The Plumb Line

A Teaching Ministry of Fellowship Bible Church

Hermeneutics practicum

Summer Short Course 2015

Fellowship Bible Church ◊ Greenville, South Carolina

SYLLABUS OF LESSONS

Session 1 – The Meaning of Meaning

One of the most difficult cavils leveled at believers by unbelievers is the fact of so many denominations, so many opinions, so much disagreement within professing Christendom that the notion of one God who has communicated through one infallible Book is just too ludicrous to accept. What do we say when the unbeliever challenges our doctrine of the inerrancy of Scripture on the basis of so many different dogmatic interpretations thereof? How do we respond when the unity of Christ's Body, the Church, is so clearly divided by major and seemingly insuperable doctrinal differences? If we blame remaining sin, what does that say about the *'anointing which you all have,'* as the Apostle John affirms,

> *But you have an anointing from the Holy One, and you know all things. I have not written to you because you do not know the truth, but because you know it, and that no lie is of the truth…But the anointing which you have received from Him abides in you, and you do not need that anyone teach you; but as the same anointing teaches you concerning all things, and is true, and is not a lie, and just as it has taught you, you will abide in Him.*
>
> (I John 2:20-21; 27)

Frankly, many within the professing church have given on trying to maintain the unity of meaning of Scripture, and have succumbed to the post-modern notion of multiple and subjective meaning. This has been done on the highly philosophical and theological level, by scholars of the 19th Century German schools and 20th Century British and American schools. It has also been done by rank-and-file Christians who speak glibly about 'what this passage means to me.' The past century and a half has witnessed a massive retreat from rigorous biblical exegesis, from seminary students being taught the biblical languages of Hebrew and Greek, and from the traditional respect once accorded to critical study and dissemination of the biblical message by the occupants of evangelical pulpits. These things have been replaced by 'culturally relevant' and media savvy presentations in lieu of the 'old fashioned' exegetical interpretation of the Scriptures. Since 'meaning' can no longer be measured by a reasonable degree of unity among

commentators, the church has largely settled for messages that address immediate cultural, political, or 'felt' needs within the congregation, often regardless of the message's connection – or lack thereof – to the biblical passage quoted.

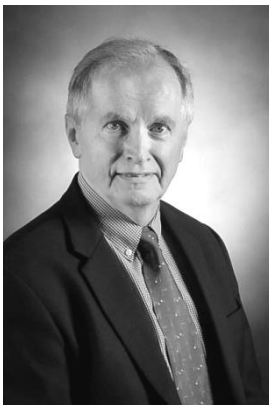
This is not an unreasonable or illogical response, except for anyone who continues to believe in the inerrancy and ultimate authority of Scripture for *"all things pertaining to life and godliness."* That there are a plethora of opinions on almost every significant, and virtually all insignificant, points of biblical doctrine cannot be denied. That this situation of doctrinal disagreement and diversity has persisted throughout the history of divine revelation – encompassing the teachings of the rabbinic schools as well as the Christian academies – also must be frankly admitted. When we survey the possible explanations for this lamentable condition, only a few options present themselves:

1. The Bible is not the inerrant, infallible Word of God.
2. The Bible contains the Word of God, infallible in its first transmission but rendered fallible by its human authors.
3. The Bible is the infallible Word of God both in transmission and in writing, but it contains multiple meanings or layers of meaning.
4. The Bible is the infallible Word of God both in transmission and in writing, but its interpreters are incapable of gaining its true meaning because of indwelling sin.
5. Biblical interpretation, due to its difficult nature and the danger of error, must be left to the 'trained professional,' the cleric, the theologian, the pastor.
6. The true meaning of Scripture can be attained by any and every believer; interpreters just need to keep working at it.

Each of these views have been espoused in recent times, and by scholars, pastors, and theologians of the Christian persuasion. However, most professing believers within broadly conservative and evangelical denominations, tend in practice toward Option #3 – the multiple meaning perspective. This is not a new phenomenon, as it has appeared chronically throughout the history of the Church. Reformed theologians have objected to this view on the grounds that it introduces a dangerous element of subjectivity into the interpretation of the Bible, a danger that can be easily and comprehensively documented

by examples throughout the past twenty centuries of biblical exegesis.[1] Thus Reformed scholars have clung to Option #5, that the meaning of the Scriptures is attainable and, in spite of the diversity and disagreement among earnest and educated commentators, it must be consistently sought in regard to every passage. This is hard and continuous labor, however, and sadly it has been more often the case that the 'meaning' discovered by some noted Reformed commentator generations earlier has become the gold standard for a particular passage, to digress from which verges on heresy or apostasy.

At the risk of denigrating the scholarly work of past generations – which we have no intention of doing – it remains true that biblical exegesis is the labor of each generation. D. A. Carson, among the most solid of modern theologians, points out that



D. A. Carson (b. 1946)

"As much as we can and must learn from our theological forebears, we face the harsh realities of this century; and neither nostalgia nor the preferred position of an ostrich's will remove either the threats or the opportunities that summon our exegetical skills to new rigor."[2] Reformed scholars like Carson believe that this generational continuum of critical biblical study represents the 'remnant' of true scholarship as it relates to "*rightly dividing the Word of Truth.*" The key, to such scholars, is to be continually honing, challenging, and inasmuch as possible, correcting and perfecting one's ***hermeneutic***.

Bernard Ramm, in his classic *Protestant Biblical Interpretation*, offers the classic definition of 'hermeneutics': "Hermeneutics is the science and art of Biblical interpretation. It is a science because it is guided by rules within a system; and it is an art because the application of the rules is by skill."[3] In a *practicum* such as this course, the rules are presumed from earlier study, and applied to specific passages and genres of

[1] For a summary of the historical schools of exegetical practice, see Chapter 2 of *Advanced Hermeneutics*, Fellowship Bible Church; Fall/Winter 2010.
[2] Carson, D. A., *Exegetical Fallacies* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books; 2003); 20.
[3] Ramm, Bernard *Protestant Biblical Interpretation: Third Edition* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House; 1970); 1.

Scripture.[4] Of necessity many of the 'rules' will be reiterated as they come to be applied, but for the most part it is the aim of this course to develop the 'art.' This term, of course, must be used with caution lest a believer come to the conclusion that he or she just does not have 'the talent,' as they might reasonably conclude in regard to other forms of art. Biblical interpretation for the believer is not a matter of stick figures for some, and life-like portraiture for others. As Bezalel the son of Uri was gifted with the Holy Spirit for the craftsmanship of the tabernacle, and as all the artisans were given *"wisdom in their hearts"* to perform the commandments of Moses in that regard,[5] so also God has graciously put within the heart of every believer the Spirit of Truth. And as there was a difference between Bezalel and the others, so also there is a difference from believer to believer as to their grasp and understanding of the biblical text. Yet it remains true that no believer is entirely without the 'art,' and also that every believer can and must improve what skill they possess. That is the application of hermeneutics, which is itself called ***exegesis***.

In regard to the difference between hermeneutics and exegesis, Carson has a helpful and brief discussion,

> At the risk of making an oversimplified disjunction, I state that exegesis is concerned with actually interpreting the text, whereas hermeneutics is concerned with the nature of the interpretive process. Exegesis concludes by saying, 'This passage means such and such'; hermeneutics ends by saying, 'This interpretative process is constituted by the following techniques and pre-understandings.' The two are obviously related. But although hermeneutics is an important discipline in its own right, ideally it is never an end in itself: it serves exegesis.[6]

Critical Thinking Applied:

[4] Refer to Chapter 1 of *Advanced Hermeneutics* for a summary discussion on the science of hermeneutics, and to the whole study for a treatment of the 'rules.'
[5] Exodus 31:1-6.
[6] Carson; 25.

Biblical Criticism has derived a pejorative sense among modern evangelicals due to the liberal hermeneutics of such branches as form criticism and higher criticism that developed out of Germany in the 19th Century. But the essence of biblical criticism is not to *criticize* the Bible, but rather to think *critically* about the text of Scripture being studied. "The essence of all critical thought, in the best sense of that abused expression, is the justification of opinions…In other words, critical exegesis in this sense is exegesis that provides sound reasons for the choices it makes and the positions it adopts."[7] This is a very important point in regard to the *practicum* of hermeneutics: the **justification of opinion**, and one that will be a central theme of this study. In light of the reality of differing opinions with regard to the interpretation of many, many passages of Scripture, it is imperative that any meaning derived from the biblical text be supported with the greatest justification of opinion possible by way of critical study and humble seeking of the illumination of the Holy Spirit. "A critical interpretation of Scripture is one that has adequate justification – lexical, grammatical, cultural, theological, historical, geographical, or other justification."[8] Furthermore, dogmatism ought to be proportional to the level of critical justification underlying any interpretation.

At this point the question might arise – and has indeed occurred to many professing believers throughout the ages – as to why all of this is necessary. Is not the Bible inherently clear? Do not even the classic Reformed confessions refer to the *perspicacity* of the Bible, to its openness and clarity? Why must a Christian develop a *methodology* of interpretation prior to even practicing interpretation? The simplest answer to such questions, of course, remains the fact of residual sin within the mind of even the most mature and ardent believer. The history of biblical interpretation, moreover, assures us that "not even piety and the gift of the Holy Spirit guarantee infallible interpretations."[9] And the sad reality of the church in all ages is that very few believers

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[7] Carson; 16.
[8] *Idem.*
[9] *Idem*.

are interested or willing to expend the energy required to develop sound exegetical skills, to develop that sort of hermeneutic that will furnish *justification* for their opinions.

It is the position of this study, as it is the position broadly of the Reformed tradition, that diligent effort coupled with prayer and humility and dependence upon the Holy Spirit, will yield tangible advances in biblical understanding. First for the individual, then for the church. This *has been* the case periodically throughout church history, with notable episodes of scholarly advancement within significant segments of professing Christendom. While it cannot be denied that there have been times of arid wilderness, and of error and ignorance, the overall trajectory of the wisdom and understanding of the church has been generally upward. We gain greater appreciation of an Augustine when we realize that he did not have an Anselm to consult, and of Anselm that he could not pull Aquinas, or Calvin, or Warfield off of his bookshelf. It has been said in another context that we now see so far only because we stand on the shoulders of giants. And in our own day marvelous contributions have been and are being made in the area of biblical studies, of which future generations will reap immeasurable benefit.

Fundamentally, therefore, the effort should be made not merely because of the sin which dwells still in our members, but also because the reward is great. We are motivated to study by the dignity of the object of our study: the Word of God, the self-disclosure of the Maker, Governor, and Redeemer of the Universe. We are humbled in our study by the evident limitations of our own minds, and by the fact that so many thousands of years separate us from the original written communications from this God. And we are encouraged in our study by the promise of the Holy Spirit, Who will *"guide you into all truth,"* and will progressively – albeit slowly – illuminate the divine revelation to our understanding. As to the diversity of views that exist within the church, our responsibility does not extend to the solution of this troubling conundrum. Each believer is called to imitate the Bereans, to *'search the Scriptures to see if these things be so,'* and to be fully convinced of the biblical foundation of justification for all opinions. The

'methodology' adopted, be it ever so good, cannot fully guarantee against error; but it is reasonable to assert that no methodology at all certainly assures error.

The Meaning of Meaning:

As to the question of meaning, believers in every age have had essentially the same answer: faith. We can rationally argue for the existence of a God, and reasonably maintain that if such a God is to be known, it must be that He makes himself known. If that revelation is corrupted, if it is unreliable, if it is indecipherable, then the result would be worse than innocent ignorance. One cannot be culpable for not knowing what cannot be known. But to 'know' that which is falsehood, and to dogmatically propound and enforce such knowledge on others, is criminal. Nonetheless, all of this reasoning is founded upon faith: belief in a self-revealing deity and in the capacity of His created image to receive and to understand – even in measure – that revelation.

Hence the study of hermeneutics, a field of Practical Theology that is closely related and must remain closely related to all other branches of theology. Moisés Silva, in his book *Has the Church Misread the Bible?*, offers a helpful summary of the relationship between the various disciplines of Christian theology. Silva notes that the common view within especially Reformed scholarship places biblical criticism – hermeneutics and exegesis – as foundational. The first, biblical criticism as hermeneutics, includes the languages of Hebrew and Greek, the historical background of

Moisés Silva (b. 1945)

the biblical narratives, and literary considerations of genre and style. The second, biblical exegesis, then builds upon this foundation with its historical-grammatical analysis of individual passages and books of the Bible. The next block is Biblical Theology, which "attempts a measure of synthesis by focusing on the distinctive teaching of individual writers (e.g., Pauline theology) or of well-defined historical periods (e.g., postexilic

theology)." Biblical Theology emphasizes the chronological flow of progressive revelation.

Systematic Theology then attempts a synthesis of the biblical teaching as a whole, focusing on the development of dogma throughout the history of revelation (e.g., the doctrine of God and the Trinity, of the atonement, of sanctification). This study also includes the History of Doctrines, within both Judaism and Christianity, as modern scholars sift through the volumes written and try to separate the wheat from the chaff. Finally, Practical Theology deals with the dissemination of all of this information through the preaching and teaching, the sacraments and the life of the believing community. But Silva wisely notes that this 'order' of events within theological learning is impracticable in reality. In fact, the various disciplines mentioned bear a symbiotic relationship, rather than a causal relationship, to one another. Indeed, due to the fact that Bible study is the heart and soul of sanctification and growth in grace, vital to the life of the church, this course in Hermeneutics has been placed under the rubric of Practical Theology, the farthest removed from it in this traditional curriculum of study. Silva writes,

> Anyone familiar with seminary curricula realizes that no school follows this pattern in strict sequence – as though a seminarian had to wait until the very last term to take courses in practical theology! Moreover, even apart from pragmatic academic considerations, there are substantive reasons for not following a 'logical' sequence of courses. The truth is that one cannot really practice, say, biblical exegesis without taking into account the concerns of systematic theology; similarly, it would be artificial to suggest that we must not or cannot address the problems posed by practical ministry until we have fully explored the area of biblical theology.[10]

All this to say that the study of Hermeneutics rests properly alongside that of Biblical Theology and Systematic Theology, and bear directly and reciprocally on Practical Theology. The biblical text is indeed timeless, but its exegesis cannot be done in a vacuum. There must be consideration for what the church, and the people of the church, are dealing with in the time and culture in which they live. This is one major

[10] Silva, Moisés *Has the Church Misread the Bible?* In Foundations of Contemporary Interpretation (Grand Rapids: Zondervan; 1996); 29.

reason, though not the only one, why hermeneutics and exegesis – indeed, the entire Christian scholarly effort – remains the fresh task of every generation until the Lord's return.

Furthermore, each denominational family within each generation brings to the task a unique set of 'preunderstandings' that invariably color biblical interpretation within that dogmatic clique, and render it effectively deaf to the contributions of any other group within Christian scholarship. "Every reader brings a horizon of expectation to the text. This is a mind-set, or system of references, which characterizes the reader's finite viewpoint amidst his or her situatedness in time and history."[11] In modern American evangelicalism, for instance, the Scriptures are represented by some as containing doctrinal data to be discovered, analyzed, systematized, and preached. For other it is a book of comfort and wisdom, with pithy 'refrigerator magnet' verses to be memorized and internalized and 'claimed' by one who has faith. Still others have been so absorbed by the prophetic element within the Bible that it is almost impossible for them to read its pages without their mind dwelling on calendars and charts and the daily news reports. Each of these points of view, these 'horizons of expectation,' seriously impact the manner in which the reader reads the Scripture, making certain interpretative patterns all but inevitable…and often very wrong.

Reformed scholars tend toward the first of these three examples, which are, by the way, not exhaustive by any means. It is the characteristic – some would say the obsession – of Reformed biblical scholars and teachers to distill the last possible drop of concentrated dogma from any given passage, linking it to all other similar passages, and developing an intricate system of doctrine whose strength is greater than the sum of its parts. This is not entirely wrong, but in its singularity of focus it does tend to miss a great deal of the *nature* of biblical revelation, which is not nearly as conducive to the academic empirical method as Reformed theologians have maintained. It would rattle the cages of many professing believers in Western evangelicalism to suggest, that the Bible

[11] Thiselton, Anthony C. *New Horizons in Hermeneutics* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House; 1992); 34.

purposefully leaves off arriving at many conclusions, conclusions that have long become part of accepted denomination doctrine. In other words, many passages of Scripture are *incomplete* with regard to the full data required to deduce a scientific conclusion. Thiselton writes by way of example, "It is arguable that Job and Ecclesiastes also function not to supply some packaged piece of information, but to place the reader in a position where he or she can work their way towards certain perspectives or even conclusions at first-hand."[12] This is a concept to be investigated in this course.

The goal of a course *practicum* is to improve one's ability at doing some particular task, of which he or she has learned the mechanics in an earlier course. The tendency, however, in denominational seminaries and churches is to reinforce the methodology 'perfected' over the generations, in order to arrive at the predetermined conclusion already set down within that denomination's accepted literature. Many of these conclusions are correct, and ought to be maintained sacrosanct, though their formulations and justifications ought to be worked out in as fresh and objective a manner as possible by each generation. Other conclusions are patently wrong, resting upon false hermeneutical principles, insufficient critical analysis, or illogical syllogisms. Still other conclusions are wrong because they *are* conclusions, drawn from books and passages that lead our thinking onward in a particular direction, but do not arrive at any dogmatic end. While it is impossible for a short course to even touch upon each and every biblical teaching, passage, or doctrine, it is hoped that samplings drawn from the different eras of biblical revelation, as well as from the different genre of biblical literature, will furnish illustrations of each of these categories.

[12] *Ibid.*; 65.

Session 2 – Pre-understanding: Philosophy

There was a time, and for a long time, that *objectivity* was in very short supply within human study and writing. Josephus, for instance, clearly biased his histories to shine favorably upon Emperor Vespasian, his patron. Even as recent as the 19th Century finds panegyric biographies of George Washington and Abraham Lincoln, with healthy doses of the legendary alongside the historical. In Science the same phenomenon is to be found well into the modern era, during which time what we now call 'Science' was termed 'Natural Philosophy.' This was to show the *subjective* character of the pursuit, as 'natural philosophers' approached the events of nature from a pre-established philosophical worldview. It was not until the 16th Century that men began to consider the *object* of their study as being determinative of its own meaning. This paradigm shift has been largely attributed to Francis Bacon, the English philosopher/statesman known popularly as the Father of Empiricism. Bacon's advocacy of the 'Scientific Method' introduced *objectivity* into all spheres of human thought: science, literature, statescraft, etc., as men began to consider the truth *inherent* in a thing rather than the truth *imposed* upon it.

Francis Bacon (1561-1626)

The pendulum has swung to the other end of the spectrum in the 21st Century, and we are now led to believe that there can be nothing more detrimental to any form of study than the element of *subjectivity* brought about by pre-understanding and bias. This is especially true within Reformed hermeneutics, the 'science' of biblical interpretation according to the most conservative evangelical schools. Much is said about practicing *exegesis* – gleaning knowledge and understanding *from* (ex-) the text, rather than *eisegesis* – reading understanding *into* (eis-) the text of Scripture. Yet it should be noted that perhaps too much has been said on this score, erecting an unattainable standard of 'objectivity' to what should be a natural and enjoyable practice for all believers: studying

their Bibles. We cannot approach the text as a *tabula rasa*; we come with a mind already trained in sensory perception and process according to the culture in which we were raised. In short, we come with philosophical pre-understandings. "None of us is able to approach new data with a blank mind, and so our attempts to understand new information consist largely of adjusting our prior 'framework of understanding' – integrating the new into the old."[13]

> These ideas have immediate consequences for the way we interpret the Bible and do theology. The common insistence that we should approach the text without any prior ideas regarding its meaning become almost irrelevant. And the standard advice given to theological students to study the text before consulting commentaries, or to determine its meaning before considering its application, appears self-defeating.[14]

One of the reasons that we cannot entirely shed our preconceptions is that it is through these that knowledge is mediated to our understanding. Before we think, we learn how to think. This process is natural, not forced – the inchoate mind of a child is nonetheless processing, and learning how to process by observation of those around him. Early childhood meaning is mediated by observation of meaning to the adults around the child. Systems of thought that are products of culture and tradition, form the processing framework whereby the older child, the student, and the adult continues to erect concepts and conclusions. This preconceptual processing framework is also why we so often find ourselves at odds with others of a different cultural or traditional background: we simply cannot understand how it is that they think, nor they us. Unless the conceptual frameworks are somehow brought into some degree of harmony – or at least a functioning awareness of their reality and divergence – agreement cannot be reached. This phenomenon has frequently been displayed, though not as frequently recognized, within international diplomacy – two countries just cannot come to common ground, due simply to the fact that their preconceptions of truth and knowledge are so massively divergent.

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[13] Silva; 20.
[14] *Ibid.*; 21.

This is also the reason why denominations exist. A member of one denomination or doctrinal belief system just cannot comprehend why his neighbor, a member of a different doctrinal system, cannot see the 'truth' of his particular interpretation of Scripture, as is it so plain to him. Usually the other man feels the same way in reverse. To be sure, the tenacity of the disagreement may be due to stubbornness or ignorance on the part of one or both of the disputants. But equally plausible is the reality that the philosophical pre-understandings of the two men prevent their being able to rationalize according to the other man's paradigm.

Turning one's philosophical pre-understanding off is impossible; recognizing that it exists is, at least, a step in the right direction. As important as this concept is in the realm of polemics – the disputation of doctrines – it is even more important in the realm of hermeneutics. For in this case the two disputants are separated by at least two thousand years, worlds and cultures apart from one another. One can hardly overstate the significance this philosophical divide to a 21st Century western mind attempting to find meaning from a text written by a 1st Century – or even 13th Century BC Oriental pen. From a purely human and rational standpoint, the chasm is too wide to bridge: there can be no real expectation of the one correctly interpreting the other, of the reader truly understanding the author. This conclusion has led to skepticism and to subjectivity in interpretation, whereby (in the first case) biblical exegesis is abandoned as impossible and fruitless, and (in the second) subjectivity is given free reign and the original intention of the author completely ignored.

Neither option is acceptable to the Reformed student of Scripture, who must believe that the gift of the Holy Spirit, along with the attendant promise that He would lead us into all truth, guarantees that the gulf separating the modern reader from the ancient author can be bridged. D. A. Carson calls this process of bridging the gulf 'distanciation,' which he defines indirectly by way of illustration in his treatise *Exegetical Fallacies*.[15] The word itself – though apparently used by 'hermeneutical experts'

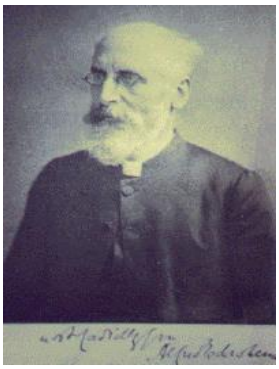
[15] Carson; 23.

according to Carson – is not defined in any common theological dictionaries, so its meaning pretty much has to be developed from Carson's usage. Basically, distanciation is the process whereby the biblical student *establishes* the distance that exists between himself and the author of the text. This is accomplished first by recognizing the gap, and then by seeking to close it through further investigation into the original culture. Carson writes,

> [W]e must first of all grasp the nature and degree of the differences that separate our understanding from the understanding of the text. Only then can be profitably fuse our horizon of understanding with the horizon of understanding of the text – that is, only then can we begin to shape our thoughts by the thoughts of the text so that we can truly understand them.[16]

This process may seem daunting, if not impossible, at first blush. But in the wisdom of Divine Revelation the process of distanciation is made simpler by the very nature of the Book being studied. As primarily historical narrative, with mixtures of self-reflecting poetry and entire books of 'wisdom,' the Bible lays out its own cultural milieu before the reader of any subsequent age. The process does take time – time spent reading through the Bible with a concerted focus on imbibing the cultural and

[16] *Ibid.*; 24.



Alfred Edersheim (1825-89)

traditional framework – the horizon of understanding – shared by the biblical writers. Subsequent study then approaches the passage in view, first from the viewpoint of the original writer and audience – inasmuch as possible – before attempting to 'fuse' the modern framework of understanding into the ancient. It is important to note that order: it is the modern student's mind that is to be fused into that of the biblical author, not the other way around.[17] Other aids are also available to this process. Alfred Edersheim's works, *The Life and Times of Jesus the Messiah*, *Sketches of Jewish Social Life in the Days of Christ,* and *The Temple and its Ministry and Services at the Time of Jesus Christ* are of great benefit, as is Werner Keller's *The Bible as History* and Sir William Ramsay's *Luke the Physician*. Also very helpful are secular works on archaeology, such as William F. Albright's *From the Stone Age to Christianity*, and secular histories such as Josephus' *Jewish Antiquities* and Tacitus' *Annals of Rome.* Yet none of these extra-biblical resources are vital to the process of distanciation, for the believer, having that anointing from the Holy Spirit, may traverse the distance between himself or herself and the biblical text from the text itself. This is because the very same Spirit who illuminates the understanding of the modern reader, is the One who inspired the ancient author.

Hermeneutics Practicum: Thematic Study

A perennial question among Bible expositors, theologians, and preachers has to do with the usage the Apostle Paul makes in his letters of the Greek word *nomos* (■□☜❍□𝒆𝝉), generally translated 'law.' There seems to be a disconnect between certain Pauline passages – some referring to the 'law' in favorable terms, others in

[17] This is one reason why modern, 'easy-to-read' paraphrases of the Bible are not truly helpful. We are interested in learning what the Scriptures has to say to us in our day, not what the Scriptures would sound like if they were written in our day.

decidedly unfavorable terms. This sort of hermeneutical/exegetical study is *thematic*, with the theme being 'Paul's use of *nomos*.'

At first glance, such a study would seem to be conducive to the infamous 'word study' approach: using a good Concordance, look up every use of the word *nomos* and tabulate your results. But this particular version of the word study has additional parameters – beyond the common flexibility of most words, and thus the inherent deficiency of the 'word study' approach, this exegetical question pertains specifically to *Paul's* usage of the word, and in practice, to his usage of the word in two of his epistles: those to the Romans and to the Galatians. Thus we begin, as in most cases, by establishing the *pericope* – the immediate context of Scripture wherein we hope to find our truest interpretation. Broadly speaking, this context would be the epistles of Paul; more narrowly – and ultimately more helpfully – the context of Paul's usage of *nomos* in Romans and Galatians.

