

*BFCS TEACHER CERTIFICATION COURSE*



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# Teacher Certification Class Syllabus

## Basic Concepts for Teaching the Bible

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# Basic Concepts for Teaching the Bible

## Part I

*Excerpts from: Journey into Gods Word*  
*J. Scott Duval and J. Daniel Hays*

### Section 1: The Interpretive Journey

The process of interpreting and grasping the Bible is similar to embarking on a journey. Reading the text thoroughly and carefully lies at the beginning of the journey. From this careful reading we become able to determine what the passage meant in the biblical context—that is, what it meant to the biblical audience.

Often, however, when we try to apply this meaning directly to ourselves, we run into problems. We are separated from the biblical audience by culture and customs, language, situation, and a vast expanse of time. These differences form a barrier — a river that separates us from the text and that often prohibits us from grasping the meaning of the text for ourselves.

If that were not enough, the Old Testament widens the river by adding another major interpretive barrier that separates us from the audience. Between the Old Testament biblical audience and Christian readers today lies a change in covenant. We as New Testament believers are under the new covenant, and we approach God through the sacrifice of Christ. The Old Testament people, however, were under the old covenant, and for them the law was central. In other words, the theological situation for the two groups is different. There is a covenant barrier between the Old Testament audience and us because we are under different covenants.

Thus, the river between the Old Testament text and us consists not only of culture, language, situation, and time, but also of covenant. We have much more in common with the New Testament audience; yet even in the New Testament, the different culture, language, and specific situations can present a formidable barrier to our understanding of the meaning of the text. The river is often too deep and too wide simply to wade across.

As a result, today's Christian is often uncertain about how to interpret much of the Bible. How should we understand Leviticus 19:19, which prohibits wearing a garment made of two types of material? Does this mean that obedient Christians should wear only 100 percent cotton clothes?

In Judges 6:37 Gideon puts out a fleece in order to confirm what God had told him. Does this mean that we should put out fleeces when we seek God's leading?

Passages in the New Testament are not always much clearer. For example, Peter walks on the water in Matthew 14:29. Does this mean that *we* should attempt to walk on water in our obedience to Christ?

If not, what does it mean and how can we apply that passage to our lives?

Even if we cannot walk on water, how do we cross the river that separates us from the text?

Any attempt to interpret and to apply the Bible involves trying to cross the river. While often unconscious of their interpretive method, many Christians today nonetheless frequently employ an *intuitive* or *feels-right approach* to interpretation. If the text looks as if it could be applied directly, then they attempt to apply it directly. If not, then they take a *spiritualizing approach* to the meaning— an approach that borders on allegorizing the biblical text (which shows little or no sensitivity to the biblical context). Or else they simply shrug their shoulders and move onto another passage, ignoring the meaning of the text altogether.

Such approaches will never land us safely on the other side of the river. Those using the intuitive approach blindly wade out into the river, hoping that the water is not more than knee deep. Sometimes they are fortunate and stumble onto a sandbar, but often they step out into deep water, and they end up washed ashore somewhere downstream. Those who spiritualize, by contrast, try to jump the river in one grand leap, but they also end up washed ashore downstream with their intuitive buddies. Shrugging or ignoring a passage is to remain on the far side of the river and simply to gaze across without even attempting to cross.

Many Christians are admittedly uncomfortable with such approaches, recognizing the somewhat willy-nilly methodology and the extreme subjectivity involved, but they continue to use them because they are the only method they know. How do we move from the world of the biblical audience to the world of today?

We need a valid, legitimate approach to the Bible, one that is not based strictly on intuition and feeling. We need an approach that derives meaning from within the text, but one that also crosses over to the situation for today's Christian.

We also need a consistent approach, one that can be used on any passage. Such an approach should eliminate the habit of skipping over texts and surfing along through the Bible looking for passages that might apply. A consistent approach should allow us to dig into any passage with a method to determine the meaning of that text for us today. We need an approach that does not leave us stranded on the banks of the interpretive river and one that does not dump us into the river to be washed ashore downstream. We need a way to study the Bible to cross over the river with validity and accuracy.

### **The Basics of the Journey**

Keep in mind that our goal is to grasp the meaning of the text God has intended. We do not create meaning out of a text; rather, we seek to find the meaning that is already there. However, we recognize that we cannot apply the meaning for the ancient audience directly to us today because of the river that separates us (culture, time, situation, covenant, etc.).

Following the steps of the Interpretive Journey provides us with a procedure that allows us to take the meaning for the ancient audience and to cross over the river to determine a legitimate meaning for us today.

This journey works on the premise that the Bible is a record of God's communication of himself and his will to us. We revere the Bible and treat it as holy because it is the Word of God and because God reveals himself to us through this Word. Many texts in the Bible are specific, concrete, revelatory expressions of broader, universal realities or theological principles.

While the specifics of a particular passage may only apply to the particular situation of the biblical audience, the theological principles revealed in that text are applicable to all of God's people at all times. The theological principle, therefore, has meaning and application both to the ancient biblical audience and to Christians today.

Because the theological principle has meaning and application to both audiences, it functions as a bridge spanning the river of differences. Rather than blindly wading out into the river, foolishly attempting to jump across the river in one short hop, or wishfully gazing at the other shore without ever crossing, we can safely cross over the river on the bridge that the theological principle provides. Constructing this *principilizing bridge* will be one of the critical steps in our Interpretive Journey.

Thus, our journey starts with a careful reading of the text. Our final destination is to grasp the meaning of the text so that it changes our lives. It is an exciting trip, but one that requires hard work. There are no easy shortcuts.

**The basic Interpretive Journey involves four steps:**

***Step 1: Grasping the Text in Their Town.***

*What did the text mean to the biblical audience?*

The first part of Step 1 is to read the text carefully and observe the details. In Step 1, try to see as much as possible in the text. Look, look, and look again, observing all that you can. Scrutinize the grammar and analyze all significant words. Likewise, study the historical and literary contexts. How does your passage relate to the one that precedes it and the one that follows?

After completing all of this study, synthesize the meaning of the passage for the biblical audience into one or two sentences. That is, write out what the passage meant for the biblical audience. Use past-tense verbs and refer to the biblical audience. For example:

- God commanded the Israelites in Joshua 1 to ...
- Jesus encouraged his disciples by ...
- Paul exhorted the Ephesians to ...

Be specific. Do not generalize or try to develop theological principles yet.

## ***Step 2: Measuring the Width of the River to Cross.***

*What are the differences between the biblical audience and us?*

As mentioned above, the Christian today is separated from the biblical audience by differences in culture, language, situation, time, and often covenant. These differences form a river that hinders us from moving straight, from meaning in their context to meaning in ours.

The width of the river, however, varies from passage to passage. Sometimes it is extremely wide, requiring a long, substantial bridge for crossing. Other times, however, it is a narrow creek that we can easily hop over. It is obviously important to know just how wide the river is before we start trying to construct a principlizing bridge across it.

In Step 2 you will take a good hard look at the river and determine just how wide it is for the passage you are studying. In this step you look for significant *differences* between our situation today and the situation of the biblical audience. If you are studying an Old Testament passage, also be sure to identify those significant theological differences that came as a result of the life and work of Jesus Christ.

In addition, whether in the Old Testament or in the New Testament, try to identify any unique aspects of the *situation* of your passage. For example, in Joshua 1:1-9, the people of Israel are preparing to enter the Promised Land. Moses has just died and Joshua has been appointed to take his place. In this passage God speaks to Joshua to encourage him to be strong and faithful in the upcoming conquest of the land.

What are the differences?

- We are not entering or conquering the Promised Land.
- We are not the new leaders of the nation of Israel.
- We are not under the old covenant.

## ***Step 3: Crossing the Principlizing Bridge.***

*What is the theological principle in this text?*

This is perhaps the most challenging step. In it you are looking for the theological principle or principles that are reflected in the meaning of the text you identified in Step 1. Remember that this theological "principle is part of the *meaning*.

Your task is not to create the meaning but to discover the meaning intended by the author. As God gives specific expressions to specific biblical audiences, he is also giving universal theological teachings for all of his people through these same texts.

To determine the theological principle:

- First recall the differences you identified in Step 2.
- Next, try to identify any *similarities* between the situation of the biblical audience and our situation. *For example, consider Joshua 1:1-9 again.*

*Recall, of course, the differences that we identified in Step 2.*

- Then note the similarities between the biblical situation and our own: *We are also the people of God, in covenant relationship (new covenant); while we are not the leaders of Israel, nonetheless many of us are in leadership positions in the church; we are not invading the Promised Land, but we are seeking to obey the will of God and to accomplish what he has commanded us to do.*

After reviewing the differences and identifying the similarities, return to the meaning for the biblical audience that you described in Step 1 and try to identify a broader theological principle reflected in the text, but also one that relates to the similarities between us and the biblical audience. We will use this theological principle as the *principlizing bridge* by which we can cross over the river of barriers.

In addition, during this step you must enter into the *parts-whole spiral*. That is, you reflect back and forth between the text and the teachings of the rest of Scripture.

The theological principle that you derive should not only be present in the passage, but it must also be congruent with the rest of Scripture. We can summarize the criteria for formulating the theological principle with the following:

- ◆ The principle should be reflected in the text.
- ◆ The principle should be timeless and not tied to a specific situation.
- ◆ The principle should not be bound to one particular culture.
- ◆ The principle should correspond to the teaching of the rest of Scripture.
- ◆ The principle should be relevant to both the biblical audience and the contemporary audience.

Write out the theological principle (or principles) in one or two sentences.

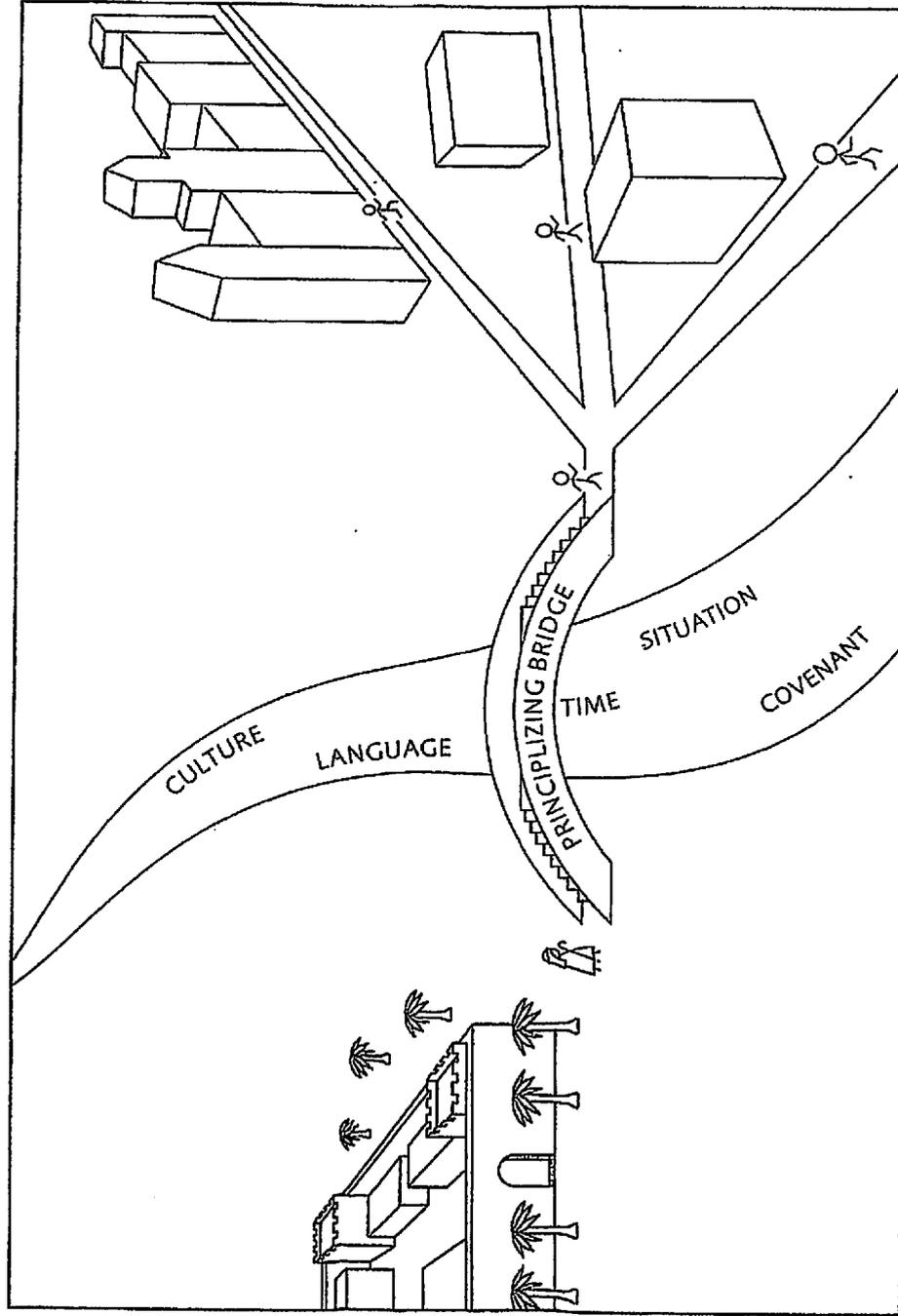
Use present-tense verbs.

