

What We Believe: Knowing and Loving our Doctrines
 Adult Sunday Studies 2023-24
 4 | Biblical Interpretation, cont.

HOW DO WE INTERPRET THE BIBLE?

1. **Only God Reveals God - Word of God and the Spirit of God at work in revealing who God is**
 1. WCF 1.5 - "We may be moved and induced by the testimony of the church to an high and reverent esteem of the Holy Scripture. And the heavenliness of the matter, ... yet notwithstanding, our full persuasion and assurance of the infallible truth and divine authority thereof, is from the inward work of the **Holy Spirit** bearing witness by and with the **Word** in our hearts."
 2. WCF 1.6 - "...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**..."
 3. WCF 1.10 - "The supreme judge by which all controversies of religion are to be determined, and all decrees of councils, opinions of ancient writers, doctrines of men, and private spirits, are to be examined, and in whose sentence we are to rest, can be no other but the **Holy Spirit speaking in the Scripture**."
 4. The Bible is by God, about God, interpreted by God, for the church of God. Notice the full work of the Trinity. Packer described the Scriptures as "God the Father preaching God the Son in the power of God the Holy Spirit." Why is this important for how we interpret?
 1. Notice that the Bible, then, is not a static document just written thousands of years ago. We're not deists!
 2. If you're not transformed by the Spirit, then you can't understand the Word. See 1Cor. 2.9-10 and Heb. 4.12.

2. **To Whom does God Reveal Right Interpretation?**
 1. **Just to Individuals?** - **No!** Lest we're subject to the whims of every individual.
 2. **Just to Every Local Community?** **No!** Surely there's still too many blind-spots and biases even there.

3. **With Greater Church of all ages** - still fallible, but transcending individual and local biases
 1. To preserve the apostolic foundation - see last week for Scripture references on apostolic foundation
 2. Done in different ways - often with a common consensus, which for CPC is Westminster Confession of Faith.
 1. The purpose of Creeds and Confessions are *never* to replace Scripture or compete with Scripture, but to *preserve* the authority of Scripture in the language of a new generation. Those who say “we believe in no creed but the Bible” have never met a real heretic! Heretics quote Scripture too!
 2. Notice how this also reflects what the Bible is - by God for God’s community.

3. How Can We Pursue Right Interpretation? - “Good and Necessary Consequence”

1. **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, whether by new revelations of the Spirit, or traditions of men. 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: and that there are some circumstances concerning the worship of God, and government of the church, common to human actions and societies, which are to be ordered by the light of nature, and Christian prudence, according to the general rules of the Word, which are always to be observed.”
 1. “Elements” vs. “Forms” - “Necessary” vs. “Some circumstances”
 2. “Regulative Principle”
2. **We want to avoid *adding to or subtracting from the Word of God*.** So, we need a very high standard in order to be able to conclude that the Word truly teaches it. It must not only be a “good” or “reasonable” inference from the text, but also a “necessary” one. It must be the binding inference from the text.

1. For Example: Eph. 5.18 - "*And do not get drunk with wine, for that is debauchery, but be filled with the Spirit*".

1. What's really at stake here?

3. Genre and the Author's Intent

1. "Scripture is without error *in all it intends to say*" - the question is what does it *intend* to say?
2. We must understand God's purpose in Scripture according to the *genre* in which it is written:
 1. Compare Exodus 14 - the narrative account of the exodus - with Exodus 15 - Moses' song in celebration of the exodus. In what sense are 15.6, 8-10 true? In what sense are they not true? See also Judges 4 & Judges 5. (Examples taken from Tim Keller's "Creation, Evolution, and Christian Laypeople")
 2. Ps. 104.22 reads, "When the sun rises, they steal away and lie down in their dens." Does the sun rise? What's the point of the psalm here?

4. Two Overall Tasks in Reading:

1. THEN - What it meant: Exegesis and Original Intent

1. "aim of good interpretation is not uniqueness. Unique interpretations are usually wrong. . . aim of good interpretation is simple: to get at the 'plain meaning of the text,' the author's intended meaning" (Fee & Stuart)
2. We really have to fight against our cultural assumptions here, where new and edgy is automatically prized
3. **Context:** Historical and Literary

2. NOW - What it means: Exegesis has to control hermeneutics/ application

1. "A text cannot mean what it could never have meant for its original readers/hearers." (Fee & Stuart)
 1. Book of Revelation only relevant to 2,000yrs later?
 2. 1Cor. 12-14 on spiritual gifts in the context of unity, NOT disunity toward two levels of Christians

How ought this to impact our prayer, character, and community?

