagrams

This chapter is going to begin by talking about “**Authority Pattern Diagrams.**” J.D. Thomas in his book, We Be Brethren, uses these valuable tools also. These diagrams will help us see the implications of the silence of Scripture.

Definitions: Generic, Specific, and Optional

There are three terms that need to be defined before we begin. **First**, the word “**generic**” applies to something that is an authorized, and therefore binding, attitude or practice given by God as a **general requirement**. It has no specification inherently in it with instructions on how the practice is to be done. It gives a general exhortation, but does not tell specifically how to carry it out. **Second**, the word “**specific**” refers to an attitude or practice that includes certain ways of carrying out or accomplishing the generic. The **generic** is general; the **specific** has clearly defined ways to carry out the practice. The word “**optional**” will refer to areas where the scriptures are silent and contain no information. There are two kinds of specifics: **required** and **optional**.

Illustrations of the Terms: Generic and Specific

God spoke to Noah to give him instructions concerning how to build the ark (cf. Genesis 6:11-22). God said, “Noah, build an ark.” Biblically, that would be considered a command from God. Not only did God tell Noah to build an ark, He gave him specific instructions concerning how to build the ark. God said to build the ark out of gopher wood, to put pitch on the inside and on the outside, and to make one window and one door. In Noah’s case, God gave a generic command that contained required and specific instructions on how to carry out the generic command. Both the generic and the specific were required.

Diagram One:

Generic and Specifics Required of Noah “Build an Ark” (Required)

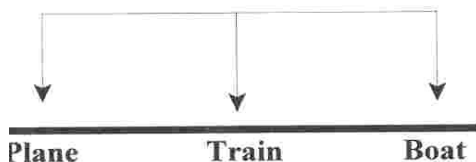
Required Specifics



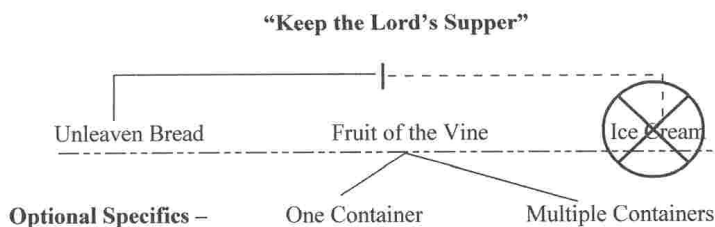
A **required specific** means that the scriptures specified and authorized the action and it had to be done that way. It was an authorized command or example. An **optional specific** means that the scriptures were silent on a particular matter, which means it was left up to the individual person or church as to how the **generic** was to be carried out. For example, another **generic** is, “. . . *Go into all the world . . .* ” (Mark 16:15). After the **generic command** “*Go into all the world,*” God gave some required specifics. Jesus told the apostles, “*Go into all the world **and** preach the good news to all creation.*” “*Preach the good news*” is a **required specific** that follows a **required generic**.

Diagram Two:**Generic (Required)****“Go into all the world”****Required Specific****“Preach the Gospel”**

Jesus told his apostles where to go and what to do, but He did not tell them how they needed to do this. The **optional specifics** to this command are how to go — we can go by plane, train, or boat — that is optional.

Diagram Three:**Generic (Required)****“Go Into All the World”****Optional Specific****Law of Exclusion**

One more important aspect of these diagrams is that if there is a **required specific**, that specification necessarily infers the **exclusion** of other specifics in the same category which are not allowed elsewhere in Scripture. Of course, if they are permitted somewhere else in Scripture, then they become **required specifics** also.

Diagram Four:

The **generic** that is required is, “Keep the Lord’s Supper.” In His instructions to the apostles, Jesus gave them the **required specifics** of using “*unleavened bread*” and “*fruit of the vine*” when they kept the Lord’s Supper. Notice in Diagram Four, I have added other implements that the scriptures are silent about. The scriptures do not say anything about using ice cream and cake so I have marked that out. The problem with using ice cream and cake is that it is in the same specific category as the unleavened bread and fruit of the vine. When a **specific** is stated and required in one particular category, then that **specific** excludes anything else in that category. Look at the **optional specifics** in Diagram Four. There are no **specifics** concerning the fruit of the vine and how it should be served. The Scriptures are silent on this matter so it is **optional** what kind of container to use to distribute the juice. We can use one cup or multiple cups because that is a separate category from the unleavened bread and the fruit of the vine.

When Silence Permits

The extremists in this area say anything not commanded in Scripture is, therefore, allowed because the Scripture does not specifically condemn that which is not commanded. However, to speak about freedoms where the Bible does not forbid is to speak where the Bible is silent, and that is the very charge that is made against the one who wants the silence of Scripture to forbid in certain cases. There is, therefore, inconsistency in the argument that silence always permits. Recall the authority diagrams — they indicate that in some cases silence permits the freedom of several possibilities. Those are the **optional specifics**.

Consider some specifics example to illustrate the fact that silence permits. The Great Commission commands Christians to go into all the world, but it does not specify the method of going or even the particular places to go. Without specifics on

this matter, we must make wise and careful choices in order to accomplish the **generic command**. In this case, the silence of the scriptures permits us to do certain things. There are examples in Scripture of how some people in the first century traveled—by foot or on boat—but those methods of movement are not restrictive in today’s situation. There are also examples of preaching in synagogues, by the riverside, from house to house, in the marketplace, and on top of a hill. These, too, give some direction and some insight, but do not exclude other places today like tent meetings, on television, radio, evangelistic meetings, on street corners and through the printed page. In other words, silence permits certain methodology not specifically stated in Scripture.

Another example comes from James 1:27, *“Religion that God our Father accepts as pure and faultless is this: to look after orphans and widows in their distress and to keep oneself from being polluted by the world.”* How is that to be done? How is that to be carried out? Families are encouraged to look out for their own, but widows without family or funds to care for themselves are to be cared for by the church (cf. 1 Timothy 5: 3-16). Orphans would be in the same category, but there is no specified method of taking care of them in Scripture. Churches through the years have used several methods, such as foster care or adoption, and the institutional home. One may be generally better than others, but all are allowed because of the silence of Scripture.

Another example is in Galatians 6:10, when Paul said, *“Therefore, as we have opportunity, let us do good to all people, especially to those who belong to the family of believers.”* That command leaves the door wide open as to the **optional specifics** of how to help people. How could Scripture give a comprehensive list of how we are to do good? It would take another whole book! Therefore, I am free to mow my neighbor’s lawn while he is on vacation, and I may take food to a brother or sister whose loved one has died. I may give some financial aid or advice to whomever needs it, Christian or non-

Christian. All of these, and a host of other good deeds, are allowed. Why? Because of the silence of Scripture.

When Silence Forbids

The Law of Inclusion

Sometimes the silence of Scripture does forbid rather than permit. The Law of Inclusion is a command in Scripture which only authorizes what is **included** in the command. In other words, what is not included is excluded from being a part of it or being authorized by the command. The authority for having the right to do something other than that which is specifically authorized must be found elsewhere in Scripture. Look back at the **authority pattern diagrams**. If **required specifics** are commanded by Scripture, other specifics in that same category are not included, and therefore are excluded, unless they are authorized elsewhere in Scripture. Remember the example of the ice cream and cake.

The Scriptural Principle

Notice the scriptural principles given in the Old Testament:

“Do not add to what I command you and do not subtract from it, but keep the commands of the LORD your God that I give you” (Deuteronomy 4:2).

“See that you do all I command you; do not add to it or take away from it” (Deuteronomy 12:32).

“Do not add to his words, or he will rebuke you and prove you a liar” (Proverbs 30:6).

The scriptural principle as it is stated is “Do not add to or take away from God’s commands.” Any unauthorized addition is considered a lie, an untruth, and is not authorized by Scripture. There are Old Testament examples of behavior that are right because of God’s commands, but adding to these

behaviors is excluded because of silence of the Scripture. Notice the following examples:

Example: Sexual Relationships

In the Garden of Eden the Lord announced and established the monogamous relationship in marriage (cf. Genesis 2:15-25). The monogamous relationship is commanded and exemplified, and that is therefore, the **authoritative pattern**. Polygamy and homosexuality are not included in **the pattern**. Even though polygamy and homosexuality are not specifically forbidden, we understand that they are forbidden because of the silence of Scripture. Polygamy, homosexuality, and monogamy are in the same category of kinds of sexual relationships. Since monogamy is the **authorized pattern** for a scriptural sexual relationship, then all other relationships in the same category must be excluded. All other relationships besides monogamy are wrong — the silence of the Scripture forbids them.

