

# Rightly Dividing the Word

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Week Four: Interpreting the Scriptures through Interpretive Lenses

Tonight we'll be looking at how 3 Interpretive Lenses to use for rightly interpreting a portion of scripture.

The rest of all our time together will look like this

Week 4: Interpretive Lenses

Week 5: Genre Analysis

Week 6: Application

Week 7: Devotional Reading & Receiving a Word of Prophecy.

Class Exercise.

Couple of reminders...

**Slow Down.** When you are studying the Bible slow down to gain context and observe everything.

**Devote.** Don't forget your devotions in God's word. By that I mean when you are alone with God and your Bible listening to the Lord with all your heart. Asking the Lord to reveal Himself to you, set you right, and to capture all your attention. ***This time will have less to do with analysis and study and more to do with intimacy with Jesus.***

## Remember Hermeneutics?

- **Hermeneutics** – the science or art of interpreting the Bible
  - Explaining in one language [and culture] what was first written in another language [and culture].<sup>1</sup>
  - The art of moving the text from what it meant then to what it means now<sup>2</sup>.
    - ***To convey the meaning of scripture today from Biblical culture to our culture we must interpret.***  
“If we do not interpret properly, we may end up applying the bible wrongly.”<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Roy Zuck, *Basic Bible Interpretation* 19

<sup>2</sup> Graeme Goldsworthy, *Gospel-Centered Hermeneutics* 27

<sup>3</sup> Roy Zuck, *Basic Bible Interpretation* 14

- Thus the importance of Exegesis as a part of Hermeneutics
  - Begin with the process of exegesis of the text in order to understand what it originally meant. What was the author's intended meaning??
    - **Slow down and gain context. What did the original hearers hear?**

## From Context to Interpretation

Context is King (Context Rules)

- First determine the purpose of the book
  - Ask the 5 W's and an H
    - Who, What, Where, When, Where, Why & How?
- Importance of Context in Interpretation
  - "Disregarding the context is one of the greatest problems in Bible interpretation. By disregarding the "total surroundings" of a Bible verse, we may completely misunderstand the verse. We need to take into consideration the sentences and paragraphs that precede and follow the verse and also to take into consideration the cultural setting in which the passage and even the entire book is written<sup>4</sup>."
- We are endeavoring to *interpret* the Bible through its **literary meaning!** To do this we must understand the History, Context, Language and Genres of the Bible!

## Interpreting the Bible through 3 Lenses

- Interpreting through Genre
- Interpreting through Culture
- Interpreting through Grammar

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<sup>4</sup> Roy Zuck, *Basic Bible Interpretation* 76-77

## Interpreting Through Genre

Interpreting through genre, or genre analysis, means to study the literary forms, figures of speech and styles of the Bible.

- We do this with all kinds of literature. We read Dr. Sues different than we read Blogs. We read Spurgeon different than we read the fictional writings of CS Lewis. We read the newspaper different than we would read the lines to a poem written to us by a loved one.
  - Failure to make these distinctions when dealing with the Bible can lead to a host of problems with interpretation<sup>5</sup>.
  
- Before we look at the content of a word (what it means) we must look at the form it takes (*how does it mean to be understood?*).
  - Linguists use an analogy of different types of games do describe different types of genres.
    - Each game has its own set of rules. Euro Football has different rules than American Football. Basketball has different rules than Soccer.
      - You can't apply the rules of soccer to basketball or volleyball to soccer.
      - You can't read Genesis like you would read Psalms.

## Some Genres of the Bible

\*We will be spending the better part of next week discussing how to read each Biblical genre

### History

- Legal – Law given to Israelites
  - “You shall not” (Direct commands)
  - “If you, then...” (Conditional commands)
- Narrative – story told to convey a message through people and their problems and situations.

### Poetry

- Wisdom
  - Proverbial — These are guidelines which are normally true in general. They are guidelines, not guarantees; precepts, not promises.
  - Reflective — Job & Ecclesiastes, a discussion of the mysteries of life.