We must not consider this type of study to be dispassionate, merely an academic pursuit of an apostle's use of an important term. No, there is a strong polemic component to the question. Frankly, this is the case for most 'difficult' passages or themes in Scripture; if it were not for the polemical controversy, they would hardly be considered 'difficult' passages to begin with. For *nomos* and Paul, the controversy seems to have its epicenter in Romans 6:14, "*For sin shall not be master over you, for you are not under law, but under grace.*" This passage, as well as several others from Paul's letters, set up a dichotomy between 'law' and 'grace' as two distinct paradigms under which men may live, though it is also apparent that they cannot be under both regimes at once. Statements like Romans 6:14 also seem to render null and void the significance, authority, and application of the law to the life of the believer, who is now 'under grace.' This is and has been the conclusion of many who have consequently relied on Romans 6:14 for their dismissal of the law from the life of the Church and of believers.

Here are some of the opposing couplets found in Paul's letters as they relate to the law and to grace:

Living 'under law' or 'under the law'	vs.	Living 'under grace'
Justification by 'the works of the law'	vs.	Justification by grace
The 'law of sin and death'	vs.	The law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus

These couplets are, as has been stated, primarily treated in the two letters of Romans and Galatians. As the two letters have such a concentrated focus on *nomos*, it is important to the exegesis of the term to establish the context or occasion of the letters in which it is used so frequently. The setting of the two epistles is quite different: one (Romans) is written to a church that Paul had not yet visited, one of which he had no part in founding. The other (Galatians) is to a church or churches that were intimate to Paul, he having been their father according to the faith and having nurtured them through many years. The two churches or church regions had two different 'problems,' but both of these problems centered on *nomos* at least to some extent. For the Galatians the problem is fairly obvious from a cursory reading: the *Judaizers* were apparently running amok through the churches of the region, requiring Gentile believers to succumb to Mosaic rituals, including but not limited to circumcision, in order to be 'true' believers. The problem facing the Roman church was more subtle, that of *Jewish elitism*. The Jews of Rome did not seem to be erecting any improper standards of church membership for Gentile believers, such as the Judaizers were doing across Asia Minor, but it is apparent from the tone of Paul's letter that they were, to some extent, 'lording it over' the Gentiles that they were of Jewish stock. For Paul, the law – *nomos* – pertained to both problems, though differently in each case.

Before delving into the exegesis of the Pauline literature, there are several other hermeneutical principles or obstacles to discuss that pertain to thematic studies in general. We have already touched upon the 'word study,' and will have occasion to revisit that issue in future workshops. The etymology of *nomos*, like so many words in so many languages, yields a fairly flexible word that can mean 'principle' or 'motivational force' as well as the more common 'law.' Studies that focus merely on the use of the law will, in addition, miss the significant ways that Paul uses the word in several

prepositional phrases: *under* law, *through* law, and *in* the law. Thus we conclude at the outset that the 'word study' approach will not be fruitful in this particular case.

Other obstacles to thematic studies include the use of verse-by-verse commentaries. While these can be very enlightening, and the student of Scripture must always avail himself of previous scholarship to the greatest extent feasible, the problem with consulting commentaries is similar to that of the 'word study.' In a thematic study, it is the 'big picture' that we seek; in this case, the underlying thought that permeates the apostle's writings with respect to *nomos*. If outside sources are to be consulted, studies in Pauline Theology will be more useful in their chapters on Paul's view of 'law' than most commentaries will be on the individual verses.

Finally, and particular to this theme, there is the theological tendency to digress into the various 'forms' of law – the moral, the civil, the ceremonial, and so forth. Such a hermeneutical methodology will quickly leave the important context of Paul's letters to the churches of Rome and Galatia, and will introduce into the analysis features that are completely absent from Paul's writing. Paul makes no distinction in his letters between the different facets of *nomos*, focusing his attention on 'law' in its most general sense, albeit clearly in the Mosaic sense.

There are other peripheral issues that can enter into a thematic study like this one, and like the dissection of *nomos* into moral, civil, and ceremonial aspects, these tend to diverge from the intended result, an interpretation of a particular theme in Scripture. Examples of these otherwise significant side trails with respect to the law, would be a study on the phrase *'the works of the law'* and a discussion on Paul's contrast between the *'letter'* of the law which kills, versus the *'spirit'* which gives life. A proper hermeneutic will leave such peripheral matters to a different and later study, pealing away and temporarily setting aside any line of exegesis that detracts from the central issue at hand: Paul's usage of *nomos* in his letters to the churches of Rome and Galatia.

Hermeneutics Workshop: Paul's Usage of *nomos* in Romans & Galatians

1. Taking Romans 6:14 as our point of departure, as it is often the center of polemical controversy regarding Paul's usage of the term 'law,' we begin the exegesis of the apostle's writings by recognizing first that, in this verse, *nomos* is the object of a preposition: *under* (Greek *upo* - ◆☎□□ॐ).
    a. The prepositional use of *nomos* is grammatically distinct from its nominative use, and this distinction turns out to be quite significant in Paul.
    b. It should be noted – something a non-Greek reading student will discover if consulting either commentaries or Pauline studies – that the apostle does not often use the *definite* form of *nomos*, i.e.; '*the* law.' Numerous studies have been done on this score, and the current consensus is that there is no meaningful difference between the anarthrous (no article) and the articular form of the noun, whether it stands alone as a noun or is part of a prepositional clause.
    c. The prepositional usage *under law* is formulaic in Paul. One particular passage strikes an interesting parallel with Romans 6:14

*For if you are led by the Spirit, you are not **under the law**.* (Galatians 5:18)

    d. But many instances of this prepositional clause do not contain the oppositional couplet of 'law and grace' or 'law and spirit.' Several are more neutral,

*But before faith came, we were kept in custody **under the law**…* (Galatians 3:23)

*But when the fullness of time had come, God sent forth His Son, born of woman, born **under the law**…* (Galatians 4:4)

*Now we know that whatever the law says, it speaks to those who are **under the law**, that every mouth be closed, and all the world become accountable to God.* (Romans 3:19)

*And to the Jews I became as a Jew, that I might win Jews; to those who are **under the law**, as **under the law**, though not being myself **under the law**, that I might win those who are **under the law**.* (I Corinthians 9:20)

e. These passages indicate that, at least from one perspective, being *under the law* is a condition that at a certain time is normal and right, at another time neutral and hopefully temporary, and at still another time both wrong and dangerous.
    i. For those *under the law* prior to the advent of Christ, it was a period of nonage, not bondage; a time of being kept under a tutor and guardian, waiting for the time of maturity to come.
    ii. For those during the initial flush of the gospel proclamation, being *under the law* was simply the situation of the Jewish people both in Palestine and throughout the Diaspora, but it was the intent of the gospel to deliver them from this condition, to show them the paradigm shift that had occurred in Christ Jesus.
        1. Galatians 3:25 teaches that now that faith has come *"we are no longer under a tutor,"* whereby a parallel is drawn between *under law* in verse 23.
        2. Galatians 4:5 indicates that the purpose for the Son of God being born *under the law* was *"to redeem those who were under the law, that we might receive the adoption as sons."*
    iii. To the Gentile believers in Galatia, to become *under law* would be tantamount to apostasy, rendering their profession of faith in Jesus Christ void and their souls in jeopardy.
        1. In Galatians 4:21, Paul rhetorically asks such people, *"Tell me, you who wish to be **under law**, do you not listen to the law?"*

f. The development of Paul's thought in Galatians concerning being 'under law' moves from a necessary and proper *tutor* – called 'nonage' – to a *yoke of slavery* in Galatians 5:1. This indicates that the believers relationship to the law cannot be the same as that of an unbeliever, especially that of an unbelieving Jew. *But does this mean that the law no longer has any place in the life of a believer?*

2. The answer to this question is not as straightforward as many exegetes have claimed (and who have usually answered in the affirmative). To arrive at an answer more representative of Paul's thought, one must further investigate the condition of being *under law*, this time with a view to determining the deficiency of that condition. In other words, to ask *why* being under the law was a condition to be delivered from and to which never to return.
    a. We learn from other passages in Galatians, and especially from Paul's treatment of the subject in Romans, that being *under law* is a condition from which there is no deliverance *under law*. It is a predicament that offers no hope of escape within itself, a regime of moral government that offers no chance of salvation from its own moral strictures.
    b. This is because the law brings to man the *knowledge of sin* without also bringing the power to control or eradicate that sin.

For the law brings about wrath; for where there is no law, neither is there violation."
(Romans 5:13)

…for apart from the law, sin is dead. And I was once alive apart from the law, but when the commandment came, sin became alive, and I died." (Romans 7:8)

…but the power of sin is the law." (I Corinthians 15:56)

    c. All of these passages, and others of similar tone, combine to give the impression that the law itself is the problem, sort of the third member of the triumvirate of 'sin, death, and the law.' One must dig deeper into Paul, though not too terribly far, to realize that these passages were never meant as an indictment of the law itself. There is nothing wrong with the law, for it is the gift of a Holy and Righteous God.

So then the law is holy, and the commandment is holy and righteous and good. (Romans 7:12)

d. Paul indicates that it was never the divine intent that the law provide anything more than the knowledge of sin, certainly not that it provide the means of escape from sin.

I do not nullify the grace of God; for if righteousness comes through the law, then Christ died needlessly. (Galatians 2:21)

Is the law then contrary to the promises of God? May it never be! For if a law had been given which was able to impart life, then righteousness would indeed have been based on law." (Galatians 3:21)

3. We arrive, then, at the cause of the problem, and it is not the law. It is the sin of the flesh, and the very sinfulness of sin is magnified in the fact that sin utilizes the holy, righteous, and good law to bring about man's death. In a classic passage on this subject, Paul ties together the fact that the law was not intended to bring about righteousness and the fact that this impotence of the law is due entirely to human sin.

For what the law could not do, weak as it was through the flesh, God did: sending His own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh and as an offering for sin, He condemned sin in the flesh. (Romans 8:3)

a. Paul makes it clear that the first advent of Jesus Christ brought about a decisive paradigm shift with respect to the law. This does not necessarily mean that the law is of no further value or importance, any more than one's graduation means that the lessons learned and materials accumulated during the school years are of no further value or importance. Yet the relationship has radically and irrevocably altered for the one who is in Christ and *under grace*. There has been a regime change.
b. Nonetheless, the positive things that the apostle does say concerning the law and its nature, give at least some support to the thought that the law retains importance and value; now it remains to see if that conclusion is valid.

4. The final thread in this particular hermeneutical tapestry moves from the conclusion that the believer is no longer *under law*, to now attempt to determine if the believer still has a relationship *to* the law. Paul's subsequent reasoning in Romans 8 would seem to indicate that the answer is 'yes.'

> *In order that the **requirement of the law might be fulfilled in us**, who do not walk according to the flesh, but according to the Spirit.* (Romans 8:4)
>
> *But we know that the law is good, if one uses it lawfully.* (I Timothy 1:8)
>
> *For we know that the law is spiritual; but I am of flesh, sold into bondage to sin…But if I do the very thing I do not wish to do, I agree with the law, confessing that it is good.* (Romans 7:14-16)
>
> *Owe nothing to anyone except to love one another; for he who loves his neighbor has fulfilled the law…Love does no wrong to a neighbor; love therefore is the fulfillment of the law.*
> (Romans 13:8-10)

At this point, and recognizing that this study has been far from exhaustive, we may offer some preliminary conclusions. The first is somewhat counterintuitive: that Paul's usage of *nomos* is consistent throughout his letters, it is 'monolithic.' For Paul, the law is never anything but holy, righteous, and good; the fault in the matter is entirely due to the sin of the flesh. The law is spiritual, and Paul agrees with it in his inner man, an agreement made more poignant by his inability to obey its righteous commands. This realization offers an *a priori* determination in favor of the law retaining a place in the believer's life, though one that is never again to be that of tutor or guardian. This, of course, opens up a whole new strain of exegesis; but that is what biblical hermeneutics always does.

Some Quotes:

> "…Not only can the law not give man the righteousness that makes him acceptable before God; it is also incapable of breaking the power of sin and conquering 'the flesh,' so that sin might no longer reign in the 'mortal body'…Paul…tells the church that in the struggle against the power of sin it may live not under the regime of the law, but under that of grace."

(Herman Ridderbos; *Paul: An Outline of His Theology*; 143.)

"This is why in the state and condition of sin ◆☎□□ॐ ■□✍❍□ℯ𝓇 ('under law') is the antithesis of grace. Provisions for the condemnation and bondage to which the law consigns us must proceed from another source, the source summed up in the word 'grace.'"

(John Murray; *Collected Writings: Vol. 4*, "Paul's Use of 'Nomos'"; 136-137)

"It is because of the law's sanction in condemnation and its impotence in reference to deliverance from sin that the law cannot justify or release from sin's power and defilement." (Murray; 137)

"It is not the law itself, therefore, which is sin. But sin avails itself of the law as its starting point,, that is to say, sin – here thought of as a personified power – gets its opportunity through the law. For the law forbids sin. Consequently, when the law comes on man with its prohibition, sin springs into action and awakens in man the desire for what is forbidden by the commandment." (Ridderbos; 144)

Session 3 – Pre-understanding: Theology

Dava Sobel's 1995 bestseller, *Longitude*, recounts the 18th Century competition sponsored by the British Parliament for the discovery of an accurate means of determining one's longitude at sea. Calculations of latitude had been perfected in antiquity, and the methodology of the sextant had not changed much over the millennia. But ship's navigators rarely knew with any certainty where their vessel was along the East-West circumference of the earth – their longitude – and this all too frequently led to disaster. Sobel's book opens with the Scilly Disaster of 1707, in which British Admiral Sir Cloudesley Shovell sailed his fleet into the rocks off the Isle of Scilly, losing his own life and that of over 1,400 sailors. This disaster was the result of navigational error with regard to the longitude of the fleet – being off by some 60 miles – and led to the parliamentary contest to encourage the discovery and development of an accurate means of determining this all-important parameter at sea. Sobel's book is highly recommended.

Engraving of Scilly Naval Disaster 1707

Biblical hermeneutics is analogous to navigation, in many respects. Thanks to the innovation of the Reformation era scholar Robertus Stephanus, we are always able to locate ourselves in the Bible with reference to chapter and verse. But figuring out where we are in terms of the overall progressive revelation of God – in terms of doctrine, or prophecy, or righteous praxis – is somewhat harder than determining longitude on the open seas three hundred years ago. What is needed is a similar coordinate system of 'mapping,' as it were, to keep the student of Scripture from shipwreck. This necessary system of guidance – or better, of location – is *theology*. But the role of theology within hermeneutics is not entirely clear, nor universally agreed upon – even to the point of its necessity – throughout the history of biblical exegesis. Some disparage the use of a

theological hermeneutic as being detrimental to the discovery of the 'true' meaning of a text. Students are warned not to let their theology get in the way of their exegesis, and the warning is often valid. The 19th Century German biblical commentator, H. A. W. Meyer negated the value of both philosophy and theology to the work of exegesis. He wrote,

H. A. W. Meyer (1800-73)

> The area of dogmatics and philosophy is to remain off limits for a commentary. For to ascertain the meaning the author intended to convey by his words impartially and historicogrammatically – that is the duty of the exegete. How the meaning so ascertained stands in relation to the teachings of philosophy, to what extent it agrees with the dogmas of the church or with the views of its theologians, in what way the dogmatician is to make use of it in the interest of his science – to the exegete as an exegete, all that is a matter of no concern.[18]

Meyer makes an excellent and necessary case in support of the primacy of the historical-grammatical hermeneutic that has guided sound biblical exegesis since the time of the Reformation. In his effort to objectivize biblical interpretation, however, Meyer has committed the same overstatement that we evaluated in the previous session with regard to one's philosophy. It is equally the case with theology as it is with philosophy: one cannot completely divest oneself of a theological pre-understanding that necessarily colors and filters one's understanding of a text. "But no one can escape theological prejudice of one sort or another – even if it takes the form of approaching the text in an untheological fashion!"[19] It is also true, as with philosophy, that not only is it impossible to approach the text with no theological pre-understanding, it is probably unadvisable to do so.

The need for doctrinal grounding in order to sound biblical exegesis is manifest in the often-heard comment within professing circles, "Well, *my* God isn't like that!" or "*My* God wouldn't act that way!" Such comments belong to the 'what the passage means to

[18] Quoted in Silva, *Foundations*; 30.
[19] *Idem.*

me' category of exegesis by bluster and ignorance, and evidence a sad lack of hermeneutical training or skill. In particular, the '*My* God' comments generally represent a *reaction* to some doctrinal ramifications of an exegetical conclusion, one founded upon a theological basis in fundamental disagreement to the theology of the objector. But such comments usually do not represent a cohesive theological foundation of their own, merely betraying the lack of one. This is the 'untheological'end of the spectrum and, as Silva points out above, it has just as much of a prejudicial influence on a person's interpretation of a passage as does the most developed theological system.

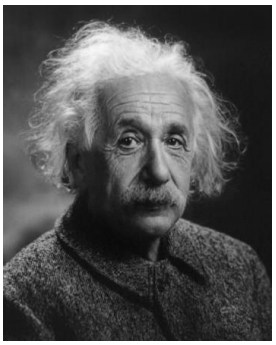
However, the fully developed theological system is the error at the other end of the spectrum. The development of doctrinal confessions during and after the Reformation has perhaps generated the biblical interpretive environment that motivated Meyer's strong words with regard to banning all dogmatic input into the biblical hermeneutic. It cannot be denied that a fully formed theological system will color both the reading and the interpreting of the Bible in hues comfortable to that dogmatic framework. But it should be equally clear that the resultant exegesis will be only as correct as is the theological framework, and as erroneous as the framework is faulty. In the realm of biblical hermeneutics, therefore, there must be some middle ground between a completely 'untheological' approach, and one that is already so theologically defined as to prohibit any real 'searching' of the Scriptures.

What we are looking for here is a theologically unifying principle for a biblical hermeneutic. To return to the realm of science, this is analogous to the perennial search for a unifying principle in the realm of nature. Isaac Newton's seminal work *Philosophiæ Naturalis Principia Mathematica* (Mathematical Principles of Natural Philosophy) laid the modern foundations of the laws of mechanics and motion – unifying principles upon which much of subsequent science was based. Much, but not all,

Isaac Newton (1643-1727)

as in the early 20th Century Albert Einstein provided another perspect-
ive on 'unifying' theory with his work on General Relativity. The point of this analogical review is to show both the necessity of unifying principles for continued study, and that these principles themselves must be challenged, changed, and expanded as science – or biblical interpretation – advances. Two points may be derived from the history of the pursuit of a unifying principle in nature, that bear upon the theological aspect of hermeneutics.

First, the unifying principle is not the entirety of the scientific encyclopedia. In other words, and applied to theology, the necessary unifying principle *cannot* be the entire volume of Systematic Theology – that is too broad, too diffuse to be unifying. Ecclesiology and Eschatology, for instance, are not unifying principles of biblical hermeneutics (nor are they very unifying within doctrinal discussions, either). Even Soteriology, as important a branch of theological study as it is, cannot be classified as a unifying principle of theological hermeneutics. Perhaps the pursuit of a theological unifying theory should be limited to the Doctrine of God, or perhaps to that of the Christ, or the Doctrine of "God in Christ" or of Christ and the World. These have been pursued by excellent biblical scholars and theologians throughout the years, and each has it merits and its advocates today. But the true test of a unifying theological principle has to be the same as that of a scientific unifying principle, or of the correct determination of longitude: it must work more times than it does not work; it must coordinate all of the available data more coherently than any other contending prin-



Albert Einstein (1879-1955)

ciple. But this leads to the second important point, one illustrated by the life's pursuit of Einstein. Albert Einstein is, of course, famous for the Theory of Relativity which he developed during his *Annus Mirabilis* – his 'miracle year' of 1905. To some extent Einstein rode on the wings of that glorious year through the rest of his life, though he certainly continued to make worthy contributions to the advance of physical science in the 20th Century. A lesser known aspect of his scientific life was his obsessive pursuit of a singular unifying principle of the universe – his equivalent of the modern pursuit of 'string theory.' Einstein's 'unified field theory' was broadly rejected by his colleagues, and his intense pursuit of it led to his increased isolation toward the end of his life. This was one of several sad chapters in the life of the 20th Century's greatest scientist.

The analogy to be drawn from this example is that a pure, singular unifying theory within theology is even more impossible to isolate and define than one in natural science. The process cannot be one of obsessive searching for a unifying theology, to the exclusion of all other study and interests within the broader scope of biblical revelation. Rather, the process is one of interaction, a formative theory is tested by continuing exegesis and by the application of that exegesis in the development of a more systematic theology. This systematic theology, then, is broadened under the rubric of the initial unifying theory, with the latter continually challenged by the former and modified – or abandoned – as the data demands. Continued reading of the Bible from both a devotional as well as an exegetical perspective is crucial to the proper critical evaluation of one's unifying theological principle or principles (there may be several unifying principles vying for ascendancy within the Bible student's mind at any given time!). This reading cycle ought also to be interspersed with specific passage studies, doctrinal examinations within the Scriptures, thematic studies, and even studies of particular authors – such as the Pauline Epistles, the books of Luke and Acts, the prophetic writings of Jeremiah, or the Psalms of David. The approach to a valid unifying theological principle will be made more clear

by this procedure: clear that one is on the right track, or clear that the current theological path ought to be abandoned for a more unifying one.

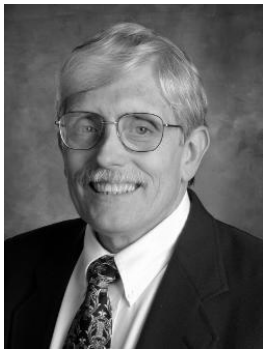
Hermeneutics Workshop: 'Arminian' Passages in Johanine Writings

Anyone familiar with theological debate is aware that there are certain 'proof texts' that are typically used in defense of one point of view, and other 'proof texts' used in opposition. The response to a teaching on justification or election or premillennial rapture is often, "What about what Paul/John/Peter/Isaiah says in such-and-such chapter and verse?" The hermeneutic is frequently called 'proof texting,' and it is almost always pejorative, used against an opponent to one's viewpoint. It is essentially the same as charging one's theological opponent with taking biblical passages out of context, to be used in a manner never intended by either the author or the Holy Spirit, to bolster the defense of an indefensible position. One modern author believes that a newfound harmony will suddenly appear between Calvinists and Arminians, if only this technique of proof texting were abandoned.

> Many of the difficulties between Arminianism and Calvinism would disappear if scholars were to abandon the common practice of 'proof texting.' The problem is that, in the past, systematic theology has by and large taken passages out of context, grouped them together in a logical order, and in many cases made them say things not intended by the original authors. This error is common to both sides in the debate. The answer is to be found in the methods of biblical theology, whereby we take every passage in its own context and interpret it in light of the author's intended meaning. We do not place a verse from John next to a verse from Hebrews and interpret one by the other; rather we allow John to speak for himself and the writer to the Hebrews to speak for himself.[20]

This lesson's workshop will investigate several 'proof texts' used in support of Arminian soteriology: that fallen man has both the responsibility and the ability to re-

[20] Osborne, Grant. www.theabbotsabbey.blogspot.com.


Grant Osborne (b. 1942)

pent of his sin and to believe on Jesus Christ for salvation. However, before delving into the exegesis of specific passages, it is important to consider the hermeneutical principles – valid and false – that are involved here. Dr. Osborne is correct in stating that a great deal of debate between Calvinists and Arminians consists in one side lobbing incendiary proof texts into the other side's camp, only to receive a reciprocal bombardment. But his objection to the procedure, and his assertion that its abandonment would result in a clarity not experienced in the past fifteen hundred years, is as much of an oversimplification as was Herr Meyer's view regarding the need to divest biblical exegesis of all philosophical and dogmatic preconceptions.

Proof texts, in and of themselves, are a valid and necessary means by which the 'full counsel of Scripture' is brought to bear on a particular issue. This process is known theologically as the 'analogy of faith,' whereby passages from throughout the Bible – the whole spectrum of divine revelation – shed their own peculiar light upon various theological and practical matters facing the church and believers. Osborne's advocacy of biblical theology has its place: it is very important to study the flow of progressive revelation and to seek first to interpret the Bible within its immediate historical and grammatical situation. But to say that we must let John speak for John, and the writer of Hebrews speak for the writer of Hebrews – with its implication that John cannot speak to the writer of Hebrews, or vice versa – is to leave off the fact that it is God the Holy Spirit who speaks through both. We can accept that every 'proof text' must first be properly interpreted within its own context and, inasmuch as is possible, in accordance with the author's original intend. But when that is done, the collation of texts and verses from here and there throughout the Scripture – systematically forming biblical doctrine – is a vital and necessary next step. One wonders where the Doctrine of the Trinity would be if each biblical author were forced 'to speak for himself' only, with no corroborating testimony from the other authors.

'Proof texting,' – considered separately from 'proof texts' – is indeed a hermeneutical process to be devoutly avoided. It is, in fact, merely an expansion of the word study error: instead of individual words being isolated and then combined, 'proof texting' does this with verses and passages, often ones that contain the same word or words. The danger of this hermeneutical methodology is just that which was mentioned above: taking passages out of context, and making them say or support what they were never intended to say or support. Therefore, when one is considering the 'proof texts' of any particular argument, the Berean thing to do is to investigate each text with this as the first question: does the context of this passage support the usage being made of it as a proof text? This process will often cull out several 'proof text' from any list, and will put the dogmatic value of the theological assertion in better biblical perspective.

'Proof texting' is an unavoidable phenomenon within Christian polemics, partly because it is a valid means of systematizing biblical data, and partly because it serves as a shortcut to real biblical exegesis. Dr. Osborne himself, in an article titled *Exegetical Notes on Calvinist Texts*, basically participates in the process, though ostensibly as one debunking Calvinist 'proof texts.' His hermeneutic, however, betrays another and equally dangerous fallacy: *special pleading*. This logical fallacy is defined as occurring "when someone argues that a case is an exception to a rule based upon an irrelevant characteristic that does not define an exception."[21] In theological debates this logical fallacy usually takes the form of asserting that a passage does not mean what it seems to mean – which meaning would place it in support as a 'proof text' of the opposing viewpoint – without declaring *why* it does not mean what it seems to mean. An example from Osborne's essay is that of his treatment of Matthew 11:25-27.

