



Sunday August 18, 2013
Discovering God's Word
Part 2 : Guidelines for Biblical Interpretation
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Hermeneutics = The science (principles) and art (task) by which the meaning of the Biblical text is determined.

"This is that"

Joel 2:28 Acts 2:17

What Joel Said	What Actually Happened
Prophecy, dreams, visions Wonders in heaven and in earth, blood, fire, pillars of smoke, etc.	Sound of a mighty wind, tongues of fire, speaking in tongues

Although through our natural analysis we would say that these are very dissimilar occurrences - Peter, an unlearned and uneducated (untaught in Scripture) man, by the inspiration of the Holy Spirit said "This is that".

While this is not a basis for us to randomly interpret Scripture at our own spiritual whims and fancies, it does bring home a point - that the best Interpreter of Scripture is the Author Himself - the Holy Spirit.

The Challenge in Biblical Interpretation

The first five books were written by Moses around 1400 B.C. (about 3400 years ago). The last book, Revelation, was written by the Apostle John around 90 A.D. (about 1900 years ago). The Bible was written in Hebrew, Aramaic and Greek. The Septuagint, the Greek translation of the Old Testament was made around 200 B.C.

- A spiritual gap
- A time gap
- A geographical gap
- A cultural gap
- A language gap
- A literary gap

Inspiration and Illumination (Revelation)

Inspiration of Scripture was given only once - when the Word was first written.



Illumination (Enlightening, Revelation) of Scripture is given repeatedly.

By illumination we mean that today God again breathes on His Word, the Holy Spirit imparts light to us; the anointing of the Holy Spirit is upon His Word so that once again we see what God said in that day. God does something today to make alive the inspiration of yesterday.

Illumination (Enlightening, Revelation) occurs when God's Word is alive and full of life to me today as at the time when it was first written. This is a work of the Spirit.

Receiving revelation in one area does not necessarily mean you have revelation in all areas.

Here are some important things to keep in mind in the context of the illuminating work of the Holy Spirit:

1. The Holy Spirit's role does not mean that one's interpretations are infallible
2. The work of the Spirit in interpretation does not mean that He gives some interpreters "hidden" meaning divergent from the normal, literal meaning of the passage.
3. The place of the Holy Spirit in interpreting the Bible means that He does not normally give sudden intuitive flashes of insight into the meaning of Scripture - independent of careful study and meditation.
4. The Holy Spirit guides the believer into all truth (John 16:13). Bible truth is available to all believers. However, it is up to the believer to follow obediently.

We study the Word to receive illumination of God's Word that will lead us to right application and life transformation.

Conventions Rules for Biblical Interpretation (Hermeneutics)

#1, Interpret with the Cultural Context in mind

The context in which a given Scripture passage is written influences how that passage is to be understood. Context includes:

- ✓ The verses immediately before and after the passage
- ✓ The paragraph and book in which the verses occur
- ✓ The dispensation in which it was written
- ✓ The message of the entire Bible



- ✓ The historical-cultural environment of that time when it was written

The Bible reflects the culture of its day. Therefore it is important to know what the people in the Bible thought, believed, said, did and made. If we fail to give attention to these matters of culture, then we may be guilty of reading into the Bible our modern-day ideas.

Eleven Cultural Categories : Political, Religious, Economic, Legal, Agricultural, Architectural, Clothing, Domestic, Geographical, Military, Social

It becomes immediately evident that all practices in the Bible are not transferable to present day. If that were true, then when you buy a house, the former owner should take off his sandals and give it to you, the buyer, following the practice in Ruth 4:8

Here is a sample listing of some practices we see in the Bible. Are the following practices permanent (P) meaning that we are to continue them or temporary (T) meaning that they are limited to the culture of that day?