**** A bit more on Exegesis****

1. **“Location, location, location” - What is God’s *purpose* in this *stage* of revelation?**
 1. In other words, what is the *point* of the story *in its context* and what does it reveal about God and God’s people?
 2. The Bible is not a random deposit of truths, and every verse is not equally true in all places to all people. It is **one redemptive-historical plot with different stages and a progressive revelation.**
 3. **The Story within the stories** - "There are great stories in the Bible... but it is possible to know Bible stories, yet miss the Bible story... The Bible has a story line. It traces an unfolding drama. The story follows the history of Israel, but it does not begin there, nor does it contain what you would expect in a national history....If we forget the story line... we cut the heart out of the Bible. Sunday school stories are then told as tamer versions of the Sunday comics, where Samson substitutes for Superman. David... becomes a Hebrew version of Jack the Giant Killer. No, David is not a brave little boy who isn’t afraid of the big bad giant. He is the Lord’s anointed... God chose David as a king after his own heart in order to prepare the way for David’s great Son, our Deliverer and Champion..." – E. Clowney

2. **Major Biblical Turning Points** [our year-long course in a few lines!]
 1. **Common Grace Covenants** (they apply to all people at all times, and serve as a foundation upon which God initiates special grace covenants)
 1. **Covenant of Creation** - Gen. 1.1-2.3 - covenant of works, requiring perfect obedience - including “salvation” in the glory-presence of God
 2. **Covenant with Noah** - Gen. 9.1-17 - re-establishes covenant of creation after the Flood, not to destroy the earth again until the final consummation, but doesn’t offer salvation and immediate presence of God like the covenant of creation

 2. **Special Grace Covenants (apply to the elect only), begun in proto-form in Gen. 3.15**
 1. **Abrahamic Covenant** - Gen. 15.1-18 (cf. Gen. 12, 17, 22) - Unilateral, unconditional promise - promises the Mosaic, Davidic, and New

covenants - numerous offspring, conquest/land, nations (i.e. Gentiles!) will be blessed

2. **Mosaic Covenant** - Exod. 3-Numbers 36 (Ex. 20-24.11 is the majority of it) - Bilateral, conditional law, yet still based on the gracious promise of the Abrahamic covenant, with the intent of highlighting God's holiness, humanity's sin, and what it should look like to be God's chosen people. They weren't saved by following it, they were already saved, and this explained what "saved people" should look like if they were to live in the promised land.
3. **Davidic Covenant** - 2Sam. 7.1-17 - unilateral, unconditional promise - to build David's "house" and sustain his dynasty as God's Anointed King over Israel
4. **New Covenant** - fulfills all of the above
 1. **Christ in the Old Testament** – Our starting point will always be Christ as the fulfillment and fulfiller of the Old Testament – see Mt. 5.17-20 and Lk. 24.13-34
 1. We need Christ in order to interpret the Old Testament properly – it's not meant to be read on its own
 2. The Old Covenant is a "shadow" (Heb. 10.1, Col. 2.16-17) to the "reality" of the New Covenant; or as "copies" are to "substance" (Heb. 9.23-28); or, as promise is to fulfillment (Gal. 3).
 3. It's not complete until the New Covenant church – Heb. 11.39-40, 1Cor. 10.6, 1Pet. 1.10-12.
 2. **Test Case: The Exodus and the Transfiguration** – Lk. 9.28-36
 1. Jesus' "exodus", the literal definition of Gk. word "departure" (v. 31)
 2. Isaiah 43.16-21 – the new exodus – that is, the hope of Israel was a new exodus, like a new creation, to do the what the first one did, but better
 3. Jesus as the True Passover Lamb, that redeems the New Israel (the Church), and Jesus also as the True Israel to whom we are united, who undergoes our purification (thru the Red Sea) on our behalf, so that we may follow God in the "wilderness" of this world until we reach the Promised Land
 3. So, to fully understand the Exodus, we have to look at both the OT stories and Jesus.