> *At that time Jesus said, "I praise You, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, that You have hidden these things from the wise and intelligent and have revealed them to infants. Yes, Father, for this way was well-pleasing in Your sight. All things have been handed over to Me by My Father; and no one knows the Son except the Father; nor does anyone know the Father except the Son, and anyone to whom the Son wills to reveal Him.*

[21] http://www.fallacyfiles.org/specplea.html

Osborne claims that this is a proof text for Calvinists "to teach a combined doctrine of [unconditional] election and irresistible grace."[22] While neither the words 'election' or 'irresistible grace' are used in the text, the passage does seem to indicate that the revelation of God to man is motivated by the sovereign will and pleasure of God alone, which is indeed the essential truth taught by the joint doctrines of election and irresistible grace. Osborne admits that the concept of election is present in the verse, but does so in an ambiguous, evasive manner, "The election motif is an important element in the theology of Jesus and transforms the corporate identity of Israel's view to the individual thrust of Jesus' view (not the 'anyone' of Matt. 11:27)."[23] But then he adds the following paragraph,

> Nevertheless, we must ask exactly what this doctrine entailed. Does it mean that God irresistibly draws to himself those he [unconditionally] chooses [to save] and guarantees their salvation? This is certainly not the emphasis here, for Jesus centers on the revelation aspect, not the election aspect, of salvation. The latter doctrine is used by Jesus to stress the redemptive activity of God, and the place of the Son as the means of the effective outworking of that divine plan. Therefore, election is taught in this passage [but not of the 'unconditional election of only some' variety], and…irresistible grace is not.[24]

Thus Dr. Osborne establishes an exception in Matthew 11:25-27 whereby Jesus is not speaking of irresistible calling or unconditional election, even though the Lord clearly specifies the motivation for the divine revelation as *"it was well pleasing in Your sight."* This misdirection in Osborne's exegesis comes in when he distinguishes the 'revelation aspect' and the 'election aspect' of Jesus' teaching, though it should be clear from verse 27 that the revelation of which the Lord speaks is that which brings knowledge of God – which by any way you slice it, means salvation.

This example is typical of how opposing 'proof texts' are dealt with, and the only reason an Arminian example is used here is because it conveniently came to hand during the preparation for this lesson; Calvinists are equally guilty of the subterfuge. As we are

[22] Osborne, Grant. *Exegetical Notes on Calvinist Texts*; www.theabbotsabbey.blogspot.com.
[23] *Idem.*
[24] *Idem.*

about to tackle several 'classic' Arminian 'proof texts,' this example should serve excellently as a referee, to make sure the same exegetical and logical errors are not committed in 'refuting' the Arminian interpretation of certain texts that are made above in 'refuting' a Calvinistic one. Two verses are selected for this session's workshop: John 3:16 and I John 2:2. Passages from elsewhere in the Bible will be brought in to support the alleged 'Arminian' interpretation of these passages, but – in keeping with Dr. Osborne's advice due only to the limitations of time and space – the focus will be on the Johanine literature from which these verses arise.

> *For God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him shall not perish, but have eternal life. For God did not send the Son into the world to judge the world, but that the world might be saved through Him. He who believes in Him is not judged; he who does not believe has been judged already, because he has not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God. This is the judgment, that the Light has come into the world, and men loved the darkness rather than the Light, for their deeds were evil.* (John 3:16-19)

> *My little children, I am writing these things to you so that you may not sin. And if anyone sins, we have an Advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous; and He Himself is the propitiation for our sins; and not for ours only, but also for those of the whole world.*
>
> (I John 2:1-2)

John 3:16 – the official Bible verse of the NFL – is often quoted on behalf of the universality of the divine love - *for God so loved* ***the world*** - and for the individual universality of the opportunity of salvation – *whosoever believes in Him*. These two tenets of Arminianism are in direct opposition to the Calvinistic principles of Election, Irresistible Grace, and Definite Atonement. Thus the passage is a frequent participant in the Calvinist-Arminian debate. Thus also it is a tendency among Calvinistic writers to overstate their case, almost to the point of co-opting John 3:16 as a *Calvinistic* proof text. But a careful exegesis of the verse within both its immediate context and that of the Johanine Gospel, will permit to its meaning what belongs to it, and deny what does not.

Foremost in concession to opponents of Calvinism, *universality* is indeed taught by this verse, though neither the universality of the universalist (who believes that all men will eventually be saved) nor of the Arminian (who believes that God's love is

indiscriminate to each and every member of the human race). The universality taught here is in scope (the world) and particular (whosoever), and thus these two aspects of the object of the divine love need to be unpacked both within the passage and within John's broader writings.

The term translated 'world' is the common Greek form signifying the created order, and particularly that part of the created order inhabited by *Man*. The word is *cosmos*, and especially in John's writings it generally has a negative moral connotation as opposed to a generic sense of the 'earth,' or an amoral signification of all of humanity. Frederick Godet notes the usual tenor of the word in the New Testament, "The *world*, that fallen humanity of which God in the Old Testament had left the largest part outside of His theocratic government and revelation, and which the Pharisees devoted to wrath and judgment, Jesus presents to Nicodemus as the object of the most boundless love."[25] That John (or Jesus, for it is indeterminate who is 'speaking' at this point in Chapter 3) intends a moral signification for the word is indicated within the immediate context,

> *This is the judgment, that the Light has come into the world, and men loved the darkness rather than the Light, for their deeds were evil.* (John 3;19)

And by John's usage of the term elsewhere in this Gospel and in his epistles.

> *There was the true Light which, coming into the world, enlightens every man. He was in the world, and the world was made through Him, and the world did not know Him.*
>
> (John 1:9-10)

> *Do not love the world nor the things in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him. For all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh and the lust of the eyes and the boastful pride of life, is not from the Father, but is from the world. The world is passing away, and also its lusts; but the one who does the will of God lives forever.*
>
> (I John 2:15-17)

The second reference is interesting in that the apostle admonished his 'little children' *not* to love the very same world that God *so loved* that He sent His only-begotten

[25] Godet, Frederick. *Exposition of the Gospel of John*; en loc.

Son. This at least indicates that the divine love was not merited; it did not alight on a worthy 'world,' but rather on one eminently unworthy. There is also no necessity of loading the word *cosmos* down with the sort of universality that indicates each and every human being in the world. Indeed, except for those passages that speak of the scope and influence of sin, the term never carries the sense of such individual specificity. Nonetheless, it is imperative that the verse not be diluted in its meaning: the love of God extends to the world, without distinction of race or tribe. This concept in itself would have set Nicodemus' ears to tingling, though it is sufficiently present in the Old Testament that he should not have been surprised to hear Rabbi Jesus say it. Yet it is more likely that Jesus' usage of the term *cosmos* signifies a new and surprising evangelistic breadth to the love of God. "Jews were familiar with the truth that God loved the children of Israel; here God's love is not restricted by race. Even so, God's love is not to be admired because the world is so big and includes so many people, but because the world is so bad…"[26]

John 3;16 thus presents us with the motivation of God – love – and the scope of His self-revelatory and salvific work – the world. Next we are presented with the instrumentality of salvation – faith, *whosoever believes on Him shall not perish but have eternal life.* The 'whosoever believes' represents the conditions of salvation for anyone in the world, whether from Israel or from the *goyim*: faith. Elsewhere in the same Gospel, John records Jesus' words, "*This is the work of God, that you believe on Him whom He has sent.*"[27] This truth the Calvinist cannot deny; but does the responsibility of faith necessitate the ability to believe? This is the crux of the theological and soteriological debate, and it is a philosophical rather than a biblical point. But at least we can attempt to determine from John's own pen whether *he* considered the two concepts – responsibility and ability – to be inseparable. We being with an enigmatic passage from the opening chapter of the Gospel, one that admittedly does not shed a lot of light, but begins to move us in a direction.

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[26] Carson, D. A. *Commentary on John*; en loc.
[27] John 6:29

> *But as many as received Him, to them He gave the right to become children of God, even to those who believe in His name, who were born, not of blood nor of the will of the flesh nor of the will of man, but of God.* (John 1:13)

This passage utilizes the concept of 'receiving' rather than 'believing' in Christ, but all admit that the meaning is the same. John starts out by stating again the principle we are discussing: that believing or receiving Christ is the instrumentality of salvation. He then basically removes the original motive force of this step – here synonymous with regeneration as it is earlier in John 3 – from any human agency, and reposes it with God.

> *Jesus said to them, "I am the bread of life; he who comes to Me will not hunger, and he who believes in Me will never thirst.* ***But I said to you that you have seen Me, and yet do not believe. All that the Father gives Me will come to Me, and the one who comes to Me I will certainly not cast out.*** *For I have come down from heaven, not to do My own will, but the will of Him who sent Me. This is the will of Him who sent Me, that of all that He has given Me I lose nothing, but raise it up on the last day. For this is the will of My Father, that everyone who beholds the Son and believes in Him will have eternal life, and I Myself will raise him up on the last day."*
>
> (John 6:35-40)

> *Jesus answered them, "I told you, and you do not believe; the works that I do in My Father's name, these testify of Me.* ***But you do not believe because you are not of My sheep****. My sheep hear My voice, and I know them, and they follow Me; and I give eternal life to them, and they will never perish; and no one will snatch them out of My hand. My Father, who has given them to Me, is greater than all; and no one is able to snatch them out of the Father's hand. I and the Father are one."* (John 10:25-30)

These two passages distinguish between those who do not believe and those who do, and seem clearly to indicate that that which makes the two groups to differ cannot be found within men themselves, but rather in the will of the Father. It appears that the *natural* condition of man is unbelief, a condition that is not even cured by the actual sight of the Son of God in the flesh (6:36). The truism remains: *belief* in Jesus Christ is the *sine qua non* of salvation; but thus far there is no indication that the Apostle John knew of any residual ability within fallen man that would result in faith. As this is a hermeneutics practicum course, we leave off additional 'proof texts' of man's inability to believe, and simply indicate that this is the line of investigation required in order to properly

understand John 3;16. The conditionality of faith is affirmed, while the ability to believe is denied.

The second Arminian 'proof text' selected – I John 2:2 – seems irrefutably to announce Jesus Christ as the Savior of the whole world. *"…and He Himself is the propitiation for our sins, and not for ours only, but for those of the whole world."* John intensifies the scope and target of God's redemptive power through Jesus Christ by stipulating the *whole* world here in this passage, rather than jut the world in John 3:16. To most Arminians, I John 2:2 is the death knell to the Calvinistic doctrine of Limited or Definite Atonement. Indeed, few Arminians believe that a Calvinist can extricate himself from this verse without exegetical contortions that would make Houdini proud.

The first thing to note, however, is that the object of the propitiation of Jesus Christ is not *the whole world*, but rather *the sins* of the whole world (as well as *our* sins mentioned earlier in the verse). Thus it is as valid, if not more so, to understand John's reasoning as applying to *sins* – all types of sins, all types of sinners – as applying to each and every *sinner*. Robert Candlish writes in his commentary on the verse, "He is the propitiation for all sinners and for all sins. No sin, no sinner, is at any time beyond the reach of this great atonement." Here is an example of an unashamedly Calvinistic writer speaking to the universal power of Christ's atoning blood. But this is not the same as applying that blood to each and every sinner in *the whole world*.

Robert Candlish (1806-73)

This passage illustrates another hermeneutical error that is of frequent occurrence in biblical exegesis, though it is easy to spot and to remedy. That is the error of *proving too much*. The work of Christ in I John 2:2 is termed *propitiation*, which is a common English translation of the Greek *hilasmos*. It is also sometimes translated 'atonement' and a cognate is used in the Greek Old Testament to signify the mercy seat of the ark in the Holy of Holies. The word has several nuances, but at its root it means 'satisfaction' as in the full payment of a debt. Vine's Dictionary of New Testament words defines *hilasmos*

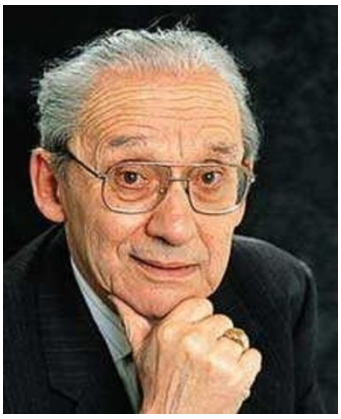
as "an expiation, a means whereby sin is covered and remitted."[28] But the significance of the propitiatory sacrifices of the Old Testament, and to an infinitely greater degree those of Jesus Christ, is that the sins thus propitiated were *forgiven* and *forgotten*. They were remitted, covered, satisfied. Thus, in I John 2:2, the application of Christ's propitiation to each and every member of the human race in the world, must lead logically to universal salvation. To say that the sin of unbelief is the one sin not covered here, is to argue against the clear meaning of the text: Jesus' blood is the propitiation of *the sins* – with no exception made – of the whole world.

Thus the impact on the world of the propitiatory blood of Jesus Christ must be logically limited in some way. It is either limited in efficacy: it does not accomplish that for which it is intended, if indeed it is intended to apply to all men without exception – unless one adopts the doctrine of universal salvation. Or it is limited in extent: it applies to the whole world without distinction of *tongue, tribe, or nation*, but not to each and every human being in the world. Evidence in favor of the latter view instead of the former would require a much longer treatise here, a thorough study of the meaning of *propitiation*. But again, this is the direction of hermeneutics: be sure that the exegesis of a passage does not prove too much. For if it does, it is in error.

[28] http://www2.mf.no/bibelprog/vines?word=%AFt0002239; and then proceeds to give a very Arminian slant to I John 2;2; the reader ought to investigate the entry for *propitiation*; Noun #2 in Vine's.

Session 4 – Pre-understanding: History

The present is mounting a concerted and vigorous attack upon the past. Through the Rationalism of the Enlightenment the wisdom of past ages slowly faded before the 'brilliance' of modern understanding, and the present was progressively alienated and eventually divorced from the past. But the past has a habit of sticking around, especially through musty histories and biographies, and so "a strong coalition of philosophers, literary theorists, and historians have risen up"[29] to tell us in the present that we cannot know with any certainty that anything recorded of the past is true. Indeed, there is now an *a priori* perspective that historical accounts – especially historical *narratives* – are by and large works of fiction and not 'fact.' The basic argument common to the various representations of this theme, is that narrative history is contrived: the events of the past are forced into a plot-oriented structure with protagonists and antagonists, and a beginning, middle, and end of the story. This modern school of literary thought – which has massively impacted modern biblical interpretation no less than that of secular history – claims that the act of recording the 'events' of history into a narrative form immediately and by the nature of the process, remove both the author and the reader from the 'real' events themselves. One of the leading exponents of this literary theory, Paul Ricoeur, states that "The ideas of beginning, middle, and end are not taken from experience; they are not traits of real action but of poetic ordering."[30]



Paul Ricoeur (1913-2005)

Conservative evangelicals tend to react to this sort of reasoning, if they ever encounter it in their increasingly isolated intellectual cloisters, with violent denunciation of 'Liberal!' and 'Heretic!' without giving the matter serious thought. But if they would stop and consider their own readings of biblical narrative history, they would have to

[29] Carr, David. "Narrative and the Real World: An Argument for Continuity," *History and Theory* 25 (1986); 117.
[30] Quoted by Carr; *op cit*; 120.

admit not a few instances where this biblical history was confusing at best, and just did not make any sense at worst. Narrative accounts that are plainly referring to the same 'history' are not the same, and sometimes are troublingly different. Unless the believer faces up to the challenges inherent to the study of history – even indirectly and implicitly as it is wrapped up within the warp and woof of Scripture – then these recurring difficulties can act as an acid, slowly eating away at one's trust in the inerrancy and authority of the Bible.

This conundrum – the belief that the Bible is the inspired Word of God over against the passages of Scripture that are either disharmonious, or perhaps even contradictory – is so necessary and acute because we realize that the divine revelation took place *in* and *through* history. From Creation to the Crucifixion to the Consummation – not only the Bible, but the *truth* it reveals is inextricably bound to the history of the world, of Man, and of Israel. The Christian faith, as the Jewish faith before it, is fundamentally *propositional* – it is founded upon distinct and non-negotiable proposition. And these propositions are *historical* in their very essence: *"In the fullness of time, God sent forth His Son…"* It is not 'neither here nor there' whether the events of biblical history *actually took place*; it is of the very essence of the faith that these events *did take place*, and that the historical record of these events is valid and trustworthy.

Is it true that narration is inherently untrustworthy? Or, rather, is it the case that narration is the *best* form of historical record, because man lives life as in a story? David Carr, in his essay *Narrative and the Real World*, defends the second view, writing, "Narrative is not merely a possibly successful way of describing events; its structure inheres in the events themselves."[31] In other words, according to Carr, men live their lives in at least semi-consciousness of being part of a 'story,' of the sequences of life events indeed having a beginning, a middle, and an end. Carr's perspective, quite interesting and thought-provoking in itself, also illuminates the question of biblical narrative and historical veracity. When one reads the 'stories' of the Bible, one implicitly understands

[31] *Idem*.

that they are stories told after the fact, and often by someone who was either not an eyewitness, or was removed from the events by many years. Furthermore, it is readily apparent that the narrative accounts are never merely 'historical record'; rather they are recorded for a purpose – detractors would say an ulterior motive; some even would say 'propaganda.' Indeed, different narratives of the same events are found to be used in different places for different reasons, and to have correspondingly different content and flow.

The narrator stands in a position of authority with respect to the original players in the drama being told, and with respect to the readers of the narration. It is the narrator who selects which facts are included, orients those facts according to his preferred schema, and creates the overall story according to his own purpose and literary style. The actors in the events recorded are often no longer on the scene and cannot gainsay the narrator's report, and the readers are also far removed from the events and cannot validate firsthand the data provided. But neither the absence of the original actors, nor the distance of the readers, necessitates that the narrative is less than trustworthy, much less that it is false. There could be several reasons why a historian's account of a past event would be untruthful and untrustworthy. First, *ignorance*: the historian does not know his data. Second, *malfeasance*: the historian purposely misrepresents the data. And third, *meaningless data*: that the events of the past have no correspondence to one another and therefore cannot be sequenced together into a meaningful and trustworthy narrative.

The first two reasons are quite possible, but the benefit of the doubt ought to be given to any author until his or her work is proven either to be the product of ignorance or malpractice, usually by comparison with many other authors of the same time period and events. It is the third perspective that characterizes much modern thought in regard to 'history' and historiography, and one that no orthodox believer can accept – nor any rational person, either. Carr offers a very commonsensical approach to the issue when he defends the narrative form of historiography as being eminently suitable to the topic. His perspective is that men invariably recognize the narrative form that exists in their own lives, "What I am saying, then, is that we are constantly striving, with more or less

success, to occupy the storyteller position with respect to our own lives."[32] He points out the universal truth that man is oriented not merely to the present as a disconnected moment, but also to the past as well as to the future – and these two as related and inextricably bound to the present. Human life is a constant interplay between the retention of past events and the 'protention' of the future, as each impinges and is impinged upon by the actions of the present. "Whatever we encounter within our experience functions as instrument or obstacle to our plans, expectations, and hopes. Whatever else 'life' may be, it is hardly a structureless sequence of isolated events."[33]

What does all of this have to do with biblical narrative history? Well, on the one hand, this analysis – as preliminary and rudimentary as it is – forces us to realize that the narratives that we read in Scripture are the *record* of events and not the events themselves. This means that perspective has come into play in the selecting of the actions and characters that are recorded, and indeed, those that are left out. It means that a certain structure and style has been imposed upon the data, one that is likely different from that imposed by a different narrator recounting the same event. But the very form in which the historical data is being recorded, far from rendering it untrustworthy or 'fictional,' brings the past to life as it was lived at the time. It invites the reader into the flow of the action, and into the self-realization of the actors that they were themselves part of the 'story,' the narrative. Carr is correct in his analysis; life is inherently conducive to narrative historiography, and history is in no way diminished in its truthfulness by being put down as narrative.

Yet a caveat is in order here, and one that the Bible answers well. That is the realization that a single account of an event is insufficient to command trust on its own. Historians, as also journalists, need to employ a version of that high school physics exercise: triangulation. History is not one-dimensional, arguably it is not even three dimensional. It is multi-faceted, and not even those who are living the history at the time are capable of seeing all of the facets. "What is essential to the story-teller's position is

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[32] *Ibid.*; 125.
[33] *Ibid.*; 122.

the advantage of real hindsight, a real freedom from the constraint of the present assured by occupying a position after, above, or outside the events narrated. The story-teller is situated in that enviable position beyond all the unforeseen circumstances that intrude, all the unintended consequences of our action that plague our days and plans."[34] But in order for the reader to firmly repose trust in the narrative of this 'free story-teller,' there must be the critical analysis of *other* equally free story-tellers relating the same event. This demand is met in the Bible by means of multiple narratives: the annals of I & II Kings compared to the records of I & II Chronicles; the Four Gospels; even the poetic Psalms as they reflect back upon the events recorded in the Pentateuch. It is not an exhaustive array of corroborating narratives, to be sure, but it is sufficient for the comfort and instruction of the believing reader, for one cannot for a moment leave out the doctrine of divine inspiration with regard to the writing of the Scriptures.

The focus of this discussion has been the narrative style of biblical history, and thus far we have established that such literary forms of historiography are by no means *a priori* untrustworthy. David Carr's analysis ably brings attention to the narrative nature of *life*, and to the fact that narrative historiography is inherently suited to recording the events of life. But that is all very academic unless it somehow impinges upon how the reader of Scripture actually *reads* the Bible, and in the context of this lesson, the historical narratives of the Bible. The phenomena of literary criticism, deconstructionism, and reader-response theory – all of which are derived from the basic premise that narrative historiography cannot be accurate – have negatively impacted modern commentary upon the Bible, and the student must be careful with regard to commentaries consulted and purchased as study aids. But beyond the realm of academia, the narrative style of biblical history often has a negative impact on the Bible student's understanding of the text, simply because he or she fails to recognize the *art* of historical narrative.

When a visual artist paints a picture, or takes a photograph, there is a great deal of discrimination and perspective that lies behind the scene – much creative selectivity

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[34] *Ibid*.; 125.

that never comes before the eyes of the viewer. This pertains, of course, to the subject matter included in the composition; it also pertains to that which is left out. In addition, visual art incorporates decisions regarding perspective, angle, and even lighting, that have analogous reference to the work of a historian, even a biblical historian. "But if the past does have some inherent structure, then the first task of historians is to seek to discern that structure. Beyond this, they must also choose a point of view – the most appropriate perspective from which to depict the subject and the 'best light' in which to see it. And they must make aesthetic choices – how shall the work be composed, what degree of detail shall be included, what shall be the boundaries of their 'picture' of the past, and so forth."[35] For instance, the physician Luke "*made careful search and inquiry*" into the events he was to record in his gospel and in the Book of Acts. And Luke, as the narrator of the events – only a small percentage of which did he witness firsthand – was the determining factor (aided, of course, by the Holy Spirit) of the 'composition' of his history. In this role, in the words of V. Philips Long, the historian becomes a "verbal representational artist."[36]

That is really the crux of the matter: that historical narrative is a form of verbal representational art. Biblical history, therefore, is not merely a chronological sequence of events as if a timeline; indeed, it is often distinctly *non*-chronological in its structure. Biblical historical narrative is as *living and active* as is the overall Bible, and as the events that it records were in their time. The various perspectives offered by multiple historical writers, poetic authors, and the prophetic or apostolic commentary, all serve to reconstruct the events in a trustworthy record of the event. But narrative history does not purport to be the entirety of the event as it occurred; it is the event as recorded, and the meaning conveyed by this process is multifaceted and purposeful. Learning the historical events is one thing; discerning the purpose behind the historical record is

[35] Long, V. Philip, in Silva, *Foundations of Contemporary Interpretation*; 327.
[36] *Ibid.*; 326.

something else entirely, and extremely important to the reading and understanding of biblical history.

Hermeneutics Workshop: Practical Theology

The apostle Peter assures us in his second letter, that God has "*granted to us all things pertaining to life and godliness.*"[37] Whatever else this may mean, it most certainly means that God has given us sufficient instruction as to how to live as believers – what to do and what not to do. But what do we do when an activity is seemingly prohibited in one place, only to be condoned in another? This particular exegetical challenge impact Christian *praxis* instead of Christian *doctrine*. Just as believing the right doctrines is called 'orthodoxy,' doing the right things – living the right sort of Christian life – is called 'orthopraxy.' Both are hard to define and even harder to maintain, as the average believer is constantly buffeted by opinions from the pulpit, from 'Christian' literature, and from friends and family. One almost despairs when he or she encounters what appears to be misdirection from the Bible itself. Two such examples will serve our workshop for this session: Acts 15:29 and Colossians 2:16. In both of these passages believers are either prohibited from doing something elsewhere permitted, or a different standard appears to be erected for different 'classes' of believers. This type of biblical exegetical challenge is most acutely felt in the church whenever there are cultural differences between members, as there was between Jewish believers and Gentile believers in the first century church.

Colossians 2:16

> *Therefore let not anyone judge you in the matter of food or of drink, or in regard to feasts, or new moons or Sabbaths, which are a shadow of the things about to come, but the substance is Christ.*

This passage is troublesome primarily to Reformed theologians and believers – those who adhere to the continued authority and place of the Law in the life of believers,

[37] II Peter 1:3

and to the Regulative Principle in the matter of worship and *praxis*. The trouble arises not so much in regard to food and drink, nor even to feasts and new moons, but rather to 'sabbaths' – translated in the NASV as 'a Sabbath day.' The word is plural in the original text and should be translated as such, but that does not immediately solve the problem. Nor does the mention of the word 'sabbaths' here necessarily impinge upon the parallel discussion regarding the Lord's Day, and the believer's obligations with regard to that day.

The question is more fundamental than these particulars, though the answer to the question posed by Colossians 2:16 must influence one's thoughts with regard to the Lord's Day and other religious days or observances. It appears that here the apostle Paul greatly diminishes the value and significance of things that were once integral parts of the identity and worship of the people of God. 'Meat and drink' pertain to the dietary laws of the Levitical code; feasts probably have reference to the three annual Israelite festivals, though there were others feasts that had accrued to the Jewish calendar; and 'new moons' possibly has reference to Numbers 29:6 (*cp* Isaiah 1:14). It was the 'sabbath,' however, that truly distinguished the Israelite from the Gentile, not only under the Mosaic dispensation, but also during the initial years of the Christian era. And it was these distinguishing marks of Judaism that were the problem facing the apostle as he wrote this letter, and this verse.

