



LIFE MISSION
C H U R C H

EQUIPPING WORKSHOP:

HOW TO STUDY



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Making Disciples Who Make Disciples Locally and Globally,
Who are Saved, Equipped, and Sent by the Gospel.

I. APPROACHES TO THE WORD OF GOD

There are three main approaches to the Word of God, and they give varying results. It is important for us to see this, so we are getting a “**balanced diet**” of the Word.

- 1) **Reading** the Word.
 - 2) **Studying** the Word.
 - 3) **Meditating** on the Word
- Reading the Word is quite simply that: reading the Word. You read it like a story or a book. This is good as it gets the Word in you, you learn characters, plots, stories, etc. But this, without study and meditation, can also be minimally fruitful. You will find yourself not understanding certain things, such as cultural information, significance of practices, monetary values, political implications, etc.
 - Studying the Word is when we dissect the Word as we read it. We look up what a word may really mean in its original language, we find out how much certain monetary values are worth, we compare verses with other verses in the bible, and we find out the overall context of what is being taught and how it relates to today. This, however, without prayer and meditation on the Word, can often leave us to be “smarty pants” type Christians who are legalistic and prideful.
 - Meditating on the Word is when we take what we have been reading and studying and we dwell on it. We think about it, pray through it, sit before Jesus concerning it. We ask Him to lead us into the truth by His Holy Spirit. We ask the Holy Spirit to help the Word go deep in our hearts so that it is accessible in life’s future events when we will need it. Meditating on the Word is when the knowledge of the Word through reading and studying travels from our brain to our hearts. Meditation, however, without studying the Word, can leave us with a very experiential relationship with the Lord where we are constantly meditating over the same things over and over again because we are not continually learning and studying new things in the Word.

With these three approaches combined, we have a balanced diet and we are getting all that we can out of the Word of God.

II. WHY WE STUDY THE BIBLE

Often times, the bible can be seen as daunting, complex, confusing, boring, or something that is only for theologians or pastors. Though some of these things can be the case, it's important for us to know that the bible is clear enough and simple enough for anyone to read and understand its basic message, yet deep and profound enough to exhaust the utmost scholar for his or her lifetime.

This is what we call the *perspicuity of Scripture*,* also sometimes called the *clarity of Scripture*.* Martin Luther said that what seemed obscure in one part of Scripture, was made clear in another part. This is not to say that every single part of Scripture is easy to understand. Nor is it to say that a deepened knowledge of background, original language, and equipping won't help. Clearly it does, which is why you are going through this class. But this is to be said about any book, be it *Hop on Pop* or *Dante's Inferno*. This idea of the clarity of Scripture, however, as we'll see, is an important interpretation tool.

However, due to laziness, pride, a lack of discipline, etc., we choose not to put the time in, leaving our faith and beliefs about God to be derived more on what we think it is or what it should be. We treat God and His plan, His will, and His works to be more mystery and ethereal, or based on whimsical thoughts or feelings and intuition. Now, no doubt, there is an *infinite* depth of God that we will never discover.¹ But His Word is clear that the Scriptures reveal what is necessary for faith and godliness.² We tend to treat the mysterious and the unsearchable as the norm, as if it's those things that we're to make the foundation of our faith. What results is a shallow faith filled with cop-outs and feeling-based decision making and living.

Understanding and knowing God is not left to the professionals, the gurus, the "spiritually in tune" (in a worldly sense), or those who have some special connection with God. God has given the revelation of His plan, work, character, will, and ways, in two infallible sources: the written Word, and the Word made flesh, Jesus Christ.

MOTIVATION:

Part of our problem, however, is motivation. Different than reading, study takes work, and it is hard work. I have heard it time and time again a statement along the lines of saying, "I don't need theology, I just need Jesus." However, that in itself *is* a theological statement. So, clearly, the person who says this *does indeed have a theology* that they ascribe to. But how and from where did they adopt this theology?

The fact of the matter is, we are *all* theologians. But are we good ones? Are we accurate and reliable? Are we based on an infallible source and based on the truth of God, or are we based on what we *think* should be the truth?

The reality is that all theology is revealed. Anything we can possibly know about God has been chosen by Him to be revealed by Him. This is what we call the *self-disclosure of God*.* The question we ask ourselves, then, is "how has God chosen to reveal this truth?" This is an important question, and it is one we don't often ask ourselves. But most people have varying ways by which they believe God has chosen to reveal truth.

Most people derive their beliefs from intangibles. It could be any number of things, such as these:

- Life experience and observations
- Anecdotes
- Feelings
- Inward desires
- Sentimentalism

¹ Romans 11.33

² 2 Peter 1.3 // 2 Timothy 3.16, 17

These inward intangibles would also be influenced by any number of outward influences:

- Mass pop culture
- Societal norms
- cursory readings of the bible or other books of philosophy or religion
- Upbringing
- Schooling

The list is endless, and the intangibles vary greatly, and they also change from culture to culture and generation to generation. For us to distinguish where true and infallible truth comes from, we need to put some time into what is called *epistemology*.*

Epistemology is the study of knowledge or information. It answers the question, “where does knowledge come from?” You can see it shares the root word with “epistle,” because an epistle, such as in the bible, is a letter to inform others of knowledge of the Gospel.

If we are all theologians (and we are), where does our knowledge, our theology, our faith, our truth come from? Is it based solidly on the revealed truth of God? Or is based on some mixture of truth, with a smorgasbord of feelings, opinions, cultural conditioning, and life experiences? Additionally, do we interpret the bible based on our own life experiences and what we have seen or felt, or do we interpret our life experiences and what we have seen or felt based on the truth of God?

These are important questions. Here are some common things we say or feel or think that reveal to us what our epistemology is would be things like this:

- I just feel like God wants me to...
- The Lord spoke to me/showed me...
- In my heart I just know/feel/think...
- I don't need man's teachings...
- I don't trust organized religion/institutional church, etc...

Now let's be clear about something. Some of these statements aren't necessarily wrong or out of line. Some of it is even semantics. Many of us would use phrases like “the Lord spoke to me” or “I really believe the Lord is leading me to do this or that.” So what do we mean when we say some of these things, and how do we discern the validity and solidarity of these statements? Is there a litmus test that can help us discern the validity of these statements, or are these more like spiritual trump cards that become ultimate decision makers and theological building blocks?

Though this could be a rabbit trail that is beyond the scope of this study (and it should, it's a very important topic), allow me to offer a simple sound byte of wisdom. An old good friend of mine, Harald Bredesen, who passed away at the age of 88 in 2006, when referring to times that the Lord would impress something upon his heart or seem to give some kind of guidance, that kind of utterance “can never be itself be directive. It may be for preparation or confirmation, but never by itself directional.” This is a wise and discerning rule of thumb. The Word of God must also be our highest authority, because God would never contradict Himself, and His Word alone is given to us as being guaranteed to be infallible and authoritative.

THE WORD OF GOD, PRAYER, AND KNOWING GOD'S WILL³

When it comes to epistemology and how we get information, in this instance, spiritual information and guidance, a good question to ask is how we know God's will. God has told us that His Word is a lamp to our feet, which means that it is our guide;⁴ He tells us that it is our daily bread that we are to live off of as much as we live off of real bread;⁵ it is our final authority, so we can base our whole life on it;⁶ it is Jesus, so it should be loved and looked to every day, as much as we can.⁷

³ Much of this section comes from the Doctrine and Theology Class section on knowing God's will.

⁴ Psalm 119.105

⁵ Matthew 6.11 // Luke 4.4

⁶ Psalm 138.2 // 1 Thessalonians 5.19-22

⁷ John 1.1-5, 14 // Revelation 19.13

If you are immersed in the mind of God, will you not then *pray* the will of God?

When you know the mind, will, ways, thoughts, desires, and heart of God, you will do nothing *but* pray the will of God. You will become so aligned with the will of God that His will *will* become *your will*.

Here's the thing, we so often treat prayer as a shortcut for answers. We would rather pray and get an answer or a feeling rather than do our due diligence and seek God out in His Word. Rather than discipline, we prefer laziness. Rather than getting to know Him, we want the cliff notes. Rather than long term wisdom, we want short term answers. We would much rather have a sign, a dream, a vision, a "coincidence," an answer to prayer, a prophetic word from someone else, or a feeling rather than actually get to know God through what He has *promised* is His thoughts, will, desires, mind, and wisdom.

Prayer is not a shortcut to knowing God.

Rather, what prayer does is takes what God has told us and revealed to us about Himself and helps us align with that. But if you don't know Him through His Word, what are you aligning yourself with? Chances are, it's your own feelings or thoughts, a make-believe theological system based on ignorance of who God really is and what His will really is. Think about it, what is your prayer life aligning you to?

Jesus told us that if *His words abide in us*, we will ask what we will and it will be done for us. I've heard this so poorly misapplied, most notably as a name it claim it type theology. That's not what this is. I've also seen many Christians get their faith pummeled because they have asked for a great number of things, but to no avail. That is devastating. But a point is missed, which is why I italicized it. The condition for receiving these things of prayer is that His words must abide in us. Because guess what, if His Word is in us, then we will pray and ask for His promises, and His promises *will be given to us!* *This* is the secret of successfully prayer.

R.A. Torrey was an incredible American theologian, evangelist, and pastor in the last half of the 1800's. He partnered with D.L Moody in his evangelistic efforts in Chicago and also served as the Dean at Biola University (which at the time was formally known as the Bible Institute of Los Angeles) starting in 1912. His clear and timeless teachings still impact teachers and students alike, as his favorite topics were the Word of God, prayer, the Holy Spirit, and evangelism. Here is what Torrey wrote in his book he wrote in 1900 called *How to Pray*:

How does real faith come?

Romans 10.17 answers the question: "So then faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the Word of God." If we are to have real faith, we must study the Word of God and find out what is promised, then simply believe the promises of God. Faith must have a warrant. Trying to believe something that you want to believe is not faith. Believing what God says in His Word is faith. If I am to have faith when I pray, I must find some promise in the Word of God on which to rest my faith. Faith furthermore comes through the Spirit. The Spirit knows the will of God, and if I pray in the Spirit, and look to the Spirit to teach me God's will, he will lead me out in prayer along the line of that will, and give me faith that the prayer is to be answered. But in no case does real faith come by simply determining that you are going to get the thing that you want to get.⁸

If prayer is a walkie-talkie, the Word tells us what channel that God is on.

When Jesus compared Himself to a vine and us to branches, He spoke of something very profound. The branches' whole life and health was dependent on the sap that was given to them through the vine. They were nothing without it; they had zero independence. He gives us great insight into what this "sap" is when he tells us that His *words* must abide in us! Torrey again says that "it is vain to expect power in prayer unless we meditate much upon the words of Christ."⁹ As well, he said this:

⁸ pg. 37, from the Hendrickson Christian Classics edition called *How to Pray/How to Study the Bible*

⁹ *Ibid.*, pg. 45

Prevailing prayer is almost an impossibility where there is neglect of the study of the Word of God...the prayer that is born of meditation upon the Word of God is the prayer that soars upward most easily God's listening ear.

So again, I ask, what are your prayers aligning yourself with? Your own desires? Your will? Your emotions? What is the "sap" that gives your prayer life its motive, directive, and depth? If His Word is not the sap, the daily bread that keeps you connected to the vine, you very much run a great risk in having a very ineffective prayer life. The only prayer that will be answered with a "yes" answer are those that are in accordance with His will. If your sap is your own will, you can guarantee that the answer will be "no." The solution is to know His will by knowing His Word.

The only way to pray in the Spirit is to pray by the sword of the Spirit.

Let me explore this just a little bit more. Jesus said that what comes out of your mouth is from the abundant contents of your heart.¹⁰ If your heart is filled with garbage and selfish desires, then you will speak and act on selfish desires. If your heart is full of the Word of God, then you will speak and act out the Word of God. In other words, you will be doing God's will, and it will have now become your will. This is how we walk in the Spirit.¹¹

Walking in the Spirit is not about getting special revelations, supernatural occurrences, and divine interventions and direction. Walking in the Spirit is being filled with the Spirit of God, equipped with His sword, and then being led by the Spirit according to His sword, the Word. This is the only way we can live obedient lives, lives that worship in Spirit and in truth. Without the sword of the Spirit, we cannot live obediently to God, even as we read earlier, that we can only please God through faith,¹² and faith comes through the Word of Christ.¹³

As Harald said that we can never be led simply and only by sources outside the bible, such as prophetic words, dreams, and answers to prayer, John Piper would agree with him. Here is how Piper describes it:

What is necessary is that we have a renewed mind, that is so shaped and so governed by the revealed will of God in the Bible, that we see and assess all relevant factors with the mind of Christ, and discern what God is calling us to do. This is very different from constantly trying to hear God's voice saying do this and do that. People who try to lead their lives by hearing voices are not in sync with Romans 12:2 [which I have quoted above].

