

Introduction

The consensus in the world today is that the average person can't accurately interpret what the Bible says. Do the following statements sound familiar to you?:

"We should rely on the clergy/experts *to tell us what the Bible means.*"

This statement reflects the assumption that the meaning of scripture is beyond the reach of the average person.

"People have always disagreed about the meaning of the Bible (different denominations)."

People have disagreed, and sometimes their disagreements have been brutal. So is the best posture tolerance of hermeneutical diversity? To what extent? Are all meanings valid?

"The Bible has been used to justify everything you can think of. You can make it mean anything you want it to mean."

We can show clear historical instances in which people have interpreted the Bible through their own cultural values, often without even being aware of it. EXAMPLES: *slavery* (using Old Testament permission vs. Philemon & New Testament silence); *women* (patriarchal views vs. Bible); *capitalism as a biblically sanctioned economic system*; *Christian psychology self-help books proof-texting secular theories* (e.g., Self-Esteem).

Can we become aware of our own cultural values sufficiently to avoid this, or should such historical abuse lead us to cynicism about the possibility of "objective interpretation?"

"That's just your interpretation." "It's impossible to determine the original author's meaning, rather, as we read it, we create our own meaning for the text."

These statements reflect the relativism and postmodernism that has permeated our whole culture.

The challenge:



You may realize these are all secular, non-Christian objections. But what about the following scenarios?

In a home Bible study when someone says "*What this passage means to me is . . .*" And then someone else says, "*That's great. But I got a different meaning (and his meaning is contradictory).*" And everyone concludes by saying "*Praise God for all the great insight we're getting!*" Aren't we violating the law of non-contradiction by accepting this resolution?"

What about this story: "*Almost twenty years ago I rode in a car with a fellow believer who relayed to me what the Lord had 'told' him that morning in his quiet time. He had been reading the KJV of Matthew; and I perceived that not only had he misunderstood the archaic English, but also that the KJV at that place had unwittingly misrepresented the Greek text. I gently suggested there might be another way to understand the passage and summarized what I thought the passage was saying. The brother dismissed my view as impossible on the grounds that the Holy Spirit, who does not lie, had told him the truth on this matter. Being young and bold, I pressed on with my explanation of grammar, context, and translation, but was brushed off by a reference to 1 Cor. 2:10b-15: spiritual things must be spiritually discerned-which left little doubt about my status. Genuinely intrigued, I asked this brother what he would say if I put forward my interpretation, not on the basis of grammar and text, but on the basis that the Lord himself had given me the interpretation I was advancing. He was silent a long time, and then concluded, 'I guess that would mean the Spirit says the Bible means different things to different people.'*" D. A. Carson, *Exegetical Fallacies* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House Co., 1984) p. 13.

If we accept this, aren't we accepting relativism in the name of spiritual experience?

Definition of Hermeneutics: The science/art of interpreting texts.

2 Tim 2:15* Be diligent to present yourself approved to God as a workman who does not need to be ashamed, handling accurately the word of truth.

"handling accurately" implies there is a proper interpretation
"be diligent" implies there are obstacles and difficulties involved
"ashamed" implies good interpretation is achievable
These issues highlight the importance of two closely related areas of bibliography: hermeneutics and perspicuity.

Hermeneutical Systems

In November of 1999 we deleted this section from the Christian Principles Class. We decided to include more detailed instruction and practice on Inductive study.

Allegorical

Definition

The literal meaning of the text is either not the true meaning or only one of many meanings. The elements of each passage have a corresponding spiritual reality which is the "real" or ultimate meaning of the passage.

History

This method was used by many 2nd - 4th century fathers. It was established as the preferred method of interpretation by Augustine and was dominant in Catholicism throughout the Middle Ages. It is also used by Amillennialists (those not believing in the establishment of a literal millennial kingdom) in their interpretation of unfulfilled prophecy.

Examples

- Origen interpreted Noah's Ark to have 3 meanings (literal, moral, and spiritual) to correspond to man's body, soul and spirit: salvation from the Flood, salvation of the believer from a specific sin, and salvation of the church through Christ.
- Popes used this method to uphold papal supremacy. Innocent III (~1215AD) said the two great lights in Gen.1 refer respectively to the order of authority on earth. Thus, the sun symbolized spiritual authority (i.e., the pope) and the moon symbolized civil authority (i.e., the emperor). Boniface VIII (pope 1294-1303) interpreted the two swords held by the disciples (Luke 22) to mean that the apostles were authoritative in both the secular and spiritual kingdoms.
- Numerology - Assigning spiritual significance to numbers used in the Bible (e.g., "666" stands for the satanic Trinity; "3" and "7" represents God; Hebrew letters have numerical value which "proves" inspiration). Unless the Bible specifically explains the meaning of numbers, we are speculating.

Critique

- Since there is no objective standard to which the interpreter must bow, the final authority ceases to be the Scripture and becomes the interpreter.
- Allegorical interpretation is only rarely seen in Scripture (Gal. 4:21-31; 1 Cor. 10:1-4). Parables are usually not allegories. Allegories are usually narratives in which every detail has a corresponding spiritual significance. Parables are local-color stories which illustrate one main spiritual truth.
- When would allegorical interpretation be allowable? Only when the biblical authors explain it (as in Gal. 4 and 1 Cor. 10).

Literalistic

Definition

Every word is taken absolutely literally including figures of speech and symbolism. Historical background is considered unnecessary and ignored. Any deviation from this rule is regarded as sacrilegious.

History

This method was used by the Jews after the Babylonian Exile. Extreme Fundamentalists and many cults (Children of God, Jehovah Witnesses, Mormons, etc. also use it).

Examples

- The Mormons say God has a body because of references to God's "eye", "hand", etc. However, see Ps. 91:1-4 — Does this mean He also has feathers and wings?
- Roman Catholic interpretation of Lk. 22:19 leads to the doctrine of transubstantiation. 19 And when He had taken some bread and given thanks, He broke it, and gave it to them, saying, "This is My body which is given for you; do this in remembrance of Me."

- Jehovah's Witnesses use Col. 1:15 to prove that Christ was a created being.
15 And He is the image of the invisible God, the first-born of all creation.

Critique

- Subscribers always use it selectively (see the above examples).
- It makes the Scripture unintelligible, contradictory, and unlivable (i.e., Lk. 14:26)

Rationalistic

Definition

The naturalistic worldview (i.e. the universe is a closed system of cause and effect) is the standard by which Scripture must be interpreted. Scripture is intelligible only as ancient man's attempt to explain God. The interpreter's task is to strip away the supernatural elements of the Bible to find "truth".

History

This system arose during the Renaissance (16th Century) and the Enlightenment (18th Century). It formed the basis of Liberal hermeneutics.

Examples

- Miracles are rejected as primitive explanations or myths.
- Thomas Jefferson's 4 gospels cut out all miraculous elements.
- In regard to Christ, the goal is to rediscover the "true record" (i.e., the Quest for the Historical Jesus/ Jesus Seminar) within the "legendary" accounts of the gospels. Usually the result is the identification of Jesus as a "good moral teacher."

Critique

- It makes a totally unproved worldview the final authority.
- The attempt to separate the historical from the mythical has been proven to be impossible (e.g., 1 Cor 15).

Neo-Orthodox

Definition

The religious experience of the interpreter is the main focus and the Bible stimulates such an experience. The Bible *in itself* is not God's revelation, but it *becomes* God's revelation when someone accepts it through faith. Interpretation is thus seen primarily as a personal encounter with God. Also, because the *words* of scripture are not as important as an encounter, much historical and factual information in the Bible could be false according to this view. Inerrancy and infallibility are denied. "All historical and orthodox forms of *inspiration* are denied."

History

One of the chief proponents of this school was Karl Barth (*Romerbrief* at the end of WW I) in the first half of the 20th century. He tried to get away from the anti-supernatural bias of Liberal theology (hence the name "Neo-orthodox"). This dominates Protestant and Catholic theology today.

Examples

- "Jesus" of history and "Christ" of faith.

"The church had to surmount the scandal of the cross and it did this in the Easter faith (i.e., the belief in Jesus' bodily resurrection). How this act of decision took place...how this Easter faith arose...has been obscured in the tradition (i.e., the gospel accounts) by legend and is not of basic importance." Rudolf Bultmann, *Theology of the New Testament*, Vol 1 (New York: Charles Scribners' Sons, 1951), p. 45

Henry N. Wieman: "After the crucifixion came the resurrection. The resurrection was an experience the disciples had three days after the terrible shock of Jesus' death on the cross. It took that long for the numbness of the shock to wear off so that they could again respond to one another and to the past in the way that they had done in the living fellowship with Jesus. So vivid and so powerful was this recovery of (their) interchange with one another...that it produced the feeling of his actual presence with them in bodily form. Many have had this experience after the death of someone deeply involved in their lives. Either they had this psychological illusion...or, what is more likely, when they tried to tell of their experience, the only way they could tell it was in words that led others to think that they were speaking of (a bodily resurrection). This would be most likely to happen after the story had passed through many mouths in an age that believed bodies rose from the dead." "The Revelation of God in Christ," *Process Studies* 10, cited in

Gordon Lewis and Bruce Demarest, ed., *Challenges to Inerrancy* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1984), p. 271

Critique

The separation of "truth" from the words of scripture leads to subjective interpretation without any objective controls. The interpreter is the final authority.

Devotional

Definition

The devotional method focuses almost exclusively on what is personally applicable and edifying. It tends to ignore literary context, historical background, and other important interpretative principles.

History

This method grew out of the Post-Reformation era as a reaction against sterile creedalism. This is the system unconsciously used by most Christians today (they read their Bible for their own blessing).

Examples

- Watchman Nee uses Mk. 14:3, Jn. 3:30, and Mk. 8:6 to support the necessity of "brokenness" is the Christian life.
Mk. 14:3 "And while He was in Bethany at the home of Simon the leper, and reclining at the table, there came a woman with an alabaster vial of very costly perfume of pure nard; and she broke the vial and poured it over His head."
Mk. 8:6 "And He directed the multitude to sit down on the ground; and taking the seven loaves, He gave thanks and broke them, and started giving them to His disciples to serve to them, and they served them to the multitude."

Critique

There is no external objective control over interpretation, thus easily leading to eisogesis and "proof-texting." There is not the necessary emphasis on sound doctrinal and expository study so the application may be misleading. Allegorizing occurs frequently, particularly with the use of the Old Testament.

Ideological Interpretation (Postmodernism)

Definition

Ideological interpreters approach the Bible looking for material relevant to their ideology. They usually are open about the fact that they have an agenda, and usually claim they are correcting oversights from earlier years by focusing on their area of interest. Most ideological readers also entertain a reader-centered hermeneutic. They are skeptical about ever knowing what the author intended to say, and focus instead on how the text affects the modern reader.

Deconstruction - Postmodern readers see the Bible, not as teaching liberation, but as a tool used for exploitation. They would say the Bible is propaganda intended to show why patriarchy (for example) is appropriate. The authors of Scripture sought to legitimize the status quo of society by teaching people to obey their authorities. They also sought to justify aggrandizement of the state of Israel and the subjugation of neighboring peoples.

Sound hermeneutics seek to decrease reader bias through the application of rules, which introduce objectivity to the interpretive process. But these ideological and reader-centered methods hold that this objectivity is never possible, because the text was never objective in the first place. The first act of interpretation was the author's decision about what to include and what to exclude in his text. Also, the uncertainty of language means modern readers might as well supply their own interpretation, because we will never know what the "true" interpretation should be. To hold to such a thing as a "true" or "real" interpretation is naive, because such faith fails to take into account the arbitrary nature of language and the social forces which distort people's (both readers and author's) view of the world.

History

The "New Criticism" advanced in the 1940's began to focus on text and reader rather than on the author. The author has no more authority over the meaning of the text than anyone else because: 1) He didn't realize his own bias at the time he wrote, and 2) We have no way to read his mind and thus know his intentions.

Examples

- Feminist Theology- seeks to study women in the Bible, and to demonstrate that the more enlightened speakers in Scripture were anti-patriarchy. In general, their studies are intended to explode the myth of patriarchy and to uncover cruelty to women. Some advance gender-neutral language in translation, including God as "she," sometimes based on lady wisdom Prov. 1:20ff.
- Marxist or Liberation Theology- seeks to show that the true intent of God in the Bible is to teach that poor and oppressed classes should be liberated from their oppression by the love of God. They tend to interpret redemptive language in terms of economics and political power. They see class struggle in much of the conflict in the Bible.
- Gay Theology - seeks to show examples of homosexual relationships (David & Jonathan; Jesus & John) that have been de-emphasized because of the heterosexual bias of the biblical authors. They also either reinterpret passages which condemn homosexuality, or reject them as examples of heterosexual oppression.

Critique

Reader-centered theories are openly biased, but they hold that in this they are no different than other approaches except that they are more honest and less naive. The reader is not under the authority of Scripture. Scripture is pressed into the ideological mold of the reader, leaving the reader in authority.

Perspicuity

Definition: *Perspicuity* means "essential clarity." Biblical perspicuity means that the Bible is understandable with regard to its main message.

Everything in the Bible is not equally clear (2 Pet. 3:15,16), but the main message is sufficiently clear for us to be saved and accomplish God's purpose. The biblical authors assumed their readers could understand their main message.

What do these authors assume about the perspicuity of the Bible?

Jn. 20:31 - John thinks that his book is understandable enough that the average reader of his day could get saved by reading it (see also 1 Jn. 5:13).

2 Tim. 3:14,15 - Paul says the main message of scripture is understandable enough for children to get saved by it.

1 Jn. 5:13 - John expected his audience to be able to understand his message well enough to have assurance of salvation.

"The Bible is basically clear and lucid. It is simple enough for any literate person to understand its *basic message*. This is not to say that all parts of the Bible are equally clear or that there are no difficult passages or sections to be found in it. Laymen unskilled in the ancient languages and the fine points of exegesis may have difficulty with parts of scripture, but the essential content is clear enough to be understood easily." [R. C. Sproul, *Knowing Scripture* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1977), p 15.]

This belief in perspicuity was a major element in Reformation thinking. Luther opposed the Roman Catholic teaching that only the clergy was qualified to interpret the Bible.

Responses to attacks on Biblical perspicuity

E.G. - The Bible is so complicated. Who could understand it?

PRESUPPOSITIONAL DEFENSE: Doesn't it make sense that if a loving God has recorded a vital message for humans, he would communicate it in such a way that we can understand that message? Only a cruel, sadistic God would purposefully record his message in such an obscure way that we could not be reasonably certain we understand it.

E.G. - "We're so far in time and culture from the original author, therefore we could never understand what he intended."

POSTMODERN CRITICS CONTRADICT THEMSELVES: Those who resort to radical skepticism about the clarity of the Bible expect me to understand their objection! I often reply by saying, "I can't understand what you mean . . ." **QUALIFICATION:** There *is* more distance between us and the biblical text, but to say it is unbridgeable is a faith assertion . . .

E.G. - "If it's so easy to interpret, why are there so many denominations?"

HISTORICAL AGREEMENT ABOUT THE BIBLE'S MAIN MESSAGE: Wherever the Bible has been the final authority, Christians have agreed on the main message. Their disagreements with each other have been over issues which, while often important, are not crucial. This is why

documents like the Apostles Creed can be formulated and agreed on by Christians from many different denominations down through the centuries. This is why it is possible for us to provide you with a concise "Statement of Faith" which agrees with historic Christianity.

E.G. - "Then...why do Christian groups disagree on essential doctrines?"

But clearly, "Christian" groups have also disagreed in their interpretation of even essential doctrines (CATHOLICS). How can this be explained? The answer to this question is surprisingly simple: *Because another authority has replaced God's Word*. They have made either official or unofficial additions to the canon. The Bible is then ignored and/or twisted to support that new authority's doctrines. There are hundreds of examples of this:

RELIGIOUS TRADITION: Rabbinic "oral law" (Mk. 7:8,9)

NEW "SCRIPTURES": Book of Mormon; Apocrypha (on purgatory)

"KEYS" TO BIBLICAL INTERPRETATION: Christian Science's *Key To Science & Health*; Rev.

Moon's *Divine Principle*; Roman Catholic Papal Infallibility & "Canon Law" (Catechism quote??)

SKEWED TRANSLATIONS OF THE BIBLE: Jehovah's Witness's *Watchtower* Version (Jn. 1:1); Mormon Bible

ALIEN PRESUPPOSITIONS: Naturalism in Thomas Jefferson's Revised Deist Bible; Liberal

Theology; Pantheistic Avatars (manifestations of the divine light); Postmodern Thought

So the issue here is actually not one of differing interpretations at all, or that the Bible is unclear on essential matters, but of differing spiritual *authorities*.

God has made his main message clear to us in three ways:

1. *By using language that is sufficiently clear.* If we approach the Bible like we would approach any other piece of literature, we find that its main message is indeed understandable.

Consider this statement: "GO TO THE KROGER STORE AND BUY 10 LBS. OF POTATOES." Now we might reasonably ask which Kroger store and which kind of potatoes. If we were unfamiliar with American culture, we might even ask what a potato is and how much a pound is. But would it ever be acceptable to interpret this statement to mean: "GO TO THE HIMALAYAN MOUNTAINS AND MEDITATE ON YOUR NAVEL?" Would it be correct to say no one can be confident he understands this statement?

Now consider this statement: "HE WHO BELIEVES IN THE SON HAS ETERNAL LIFE; BUT HE WHO DOES NOT OBEY THE SON SHALL NOT SEE LIFE, BUT THE WRATH OF GOD ABIDES ON HIM." (Jn. 3:36) We might reasonably ask who the Son is, what "believe" means, or if "believe" and "obey" are being used synonymously. But would it ever be acceptable to interpret this statement to mean: "IT DOESN'T MATTER WHAT RELIGION YOU BELIEVE BECAUSE EVERYONE GOES TO HEAVEN?" Would it be correct to say that no one can be confident he understands this statement?

"When it comes to the central core of the Christian faith . . . the biblical evidence is overwhelming. The deity of Christ, the triune nature of God, the creation of the world by God, the sinfulness of all humanity, salvation by grace through faith, the resurrection of the dead—these and many other such matters are clearly taught in scripture." [James Sire, *Scripture Twisting* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1980), pp. 12,13.]

"The main things are the plain things."

2. *By repeating the main message.* If you want your young children to understand something important, you say it to them several times and in different ways. There are many doctrines which are repeated and stated in many ways for clarity sake (How we get his acceptance--different atonement words to different audiences; our dilemma with God is spiritual and moral; that God is a personal God; etc.).
3. *By giving the Holy Spirit to help us understand and apply his Word.* God's love for us is so deep that he gets supernaturally involved to teach us the meaning of his Word and how we should respond to it. Theologians call this the *illuminating work of the Holy Spirit*. 1 Cor. 2:12 - As we come to the Bible humbly asking for God's help in understanding his Word so that we may obey it (Jn. 7:17), he promises through his Spirit to illuminate its meaning and importance for our lives.

2 Tim. 2:7* - "7 Consider what I say, for the Lord will give you understanding in everything." Nevertheless, we have a part to play in interpreting God's Word (vs. 7: "consider ["exercise the mind"] what I say").

Eph. 1:16-18ff ...do not cease giving thanks for you, while making mention of you in my prayers; 17 that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give to you a spirit of wisdom and of revelation in the knowledge of Him. I pray that the eyes of your heart may be enlightened...

Paul opens his letters to the Philippians and Colossians in a similar way.

This brings us to the subject of how to interpret...

Grammatico-Historical Hermeneutics

Definition: A method of interpretation that takes into account common rules of grammar and syntax and the author's historical context.

The goal of biblical hermeneutics is to ascertain as closely as possible the meaning intended by the original author. We want the interpreter to remain *under* the authority of the text instead of imposing his or her meaning on the text. If we can accomplish this, we can hear God speak to us through his inspired author! A goal worth pursuing.

While there may be many valid *applications* of a text, there is only one valid *interpretation*. An interpretation is the author's intended meaning; an application is how the reader should respond.

Exegesis: Extracting the meaning from the text

Eisogesis: Projection of reader bias onto the text.

Mark 12:31 "Love your neighbor as yourself." Does this mean that we cannot venture into loving others until we first have a healthy love for ourselves? This is a common misinterpretation. Or does Christ presume we already love ourselves, even selfishly, and therefore we need to step out NOW and serve others? The latter most certainly squares with the rest of scripture. The applications for the latter may be more than we like to think about!

The task of the interpreter is to ascertain that intended meaning if possible, using the following tools.

Three Principles that should guide our interpretation

1. INTERPRET GRAMMATICALLY: Take the normal meaning of the words, phrases and sentences unless it is impossible to do so. The interpretation must correspond to the words and grammar in the text in a reasonable way. Otherwise, there is no objective control over the interpreter (EXAMPLES: see "Hermeneutical Schools"). Most of the Bible can be interpreted by simply taking the language (either in the original or in translation) in the usual way. In other words, "If the plain sense makes sense, seek no other sense."

Qualifications:

- **Allow for figures of speech.** A plain sense reading should not be confused with a literalistic interpretation.
Psa. 91:4 He will cover you with His pinions, And under His wings you may seek refuge; His faithfulness is a shield and bulwark.
Lk. 22:19 - "... this is my body . . ." Where was Jesus' body when he said this? See his other metaphors (door; bread; etc.).
Col. 1:15 - "... the first-born of all creation . . ." The Old Testament sometimes uses this term to refer to "heir" (Ex. 4:22; Jer. 31:9). Heb. 1:6,7 uses it to refer to Jesus as the object of angelic worship.
- **Allow for symbolism.** If a passage is symbolic or contains symbols, this should be indicated in the text, either by textual cues or because symbolism is required in order to make sense of the text. The Bible itself explains most symbols.
Rev. 1:9-20 - The symbols are identified as such ("like") and explained. Most of biblical symbols are handled this way. Many other symbols in Revelation have been previously explained in Daniel.

2. INTERPRET HISTORICALLY: Historical interpretation means that we take into account the historical background of the author and the recipients. We are not interested at first in the question, "What does it mean to me?" but rather, "What did it mean to the original audience?" Use Bible dictionaries, encyclopedias, commentaries, or other sources to learn more about customs, money, geography, etc. We need to ascertain the original intent before we apply any biblical teaching.

Gen. 15:7-21 - "Cutting a covenant" solemnized a contract between two parties. It was normally bilateral (both parties walked through), but only God goes through >> GRACE COVENANT.

1 Cor. 11:4-6 - Shorn hair was typical of Aphrodite priestess-prostitutes; shaven heads were typical of convicted adulteresses (vs. 5).

The parable of the Good Samaritan (Lk. 10), 300 Denarii (John 12:3-5), 50,000 Drachma (Acts 19:19).

Pharisees' teaching on the relationship between illness and sin (Mk. 2)

3. INTERPRET CRITICALLY: Your interpretation must make rational sense. The entire Bible is the product of one author (God) at the same time that it is the product of many authors.

Therefore, it is reasonable to expect a consistent message throughout the Bible. Some of these rules are logical implications of a belief in the verbal plenary inspiration of scripture.

FIVE PRACTICAL RULES - These rules will help you to arrive at a critically sound interpretation.

a. Interpret in light of the context of the passage (which author? book? passage?). Never view a passage in isolation from its surroundings. *The context should be considered the most important kind of evidence in the interpretation of a passage.* Only when no critically feasible interpretation can be found can we claim that a break in context was intended. Mt. 16:28 - Referring to the transfiguration (in context of passage) "Truly I say to you, there are some of those who are standing here who shall not taste death until they see the Son of Man coming in His kingdom."

2 Peter 1:16- confirms that Peter was an eye witness of Christ's "majesty."

Jas. 1:6-8 - The "doubter" is not simply any Christian who has occasional doubts. He is the "double-minded man," whom James further describes in 4:8 (in context of book) as Christians who posture themselves as loving God but really love the world.

b. Interpret in light of progressive revelation

(*Heb. 1:1,2*). God, after He spoke long ago to the fathers in the prophets in many portions and in many ways, in these last days has spoken to us in His Son, whom He appointed heir of all things, through whom also He made the world.

Heb 8:13 When He said, "A new covenant," He has made the first obsolete. But whatever is becoming obsolete and growing old is ready to disappear.

While God's purpose for man has never changed, his strategy in accomplishing that purpose has changed. He has dealt with man under different "covenants," or

"dispensations." Therefore, it is important to ask, "Under which program was this written?" Primary application of the passage will be to the people operating under that program, but not necessarily to others. There may be secondary applications for other programs based on principles which have universal application.

Ex. 20:8-10 "Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy. Six days you shall labor and do all your work, but the seventh day is a Sabbath of the LORD your God; in it you shall not do any work, you or your son or your daughter, your male or your female servant or your cattle or your sojourner who stays with you."

Animal sacrifices, dietary laws, Sabbaths, holy days, festivals, priests and liturgy have all been fulfilled in Christ and are thus obsolete (compare with Col. 2:16,17 "Therefore let no one act as your judge in regard to food or drink or in respect to a festival or a new moon or a Sabbath day— 17 things which are a mere shadow of what is to come; but the substance belongs to Christ." and Heb. 8).

Theocracy was commanded in the Old Testament, but secular government is affirmed in the New Testament (Rom. 13:1-7; Mt. 22:21).

Mal. 3:7-12 - The practice of tithes should be seen in context of the Old Testament (see Num. 18:21-24; Deut. 14:22-29)

c. Interpret scripture in harmony with other scripture. Since the Bible is inspired by God, it does not contradict itself. Therefore, never interpret scripture in such a way that it clearly contradicts other scriptures. If a passage can be legitimately interpreted in more than one way, choose the interpretation that doesn't contradict other scriptures.

Go back to the initial example of Mark 12:31- "Love your neighbor as yourself." We must interpret this passage in harmony with Jesus' other teachings.

Acts 2:38 could be referring to either baptismal regeneration, or simply adding baptism as a desirable adjunct to the minimum requirement for salvation (i.e., faith). In view of the clear teaching on salvation by grace through faith alone, the latter interpretation is preferable.

d. Interpret the unclear in light of the clear. Every major, essential truth is taught clearly and many times. Never build a doctrine on an unclear passage.

Lk. 16:9 "And I say to you, make friends for yourselves by means of the mammon of unrighteousness; that when it fails, they may receive you into the eternal dwellings." . . . is used by Roman Catholics to support indulgences.

1 Cor. 15:29 "Otherwise, what will those do who are baptized for the dead? If the dead are not raised at all, why then are they baptized for them?" . . . mentions an obscure, unknown practice used in Corinth. Paul doesn't affirm this practice; he just asks why they're doing it if they don't believe in resurrection. Today, the Mormon church uses this passage to elevate dead ancestors to a higher status in the afterlife.

e. Interpret in light of the literary style. The literary style (genre) affects our understanding of the passage. For example, Proverbs should not be interpreted axiomatically like didactic theological statements in the gospels and epistles. It contains many general maxims, but not all proverbs are absolute promises.

Proverbs 22:6 - Train up a child in the way he should go, Even when he is old he will not depart from it.

We realize, not every child will go right, but most will.

Proverbs 15:1 - A gentle answer turns away wrath, But a harsh word stirs up anger.

Obviously, not every gentle word will turn away wrath, but in most cases it works.

Contrast these to the didactic teaching of Rom. 8:1.

Which of these rules implies belief in verbal plenary inspiration?

Inductive Bible Study Methods

Inductive Bible study methods can help you to accurately interpret a passage of scripture. These methods should be used as a regular part of your personal study in the Word. Understanding how to perform an inductive study is essential for developing sound teachings. Knowledge gained through inductive study gives you depth and credibility as a speaker and helps ensure that your interpretation is correct.

We want to give you a simple approach to inductive study that you can use and teach to someone else. With practice, you can become very skilled at using these methods.

Why do we use the word "inductive"? Inductive reasoning is "the act or process of reasoning from a part to a whole, from particulars to generals, or from the individual to the universal." --

Webster's Revised Unabridged Dictionary, © 1996, 1998 "Induction is an inference drawn from all the particulars." -- Sir W. Hamilton.

We're taking the same approach to studying the Bible.

Inductive Bible Study is utilizing the details of the text (the particulars) to arrive at the author's intended meaning (the generals).

Instructors: manage your student's expectation regarding their interpretive skills.

Realize that inductive study is a skill that takes time to develop. Your first attempt at interpreting a passage may miss the mark. Nevertheless, if you hone your inductive skills, more often than not, you'll correctly interpret the passage.

In his book, *3 Crucial Questions About the Bible*, Grant Osborne compares interpreting the Bible to salvaging buried treasure. Like raising a sunken wreck, he says extracting the truth requires "care and precision." It's hard work, but the payoff is worth it.

1 Cor. 2:16 For WHO HAS KNOWN THE MIND OF THE LORD, THAT HE SHOULD INSTRUCT HIM? But we have the mind of Christ.

This is what we're after "the mind of Christ" - to hear God speak to us through his word.

Inductive methods and types (genres) of literature

The approach we take to an inductive study of a passage will differ depending on the type of literature it is. Different literary genres require different inductive approaches.

Literary Type	Biblical Book
Theological Narrative	Genesis - Esther

Poetry, Wisdom	Job - Song of Solomon
Prophecy	Isaiah - Malachi; Revelation
Gospel	Matthew, Mark, Luke, John
Epistle	Romans - Jude

Xenos offers a course on [Hermeneutics](#) where students learn how perform inductive study on these different types of biblical texts. In this class, we'll begin with an inductive study of Philemon, an epistle.

Inductive Overview of an Epistle

An inductive overview will help you grasp the big picture, the main themes of the book you are studying. It will help you discover:

- ... the life situation of the author and the people he is writing to
- ... the flow of thought in the book
- ... the general theme(s) of the letter and why the letter was written.

The overview will not provide deeper insight into a particular doctrine, nor will it reveal how to apply an individual passage to your own life. But it will give you the background needed to understand individual passages. We'll learn how to do a paragraph study next week, which will help us get into the meaning and application of a particular text.

How to do an inductive overview of an epistle:

A. Paragraph titles: Read the book all the way through, writing down titles for each paragraph. This reveals the general thought development of the book. Titles should meet the following requirements:

- **The titles should be short.** No sentences are allowed. A phrase of a few words is the maximum length. We are not writing synopses. This will force us to get the main idea clearly fixed in our minds.
- **The titles should cover all of the significant content in the paragraph.** If there is subject matter that is not covered in your title, you need revision.
- **Decide how you will determine where the paragraph divisions belong.** If studying with a study group, it is probably best to stay with the existing paragraphs. However, if convenient, it is often correct to divide the paragraphs in a different location than those used in any particular version. Feel free to discuss where the divisions should be, and why. (Remember that they are not inspired, and are different from one version to another).

B. Identity and situation of the author, audience, and 3rd parties: Compile all the references to the author, audience and key third parties. This is usually done by drawing three or more columns on a sheet of paper - one for the author, one for the audience, and one or more for key third parties that the author mentions. The audience is the individual or group of people that the letter is written to. Key third parties are people (not God, angels, Satan, etc.) that the author mentions more than once in his letter. Examples of third parties include false teachers and individuals that are singled out for discussion (e.g. Euodia and Syntyche in Phil. 4; Hymenaeus and Alexander in 1 Timothy 1). The data should be referenced with the chapter and verse, and marked with an asterisk if the insight is implied rather than directly stated. The implied data are less conclusive in reconstructing the historical situation. Once all the data is gathered, write a one paragraph **summary of the historical situation** of the author, audience and any third parties.

C. Major themes: Review your paragraph titles and note repeated ideas, words, and themes. What are the major issues/themes that the author is addressing?

D. Why was the letter written? Record your conclusions about the author's reason(s) for writing the book.

Paragraph study (see next week)

This is the 2nd part of the inductive study method for Epistles and will be covered next week (though your handout includes both sections so that you understand the continuity between the two).

Tonight we'll practice performing an inductive overview on the book of Philemon. On your homework due next week, you'll be asked to write an inductive overview of the book of Titus. For your benefit, this assignment is non-optional. To pass this course you must complete it.

Philemon: Inductive Overview

1. Paragraph Titles

2. Identity and situation of the author, audience and 3rd parties

- AUTHOR (who wrote the letter): PAUL
- AUDIENCE (who the letter is written to): PHILEMON (also to Apphia and Archippus... but primarily to Philemon)
- 3RD PARTY (people who are mentioned in the letter): The primary 3rd party in this book is a slave named ONESIMUS

Paragraph Titles	Author: Paul	Audience: Philemon
vs 1-3: Greeting	vs 1: prisoner; w/ Timothy	vs 1: Christian worker vs 2: accompanied by Apphia (wife?) & Archippus; has house church (wealthy?)
vs 4-7: Paul's thankfulness for Philemon	vs 4: prays for Philemon vs 7: is encouraged & comforted by Ph's ministry	vs 5,7: faithful to Christ & loving to Christians
vs 8-16: Paul's plea for Onesimus	vs 8: has authority* vs 9: aged vs 9,10,13: imprisoned for the cause of Christ vs 10: converted O. while imprisoned vs 10("child"), 12 ("my heart"), 16 ("beloved brother"): loves O. vs 12: sent O. back to Philemon vs 11,13: has been helped by O. vs 14: respects Ph.'s decision about O.	vs 11: was dissatisfied with O.'s performance for him vs 14: has authority to decide Os fate vs 16: owns O. as a slave; wealthy*
vs 17-20: Paul's willingness to share the cost	vs 17: views Ph. as a partner vs 19: has financial	vs 17: partner of Paul vs 18: was wronged financially by O.* vs 19: converted by Paul*

	means*; led pH to Christ	
vs 21: Paul's confidence in Philemon's response		vs 21: has been responsive to Paul's leadership in the past; takes initiative to do what is right*
vs 22-24: Practical considerations	vs 22: hopes to be released soon; plans to visit Philemon vs 23: accompanied by many people; Epaphras is imprisoned with him—others aren't	vs 22: praying for Paul's release*; has lodging means
vs 25: Farewell		

summary of the historical situation

Paul	Philemon	Onesimus
Paul is a Christian leader, now imprisoned for his faith in Christ. While imprisoned, he has converted Onesimus, who is a slave owned by Philemon, a fellow Christian worker who Paul knows and respects. He has sent Onesimus back to Philemon with this letter, hoping that Philemon will forgive Onesimus and be reconciled to him. Though imprisoned, Paul has financial means. He hopes to be released soon and visit Philemon.	Philemon is a wealthy Christian worker who owns slaves & hosts a church in his house. He has a reputation as a loving and faithful Christian worker. He owns Onesimus, who has evidently run away, possibly with Philemon's money or goods. Philemon was converted (directly or indirectly) by Paul and recognizes Paul's leadership	Onesimus is a slave of Philemon. He evidently was stealing goods. As a runaway slave, he made contact with Paul, who is a Christian. As a result, he has been transformed from a "useless" slave to a "useful" one. He has been very helpful to Paul, and evidently the conversion of Onesimus is the central theme of the letter.

3. Major themes

Theme	References
Authority to order vs. appeal to the truth Useless vs. Useful	v. 8, 9, 10,14, 17, 19, 20, 21 - Paul has the authority to order Philemon to accept Onesimus, Philemon to do the right thing. v. 11, 13, 15, 16 - Onesimus is now useful as a Christian

4. Why was the letter written?

To persuade Philemon to forgive Onesimus and accept him back as a brother and fellow-worker.

Memory Verses

2 Tim. 2:7* - promises God's illumination of scripture, and also says we must exercise our minds to understand it

2 Tim. 2:15* - We must invest effort to interpret accurately, and we should be ashamed if we can't do this.