

Issues in Interpretation:

Sola Scriptura was a rallying cry for our Protestant forebears... neither Luther nor Calvin ever intended that this principle serve as the means by which individual interpreters might bypass the contributions of the larger interpretive community, either past or present. The Reformers maintained that interpretation of the biblical text is a responsibility not of the individual but of the community of believers gathered. It must be a corporate enterprise.
Rick Lints, *Fabric of Theology*

WCF 1.6: *The whole counsel of God concerning all things necessary for His own glory, man's salvation, faith and life, is either expressly set down in Scripture, or by good and necessary consequence may be deduced from Scripture: unto which nothing at any time is to be added...*

The Question of "Perspicuity" or Clarity:

WCF 1.7- *All things in Scripture are not alike plain in themselves, nor alike clear unto all: yet those things which are necessary to be known, believed, and observed for salvation, are so clearly propounded, and opened in some place of Scripture or other, that not only the learned, but the unlearned, in a due use of the ordinary means, may attain unto a sufficient understanding of them.*

1 Cor. 2:12, 14–15. Now we have received, not the spirit of the world, but the spirit which is of God; that we might know the things that are freely given to us of God... But the natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God: for they are foolishness unto him: neither can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned. But he that is spiritual judgeth all things, yet he himself is judged of no man.

Eph. 1:18. ... the eyes of your understanding being enlightened; that ye may know what is the hope of his calling, and what the riches of the glory of his inheritance in the saints.

See 2 Cor. 4:6.

e.g. Wouldn't it be strange, that as an act of intimacy and self-revelation such as to drive God to communicate to us by incarnational words—that God would then make such words inaccessible. AS if we could blame it on God that we don't study his word as if it were not attainable to know what it says... Satan is cunning that way!

Common Confusions:

Confidence vs. Enlightenment biased "Certainty":

E.g. Illumination vs.

- Empiricism
- Rationalism

Clarity vs. Easy

2Pet. 3:16 *as he does in all his letters when he speaks in them of these matters. There are some things in them that are hard to understand, which the ignorant and unstable twist to their own destruction, as they do the other Scriptures.*

e.g. And so while God has made the scriptures accessible, not in a way that would allow us to be independent of God acting in/with/through the Holy Spirit in communion in/with/through our inter-dependence upon one another...

Thus, our method of interpretation will require humility and reliance upon God acting through the Holy Spirit as then also mediated in/with/through the temple-church of God! Thus....

A Biblical Method Clarified:

1.Role of Holy Spirit: What the Spirit Does and Does not do in Interpretation:

WCF 1.6: *unto which nothing at any time is to be added, whether by new revelations of the Spirit... Nevertheless, we acknowledge the inward illumination of the Spirit of God to be necessary for the saving understanding of such things as are revealed in the Word*

1 Cor. 2:12-14--*Now we have received, not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit who is from God, that we might know the things freely given to us by God, 13 which things we also speak, not in words taught by human wisdom, but*

in those taught by the Spirit, combining spiritual {thoughts} with spiritual {words.} 14 But a natural man does not accept the things of the Spirit of God; for they are foolishness to him, and he cannot understand them, because they are spiritually appraised.

E.g. The Holy Spirit plays a subjective, not objective, role in biblical interpretation. In reconciling our sinful hearts to God, he promotes within us a similar desire to love and serve God as we have to love and serve our natural parents. Further, he particularly gives us the desire to *embrace* and *receive* the things of God. In doing this, he makes us willing to work hard to understand scripture, and willing to embrace the conclusions of our study of scripture.

NOTE: It is always a false dichotomy to pit the “Holy Spirit” filled life and Scripture filled life—why? Because the same spirit that enables us to believe/understand/obey God’s Word is the Spirit that spoke the words of scripture:

2Pet. 1:19 And we have something more sure, the prophetic word, to which you will do well to pay attention as to a lamp shining in a dark place, until the day dawns and the morning star rises in your hearts, 20 knowing this first of all, that no prophecy of Scripture comes from someone’s own interpretation. 21 For no prophecy was ever produced by the will of man, but men spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit.

2.Role of Church: What the Church Does and Does Not Do in Interpretation:

WCF 1.6: unto which nothing at any time is to be added, whether by... or traditions of men. (c.f. 1:10) WCF 1.8, The Old Testament in Hebrew.. and the New Testament in Greek.. being immediately inspired by God, and, by His singular care and providence, kept pure in all ages, are therefore authentic; so as, in all controversies of religion, the Church is finally to appeal unto them.

1 Timothy 3:15, you may know how one ought to behave in the household of god, which is the church of the living God, the pillar and bulwark of the truth.

*2 Tim.2:15, stand firm and hold fast to the **traditions** that you were taught by us, either by word of mouth or by our letter.*

*2Th. 3:6 Now we command you, beloved, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, to keep away from believers who are living in idleness and not according to the **tradition** that they received from us.*

3. The Role of Scripture in Interpreting Scripture:

WCF 1:9 The infallible rule of interpretation of Scripture is the Scripture itself...