#### ***Step 4: Grasping the Text in Our Town.***

*How should individual Christians today apply the theological principle in their lives?*

In Step 4 we apply the theological principle to the specific situation of individual Christians in the church today. We cannot leave the meaning of the text stranded in an abstract theological principle. We must now grapple with how we should respond to that principle in our town. How does it apply in real-life situations today?

While for each passage there will usually only be a few (and often only one) theological principles relevant for all Christians today, there will be numerous possibilities for application. This is because Christians today find themselves in many different specific situations. Each of us will grasp and apply the same theological principle in slightly different ways, depending on our current life situation and where we are in our relationship with God.



In our illustration, we have tried to show the different applications possible by showing different individuals traveling on different streets.

So, the Interpretive Journey as a whole looks like this:

Step 1: Grasp the text in their town.

Step 2: Measure the width of the river to cross.

Step 3: Cross the Principilizing Bridge.

Step 4: Grasp the text in our town.

### **An Example—Joshua 1:1 -9**

We have mentioned Joshua 1:1-9 several times already. Let's make the formal trip from this Old Testament passage to life today in order to illustrate how the Interpretive Journey works.

The passage is as follows:

<sup>1</sup>After the death of Moses the servant of the LORD, the LORD said to Joshua son of Nun, Moses' aide:

<sup>2</sup>Moses my servant is dead. Now then, you and all these people, get ready to cross the Jordan River into the land I am about to give to them—to the Israelites.

<sup>3</sup>I will give you every place where you set your foot, as I promised Moses.

<sup>4</sup>Your territory will extend from the desert and to Lebanon and from the great river, the Euphrates—all the Hittite country—to the Great Sea on the west.

<sup>5</sup>No one will be able to stand up against you all the days of your life. As I was with Moses, so I will be with you; I will never leave you nor forsake you.

<sup>6</sup>"Be strong and courageous, because you will lead these people to inherit the land I swore to their forefathers to give them.

<sup>7</sup>Be strong and very courageous. Be careful to obey all the law my servant Moses gave you; do not turn from it to the right or to the left, that you may be successful wherever you go.

<sup>8</sup>Do not let this Book of the Law depart from your mouth; meditate on it day and night, so that you may be careful to do everything written in it. Then you will be prosperous and successful.

<sup>9</sup>Have I not commanded you? Be strong and courageous. Do not be terrified; do not be discouraged, for the LORD your God will be with you wherever you go."

*Step 1: What did the text mean to the biblical audience?*

The Lord commanded Joshua, the new leader of Israel, to draw strength and courage from God's empowering presence, to be obedient to the law of Moses, and to meditate on the law so that he would be successful in the conquest of the Promised Land.

*Step 2: What are the differences between the biblical audience and us?*

We are not leaders of the nation Israel (although some of us may be leaders in the church). We are not embarking on the conquest of Canaan, the Promised Land. We are not under the old covenant of law.

*Step 3: What is the theological principle in this text?*

To be effective in serving God and successful in the task to which he has called us, we must draw strength and courage from his presence. We must also be obedient to God's Word, meditating on it constantly.

*Step 4: How should individual Christians today apply the theological principle in their lives?*

There are numerous possible applications. Here are a few suggested ones:

- Spend more time meditating on God's Word by listening to Christian music as you ride in your car.
- If God calls you to a new, scary ministry, such as teaching fourth-grade Sunday school, then be strengthened and encouraged by his empowering presence. Be obedient, keeping a focus on the Scriptures.
- If you are in a church leadership position, realize that successful Christian leadership requires strength and courage that flows from the presence of God.

## **Discussion Questions**

1. What is wrong with the "intuitive" method of interpretation?
2. What are the four steps of the Interpretive Journey?
3. What are the differences that determine the width of the river to cross?
4. What are the guidelines for developing theological principles?

## Section 2. Bible Translations

For your birthday you get some extra cash and you decide to buy a new Bible. The local Christian bookstore should have what you want.

As you enter the store and turn the corner into the Bible section, you immediately notice a plethora of choices. You see *The Open Bible*, *The Thompson Chain Reference Study Bible*, *The NRSV Access Bible*, *The Life Application Study Bible*, *The NIV Study Bible*, *The Ryrie Study Bible*, *The NKJV Women's Study Bible*, *The KJV Promise Keepers Men's Study Bible*, *The Spirit-Filled Life Bible*, and about fifty other possibilities. You didn't know buying a new Bible could be so complicated. What should you do?

The first thing to know about selecting a Bible is that there is a big difference between the Bible version or translation and the format used by publishers to market the Bible. Packaging features such as study notes, introductory articles, and devotional insights are often helpful, but they are not part of the translation of the original text. When choosing a Bible, you will want to look past the marketing format to make sure you know which translation the Bible uses.

Translation itself is unavoidable. God has revealed himself and has asked his people to make that communication known to others. Unless everyone wants to learn Hebrew and Greek (the Bible's original languages), we will need a translation. Translation is nothing more than transferring the message of one language into another language. We should not think of translation as a bad thing, since through translations we are able to hear what God has said. In other words, translations are necessary for people who speak a language other than Greek or Hebrew to understand what God is saying through his Word.

### English Translations since 1611

A number of more recent English translations have some connection (direct or indirect) to updating the King James Version.

- The *English Revised Version* (1881 –1885) was the first such revision and the first English translation to make use of modern principles of textual criticism. As a result, the Greek text underlying the ERV was different from that of the KJV.
- In 1901 American scholars produced their own revision of the ERV: the *American Standard Version*.
- Toward the middle of the twentieth century (1946-1952), the *Revised Standard Version* appeared. The goal of the RSV translators was to capture the best of modern scholarship regarding the meaning of Scriptures and to express that meaning in English designed for public and private worship—the same qualities that had given the KJV such high standing in English literature.
- The *New American Standard Bible* (1971, rev. ed. in 1995) claimed to be a revision of the ASV, but probably should be viewed as a new translation.
- The NASB (or NAS) is one of the more popular translations that adheres closely to the form of the original languages.

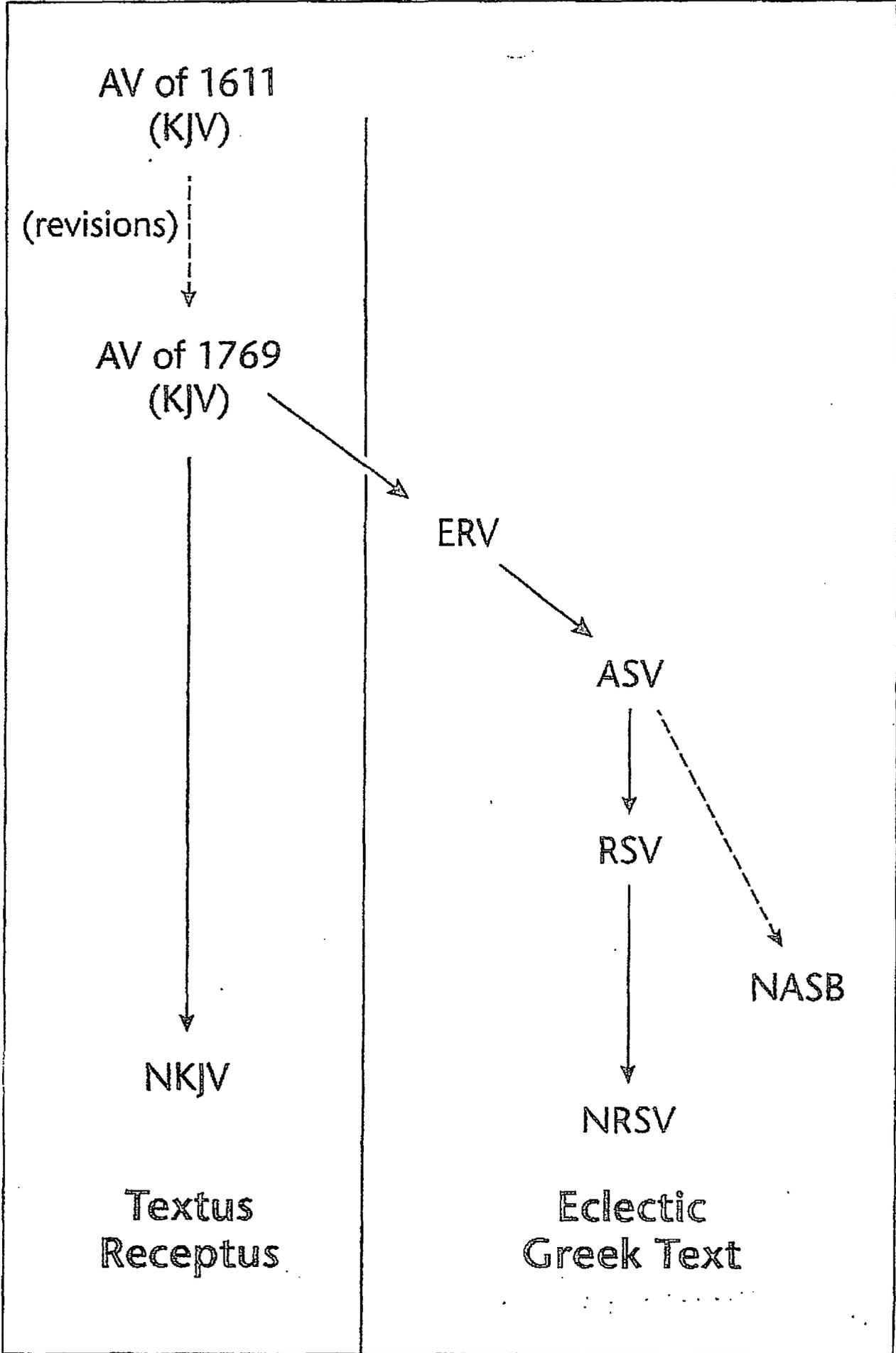
- The *New King James Version* (1979-1982) attempts to update the language of the KJV while retaining the same underlying Greek text that the translators of the KJV used (commonly called the *Textus Receptus* or TR). This preference for the TR distinguishes the NKJV from the other revisions, which make use of a better Greek text (commonly called an *eclectic* Greek text), based on older and more reliable readings of the Greek.
- The *New Revised Standard Version*, a thorough revision of the RSV, was completed in 1989 with the goal of being as literal as possible and as free as necessary.

In addition to the KJV revisions noted above, committees of scholars have produced many other new translations in recent years. Catholic scholars have completed two major translations:

- the *New American Bible* (1941 – 1970) and
- the *Jerusalem Bible* (1966).

What makes these significant is that not until 1943 did the Roman Catholic Church permit scholars to translate from the original (revisions) Greek and Hebrew. Until that time, their translation had to be based on the Latin Vulgate.