- Greet one another with a holy kiss (Romans 16:16) (T)
- Be baptized (Acts 2:38) (P)
- Wash one another's feet (John 13:14) (T)
- Observe the Lord's Supper (1 Corinthians 11:24) (P)
- Be circumcised (Acts 15:5) (T)
- Wear sandals but not an extra tunic (Mark 6:9) (T)
- Cast lots for church officers (Acts 1:26) (T)

The following principles are useful in determining which cultural practices and situations, commands and precepts in the Bible are transferable to our culture and which ones are non-transferrable:

1. Some situations, commands, or principles are repeatable, continuous, or not revoked, and/or pertain to moral and theological subjects, and/or are repeated elsewhere in Scripture, and therefore are permanent and transferable to us.

- Capital Punishment given in Genesis 9:6. Not revoked elsewhere. Hence is transferable.



- Polygamy was practiced in the Old Testament. The New Testament instructs monogamy (1 Corinthians 7:2, Ephesians 5:28,33 1 Timothy 3:2)
- A Nazarite was to let his hair grow (Judges 13:5, 1 Samuel 1:11). But in the New Testament long hair is considered dishonourable (1 Corinthians 11:14)

The Bible is its own authority, including the authority to set limits on which practices are culture-bound and which ones are not.

2. Some situations, commands, or principles pertain to an individual's specific non-repeatable circumstances, and/or non-moral or non-theological subjects, and/or have been revoked, and are therefore not transferable to today.

- No where are Christian fathers commanded to sacrifice their sons as Abraham was asked to, even though Abraham is the father of our faith.

3. Some situations or commands pertain to cultural settings that are only partially similar to ours and in which only the principles are transferable

- In five places the New Testament exhorts believers to greet one another with a holy kiss, since that was the normal form of greeting in that day. While we do not practice the same custom, the underlying principle of greeting one another with brotherly love and kindness should continue.

4. Some situations or commands pertain to cultural settings with no similarities but in which the principles are transferable

- When Moses stood in God's presence on holy ground he took off his sandals (Exodus 3:5). Are we to follow the same custom each time we pray or do we follow the principle of maintaining a heart of reverence in God's presence?
- 1 Corinthians 11:2-16 talks about a woman having a head covering over her hair. In the Corinthian culture, a woman's shawl was a symbol of her husband's authority and she was thereby showing that she was placing herself under authority. In Corinth, prostitutes associated with pagan temples did not wear a head covering. Also note worthy is that Jewish women did not



wear a head covering until they were married. There was no need to do so since they were not under the authority of a husband. Should women today wear shawls on their heads in church? No, because the significance of women wearing head covering in the Greco-Roman world no longer holds true in our culture. But is there a principle here to be followed, and to be expressed in our modern culture? Yes, the principle of submission of the wife to her husband still holds because the truth is repeated elsewhere in Scripture (Ephesians 5:22-23, Colossians 3:18, 1 Peter 3:1-2)

#2 Keep in mind normal rules for grammar and figures of speech

#3 Recognize Types, Illustrations and Parables

Types, Illustrations and parables

The type or illustration is an historical event divinely designed by God and clearly identified as such in Scripture that pointed to another event which was the "reality", the main focus. The "type" carried some elements (features, characteristics) that predicted what the "fulfillment" would have or accomplish.

The illustration is divinely designed by God as a picture of the truth.

A parable is an example or story from our world that conveys spiritual truth. Spiritual truth lies hidden in the story.

Some Examples of Types

(Not a complete listing)

Type	Fulfillment	Scripture
Melchizedek	Christ's perpetual priesthood	Hebrews 7:3, 15-17
Passover Feast	Christ our sacrifice	1 Corinthians 5:7

Some Examples of Illustrations

(not a complete listing)

Illustration	Truth	Scripture
Adam Adam was an example or illustration of Christ in that both were the head of a race of	Christ	Romans 5:14



people.		
Jonah's three day and three nights in the fish's stomach	Christ's death	Matthew 12:39-40
Brass serpent lifted by Moses in the wilderness	The need for people to look to Christ for salvation	John 3

1, Only elicit the intended meaning from the type, illustration or parable that God intends

2, Do not stretch the type, illustration or parable into other meanings or comparisons that were not originally intended.

