

**Reading the Bible Again...For the First Time
(Hermeneutics: The Science and Art of Biblical Interpretation)**

Gary T. Meadors, Th.D.
Emeritus Professor of Greek and New Testament
Grand Rapids Theological Seminary
www.gmeadors.com
gngmeadors@mac.com

LESSON 1: VIEWING THE LANDSCAPE

Getting to know one another...

Who has had advanced math classes? Psychology? Auto Mechanics? Medical? Banking? Cashier in a store? Trades? Computer programming? Philosophy? Teaching? Was learning merely intuitive for you? Have you worked hard to gain your job skills?

What kinds of jobs do you have?

How did you learn your skills?

The first time you viewed a technical textbook for your job, it all made immediate sense, didn't it?

Did your supervisor sit you down at your new job and just say, "just do what you want," "it will come to you"?

At the end of the day, in Bible study we only know what we have read-researched. By reading-research we will learn if interpretive options exist and why. We will develop a reasoned judgment on the basis of "validating" views. **All Christians are responsible to read-study the Bible but not all Christians are equally skilled in understanding and explaining it.** The Bible is quite clear that God has given gifted people to perform skilled tasks in order to help the community of believers. We all fulfill different roles in God's Kingdom. Just look at the Bible and Redemptive history itself on this score (e.g. Neh 8:1-8; Ezra; Rom 12:3-8; Eph 4:7-16; 1 Cor; 2 Tim 2:2; 2 Peter 3:15-16).

Eph 4:7 But unto each one of us was the grace given according to the measure of the gift of Christ. 8 Wherefore he saith,

¹When he ascended on high, he led captivity captive,
And gave gifts unto men.

Eph. 4:9 (Now this, He ascended, what is it but that he also descended ²into the lower parts of the earth? 10 He that descended is the same also that ascended far above all the heavens, that he might fill all things.) 11 And he gave some *to be* apostles; and some, prophets; and some, evangelists; and some, pastors and teachers; 12 **for** the perfecting of the saints [learners], unto the work of ministering, unto the building up of the body of Christ: 13 till we all attain unto the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, unto a fullgrown man, unto the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ: 14 that we may be no longer children, tossed to and fro and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the sleight of men, in craftiness, after the wiles of error; 15 but ³speaking truth in love, may grow up in all things into him, who is the head, *even* Christ; 16 from whom all the body fitly framed and knit together ⁴through that which every joint supplieth, according to the working in *due* measure of each several part, maketh the increase of the body unto the building up of itself in love.

Before we look at a number of issues about WHY we need to interpret the Bible, let us think about **the Bible itself** and how it can be your foundation into thinking about what it means.

- A. **Why do we need hermeneutics?** That is, why do we need a disciplined approach to the reading-study of the Bible?

We need hermeneutics because of the proliferation of Bible versions.

* * * * *

So Many Bibles, So Little Time!

I. **Brief Historical Overview of the Manuscript Tradition of the Bible**

- A. Old Testament (Hebrew, Aramaic and Greek)
 Septuagint / LXX (Greek translation of Hebrew during 3-2nd century B.C.)
 Dead Sea Scrolls (2-1st century B.C.)
 Masoretic Text (not standardized until the 9th century A.D.)
- B. New Testament (Greek)
 There are 5,196+ manuscripts from the 2nd to the 16th century. Of these, 3,032 are Greek manuscripts and 2,164 are Greek lectionaries. Of this total, only 318 items come before the 9th century A.D. and the rest thereafter. In addition to this evidence, there are numerous versions and the Church Fathers. [numbers subject to change with discoveries]
- C. English Versions
 Here is a chart on the history of English Bibles
<http://tmcdaniel.palmerseminary.edu/Chart%20-%20English%20Bible%20History%20-%201.gif>

- The Bishop of Rome commissioned **Jerome to do a Latin translation** of the Bible in 382. This version was culminated at Bethlehem about **404 C.E.** The Vulgate was the Bible of the Western Church for over a thousand years and only those who knew the Latin language had access to it. Gutenberg printed Jerome's version in **1452-56**. A Greek New Testament was not printed until Erasmus' in **1514** (the Spanish Complutensian Polyglot was fully published in **1520**). Erasmus (c. 1466-1536) was a scholarly Roman Catholic monk of Christian humanist persuasion who was charged by the Roman Church to provide a Greek NT for publication prior to the Spanish. He reported did so with less than a dozen Greek manuscripts. His cache of manuscripts was severely limited (he claims to have consulted the Vulgate in some places, see Aland, *The Text of the NT*, 4 and <http://confessionalbibliology.com/2016/06/08/erasmian-myths-revelation-back-translated-from-the-vulgate/>). **Erasmus' Greek NT became the base for the KJV in 1611.**
- John Wyclif (1329-1384) at Oxford resisted the Roman Church ban on translating the Bible into the vernacular (only Latin Vulgate was sanctioned). Wyclif and his associates provided a too literal translation of the Vulgate. This virtually "underground" rendition was strongly resisted by Rome, so much so that the Council of Constance in 1414 ordered Wyclif's body disinterred and burned.
- William Tyndale (1526) printed the NT in 1525 but was executed (1536) before finishing the OT. Religious intrigue was the modus operandi until Tyndale's death. Afterward, politics changed and England became a hotbed for translating the Bible into the vernacular
- Coverdale (1535)
- The Great Bible (1539)
- **Geneva Bible (1560)**
- Bishops' Bible (1568)

- **King James Version (1611)** The KJV is an English translation based on Erasmus's Greek text which was produced from less than 12 Greek manuscripts (remember, we have over 5,000 manuscripts today!). This version began about 1604 with about 54 translators involved (only 47 names preserved). The KJV was as controversial as any new translation (it was banned from the new American colonies and the Geneva Bible was mandated for the new world), but it managed to dominate the English world until a new revision was commissioned in 1870. See the American Bible Society Chart ().

Because of a continuing pocket of naïve individuals who think that "if the KJV was good enough for Paul, its good enough for me!", a few comments are appropriate.

- The KJV is an important historic translation and worthy of respect for what it is (which means that one must understand exactly what it is historically).
- The KJV is just one translation in the stream of English Bibles in the Western world.
- The KJV that we read, even the Trinitarian Bible Society version, is in no way the same as the original KJV. The difference is illustrated by comparing 1600s Shakespearian speech to today.
- The KJV is the first of a long line of "formal equivalent" translations (e.g. ASV, RSV, NASB, NKJV, NRSV). The line of versions that revised the English of the KJV did so as Western culture required changes in the felicity and level of language so that the current culture can understand the Bible.

For more information about the KJV translators see:

McClure, Alexander W. *The Translators Revived*. New York: Board of Publication of the Reformed Dutch Church, 1855.

Opfell, Olga S. *The King James Bible Translators*. London: McFarland, 1982.

Paine, Gustavus S. *The Learned Men*. New York: Thomas Y. Crowell Co., 1959
[reprinted by Baker as *The Men Behind the King James Version*].