There is a world of difference between praying and laboring for a renewed mind that discerns how to apply God's Word, on the one hand, and the habit of asking God to give you new revelation of what to do, on the other hand. Divination does not require transformation. God's aim is a new mind, a new way of thinking and judging, not just new information. His aim is that we be transformed, sanctified, freed by the truth of his revealed Word (John 8:32; 17:17). So the second stage of God's will of command is the discerning application of the Scriptures to new situations in life by means of a renewed mind.¹⁴

So again, the only way to know the will of God is to know the Word of God. As the Word of God transforms our minds and hearts, we begin to see, hear, act, speak, and think like God. This is why the Word calls it being "conformed into the image of Christ."¹⁵

So let's now look at how to sharpen the tools in our tool box so that we can more effectively discern the will of God in our life. For this to happen, we have to know how to study and understand the Word of God as well as we can so that the truths that it contains would shape, mold, and form our hearts and eventually, our decisions and actions.

¹⁰ Luke 6.45

¹¹ Galatians 5.16, 25 // Romans 8.4

¹² Hebrews 11.6

¹³ Romans 10.17

¹⁴ From an article titled "What is the Will of God and How Can We Know It?" on www.desiringgod.org

¹⁵ Romans 8.29

III. HERMENEUTICS

PRIVATE INTERPRETATION:

We cannot be subjective with the Word. We can't be cavalier nor dismissive when it comes to handling the Word of God. Far too often, we already have pre-determined views, thoughts, opinions, and lenses by which we see life and issues of faith that we take into our reading of the Word. When this happens, the truth in the Scripture is not applied *to* the person, but rather determined *by* the person.

All of a sudden, the interpreter is actually formulating their own truth, rather than discerning what the truth really is. As theologians, it is upon us to *find* the objective, self-disclosed truth, rather than create our own version of what we think the truth should be.

**With the right of private interpretation
comes the sober responsibility of accurate interpretation.**

-R.C. Sproul

There are two basic ways we go about determining what any work of literature contains. The first method is called *exegesis*.^{*} Exegesis means to "guide out of." When we approach and study the Word exegetically, it means that we are "taking out of" the bible what the bible *already contained*.

The opposite is called *eisegesis*.^{*} This means to "guide into." With this method, we are "putting into" the bible something that was not already there. We can "guide into" the Scriptures with and through a number of things, such as the various items mentioned on previous pages. We can bring into the Scriptures our own feelings, encounters, desires, or cultural norms. All of these things will color and skew what is already in the Scripture.

Our natural default is, I believe, to read exegetically. However, that quickly changes when we run across something we don't like or something we disagree with. Then our natural reaction is to assume we are reading it wrong, and so now we switch over to reading eisegetically.

The reality that is hard for us to face, and therefore makes it hard for us to always read and study exegetically, is that with any work of communication (save for purposeful double entendres, allegory and other literary devices), there is only one actual and true interpretation. Our task, then, is to find out what that one true interpretation is.

However, in our day of extreme relativism and politically correct expectations, it has become normative and seemingly even noble and "humble" to ascribe to, or at least accept, the claim that "your truth is true, and mine is also true." It is considered polite and expected to "agree to disagree" on all matters, to say things like, "who am I to say they're beliefs are wrong," or any other number of statements.¹⁶ But all of these types of statements, though sounding pious and humble, are really just veiled in a false humility. R.C. Sproul says that "to believe something simply because I believe it or argue that it is true simply because it's my opinion is the epitome of arrogance."

Think about a text message. If I send you a text that says, "I really love steak," you might reply, "I think what you really meant to say is that you really love seafood." If I then responded with, "no, I meant exactly what I said. I really love steak." It would be preposterous and dripping with false humility and arrogance to say, "well, I disagree. I think you meant to say seafood. But hey, that's okay, your truth is yours, mine is mine."

When it comes to communication, *only* the original communicator has the right to dictate what was meant by his or her words. Sure, we have every right to dispute or try to interpret or read between the lines, but it is on us, the recipients, to pursue the sober responsibility of accurate interpretation.

¹⁶ This is *not* to say that there is never any time to "agree to disagree." There will *always* be a need within the church, both among believers and unbelievers, to discern when this is truly appropriate, and when it is also simply being irresponsible.

HERMENEUTICS

This brings us to *hermeneutics*,* which is the science of biblical interpretation. The root word comes from the name of the Greek god Hermes, who was the messenger of the gods and had the solemn task of interpreting the will of the gods. The purpose of hermeneutics is to establish guidelines and rules for interpretation to help interpreters be responsible, accurate, and true. It is a well-developed science that can become technical and complex, however the basics are accessible, and also pivotal, for every student of the Word to know and apply.

R.C. Sproul gives us an example from our own country. In the United States the Supreme Court is supposed to interpret, hermeneutically, the constitution. For ages the Supreme Court would use what is called a “grammatical historical” approach to interpreting the constitution. This approach asks the questions, “what did it mean originally in its historical context,” and “what did the original authors intend to say?”

However, more recently, they have gradually switched to what is called a “broad-constructionist” approach to interpretation. When this happens, the interpretive questions become more like, “what would this author write if he or she were alive today,” or “what would they say differently if they were in this culture?”

When this happens, the interpreter now ceases from actually being an interpreter, and has now begun actually writing or re-writing the document completely. In the case of the Supreme Court, what should be an interpretive arm of our government now becomes a legislative arm of our government. We saw this clearly very recently as the Supreme Court re-defined marriage in all 50 states. They did not interpret the constitution according to what the Founding Fathers originally intended, but rather, they created new laws based on a broad-constructionist approach to interpretation. What this means is that any given Founding Father would not recognize what is going on in our country, and their response to it would be, “that is not at all what I said.”

The implications with the bible should be clear, but as quick analogy, we can see that when a pastor interprets properly, he is only revealing what is already there (exegesis). He is not writing or re-writing, he is simply explaining and showing. However, when he interprets broadly, he is now not simply an interpreter, but he is actually creating new doctrines and laws or re-creating old doctrine and laws (eisegesis). He has now become the actual author of “truth.” This is a very dreadful place to be, not only as a pastor, but as any Christian, and for that matter, any non-Christian.

When we approach the Word eisegetically with a broad-constructionist approach, we are not actually interpreting God’s Word, but we are re-writing it. We are now dictating *our* truth, rather than His. Like the Forefathers of America, the Apostle Paul or Christ Himself could peer into the things that are being taught today and say, “that is not at all what I meant.”

PRIMARY RULES OF HERMENEUTICS:

1. Analogy of Faith (or Analogy of Scripture)

Easily the most important rule of hermeneutics for studying the bible is the *analogy of faith*,* sometimes called the *analogy of Scripture*. What this means is that the best interpreter for Scripture is Scripture itself. When we read and study Scripture, it is imperative that we compare our reading to other areas of Scripture for clarity, explanation, and insight. We believe in what the Reformers dubbed *sola Scriptura*, which means “by Scripture alone.” This means that Scripture is our highest authority. Because of this belief, we look to Scripture itself to be the tool that helps us interpret Scripture properly.

Allow me to give two examples. One by way of real life application, and one by analogy.

Suppose someone wants to take me out to pizza because they heard that I like pizza, but that person was told by another friend, “no, that’s not true, because Jobey doesn’t like tomatoes, and pizza is made with tomato sauce.” This second friend has accurate info based on one instance, and it would seem to contradict what the first friend heard. These friends could choose to build a “fact” about me based on one out of one very true statement, but

that statement is limited to one instance. When brought into a larger context of more conversations and more instances in my life, these two friends will get a much broader and more complete picture of my likes and dislikes. Because the truth is that I don't like tomatoes (so that statement is true), but I also do like pizza, which has tomato sauce (so that seemingly contradictory statement is also true). Context marries them and finds the proper balance.

Another example is a 100 piece jigsaw puzzle of the Statue of Liberty. When you have one piece of a puzzle, you look at the other 99 pieces to see where it fits. You wouldn't go open up a box of another jigsaw puzzle of the Empire State Building to see where the piece fits. You would look within the context of the original puzzle itself to see how it relates. You can try to force fit the piece into the Empire State Building puzzle, and you can also try to force it in the wrong spot of the correct puzzle, but that doesn't mean it actually goes there.

When you have one verse in the bible, we must find out where and how it fits in with the whole of Scripture. We can't force it if it disagrees with other parts. We know that it has its proper spot that fits in the grand scheme of God's revealed Word, and its upon us to find it.

These two examples serve us by showing us that to get an accurate interpretation of the Scripture we are using, we need to go to a broader context of the whole Word of God and make sure that for one, nothing contradicts, and for two, that we are interpreting within the Word itself, since the Word is its own authority.

To state it simply, no part of Scripture can be interpreted to be in conflict with another. This would mean that God is a liar, and He is not.

2. Literal Sense

The next rule of good and proper hermeneutics is to discern the literal sense of the text you are studying. But let's be clear on what it means to take the bible literally. Because, in all truth be told, I don't literally take the bible literally. But before you accuse me of being a heretic, let me explain what I mean.

Do the trees literally clap their hands? Or do the mountains really sing? Because **Isaiah 55.12** says they do. The answer, of course, is "no," they don't *literally* do this, because they don't literally have hands and mouths. However, they do *literally*, as a figure of speech, declare and put on display and reveal the glory of God in their own way. So, we must define what "literal" means to us.

Liberals, for instance, have weakly tried to use the term in the bible that the sun "rises" as proof that reading the bible literally is faulty, because, as every educated person know, the sun doesn't really rise, but rather the earth rotates around it. But this is just a foolish argument. The reality is, even atheist scientists and every single educated weatherman loosely and casually uses the term "sunrise" and "sunset" to describe the events of the day, as they are "nicknames" (technically called "phenomenological language") we have used for millennia for the start and end of our day. A proper *type* of literal reading would discern this and take this into account.

So, when we speak of the "literal sense," we are taking into account figures of speech, idioms, metaphor, analogies, etc. that the original author intended. And the reality is that we do this every day. If someone comes up to me and says, "I'm so hungry I could eat a horse," my next thought isn't, "where is the best restaurant that serves up delicious horse around here?" If I play a practical joke on someone and freak them out and they scream, "oh Jobey I'm gonna kill you!!!," I wouldn't get my phone out quickly to call 911.

I would "literally" believe that my first friend is very, very hungry, and that my second friend was literally freaked out and wanted to get some kind of playful revenge.

Some common literary devices are these, among others:

- Hyperbole: purposefully exaggerating a point for effect. For instance, Jesus wasn't really talking about a physical plank in someone's eye, but He was giving a picture of how ridiculous it is that we judge others when our own sin is far greater than the sin we are judging.¹⁷
- Personification: Similar to the example of the mountains and trees, sometimes authors take inanimate objects and give them personality and action, such as "wisdom" in the Proverbs being referred to as a woman.
- Metaphor: using one word or phrase to describe another for sake of likeness.
- Phenomenological language: such as the use of words and phrases like "sunrise" and "sunset."

3. Grammatical-Historical

Closely related (really a more specific focus of the *literal sense*) is the grammatical-historical approach that we mentioned before. This focuses on literary terms, grammatical constructions, and historical contexts. When it comes to written literature, not all bits of literature are created equal. Therefore, they should all be approached differently. Poetry and business letters are written differently than each other, as are grocery shopping lists compared to newspaper articles, notes to self, text messages, legal writings, love notes to your spouse, etc. Each one should be read differently and interpreted according to its own genre.

Additionally, careful attention should be taken when considering whether the words or phrases in question are either questions, commands, indicatives, imperatives, etc.

As an example, in the book of Acts, Jesus says, "you shall be my witnesses."¹⁸ Was this a prophetic statement and observation, such as, "I'm here to tell you that you guys will eventually be my witnesses"? Or was it a command, "I am telling you as a command, go now and be my witnesses"? You see how both can be interpreted from the English rendering of that text? Proper understanding of sentence structure, as well as the particular structure of the original language, is important to figure out what it is (and for the record, the Greek construction makes it a command).

Another example is when Paul talks about the "Gospel of God." Is he talking about the Gospel of, as in *about* God, or the Gospel of, as in *owned by* God? Here in this instance, Paul uses possessive language, therefore he's talking about God's Gospel. It is not Good News *about* God, but rather he is making clear that it is God's very own Good News that is being declared.

So the questions that the grammatical historical approach answers are questions like, "who wrote it," "under what circumstances," "to whom was it written," etc. Now let's look at some helpful rules for interpretation as we start building our tool box for bible study.¹⁹

¹⁷ Matthew 7.3-5

¹⁸ Acts 1.8

¹⁹ Much of the next section was adapted and added to using many of R.C. Sproul's Rules for Interpretation in his book, *Knowing Scripture*.