Advocates of strict, or even not-so-strict, adherence to Old Testament ceremonies, rituals, dietary restrictions, festival days, or even the *Sabbath*, often have to finesse their way around the writings of Paul both here in Colossians 2 and even more emphatically in Romans 14. On the other hand, Christian libertarians are too quick to point to these passages as proving that the Christian life has no room for such things anymore. But close attention to what the apostle says – and what he does not say – will show that, while not an advocate for the strict continuance of Old Testament distinctive, he was also not prohibiting their observance, either. The key, as is so often the case in any literary interpretation, is in the verbal idea contained in 2:16, *Let no one* ***judge*** *you…* He does not say, *Let no one observe Mosaic dietary restrictions, let no one celebrate Jewish festivals or new*

moon feasts, and let no one observe the Sabbath. Nor does he by any means command that these things *should* be done. What he prohibits is *judging*, and he does so not from the viewpoint of the judge, but of the *judged*: ***Let*** *no one judge* ***you****…*

The hermeneutic of this passage, and of Acts 15:29 to which we will turn momentarily, and to most exegetical challenges that have to do with Christian *praxis*, is twofold: First, one must establish the context of the verse in question; and second, one must let Scripture interpret Scripture. To jump to the punchline in this particular case, what the apostle is dealing with is the *Liberty of Christian Conscience*. This was the priority in the light of which other, once important, matters fade into the background. In the immediate context of Colossian 2:16, Paul establishes that the *"certificate of debt consisting of decrees against us"* has been taken out of the way by God through Jesus Christ, *"having nailed it to the cross."* The content of these decrees he then enumerates in verse 16 and following, showing that these things were but shadows to the substance (literally, 'body') which is Christ.

It may have been the case with the church at Colossae that some believers were adopting, or being tempted to adopt, a form of Judeo-Christian asceticism: an adoption or adherence to Mosaic ritual observances coupled with an abstemious life, to which was added angel-worship and visions (verse 18). Paul does not condemn out of hand those observances that once were stipulated under the Mosaic Law, and had for so long characterized Jewish life and Jewish distinctive. "As with the law, Paul's attitude to the festivals here seems to be that they have lost their intrinsic value but may be enjoyed by those who wish to use them…Paul allows that the keeping of such days is purely a matter of individual conscience."[38] The issue here is not the observance or non-observance of this or that ritual or practice; the issue is *judging* a brother because of his observance or non-observance. As mentioned above, this principle of non-judgmentalism is expounded by the same author in Romans 14, summarized in verse 13 of that chapter,

[38] Carson, D. A. *Commentary on Colossians*; en loc.

> *Therefore, let us not judge one another anymore, but rather determine this – not to put a stumbling block in a brother's way.*

This verse serves both as a summary for the exegetical questions surrounding Colossians 2:16, and an introduction to the next challenge, from Acts 15:29.

> *For it seemed good to the Holy Spirit and to us to lay upon you no greater burden than this: that you abstain from things sacrificed to idols and from blood and from things strangled and from fornication; if you keep yourselves free from such things you will do well. Farewell.*
>
> (Acts 15:28-29)

The context of this circular letter sent from James the Elder, is what is known as the 'Jerusalem Council' and the occasion was a visit from Paul and Barnabas to discuss the negative influence being felt throughout the churches of Syria and Asia Minor due to the teaching of some disciples – ostensibly sent from James – that Gentile converts were also to become Jewish adherents. Luke highlights the quick agreement among Peter, James, and Paul in regard to justification of the Gentiles being by the same grace – not works – by which they themselves, as Jews, were also saved. James, who it appears presided at the meeting, summarized the judgment of the council,

> *Therefore I judge that we should not trouble those from among the Gentiles who are turning to God, but that we write to them to abstain from things polluted by idols, from sexual immorality, from things strangled, and from blood. For Moses has had throughout many generations those who preach him in every city, being read in the synagogues every Sabbath.*
>
> (Acts 15:19-21)

A full understanding of James' meaning here does hinge somewhat on the last phrase, "*For Moses has had throughout many generations…*" and the interpretation of this clause has been perennially debated. The explanation that best serves to resolve the later implications of the Jerusalem Letter, is that the teaching of the Mosaic rituals and distinctive was an on-going fact throughout the Diaspora, and thus in all of the towns and cities where young Christian churches were being planted and were growing with both Jewish and Gentile believers side by side. In other words, the *tension* of the 'Mosaic' lifestyle versus the 'Christian' lifestyle would continue to be an issue for the foreseeable

future, and James thought that something ought to be written to these congregations in order to help them sail through potentially stormy waters.

The exegetical and practical difficulty comes in when one reads Paul's first letter to the Corinthian church where, in chapter 8, the apostle seems to completely repudiate the Jerusalem Letter, of which he was a party and, theoretically, a co-signatory.

> *Therefore concerning the eating of things offered to idols, we know that an idol is nothing in the world, and that there is no other God but one. For even if there are so-called gods, whether in heaven or on earth (as there are many gods and many lords), yet for us there is one God, the Father, of whom are all things, and we for Him; and one Lord Jesus Christ, through whom are all things, and through whom we live.* (I Corinthians 8:4-6)

This passage is often pointed to as being in contradiction to the Jerusalem Letter from Acts 15, but a careful study of the context and import of the two passages will show that there is no contradiction at all. The only way there could be a contradiction is if Paul *permits* in I Corinthians 8 something that James (and the Jerusalem Council, including Paul) *prohibits* in Acts 15. From the latter passage it must be noted that nowhere is an imperative verb used. F. F. Bruce writes in regard to Acts 15:29, "Although NT Greek is well supplied with verbs of commanding, it is noteworthy that none of them is used here."[39] Even the closing phrase of the Jerusalem Letter, which is reminiscent of James' style in his own epistle, seems to be more admonition than command, "*if you keep yourselves free from these things, you will do well.*"

F. F. Bruce (1910-90)

The overall report of the Jerusalem Council proves definitively that the assembled leaders of the early church were united in defending *justification by faith* as opposed to any admixture of works or Mosaic ritual. To interpret James' suggestion and the resultant circular letter as a rigid prohibition of certain things, which prohibition stemmed from

[39] Bruce, F. F. *Commentary on the Book of Acts*; en loc.

the Mosaic dispensation, would be not only contradictory, but downright confusing to the young churches who received the Jerusalem Letter. But if the assembled leaders were concerned about the abiding unity of these same churches – comprised as they were of both Jewish and Gentile believers – then the Jerusalem Letter makes perfect sense, and Paul's later writing to the Corinthian church offers not only no contradiction, but additional support. Consider the rest of Paul's admonition in I Corinthians 8,

> *However, there is not in everyone that knowledge; for some, with consciousness of the idol, until now eat it as a thing offered to an idol; and their conscience, being weak, is defiled. But food does not commend us to God; for neither if we eat are we the better, nor if we do not eat are we the worse. But beware lest somehow this liberty of yours become a stumbling block to those who are weak. For if anyone sees you who have knowledge eating in an idol's temple, will not the conscience of him who is weak be emboldened to eat those things offered to idols? And because of your knowledge shall the weak brother perish, for whom Christ died? But when you thus sin against the brethren, and wound their weak conscience, you sin against Christ. Therefore, if food makes my brother stumble, I will never again eat meat,* ***lest I make my brother stumble****.*
>
> (I Corinthians 8:7-13)

John Stott, in his commentary on Acts, points out that the apostle to the Gentiles was adamant with regard to defending the Gospel from any corruption of works, insisting along with Peter than Jewish ritual observances have no binding authority upon Gentile believers, and could not be enforced without the resultant perversion of the Gospel of divine grace. It would be verging on schizophrenia for Paul then to immediately acquiesce to a letter that did exactly what he had so strenuously fought against! But we have ample evidence from other Pauline passages – Romans 14, for instance, and I Corinthians 8 – that the apostle was just as adamant about preserving the unity of the body of Christ in every locale, and in the midst of the Jewish-Gentile cultural divide. Stott writes, "It was

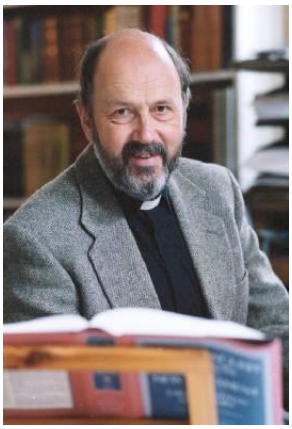
John R. W. Stott (1921-2011)

one thing to secure the gospel from corruption; it was another to preserve the church from fragmentation."[40]

Session 5 – Pre-understanding: Literary Tradition

One of the most distinguishing marks of any particular culture is its literature, and throughout time various peoples have been characterized as much by their literary traditions as by their appearance, their temperament, or their cuisine. Literary traditions develop among a people as the result of stories told amidst the generations, and these stories in turn tell the 'meta-narrative' of that particular culture. The stories themselves may be historically factual, they may be a form of historical fiction, or they may be pure myth and legend. Most often there is a combination of the three, with an admixture of poetry and song. A culture's literary tradition is the record of that people's *life* through time, and of their present perspective on life and the world. One of the first casualties of blended cultures, or at least the first point of significant tension, has to do with the conflicting and competing literature of the blending people.

Everyone has a literary tradition, even if the individual person is not much of a 'reader.' While not everyone within a cultural setting reads – indeed, throughout much of human history only a small minority within any culture was even *able* to read – everyone can hear or tell a story. And the stories told within the generational progression of any culture, reflect, reinforce, and embellish the self-perspective and the world-perspective of that culture. These stories are the warp and woof of the fabric of any people's identity; they are the cohesive force that holds that society together. "Stories are a basic constituent of human life; they are, in fact, on key element within the total construction of a worldview."[41]



N. T. Wright (b. 1948)

[40] Stott, John R. W. *Acts*; en loc.

[41] Wright, N. T. *The New Testament and the People of God* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press; 1992); 38.

When a person crosses over from their 'base' culture to another significantly different, there will be many fronts on which the 'base' and 'host' cultures will collide. Misunderstandings and offenses will occur without intention, simply because of the different cultural framework of the visitor or newcomer versus the host culture. In the field of literature, the host tradition will often be incomprehensible, and again at times even offensive, to the newcomer, whose entire framework of reference belongs to a completely different literary paradigm. This conflict becomes even more acute when the teachings and life-views of the host culture need to become part of the mental framework of the newcomer – and this is exactly what is supposed to happen when the modern believer reads his or her Bible: cultures in conflict along broad and numerous literary fronts.

It is commonplace, though not to be taken lightly, that any successful hermeneutic will take into account the various genre of literature present in the Bible.[42] Genre, however, is not the same thing as literary tradition, which is a somewhat harder concept to bring into the light. This is because it resides in the realm of pre-understanding: the framework or intellectual paradigm that a student brings to the text without realizing that he or she is doing so. The focus of this lesson will be to analyze the 'story' that lies behind and underneath the various biblical books, and in fact informs the genre of each. In other words, the style of literature, while important, is to some extent merely the clothing in which the true meaning – the *story* – is dressed. Various genre, therefore, serve as a wardrobe and provide the biblical culture, as in every other culture, a more vivid, attractive, engaging, and frankly, entertaining recapitulation of that culture's meta-narrative. But the same 'story' is present, whether it is clothed in historical narrative, apocalyptic vision, or wisdom poetry. The ultimate goal for the biblical student is to reach that story through the multi-colored wardrobe of the biblical genre.

[42] The student is referred back to the course on Advanced Hermeneutics for further study on the literary genre of the Bible: Chapter 7 (Historical Narrative); Chapter 8 (the Gospels and the Book of Acts); Chapter 9 (the Epistles); Chapter 12 (the Prophets); and Chapter 14 (Apocalyptic Literature).

From a hermeneutical standpoint, there are a few commonalities between stories that are otherwise vastly different, as coming from vastly different literary traditions. "At the internal level, stories have structures, plots and characters. They use various rhetorical techniques, which include mod of narration, irony, conflict, different narrative patterns such as 'framing,' and so forth."[43] This statement should appear to the reader to be rather obvious – simply outlining the various common elements of any story. But what is not so obvious to many evangelicals in our day, is the fact that the very same principles apply to the *biblical* literature as to un-inspired, secular literature. For some reason modern Christians have been taught to come to their Bibles in a manner wholly different than their approach to any other written communication – and in so doing, they are severely limited as to what they will glean from the Scriptures.

To put this another way: the common approach to reading the Bible has been – and this is a chronic ailment of the Church – to 'let the Bible say what it says,' with the tacit assumption that this meaning is plain and evident to all who will simply follow this 'rule.' But anyone who has studied, or merely read, the literature of a culture sufficiently different than their own, will attest to the great difficulty experienced in getting any meaning out of the text. Eventually meaning will be derived from the literary source, but it may be very far from the meaning originally intended by the author. Such is the case all too often with the Bible as well. A large part of this disconnect may be blamed on a false hermeneutic, whereby the modern Bible student is told that the biblical text 'says what it means, and means what it says.' The common features of all human literature are somehow denied to the Bible due to the fact that it is divinely inspired. Though God-breathed, the Bible is Man-penned. And a proper doctrine of inspiration will take into account the human element – the *confluence* of the divine and the human – in the written document.

This is to say, first of all, that the common features of human literature – and the essential elements of the *story* – are indeed present in the Bible. There is conflict, irony,

[43] Wright; 39.

figures of speech, plays on words, and even misdirection within the Scriptures. Many of these, if not most, would have been clearly recognizable by those whose literary tradition fostered the biblical writers. And many of these, if not most, remain cloaked in mystery to those of us from a very different literary tradition. Thus, in addition to recognizing the uniqueness of the various genre of the Bible – and thereby not interpreting the epistle as if it were a psalm, the apocalyptic vision as it if were historical narrative – the modern Western student must also wrestle with the clash of literary traditions. At the bottom of this is an even more significant clash: that of worldview, which is represented by those conflicting literary traditions.

It has been the perspective of this study thus far, that the Bible is more than a religious handbook, more even than the 'path of salvation for sinners.' It is the self-disclosure of the Almighty Creator of the universe. And this disclosure is in the form of relationship and story: the story of God becoming God 'for man,' as Karl Barth enigmatically put it, of God condescending to *become* man and to enter into the very story that He is writing (or has written). But that fact makes the biblical story *the* story of all stories; the meta-narrative of all meta-narratives. And this forces all other literary traditions to accommodate themselves to the biblical. So the hermeneutical challenge becomes not only to recognize and acclimate to the literary tradition of the Bible, but for that ancient tradition to mold and shape the modern. As light permeates darkness, and leaven stimulates the whole lump of dough, so the Word of God enters into the literary traditions of the cultures to which it comes, and seeks to influence them and reorient them to the divine meta-narrative of God's self-revelation. This spiritual work of the Word is presented in apocalyptic vision in Zechariah chapter 5,

> *Then I turned and raised my eyes, and saw there a flying scroll. And he said to me, "What do you see?" So I answered, "I see a flying scroll. Its length is twenty cubits and its width ten cubits." Then he said to me, "This is the curse that goes out over the face of the whole earth: 'Every thief shall be expelled,' according to this side of the scroll; and, 'Every perjurer shall be expelled,' according to that side of it."*
>
> > *I will send out the curse," says the LORD of hosts;*
> > *It shall enter the house of the thief*

And the house of the one who swears falsely by My name.
It shall remain in the midst of his house
And consume it, with its timber and stones. (Zechariah 5:1-4)

The procedure, if we may use that term, for getting accustomed to the literary tradition of the Bible is much the same as that for any other culture's literary traditions, and the same as that for learning the biblical history: immersion. But immersion itself begins with a mindset that accepts, rather than rejects, the novelty and discomfort of the alien culture. Tourists do not acclimate; they come and they go home. Too many Christians are tourists in the Bible: they bring out souvenirs in the form of memory verses or 'verses to live by' or to stick on their refrigerators, but they never grow any closer to the host culture of the biblical literary tradition, the biblical worldview.

This process requires, beyond the recognition that it is necessary and profitable, not only the important hermeneutical distinction between genre, but a deeper searching for the underlying 'story' that is woven through the apocalyptic, the epistle, the narrative, and the psalm. "Even at its most proverbial and epigrammatic, Jewish writing retains the underlying substructure of the Jewish story about the covenant God, the world, and Israel."[44] The meta-narrative that informs the Book of Job is the very same one that underlies the Epistle to the Ephesians. The historical narratives of Exodus, Judges, Kings & Chronicles, and Esther reflect the same literary tradition as that of the four Gospels and the Book of Acts. To a great extent, the Bible needs to be read as a story – as a remarkable piece of ancient literature, to be sure – but even more so as a consistent and cohesive story told in a thousand different ways by scores of different voices. The student of Scripture must search for the conflict and the irony, the figures of speech, metaphors, and parables; he or she must come to know the characters and their role and relation to the underlying meta-narrative that all the shorter stories combine to reflect as just so many prisms. Then, and during the process, the literary tradition of the reader will slowly become altered, changed by the divine perspective of the only piece of human literature that tells the one, true Story: the *"truth as it is in Jesus."*

[44] Wright; 39.

A caveat is in order at this point, so that the message of this lesson is not misunderstood. The past generation of scholarship – literary and biblical studies – has been massively affected by 'Literary Theory.' While there are some praiseworthy results from this perspective, there are more that ought to be lamented and avoided. By and large, literary theory is a product of post-modernism, and tends toward a derogation of the objective authority of the Bible. In addition, and contrary to what is advocated in this lesson, literary theory in the modern sense tends to negate the literary tradition of the Bible itself, focusing rather on such things as demythologization, deconstruction, and 'reader response.'

The primary benefit of this emphasis on the Bible as literature, is to reacquaint its readers with the importance of literary tradition in both their own culture and in the biblical culture. From this new perspective, the student of Scripture can begin to recognize more and more the underlying story that permeates the Bible. Through faith, this story is seen to reflect the meta-narrative of God's creation, governance, and redemption of the world. The various genre of Scripture are coordinated through a common literary tradition to form a multifaceted gem of revelation, that more brilliantly reflects the light of God's Word to our clouded understanding. The Bible *is* literature, and it is great literature. But even more important than this realization, is the discovery of the *story* of Scripture told by so many different stories and in so many different ways. The student of Scripture is challenged to become ever more acquainted with the storyline of the Bible, but repetitive readings, yes, but also by a conscious exercise in *recognizing* the literary aspects of the book, and not just its theological or eschatological ones.

The recent emphasis on literary theory has produced a bevy of study aids, of various degrees of helpfulness depending on the author's literary philosophy, but usually of interest at least. Tremper Longman, professor of Biblical Studies at Westmont College, has written a series of 'How to Read' books – *How to Read the Psalms, How to Read Genesis, How to Read Proverbs*, etc. – that utilize a literary theoretical approach to the text within a

generally Reformed theological perspective.[45] Robert Alter, much less orthodox than even Longman, has however contributed numerous helpful biblical commentaries – on Genesis, the Pentateuch, and the Wisdom Literature – that attempt to do justice to the 'story' contained within these Old Testament books. Such books as these should be read, but with caution and only after one has thoroughly read the biblical texts themselves. They are, however, a refreshing break from the common fare of deeply technical exegetical commentaries so popular within evangelical circles since the Protestant Reformation. These two authors, and others with them, have perhaps over-emphasized the literary angle to the detriment of the doctrinal and historical. Nonetheless, they have brought a necessary correction to the pendulum, reminding readers of the Bible that there is a story that is being told in its pages – one that is no less true and historical for it being a story – that compels us to enter, that we may acquaint ourselves with its plot and characters, and that it may deeply impact our minds and hearts, as stories have done throughout the long generations of human history.

Hermeneutics Workshop: The Regulative Principle

The Book of Leviticus contains a sobering narrative regarding the worship of God, involving Nadab and Abihu, sons of the Aaron, Moses' brother and the High Priest of Israel in the wilderness. The story is familiar to most, and disturbing to most, readers of the Bible, and is often pointed to as evidence that the 'God of the Old Testament' was a wrathful and vengeful deity.

> *Then Nadab and Abihu, the sons of Aaron, each took his censer and put fire in it, put incense on it, and offered profane fire before the LORD, which He had not commanded them. So fire went out from the LORD and devoured them, and they died before the LORD.*
>
> (Leviticus 10:1-2)

[45] Sadly, as is often the case when biblical scholars delve into literary theory, Longman has strayed from orthodoxy within the Reformed paradigm, stating publically that the actual historical existence of an 'Adam' – a first man and a first woman – is inconsequential to biblical study and theology.

Somewhat alarmingly, the Lord instructs Moses that Aaron, the father of the two men thus consumed in the divine fire, was not to mourn their loss or to show any public evidence of grief, lest they too be consumed by God's wrath. The Lord's explanation of the whole event is summary judgment on the nature of the worship of God.

> *By those who come near Me I must be regarded as holy;*
> *And before all the people I must be glorified.* (Leviticus 10:3)

This lesson's workshop is not an exegetical study on this passage in Leviticus 10, for it is pretty straightforward as to the narrative and as to the meaning. Worship of Jehovah is not a matter to be taken lightly, and it is not something that comes from the imagination of the men who worship. Elsewhere it is recorded that Nadab and Abihu offered up 'strange' or 'profane fire' before the Lord, and were thus destroyed. Thus the Reformed tradition, in reading this passage and others of similar import, has developed a pattern of worship known as the Regulative Principle. This principle grew out of the Protestant Reformation, over against a more liberal Lutheran principle of worship. The Lutheran view was, basically, that whatever was not expressly forbidden by God in the matter of His worship, was thereby permitted. The Regulative Principle reverses the priorities by stating that whatever has not been expressly enjoined in the worship of God is thereby forbidden. The Regulative Principle, to most Reformed scholars, is graphically borne out through the narrative concerning Aaron's sons, as well as by the Apostle Paul's prohibition of 'will worship' in Colossians 2:23.

> *These things indeed have an appearance of wisdom in **self-imposed religion**, false humility, and neglect of the body, but are of no value against the indulgence of the flesh.*[46]

The Regulative Principle does appear to properly answer to the divine demand that '*those who come near God will regard Him as holy.*' But in practice the principle is rather difficult to apply, and has not been uniformly and un-controversially applied across

[46] The word translated 'self-imposed religion' is literally 'will ritual,' and indicates a form of religious worship that derives from the worshiper's own will rather than from direct precepts from God.

various Reformed denominations from the 16th Century to the present. One area of perennial debate, though far less in the modern era than in days past, has to do with the worship of God in song. The passages that form the study of this lesson's workshop are almost identical, both from the Apostle Paul, and both seemingly addressing this sensitive issue in regard to the proper form of musical or lyrical worship of God.

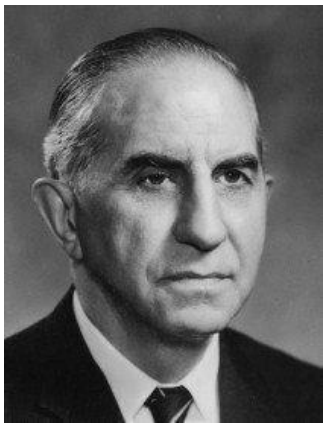
> *And do not be drunk with wine, in which is dissipation; but be filled with the Spirit, speaking to one another in* ***psalms and hymns and spiritual songs****, singing and making melody in your heart to the Lord, giving thanks always for all things to God the Father in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, 21 submitting to one another in the fear of God.*
>
> (Ephesians 5:18-20)

> *And let the peace of God rule in your hearts, to which also you were called in one body; and be thankful. Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly in all wisdom, teaching and admonishing one another in* ***psalms and hymns and spiritual songs****, singing with grace in your hearts to the Lord. And whatever you do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through Him.*
>
> (Colossians 5:15-17)

Obviously the phrase in question is the threefold mention of *psalms*, *hymns*, and *spiritual songs* in each passage, the only places in the Bible where this construction occurs. Advocates of exclusive psalmody see in these verses evidence that the early church was enjoined to sing nothing but the divinely inspired Psalms; the other camp – may we call them 'anti-psalmists'? – see permission in these verses to sing various different types of music in worship. The various debates, commentaries, and books on the subject have not brought the two groups closer together. One reason this has been the case is that the realm of music is a very sensitive and controversial one to begin with, and one that can hardly be approached without a great deal of pre-understanding on the part of the reader. Generally speaking, what Paul says in these two verses has usually been very quickly and cavalierly interpreted in the light of the reader's denomination tradition with regard to musical and lyrical praise. If the person's church sings hymns, the justification is found here; if Scripture choruses, it too is found defended here; if exclusive psalmody, that is here as well.

The problem becomes acute when one grasps the meaning of the narrative of Nadab and Abihu, and comes to the sobering realization that God cannot be properly worshiped 'just any ole' way.' Sincerity of heart is not sufficient, as there was no indication in the Leviticus narrative that Nadab and/or Abihu were insincere. The argument that 'that was God in the Old Testament, but now Jesus has come,' cannot hold water, for God is eternally immutable and Jesus Christ the same *'yesterday, today, and forever.'* So the problem remains: how do we interpret and apply these verses to our Christian worship?

That question provides the first hermeneutical 'angle,' as it were: *do these verses even address Christian corporate worship at all?* One author states in regard to Ephesians 5:29 and Colossians 3:16, "These two passages are perhaps the most important and most debated passages in the New Testament dealing with song in worship."[47] But when the context is studied, it becomes apparent that John Murray, a staunch exclusive psalmodist of the 20th Century, is correct to caution us in this regard. "With respect to these two texts it should be noted first of all, that Paul is not necessarily referring to the public worship of God…Indeed, the context in both passages would appear to show that he is exhorting to a certain kind of exercise in which believers should engage in reference to one another in the discharge of that mutual instruction and edification requisite to concerted advancement of one another's highest interests and of the glory of God."[48] The context of the two passages Deals far more with the interpersonal relationship and intramural instruction of the believers in Ephesus and Colossæ than with what they sing on Sunday mornings. The verses before and after the subject phrase are replete with 'one another' behavior, though



John Murray (1898-1975)

[47] Bushell, Michael. *The Songs of Zion: A Contemporary Case for Exclusive Psalmody* (Pittsburgh: Crown & Covenant Publicatioins; 1977); 83.
[48] Murray, John. *Song in the Public Worship of God.*

it must also be noted that in both passages the ultimate recipient of this behavior – the ultimate object, as it were – is *'the Lord.'*

Although we may state that the context does not unequivocally necessitate the application of these verses to 'public worship,' to thus dismiss the debate out of hand it to make a false dichotomy between 'public' and 'private' behavior both in the individual believer and in the community of faith, a dichotomy that the apostle himself would have found anomalous if not downright sacrilegious. It is a feature of modern Christianity, and not of 1st Century Christianity, that the Christian life has been bifurcated into public and private arenas. Paul, in the Colossians passage, puts the matter to rest by stating that "*whatever you do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through Him.*" This makes every act of the believer an act of worship.