For books that address "The King James Only" scenario:

Carson, D. A. *The King James Version Debate: A Plea for Realism*. Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1979.

White, James R. *The King James Only Controversy: Can You Trust the Modern Translations?* Minneapolis: Bethany House Publishers, 1995.

White, James R. *King James Onlyism: A New Sect*. Singapore: Saik Wah Press, 2006.

- **English Revised Version (1881-1885)**
- **American Standard Version (ASV, 1901) My favorite paragraphed Bible.**
- **Revised Standard Version (1946-1952)**
- **New Revised Standard Version (NRSV, 1990)**

ALL of the versions above after 1611 are built on the KJV...they are revisions of it and not totally new translations.

II. Defining English Bible Translation Procedures

The historic purpose of translation is to render the Bible in the language of the people so that all have access to Scripture. The Septuagint, the Greek translation of the Bible for Jews of the second century before Christ illustrates this principle. All “versions” (versions are any translation of the “original” Bible) since that time serve the same purpose.

It is unfortunate that the modern era has become more “market oriented” than legitimate translation oriented. Consequently, **it is imperative that current Christians understand the nature of translations** available to them. With an appropriate understanding of English versions available today, one can make good use of all legitimate Bibles (“legitimate” refers to translations produced by competent scholars. There are many “personality” bibles and “understandable” bibles that do not meet this criteria. These kinds of bibles should be rejected).

There are two prominent translation procedures (“rule of thumb”).

A. Formal Equivalence (KJV, ASV, NASB, RSV, ESV)

All but the ESV (it uses 1971 RSV) of these English translations are revisions of the KJV. Translators did consult the growing manuscript evidence with each new version. They all follow—more or less—a formal equivalence procedure for translation. Bruce Metzger explains this by his comment in the introduction to the NRSV, “...the directive to continue in the tradition of the King James Bible, but to introduce such changes as are warranted on the basis of accuracy, clarity, euphony, and current English usage. Within the constraints set by the original texts and by the mandates of the Division, the Committee has followed the maxim, **“As literal as possible, as free as necessary.”** As a consequence, the New Revised Standard Versions (NRSV) remains essentially a literal translation.” [Introduction “To the Reader” to the NRSV. The NRSV is receiving criticism for allowing modern cultural pressure to detract from formal equivalency, e.g. gender issues.]

A “literal translation” requires more from the reader since the translators do very little interpretive adjustments. Furthermore, the KJV is reputed to have been written at a 12th grade level and the NIV at a 6th grade level.

B. Dynamic or Functional Equivalence (NIV/moderate, NLT/aggressive)

This translation procedure is well explained in the introduction to the New Living Translation Bible (a revision of The Living Bible). “A dynamic equivalence translation can also be called **a thought-for-thought translation**, as contrasted with a formal equivalence or word-for-word translation. Of course, to translate the thought of the original language **requires that the text be interpreted** accurately and then be rendered in understandable idiom.” [I would say, however, that the NLT is beyond the NIV in this regard, but this statement captures the NIV as well.]

A “dynamic equivalence” translation is **more of an interpretive translation.** The “interpretive translation” is guided by the need to make the translation easier to read/understand (cf. some of the illustrations to follow). It therefore **requires less judgment from the reader since the translators have included their interpretation of texts to avoid the ambiguous nature of the English renditions.**

Since functional equivalent translators make more judgments about texts, it is useful for an English reader to be alert to such decisions by having a “control” formal equivalent version nearby in order to see the differences. Seeing the differences is the guide to knowing what needs interpretation.

- C. Other Procedures (paraphrase, amplified, renditions often from English to English! Gender inclusive translations)
- D. Recommendations
 1. Choose Bibles that use a paragraph format. The older “every verse in the left-hand column” type of Bible leads to a proof text mentality rather than an understanding of context. A paragraph is a unit of thought and determines how the sentences in the paragraph should be interpreted.
 2. Choose a continuum of Bibles for study (KJV or ESV, NRSV, NIV, NLT). Watch how the dynamic equivalent versions interpret your formal equivalent control Bible. The Zondervan four versions parallel Bible (KJV, NASB, NIV, NLT) is a good choice to have four key versions in view.
 3. Be careful with “Study” Bibles. Study Bibles tend to frame the Bible after the purposes of the study in view. They may ignore correct structure for outline/thematic purposes.
 4. Avoid the expanded translation kinds of Bibles (e.g. any Bible called a “paraphrase”, The Message, etcetera). Be a solid Bible reader, not faddish. These kinds of Bible can be used like a commentary.
 5. Be a student of the Bible. This is every Christian’s responsibility.

III. Engaging English Bible Versions and Translation Procedures

If you procure and use the Zondervan four version Bible, you can continue to make your own comparisons. **IF the Zondervan Bible is not available there may be online help. For example...**

Go to: www.biblegateway.com/passage/ where you will find a program to help you put various versions in parallel columns. [This site can also be a concordance if you need it.]

1. Choose the passage you need to view.
2. Select the versions *in this order*: FORMAL to FUNCTIONAL to PARAPHRASE
[Avoid “paraphrases” and individually produced Bibles]
3. Block both footnotes and cross-references with a check mark.
4. Compare from left (formal) to right (functional/dynamic) to see how your text is translated.
As you move from the left (formal) to the right (dynamic) the changes, expansions, etc. you observe are part of the translator’s “trying” to make the Bible understandable. It is often “their” interpretive opinions put into the translation.

BIBLE VERSIONS CONTINUUM (Sample listing of best known)

FORMAL EQUIVALENT

“...as literal as possible, as free as necessary...” (RSV introduction)

KJV (1611)
NKJV (1979)
ERV (1885)
ASV (1901)
NASB (1963)
RSV (1946)
NRSV (1990)
ESV (2001)

FUNCTIONAL/DYNAMIC EQUIVALENT

“a thought-for-thought translation, as contrasted with a formal equivalence or word-for-word translation”

NIV (1984) NLT (1997)
NIV (2011)

JB (Jerusalem Bible 1966)

PARAPHRASE

[READ their introduction]

Phillips (1958)
LB (Living Bible 1971)
The Message (1992)

Your **first task** is to choose a “CONTROL BIBLE.” This should come from the Formal Equivalent column. You can choose two if you like (I do). For example, KJV + NRSV.

Then choose some Functional versions (the more the merrier here since these will alert you to “interpretive translation”). You will notice the NLT (New Living Translation is farther right in this column. This is because it is nearly a paraphrase in my opinion).

Zondervan no longer publishes the *Today’s Parallel Bible*, but you might find it in a used book store.

You can also include some farther out versions if you like (e.g. some real favorite of yours). But when you get beyond the first two columns, you are on some thin ice. Paraphrases are a bit wild at times. Some are even a “famous person” doing a paraphrase of their English Bible!! This is not material for Bible interpretation, especially since such persons seldom have adequate credentials to make translation judgments...they just have popularity and sell-ability.