IV. RULES FOR INTERPRETATION

1. READ THE BIBLE LIKE ANY OTHER BOOK

Simply put, and there is nothing really behind it. We read Paul's letters as if we were reading a historic letter that your grandpa received from his pen pal in Germany when he was in fifth grade. You read it and wonder, "I wonder what that word meant in Germany in the 1930's?" Or maybe, "I'm not sure because I don't have his previous letter, but here it sounds like maybe his mother passed away." We read to understand what was going on and to get an accurate picture, just like any story.

This does *not* mean that the bible is *like* every other book in every way. Nor does it mean that prayer and the Holy Spirit are not needed to *apply* and help us *appropriate and believe* in the truths it contains. However, when it comes to reading it and discerning truth from metaphor, poetry from letters, historic background and audience, reading as we would any other book is important.

2. INTERPRET THE HISTORICAL NARRATIVES BY THE DIDACTIC

The term *didactic form* comes from the Greek word for "teach" or "instruct." So when we say to interpret narratives by the didactic, we are saying to handle narratives and stories properly, filtering them through the portions of Scriptures that are specifically intended to teach and instruct.

By and large, in the New Testament specifically, theologians have generally treated the Gospels and Acts as the narrative story of the life and ministry of Christ and then the church, with the epistles being the "explanation" of the life and ministry of Christ. Of course, this isn't a totally clean delineation, as Christ also taught during His lifetime, and we need to take His teachings as actual "didactic" teachings. However, in general, this is an important rule for us.

The apostles, after the death and resurrection of Christ, were then given the task of instructing the church of all the things that Christ taught and modeled, in order to help these new churches rightly follow Christ. Therefore, the letters were written to explain the life and teachings of Christ and give the churches specific instruction on how to carry out their lives in light of this.

This does not mean that Jesus' sayings are less authoritative than the apostles. In actuality, they are equal, since the words of the apostles in the epistles and the Gospels were inspired by the Holy Spirit. What it simply means is that one portion of Scripture has one role, and another portion has another role, even though they are equally as authoritative.

Additionally, we see that in many of the narratives in the bible, many of God's people that came before us had done some pretty sinful things. This should not serve as "proof" that God is okay with certain practices. Nehemiah, as example, had a great role in being used by God for standing up for truth against naysayers, yet at the end of his book he mentions how he "confronted them and cursed them and beat some of them and pulled out their hair."²⁰ As great of a guy as Nehemiah was, this should *not* give us fair permission to employ this in our counseling sessions!

3. DISCERN BETWEEN THE DESCRIPTIVE AND THE PRESCRIPTIVE

Similar to the above rule is also the rule of discerning the "descriptive from the prescriptive." For instance, we know that Jesus is "described" as being a traveling teacher and did not have His own home, but the Word doesn't "prescribe" then, therefore, for all teachers, much less all Christians, to also be homeless. Jesus also spit in mud and rubbed it in people's eyes when He healed them, but that isn't what is prescribed for us to do as practice. We

²⁰ Nehemiah 13.25

must be careful to not make what is clearly described in the Word into something that is clearly prescribed. We will quickly fall into legalism, judgmentalism, and even worse, adding to God's Word.

Another common thing Christians do is follow other examples from narratives. In **Judges 6.37**, Gideon lays a fleece on the floor and says that if dew is on it the next day and not the floor, that would be a sign that God would deliver Israel. We take that as being "permission" to give God "tests" to determine His will. But does this text teach that this is okay to do, or that we should do it, or that this is the normative way that God helps us determine His will? It does not.

At the end of the day, building doctrine off of narratives alone is very dangerous and is asking for all sorts of distorted or unfounded truth.

As a matter of fact, the Word most clearly tells us that testing God and seeking for signs is not for us (more on the explicit vs. the implicit in Rule 4 below). Just because God chose to do this for Gideon, doesn't at all mean that this is now normative or the right way we should do things. The disciples cast lots to choose who would be the new twelfth disciple, so should we cast lots to choose who our church pastors should be? We have to take into consideration the context of the time, what was available to these people in their day, and consider the reasons why God may have allowed those particular instances. We should not, however, build doctrines and practices solely out of what is described in the bible, yet not prescribed.

4. INTERPRET THE IMPLICIT BY THE EXPLICIT, THE UNCLEAR BY THE CLEAR

This rule cannot be understated. We *must learn* to recognize the implications of Scriptures, but we also must be careful not to suppose implications that aren't actually there (or aren't absolutely or necessarily there). Again, the context of the whole bible must help us determine this.

When I teach, I try to be clear when I see implications or possibilities that the Word seems to indicate that those implications are not necessarily the case, but something we can consider. A recent example was from the sermon I gave on James and John's mother asking if her sons could be put at Jesus' left and right hand. He replied, "you don't know what you ask. Can you drink the cup I am going to drink?" They replied in the affirmative, and He said then, "you will drink from my cup."

Is the cup Jesus is talking about the cup of the Father's wrath? If so, does that imply that James and John will also drink the cup of wrath? Well, explicitly speaking, we know that believers will *not* drink the cup of the wrath of God, so though it might seem to be implicit that this is the case, the explicit tells us it is not the case. The solution must be something else.

When an implication is drawn that is contradictory to what is explicitly stated, the implication must be rejected.

-R.C. Sproul²¹

Here is something that is very important to remember. Sometimes, certain Scriptures seem to be contradictory. But rather than immediately give up when a contradiction seems apparent, rather we think critically through how they reconcile, or how they *may* reconcile. A contradiction is only a true contradiction when two things are *proven* to be in direct opposition with each other. However, so long as there is a reasonable explanation (even if we can't know for sure what the explanation is), we can't truly classify it as a contradiction.

Interpreting the implicit by the explicit helps us to reconcile things that seem to be contradictions. If we use the explicit as a jumping off point, because it is clear that this particular fact is undisputed, we can more quickly and accurately learn to reconcile other parts of Scripture that seem to be in contradiction, but really are not.

²¹ *Knowing Scripture*, pg. 85

Closely related to the explicit interpreting the implicit is interpreting unclear texts by the clear texts. How often do we run across confusing texts that just seem to throw us for a loop? It can cause us to wonder about the validity about the bible, or we can start believing the accusations of others who say the bible is filled with error and contradiction. We can also then start building our beliefs based on doctrine that just isn't true. So what do we do when we run across the murky and cloudy parts of Scripture?

Again, this goes back to context, as we want to take into context the whole entirety of Scripture. So when we look at other portions of the Word, it doesn't take long to notice that some things are very clear, and some things are not. One thing we can do to help us make proper sense out of the confusing parts is to use the main and plain and very clear parts and teachings as our foundation. The truths in the Word that are indisputable and clear should provide the lens by which we use as our starting point. The implicit, or more unclear part, may color or give nuance to the explicit truth, but it won't change the explicit truth.

5. DETERMINE CAREFULLY THE MEANING OF WORDS

One mistake many bible students make is by looking up a word in the original language by using a lexicon (an invaluable resource, it's a dictionary of another language but is also "period correct"), seeing multiple ways the word can be used, and then inserting in whichever word they think is most colorful or helpful. But this is not the *only* determining factor for the meaning of words.

For instance, in today's English the word "mad" can be used for crazy or for angry. If my friend John says to me, "my dad is mad," I can't then go to someone else and say, "John's dad is psychotic. He said he's mad, and he might have meant angry, but that can also mean he's crazy." Now we've completely interpreted John's statement falsely.

Not only that, but words take on different meanings to different users. How quickly even in just our lifetime have words like gay, sick, cool, mouse, web, and viral even gotten totally new additions to their possible meanings?

To properly determine proper words, we have to take into consideration the context that the word is used in. If John just mentioned that he came home well after curfew and his dad was "mad," I can easily deduce that he's not saying he's become mentally insane, but that he's angry. Sometimes the context leaves us unsure, and so we need to exercise caution in making definitive statements.

A great example in the Word are two *seemingly* contradictory verses from two different authors that use the *same* word.

Romans 3:28 ^(ESV)

²⁸ For we hold that one is justified by faith apart from works of the law.

James 2:24 ^(ESV)

²⁴ You see that a person is justified by works and not by faith alone.

So...which is it?! Is this a definite contradiction, or is there another explanation? All throughout the bible, we see the explicit truth that we are saved by grace alone, through faith. So though we may *imply* something from James, the explicit must reject it. Where is our problem? It's in the word "justify."

But justify can mean one of two things. It can mean being pardoned and forgiven by God, or it can mean vindicated or proven. For instance, when we make a poor decision to spend money on something foolish and then we try to *justify it*, but we are not saying, "I just made this decision to spend way too much money on something stupid, and therefore this act of foolishness has made me right with God."

No, clearly we aren't saying that. We are trying, rather, to vindicate or prove that our poor decision was somehow warranted. So, as we look at the example of James, we see that James is saying that a person's genuine standing in Christ is "proven" or "validated" by his works, not simply by an outward declaration of faith. His works "prove"

that his faith is real. Or to use the word thrice in two different ways in one sentence, we could say that his works are justification to show that his claim of justification is justified.

6. NOTE THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN PROVERB AND LAW

Proverbs are words of wisdom, but are not necessarily commands or law. And when we say “law,” we can actually mean two different types of law. We can mean a command that must be obeyed, or an observable truth and absolute, like the law of gravity. We might call it an “if...when” law. *If* you drop a book, *then* it will fall to the ground. That’s a law.

With proverbs, they serve as good counsel and wisdom, but they are not necessarily commands that, if not obeyed, would *necessarily* be sinful. Proverbs are also “observations,” which means the other type of “law” we are talking about such as with the law of gravity, but these proverbs aren’t absolute observations. So they are not binding “laws” in that sense, but they are wisdom based on observations.

For instance, the Word says in **Proverbs 20.7**, “the righteous who walks in his integrity — blessed are his children after him!” If taken as an absolute promise or law (such as gravity, “if...then”), one would think that as long as a man or woman lives a godly life, it is a guarantee (a law) that the kids will be blessed. But this is a proverb, not a law. What does this mean?

When it comes to God’s grace, we speak a lot of the “means of grace.” These are the ways that God dispenses His grace to us. At our church, we most often talk about the Word of God, prayer, and Gospel community as being the primary means of grace. When we are speaking of this type of grace, we are speaking specifically of the transforming and empowering grace of the Gospel as it sanctifies us.

But there is also what we call “common grace.” And this common grace is the kind of grace, or gifts, God gives to all people, such as food, love, friendships, etc. Most of these are not so much given to us through the three primary means of grace (people who don’t pray or read the Word still find love and friendships), but through other ways that God has designed for us to receive His common grace. One instance of this is consequences. If a believer is honest at work, it may result in him getting a raise because of his integrity. A modern proverb for that would be “what goes around comes around.” And that is often true, but it is not a law. He may actually lose a bid or a certain job because he couldn’t cook the books. However, the most “common” way that the Lord has designed His universe is that people (even non-believers) recognize integrity in an honest person and want to honor it. It’s not a universal law, but it is a common law.

All this to say, it would be a normative and common consequence of a godly mom and dad to have children who are blessed. But there are exceptions, and it is no absolute. It is wise for us to pursue godliness in our parenting and trusting the Word, but parenting is not formulaic. No relationship is formulaic, but the proverbs give us great wisdom for pursuing godliness in our life as we also simultaneously trust God’s sovereign plan, wisdom, and timing.

One reason we must differentiate between these two is expectations. We can get our hopes up, only to have them dashed when things don’t go our way. We can also put “laws” upon others that quite simply aren’t meant to be laws. When we read and study the Word, we must be careful with how we approach these.

7. BE CAREFUL WITH THE PARABLES

Parables were widely used by Jesus, and they have been widely distorted by Christians. We have to understand that parables are simple, and we tend to overcomplicate them. Parables usually have one main point, and that's about it. Here's a few common mistakes we can make with parables:

- Over analogizing every aspect
 - For instance, in the story of the vineyard laborers who worked different amounts of time.²² We could over analogize that and say that our payment is because of our work, which would imply that our salvation is a reward for our good works. But this is not the point of the parable, and now by making analogy over every aspect of the parable, we've gone into bad theological territory.
- Pressing the implications too far
 - For instance, when the person who is already at the banquet in **Matthew 22** is found to not have proper attire, he is kicked out. This is *not* to imply that some people can get to heaven only to be kicked out. That goes beyond the scope of the intended purpose of the parable. Another for instance, though not quite a parable, Jesus said that when He comes He will come like "a thief in the night." Should we take this to now compare Jesus to a sinful thief? No, it's not the quality or character of a thief that is being implied, but the stealth and unexpectedness that is to be considered.
- Carrying over interpretations from other parables
 - For instance, leaven in one parable is the Kingdom of God, and in another parable it is sin.²³ The parables should be interpreted within themselves since it is the *effect* of leaven that is being analogized rather than the *object* of leaven.

