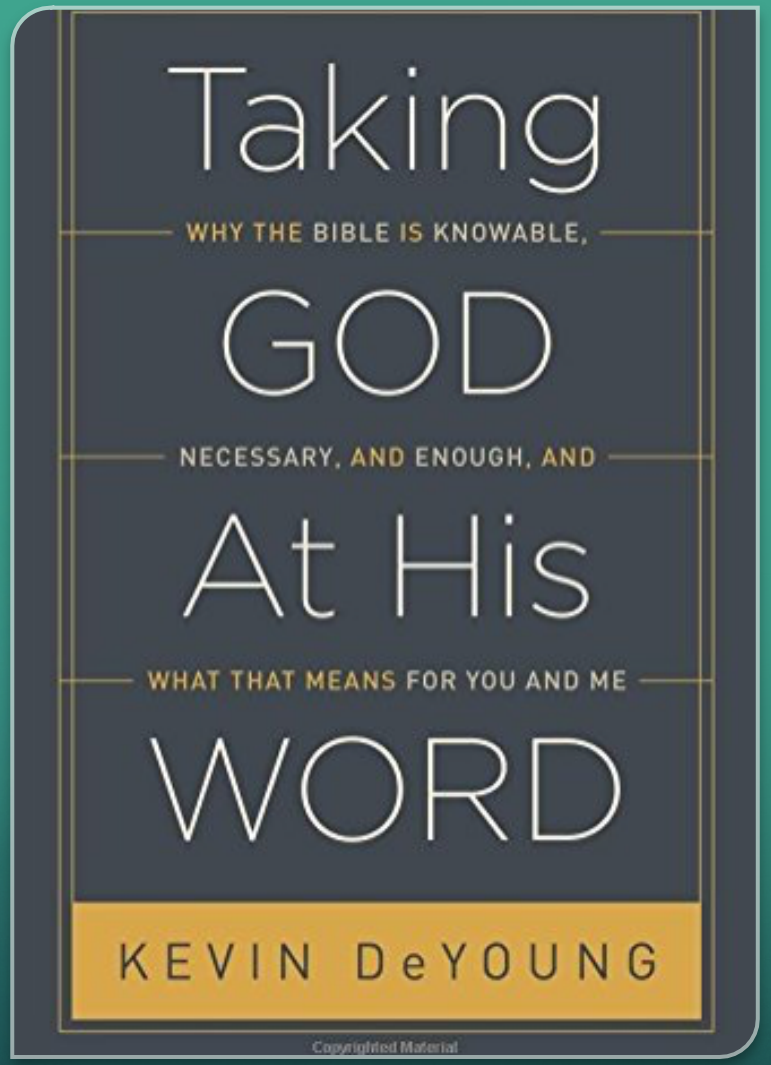
Bible Interpretation

THE RELIABILITY AND USABILITY OF SCRIPTURE IN OUR PRESENT AGE



A Good Companion Book For This Class

Course Description

Within an awareness of the present post-enlightenment and post Christian skepticism concerning the Christian Bible, the objective of this class is to provide the student with an introductory level of confidence in the Reliability, Usability and Sufficiency of the Christian Scriptures such as to adopt as a matter of Christian faith and application the following confessions: (c.f. Syllabus)

Course Description Continued

- Concerning Reliability :
- … an high and reverent esteem of the Holy Scripture… whereby it doth abundantly evidence itself to be the Word of God. WCF 1.4

Concerning Sufficiency:

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, whether by new revelations of the Spirit, or traditions of men. WCF 1.6

- Concerning Usability:
- …[That} in a due use of the ordinary means, [we] may attain unto a sufficient understanding of them. WCF 1.5

"Test the Spirits"

Do not quench the Spirit. Do not despise prophecies, but test everything; hold fast what is good. 1Th 5:19-20

Beloved, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits to see whether they are from God, for many false prophets have gone out into the world. 1John 4:1

What exactly do we test?

- *Test relative to MY SPIRIT- is this authentic to me—does it resonate with my internal "gut"-- Individual subjectivism*
- *Test relative to my significant others—does it conform to what my trusted others think is right- populist subjectivism*
- *Test relative to the authors experience—does it confirm to the what I perceive to be the experience of the biblical author, rid of ancient myths/misconceptions.*
- *Or? Test relative to fixed writings contained in the scriptures of the Old and New Testaments within the redemptive-historical context of the salvation events from God.*

Biblical Answer: Test Against the Words of Scripture

Acts 17:10 when Paul and Silas arrived in Berea "they went into the Jewish synagogue (to preach/teach) **11** ... they received the word with all eagerness, examining **the Scriptures** daily to see if these things were so.