If we therefore proceed under the preliminary conclusion that these two verses do, in fact, touch upon the believer and the believing community in their worship of God, we must consequently ask whether the apostle is enjoining a *particular* type of worship in song. In other words, does Paul here address what we now refer to as the 'Regulative Principle'? And if he does, is he stipulating a particular form of worship in song that is acceptable to God, to the exclusion of all other forms? These questions form the heart of the debate, a debate that sadly is not engaged much anymore as the modern church has basically left the Regulative Principle in the dustbin and has embraced an 'anything goes' attitude in regard to worship. It is probably good (or maybe not so good) that God's treatment of Nadab and Abihu – or of Ananias and Sapphira for that matter – has not been repeated as often as their offenses have been in the church.

The phrases in Ephesians 5 and Colossians 3 are not identical, though they appear to be in the common English translations. The difference between them may be inconsequential, but a solid hermeneutic demands that it be taken into consideration. In the Ephesians passage, each of the three musical terms is separated by the Greek conjunction *kai*, 'and.' Here Paul admonishes his audience to *speak* to one another *in psalms **and** hymns **and** songs spiritual* and then brings in the aspect of *singing and hymning in your hearts to the Lord*. In the Colossian passage, however, the three terms are listed

without intervening conjunction (and the original Greek did not have punctuation such as commas). Here the readers are exhorted to *in all wisdom* teach and instruct one another *psalms, hymns, songs spiritual* – there they are, listed one right after the other, though once again within the immediate context of mutual edification in instruction – followed by *with grace singing in your hearts to God*.

The words themselves do not shed a great deal of light on the matter, unfortunately. The first, *psalms*, almost certainly refers to the Old Testament songs of praise – and not exclusively those from the Book of Psalms. The word itself derives from *psallō,* which means to twitch or twang, and then to pluck as at a stringed instrument, so often enjoined as accompaniment to the inspired psalms. Thus the word 'psalm' is not itself a song *per se*, as it is a form of music that involves stringed instruments. Some have argued that the singing aspect of the word derives from the human vocal cords themselves being 'stringed instruments,' but this is requiring a knowledge of anatomy that may very well have been beyond the ken of David and the other psalmists!

Humnos – hymn – is a Greek word employed both in the Septuagint and in extra-biblical Greek literature quite frequently. It indicates a song of praise, particularly to a deity. This is how it would have been understood by the early church. Most likely the mind of the Jewish believer would go immediately to the psalms of his nation's heritage, while that of the pagan convert to Christianity would contemplate the ritual music of the pagan temples and festivals. Some have argued that the necessity of keeping the convert from paganism from reverting back to his godless singing *requires* that the types of songs employed in Christian worship be nothing other than the inspired psalms. The logic is there, indeed; but the conclusion goes beyond that which is written. It may be equally true – as it was in regard to meat sacrificed to idols – that Paul would rather enjoin the sanctified use of *hymns* by the former pagans, who now know that there but one God through Jesus Christ the Lord.

What is true in regard to *hymns* is even more so in regard to the third term, *odee*. This is the root of the English word 'ode,' and it represents a lyrical poem that often tells a story, usually set to music in order to aid the memorization of it. More so than *humnos*,

this term is particularly pagan in its origin and use, and so most commentators interpret Paul's addition of *pneumatikosi* – 'spiritual' – as necessary to immediately prevent any misunderstanding. It is perhaps more to the point to translate the third phrase as 'spiritual song stories,' and to see in this couplet the apostle's consistent emphasis on the 'spirit' as opposed to the 'flesh.' This interpretation would also fit in better with the overall context of both Colossians 3 and Ephesians 5, in both of which such things as *walking in the Spirit* and *putting to death the deeds of the flesh* are a common theme. But either of these views in regard to the adjective 'spiritual' is better than the one that applies the word to all three previous (i.e., not only *spiritual songs,* but also *spiritual hymns* and *spiritual psalms*) and consequently demands that Paul is insisting on *inspired* music as opposed to *uninspired*.

It is likely, though impossible to maintain dogmatically, that the apostle is not here delineating three types of music, or three types of psalms, that are alone acceptable in Christian worship. The lack of the conjunction in the Colossians passages, along with the setting within the 'talking and teaching and instructing' that is to be prevalent in the Christian community, argue for the terms to be taken in a more metaphorical sense as describing the heart attitude of believers to one another in the sight of the Lord. Their attitude together is to be one of singing and making melody, which in all human conduct is diametrically opposed to back-biting, gossip, and slander. The *psalms and hymns and spiritual songs* are reflective of the joyful hearts of those who know from whence they have been redeemed and who live theirs lives together in the joyful presence of the One who has redeemed them. More than this it would be hard to prove from the texts.

A caveat is in order here. This provisional conclusion should in no way be interpreted as arguing either for or against any particular type of music in the worship of God. That is a valid and important discussion that the church of every generation has had, and must have. It is merely the conclusion of this brief study that it is not the primary – and perhaps not even a secondary or tertiary – issue of the apostle's phrase in Ephesians 5 and Colossians 3.

Session 6 – The Meaning of the Text

Hermeneutics is the science and art of interpreting the meaning of a text, in particular a text of Scripture. But is there just one meaning of a text? Or are there multiple meanings contained in the words of a single passage? If there is but one meaning, how can we know we have arrived at it? Through the consensus of the ages, the tradition of the Church? By the majority report of collected commentaries? And if multiple meanings are implied, the uncertainty of having arrived at the meaning is multiplied now by the number of possible meanings. It all gets rather confusing, and has led skeptics to deny that *any* meaning exists in a text – any text – apart from 'what it means to me,' the individual reader's own perception of meaning when he or she reads the text. The search for meaning has existed as long as there have been written texts that purport to be the truth, or at least the true account of something, someone, or some place.

Language, especially written language, is often claimed to be the vehicle of communication of ideas, and to a large extent it is that. But language is also, by its essential nature and its multi-variegated characteristics, intrinsically obscurantist, as is evidenced by this very sentence. We remember that God introduced different languages within the human family in order to confuse men, to scatter them and to prevent them from effectively communicating amongst themselves. Written language takes the confusion several steps further, by placing an intermediary – the author – between the event and the reader. Another layer of separation is added when we consider the current audience of the text in comparison to the original audience of the author's work. These factors and more have already been touched upon in our discussion on the Literary Theory critique of written texts, which raises some valid questions, offers some interesting insights, and frequently veers off into self-defeating and self-destructive skepticism and subjectivism.

For the purposes of this study, we shall adopt several assumptions that are 'common-sensical,' in that they appeal to the vast majority of men and women who pick up a written text, whether biblical or not. The first is that the text contains some meaning,

it *means* something, and it is concurrently assumed that this meaning is discoverable by normal means of perception. Second, we give the author the benefit of the doubt with regard to his or her desire to communicate and not to obscure. This assumption means that that which at first glance may seem to obscure meaning, is intended instead to deepen meaning by presenting a different perspective and by stimulating more stringent investigation and thought on the part of the reader. Third, the use of the written word can, and often does, intent both multiple and deeper meanings than that which is ascertained 'on the surface.'

These principles are exampled by the Apostle Paul's discourse in Galatians 4 concerning the family dynamics of the patriarch Abraham.

> *Tell me, you who desire to be under the law, do you not hear the law? For it is written that Abraham had two sons: the one by a bondwoman, the other by a freewoman. But he who was of the bondwoman was born according to the flesh, and he of the freewoman through promise, which things are symbolic. For these are the two covenants: the one from Mount Sinai which gives birth to bondage, which is Hagar – for this Hagar is Mount Sinai in Arabia, and corresponds to Jerusalem which now is, and is in bondage with her children – but the Jerusalem above is free, which is the mother of us all.* (Galatians 4:21-26)

John Bunyan (1628-88)

The word translated 'symbolic' in verse 24 (in the New King James version above), is literally 'allegorical.' In fact, the word in the Greek is *allegoroumena*, from which we get the English 'allegory.' The definition of an allegory is "The representation of abstract ideas or principles by characters, figures, or events in narrative, dramatic, or pictorial form."[49] We are familiar with allegorical works such as John Bunyan's *Pilgrim's Progress*, but usually less than eager to consider texts of Scripture as allegory. Yet it is from the inspired pen of the apostle that we learn that the events that transpired surrounding the births of Abraham's sons Ishmael and Isaac, have an allegorical meaning

[49] http://www.thefreedictionary.com/allegory

in addition to their historical factual content. This phenomenon is paralleled in the Epistle to the Hebrews, where the author designates the entire Levitical ritual system of the Mosaic dispensation as a 'parable.'

> *Now when these things had been thus prepared, the priests always went into the first part of the tabernacle, performing the services. But into the second part the high priest went alone once a year, not without blood, which he offered for himself and for the people's sins committed in ignorance; the Holy Spirit indicating this, that the way into the Holiest of All was not yet made manifest while the first tabernacle was still standing. It was* ***symbolic*** *for the present time in which both gifts and sacrifices are offered which cannot make him who performed the service perfect in regard to the conscience – concerned only with foods and drinks, various washings, and fleshly ordinances imposed until the time of reformation.* (Hebrews 9:6-10)

In this passage we focus on the word translated 'symbolic' in verse 9. A more literal English translation would be 'a symbol' rather than 'symbolic,' but the Greek word is not the usual one used for 'symbol.' It is *parabolé* – 'parable.' Again, it is not the intention of the author of Hebrews to dismiss the historical reality or significance of the Levitical ritual system, no more than it was Paul's intent to deny the historical validity of Abraham, Sarah, and Hagar. Rather both authors, under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, are indicating to their readers that the text on the surface also contains a deeper meaning, one that is every bit as important as that which lies in 'just the facts.'

The realization that language, both spoken and written, often contains multiple meanings – hidden meaning, deeper meaning, progressive meaning, etc. – has always driven scholars of texts to both diligent search and flights of imaginative fancy. It has not always been clear which of the two has been the source of various interpretations of specific texts. During the early years of the Christian Church, the most famous of the allegorizing biblical expositors was the Alexandrian Jew, Philo Judaeus (*c.* 20 BC – *c.* AD 54). Philo was a convinced Jew who also was enamored with Platonic Greek philosophy. As a scholar he sought to merge the two worlds of thought into one interpretive schema, and concluded that the allegorizing methodology of the Greeks furnished a deeper meaning to the written text of the Jewish Scriptures. Philo believed that the "literal sense

was the body of Scripture, and the allegorical sense its soul."[50] Philo did not discount entirely the 'straightforward, literal' sense of the text, but believed that this sense was for the immature; the enlightened 'mature' student of Scripture was the one who sought for and discovered the deeper allegorical meaning. The results of this allegorizing, however, often wildly departed from the literal meaning, and represented the reader's (Philo, for instance) own philosophy far more than the intended meaning of the original author. A famous example of Philo's work interpret Abram's trek from Ur of the Chaldees to Palestine as really indicating the spiritual journey of a Stoic philosopher on his way from mere understanding (represented by Chaldea), through sensory perception (represented by Abram's stay in Haran), to the ultimate goal of enlightened philosophy (represented by the change of the patriarch's name to Abraham). "To marry Sarah is to marry abstract wisdom," claimed Philo.[51]

Early Christian scholars such as Clement of Alexandria and his disciple Origen, incorporated Philo's hermeneutic into their own study of both the Old and New Testament writings, and often attained as far-fetched interpretations as Philo had before them. Allegorizing fell out of vogue as the Church widely rejected Origen's more exotic flights of fancy, but as a hermeneutic it has always enjoyed a camp following among pietists and charismatics, and continues to do so today. And if it were not for such biblical passages as Galatians 4 and Hebrews 9, quoted above, one might safely reject all forms of allegorical hermeneutic, and stick with the 'plain meaning' of the text. But Philo and Clement and Origen were not entirely wrong, though perhaps a bit imbalanced at times. Today biblical scholars recognize multiple layers of meaning within the text, though there is hardly more agreement as to what these layers are in reference to a specific passage, than there was in Origen's time. Broadly speaking, however, there are four 'levels' of meaning that are frequently discussed.

[50] Ramm, Bernard. *Protestant Biblical Interpretation: Third Revised Edition* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books; 1970); 27.
[51] *Ibid.*; 28.

The *historical* level of meaning is "the immediate extra-linguistic referent."[52] In other words, the event that is the immediate context of the text. For example, the exodus of Israel from Egypt, or the preaching service in Galilee subsequently recorded as the *Sermon on the Mount*. This level of meaning corresponds most directly with the 'literal' reading of the text, and broadly characterizes the hermeneutic of the Christian Church in the pre-modern era (i.e., prior to Descartes). Many believers claim that this is the only true sense of Scripture, derogating any further pursuit of meaning beyond the plain text. But as we shall see further in this study on 'meaning,' even the plain text is not always so plain to the reader. The progressive and prophetic nature of Scripture, as well, leads us to surmise a more nuanced hermeneutic of the text than one that is strictly historical and literal, though it is never safe to jettison the historical sense entirely.

The next level is the *allegorical*, discussed earlier. This level seeks a deeper meaning to the words - especially the names and places and numbers - used in the text of a passage. This level of meaning forms a more contemplative analysis of the text under the realization that words themselves are symbols, that written texts often have deeper significance than just the surface meaning (because the author himself had a *purpose* for writing what he did, and not writing what he did not write), and that the Bible is the self-disclosure of the incomprehensible and sublime God. We have the example of Paul in Galatians 4, along with the caution that while the apostle was guided by the Holy Spirit to the point of inerrancy; we are not. Under the rubric of the allegorical level of meaning arises an intriguing and important question: Given the progressive nature of divine revelation, is it possible (or even probable) that the meaning of earlier texts is tangibly altered by the advent of later ones? In other words, can the meaning of a text *change* when encountered by a later text? A common biblical passage pointed to as an example of this phenomenon is from Matthew 2, where the gospel writer is recounting Joseph's return to Palestine from Egypt, with his wife Mary and the child Jesus. Matthew quotes from the

[52] Thiselton; 144.

prophet Hosea, "*Out of Egypt did I call My Son.*"[53] It is clear from the context of Hosea 11 that the referent of 'son' is the nation of Israel,

> *When Israel was a youth I loved him, and out of Egypt I called My son.*
> *The more they called them, the more they went from them;*
> *They kept sacrificing to the Baals.*
> *Yet it is I who taught Ephraim to walk.* (Hosea 11:1-3)

The difficulty in the Matthean passage would be somewhat alleviates by the explanation that Matthew is simply allegorizing the Hosea passage in a similar manner as Paul does in Galatians 4. This would perhaps work, except for the explicit claim by Matthew that the return of Joseph's family from their self-imposed exile in Egypt (pending Herod's death) was so that "*what was spoken by the Lord through the prophet might be fulfilled, saying, 'Out of Egypt did I call My Son.'*" John Calvin, in his commentary at this location, devotes the majority of his comment to the condition of Israel in the days of Hosea, when the first instance of the phrase was used, stating briefly that Matthew "cunningly applies it to the present case."[54] John Gill clearly defends Matthew's usage of the Hosean passage as *originally* referring to Jesus, "This is the natural and unconstrained sense of these words, which justifies the Evangelist in his citation and application of them to Christ's going to Egypt, and his return from thence."[55] Matthew Henry seems to miss the incongruity of the two passages altogether, passing over any exegetical or hermeneutical issues to move straight into a devotional application of Matthew's statement.

John Calvin (1509-64)

> Egypt had been a house of bondage to Israel, and particularly cruel to the infants of Israel; yet it is to be a place of refuge to the holy Child Jesus. God, when he pleases, can make the worst of places serve the best of purposes. This was a trial of the faith of Joseph and

[53] Matthew 2:15. *Cp.* Hosea 11:1.
[54] Calvin, John *Calvin's New Testament Commentaries: Volume 1* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans; 1972); 101.
[55] http://www.biblestudytools.com/commentaries/gills-exposition-of-the-bible/matthew-2-15.html

> Mary. But their faith, being tried, was found firm. If we and our infants are at any time in trouble, let us remember the straits in which Christ was when an infant.[56]

These conservative commentators of the Reformed tradition uniformly avoid the possibility that the phrase *"out of Egypt did I call My Son"* meant one thing in Hosea's day, and something else in Matthew's day. Without doubt there is a strong connection between Israel and the Messiah, as the latter becomes the embodiment and consummation of the former. But a passage like this one, with the strength with which Matthew lays claim to a fulfilled prophecy, indicates that one consequence of progressive revelation is the *development of meaning*. This will be a theme hopefully treated in greater detail in a future lesson.

The third of the four levels of meaning is the *moral*, in which the passage is found to impinge upon the mind and heart of the reader: to change perspective, to convict of sin, to enjoin duty. This is sometimes referred to as the tropological or homiletical meaning due to the fact that it is often the layer of meaning brought out in a sermon on the particular passage.

The fourth level is the *anagogic*, an unfamiliar word that means 'spiritually uplifting.' This is the contemplative sense through which the reader seeks the *beatific vision*, as the medieval scholastics put it: the beautiful vision of God. Thiselton writes that this fourth sense of biblical meaning, "embraces the horizon of the future consummation."[57] The Roman Catholic Church tends to emphasize the *anagogic* meaning more regularly than do Protestant scholars and preachers, the latter perhaps finding the perspective a bit too mystical and dangerous for comfort. One Catholic resource offers this description of the anagogic sense of Scripture.

> Finally God wants us to raise our thoughts and interests towards the last things: heaven, hell, the last judgment, the state of glory, etc. But since our ordinary language is inadequate to express such transcendental truths, the Bible uses persons or things of time as symbols of eternal realities. This is the anagogical sense.[58]

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[56] http://www.christnotes.org/commentary.php?com=mhc&b=40&c=2
[57] Thiselton; 183.
[58] http://catholicism.org/four-meanings-scripture.html

Different segments, and different eras, of the Church's exegetical history have emphasized each of these four layers of meaning to different proportions. Undoubtedly some have been utilized out of proportion, especially when the 'deeper' layers of meaning are sought after to the exclusion of or the bypassing of the 'shallower.' Perhaps a good way of looking at these four senses of the meaning of a text is that of layers of an onion, or of expanding concentric circles. In the first metaphor, the historical or literal sense would represent the outer skin of the onion; in the second metaphor this first sense represents the most central circle in relation to the others. "[T]his fourfold schema is not one of polyvalent meaning in any arbitrary sense, but that which is brought about by a series of widening contexts or horizons, until a final context of ultimacy is achieved."[59]

Though caution ought to be observed, the concept of multiple, layered meaning within Scripture is not to be rejected out of hand, for several reasons. First, as we have seen from the prophetic reference in Matthew 2:15, the fact of progressive revelation strongly implies deeper meaning to older passages in the light of later ones. Second, there is the fact that the human writers were instrumental in the selection and presentation of the material, which brings into the equation things like the audience and the authorial intent. This phenomenon will be discussed in greater detail, Lord-willing, in the next lesson. There is, as well, the confluence of human and divine authorship in Scripture, again strongly implying the deeper, more spiritual sense of meaning contained in the Word. The hermeneutical principle here, however, is to hold the various layers in consistent relation to each other, and to the whole counsel of Scripture. We will attempt to explore and unpack these concepts in the next few lessons, seeking to establish a solid biblical hermeneutic that takes one's eyes from the text of Scripture to the ascended Lord.

[59] Thiselton; 144.

Hermeneutics Workshop: Three Days and Three Nights

It has long been the tradition of professing Christendom that Christ was crucified on Good Friday, and rose from the grave on Easter Sunday. The time of Christ's Passion is marked in the Roman Catholic calendar from Maundy Thursday, when Jesus washed the disciples' feet and took the Passover Seder with them, to Easter Sunday, when the women found the tomb empty. But if Christ was nailed to the cross on Friday, and rose from the grave on Sunday, there appears to be a factual error in His own prophetic words concerning this event. Recorded in Matthew, Jesus responds to the scribes and Pharisees' demand for a sign, attesting to His identity and authority, but promising only the 'sign of Jonah.'

> *But He answered and said to them, "An evil and adulterous generation seeks after a sign, and no sign will be given to it except the sign of the prophet Jonah. For as Jonah was three days and three nights in the belly of the great fish, so will the Son of Man be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth.* (Matthew 12:39-40)

Jesus' allusion to the Old Testament prophet is straightforward enough, "*And the LORD appointed a great fish to swallow Jonah, and Jonah was in the stomach of the fish three days and three nights.*"[60] There is no indication that Jesus doubted the historical factuality of the Jonah event, as do most modern biblical scholars, but that is beside the point at any rate. The cross-reference between Jesus and Jonah has to do with their time in the 'depths' – the stomach of the fish for Jonah; the tomb of Joseph for Jesus. Yet the traditional celebrations within the Church concerning the Passion Week have Jesus in the tomb for only a part of three days, and only two nights. Can this be resolved?

From a hermeneutical perspective, the first point of challenge must be with the tradition of the Church. This is not to say that there will not be difficulties remaining with the text of Scripture, but rather that it is in keeping with even the most liberal doctrine of inspiration for the scholar to look *first* for error or inconsistency in the traditional reading of the text, and only then move on to look at the text itself. The

[60] Jonah 1:17

association of the crucifixion with Friday appears to have arisen due to the statement in the gospels that Jesus died on the day of preparation, as recorded by Mark,

> *Now when evening had come, because it was the **Preparation Day**, that is, the day before the Sabbath, Joseph of Arimathea, a prominent council member, who was himself waiting for the kingdom of God, coming and taking courage, went in to Pilate and asked for the body of Jesus. Pilate marveled that He was already dead; and summoning the centurion, he asked him if He had been dead for some time. So when he found out from the centurion, he granted the body to Joseph. Then he bought fine linen, took Him down, and wrapped Him in the linen. And he laid Him in a tomb which had been hewn out of the rock, and rolled a stone against the door of the tomb.*
>
> (Mark 15:42-46)

The *terminus ad quem* of Christ's Passion is also established fairly clearly by John's gospel.

> *Now on the first day of the week Mary Magdalene went to the tomb early, while it was still dark, and saw that the stone had been taken away from the tomb.* (John 20:1)

The first day of the Jewish week is incontrovertibly Sunday, as the Jewish week is patterned after the Creation Week of Genesis chapters 1 and 2. The seventh day thus being the Sabbath, the Day of Rest, or Saturday. Yet there is still some question from our perspective of days and nights and the Jonah prophecy, with regard to when it was that Jesus rose from the grave. For the Jewish day was not like the Roman day (our day being patterned after the Roman, which begins at midnight and ends at 11:59 pm). The Jewish day, as the Jewish week, is also patterned after the Creation day, which progressed from evening to morning. In other words, the Jewish day begins at 6:00 pm and runs to 5:59 pm the next evening. Yet there was still a common non-technical understanding of 'morning' as being sunrise, and Jews slept during the 'night' just the same as Romans did. Thus the time of the day when Mary Magdalene approached the tomb was most likely just before dawn on Sunday, say around 6:00 am by our reckoning. But by this reckoning, Jesus could not have been crucified on Friday or, if He had, the Jonah prophecy was not fulfilled.

At this point we must analyze the Feast of Passover during which our Lord was arrested, tried, condemned, and crucified. The gospel writers link the events of Jesus' passion to the events of the annual feast, but they do not do so with the analytical clarity and precision that we might wish. We begin by establishing the calendar of this feast as it was prescribed for the nation of Israel under the direction of Moses. The first mention we find of the continual annual observance of a Passover is in Exodus 12,

> *Now the LORD said to Moses and Aaron in the land of Egypt, "This month shall be the beginning of months for you; it is to be the first month of the year to you. Speak to all the congregation of Israel, saying, 'On the tenth of this month they are each one to take a lamb for themselves, according to their father's households, a lamb for each household…and you shall keep it until the fourteenth day of the same month, then the whole assembly of the congregation of Israel is to kill it at twilight.'"*
> (Exodus 12:1-2, 6)

Twilight, being evening, would be the beginning of the 14th day of the month, the month 'Nisan.' We cannot know exactly which day of the week the 14th of Nisan fell in the year in which Jesus was crucified, for we do not know with any certainty exactly which year that was.[61] But we do know from the biblical narrative that our Lord was already dead by the evening or end of the Preparation day, which was the day before the Sabbath. But which 'Sabbath'? The weekly Sabbath, or the High Sabbath of the Passover Feast? We read in Numbers 28 that the day after the observance of the Passover meal was to be the beginning of a seven day feast, called the Feast of Unleavened Bread. The first day of this feast, or the 15th of Nisan, was set apart as a 'High Sabbath.'

> *On the fourteenth day of the first month is the Passover of the LORD. And on the fifteenth day of this month is the feast; unleavened bread shall be eaten for seven days. On the first day you shall have a holy convocation. You shall do no customary work.* (Numbers 28:16-18)

This would have been the 'sabbath' referred to in the gospel accounts with regard to the 'preparation day,' although the concept of a preparation day is not specifically

[61] Of course, if we determine the day of the week on which Jesus died from the historical narratives of the gospels, and can back-calculate in which year that day corresponded with the 14th of Nisan, then we can with fair certainty determine the year in which the Lord died.

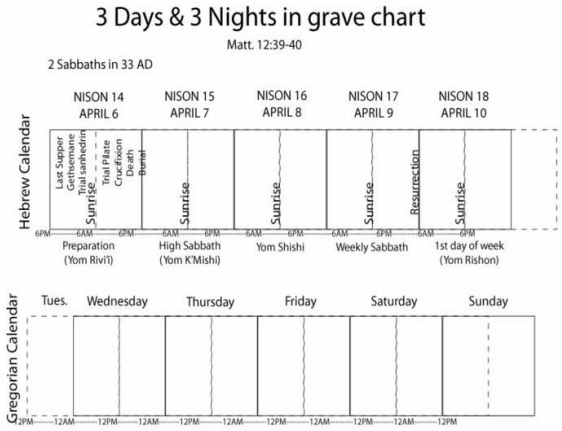
enjoined upon the Israelites with regard to the Sabbath. It is likely that this day of preparation arises from the instructions received in the wilderness in regard to the gathering of the manna, which was to be gathered each day – one day's supply for that day – with the exception that two days' supply would be allotted on the day before the Sabbath so that no one should venture forth to gather manna on the Sabbath. This preparation day was, therefore, an extension of the Sabbath, much as some Christian denominations participate in preparation services for the observance of Communion.