- The *New Jerusalem Bible*, a revision of the Jerusalem Bible, appeared in 1985.
- Both the *New English Bible* (1961 — 1970) and its revision, the *Revised English Bible* (1989), are translations into contemporary British idiom.
- The American Bible Society completed the *Good News Bible* in 1976 (also called *Today's English Version*). The translators of this version sought to express the meaning of the original text in conversational English (even for those with English as a second language).
- In the *New International Version* (1973-1978), a large committee of evangelical scholars sought to produce a translation in international English, offering a middle ground between a word-for-word approach and a thought-for-thought approach.
- The *New Century Version* (1987) and the *Contemporary English Version* (1991-1995) are recent translations that utilize a simplified, thought-for-thought approach to translation.
- A similar translation from the translators of the NIV is the *New International Reader's Version* (1995-1996).
- The *New Living Translation* (1996) is a fresh, thought-for-thought translation based on the popular paraphrase, the *Living Bible* (1967-1971).
- A recent attempt by an individual (rather than a committee) to render the message of Scripture in the language of today's generation is *The Message* by Eugene Peterson (1993 – 2002). *The Message* claims to be a translation but reads more like a paraphrase aimed at grabbing the reader's attention.
- *Today's New International Version* (2001) is a revision of the NIV, using the best of contemporary biblical scholarship and changes in the English language.
- The *English Standard Version* (2001) is a word-for-word translation that uses the RSV as its starting point. Its goal is to be as literal as possible while maintaining beauty, dignity of expression, and literary excellence.
- The *Holman Christian Standard Bible* (1999 –2004) is a new Bible translation that promotes a word-for-word approach unless clarity and readability demand a more idiomatic translation,



10-A

More  
Formal

More  
Functional

KJV	NASB	RSV	NRSV	NAB	NIV	NJB	NCV	GNB	The Message
ASV	NKJV	HCSB	NET		TNIV	REB	NLT	CEV	
	ESV								

in which case the literal form is often put in a footnote.

- The *New English Translation*, commonly referred to as the NET Bible (1998), offers an electronic version of a modern translation for distribution over the Internet. Anyone anywhere in the world with an Internet connection (including translators and missionaries) can have access to this new version (and its more than 60,000 translation notes), not to mention that it is under continual revision.

Now let's explore the different approaches translators take when making a translation.

### Approaches to translating the word of God

The process of translating is more complicated than it appears. Some people think that all you have to do when making a translation is to define each word and string together all the individual word meanings. This assumes that the source language (in this case, Greek or Hebrew) and the receptor language (such as English) are exactly alike. If life could only be so easy! In fact, no two languages are exactly alike.

For example, look at a verse chosen at random—from the story of Jesus healing a demon-possessed boy (Matthew 17:18). The word-for-word English rendition is written below a transliteration of the Greek:

- *Kai epetimesen auto ho Mous kai exelthen ap' autou to daimonion*  
And rebuked it the Jesus and came out from him the demon
- *iskai etherapeuthe ho pais apo tes horas ekeines*  
and was healed the boy from the hour that

Should we conclude that the English line presented above is the most accurate translation of Matthew 17:18 because it attempts a literal rendering of the verse? Is a translation better if it tries to match each word in the source language with a corresponding word in a receptor language? Could you even read an entire Bible "translated" in this way?

The fact that no two languages are exactly alike makes translation a complicated endeavor. D. A. Carson identifies a number of things that separate one language from another:"

- ◆ No two words are exactly alike. Words mean different things in different languages. Even words that are similar in meaning differ in some way. For example, the Greek verb *philea*, often translated "to love," must be translated "to kiss" when Judas kisses Jesus in an act of betrayal (Matthew 26:48 in both KJV and NIV).
- ◆ The vocabulary of any two languages will vary in size. This means that it is impossible to assign a word in a source language directly to a word in a receptor language. This kind of one-to-one
- ◆ correspondence would be nice, but it is simply not possible.
- ◆ Languages put words together differently to form phrases, clauses, and sentences (syntax). This means that there are preset structural differences between any two languages.

For example, English has an indefinite article ("a, an"), while Greek does not. In English adjectives come before the noun they modify and they use the same definite article (e.g., "the big city"). In Hebrew, however, adjectives come after the noun they modify and they have their own definite article (e.g., "the city, the big").

- ♦ Languages have different stylistic preferences. Sophisticated Greek emphasizes passive voice verbs, while refined English stresses the active voice. Hebrew poetry will sometimes use an acrostic pattern, which is impossible to transfer into English.

Since languages differ in many ways, making a translation is not a simple, cut-and-dried, mechanical process. When it comes to translation, it is wrong to assume that *literal* automatically equals *accurate*. A more literal translation is not necessarily a more accurate translation; it could actually be a less accurate translation. Is the translation "and was healed the boy from the hour that" better than "and the boy was cured at once" (NASB) or "and the child was healed from that moment" (NET Bible)? Translation is more than just finding matching words and adding them up.

Translation entails "reproducing the meaning of a text that is in one language (the *source language*), as fully as possible, in another language (the *receptor language*)."<sup>12</sup> The form of the original language is important and translators should stay with it when possible, but form should not have priority over meaning. What is most important is that the contemporary reader understands the meaning of the original text. When a translator can reproduce meaning while preserving form, all the better.

Translating is complicated work and translators often must make difficult choices between two equally good, but different ways of saying something. This explains why there are different approaches to translation. Individuals and committees have differences of opinion about the best way to make the tough choices involved in translation, including the relationship between form and meaning.

There are two main approaches to translation: the *formal* approach (sometimes labeled "literal" or "word-for-word") and the *functional* approach (often called "idiomatic" or "thought-for-thought"). In reality, no translation is entirely formal or entirely functional. Since source and receptor languages differ, all translations will have at least some formal features and some functional features. The situation is more like a scale, ranging from translations that are more formal to translations that are more functional (see below).

The *more formal* approach tries to stay as close as possible to the structure and words of the source language. Translators using this approach feel a keen responsibility to reproduce the forms of the original Greek and Hebrew whenever possible. The NASB, the ESV, and the HSCB use this approach. On the downside, the formal approach is less sensitive to the receptor language of the contemporary reader and, as a result, may appear stilted or awkward. Formal translations run the risk of sacrificing meaning for the sake of maintaining form.

The *more functional* approach tries to express the meaning of the original text in today's language. Here the translator feels a responsibility to reproduce the meaning of the original text in English so that the effect on today's reader is equivalent to the effect on the ancient reader.

Many contemporary translations utilize this approach, including the NIV, NLT, and GNB. The functional approach is not always as sensitive as it should be to the wording and structure of the source language. When it moves too far away from the form of the source language, the functional approach runs the risk of distorting the true meaning of the text. The spectrum of translations might look something like this, moving from the more formal to the more functional.

In addition to the two main approaches to translation discussed above, you will encounter what is known as a *paraphrase*. Technically, a paraphrase is not a translation from the original languages at all, but merely a restatement or explanation of a particular English translation using different English words. The *Living Bible* (1967-1971), perhaps the most famous paraphrase, is Kenneth Taylor's restatement of the *American Standard Version* (1901) for the benefit of his children.

Another translation similar to a paraphrase is the *Amplified Bible* (1958 —1965), which tries to give the reader an understanding of the many meanings contained in a particular verse through the "creative use of amplification." For instance, John 11:25 reads: "Jesus said to her, I am [Myself] the Resurrection and the Life. Whoever believes in (adheres to, trusts in, and relies on) Me, although he may die, yet he shall live." Since any one word does not bring its full range of meaning into every context, the *Amplified Bible* leaves the misleading impression that the reader is free to choose from among the options presented.

Again, paraphrases are not translations from the original language. We do not recommend using paraphrases for serious study because they tend to explain rather than translate. We believe that the author's meaning is encoded in the details of the text. In a paraphrase the "translator" makes far too many of the interpretive decisions for you. The result is that paraphrases add many things that are simply not in the Bible. Rather than translating the Word of God, paraphrases present a commentary on the Word of God. You should treat paraphrases like commentaries and use them as such. Our advice for those who are addicted to the *Living Bible* and other paraphrases is to switch to the *New Living Translation*.

## **Choosing a Translation**

We suggest the following guidelines for choosing a translation:

1. *Choose a translation that uses modern English.* The whole point of making a translation is to move the message of the original text to a language you can understand. History teaches us that languages change over time, and English is no exception. The English of John Wycliffe's day or of 1611 is simply not the same as the English of the twenty-first century. There is little to be gained by translating a Greek or Hebrew text into a kind of English that you no longer use and can no longer comprehend. For that reason, we recommend that you choose among the many good translations that have appeared within the last fifty years.

2. *Choose a translation that is based on the standard Hebrew and Greek text.*  
The standard text for the Old Testament is the *Biblia Hebraica Stuttgartensia (BHS)*. For the New Testament the standard text is reflected in the latest edition of the United Bible Societies' *Greek New Testament (GNT)* or Nestle-Aland's *Novum Testamentum Graece*. Along with the majority of scholars, we much prefer an eclectic text to the *Textus Receptus* used by the KJV and the NKJV.
3. *Give preference to a translation by a committee over a translation by an individual.*  
Translating requires an enormous amount of knowledge and skill. A group of qualified translators will certainly possess more expertise than any one translator possibly could. In addition, a group of scholars will usually guard against the tendency of individual scholars to read their own personal biases into their translation.
4. *Choose a translation that is appropriate for your own particular purpose at the time.* When you want to read devotionally or read to children, consider a simplified, functional translation such as the *New Living Translation* or the *New Century Version*. If you are reading to nontraditional or un-churched people, consider the *Contemporary English Version* or *The Message*. If you are reading to people with English as a second language, consider the *Good News Bible*. If you are reading to a "King-James-only" church, consider the *New King James*. But for your own personal serious Bible study, we suggest the *New American Standard Bible*, the *New International Version*, *Today's New International Version*, the *New Revised Standard Version*, the *English Standard Version*, the *Holman Christian Standard Bible*, or the *NET Bible*.

## **Conclusion**

Few things are as important as how the Bible has been translated. We can be thankful that God has used translators to get the message of the original text into our hands. Can you imagine the Christian life without your own copy of God's Word? In spite of the many good Bible translations available to us, there is no such thing as a perfect translation. Furthermore, languages change over time. For these reasons, committed scholars and linguists must continue to work hard to get the message of the original text into a language that people can understand. Who knows, God may call you to serve as a Bible translator.

## **Discussion Questions**

1. Which approach to Bible translation do you prefer? Why?
2. Why does "literal" not automatically equate to "accurate" when it comes to Bible translation?
3. Which particular translations do you like to compare as you study a passage of Scripture?

# Basic Concepts for Teaching the Bible

## Part II

### Section 1. Serious Reading

One of the most critical skills needed in reading the Bible is the ability to *see* the details. Most of us read the Bible too quickly and we skip over the details of the text. However, the meaning of the Bible is intertwined into the details of every sentence. Our first step in understanding a biblical text is to observe as many details as possible. At this early stage of analysis, try to refrain from *interpreting* or *applying* the text. These steps are important, but they come later, after the *observing* step.

Our first step is to read *seriously*, to note as many details as possible, to *observe* our text as closely as Crime Scene Investigators do a crime scene. Keep in mind that we are not yet asking the question, "What does the text mean?" We are simply asking, "What does the text say?" We have not yet begun to explore the implications of our observations. Also, do not limit your observations to so-called *deep insights* or highly important features. At the observation step we want to see everything, all the details. Later the lesson we will tackle the problem of sorting through the details to determine meaning.

#### Things to Look for in Sentences

##### 1. Repetition of words

Look for words that repeat. Be sure to note any words that repeat within the sentence you are studying. Then survey the sentences around the text you are reading and look for repetition in the larger passage.

For example, read 1 John 2:15-17:

<sup>15</sup>Do not *love* the *world* or anything in the *world*. If anyone *loves* the *world*, the *love* of the Father is not in him.

<sup>16</sup>For everything in the *world*—the cravings of sinful man, the lust of his eyes and the boasting of what he has and does— comes not from the Father but from the *world*.

<sup>17</sup>The *world* and its desires pass away, but the man who does the will of God lives forever.

Which word repeats in the first sentence? Does this word (*world*) appear in the next sentence as well? How many times in this passage does *world* occur? Is it in every sentence? Does it always have the definite article *the*, as in *the world*? Did you also notice the repetition of *love*? How many times does *love* occur? Simply by observing the repetition of words, we have an early indication of what the passage may be about.

It has something to do with the world—in particular, about loving the world.

Let's look at word repetition in a few other passages as well. Look up the following texts and note the number of times the words listed are repeated:

- John 15:1-10 (look for *remain*)
- Matthew 6:1 – 18 (look for *father*)
- 1 Corinthians 15:50 –54 (look for *perishable* and *imperishable*)

## 2. *Contrasts*

Look for items, ideas, or individuals that are contrasted with each other. For an example of contrast, take a look at Proverbs 14:31:

- He who oppresses the poor shows contempt for their Maker, but whoever is kind to the needy honors God.