2Tim. 3:16 All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, **17** that the man of God may be competent, equipped for every good work.

Rev. 1:3 Blessed is the one who reads aloud **the words** of this prophecy, and blessed are those who hear, and who keep **what is written** in it, for the time is near

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...*

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

E.g. What Exactly is Inspired

1. **Liberal Protestant View: The Biblical author is inspired**. Locus moves from the objectivity of what has been written to the subjectivity of the authors experience. Identify the experience of the author and related to the experience of the reader.
2. **Neo-Orthodox/Modern Evangelical View: The reader is inspired.** Locus moves to the reader response: Confuses doctrine of inspiration with illumination. The Bible as God's written word is a window/guide into the Word that is spoken into the individual reader. Denies the sufficiency and objectivity of the written word such as to rely upon the subjectivity of the reader. This view reveals it's existential leanings.
3. **Classic Evangelical View: The words themselves are inspired**. E.g. "Verbal" Inspiration. Distinguishes "Revelation" From "Illumination"

> *2Tim. 3:16* ***All Scripture*** *is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness*

Inspiration of Scripture Clarified

Definition: The process in which the words of scripture are made by the Holy Spirit working through responsible human agents to be revelatory without usurping the personality and mind of the writers. Creative work of H.S. through human instruments by divine-human confluence, an linguistic-incarnational event ….

2 Tim.3:16- "God-breathed" = "Created" (To bring to life, a creation event. C.f. Ps.33:6, Gen.2:7) "all") e.g. God brings to life the scriptures as His words.. "All" scripture is inspired.

2 Peter 1:19-21- Scripture is not a private interpretation. It's more than simply being eyewitnesses of historical events, but the interpretation of those events given by God to human authors such as to be put in writing.

John 10:33-34- Jesus makes defence of his authenticity and ministry by reverence to the authority of Scripture as God himself speaking. Scripture and God lay so close together in the minds of the writers of Scripture that they spoke of scripture doing what only God can do. The"oracles of God."(Rom.9:17; Gal.3:8; Acts 4:25; Acts 8:3…

Sufficiency of Verbal Inspiration

Heb. 1:1-3—*God "spoke"... not "speaks"*

1Tim. 4:6 If you put these things before the brothers, you will be a good servant of Christ Jesus, being trained in **the words** of the faith and of the good doctrine that you have followed.

Eph. 2: 20 *built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, with Christ Jesus himself as the cornerstone.*

Rev.22:18 ...*if anyone adds to them...*

The Word-Deed-Word Principle of Inscripturation..

where "Redemption and revelation coincide.(Geerhardus Vos)

The Perspicuity (Clarity) of Verbal Inspiration

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.*

2Tim. 3:16 **All Scripture** is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness

1Tim. 4:6 If you put these things before the brothers, you will be a good servant of Christ Jesus, being trained in **the words** of the faith and of the good doctrine that you have followed.

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.

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Summary of Biblical View of Inspiration

Verbal: the very words of canonical text, not merely the writers or general concepts, are breathed out by the H.S.

Plenary: Inspiration extends to all parts of the Bible as opposed to views of partial inspiration.

Confluent: The divine and human interaction "flow together" such that the individual personalities and styles are not suppressed….

Inerrancy: The text of Scripture is true in all that it intends to affirm.

Enlightenment Informed Subjectivism in Interpretation Illustrated

The Same Enlightenment Program Applied to Textual Criticism Is Applied To Interpretation

By way of analogy, the past realities/assumptions are compared to the present with a presumption that the present realities must reinterpret the assumptions of the past.

- *Pre-Enlightenment: Verbal Revelation Interprets Reader Subjectivity/Historicity*
- *Post Enlightenment: Reader Subjectivity/Historicity Interprets Verbal Revelation*

Objectivity in Interpretation?

About the "New Hermeneutic:"

If an interpreter cannot overcome the distorting perspective of his own historicity, no matter how hard he tries, then it follows that one understands differently when one understands at all.