After you have your Bible Versions in place, the real fun begins ;-)

NOTE: American Church traditions and popular level theology has been strongly influenced by the way the King James Version phrases its translation. Many verses created “stereotypes” in the thinking of church people. New translations and new generations often do not have this baggage. But it is good to identify some of the baggage because you will see it in your parents and grandparents thinking ;-)

The following charts are provided to illustrate the differences between major formal and dynamic versions. These comparisons illustrate how you can utilize “interpretive” versions as commentary on the more ambiguous renditions of formal equivalent translations. LOOK FOR DIFFERENCES and let that be your trigger for research.

Texts	<u>Formal Equivalence</u> King James (KJV)	<u>Formal Equivalence</u> New Revised Standard (NRSV)	<u>Dynamic Equivalence 1</u> New International Version (NIV 1984)	New International Version Revised (NIV 2011)	<u>Dynamic Equivalence 2</u> New Living Translation (NLT)
John 3:16	For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son ,....	For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son ,....	For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son ,....	For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son ,...	For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son ,...
Acts 26:28	Then Agrippa said unto Paul, Almost thou persuadest me to be a Christian.	Agrippa said to Paul, “Are you so quickly persuading me to become a Christian?”	Then Agrippa said to Paul, “Do you think that in such a short time you can persuade me to be a Christian?”	Then Agrippa said to Paul, “Do you think that in such a short time you can persuade me to be a Christian?”	Agrippa interrupted him. “Do you think you can make me a Christian so quickly?”
Gal 5:4	Christ is become of no effect unto you, whosoever of you are justified by the law ; ye are fallen from grace.	You who want to be justified by the law have cut yourselves off from Christ, you have fallen away from grace.	You who are trying to be justified by law have been alienated from Christ; you have fallen away from grace.	You who are trying to be justified by the law have been alienated from Christ; you have fallen away from grace.	For if you are trying to make yourselves right with God by keeping the law, you have been cut off from Christ! You have fallen away from God’s grace.
Rom 9:3	For I could wish that myself were accursed from Christ for my brethren, my kinsmen according to the flesh	For I could wish that I myself were accursed and cut off from Christ for the sake of my own people	For I could wish that I myself were cursed and cut off from Christ for the sake of my brothers, those of my own race	For I could wish that I myself were cursed and cut off from Christ for the sake of my people, those of my own race,	For my people, my Jewish brothers and sisters. I would be willing to be forever cursed —cut off from Christ!—if that would save them.
Phil 3:6	Concerning zeal, persecuting the church; touching the righteousness which is in the law , blameless.	As to zeal, a persecutor of the church; as to righteousness under the law , blameless.	As for zeal, persecuting the church; as for legalistic righteousness , faultless.	as for zeal, persecuting the church; as for righteousness based on the law , faultless.	And zealous? Yes, in fact, I harshly persecuted the church. And I obeyed the Jewish law so carefully that I was never accused of any fault.

Matt 19:9	And I say unto you, Whosoever shall put away his wife, except for fornication , and shall marry another, committeth adultery.	And I say to you, whoever divorces his wife, except for unchastity , and marries another commits adultery.	I tell you that anyone who divorces his wife, except for marital unfaithfulness , and marries another woman commits adultery.	I tell you that anyone who divorces his wife, except for sexual immorality , and marries another woman commits adultery.”	And I tell you this, a man who divorces his wife and marries another commits adultery— unless his wife has been unfaithful .
1 Cor 5:5	To deliver such an one unto Satan for the destruction of the flesh , that the spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord Jesus.	you are to hand this man over to Satan for the destruction of the flesh , so that his spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord.	hand this man over to Satan, so that the sinful nature may be destroyed and his spirit saved on the day of the Lord.	hand this man over to Satan for the destruction of the flesh , so that his spirit may be saved on the day of the Lord.	Then you must cast this man out of the church and into Satan’s hands, so that his sinful nature will be destroyed and he himself will be saved when the Lord returns.
1 Cor 7:1	Now concerning the things whereof ye wrote unto me: [It is] good for a man not to touch a woman .	Now concerning the matters about which you wrote: "It is well for a man not to touch a woman."	Now for the matters you wrote about: It is good for a man not to marry .	Now for the matters you wrote about: "It is good for a man not to have sexual relations with a woman."	Now about the questions you asked in your letter. Yes, it is good to live a celibate life .
1Thess 1:3	Remembering without ceasing your work of faith, and labour of love, and patience of hope in our Lord Jesus Christ, in the sight of God and our Father;	remembering before our God and Father your work of faith and labor of love and steadfastness of hope in our Lord Jesus Christ.	We continually remember before our God and Father your work produced by faith, your labor prompted by love, and your endurance inspired by hope in our Lord Jesus Christ.	We remember before our God and Father your work produced by faith, your labor prompted by love, and your endurance inspired by hope in our Lord Jesus Christ.	As we talk to our God and Father about you, we think of your faithful work, your loving deeds, and your continual anticipation of the return of our Lord Jesus Christ .
1 Tim 3:11	Even so [must their] wives [be] grave, not slanderers, sober, faithful in all things.	Women , likewise must be serious, not slanderers, but temperate, faithful in all things.	In the same way, their wives are to be women worthy of respect, not malicious talkers but temperate and trustworthy in everything.	In the same way, the women are to be worthy of respect, not malicious talkers but temperate and trustworthy in everything.	In the same way, their wives must be respected and must not speak evil of others. They must exercise self-control and be faithful in everything they do.

Consider Eph. 4:27; Acts 9:36; Hosea 9:7 “man of the spirit”; 1 Tim. 1:4; 2:5; 3:2 marriage issue; 1 Tim 3:6 devil issue; 1 Cor. 4:4; Phil. 3:6; James 2:2;

NIV CHANGES from original version of 1984 to 2011 revision. For nearly 30 years, the NIV remained essentially as it was released in 1984. This is true in spite of a number of scholarly criticisms of translation. In 2011, the first major revision was released and there were massive changes that usually reflected the criticisms that had accumulated. You will notice how my criticisms of a very small sample of passages in the original NIV were almost all emended back to more formal renditions of the text.

If you want to review this part of our study, go to <http://biblicalelearning.org/new-testament/1-corinthians-meadors/> I have this lecture online, but the handout there is not as new as the one here but you can download the notes at the beginning screen. The basic content is the same.

* * * * *

A. Why do we need hermeneutics? That is, why do we need a disciplined approach to the reading-study of the Bible?

1. **Because of the proliferation of English translations.** (treated above)

Now that we have some understanding of English Bible, let me ask the question... what can I achieve with you in regard to “how” to interpret the Bible?

- On one hand, I can answer this very simply: DO your homework. Bible interpretation is an ACTIVITY.
- On the other hand, I realize that busy folks do not have always have adequate time to do their homework. I hope to help you be effective even with little time.
- Consequently, the best I can do is:
 - **Create in you a CONSCIOUSNESS of what reading-researching the Bible means;**
 - **And Point you to resources to do just what I do...the 3 Rs of learning: R-R, R-R, R-R.**

YOU CAN INTERPRET THE BIBLE, but you have to do the same thing I do...read and research. Yes, we all have different access points in our experience and knowledge, but we still all have access.

We are asking “why” we need to interpret. Answering these basic categories will help us know the “what” we have to do. Then we have the rest of our lives to do it.

2. **We need hermeneutics because of blocks to surface self-interpretation (see Fee’s illustrations).** If you do Bible comparison and read an up-to-date translation, many issues illustrated below are dealt with in translation.

1a. Different languages

word plays, 1 Sam 4:5-6 with 4:10; Rom 1:28
 grammatical categories (genitive case in Greek)
 judgments about vocabulary, 1 Thess 5:22 KJV
 translation of terms, “flesh” vs. “sinful nature”

2a. Different time frames (historiography issues; sequence issues...Kgs/Chron & Gospels)

3a. Different cultures (consider “high and low contexts”; worldviews; geography; Deut 22:5)

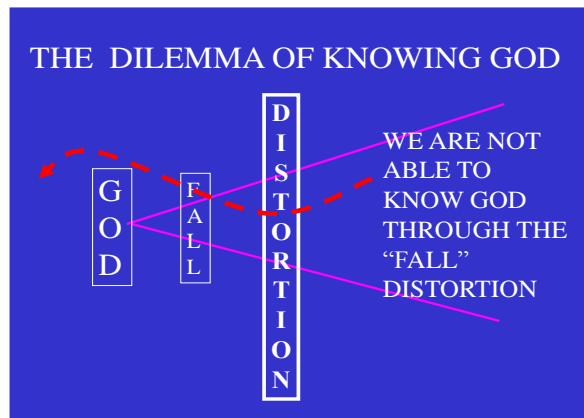
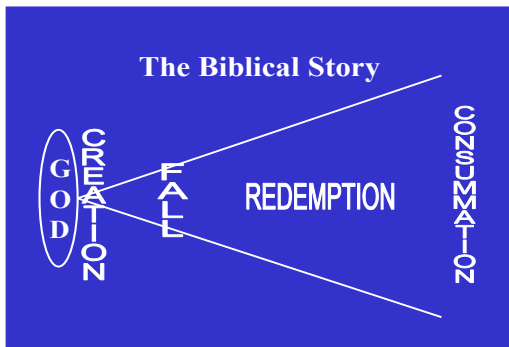
- 4a. Different literary conventions (literary genre, e.g. Proverbs are not “promises” but statements of how life should be if the world worked like God intended).
- 5a. Figures of speech (Mark 10:24-25; 1 Cor 14:34-35 as a “slogan” explains the apparent contradiction with 11:2-3).
- 6a. Different interpretations of the same text/s requires “validation” (identify and evaluate views). For example, 1 Tim 2:12; 1 Cor 11, “cover”/roles in public worship; cf. 14:35-36)
- 7a. Because we have to “go beyond” the plain reading of the Bible to answer many questions (See Theological Encyclopedia chart). That is, it is not self-evident.

So...**HOW do YOU overcome the various “blocks”** to your understanding the Bible? You do it by:

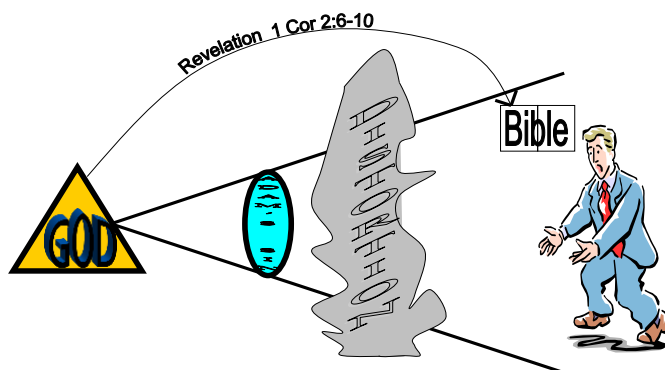
- Going to school on the Bible (have and read good resources...tools)
- Put yourself in a place where you have teachers who have prepared themselves to teach you and actually do so in a systematic manner over time.

3. **We need hermeneutics because we are sinners (cf. “noetic” effect of the Fall). God has provided an inspired text but NO inspired readers.**

THE DILEMMA



GOD’S SOLUTION TO THE DILEMMA



What is the remaining problem in the third illustration?

- 1a. **We have been given an inspired Scripture but no inspired interpreters.** For whatever reason, God has chosen to direct his work by his Word in the hands of sinners, albeit “saved sinners.”
- **God** has not chosen typically to micro-manage humans in redemptive history. Why? Perhaps because he **created us in his image and he expects us to take responsibility**. The Father/Child metaphor is prominent in Scripture. Our Father provided Scripture for our journey in this life.
 - Sinners, even those saved by grace, need **checks and balances**. In dealing with the Bible, hermeneutics provides **guidelines and boundaries** for how the Bible is understood. [See the books recommended for these lessons by Fee and Stuart and Robert H. Stein.]
- 2a. Sinners are by nature lazy. Always looking for short cuts. They are even so creative they create models so they do not have to work at understanding the Bible! However...

Hermeneutics, i.e. the process of biblical interpretation, **is an activity**. It is an activity performed **from a skill base** that accesses **tools** to probe and surface what the biblical writers chose to provide. [see tools list below]

4. **We need hermeneutics because the Bible is not always self-interpreting.**

Because we can read the words of the Bible and they seem to make sense to us is not evidence that our reading is valid. It may be ourselves talking to ourselves through the Bible. Living in our Western Church culture means we have a lot of “Bible context” in our thinking patterns (although that has nearly faded in our culture). We correlate with many of the moral principles of Scripture. But that does not mean that the “meant” of biblical texts is self-evident. It merely means that we have imposed our ideas on to the text. Sometimes we may be right. But how do we “know” when we are and when we are not?

Where does meaning and authority reside? Is it in the reader or the text? [BIG Question]

5. **We need hermeneutics because the history of interpretation is not consistent.**

Consider variety in how meaning has been read from the Bible...Jewish, Christian, Pre-modern, Modern, and Postmodern (with variations within each!!), Baptists, Methodists, etcetera.

The Judaeo-Christian Scriptures have been read/interpreted in a variety of ways over its long codified history (ca. 1450 BCE – 100 CE). This diversity raises questions about where we get our models for how to read the Bible. While this course cannot focus on the history of hermeneutics, the **variety in how to read-off meaning from Scripture** is overwhelming.

Think about scores of categories among conservative Evangelicals where major differences about understanding the Bible exists. For example, some major items include...

Arminians	Eschatology (pre/post/amill/etc.)
Calvinists	Gender issues in Church work
Covenant Theology	Charismata
Dispensationalism	etcetera, ad infinitum, ad naseum
Different Church Models	
Baptism	

This diversity among competent and godly leaders illustrates that God has at least allowed this diversity. He has locked us up to Scripture without a “blue phone” on the desk. He created us in his image to struggle, even among ourselves, until Jesus comes.

Brain Teaser: Is the interpretation of Scripture a moral issue?
Is a person immoral if they don't agree with you?

Does all of this diversity undermine an objective and authoritative text? No. **It is a window into God's design.** It merely illustrates the diversity of history and the need to follow standard rules in reading biblical literature. Throughout Church history, each generation has greater resources and opportunity to “correctly handle the Word of truth” (2 Tim 2:15) and thereby greater responsibility.

6. **We need hermeneutics because we draw information from the Bible in a variety of ways for a variety of reasons.**

See attached charts for this section at the end of the notes.

Understanding the “**Theological Encyclopedia**”

How does the Bible teach us? [Direct, Implied, Creative Constructs]

Foundational to the interpretation of Scripture is learning how to discern at what level you are using the Bible for any given question for which you seek an answer.

7. **We need hermeneutics because by God's decree we are responsible for knowing and disseminating biblical knowledge ... there are no short cuts nor any mystical “here is what it means.” Bible interpretation is hard work.**

B. Does the Holy Spirit's presence in our lives bypass the need for interpreting the Bible?

1. Texts that are often presented to claim that the Spirit tells “me” what the Bible means.

John 14:26 (14:25-31) “...he shall teach you all things....”

John 16:13-14 (16:12-17) “...he shall guide you into all truth....”

“...he shall declare unto you the things that are to come.”

In context, these texts are in the Upper Room Discourse addressed to the disciples on the eve of Jesus' crucifixion. They constitute his promises to them of recall when they continue his Story after he is gone. In short, they are promises of God's superintendence in regard to their record of his words and deeds.

1 Cor 2:10 (2:6-16) “But unto us God revealed them....”

In the context of 1 Cor 1-4, 2:6-16 is Paul’s answer for why his teaching is authoritative. It is because it is God’s revealed truth (2:10) by the unique work of the Spirit with the apostolic community.

Enlightened, Eph 1:18; Heb 6:4; 10:32 (**In context** = come to understand the content you have been taught, not get new information; cf. 1 Sam 14:27; 14:29; Jer 33:30)

1 John 5:27 “...ye need not that anyone teach you....”

- **Consider the context** of this text !! = “you need not that anyone *ELSE* teach you.”
- Contrast Matt 28:18-20; Eph 5; 1 Tim 3; 2 Tim 2:15 with the claim that you do not need a teacher.

2. Texts that teach us the role of the Spirit to “us” is a role of conviction **not** dissemination of content.

Rom 8:16: “The Spirit himself beareth **witness** with our spirit, that we are children of God.”

1 Jn 5:10: “He that believeth on the Son of God hath the **witness** in him.”

Rom 5:5 “... because the love of God hath been shed abroad in our hearts through the Holy Spirit which was given to us”

The Spirit as a “witness” dominates his work. Think about this analogy. A witness relates to something. A witness does not create something. The Spirit bears witness to Jesus as Messiah, to our profession of faith as genuine, and to the Word as authority.

3. The history of the witness of the Spirit and interpretation

John Calvin (*Institutes*, 1.vii-ix)

Calvin changed the equation from the Word/Church [Roman Catholic] to the Word/Spirit [Protestant Reformation]. He called it the doctrine of the “*testimonium*”. **Calvin viewed the role of the Spirit to be that of convicting the believers heart [=mind] concerning the truthfulness and authority of Scripture: “...the efficacious confirmation of the Word”** (ix, 2). For Calvin, **the role of the Spirit was one of persuasion, not content**. The content was the Word to which the Spirit bore witness. [Cf. John 15:26; 16:8]

As Ramm (*Witness of the Spirit* [Eerdmans, 1959]) summarized Calvin, “Because the *testimonium* is a persuasion, it is a persuasion about something. It is not its own content. The *testimonium* is a revealing action, not a revealed content. It is an illumination, not a communication. For this reason, Calvin opposed the enthusiasts who claimed a revelation with a content” (p. 18).

“Every believer sustains a relationship to the Holy Spirit. What is commonly called “illumination” is the benefit of regeneration in which the Spirit helps the believer to exercise the capacity to submit to the teaching of Scripture about ourselves and our world—i.e. that we might be interpreted by Scripture. The actual process of accessing the intended meaning of Scripture is the task of hermeneutics. The ability to expose this intended meaning depends upon the interpreter’s skill in applying the science and art of hermeneutics and in his/her willingness to

submit to what the Scriptures actually teach. The Spirit does not communicate content—either new or interpretive—to the interpreter, rather, the Spirit—in inexplicable ways—helps the interpreter to submit to the teaching which is being accessed while avoiding the imposition of a will/mind/emotion complex which avoids or distorts material into self-serving tracks.” (gtm)

What is the so-called idea of “illumination?” The concept of “illumination” (a creative construct theological term not a biblical term for the transfer of revelatory information). We have learned that the proliferation of English Bibles can influence the words we use. Let’s look at this term in our “comparing translations” model.

VERSIONS	Illumination	Illumine	Illuminate/d		Enlighten/ed/
KJV	X	X	Heb 10:12 to mean enlightened		Psa 18:28 1 Sam 14:27, 29 Job 13:30 Psa 97:4 Eph 1:18 Heb 6:4
ASV	X	X	X		6 times /ed Same as KJV + Heb 10:32
NRSV	X	X [Wis 17:5 = natural light]	X [Wis 17:20 same]		Rom 10:2 Eph 1:18 Heb 6:4; 10:32 Psa 19:8 Isa 40:14; Dan 5:11, 14
NIV (2011)	X	X	Eph 5:13 Rev 18:1		Isa 40:14 Eph 1:18 Heb 6:4
NLT	X	X	2 Tim 1:10 Rev 21:23		*Job 26:5 Heb 6:4

Obviously, the term “enlighten” (fwtiz-) is **the common term for “perceiving and understanding” some kind of content and not the reception of content.** For Christians, this is imaged in “assurance of salvation” (Heb 6:4, 10:32) and confidence in a future hope (Eph 1:18).

<p>2 Tim 1:10 <u>ASV / 10</u> but hath now been manifested by the appearing of our Saviour Christ Jesus, who abolished death, and brought life and ⁶immortality to light through the ⁷gospel,</p>	<p><u>NLT / 10</u> And now he has made all of this plain to us by the appearing of Christ Jesus, our Savior. He broke the power of death and illuminated the way to life and immortality through the Good News.</p>	<p><u>10</u> φανερωθεῖσαν δὲ νῦν διὰ τῆς ἐπιφανείας τοῦ σωτῆρος ἡμῶν Ἰησοῦ ἡ καταργήσαντος μὲν τὸν θάνατον φωτίσαντος δὲ ζωὴν καὶ ἀφθαρσίαν διὰ τοῦ εὐαγγελίου</p> <p>The formal translation is “to light, enlighten,” and the Functional or dynamic translation is “illuminated.” God’s Word “enlightens” us...if we will turn the light on.</p>
--	---	--

The theological idea of illumination is derived from the category of “the inner **witness** of the Spirit.” Theologically, this is a popularized way to refer to the “doctrine” of the “witness of the Spirit.” Scripture indicates that the Holy Spirit “**bears witness**” to **Jesus as the Messiah, to our self-consciousness of being redeemed, and to the Word as God’s self-disclosure.** There are no texts that say the Spirit will tell you what the Bible means. [Review Calvin, ...a persuasion not a content]

The question of the Spirit’s role in relation to Scripture, especially the issue of interpreting Scripture, is a core issue in Christian epistemology. **We need hermeneutics because the Holy Spirit does not tell us what the Bible means. He merely (!) CONVICTS us that it is true and authoritative and worthy of obedience.**

Reflect on these issues in relation to the fact that we are created in the image of God. What does God expect of us?