This passage contrasts two different types of people. They are contrasted in the way they treat the poor and in the way that this behavior toward the poor reflects their attitude toward God.

- One type oppresses the poor, and this action reflects contempt for God since he is their Creator.
- The other type of person is kind to the poor; his action toward the poor honors God.

What is being contrasted in Proverbs 15:1?

*A gentle answer turns away wrath, but a harsh word stirs up anger.*

The New Testament writers frequently use contrasts as well. Read Romans 6:23 and identify the two contrasts:

*For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.*

## 3. *Comparison*

Contrast focuses on differences, whereas comparison focuses on similarities. Look for items, ideas, or individuals that are compared with each other. Proverbs 25:26 provides a good Old Testament example:

- Like a muddied spring or a polluted well is a righteous man who gives way to the wicked.

How is a righteous man who gives way to the wicked like a muddied spring? Because the spring, like the man, was once clean, pure, and useful, but now is contaminated and useless for service.

A wonderful comparison is made in Isaiah 40:31, where the renewal of strength received from placing one's hope in the Lord is compared to the soaring of eagles.

- ... but those who hope in the LORD will renew their strength. They will soar on wings like eagles; they will run and not grow weary, they will walk and not be faint.

Good Bible study can make you soar like an eagle, too. So read on.

#### 4. Lists

Any time you encounter a list of more than two items, identify it as a list. Write the list down and explore the significance of the list.

- Is there any order to the list?
- Are the items in the list grouped in any way?

For example, what three things are listed in 1 John 2:16?

- For everything in the world—the craving of sinful man, the lust of his eyes and the boasting of what he has and does—comes not from the Father but from the world.

What is listed in Galatians 5:22 –23?

- But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control.

What is listed in Galatians 5:19-20?

- The acts of the sinful nature are obvious: sexual immorality, impurity and debauchery; idolatry and witchcraft; hatred, discord, jealousy, fits of rage, selfish ambition, dissensions, factions and envy; drunkenness, orgies, and the like.

#### 5. Cause and Effect

Often the biblical writers will state a *cause* and then the *effect* of that cause. The *effect* is a result or a consequence of the *cause*. Earlier we looked at Proverbs 15:1 and found that the verse contained a contrast. It also has two cause-and-effect relationships. Take look at it again:

- A gentle answer turns away wrath, but a harsh word stirs up anger.

The first cause is *a gentle answer*. What is the effect of this cause? It turns away wrath. The second cause is *a harsh word*.

And what does it result in? As we all well know, it stirs up anger.

Let's also look at Romans 6:23 again:

- For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.

In this passage *sin* is the cause and *death* the effect. Likewise, Romans 12:2

- Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is—his good, pleasing and perfect will.

What is the cause? Our transformation through the renewing of our minds.

What is the associated effect? The effect is the ability to discern God's will.

As you can see, cause-and-effect relationships play an important role in the Bible. Always be on the lookout for them.

## 6. Figures of Speech

Figures of speech are images in which words are used in a sense other than the normal, literal sense. For example, think about the lamp image in Psalm 119:105:

- Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light for my path.

God's Word is not a literal *lamp* to light up the trail for us. Rather, it is a figurative *lamp* that allows us to see our way through life (*feet/path*) clearly. Note that both *lamp* and *feet/path* are figures of speech.

As you observe biblical texts, always note and identify any figures of speech that occur. Try to visualize the figure of speech. Ask: "What image is the author trying to convey with the figure of speech?" For example, consider Isaiah 40:31 again:

- ...but those who hope in the LORD will renew their strength, they will soar on wings like eagles; they will run and not grow weary, they will walk and not be faint.

Soaring on wings like eagles is a figure of speech. Can you visualize the image—soaring up high ... coasting on a warm air current ... gliding along without even flapping your wings? Figures of speech are powerful literary forms because they paint images that we can relate to emotionally.

## 7. Conjunctions

If we imagine the biblical text to be like a brick house, then conjunctions are the mortar that holds the bricks (phrases and sentences) together. One critical aspect of careful reading is to note all of the conjunctions (*and, for, but, therefore, since, because, etc.*).

Our tendency is to skip right over them! But don't do it. Without the mortar the bricks would fall into a jumbled mess. So always take note of the conjunctions and then identify their purpose or function. That is, try to determine what it is that the conjunction connects.

For example, if you encounter the conjunction *but*, you might suspect some sort of contrast. Look in the text for the things being contrasted by this conjunction. Recall Romans 6:23:

- For the wages of sin is death, *but* the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.

The conjunction *but* indicates a contrast between the wages of sin (death) and the gift of God (eternal life).

*Therefore* or *so* usually presents some type of conclusion based on earlier arguments or reasons. When you encounter a *therefore*, read back into the text and determine what the earlier reason was. Sometimes the reason is easy to find, lying out in the open in the previous verse. However, at other times, the earlier reason is more difficult to find. It may refer to the larger message of several previous chapters.

## 8. Verbs—Where All the Action Is

Verbs are important because they communicate the action of the sentence. As you observe the text, be sure to note the verbal action. Try to identify what kind of verb is used:

- Is the verb a past, present, or future tense verb (*I went, I go, I will go*)?
- Does it present a progressive idea; that is, does it have continued action (*I was going, I am going, I will be going*)?
- Is it an imperative verb? Imperatives are verbs that command someone to do something (*Go!*). Be especially sure to note all imperative verbs! These are often God's commands to us.

Note the list of imperative verbs in Ephesians 4:2 –3:

- Be completely humble and gentle; be patient, bearing with one another in love. Make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace.

Another important distinction to look for in verbs is whether they are active or passive.

- Active verbs are those where the subject is doing the action (Bill *hit* the ball).
- Passive verbs are those verbs where the subject is acted upon (Bill *was hit* by the ball).

This distinction is particularly important in Paul's letters because verbs often distinguish between what we do and what God has done for us. Note the following active and passive verbs:

- Since, then, you *have been raised* (passive!) with Christ, *set* (active!) your hearts on things above, where Christ is seated (passive!) at the right hand of God. (Col. 3:1)
- In him we *were* also *chosen* (passive!), *having been predestined* (passive!) according to the plan of him who *works out* (active!) everything in conformity with the purpose of his will. (Eph. 1:11)

## 9. Pronouns

Pronouns are words that refer to other nouns (people, places, items, ideas) in the context. Pronouns include words such as *he, she, you, me, my, we, our, and it*. Note all pronouns and be sure to identify the antecedent (to whom or to what the pronoun refers). Who is the *our* and *us* in Ephesians 1:3?

- Praise be to the God and Father of *our* Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed *us* in the heavenly realms with every spiritual blessing in Christ.

Identify all of the pronouns in the following text:

- <sup>27</sup>Whatever happens, conduct yourselves in a manner worthy of the gospel of Christ. Then, whether I come and see you or only hear about you in my absence, I will know that you stand firm in one spirit, contending as one man for the faith of the gospel
- <sup>28</sup>without being frightened in any way by those who oppose you.
  - This is a sign to them that they will be destroyed,



but that you will be saved—and that by God.

- <sup>29</sup>For it has been granted to you on behalf of Christ not only to believe on him, but also to suffer for him,
- <sup>30</sup>since you are going through the same struggle you saw I had, and now hear that I still have. (Philippians 1:27 —30)

## Discussion Questions

1. Read 1 John 1:5-7. Which "things to look for" from this chapter do you see:
  - verse 5?
  - In verse 6?
  - In verse 7?
2. Read Romans 12:1-2. Which "things to look for" from this chapter do you see:
  - in verse 1?
  - In verse 2?

## 2. Keep Your Eyes on the Horizon

In contrast to Part II: Section 1, sometimes we need to turn our attention to the horizon. Sometimes we need to take a step back and notice the big picture around the passage we are studying. In Section 1 you learned how to make observations at the sentence level. In this section you will continue to develop your skill in making observations, but we will shift the focus of your observation from sentences to paragraphs and even chapters and episodes. Keep looking! Keep observing! Keep digging into the Word of God!

### 1. *General and Specific*

Sometimes an author will introduce an idea with a general statement—that is, an overview or summary of their main idea. The author will then follow this general statement with the specifics of the idea. Often these specifics provide the supporting details that make the general idea true or explain it more completely.

For example, I can make a *general* statement, "I like dessert." I can then explain this more fully with the *specific* details, "I like apple pie, strawberry shortcake, chocolate ice cream, and cheesecake." This is a movement from *general* to *specific*.

Although the biblical writers do not write of chocolate ice cream, they do often use the *general-to-specific* literary feature to communicate to us.

For example, Paul makes a *general* statement in Galatians 5:16:

So I say, live by the Spirit, and you will not gratify the desires of the sinful nature.

Living by the Spirit and gratifying the desires of the sinful nature are general statements. As readers we want to know more details or specifics about each of these. Paul obliges us and presents the specifics of gratifying "the desires of the sinful nature" in 5:19 —21a:

- The acts of the sinful nature are obvious: sexual immorality, impurity and debauchery; idolatry and witchcraft; hatred, discord, jealousy, fits of rage, selfish ambition, dissensions, factions and envy, drunkenness, orgies, and the like....

Paul next presents the *specifics* of how to "live by the Spirit" in 5:22:

- But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control.

So Paul has presented a *general* statement in Galatians 5:16 and then moved to the associated *specific* statements in 5:19-22.

Also keep in mind that the authors will frequently reverse the order and go from *specific* to *general*. The writer will first list out the *specifics* ("I like apple pie, strawberry shortcake, chocolate ice cream, and cheesecake") and then recap the idea with a *general* statement summarizing the main point ("I like dessert").

## 2. *Questions and Answers*

Occasionally an author will raise a rhetorical question and then answer his own question. Paul does this several times in Romans. For instance, in Romans 6:1 he asks:

- What shall we say then? Shall we go on sinning so that grace may increase?

Paul then answers his own question in verse 2:

- By no means! We died to sin; how can we live in it any longer?

In the verses that follow, the apostle continues to discuss the answer to his opening question in Romans 6:1. Paul uses this type of question-and-answer format in numerous other places in Romans as well (3:1, 5, 9, 27-31; 4:1, 9; 6:15; 7:1, 7, 13; 8:31-35; 11:1, 7, 11).

This technique is not limited to Paul's letters. Mark uses the question-and-answer format in several places as the backdrop for the story of Jesus. For example, in Mark 2:1 —3:6 there are five episodes that revolve around a question and an answer.

## 3. *Dialogue*

Dialogue, of course, overlaps slightly with the question-and-answer feature discussed above. The four questions in Mark 2:15 —3:6 are part of an ongoing dialogue between Jesus and the Pharisees.

Dialogue may seem at first glance to be too obvious to worry about. Clearly, in narrative material dialogue is employed frequently and is easy to spot. But do not simply read past the point of the dialogue. Note the fact that a dialogue is taking place. Then ask questions of the dialogue:

- Who are the participants?
- Who is speaking to whom?
- What is the setting?
- Are other people around?
- Are they listening?
- Are they participating in the dialogue?
- Is the dialogue an argument?
  - ◆ A discussion?
  - ◆ A lecture?
  - ◆ Friendly chitchat?
- What is the point of the dialogue?

The stories of the Bible contain a multitude of wonderful dialogues. Recall Jesus' conversation with the Samaritan woman at the well in John 4:1-26. Another famous dialogue occurs between Peter and Jesus in John 13:6—10, where they discuss whether or not Jesus will wash Peter's feet.

Clearly one of the most unusual discussions in the Bible is the conversation between Balaam and his donkey in Numbers 22.

#### ***4. Purpose and Result Statements***

Always identify *purpose* and *result statements*. These are phrases or sentences that describe the reason, the result, or the consequence of such action.

They are frequently introduced by result-oriented conjunctions such as *that*, *in order that*, *so that*, etc., but they can also be introduced with the simple infinitive (*to* plus a verb). The following examples illustrate the use of purpose statements:

- For we are God's workmanship, created in Christ Jesus *to* do good works. (Eph. 2:10)
- For God so loved the world *that* he gave his one and only Son. (John 3:16)
- You did not choose me, but I chose you and appointed you *to* go and bear fruit—fruit that will last. (John 15:16)

#### ***5. Means***

When an action, a result, or a purpose is stated, look for the *means* that will bring about that action, result, or purpose. How is the action or result brought into reality? How is the purpose accomplished? For example, read the second half of Romans 8:13:

- ... but if *by the Spirit* you put to death the misdeeds of the body, you will live.