Example: Noah

When God told Noah to build an ark, He gave Noah **specific instructions**: *“Make yourself an ark of gopherwood; make rooms in the ark, and cover it inside and outside with pitch. And this is how you shall make it: The length of the ark shall be three hundred cubits, its width fifty cubits, and its height thirty cubits”* (Genesis 6:14-15, NKJV). (Since Moses, who wrote Genesis, was educated in Egypt it’s possible he used the Egyptian cubit of approximately 20.5 inches to indicate the size of the ark). Different versions state different kinds of wood to be used because the Hebrew for that particular word is uncertain. God stated a **specific** kind of wood so the command in Scripture only authorizes that **specific** kind of wood. If Noah had used any other kind of wood that would have been disobeying God. All other kinds of wood would have been unauthorized and excluded because **silence forbids**.

Example: Moses

While Moses was on Mount Sinai, God gave him instructions on how to build the tabernacle. God said, “. . . have them make a sanctuary for me, and I will dwell among them. Make this tabernacle and all its furnishings exactly like the pattern I will show you. . . . See that you make them according to the pattern shown you on the mountain” (Exodus 25:8, 40). In the New Testament the writer of Hebrews said, “*They serve at a sanctuary that is a **copy and shadow** of what is in heaven. This is why Moses was **warned** when he was about to build the tabernacle: ‘See to it that you make everything according to the pattern shown you on the mountain’*” (Hebrew 8:5). The tabernacle could not have been build “**according to the pattern**” if Moses had allowed extras in the same category. One of the reasons that God wanted the tabernacle built according to a **specific pattern** was probably because the tabernacle was to serve as a type (“*copy and a shadow*”) of the church and of heaven (cf. Hebrews 8:5; 9:23). If the pattern was distorted, then the Jewish perception of the realities that were to follow would be also distorted. God wanted the tabernacle built a **specific** way for a very good reason. His silence forbade deviation. God was silent on the deviation, but that still excludes them. He did not say, “Do **not** do it this way or that way.” All He had to do was say, “Do it **this way**” and that **excludes** everything else in the same category.

Example: Jeremiah

Through Jeremiah God said,

“The people of Judah have done evil in my eyes, declares the LORD. They have set up their detestable idols in the house that bears my Name and have defiled it. They have built the high places of Topheth in the Valley of Ben Hinnom to burn their sons and

daughters in the fire — something I did not command, nor did it enter my mind” (Jeremiah 7:30-31).

The Lord condemned the idolatry of His people and the practice of burning their own children during Jeremiah’s day even though in the original giving of the law He had not specifically condemned burning their children. He expected them to understand the implications of forbidden things like burning children as sacrifices even though He had been silent about that. Burning a child should have been understood as forbidden on the basis of silence. The people of Judah had added specifics that were not **“optionals”** in a category of commands that God had given in the Law of Moses.

Example: Uzziah

The great king of Judah, Uzziah, became very proud. He decided that he was quite capable of carrying out the duties of a priest and offering incense in the Temple (cf. 2 Chronicles 26:16 - 23). The priest, Azariah, said to him, *“It is not right for you, Uzziah, to burn incense to the LORD. That is for the priests, the descendants of Aaron, who have been consecrated to burn incense. Leave the sanctuary, for you have been unfaithful; and you will not be honored by the LORD God”* (2 Chronicles 26:18b). In other words, it had been specifically stated in the Law that the Levitical priests were to do this job. The silence of Scripture did not specifically forbid a king to offer incense, but Uzziah was condemned because he failed to assume exclusion of all others, except the priests, based on silence.

Conclusion to Old Testament Examples

The command God gave to Moses in Numbers is a good conclusion. God told His children that adding specifics of their own choosing as **“optional specifics”** was *“going after the lusts of your own hearts and eyes.”* We do not live under the old covenant, but these are good examples of the principle of silence — silence forbids in certain cases.