E. D. Hirsch, *Validity in Interpretation*

Lordship In Interpretation?

" Everyone does right in their own eyes"

*1Cor. 12:3 Therefore I want you to understand that no one speaking in the Spirit of God ever says "Jesus is accursed!" and no one can say "**Jesus is Lord**" except in the Holy* Spirit.

The Subjectification of Interpretation

The meaning of a text goes beyond its author not just sometimes but always. Understanding is not a reproductive but always a productive activity... the winning of the true sense contained in a text or artistic work never comes to an end. It is an infinite process.

Georg Hans Gadamar, (Often described as the Father of Moddern Interpretation), *Wahrheit und Methode (Truth and Method)*

A Present Challenge To Verbal Inspiration Illustrated:

The "Trajectory Hermeneutic" ("TH")

(A more recent version of the New Hermeneutic)

A hermeneutical approach that seeks to locate a topic within the text and follow its "trajectory" throughout Scripture to see how God was slowly working to "redeem" that topic and move the world toward a better standard. Once the trajectory is identified, it is extrapolated into the present-day world to see how we should view that same topic today by llogic extension given the assumptions of our present subjectivity/historicity.

By its very definition, trajectory hermeneutics or redemptive-movement hermeneutics, goes beyond what Scripture says. It relies on a "logical extension" of Scripture for its application in modern-day life.

The Obvious Problem:

- What determines the "logic" of a logical extension?
- If the hermeneutic must be *developed (expanded)* outside of Scripture, then who gets to plot the trajectory?
- Where does it stop? What "canon" (rule) other than what is is inherently textual in scripture is being imposed and who then is *really* Lord of the conscience?

An Often Used Illustrative Argument Used by "TH"
The Problem of Slavery

Assumptions:

- The Bible doesn't prohibit slavery and in fact commands it in certain instances.

- And yet, the Mosaic Law limited what could be done to slaves and provided for treatment that was humane, compared to what the surrounding cultures allowed.

- Such rules show the "trajectory" that God intended to take regarding slavery. In the New Testament, masters were admonished to treat their slaves well, etc.

Assumptions Exposed :

Re. "The Bible doesn't prohibit slavery and in fact commands it in certain instances."

- In fact, the Bible does condemn human trafficking and slavery such as to reduce humans to personal property (c.f. Dt 23:15 (Mosaic law prohibited someone from returning an escaped slave!),Amos 1:6 (explicit condemn of human trafficking) , 1 Tim 1:10 (against "man-stealing")

- Even if the Bible doesn't prohibit in a certain instance, but rather reforms it, this doesn't mean that it condones it. E.g. the absence of evidence isn't the evidence of absence.

- The Moral Structure throughout scripture for the Condemnation of Slavery beginning with all people made in the image of God and Biblical equality within the covenants of redemptive history. (Gen 1:26-27, James 3:9, Galatians 3:28, Colossians 3:11, ect.)

Conclusion:

A trajectory Hermeneutic is not needed to condemn slavery and therefore doesn't argue for the necessity of a trajectory method.

Example of "TH" Applied Today: GAY MARRIAGE

Two Sources:

- *Bible, Gender, and Sexuality: Reframing the Church's Debate on Same-Sex Relationships*, by James Brownson
- *God and The Gay Christian: The Biblical Case in Support of Same-Sex Relationships*, by Matthew Vines (2014)

Assumptions:

- Bible doesn't prohibit monogamous and loving same sex marriage

"The Bible doesn't directly address the issue of same-sex orientation—or the expression of that orientation" (Vines)

" Concerning a possible gay couple with mutual commitment, self-giving love, and communal accountability, "it is fair to say that Paul's language never directly envisions such a possibility" (Brownson)

"NH" Today: GAY MARRIAGE

Assumptions Continued:

- Re. "What appears to be prohibitions against homosexuality are in fact condemnations of sexual abuse within a patriarchal society." *e.g. The prohibition was against* **'degrading passions' and 'shameless acts'** which is assumed not to refer to homosexuality itself, but to sexual abusiveness.