The *means* by which the misdeeds of the body are put to death is the Spirit.

Likewise, ponder a moment on Psalm 119:9:

- How can a young man keep his way pure? By living according to your word.

The purpose or action desired is for a young man to keep his way pure. What is the *means*?

- By living according to God's Word.

## 6. *Conditional Clauses*

Identify all conditional clauses. These are clauses that present the conditions whereby some action, consequence, reality, or result will happen. The conditional aspect will usually be introduced by the conditional conjunction *if*; the result or consequence will occasionally be introduced by *then*, though often the result or consequence has no specific introductory words. Any time you encounter a conditional clause, always determine exactly what the required conditional action is (the *if* part) and what the result or consequence is (the *then* part).

Identify the conditional clause and the result or consequence in each of the following:

- If we claim to have fellowship with him yet walk in the darkness, we lie and do not live by the truth. (1 John 1:6)

Condition: *if we claim to have fellowship with him yet walk in darkness*

Result or consequence: *we lie and do not live by the truth*

- Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has gone, the new has come! (2 Cor. 5:17)

Condition: *if anyone is in Christ*

Result or consequence: *he is a new creation; the old has gone, the new has come*

## 7. *The Actions/Roles of People and the Actions/Roles of God*

Biblical passages will often refer to actions that people do as well as actions that God does. Identify these and mark them separately. Ask the question:

- "What does God (the Father, the Son, or the Spirit) do in this passage?" and also,
- "What do people do in this passage?"

Then ask whether or not there is any kind of connection between what God does and what people do. For example, read Ephesians 5:1-2:

- Be imitators of God, therefore, as dearly loved children and live a life of love, just as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us as a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God.

What are the actions or roles of people in this passage? We are told to be imitators of God in the same way that children are imitators. We are also told to live a life of love as Christ did. What is Christ's or God's role in this passage? Christ's role was to offer himself up to God for us. God's role is to be the one who is imitated.

In addition, be sure to observe when references to God are made with relational terms (father, husband, king). For example, in Matthew 5:43-6:34 there are *eleven* references to God as "Father" (5:45, 48; 6:1, 4, 6, 8, 9, 14, 15, 18, 32). By his repeated use of "Father" in this passage (from the Sermon on the Mount) Jesus is clearly trying to convey an idea of relationship to God as a Father (both his and ours).

### 8. *Emotional Terms*

The Bible is not a book of abstract, technical information. It is a book about relationships, primarily relationships between God and people. Emotions play a big role in relationships. This is frequently overlooked in biblical interpretation. As part of your careful reading, when you observe the text be sure to underscore words and phrases that have emotional overtones, that is, words that convey feeling and emotion. Also be sure to note terms such as "father, mother, child, daughter, son," and so on. These usually have underlying emotional connotations as well.

Read the following passage and note the emotional connotations of the italicized phrases and words:

- *I plead* with you, brothers, become like me, for I became like you. You have done me no wrong. As you know, it was because of an illness that I first preached the gospel to you. Even though my illness was a trial to you, you did not treat me with *contempt* or *scorn*. Instead, you *welcomed* me as if I were an angel of God, as if I were Christ Jesus himself. What has happened to all your *joy*? I can testify that, if you could have done so, you would have *torn out your eyes* and given them to me. Have I now become your *enemy* by telling you the truth? (Gal. 4:12 —16)

*Plead* is much more emotional than *ask*, isn't it? Paul seems to have intentionally chosen strong emotional terms to express himself in this passage (and throughout Galatians).

What feelings does Paul express here? Why does he bring up their past relationship, recalling how they once welcomed him? How strong is the phrase *torn out your eyes*? Likewise, what kind of connotations does the word *enemy* carry?

### 8. *Connections between Paragraphs and Episodes*

After reading carefully and observing thoroughly at the sentence level and at the paragraph level, it is important to ask how your paragraph (in the letters) or your episode (in the narratives) relates to the other paragraphs/ episodes that come before and after the one you are studying.

- What is the connection between your paragraph and the paragraph that precedes it?
- What about the paragraph that follows?

- How do they all relate?

So far we have focused on the relationship between phrases, clauses, and sentences. We looked at cause-and-effect relationships, general-to-specific relationships, conditional clauses with resultant or consequential effects, and other relational features within sentences and between sentences. These same features will also often connect paragraphs (in the letters) and episodes (in narratives).

Look for connections. Look for repeated words or repeated themes. Look for logical connections like cause-and-effect. Be sure to note the conjunctions between the paragraphs. In narrative episodes pay attention to the time sequence of each episode. And remember—keep looking and keep digging and keep reading and, whatever you do, don't stop after one short glance at the text. Immerse yourself in the passage. Search for these connections. They are critical to the meaning.

### ***10. Story Shifts: Major Breaks and Pivots***

As you read larger units of text, look for critical places where the story seems to take a new turn. In the letters this takes the form of a *major break*. The writer will shift topics, frequently changing from doctrinal discussion to practical discussion. These *shifts* are important to note. These *shifts* occur in narratives also, but they usually take the form of *pivot episodes*.

Usually a shift in the direction of the story will be signaled by an unusually significant episode (a *pivot episode*).

For example, in the first three chapters of Paul's letter to the Ephesians, he presents a doctrinal explanation about the Ephesians' new life in Christ and the implications of that new life, especially regarding the unity of Jews and Gentiles in that new life. Ephesians 4:1, however, signal a *major break*, because Paul now begins to give practical exhortation about how the Ephesians ought to put the doctrine of chapters 1-3 into practice. So while chapters 1 – 3 deal primarily with doctrine, chapters 4 –6 focus on practical living.

### ***Conclusion***

In order for us to interpret and understand the Bible, we must first read it carefully, observing all the details. We must observe it both at the sentence level and at larger levels like the paragraph and the episode. We have listed some features to look for — cause-and-effect, repetition, general-to-specific, and so on. This list is far from exhaustive. The purpose of the features we have listed is to get you started into careful reading. We have presented some of the major literary features to look for. But as you are finding out, reading carefully—really observing closely—involves looking at all the details and asking numerous questions of the text.

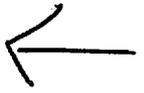
Keep in mind that we are still only at the first step in our journey into God's Word. Later we will move on to determining the meaning and applying the meaning. Part II Sections 1 and 2 about observation and careful reading, however, are critical,

because if you bypass the careful reading step and move straight to application after only a superficial reading, you will almost certainly miss the meaning of the passage. In addition, the Bible will become boring for you because you will never see anything in it that you haven't already seen. If you read carefully, however, and observe, observe, observe, you will be much more likely to arrive at the true meaning and the Bible will become interesting to you because you will be seeing new things.

Because it is God's Word, the Bible is a unique piece of literature. It is like a mine that never runs out. One can dig in it for a lifetime and not exhaust it. Even when you been studying the Bible seriously for many years, you will continue to see new things—new insights that you never noticed, new connections you never made. This keeps the Bible fresh and exciting for you. Our hope and prayer for you is that you will continue to read God's Word carefully and study the text with discipline. Make this a lifelong pursuit. The rewards are rich.

### **Discussion Questions**

1. Why do you think it is important to observe both the details to text (chapter 2) and the larger patterns within a text (chapter 3)
2. Besides what is listed for observation in chapters 2 and 3, what other characteristics of a passage do you find it helpful to observe?
3. What are the benefits of careful observation? What happens if the interpreter does nothing more than observe?



Domador

1. Definieren Sie die Begriffe

Domestikation und

Domestikation und Domestikation

2. Beschreiben Sie die Domestikation

von Tieren und Pflanzen

3. Nennen Sie Beispiele für

Domestikation von Tieren

und Pflanzen

4. Erklären Sie die Domestikation

von Tieren und Pflanzen

# Basic Concepts for Teaching the Bible

## Part III

### Section 1. Discovering the Historical Context

We believe that the way we approach the Bible (i.e., the way we listen to God) should match how God gave us the Bible (i.e., the way God chose to speak). Otherwise, we will likely misunderstand what God is trying to say to us. Since God spoke his message in *specific, historical situations* (i.e., to people living in particular places, speaking particular languages, adopting a particular way of life), we should take the ancient, situation seriously.

The bottom line is that we cannot simply ignore "those people living back then" and jump directly to what God wants to say to us. Why not? Again, because the way we listen to God (our interpretive approach) must honor the way God chose to communicate. We should not be so arrogant and prideful as to think that God cared nothing about the original audience but was merely using them to get a message to us.

The truth of the matter is that God cared deeply about the original hearers and spoke to them within their own historical-cultural situation. God also cares deeply about us and wants to speak to us. The time-bound message of Scripture contains eternally relevant principles that we can discover and apply to our lives. Remember that the Interpretive Journey moves from the meaning of the text for the biblical audience across the river of differences (e.g., time, place, culture, situation) by means of the principlizing bridge to the application of those theological principles in our lives.

Thus, we need to know the original historical-cultural context because it offers us a window into what God was saying to the biblical audience. Since we live in a different context, we must first recapture the meaning of the text in its original context. Then we can apply it to our lives in ways that will be just as relevant. God's Word is eternally relevant. Our task as students of his Word is to discover that relevance by doing our contextual homework.

This leads us to a crucial interpretive principle: For our interpretation of any biblical text to be valid, it must be consistent with the historical-cultural context of that text.

If our interpretation would not have made sense back then, we are probably on the wrong track. We must first determine what a text meant "in their town" before we can determine what it means and how we should apply that meaning to our own time and culture. Our *goal*, then, is to understand the historical-cultural context of the biblical passage as clearly as possible in order to grasp the meaning of the passage. In this first section you will learn about the historical-cultural context (commonly referred to as "background"). In the next section you will discover more about literary context.

#### ***What Is Historical-Cultural Context?***

By *historical-cultural context* we are referring to information about the biblical writer, the biblical audience, and any other historical-cultural elements touched on by the passage itself.

Historical-cultural context relates to just about anything outside the text that will help you understand the text itself

(e.g., what life was like for the Israelites as they wandered in the desert, what the Pharisees believed about the Sabbath, where Paul was when he wrote Philippians). Literary context, by contrast, relates to the context within the book (e.g., the form a passage takes, the flow of argument within the book, and the meaning of the words and sentences that surround the passage you are studying). Let's look briefly at each aspect of historical-cultural context and mention a few resources you can use to uncover that context.

### ***The Biblical Writer***

Because God chose to work through human authors as the immediate source of his inspired Word, the more we know about the human author the better. Try to find out as much as you can about the writer's background. Try to determine when he wrote and the kind of ministry he had (e.g. Hosea's ministry was linked to his marriage to his infamous wife, Gomer). You will also want to understand more about the specific relationship between the writer and the people he was addressing (e.g., note Paul's stern tone in his letter to the Galatians, but his praise for the Thessalonians).

Perhaps the most important thing to know about the biblical writers is why they are writing. Why does the author of 1 and 2 Chronicles, for example, repeat much of Samuel and Kings? The answer lies in the writer's purpose. The Chronicler (perhaps Ezra) is writing for Israel *after* the Exile (i.e., for the restored community). He is trying to show that God is still very much interested in his people after judging them by the Exile. For example, the Chronicler seems to idealize David and Solomon by omitting anything that might tarnish their image (e.g., David's sin with Bathsheba). In this way the writer reassures his audience that although God has judged his people, he still loves them and wants to use them to accomplish his purposes. So, when it comes to the biblical writer, try to determine his background, the time of writing, the kind of ministry he was seeking to fulfill, his relationship with the people he addresses, and why he is writing.

### ***The Biblical Audience***

Discovering the historical-cultural context also involves knowing something about the biblical audience and their circumstances. Take Mark's Gospel as an example.

Mark makes a point of emphasizing the cross of Christ and the demands of discipleship throughout his Gospel. Many scholars believe that Mark's original audience was the church in the vicinity of Rome and that Mark was preparing them for the persecution they would soon face at the hands of Emperor Nero during the mid-60s AD. To encourage these believers to remain faithful in the midst of suffering, Mark stresses how Jesus remained faithful during his time of suffering.

### ***Other Historical-Cultural Elements***

As noted earlier, historical-cultural context involves the biblical writer and the biblical audience, plus any historical-cultural elements touched upon by your passage. Sometimes it is difficult to know much about the biblical author and the audience or their specific circumstances.

Often you will focus more on the historical, social, religious, political, and economic elements that shape your passage. Here are a few examples of how understanding these elements can shed light on the meaning of your passage.