Example:

When Jonah was in the belly of the fish - it was totally dark in the belly, representing spiritual darkness; there were sea weeds representing the bondages of sin; there were gastric juices representing the effects of sin; the fish coughed up Jonah on the beach, representing the resurrection; etc. etc.....doing something like this is incorrect ("allegorizing" - which we address in the next section).

#4 Use Allegorizing With Caution

Allegorizing is when we take an incident or narrative in Scripture and elicit meaning that is not stated explicitly in Scripture.

Allegorizing

- There is no natural correspondence. Instead a forced or hidden meaning is sought behind the text.
- The literal meaning is rendered unimportant
- The allegory is a conjuring up of hidden ideas, foreign and behind the text.
- The allegory does not fulfill the texts
- The allegory is in the interpreter's imagination, not in the design of God
- The allegory is not mentioned in Scripture



Examples of Allegorizing

(resulting in wrong interpretations of Scripture)

1. The inn in the parable of the Good Samaritan is a type of the Church which should be full of Christians who will nourish newborn Christians.
2. The wicks on the tabernacle lamp stand are a type of the Christian's old sin nature which constantly needs trimming
3. Abraham's servant finding a bride for Isaac is a type of the Holy Spirit finding a bride (the church) for Christ.
4. Moses praying with his arms held up high is a type of Christ being crucified on the cross.
5. The cooking of the fine flour in the grain offering is a type of Christ being tested by suffering
6. Samson meeting the lion is a type of Christ meeting Paul on the Damascus road
7. The divided hoof in some animals (Leviticus 11:3) is a type of the Christian whose spiritual walk is divided.

Right and Wrong Use of Allegorizing

Draw meaningful lessons from incidents and Bible narratives is perfectly right.

Introducing forced meaning and comparisons is incorrect use of Scripture.

Example:

If we use the incident of David fighting Goliath to draw lessons about courage, faith in God, the power of covenant, the importance of initiative, etc. this is perfectly right.

However, if we say that David represents Jesus, Goliath represents satan, etc., we are allegorizing since this is not stated elsewhere in Scripture.

Prophetic inspiration and allegory

It is quite possible that some times God can inspire the use of a story or passage in the Bible, as a backdrop to a prophetic message that He desires to speak to the people. In such cases, it must be made clear to the audience that the Bible story/passage is being used as such – and the emphasis should be on the message that God is desiring to speak to the people, rather than on the story itself.

Example:



When giving a personal prophecy to an individual, the Spirit of God may lead you to prophesy and say "Just as God raised up Joseph in his day to bring solutions to problems, God will use you to bring solutions that will be implemented at a national level....". In this case, this is a word of prophecy to an individual and not a teaching from Scripture, and hence is perfectly fine.

#5, God's revelation of Himself, His plans and purposes are progressive.

Since God's revelation of Himself and His plans are progressive, we need to read starting from Genesis to Revelation, and understand the full development of the purpose of God and interpret Scripture based on this, rather than taking a portion and isolating it from the rest of Scripture.

Additional Rules for Biblical Interpretation

#6, Interpretation based on Divine Nature

God's nature is perfectly revealed in One Person Jesus Christ. Every other human person mentioned in the Bible is human and hence has flaws, etc. We therefore cannot base theology on another man, but Jesus.

"Jesus Christ is Perfect Theology" - Bill Johnson

When we interpret Scripture we need to based it on the nature of God as revealed in the Person of Jesus Christ.

#7, Scripture interprets Scripture

The Holy Spirit connects Scripture to Scripture and we need to follow the pattern He sets.

Examples:

Isaiah 53:4 <=> Matthew 8:17 Jesus taking our sicknesses and diseases

Joel 2:28 <=> Acts 2:17 Outpouring of the Spirit

Amos 9:11 <=> Acts 15:16 Tabernacle of David

#8 Be careful of personal or subjective Revelations

It is true that the Holy Spirit will quicken Scripture that are intended only for personal application and guidance or for a specific group.