Be that as it may, we can begin to lay out a calendar of events that accords both with the events of the Passover week and the Jonah prophecy. On the evening of the 14th of Nisan (at the *beginning* of that day according to Jewish reckoning), Jesus observed the Passover Seder with His disciples in the upper room. Later in the evening He went to the Mount of Olives, where He was arrested. His 'trials' – a form of shuttle miscarriage of justice between the Roman procurator Pontius Pilate and the King of Judea, Herod, with the sham religious assize before the High Priest and the Sanhedrin – all took place during the night of the 14th. He was crucified at "*the third hour*" according to Mark (15:25). Luke informs us that Jesus was on the cross at the "*the sixth hour*' when darkness covered the whole land until the ninth hour. It was at that time that Jesus cried out, "*Father, into Thy hands I commit My spirit*" and died. These events would have all taken place on the 14th of Nisan, with the third, sixth, and ninth hours being the watches of the night or the day (four watches to each). Thus the third hour would correspond to 9:00 am, the sixth hour to noon, and the ninth hour to 3:00 pm.

This calendar of events would have Jesus dead before the evening of the 15th of Nisan, which was the High Sabbath of the Feast of Unleavened Bread. Thus the request by Joseph of Arimathea, evidently an influential as well as a wealthy man, to Pontius Pilate that the body of Jesus be given to him to prepare for burial prior to the High Sabbath – on which day such preparations were forbidden. The preparations must have been hasty, for there were only a few hours left before the evening of the 15th, the beginning of the High Sabbath, but it was sufficient time for Jesus to be buried on the same day He was crucified. This in itself was a phenomenon that caused Pilate to marvel,

for usually the victims of crucifixion took several days – some took over a week – to die, and it was in deference to the religious sensibilities of the Jews (Pilate not wanting a revolt on his hands) that the Roman procurator ordered that the legs of the criminals be broken, to speed their demise.

Thus Christ would be in the tomb for the entirety of the High Sabbath – one day. But what of the other two days? Of the resurrection we read in Luke 24, as well as in the other accounts, that it was on "*the first day of the week*" that the women went to the tomb in order to complete the embalming process begun on the preparation day. The phrasing of this time reference seems strongly to indicate some passage of time. In other words, this was not merely 'the next day,' as it would have to have been if Christ had been buried on Friday, but rather it was "*the first day of the week*" – removed at some distance from the earlier days of the narrative. This is most reasonably answered by the placement of two more days between the High Sabbath of the Feast and the first day of the week. One of these two days would have been the regular weekly Sabbath, the other would have been Friday. This would account for three days: the High Sabbath of the Feast, an intervening day, and the regular Sabbath. Here is a graphical presentation of this schema, along with the corresponding days of the week under our Gregorian calendar.



There is nonetheless one pecular problem with this accounting of the days. There is no issue with the fact that there were multiple 'sabbaths' in the Jewish calendar, and that each was preceded by a day of preparation and each was observed in the same manner: no customary work being done. But what of the intervening day between the Sabbaths? It is necessary to arrive at the Jonah prophecy of three days and three nights, but it causes the question, 'why did the women not attend to the embalming on that day, rather than wait until the first day of the week?'

The answer to this question is perhaps more difficult to arrive at than as to the days of Jesus' last Passover week. It is difficult to harmonize the four gospel accounts as to exactly what was done concerning the body of Jesus, and on which day it was done. For instance, John's gospel has the body of Jesus being anointed for burial by Joseph of Arimathea and Nicodemus prior to its placement in Joseph's tomb, or on the 14th of Nisan, prior to the High Sabbath. Luke's account has the women who had attended to Jesus in Galilee coming on the first day of the week, bringing with them the spices that they had prepared with which to anoint Jesus' body. Mark corroborates Luke's account and adds the identities of those who came to the tomb on the first day of the week: Mary Magdalene, Mary the mother of James, and Salome. Again, their intention for visiting the tomb on this day was "*that they might come and anoint Him.*" Matthew records that Mary Magdalene and "*the other Mary*" came to the tomb simply "*to look at the grave.*"

It may be that there is no resolution to the question as to what the women did on the day in between the High Sabbath and the weekly Sabbath. One might place the two Sabbaths back-to-back, but only to arrive at the original, more serious problem of the three days and three nights prophecy. Recognizing the different types of Sabbaths within the Jewish calendar, however, moves us much closer to a solution than the traditional model allows. To say that the women *should* have anointed Jesus' body on the day between the two Sabbaths is not an argument from Scripture and therefore cannot be a decisive refutation of this exegesis. From a hermeneutical viewpoint, therefore, this quandary exemplifies the necessity for the student of the Bible to become conversant in the ceremonial and ritual history of God's people Israel, of whom the Messiah was both Savior and citizen.

Session 7 – Aspects of Meaning

Either I determine the place in which I will find God,
or I allow God to determine the place where He will be found.
If it is I who say where God will be, I will always find there a God who in some way
corresponds to me, is agreeable to me, fits in with my nature.
But if it is God who says where He will be,
then that will truly be a place which first is not agreeable to me at all,
which does not fit so well with me.
(Dietrich Bonheoffer)

It is a common maxim among modern evangelicals, especially in the United States, that the Bible "says what it means and means what it says." This aphorism is a more vernacular rendering of the *perspicacity* of Scripture, a doctrine held by evangelical theologians since at least the Reformation of the 16th Century. *Perspicacity* means 'clearness' or 'clarity,' the doctrine thus teaching that the meaning of the Bible is accessible to the average reader, in spite of occasional difficult passages. As an evangelical doctrine it arose in reaction to the Roman Catholic position that the Scripture is *imperspicuous* until interpreted by the Magisterium of the Church, the collegiate assembly of cardinals and bishops, with the Pope at their head. The doctrine of perspicacity is also raised in opposition to the post-modern philosophy of the current era, by which the Bible – and all literary work in general – is said to be essentially meaningless because it lacks any clear meaning, or because it contains as many meanings as it has readers.

The effect of this doctrine within the Protestant community has been to encourage personal reading, interpretation, and application of the Bible by the individual Christian. This activity has recently been granted to individual 'lay' Catholics by the canons of the Second Vatican Council in the 1960s, but it is significant to note that only the *reading* of Scripture is now permitted to the rank and file Catholic; *interpretation* of Scripture is still the reserved province of the Magisterium. But Protestants have always been encouraged and admonished to read the Scriptures, which are still able to make "*one wise unto*

salvation."[62] That the Bible is, in fact and to at least some degree, clear is attested to by some specific passages within its books. For instance, Moses' challenge to the children of Israel to choose between life and death is couched within the perspicacity of the commandment.

> *For this commandment which I command you today is not too mysterious for you, nor is it far off. It is not in heaven, that you should say, 'Who will ascend into heaven for us and bring it to us, that we may hear it and do it?' Nor is it beyond the sea, that you should say, 'Who will go over the sea for us and bring it to us, that we may hear it and do it?' But the word is very near you, in your mouth and in your heart, that you may do it.*
>
> Deuteronomy 30:11-14)

And the psalmist extols the accessibility of the Word of God, circumlocuted by 'the Law,' to every man.

> *The law of the LORD is perfect, converting the soul;*
> *The testimony of the LORD is sure, making wise the simple;*
> *The statutes of the LORD are right, rejoicing the heart;*
> *The commandment of the LORD is pure, enlightening the eyes;*
> *The fear of the LORD is clean, enduring forever;*
> *The judgments of the LORD are true and righteous altogether.*
> *More to be desired are they than gold,*
> *Yea, than much fine gold;*
> *Sweeter also than honey and the honeycomb.*
> *Moreover by them Your servant is warned,*
> *And in keeping them there is great reward.* (Psalm 19:7-11)

Yet, for all the cogent and convincing arguments made in support of the perspicacity of Scripture, it still remains an ever-present reality that believers often find themselves quoting the Ethiopian eunuch after reading such-and-such passage of Scripture: "*How can I understand unless someone guides me?*" This was in response to Philip's question, "*Do you understand what you are reading?*" which is a question believers have to ask themselves repeatedly as they read through the Bible. The problem is not that the Bible is written in some sort of ancient code, nor that its comprehension is

[62] II Timothy 3:15

accessible only to a minority *illuminati*. Rather the problem is one of *meaning* and is common to all manner of human communication through the written word. The words are clear, for the most part, and the sentence structure is also clear, for the most part. But the combination of grammar and syntax, though intended by the author to convey meaning, does not always succeed in its goal. Indeed, the Bible "says what it means and means what it says," but this does not invariably guarantee that we will *understand* that meaning. But it is a maxim worthy of Muggles of Slipper-on-the-Water, that if we are to find that for which we seek, we must first know what we are looking for.[63] Thus we continue with our study of the meaning of meaning, in order to determine what it is we seek when we ask ourselves the question, *"Do you understand what you are reading?"*

In this segment of our study into the meaning of meaning, our discussion points will be borrowed from an essay by Walter Kaiser, titled *The Meaning of Meaning*, in the hermeneutical text co-authored with Moisés Silva, *An Introduction to Biblical Hermeneutics*. Kaiser offers several 'aspects' of meaning that assist the reader first in recognizing the nuances of meaning in any written text, and second in determining the 'meaning' roles of the various parts of a text.

Walter Kaiser (b. 1933)

The terminology may be somewhat unique to Kaiser, and may be a bit confusing to the student, but the purpose is still both necessary and admirably met by his treatment of the matter. This purpose is the exposition of *meaning* through the recognition that there are many perspectives of meaning to the author as well as to the reader. The bringing together of these perspectives – somewhat like aligning the crosshairs when focusing an old-style 35 mm camera – brings to light the meaning of the passage. Kaiser offers four major aspects of meaning: meaning as *referent*, meaning as *sense*, meaning as *intention*, and meaning as *significance*. One does not get the impression that Kaiser intends to be

[63] To the uninitiated, Muggles is the heroine of *The Gammage Cup*, a classic children's novel most thoroughly enjoyed by the adults reading it.

exhaustive in this presentation, as his last category is titles "Other Meanings of 'Meaning'"!

Meaning as Referent:

This aspect of meaning is perhaps the simplest to grasp: the *referent* is what is being referred to by the passage or text. It is what the author is talking about. To return to the Ethiopian eunuch, it is what he asks of Philip in regard to the passage from Isaiah that he had just been reading, *"I ask you, of whom does the prophet say this, of himself or of some other man?"*[64] Such questions must always be asked of the biblical text, and the answer is not always obvious. What the speaker or author is 'talking about' may not be what is on the surface of his dialogue, as in the case of Jesus' exhortation to the masses recorded in John 6,

> *Then Jesus said to them, "Most assuredly, I say to you, unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink His blood, you have no life in you. Whoever eats My flesh and drinks My blood has eternal life, and I will raise him up at the last day. For My flesh is food indeed, and My blood is drink indeed. He who eats My flesh and drinks My blood abides in Me, and I in him.*
>
> (John 6:53-56)

Christian readers of this passage do not struggle with the meaning nearly as much as did the original audience, since Jesus later instituted the Lord's Supper. But He had not yet done this when He first spoke these words, and that in itself is a significant hermeneutical point. In other words, to declare the *referent* to be the bread and wine of the Supper is to short circuit the hermeneutical process by means of an anachronism – a foisting back upon the passage 'knowledge' that had not yet been revealed. In doing this, the exegete actually fails in his attempt to understand the passage in John 6, while at the same time missing the deeper significance of the Lord's Supper later revealed.

Discovery of the *referent* is most difficult, and perhaps also most critical, when one is reading prophetic texts, especially those written in the apocalyptic style. The honest, seeking reader of the Book of Revelation or the prophecy of Ezekiel, spends a great deal

[64] Acts 8:34

of time asking, "What is the author talking about?" The passage of the Woman, the Child, and the Dragon is a case in point.

> *Now a great sign appeared in heaven: a woman clothed with the sun, with the moon under her feet, and on her head a garland of twelve stars. Then being with child, she cried out in labor and in pain to give birth. And another sign appeared in heaven: behold, a great, fiery red dragon having seven heads and ten horns, and seven diadems on his heads. His tail drew a third of the stars of heaven and threw them to the earth. And the dragon stood before the woman who was ready to give birth, to devour her Child as soon as it was born. She bore a male Child who was to rule all nations with a rod of iron. And her Child was caught up to God and His throne. Then the woman fled into the wilderness, where she has a place prepared by God, that they should feed her there one thousand two hundred and sixty days.* (Revelation 12:1-6)

This example shows that the search for the *referent* is not the same as the determination of symbolism – i.e., what the Woman represents; the Child; the Dragon; etc. Nor does the *referent* consist in the understanding of the numerology – the 1,260 days of refuge for the Woman. Commentators spend a great deal of energy and ink trying to definitively associate each component of the vision with the 'correct' antitype, and still fail to grasp the meaning of the passage itself. To discover the *referent* of texts such as this one, the exegete must search wider afield to the overall context of the book and to the biblical prophetic language – and thus the allusions made to Old Testament prophetic writings – that is being used. This does not mean that each and every student will determine the exact same *referent*; a student with a Dispensational Eschatology is likely to come up with a different *referent* in Revelation 12 than one with an Amillennial Eschatology – theological presuppositions do still matter here. What it does mean is that the exegete's interpretation of the symbolism, as well as the prophetic intent of the passage, will be powerfully governed by his or her determination of the *referent*: what the passage is referring to in the first place. Thus, from a hermeneutical perspective, determination of meaning as *referent* is both crucial and primary; it must be done first.

In terms of practical hermeneutics, it should be stated that the determination of the *referent* may not be possible upon the first or second reading of a text, or perhaps not

upon the hundredth or thousandth reading, depending on the passage! *Referent* in a written text is analogous to the same concept in spoken communication, and the reader of a text must be as familiar with the overall thought context of the author as the hearer must be of the speaker, if either is to 'get it' in regard to what is being spoken of. In the case of apocalyptic prophetic writings such as Ezekiel and Revelation, it is the general consensus of Reformed scholars that the meaning as *referent* cannot become evident apart from a thorough familiarity with the non-apocalyptic language of prophecy, as well as with the overall history of Israel as God's redeemed people. This is far more than merely recognizing that the reference to 1,260 days in Revelation 12:6 is reminiscent of Daniel's 1,290 days (Daniel 12:11); it requires as thorough a familiarity with the prophecy of Daniel – and those of Isaiah and Ezekiel and others – as that of the author of Revelation 12 himself. It is for this reason that many sober biblical exegetes have refrained from anything more than surmises in regard to many apocalyptic passages: they simply cannot figure out what it is to which the text *refers*.

Meaning as Sense:

The second of Walter Kaiser's four aspects of meaning is that of *sense*. The *sense* of a text, according to Kaiser's usage, is what the author is saying *about* the referent. Thus "meaning as sense tells what is being said about the referent."[65] Comprehensive biblical knowledge derives from associating the *sense* meaning of many different passages that bear the same *referent*. For instance, if the referent is 'the Day of the Lord,' then a number of different passages provide the *sense*; they tell the reader something about the Day of the Lord.

It *comes as a thief in the night* (I Thessalonians 5:2)
It will come *as destruction from the Almighty* (Isaiah 13:6; Joel 1:15)
It is a *day of vengeance* (Jeremiah 46:10)
It is the *time of the Gentiles* (Ezekiel 30:3)
It will be *darkness and not light* (Amos 5:18)

[65] Kaiser, Walter *The Meaning of Meaning*; in *An Introduction to Biblical Hermeneutics*; 35.

It will be preceded by the coming of *Elijah the prophet* (Malachi 4:5)
It will bring about the end of heaven and earth (II Peter 3:10)

These are just the *sense* provided in passages in which the referent is explicitly the 'Day of the Lord,' and do not take into account the many passages in which the referent is implied. The more comprehensive task of Bible study, however, consists in making the correct associations of referents from passage to passage, and then filling in the *sense* that is presented in each passage with regard to a common referent. Hopefully this particular example helps to illustrate the danger that arises when either the referent is improperly determined (or entirely ignored), or the exegete fails to associate biblical passages in which the referent is common.

Meaning as Intention:

The third aspect of meaning gets a bit tricky, for it requires the determination of *authorial intent* – what the author *intended* to convey by the particular words, grammar, and syntax of a particular passage. Sometimes the *intention* is fairly obvious, as with Luke's self-disclosure of intent in both his gospel and the Book of Acts.

> *Inasmuch as many have taken in hand to set in order a narrative of those things which have been fulfilled among us, just as those who from the beginning were eyewitnesses and ministers of the word delivered them to us, it seemed good to me also, having had perfect understanding of all things from the very first, to write to you an orderly account, most excellent Theophilus, that you may know the certainty of those things in which you were instructed.* (Luke 1:1-4)

> *The former account I made, O Theophilus, of all that Jesus began both to do and teach, until the day in which He was taken up, after He through the Holy Spirit had given commandments to the apostles whom He had chosen, to whom He also presented Himself alive after His suffering by many infallible proofs, being seen by them during forty days and speaking of the things pertaining to the kingdom of God.* (Acts 1:1-3)

Or the apostle John's preamble to his first epistle, I John 1:1-4:

> *That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked upon, and our hands have handled, concerning the Word of life – the life was manifested, and we have seen, and bear witness, and declare to you that eternal life which was with*

> *the Father and was manifested to us – that which we have seen and heard we declare to you, that you also may have fellowship with us; and truly our fellowship is with the Father and with His Son Jesus Christ.* ***And these things we write to you that your joy may be full****.*

However, even when the *intent* is so explicitly stated we must not assume that such statements are exhaustive. For instance, it appears obvious that Paul's *intent* in writing a letter to Philemon was to pave the way for the agreeable reception and forgiveness of Philemon's escaped slave, Onesimus. But it also appears obvious, at least to many readers and commentators on this short epistle, that Paul had other *intentions* in mind when he wrote the letter: perhaps that Philemon should give Onesimus his freedom legitimately (though Paul never asks, much less demand, this), or that Philemon return Onesimus to Paul for further service with the apostle.

Intent is often most difficult and most important in regard to the reading of parables. This is not so much the case with parables that are similes, as with the Kingdom Parables: *the kingdom of heaven is like…* In these it is clear that the referent is the *kingdom*, the parabolic symbolism is the *sense*, and the *intent* is to convey descriptive and motivation information regarding the kingdom. But frankly there are times when our Lord answers a question put to Him by means of a parable, and it is not always clear what is intended in the answer. One such parabolic text is found in Matthew 11. The *referent* is clearly stated as 'this generation,' but both the *sense* and the *intention* of what Jesus says is less clear.

> *But to what shall I liken this generation? It is like children sitting in the marketplaces and calling to their companions, and saying:*
>
> *'We played the flute for you, and you did not dance;*
> *We mourned to you, and you did not lament.'* (Matthew 11:16-17)

Another example of difficulty in determining the *intention* of a parable is found in John 12, where it is recorded that a group of Gentiles came to see Jesus. When Philip informed the Lord of His visitors, He seemingly fails even to acknowledge either Philip's comment or the Gentiles' presence. Instead, He responds with a parable.

> *But Jesus answered them, saying, "The hour has come that the Son of Man should be glorified. Most assuredly, I say to you, unless a grain of wheat falls into the ground and dies, it remains alone; but if it dies, it produces much grain. He who loves his life will lose it, and he who hates his life in this world will keep it for eternal life. If anyone serves Me, let him follow Me; and where I am, there My servant will be also. If anyone serves Me, him My Father will honor.*
>
> (John 12:23-26)

Modern literary criticism has often concluded that the *intention* of the author is impossible to discern and, therefore, meaning as *intention* has no place within the reader's hermeneutical profile. While it is true that apart from an explicit statement of intent, any determination of *intention* is speculation to a greater or lesser degree. But it is not consequently true that the author's intention is impossible to discern in any measure, nor is it true that the reader can ascertain the meaning of the passage apart from some determination of the author's intention. For instance, as Kaiser notes, "the author's intention determines whether the words are to be understood literally or figuratively."[66] Authorial *intention* is conveyed by the very genre of literature used: a psalm conveys an intention different from a narrative or an epistle. And so the author's *intention* is not beyond the reach of the reader – the original reader or the modern one – but in some cases this intention is more difficult to discern.

Intention can be further complicated in prophetic writings when the *sense* accorded to the *referent* has multiple *intent*. A classic example of this phenomenon is the 'child prophecy' from Isaiah 7,

> *Then he said, "Hear now, O house of David! Is it a small thing for you to weary men, but will you weary my God also? Therefore the Lord Himself will give you a sign: Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a Son, and shall call His name Immanuel. Curds and honey He shall eat, that He may know to refuse the evil and choose the good. For before the Child shall know to refuse the evil and choose the good, the land that you dread will be forsaken by both her kings.*
>
> (Isaiah 7:13-16)

Similar to this is the 'abomination of desolation' prophecy in Daniel 9, which referred both to the desecration of the Temple by the Greek king Antiochus Epiphanes

[66] Kaiser; 38.

and to the destruction of the Temple by the Roman legions under Titus, events that took place two hundred hears apart. But these and other such prophetic examples do not diminish the importance of determining the *intention*, they merely illustrate that with biblical literature there may be multiple layers of *intention* to discern. This principle brings into play the very important correlative: *divine intention*. Up to this point we have been discussing *intention* from the perspective of the human author or the human speaker conveyed by the author. In Scripture, however, we have the confluent authorship of the human writer and the Holy Spirit. Thus it is possible, and at times perhaps even probable, that the human author himself did not fully intend what the divine Author intended. The human *intention* is to be sought as much as possible within the immediate context of the passage; the divine *intention* is often not revealed until further writings much later in redemptive history.

Meaning as Significance:

Finally, at least in Walter Kaiser's presentation of the data, we have meaning as *significance*. This is that aspect of meaning that brings the text home to the reader – in personal application and response. Kaiser quotes E. D. Hirsch with approbation regarding the need to distinguish between the words *meaning* and *significance*,

> *Meaning* is that which is represented by a text; it is what the author meant by his use of a particular sign sequence; it is what the signs represent. *Significance*, on the other hand, names a relationship between that meaning and a person, or a conception, or a situation, or indeed anything imaginable…Significance is meaning-as-related-to-something-else.[67]

This fourth aspect of meaning is where the rubber meets the road, so to speak; it is the ultimate interpretation of a passage. This is because the *significance* changes with the reader's circumstance and situation in life, whereas *referent, sense,* and *intention* – at least theoretically – remain constant. But determining the significance of a passage requires a deeper analysis of the relationship between the author and the text, the reader and the

[67] Kaiser; 41.

text, the author to his world, and the reader to his. This analysis will, therefore, be the subject of our next lesson.

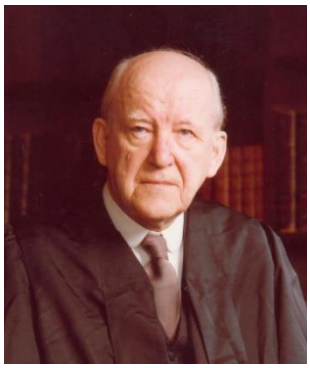
Hermeneutics Workshop: Fight or Flight?

One of the most difficult aspects of biblical exegesis is the apparent shift between the Old Testament and the New Testament in regard to the covenant member's responsibility vis-à-vis the State and the world around him. Sanctified militarism in the Old Testament seems to give way to a 'turn the other cheek' pacifism in the New, and generations of Christians have wrestled with the 'fight or flight' antithesis. This necessary mental struggle has waned in recent years, as evangelicals in the United States have essentially embraced a certain militarism – a coalition between Christianity and the Armed Forces that would undoubtedly have made Paul uncomfortable. But earlier in the 20th Century, and periodically through the preceding nineteen centuries, Christian scholars and pastors have tried to come to grips with the biblical testimony concerning the believer's, and the Church's, relationship and responsibility to the State and to the broader society in which he lives.

To put this issue in modern (or at least early modern) perspective, we have the example of the Anabaptists during the Protestant Reformation of the 16th Century. These men and women, most of whom were without serious doubt believers in Jesus Christ and numbered among the elect, were intensely persecuted, exiled, and executed by both Lutherans and Calvinists on the one side, and Roman Catholics on the other. Their crime? Well, it was twofold (in the broadest of generalities). First, they advocated *believer's* baptism, and second, they tended strongly toward *pacifism*. Neither of these would warrant the death penalty in modern society, but in the 16th Century, when all children were born both into the State and into the Church, the Anabaptist view of *re*-baptism and of pacifism were destructive of the prevailing social order. We do not have room here to fully develop the history of the conflict, but it suffices for our purpose to recognize that the opposition was less theological than it was political. As in our own day, evangelicals tend to justify militarism on the basis of national security, or patriotism, rather than upon

solid exegesis of Scripture. Indeed, today the Roman Catholic Church tends far more toward pacifism than do evangelical denominations.

Another historical example occurred closer to our own time: during the run-up and the prosecution of World War II. Militaristic Nazi Germany entered the scene at a time when Western Christianity had all but embraced pacifism as a result of the carnage of the First World War – the 'war to end all wars.' The rise of Hitler's police state, and the increasing evidence of its brutalities even in the 1930s, gave pause to many evangelicals with regard to the Christian's proper response to civil and political evil. Two gifted and well-regarded scholars – D. Martyn Lloyd-Jones in Great Britain, and Lorraine Boettner in the United States – each published treatises addressing the biblical justification for war during this era, with the expressed intention of addressing the threat posed by Germany. Lloyd-Jones' work, *Why Does God Allow War?* Was published in 1939 with Great Britain on the brink of hostilities with Germany, and Boettner's *The Christian's Attitude Toward War* in 1942, with the United States now entered upon the international conflagration. Both men responded in the time-honored conservative manner: by presenting biblical justification for their nations' entry into war, and for the participation in that war by evangelical believers. Both Lloyd-Jones and Boettner purport to give their readers a *biblical* view on war, and consequently a *biblical* justification for Christians to both support and participate in their nation's military struggles against an enemy nation. Boettner states the evangelical line, "In all matters of controversy among Christians the Scriptures



D. M. Lloyd-Jones (1899-1981)

Lorraine Boettner (1901-90)

are accepted as the highest court of appeal."[68] Both men freely acknowledge that their foray into the subject was determined by 'the present crisis,' but it seems that neither fully recognized how powerfully that crisis influenced their own exegesis.