*“The Lord said to Moses, ‘Speak to the Israelites and say to them: Throughout the generations to come you are to make tassels on the corners of your garments, with a blue cord on each tassel. You will have these tassels to look at and so you will remember all the commands of the LORD, that you may obey them and not prostitute yourselves by **going after the lusts of your own hearts and eyes**. Then you will remember to obey all my commands and will be consecrated to your God. I am the LORD your God, who brought you out of Egypt to be your God. I am the LORD your God’” (Numbers 15:37-41).*

New Testament Examples

There are examples of the principles of silence also in the New Testament.

Example: Temptations of Jesus

During one of the temptations of Jesus, the devil took Jesus to the highest point of the temple and quoted Psalm 91:11-12 to Him: “. . . ‘*He will command his angels concerning you, and they will lift you up in their hands, so that you will not strike your foot against a stone.*’” Jesus answered him, “*It is also written: ‘Do not put the Lord your God to the test’*” (Matthew 4:6-7). Jesus responded with Scripture also by saying that the silence of that text in certain circumstances is further defined by what is **specifically stated** in another text: “*Do not test the LORD your God . . .*” (Deuteronomy 6:16). In other words, the silence of one passage may be filled in by a statement from another passage. If the silence of one passage is not filled in by a statement from another passage, then we do the same thing we have been doing in the Old Testament examples.

The commands and examples of Scripture state that sinful, believing, and penitent adults are to be baptized for the remission of sins (cf. Matthew 28:19; Acts 2:38). There is no

specific prohibiting infants being immersed or sprinkled or poured with water. However, the command only authorizes what it includes — adults. It does not include infants, therefore, it does not authorize infants being baptized in any mode since adult and infant immersion are in the same **specific** category. Silence forbids — only adult immersions are allowed and infant baptisms are excluded. That makes infant baptism wrong on the basis of silence of the Scripture.

Example: Worship of Mary.

The New Testament is silent on the worship of or prayers offered to Mary, but it is **specific** in its exhortation to worship and serve and pray to God the Father (cf. Matthew 4:10; John 4:24; Hebrews 12:28). Worshiping Mary and worshiping God would be in the same category, so praying and worshiping Mary is excluded on the basis of silence.

Example: Church Government

The New Testament states that elders are to be appointed according to the qualifications given in the scriptures (cf. Acts 14:23; 1 Timothy 3:1-7; Titus 1:5-9). These men are to be the leaders of the local congregations. There is no sanction for any other kind of government within the body of Christ. The silence of the Scripture forbids any centralized, pyramid-type of government that is found in so much of the religious world today. Any other kind of government would be excluded on the basis of silence.

Example: Instruments in Worship

Mechanical instruments of music may be considered under this approach. Christians are commanded to sing and “pluck the heart strings” (cf. Ephesians 5:19; Colossians 3:16). The music that is to be made by Christians in order to worship God and edify other Christians is singing as an expression of love from the heart toward God and other Christians. If there is to be an instrument involved, it is the vocal cords, the spirit, and the

heart. There is no mention in the new covenant regulations of mechanical instruments. Mechanical instruments fit into the same category as “. . . *Sing and make music in your heart to the Lord*” (Ephesians 5:19b). This verse tell Christians the kind of instrument that is to be used to praise God in our music. Since this is the only kind of music the New Testament authorizes and it is silent concerning mechanical instruments, then mechanical instruments are excluded on the basis of silence as a pleasing way to worship God.

Conclusion

A good way to conclude this chapter is by reading Revelation 22:18-19:

“I warn everyone who hears the words of the prophecy of this book: If anyone adds anything to them, God will add to him the plagues described in this book. And if anyone takes words away from this book of prophecy, God will take away from him his share in the tree of life and in the holy city, which are described in this book.”

The writer of the book of Revelation said we were not to add to or take away from that book, and surely, we are not allowed to add or take away from any other book in the Bible. That is a necessary inference. Paul stated this same principle when he told the Corinthians, “*Do not go beyond what is written*” (1 Corinthians 4:6). Paul was saying, “This is what has been written; here are the specifics and you are not allowed to go beyond that and to say it is all right.” A consistent and trained biblical interpreter knows when silence permits and when silence excludes. Christians need to understand these principles or we will continue to disagree and be split religiously because of misapplying the silence of Scripture.

May God bless your study and your interpretation of the areas of Scripture where God does not speak — the silence of Scripture.