It is important we don't put into the parables what was not intended (eisegesis). Martin Luther said, "it is necessary that no one invent mysteries on his own, as some people have done and are still doing. The Spirit Himself must do it." In other words, we must be careful to only try to discern what the Holy Spirit intended for us to see.

RULE 8. BE CAREFUL WITH PREDICTIVE PROPHECY

Predictive prophecy is, for myself, the most difficult in many ways. Time and time again, we hear teachers place so much emphasis and confidence in predictive prophecy as if they know exactly what it means. This has been a foible of the church for millennia. You can turn on the radio at any time of the day to a Christian station and hear them talking about how every little current event is a sign of a certain passage in the bible. However, how often, when it turns out to just blow by, do you hear those same radio commentators say, "when we said 3 months ago that this instance in the news was an obvious bible prophecy, we were wrong"? Never. We are far too cavalier with our handling of the Word when it comes to predictive prophecy.

This area in particular is worthy of much more extensive study, far beyond the scope of this particular study. The bottom line, for our purposes, is to not make quick, simple, and flippant interpretations of this. I remember once hearing a teacher claim that the United States was mentioned in **Revelation 12.14** because an eagle takes the woman, who they said was a picture of Israel, into the wilderness to be protected from the serpent. And of course, since our national bird is an eagle, this must mean that we are going to be the ones who protect Israel from the enemy.

Now, this is just irresponsible and foolish to go there. When we approach predictive prophecy, we must be very careful, very humble, and very clear that we are simply exploring and postulating without any real clear and definitive answers when there are none that are clear and definitive.

²² Matthew 20.1-16

²³ Matthew 16.6-12, 13.33

9. MORALIZING

One thing we tend to do so very easily is what is called *moralizing*²⁴ the Scriptures. What this means is that we look at parts of the bible, particularly the narratives, and even more particularly, the Old Testament narratives, and we ask ourselves, “what is the moral of the story?” We will look at, say, the story of Isaac and his sons, Jacob and Esau, and we can say “look at how the parents showed favoritism to their boys, and then they are pitted against each other. So parents, don’t show favoritism.”

That may be good advice, and can surely be taken to heart, but that is *not at all* the point of this story, and it massacres what believers *should be* seeing in the Scripture. Or, very commonly, we may look at the story of David and Goliath and say, “so what we see here is that we can have courage and bravery in light of our enemies, and God wants to make you strong and able to overcome the Goliaths in your life.”

But that also is not the point. What’s the better question to ask? We know that every bit of Scripture points to Christ somehow or in some way,²⁴ and we believe that the point of the *whole bible* is to testify of the Gospel, God’s plan of redemption for fallen people through the person and work of Jesus Christ. Therefore, a better “starting point” question to ask is not, “what is the moral of this story,” but rather, “how does this story point us to the redemptive plan of God in Christ?”

When we moralize, the emphasis goes on us and our behavior. It turns the bible into a self-help book rather than a look-to-Christ-for-help book. It goes on us and what we can or need to do to improve our lives. “Don’t show favorites,” “face our giants,” etc. become the battle cries of our bible study time and sermons. But the bible is not about us. It is about Jesus. And so we must look to the Word and ask the Holy Spirit to show us why He has certain stories in the bible and how they point to the glory of God and His massive work of redemption.

Just as all roads lead to Rome, all Scripture leads to Christ.

10. IRRESPONSIBLE APPLICATION: NARRATIVES

Going back to proper exegesis and searching out the true and singular interpretation for Scripture, it should also be said that though there is only one actual and true interpretation, there can be many applications. But what’s the difference, and why is it important?

I remember a friend once told me he was praying about where to move, and he was in Isaiah and read a part about the Lord doing a work among the coastlands. Boom! There it was! They were to move to the coast! He told me the story and told me that the Lord had spoken to him through that Scripture and told him that he and his family were to move to the coast. I could only hope that the same person wouldn’t be praying about how to react to someone who is being hurtful to them and then open up to the Psalms when David prays to have his enemies’ children dashed upon the rocks!

I can’t tell you how many times churches have been in building campaigns or are about to move into a new facility and they refer to their move as “reaching our Promised Land.” They raise money, rally the troops, do build-outs, and compare themselves to the exodus. This is wrong on so many levels! Yes, there *may* be some great inspiring stories of camaraderie and working together, and some of those things can be applied on some level, but we can do so much harm to the Scriptures when we irresponsibly kidnap the Scriptures for our own purposes.

Now, like with the moralizing, this isn’t to say that the Lord does *not* use Scripture in these ways sometimes. But it is *so important* that we be responsible and mature in how we handle and even communicate these times in the Word, as well as the importance and weight that we give them. We must be *clear* when we are making these applications, when the applications are responsible and appropriate. Let me give an example from our human friendships.

²⁴ Luke 24.27

Let's say I go to lunch with my friend Charles, and Charles tells me about his physical health and how he has not been nourishing his body and he has been neglecting exercise and has been eating poorly. This may prompt my mind and make me think similarly that I also need to start nourishing my *spiritual* health and get into better habits of exercising my faith and not "eating" sinful things. But would it be right for me to then go and tell my wife, "today at lunch Charles really spoke directly to me and told me to get in shape spiritually"?

No, it wouldn't. I *could* say that "in my time with Charles, he was telling me about his physical health, and it got me thinking about my spiritual health." That very well could have been the Holy Spirit convicting me and guiding me, but what I am *not* doing is actually putting words into Charles' mouth. Likewise, when we read the Scripture, our own minds or even the Holy Spirit Himself may lead us to think of other things in our life, but what we should *not* do is put words into God's mouth. We must be very, very careful with that, for at least these reasons:

- We put too much weight on things that aren't sure. Suppose we act on things that we believe God "told us." What happens when it fails? Oftentimes, we blame God or then begin to live in a lot of confusion. When we rightly see it as something that we believe that the Lord revealed to us or set before us, but we hold it with an open hand and don't insist that it was for sure the Lord speaking to us, if it fails we learn more quickly and we grow in our discipleship.
- We use it as a spiritual trump card. If my friend says, "the Lord spoke to me to be a missionary through this Scripture," that is a noble thing, but what if others see some glaring sin issues or immaturity? We can't speak against the Lord! And if he or she is convinced the Lord spoke, they would have no reason to listen to others.
- We teach others by our example to pursue a subjective, emotional type of relationship with God. When we throw Scripture around lightly as our green light for this or that, we teach others to do the same.

When we believe that the Lord has somehow prompted our mind or our spirit for something, such as a move to the coastlands or to marry someone or to work on our spiritual health, we need to check these things with other Scripture, with others that know us and that we trust, and ask ourselves epistemological questions such as, "why do I think this is absolute truth" and "where is this truth really coming from?"

II. IRRESPONSIBLE APPLICATION: PROMISES AND PROPHECY

Another way we do this is applying promises and prophecy wrongly. Countless times will we hear people "claim" promises of God that were just simply not for them. When people are going to buy a house, and the wife reads in the Word where God says to Abraham in **Genesis 13.15**, "and I will give you the land," and the wife jumps and screams in excitement, "honey, I *know* that the Lord is going to give us the house that we want!" But, last I checked, that was *primarily* a promise for Abraham. But let's come back to that. Let's look at another popular promise from the Lord.

In **Jeremiah 29.11**, it famously says, "for I know the plans I have for you. Plans for good, and not of evil, to give you a future and a hope." What a great promise! And it has made it onto many coffee cups, t-shirts, greeting cards, and art prints over the years. But who was it for? Is it for me to appropriate as mine? Let's look at another example.

If my wife says to Micah, our son, "after school, I will give you ice cream." Can my other son Liam now go to Katie after school and say, "I'd like my ice cream, because you promised ice cream"? He wouldn't have that right, because the promise was for Micah. The "you" in that statement that Katie made is Micah, not Liam. In the Jeremiah verse, who is the "you"? This prophecy was specifically written to Israel during their captivity in Babylon. He was promising them, those people in that time, that their future is good because they are His people and that He would rescue them from Babylon.

So, here's the thing, God's promise for their captivity doesn't speak much about our future at college or in a new job or marriage. Now, that isn't to say that it is *not true* that God doesn't have a future and a hope for *all of His*

people, both Jews during this time and Gentile believers at **Life Mission Church**. But it is to say that this verse wasn't specifically meant for us to irresponsibly use however we want.

Now, before we get too far down the road with this, we should ask, "is there *anything* in these verses that *are* for us?" The answer is yes.

God promised Abraham that He would give him the land to possess for him and his offspring forever. Well, we are actually *in* that prophecy, because we as believers in Christ are all Abraham's children *in faith*.²⁵ So the land that has been promised to Abraham will also be *ours* in the future! And what is this land? Well, it probably has *nothing* to do with the home you want to purchase, but it *does* have to do with the *whole earth*! There is a day that is coming that all of God's people will inhabit a perfectly redeemed earth that He promised. He will rule and reign on the earth and we, the people of His pasture, will be His forevermore! That's much better than any earthly home we have our sights set on!

With the **Jeremiah 29.11** passage, God as we said is speaking to the people, Israel, but we also know that we have been grafted in with Israel spiritually. When God was speaking to this particular physical group of people in captivity, He was speaking not only about their eventual release from Babylonian captivity, but *also* of their eternal future and hope and release from *spiritual* captivity. Therefore, we, as spiritual Israel, can also lay claim to this great promise, knowing that *because we are grafted in with Israel*, we can partake in the promises made to Israel!

Now, you may be thinking, "well, that's great, but the outcome is virtually the same. Either way I apply it, I realize that the Lord has a future and a hope, so what's the big deal?" It's a *huge deal*, because in the second way that applies it within context actually magnifies the plan of redemption and makes God's amazing plan for His people central, rather than making us the individual central. When we see how we fit into God's plan, rather than having Him fit in our plan, it makes *all the difference* in how we give thanks to Him when we appropriate Scriptures for our lives.

Another common misappropriation comes from **Philippians 4.13**. How many football players have you seen with "Phil 4.13" on their eye black? Or that we are given as a "pep talk" before a job interview or something we are hoping to achieve? Is that verse really meant to remind us to give us strength to win games or achieve anything we put our mind to? Again, when you look in the context of Philippians, Paul wrote it in prison, and the direct context he is talking about learning how to be content with much or with little. He then exclaims, "I can do all things through Christ who gives me strength."

What Paul is declaring is not that Christ gives us the strength to accomplish anything we set our minds to and work hard at, but that Christ makes him able to endure all things that come his way with contentment and joy because He gives him the strength for every trial and triumph as he pursues Christ with everything he has. It is not at all a verse to draw upon for some inner strength and motivation to get pumped up to give your all; it is a verse about enduring suffering for Christ and pursuing him with the strength of the Lord because you yourself have run out.

²⁵ Romans 9.6-8

V. CULTURAL CONDITIONING AND CONTEXTUALIZATION

The bible reflects the day, people, and culture it was written in and around. And we also reflect the day, people, and culture that we live in and around. We interpret things based on what we see and experience, and then we communicate things through that lens. So, the question for us is, if the bible was written in a certain time by a certain people, how much of the bible is relevant only to those to whom it was written? How much is relevant to us? Which parts are we bound to?

This is a specific instance of discerning the descriptive and prescriptive, but it is a major side-category of it, worthy of its own section. We've spent some time talking about how learning the context in which the Word is written is important for us to know, as well as we can, for accurate exegetical study. But just as important is working through our own cultural conditioning.

Here is the question that R.C. Sproul asks: to what extent is the bible's relevance and authority *limited* by changing human structures and perspectives in the biblical text? In other words, where do we "draw the line" on applying certain things we find in the Word that seem culturally conditioned and "out of date" or "inapplicable" in our day and age?

PRINCIPLES AND CULTURAL CUSTOMS

We've used the example of descriptive vs. prescriptive when speaking of Jesus being a homeless itinerant preacher and teacher. But where this goes further is in the confusing parts of Scripture that actually seem to be *commands* given. Jesus never said, "be a homeless teacher," but in the instances we will be looking at, what happens when there seems to be an actual command in place?

One example of this is when Jesus told the rich young ruler to sell all and give to the poor.²⁶ Many a pastor or Christian has then taken that as a challenge for everyone. Because Jesus told him to do it, it must be a command for all believers. But is this the case? If not, why, and how do we rightly determine which it is?

The question for us is between two things: principles, and customs. Which things are timeless, eternal principles that carry over from generation to generation, regardless of the customs or culture? And which parts of the Word are describing particular cultural customs that don't transcend generations or people groups? Finally, how can we tell the difference?

This is a very difficult part of interpretation that is not easy, and also is sometimes left unclear. There will be times when our study is inconclusive, and the legalistic, religious parts of us will be frustrated in not finding a nice and neat order for everything in the Word.

So let's look at a few guiding principles to hopefully help us discern what to do with these parts of the Word that contain principles and customs.

GUIDING PRINCIPLES

1. Examine the bible itself for apparent areas of custom. There are some very obvious areas of custom that don't apply to us today. We can start with the ridiculous, simply to show that they do in fact exist, which just shows us that not all commands are binding and absolute commands in their most literal sense. For instance, Jesus says to "give to Caesar what is Caesar's." Clearly, not all believers today should give to Caesar, because Caesar is dead, and we aren't citizens of Rome. Paul instructs believers to greet each other with a holy kiss. And though in many countries, a kiss is a common greeting, it isn't so in many, including America.

These examples are admittedly simple to discern. And though they may be a little obvious, they show that there are indeed some things that aren't binding. Now, when we get into institutions and practices, this is where it gets more complex. For instance, when Jesus commanded to give to Caesar what is Caesar's, this is not necessarily an endorsement of Caesar, his character, or even his country. In God's great sovereignty and plan, He has designed many things to be in existence that serve His greater purpose. Human governments, money, certain trades, and even things like sickness and poverty are all things that have been brought into existence to serve a greater purpose. Just because the bible tells us how to interact with these things

²⁶ Matthew 19.21

does not mean that these things are endorsed by God, which also means our participation and interaction with them also does not necessarily mean that we endorse them.

But there are other institutions, such as marriage, that are binding and timeless. One common example of trying to “equalize” customs and principles is the supposed relationship between marriage equality and slavery. The argument goes that since the bible permitted slavery and opposed homosexuality, and Christians have evolved in seeing that slavery is wrong, we need to now also likewise see an opposition of homosexuality is wrong. The argument is that both slavery and homosexuality were culturally conditioned perspectives that we are now being “enlightened” to see that those old positions are wrong and we need to evolve.

So what is it? If we agree that slavery is wrong, despite the bible seeming to condone it, what stops us from now saying homosexuality is okay, even though the bible says it is wrong? It’s a great question, isn’t it?

One main thing we do is we look, again, at the whole bible. And when it comes to discerning principles, we look to see where, if anywhere, these beliefs are rooted in anything consistently substantial historically. One way to say it is that some institutions (such as slavery or the Caesar and his Roman government) are institutions that simply exist in the story line of humanity. Leaders come and go and rise and fall, slavery is hit and miss in varying eras and nations. For some reason, they have popped up in our world in various ways.

But some institutions, such as marriage, don’t just “happen to be,” but have been around from the beginning, and are even rooted in creation itself. We see marriage as something that God both ordained *and* endorsed, and this becomes a major difference maker in discerning principles and cultural customs.

2. Allow for Christian distinctive in the first century. Like with the holy kiss or head coverings for women in the church, we must recognize that some of these things were mentioned as part of normative culture in that day. If an epistle were written today, it could say, “be mindful of how much time you are on your iPhone.” But that would not have any explicit bearing on the future believers in the 23rd Century, though there may be some implicit principles that are helpful and important.

We must see that some room must be given for things that simply exist as cultural marks, but are not necessarily expected to be a part of perpetual Christian living.

3. The creation ordinances are indicative of transcultural norms. As mentioned before, some institutions are derived directly even from creation itself. These should be the most obvious, and therefore most guarded principles, because these principles are founded not on being a Jew or a Christian, but simply on being human. These ordinances we see even rooted in creation should dictate ongoing culture, and even over generations.

Similarly, we should look to the nature and character of God, including His existence as a Trinitarian God, as a spring board for principles. After all, the Trinity is *the original* “institution” from which all things have derived. Again, this is why marriage is not up for negotiation, because marriage not only is spoken of directly in the creation account, but it also specifically gives a picture and flows from the model of the Person and nature of God Himself. God is three unique and different Persons, but one God. Marriage is two unique and different persons who become one. There are not two (or three) Sons of God, but one, who is one with His Father and the Spirit. Likewise, it is not two males, but a male and female that become one.

Additionally, the varying roles of husband and wife are modeled not only in the creation, but also the Trinity. Equal in all essence and character, but different in role. The Son lovingly and humbly submits without being denigrated or seen as lesser than. Therefore, in our marriages, though culture may say, “this is the 21st century,” we say, “but the Word of God is eternal.”

4. When it is uncertain, use humility. Sometimes, there is no final, clear cut answer to whether something we find in the Word is culture or principle. Let’s use the aforementioned example of head coverings in **1 Corinthians 11**, since it is a common text pointed to when dealing with the bible’s cultural relevance. The text speaks about head coverings being a symbol and outward show of a woman’s submission to her husband.

R.C. Sproul points out that there are four main conclusions we can come up with considering this particular topic.

Conclusion 1. It is all cultural: this would say that the whole text is just a glimpse into the 1st century living, but has no bearing on us whatsoever. Wives no longer need to be submitted to their husbands, nor need to wear head coverings to show that.

Conclusion 2. It is all principle: this would say that we must follow the exact “command” by the book. Wives should still be submitted to their husbands, and also must wear head coverings to show that.

Even trickier is the next two options (and variances in between).

Conclusion 3. It is part cultural and part principle (Option 1): this would say that it is parts of both. Wives submitting to their husbands is still binding because of what was spoken of in the creation account, not just in the Corinthian church, but the article of clothing can vary from culture to culture. A woman could wear any varying type of head covering depending on the culture, but it is binding that she should wear a head covering.

Conclusion 4. It is part cultural and part principle (Option 2): this would say the same as Number 3, that it is a mix of culture and principle, but here that the wives also should be submitted to their husbands as part of the order of creation, but that head coverings themselves were cultural. In this option, this could mean a number of outward showings of love, respect, and submission, such as wedding rings, modest dress, holding hands, not gossiping, etc.

So which is it? At the end of the day, it really would be impossible for anyone to definitively declare that one of these is absolutely beyond the shadow of a doubt the correct interpretation. We could only postulate and make a decision in faith, but also, importantly, in humility.

These are areas where we can, and should, “agree to disagree” with the utmost respect to those who see it differently. When another believer believes something different than us, but it falls still in the line of orthodoxy and is a viable belief compatible with biblical teaching, we can still share great fellowship and communion with each other. We must be humble, holding these things because of conviction, but holding them with a loose hand, knowing that it is quite possible we may have our view wrong, and they are right.

Some things in the Word are crystal clear, backed up by dozens of very, very clear Scriptures. Of those, some are indeed “more important” than others. All of the Scriptures are the Word of God and are profitable to us, but some portions have a greater bearing and role on our faith. **John 3.16** is more important for us and our relationship with Christ than this verse on head coverings is. Both are helpful, both are the Word, both teach us something about the Gospel and Christian living and the Person and work of God, but one is more poignant, more clear, and more foundational.

WHICH WAY SHOULD WE GO?

Just because there are potentially multiple conclusions we can come to that don’t directly oppose Scripture (yet still knowing only *one* of them is truly correct), we know we are to be humble in our conclusion, but what is the better way (if there is one) to decide on a conclusion?

Do we err on the side of making sure we are being obedient in every way, therefore leaning more towards following them as principles in an attempt to make sure we are honoring God? Or do we err on the side of treating them as cultural, in an attempt to not become legislators adding to God’s Law and becoming legalistic?

With **Conclusion 2**, and to a lesser degree **Conclusion 3**, we may err on the side of treating them more like principles, but we run the risk of deciding on something more legalistic.

With **Conclusion 1**, and to a lesser degree **Conclusion 4**, we err on chalking it up to culture, but we run the risk of not obeying God’s design.

Both legalism and licentiousness are attitudes of the heart and lifestyles to be avoided at all costs. Which is the lesser of these two evils? It’s nearly impossible to say. When either the Scripture is silent or unclear, and only after all responsible and careful study and exegesis is done, there are a few things we can keep in mind.

1. Everything we do must be done in faith. **Romans 14.23** says that “whoever has doubts is condemned if he eats, because the eating is not from faith. For whatever does not proceed from faith is sin.” This is an important principle for us as we make decisions that seem to not have a 100% clear cut answer. We must be able to either enjoy or abstain from choices with a clear conscience before the Lord, and to the glory of the Lord. Augustine said, “love God and do as you please.” That seems very irresponsible, but in a greater context, Augustine is saying that if we love God, we’ll want to honor Him rightly. If we want to honor Him rightly, we’ll be objectively in the Word seeking direction. When we have exhausted our pursuit and come to our conclusion to enjoy or abstain, we can do as we please, because in our enjoyment or abstinence we will be seeking to love God.

2. Seek the counsel of others. Part of exhausting your resources would be to seek out the counsel of others. This would include both commentaries from current and historic theologians, as well as people you trust that have a biblical approach to life. As a side note, when we are facing difficult decisions, I have often turned to my counselors and defaulted to their counsel, even if it is not quite what I had in mind, and so long as it doesn’t violate my conscience before the Lord. I’ve found it to be liberating when I am at a cross roads and two ways seem to be

legitimate to be able to submit myself to others who may not be thinking emotionally or subjectively since they are not wrapped up in the decision as I am.

3. Where to err. My personal opinion, and I hesitate somewhat writing this because I don't always err on this, even purposefully, is to not err on the side of legalism. Again, as an absolute last resort, if the choice is between legalism or chalking something up to culture, I would choose culture. The reason is that I think personally I fear more "putting words in God's mouth" and "adding to the Scriptures" and then imposing my own law into others' lives. I would say that with something like head coverings, for instance, that are not that clear, I think are probably not clear because it wasn't meant to be that clear, because it quite possibly wasn't meant to be a guiding, transcultural principle. If it was meant to be that, simple logic might tell me that the Spirit would have made that more clear. The Scriptures that are unclear, may be unclear for a reason.

VI. TOOLS TO GET YOU STARTED

BIBLE TRANSLATIONS

You may have wondered why there are so many translations out there. Without getting too technical and arduous (because there are a large number of reasons), we will make mention of what is probably the main noticeable reason, which is the balance of literal, word for word translation (known as “formal equivalence”) versus readability (“functional/dynamic equivalence”).

For study purposes, it is recommended to have at least two, if not more, translations readily available. You would probably want to have a “main translation” that you like, one that is convenient to take with you, to read, to comprehend, and to memorize. But you would also want others to give you other insights. This can be done in a few ways, either by purchasing separate bibles, having a bible study software program, or a parallel bible (more on this later). Before you do that, here is a rundown of what you can expect from the popular translations to help you make a decision. Take a look at this chart to see where particular translations rest in their literal vs. functionality balance.

Formal Equivalence (Literal/Word for Word)		Dynamic Equivalence (Functional/Phrase by Phrase or Thought by Thought)			Paraphrase	
KJV/NKJV	NASB	ESV	NIV	NLT	LB	the Message

English Standard Version (ESV) is a recent translation that was derived from the previous RSV. The general editor was noted theologian J.I. Packer and, along with 130 others, and also had Wayne Grudem, another noted theologian, as one of the translators. It seeks to be accurately word for word, but taking into consideration ancient idioms and syntax, making it more readable than the NKJV or NASB, but not quite as dynamic as the NIV. This is nearly a must have for some aspect of your study, if not also as your every day reading bible.

New International Version (NIV) is an easier read than others, but is also a good version to study from. There are plenty of study materials out there to accompany NIV. The NIV is an easier read because it is translated “phrase by phrase (dynamic/functional)” rather than “word by word (formal/literal),” making it flow better in modern day English. This is noted as being a great every day reading bible, as well as a very accurate translation for study.

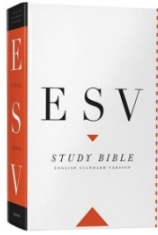
New American Standard Bible (NASB) is a “word for word” translation as well, sticking very conservatively to the original language. The NASB is widely regarded as one of the most literally translated of 20th-century English Bible translations. It began as a re-translation of the ASV, which was somewhat liberal. Though it is a strict word for word translation, when the text was truly confusing, they would occasionally become “thought by thought,” and footnotes were added so the reader knew when this would happen. Twenty conservative scholars from varying backgrounds oversaw the translation.

New King James Version (NKJV) is great for studying original language meaning and getting a very close translation to original. NKJV is a “word by word” translation of the bible. It uses a slightly younger manuscript of the New Testament than others, such as the NIV and NASB. Though it has a very academic feel to it, and would be a good insightful translation to check into, it is typically not the best for every day reading and use, but more as a supplemental translation.

New Living Translation (NLT) is the revision of the “Living Bible (LB).” These are even easier reads than the NIV, very plain language and easy to understand. Though popular with younger students and new believers, in the long run it would not be very good for in depth bible study. For the record, the older “Living Bible” borders on practically being a commentary more than a translation as it took a lot of “creative license” in paraphrasing (rather than translating) the bible. The NLT employed 87 scholars.