Indeed, any cursory reading of the Bible, as well as any in-depth study of the relevant passages and biblical examples, will convince most unbiased readers that there has been a definite paradigm shift in the biblical attitude toward war. Not only war, but also civil strife and activism of most every sort (including *rebellion* against a lawful government, though the American Revolution was largely encouraged and propagated from mid-18th Century American pulpits). So pronounced is the difference in language between the two Testaments, that false teachers throughout Christian history have postulated two *gods* – sort of a Mars of the Old Testament and a Hermes of the New. What is needed is a sound hermeneutical mechanic to deal honestly and fairly with the martial testimony of the Old Testament, as well as with the pacific witness of the New Testament. We may not fully develop one in these pages…but that is what is needed, anyhow.

The application of such a hermeneutic is broader than just one's support of one's nation in time of war, and more significant than the necessary struggle every Christian should go through before actually donning a uniform and taking up arms against his fellow man. These are weighty and important matters, but for most of human history they have been matters too lofty for the average citizen; it has only been within the last two or three centuries that the 'common' man found himself beset with such mental struggles, prior to that he had the choice of supporting and participating with his lord in military endeavors, or being executed. The hermeneutic we wish to develop, however, must apply to all interaction between the citizen of the kingdom of heaven and his or her 'host' culture – the place of his sojourn during his time upon the earth. But we must issue a caveat at the beginning: this particular hermeneutical path may very well be one that

[68] Boettner, Lorraine *The Christian Attitude Toward War* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co.; 1942); 20.

we have discussed in general before: that the Scriptures do not provide us with definitive answers, but rather a way of thinking through things on our personal path to an answer.

We might term this particular hermeneutical workshop a 'Full Counsel of God' workshop, taking the cue from Paul's witness before the Ephesian elders in Acts 20:27, *"For I have not shunned to declare to you the whole counsel of God."* The process is simple in theory, and time-consuming in practice: it involves a full biblical survey of all relevant passages concerning militarism or other forms of civil activism, followed by a careful exegesis of the context and intent of each instance within the overall framework of biblical redemptive history. Only then, and perhaps, will a pattern begin to develop to guide the believer's thoughts in regard to these issues. The approach is the same as the one the whole of Christianity has taken over the centuries with regard to the issue of human slavery: lacking any explicit *Thou shalt* or *Thou shalt not* of Scripture, the Church groped its way through the principles of human dignity to arrive (and not without violence, unfortunately) to the modern consensus against the evil of human chattel slavery. We still have some work to do in regard to *economic* slavery, it would appear, but that is another issue.

We begin in the Old Testament, where we find Moses extolling Jehovah as *"a Man of War"* in Exodus 15, a perspective that seems inimical to the New Testament concept of God. Abraham is found warring victoriously against the five kings in Genesis 14, afterward to be greeted and blessed by Melchizedek, king of Salem and priest of the Most High God,

> *Blessed be Abram of God Most High,*
> *Possessor of heaven and earth;*
> *And blessed be God Most High,*
> *Who has delivered your enemies into your hand.* (Genesis 14:19-20)

Throughout the subsequent history of God's people, we find God driving out the nations before Israel, or using the nations as goads and whips to discipline His people Israel – all within the context of war. Within the family of Israel himself we have the instance of Levi and Simeon taking revenge for the shaming of their sister Dinah by

Shechem the son of Hamor. The narrative is found in Genesis 34, where it is recounted how Levi and Simeon utilized subterfuge – promising their sister to Shechem in marriage if only the men of Shechem would agree to be circumcised – to bring about the slaughter of all of the men of that city while they were still recovering from the surgery. What are we to make of this story? Were Simeon and Levi right in avenging their sister's honor, or was their father, Jacob, in the right when he protested against them after the deed had been done? The Bible does not answer the dilemma, but merely presents it to us.

> *Then Jacob said to Simeon and Levi, "You have troubled me by making me obnoxious among the inhabitants of the land, among the Canaanites and the Perizzites; and since I am few in number, they will gather themselves together against me and kill me. I shall be destroyed, my household and I." But they said, "Should he treat our sister like a harlot?"*
>
> (Genesis 34:30-31)

As for the issue of a member of the covenant community participating in the defense of the community at large, we have the stirring example of Nehemiah's command that the workers rebuilding the walls of Jerusalem were to work with trowel in one hand and sword in the other. Charles Spurgeon, the noted Baptist preacher of the mid-19th Century, borrowed this metaphor as the title of his periodical, *The Sword and the Trowel*, which is still published by the Metropolitan Tabernacle today. Mention is made of Spurgeon's magazine for the reason that it represents the classical Christian shift from the literal militarism of the Old Testament era – or thus it is perceived – to the pacific and more spiritualized realm of New Testament Christianity. This shift *has* occurred – though in times of national threat the tendency is to revert to a more literal interpretation of the Bible with reference to militarism. In Nehemiah's day, of course, there was no spiritualizing of the threat posed by Israel's enemies, nor of the necessity of both continuing the rebuilding of the wall and of being prepared to defend the city against those who would stop at nothing to stop that project.

Charles H. Spurgeon (1834-92)

As far as an individual in the Old Testament in whom we seem to find the epitome of martial glory coupled with divine blessing, that man must be David, the son of Jesse. But it is also with David – the *'man after God's heart,'* the *'sweet psalmist of Israel,'* and the conquering king who expanded Israel's borders to the full extent of the Abrahamic promise – that we begin to see more deeply into the divine mind with regard to militarism. David turned Israel into an armed camp, though his predecessor Saul also had a small army and a personal bodyguard. But when David insisted that the tribes of Israel be counted in order to assess the nation's military potential – in which action he was strenuously opposed by his Chief of General Staff Joab – God manifested His extreme displeasure against him. This act, which would be considered prudent by most modern evangelicals, was met with divine rebuke and a pestilence that claimed seventy thousand men.

But most telling with reference to God's attitude toward war is the fact that David was not permitted to build the Lord's Temple for the very reason that he was a 'man of war.'

> *Then King David rose to his feet and said, "Hear me, my brethren and my people: I had it in my heart to build a house of rest for the ark of the covenant of the LORD, and for the footstool of our God, and had made preparations to build it. But God said to me, 'You shall not build a house for My name, because you have been a man of war and have shed blood.'*
>
> (I Chronicles 28:2-3)

One begins to recognize a strand within the Old Testament Scriptures that argues against the militaristic view of that era. Not only is King David prevented from building the Temple due to his violent history, the son who is permitted to build a house for Jehovah is named Solomon, a derivation of *Shalom* – 'Peace.' As progressive revelation moves into the era of the prophets, we begin to read of the promise of a time when not only will wars cease, but the very art of war will no longer be taught or studied.

> *He shall judge between the nations,*
> *And rebuke many people;*
> *They shall beat their swords into plowshares,*

And their spears into pruning hooks;
Nation shall not lift up sword against nation,
Neither shall they learn war anymore. (Isaiah 2:4)

It is most commonly interpreted that such passages refer to the New Heaven and the New Earth – to a millennial reign or a Golden Age in the future. But the perspective that God possesses of the future is the proper perspective for man to have in the present. And thus as we move into the teachings and witness of the New Testament we perceive a definite shift in attitude toward militarism and civil activism, from martial to pacific. This shift has been a challenge to believers for the past two thousand years, though most generations have come to a tenuous balance between the spirit of pacifism that pervades the New Testament, and the exigencies of national emergency that confront each generation. Unique in human history up to the modern era, the fledgling United States granted *conscientious objection* as a religious right to its citizens – the right to avoid participation in the military on the basis of religious conviction.

One of the most famous examples of this struggle of conscience was Alvin York, famous because he resolved his inner turmoil in favor of answering the call to military service for the United States during World War I, and subsequently became a hero. York was drafted by the U. S. Government, which prompted a deep struggle within his intensely religious nature and conscience. By his own account he spent hours reading the Bible and consulting with his pastor, before determining that the cause of his country in this war was just, and therefore he was free to participate in the conflict. His subsequent actions as a soldier proved beyond doubt that his earlier misgivings were not motivated by cowardice, but rather by a sincere conviction that the spirit of Christianity was inimical to war and to killing.


Alvin York (1887-1964)

From the Sermon on the Mount to the epistles of Paul and Peter, the believer is exhorted, "*blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called the sons of God,*" and "*You have*

heard that it was said, 'An eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth.' But I tell you not to resist an evil person. But whoever slaps you on your right cheek, turn the other to him also. If anyone wants to sue you and take away your tunic, let him have your cloak also. And whoever compels you to go one mile, go with him two." Paul admonishes believers to *"be subject to the governing authorities,"* which is echoed by the apostle Peter. Paul goes further, insisting to believers, *"If it is possible, as much as depends on you, live peaceably with all men."* Even in the least violent of civil strife, the law court, believers are not to take matters before a judge, but are *"rather to be wronged."* These verses, and many like them, are sufficient to illustrate a spirit of meekness and pacifism that marks a distinct contrast with, say, the imprecatory psalms of David in the Old Testament.

It would appear that Paul does present at least a crack in the door with his statement, *'inasmuch as it depends on you…'* with regard to living peaceably with all men. There are times when matters no longer depend on the believer, but have moved outside the realm of sanity and peace. This is what Alvin York determined with regard to the need to fight Imperial Germany in order to bring about a more peaceful world after her defeat. This is not rationalization, nor is it *"doing evil that good may come."* But it is the recognition that God's people are to be characterized by *doing good to all men, especially those of the household of faith*. Ideally, this 'good' would be peaceable, would be what mankind has always considered 'good.' But there are times, many times, when doing good is comprised of doing harm to one segment of the world's political population lest they do even greater harm to the other part. This, of course, leads into the concept of 'Just War,' which goes to show just how a 'full counsel of God' type of hermeneutic often does not lead directly to an *answer*, but guides our thoughts in the paths of the divine mind as it is progressively revealed to us in the Bible.

Session 8 – The Relationships of the Text

Having established that the written word is a means of human communication, it remains to analyze that concept: *communication*. On the surface there are four components to any communication: that which is to be communicated; the one who is communicating; the means or mode of communication; and the one to whom it is being communicated. In terms of textual hermeneutics, these four components would be the *meaning*, the *author*, the *text*, and the *reader*. But there are also ancillary features to these four, such as the *Sitz im Leben* – the 'setting in life' - of the author when he wrote, and of the reader when he reads, the text. There are also linguistic components to any communication, both as to the fact that every language has its own limitations and to the fact that, through a written text such as the Bible, the communication is being made across languages. Even within a single language there are tectonic shifts in meaning over time, so that words that meant one thing in 1611 now sometimes mean the exact opposite.

All this is to say that *clear* communication has never been an easy thing to accomplish within the community of fallen mankind. We assume, of course, that Adam and Eve understood each other perfectly prior to their descent, though the realization that they were married might mitigate against even this conclusion! But there can be no argument from any quarter, that the history of mankind since its origination has been permeated by miscommunication and misunderstanding. The science/art of hermeneutics consists perhaps at its very core, of the attempt to unravel the various communicative relationships that pertain to the interaction between an author, a text, and a reader. In this lesson the focus will be kept on these three components, as that of *meaning* has already been treated. In subsequent lessons attention will be paid more to the associated components of communication such as *Sitz im Leben* and language. The goal in all such endeavors, however, must be to maximize the clarity of the communicated message, to progressively increase the confidence of the reader that he or she is attaining to the *meaning* of the text.

We have at times borrowed hermeneutical paradigms from other authors – hopefully with all proper credit given – and in this lesson we shall do so again. N. T. Wright, in his *The New Testament and the People of God*, devotes the first third or so of the book setting forth his view of how the author-text-reader interplay ought to be considered. He terms his hermeneutical philosophy *critical realism*, and contrasts it with two other philosophies that have held sway at various times within textual critical circles, biblical and otherwise. These other two are *positivism* and *phenomenalism*. Each of these perspectives offers a conclusion as to the directness of the relationship from the author, through the text, to the reader. The *positivist* view is the most direct; the *phenomenalist* view the least direct; and the *critical realist* view is somewhere in between.

The *positivist* "believes that there are some things at least about which we can have definite knowledge."[69] Wright terms this the 'optimistic' view, though he comments in several places that this view can also be somewhat naïve. In its barest form, *positivism* sees a direct link between what the author intends to convey and what the reader understands: the medium of the written text is a pure conductor of the message, with no loss or distortion. This perspective is also termed 'pre-critical,' as it perhaps best defines the attitude toward the text – especially the biblical text – held by and large during the centuries prior to the Enlightenment. But it is still a modern perspective, fairly common within literalist and fundamentalist circles. In biblical hermeneutics, this view attempts to read the ancient text directly into the modern circumstance and tends to downplay any distortion of the message caused by the shift in culture, time, and language between the author and the reader.

An example of this type of exegesis is found in the common modern interpretation of the vivid graphical word pictures from the Book of Revelation. Rather than attempting to understand the symbolism from the perspective of a first century Jewish Christian – the Apostle John – the tendency is to 'flesh out' the images with 20th and 21st Century antitypes, such as nuclear missiles. Thus the necessary hermeneutical shift between

[69] Wright; *New Testament and the People of God*; 32.

cultures and languages is bypassed, and the words themselves are read in the modern context as if they *clearly* represented modern things. When the usually associated literalism is added to the mix, one has what Wright calls 'naïve realism.'

Whereas the *positivist* claims a direct and open channel between the Object and the Subject of knowledge communication, the *phenomenalist* claims that the only thing of which the Subject can be sure is his or her own sense perceptions – what the person 'feels, ' or 'senses' rather than what is actually, objectively, and externally there. This view is a derivative of Kantian philosophy in which all reality is internal and personal, and all knowledge is sense-originated. The *phenomenalist*, therefore, will claim that the reader of a text learns nothing really about the intention of the author, but only about his or her own prejudices, perspectives, ambitions, and fears. The written text becomes, as it were, a mirror rather than a lens. This epistemological perspective is common in modern literary critical circles as the 'reader response' form of analysis, and in a less philosophical form underlies the common phrase heard in so many modern churches: "this is what the passage means to me."

Against these two paradigms of learning, Wright sets his own *critical realism*, which seeks to glean the true from both *positivism* and *phenomenalism* while at the same time avoiding the pitfalls and errors.

> Over against both of these positions, I propose a form of *critical realism*. This is a way of describing the process of 'knowing' that acknowledges the *reality of the thing known* (hence 'realism'), while also fully acknowledging that the only access we have t othis reality lies along the spiraling path of *appropriate dialogue or conversation between the knower and the thing known* (hence 'critical')…Knowledge, in other words, although in principle concerning realities independent of the knower, is never itself independent of the knower.[70]

Wright's approach is one of common sense. In spite of the plethora of philosophical bilge that has been foisted on Western civilization since the days of Kant, the average person (including the post-modernist, deconstructionalist Kantian

[70] *Ibid.*; 35.

descendent) lives and acts as if those things perceived in the subject's mind are actually real and external to the subject. This translates into written texts as meaning that the author's intent or meaning is widely viewed as somehow being contained and communicated by the author's words. Even the most ardent *phenomenalist*, Wright points out, would maintain that they are trying to convey a comprehensible message through their own books, and are just as touchy and defensive when their 'meaning' is misunderstood.[71] Wright is simply operating from the perspective that *positivism* cannot work due to the evident fact of cultural, linguistic, and chronological shifts between the author and the reader, and *phenomenalism* can only lead to the untenable and arrogant position that there exists nothing in the universe other than the individual 'self.'

The Bible student (and Wright's book *is* addressed to Bible readers, not to epistemological philosophers) cannot long maintain either the *positivist* or the *phenomenalist* position with regard to the Scriptures. On the one hand, honest inquiry into the Word will reveal the distortion that has evidently taken place between the author and the reader through the media of time, language, and culture. In other words, there are things in the text that the modern believer just does not understand. On the other hand, the idea that the biblical *meaning* is so patently individualistic as to preclude any objective sense of the text is repugnant to most believers – at least, one hopes, Reformed believers. Wright's *critical realism* is, therefore, a hermeneutic that attempts to bridge the gap between the objective reality wished to be conveyed by the author of the text, and the objective reality perceived by the reader.

> What we need, I suggest, is a *critical-realist account of the phenomenon of reading in all its parts*. To one side we can see the positivist or the naïve realist, who move so smoothly along the line from reader to text to author to referent that they are unaware of the snakes in the grass at every step; to the other sides we can see the reductionist who, stopping to look at the snakes, is swallowed up by them and proceeds no further. Avoiding both these paths, I suggest that we must articulate a theory which locates the entire phenomenon of

[71] *Ibid.*; 58.

> text-reading within an account of the storied and relational nature of human consciousness.[72]

The process of developing this *critical-realist* hermeneutic involves several basic, common-sense assumptions be made by the reader. As these are 'commonsensical,' it might come as a surprise to the student that Wright's perspective is far from mainstream in the modern epistemological and hermeneutical world. But it has often been said that common sense is never very common. Be that as it may, the **first** assumption we make is that the author of the text was not merely regurgitating his own perceptions and thoughts onto the papyrus, but was, in fact, attempting to convey a message, a teaching, or the record (and perhaps analysis) of a *real* historical event. Modern literary and historical critics have maintained that an author's bias *ipso facto* disqualifies that author from actually conveying *reality* about another person, a teaching, or an event. But this is a logical non sequitur – it *does not follow* that a person's bias so thoroughly taints his or her written account of a matter as to render it devoid of any truth content. To be sure, bias ought to be recognized, a hermeneutical task that is accomplished by reading various accounts of the same event, or various perspectives of the same teaching, and so forth. Indeed, it is hard to imagine why any man would put pen to paper without a bias: all communication of knowledge comes with the perspective (bias) of the communicator. Thus, fundamentally to the *critical realist* position, the author is neither providing a kaleidoscopic vision of his own mind, nor a mirror through which the reader sees his or her own mind. Rather, he is offering a telescope or microscope through which the reader attains a perspective on an event, a person, a teaching that the author wishes to convey. It may be distorted; it may be untrue even, but the connection nonetheless exists between the author and the reader.

The **second** facet of a *critical-realist* hermeneutic is the recognition that the text itself is a 'player' in the overall game. It is not the case that the text is an object carved in stone, incapable of any development in meaning through the process of reading from the time

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[72] *Ibid.*; 61.

of the author to the time of the reader. It is also not the case that the text is silly putty, to be molded and shaped into whatever configuration guided by the reader's own perception. It is the case that the text 'is an entity of its own,' as Wright puts it, and must be treated as existing to some extent independently of both the author and the reader. This is to accord proper respect to the text as the integral connecting part between the author and the reader, as well as a significant factor in itself. Wright sets forth the two relationship pairs as follows:[73]

Reader/Text ----------Text/Author

> What we need, then, is a theory of reading which, at the reader/text stage will do justice *both* to the fact that the reader is a particular human being *and* to the fact that the text is an entity on its own, not a plastic substance to be moulded to the reader's whim. It must also do justice, at the text/author stage, *both* to the fact that the author intended certain things, *and* that the text may well contain in addition other things – echoes, evocations, structures, and the like – which were not present to the author's mind.[74]

This development and independence of the text allows the meaning to be influenced by other important factors. These would include the development of meaning through the *reuse* of a text – for instance, in the citation of an Old Testament text by a New Testament author. It would also include the nuances of prophetic meaning that would be recognized by the reader's of a later age, but unforeseen by the author from an earlier one. And, of course, this perspective also leaves room for a *sensus plenior* – a 'fuller sense' – of the text as inspired and developed by the Holy Spirit.

This analysis of the relationships involved in the communication of knowledge through the medium of the written text, provides a framework that needs to be built upon. At this point there are the following relationships, each of which will be shown to have associated relationships that impact the overall communication – and the clarity of that communication – of any message:

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[73] *Ibid.*; 62.
[74] *Idem*.

Intended Meaning--------**Author**------**Text**--------**Reader**------*Interpreted* Meaning

Wright adds to this mix his own analysis of the importance of the *story* as the fundamental medium of communication throughout human history and within human society. He comments, "I suggest that human writing is best conceived as the articulation of worldviews, or, better still, the *telling of stories which bring worldviews into articulation*."[75] Thus the process of *critical realism* is the transference of an ancient story into a modern one, without loss of meaning or distortion of truth. This process will of necessity involve a critical analysis of the situation and circumstances – as best as they can be determined – in which the author first conveyed his worldview. It also requires some analysis of the vehicle of that conveyance – the genre of the text as well as the language of the text. Finally, the reader is also situated in a certain age and culture, with traditions and mores that are often vastly different from the author's world. These are the ancillary components of the relational picture, to be dealt with in greater detail in our next lesson. Through it all, may it never be forgotten, there is the inspiring, preserving, and illuminating influence of the Holy Spirit, who alone is unchangeable. Thus, while it is true that the modern reader can attain to a relatively clear picture of the past through the various written records, it is even more true when that written record is God's inspired Word.

Hermeneutics Workshop: *Does God Hold a Grudge?*

One of the most difficult paradigm adjustments that readers of the Bible have had to make throughout history has been the juxtaposition of the biblical culture over the reader's own culture. Never has this been more acute than at the present time, and this phenomenon has left many modern believers scratching their head in confusion and disbelief with regard to many of the things we read in the Bible, especially in the Old Testament. To put it mildly, it sometimes seems that God himself has changed from one testament to the other, from a harsh and begrudging deity to a kind and forgiving one.

[75] *Ibid.*; 65 (italics Wright's).

Our theology tells us that this cannot be; but sometimes our theology is insufficient to take the edge off the biblical passages that cause such unsettledness.

One such passage is found in Deuteronomy 23, where very clear and harsh restrictions are laid down with regard to several classes of people on the basis of things that may have been, and in some cases definitely were, beyond their control.

> *He who is emasculated by crushing or mutilation shall not enter the assembly of the LORD. One of illegitimate birth shall not enter the assembly of the LORD; even to the tenth generation none of his descendants shall enter the assembly of the LORD. An Ammonite or Moabite shall not enter the assembly of the LORD; even to the tenth generation none of his descendants shall enter the assembly of the LORD forever, because they did not meet you with bread and water on the road when you came out of Egypt, and because they hired against you Balaam the son of Beor from Pethor of Mesopotamia, to curse you. Nevertheless the LORD your God would not listen to Balaam, but the LORD your God turned the curse into a blessing for you, because the LORD your God loves you. You shall not seek their peace nor their prosperity all your days forever. You shall not abhor an Edomite, for he is your brother. You shall not abhor an Egyptian, because you were an alien in his land. The children of the third generation born to them may enter the assembly of the LORD.*
>
> (Deuteronomy 23:1-8)

The natural, 'Christian' way to interpret this passage is to somehow 'let God off the hook' with regard to being harsh and unforgiving toward particular people. Liberal theologians generally reject this passage, and others like it, as being representative not of God, but of Moses (or whoever the exegete theorizes was the author of this passage). Evangelicals will wax eloquent on the majesty of divine grace manifested through Jesus Christ, whose blood removed the curse and the painful strictures here recorded, but often fail to actually exposit the passage itself. It thus represents an excellent hermeneutical challenge – to exegete a passage of 'law' consistently with biblical theology, what the Bible has to say about God.

The first step is to lay out the passage and determine in as concise a manner as possible what it is saying, exactly. There are six categories of people who fall under some degree of restriction with regard to the "*assembly of the LORD*" – the emasculated/eunuch, the bastard, the Moabite, the Ammonite, the Edomite, and the Egyptian. The restriction itself falls into two classes: the *tenth generation* and the *third generation.* Thus,

Excluded to the Tenth Generation	*Excluded to the Third Generation*
Emasculated, damaged genitals, eunuchs	Edomite
Illegitimate birth	Egyptian
Ammonite	
Moabite	

No explanation is given for the exclusion of the first two categories under the *tenth generation* grouping, while somewhat extensive reasoning is provided for the national exclusions of Ammonite, Moabite, Edomite, and Egyptian. There are several exegetical issues involved with a passage such as this one, and it is often helpful to set out the questions on a piece of paper:

1. What is the meaning of the phrase *"assembly of the LORD"*?
2. What is the 'offense' of the emasculate and the bastard?
3. Are the two exclusion periods to be taken literally or figuratively?
4. And WHAT ABOUT RUTH, THE MOABITESS??

Honestly, most modern readers skip the first three and land squarely on the fourth. This is also true of many commentators from across the ages. The Puritan exegete and pastor Henry Ainsworth (1571-1622) refers to a unsubstantiated Jewish tradition, for instance, that the restriction against the Ammonite and the Moabite referred only to the men.

> We have it as a tradition of Moses from mount Sinai, that the Ammonite is the male, and the Moabite is the male, which is forbidden for ever to marry a daughter of Israel, though it be his son's son to the world's end.[76]

This is convenient for the exception of Ruth, but there appears to be no such limitation or definition placed on the exclusions as we read them in Deuteronomy 23. It

[76] Ainsworth, Henry *Annotations on the Pentateuch and the Psalms* (Ligonier, PA: Soli Deo Gloria Publications; 1991); 314.

may be implied by the fact that the first category of outcasts most certainly applies to the male – he that is emasculated, has damaged genitals, or has been made a eunuch. Yet the second category seems very expansive in its reach, "*No one of illegitimate birth…none of his descendants, even to the tenth generation…*" Again, the 'his' might further imply that only the males of the line are excluded, but it would be more natural to read this as a generic possessive pronoun (as the Holy Spirit was not nearly as politically correct as our modern theologians, who insist on giving the female pronoun equal or even prioritized mention). It is special pleading, it would seem, to somehow read into the passage a distinction between sex that is not evident from the language of the text. There is really no need to do so unless one is trying to come up with an explanation for the inclusion of Ruth not only into the nation of Israel, but into the lineage of the Messiah.

Another common approach to this passage, and again, others like it, is to try to find something inherent within the people groups to justify their exclusion from the assembly. This is made easier – and thus seems to justify the hermeneutical approach itself – by the Lord explaining both the *tenth generation* exclusion of the Ammonite and the Moabite, and the *third generation* restriction on the Edomite and the Egyptian. Nonetheless, this approach leads one to some very unpleasant, and biblically untenable, conclusions with regard to God's attitude toward people (and it does not help explain Ruth). Still, as an approach to solving the problem of the passage, this one is not without merit. It cannot be denied that these are *specific* groupings of people who are receiving, in varying degrees, a harsh judgment lasting multiple generations. For instance, one might reasonably ask why the ninth and tenth generation Ammonite is still being held responsible for the lack of hospitality – and outright hostility - of his forebears in the days of Moses? Furthermore, it undoubtedly upsets our modern, inclusive sensibilities that illegitimate children should be punished for sins that were not their own. And frankly, with regard to the first group of men, most modern readers would rather not discuss it at all.