Sometimes knowing more about the geography or topography assumed by the text can help you grasp its meaning. Jesus starts his parable of the good Samaritan with the statement:

- "A man was going down from Jerusalem to Jericho" (Luke 10:30). You would certainly go down from Jerusalem to Jericho, descending from about 2,500 feet above sea level to about 800 feet below sea level. In addition, the trip would not be a walk in the park. The distance is almost twenty miles and would take you through some rugged desert country that offered plenty of hiding places for thieves. Knowing the geography helps you understand how easy it would have been to pass by the dying man and how troublesome it would have been to be a loving neighbor.

One of the most productive areas of background study relates to social customs. If you are studying Ephesians 5:21 —6:9, for example, you need to know something about Greco-Roman household codes in order to make sense of your passage. These rules were developed primarily to instruct the head of the household about how to deal with members of his family. The apostle Paul uses the household code concept, but he transforms it in powerful ways. For instance, Greco-Roman codes told husbands to make their wives submit, but they never listed love as a duty of the husband. In Ephesians 5:25 Paul breaks the mold when he instructs husbands to "love your wives, just as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her." Paul's exhortation for all members of the household to "submit to one another out of reverence for Christ" (5:21) would have been even more radical.

Sometimes your passage will touch on economic issues. On his second missionary tour,(Acts 15:39-18:22), Paul plants a church at Philippi. There Paul and Silas meet a slave girl who has a spirit by which she predicts the future. She continues to bother the missionary team until Paul finally commands the spirit to come out of her. Her enraged owners then drag Paul and Silas into the marketplace, where the magistrates order them to be stripped, beaten, and later imprisoned for causing trouble. All this happens because the demon-possessed slave girl has been earning a lot of money for her owners. When the spirit left the girl, the money left the owners' pockets, and they take their revenge on the missionaries.

You also need to pay attention to political issues that may surface in your passage. In the Acts 16 episode notice what happens next to Paul and Silas. After spending time in prison (where God does some exciting things), the magistrates send word that the missionaries may leave the city (Acts 16:36-40). Since it was illegal to publicly beat and imprison a Roman citizen, especially without a trial, the Roman officials act quickly to apologize for their actions. Paul and Silas probably demand an escort out of town in order to make a public statement about their innocence for the benefit of the church in Philippi.

Historical-cultural context includes information about the author and the audience—their background, circumstances, and relationship—as well as geographical, social, religious, economic, and political elements connected to the passage. Some people are convinced that background studies are tedious ways of making the Bible less relevant. We have found the opposite to be true. When we take time to understand the context, the passage comes alive and explodes with relevance (sometimes more than we can take). We are able to see that God was speaking to real people struggling with real life and that he continues to speak to us.

Before citing various resources one can use to study the historical-cultural context, we want to mention a few of the dangers associated with studying this type of material.

### ***Dangers Associated with Studying Background***

While the greatest danger is ignoring the historical-cultural context, there are also dangers associated with studying it. To begin with, you need to *watch out for inaccurate background information*.

One of the dangers associated with studying historical-cultural context is that of elevating the background of the text above the meaning of the text. When studying the parable of the Pharisee and the tax collector in Luke 18:9-14, for instance, you may be tempted to spend all your time learning about Pharisees and tax collectors. You certainly need to know something about these two groups and their role and reputation in Jesus' day. Yet you don't want to let your fascination with background information cause you to miss the point—God judges the proud and exalts the humble.

Finally, we caution you not to let yourself slowly evolve into nothing more than a walking database of ancient facts. Don't lose your interpretive heart in your quest for information to deepen your understanding of the text. Keep your study of the background of the Bible in proper perspective. We study the historical-cultural context not as an end in itself, but as a tool to help us grasp and apply the meaning of the biblical text.

### ***The Historical-Cultural Context of the Whole Book***

To identify the historical-cultural context you need to:

- grasp the historical-cultural context of *the book* that contains your passage and
- recognize the specific historical-cultural context of *the passage* itself.

In order to understand the historical-cultural context of the entire book, we suggest you consult Bible handbooks, introductions, and surveys of the Old and New Testaments, and especially good commentaries.

### ***Bible Handbooks***

These resources usually begin with general articles about the Bible and the world of the Bible (e.g., the nature of Scripture, life in Bible times). They normally include a brief introduction to each book of the Bible and an equally brief running commentary on the entire biblical text. We have found the following Bible handbooks useful:

- Alexander, Pat, and David Alexander, eds. *Zondervan Handbook to the Bible*. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1999.
- Dockery, David S., ed. *Holman Bible Handbook*. Nashville: Holman, 1992.
- Thompson, J. A. *Handbook of Life in Bible Times*. Downers Grove, IL: Inter-Varsity Press, 1986.

## ***Old and New Testament Introductions and Surveys***

These tools supply detailed background information on each book as well as an overview of the book's contents. Usually they discuss authorship, date, recipients, situation, purpose, and more. Generally speaking, introductions offer more technical discussions of the background issues and spend less time on the actual content of the books, while surveys touch on background issues and focus more on content. These types of books normally go into greater detail than Bible handbooks, so there is simply too much information to fit both Old Testament and New Testament into a single volume. Here are a few of the better ones:

- Arnold, Bill, and Bryan Beyer. *Encountering the Old Testament*. Grand Rapids: Baker, 1999.
- Carson, D. A., and Douglas J. Moo. *An Introduction to the New Testament*. 2nd ed. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2005.
- Dillard, Raymond B., and Tremper Longman III. *An Introduction to the Old Testament*. 2nd edition. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2006.
- Elwell, Walter, and Robert Yarbrough. *Encountering the New Testament*. Grand Rapids: Baker, 1998.
- Gundry, Robert H. *A Survey of the New Testament*. 4th ed. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2003.
- LaSor, William S., David Alan Hubbard, and Frederic W. Bush. *Old Testament Survey*. 2nd ed. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1996.
- Walton, John H., and Andrew E. Hill. *Old Testament Today*. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2004.

## ***Commentaries***

In most cases a good commentary will be your best bet for up-to-date, detailed information about the historical-cultural context of the book that contains your passage. Because commentaries are always written from a particular point of view and since they differ in quality and scope, it is always a good idea to consult more than one commentary. We recommend that you consult a commentary in one of the following series as you begin your study. There are certainly other fine commentaries (and some are not attached to a series), but this is a solid place to start.

- Baker Exegetical Commentary. Grand Rapids: Baker.
- Bible Speaks Today. Downers Grove, IL: Inter-Varsity Press.
- Expositor's Bible Commentary. Grand Rapids: Zondervan.
- IVP New Testament Commentary. Downers Grove, IL: Inter-Varsity Press.
- New American Commentary. Nashville: Broadman & Holman.
- New International Commentary on the New Testament. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans.

- New International Commentary on the Old Testament. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans.
- NIV Application Commentary. Grand Rapids: Zondervan.
- Pillar New Testament Commentaries. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans.
- Tyndale New Testament Commentaries. Downers Grove, IL: Inter-Varsity Press.
- Tyndale Old Testament Commentaries. Downers Grove, IL: Inter-Varsity Press.
- The Pulpit Commentary. Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co. Grand Rapids Michigan

### ***The Historical-Cultural Context of the Passage***

After you have a good sense of the background of the book that contains your passage, you need to identify the historical-cultural context of the passage itself. This involves examining any elements of history and culture that are connected to or mentioned in the passage (e.g., geography, politics, religion, economics, family life, social customs). To accomplish this, we recommend using Bible atlases, Bible dictionaries or encyclopedias, commentaries, background commentaries, Old and New Testament histories, and special studies on ancient life and culture.

#### ***Bible Atlases***

If you want to learn more about the people, places, and events mentioned in your passage, take a look at a Bible atlas. You will find colorful maps of the land, pictures of many of the important sites, helpful charts of political and religious leaders, discussions of the various periods of biblical history, and more. Here is a list of helpful Bible atlases:

- Beitzel, Barry J. *The Moody Atlas of the Bible Lands*. Chicago: Moody, 1985.
- Brisco, Thomas C. *Holman Bible Atlas*. Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 1998.
- Lawrence, Paul, ed. *The IVP Atlas of Bible History*. Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2006.
- Rasmussen, Carl G. *Zondervan NIV Atlas of the Bible*. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1989.

#### ***Bible Dictionaries and Encyclopedias***

This is the place to go when you need information about a particular topic mentioned in your passage. For instance, if you want to know more about the garden of Gethsemane, consult a Bible dictionary or encyclopedia. These resources cover a full range of biblical topics and arrange the topics alphabetically. All you have to do is turn to "Gethsemane" and read. Included among the most helpful Bible dictionaries and encyclopedias for the beginning student are the following:

- Butler, Trent, Chad Brand, Charles W. Draper, and Archie England, eds. *Holman Illustrated Bible Dictionary*. Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 2003.
- Douglas, J. D., ed. *The Illustrated Bible Dictionary*. 3 vols. Downers Grove, IL: Inter-Varsity Press, 1980.
- Douglas, J. D., and Merrill C. Tenney, eds. *New International Bible Dictionary*. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1987.
- Elwell, Walter. *Baker Encyclopedia of the Bible*. 2 vols. Grand Rapids: Baker, 1988.
- Hays, J. Daniel, J. Scott Duvall, and C. Marvin Pate. *The Dictionary of Biblical Prophecy and the End Times*. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2007.
- Marshall, I. Howard, A. R. Millard, J. I. Packer, and D. J. Wiseman, eds. *New Bible*

*Dictionary*. 3rd ed. Downers Grove, IL: Inter-Varsity Press, 1996.

- Reid, Daniel G., ed. *The IVP Dictionary of the New Testament*. Downers Grove, IL: Inter-Varsity Press, 2004.

### ***Commentaries and Background Commentaries***

We mention commentaries again because the good ones are also helpful in shedding light on background matters within your specific passage. Do you recall Paul's harsh words for the Corinthian Christians regarding their practice of celebrating the Lord's Supper (see 1 Corinthians 11:17 –22)? A good commentary will do what Craig Blomberg does in his commentary on 1 Corinthians—it will clarify the meaning of the passage by summarizing the historical-cultural context.

- The minority of well-to-do believers (1:26), including the major financial supporters and owners of the homes in which the believers met, would have had the leisure-time and resources to arrive earlier and bring larger quantities and finer food than the rest of the congregation. Following the practice of hosting festive gatherings in ancient Corinth, they would have quickly filled the small private dining room. Latecomers (the majority, who probably had to finish work before coming on Saturday or Sunday evening—there was as of yet no legalized day off in the Roman empire) would be seated separately in the adjacent atrium or courtyard. Those that could not afford to bring a full meal, or a very good one, did not have the opportunity to share with the rest in the way that Christian unity demanded....The result of the lack of consideration by the wealthy for the less well-to-do implies that they are not celebrating the *Lord's Supper* at all, merely "their *own* supper."

A relatively new type of commentary is called the background commentary. These resources focus not on the meaning of each passage but on historical-cultural background essential to grasping the meaning. Background commentaries are helpful because they provide a wealth of information conveniently arranged in a verse-by-verse format. As you study Jesus' teaching on nonresistance in Matthew 5, you will come across the statement: "And if someone wants to sue you and take your tunic, let him have your cloak as well" (v. 40). Keener's background commentary offers the following insight into the context of the passage:

- The poorest people of the Empire (e.g., most peasants in Egypt) had only an inner and outer garment, and the theft of a cloak would lead to legal recourse. Although conditions in first-century Palestine were not quite that bad, this verse could indicate divestiture of all one's possessions, even (hyperbolically) one's clothes, to avoid a legal dispute affecting only oneself. Jesus gives this advice in spite of the fact that, under Jewish law, a legal case to regain one's cloak would have been foolproof: a creditor could not take a poor person's outer cloak, which might serve as one's only blanket at night as well as a coat (Ex 22:26-27).

It's hard to overestimate the value of the following background commentaries:

- Arnold, Clint. *Zondervan Illustrated Bible Background Commentary*. 4 vols. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2002.
- Keener, Craig S. *The IVP Bible Background Commentary: New Testament*. Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1993.
- Walton, John H., Victor H. Matthews, and Mark W. Chavalas. *The IVP Bible Background Commentary: Old Testament*. Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2000.