- C. The use of figurative language** (“figures of speech”) in the Bible requires an awareness of how this category of language works.

The Bible makes massive use of “figures” to describe God’s actions, religious language (“spiritual” images), and a great variety of ideas and activities.

Because poetry is dominated by figurative language, we will treat this area just prior to looking at poetry.

- D. Building your “tool box” for reading and interpreting the Bible.**

While you may be able to sit down and read the Bible and glean some common moral lessons, such reading is “reader-centered.” The authority of Scripture is inherent to the text of Scripture, not in the perception/mind of readers. You only have authority as you validate the authenticity of your claims about the Bible.

So **I have good news and bad news** for you as we begin this journey in the Bible. The good news is that you can benefit from your Bible reading and God calls you to do it. The bad news is that God also calls you to “study to show yourself approved” and a valid user of God’s Word. **EVERYONE** can study the Bible. The question is, will you?

As with any of our jobs, we have tools to do our work. In the Western World, more attention has been paid to the explanation and interpretation of the Bible than any other book. When in graduate school, I used to research at the University of Chicago. They had a consortium library of about 6 million books and journals!

See the “tools” list attached.

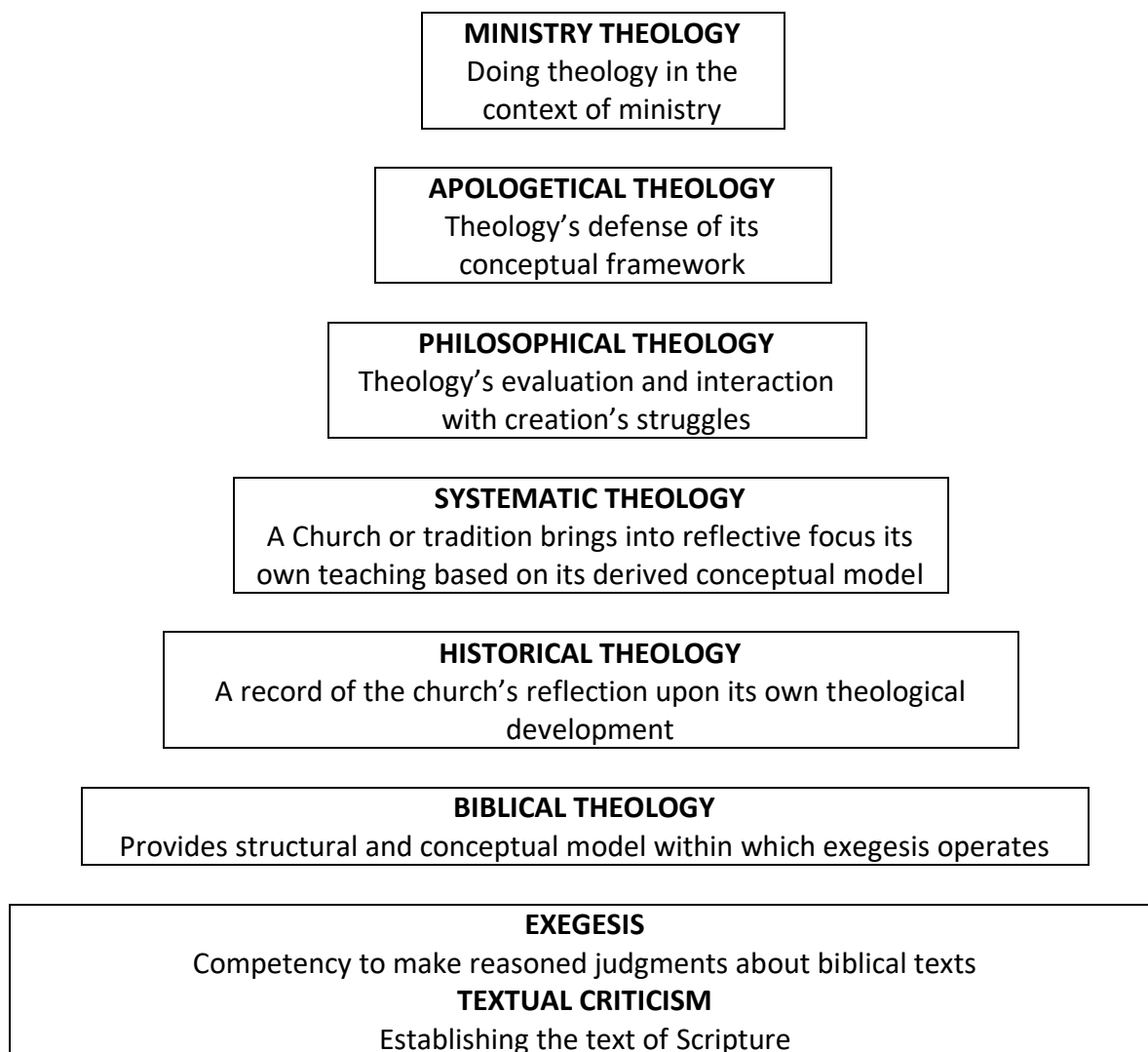
E. A preview into the literary nature of the Bible.

Genre	Preliminary Definition/Description	Where in Bible?
Narrative	<p>“Meta-narrative” = Genesis to Revelation Narrative is a story form that conveys meaning via a number of literary features/forms...</p> <p>Primarily prose style telling a story of human life with literary conventions to convey divine perspective. Elements include scene, plot, point of view, characters, narrators, observers’ viewpoint, along with...and the key to the other categories...a plethora of literary techniques.</p>	<p>Narrative provides about 40% of the Bible (40% OT and 60% NT).</p> <p>Genesis through 2 Kings; then Chronicles through Esther. Ruth, Jonah, Daniel 1-6, Job a bit. The prophets have narrative as well. In the NT, Luke-Acts is a narrative. The other Gospels also contain narrative features.</p>
Legal	Codes for life in community and before God including apodictic and casuistic codes.	While the Pentateuch is commonly called the Torah/Law, the actual “casuistic” codes are few.
Poetry	<p>“Poetry is a language of images that the reader must experience as a series of imagined sensory situations.” Its language is highly figurative, calling for the reader to participate in the feeling.</p> <p>Read Judges 4 and Exodus 14; then Read Judges 5 and Exodus 15. Same accounts different genre.</p>	Poetry provides about 30% of the Bible. The Poetic Books () and many other places in the OT and NT communicate through poetry.
Wisdom / Proverbs	In the Bible, Wisdom is not merely an extension of knowledge. It is a form of knowledge (“skill” about life).	Proverbs, Job, Ecclesiastes, Some Psalms
Prophets	“Covenant Policemen” calling Israel back to loyalty to Yahweh.	Primarily the Major Prophets and The Twelve (Minor Prophets)
Gospel	A unique form that tells the story of Jesus through the eyes of four witnesses.	Matthew, Mark, Luke and John
Epistle	Letters	NT Epistles and a few letters internal to texts in OT and NT.
Apocalyptic	A part of prophetic genre that utilizes figures of speech to image what we cannot imagine	Some OT Prophets and the Book of Revelation use it in significant portions.