DISCUSSION

1. What is the Law of Exclusion and how do we use this?
2. How does the Law of Inclusion work? Give some examples.
3. Why is instrumental music in worship wrong and how do we prove it using Scripture?
4. How do we know that the first day of the week is the only time that we may partake of the Lord's supper?

DIFFERENCES IN INTERPRETATIONS OF SCRIPTURE

Introduction

This study of Biblical Interpretation began by proving that all men can and should understand the Bible alike. In subsequent chapters, guidelines were given to be used in a proper interpretation of the scriptures. That ought to be the end of this topic, but it is not. The fact of the matter is that there are disagreements among men in interpreting the scriptures. These disagreements come from lack of knowledge, preconceived ideas, and prejudices that cause men to make the wrong interpretation. Sometimes the disagreement may come from poor hermeneutical processes. The Christian religious world has been divided because of disagreements over interpretations of the scripture. There are a multitude of different beliefs based on different interpretations. This last chapter is going to address the phenomena of differences in interpretations in a more specific way.

Differences In Interpretation

Agreement on Essentials

Everyone who professes to believe in Jesus as the Son of God and the Bible as the Word of God needs to agree on the **essentials**. There are some doctrines in the Christian faith that

must be believed and accepted if there is to be a relationship with God and with fellow believers. God does not allow a person to believe and practice anything he wishes and still be in a saved relationship with Him. Christians are “*justified through faith*” (cf. Romans 10:10; Galatians 2:16). That “*faith*” is a trust in and an obedience of God’s revealed Word. If a person can believe and practice anything he wishes, then he is not believing in God or His Word. In such cases, there can be no justification or salvation.

Essentials and Non-Essentials

What are the **essentials** that everyone must believe and accept in order to be in a relationship with God and with one another? What are the **nonessentials**? It is not easy to determine what are the **essentials** and **nonessentials**, and that may explain why there is such a difference in the lists of essentials and nonessentials. Some doctrines have a list of **essentials** that is too long while others have one that is too short. Some people believe that repentance is not essential to salvation. Others believe that it is. Some believe that if you eat a fellowship meal in the church building that will hinder your salvation. Others find nothing wrong with eating in the building.

A key scripture in this regard is Ephesians 4. Paul instructed the Ephesian Christians concerning the subject of Christian unity by saying: “*Make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace*” (Ephesians 4:3). He gave them four ways to keep that unity and peace. **First**, he told them they needed to adopt loving attitudes toward one another (cf. Ephesians 4:1-2). **Second**, he said they needed to use their God-given gifts to build up the body and the individual Christians in the body (cf. Ephesians 4:7-10). **Third**, he told them to keep themselves pure in all areas of Christian living (cf. Ephesians 4:17-32). **Fourth**, Paul urged the Christians in Ephesus to have the **key essential doctrines** in common (cf. Ephesians 4:4-6). These three verses will be the emphasis of the rest of this study.

Essential Doctrines We Must Hold in Common

*“The is **one body** and **one Spirit**—just as you were called to **one hope** when you were called—**one Lord, one faith, one baptism; one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all**” (Ephesians 4:4-6).*

Paul listed **six essentials** in terms of the doctrines that must be believed in order for a person to be saved. These **six essentials** must be **held as true by all** for there to be a unified relationship with one another.

Number one is the concept of one body (one church). There is one body — not a multiple number of churches.

Number two is the acknowledgment that there is only one Spirit. He inspired the Word of God by which we live and learn. The Spirit lives in the Christian’s heart and helps him to live for Jesus.

Number three is the fact that there is one Lord. Jesus is His name. He is the only King, Master, and Savior. He was deity in the flesh, but He was also humanity to the same degree as any other man. He was our Savior on the cross and was raised from the dead to save all mankind. This is an essential that every man must accept and believe or he cannot have fellowship with God.

Number four is the doctrine that there is one faith. This means that there is one set of doctrines which are from God. This excludes all other revelations. The Scripture uses the terms: *“the faith,” “the truth,”* and *“the gospel”* to refer to the doctrines that bring salvation (cf. 1 Corinthians 16:13; Philippians 1:27; Jude 3; 1 Peter 1:22; Ephesians 4:22). Paul told the Corinthian brethren:

*“Now, brothers, I want to remind you of **the gospel** I preached to you, which you received and on which*

*you have taken your stand. By this **gospel** you are saved, if you hold firmly to the word I preached to you. Otherwise, you have believed in vain. For what I received I passed on to you as of first importance: that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures”* (1 Corinthians 15:1-4).