Example:

A, The Holy Spirit may quicken a verse/passage of Scripture to indicate to you, your personal life assignment.

e.g. John the Baptist took what Isaiah prophesied in Isaiah 40:3, as his life assignment John 1:23.

This is valid.

B, Sometimes a you may feel that several Scriptures are jumping "out of the page" as God's answer to guidance you are seeking.

Example:

If you are praying about a particular man as your life partner, and verses like these come up as you flip the Bible:

Song of Solomon 2:10 My beloved spoke, and said to me: "Rise up, my love, my fair one, And come away."

1Samuel 10:24 And Samuel said to all the people, "Do you see him whom the LORD has chosen, that there is no one like him among all the people?" So all the people shouted and said, "Long live the king!"

Acts 10:20 Arise therefore, go down and go with them, doubting nothing; for I have sent them."

it would be rather dangerous to make you decision based on these. You need the leading of God's Spirit, godly counsel as well as look into other aspects before making a decision on such matters.

"Watch Out"

- ✓ Stay true to the basics
- ✓ Beware of "high minded" "super spiritual" revelations
- ✓ Beware of caught up with spiritual sounding jargon
- ✓ The true test of any "revelation" is the fruit it bears - are you transformed to be more like Jesus so that you can sit beside sinners and love them or does it make you feel more spiritual about yourself becoming critical of others and distancing yourself from ordinary people?

Application of God's Word

Martin Luther stated that the Bible "is not merely to be repeated or known, but to be lived and felt".

The application (doing) of God's Word must follow the interpretation (understanding) of God's Word.



Guidelines for Application

1. Build application on interpretation. First interpret correctly, then apply the Word.
2. Base application on things present day readers share with original audience
3. Recognize how God's working varies in different ages
4. Determine what is God's normal way of working for today
5. See the principle that is in the text – The principle “is a generalized statement deduced from the specific original situation then and applicable to different though similar situations now”.
6. Think of the principle as a bridge to application, i.e. the principle will help us apply the Word today
7. Rely on the Holy Spirit

John 8:31-32 Continue in the Word and then you will know.

John 14:21 Obedience opens the door for greater revelation.

Salvation Call

References

Basic Bible Interpretation - A Practical Guide to Discovering Bible Truth

Roy B. Zuck, 1991. Indian Edition published in 2002 and available from OM Books.

[Note: This reference is an extremely useful book. There are some theories however with which we do not agree with the author. Hence we have gleaned only the relevant portions from this book.]



USEFUL RESOURCES



Watch our online Sunday Church service live stream every Sunday at 10:30am (Indian Time, GMT+5:30). Spirit filled, anointed worship, Word and ministry for healing, miracles, and deliverance.

YOUTUBE: <https://youtube.com/allpeopleschurchbangalore>

WEBSITE: <https://apcwo.org/live>

Our other websites and free resources:

CHURCH: <https://apcwo.org>

FREE SERMONS: <https://apcwo.org/resources/sermons>

FREE BOOKS: <https://apcwo.org/books/english>

DAILY DEVOTIONALS: <https://apcwo.org/resources/daily-devotional>

JESUS CHRIST: <https://examiningjesus.com>

BIBLE COLLEGE: <https://apcbiblecollege.org>

E-LEARNING: <https://apcbiblecollege.org/elearn>

WEEKEND SCHOOLS: <https://apcwo.org/ministries/weekend-schools>

COUNSELING: <https://chrysalislife.org>

MUSIC: <https://apcmusic.org>

MINISTERS FELLOWSHIP: <https://pamfi.org>

CHURCH APP: <https://apcwo.org/app>

CHURCHES: <https://apcwo.org/ministries/churches>

WORLD MISSIONS: <https://apcworldmissions.org>