### ***Computer Software and Internet Resources***

You will be able to find some of the resources we have mentioned above in electronic format. We encourage you to take full advantage of computer software packages that include the best resources. Often the convenience and price are hard to beat. But remember that you are after the best tools, not simply the least expensive deal. You can use the bibliography of resources throughout this chapter to evaluate the various software packages.

You need to be much more cautious about Internet resources. This is a rapidly changing environment that has not traditionally represented the best in biblical scholarship. While the Internet is certainly convenient, you don't always know whether you are getting reliable information. We recommend that you stick with articles by respected authors.

### **Conclusion**

In this section we have learned about the importance of historical-cultural context in the process of interpreting and applying the Bible. We cannot overemphasize the importance of context for faithfully reading Scripture. Remember, we study the historical-cultural background of the Bible because God chose to speak first to ancient peoples living in cultures that are radically different from our own. As we recapture the original context of God's Word, we will be able to grasp its meaning and apply that meaning to our lives.

While some may label background studies "boring" and "irrelevant," we argue just the opposite—that knowing the background of a passage can clarify its meaning and heighten our understanding of its relevance. We believe that studying the historical-cultural context of a passage is among the most practical things you can do when it comes to Bible study.

### **Discussion Questions**

1. What can happen when people approach the Bible without any concern for the historical-cultural context? Care to share any examples from your own experience?

2. Can you think of an example of the historical-cultural context shedding significant light on the meaning of a biblical text?
3. For people living in an "instant application" society such as ours, what can persuade them to put forth effort to study the historical-cultural context?

## 2. Discovering the Literary Context

Imagine that you are a college student strolling to class one day when a total stranger hits you with a one-liner: "Go for it!" How would you respond? Would you say, "Sure," and walk away thinking that he or she was one fry short of a Happy Meal? Or would you take the message with all religious seriousness and conclude God must be speaking to you through that person, answering your prayers about your decision regarding a major, a new relationship, or whether to take the summer job?

To unveil the meaning of "go for it," most of us would probably come back with a few questions of our own. "What exactly do you mean?" or "Go for what?" We would ask questions as part of our search for a context to give meaning to those three little words. Without a context, "go for it" can mean almost anything. Without a context, words become meaningless.

When it comes to interpreting and applying the Bible, context is crucial. In fact, we would go so far as to say that the most important principle of biblical interpretation is that *context determines meaning*. When we ignore the context, we can twist the Scriptures and "prove" almost anything. Consider the example of a young man seeking advice from God's Word about whether to ask his girlfriend to marry him. As he dances around the Scriptures, he finds a couple of verses that provide the answer he so desperately wants with a timetable to boot. 1 Corinthians 7:36c: "They should get married." John 13:27: "What you are about to do, do quickly." The young man sees in the first verse a direct command to get married and in the second a timetable—get married now! God has spoken!

What keeps us from taking this ridiculous example seriously? *Context!* Apparently the young man did not bother to read the entire context of 1 Corinthians 7:36c, where the apostle Paul gives advice to engaged men in light of the distressing circumstances in Corinth (notice the italicized portions [italics have been added]) :

- If anyone thinks he is acting improperly toward the virgin he is engaged to, and if she is getting along in years and he feels he ought to marry, he should do as he wants. He is not sinning. *They should get married*. But the man who has settled the matter in his own mind, who is under no compulsion but has control over his own will, and who has made up his mind not to marry the virgin—this man also does the right thing.

*So then, he who marries the virgin does right, but he who does not marry her does even better. (1 Corinthians 7:36–38)*

In light of the situation, Paul actually says that it's better not to marry. In the second verse (John 13:27), the phrase "what you are about to do" refers to Judas's betraying Jesus and has nothing at all to do with marriage. Under the spotlight of context, we see that these two verses give the young man no scriptural basis for proposing marriage.

Not all examples are this ridiculous, of course, but every violation of context is a dangerous matter. By honoring the context of Scripture, we are saying that we would rather hear what God has to say than put words in his mouth. Context determines meaning!

Along with knowing more about the historical-cultural context, we also need to know about the literary context. *Literary context* relates to the particular form a passage takes (the *literary genre*) and to the words, sentences, and paragraphs that surround the passage you are studying (the *surrounding context*).

### ***What Is Literary Genre?***

Of every passage of Scripture, we must first notice the form it takes before we look at its content, since form affects content. The word *genre* is a word of French origin meaning "form" or "kind." When applied to biblical interpretation, the expression *literary genre* simply refers to the different *types* of literature found in the Bible. In the Old Testament you will encounter narrative, law, poetry, prophecy, and wisdom. The New Testament forms include gospel, history, letter, and prophetic-apocalyptic literature. Both Old and New Testaments feature a number of subgenres (e.g., parables, riddles, speeches).

Many linguists use the analogy of a game to describe literary genre. You can think of each genre as a different kind of game complete with its own set of rules. This insightful analogy shows how we as readers have to play by the rules when it comes to recognizing literary genre.

Think for a moment of a European soccer fan attending his first (American) football and basketball games. In football the offensive and defensive players can use their hands to push their opponents. In basketball and soccer they cannot. In basketball players cannot kick the ball, but they can hold it with their hands. In soccer the reverse is true. In football everyone can hold the ball with his hands but only one person can kick it. In soccer everyone can kick the ball but only one person can hold it. Unless we understand the rules under which the game is played, what is taking place is bound to be confusing.

In a similar way, there are different "game" rules involved in the interpretation of the different kinds of biblical literature. The author has "played his game"—that is, has sought to convey his meaning—under the rules covering the particular literary form he has used. Unless we know those rules, we will almost certainly misinterpret his meaning.<sup>5</sup>

For communication to occur, the reader must be on the same page as the author in terms of genre.

When the stranger said "go for it," you could have responded with questions to clarify the meaning. But how can we clarify the meaning of the ancient authors when they are not around to field our questions? The answer is literary genre. Even though the author and reader cannot have a face-to-face conversation, they meet in the text where they are able to communicate because they subscribe to a common set of rules—the rules of the particular genre.

In this way, literary genre acts as a kind of *covenant of communication*, a fixed agreement between author and reader about how to communicate. In order for us to "keep the covenant," we must let the author's choice of genre determine the rules we use to understand his words. To disregard literary genre in the Bible is to violate our covenant with the biblical author and with the Holy Spirit who inspired his message.

If you stop and think about it, you are constantly encountering different genres in the course of ordinary life. In a single day you might read a newspaper, look up a number in a telephone directory, order from a menu, reflect on a poem, enjoy a love letter, read a map showing how to get to a friend's house, or meditate on a devotional book. When you meet these different genres, you know (whether conscious of it or not) that you need to play by certain rules of communication, the rules established by the genre itself. If you fail to play by their rules, you run the risk of misreading.

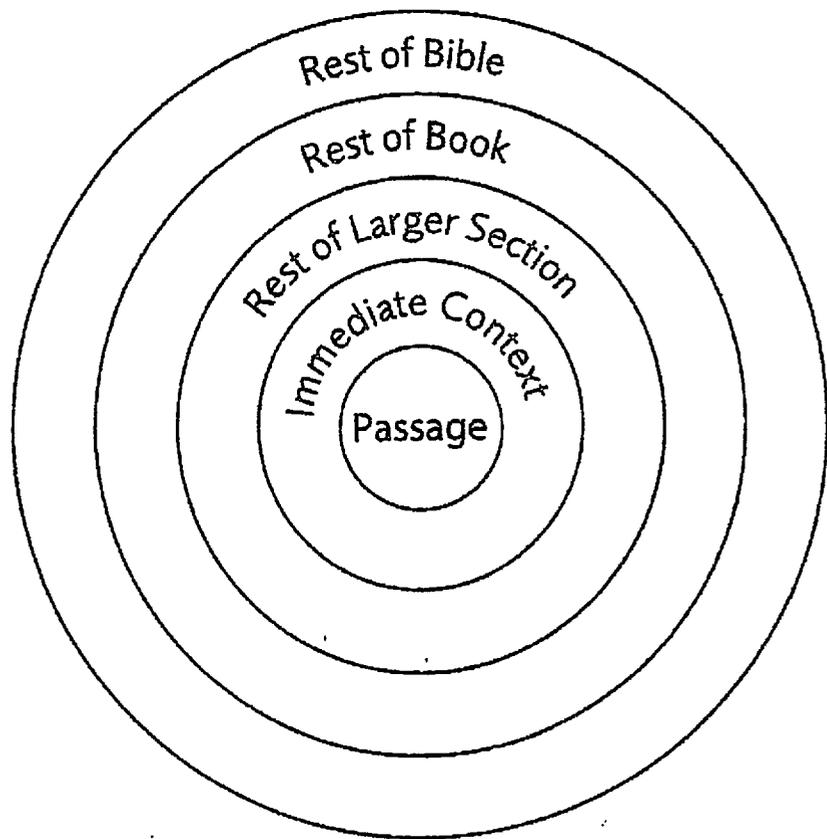
You run dangerous risks if you were to confuse a telephone directory with a love letter or mistake a menu for directions to a friend's house. Obviously we don't read menus the same way that we read love letters or newspapers the same way that we read devotional books. We know this because the genre game determines the rules for interpretation. Just as we know that the kind of game determines the rules we play by, so we know that each literary genre in the Bible comes with its own set of built-in rules for interpretation. When readers pay attention to those rules, they have a much greater chance of reading the passage as it was intended.

Genres shape our expectations about how to approach a particular text. The form or genre of the text really is connected to the content of the text, and for this reason, we should take literary genre seriously. The very meaning of the Bible is at stake!

### ***What Is Surrounding Context?***

Literary context includes not only the genre or type of literature, but also the *surrounding context*—the texts that surround the passage you are studying. You can think of it as the textual world in which your text lives. This includes the words, sentences, paragraphs, and discourses that come before and after your passage. The surrounding context of Romans 12:1-2, for instance, includes the first eleven chapters of Romans as well as Romans 12:3 through the end of the book. In a broader sense, the surrounding context of Romans 12:1-2 is the rest of the books in the New Testament and even the entire Old Testament. These various contexts form circles around your passage.

The *immediate context* circle is closest to the center since it describes what comes immediately before and after your passage. First Peter 5:7 is an encouraging verse:



37-A

"Cast all your anxiety on him because he cares for you." Do you recall its immediate context? The immediate context includes at least verses 5-9, perhaps more (v. 7 has been put in bold, below).

- Young men, in the same way be submissive to those who are older. All of you, clothe yourselves with humility toward one another, because, "God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble."
- Humble yourselves, therefore, under God's mighty hand, that he may lift you up in due time. Cast all your anxiety on him because he cares for you.
- Be self-controlled and alert. Your enemy the devil prowls around like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour. Resist him, standing firm in the faith, because you know that your brothers throughout the world are undergoing the same kind of sufferings.

We encourage you to give highest priority to the immediate context when determining the meaning of your passage. As the circles of the context diagram illustrates, the closer the circle is to the center, the greater influence it usually has on the meaning of your passage.

A careful look at the immediate context of 1 Peter 5:7 reveals that casting our cares on the Lord is strongly tied to humbling ourselves before him. This relationship grows even stronger when we realize that the word "cast" (v. 7) is actually a participle in the Greek text and should be translated "casting" (see, e.g., the NASB translation).

The immediate context reveals that humbling ourselves before God means that we entrust our concerns and troubles to God because we know that God loves us and will not let us down. Pride says to God, "I can bear this burden by myself," whereas humility involves casting our cares on our caring God. What a positive definition of humility! And that insight comes from a careful reading of the immediate context.

The next step is learning to *identify* the surrounding context of your passage. Before we do that, however, we should first discuss a couple of dangers associated with disregarding context.

### ***Dangers of Disregarding Literary Context***

You have probably heard it said that you can make the Bible say anything you want. That is true *only* if you disregard the literary context. When you honor the literary context (including the covenant of communication implicit in the genre), you cannot make the Bible say just anything. Cults are famous for Scripture twisting, and most of their miss-readings stem from a breach of literary context. Just because we approach Scripture as evangelical Christians does not make us immune to misinterpretations should we decide to neglect literary context. There are a number of dangers associated with disregarding literary context. Here we will point out only two of the most common problems.

#### ***1. Ignoring the Surrounding Context***

The first danger is simply ignoring the surrounding context.

This usually happens when individuals focus on a single verse without paying attention to how the surrounding verses might affect its meaning. For example, do you know the context of 2 Timothy 2:22, which reads: "Flee the evil desires of youth, and pursue righteousness, faith, love and peace, along with those who call on the Lord out of a pure heart."