If we do follow this particular approach – that of attempting to find something inherently repulsive with regard to each group of people – we set up a principle of

hermeneutics that then justifies other exclusivities among mankind. This has indeed been the case, with sometimes wild and imaginative biblical allusions connecting the homosexual with the eunuch, or the Negro with the Ammonite. But if there is something inherent to the person – being an Ammonite, or being born illegitimate (which, by the way, does not necessarily mean being born out of wedlock) – then in what manner does this inherent corruption 'expire' after ten or three generations? If there is something inherent to the people to the third or the tenth generation, then why not to the thousandth? Furthermore, if we continue along this line of thinking, must we not also take into account God's self-disclosure to Moses, recorded in Exodus 34?

> *And the LORD passed before him and proclaimed, "The LORD, the LORD God, merciful and gracious, longsuffering, and abounding in goodness and truth, keeping mercy for thousands, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin, by no means clearing the guilty, visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children and the children's children to the third and the fourth generation."*
>
> (Exodus 34:6-7)

This passage would seem to indicate that God's wrath is exhausted by the third or fourth generation, whereas Deuteronomy 23 continues that wrath for the first four groups by another six or seven generations. This, of course, leads to the question listed above with regard to whether the 'generations' ought to be taken literally or figuratively. In support of the figurative reading, both numbers – ten and three – are numerically 'perfect,' indicating completeness. Arguing for the literal interpretation is the fact that the statue is found in a fairly straightforward section of civil law, and would have naturally been read by Moses' heirs in leadership as indicating a literal length of time during which a particular lineage was to be excluded from the assembly. Perhaps the point is moot, as it no longer pertains to God's covenant economy – or at least there are few who would still attempt to apply it today. Yet one's analysis of the passage does influence one's view of God – or should that be the other way round?

If we seek to find an inherent sin within the emasculate, the bastard, the Ammonite, and the Moabite that is of a deeper hue than the sins of other men, we will

not be able to explain either the eventual expiration of this corruption (as noted above) nor the eventual rescinding of the law of exclusion itself.

> *Do not let the son of the foreigner*
> *Who has joined himself to the LORD*
> *Speak, saying,*
> *"The LORD has utterly separated me from His people";*
> *Nor let the eunuch say, "Here I am, a dry tree."*
> *For thus says the LORD:*
> *"To the eunuchs who keep My Sabbaths, and choose what pleases Me, and hold fast My covenant,*
> *Even to them I will give in My house*
> *And within My walls a place and a name better than that of sons and daughters;*
> *I will give them an everlasting name that shall not be cut off.* (Isaiah 56:3-5)

And, of course, there is Ruth the Moabitess.

Another approach is to try to figure out just what constitutes the exclusion in Deuteronomy 23, what exactly the "*assembly of the LORD*" is referring to. In this analysis there are several options, at least common ones put forth by various commentators. The first is that this exclusion is complete with regard to the participation of one of these people in the civil and religious life of Israel. But such an application of the 'assembly' would contradict other passages in which no distinction is made among the foreigners with regard to participation in the worship of Jehovah. This one is particularly interesting in its mention of *throughout your generations*:

> *And if a stranger dwells with you, or whoever is among you throughout your generations, and would present an offering made by fire, a sweet aroma to the LORD, just as you do, so shall he do. One ordinance shall be for you of the assembly and for the stranger who dwells with you, an ordinance forever* ***throughout your generations****; as you are, so shall the stranger be before the LORD. One law and one custom shall be for you and for the stranger who dwells with you.*
> (Numbers 15:14-16)

Another view frequently espoused concerning the meaning of the 'assembly' in Deuteronomy 23 limits the exclusion to civil relationships between Israelites and those listed in the exclusions – prohibitions on marriage in particular. This may have been the case, but there are also many indications that when a foreigner joined himself to the

people of Israel – manifested through circumcision – he was to be treated as if he were a native of the land. This provision applies most explicitly to participation in the Passover feast, but the phrasing is so inclusive that it is hard to limit its application simply to that one annual event.

> *But if a stranger sojourns with you, and celebrates the Passover to the Lord, let all his males be circumcised, and then let him come near to celebrate it; and* ***he shall be like a native of the land****. But no uncircumcised person may eat of it.*
>
> (Exodus 12L48)

And, of course, extending the exclusion of Deuteronomy 23 to marriage puts Boaz in hot water for marrying Ruth, who was clearly *first* generation Moabite.

It is likely, therefore, that the phrase "*the assembly of the LORD*" pertains neither to participation in the worship, nor to marriage, but rather to the civil and, if we may put it this way without undue prejudice, the *political* congregation of the tribes of Israel. This phrase is used only one other place in the Pentateuch other than the three times it is mentioned in the opening eight verses of Deuteronomy 23. In the only other reference, the context clearly is the leadership of the nation – the *political* leadership of the nation. The historical situation was that of the rebellion of Korah,

> *Now Korah the son of Izhar, the son of Kohath, the son of Levi, with Dathan and Abiram, the sons of Eliab, and On the son of Peleth, sons of Reuben, took action, and they rose up before Moses, together with some of the sons of Israel, two hundred and fifty leaders of the congregation, chosen in the assembly, men of renown. They assembled together against Moses and Aaron, and said to them, "You have gone far enough, for all the congregation are holy, every one of them, and the LORD is in their midst; so why do you exalt yourselves above* ***the assembly of the LORD****?"*
>
> (Numbers 16:1-3)

To put this in modern parlance, it is quite possible that Deuteronomy 23 is talking about *voting rights,* 'suffrage' as it is referred to in political science. In this case, of course, it would have applied exclusively to men, which may help explain the 'tradition' that Ainsworth references but does not corroborate. We may still struggle with *why* certain groups were excluded, but we can at least recognize that all societies, including our own,

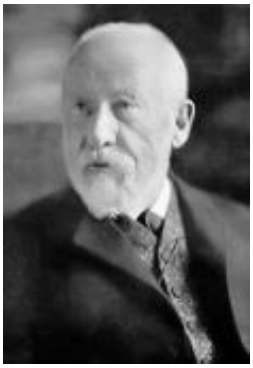
have had such exclusions with regard to participation in the political leadership of the nation. And this interpretation gains support from the passage itself in Deuteronomy 23, where the Israelites are admonished not to seek the welfare of those peoples who failed to seek the welfare of Israel. This, of course, does not apply to the eunuch and the bastard, but it lends at least some weight to a political interpretation rather than a religious or social one.

And it lets Boaz off the hook. But Boaz was perhaps never really in danger, for in marrying Ruth he was not breaking the prohibition against marriage to foreigners – *that* was the sin and guilt of Ruth's first husband, either Mahlon or Chilion (the text is not specific as to which brother married which Moabitess). At the time Ruth was not a member of the covenant people and was under the ban; indeed, it has been argued that the reason that Naomi's husband and sons died was that they should not have left Israel in the first place.[77] Be that as it may, when Ruth travelled with Naomi back to Israel, she professed common cause with her mother-in-law in life and faith. But Boaz, in marrying Ruth, was being obedient to another law of the land, that of the kinsman-redeemer. And even if one could be convinced that the prohibitions of Deuteronomy 23 applied to marriage, and to Ruth, it would appear that the law of kinsman-redeemer trumped the law of exclusion, which would be very much in keeping with the nature of God as He has revealed Himself in Scripture.

[77] As late as the return of the exiles from Babylon, we find the prohibition against marriage to foreign women upheld by Nehemiah, who constrained offenders to 'put away' their foreign wives lest the wrath of God be kindled against the land (*cp* Neh. 13:23*ff*).

Session 9 – The Worlds of the Author & Reader

'Weltanshauung' is a term commonly found in modern philosophy and literary criticism. It is German, and roughly translates to the English 'worldview.' Merriam-Webster defines it as "a comprehensive conception or apprehension of the world especially from a specific standpoint,"[78] and the Oxford Dictionary describes it as "A particular philosophy or view of life; the world view of an individual or group."[79] Due to the importance of the term in modern philosophical thought, the Encyclopædia of Philosophy furnishes a full article on 'Weltanshauung.' The earliest usage of the term in its modern, philosophical and hermeneutical sense, is credited to the German sociologist and historian Wilhelm Dilthey, who sought to applied Kantian philosophy in the natural sciences to his own branch of social science and the humanities. Dilthey believed that, whereas the natural sciences were based primarily on observation, the social sciences were based on interpretation. This interpretation, furthermore, was powerfully conditioned by the interpreter's *weltanshauung*, his framework of perception concerning the universe and mankind's relationship to it.



Wilhelm Dilthey (1833-1911)

> Every interpretation, he reasoned, takes place within a larger understanding of the world (i.e., a Weltanschauung), which itself is historically conditioned. Thus, interpreters of human history and culture must recognize their immersion in a particular historical situation and tradition and in that process come to terms with the finitude of their perspective.[80]

Dilthey's work initiated a century-long attack on the validity of any individual's interpretation, just as Kant's work had launched an attack against the validity of any individual's perception of reality. Neither Dilthey nor Kant intended that their thoughts

[78] http://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/weltanschauung
[79] http://www.oxforddictionaries.com/definition/english/Weltanschauung
[80] http://www.encyclopedia.com/topic/Worldview_%28Philosophy%29.aspx

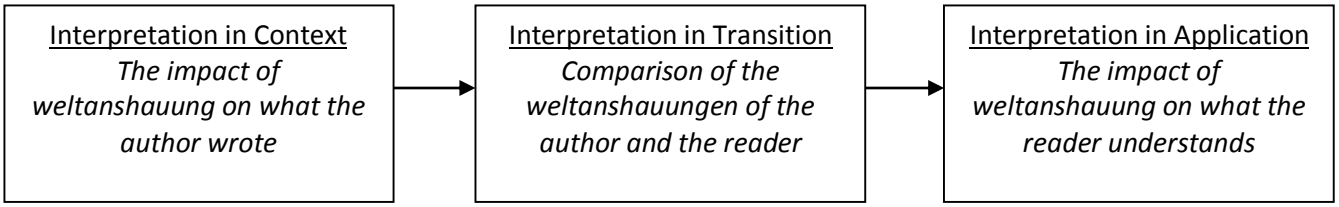
would be taken to this extreme, but each introduced unfettered subjectivity into their respective fields, and things went downhill from there.

The history of 'weltanshauung' is, unfortunately, the typical history of a valid and important concept being taken to extremes, with a subsequent reaction against the term on account of the extremes to which is has been taken. In truth, the human mind cannot escape its own *weltanshauung* – the perceptive paradigm through which it processes and interprets all sensory perception as well as all abstract thought. This, in turn, impacts the *communication* of the individual with other individuals. When the lines of communication are between people with common *weltanshauungen*, there is general understanding and agreement, and a minimum of misunderstanding and misinterpretation. But – and this is more often the case since the confusion of human language at the Tower of Babel – communication across *weltanshauungen* is fraught with difficulty, often to the point that what transpires can hardly be called 'communication.' This phenomenon is actually more acute in written communication, due to the more rigid forms and structures that adhere to that mode of converse than to spoken communication.

Thus it becomes the work of the textual exegete, whether biblical or other, to attempt to cross the divide between the *weltanshauung* of the author and the *weltanshauung* of the reader. There are at least four aspects of a *weltanshauung* that influence first the communication of the author, and then the interpretation of the reader. These are common in concept to both the author and the reader, but are rarely common in content.

Author	**Reader**
Heritage & Traditions	Heritage & Traditions
Sitz im Leben	*Sitz im Leben*
Immediate & Proximate Concerns	Immediate & Proximate Concerns
Forms & Rules of Written Language	*Forms & Rules of Written Language*

The hermeneutical task of the exegete of any text, is to attempt to transfer the authorial meaning to that of the reader, without losing the content of the text and without ignoring either the *weltanshauung* of the author or the *weltanshauung* of the reader. The process involves a three-step transition in interpretation from the author to the reader, and looks as follows:



The exegetical process must flow in this direction, and not the reverse, if the text is to retain any integrity, let alone any authority, in the modern setting. If the modern cultural setting dominates, then a purportedly authoritative document like the Bible simply becomes a tool of rationalizing current behavior, behavior that is perhaps condemned in the Scriptures but is condoned within the modern cultural milieu. Walter Kaiser writes,

> When the concerns of the contemporary interpreter supersede those of the text in such a way that the text is used merely as a springboard for issuing what moderns wish to say, the term *contextualization* has been diverted from something useful to being merely the servant of its handlers. The text still must remain prior to and master of whatever context it is being applied to.[81]

But there is a danger to the opposite extreme, as there so often is. There is a tendency – in the modern context predominant among fundamentalists – to *divinize* the culture of the Bible. Because Scripture is the inspired Word of God, it is concluded that even the cultural setting – and with that setting the cultural traditions and behaviors – are 'inspired' and are normative and binding on all subsequent ages and cultures. While this approach may be less offensive than the imposition of a 'non-biblical' culture upon a subsequent era, it is nonetheless incorrect and detrimental to a proper hermeneutic of

[81] Kaiser, *Biblical Hermeneutics*; 177.

Scripture. The error flows from a faulty doctrine of inspiration in the first place, a believing that the entire process of revelation is 'divine' and a discounting of the human element and the human setting. The cultural context, and the *weltanshauung* of the author, is the indispensible *human* element of the confluence of human and divine in revelation. It represents the mediation of divine thought through the instrumentality of human communication. It bears, therefore, all the limitations inherent in human thought and human social interaction, but it also constitutes a large part of the 'living' characteristic of God's Word. Paul speaks of the 'language of angels,' but that is not the medium of his epistles; rather he spoke 'in human terms' and with a very human *weltanshauung*.

This is not to say that the cultural setting of the Scriptural witness may be blithely ignored – which is the error of the first extreme, it is simply to say that it must not be divinized – the error of the second. Divine Providence must have its say in the court of hermeneutics: while the world of Moses, of the Prophets, and of the Apostles was no more 'divine' than that of Marcus Aurelius, René Descartes, or Immanuel Kant, it was the Lord's sovereign providence that determined the setting and timing – including the cultural milieu and the *weltanshauung* of the authors – of His Special Revelation through the Bible. The author's cultural setting and his worldview must be respected, and understood inasmuch as possible from such a distance, but it is not the culture of heaven itself. Care must be exercised in extracting the kernel of truth from what may be the chaff of authorial culture, recognizing that that 'chaff' might itself be part of the spiritual and intellectual nutrition offered by the passage.

Hermeneutics Workshop: Cultural Issues

With the exception of *Sitz im Leben*, the terms in the comparison table on page 113 are self explanatory, and we have already encountered this other German phrase – *situatedness* or *situation in life* – before. Frankly, the hermeneutical principles involved in moving from the author's *weltanshauung* to that of the reader is best shown by illustration, and the Bible is chock full of illustrations. The interpretive issue involved is called in modern parlance, *cultural relevance*, though this is just a current way of asking an age-old

question: How does this ancient text apply in the 'modern' world? Is there a direct, one-to-one correspondence between *all* that I read from the 1st Century, or the 6th Century BC, to my current situation in life? Or are there elements of ancient culture that color the form of communication of the author, but contain a trans-cultural kernel of truth that can and must be gleaned? In the modern church this issue has formed the battleground for gender relations debates and denomination struggles over homosexuality.

The purpose of this study, however, is not to dive into controversy, but to illustrate a hermeneutical principle. Fortunately there are other biblical passages that offer excellent workshop material without the attending controversy. One such passage is from Paul's First Epistle to the Corinthians, and touches upon the issue of hair length and head coverings. This was (and still is in some circles) a very volatile topic, but for the most part it has faded into relative obscurity in the glaring light of the previous two mentioned above. Our workshop passage is from I Corinthians 11, particularly verse 14.

> *Now I praise you because you remember me in everything and hold firmly to the traditions, just as I delivered them to you. But I want you to understand that Christ is the head of every man, and the man is the head of a woman, and God is the head of Christ. Every man who has something on his head while praying or prophesying disgraces his head. But every woman who has her head uncovered while praying or prophesying disgraces her head, for she is one and the same as the woman whose head is shaved. For if a woman does not cover her head, let her also have her hair cut off; but if it is disgraceful for a woman to have her hair cut off or her head shaved, let her cover her head. For a man ought not to have his head covered, since he is the image and glory of God; but the woman is the glory of man. For man does not originate from woman, but woman from man; for indeed man was not created for the woman's sake, but woman for the man's sake. Therefore the woman ought to have a symbol of authority on her head, because of the angels. However, in the Lord, neither is woman independent of man, nor is man independent of woman. For as the woman originates from the man, so also the man has his birth through the woman; and all things originate from God. Judge for yourselves: is it proper for a woman to pray to God with her head uncovered?* ***Does not even nature itself teach you that if a man has long hair, it is a dishonor to him****, but if a woman has long hair, it is a glory to her? For her hair is given to her for a covering. But if one is inclined to be contentious, we have no other practice, nor have the churches of God.*
>
> (I Corinthians 11:2-16)

Is it a sin against Nature for a man to have long hair? Likewise, it is a sin against God's established order for the sexes for a woman to have short hair? Are women to

wear head coverings in church? Or is the apostle even addressing these issues at all? Most evangelical commentators properly work to establish the intent of Paul's message in this pericope: the observation of proper authority structure within the church (and, incidentally, the home). It is rare for a commentator to miss the kernel for the chaff, but common for commentators and preachers to make a great deal of the chaff nonetheless. The underlying intent of the passage is determinable from the usual hermeneutical methods of establishing the pericope, understanding the context – in this case another example of controversy in the Corinthian Church – and extracting the timeless principle of biblical authority structures inherent in all human institutions. But the peripheral issues of hair length and head coverings frequently take center stage, with the not uncommon result that the interpretation of these peripheral issues alters the interpretation of the main message. This is the hermeneutic of Feminist Theology, the refutation of which is beyond the scope of this study.

One must hold fast the distinction between the central message and the peripheral illustrations used to highlight and emphasize that central message. But that does not release the exegete from studying the periphera, nor from the requirement of determining – as best he or she can – whether these peripheral issues are still applicable in the modern setting. This is where the *weltanshauung* approach is necessary. In particular, the question that faces the modern reader of Paul's letter to the Corinthians is 'What is it that nature teaches in regard to male/female relationships?' And even more particularly: 'What does the Bible have to say about the length of a man's hair?'

It was probably not Paul's intention to confuse future generations when he made the appeal to personal judgment in verse 13, and then enlisted the support of 'nature' in verse 14. But most of the problem has come in when biblical interpreters fail to realize that it is just that, *an argument from analogy and not from necessity*. As a result of this error, sermons and treatises – not to mention gossip, snickering, and condescending stares – have been directed over the generations at men with long hair – except during those rare eras when long hair on men was 'natural' according to the prevailing culture! Consider

the title of a 1653 English pamphlet, transliterated into modern English, though it is far quainter in the Olde English:

The Loathsomeness
Of
Long Hair:
Wherein you have the Question
Stated, many Arguments against it produced,
And the most material Arguments for it refell'd and answer'd
With the concurrent judgment of Divines both old and new against it;
With an Appendix against Painting, Sports, Naked Breasts, etc.

The treatise is quite long for one dedicated to the 'loathsomeness' of long hair, and it is perfectly serious in its diatribe against this loathsome sin. From the 21st Century, however, it comes across at times heavy-handed, leaden, and downright funny. The pamphlet opens with a lengthy ditty, only the first stanza repeated here:

Go Gallants to the Barbers, go,
Bid them your hairy Bushes mow.
God in a Bush did once appear,
But there is nothing of him here…

The centerpiece of the pamphleteer's argument is, of course, I Corinthians 11:14.

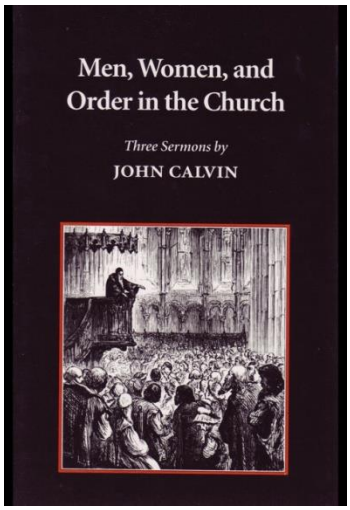
> I say, *it is unlawful*, and that not only by man's Law (for some Nations have made Decrees against it) but by the Law of God, tis his word that condemns the wearing of *Long-hair*, as I shall prove in the Arguments. It's contrary to that order which God hath set in nature, hence the Apostle blaming the *Corinthians* for this sin, appeals to their own consciences, and to the voice of God in nature; I *Cor.* 11.14…The *Apostle's* Interrogation is a strong affirmation, this sin of wearing *Long-hair* is so evident that even nature itself, much more Grace, doth condemn it.

Many in the modern fundamentalist church would give a hearty 'Amen' to their 16th Century forebear, but it is the case that the apostle Paul is 'condemning' long hair on men, and that with divine sanction? This conclusion stems from assigning to Paul's usage of the term 'nature' that which was common among the Stoic philosophers of his age, but

which bears no correspondence to Paul's own philosophy and *weltanshauung*. The Stoics divinized Nature; indeed, to the Stoic there was no God other than Nature. But it would take a lot more corroborative evidence to support the claim that Paul agreed with this view. He does not equate 'nature's law' with God's Law, as the author of this pamphlet does, but rather utilizes the term nature as representing "a correspondence with things as they are found truly to be, without artificial change."[82]

> The idea is not an abstruse theological one; Paul is thinking of the natural world as God made it, rather than (in the Stoic manner) of Nature as a quasi-divine hypostasis.[83]

But we must go farther than this, for 'nature' has not always taught men the same message with regard to the length of their hair, and God's Law itself specifically makes provision – the Nazarite vow – for men to wear their hair long. Furthermore, though the context of the passage also mentions men praying with their heads uncovered, the common practice among Jews was to pray with their heads covered. This has often been the case within Christianity, with the humorous cover of the booklet *Men, Women and Order in the Church* – a compilation of three sermons by John Calvin on this passage in I Corinthians 11 – showing Calvin himself preaching with his head covered, a common practice in the 16th Century. But Calvin does not make the mistake of divinizing nature in I Corinthians 11:14, spending a fair amount of his time in commentary on the passage discussing the changing trends in men's hair length.



> Paul again sets *nature* before them as the teacher of what is proper. Now, he means by 'natural' what was accepted by common consent and usage at that time, certainly as far as the Greeks were concerned. For long hair was not always regarded as a disgraceful

[82] Barrett, C. K. *The First Epistle to the Corinthians* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers; 1987), 256.
[83] *Idem.*

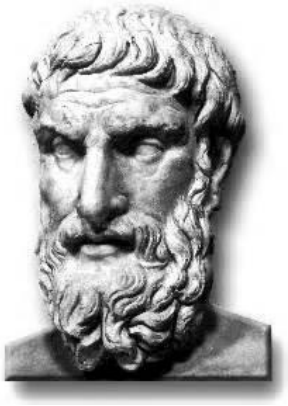
> thing in men. Historical works relate that long ago, i.e., in the earliest times, men wore long hair in every country. Thus the poets are in the habit of speaking about the ancients and applying to them the well-worn epithet 'unshorn.' In Rome they did not begin to use barbers until a late period, about the time of Africanus the Elder…But since the Greeks did not consider it very manly to have long hair, branding those who had it as effeminate, Paul considers that their custom, accepted in his own day was in conformity with nature.[84]

Calvin seems to move to the other end of the spectrum with regard to the divinization of 'nature' that we saw in the pamphlet – published during Calvin's lifetime, by the way, a fact which shows that there has always been disagreement within the Church on such matters. From his commentary, the Genevan Reformer has Paul accommodating himself to the customs of his Greek audience, though it is not certain that the same custom was observed among his Jewish countrymen. For instance, it is widely considered that the vow that the apostle himself took late in his recorded ministry was, in fact, the Nazarite vow which forbad the Nazarite from cutting or shaving his hair. The timing is uncertain, but one can imagine the situation wherein the apostle was writing these words to the Corinthian Church, while at the time wearing long hair on account of his own vow.

Maybe the length of a man's hair is not even the issue. In passages like these, where the custom employed by way of analogy is found to be variable across time and among the nations, it is probably a good bet that the analogy itself is of secondary importance to the text's meaning, and maybe even tertiary or below. While the *weltanshauung* of first century Corinth evidently held that long hair on men was 'unnatural,' and thus served as an analogy to the apostle, the *message* of the text is not about men's hair but about the proper relationship between men and women in the church. The Greeks believed that the Divine Being had instituted specific 'signs' that differentiated between the sexes, two of which were the length of hair and the growing of beards (just to avoid any misunderstanding: long hair on women, beards on men). The

[84] Calvin, John *Calvin's Commentaries on the New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans; 1970), *en loc.*

Greek philosopher Epictetus, only one generation removed from the Apostle, believed that these distinguishing marks ought to be maintained and not ignored. He wrote, "For this reason we ought to keep the signs that God has given, we ought not to throw them away, nor to confound, so far as we can, the distinction of the sexes."[85] This distinction is what the apostle is talking about, with reference to the role of women in the church vis-à-vis men. He borrows what would have been a natural (pun intended) analogy from the prevailing Greek culture in which he was writing, but probably had no intention of divinizing that culture or its fashion sense with regard to men's hair.



Epictetus (AD 55-135)

The last step in the hermeneutical process is that of application to the reader's culture. Does the *weltanshauung* of modern America correspond to that of 1st Century Corinth? To a large extent it does, since short hair among men is still the norm and long hair is still viewed askance by many, though the distinction between the sexes has been blurred to a great extent over just the past several generations. Perhaps the question becomes, when one encounters long hair on a man or short hair on a woman: 'Is this a statement?' and, if so, 'What is being stated?' 'Nature,' being essentially the cultural setting of either the author or the reader's world, may not always correspond with God's established order with regard to men and women. Long hair may not always indicate effeminacy, nor short hair masculinity. The matter becomes one for the heart of the long-haired 'gallant' or the short-haired woman. This, in turn, orients us to Romans 14,

> *Who are you to judge the servant of another? To his own master he stands or falls; and he will stand, for the Lord is able to make him stand.* (Romans 14:4)

[85] Quoted in Barrett; 257.