The death, burial and resurrection of Jesus are the focal points of the truth in the gospel that saves.

Number five is the fact that there is one baptism. This baptism is not sprinkling or pouring. It is immersion only of adults only for the remission of sins and the reception of the Holy Spirit. It means that through this one baptism the Christian is added to the Lord's church by the Lord and Him only (cf. Acts 2:41, 47). No one receives the Holy Spirit before baptism, no one is forgiven, and no one is saved before baptism. Unity in the religious arena depends upon Christians agreeing upon baptism.

Number six is the fact that there is one God and Father. Jehovah God is that one God. There are not a multitude of deities. *El Shaddai* is that one God. He is the loving heavenly Father who created all things, rules all things, and will end all things. One day He will be the Judge of all.

These are the essentials in terms of the doctrines that must be believed in order to be saved and must be practiced by all for there to be a unified relationship with one another. A Christian brother should not be asked to accept anyone as a brother who denies the deity of Jesus, or the essentiality of baptism for salvation, or the concept of one church. Paul said these things are **essentials** that all men must accept. The ecumenical (representing all Christians, Ed.) approach to unity will fail miserably to fulfill the wishes of Jesus as He expressed them in His prayer for unity (cf. John 17). The ecumenical approach allows too much diversity of belief. It does not put enough

emphasis on the **essentials** to accomplish the unity for which Jesus prayed. If the ecumenical approach was right, a Christian could believe anything and have no absolutes at all.

Nonessentials

Christians do not have to agree on the **nonessentials**. This does not mean that we cannot determine what the truth is from Scripture, but the Lord does not require that we all agree in all the nonessentials as revealed in the New Testament. Just as the ecumenical approach is bound to fail, so is any approach that attempts to bind beliefs and practices on other Christians that does not constitute **essentials**. When the list of essentials becomes too long because nonessentials are added, that is when religious groups fracture and divide. The typical line of thought is, “I do not agree with you on . . . (whatever), and since I consider agreement on this issue an essential to our salvation and our fellowship as Christians, then I am going to break off any fellowship with you!” This attitude has resulted in division over and over again. This initially happens when there are too many doctrines on the essentials list. I am not saying that we cannot determine from Scripture what these doctrines mean as far as God is concerned. I am saying that God does not ask or require us to be united in our beliefs on everything that Scripture reveals.

Opinions are the beliefs that cannot be determined as right or wrong by Scripture. We can become divided over matters that are just opinion, but in this study, I am talking about the things that are nonessential to salvation and fellowship doctrines. I am not saying that these nonessential doctrines are not important. Because God gave them in His Word, that makes them important. I am not saying that they cannot be properly discerned and interpreted — they can and should be. We can make this assumption based on the fact that God gave us His Word and He did not give us what we cannot discern. I am persuaded that we will all go to our graves still sinning in our practice of the Christian life from time to time, still imperfectly

practicing certain aspects of Christianity (and that is sin), and still holding positions of belief that are doctrinally wrong. If that is not true — if we must be doctrinally perfect when we die — then no one will be saved. That is what grace is all about. Grace is all about justifying the wicked and the imperfect of all his imperfect practices and beliefs. Paul put it this way to the Roman brethren: “. . . *to the man who does not work but trusts God who justifies the wicked, his faith is credited as righteousness*” (Romans 4:5).

Principles of Interpretation

To help clear up the point of essential agreement and non-essential disagreement, consider the situation in Rome. The Roman church was a mixture of Jewish and Gentile Christians. We know this because of the content of the book and the names in Romans chapter 16. Apparently, they had been quarreling and condemning one another. Paul called upon both parties to quit this kind of action (cf. Romans 14:3-4, 10, 13). He told them to stop passing judgment on each other. The Jews came from a religious background of feasts, Sabbaths, and new moon celebrations. Certain days and foods were very special under the law of Moses. They had been commanded under the Law to keep certain days as sacred and to refrain from eating certain unclean foods. On the other side, the Gentiles came from a radically different background full of mystery cults and idol worship. They also had certain days and foods that were sacred and special.