HANDOUTS PREVIOUSLY MENTIONED

THEOLOGICAL ENCYCLOPEDIA

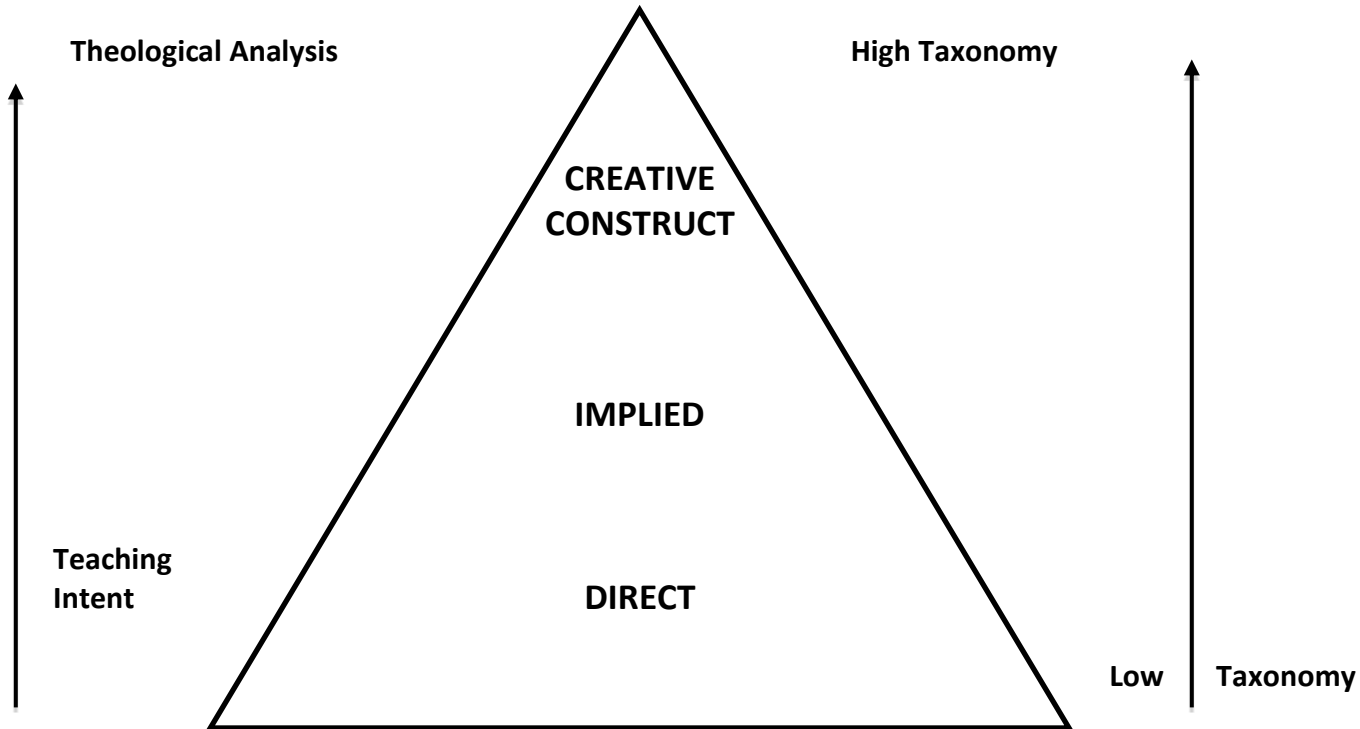
Biblical study is such a broad and complex task it requires numerous professional fields of study in order to pursue meaning. The following chart (credits to James Grier with modest revisions by Meadors) images the “encyclopedia” of the tasks involved with the study of Scripture.



The various disciplines that comprise the encyclopedia are to be integrated not bifurcated. The work of interpretation must begin with the foundation of the triangle, the task of unpacking the meaning of the biblical text itself, and move to the top. A reverse process reads “into” the text rather than “from” it. If the initial work of exegesis and biblical theology is flawed, everything that follows is tainted.

The next paradigm addresses the question, “How does the Bible teach us?” I would suggest a model of three levels by which the Bible teaches us in consort with our own interpretive skills. We will use the following diagram as a paradigm for this model.

THREE LEVELS OF BIBLICAL TEACHING



Christians affirm that the Bible is their ultimate source of knowledge for faith and practice. But when they look for a biblical passage that addresses the questions of their current setting they often discover that there is *not* a text that *directly* addresses their concerns. In order to compensate, they become ventriloquists, using the Bible as the dummy to say what they want to hear. The words of the texts seem to correlate with their question, but the contextual meaning of the passage they are forcing to serve their purposes has nothing to do with the subject queried. This is a reality we have all observed, been victimized by, and perhaps even practiced! This scenario merely illustrates that sometimes believers do not know how to read the Bible beyond a proof-text-for-my-pretext level.

Let’s unpack the meaning of this chart.

Biblical teaching is developed in at least three levels: Direct, Implied and Creative Constructs (see Chart).

1. The **DIRECT TEACHING LEVEL** relates to discerning the authorial-textual intension of a given context. This teaching might be as straightforward as a simple imperative, “Thou Shalt not...,” or as complex as an extended narrative. The supreme commands of the bible, to love God and your neighbor, seem simple until we ask, “What does that entail?” Direct teaching is not necessarily simple teaching but the starting point seems “clear”. Exegesis and biblical theology tend to work on the direct level.
2. The **IMPLIED TEACHING LEVEL** relates to concepts that are not directly stated by biblical words in a context but are teachings that the believing community recognize as the extensions of biblical statements and contexts. This level accounts for a number of crucial doctrines. For example, we hold

the doctrine of trinity as essential for Christian thought, but it is an implied rather than a direct teaching. Alister McGrath observed, “The doctrine of the trinity can be regarded as the outcome of a process of sustained and critical reflection on the pattern of divine activity revealed in scripture, and continued in Christian experience. This is not to say that Scripture contains a doctrine of the trinity; rather, Scripture bears witness to a God who demands to be understood in a trinitarian manner.” (*Christian Theology: An Introduction*. 2nd Edition. Oxford: Blackwell, 1997, p. 294] Much of the work of the early Church Fathers and creedal development evidences this category. Many of the core concepts of the theology disciplines also reflect this category.