  "Paul wasn't condemning the expression of a same-sex orientation as opposed to the expression of an opposite-sex orientation. He was condemning excess as opposed to *moderation." (Vines)*

- *Re. "The assertion that Marriage isn't defined by procreation even if procreation is limited to heterosexual intercourse and therefore allows for homosexuality."*

Assumptions about Bible and Gay Marriage Exposed:

1) Even if doesn't prohibit same sex marriage, the absence of evidence is not the evidence of absence– If God is the ultimate author of scripture, then God is capable of inscripturating a definition that transcends cultural historicity, thus the sufficiency of positive institution that explicitly define marriage between a "man and woman."

e.g. The Fallacy of Argument from silence. "Nowhere in all of scripture does God say anything about nuclear warfare explicitl, so is it justified?"

2) There are what seem to be explicit prohibitions against homosexuality, and yet conterarhy to "NH" insertion, there is no evidence in the textual context of prohibitions that suggest sexual abuse against homosexuality vs. homosexuality itself.

Lev. 18:22 You shall not lie with a male as with a woman; it is an abomination (c.f. Lev 20:13, 1 Cor 6:9, 1 Tim 1:10, Rom 1:26-27– again, no contextual reason to postulate the condinmation is anything other than what is explicit)

e.g. The fallacy of assumption (sometimes called the complex question)

3) Why is it assumed that nature (Book 1 of Revelation) is not revelatory as an intentional act of God's providence such as to define heterosexual reproduction within the positive institution of marriage? The fact that one may choose or be prevented from reproduction doesn't change an anatomically determined definition of sex and even one purpose of marriage.

Conclusion:

- The trajectory hermeneutic is yet another program of the "New Hermeneutic" to extend God's word beyond the Scriptures of the Old and New Testament. It requires an epistemological bias that favors reader response informed by enlightenment secularism vs. the timeless revelation originating with the personal God of the Bible. Consequently, it undermines the exclusive Lordship of Christ over human conscience.

> *When it comes to our approach to Bible hermeneutics, it is sometimes easy to forget the obvious. But if scripture IS a communication from God to us, it is not to obscure His will for us and our salvation but to clarify it; it is not to diminish God's sovereignty over us but to expand it; it is not to blunt God's glory but to amplify it. Any theory or practice in the interpretation of scripture that denies the obvious refutes it's own usefulness in this endeavor.*
>
> *Vern Poythress*

Other Forms of the "New Hermeneutic" in Popular Culture: Trends Toward Subjectivism:

In different terms, there is a shift from a concern with "what the Bible states" to "what God is telling me...The coming generation, then, is less demanding in its expectations of the Bible. Beyond this, however, there is a marked tendency toward "hermeneutical subjectivism.

Sociologist Jame Hunter

Example: the inherent danger of "small groups th at are intentionally "small" such as to foster participation. ALL GOOD… BUT! What if such participation bleads into Biblical "interpretation?"

"What do you think about this verse?"

Other Forms of "NH" In Popular Culture: "Emotionalism"

Emotionalism: The belief that the way we understand truth and worship God is *primarily through our feelings.* We're encouraged to use our feelings, rather than the facts of Scripture, as a gauge to see where we're at spiritually. Strong faith is equated to an emotional high, to being "on fire for God"… but anything less is labeled as weak faith (or even, *no* faith at all)

- Music inspired experience as the bases for authentic Revelation– e.g. "Do you feel it, God is in this place, God is speaking, God is telling us to…."
- Personal "anointing" by the Holy Spirit confused with personal "charisma."
- Creativity in Bible Interpretation and infatuation with novel insights into scripture confused with Revelation

Other Forms of the "New Hermeneutic" in Popular Culture: "Humiliation of the "Word"

The spiritual baton has been passed in the West from the Church to popular culture, in which spiritual and communal myths and values once associated with institutional religion and Christian culture are now to be found—modified, to be sure, but still sufficiently widespread and foundational to represent a spiritual continuity. The "Neo-xyz religion.

Increasingly we live within a culture that is *visual* as much (or perhaps more) than it is *verbal*, and we can now speak of "reading" the texts of film.

Because literature is no longer the dominant form of expression, scriptwriters, directors, and actors do more to shape the culture in which we live than do the giants of literature or philosophy. We may be at the point in the development of Western culture that the Great Books series needs to be supplemented by a Great Films series.

Scott Cowdell, Postmodernism, Christianity and the Hollywood Hermeneutic

Sir,
Bring Us To Jesus!

Rogier van der Weyden
1399/1400 – 1464
The Vision of the Magi