Paul designated one of these groups the “*strong in faith*” and the other the “*weak in faith.*” The “*strong in faith*” are those whose consciences will allow them to eat any kind of meat. The “*weak*” cannot eat meat, and he does not believe that the other person should eat it either. The “*strong*” believes that all days are the same in the Christian view, but the “*weak*” brother considers some days, perhaps feast days, more sacred than others and wants the stronger brother to agree with him.

Can you see the conflict and how the tensions might grow to the point where people would choose not to speak to one another or even fellowship with one another? Paul does not make it clear whether the “*strong*” are the Jewish or the Gentile brothers, but that does not change the reasoning. The point is that these matters are doctrinal in nature. There is a right view and a wrong view. Paul gives his inspired interpretation: “*As one who is in the Lord Jesus, I am fully convinced that no food is unclean in itself. But if anyone regards something as unclean, then for him it is unclean*” (Romans 14:14). In a parallel passage, Paul wrote to the Corinthians concerning idolatry:

“So then, about eating food sacrificed to idols: We know that an idol is nothing at all in the world and that there is no God but one. For even if there are so-called gods, whether in heaven or on earth (as indeed there are many ‘gods’ and many ‘lords’), yet for us there is but one God, the Father, from whom all things came and for whom we live; and there is but one Lord, Jesus Christ, through whom all things came and through whom we live. But not everyone know this. Some people are still so accustomed to idols that when they eat such food they think of it as having been sacrificed to an idol, and since their conscience is weak, it is defiled” (1 Corinthians 8:4-7).

Paul asserts that the doctrinal position of the “*strong*” brother is right and the doctrinal position of the “*weak*” brother on this matter of foods and days is wrong. Paul gives an inspired view of what is right and wrong. Under these circumstances, when brethren disagree on doctrinal beliefs other than the essentials and both are sincerely dedicated to the Lord, there are some important principles (teachings and admonitions) they we can learn from Romans 14 and 15.

The First Principle: Accept One Another

Paul told the Romans to accept one another and put the burden especially on the “*strong*” brother (the doctrinally correct brother). He said, “*Accept him whose faith is weak, without passing judgment on disputable matters. . . . Accept one another, then, just as Christ accepted you, in order to bring praise to God*” (Romans 14:1, 15:7). They had no right to pass judgment on one another because God had accepted them — they had no right to not accept one whom God had already accepted (cf. Romans 14:1, 3-4, 10, 13).

The Second Principle: Be Convinced About Your Belief

Paul said, “. . . *Each one should be fully convinced in his own mind*” (Romans 14:5). Christians must be willing to study and discover the truth on any matter. If the issue is difficult and many people do not agree, that is no reason to become frustrated and give up the study. Christians have an obligation to try to find the truth. Even when one does not agree with others, he needs to study the issues about which there is a disagreement.

The Third Principle: Keep It to Yourself

Paul said, “*So whatever you believe about these things keep between yourself and God*” (Romans 14:22a). If brethren cannot talk about certain beliefs without causing strife, then they need to keep it to themselves. When brothers disagree the atmosphere can become heated causing both to become defensive and speak about that which is doctrinally and practically right, but to do it in a bad way (cf. Romans 14:16). Paul urged the doctrinally right brother to keep it to himself, then the other person would not have a reason to become defensive and say that is wrong.

**The Fourth Principle:
Appreciate a Brother's Security**

Paul said,

"He who regards one day as special, does so to the Lord. He who eats meat, eats to the Lord, for he gives thanks to God; and he who abstains, does so to the Lord and gives thanks to God. For none of us lives to himself alone and none of us dies to himself alone. If we live, we live to the Lord; and if we die, we die to the Lord. So, whether we live or die, we belong to the Lord" (Romans 14:6-8).

Both parties are sincerely dedicated to the Lord; they love the Lord, and are practicing their beliefs to please the Lord. They were not acting out of selfishness; both were doing it because they believed the Lord desired it of them. God accepted them both as they were.

**The Fifth Principle:
The Lord Is Judge, Not You!**

Paul told the Romans that it was not their responsibility to act as a judge in nonessential matters. Only God can make the judgment whether a brother is in Christ or not. He said:

"For this very reason, Christ died and returned to life so that he might be the Lord of both the dead and the living. You, then, why do you judge your brother? Or why do you look down on your brother? For we will all stand before God's judgment seat. It is written: "'As surely as I live,' says the Lord, 'every knee will bow before me; every tongue will confess to God.'" So then, each of us will give an account of himself to God" (Romans 14:9-12).