3. The CREATIVE CONSTRUCT LEVEL is the product of selecting one’s view of macro understandings of how the Bible has framed certain subjects. For example, are you premillennial or amillennial? Are you a covenant theologian or a dispensationalist or some other construct that provides a synthesis of the whole Bible? Are you an Arminian or a Calvinist...or just confused?!¹ These views of the whole Bible are large frames that help interpreters exposit the sense of the whole from its parts. *Constructs are the product of our sustained reflection upon texts, but they are seldom proven from any specific direct context.* Constructs are the product of an inductive process. The use of inductive logic brings another perspective to the nature of creative constructs. It is impossible to address this dimension with brevity, but let me put it this way. We have a Bible that is the product of revelation (deductive), but we use “inductive Bible study methods” to unpack it. In formal logic, deductively sound arguments can lead to certainty, but induction only leads to degrees of probability. Consequently, no matter how tightly argued and how convinced we are about our creative construct systems, they are still only in the realm of probability not certainty. Heated theological debates are the result of conflicting views/constructs about texts/subjects.

While creative constructs often emerge as large paradigms, they are not limited to that. There are many legitimate CCs. But there are bad CC readings take all kinds of shapes. For example, "Abstain from all appearance of evil" (1 Thess 5:22, KJV) has often been used to whip people into submission to a viewpoint. They claim that this text = guilt by association. BUT that is a bad creative construct from a surface reading of the words forced on the text. When studied, this text means, "avoid every form/kind of evil" (which is more concrete in definition). Avoid murder, lying, etc. Not avoid a restaurant that serves booze! Or a movie theater! To force guilt by association on this text is neither direct or implied but their imagination (bad CC).

¹ Many individuals feel overwhelmed when they try to study these large paradigms of interpretation and often feel that real understanding will never happen. So some turn away from the hard work of the text. However, this should be an expected perception *because* one never understands any part of a paradigm until they understand the whole paradigm (e.g. the book of Revelation). Understanding the whole requires more reading, thinking and plain old hard work than most Christians are willing to do. I do not think that any person can grasp large paradigms with understanding and conviction—be it the eschatological issues or the bible on divorce and remarriage, or whatever—without working through a couple thousand pages of reading and studying on the topic. This, obviously, is *usually* the task of leadership not the laity. The Bible implies that this is why God ordained leaders in the church. My life verse is 2 Peter 3:16. In this text, Peter refers to Paul saying, “... His [Paul’s] letters contain some things that are hard to understand...”. If the apostle Peter had a problem understanding Paul’s part of the Bible, who are we to think we should not struggle with texts?!

As you move from the bottom of the triangle upward, you move from “simple” direct teaching to more sophisticated theological structures, from “teaching intent” that the basic features of the text can sustain to complex lines of reason that comprise “theological analysis.” You move from a “low taxonomy” (= brute facts) to a “high taxonomy” (sophisticated systems of thought).

Every subject or text we study must be evaluated against these three levels of teaching. Where does our “claimed” text rest on the pyramid? One’s confidence and humility of conviction should also be scaled in concord with the appropriate level. One’s willingness to compromise for the sake of the community is also related to this scale. We might die for the Trinity, but not for a certain eschatological position. One’s ability not to be manipulated by others can also be controlled with this model. If someone claims a view that is only their construct, you have no obligation to conform to their view of things. The model also gives you a base line for discussion of your different views on the text. All of us have a propensity to deify our own views from time to time. American Christianity is drunk with individualism derived from our culture. With this individualism comes the assumption of self-authenticating authority. Theology, however, requires a community.

We should perceive that as we go up the pyramid we are in the process of relating an ancient text written in ancient settings to modern questions. For example, is slavery an acceptable practice as “God’s will?” Most would say no. But how do you argue your view when there is no “proof text” to support your position? Furthermore, how do you avoid the embarrassment of biblical silence in relation to certain modern issues? In essence, how the Bible is *relevant* in the progress of history when culture moves “beyond” out-dated mores is a major challenge to hermeneutics. This is a more advanced discussion than the reflections of this handout can provide (For a fuller study of this see Gary T. Meadors, editor, *Four Views on Moving from the Bible to Theology*, Zondervan, 2009).

In addition to this discussion of the interpretation of Scripture, there is also the next question, “How is Scripture applied in our modern setting?” (the issue of “application”, or “contextualization” of texts to current culture). The bottom line is there is no “means to me” apart from “meant to them.” If you do not know what it “meant,” you have no basis for claiming what it means.

The three levels assist us in this discussion as well, but not for this handout.

Starting Selective Resources for Doing Biblical Interpretation Acquiring the Tools You Need for Understanding the Bible

“If you want good oats, you pay a fair price.
If you want cheap oats, seek that which has already been through the horse.” Amish Proverb
The moral of this saying is that nothing worthwhile is free.

Books to follow while doing the study (see class outline for reading schedule)

Stein, Robert. *A Basic Guide to Interpreting the Bible, Playing by the Rules*. Second Edition. Baker Publishing, 2011. [ISBN 9780801033735]

Fee, Gordon D. and Stuart, Douglas. *How to Read the Bible for All Its Worth*. 4th Edition. Zondervan, 2014. [ISBN 9780310517825]

Books to build your home resource library

Study Bibles (three different foci so notes are different)

NIV Zondervan Study Bible. D.A. Carson, General Editor. Zondervan, 2015.

ESV Study Bible. Crossway Bibles, 2001.

Archaeological Study Bible. Walter Kaiser, General Editor. Zondervan, 2003.

Bible Dictionaries (articles **not** just definition of words; will give you an intro to every book of the Bible and articles on key words, people, places, things, etc.)

Eerdmans Dictionary of the Bible. Edited by David Noel Freedman. 2000.

Harper-Collins Bible Dictionary. Edited by Paul I. Achtemeier. 1996.

The Anchor Bible Dictionary. 6 vols.

The Eerdmans Dictionary of Early Judaism. Edited by John J. Collins and Daniel C. Harlow. 2010.

NOTE: Has your Bible reading become boring? Do you struggle with what in the world you just read? A couple hours after your reading, can you remember what you read? **Suggestion:** For one month, read *daily* a modest size dictionary article of your choice for your devotions and then ask the above questions? Then read your Bible with a dictionary handy to explain to you what you have read.

Bible Commentaries (Starter one volume works)

Eerdmans Commentary on the Bible. James D. G. Dunn and John W. Rogerson, Editors. 2003.

Harper Collins Bible Commentary. James L. Mays, General Editor. Revised Edition, 1988.

Baker Commentary on the Bible. Walter A. Elwell, Editor. 1989.

Bible Commentaries (multi-volume sets, you can select individual books of the Bible per your interest)

The NIV Application Commentary series. Zondervan. This is a good place to start.

Theological Dictionary

Elwell, Walter A., Editor. *Evangelical Dictionary of Theology*. Second Edition. Baker, 2001.

Computer Resources (best place for “Concordance” work)

Logos Bible Software is the best all-around program. It has “staying power” in the market demonstrated by a consistent history of research and development. Consult Gary or Josh if you want to begin building an electronic study base.