The Message is a paraphrase (NOT a translation) if you want to read the bible like a story or novel. It is very colorful, and poetically descriptive. Though it serves as a supplemental bible for devotional time, there are no study tools that I am aware of to accompany this translation, which makes it a poor choice for in depth bible study.

STUDY BIBLES



****The English Standard Version (ESV) Study Bible** (Crossway)

This bible has lots of great commentary, graphs, charts, full color maps, a great appendix full of sections on doctrinal overviews, how we got the scriptures, biblical ethics, how to read and interpret the bible, and more. It also comes with a free online resource that includes the bible itself, all the maps, a concordance, and all the resources, all searchable.

****The Nelson Study Bible**

Lots of a great maps, insights, word studies, and in depth topical studies

****The Life Application Bible**

****John MacArthur Study Bible**

****The Reformation Study Bible**

****The Gospel Transformation Bible**

Not an official “study” bible, but it has notes at the bottom like a study bible that points out the big picture of the Gospel in each part of Scripture. A very, very valuable reference bible.

BIBLE STUDY SOFTWARE

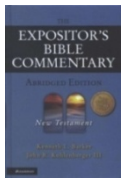
****Logos** is the best software on the market. It can be more expensive, but there are a wide range of options and levels of depth, as well as cost. It also has a free app, and the app syncs to your computer software.

****Online Resources** that are free and helpful are www.e-sword.net, www.biblegateway.com, and www.blueletterbible.org.

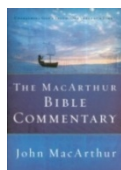
COMMENTARIES

Commentaries are the work of a particular teacher, pastor or group of Bible researchers. They are created to give further verse by verse, in depth information, both factually and theologically.

Important note: there are *numerous* commentaries from so many people, theological backgrounds, and eras of history. Do your research ahead of time to know who you are picking up and where they come from. Here are a few that I use and/or recommend:



****Expositor's Bible Commentary:** A verse by verse commentary on the whole bible made into two volumes, Old and New Testament. You can buy them separately, or as a set. This is a great aid to your study if you want something to cover the whole bible. 250 charts, maps, tables, and pictures.

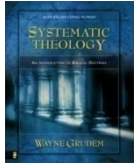


****MacArthur Bible Commentary:** A thorough, scholarly look at the entire bible. Lots of cross references and insights. MacArthur adds a great resource for your bible study, especially for an all in one book.

NOTE: check out www.bestcommentaries.com for more information on great commentaries of all sorts. Whole bible, Old Testament, New Testament, various books of the bible, you name it. A great resource with great reviews.

THEOLOGY AND DOCTRINAL BOOKS

Books that specifically tackle particular doctrines or theology differ from commentaries in that they go after a concise understanding of how theology and doctrine work as weaved throughout the whole bible, not just a specific look at a book of the bible. One method of study is called “systematic theology,” where you build a “system” by which theology is connected to each other. This is a very important part of study that helps us get an overall view of particular doctrines using the whole counsel of God.



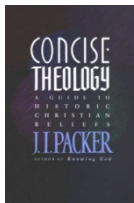
****Systematic Theology** by Wayne Grudem.

One of the most thorough, well written books on doctrine and theology, Grudem’s work is a staple in most bible teachers’ and pastors’ libraries. Intimidating at first, it is surprisingly readable and understandable, and it is easy to find the particular aspects of theology with his thorough index and footnotes.

1291 Pages.

A smaller, 528 page, abridged version is also available.

Also, a super condensed, 156 page version is available.



****Concise Theology** by J.I. Packer.

Packer is another theologian whose commentaries and writings have inspired and helped teach thousands. He is one of the most influential modern day theologians and authors and has authored or contributed to dozens of books about the supremacy of God, His glory, holiness, and worship. This more compact book on theology is a great start at understanding the essentials.

267 Pages.

MISCELLANEOUS ONLINE RESOURCES

There have been many, many amazing bible scholars, researchers, theologians, pastors, and expositors over the years. While it is important for us to glean truth and wisdom from their studies, at the end of the day, everything must be tested against scripture. At our church, we have quite a few “favorite” teachers. There is no perfect teacher, however, and so while we may “endorse” certain men and women, we know that their work is fallible, yet we have gained much from many of their teachings.

****www.desiringgod.org:** Dr. John Piper is one of the most gifted theologians of our day, Dr. Piper may be one of the most profound and humble servants of Christ around today. His website, www.desiringgod.com is an amazing resource for sermons, articles, and insights into the Word of God.

****www.thegospelcoalition.com:** This site is an incredible resource for articles, videos, and other information on so many theological topics. Search through their content to find great insights into many important questions concerning the Word of God and life as the body of Christ.

****thevillagechurch.net:** The Village Church’s website has a resource center online with short 1 or 2 page writings on doctrinal issues. If you have a question on certain topics, check out their website for great, concise writings on various biblical subjects.

****gotquestions.org:** This site is a great site when you have theological questions and run into various terms or topics and want some quick insights. They do a great job in being very objective and not very “slanted” toward one theology or another, giving what seems to be a pretty fair balance. I’d say I probably have agreed with about 90% (at least) of what I’ve run across there.

VII. BEGINNING YOUR STUDY

STEP 1: PRAY

The greatest thing you have going for you when it comes to reading and studying the Word is that you have the actual Author Himself living *in you!* That is one advantage you *never* had in high school growing up with all of the text books you had to study!

So, when you begin a time of reading or study, always ask the Holy Spirit to lead you into truth and teach you through the very Word that He authored. He has been sent and given to us as a *Helper*, so let Him do His job! Ask Him for the help you need to understand Scripture. These are spiritual things we are trying to understand, so let's ask *the Spirit* for help.

STEP 2: READ THE TEXT

The first thing you will want to do is simply read through the text. This is the first step of doing proper exegesis, which again is the act of asking the question "what did the original author (the human author and God Himself) intend to communicate to the original hearer?" This helps you keep everything *in context* and is necessary before we apply anything to our own lives. When you do this, consider a few ideas:

- **You *may* want to read a background introduction from a commentary or study bible.** I like reading first before getting into external sources, but if you are just looking for background info, and if you are new to studying, this is a good place to start.
- **Use multiple translations.** This will help you give a nice rounded context of what is going on in the text. Recommended translations would be NIV, ESV, and the NASB. A parallel bible or bible software would be a great help.
- **For smaller books like 2 Timothy or Titus or Jonah, you should read through it a few times,** maybe even read through it once for every bible translation you have.
- **For larger books like Exodus, read it in one or two sittings.** As much as you can, compare with other translations as you go, especially if the text gets difficult to understand.
- **Take brief, quick notes** either by marking your bible or jotting them down on paper. Note items such as purpose of the text, tone of attitude of the writer, and main themes.
- **Try not to read any commentary while you are reading through the Scriptures!** This will be a temptation, especially if you want understanding. This isn't the time to get every detail, it's the time to comprehend the main themes, characters, and plot.

Once you feel like you have a good overall understanding of the overall theme of the book, take some more detailed notes in order to divide up and put into your own words the major themes of the book. Many good study bibles and commentaries will do this for you as an introduction. Don't look at these yet, you are trying to train yourself. Do it on your own, and when you feel confident, compare your outline with other outlines. There is no "right" way to outline, but you will notice that you had similarities in many of the divisions. Try something like this:

- **Find major changes in theme throughout the book.** Start with this in mind, titling your sections in your own words. Then have a few lines under each heading to further divide subthemes.
- **Paraphrase each section or topic.** Use your own words to put the main thoughts of each paragraph or section into one sentence or thought. This helps you contextualize and soak in an entire theme.
- **Read through your outline.** Spend time going through your outline to see if it helps you understand the overall flow, purpose, and attitude of the book you are reading in the bible. By now, this should give you a really good idea of the *big picture* of the book, so that you can indeed keep your verse by verse study *in context*. This is an important part of proper study. You are ready to now study verse by verse.

STEP 3: STUDY VERSE BY VERSE

It's a good idea, inasmuch as you will be going verse by verse, to more realistically think in terms of "paragraph by paragraph" or "theme by theme." If you learn to "think in paragraphs" you will run much less of a risk of taking a verse out of context. Here's a few ideas:

- **Select your paragraph or sub-section.** Once you do this, read through this section again a few times, preferably with different translations. Keeping in the back of your mind (or on the outline in front of you) the overall theme, occasion, and tone of the book, you will read this section within that context. Make more detailed notes or marks in your bible as you go.
- **Now go verse by verse.** The first thing you want to do is to figure out "what did the author intend to communicate?" This is again called "exegesis." Before we apply anything to our own life, we have to first find out what was intended in the first place.
 - a. **Do a word search** (this is called *cross reference*). Use a concordance in bible study software to do this. Also, if you have a good study bible, often times it will have in the margins other related Scriptures you can open to. This is called a *chain reference*. To do a word search, a complete concordance or a software program is necessary. This helps you see how certain words or phrases were used elsewhere in the bible, giving you a broader, more balance context. Remember to use multiple translations.
 - b. **Look up the word in its original language.** Though this sounds difficult, it is not. This tool helps you see the exact meaning for the words. It gives you more context. Try blueletterbible.com or purchase software like **PC Study Bible** or **Logos**.

Always Remember, Context is King!

STEP 4: CHECK YOUR FINDINGS

Notice, we have gotten this far by *only using our brains, the bible, and the Holy Spirit* (by this I mean that even in using www.blueletterbible.org we still only did cross references and language checks, keeping us in the text of the Word only; we have not looked into commentaries, maps, or other resources).

So now, it's a good time to check your findings. You can do this in many ways, and it is always good to hold yourself accountable with your studies and check with others. Some people will say that we shouldn't need other people's opinions and that we only need the bible and the Holy Spirit. Though this sounds very reverent and "holy," it is a terribly unbiblical view of the Word and how we approach it. Countless times in the Scriptures, it speaks of us being taught, being teachable, learning from one another, sharpening each other, teaching others, being committed to the apostles' teachings, being instructed by others, and being built up and equipped by pastors and teachers. Paul tells Timothy to train up teachers that can in turn teach others.²⁷ It is a sign of humility when we admit we don't know everything and that we can learn from others who have put more time and commitment into the study of the Word.

The fear, of course, is fallibility. And to be sure, *everything* you read or hear outside of the bible *must* be compared to Scripture, whether it is a pastor, teacher, book, or church tradition. But in addition to this, guess what else this caution includes? *Your own mind!!!* Yes, just as each teacher on earth is not perfect, *neither* is your mind, so even if you *were* to just read on your own with no outside help, you are still stuck with *your* imperfect mind!

Because of this, we have to be on the lookout for good and bad teaching. This can be a touchy subject, and we need to be careful in how we discern this. That said, because we are imperfect, it is good and wise to seek advice

²⁷ 2 Timothy 2.2

and counsel (from more than one person that you trust) on any given book, author, or doctrinal belief. Get the opinions of others you trust, check it against the Word, pray through it, etc. If you can't make a decision on a matter, it's best to put it on the shelf until a later time. Don't rush to make doctrinal judgments.

- **Open a commentary.** Commentaries are writings based on the studies of other theologians. While incredibly helpful, it is important again to remember that only God's Word is perfect. Try bestcommentaries.com for solid reviews and direction. Also, a good study bible, such as the ESV Study Bible, will have good commentary in it. See the list of authors and theologians that the pastors enjoy and trust.
- **Read other sources.** There are many great books (and bad ones) out there. Remember, however, to make reading/studying the bible your number one goal, time wise and priority wise. If you don't know the bible and good sound doctrine like you should, don't spend/waste time on other books. Know His Word first. Check out our website, lifemissionchurch.com, for recommended books, as well as thevillagechurch.net, desiringgod.org, and gospelcoalition.org, and use their search engine for good articles, sermons, and writings on biblical principles and doctrine.
- **Ask a pastor or solid mentor if what you feel like you found is solid.** Having a good conversation to walk and talk through questions is always a good thing. Be humble and teachable. Doctrine can be a sticky thing for many, and so many will even just avoid it. Additionally, many will just have a "buffet-style" theology, where they just pick and choose theology and doctrine as they please, with no real systematic connections. Everything we believe must be in context to the rest of Scripture.

STEP 5: MEDITATE

Once you have read and studied on your own, it is time to meditate on the verses. Meditation is thinking about a Bible verse in order to discover how I can apply its truth to my own life.

This is the key to a transformed life. On my bookshelf on my desk I have written the verse "knowledge puffs up, but love edifies."²⁸ We don't want to just get puffed up with pride and information. We want what we learn and study to transform us into the image of Christ.

The Goal of Theology is Worship.

-Philip Ryken

Reading, studying, and meditating on the Word is *the key* to becoming like Christ.