The Issue of Redemptive-Historical vs. “Proof-texting” in Interpretation:

WCF1.1 “therefore it pleased God at sundry times and in divers manners to reveal himself and to declare...”

Key—A Covenantal Way of Reading the Scripture vs. proof-texting—

- *There is many “texts” but one context—The redemptive history of God*
- *NT and OT—not a new religion, but a progressive revelation of redemption wherein the Old is developmentally mature in the New... e.g.*
- *We must learn to read the Bible backwards and forwards looking to locate each text into the trajectory or context of the whole of redemptive history and the working out of God’s covenant with Adam ultimately...*
- *Example: We read Acts, not as an isolated event, but in the context of redemptive expectations and trajectories that have long proceeded it, even if awaiting its final consummation in glory.*

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

Theology 1 Study Guide
WCF Chapter 1, Scripture/Interp.

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

The Issue of Christ-Centered Interpretation:

c.f. Emmaus Road: Luke 24: 27 Then beginning with Moses and all the prophets, he interpreted to them the things about himself in all the scriptures.

c.f. Heb. 1:1-3 Heb. 1:1 Long ago God spoke to our ancestors in many and various ways by the prophets, 2 but in these last days he has spoken to us by a Son,

Next Week: WCF 2: Who/What is God?

For Discussion: What are our expectations in Knowing/understanding God?

Mystery is the vital element of Dogmatics. It is true that the term "mystery" in Scripture does not indicate abstract-supernatural truth...; nevertheless, the idea that the believer would be able to understand and comprehend intellectually the revealed mysteries is equally unscriptural. On the contrary, the truth which God has revealed concerning himself in nature and in Scripture far surpasses human conception and comprehension. In that sense Dogmatics is concerned with nothing but mystery, for it does not deal with finite creatures, but from beginning to end raises itself above every creature to the Eternal and Endless One Himself.

Herman Bavinck

Handout: The Role of the Church in Interpretation

I. The Biblical Injunctions/warnings and church responsibility in Confessional Training:

Christ warns against assuming the position of a teacher without due caution,

James 3:1 Not many of you should become teachers, my brothers and sisters, for you know that we who teach will be judged with greater strictness.

Christ tells us to watch carefully lest false teachers bring harm to the church,

2Pet. 2:1-2 But false prophets also arose among the people, just as there will be false teachers among you, who will secretly bring in destructive opinions. They will even deny the Master who bought them--bringing swift destruction on themselves.

Even so, many will follow their licentious ways, and because of these teachers the way of truth will be maligned.

2John 1:10 Do not receive into the house or welcome anyone who comes to you and does not bring this teaching;

Christ commands that those who do teach false doctrine be removed from teaching,

Titus 1:11 they must be silenced, since they are upsetting whole families by teaching for sordid gain what it is not right to teach.

Christ warns us that the last days will be characterized not only by "false teaching" but also a natural affinity for it so as to take all possible precautions against it,

2Tim. 4:3 For the time is coming when people will not put up with sound doctrine, but having itching ears, they will accumulate for themselves teachers to suit their own desires,

1Tim. 4:1 now the Spirit expressly says that in later times some will renounce the faith by paying attention to deceitful spirits and teachings of demons,

Christ warns us that many will want to be teachers who may not be qualified,

1Tim. 1:7 desiring to be teachers of the law, without understanding either what they are saying or the things about which they make assertions.

Christ explicitly commands that those who do teach be teachers of "sound doctrine"

Titus 2:1 But as for you, teach what is consistent with sound doctrine.

Christ commands that teachers are to be measured by the "standards" of sound doctrine,

2Tim. 1:13 Hold to the standard of sound teaching that you have heard from me, in the faith and love that are in Christ Jesus,

Christ intends for the ministry of "teaching" to be passed on through the succession of apostolic faith

2Tim. 2:2 and what you have heard from me through many witnesses entrust to faithful people who will be able to teach others as well.

The teaching ministry of the church is to be performed by those approved as qualified.

1Tim. 3:2 Now a bishop must be above reproach, married only once, temperate, sensible, respectable, hospitable, an apt teacher,

1Tim. 5:17 Let the elders who rule well be considered worthy of double honor, especially those who labor in preaching and teaching;

Christ commands the elders to 'watch over the flock of God' with due diligence and this would include keeping watch over the teaching of the church,

Acts 20:28 Keep watch over yourselves and over all the flock, of which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to shepherd the church of God that he obtained with the blood of his own Son.

Heb. 13:17 Obey your leaders and submit to them, for they are keeping watch over your souls and will give an account. Let them do this with joy and not with sighing--for that would be harmful to you.

A low view of the functions of the ministry will naturally carry with it a low conception of the training necessary for it... A high view of the functions of the ministry on evangelical lines inevitably produces a high conception of the training which is needed to prepare men for the exercise of these high functions... for here we have, of course, an infinitely higher conception-- as merely an enthusiastic Christian eager to do work for Christ... we might as well seek recruits for the ministry among the capable young fellows about town, zeal their highest spiritual attainment.

B. B. Warfield

Three Options for Use of Creeds in Interpretation:

