

UNDERSTANDING THE BIBLE

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I. DEFINITION.

1). Study the Word!

In one sense the Bible is the most misunderstood Book in the history of the world! You have only to read some church history or look at the beliefs and interpretations of the multiplicity of cults and heresies, to realize that. The one cardinal mistake the cults (and some Christians) make is the fallacy of thinking that Scripture can be 'easily' understood.

I do not want to be misunderstood here. The Holy Spirit can and does - as he pleases - 'open up' or 'illuminate' the Scriptures so that we are enabled to understand a good deal of it. How often have we not heard of non-Christians who, in moments of great need and distress, pick up a Bible placed in their hotel room by the Gideons, begin to read it and suddenly grasp the great truth of Salvation through the Lord Jesus alone?

The same applies to Christians who read the Bible and - again through the Holy Spirit's work - find they understand more and more, as the years go by. So, in a general sense, the Holy Spirit does 'illuminate' God's Word, enabling us to understand much of it.

Nevertheless, there is another side to this truth. And that is the truth penned by Paul to Timothy: " Study to show yourself approved unto God, a workman that does not need to be ashamed, correctly handling the Word of truth." (2 Tim.2:15).

Why does Paul exhort Timothy to 'study'? The obvious answer is that the Word of God does not easily yield up its deepest treasures. The analogy of mining comes to mind. You can 'pan' for gold in some rivers and find nuggets here and there, but you will rarely get rich. For the latter to happen you have to dig and burrow and sink shafts to reach the rich 'seams' or 'veins' deep underground.

So the question to us is this: are we prepared simply to 'pan' along the surface of the Word, finding a few nuggets here and there, or do we want to enrich ourselves by hard study, sinking deep shafts into the Word thus uncovering its 'seams' of spiritual gold? I'm sure we all know what the answer is. But our analogy is not finished.

2). Safeguards, Principles and Procedures.

When gold was first discovered on the Witwatersrand, in California, in the Yukon and elsewhere in the world, the mining techniques were very rough and ready. You just dug a hole straight down or into the side of a mountain and used pieces of timber from the nearest tree to shore up the sides or roof of the shaft. Accidents, fatal and otherwise, were often. You simply

took the risk to get rich!

But over the years mining techniques and principles became increasingly important. Mining correctly became a science. Better engineering techniques were utilized, air shafts were put in, skips constructed, steel cages made to carry miners down concrete-lined shafts, and so on. Practical safeguards, scientific techniques and engineering principles are all essential in modern mining.

Why all the trouble to mine correctly? Apart from safety considerations, the basic reason is one of greater wealth. It stands to reason that if you use the right procedures you can sink deeper shafts, reach more gold and end up a wealthier man. It is really no different from studying the Word.

What do I mean? Basically this: to reach the rich spiritual 'seams' or 'veins' in the Word of God you must employ the right principles and procedures of interpretation. You must also make use of the right safeguards. Or, to put it slightly differently: to UNDERSTAND THE BIBLE the Christian must employ the RIGHT PRINCIPLES OF INTERPRETATION.

Allow me a quick example. In Ps.44 we read: " With your 'hand' you drove out the nations...It was not by their sword that they won the land,...it was your 'right hand,' your 'arm,' and the light of your 'face,' for you loved them." (Ps.44:2-3).

Now, if like the Mormons, you understand the words 'hand,' 'arm,' and 'face' literally, then you are immediately in trouble. Why? Because, (i) then you have to be consistent and also believe that God's 'arms' and 'hands' have literal bones, blood, veins, nerves and cells, all of which is obviously an absurd and unbiblical understanding of God's Nature.

And (ii) if God has a literal 'body' then he cannot be Omnipresent, (ie. present everywhere in his universe all at one and the same time), or Omnipotent (ie. all powerful). And if that is the case then God ceases to be God. It is obvious, therefore, that we must INTERPRET or UNDERSTAND those words as being Figurative language and not Literal. This automatically brings us to the next point.

3).Understanding the Bible (Hermeneutics) Defined.

" Hermeneutics is the science that teaches us the principles, laws, and methods of interpretation." (L.Berkhof. Principles of Biblical Interpretation. Baker Book House, 1957, p.11).

A helpful analogy here is supplied by J.C.Sroul. Between 14 May and 17 September, 1787, some 55 men gathered in Philadelphia, in the USA, to draw up the famous 'Constitution of the USA.' These were a set of principles adopted in order to govern the Country. It is important to realize that they were broad rules laid down for the welfare of its citizens. They seldom go into minute and detailed rules.

For example, the First principle of that Constitution guarantees freedom of religious worship, of speech and of the press, as well as the rights of peaceful assembly and petitioning the government. But what happens if a very detailed problem like abortion or euthanasia comes up?

Sproul answers: " Historically the USA has a special agency that... functions as the supreme board of hermeneutics...That agency is called the Supreme Court. One of its primary tasks is to INTERPRET the Constitution..." (R.C.Sproul. Knowing God's Word. Ark Publishing, 1977, pp.45-46).

Put yet another way we can say that Understanding the Bible or hermeneutics is:

" An explanation of what is not immediately plain in the Bible...The Biblical documents are ancient, written in Hebrew, Aramaic, and Greek at various times between 1200 B.C. (if not

earlier) and A.D.100, reflecting several different cultural and historical settings. A basic requirement for the understanding of these documents is their gram-matico-historical interpretation or exegesis - bringing out of the text the MEANING the writers intended to convey..." (W.A.Elwell, Ed. Evangelical Dictionary of Theology. Baker Book House, Jan.1985,p.565).

The word 'hermeneutics' is of Greek origin, from 'hermeneuo' which means 'to interpret' or 'to explain.' Some have suggested that the word comes out of Greek mythology in which the god Hermes was the messenger of the gods. It was his task to interpret or explain the will of the gods.

4).Furthermore...

It is furthermore necessary to distinguish between General and Special Hermeneutics. General hermeneutics apply to the overall interpretation of the general principles that govern all languages and all the writings of the Bible. Special hermeneutics apply to a more detailed understanding of specific kinds of writing in the Scripture, such as laws, history, prophecy, poetry, the parables of Jesus in the NT, as well as types and symbols.

There is also a very close relation between hermeneutics and exegesis. 'Exegesis' involves studying the Scripture in such a manner that you understand, (i) the BACKGROUND of a passage, (ii) the CONTEXT of that verse or passage, (iii) what the various KEY WORDS mean, (iv) what, for example, Paul or John or David or Moses actually MEANT when they penned their words, and (v) how those words APPLY to us in the 20th Century. And all this can only come about through correct INTERPRETATION.

II. THE DIFFERENT SCHOOLS OF INTERPRETATION.

1).The Palestinian Jews.

Here we have to do with the OT. They held the Law in far higher esteem than the Prophets or the Holy Writings (eg. the Psalms). " In traditional Jewish exegesis...the Prophets and the (Holy) Writings were treated largely as commentaries on the Torah (the Law)." (Elwell,ibid, p.566). Thus, the interpretation of the Law was their great objective.

To which Berkhof adds: " They carefully distinguished between the mere literal sense of the Bible (technically called 'peshat') and its exposition of exegesis ('midrash')...One of the great weaknesses of the interpretation of the Scribes is due to the fact that it exalted the Oral Law, which is...identical to the inferences of the of the rabbis, as a necessary support of the Written Law, and finally used it...to set the Written Law aside. This gave rise to all manner of arbitrary interpretation. Notice the verdict of Christ in Mk.7:13." (Berkhof, op.cit., p.15).

Leading rabbis set down certain rules or principles to be followed in seeking to understand and interpret the OT Scriptures. Rabbi Ishmael (who lived round about A.D.100) laid down 13 such rules, while Rabbi Eliezer ben Yosa (c. A.D.150) suggested no less than 32! (By the way, the little 'c' that precedes the date just given means 'about.')

The famous Hillel (c. A.D.10) had seven rules. There is no room to expand on them or explain them, so I will just name them: (a) light and heavy, (b) 'equivalence', (c) deduction from special to general, (d) an inference from several passages, (e) inference from the general to the special, (f) analogy from another passage, and (g) an inference from the context.

2).The Alexandrian Jews.

Basic to this school of interpretation is the fact that one should never believe anything that is unworthy of God. But at this point they discovered a problem. In a number of cases in the O.T. they came up against several passages which to them seemed 'unworthy' of God, ie. things which they felt God could not possibly have done or thought.

How did they solve the problem of passages they felt were offensive to God? They interpreted them 'allegorically.' (An 'allegory' is a figure of speech in which two things are likened on the strength of some common quality, though in other respects they are unlike. John Bunyan's famous 'Pilgrim's Progress' is an allegorical tale.).

Perhaps the most famous man in the Alexandrian school was Philo, who lived from c.30-c.40. Philo was also a philosopher who was greatly attracted to the Greek philosopher Plato. This greatly influenced his approach to the Scriptures. He basically attempted to fuse Jewish and Greek thinking. In doing so he did not follow in the main stream of rabbinical traditions.

Milton S. Terry points out that Philo appeared sometimes, "...to assume or allow the literal sense of a passage, but his great aim (was) to exhibit the mystic depths of significance which lie concealed beneath the sacred words." (M.S.Terry. Biblical Hermeneutics. Zondervan, no date given, p.611). He did not want the common people to believe that the divine revelation in the Scriptures could be easily understood. This, he said, would be an insult to God. However, Philo took this view to extremes. Greek philosophy, which fascinated him so much, was to him, "... a natural and necessary part of the laws of Moses." (Terry, *ibid*, page 611).

Philo seems to have believed that it was not necessary to accept that the statements of Moses were either realistic, historical, accurate or truthful. He seems to have had contradictory beliefs. On the one hand, he shows little regard for the way in which passages of Scripture are related and connected, or for the integrity or trustworthiness of the Scriptures, while on the other hand he treats the Law as divinely inspired of God.

3).The Apostolic or Church Fathers.

(a).Clement of Rome (c.90 or 100 AD).

It appears that Clement had a 'high' view of Scripture. This emerges quite clearly in his Epistle to the Corinthians and his Second Epistle named 2 Clement. (It is not absolutely certain that Clement actually wrote this epistle. However, many church historians refer to this letter as '2 Clement', for the sake of convenience.).

Almost without fail when Clement quotes from Scripture (OT or NT) he makes it clear that he believes that Scripture is the divinely inspired Word of God. Thus when he quotes from Scripture he precedes the quote with phrases such as the following: 'For so it is written', 'For He (God) saith unto him (Abraham)', 'For the Holy Ghost saith', 'of whom (David) God said', 'His (God's) counsel', 'For thus saith God', and so on. (see: J.B.Lightfoot. The Apostolic Fathers. Baker Book House, March 1986 Edition, pp.13-52).

Commenting upon the view Clement had of the Scripture G.W.Bromiley says: " Though he may have hazy views of the canon, (he) sees that the NT is Scripture, shows some grasp of the unity of the Testaments, and equates the written word directly with the truth of God, or the God of truth." (G.W.Bromiley. Historical Theology. Eerdmans, Nov.1979 Re- print, p.9).

Furthermore it seems that Clement did not normally deal with Scripture in a fanciful manner (as, for example, Philo did). Sometimes however he did interpret Scripture in an allegorical manner. Thus, commenting on Josh.2:18, he said that the scarlet thread that Rahab hung in her window to avoid death at the hands of the Israelites foreshadowed the blood of Christ.

(b).Clement of Alexandria (c.155-c.220 AD). For Clement of Alexandria, the Scriptures hold a key place or key role in acquiring spiritual knowledge. It is given by God. By studying the Scriptures we hear the voice of God, and this then teaches us the true knowledge of the Truth. God thereby uses the Scripture as an educational tool in our spiritual growth.

It seems furthermore - from the quotation in the next paragraph - that Clement held the view that Scripture authenticates itself, ie. that the Scriptures 'prove' themselves to be of God. Today we would call that view very similar, if not the same, as "Presuppositionalism." In other words

you use the Scriptures to prove its own inherent divine inspiration.

" We rest neither on human assertion nor personal opinion but listen to 'the voice of the Lord, which is more to be relied on than any demonstration.' A taste of Scripture brings faith but with further study we become 'accurate judges of the truth,' obtaining 'from the Scriptures themselves a perfect demonstration concerning the Scriptures,' (vii.16.95ff.)." (Bromiley, *ibid*, p.40).

Regarding the question of interpreting or understanding Scripture, Clement believed, (a) that the Scriptures must be used in their entirety, by which he probably means that a passage must be understood in its setting and wider context of the whole Bible, and not in isolation from the rest of Scripture.

Then, (b) he held to the rule of what is called 'congruity.' By this he seems to have meant that Scripture must always be understood in the light of the character and nature of God. Or, put differently, the Scriptures must never be interpreted in such a way as to conflict with the holiness and perfection of God.

Thus, for example, you could not use Scripture to 'prove' that homo-sexuality is acceptable and not sinful, since to do that would clash violently with God's holiness and God's handiwork in making us in his image. Such an approach destroys the claims heard increasingly in and outside the Church to accept and approve and ordain 'gay' men and 'lesbian' women to the ministry.

III. THE VIEWS OF THE REFORMERS - LUTHER AND CALVIN.

1).Introduction.

During the Middle Ages, as well as in the 14th and 15th Centuries, great ignorance prevailed, not only regarding the content of the Bible but equally so with regards to the way of understanding and interpreting it. The Renaissance writers and thinkers insisted on going back to the originals of Greek and Latin manuscripts. This insistent note also bore fruit in the thinking of the various Reformers. During the Middle Ages the so-called Schoolmen (ie. Anselm, Abelard, Thomas Aquinas, John Duns Scotus etc), held that there was a fourfold interpretation of Scripture. They were the following.

(a). The Literal sense, such as things done or said in the Bible according to its surface meaning.¶(b). The Moral sense, which brought out lessons for life and conduct.¶(c). The Allegorical sense, which deduced doctrine from the text.¶(d). The Analogical sense, which derived heavenly meanings from earthly data.¶

To give one example of these four methods of inspiration: a Biblical reference to 'water' could denote on the four different levels, (i) literal water, (ii) moral purity, (iii) the practise and doctrine of Baptism, and (iv) eternal life in the heavenly Jerusalem as found in Rev.22:1.

The Reformers, generally speaking, abandoned this approach, and established in its place the principle that the Bible had but one sense. Over against the 'infallibility' of the Church and Tradition, the Reformers placed the infallibility of the Word of God.

" The essential character of their exegesis resulted from two fundamental principles: (1) 'Scriptura Scripturae interpres', that is, Scripture is the interpreter of Scripture;...

and (2) 'omnis intellectus ac exposito Scripturae sit analogia fidei', that is, let all understanding and exposition of Scripture be in conformity with the analogy of faith. And for them the 'analogia fidei' equalled the 'analogia Scripturae', that is, the uniform teaching of Scripture." (Berkhof, *op.cit.*, p.26).

We will look at 'The Analogy of Faith' later on in another Chapter. Suffice it to say that interpreting Scripture in accordance with the 'analogy of faith' means basically that any

interpretation of a text or passage must be in harmony with the rest of Scripture and with the Christian Faith, as it is given Biblically.

2).Martin Luther (1483-1546).

(a). The Abuse of Reason.

Luther rejected the role of reason as the SOLE interpreter of Scrip- ture. The truths of revelation cannot be comprehended by the use of the natural intellect acting on its own. Luther was strongly opposed to the misuse of Scripture, ie. claiming that the intellect can under- stand Scripture unaided by the Holy Spirit, distorting or twisting Scripture. Ultimately even the Christian (let alone the non-Chris- tian) can only apprehend the truths of the Bible if the Holy Spirit 'illuminates' the mind to understand and grasp it.

It was upon this concept that Luther set aside the right of the Pope or his priests or the Church or the Church Councils, to interpret the Word.

(b). The Interpreter Spirit.

This point is really an extension of the first point. It is not enough to have the revelation of God, we need the interpretation as well. Neither is it enough to have only the Word, since that is just pos- sessing the Word, not understanding it. Furthermore because the Word falls into the category or realm of what is truly 'Spiritual,' it needs the Spirit of God to understand it.

A further truth is that, " The Holy Spirit, Luther insisted, works only through the Word. 'The Spirit is given to no one without and outside the Word; He is given only through the Word.' " (A.S.Wood. Captive to the Word : Martin Luther - Doctor of Sacred Scripture. The Paternoster Press, 1969, p.161. Footnote 5.).

(c). Scripture is its own Interpreter.

One passage of Scripture must be clarified by other Scriptural pas- sages, was a rule he often reiterated. To interpret Scripture by Scripture involves a comparison of passages from all over Scripture with each other. Thus a NT quotation of an OT passage involves pla- cing them next to each other, (i) to compare the actual passages or verses with each other, and (ii) to gain an insight to the context of both the OT and NT usage of the passage, and, (iii) to compare them with similar passages from the rest of Scripture.

(d). Obscurity clarified by Certainty.

The essential principle here is that a difficult and obscure passage must be explained by a clear and certain passage. Obviously the clear passage needs no explanation because it is open to straightforward exegesis, and hence to an understanding of it. The Christian then uses the clear passage as one would use a flashlight, ie. let it shine upon the more difficult one, thus illuminating the difficult one.

(e). The Analogy of Faith.

For Luther the 'analogia fidei' (analogy of faith) was actually the Scripture itself. This makes it very similar to point (c). It meant that if - in exegeting a passage - one arrives at a certain understanding, then that understanding must square with the rest of Scrip- ture. It also meant that if one held certain convictions that one had received through a so-called 'vision' or 'dream' or 'spiritual experience', then such a conviction must also square with Scripture.

To illustrate: A colleague of mine in the ministry had an experience some 25-30 years ago in which a church member had come to a strong conviction that they should divorce their marriage partner and marry someone else! Such a conviction cannot be squared with Christ's tea- ching on marriage and is therefore not according to the Analogy of Faith. Consequently it is completely

invalid and unBiblical.

(f). Grammatico-Historical sense.

The Christian reader should make it his first task to seek the literal sense and context in the Greek or Hebrew grammar, as well as the his- torical background as he interprets or seeks to understand a passage.

Luther's basic hermeneutical principal was: " A text of the Scriptures had to be taken as it stood unless there were compelling reasons for taking it otherwise...If we want to treat Holy Scripture skilfully, our effort must be concentrated on arriving at one simple, pertinent, and sure literal sense." (Wood, *ibid*, pp.166+164. Footnotes 7 and 5).

3).John Calvin (1509-1564).

(a). Divine Inspiration and Authority.

Since Calvin and Luther's principles of understanding the Bible were largely similar, this sub-section may be shorter. Calvin was undoub- tedly peerless when it comes to the aspect of exegesis amongst the Reformers.

Although there are in Calvin's writings statements that have, to some, suggested the opposite, Prof.John Murray, in his monograph, has quite clearly established that Calvin accepted the full and plenary and Di-vine Inspiration and Authority of Scripture.

Prof.Murray speaks of Calvin's, "...characteristic dictum that the Scripture speaks to us with a veracity and authority equal to that of God speaking to us directly from heaven. We do not read far into the 'Institutes' before we come across the most explicit affirmation to this effect." (J.Murray. *Calvin on Scripture and Divine Sovereignty*. Evangelical Press, 1979, p.16).

(b). Self-Authenticating.

The Spirit's ministry authenticates itself as God's Word and is thus the basis for its own authority. " Scripture authenticates itself be- cause it has in fact sprung from God...The divine authorship and au- thority are just as axiomatic as that white is white or sweet is sweet (i.7.2). 'The highest proof of scripture,' then, is that 'God in per-son speaks in it.' (i.7.4). " (Bromiley, *op.cit.*, p.224).

To which Dr.Jim Packer, adds: " Scripture is, in the last analysis, self-evidencing and self-authenticating, says Calvin, as Divine rea- lities always are: those who have faith recognise its Divine character in the immediate, unanalysable way in which one recognises a colour or a taste,..." (Article by J.I.Packer entitled 'Calvin's View of Scrip- ture,' in the book 'God's Inerrant Word', Edited by J.W.Montgomery. Bethany House, 1974, p.109).

(c). Agreement of Spirit and Scripture.

What does this involve? The following: if, for example, we say that the Spirit has 'illuminated' our minds to understand the 'truth' of a passage, then that 'truth' must square with the whole of Scripture. In other words the 'truth' that the Holy Spirit teaches and the 'truth' that the Scriptures teach must be ONE AND THE SAME.

The Spirit and the Word go together. They do not proclaim two differ- ing sets of truth. The Word, after all, "...never had its origin in the will of man, but men spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit." (2.Pet.1:21). The Spirit and the Word speak one and the same theological and practical Christian language.

If someone has a 'revelation' from the Spirit about a certain passage, but that so-called 'revelation' is in conflict with the rest of Scrip- ture, then that person's hermenutics or

understanding of that passage (and probably the rest of Scripture) is not from the Spirit. It is self-manufactured.

(d). Scripture must speak for itself.

One of characteristics of Calvin's commentaries is their lucidity and clarity. Because he disciplined his mind to be what one might call an 'objective reporter and interpreter,' Calvin had the happy knack of allowing the Word of God to speak for itself.

He regarded, "...it as 'the first business of an interpreter to let his author say what he does say, instead of attributing to him what we think he ought to say.'" (Berkhof, op.cit., p.27).

(e). Contextual and Anti-Allegorical.

On this score Terry says: " His commentaries, accordingly,...exhibit ...a ready grasp of the more obvious meaning of words, and an admiral regard to the context, scope and plan of the author. He is...conspicuously free from mystical, allegorical, and forced methods of exposition...says Tholuck...he deduces everywhere the explanation of that which is particular from that which is general..." (Terry, op.cit., pp.676-677).

(f). Typology.

" He firmly believed in the typical significance of much that is found in the O.T.,but did not share the opinion of Luther that Christ should be found everywhere in Scripture. Moreover, he reduced the number of Psalms that could be recognized as Messianic." (Berkhof, op.cit., p.27).

IV. MODERN SCHOOLS OF THOUGHT.

1). The Historical-Rationalist School.

This view of understanding the Bible largely originated with J.S.Semler (1725-1791). His teaching fostered and encouraged the idea that the Scriptures are, in the final analysis, fallible and human writings. He made human reason the final arbiter and interpreter with regards to the Scripture.

" In practice, Semler valued only those parts of the O.T. that mirrored the spirit of the N.T. He was not bound by the traditional limits of the O.T.canon...(he)...took the steps of abandoning belief in the 'supernatural understanding' of the Bible." (P.Avis. Series Ed. The History of Christian Theology : Volume Two - The Study and Use of the Bible. Marshall/Pickering, 1988, p.107).

He was followed by H.E.G.Paulus (1761-1851), who regarded the miracle-stories of the Gospels as based upon authentic memories, but rejected any supernatural interpretation of them. He 'explained' them entirely in terms of natural causes. Thus, Lazarus was not dead but in a deep coma and recovered when Jesus called him out of the tomb. (Avis, ibid. p.338).

To these names must be added that of F.D.E.Schleiermacher (1768-1834) and D.F.Strauss (1808-74), the latter being one of the founders of the 'Tubingen school' of N.T.critics. He dismissed the Supernaturalistic view as well as the Rationalistic view (even though he, strictly speaking, falls within this ambit), saying that only one, "...further possibility remains open, and that is to see the Gospel story as one of myth." (Avis, ibid., p.339).

Strauss was strongly under the influence of Hegel, believing that in the time of Jesus there were Messianic expectations in the air. Furthermore Jesus' work and teaching left such a deep impression upon his disciples, that, after his death, they ascribed to him all the wonderful words he spoke as well as his works. The latter included the disples rather naive view of Jesus being resurrected, - since all this (his words and works) were expected of the Messiah.

2). The Existentialist School.

The main figure here is that of R.Bultmann (1884-1976). He, "...believed that the biblical

writings only apparently or secondarily presented generalizing and descriptive statements about God and man. Their primary purpose, he urged, was the existential or practical function of calling persons to appropriate 'attitudes' and 'responses of will.' For example, the utterance 'God will judge the world' is to be interpreted less as a statement about a future event than as a call to responsibility before God in the present moment..." (Fergusson, Wright, op.cit., p.296).

QUESTIONS

1. What principles and truths must be kept in mind in the matter of 'Defining' what it means to understand the Bible (ie.Hermeneutics)?
2. Discuss the views on interpretation held by the two Jewish Schools of thought as well as that of the Apostolic or Church Fathers.
3. Describe the Hermeneutical principles of Luther and Calvin.
4. Describe the way (i) Martin Luther, and (ii) The Modern Schools have 'understood the Bible.'

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BIBLE STUDY CORRESPONDENCE COURSES COURSE NO:038

by the

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UNDERSTANDING THE BIBLE

-OR-

HERMENEUTICS

CHAPTER II

UNDERSTANDING THE BIBLE : SOME FUNDAMENTAL RULES

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 - (c). Questions
 - 2). 1 Cor.3:5-17
 - (a). Think Paragraphs
 - (b). Chapter 3:5-9
 - (c). Chapter 3:10-15
 - (d). Chapter 3:16-17
- VIII. RULE EIGHT - THINK PRACTICE

-----NB! (1). From this Chapter onwards the full titles of books, publi-sheer, date,etc. will only be given if new material is quoted from. Otherwise the quotations will refer to books already described in full in previous Chapters. For example: (Berkhof, op.cit. or ibid.,p.50) will refer to the full description of Berkhof's book in the previous Chapter.

(2). Furthermore, with regard to this particular Chapter, I will not cover every possible Rule, but will concentrate on the more important ones.

(3). The student should also realize that due to the very nature of the subject there may be some overlapping in the Chapters.

I. RULE ONE - THE BIBLE IS INFALLIBLY INSPIRED.

1). Inerrant and Inspired.

In October of 1973 the Ligonier Valley Study Center in the USA sponse-red a Conference on the Inspiration and Authority of Scripture. When it was over the Conference issued what they called " The Ligonier Statement." This summed up what the main speakers believed about the Scriptures. They were wise and godly men who realized that you could NOT TRY TO UNDERSTAND OR INTERPRET SCRIPTURE CORRECTLY UNLESS YOU BE-LIEVED IN ITS GOD-INSPIRED INFALLIBILITY. And neither can we!

Although I do not intend to elaborate on the Doctrine of Inspiration, because that will be handled in COURSE OO9 - 'The Doctrine of Scrip-ture' - I would like to include the Ligonier Statement here. It is thoroughly Evangelical, well stated, comes out of a modern context and will, I trust, set the tone for this Chapter. I will break it up into parts for easier consumption. The Statement goes as follows:

" We believe the Holy Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments to be the inspired and inerrant Word of God. We hold the Bible, as original- ly given through human agents of revelation, to be infallible and see this as a crucial article of faith with implications for the entire life and practice of all Christian people.

" With the great fathers of Christian history we declare our confi- dence in the total trustworthiness of the Scriptures, urging that any view which imputes to them a lesser degree of inerrancy than total, is in conflict with the Bible's self-testimony in general and with the teaching of Jesus Christ in particular. Out of obedience to the Lord of the Church we submit ourselves unreservedly to his authoritative view of Holy Writ." (J.W.Montgomery, Ed. God's Inerrant Word. Bethany House, 1974, p.7).

The document was signed by, inter alia, John M.Frame, John H.Gerst- ner, John Warwick Montgomery, Clark H.Pinnock, R.C.Sproul and James I.Packer.

2). Original Autographs or Writings.

It must be emphasized that regarding Inspiration, orthodox Evangeli- cals have always held that such Inspiration is LIMITED to the ORIGINAL WRITINGS of the sacred Scriptures. The word 'Autographs' or 'Autogra- pha' simply means 'writings of the Scriptures.'

As Berkhof puts it: " The assertions that the Scriptures are, in every particular, infallibly inspired, refer only to the autographa, and not, in the same sense, to the manuscripts now in our possession, the present editions of the Bible, and the translations." (Berkhof,op. cit., p.50). But can we then trust our Bibles? Certainly!

There is much evidence that I could marshall. Suffice it however to refer to the work of

F.F.Bruce, who says of the N.T.: " The evidence for our NT writings is ever so much greater than the evidence for many writings of classical (Greek and Roman) authors,... There are in existence about 5,000 Greek manuscripts of the NT in whole or in part...

" Perhaps we can appreciate how wealthy the NT is in manuscript attestation if we compare the textual material for other ancient historical works. For Caesar's 'Gallic War' there are...only 9 or 10 (that) are good...of the 14 books of the 'Histories' of Tacitus... only 4-and-a-half survive; of the 16 books of his 'Annals', 10 survive in full and 2 in part...". No classical scholar would question their authenticity! (F.F.Bruce. The NT Documents. IVP, 1966, pp.15-17).

II. RULE TWO - SIMPLICITY.

1). Simple or Natural.

The key verse here is 1 Jn.1:5: "...God is light; in him there is no darkness at all." What does this mean? " It is His nature to reveal Himself, as it is the property of light to shine;..." (J.R.W.Stott. The Epistles of John. Tyndale, July 1964, p.70). John is here using an analogy. In the same way as 'light' shining is clear, uncomplicated and plain, so God and his Word are basically clear and plain. Note that there is a difference between 'simplicity' (clear and plain) and being 'simpleminded' (childish and immature).

God has revealed himself chiefly by speaking. Scripture consists of the 'breathed-out Words of God' (2.Tim.3:16). To quote John Stott again: " We may be quite sure, therefore, that he has spoken in order to be understood, and that He has intended Scripture...to be plain to its readers." (J.R.W.Stott. Understanding the Bible. Scripture Union/ Regal, 1972, p.218).

But, you say, there are many passages I don't understand. The answer to that problem is, (1) there are certainly passages that are very difficult to understand, (2) the use of a good commentary will to a surprising extent clarify 'difficult' passages, (3) the application of the many rules of interpretation discussed in these Chapters will also go a long way to illuminate such passages, (4) the BASIC message of Scripture IS plain enough for even a very young person to grasp.

2). Literal not Allegorical.

In studying the Bible we must look first and foremost for the 'literal' (or 'natural') or obvious meaning. Unless the subject-matter shows otherwise we are to understand the plain, ordinary meaning of the words. I once heard a preacher 'preach' on 2 Kings 3. Joram, the king of Israel, and Jehoshaphat, the king of Judah, launch a combined attack upon Moab.

The route is through the Desert of Edom. Soon the armies find themselves without water. Elisha the prophet instructs them to dig 'this valley full of ditches' (v.16ff). That night God fills the ditches with water. The preacher I heard allegorized the incident and exhorted us to become 'ditched Christians.' Only by doing this would we be filled with the Spirit and be sanctified!

However, the correct understanding of that passage will lay the emphasis upon God's gracious provision in a time of need. That, surely, is the natural and sensible and literal meaning of 2 Kings 3. Where the passage is 'figurative' or 'symbolic' the subject-matter will in most cases make that clear.

It is surely obvious that there are many passages in Revelation that fall into that category. The 'chain' with which Satan is bound in Rev. 20 cannot conceivably be a literal chain manufactured out of steel rings made in a steel plant! Why not? Simply because you cannot bind a non-material being or angel or spirit with a literal steel chain.

III. RULE THREE - HISTORY AND GRAMMAR.

1). History.

God has chosen throughout Scripture to reveal himself in a precise historical setting and context. Each part of Scripture was addressed in the first place to, "...a particular people of a particular age in a particular country." (Stott. *Understanding the Bible*, op.cit., p.224).

Thus, in seeking to understand the Scriptures, we must seek to trans-*port* ourselves back to the year 1,400 B.C. or 800 B.C. or 60 A.D,etc. as if we were the recipients of the message of a Moses or an Isaiah or a Jeremiah, or a member the church in Corinth or Rome hearing the epistles of Paul or Peter or John. Or, put differently, we must ask our- selves: Who wrote this book and why? In what circumstances? For what reason? What are the people like to which the message went?

Dr.Jim Packer puts it like this: " First, interpret Scripture histori- cally, in terms of what each writer meant his own first readers to ga- ther from his words. This means seeing each book in its own historical and cultural setting, and putting ourselves in both the writer's and the reader's shoes. Each book was written as a message to the writer's contemporaries..." (J.I.Packer. *Beyond the Battle for the Bible*. Cor- nerstone Books, 1980, pp.22-23).

2). Grammar.

All human language is a living, changing, dynamic thing. The meaning of words change from century to century and from one culture to another. Take the word 'love.' We cannot just read it and immedia- tely think we know what it means. Four different Greek words are used in the N.T. They are all translated as 'love' in English, yet in the original each one has a different meaning! This is one reason why it is so imperative that we employ good Commentaries as we study a par- ticular Bible book in our devotions.

To give another example. In his two epistles to the Thessalonians Paul uses the word 'atakos' several times. In classical Greek the word re- fers to soldiers braking up in disarray. Hence the A.V's translation of 'disorderly.' But further light from newly discovered papyri use the word for apprentice's who played truant from work. The word used is the Greek cognate verb of 'atakos.' Hence the N.I.V.'s more correct translation of being 'idle' while waiting for the Lord's return.

IV. RULE FOUR - ORGANIC UNITY.

This is sometimes called 'The Principle of Harmony.' We must interpret or understand the Bible as a complex unity. The late C.S.Lewis wrote works which involved criticism, literary history, philology, theology, apologetics, poems, novels and fantasies for both adults and children. Yet if you were to study all his different works you would soon come to realize a strong common strand that runs through them all, namely, his Christian faith and commitment.

The same is true, by way of analogy, of Scripture which has 66 books written by some 40 authors over a period of about 1,500 years. To quote J.I.Packer again. He says of the writers of Scripture: "...they too express one mind, telling one story about one God, one Saviour, one covenant, and one church, and teaching one way of serving God, the way of faith, hope, and love, of repentance, obedience, praise, pray- er, work and joy." (Packer, *ibid.*, p.23).

The word 'organic' can be understood if you think of the human body which is one single organism but with different members of that body. Further, just as the human body 'grows' from birth to adulthood - yet still as a unity, as a single organism - so the Bible 'grew' in an organic manner. Berkhof, taking up the concept of growth, says the following about the Bible.

" The Bible was not made, but grew, and the composition of its several books marks the stages of its progressive development. It is, in the last analysis, the product of a single mind...The different parts of it are mutually dependent, and are all together subservient to the organism as a whole." (Berkhof, *op.cit.*, p.53).

What does this mean in practice? Simply that in understanding or in- terpreting a verse you must always make sure that your interpretation is in harmony with the other books and writings

of the Bible in its entirety.

You cannot, for example, take the passages in the N.T. which speak of our 'freedom in Christ from the law' and dismiss the Ten Commandments, in the O.T., as no longer valid or applicable. The 'freedom from the law' passages refer to a freedom from keeping the law for salvation, not 'freedom' from keeping the law as a guide to Christian behaviour.

V. RULE FIVE - HISTORY INTERPRETED BY DIDACTIC.

Don't panic! This 'heavy-looking' title is really quite straightforward. Once you've read the paragraphs to follow you'll see!

1).The term 'didactic.'

I am not going to give a detailed explanation of what 'history' means since it is a common word, and most of us took History at school or perhaps University. Suffice it to say that a 'historical narrative' is basically a 'historical story' such as you find in Joshua, Kings and Acts, to name but a few. Job starts off as an historical narrative.

About the word 'didactic', R.C.Sproul says this: " The term 'didactic' comes from the Greek word that means 'to teach' or 'to instruct.' Didactic literature is literature that 'teaches' or 'explains.' Much of Paul's writing is didactic in character." (R.C.Sproul. Knowing God's Word. Ark Publishing, 1977, p.68). Books like Roman, Galatians, Colossians, 1+2 Peter, James etc. are packed full of doctrinal teaching.

2). Interpretation.

This Rule is this: We should try to understand the history or narrative books (ie. Genesis, Exodus, Joshua, Kings and the Gospels-to name a few) by putting on the spectacles of the didactic or teaching or doctrinal books (ie. Romans, Galatians Ephesians, etc.). In this way you as it were place the doctrinal books over the narrative books in order to understand them, and in order to construct your theology.

Put differently, the Christian, as a general rule, should develop his doctrines from the didactic books before he does so from the history books. Notice that I used the word 'before.' That was deliberate. The reason is that (1) this rule does not exclude narrative books such as the Gospels from teaching doctrine.

And (2) the narrative books are NOT one whit less infallibly inspired and inerrant and authoritative than, say, the epistles! It is simply using the books and the epistles for the reason why they were written. Of course there's doctrine in the narratives (ie.the doctrine of Providence), but they were not PRIMARILY written to formulate doctrine, while the epistles WERE.

VI. RULE SIX - THE OBSCURE INTERPRETED BY THE PLAINER. Perhaps an example will make this principle clearer. One of the most difficult passages to come to grips with is Romans, chapter 9. The section that troubles Christians most is the following: " Yet before the twins were born or had done anything good or bad - in order that God's purpose in election might stand...it is written: 'Jacob I loved, but Esau I HATED.' " (Rom.9:11-13).

In that same chapter we also read:" For the Scripture says to Pharaoh: 'I raised you up FOR THIS VERY PURPOSE, that I might display my power in you, and that my name might be proclaimed in all the earth.'Therefore God has mercy on whom he wants to have mercy, AND HE HARDENS whom he wants to harden."

The words are perfectly plain. 'Esau I HATED.' 'Pharaoh have I HARDENED...that was the very PURPOSE for which you were born.' But the question is, 'How can God who is Love act in this seemingly arbitrary manner, and that before the twins were even born?'Isn't the word used,

ie. 'hate' not very harsh? And what about hardening Pharaoh?

In fact the whole doctrine of predestination is abhorrent to many Christians. Nevertheless Rom.9 IS part of God's inspired, inerrant and authoritative word! So how then do we approach and try to understand these verses?

In the light of Rule Six, the following suggestions might help, even though it does not fully answer our questions.

(a). We must not try and answer them away. By that I mean that we must not start off by saying (in Esau's case) that God's reaction to him was because of any reprehensible deeds, actions or motives in Esau as he grew up, and (in Pharaoh's case) God hardened him because he first hardened himself.

The problem with such answers is that they try to explain certain un-pleasant facts away. Paul's exegesis and understanding of those O.T. passages is quite clear. This 'hatred' was shown towards Esau while he was still in the womb! And Pharaoh, we read, was deliberately brought into the world to be hardened to show God's power!

(b). Secondly, we must willingly accept God's Word at this point, and furthermore we must willingly accept the fact that WE WILL NOT FULLY UNDERSTAND the passages this side of glory. There is a world of difference between 'forcing' an answer by trying to impose on those passages answers that are acceptable to US, ie. God only hardened Pharaoh's heart because Pharaoh first hardened his, and a frank acknowledgement that what Paul, under the Spirit, said was correct but not fully comprehensible to us.

(c). What then about a clearer and plainer passage to help us in this problem? I find great comfort in Gen.18:25c, which reads: " Will not the Judge of all the earth DO RIGHT? " How does this help? It helps because, whatever Rom.9 might mean, this verse establishes the integrity and fairness and just nature of God's character, person, nature, attributes, Godhood and actions!

To put it differently. I do not have to have a complete understanding about those passages in Rom.9 in this life in order to live a Christian life. But what I must have in order to live in a loving and trusting manner with God is the reassurance that God is a JUST God!

Having FIRST established that God is a just God, I can then come back to Rom.9, saying, 'Well I don't fully understand all this but I accept it as God's Word, and that Word is based upon the nature and character and person of a JUST God. And knowing that, I also know that he cannot ever do anything that is unloving, unkind and unjust.'

Thus do I use a clear passage to approach an obscure and difficult passage without doing violence to Rom.9 by trying to explain it away in a humanistic fashion.

VII. RULE SEVEN - THINK CONTEXT.

Did you know that the Bible was NOT originally written with chapter and text divisions? With regard to the O.T. it was a man called Stephen Langton who, in 1228 AD, divided the whole Bible into chapters. The Masorites, a group of Jewish scholars, who lived between the destruction of Jerusalem (587/6 BC) to the 12th Century AD, divided the O.T. into verses. Finally, in 1551, Robert Stephens, divided the N.T. up into verses.

This has made it easier to read, but it has also had a negative result in the sense that we no longer sit down and read, for example, the epistles in the N.T. right through in one go as we would normally do with a letter. This is serious because it has taught us to THINK in terms of VERSES rather than THINKING in terms of an entire PARAGRAPH or a CHAPTER or a WHOLE BOOK OR WHOLE EPISTLE. In other words we no longer think IN CONTEXT or CONTEXTUALLY.

What does that mean? It means, (i) that you do not ISOLATE a verse from the verses and chapters that precede that verse or from the verses and chapters that follow that verse, (ii) that you deliberately, positively and knowingly study that verse in the CONTEXT of the surrounding verses and context, as well as the Context of the the WHOLE BIBLE.

How does one set about thinking in terms of 'context'? Let's take as an example 1 Cor.3:5-17, and let's see step-by-step just how to go about understanding 'in context.' 1). The Historical Context of the Whole Epistle.

The first thing one must try to do is to understand the global situation that Paul was speaking to. Thus, we ask, what was going on in Corinth that caused Paul to write 1st Corinthians? How did he come to learn of their situation? What kind of relationship had he had with them? What was the historical, cultural, social and religious setting of the people to whom he was writing?

(a). Corinth and its People.

You would, for starters, need to consult a Bible Dictionary or the Introduction to your commentary to find out as much as possible about the city of Corinth and its people. The age of the city, its strategic location for commerce, its cosmopolitan atmosphere, its wealthy patrons, the place of art and religion (at least 26 temples and shrines) and wide reputation of sexuality ('To live or play like a Corinthian' was a well-known phrase throughout the Roman Empire).

(b). Read the whole Epistle.

Next, the wisest thing to do would be to read the whole Epistle right through, if possible in one sitting. Why? Because that is the way you read every letter that you get through the post! You don't read a few lines every day...you read it all in one go. Consequently you must treat the 1st Corinthians the same way. You will not understand all you read but you will get a global picture, a big view, a 'contextual' view.

(c). Questions.

As you read the epistle it would help if you made brief (!) notes - don't write a commentary! You can do this by asking yourself questions, such as the following.

(i). What am I discovering about the Corinthian's condition, - their nationality, economic and cultural status, the particular problems they are experiencing as a Church, their intellectual, emotional and spiritual state and attitude? ¶(ii). What is Paul's concern, attitude, evaluation of the Corinthian Church's condition.¶(iii). What does he warn them against or instruct them to do?¶(iv). Does he deal with any specific problems, and how?¶(v). What are the letter's natural and logical divisions?¶(vi). Are there any key concepts or words or analogies or figurative expressions that he uses?¶(vi). What suggestions does he make to the Corinthians with regards to any problematic areas in the life of the Church?¶

2). 1st.Cor.3:5-17. (a). Think Paragraphs.

Gordon Fee and Douglas Stuart put it this way: " We simply cannot stress enough the importance of your learning to THINK PARAGRAPHS, ...as the absolutely necessary key to understanding the argument in the various epistles...one question you need to learn to ask over and over again is, 'What's the point'? Therefore, you want to be able to do two things: (1)...state the 'content' of each paragraph. What does Paul say in this paragraph? (2)...try to explain 'why' you think Paul says this right at this point...? " (G.D.Fee and D.Stuart. How to read the Bible for all it's worth. Zondervan, 1982, p.51).

In the sections to follow I am not going to try and explain what Paul said or meant. (That's your task!). But I will suggest the kind of questions you might want to ask as you do your own exegesis.

(b). Chapter 3:5-9.

What is the nature and function of the leaders over whom they are quarreling? What is their (the leader's) real 'office' or 'status' and why? What analogy does Paul use to describe the differing functions of Apollos, Paul and God? What is the origin of the life that gave birth to the Church? What ought the single purpose to be of God's ministers or evangelists? What is the relation of these workers to God? What are the two metaphors Paul uses to describe the Church at Corinth? What is Paul's MAIN AIM in this section?

(b). Chapter 3:10-15.

What is the main metaphor Paul employs in this section? How should this be carried out? What does 'gold, silver, costly stones' refer to? What does 'wood, hay, straw' refer to? Very important: Who does the building refer to? Or, if you like, who is the building? What does 'being saved or escaping as through the flames' mean? What is Paul's MAIN AIM in this section?

(c). Chapter 3:16-17.

What is the basic metaphor here? Must that metaphor be interpreted individually or collectively? Or could it be both? How does this section and metaphor tie up with 2 Cor.6:16 and Eph.2:19-22? What is Paul's MAIN AIM in these two verses?

VIII. RULE EIGHT - THINK PRACTICE.

It is not enough to simply gain the necessary knowledge about and insight into the passage. It is, however, imperative that we APPLY this knowledge to our spiritual lives. The Word of God, if used correctly, should always prompt a response from us.

As J.I.Packer says: " Having seen what the text meant for its writer and first readers, we (must) now see what it means for us. We study Scripture in the presence of the living God...Each time it is as if he has handed us a letter from himself and stays with us while we read it to hear what our answer will be...'Give me understanding, that I may keep thy law'." (Packer, op.cit., p.24).

QUESTIONS

1. Write an essay which deals (i) with the Bible as Infallibly Inspired, and (ii) the Rule of Simplicity in understanding the Bible.
2. In your own language discuss Rules Three, Four and Five.
3. How (i) does Rules Six and Seven help us to understand a passage of Scripture, and (ii) suggest ways in which a Christian can apply such a passage to his spiritual life. You may also use other Biblical passages to illustrate this point.

THE BIBLE INSTITUTE OF SOUTH AFRICA

BIBLE STUDY CORRESPONDENCE COURSES COURSE NO:038

by the

REV.JIM VAN ZYL.B.A.M.A.

UNDERSTANDING THE BIBLE

- OR -

HERMENEUTICS

CHAPTER III

THE ANALOGY OF FAITH AND THE MEANING OF WORDS

I. THE ANALOGY OF FAITH

- 1). Origen
- 2). Consistency - Scripture to interpret Scripture
- 3). Positive Analogy
- 4). General Analogy
- 5). Degrees
- 6). Stick to the Rules!
 - (i). Clear Support
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II. THE MEANING OF WORDS

- 1). Communication
 - 2). The Study of Words or Etymology
 - 3). The meaning of Words in their Context - Usus Loquendi
 - (i). Grammatical Sense
 - (ii). One Sense Only
-

I. THE ANALOGY OF FAITH.

- 1). Origen.

The term 'Analogy of Faith' is derived from Romans 12:6, and in particular from the phrase '...in proportion to his faith' (in the Greek: 'analogia tes pisteos'). It has sometimes been thought that the word 'faith' used here must be viewed objectively. Then it would refer to, for example, 'The Christian Faith as a body of Doctrinal Truths.'

However a study of the context reveals that Paul is referring to some-thing that is more subjective and personal. At the very beginning of verse 6, for example, Paul says explicitly: " We have different gifts, according to the grace given us. If a man's gift is prophesying...."

Hence the explanation by Vaughan and Corley: " The discussion now turns to the ministry of

individuals within the body of Christ...The appointed tasks arise out of the received gifts; so the Christian must tend to his own sphere of ministry, neither begrudging others nor inflating his own position." (C.Vaughan and B.Corley. Romans. Zondervan, 1976, pp.139-140).

2). Consistency - Scripture to interpret Scripture.

The following, from prof.John Murray, brings us a step closer to the understanding of 'The Analogy of Faith.' You will recall that in Romans 12 (see above) Paul mentions, inter alia, the office of 'prophecy.'

About this office prof.Murray says: " Prophecy refers to the function of communicating revelations of truth from God. The prophet ...was God's spokesman...The prophet when he speaks God's word IS NOT TO GO BEYOND THAT WHICH GOD HAS GIVEN HIM TO SPEAK...a prophet should be reminded that the NEW REVELATIONS he has received ARE NEVER TO BE IN CONFLICT WITH EXISTING REVELATION." (J.Murray. The Epistle to the Romans. NICOT. Eerdmans, 1965, Vol.II, p.122).

When the Reformers broke with Rome they, first and foremost, stated that the Bible was to be the supreme authority of the Church (Sola Scriptura). Secondly, they were careful to define basic rule of interpreting or understanding the Bible.

Their, "...primary rule of hermeneutics was called 'the analogy of faith.' The analogy of faith IS THE RULE THAT SCRIPTURE IS TO INTERPRET SCRIPTURE: 'Sacra Scriptura sui interpres' (Sacred Scripture is its own interpreter). This means, quite simply, that no part of Scripture can be interpreted in such a way as to render it in conflict with what is clearly taught elsewhere in Scripture." (Sproul, op.cit., p.46).

This principle rests on the fact that since Scripture is divinely inspired by God, it stands to reason that God would never contradict himself. Thus, for example, if a specific verse is capable of two interpretations and one of those interpretations goes against the rest of Scripture while the other is in harmony with it, then the latter interpretation must be used.

As an extension of this principle or rule Augustine insisted that the interpretation should not violate the rule of faith as found in the Apostles' Creed. If Scripture, he said, is alleged to mean something contrary to the universally accepted Body of Christian truth, the validity of that person's exegesis is suspect. ('Exegesis' involves the study and explanation of Scripture by examining the words, phrases, context and sense of the verse in order to arrive at its meaning).

A final quote to drive this point home:

" Since God is the author of Holy Scripture, what is taught in one Scripture cannot contradict what is taught in another Scripture on the same subject. In fact, the meaning of a given text is often established only after careful consideration of other passages which speak to the issue...

" Paul's ('so-called') negative attitude toward the law in Rom.10:4 and Gal.3:13 is clarified by a consideration of his positive endorsement of the law as in...Rom.7:12, 14, 16...(thus)...the apostle repudiates law-keeping as a means of salvation, although as an expression of the moral will of God the law's precepts serve as a universal standard of conduct." (Elwell, op.cit., pp.43-44).

3). Positive Analogy.

Positive analogy is an analogy which goes directly to and directly rests upon a specific passage of Scripture. " It consists of those teachings of the Bible that are so clearly and positively stated, and supported by so many passages, that there can be no doubt of their meaning..." (Berkhof, op.cit., p.164).

This means that as we range throughout the whole Bible we consistently find that, for example, the attributes of God such as his holiness and righteousness and mercy and grace and omniscience and love and omnipotence, etc. are THE SAME EVERYWHERE. Or, to use another example, the Providence of God is the same in Genesis, Kings, Job, the Psalms, the Prophets, the Gospels and the Epistles.

Furthermore, a careful study of Scripture will show that there is only one way of Salvation in both the Old Testament and the New Testament; that the Bible speaks with one voice on such subjects as sin, repentance, faith, justification, regeneration, atonement, sanctification, holiness, heaven and hell. In other words since the Scriptures are internally and inherently consistent one passage of Scripture should harmonize with another. Hence 'the analogy of faith.'

4). General Analogy.

In this second case the 'analogy of faith,' "...does not rest on the explicit statements of the Bible, but on the obvious scope and import of its teachings as a whole, and on the religious impressions they leave on mankind." (Berkhof, *ibid.*, p.165). What does that mean? And how does it work in practical terms? Let me explain.

While it might not be stated in so many words, nevertheless the spirit and principles of Scripture are against the cruel forms of slavery and racial discrimination practiced in the ancient world as well the 20th Century.

Paul does not, for example, indulge in a long political or social exhortation about slavery in his day. But nevertheless the overall and general principles of the Christian Faith, and more especially, (i) the doctrine of man made in God's Image, (ii) the principles of Justice and Righteousness, and (iii) the doctrine of God's love, were diametrically opposed to any form of slavery.

Likewise the doctrine of 'Union with or in Christ' does away with race, class or caste structures. Being 'in Christ' there is no longer any higher, middle or lower-class Christians. The glory of the N.T. Church lies precisely in the fact that the wealthy, the poor, those holding high office in Rome's vast civil service, the slave, the trader, the manufacturer of goods, the merchantman, the learned and the ignorant were on exactly the same level as fellow Christians.

Again, while the Bible does not legalistically prescribe that we must have our spiritual devotions at a certain time of day or for a specific duration, it nevertheless encourages an ongoing, warm, spiritual fellowship with God and his Son, our Lord Jesus Christ.

And, to bring us into the 20th Century, while the Bible does not tell us which TV programmes and Films to see (it was a historical impossibility!), nevertheless it gives us principles such as you find in the Epistle to the Philippians, chapter four, verse 8 following: "Whatever is true...noble...right...pure...lovely...admirable...excellent...praiseworthy..." We can utilize these principles to give us guidance and direction in the choices we make.

5). Degrees.

The 'analogy of faith' will not always have the same degree of evidence, and consequently not the same degree of value and authority. This means that:

(a). The number of passages that contain the same teaching becomes important. The 'analogy' will be stronger when it is based on 12 passages instead of say only 2 or 4. This does not diminish the authority of God's Word for which only 1 verse is sufficient. It refers to the clarity of a certain teaching which one wishes to establish. The more passages, the clearer the teaching will be on, for example, the 'Millennium.'

(b). The unanimity or correspondence of different passages in relation to one another. The value or 'certainty' of the 'analogy' will sometimes be in proportion to the agreement (or

'correspondence') of the passages on which it is founded, for example, the much-debated Biblical teaching on 'tongues', 'the baptism by the Holy Spirit', and that on 'healing.'

(c). The clarity of a passage can also be crucial in interpretation or understanding the Bible. Hence, "...an analogy which rests wholly or to a great extent, on obscure passages, is of dubious value." (Berkhof, *ibid.*, p.165).

Hence the general hermeneutical principle, "...that an obscure text or passage may be illumined by other texts of Scripture whose meaning is clear." (Elwell, *op.cit.*, p.43). This is one of the most important of principles in understanding the Bible, and exegeting it, namely that the clearer and more transparent passages should always be used to throw light on the more difficult and obscure passages AND NEVER VICE VERSA.

(d). A word about the Epistles and Progressive Revelation. While the Epistles are NO MORE the Word of God than Genesis, Numbers, Nehemiah or Job, the Epistles do occupy a special place in God's economy (or if you like God's 'plan'), in the sense that they are the highest forms of DOCTRINAL DEFINITION in the Bible. Thus, for example, to form a complete doctrinal position on controversial passages in Acts, without recourse to the Epistles, is a very dubious procedure to follow.

6). Stick to the Rules!

When employing the 'analogy of faith' in seeking to understand the Bible, the following must also be kept in mind:

(i). Clear Support.

(a). A doctrine that is clearly supported by the 'analogy of faith' in interpreting the Bible, (ie. in case you've forgotten, that means that Scripture must interpret Scripture), cannot ultimately be contradicted by a contrary and obscure passage.

Take, for example, the words of 1 John 3:6 "No one who lives in him keeps on sinning. No one who continues to sin has either seen him or known him." Furthermore, in the same chapter John continues: "No one who is born of God will continue to sin...he cannot go on sinning, because he has been born of God." (v.9).

These are not easy verses to understand, particularly in the light of a previous verse in 1st John which seems to say the exact opposite: ¶ "If we claim to be without sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us." (1 John 1:8). But John is not finished. Starting chapter two, he says: "My dear children, I write this to you so that you will not sin. But if ANYBODY DOES SIN, we have One...Jesus Christ...etc."

Now what? The mystery deepens! How can we reconcile the two? On the one hand he says that a Christian 'cannot sin.' On the other hand he acknowledges that Christians do sin. In fact if you deny that truth then you are deceiving yourself!

Various efforts have been made to 'explain' this conundrum. Some argue that John is speaking of the spirit or soul which is totally without sin. The physical body, however, can and does engage in sin. Some suggest that John is distinguishing between the old and the new nature. Others feel that John's words should be restricted to flagrant and extremely serious sins. Yet others argue that John is describing the 'ideal', not the 'actual' Christian experience.

None of the above solutions are really helpful. Why? Did you notice that not one followed the rule of 'analogy of faith', ie. FINDING ANOTHER CLEARER PASSAGE IN SCRIPTURE TO EXPLAIN THE DIFFICULT ONES IN JOHN! So where does that leave us? Let's go to a passage in Romans that might just throw some light on the difficult passages in First John. It will also illustrate the 'analogy of faith' procedure.

Rom.8:8-9: " Those CONTROLLED by the sinful nature cannot please God. YOU, however, are CONTROLLED NOT BY THE SINFUL NATURE but BY THE SPIRIT..." What is Paul saying here? He is speaking of two kinds of person, (i) the non-Christian ('the sinful nature'), and (ii) the Christian ('You...by the Holy Spirit').

He is also saying that they are both 'CONTROLLED.' The non-Christian is 'controlled' by his 'sinful nature.' What does that mean? At least two things:

(i). To be 'controlled' by your sinful nature means that until such time as God steps in, the non-Christian is continually, persistently, unalterably and permanently in the (humanly) unbreakable power and authority and lordship of the drives, thoughts, desires, and decisions of his 'sinful nature.' He is a slave and a willing servant of that sinful nature.

(ii). To be so 'controlled' means that your sinful nature is compellingly and commandingly and, I might add, tyrannically, being directed in only one direction, - away from God and Christ and Salvation and Holiness. Under the 'command' of your sinful nature you are driving down the 'broad way' in one direction, to hell.

This does not mean that the non-Christian cannot do good deeds and try to live a sophisticated, civilized and even 'moral' life. He still has traces of the Image of God in him and restraints of God's Common Grace. He may even be a very congenial and amiable person. But when you step back from him and put on the spectacles of Rom.8:8, you will very soon realize that he is dominated by non-and even anti-God emotions and that his WHOLE LIFE is moving non-stop in one direction only.

(ii). Controlled by the Holy Spirit.

(b). The very opposite is true of the Christian. He, we read, in contrast, is CONTROLLED BY THE SPIRIT. Here too are two aspects.

(i). The Christian is continually, persistently and unalterably under the power, authority and Lordship of the Holy Spirit. He is a 'new creation'. His sinful nature, though not yet infallible and still weak enough to sin, has nevertheless been regenerated and renewed to such an extent that there has been a basic and profound and radical alteration in his NATURE.

(ii). So powerfully has the Holy Spirit regenerated the Christian that he has been turned round in a diametrically opposite direction from that of the non-Christian. His feet have been set on the 'narrow way' which has as its culmination the presence of God in heaven and glory. In other words his WHOLE LIFE is steadily but surely moving in one direction only.

This does not mean that the Christian will never sin, but it does mean that in the OVERALL he is increasingly resisting sin and overwhelmingly anxious to live a life of holiness and obedience to God. THAT is his PRIMARY objective.

Curtis Vaughan sums it up well: " This does not mean that a Christian will never commit an act of sin.; (but) it does mean that the Christian does not PERSIST in sin..that sin cannot be the RULING PRINCIPLE in his life." (C.Vaughan. 1,2,3 John. A Study Guide Commentary. Zondervan, 1970, p.78).

Let me sum this section up by way of a military analogy. In May, 1980 the world was riveted when six Arab terrorists held a number of hostages captive in the Iranian Embassy in London. Even more dramatic was their rescue by the famed British SAS (Special Air Service).

To become part of the SAS demands a very exacting examination. Now, the point is this. When you are invited to join the SAS you are bound to be something of a novice. Many months of training still lie ahead. What's more you are also bound to make mistakes, show some ignorance and generally speaking make some 'flop's'.

But that, while serious, is in another sense irrelevant; they will be ironed out. The MOST IMPORTANT AND PRIMARY FACT is that you are IN THE SAS! You are NOT in some other part or section of the army. The SAS has drawn you into its life, its training, its principle of battle, its camaraderie, its bonds, its very life, existence and ethos, its exclusive organic unity.

The same holds true for the Christian. As a novice or even as an older Christian you are bound to fall into sin, which is serious and re-quires confession and repentance. But ABOVE AND BEYOND THAT IS SOME-THING OF GREATER IMPORTANCE and that is that PRIMARILY YOU ARE 'IN CHRIST', on the NARROW WAY and INDWELT AND CONTROLLED BY THE HOLY SPIRIT.

Thus to sum up this sub-section; the 'analogy of faith' means, inter alia, comparing Scripture with Scripture, just as we have done with the passages in 1st John and Romans 8.

7). Little Support.

When a doctrine or teaching or understanding is drawn from a difficult or obscure passage and finds little or no explanation or support else- where in the Bible (utilizing the 'analogy of faith' procedure), then such teaching or understanding must only be accepted, (i) with great reserve or (ii) not at all. Says Berkhof: " Possibly, not to say pro-bably, the passage requires a different interpretation put upon it... ." (Berkhof, op.cit., p.166).

Take, for example, Rev.20:1-3. John sees an ANGEL coming down out of heaven. The angel has a KEY to the ABYSS as well as a GREAT CHAIN.The angel seizes the DRAGON, that ancient SERPENT,that is the DEVIL or SA- TAN and proceeds to BIND him for a THOUSAND years. Satan is thrown in- to the Abyss and LOCKED and SEALED in it until the 1,000 years are up. He is then SET FREE for a short while.

You will notice that I have highlighted certain words and phrases. ¶The great problem he is to try and discover (i) whether the words and phrases must ALL be taken literally, or (ii) all figuratively or sym- bologically, or (iii) or SOME literally and OTHERS figuratively? You will, I trust, see that this is a particularly difficult passage to understand.

I am not going to make a detailed exegesis, except to point out cer-tain features and problems, - all, to indicate how careful we must be in being dogmatic in our interpretation. We can, I suggest, accept that there is a literal ANGEL and DEVIL. Why? Because using the 'ana- logy of faith' procedure we know that in many other parts of the Bib-le 'angels' and the 'Devil' are literal beings. No problem there!

But how must we understand the 'key', the 'abyss', the 'chain', the 'dragon', the 'serpent', the '1,000' years, the 'locking and sealing' etc. Why are these so problematic?

For one thing is the 'chain' made of steel rings, and how can you 'bind' an angel or spirit-being (such as the Devil) with a literal, steel chain?! The answer, I suggest, is that you cannot. Such a sce-nario might find room in Tolkien's "Lord of the Rings", but not in reality.

But if the 'chain' is not literal, then can we not say the same about the 'key' as well as the terms 'dragon' and 'serpent'. Satan is a fal- len angel, and besides how can he be a 'dragon' and a 'serpent' at one and the same time? Is the 'abyss' a literal, deep, craggy canyon or is it another name for hell (which is literal enough!)?

And the most controversial of all, - is the 1,000 years quite literal-ly a definite and chronological time-scale, or is it a Hebraism that simply signifies a very long period? We don't take the phrase in the Psalms, ie. "...and the cattle on a 1,000 hills " (Ps.50:10) that be- long to God, literally. Why not? Because, (i) we realize that the Psalmist is speaking figuratively, and (ii) who do the cattle belong to from hill 1,001 onwards?

I am asking these questions to make you aware of the fact that the passage in Rev.3:1-3, swarms

with problems THAT THE REST OF SCRIPTURE THROWS LITTLE LIGHT UPON. Consequently we must think more than just twice before we extract any dogmatic doctrine or teaching from it.

II. THE MEANING OF WORDS.

1). Communication.

The Bible is a book which communicates information verbally. It is wrong to approach the Bible as if it held a secret message which can only be broken by a Christian 'cryptographer.' ('Cryptographers' are used in war to break the code of enemy signals). While there are difficult passages, nevertheless, God so inspired 'holy men' that they "...spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit." (2 Pet.1:21).

Communication is closely linked to 'Revelation.' Think of the Bible as a great Communications Centre in and through which God has and still is Revealing a great deal of information. Even more important is the fact that this Revelation through the Word, this Communications Centre, is singular and absolutely unique. There is nothing like it in any other religion. Why?

Because it is a communication about God's Nature and Attributes and Actions. In our fallen state we are 'blind' about both the existence and nature of God (2 Cor.4:4). It seems to me that many Christians (including myself) tend to take our knowledge of God and of the Christian Faith too much for granted. Revelation and communication flows in one direction only, from God to man.

Unless God (who was under no obligation) had stooped down to reveal and communicate his love, his grace, his justice, his righteousness, his attributes, his hatred of sin, his plan of Salvation we would all still be in stygian darkness and blindness. Imagine that you have been placed in a totally blacked out room full of objects that were unfamiliar to you. Imagine the terror of a total absence of light with you blundering into one unfamiliar object after another. That is what the world would be like without the revelation of the light of God.

We would have no understanding of the nature of sin, the key to history, who we really are, what (if any) purpose we had for existing, why there was a world full of beauty and wonder, where the laws of science, medicine and physics (to name but three) even existed, why there was a universe with millions upon millions of galaxies and stars, why justice and integrity and honesty were necessary, why there was the romance of love, why human life was sacred and why we even possessed 'life.'

We would find ourselves in the same position as the main character of Umberto Eco's newly published novel "Foucault's Pendulum". At one stage the character, Casaubon, says to himself: " But now I have come to believe that the whole world is an enigma,...(an)...enigma that is made terrible by our own mad attempt to interpret it as though it had an underlying truth." (Umberto Eco. Foucault's Pendulum. Picador, 1990 and p.95).

2). The Study of Words or Etymology.

The Bible, written in human language, involves the use of grammar and distinct, unique, separate words. Revelation and communication from God, as we saw in the previous point, is verbal. The words were chosen by the Holy Spirit himself. Hence the orthodox Evangelical's belief in the 'verbal inspiration' of the Bible.

This is also called the Etymological study of Scripture. Etymology is the, "...study of the historical development of the meanings of words and phrases. It tells us, for eg., that the original meaning of 'good-bye' was 'God be with you' (F.A.Deist. Concise Dictionary of Theological Terms. J.L.van Schaik, 1986, p.56).

Berkhof underlines the necessity of such a study procedure: " The etymological meaning of the

words deserve attention first,...because it logically precedes all other meanings...it is advisable that the expositor of Scripture take notice of the established etymology of a word, since it may help to determine its real meaning and may illuminate it in a surprising manner." (Berkhof, op.cit., pp.67-68).

To illustrate the importance of words, think, for example, of the Hebrew words 'kopher', 'kippurim', and the word 'kapporeth.' They are translated respectively 'ransom', 'redemptions' or 'atonements', and 'Mercy-seat.' Yet they are all derived from the root 'kaphar', which means 'to cover', and contains the idea of a redemption or atonement brought about by a certain covering. Hence sin or the sinner is covered by the blood of the O.T.sacrifices.

3).The Meaning of Words in their Context - Usus Loquendi.

But it is not enough just to understand the meaning of words in isolation from their surroundings. It is of the utmost importance to establish the meaning of words in their CONTEXT, ie. in relation to the passage in which it stands, and not simply establishing the meaning ON ITS OWN. Here are some principles to go by:

(a). Grammatical Sense.

The language of Scripture should (i) be interpreted according to its grammatical sense, and (ii) the sense of any expression, proposition or declaration should be determined by the words used.

That is to say, the understanding of the LANGUAGE of the Bible must rest upon the correct GRAMMATICAL understanding of the word or words used. This is so straightforward as to be obvious. This is the first task of any missionary. He must understand the grammar of the words he is learning, - be it Zulu, Russian or Italian.

I would like to demolish the fear, hesitancy, reluctance and even hostility that the average Christian has towards learning the rudiments of Greek and Hebrew. You do not have to become an expert linguist. The use of a simple grammar book, a good lexicon, concordance, Bible dictionary and a good commentary, will soon help you to understand the meaning of the Greek and Hebrew words. Remember, you are dealing with GOD'S WORD! A little extra effort will reveal your reverence for it.

Put another way, the SENSE of any passage rests upon the correct understanding of the WORDS! Scriptural knowledge will be faulty in proportion to your ignorance of the meaning of the words in their original language and context.

(b). One Sense Only.

A word can have but one sense or meaning in the context in which it appears. Thus, if you take one word and think that it means the same throughout Scripture, irrespective of its context, you will run into serious trouble. To use an example.

The Greek words 'sarx' may mean, (i) the solid part of the body, except the bones, (ii) the whole substance of the body when it is synonymous with 'soma', (iii) the animal or sensual nature of man, (iv) human nature as dominated by sin, the seat and vehicle of sinful desires.

Now, if the interpreter were to ascribe all these meanings to the word used in John 6:53, he would end up attributing sin in an ethical sense to Christ!

QUESTIONS

1. Under the heading of 'The Analogy of Faith' elaborate on Consistency, (ii) Positive Analogy and (i) Origen's, (ii) (iv) General Analogy.

2. Under the heading of 'The Analogy of Faith' describe what you understand about
(i) Degrees, (ii) Sticking to the Rules, (iii) Little Support.
3. Under the heading of 'The Meaning of Words' discuss (i) Communication, (ii)
Etymology, and (iii) the Meaning of Words in their Context.
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THE BIBLE INSTITUTE OF SOUTH AFRICA

BIBLE STUDY CORRESPONDENCE COURSES COURSE NO:O38

by the

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UNDERSTANDING THE BIBLE

- OR -

HERMENEUTICS

CHAPTER IV

THE INTERPRETATION OF THOUGHTS

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- II. SPECIAL IDIOMS AND FIGURES OF THOUGHT
- 1). Representation of the Truth
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I. INTRODUCTION AND STYLE.

In our previous Chapter we looked at 'The Analogy of Faith' and 'The Meaning of Words.' In this Chapter we will be looking at words in their mutual relationship, or if you like 'thoughts' since a 'thought' is nothing less than a number of words put together in such a rational manner that they make-up, in their mutual relationship, a sentence which can be understood and which makes sense.

The interpretation of thoughts, therefore, is sometimes called 'Logical Interpretation.' This is so because it proceeds on the assumption that the languages of the Bible, are, like every other language, a product of the human mind and spirit, and developed logically in terms of grammar, syntax and sentence-construction. It can there be analysed logically as well, and likewise, so can the Bible's languages which are predominantly Hebrew, Greek and some Aramaic.

It is a singularly interesting fact that, to the best of my knowledge, no language has ever been discovered that cannot ultimately be reduced to a grammar, which will then lead to a Bible

translation. This is the main task of the missionary organization, Wycliffe Bible Translators.

It is not uncommon for Wycliffe missionaries to spend 10-12 years with a tribe or race, in order to build up as complete as possible a dictionary of their words and a complete grammatical and idiomatic analysis of that language, in order to translate the Bible into their tongue as accurately as possible.

The important point to note is that in a detailed study and translation, they are not simply translating individual words, but whole sentences and paragraphs, all of which involves 'thought processes.' The 'thought process' of one race is usually totally different to that of another race, in, for example, the possession of goods, humour, what is considered of value, medicinal treatment, religion, ancestor worship, sacred rituals, morality, what gives a man status, burial and so on.

It is no different in seeking to understand the Bible. Idioms, reasons for war, possession of goods, treatment of slaves, agriculture, animal husbandry, ie. their 'thought processes' differ from tribe to tribe, nation to nation, between Hebrews, Greeks, Romans and even from area to area in the main Roman provinces, as well as from city to city (ie. Jerusalem as over against Corinth).

This is also important in the understanding of different writers of the Bible. The 'thought-processes' of a Moses, an Isaiah, a Joel, a John, a Paul, a Peter and a Jude all vary considerably, and have to be taken into account in interpreting and understanding the Bible.

The Apostle John, for example, is meditative, reflective, contemplative, sometimes elliptical (by that I mean he approaches a historical event or teaching in a somewhat indirect manner). He is pensive, sometimes slightly philosophical, even metaphysical. His writings show you the beauty and godliness and Godly nature of the Gospel, as well as the unutterable joy of being a son or daughter of God. Here is a man with a warm, affectionate spirit...the beloved disciple.

"...John is (also) concerned with historical information. Again and again he drops into his narrative pieces of topographical information...or time notes." (L.Morris. The Gospel according to John. Eerdmans, The NICON Series, 1987, p.42). He always shows great sensitivity and an awareness that he is dealing with a very sacred subject. Witness, for example, the sensitive, understanding and careful manner with which he handles Christ's prayer in John 17.

Paul shows some of the same characteristics, but also many that are singular to himself. Paul is pre-eminently an evangelist and a theologian (yes, the two CAN go together!). Paul, as we see him in Acts is the soul seeker, aflame with a message of which he is not ashamed.

He is also a great debater; he goes from city to city and from one synagogue to another to argue the merits and God-given nature of the Gospel. He is the first 'apologist'. I do not mean that he apologizes for the Gospel. That, Paul could never do! I mean that he piles argument upon argument that the Gospel is from God alone.

This is apparent in his epistles when we see him, stage by stage, developing one Christian doctrine after another. Paul is not afraid to break out in a doxology and praise (Romans 11:33-36) and neither is he afraid to use his intellectual gifts in his long argument which deals with sin, unrighteousness, condemnation and death through Adam in contrast with righteousness, justification, life and reconciliation with God through Christ's first coming (Rom.5:12-21).

Paul was also the outstanding theologian, covering more doctrinal aspects of the Gospel than any other N.T. writer. He deals with the doctrines of man, sin, grace, justification by faith, the atonement, Christ as the Second Adam, 'union with Christ', election, predestination, the resurrection, - and above all God in all his glory and wrath and grace and love, and many more.

So, to tie this into our subject again: to interpret and understand ANY author of either the O.T. or N.T. it is very important to understand his style, his particular approach, what in particular he emphasizes and what the background and circumstances were that might have influenced his style and 'thought processes.'

II. SPECIAL IDIOMS AND FIGURES OF THOUGHT.

1). Representation of the Truth

Some figures of speech promote a lively representation of the truth. (i). The Simile.

" A simile is a figure of speech in which two things or actions are likened on the strength of some common quality though they are in all other respects unlike..." (R.Ridout and C.Witting, eds. The Facts of English. Pan, 1976, p.293). From this definition it will be seen that a Simile and a Metaphor are virtually identical. A Metaphor is like a condensed Simile. Similes can usually be spotted by such linkage words as 'like' and 'as.'

Thus in Ps.2b we read, "...you will dash them to pieces LIKE pottery." And Is.1:8 " The Daughter of Zion is left LIKE a shelter in the vine- yard, LIKE a hut in a field of melons, LIKE a city under siege." See too Ps.102:6 and Song of Solomon 2:9.

(ii). The Allegory.

The Allegory, "...is merely an extended metaphor, and should be interpreted on the same general principles." (Berkhof, op.cit., p.89).The Allegory is continually using words in a metaphorical sense, and its narrative, however supposable in itself, is obviously fictitious. See here Ps.80:8-15 and John 10:1-18.

2). Brevity of Expression.

Other figures of speech promote brevity of expression. They result from the rapidity and energy of the author's thoughts which omit superfluous words. The following is an example.

(i). The Ellipsis.

This is, "...the shortening of a sentence by the omission of a word or words that may be readily understood from the context or from general knowledge, e.g....'The first boy was reading, the second (BOY WAS) writing a letter, and the third (BOY WAS) playing in the garden.'" (Ridout and Witting, op.cit., p.114). The words in brackets, ie. BOY WAS, is an example of using an Ellipsis.

An example is in Gen.3:22 " And the Lord God said, 'The man has now become like one of us (FATHER, SON AND HOLY SPIRIT) knowing good and evil.'" Who the 'us' are is not stated, but from the context of the whole Scripture can only refer to the Trinity.

So too in 1 Cor.6:13 " Food (IS) for the stomach and the stomach (IS) for food - 'but God will destroy them (FOOD AND STOMACH) both!'"

3). Softening an Expression.

Still other figures of speech aim at softening an expression. They find their explanation in the author's delicacy of feeling or a sense of modesty.

(i). Euphemism.

The use of a Euphemism consists of substituting a less offensive word for one that expresses just as accurately what is meant, but in a more delicate way. See here:Acts 7:60 "...he fell asleep." This passage refers to the stoning of Stephen and the phrase indicated as a Euphemism

refers to his death. Luke however softens the concept of being stoned to death by the use of the concept of falling asleep.

Our Lord uses the same expression when he talks of Lazarus. " Our friend Lazarus has fallen asleep..." (Jon 11:11). Paul also uses the same expression in 1 Thess.4:13-14.

(ii). Litotes.

This involves describing something negatively in order to get the opposite and positive truth more strongly across or illuminated. The classic example is Rom.1:16 " I am not ashamed of the Gospel, etc..." What Paul is really meaning is that he is immensely proud of the Gospel since he goes on to say, "...because it is the power of God ..." Putting it negatively in fact strengthens the positive aspect which you really want to convey. See also: Ps.51:17 and Is.42:3.

(iii). Meiosis.

This is a figure of speech similar to Litotes: " This is an under- statement for the sake of emphasis, often for humorous effect, e.g. ...'When one of the passengers in the railway compartment stepped heavily on my foot, I mentioned the matter to him.' " (Ridout and Witting, *ibid.*, p.193). Such an event could only have taken place in an English railway coach!

Heb.13:17 " Obey your leaders...so that their work will be a joy, not a burden, for that would be OF NO ADVANTAGE TO YOU."

4). Strengthening an Expression.

(i). Irony.

Irony contains censure or ridicule under cover of praise or compliment. This figure of speech is a kind of 'cousin in reverse' to Litotes. An example is found in Job.12:1-2, "Then Job replied: 'Doubtless you are the people, and wisdom will die with you!' " In 'complementing' his friends, Job is using irony or ridicule to show them what he really thinks of their pomposity. See too 1 Kings 18:27.

(ii). Epizeuxis.

In this figure of speech an expression is strengthened by the simple repetition of a word. Gen.22:11 " But the angel of the Lord called out to him from heaven, 'Abraham! Abraham!' " See too 1 Sam.3:3-10 as and Is.40:1.

(iii). Hyperbole.

This figure of speech is frequently used and consists of rhetorical overstatement. An example is found in Gen.22:17 " I will surely bless you and make your descendants as numerous as the stars in the sky and as the sand on the seashore. " In the light of the fact that there are approximately 100 million galaxies, with each galaxy containing something of the order of 100 million stars each, it is obvious that God could not have referred to the Jewish people in literal terms. It is therefore a hyperbole or overstatement to indicate a vast number of people. See too Deut.1:28.

III. THE PARABLE.

1). Derivation.

The word is derived from the Greek word 'paraballo' which means 'to throw' or 'place by the side of.'

This suggests the idea, "...of placing one thing by the side of another for comparison. It denotes

a symbolic method of speech, in which a moral or spiritual truth is illustrated by the analogy of common experience...The parable limits itself to that which is real, and in its imagery does not go beyond the limits of probability, or of what might be actual fact...

" The Lord had a twofold purpose in using parables, viz. to reveal the mysteries of the Kingdom of God to his disciples, and to conceal them from those who had no eye for the realities of the spiritual world." (Berkhof, op.cit., p.100).

To illustrate the above statement, take for example the parable of the Sower in Luke 8:5ff. For one thing, this parable does not go beyond the limits of probability. In other words, it is rooted in factual reality. Such a situation, described by our Lord, could really have existed. It was, therefore, a common-enough experience which those with any kind of agricultural knowledge would have recognized as a distinct probability.

Next, the different kinds of soil are symbolic of the spiritual condition of various kinds of heart. Thus the common-enough, real and factual experience is (by way of analogy or comparison) used to illustrate a moral or spiritual truth.

2). Interpretation.

In the interpretation of the of the parable the following elements must be taken into consideration.

(i). The scope of the Parable/Truth to be illustrated. ¶ (a). The occasion on which a parable is introduced may illustrate its meaning and bearing. ¶ - Matt.20:1ff is explained by 19:27. ¶ - Matt.25:14ff " " " verse 13.¶ - Luke 16:19-31" " " verse 14.¶ (b). The object of the parable may be expressly stated in the introduction, as in Luke 18:1. ¶ (c). Certain expressions at the end of a parable may also indicate its bearing, cf. Matt.13:49; Luke 11:9; 12:21.

(d). Again, a similar parable of similar importance may point out the thing to be illustrated. Compare Luke 15:3f with Matt.18:12f. The 14th verse of Matt.18 contains a valuable hint.

(e). In many cases the interpreter will have to examine the context to understand the parable.

(ii). The Figurative representation of the parable. ¶ " After the scope of the parable is determined, the figurative representation calls for close scrutiny. The formal narrative is meant at once to reveal and to conceal the truth and must be analysed carefully. All the necessary geographical, archaeological and historical light must be brought to bear upon it." (Berkhof, ibid., p.101).

(iii). The term " tertium coparationis." ¶ The exact point of comparison must be detected or located. There is always some special aspect of the Kingdom of God that stands out, some particular line of duty to be followed, or some danger to be shunned which the parable seeks to centralize and to which all the details and all the imagery is subservient. As long as the interpreter has not discovered this one point, he cannot hope to understand the central point of the parable, and he should not try to explain the individual traits, for these can only be seen in the light of the central idea. Moreover great care should be taken not to ascribe independent spiritual significance to ALL the DETAILS of the parable.

(iv). Some of Jesus' parables were clearly intended to illustrate several lessons. An example is the parable of the Prodigal Son, where stress is laid on the joy which God as Father has in forgiving his children, the nature of

repentance. Also the

sin of jealousy and self-righteousness (Luke 15: 11-32).

3). An example of wrong interpretation.

Even such a great and brilliant scholar like Augustine shows in the following example just how wrong one can interpret a parable if you insist upon using the allegorical method of interpretation. This is his interpretation of the parable of the Good Samaritan:

A certain man went down from Jerusalem to Jericho = Adam ¶Jerusalem = the heavenly city of peace, from which Adam fell ¶Jericho = the moon, this signifies Adam's mortality ¶thieves = the devil and his angels ¶stripped him = namely, of his mortality ¶beat him = by persuading him to sin ¶and left him half-dead = Adam died spiritually, result: he is half-dead ¶the priest and Levite = priesthood and ministry of the O.T. ¶the Samaritan = Christ ¶bound his wounds = binding the restraint of sin ¶oil = comfort of good hope ¶wine = exhortation to work with a fervent spirit ¶beast = the flesh of Christ's incarnation ¶inn = the church ¶the morrow = after the Resurrection ¶two-pence = promise of this life and the life to come ¶innkeeper = Paul ¶ (Fee and Stuart, op.cit., p.124). Augustine broke the cardinal rule of hermeneutics or understanding the Bible, namely, to understand it in the literal and obvious sense, which is quite simply - at its most basic level - to do good unto others in their time of need. Instead, like the Schoolmen of the Middle Ages he tried to hunt out secret and hidden meanings. He was apparently unable to grasp that what our Lord said, he actually meant to be taken literally.

IV. THE CONNECTION.

1). An Absolute Necessity. As regarding this point Berkhof says the following:

" The absolute necessity of taking particular notice of the preceding and following (verses or passages), the near and remote connection of a passage, can scarcely be over-emphasized. It is the 'condition sine qua non' of all exegesis. And yet this is quite often neglected, especially by those who regard the Bible as a collection of prooftexts...

" The division of the contents of Scripture into chapters and verses is always apt to endanger this conception. Consequently, many passages of the Bible were misinterpreted in the course of time, and these per- versions were handed down from generation to generation..." (Berkhof, op.cit.,pp.104-105).

For eg. Rom.3:20 with the connecting word 'Therefore' points backwards in explanation of Rom.3:9-19. The same is true of Rom.5:18 and the linking word 'Consequently' which points back to 5:1-17 in explanation. Likewise Rom.8:1 points back to virtually all the preceding chapters of Romans.

2). Four kinds of Connection.

(i). Purely historical. This is when one historical narrative follows another to which it is genetically and ideologically related. Matt.3:13-17; 4:1-11.

(ii). Doctrinal. This is when Paul, for example, develops a doctrine or theological argument that takes up a whole chapter or chapters or sections. Rom.3+4; Rom.8:28-39.

(iii). Logical. This is when thoughts or arguments are presented in a strictly logical order. Rom.5:1ff; 1 Cor.15:12-19.

(iv). Psychological, which often causes an apparent break in the line of thought. Heb.5:11ff.

3). Conjunctions.

In studying the connections, close attention must be paid to the conjunctions. A conjunction is that part of speech that joins words and phrases, such as - 'and, but, yet, as well as, so, or, nor, both, however, therefore, after, before, since, for, if, because, when, where, now that, whatever, etc'.

4). Immediate Context.

As a general rule the connection between verses should be sought in the immediate context. But if the passage does not yield good sense in connection with the immediate context then a more remote context should be consulted. For example, at the beginning of a chapter or even in a previous chapter. Thus, it is difficult to link Rom.2:16 with v.15, but v.16 makes more sense if linked with vv.12-13.

5). Pause and Reflect.

When the connection is not at once apparent, the interpreter should not hastily conclude that there is no connection between certain verses, or even that there is a change of thought or direction. This may be the case, but the interpreter should rather pause and reflect once again on the passage.

" In 1.Cor.8, Paul treats of the right use of Christian liberty in 'adiaphora' (things indifferent). Now it seems as if he turns away from this subject in 9:1f, and begins with a defense of his apostle-ship when he says:'Am I not an Apostle?' But this is only apparent. He points out that he, as an apostle of Jesus Christ, has many rights and liberties, but makes a considerate use of them, in order that his work may be more fruitful." (Berkhof, *ibid.*, p.106).

6). Three things to watch for.

The interpreter should have his eyes open to : 'Parentheses', 'Digressions', and 'Anacolutha.' These all disturb the connecting links more or less.

(i). Parentheses. In this, remarks of one kind or another, for eg. time, place, brief secondary circumstances are intercalated (inserted or interposed), after which the paragraph or sentence is continued, as if no interruption had taken place. Gen.23:2; Is.52:14; Acts 1:15.

(ii). Digressions. These differ from parentheses in that they are longer and consist of deviations from the line of argument that is then pursued in a parallel or collateral topic, or even turning from the direct course of thought to another somewhat allied to it. Thus in Ephesians 3:2-13, Paul begins a thought in v.1 and then only continues it in v.14!

(iii). Anacolutha, consists of an unexpected change from one construction to another, without completing the former. They are often expressive of strong emotions.

In Rom.5:12 the apostle says, " Therefore, just as sin entered the world through one man and death through sin, and in this way death came to all men, because all sinned...". Now Paul would naturally be expected to continue in something of the following vein, "...so also by one, Jesus Christ, righteousness entered, and through righteousness life." But he drops that idea in v.12 and only picks it up again in v.18, and in the meantime the construction of his thought pattern has changed.

7). The writer often Anticipates.

Sometimes when the connection is not obvious, the writer may in fact be reflecting upon or answering the thoughts he knows are in the reader's mind, rather than answering in actual words.

A careful study of the discourses of Christ reveals that he often gave answers to thoughts rather than the words of his hearers. Lk.14:1-5; Jn.3:2-3; 5:17, 19, 41; 6:26.

8). Accept the Explanations.

Interpreters should gladly accept the explanations which the authors themselves occasionally give of their own words or of the words of speakers, in the immediate context. Jn.2:21; Rom.7:18; 7:29; 12:33.

QUESTIONS.

1. Discuss (i) the aspects noted in the Introduction and Style, (ii) under the second main heading (Representation of the Truth), explain what is a Simile and an Allegory, giving Biblical examples.
2. Elaborate on (i) the Ellipsis, (ii) Euphemism, Litotes and Meiosis, and (iii) Irony, Epizeuxis and Hyperbole, always giving Biblical examples where you can.
3. Write an essay on (i) the Interpretation of the Parable, and (ii) the wrong way to interpret a Parable.
4. Elaborate on "The Connection."

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by the

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UNDERSTANDING THE BIBLE

- OR - HERMENEUTICS

CHAPTER V

FIGURATIVE AND HISTORICAL INTERPRETATION

I. THE FIGURATIVE USE OF WORDS

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I. THE FIGURATIVE USE OF WORDS.

- (I). The Principal 'Tropes' used in Scripture.

In those figures of speech commonly called 'tropes', "...a word or expression is used in a different sense from that which properly belongs to it." (Berkhof, op.cit., p.83). 'Tropes' is also defined as, "...a figure of speech which consists in the use of a word or phrase different from its ordinary meaning...Example: " All in a hot and COPPER sky, the BLOODY sun at noon." (C.L.Barnhart. Ed.in Chief. The World Book Dictionary, Vol.II, L-Z. Field Enterprises, 1975, p.2223.).

The principal 'tropes' are: The Metaphor, The Metonymy and The Synecdoche.

- 1). The Metaphor.

The metaphor is a figure of speech, "...in which two things or actions are likened on the strength

of some common quality though they are in all other respects unlike...(for example)...'Miss Amelia Jones is a fussy old hen', 'the sands of time', 'crocodile tears', 'the Countess sailed across the room.' " (Ridout and Witting, op.cit., p.293).

(Before we continue, and in order to avoid confusion, I must point out that a 'simile' and a 'metaphor' are very alike. In a simile I would say: 'Miss Amelia Jones is LIKE a fussy old hen.' In a metaphor one would simply condense or shorten that to: 'Miss Amelia Jones IS a fussy old hen.' Thus, the use of the word 'LIKE' turns a metaphor into a simile, while leaving the word 'LIKE' out turns a simile into a metaphor.).

Metaphors frequently appear in the Bible. No less than seven (!) make their appearance in Ps.18:2 " The Lord IS my ROCK, my FORTRESS and my DELIVERER; my God is my rock (already mentioned), in whom I take REFUGE. He is my SHIELD and the HORN of my salvation, my STRONGHOLD." The metaphors are therefore - rock, fortress, deliverer, refuge, shield, horn, stronghold.

Jesus, in speaking to the Pharisees, says of Herod: " He replied, 'Go tell that FOX...' " (Luke 13:32).

There are two kinds of metaphors in the Bible that have reference to God; they need special mention.

(i). Anthropopathisms. In this case human emotions and desires are ascribed to God. Thus, when, just before the Flood, God saw sin and wickedness and unrighteousness everywhere, we read: " The Lord was GRIEVED...and his heart was filled with PAIN. " (Gen.6:6). In the N.T. we read: " And do not GRIEVE the Holy Spirit of God," (Eph.4:30). See also Deut 13:17).

(ii). Anthropomorphisms. In this case bodily members (ie. parts of the body) and physical activities are attributed to God. It is important to keep this 'anthropomorphic metaphor' in mind, since Christians are often puzzled at what seems to be really violent actions on the part of God.

Thus we read: "...STRIKE all my enemies on the jaw, BREAK the teeth of the wicked." (Ps.3:7). Likewise we read in a later Psalm: " BREAK the teeth in their mouths, O God..." (Ps.58:6). Both these psalms are psalms of David.

Keep in mind therefore:

- (1). That these are basically 'figures of speech', and in particular 'anthropomorphic metaphors'.
- (2). David is not concerned here with any personal revenge (although it may look like that in Ps.3). He is essentially asking God to act against the forces of the ungodly, anti-godly and unrighteousness.
- (3). David was a soldier. Consequently he would think in military terms which would inevitably involve the use of violence.
- (4). We do have Biblical justification to ask God to frustrate and punish and judge and act against such forces of evil. In World War II Christians were justified in praying that God would frustrate the actions of, and judge an evil man like Adolph Hitler.

See further: Exod.15:16; Ps.34:16; Lam.3:56; Zech.14:4.

Much of the language in Revelation is metaphorical, such as the description of heaven as a city with GOLDEN streets and PEARLY gates. These are metaphors because the 'golden quality' and colour and brilliance and sheen of the streets have the same common quality of highly polished gold, but are not in fact made of real mined gold.

2). The Metonymy.

This is, "...a figure of speech in which the thing really meant is re- presented by something closely associated with it, e.g.'The stage'(ac- ting profession) is up in arms against this critic...He is even alleg- ed to be addicted to 'the bottle' (strong drink)...Other examples are: 'the turf' (horseracing), 'the Press' (newspapers in general), 'the pulpit' (preachers and preaching), 'the table' (food)..." (Ridout and Witting, *ibid.*, p.194). The relation is a mental rather than a phy- sical one.

In the parable of Dives and Lazarus, Abraham says, " They have MOSES and the PROPHETS..." (Lk.16:29). Jesus naturally means that they have the writings and therefore the instructions and warnings of Moses and the various prophets. In Is.22:22, the phrase " the KEY of the house of David " conveys the concept of control over the royal house. In these cases, therefore, 'the writings' are closely associated Moses and the prophets, and 'control'is closely associated with the Key.

3). Synecdoche.

This is, "...a figure of speech in which a part is made to stand for the whole, or the whole for a part, e.g. 'The brains of New Zealand' (stands) for the brainy people of NZ..." (Ridout and Witting, *ibid.*, p.317). Furthermore an individual can be made to stand for a class, or a class for the individual, a plural for a singular, or a singular for a plural.

Thus Jephthah is said to have been buried " in the cities of Gilead " (Judg.12:7), when only one city is meant. When the prophet says in Dan.12:2, " And many of those that sleep in the dust of the earth shall awake ", he certainly did not mean to teach partial or limited resurrection! The word 'MANY' is a figure of speech which stands for the 'WHOLE OF MANKIND.'

In the same way, when Paul in Rom.5:19 suggests that through one man " the 'many' were made sinners...", he is not suggesting that only part of the human race is fallen! Once again the 'MANY' is made to stand for the 'WHOLE'.

(II). Figurative or Literal?

In this section we will look at some Internal helps to determine whe-ther the 'figurative' or 'literal' sense is meant in a verse or pas- sage. The Jews and even the disciples, often made the serious mistake of interpreting literally what Jesus meant figuratively.

In John 4, Jesus is talking to the Samaritan woman and tells her in verse 10 that if she knew who the gift of God was and who was asking her for water (Himself, the only Son of God, and the true Messiah), then she could "...have asked him and he would have given (her) LI- VING WATER."

The woman thinks that Jesus means 'literal' water, notwithstanding the fact that he is talking about himself and that truly knowing him will quench her spiritual thirst, so much so that it,"... will become in him (ie.the sinner) a spring of water welling up to eternal life." (v.13). The same is true of Jn.4:32; 6:52; and Matt.16:6-12.

What then are these helps?

1). Figurative language an Impossibility.

There are certain writings in which the use of figurative language is a priori impossible.

These include: The Moral Law or Ten Commandments; other laws in the first five books of the Bible; historical writings such as Kings, Chronicles, the Gospels and the Acts of the Apostles; and references, for example, in the Psalms that refer to historical facts, such as Ps.51:2-4; 68:7-8. Likewise such events as the Creation (in Genesis), the Incarnation, Atonement and

Resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ.

This is an important point in relation to the inspiration and author-ity of the Scriptures. The story of the Creation in Gen.1:1ff. is ne-ver to be taken as 'figurative.' It is clear from Mark 13:19 that Je- sus accepted the Creation story as literal. Evangelicals may differ on the length of the 'days' of creation, but orthodox evangelicals must always accept the full historicity and literal reality of the Crea- tion.

Likewise do orthodox evangelicals accept the literality and histori-city of the Crucifixion, the Resurrection and the Ascension. Dr.Fran- cis Schaeffer, speaking of the Crucifixion, put it very vividly when he said that if you ran your thumb up the main, vertical piece of wood, out of which the cross was made, you would get a splinter of wood in your finger!

This need to retain the literal and historical is also tied in with orthodox, evangelical theology. If you believe that the 'Creation' and 'Resurrection' events are merely figurative, then it is bound to have profound consequences in Christian doctrine and theology as well. This is no new problem; it has plagued the Church for well over a cen- tury now.

It is most interesting to read in the newly published 2nd Volume of the Life of Dr.Martyn Lloyd-Jones, what reaction he caused by his stand on the fundamentals of evangelical theology as far back as 1949! In the Dec 29, 1949 issue of the 'British Weekly', a regular colum-nist, rejoicing in the anonymity of the name 'Ilico', wrote the fol-lowing:

" 'Not "Liberalism" but obscurantism would seem the greater danger in these days'...God has not revealed 'theological propositions'...There is no one set of statements which anyone may claim to possess the tru-th:There have, in fact, been a GOOD MANY doctrines of the Atonement as of the Person of Christ or of the Trinity, and NONE of them seems to us today TO BE FULLY ADEQUATE to the Gospel.' " (I.H.Murray. David Martyn Lloyd-Jones : The Fight of Faith 1939-1981. Banner of Truth, 1990, p.192).

What I am trying to impress upon you is the urgent necessity to dis-tinguish between 'literal' and 'figurative' interpretations of Scrip- ture. If you interpret, say, the Creation or the Incarnation or the Resurrection 'figuratively', and not literally, then you emasculate fundamental, orthodox, evangelical and Biblical doctrines.

On the other hand if you interpret the passage which tells us that the 'cattle on a thousand hilltops are the Lord's' in a literal manner, then you make Scripture absurd.

2). Literal unless Contradictory or Absurd.

Words should be understood in their literal sense, unless such a lit-eral interpretation involves an obvious and manifest contradiction, an absurdity, or if the statement, illustration, parable, analogy etc. is obviously to be taken figuratively. An example here is the " I am's " of Jesus, - " I am the Door (Gate)" (Jn.10:7), " I am the True Vine " (Jn.15:1), and so on. It is pre- cisely on a point such as this that the unity of the Reformers was wrecked at the Marburg Colloquy in 1529.

The reformers such as Luther, Zwingli and Melanchton could mutually accept a formidable number of evangelical doctrines. What wrecked the whole conference was the interpretation of the sacrament of communion, and in particular the understanding of such phrases, used by Christ, as " This is my body ...this is my blood."

Luther, "...stood firm on the plain meaning of the words 'This my Body', Zwingli on its spiritual, figurative meaning. Luther felt that no agreement could come out of such a basic difference...(and)...took the view that the corporal presence of Christ in the sacrament was no 'non-essential'..." (J.Atkinson. Martin Luther and the Birth of Pro- testanism. Penguin, 1968, p.273).

It is today generally accepted by orthodox Evangelicals that Luther's insistence on taking those words of our Lord literally is inconsistent with the principles of hermeneutics or Understanding the Bible. For, if one adopts Luther's interpretation, then one must be consistent and take " I am the Door " and " I am the True Vine " also literally, which would be an absurdity.

Likewise, in Jn.6:53-57, our Lord is quite obviously not referring to his physical flesh and blood; that would be cannibalism! So too the reference to the rebuilding of the Temple in 3 days (Jn.2:19) is not to be taken literally, as is his reference to the waters of eternal refreshment in Jn.4:13-14.

3). The Importance of Strict Questioning.

The interpreter should pay strict attention to the following questions:

1). Is my interpretation in keeping with 'The Analogy of Faith'? (See Chapter Three). ¶2). Does it conform and 'fit into' the surrounding context? ¶3). Does it conform to the character of the subject? ¶4). Is it part of Parallelism (the same truth expressed slightly differently in the same immediate passage)? ¶5). Does it conform doctrinally with other parts of Scripture, especially the doctrinal definitions in the N.T. Epistles? ¶6). Is the interpretation true to the contextual argument, in, for example, the Epistles? ¶7). Is my interpretation following the same development of thought that the Bible Author had in mind? ¶8). Am I guilty of 'spiritualizing' or making an 'allegory' out of what is plain, unvarnished Biblical History? (See, for example, 2 Kings 3:15-20, where the digging of ditches can be 'spiritualized' into a call upon believers to be 'ditched Christians', ie. fully surrendered Christians!) ¶ (III). Interpreting Figurative Language.

Here are some useful principles to employ.

1). Clarity.

The interpreter or bible student should have a clear understanding of the things upon which the figures are based or borrowed since there is usually a certain resemblance between the two. Thus when our Lord uses the expression, " I am the Door " (ie. 'the figure') he has in mind the concept of " entrance into God's presence " (ie. the 'resemblance' upon which 'the figure' rests. Thus: 'Door' = 'entrance').

(i). Derivations.

The figurative language of the Bible is usually derived from especially, (1) The physical features of the holy land such as its geography, topography, lakes, rivers, plains, the city of Jerusalem itself, (2) the religious institutions of Israel, such as the tabernacle, temple, sacrifices, priesthood, blood atonement, (3) the literal, narrative history of God's Ancient people, and (4) the daily life and customs of the various peoples that occupy a prominent place in the Bible, ie. going up to the temple to sacrifice.

(ii). Examples.

Thus, we, for example, read in Ps.92:12 " The righteous shall flourish like a PALM TREE, they will grow like the CEDAR of Lebanon." However, we must realize that we can never hope to clearly understand that verse and its obviously 'figurative' meaning, until we are solidly acquainted with the 'literal' characteristics of a PALM and a CEDAR tree.

In other words the spiritual flourishing of the righteous is being illustrated by the way a Palm tree flourishes! To take this particular example a step further, the Lion Handbook to the Bible says this:

" The well-known date is borne on the 'date-palm' (*Phoenix dactylifera*) which grows in oases in Sinai and in the warmer parts of Palestine. It is a lofty palm-tree...surmounted by a tuft of

huge leaves..." (The Lion Handbook to the Bible. Lion Publishing, 1973, p. 97).

What does this suggest about the righteous flourishing as a Palm tree? I do not think it is 'spiritualizing' or 'allegorizing' if we say that what comes to mind is (i) fruit (dates), (ii) refreshment (the cluster of palm-trees at an oasis), and perhaps (iii) shade. Thus these physical factors naturally flow over into the spiritual qualities that ought to be part of a spiritually flourishing Christian.

What is further important here is to discern the 'natural' qualities that can be applied to the 'righteous', and not 'unnaturally force' parallel qualities.

Thus it would be quite wrong to say that because the palm-tree grows straight-up, therefore we must be 'upright Christians!' That is forcing the analogy in an unnatural manner. All trees, generally speaking, grow into an upright position, - including trees with poisonous berries! Neither should anything unnatural be forced with regards to the 'greenness' of the leaves, or the size and shape and usefulness of the date.

2). Discover the Principle Idea.

The bible student who is seeking to understand the Bible should make a point of discovering the 'Principle' idea in the passage, without at first placing too much importance upon the details. "When the Biblical authors employed such figures as metaphors, they generally had some specific point or points of agreement in mind." (Berkhof, op. cit., p.86).

In Rom.8:17, for example, Paul is speaking of us as "heirs of God and joint-heirs with Christ." It is obvious that in his main point he is referring to the blessings which believers receive with Christ from their common Heavenly Father. But the figurative language contained in the word 'heir' would be pressed too far if it were made to imply the death of the Heavenly Father as the testator!

3). Inadequacies.

In connection with the figurative language that refers to God and the eternal order of things, the interpreter should keep in mind that it (the figurative...etc.) generally offers but a very inadequate expression of the perfect reality.

God is called a Light, a Rock, a Fortress, a High Tower, a Sun and a Shield, etc. All these figures - because they are human and an expression of fallen man's mind and heart, even after regeneration - only go some little way to convey what God is really like. And in explaining them we must not go to un-Biblical and ridiculous lengths, for then we would end up trivialising God.

Special care must be taken here in the use of examples or illustrations or applications. To say, for example, that because God is like a Sun, he therefore keeps us 'spiritually warm' may sound pious, but just WHAT EXACTLY does THAT mean!? Perhaps a better way of applying that passage is to suggest that like the Sun, God is a Being of great brilliance and glory.

II. HISTORICAL INTERPRETATION.

(I). Definition.

Grammatical and Historical interpretation are closely related. The first is embedded in the second. "The term is here used to denote the study of Scripture in the light of those historical circumstances that put their stamp on the different books of the Bible...the historical refers to the material contents of the Bible." (Berkhof, *ibid.*, p.113). It proceeds upon the following assumptions.

(II). Basic Assumptions for Historical Interpretation.

1). Historical Origin of the Word of God.

The Word of God originated in an historical manner, and therefore can only be understood in the light of that history. This does not mean that everything the Bible contains can or must be explained historically. There are many passages of Scripture that belong to the circle of the non-historical. I am not suggesting that if they are non-historical, they are not a revelation from God. In other words that non-historical equals not 'inspired', or not 'infallible/inerrant.'

What I mean is that they are not historical because they are 'parables', 'prophecies', 'metaphores', 'similes', 'hyperbole', and so on. But it does mean that large sections of the Bible consist of history or historical narrative, and must consequently be understood or interpreted historically and not symbolically or figuratively.

2). Understood as a Living Historical Record.

A word or phrase or passage is never fully understood until it is understood as part of a living, historical record originating in the soul of the author. It is impossible to understand an author or passage unless what he has written is seen against the proper historical background. Authors are, ultimately, the product of their historical environment.

He is a child of the age, culture, history, people and environment in which he lived. The place, the time, the circumstances, and the prevailing view of the world, world-events, and of life-in-general will naturally colour the writings produced at that time and in that place

(III). Demands on the Exegete.

1). Know the Author.

Don't be frightened off by the word 'exegete'. It simply refers to any Christian who tries to understand and interpret the Bible in accordance with the different laws, rules and principles that are found scattered throughout the various Chapters of this Course. If you are doing that, then you are an 'exegete'. Not perhaps like men (John Murray, J.I.Packer, F.F.Bruce, Leon Morris, D.M.Lloyd-Jones or J.R.W. Stott) who spend years in study and write impressive commentaries, but nevertheless you are still an 'exegete.'

One of the first things that you must do in order to do exegesis properly, is to seek to know the author of the book or passage you are studying, - Moses, David, Joel, Job, Paul, Peter, Jude and John. You must try to get as much knowledge as possible about: his parentage, his land, country, his circumstances, his character, his upbringing, his temperament, his education, his social class, his intellectual ability, his religious (O.T. or N.T) background, and so on.

2). Reconstructing the Historical.

The 'exegete' must try, as far as possible, to reconstruct the historical data at hand as well as the historical environment in which the particular writings originated, and for this he might have to establish an historical hypothesis. In other words he must try and 'think himself into' the author's world and environment.

He will have to know the physical features and geographical contours of the land in which the books were written, as well as that land's character, history, customs, morals, government, and religious aspects. What were the Assyrians, the Egyptians, the Edomites, the Philistines, the Medo-Persians like? In other words what were the people amongst whom and for whom the Scriptural author wrote?

Furthermore, this means the exegete must know as much as possible about the original readers (ie. the Corinthians, the Ephesians, etc. and some of that information he will find in Acts); what the writer's purpose was and how he went about it.

With regard to this last aspect Paul had a distinctive style using an introduction that would logically lead to his various arguments which he would logically develop in his opening chapters, then in his last few chapters always applying his doctrinal arguments to practical Christian living.

(IV). Personal Characteristics of Author/Speaker.

1. Who is the Author?

This is the first question! Some Bible books name the author, some do not. If the exegete knows then he can usually complement that with a study of the the book itself which often reveals something of the author's personality traits. If he does not know then he must comb the book for clues on his: personality, character, temperament, disposition, habits, eccentricities, his mode of thought, his relationship with God, what motives controlled his life and speech or prophesy, his profession, - priest, prophet, shepherd, medical man, king, apostle, etc.

The best way of becoming acquainted with the author is, as I have already suggested, to study his writings diligently. It is amazing how much a man will reveal of himself in his writings. If, for example, you want to know more about Moses then study the Pentateuch. And in particular, such passages as Exod.2-4; 16:15-19; 33:11; 34:5-7; Numbers 12:7-8; Deut.34:7-11; Acts 7:20-35 and Heb.1:23-29.

These shed light on his parentage, as O.T. mediator, his providential deliverance, education, love for his people. They portray him as an impulsive man, self-assertive in his youth, learning patience and humility, a man with leadership qualities, maligned by his people, a man of prayer and obedience to God, a man with profound desire to know - even wanting to 'see'- God, and one of the heroes of faith.

2). Who is the Speaker?

The Bible often introduces a 'second' or even 'third' or more speakers. Thus we must distinguish between the 'author' and the 'speaker.' In the historical books this is usually fairly obvious. In 2 Kings 4, for example, the speakers include Elisha, the woman of Shunem who built an extra room for him, Gehazi, the woman's child that died, and the child's father.

Sometimes it is uncertain if there is a second speaker or not. It is, for example difficult to determine whether the words in Jn.3:16-21 were spoken by Jesus to Nicodemus, or whether the apostle John added them as an explanatory note. In the Prophets we must watch out for a sudden transition from Divine to human words.

A simple rule here may be helpful: 'The writer of a book may be re-garded as the speaker until there is some express evidence to the contrary.'

QUESTIONS

- 1). Write an Essay concerning the Figurative Use of Words.
 - 2). Elaborate on (i) the question 'Figurative or Literal?', and (ii) Interpreting Figurative Language.
 - 3). Discuss (i) the Historical Interpretation, (ii) the Demands on the Exegete, and (iii) the Personal Characteristics of the Author and the Speaker.
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THE BIBLE INSTITUTE OF SOUTH AFRICA

BIBLE STUDY CORRESPONDENCE COURSES COURSE NO:038

by the

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UNDERSTANDING THE BIBLE

- OR -

HERMENEUTICS

CHAPTER VI

THEOLOGICAL INTERPRETATION - PART ONE

I. WHY A THEOLOGICAL INTERPRETATION?

- 1). The Intellect.
- 2). The Need for 'Experienced-Knowledge.'
- 3). A Classic Example : Jonathan Edwards

II. THE BIBLE AS A UNITY

- 1). The Relation of the O.T.to the N.T.
- 2). The Unity of the Covenant of Grace
- 3). The O.T.and the NT.constitute a Unit
 - (i). Covenant Continuity
 - (ii). The 'True' Israelites
 - (iii). Differences
- 4). Some Guidance in Interpreting the O.T.and N.T.
 - (i). The Key
 - (ii). Commentary
 - (iii). On Guard
 - (iv). Organic Unity

I. WHY A THEOLOGICAL INTERPRETATION?

- 1). The Intellect.

The Bible must not only be interpreted historically and grammatically, but also theologically as

well. This flows from the fact that the Bible is basically a theological treatise. The word 'theology' comes from two Greek words 'theos' meaning 'God' and 'logos' meaning, inter alia, 'word', 'understanding', 'knowledge', 'study', 'reason.'

Thus the 'theology' of the Bible put simply is 'An Understanding/Knowledge/Study' of God and his Truth. Now, it is absolutely vital to realize that this knowledge involves the intellect and mind insofar that we must intellectually grasp what the Bible means by God's 'holiness', God's 'righteousness', 'wrath', 'omnipotence', 'providence', 'grace', 'mercy', 'power', and all the other attributes.

The reason for saying that this knowledge involves the intellect is:

(1). Because the intellect and mind is one of the most precious gifts to man; it is one of the most crucial differences between man (on the one hand) and animal and vegetable life (on the other hand). Just as human physiological growth includes the growth of a child's mind, so likewise does spiritual growth include the growth of 'spiritual-in-tellectual' knowledge.

Writing to the Corinthians Paul tells them (and us) that we, "... are in Christ Jesus, who has become for us WISDOM from God.." (1 Cor.1:30) which he follows up with, " We...speak a message of WISDOM among the mature...(2:6)...we speak of God's secret WISDOM...(2:7)...we have... received...the Spirit who is from God, that we may UNDERSTAND what God has freely given us (the Gospel)...(2:12)...we have the MIND of Christ (2:16)." 'Wisdom', 'Understanding' and 'Mind' equally involves our in-tellect and mind.

(2). But, you say, quite rightly, why does Paul condemn the Greeks who looked for 'wisdom' (1.Cor.1:22), why does he say that he did not come to them with superior 'wisdom' (2:1), why does he say that his message and preaching 'were not with wise...words' (2:4), and so on.

(i). Because, as he says quite clearly, he isn't interested in proclaiming any 'human, Grecian philosophy' (1.Cor.1:20-24), or 'human eloquence' (2:4), or 'the wisdom of this age' (2:6), or 'the spirit of the world'(2:12), or 'words taught us by human wisdom'(2:13).

(ii). In a word:Paul is not interested in an attitude of 'human intellectualism.' There is world of difference between 'intellect' and 'intellectualism.' There are numerous instances in which Paul uses his God-given intellect in his statements and arguments in his epistles.

See for example how closely he 'reasons' in 1 Cor.3:1-15; and ¶1 Cor.15:12-58 and Rom.8:28-39 and Gal.3:1 - 4:7. He is however utterly opposed to 'intellectual arrogance' that coldly, clinically and purely academically piles up masses of facts and information 'about' God and stores them away to uses in debates. In short, there is no greater curse in the Christian Church today than 'professional theologians.'

(3). A third reason why the intellect and mind is necessary in a theological interpretation of the Bible is that many varied parts of Scripture DEMANDS it.

(i). How for example are you going to distinguish between historical narrative, literal truth, figurative truth, metaphors, analogies, anthropomorphisms, symbols, types etc., unless you use your mind? When, for example, Paul in Rom.1:16 says that 'he is not ashamed of the Gospel', what exactly does he mean? Why put it in that kind of language? It is only when you realize that he is using 'litotes' (putting something negatively in order to actually make your point stronger) do you understand that verse. But that involves the use of your intellect!

(ii). Or take Paul's argument in Rom.5:12-21. Paul is himself using his logic, his intellect to construct the argument. On the one hand you have the first Adam, God's law, then his disobedience, sin, condemnation, imputed guilt, death. On the other hand you have the Second Adam, Christ's obedience and righteousness, the gift of God's grace in Christ, justification, imputed righteousness, eternal life. But -if you want to be faithful to Scripture - you have to intellectually enter into Paul's logical reasoning.

(iii). Or listen to Paul's prayer of praise in Colossians 1 for the conversion the brethren. They had 'heard' the word of 'truth', 'under- stood' God's grace in all its 'truth', 'learned' it from Epaphras (cf. vv.5-7). How can one 'hear', 'understand' and 'learn', unless they used their minds; minds and intellects illuminated by the Spirit. But in the same way as in saving faith God does 'believe' FOR us, likewise in the Colossians' conversion God did NOT 'hear', understand', 'learn' FOR them. I am not for a moment negating the action of God's Sovereign and Free Grace; ALL is 'of grace'. Yet that does not clash with our responsi-bility to 'believe', to 'hear', understand', and 'listen.'

2). The Need for 'Experienced-Knowledge.'

I started by explaining that interpreting or understanding 'theology' in the Bible was no more than a 'Knowledge of God.' I then went on to point out the essential need of the use of the intellect to arrive at this knowledge.

I also went on to say that we must distinguish between the correct and godly use of the 'intellect' as against 'intellectualism' which was simply gathering facts 'about' God such as 'professional theologians' do in order to write unintelligible tomes or score points at some cold academic conference on theology. What has this got to do with inter-pretng the Bible theologically? This:It shows us what the AIM and PURPOSE of such 'theological interpretation' should always basically be.

What we really need - if we want to be Biblically balanced - is a ¶" Theology on Fire ." Knowledge of God, not merely 'about' him. As Dr.D.M.Lloyd-Jones points out, this, "...becomes all-important when we realize that the whole end and object of theology is to know God! A Person! Not a collection of abstract truths, nor a number of philo-sophical propositions, but God! A Person! To know Him! - 'the only true God', and Jesus Christ, whom thou hast sent! " (D.M.Lloyd-Jones. The Puritans:Their Origins and Successors. Banner of Truth, 1987, p. 32).

Later on he exhorts us to consider, "...the tests which show whether we HAVE this TRUE KNOWLEDGE (of God). First...obviously, is love of God. As the Apostle puts it in...1 Cor.8:3: 'If any man love God.' That, he says in effect is 'knowledge.'...here is the argument. To 'know' God, of necessity, is to love Him...If any man really knows God he will be 'lost in wonder, love and praise'...True 'knowledge'always leads to a love of God. " (Lloyd-Jones, ibid., p.40).

3). A Classic Example : Jonathan Edwards.

This is such an important aspect of 'theological interpretation' that I include this example. A secular scholar of Yale, Perry Miller, who was largely responsible for the commencement of the definitive edition of 'The Works of Jonathan Edwards' (begun in 1957, Yale University Press) has called Edwards, "...the greatest philosopher - theologian yet to grace the American scene..." (P.Miller. The Works of Jonathan Edwards, Vol.1. Yale University Press, 1957, p.viii). High praise indeed from a secular, academic man.

Edwards was a remarkable man. A brilliant thinker and theologian (his first work published by Yale on the 'Freedom of the Will'runs to 470 pages of closely reasoned arguments), he was also a first-class exe- gete possessing a profound understanding of the Bible. Yet, intel- lectually brilliant as he was, his was a 'theology of fire and life.'

Let me give you one example. Here are Edwards' own words (which I will break up as usual):

"...God has appeared (not literally!) glorious to me on account of the Trinity...Once, as I rode out into the woods for my health, in 1737, ...I had a view (not in a literal vision) that for me was extraordi- nary, of the glory of the Son of God, as Mediator...and (of) his won- derful, great, full, pure and sweet grace and love...The person of Christ appeared ineffably excellent...great enough to swallow up all thought...

"...which continued...about an hour; which kept me the greater part of the time in a flood of

tears...I felt an ardency of soul to be,...to lie in the dust, and be full of Christ alone; to love him with a holy and pure love; to trust in him with a holy and pure love; to trust in him; to serve and follow him...I have, several other times, had views very much of the same nature, and which have had the same effect.... I.xlvi-xlvi (I.H.Murray. Jonathan Edwards. A New Biography. Banner of Truth, 1987, p.100).

I have deliberately given this illustration to emphasize that while 'interpreting' or 'understanding' the Bible NECESSITATES the use of the intellect, the very act of 'interpreting', 'understanding', of 'hermeneutics' MUST ALSO and ALWAYS set our heart and mind ON FIRE with a LOVE for the truth and God!

Let us now press on with our main theme, ie. 'Theological Interpretation.'

II. THE BIBLE AS A UNITY

1). The Relation of the O.T. to the N.T.

Many present-day interpretations see the O.T. as a purely nationalistic religion. That is to say that it was a religion tied to the ethnic race of the Hebrews. In this sense it was no different from the religions of the Edomites, the Philistines, the Moabites, the Assyrians or the Egyptians. It was on a par with them, no better, no worse. It was external, it had its own tabernacle or temple, its own hierarchical priesthood, signs, symbols, altar, methods of worship, liturgy, corpus of literature and rules and religious legislation.

Furthermore, the view is held, that while the N.T. in general terms grew out of the O.T. they are not profoundly linked. The N.T. Church -while learning from the Hebrew's religion in the O.T.- nevertheless developed a new Concept of God (God is represented as 'the God of Wrath' in the O.T., while in the N.T. he is presented by Christ as 'the God of Love.'). The N.T. had its own corpus of religious and theological views, literature, ministers of the Gospel, etc.

2). The Unity of the Covenant of Grace.

In opposition to this view the orthodox evangelical points, inter alia, to the amazing unity of the Covenant of Grace that began in the O.T. and continued over into the N.T.

The Covenant of Grace is organically related (ie. just like the various 'organs' of the body are all interrelated) to, on the one hand, the covenants of Abraham, Moses and David, and on the other hand to, "...the New Testament 'realizations' of this consummating covenant." (O.P. Robertson. The Christ of the Covenants. Presbyterian and Reformed, 1980, p.41).

In Ezekiel, the prophet COMBINES 'allusions' to the covenants made by God with Abraham, Moses and David with a prophecy concerning the 'New Israel' (the Christian believers) which was still to come: "...my servant David will be king over them, and they will have one shepherd... they will walk in my ordinances, and keep my statutes...and I will make a covenant of peace with them; it will be an everlasting covenant..." (Ezek.37:24-26).

Actually this passage is a good illustration of 'figurative' speech. Ezekiel is not referring to the real, historical David, since (i) he was long since already dead, and (ii) he uses the future tense to speak of a king David still to come; this can only be a reference to Christ.

Furthermore the 'everlasting covenant of peace' is described by Ezekiel himself: "...I... will put a new spirit in them...remove from them their heart of stone and give them a heart of flesh...they will follow my decrees...THEY WILL BE MY PEOPLE, AND I WILL BE THEIR GOD." (Ezek.11:19-20. An almost identical prophecy is found in Ezek.36:25-28.).

The heart of the Covenant of Grace that firmly links the O.T. and N.T. are found in the words " They will be my people, and I will be their God. " This is THE common, binding factor that like a cosmic and historical and theological and practical circle includes both the believers in the

O.T.(who looked forward to the coming Messiah, Saviour, Atonement for our sins and Redeemer), and the N.T. believers who were able to see, seek and find the Atoning Messiah in Christ.

To hear from Robertson again: " Because the various strands of hope for redemption converge on this single person (Christ), He becomes the unifying focus of all Scripture...In the person of Jesus Christ, the covenants of God achieve incarnational unity. Because Jesus...cannot be divided, the covenants cannot be divided." (Robertson, *ibid.*, pp. 51-52).

Thus the covenants made with Abraham, Moses, David and the 'new covenant in my name' (the Lord's Supper) combine in Christ to make one single, overarching Covenant of Grace. Thus, to be practical, any 'interpretation', 'understanding of the Bible' or 'hermeneutics' must always be done against the background that there is basically only ONE Covenant of Grace that firmly and unbreakably joins the O.T. and N.T. interpretation. Any 'interpretation' that ignores that fact will run the risk of 'misinterpretation.'

3). The O.T.and the N.T.constitute a Unit.

This point is similar to point 2) but from a slightly different perspective.

(i). Covenant Continuity. The doctrine of redemption was essentially the same for those who lived under the Covenant in the O.T. as for the Covenant Church in the N.T. This is sometimes overlooked when the Symbolic character of many institutions and ceremonies in the O.T. is lost sight of.

In other words an 'interpreter' may see in the Sacrificial System of the tabernacle or temple, the mercy-seat, the institution of the High Priest, the bronze snake (in Numbers 21), the sacrificial lamb, etc. only external forms, thus missing the symbolic and spiritual significance.

They do not see clearly that the Sacrifices of the O.T. foretell the Great Atoning Sacrifice of Christ, and that the oft-repeated Washings symbolize the purifying influence of the Holy Spirit. The tabernacle and temple AS A WHOLE was a revelation of the Way to God.

(ii). The 'True' Israelites.

The election of Israel, as an ethnic race, was not God's ultimate aim. Rather the formation of a 'Spiritual Israel' made up of many nations. The prophets looked forward to the time when the Gentiles too would bring their treasure into the 'Temple of the Lord', the Church.

Paul makes this abundantly clear: " A man is not a Jew if he is only one outwardly, nor is circumcision merely outward and physical. No, a man is a Jew if he is one inwardly; and circumcision is circumcision of the heart, by the Spirit, not by the written code " (Rom.2:28-29).

Abraham, Paul continues, was not saved because he was outwardly circumcised but became righteous when he put his faith (through Christ) in God. Consequently 'grace' is, "...guaranteed to ALL Abraham's offspring - not only to those who are of the law (ie. believers of the O.T.) but also to those who are of the faith (ie. believers in the N.T.) of Abraham. He is the Father of us all." (Rom.4:16).

(iii). Differences.

The differences between the privileges and duties of the Old and New people of God is relative, not absolute. There are differences, the first emphasizes the Law, the second Grace. But there is NO ABSOLUTE ANTITHESIS. Even in the O.T. the pious Jew had the law in his heart (Ps.37:31; 40:8). They needed the same Mediator and Holy Spirit. The Covenant of Grace in the O.T. and N.T. are related to each other as a bud to a flower.

In the O.T. circumcision, passover, sacrifice and purification were not simply carnal institutions

pertaining to the flesh; they also required faith on the part of the worshipper.

4). Some Guidance in Interpreting the O.T. and the N.T.

In the interpretation of the Old and New Testaments, and in their mutual relations, the interpreter should be guided by the following.

(i). The Key.

The O.T. offers the Key to the right interpretation of the N.T. The contents of the N.T. are already the fruit of a long, previous development.

How, for example, could we understand the Fall without the historic episodes in the O.T. such as the actual Fall itself, the murder of Abel by Cain, the tragic words of Gen.6:5, "The Lord saw how great man's wickedness on the earth had become...", the actions surrounding the Tower of Babel, the disobedience of the children of Israel in the desert, the constant refrain in Judges, the fall of David, and so on.

It is true of the Creation (picked up again Col.1:15-19; Rom.8:22), the establishment of the Covenant of Grace (see Gal.3:-5:10), the prophecies of the coming Redeemer (picked up in Acts 2:14-41; 3:11-26; 7:1-53). Moreover the N.T. contains a great deal that serves to confirm and illustrate certain truths from the O.T. (see: Jn.3:14-15; Rom. 4:9-13; Heb.13:10-13).

(ii). Commentary. The N.T. is a commentary on the O.T. The Old Testament contains, what one could call 'shadowy' representation of spiritual realities. These 'shadowy' representation of spiritual realities are presented in the N.T. in the radiating glow of the fullness of perfect light and time.

In the one there are types, in the other the types realized; in the one prophecy, in the other fulfilment. At times the the N.T. writers furnish explicit and striking explanations of the O.T. passages and reveal depths that might easily have escaped the interpreter. See, for example, Acts 2:29-31; Matt.11:10; Gal.4:22-31, and the whole epistle to the Hebrews.

Or, to put it differently:

"The consciousness of the common heritage of promise permeates the New Testament. The promise that the Lord will be God to his people is echoed in 2 Cor.6:16; Heb.8:10 and Rev.21:3,7. The concept of a royal people is found in 1.Pet.2:9 and Rev.1:6; 5:10...

The promise of the offspring figures...in Rom.4:16; Gal.3:29; Titus 2:14; Hebrews 11:18; 1 Pet.2:9-10 and Rev.12:17; the function of Christ as the offspring appears in Gal.3:16. The promise of the land may be found in Heb.4:1-10 and Rom.4:13. Gentile inclusion in the promise is set forth by Paul in Rom.9:24-25." (T.E.McComiskey. The Covenants of Promise. IVP, 1985, p.189).

(iii). On Guard.

The interpreter should guard against reading too much into the O.T. This happens when, for example, the 'details' of the work of redemption, as revealed in the N.T. are read back into the Old. The great question for the exegete is, how much God actually revealed in any particular passage (ie. Gen.3:15), and this can only be done when read in (i) context, and (ii) in the light of progressive revelation.

(iv). Organic Unity.

The separate books are ALL organically related to each other. They are mutually complementary. They are ONE in recording the work which God in his redemptive plan, brought about in Christ.

Thus, for example, " Genesis speaks to all ages...of the creation of man in the image of God, of the entrance of sin into the world, and of the initial revelation of God's redeeming grace. Exodus acquaints the successive generations of men with the doctrine of deliverance through the shedding of blood, while Leviticus teaches them how sinful man can approach God... Numbers pictures the pilgrimage of God's people, and Deut., points to the blessings that accompany a life of obedience to God... The book of Job offers a solution for the problem of suffering in the life of God's people; the Psalms furnish an insight into the spiritual experience of the people of God - their struggles and triumphs, their joy and sorrow...Isaiah describes the love of God for his people.... Jeremiah...a revelation of his righteousness...In Galatians, Paul defends the liberty of the people of God as over against the ceremonialism of the O.T...in Ephesians he calls attention to the unity of the church...in...Colossians he magnifies Christ as head of the Church. " (Berkhof, op.cit., pp.139-140).

QUESTIONS

1. Discuss the question, 'Why a Theological Interpretation?'
 2. Under the heading, 'The Bible as a Unity', discuss (i) the relation of the O.T. to the N.T., (ii) the Unity of the Covenant of Grace, (iii) O.T. and the N.T. constitute a Unity.
 3. Elaborate on some of 'Guidance' principles in interpreting the O.T. and the N.T.
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CHAPTER VII

THEOLOGICAL INTERPRETATION - PART TWO

I. THE MYSTICAL SENSE OF SCRIPTURE

- 1). Explanation
- 2). Guides to discover the Mystical Sense
 - (i). Scripture itself.
 - (ii). A Symbolic relation

- (iii). A Dioramatic Unity
- (iv). Connection in Lyric Poetry
- 3). Extent of the Mystical Sense

II. THE SYMBOLIC AND TYPICAL INTERPRETATION OF SCRIPTURE

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 - (i). Jer.1:11
 - (ii). Jer.24
 - (iii). Amos 8:1f
- 2). Facts have a Symbolic significance

(II). THE INTERPRETATION OF TYPES

- 1). What is a Type?
- 2). Characteristics of Types
 - (i). Obvious points of Resemblance
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- 3). The Interpretation of Types
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 - (ii). Type lies in Symbol
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 - (vi). Based on Genuine Historic Parallel
 - (vii). Need for Exegetical Details
 - (viii). Context!

I. THE MYSTICAL SENSE OF SCRIPTURE.

- 1). Explanation.

In using the word 'Mystical' we must be quite clear that the 'Mysti-cism' we are talking about is, "...NOT the same as magic, clairvoy-ance, parapsychology or occultism, nor does it consist in a preoc-cupation with sensory images, visions, or special revelations." (El- well, op.cit., p.744).

In other words we are NOT talking about the Christian who allows his intellect to be taken over by introspective, brooding, dreamlike 'encounters' with some deeper, hidden meanings of Scripture that come to him while he is in a kind of joyous ecstasy; or where he is in some kind of self-induced trance and fanciful interpretations appear before his mind's eye.

The word 'Mystical' is perhaps an unfortunate choice but it has nothing whatsoever to do with 'visualizations', 'subjective images', or anything 'dreamlike', 'insubstantial fanciful thoughts', 'word pictures', or 'visionary impressions' on the brain or 'abstractions' that appear before a person's subjective inner eye.

It is remarkable how much of this kind of 'mystical vision' or 'revelation' has to do with the Second Coming. David R. Smith in his book entitled "Queer Christians" mentions some of them. Abbott Joachim, who died in 1201 was greatly taken up with the coming Judgement and the belief that the events in Revelation were then taking place. According to him the Anti-Christ would appear in 1260!

In 1531, Melchior Hofmann, an eccentric leader of the Anabaptist movement suspended baptisms in preparation for Christ's Coming which, he predicted, would happen in 1533. James Milner set the date for 1652, Joseph Mede for 1660, John Napier for 1688, the Huguenot Jurieu for the year 1690, Nicholas of Cusa for 1734 and a George Bell for 1763. (D.R. Sith. Queer Christians. Rule Book, 1967, pp.17-18).

It has nothing to do with the Alexandrian school of exegesis, represented by Clement of Alexandria and Origen, who searched for hidden meanings in large sections of the O.T.

Neither are we talking of the Medieval Mysticism which consisted, "... of three classic stages - the path of purification, the phase of illumination, and the mystical union itself." (Elwell, *ibid.*, p.745).

'Mystical' in hermeneutics or Biblical interpretation simply means that one thing, or statement or historical event or ceremonial event HAS MORE THAN ONE MEANING; more than one level of understanding or interpretation, for example, the sacrificial system in the tabernacle and later the temple.

2). Guides to discover the Mystical Sense.

(i). Scripture itself.

Scripture itself contains indications of a mystical sense. For example, the N.T. itself interprets several passages of the O.T. 'Messianically' (compare Lk.4:18-19 with Is.61:1-2), and in so doing not only points to the presence of the mystical sense, in those particular passages, but also suggests that whole categories of related passages should be interpreted in a similar manner.

(ii). A Symbolic relation.

A symbolic relation exists between different spheres of life, in virtue of the fact that all life is organically related. The natural world is symbolically related to the spiritual; the life that now is points to the veiled glories of the life to come. Thus, Paul in Ephesians 5, points to 'Marriage' indicating the relationship between Christ and the Church.

(iii). A Dioramic Unity.

History is characterized by a dioramic unity. This comes from the word 'dioramic' which refers to a picture obtained by looking through a small window. Thus in looking at Biblical History in this manner many analogous or similar events often re-appear or seem to repeat themselves, and these repetitions are, more or less 'typically' related.

Israel is, for example, 'typical' of spiritual Israel. (physical Israel is the dioramic or small window through which we look to see the greater, spiritual Israel). So too is Gal.4:22-31 dioramic, as well as virtually the whole epistle to the Hebrews.

(iv). Connection in Lyric Poetry.

A close connection is seen between individual and communal life as re-vealed in lyric poetry. In the lyric psalms, the sacred poets do not merely sing as detached individuals or poets, but as members of the community, ie. Ps.84. They share the joy and sorrow of the people of God, which is, in the last analysis, the joy and sorrow of Christ in whom the Church finds its bond of union.

3). Extent of the Mystical Sense.

This extent of the mystical sense is not limited to any one book of the Bible, but is found in several different forms in Biblical writings. Its character can best be brought out as we look, (i) The symbolical and typical interpretation of Scripture, (ii) The interpretation of prophesy, and (iii) The interpretation of the psalms.

II. THE SYMBOLICAL AND TYPICAL INTERPRETATION OF SCRIPTURE.

(I). THE INTERPRETATION OF SYMBOLS.

1). Introduction and Examples.

Biblical Symbolism is, in many ways, one of the most difficult aspects of interpretation or understanding of the Bible that we have. And because of its difficult or enigmatic character the whole subject calls for balance, soberness, discernment and discrimination.

We will approach it from a somewhat different angle than we usually follow. We'll gather together some examples and then from there see if we can draw out some 'principles of interpretation.'

(i). Jer.1:11-12. In v.11 the prophet Jeremiah is asked by the Lord what he sees? He answers that he " sees the branch of an almond tree ." What does this symbolize? The answer is tied up with the word " watching " in the v.12. God says he is " watching " to see that his word is fulfilled. The Hebrew words for " almond tree " and ׀" watching " have the same root.

But the almond tree blooms FIRST in the year. It therefore 'wakes up early' after the winter. The Hebrew word for " watching " in v.12 is a play on " almond tree " in v.11, suggesting the act of 'waking up' or being 'wakeful' from the first moments of its blooming.

The symbolism that is therefore being suggested is that the Lord is 'watching' or 'wakeful' from the very word go as to what the reaction to his Word is going to be, or perhaps more accurately the Lord is going to make sure that his Word will be carried out immediately!

(ii). Jer.24. Here the prophet sees two baskets of figs placed in front of the temple, as if they had been placed there for offerings to the Lord. One basket had good figs that could be eaten, while the other had figs in such a poor state that they could not be eaten.

In v.5 God himself says that the good figs represent those Jews who had been sent into exile. These were the godly Jews sent into exile to be disciplined, but in due time to be brought back again. The bad figs represent (v.8ff) Zedekiah and the ungodly remnant against whom God will send the sword, famine and plague to destroy them.

(iii). Amos 8:1ff. Amos is shown a basket of " ripe fruit." Why " ripe " ? Because, as v.2 tells us, Israel is " ripe " for the judgement of God. Before this they were still green and maturing in their wickedness, but now, having reached an advanced or mature or ׀" ripe " age,

they can no longer plead their youth or inexperience or plead for more time. " Ripe " here means 'the end, ready for judge-ment.'

2). Facts have a Symbolic significance.

God revealed himself not only in 'words', but also in 'facts.' The two go together. The three examples given above are not mere 'words' that signify nothing, but very definite 'facts.' The " almond tree ", " the figs ", and the " ripe fruit " actually exist or existed in reality. In other words something non-existent cannot (normally) be a Symbol.

Historical facts or events, therefore, may normally serve as Symbols of Spiritual Truth. A 'Symbol' (from the Greek 'sun' plus 'ballo') is a Sign of 'something else.' It signifies something or someone other than what it itself is.

Take for example the wrestling of Jacob in Gen.32:24-32 and referred to in Hosea 12:2-4. What is the meaning of this event? What does it Symbolize? This will not be understood, until it is contemplated as a Symbol of the fact that Jacob, though heir to the promises of God, had all along wrestled with God.

He had sought to attain success in his own strength and by his own de-vices, but was now being taught, by being disabled, that his career of self-help was futile. Furthermore that he had to resort to the use of spiritual weapons, particularly that of prayer, in order to obtain the blessings of Jehovah.

Three fundamental principles of symbolism are therefore, (i) the names of symbols are to be understood literally, (ii) the symbols always de- note something essentially different from themselves, and (iii) some resemblance is traceable between the symbol and the thing symbolized.

(II). THE INTERPRETATION OF TYPES.

1). What is a Type?

The word 'type' (Greek 'tupos' derived from the verb 'tupto'), denotes: (i) the mark of a blow, (ii) an impression, the stamp made by a die, hence a figure or image, (iii) an example or pattern, which is the most common meaning in the Bible.

Both 'symbols' and 'types' are indicative of something else than them-selves. They differ, however, in important points. A 'symbol' is a 'sign', while a 'type' is a 'pattern' or 'image' of something else. A symbol may refer to something past, present or future, while a type 'prefigures' some future reality.

" A Symbol is a fact that teaches a moral truth. A Type is a fact that teaches a moral truth AND predicts some actual realization of that truth. " (Berkhof, op.cit., p.144, quoting Davidson, Old Testament Prophecy, p.229). There are 'typical' persons, places, things, events, rites and facts.

In Rev.7:1f we read of the 12,000 from the 12 tribes, and John says: " Then I heard the number of those who were sealed:144,000 from all the tribes of Israel." (v.4). This figure is obviously NOT a 'type' but a 'symbol.' Why? To begin with, (i) it does not prefigure or predict an 'actual' or 'real' fact. It is what is called a 'Hebraism' which is a kind of idiomatic speech indicating a 'very, very large number.' Thus (ii) it is indicative of the large number who will be numbered with the elect or those saved through Christ, which will obviously be a very large number. This number, contrary to the teaching of the Jehovah's Wit- nesses and Mormons, is symbolic precisely because it is not a fixed number.

We have symbolism used in everyday language, particularly sport. A sportspage of a Newspaper will report that Sir Donald Bradman, in a cricket test against England knocked up or scored 'a ton'. This is a symbolic way, in cricket, of saying that he scored a century or 100 runs.

The phrase is used to convey a truth by 'sign' language.

A 'Type', on the other hand goes beyond teaching or indicating a truth; it prefigures or predicts that which will certainly come to pass. (A 'type' will never be actualized or come to pass). What example can we use, then, regarding a 'type'?' Berkhof gives this answer:

" When Abraham offered up his only son on Mount Moriah, he performed a 'Typical' deed. David, as theocratic king, was clearly a 'type' of his Great Son (Christ). The Serpent lifted up in the desert pointed forward to the elevation of Christ on the Cross...the high priest entering the inner sanctuary once a year to make Atonement for the sin of the people prefigured Him who in the fulness of time entered the Heavenly Sanctuary with his own blood, thus obtaining eternal redemption." (Berkhof, *ibid.*, p.144).

2). Characteristics of Types.

The following THREE characteristics are generally given by writers on Typology.

(i). Obvious point of Resemblance.

There must be some really notable and obvious point of resemblance between the Type and the Antitype. Such as, for example, the Serpent in the Wilderness, the Sacrificial Lamb on the Day of Atonement. Whatever peripheral and other differences there may be, the Type should be a true Picture of the Antitype.

(ii). Designed by Divine Appointment.

Generally speaking the Type must be designed by Divine Appointment (ie. God himself), to bear a likeness to the Antitype. Accidental similarity between an Old and a New Testament person or event or truth does not constitute the one a Type of the other, for example, Josh.2: 21; 6:17;6:25.

(iii). Always Prefigures.

A Type always prefigures something which is to take place in the future. It is however, just as well to remember that that O.T. Types were at the same time, very often Symbols, ie. they conveyed Spiritual Truths to their contemporaries and to us.

3). The Interpretation of Types.

(i). There must be Congruity.

The Interpreter should guard against the mistake of regarding something that is in itself evil as a Type of what is good and pure. Thus, some expositors maintain that the clothes of Esau which Jacob wore in order to deceive Isaac represents the Righteousness of Christ in which saints are adorned. This jars our moral sense and is incongruous.

(ii). Type lies in Symbol.

The proper way to understand a Type lies in the study of the Symbol. The question must first be settled as to what general, overall moral or spiritual truth the OT symbols conveyed to the Israelites. How did they see it? Only when this is satisfied can the expositor move on to the NT to see how this truth was understood on a higher and different level in the NT. By this approach the 'proper limits' of the interpretation of the Type will be fixed at once.

Take, for example, the Brazen Serpent. Some interpreters found in fact that the brazen serpent was made of inferior metal and was thus a figure of Christ's outer meanness and humble appearance and that its dim lustre was a prefiguration of the veil of his human nature.

This is all very far-fetched, and all such speculation would have ceased if the interpreter had only realized that to the O.T. Israelites the PROPER LIMIT of the Symbolic action was, in

general terms 'Healing' and 'Redemption', and no more! Once that becomes clear then the understanding or interpretation of Christ, the Antitype, on the Cross with its central message of 'healing and redemption from sin' is obvious.

(iii). Exact Truth found in the N.T.

The real insight of an OT Type is to be found in the New Testament. Take for example Jn.3:14. The Type in the O.T. is in 'veiled' form, the Antitype in the N.T. is in a 'completed' form. The 'veiled shadows' become 'understandable realities.' For example, Heb.9:6-16; 9:19-28; 10:1-13.

(iv). One Meaning. Types have only one radical and definite meaning, not many. In the passage in 1.Cor.10:2, the Israelites passing through the Red Sea is a Type of Baptism, - and no more than that! It is quite wrong to find 'extra' meanings, so that their experience refers (a) to the atoning blood of Christ, which offers a safe way to the heavenly Canaan, and (b) to the trials and tribulations through which Christ leads his people to their heavenly rest.

(v). Difference between Type and Antitype.

The one represents truth on a lower stage, the other the same truth on a higher stage. To pass from the Type to the Antitype is to ascend from that in which the carnal or fleshly or material preponderates to that which is purely spiritual. From the 'external' to the 'internal.' From the present to the future, from the earthly to the heavenly.

The Roman Catholic Church loses sight of this when it finds the anti-type of the Mass in the O.T. sacrifices; of apostolic succession in the priesthood of the O.T; and of the Pope in the office of the High Priest. Besides which it involves 'reading back' into the O.T. what was not there to begin with.

(vi). Based on Genuine Historic Parallel.

Both the Type and the Antitype should be based upon definite and genuine historical parallels rather than timeless mythological parallels. In other words, typology should not redefine the meaning of the O.T. text or suggest superficial rather than genuine correspondence or parallels. The 'Adam-Christ' Typology based on an historical parallel as found in Rom.5:12-19, is a good example of genuine typology.

(vii). Need for Exegetical Details.

" Here typology is similar to parable research, necessitating a consideration of exegetical details in both O.T. and N.T. passages..... There will always be a single central point, and secondary details must be noted with care before they are applied to the analogy (comparison). Noting the dissimilarities provides a control against an overly imaginative, allegorical rendering of the type. " (Elwell, op.cit., p.1118).

(viii). Context!

Finally, one must not seek types where the context does not warrant them. In all exegetical study we want to arrive at the Authors intended meaning rather than a generalized and subjective interpretation. Thus, we must ask ourselves what the Author's overall intended meaning was in describing the Tabernacle and the Temple, and not seek to find some hidden meaning in every pillar, sculpted pomegranate, texture of cloth, various colours used, and so on.

QUESTIONS

1. Discuss the 'Mystical' sense of interpreting Scripture.

2. Elaborate on the Interpretation of Symbols. Try to give more examples than the ones noted in the Chapter.
3. Write an Essay on 'The Interpretation of Types.'

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BIBLE STUDY CORRESPONDENCE COURSES COURSE NO:O38
by the
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UNDERSTANDING THE BIBLE
- OR -
HERMENEUTICS
CHAPTER VIII
THE INTERPRETATION OF PROPHECY

-----I. PERSPECTIVES ON
BIBLICAL PROPHECY

- 1). For the Spiritually and Intellectually Mature only?
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4). How to 'Read' Prophecy

5). Prophecy and Poetry

-----Before we begin I must point that I was greatly helped by Joel B. Green's book " How to Read Prophecy ", and the book " How to Read the Bible for all its Worth, " by G.D.Fee and D.Stuart.

I. PERSPECTIVES ON BIBLICAL PROPHECY

While there a number of differences in the interpretation of prophecy there are at least three perspectives to take note of.

1). For the Spiritually and Intellectually Mature only?

This is a common though understandable mistake. The Gospels, N.T.Epis- tles, Psalms, Proverbs and the Historical books (Judges, Kings,etc) are generally, though often indirectly, hinted as being more easily 'understood' than the prophets. And if one were to approach Scripture superficially that may seem to be the case.

Our answer to that suggestion is (i) that there are many sayings and parables of Jesus, and there are many passages in the Epistles (ie. the whole book of Galatians, the sections in 1 Corinthians dealing with 'gifts' and 'tongues', and Col.1:15-20, to mention but a few) that are just as difficult to understand, and (ii) the application of the rules governing the interpretation of prophecy can go a long way towards 'understanding' prophecy.

As Green says: " Among many Christians biblical prophecy is an un- known territory, the last frontier, to be explored only by experts. Consequently, most Christians neglect whole sections of the Bible or pass over them quickly in a read-through-the-Bible exercise." (J.B. Green. How to Read Prophecy. IVP, 1984, p.18).

The WHOLE Bible was meant for ALL Christians. Hence 'prophecy' is not to be regarded as fit only for 'experts' to understand and explain.

2). Literal Sensationalism!

In contrast to those in the first point who suspect that biblical pro- phesy is beyond the comprehension of most 'ordinary' (a most unhappy and unScriptural concept) Christians. They argue that prophecy must simply be taken 'literally' in order to understand it!

Thus Herman A.Hoyt says that: " This principle clearly stated is that of taking the Scriptures in their literal and normal sense, under- standing that this applies to the entire Bible...the prophetic mater- ial is also to be understood in this way. " (Green, *ibid.*, p.18. Foot- note 8). This an attractive but shallow suggestion. Little hard mental or theological study is necessary. However, the following questions need to be asked.

(1). SHOULD all the Bible be understood literally? That is to say, is it consistent with the writers' intentions to read all texts in a lit- eral way? Surely Nebuchadnezzar's dream of the Tree to be cut down, in Daniel 4, does not involve a 'literal' tree, but is a prefigurative prophecy of his coming spiritual experience? The same question must be asked about the two baskets of figs in Jer.24, which was explained in a previous Chapter.

(2). CAN all of the Bible be understood literally? What about the various 'figures of speech'? The 'simile', the 'allegory', 'the ellip- sis', 'euphemism', 'litotes', 'irony', 'hyperbole'? Surely these must be interpreted as the author intended them to be understood, ie. as 'litotes', as 'irony', as 'hyperbole', etc?

(3). SENSATIONALISM - in interpreting prophecy - can hardly be left out, when some demand

a literal interpretation of prophecy with an eye fixed on today's newspaper headlines? Scores of books have recently appeared in which the economic, military, political, social and moral conditions of the world, as it is TODAY, are shown to have its roots in Biblical prophecy and that the Second Coming is at hand.

However, as I pointed out in a previous Chapter such 'fulfilled' prophecies can be traced back through history to many men and women who, from the happenings of their day, believed prophecy was being fulfilled and the Second Coming was at hand.

Such a frenzy seized Europe as the year 1000 AD approached. People sold their goods and moved to shelters on the tops of mountains to be 'ready' for Christ's Coming. It does not need a prophet to suggest that as that magical figure of 2000 AD approaches we will see much of the same intense study of Biblical statistics and prophecies to line up with world events.

3). Higher - Critical Skepticism.

This was a highly critical approach to Scripture which daunted even the experts' study of prophecy, let alone the 'ordinary' Christian. To the higher-critic the following principles were paramount:

(1). All historical statements in Scripture are open to doubt. Thus the historian must approach any and all Scripture history in a skeptical frame of mind. Furthermore the results he arrives at are only probable and never certain.

This meant that BOTH the historical setting of a prophecy as well as the historical event prophesied were to be doubted and treated in a highly skeptical manner. Thus was the entire historical infrastructure and super-structure of Scripture placed in doubt, and with it large portions of Scripture as well.

Adam, for example, was not a real historical figure and the Resurrection did not take place in history. In the realm of prophecy the so-called 'proto-evangelium' of Gen.3:15; Ps.22 and Is.53 did not refer to the coming of a Messiah and Redeemer; rather, they referred to incidents within their own local circle, - if at all!

(2). All 'historical' events had to be understood in terms of an analogy with our own experience in the present time. All events are in principle similar. Thus, in an 'existential' or 'spiritual' encounter we 'experience' the resurrection of Christ in our hearts TODAY, just as the disciples did centuries ago. No, they were not visited by an historically risen Christ, but with a 'spiritually resurrected Christ in their hearts.' His 'spirit', his 'charisma' rose in their hearts.

Likewise, the same holds true for prophecy. We must not look forward to a Second, historically-bounded Coming of Christ; that 'Second Coming' can take place 'spiritually' and 'existentially' and 'experientially' in our hearts any and every day of the week. Prophecy is thus no longer either a 'forthtelling' or a 'foretelling' of God's will and plans, but becomes simply an 'experience' of it.

(3). Everything that happens in history is governed by the natural laws of 'cause and effect.' Miracles and acts of God are therefore an impossibility. This effectively dismisses all forms of prophecy, because a 'prophecy' said to come about in some future date, such as the Incarnation of Christ, is - according to the higher critic - an impossibility. History is only 'natural', it can never be of the order of the 'supernatural.'

II. THE FUNCTIONS OF PROPHETS.

1). The Prophets as Spokespersons.

Perhaps the most important problem that faces most modern readers of the prophets stems from an inaccurate prior understanding of the word 'prophecy.' For most people the word refers to

'foretelling or predic-ting what is to come.' Thus it often happens that many Christians re-fer to the prophets ONLY for predictions about the Second Coming, as if the prediction of events far distant from their own day was their MAIN concern.

To see the prophets primarily as 'predicters of future events' is to miss their primary function, which was to SPEAK for God to their con- temporaries, ie. to the people of their day. While Scripture seems to indicate that there were large numbers of prophets (1.Sam.10:5; 10:10- 11; 1.Kings 18:4, which speaks of 200 prophets; and other related passages), only 16 (!) were chosen to speak oracles or messages from God, that would be collected and written up in books.

It is furthermore true that in the historical and narative books we hear more about what they did than what they actually said. Elijah and Elisha were very influential in bringing God's Word to the Jews. Ne-vertheless, what they DID is described in far greater length than what they SAID. However, in the prophetic books we hear FROM God VIA the prophets but very little about the prophets themselves.

2). The Prophets were Covenant Enforcers and Mediators.

God's Law(s) constituted a Covenant between God and his people. This covenant, "...contains not only rules to keep but describes the sorts of punishments that God will necessarily apply to His people if they do not keep the Law, as well as the sorts of benefits He will impart to them if they do. " (G.D.Fee and D.Stuart. How to read the Bible for all its Worth. A Guide to Understanding the Bible. Zondervan, 1982, p. 151).

The punishments are often called 'curses' of the covenant, and the benefits 'blessings.' What is important here is that God does not merely give his law; he also enforces it. Positive enforcement is blessing; negative enforcement is a curse. Where do the prophets function in this enforcement? Here:God announces his enforcement (positive or negative) of his law through them!

Or, if you want to put it diferently, the function of the prophets with regard to the law, is that of 'mediator.' Thus, through them, ¶God reminds the people from generation to generation that if the law is kept, blessing will result; if not, then punishment will ensue. The great paradigm (model) as the mediator of God's law was Moses.

The prophets did not invent the blessings or the curses. They simply reproduced God's Words, not their own. The categories of blessings or curses are to be found in Leviticus 26, Deut.4, 28-32. The most spe- cific blessings involve: life, health, prosperity, agricultural abun- dance, respect and safety. The curses are grouped under ten headings: death, disease, drought, danger, destruction, defeat, deportation, de- stitution and disgrace. (Fee and Stuart, ibid., p.152).

3). The Prophets' Message was God's Message.

It is God himself who raised up the prophets (cf.Exod.3:1f; Is.6; Jer- emiah 1; Ezek.1-3; Hos.1:2; Amos 7:14-15; Jonah 1:1, et al.). If a prophet presumed to take the office of prophet upon himself, this would be good cause to consider such a person as a false prophet (Jeremiah 14:14; 23:21). The prophets responded to a 'divine' call. The Hebrew word for prophet (nabi) comes from the semitic verb (nabu) which means 'to call'.

That is why the genuine prophets preface, or conclude, or regularly include in their oracles or writings phrases such as " Thus says the Lord " or " Says the Lord." In a majority of cases, infact, the pro- phetic message is relayed directly as received from the Lord, in the first person, so that God speaks of himself as 'I' or 'Me.'

It was not an easy task to be the one who proclaimed GOD'S WILL to the people. For example, read Jer.27 and 28. He had the difficult task of relaying to the people of Judah that it would be necessary for them to submit to the imperial armies of their enemy, Babylon, if they wished to

please God. The modern equivalent of this would be treason, but he makes it abundantly clear that the people are not hearing HIS views on the issue but GOD'S!

Thus he begins by stating, " This is what the Lord said to me....." (27:2), and then quotes God's command, " Then send word..." (27:3); ¶" Give them a message..." (27:4), adding "...says the Lord. " (27:1). He delivers God's Word on God's Authority (28:15, 16), not his own.

The fact that the prophets merely acted as a mouthpiece for God is re-vealed in the fact that they delivered their message irrespective of the class or social level they addressed. Thus they spoke of the covenant violations of royalty (2 Sam.12:1-14; 24:11-17; Hos.1:4); the so-called clergy (Hos.4:4-11; Amos 7:17; Mal.2:1-9). In fact, prophets, speaking God's Word installed or deposed kings (1 Kings 19:16; 21:17- 22).

4). The Prophets' Message was Unoriginal.

The prophets were, on their own, neither radical social reformers nor innovative theological or religious thinkers. The social and moral re-forms and standards which God wanted the people to live by had already been revealed in the Covenantal Law(s). In this sense the prophets were like ambassadors from the heavenly court. Ambassadors, while they have leeway in their choice of words are essentially in foreign countries to convey the views of their government, NOT their OWN. Therefore, when we read the prophets' words, we are, in one sense, not reading anything new, but essentially the same message that God delivered through Moses to the people of Israel even though the form may alter from one prophet to another. God raised up the prophets to gain the attention of the people in different periods. Gaining their attention undoubtedly involved rephrasing old truths, and this in itself had a certain kind of 'newness.' But the 'newness' did not lie in a new message, but rather in a new format.

A good example is the first half of Hosea 4:2 in which the prophet says: " There is only cursing, lying and murder, stealing and adultery. " In this verse five of the Ten Commandments are summarized, each by a single term.

There is 'Cursing' (the third commandment in Exod.20:7; Deut 5:11); 'Lying' (the ninth commandment in Exod.20:16; Deut.5:20); 'Murder' (the sixth commandment in Exod.20:13; Deut.5:17); 'Stealing' (the eighth commandment in Exod.20:15; Deut.5:18), and 'Adultery' (the seventh commandment in Exod.20:14; Deut.5:18). It is important to realize that Hosea does NOT quote all ten commandments, but only the ones God had commanded him to emphasize.

III. SPECIAL CHARACTERISTICS OF PROPHECY.

1). Organic Character.

Prophecy as a whole has an organic character. Prophecy must not be regarded as aphoristic, or to put it another way made up of isolated 'forthtellings' or 'predictions' which are not linked to the rest of the prophetic 'corpus' or 'prophetic body' of writings in the rest of the O.T.

Sometimes the prophets predict plain, straightforward facts that are obvious (for example, Daniel's Great Statue). At other times they proclaim general ideas that are only generally realized. That is to say over a period of time, in the course of God's general, progressive revelation they increase in definiteness and particularity, such as those prophecies of a Messianic character. The bud - as it were - opening to a flower.

2). Linked with History.

Prophecy is closely and logically linked with history. Prophecy must always be placed in its historical setting and context. The epic confrontation of Elijah with the prophets of Baal on Mount Carmel in the first book of Kings, chapter 18, cannot really be fully understood apart from Elijah's role as prophet, in a general sense, or the lives of king Ahab and queen Jezebel, or the history of the prophets of Baal and their functioning in that role, or even apart from the

worship of Baal himself.

As Berkhof puts it: " It is a mistake, of frequent occurrence in the past, to regard the prophets as abstract personalities that were not in living contact with their environment. " (Berkhof, op.cit., p.149). While they stood apart from the 'common' people regarding their high calling from God to minister his Word, they were nevertheless very much part of the community in which they lived.

Amos is a striking example of this truth. He tells us in Amos 1:1 and 7:14-15 that he was a shepherd and a horticulturist - "...I also took care of sycamore-fig trees." He was of the people, lived amongst them, partook of their joys and sorrows. He also warned them of God's judgment to come.

He shows a knowledge of certain cities and territories, such as Je-rusalem (1:2), Damascus (1:3), Gilead (1:3), the valley of Aven (1:5), the people of Aram (1:5), Gaza (1:6), Ashdod (1:8), Ekron (1:8), Tyre (1:9), Edom (1:11), Ammon (1:13), Moab (2:1), Judah (2:4), Israel (2:6), the history of the wandering in the desert of the Hebrews for 40 years (2:10), other prophets (2:11), the Nazirites (2:12), the archer (2:15), the 'fleet-footed soldier'(2:15), and horseman (2:15).

3). Perspective.

Prophecy has its own peculiar perspective. They compressed great events into a brief space of time and took in momentous events in a single glance. This is sometimes referred to as the 'foreshortening of the prophets horizon.' The future, to them, was like a mountain range, or more accurately mountain ranges, in which one range after another appears or seems to be close together, but are fact many miles apart. This is particularly true of the Twofold Coming of Christ.

IV. INTERPRETATION OF PROPHECY.

1). Literal unless clearly Symbolic.

The words of the prophets should be taken in their usual literal and grammatico-historical sense UNLESS the (i) context shows otherwise, and (ii) the manner of their fulfillment reveals them to have been Symbolic.

2). Fundamental of the Figurative.

In studying the figurative descriptions in the prophets, the interpreter should make it his aim to discover the fundamental idea expressed. For example, when Isaiah pictures wild and domestic animals living together in peace and led by a little child, he is giving a poetic description of the peace that will one day prevail, in the future, upon the earth. More about the poetic side of prophecy in a moment.

3). Instalments.

The fulfillment of some important prophecies are, what is called, 'ger- inant'. That is to say they are fulfilled by instalments, each fulfillment being a pledge of that which is to follow. We can therefore speak of a twofold or even threefold fulfillment of prophecy. It seems as if Joel's prophecy in Joel 2:28-32 was not completely on the Day of Pentecost.

4). How to 'Read' Prophecy.

Prophecies should be read - where possible - in the light of their fulfillment, for this will often reveal depths that would otherwise have escaped attention.

5). Prophecy and Poetry.

All the prophetic books contain a substantial amount of poetry. Before therefore reading the prophets it would be helpful to know at least three features of the repetitive style of O.T. poetry.

(i). Synonymous parallelism.

This is where the subsequent or second line 'repeats' or 'reinforces' the sense of the first line, as Is.44:22... ¶ " I have swept away your offenses like a cloud, ¶ your sins like the morning mist."

(ii). Antithetical parallelism.

The second or subsequent line 'contrasts'the thought of the first, as in Hosea 7:14...

" They do not cry out to me from their hearts, ¶ but wail upon their beds."

(iii). Synthetic parallelism.

This is where the second or subsequent line 'adds to the first line' in any manner which provides 'further information', as in Obadiah 21..

" Deliverers will go up from Mount Zion ¶ to govern the mountains of Esau. ¶ And the kingdom will be the Lord's." ¶

QUESTIONS

1. Discuss the three 'Perspectives' on Biblical Prophecy.
 2. Describe the various 'Functions' of prophets.
 3. Write an Essay on the, (i) 'Special Characteristics' ¶ of prophecy, and elaborate (in the same Essay) on (ii) ¶ the 'Interpretation' of prophecy.
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BIBLE STUDY CORRESPONDENCE COURSES COURSE NO:O38
by the
REV.JIM VAN ZYL.B.A.M.A.
UNDERSTANDING THE BIBLE
- OR -
HERMENEUTICS
CHAPTER IX
THE NEW HERMENEUTIC - PART ONE

-----IMPORTANT: 1). We have dealt fairly widely with 'Understanding the Bi- ble' or 'Hermeneutics.' One of the most crucial areas we have not dealt with is, what is called today, the 'New Hermeneutic.' This is basically a way of 'understanding' or 'interpreting' the Bible that is NOT in the orthodox, evangelical tradition.

It has however gained much ground in 'liberal' theological circles and its influence has been felt even in evangelical circles. Like the 'New Age Movement', which we will examine in the Course OO2 'Sects, Here-sies and Cults', the 'New Hermeneutic' is SO IMPORTANT that we MUST try to understand it as best we can. It is profoundly prevasive in a very large number of Bible Commentaries today. I propose to examine it in our last two Chapters in this Course.

2). I think it only fair to point out that because of the very NATURE of the subject it will demand more from you by way of in-tellectual effort than probably any of the other Chapters. I will do my very best to sweeten the pill and if you just KEEP ON chewing - even in the difficult parts - you will be rewarded intellectually, but more importantly spiritually! So, for want of a better expression let me urge you 'to hang in there'.

3). So important is this aspect of understanding your Bible that at the end of Chapter IX, I plan (DV) to include a Bibliography that deals largely, if not exclusively, just with the 'New Hermeneu- tic.'

4). Again, because of the nature of the subject, the QUES-TIONS, which usually come after each Chapter, will in this case all come at the end of Chapter X.

5). Finally, let me ask you: 'Do you really want to know HOW to understand your Bible? ' 'Of course', you answer. Well, if that is so then you must ALSO know HOW NOT to approach, understand or inter- pret your Bible!

I. MARTIN HEIDEGGER

1). Reality

2). Truth

II. THE NEW HERMENEUTIC

1). Private Revelation

2). Subjectivism

3). Historical-Contextual Meaning

III. SELECTIVE BIBLIOGRAPHY ON THE 'NEW HERMENEUTIC.'

I. MARTIN HEIDEGGER.

1). Reality.

We must unhappily start off with an attempt to try and understand the philosophy of a man called Martin Heidegger (1889-1976). This, by the way, has been one of great misfortunes that has befallen the modern Christian Church, namely, the fact that 'philosophers' rather than Biblical and Evangelical theologians, have shaped the thinking of the Church. And in this case it is particularly regrettable since as great a thinker as Betrand Russell has commented on the difficulty of trying to 'understand' Heidegger.

Dr.J.I.Packer has stated flatly that to understand the 'new hermeneu-tic' means, to begin with, an understanding of Heidegger's 'Ontology.' (D.A.Carson and J.D.Woodbridge,eds. Scripture and Truth. Article by J.I.Packer entitled 'Infallible Scripture and the Role of Hermeneu- tics'. IVP, 1983, p.340).

'Ontology' is simply the theory a man holds about what REALLY EXISTS as opposed to that which APPEARS to exist but does NOT. At the risk of over-simplification 'ontology' is one man's view that an apple REALLY EXISTS in contrast to another man's view that the apple does NOT REAL- LY EXIST but only 'APPEARS' to exist. What does this have to do with Heidegger and 'understanding the Bible'? Try and grasp the following and you'll see.

Heidegger did not believe in the existence of an EXTERNAL, ABSOLUTE BEING like GOD. He says mysteriously: " 'Thinking' and 'Being' together belong to the 'Same'...together they stem from the 'Same'." (M. Heidegger. Essays in Metaphysics. Philosophical Library, 1960, p.18).

To return to our example of the apple. A man and an apple are not two separate 'things', they both belong and flow out of what might be called the 'Same Being.' But what then about 'Man' and 'God'? Are they two separate entities? Heidegger says, 'No.' 'Man' and 'God' and 'Truth' are all part of the SAME REALITY or SAME BEING.

The word 'domicile' means to 'live or exist within something', - like a room, a house etc. Now, says Heidegger, 'man', 'truth', 'being' and 'reality' and 'existence' are all 'domiciled' within each other. They are not separate things or truths or facts...they are ALL ONE AND THE SAME THING.

Therefore (and this is very important) if you want to come to real 'knowledge', real 'reality', real 'existence' YOU MUST ENTER INTO YOURSELF, AND YOUR SUBJECTIVE THOUGHT AND IDEAS AND EXISTENCE. This diving into or delving into yourself is self-disclosing AND IS THE ONLY AUTHENTIC 'REALITY' THAT WE HAVE. Remember, according to Heidegger's 'ontology' you and 'God' flow out of and have the 'Same Be-ing.'

You do not, for example, look 'OUTSIDE' of yourself to an externally and objectively and separately existing Bible, or the Ten Commandments, or the Epistles or even God. Why not? Because they really only 'appear' to exist separately from yourself. The result is that ALL REALITY IS SUBJECTIVE. The Bible, because it is outside of us and because it is objective is NOT REALITY. This is really Zen Buddhism!

T.D.Suzuki is a leading exponent of Zen Buddhism. Of his writings Heidegger once said that if he understood Suzuki correctly, then "...this is what I (Heidegger) have been trying to say in all my writings." (Carson and Woodbridge, *ibid.*, p.416).

2). Truth.

What about 'truth.'? I apologize for having to use this language but I have no other way, known to me, to put it.

As far as the 'Truth' is concerned a man must open himself up to the totality of his own 'Being', and, "...if he so chooses, live an authentic human existence; he fixes his gaze on the truth (within himself) AS HE IS ABLE TO DISCOVER IT,..., from within the authentic womb of his own Being." (H.H.Titus. Living Issues in Philosophy. American Book Co., 1964, p. 305).

This, putting it bluntly, is nothing else than what is called 'existential mysticism.' And that, being translated, means that if you want to know the 'truth' then you must concentrate profoundly upon and consult your own inner, deep-seated emotions, feelings, ideas, concepts, the ebb-and-flow of your experiences.

Naturally you must by-pass your mind and intellect and thoughts processes. And that means that you must by-pass the objective, propositional doctrines and objective 'truth' of the Bible. As a result of this inner, existential and mystical experience you now gain a new 'transcendent knowledge', far greater than that which is merely written in the Bible.

'Truth', for Heidegger comes from a, "...thinking-less-God...without any connection with a

doctrine of faith or a church doctrine." (Heidegger, op.cit., pp.65 and 47).

II. THE NEW HERMENEUTIC.

1). Private Revelation.

The 'New Hermeneutic' or the new 'understanding' and 'interpretation' of the Bible flourished in the 1960s and is still with us today. This 'new' way of interpretation became associated with the names of Ernst Fuchs, Gerhard Ebeling, Hans-Georg Gadamer and Eberhard Jungel. In simple terms they took Heidegger's concept of 'ontology' (ie. the nature of 'reality' and 'truth') and brought it into their 'theology.'

And in particular into an area which they called 'the language-event.' How is God known, they asked? Answer: " God is known, they say, IN and BY each 'WORD-HAPPENING'...or 'LANGUAGE-EVENT'...that the faith-full speech of the N.T. SPARKS OFF in those who READ and HEAR it." (Carson and Woodbridge, op.cit., p.341).

The essence or hearing or understanding or interpreting the Word of God preached or taught is thus, for them, NOT the receiving of instruction FROM GOD (by what they 'hear'), but by the birth of new 'SELF-UNDERSTANDING' regarding oneself and one's personal world round about oneself and to whom one is related.

In one way or another this 'NEW' understanding dawns in our hearts; not in the normal manner of grammatico-historical exegesis IN or OF the Biblical text, but THROUGH the text. And this - please note - could be a 'truth' quite unconnected from the actual content and meaning of the passage. Thus I would gain 'new light' or 'new insight' which the text triggered off in me which might be wholly different from the real, original and exegetical truth of the text.

These become what one might call 'personal understandings', 'new understandings', which are nothing less than a kind of 'private revelation' or 'illumination.' But it goes even farther than that. The practical outcome of this 'private revelation' of the 'new hermeneutic' is that YOU could end up with a 'new understanding' of the Biblical passage in 20th Century terms that Paul NEVER intended when he wrote his epistle or David when he penned a Psalm.

2). Subjectivism.

Craig Blomberg points out that the 'new hermeneutic' thinking, "...came to refer to a movement which emphasizes the 'subjectivity' of the process on interpreting biblical texts." (C.L.Blomberg. The Historical Reliability of the Gospels. IVP, 1987, p.54). This is 'subjectivism' run riot.

By 'subjectivism' I mean an understanding and interpretation of a passage that is a view of or a conclusion about the meaning of a passage that is MY OWN INNER FEELING about the truth in it irrespective of the fact that most, if not all, other commentators have a different (but similar) view. That is, 'similar' amongst themselves.

Rather than emphasizing the ability of an interpreter or exegete to arrive at an 'objective' meaning of a given text or passage, those who hold to the 'new hermeneutic' affirm that they must allow the text to 'speak to them' in a 20th Century context in which it challenges, "... their preconceptions about what it means, (and creates) what has come to be called a 'language-event' whereby they hear the Word of God 'afresh with new insight.'" (Blomberg, ibid., p.54). And this new 'insight' comes from within their own 'Being.'

To give a theoretical example, take Gal.3:26-29 in which Paul stresses that there is neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, male nor female, "...for you are all one in Christ Jesus." It is perfectly obvious, and you discover this if you read the major orthodox evangelical commentators, that Paul is affirming a SPIRITUAL truth. Why? For one thing, becoming a Christian does not change your physical anatomy, a man remains a man, and woman remains a woman!

But someone whose approach is along the lines of the 'new hermeneutic' and who gains 'new' and 'fresh' insight in 20th Century terms may 'discover' in that passage some 'new' medical-anatomical-unanimity significance that brings out a new previously unheard of 'femininity' of the male species, and a 'masculinity' of the female species. And this notwithstanding the fact that Paul has - in this passage - not the slightest interest in medicine or anatomy.

3). Historical-Contextual Meaning.

Walter C.Kaiser puts it this: " For at the heart of much of the debate there is...the problem of how the interpreter can relate 'what the text MEANT in its historical context' to 'what that same text (NOW) means to me.' " (W.C.Kaiser. Towards an Exegetical Theology. Baker, 1981, p.23).

Put bluntly: Is the meaning of the text to be solely in terms of its grammatico-historical, verbal and literal meaning of that text as those words were used by their Scriptural author, or should the 'meaning' of that text be either partially or even fully understood in terms of what it 'now means to me', the reader and interpreter?

Kaiser also reminds us of the role of one of Evangelicalism's arch-enemy's, the liberal higher-critic Schleiermacher's, role in this debate, for he taught:

"...the process of grammatical understanding...of an author's words must be distinct and separate from the... 'technical' (read=grammatical, historical and contextual) interpretation...as such...interpretation can never function as a source for universal principles... FOR ALL MEN AND TIMES...every word...is to be worked out from the total given language BROUGHT TO THE TEXT..." (Kaiser, *ibid.*, pp.28-29. Footnotes 24, 26).

In other words the 'language-event' in the new hermeneutic means that you can disregard what the original Hebrew and Greek language meant, as used by Moses, David, Jeremiah, Luke, John, Peter and Paul, and can use the 'modern' understanding of a word or phrase in order to understand the original writer. Which means that you do NOT read the writings of David through David's eyes, or Paul's epistles through Paul's eyes, but rather through 20th Century eyes and mind, or worse still, through YOUR OWN EYES. YOU therefore actually REPLACE Paul.

You may want to check back to my explanation - at the beginning - of Heidegger's 'ontology'. He did not believe that we and God were separate entities. We all flowed out of the 'Same Being'. Thus my thoughts flowed out of me AND WERE THUS THE FINAL AUTHORITY. Thus in interpreting the Bible MY 'UNDERSTANDING' which flowed out of me were FINAL and AUTHORITATIVE. There was no need to believe that (a) God had revealed His Word finally and authoritatively through a Biblical writer. MY UNDERSTANDING is not only good enough, but also FINAL.

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CHAPTER X

THE NEW HERMENEUTIC - PART TWO

I. PROBLEMS THAT THE 'NEW HERMENEUTIC' RAISES

- 1). An Impossibility
- 2). The True Sense
- 3). Pantheism
- 4). Wrong or Right Interpretation ?
- 5). Uncontrolled Mysticism

- 6). What is the Truth ?
- 7). Replaces the Gospel
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- 9). Irrational
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II. CONCLUDING JUDGEMENT ON THE 'NEW HERMENEUTIC.'

- 1). Unreliable viz-a-viz Objective Truth
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- 4). 'Hermeneutic Circle'
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- 6). Philological Failure
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- 8). Inerrancy and Authority
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I. PROBLEMS THAT THE NEW HERMENEUTIC RAISES.

1). An Impossibility.

Firstly, if one were to accept the 'new hermeneutic' then one must also accept (with Schleiermacher) that it is virtually impossible to reconstruct the mental process of the original author, because the coherence between the author's meaning and my understanding today has become too fragile. You cannot - if you accept the concept of 'onto-logy' and the theology that flows from it by Heidegger, Fuchs, Eberling, etc. - make a mental or historical leap backwards of nearly 2000 years.

2). The True Sense.

If the text always (or even partially) goes beyond what its author (Matthew, Paul or Peter) intended, then the 'true sense' of that text will end up as an unending process which is never exhausted or captured DEFINITELY. (This is not the same as saying that the Scriptures are an inexhaustible well of spiritual riches for each new Christian generation!)

Says Kaiser: " Thus, there remains no yardstick for determining which interpreter is more nearly correct if both happen to hit upon conflicting interpretations at the same moment in time. There is neither any- one nor anything that can validate the interpretation in this sad state of affairs: not the author, nor his words as he intended them - not even what the text meant in the past! (Kaiser, op.cit., p.30).

Once again, this is not to 'ossify' Scripture. Of course there are passages that are difficult to interpret, but in terms of broad orthodox, evangelical interpretation of key verses and passages

there has been substantial agreement since the time of the Reformation. Any 'better' understanding of a text cannot be stretched to the production of a 'new' meaning.

3). Pantheism.

Heidegger's 'ontology' upon which this 'new hermeneutic' is built is, ultimately, a Western concept of Eastern Pantheism! Man, says Heidegger, represents some 'Existent', and then adds: "As such he belongs with the stone, the tree, and the eagle to the totality of Being." (Heidegger, op.cit., p.21).

And this leads to both mysticism and relativism. As Heidegger says: ¶ "Now, we are under obligation to experience IN OUR OWN PERSON quite simply this concinnity wherein Man and Being are con-cinnate." (Heidegger, ibid., p.27). What Heidegger seems to be saying is that Man and Being are 'elegantly and suitable and appropriately One.'

But if we accept this idea of reality then it is quite impossible not to end up with a highly individualistic and subjective 'interpretation.' What Paul -or even God - for that matter meant, in say Jn.3:16 is quite irrelevant. Why? Because there is no separate Person like the God of Scripture, and since I and God are One Being, MY interpretation is perfectly acceptable.

4). Wrong or Right Interpretation ?

Such an approach to Scripture is really asking for exemption for it-self. "To be consistent, the person claiming that no attempt to write history can ever be fully reliable must admit that he or she have made a statement about history that (equally) cannot be fully reliable." (Blomberg, op.cit., p.55. Footnote 1).

In other words, and to simplify it, you can end up with your own interpretation being quite wrong, - and you would never even know it! This kind of 'subjectivity' becomes quite meaningless since without the existence of objective truth there is nothing to which such 'subjective' claims can be submitted to for judgement.

5). Uncontrolled Mysticism.

From a slightly different perspective than point 4, one must add the following question: If Fuchs, Ebeling, etc. want to stress that 'God' comes to people through Scripture to bring about a 'new' self-understanding, and if further, they suggest that Scripture is only a human witness which is culturally determined, how then can they give any meaning or substance to their OWN point(s) or interpretation ?

"The snag in this...is that it sets us off and running along a path of fundamentally uncontrolled linguistic mysticism, in which, as it seems, almost anything could bring almost anything to speech. For the restraint of the text as an object (or:objective fact) -ie. as carrier of the precise meaning that its words are expressing - has been with-drawn...It is hard to be enthusiastic about Fuch's proposals." (Carson and Woodbridge, op.cit., p.343).

6). What is Truth?

Can the 'new hermeneutic' state the relation between (what in its view) comes to each individual from the Biblical text (in the so-called 'language-event') and what the text actually meant historically, grammatically, contextually and exegetically ? Answer:It is highly unlikely. Indeed, on the principles of the 'new hermeneutic' approach IT DOES NOT MATTER! And on such a shaky foundation how can anyone preach an expository sermon, - but that too, it seems, does not matter.

7). Replaces the Gospel.

Alan Richardson (with whom evangelicals do not always agree), nevertheless, sums up the

'new hermeneutic' very aptly: " What Heidegger in fact does is to provide modern man with a secular parody of the Christian religion...

" Instead of God he speaks of Being; instead of revelation through the Word of God he gives us the disclosure of Being through the voice of Being. Instead of faith we have primal thinking. Instead of Christ we read of man as 'the shepherd of Being'...

" Instead of a once-for-all victory over sin and death there is the individually repeated salvation from the dread of nothingness and from the futility of secondary thinking and unauthentic existence. Instead of the community of the redeemed there is a gnostic collection of individual primal thinkers. Instead of the fulfillment of man's destiny as the goal of history (eschatology) there is only a disclosure or 'event' of Being." (Carson and Woodbridge, *ibid.*, p.341. Footnote 54).

8). Authentic or Self-Delusion ?

" Can ", asks Dr.J.I.Packer, " the new hermeneutic provide any criterion of truth or value for assessing the new self-understanding(s) to which language-events give rise ? Again, it seems not." (Carson and Woodbridge, *ibid.*, p.344). In other words when a text of Scripture 'speaks' to me how do I know that what I'm 'hearing' or 'experiencing' is authentic or not ?

Remember where this 'new hermeneutic', and in particular Fuchs, has placed us. The 'rules' for understanding the Bible (ie. the various hermeneutical rules examined in other Chapters), the 'rules' for understanding the apostolic teachers and the 'historical' and 'contextual' sense of the text have been DENIED us!

How then can we 'authenticate' (ie. say, 'this is the truth') when the text 'sparks off' some new 'self-disclosure' or 'self-understanding' in us ? How do we know that it is not just self-delusion and thus some falsehood ?

If the standard or criterion of TRUTH is ONLY in the 'language-event' (when Scripture 'comes alive' to ME alone), how can that event or experience be safeguarded against delusion, mockery, or utter triviality ? In other words, when you study your Bible and suddenly you have some vivid new 'insight', some vivid new 'meaning' - APART from studying the historical background, the context, the meaning of the individual words, and normal exegesis as to what the writer meant when he wrote it - how can you know that the new 'meaning' is true ?

The only thing you can do is judge the new 'event', the new 'understanding' AGAINST ITSELF! Hence this new 'meaning' can give you the 'impression' that SOMETHING significant has happened, when in fact NOTHING significant has happened.

9). Irrational.

Thus, Dr.Packer concludes: " Logically, the new hermeneutic is relative (ie. you can never be sure that you have 'understood' Scripture correctly and thus have real and absolute 'truth'); philosophically, it is irrationalism (how can you measure some new 'understanding' with or against itself ?); psychologically, it is freedom to follow unfettered religious fancy (every Christian can have a 'different' interpretation of the same text);...religiously it is uncontrolled individualistic mysticism (because only YOU 'experience' in your subjective heart and mind this 'new' insight)..." (Carson and Woodbridge, *ibid.*, p.344).

10). Communication from God?

Finally, to take up a point made by Dr.Francis Schaeffer. If the God portrayed in the Bible is a COMMUNICATING God, it would be nothing less that capriciously cruel of him to give us (i) an unauthoritative, non-communicating Word, and (ii) leave us to find within ourselves or from the 'ground of our being' (whatever that may mean) a new 'understanding' of a text that

cannot be authenticated or guaranteed as a TRUE communication from himself.

This would leave us with 2000 years of Christian History in which God has not really been communicating final, infallible, inerrant, authentic and authoritative 'Truth'. If that is the case then there is no point to the Christian Church's existence, preaching, evangelism or missionary work. The 'new hermeneutic' makes all that an exercise in futility.

II. CONCLUDING JUDGEMENT ON THE 'NEW HERMENEUTIC.'

With all this evidence before us I would like to suggest that the 'New Hermeneutic' is Biblically, theologically and exegetically unsound and extremely dangerous. My reasons are as follows:

1). Unreliable viz-a-viz Objective Truth.

By that I mean that it plays right into the hands of unbalanced, extremist, introspective and subjectively-orientated 'Christians.' Why? Because the interpretation of a text can end up as a personal, highly subjective 'new understanding' in which the normal orthodox protestant-evangelical 'grammatico-historical' interpretation and exegesis simply goes to the wall.

And if you study the various sects and cults and heresies that have arisen from within the Church - before separating and going their own way - you almost invariably find that some 'Christian' man or woman experienced a personal 'new insight' or 'new revelation' from the Bible.

2). The New Age Movement.

It plays right into the hands of the New Consciousness or New Age Movement, where the final authenticity of an 'experience' comes from within your own consciousness or 'ground of your Being.' This cannot but be linked up with the New Mysticism and Pantheism sweeping into the West from the East. A 'mystical' or 'self-consciousness' experience thus becomes 'self-authenticating.'

3). Cultural Displantation.

What I mean by that is that while the text was or is acceptable for Paul in his cultural situation, the 'new hermeneutic' could (and usually will) make it undergo a cultural change to adapt it to our modern cultural situation.

Good, sound theology thus becomes 'relative' as it is adjusted culturally! Theology has become dependent upon whatever cultural period you live in. It is no longer the theology of Moses or David or Paul; theology revealed by God through the Spirit that is as eternal and inerrant and infallible as God himself. It becomes a forever-shifting theology depending on whether you find yourself in 16th Century, 18th Century or 20th Century culture.

4). 'Hermeneutical Circle.'

Dr. Noel Weeks describes this as follows: " It is held that a person will bring to the Scriptures the ideas of HIS background and culture. He will naturally read those ideas INTO what he reads. Hence he sees those ideas as being confirmed by the Bible. He reads out of the Bible what he reads into it. Hence we have a circle of interpretation or a 'hermeneutical circle.' " (N.Weeks. The Sufficiency of Scripture. Banner of Truth, 1988,p.81).

W.Kaiser puts it this way: " The process of exegeting a text is declared to be circular (the hermeneutical circle) and not linear. While we are assured that the circle is not a vicious circle, the point usually made is that the interpreter (that means YOU) affects his text (by his own culture, beliefs - ie. ontology - and methods for discovering meanings) as much as the text affects the interpreter! " (Kaiser, op.cit., p.31).

This means that any discussion of whether the Bible is the Word of God is rather pointless. In

any event there can never be any consensus as to the 'right' or 'correct' interpretation of a text. Nothing can ever be final and certain. The so-called solid and immovable 'promises of God' in which the Christian takes so much comfort becomes 'sinking sand.' And the Christian is left without any eternal foundation of assurance and safety.

5). The Mission of the Church Paralysed.

This kind of 'theological relativism', as Dr. Weeks reminds us, once again, "...paralyses the mission of the church to the unconverted." (Weeks, *ibid.*, p.83).

This is, therefore, a very serious dilemma that the 'new hermeneutic' has confronted the Christian Church with. For 2000 years the Church has sought to bring the Gospel of redemption through Christ to the non-Christian. And that Gospel includes the Inscripturated as well as the Incarnated WORD.

Now, however, the Church stands in serious danger of having to bid farewell to an Authoritative communication from God. Church worship, personal devotions, the preaching of the Word, evangelism, missions, walking with God in Holiness is paralysed if not destroyed.

6). Philological Failure.

The word 'philological' simply refers to 'words' or the use of words. Now, any method of exegesis that is not 'philological', or that does not taken into account the actual God-breathed 'words' of Scripture is both dubious, suspect, and runs the risk of being wrong and fallacious in its exegesis of a passage.

You have only to think of words such as 'justification', 'sin', 'gra-ce', 'redemption', 'propitiation', and so on to realize the enormous importance and significance of understanding Biblical words correctly. It is not going too far to say that an incorrect understanding of such words leads to an incorrect understanding of the Gospel.

Take the word 'justification' as an example. We are constantly told - from evangelical pulpits! - that justification means 'to have your sins forgiven.' I have no quarrel with that definition EXCEPT that many evangelicals stop at that point! That is to leave both the definition of the word and the Gospel half-formed. It correctly stresses the 'negative' aspect, namely, 'forgiveness', but that is not enough.

We MUST go a step further and add that 'justification' ALSO means that we have positively been made holy and righteous because Christ's Righteousness has been credited to our account, or if you like 'given' to us, so that when God the Father looks upon us he sees only Christ's full and perfect holiness and righteousness covering us.

However, if you followed the 'new hermeneutic' you could come up with a 'language-event' that gave a totally different meaning to the word 'justification.' With 'new insight' you could, for example, think that the word means to 'be at peace with mankind', or that you are 'justified' or 'correct' in your religious convictions, whatever they may be, and so on.

As Walter Kaiser puts it: " It is by 'words' of the Holy Spirit only, that we are led to understand what we ought to think respecting things. Said Melancthon very truly: 'The Scripture cannot be understood THEOLOGICALLY, until it is understood GRAMMATICALLY.' " (Kaiser, *op. cit.*, pp.26-27. Footnote 18).

There is a great deal of truth in understanding the great Reformation in terms of one word - Justification by Faith, 'Sola Fidei' - alone.

7). Internal Knowledge.

If one accepts the principles of the 'new hermeneutic', "...then man will have to seek knowledge

WITHIN himself as the FINAL REFERENCE POINT." (C.Van Til. A Christian Theory of Knowledge. Presbyterian and Reformed, 1969, p.17.). However, Van Til points out, "...the Bible must be identified in its entirety in ALL that it says on ANY subject as the Word of God...we are not to separate the fact of Scripture from the nature of Scripture." (Van Til, *ibid.*, pp.31, 32).

8). Inerrancy and Authority.

One cannot escape the fact that 'inerrancy', 'authority' and 'meaning' are all bound up together with regard to the Scriptures.

"Biblical inerrancy and biblical authority are bound up together. Only truth can have final authority to determine belief and behaviour, and Scripture cannot have such authority further than it is true...Scripture can only rule us so far as it is UNDERSTOOD, and it is only understood as far as it is PROPERLY INTERPRETED. A misinterpreted Bible is a misunderstood Bible, which will lead us out of God's way rather than in it." (J.I. Packer. *Beyond the Battle for the Bible*. Cornerstone Books, 1980, pp.17, 19).

9). The Divine Beauty and Harmony of Scripture.

Finally, the 'new hermeneutic' with its highly individualistic and subjective 'new understandings' will wreck and destroy the beauty and harmony and system of the Bible as always understood by Protestant and Orthodox Evangelical theologians. And that is no small matter since that casts a reflection upon the harmony, order and symmetry of the Trinity itself,- from when the Scriptures flowed.

Let Calvin have the last word here as he speaks of the Scripture: "... For it is wonderful how much we are confirmed in our belief, when we more attentively consider how admirably the system of divine wisdom contained in it is arranged...how beautifully it harmonizes in all its parts - and how rich it is in all the other qualities which give an air of majesty to (its) composition." (J.Calvin. *Institutes of the Christian Religion*. James Clarke, 1957, Book I, chapter VIII, section 1, p.75 of Vol.I).

QUESTIONS

1. Write an Essay in which (i) you describe the views of Martin Heidegger, and (ii) what the 'New Hermeneutic' is. (See Chapter IX.
 2. Discuss the Problems that the 'New Hermeneutic' raises.
 3. What is your concluding 'judgement' of the 'New Hermeneutic.' ?
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