John 8:32

[Jesus speaking to believers:] Then you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free.

How do we get free from sin? By knowing the truth. What, then, is the truth?

John 17:17

[Jesus speaking to the Father:] Sanctify them by the truth; Your Word is truth.

The Word is the Spirit-breathed Word of God.

2 Corinthians 3:17-18

Now the Lord is the Spirit, and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom. And we, who with unveiled faces all reflect the Lord's glory, are being transformed into his likeness with ever-increasing glory, which comes from the Lord, who is the Spirit.

²⁸ 1 Corinthians 8:1

- **Once you feel confident in your findings, it is time to meditate on them.** Go through the verses again, reading, again possibly in various translations. Pray as you read, stopping frequently at words or phrases that stick out to you. Ask God to reveal to you what He intended for us to know and walk in. Thank Him for the truths that He is showing you, and ask Him to reveal more as you study.
- **Take your time.** Take time to pause, reflect, and be silent. Let Him speak to you through His Word.
- **Contextualize it with the Gospel.** Ask yourself, “how does this show me a certain aspect of the Gospel?” “How does this find its fulfillment in Christ?” “How does this point me to Jesus?”
- **Picture it.** Visualize the scene in your mind or visualize your life if you were being obedient to this passage.
- **Pronounce it.** Say the verse aloud, each time emphasizing a different word.
- **Paraphrase it.** Say the verses in your own words. Maybe read through your paraphrases you wrote down.
- **Pray it.** Turn the verse into a prayer and say it back to God.

STEP 6: INVEST TIME AND MONEY

Invest in your discipleship. Set aside regular time to read, study, and meditate. Additionally, set aside money to invest in this part of your life. Ask your spouse or a friend to hold you accountable in this so that you do it. If money is an issue, budget \$15-50 per month to invest in your studies, whatever you can afford. Make a list of books you may want to pick up to help you study. This is for the rest of your life, and it is for a healthy marriage and the raising of your kids. It is also for the sake of the non-believers around you. This is a worthy investment, far more worthy than cable, Starbucks, fast food, or even a car payment for that matter. Make it happen.

STEP 7: WORK HARD AND BE PATIENT

Be patient, be deliberate, and work hard. Don't rush, don't get frustrated, keep going and work hard at it. If the average book of the bible takes you 6 months to study in depth, and there are 66 books in the bible, it will take you 33 years to thoroughly study the entire bible! So don't be in a rush! You have your whole life! Concentrate on quality, *not* quantity!

VIII. PRACTICAL THEOLOGY

How We Apply Our Studies to Life

**With the right of private interpretation
comes the sober responsibility of accurate interpretation.**

-R.C. Sproul, "Knowing Scripture"

Let's recap a little bit as we look more into interpreting the bible as well as applying it to our lives.

1. **The Interpreter.** To properly interpret the bible, we must first start with our greatest tool: the Holy Spirit. He is the One who teaches us and testifies of the bible's truth. He must be our interpreter, not our social or cultural conditioning or opinions.
2. **The Word.** We have to have a right doctrine of the Word, the Word that is perfect, God-inspired, inerrant, and infallible. We believe that it doesn't contradict itself. This is the groundwork for our approach to the Word.
3. **Approach.** Once we believe those essentials, we have to have what is called proper "hermeneutics." This is the technical term for the method of interpretation. *Everyone* already does hermeneutics with anything they read. Whether it's the bible, a text message, an email, or a history book, we have a method in which we discern what is being said. Many an email or text message has been "read wrong" by the recipient because of faulty hermeneutics. Most evangelical Christians adhere to what is called the "historical grammatical" method. This means that when we interpret, we take into consideration historical and literal context as well as the use of idioms, metaphors, poetry, and symbolism.
4. **Study.** Once you have your method of interpretation, we study the word to find out what the original intent of the writer was. This is called "exegesis," which is a twenty dollar word for "study," but it infers the proper method (hermeneutics) and actual breaking down of what was actual intended. Like hermeneutics, though it's a big word, *everyone* already does this. Anytime you read anything and interpret it, you are doing exegesis.
5. **Interact.** Humility and accountability are incredibly important for study. Though we have the Holy Spirit, the Word, and a God-given brain, it is imperative that we are accountable to each other in our studies and findings. This is the heart of the statement at the top of the page. It is our responsibility to check our findings. Scripture is clear that we are to teach others and be taught, and that there is no such thing as "truth for you." We are given commentators, theologians, friends, pastors, mentors, and books to help us stay on track (as long as those sources are rooted in the Word as well and point us there).
6. **Formulate.** As you exegete, or study, and interact with others in discussing and checking your findings, you start putting pieces together. This is called "doctrine," which simply means "teaching." Your doctrinal beliefs on various aspects and topics in the bible will radically dictate how you view life, faith, interaction with God, people, etc. Proper doctrine is the building blocks for a good, biblical theology (here I make distinction between theology and doctrine, though their relation is so close many see them as synonymous. This is fine, but for our purposes we will say that doctrinal truths create our overall theology, the things in which we believe. Once we have good doctrine on a these many issues, we have what is called a "systematic theology," meaning the way doctrines interact and interlock.)
7. **Application.** Last, but absolutely not least, is application. Application is a practical way of saying "obedience." We are to not just be hearers of the Word, but doers also.²⁹ It answer the question "now what?" We will be looking at how we apply our studies.

²⁹ James 1.22

IX. BUILDING YOUR THEOLOGY

How Various Doctrines Shape Your Life

We live in a day and age of Christianity where there is a lot of fluff, a lot of feel-good theology and writings that appeal to our emotions. Many believe “theology” or “doctrine” to be something divisive or something of “old fashioned religion,” and that the popular phrase that “Christianity is not a religion, but a relationship” throws doctrine and theology in the category of religion, making a relationship with Christ the only thing of importance. A general view is that as long as the person believes in Jesus, prays, and reads their bible (or in many cases, just Christian literature), then we are good to go. Though this may be enough for salvation, this is by far a false view of being a passionate disciple of Christ.

Knowing right doctrine and theology will point you towards a *healthier, richer, balanced, passionate* relationship with Jesus Christ. For those that are married or have children, you know that the more that you *know* the person you love, the more you love them. This is true with God. The more we know Him – His Word, His ways, His faithfulness, His truth, His character, His methods, His plan, His heart, His “history”, and His grace – the more we fall in love with this wonderful, beautiful God.

STEP 1: BE AWARE OF WHAT YOU ARE READING

This, in part, is a matter of *hermeneutics*, or, more simply stated, the theory or principles of how you approach the Word. Here is a brief rundown of a few facts we have to consider as we approach the Word:

The Old Testament is broken up in three styles of literature:

- **Historical Books.** There are 17 historical books (sometimes called “historical narratives”): Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, Deuteronomy, Joshua, Judges, Ruth, 1 Samuel, 2 Samuel, 1 Kings, 2 Kings, 1 Chronicles, 2 Chronicles, Ezra, Nehemiah, and Esther.
- **Poetry Books.** There are 5 poetry books (sometimes called “wisdom books”): Job, Psalms, Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, and Song of Solomon.
- **Prophetic Books.** There are 17 prophetic books: Isaiah, Jeremiah, Lamentations, Ezekiel, Daniel, Hosea, Joel, Amos, Obadiah, Jonah, Micah, Nahum, Habakkuk, Zephaniah, Haggai, Zechariah, and Malachi.

The New Testament has 4 Gospels, Acts, 21 Epistles, and Revelation in it.

- **Gospels and Narratives.** There are 4 gospels: Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John, which are also narratives, along with Acts, which is a narrative.
- **Epistles.** There are 21 Epistles: Romans, 1 Corinthians, 2 Corinthians, Galatians, Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians, 1 Thessalonians, 2 Thessalonians, 1 Timothy, 2 Timothy, Titus, Philemon, Hebrews, James, 1 Peter, 2 Peter, 1 John, 2 John, 3 John, and Jude.
- **Apocalyptic.** There is 1 apocalyptic book: Revelation.

Of these styles, they each have their own unique challenges, which we will discuss. Also, it is important to note that within all of these books, there can be seen sub-divisions and inter-usage. In other words, the Gospels use poetic writing at times (i.e. the parables), but they are largely the story and declaration of the Good News (and therefore can be said that they are “historical books”). There are also apocalyptic sayings from Jesus as well. Additionally, the epistles could be subdivided into epistles and letters (particularly the pastoral epistles: 1 and 2 Timothy, Titus, and Philemon). All of this changes our approach, which we will discuss.

Also, we remember that the bible is what is called “culturally conditioned.” This means that though the truths are timeless and eternal, they were written by men and women in their contemporary time and culture with a particular purpose for each writing. All of this must be considered as we build our theology that we base out of the Word. For instance:

The Bible was written:

- over a 1500 year span (from 1400 B.C to A.D. 100)
- over 40 generations
- over 40 authors from many walks of life (i.e. - kings, peasants, philosophers, fishermen, poets, statesmen, scholars)
- in different places (i.e. - wilderness, dungeon, palaces)
- at different times (i.e. – times of war, peace, slavery, etc.)
- in different moods (i.e. - heights of joy, depths of despair)
- on three continents (Asia, Africa, and Europe)
- in three languages (Hebrew, Aramaic, and Greek)

This takes us back to the combination of hermeneutics and exegesis. Remembering that the best way to exegete, or study, is by using a “historical grammatical” approach as your hermeneutics. This means that you will take into account the historical context and literal purpose of the writing, as well as take into account language use, such as slang, idioms, and imagery.

Real contextual studying means not just “how does this make sense in a sentence or paragraph,” but also includes history, language, time, location, the author’s tendencies, style of literature, syntax, etc.

Let’s look briefly at a few principles as we consider how to exegete the various parts of the bible properly so we can build our theology. We will only examine a few of the main types of literature.

STEP 2: DISCERNING YOUR FINDINGS

First of all, let’s remember “the analogy of Scripture (or faith).” The analogy of faith is a phrase that was coined to describe the idea that Scripture interprets Scripture. Knowing that the Word doesn’t contradict itself, when we are either wondering about the meaning of a verse or seeing an “apparent” contradiction or tough saying, we have to look at the way it affects other Scripture. In our approach to the Word, a common thread as we look at the varying literature styles and topics that run through the Word, it will often come back to “context” of not just the book it is found in or the historical time frame, but to the whole bible itself.

Old Testament Historical Narratives. OT narratives are great epic stories. They are colorful, descriptive, but at some times disconcerting as we see some bizarre stuff happen. Here are a few important principles to keep in mind when it comes to these great books of the bible:

- They don’t *usually* teach an explicit doctrine. Building a doctrinal belief *solely* on an OT narrative can be dangerous. Though we can often times find principles and underlying wisdom, these weren’t purposed for explicit doctrine.
- That said, they can and will, however, support doctrinal beliefs explicitly stated other places in the bible. So this is not to say that they have zero doctrine, but that it wasn’t their main purpose. For instance, if we want to conquer a city, the bible doesn’t teach us to march around it seven times (**Joshua 6**). That would be a false doctrine. That said, this story does add to the doctrine, or teaching, that God is all-powerful and can work miracles.
- Narratives record what happened, not necessarily what should have happened. Abraham having concubines is not doctrinal support for us to have concubines. It records history, with the good, the bad and the “unbiblical.”
- Narratives primary purpose is as stated above: to record events. The overarching purpose of all these events is to illustrate God’s plan for the redemption of mankind, His creation, and to illustrate His power, love, perfection, holiness, and glory. Their primary focus is not necessarily to answer all the theological questions that arise within them, though often times the answers to some of these questions can be found elsewhere.

Note: As stated before, other works, particularly the book of **Acts** and on a lesser scale (due to their absolute uniqueness in overall specific purpose), the Gospels, also can fall into the category of “historical narratives.” It is of good value to note that many of the stories are “descriptive” rather than “prescriptive.” Unless the Word says “therefore, do this,” we cannot always assume that just because they are there that they prescribe to us what we should do, but rather describe what was done (and often for a principle, rather than a specific prescription.). For

instance, just because **Acts 6.1-6** has men distributing food to widows, this doesn't mean every church has to have a Food for Widows Ministry (that would be prescriptive). Rather, it does give us an example (descriptive) that we need to be mindful of the needs of the church.