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<sup>5</sup> RC Sproul, *Knowing Scripture* 49

- Psalms
  - To be used as a guide to worship

### **Gospel**

- The overriding purpose of the Gospel stories is to explain and praise the Person and word of Jesus...through His actions, through His words, and through the responses of other people to Him.<sup>6</sup>

### **Epistles**

- Includes Romans through Jude
  - Expository – Expounds certain truths or doctrines.
    - Resurrection in 1 Cor 15
  - Exhortation – Exhorts to follow certain courses of action or to develop certain characteristics in light of the truths presented...
    - “Romans 12...therefore”
    - Important to know the occasion of the Epistle.

### **Prophecy**

- Material that includes predictions of the future at the time of the writing with an emphasis that those who hear the prophecy adjust their lives in light of the predictions!
  - 1 Thessalonians 4 & 5

### **Why Literary Genre in Interpretation?**

Understanding literary genre will help with the overall flow of the book, so you can look at paragraphs, sentences and words in light of the whole.

- Think of Genre as a broad look at what you're interpreting, Culture as a closer look at it, and Grammar as the closest look what you are interpreting.
  - Most difficult of these three steps because it's most time consuming and you can't do this part without help. You must go to outside resources.
  - But to neglect this part of the process can leave you with faulty application.

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<sup>6</sup> Roy Zuck, *Basic Bible Interpretation* 132

## Interpreting Through Culture

Culturally Conditioned Bible Passages.

*A passage that is conditioned by the culture and must be interpreted to know if it is transferable in part, in whole or not at all.*

*“One of the most important issues Bible interpreters face is the question of culturally conditioned Bible passages. That is, are some passages of the Bible limited to that day by the cultural setting and therefore not transferable to our culture, or is everything we read in the Scriptures normative for today? **If some passages are limited in this way, then how do we determine which ones are transferable to our culture and which ones are not?**”<sup>7</sup>*

- How do you interpret Ephesians 6 where it talks about slaves and masters? There are no slaves today. But if you do away with that verse then you have a problem with interpreting the command to wives submitting to their husbands in Chapter 5...
- It should be immediately evident that all practices in the Bible are not transferable to the present day.

## Guidelines for Transferring Cultural Conditioned Passages in Scripture<sup>8</sup>

### 1. Repeated not Revoked or have Theological Basis. (Permanent/Transferable)

- How does the scriptures treat this scripture??
  - Scripture has the highest authority, even of itself. It has the authority to set limits on which practices are culture-bound and which ones are not.
  - Any approach to Scripture must be the approach that Scripture takes to itself; otherwise, Scripture is no longer the ultimate authority<sup>9</sup>.
    - The apostles treated the teachings of Christ as ultimate authority in their writings.
    - 2 Peter 3:15-16 Peter treats Paul's writings as Scripture
      - Contextually Peter is writing about the authority of scripture and exposing false teachers.

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<sup>7</sup> Roy Zuck, *Basic Bible Interpretation* 90

<sup>8</sup> Roy Zuck, *Basic Bible Interpretation* 91-92

<sup>9</sup> Robertson McQuilkin, *Understanding and Applying the Bible* 282

- Check to see if the command or situation is paralleled in Scripture elsewhere.
      - “Trust the Lord...” repeated 71 times in scripture and is never revoked.
- Does the Scripture limit the audience??

## **2. Individual Situation. (Principle not transferable)**

- Pertains to an individual's specific non-repeatable circumstances.
- 2 Timothy 4:11-13
  - Limited to Timothy's situation because it pertains to his situation and is non-theological.
  - Why then is 2 Timothy 4:5 Transferable??
    - Jesus said the same thing in John 16:33; Matt 28:19

## **3. Similar Situation (Principles Transferred)**

- Cultural settings are only partially similar to ours, in that case transfer only the principle.
  - Eg. Holy Kiss.
- 1 Corinthians 8
  - Meat sacrificed to idols. \*Not a situation we deal with daily in our culture.
    - Principle in vs.9?

## **4. No Cultural Similarities (Principles Transferred)**

- Some situations pertain to cultural settings with no similarities but which the principles are transferable.
- Matthew 26:6-9
  - How do we transfer principle?

## **Guidelines for Determining Whether Bible Practices Are Culture-bound or Transcultural**

1. Does the behavior in the biblical culture mean something different in our culture?
2. If the behavior does mean something different, determine the timeless principle expressed in that practice.
3. Determine how the principle can be expressed in a cultural equivalent.

### **1 Corinthians 11:2-16**

#### **Interpreting Through Grammar**

Interpreting the meanings of words and sentences and the way they are put together is especially important because every one of God's Words is inspired.

- The goal of interpretation taken from solid exegesis is to determine what the text of Scripture itself says and means. (not reading something into it)
- To communicate, God expressed his thoughts through words, and words are the building blocks of sentences, which make up paragraphs...etc.
- Thus to know God's thoughts we must study His words and how they are associated in sentences<sup>10</sup>.
- We cannot neglect the meaning of words and how they are used. This is how you correctly interpret.
  - Keeps you from making the Bible mean whatever you want it to mean!

#### ***What is Grammatical Interpretation?***

When we speak of interpreting the Bible grammatically, we are referring to the process of seeking to determine it's meaning by discovering four things<sup>11</sup>:

1. the meaning of words (lexicology)
2. the form of words (morphology)
3. the function of words (parts of speech)
4. the relationship of words (syntax)

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<sup>10</sup> Roy Zuck, *Basic Bible Interpretation* 99

<sup>11</sup> Roy Zuck, *Basic Bible Interpretation* 100

## Meaning of Words (Lexicology)

- Etymology: how words were derived or developed.
  - In many cases words in the original language of the Bible have no English derivative.
    - In some cases a transliteration is used, but even that doesn't solve the problem completely.
  - What is needed is a study of the original words and their root meanings.
    - Example: **Hebrews 5:2** The Greek word used here for compassion is two Greek words:
      1. It is one of those *untranslatable words that is formed by joining two words*
      2. The word seeks to describe the one who takes the middle road between **extravagant grief and indifference**.<sup>12</sup>
  - We must not project *English* etymology on the words of Scripture.
    - Example **Dunamis** (Acts 1:8). Where we get our English word 'Dynamite'. To apply that word to our word dynamite would be projecting what the word means today to what Jesus said to His disciples or what Paul said about the Gospel (Romans 1:16). *Gospel is the "power" of God...*
    - Another example would be to project what we mean today by Love in English-speaking America to how the Bible uses the Word. TOTALLY DIFFERENT.
      - This is why the Bible student should make it a goal to study the great words of the Scripture.<sup>13</sup>

## Couple points of Grammatical Interpretation in your study

1. Discover the meaning of the word when the writer used it.
  - Since etymology in any language changes we must seek to discover what the word meant during the time the writer used it.
    - Until you know Greek yourself, turn to Zodhiates!
2. Take the word(s) in context.
  - The word and it's meaning is normally controlled by the words that precede and follow (context).
    - Example: word *TRUNK*.
      - Trunk of a car, Trunk of an elephant, Trunk of a tree, Trunk of storage, Trunk of an artery????

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<sup>12</sup> Robert L. Cargill, *Understanding the Book of Hebrews: An Inspirational Commentary* Nashville: Broadman Press, 1967), 47.

<sup>13</sup> Robert McQuilkin, *Understanding and Applying the Bible* 111

- **Biblical Example in page 107 in *Basic Bible*.**
  - The same word may have different meanings in its various occurrences in the Bible.
    - *Kosmos used in seven senses in Greek.*
      - Do the exercise from the Book.
        - \*\*The same word in the Bible does not always mean the same thing!
  - The Main Point: Each occurrence of a word will normally have **only one of its possible senses**, and that meaning is usually determined by the context. (Only one definition that fits in the context.)
    - Zodhiates does a good job in telling you which word is used.

## Homework

Read Basic Bible Interpretation Chapters: 4-6

Interpret Philippians 3:10

What does this text mean in light of the 3 interpretive lenses?

Why does Paul wanted to know the power of Jesus' resurrection mean?

What does it mean to have fellowship with His sufferings & conformed to His death?

\*\*Remember no commentaries!