God is the only one who can act as the judge in these matters because He is the only one who can judge the attitude

of the person who is involved. A person who is wrong in some nonessential doctrine could have the right attitude and still be in a saved condition. It is also possible for someone who is doctrinally right to have the wrong attitude and be in a lost condition. God is the only one who can judge on the inside (the attitude).

The Sixth Principle:

Forego Your Rights If Necessary

Paul said Christians needed to forego practicing something that was doctrinally right and forego sharing their correct doctrinal position **if** it caused the “*weak brother*” to be influenced into doing something which would violate his conscience and thus condemn him. Paul said:

“Therefore let us stop passing judgment on one another. Instead, make up your mind not to put any stumbling block or obstacle in your brother’s way. . . . But the man who has doubts is condemned if he eats, because his eating is not from faith; and everything that does not come from faith is sin” (Romans 14:13, 23).

If you believe something is right and force that belief on a weak brother who believes it is wrong, and then he practices something which he believes to be wrong because of your influence, then he violates his conscience and he is condemned.

The Seventh Principle:

Put Spiritual Priorities in Order

The kingdom or the church and a Christians’s spiritual life have more importance than total agreement on nonessential doctrines all the time. Paul said, “*For the kingdom of God is not a matter of eating and drinking, but of righteousness, peace and joy in the Holy Spirit*” (Romans 14:17). Jesus stated this same principle about some matters of doctrine being weightier than other matters in Matthew 23:23-24.

The Eighth Principle: Promote Peace and Edification

Paul said, *“Let us therefore make every effort to do what leads to peace and to mutual edification”* (Romans 14:19). Christians need to temper everything they say and do with the questions, “Will this build up or tear someone down? Will this promote peace and unity between us?” If their speech and actions do not build someone up or promote peace and unity, then they need to refrain from saying or doing it.

The Ninth Principle: Please Others in the Lord

Paul said: *“We who are strong ought to bear with the failings of the weak and not to please ourselves. Each of us should please his neighbor for his good, to build him up. For even Christ did not please himself . . .”* (Romans 15:1-3). Christ did not seek to make everyone around him agree with everything He knew was right. He was doctrinally perfect, yet He did not cause everyone to become doctrinally perfect before he would fellowship with them.

The Tenth Principle: Promote Unity

Paul said: *“May the God who gives endurance and encouragement give you a spirit of unity among yourselves as you follow Christ Jesus, so that with one heart and mouth you may glorify the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ”* (Romans 15:5-6). Christians are to treat the other brothers in such a way that it will promote unity. Unity is more important than being able to agree on every nonessential doctrine. Unity itself is an **essential** doctrine because that is what it takes to glorify God and attract and retain people in His church.

Conclusion

The Lord’s church must agree with one another on the **essentials**. These essentials have been outlined from the study

of Ephesians 4:4-6. Christians must agree on these essentials if they are going to be in fellowship with God and one another. They must be willing to study and discuss biblical matters, believing that they can understand the Scriptures and eventually understand them alike. Until that happens, they must refrain from condemning those who are dedicated to the Lord but do not see the **nonessentials** all in the same way. This is the challenge for all Christians.

Read Romans 14 and 15 again carefully. Be able to discern what is an **essential doctrine** of Christ and what is a **nonessential doctrine**. Try to have a balanced view that can say these are the doctrines we must agree on to be in fellowship with one another and these are the nonessentials doctrines that we do not have to agree on; then agree to study and discuss the nonessential doctrines and continue in fellowship with God and one another.

DISCUSSION

1. What brings a person into a saved relationship with God?
2. Do we keep something to ourselves, to keep unity and peace, if we know it is not doctrinally correct? If not, how do we approach it?
3. How do we know the difference between essential and nonessential doctrines of Christ?
4. Must we agree in the essentials? If not, can we have a relationship with God? With each other?
5. Does your attitude make a difference and could it really make a difference in your salvation? Why?

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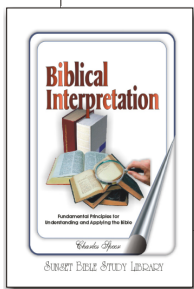
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