The Gospels. The Gospels are the first four books of the New Testament comprising of the life and ministry of Jesus. In one sense, they are like Old Testament historical narratives in that it tells a story of factual events. But of course, it also has many teachings, some in parable, some plain, and some using word plays. Here are a few things to keep in mind with the gospels:

- The Gospels were written by four different men, and therefore are from four varying points of view. Keeping in mind the audience and purpose is the key.
- Like narratives, sometimes the Gospels alone can't be used to build explicit doctrine, but more to add or give nuance and clarity to concrete doctrine found elsewhere. Of course, this isn't always the case, but we need to be aware of that. For instance, just because Jesus washed the feet of the disciples doesn't mean that every church should have a Foot Washing Ministry. Again, this was descriptive. The epistles, as we will see, do their part in expounding the words of the Gospels into more concise doctrines. To be sure, the Gospels are, however, an absolutely important piece to formulating biblical doctrine.
- The Gospels, though relatively historical in their literature, also have plenty of word play, hyperbole, parables, and other styles of communication. Jesus Himself spoke many a time in parable, word play, and hyperbole. For instance, we know that He doesn't really mean for us to pluck our eyes out if our eyes cause us to sin. He was very creative in His speech and used this kind of hyperbole to effectively communicate. We can ascertain, however, what the point of the saying was.

The Epistles and Letters. These are for sure the most purposeful in forming correct doctrine and theology. That said, the epistles and letters build on the truths found in all the rest of the Old Testament and teachings of Christ. One problem we run into in the church, however, again is context. Much must be understood about the purpose of the letter, the historical background, and the author. Here are a few tips when approaching the epistles and letters:

- The epistles and letters were largely used for instruction. They were written to churches and church leaders. They are, in many ways, the "how tos" of the Gospels. In all of the bible, they are the most explicitly prescriptive for the church and Christian living, building on the theology found in the rest of the bible.
- That said, it is important to take into consideration the history, context, audience, author, and culture of these works. There are, indeed, parts of these letters that are more descriptive rather than prescriptive. A holy kiss, for instance, though it *sounds like* a command "*greet* each other with a holy kiss" does not seem at all to be an actual command given to the church for all time, but is a part of culture in the first century. The heart behind more seems to be the greeting, rather than the kiss (today, a hand shake or hug will do just fine).
- With contextualization, it is of utmost importance to be very humble, discerning, and careful. We can very easily say that since the holy kiss is outdated then something else is also outdated. Again, we have to be very careful with our exegesis, taking into consideration *all of the scriptures*, not just one verse.

There are other forms of literature that we didn't cover, and inter-usage, such as apocalyptic literature found in Daniel, Ezekiel, and Isaiah, and we can also put the Psalms and even Acts into their own category. But for the sake of our study, this should give us a good groundwork for how we approach particular books.

Now, using the "analogy of Scripture," we will see how our findings will build our doctrines of particular issue to help build a working theology.

**Remember, the Old Testament is the New Testament concealed,
and the New Testament is the Old Testament revealed.**

STEP 3: BUILDING RIGHT DOCTRINE

Once you have a good exegetical system down, you start formulating your “theology,” or your “study of God.” There are various subdivisions of theology.

We will use some of these methods when we approach particular topics and issues in the Word. These specific focused studies we affectionately call the “ologies.”

The suffix “-ology” comes from the Latin word for “word.” We translate it as “study.” Therefore, “bio-”, meaning “life,” and “-ology,” meaning “study,” means “the study of life,” or “biology.”

Theology: The Study of God (“Theo” = “God”): Theology is specifically studying God. Who He is, what He does, His patterns, ways, and interactions. It is the most general term we use for studying His Word.

Bibliology: The Study of the Word (“Biblio” = “Book”): Bibliology is the study of the Word, specifically the bible itself.

Anthropology: The Study of Man (“Anthropos” = “human”): Origin, physical make up, behaviors, and such.

Hamartiology: The Study of Sin (“Hamartia” = “sin” or “missing the mark”): How it affects us, where it comes from, the residual effects of it, how it is fixed, etc.

Christology: The Study of Jesus Christ: (“Christos” = “Christ”): Who He is, what He accomplished, how He affects our life, His relationship within the Trinity, His deity, His humanity.

Pneumatology: The Study of the Holy Spirit: (“pneuma” = “breath”): “Breath” is a metaphor for a non-material being (ghost or spirit) or influence. It is the study of where the Holy Spirit came from, what His role is in our life, His relationship within the Trinity, etc.

Soteriology: The Study of Salvation: (“soterion” = “salvation”): How do we receive salvation, who can be saved, what is the process, how is it carried out?

Ecclesiology: The Study of the Church: (“ekklesia” = “assembly”): What is the church, who leads the church, who is part of the church, what is the church’s role, how does it function and carry out God’s will?

Eschatology: The Study of the Last Things (End Times): (“eschatos” = “last”): What will happen at the end of days, what is the order of the last days (rapture, second coming of Christ, etc.)?

Once we have a decent grasp on our biblical theology, especially the many major subdivision “ologies,” we see how they fit together, like a jigsaw puzzle. They complement each other, they illuminate each other, and they don’t contradict each other. This is what we call “systematic theology.”

Systematic Theology: This is the type of theological study that answers the question “what does the whole bible say about this particular topic or issue.” It shows how various Scriptures throughout the bible work in harmony together to form a well rounded, connected, agreeing view of a particular topic. It also then connects them to other “ologies,” forming a completed jigsaw puzzle. This isn’t to say that every single last question in the bible is answered, this simply can’t be, as God cannot be *completely* known in totality, but we do understand, with confidence, how God has chosen to reveal Himself and work and act among our world.

Practical Theology: An important byproduct of knowing our various “ologies” is the result of practical theology. This is when we are studying and we examine how to best apply truths to the life of the church and the world around us (missions, preaching, evangelism, counseling, etc.). No “ology” is very useful unless it changes us.

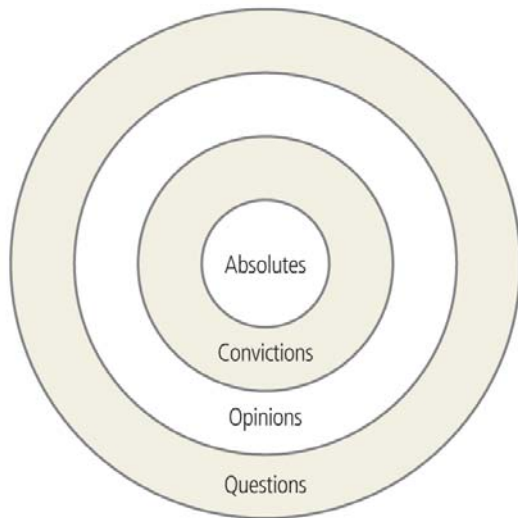
Apologetics: Lastly, a proper understanding of all of these will give us confidence in our life and we will be able to recognize, oppose, and defend against, false teaching. Apologetics is the studying of theology in order to defend truth against criticism and distortion and giving evidence to its credibility.

The bible certainly covers a *lot* of topical ground. What it says about various topics and subjects, the importance Scripture puts on them, their clarity in Scripture, their agreement with other Scripture (the analogy of faith), what the consensus of the historical orthodox church is, and the ramifications they have in our life and faith greatly dictate what we do with them and how we walk them out. Generally speaking, you will often hear them spoken of as “**closed hand**” issues or doctrines (beliefs we in no way compromise: the deity of Christ, salvation by grace through faith alone, the existence of only one true God, etc.), as well as “**open hand**” issues or doctrines (beliefs that are not essential for salvation or being a Christian, such as church structure, the gifts of the Holy Spirit, Christian liberty, etc.).

More specifically, we can break down the various doctrinal findings in the following four categories:

In the chart below, the center circle contains **Absolutes**, doctrines that would be the “closed hand” essentials. These are the ones that we *will not* compromise in any shape or form. The second circle, **Convictions**, are beliefs that we hold strongly to as they facilitate much of the way we live out our life. They are often times essential to the walking out of our faith, but not essential to having faith. We more often than not don’t ever compromise these, however we are constantly open to those convictions changing as God does various works within us. The next circle, **Opinions**, are quite simply that: opinions. These are things that we have typically given thought to, are generally important to us, but in no way do we hold on tight to, often times because the Word doesn’t say much about them and we therefore don’t become dogmatic about them. These opinions will oftentimes greatly change throughout the course of our life, depending on the stage of life we are, our experience, wisdom, and continual revelation of truth in the Word. Lastly, **Questions** are the parts in the Word that are not quite as clear or definitive. These are the least mentioned (or often times unmentioned) issues in the bible that don’t have much dogmatic education, but we know are there for a reason and so we ask questions about their place in our life.

What various issues or doctrines would fall under the following categories?



Absolutes: _____ _____ _____
Convictions: _____ _____ _____
Opinions: _____ _____ _____
Questions: _____ _____ _____

Three main approaches to these doctrines will place us in a particular journey of theology:

What happens when we push **Questions, Opinions, or Convictions** closer to center or into the **Absolutes** inner circle?

What happens when we push any of the **Absolutes** into any one of the outlying circles?

What happens when we are mindful of these issues and rightly aim to place them in their proper category?

We must guard against both syncretism as well as sectarianism. Syncretism allows too many absolutes and convictions be pushed to the outside, and sectarians push them to more to the middle.

STEP 4: APPLYING YOUR STUDIES

John 17.17 says that the Word sanctifies us. This means that as we read, study, and meditate on the Word, it will change us and conform us more and more into the image of Christ. It not only gives us instruction and direction on how to handle situations, but more than anything, it changes our hearts.

The human heart is an idol factory.

– John Calvin

With this in mind, all the attempts and regulations and steps we can take to change ourselves will be futile. It is the Word, the Word which is breathed by the Holy Spirit, that realigns our worship from our own selves onto Christ. The more we know the Word, the more we know Him. The more we know Him, the more we worship Him. Studying the Word is a part of becoming the worshipper who worships in “spirit and in truth,” not in “spirit and in ignorance.” And, to be sure, I’m not so convinced that the latter is even possible. There must be at least *some* knowledge to worship in spirit, it is only our own choice to limit *how much* truth we are given to, and therefore limit *how much* we worship.

Having a well rounded, good working theology will do a few things for you:

- It changes how you worship, and how much you worship.
- It changes how you pray, and what you pray for.
- It changes how you share your faith.
- It changes how you read the Word, and how often and how well you read the Word.
- It helps you spot false teaching, bad advice, and bad decisions.
- It sheds sin from your life.
- It makes you more joyful, content, peaceful, and gracious.
- It improves your friendships, marriage, work, and family.
- It causes you to love others more.
- It changes your desires.

**It is not enough to simply discover truth,
but we need to apply it for it to be of any value.**

X. GLOSSARY OF TERMS

Perspicuity (or Clarity) of Scripture: This is the belief that Scripture is clear enough to be understood by everyone. It does *not mean* that *every* part of Scripture is crystal clear, but that the overall story and message of the Word and its main theological truths are able to be understood by everyone who reads it.

Epistemology: Epistemology is the study of knowledge or information. It answers the question, “where does knowledge come from?” You can see it shares the root word with “epistle,” because an epistle, such as in the bible, is a letter to inform others of knowledge of the Gospel.

Exegesis: Exegesis means to “guide out of.” When we approach and study the Word exegetically, it means that we are “taking out of” the bible what the bible *already contained*. When we study exegetically, we are attempting to dissect and properly understand what was already put into the text by the original author. To do this properly, however, we must employ the proper set of rules, known as hermeneutics. If exegesis is the eyes, hermeneutics is the glasses that give proper focus to the eyes.

Eisegesis: This means to “guide into.” With this method, we are “putting into” the bible something that was not already there. We can “guide into” the Scriptures with and through a number of things, such as the various items mentioned on previous pages. We can bring into the Scriptures our own feelings, encounters, desires, or cultural norms. All of these things will color and skew what is already in the Scripture.

Hermeneutics: This is the science of biblical interpretation. Having a proper hermeneutic, meaning the rules and principles and patterns that we use when interpreting any form of literature, is important for us if we want to find the correct interpretation of any written work as intended by the original author. The hermeneutic we employ is a set of rules and practices that help us properly understand literature. Hermeneutics acts as the lens by which you find focus in the Scriptures.

Analogy of faith (or analogy of Scripture): What this means is that the best interpreter for Scripture is Scripture itself. If we want to understand certain parts of the Word, we go to other parts of the Word to understand it. Just how we interpret personal conversations based on the context of other conversations, whether they were the day before or the year before, we build context from a number of conversations with a particular person.

Didactic Form: comes from the Greek word for “teach” or “instruct.” So when we say to interpret narratives by the didactic, we are saying to handle narratives and stories properly, filtering them through the portions of Scriptures that are specifically intended to teach and instruct. These are most commonly, but not exclusively, the epistles in the New Testament, as well as portions of the Old Testament, such as the Law.

Moralizing: What this means is that we look at parts of the bible, particularly the narratives, and even more particularly, the Old Testament narratives, and we ask ourselves, “what is the moral of the story?” We simply get the moral of the story, rather than ask why the story was really put there by the Holy Spirit as a story that somehow points to the larger picture of God’s redemptive plan for mankind and, specifically, the Gospel of Jesus Christ. When we moralize, we miss the point of God’s glory through the Gospel.