Second Timothy 2:22 is a favorite verse for fighting off sexual temptation. But how does the surrounding context define "evil desires of youth"? Paul is writing to Timothy, who is facing the problem of false teachers within the leadership of the church at Ephesus. The previous unit (2:14-19) makes it clear that Timothy must resist the false teachers. This is supported by an analogy from the household (2:20—21). Likewise, 2:23—26 speaks of false teaching.

In verse 22 Paul tells Timothy to run away from foolish discussions, arguments, and theological novelties so attractive to young ministers (i.e., "evil desires of youth") and to run instead after righteousness, faith, love, and peace with the true people of God. Much to the surprise of some, this verse has little (if anything) to do with sexual temptation.

The way our Bibles have been divided into chapters and verses doesn't help matters much. The chapter and verse numbers help us find passages quickly, but they can also lead us to believe that each verse stands alone as an independent unit of thought, which is not the case. Just because we attach numbers to the sentences in a paragraph doesn't mean that we can rip one particular sentence out of its context and disconnect it from what precedes or follows.

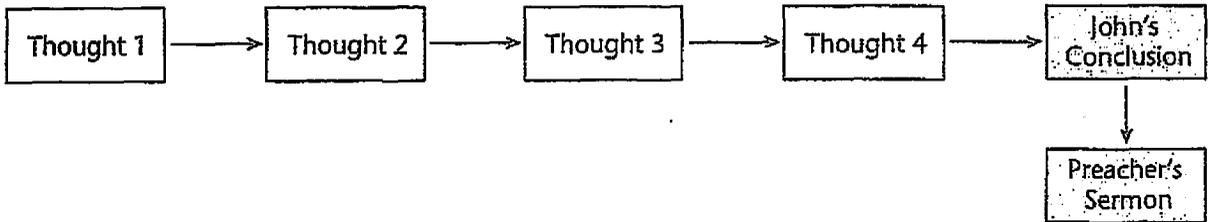
We also need to remember that the chapter and verse divisions were not part of the original documents but were added much later. When we speak of the Holy Spirit's inspiring the Scriptures, we are talking about the text itself, not about the reference numbers. Don't let these later editorial additions cause you to lift individual sentences out of their surrounding context and give them a meaning never intended by their authors.

## ***2. Topical Preaching***

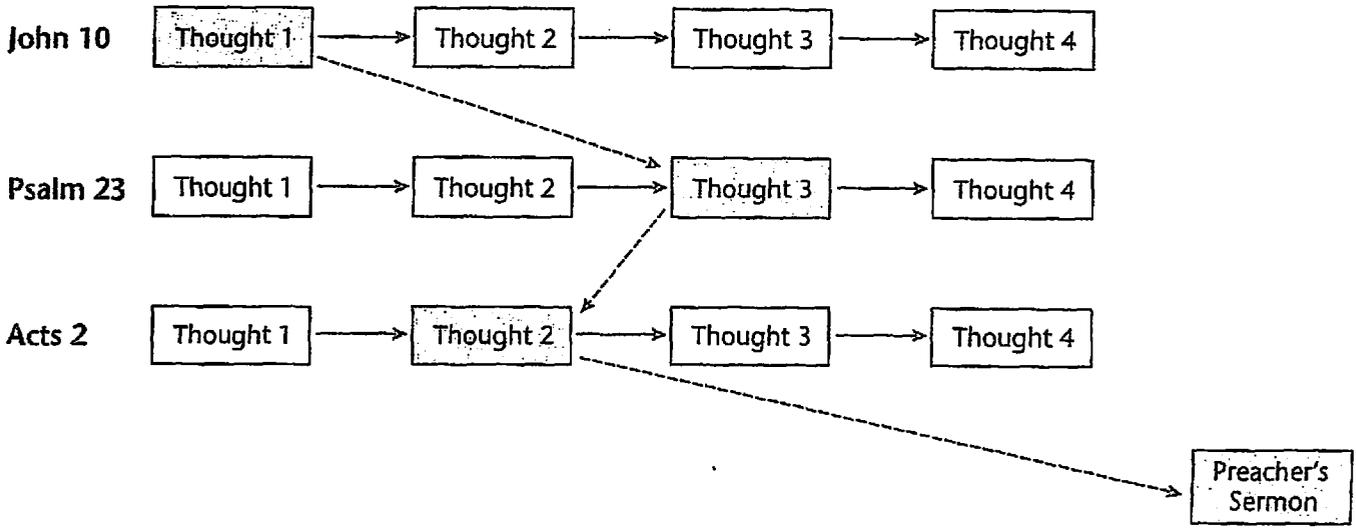
A second danger associated with disregarding literary context relates to how Scripture is preached. Topical preaching is a valid approach to preaching when the various passages are understood in context and the overall message doesn't violate those individual contexts. But far too often topical preaching distorts the meaning of Scripture by disregarding the literary context. Here is how that happens.

- Expository preaching (in contrast to topical preaching) will follow an author's flow of thought through a particular text (e.g., John 10) in order to grasp the intended meaning and communicate that meaning to the congregation.
- Topical preaching, by contrast, often jumps from one passage to another by stringing together a series of originally unrelated thoughts (see the resulting diagram below). That is the same as jumping from the newspaper to the menu to the poem to the love letter, picking thoughts at random, in order to construct a message of your own choosing.

John 10



39A



39-B

You can see how this approach could easily violate the literary context and lead to all sorts of unbiblical conclusions. Quoting Bible passages out of context may make for an entertaining sermon, but it will mask God's true message. Misreading the Bible ultimately hurts people by enslaving them rather than setting them free with truth. What if the young man we mentioned at the beginning of the chapter really believed God had told him to marry his girlfriend when in fact God had done no such thing? The young man's failure to consider the context would cause a misreading with serious relational consequences. Of course, his girlfriend might say "no" to his proposal and encourage him to take a class on Interpreting the Bible. Then all would be well.

### *How to Identify the Surrounding Context*

The Bible is more than a collection of unrelated parts. The Holy Spirit moved the biblical writers to connect their words, sentences, and paragraphs into a literary whole in the normal way that people use language to communicate. Just imagine how a document would appear if the sentences were not linked together to form a unified message. Better yet, read the following paragraph:

- I heard an interesting story on the news the other night. The quarterback faded back to pass. Carbon buildup was keeping the carburetor from functioning properly. The two-inch steaks were burned on the outside but raw on the inside. Ten-foot-high snow drifts blocked the road. The grass needed mowing. The elevator raced to the top of the one-hundred-story building in less than a minute. The audience booed the poor performance.

We typically don't string together randomly selected ideas when we are trying to communicate. Normally, sentences build on previous sentences and lead into later sentences in order to produce a coherent message. As God's communication to us, the parts of the Bible connect to form a whole, while the whole in turn provides guidelines or boundaries for understanding the parts.

When we ask you to identify the surrounding context, we are asking you to see how these sentences (the parts) fit together in a book to communicate the larger message (the whole). We cannot read the author's mind, but we can trace his thought as it flows through each sentence and paragraph to form the whole book. We want to see how the smaller units connect to form the larger units. Moreover, the most accurate interpretation of a passage is the one that best fits that passage's surrounding context.

We are going to use the short New Testament book of Philemon to illustrate how you identify the surrounding context of a passage. Suppose that you are trying to determine the surrounding context of Philemon 4-7 (there is only one chapter in the entire book of Philemon). Take a moment and read Philemon in your Bible. To grasp what Paul really means in verses 4-7, you need to examine what Paul says before and after this passage. This is what we mean by "surrounding context" — how a section fits with what comes before and after it. Finding the surrounding context of any passage consists of three steps:

- identify how the book is divided into paragraphs or sections
- summarize the main idea of each section

- explain how your particular passage relates to the surrounding sections.

Let's continue with our Philemon example.

1. *Identify how the book is divided into paragraphs or sections.* Look at several different Bible translations to see how the translators have divided the book and the chapters into smaller units. Although there will not be universal agreement about how to divide the text into sections, often there will be a consensus among the translations (as there is with vv. 4-7). If you want to do the work yourself, you need to look for changes in the text as clues to a shift in the author's flow of thought (e.g., conjunctions, changes of literary type, topic or theme, time, location, setting).

You will notice some of these transition points in Philemon. Paul switches from a greeting to a prayer between verses 3 and 4. Don't miss the conjunction "therefore" in verse 8 and the "so" in verse 17, both beginning new sections.

2. *Summarize the main idea of each section in about a dozen words or less.* For each statement that you write, make sure that you summarize the point of the whole section and not just a portion of the section. After writing a summary, you may want to read the section again and see if your summary truly captures the entire section. When writing your summary, think about two things: (a) the topic or main idea of the section, and (b) what the author says about the topic or main idea. Take a look at our summaries for each section of Philemon:
  - vv. 1 —3: Paul identifies the letter senders/recipients and offers a greeting.
  - vv. 4 — 7: Paul thanks God for Philemon's faith and love and intercedes for him.
  - vv. 8-16: Paul appeals to Philemon for his "son" Onesimus and offers Philemon perspective on God's providence in the matter.
  - vv. 17-20: Paul urges Philemon to receive Onesimus as he would receive Paul himself.
  - v. 21: Paul expresses confidence that Philemon will do even more than he asks.
  - v. 22: Paul shares his hope to come in person and visit Philemon.
  - vv. 23 —24: Paul shares greetings from his fellow workers.
  - v. 25: Paul closes the letter with a benediction of grace.

3. *Explain how the section you are studying relates to the surrounding sections.* Now that you can see the author's flow of thought through the entire book by reading your section summaries, it is time to look at how your passage fits into its surroundings. We tell our students, "If you do nothing else besides read what comes before and what comes after your passage, you will eliminate about 75 percent of all interpretive mistakes." The heart of identifying the surrounding context is observing how your section relates to what comes before it and what comes after it. In Philemon, our section (vv. 4-7) is sandwiched between the opening of the letter (vv. 1-3) and the body of the letter (vv. 8-22). Almost everything that Paul says in our thanksgiving and prayer passage prepares the reader for what he is about to say in the body of the letter.

- In this case, the thanksgiving becomes the basis for the request that follows. Paul attributes a number of qualities to Philemon in verses 4-7, the very qualities that will

enable him to respond positively to Paul's upcoming request. Paul thanks God that Philemon trusts the Lord and loves people. This love, Paul goes on to say, has "given me great joy and encouragement." He also commends Philemon for refreshing the hearts of the saints. Now Paul has a favor to ask about one saint in particular, Onesimus. Thus, the thanksgiving and prayer section (vv. 4-7) prepares the way for the body of the letter. Philemon's good qualities that are highlighted in verses 4-7 provide the character anchor that will motivate him to do what Paul is about to request in the rest of the letter. When we study Philemon 4-7 with its surrounding context in view, we can truly grasp the meaning of the passage.

## **Conclusion**

We study literary context of Scripture because the interpretation that best fits the context is the most valid interpretation. When we disregard literary context, we run the risk of forcing the Bible to say what we want it to say. This may appear to satisfy people's immediate needs, but ultimately, this approach hurts people by robbing them of God's liberating truth. People are seeking time-tested answers to problems that are staring them in the face, answers that contemporary culture simply cannot supply. When we take the literary context seriously, we are saying, "We want to hear what God is trying to say to us."

We honor the literary context by playing by the game rules established by the author through his use of literary genre and when we pay close attention to the surrounding context. We ourselves communicate by connecting our words, sentences, and paragraphs into a coherent message, and the Bible does the same. As you honor the literary context of a passage of Scripture, you will be saying through your actions that above all, you want to hear what God has to say to you through his Word.

## **Discussion Questions**

1. What happens if you carefully consider the surrounding context of a passage, but ignore its literary genre?
2. Besides those examples cited in this chapter, what are some instances of interpreting a biblical passage apart from its immediate context?
3. When is topical preaching contextually valid? When does it disregard and violate context?

→ Divide

1. The first step is to identify the problem and the goal of the project.

2. The second step is to gather information and resources.

3. The third step is to develop a plan and strategy.

4. The fourth step is to implement the plan and monitor progress.

5. The fifth step is to evaluate the results and make adjustments.

# Basic Concepts for Teaching the Bible

## Part IV

### Section 1. What do We bring to the Text

In the final sections we will be discussing the importance of *context* to biblical interpretation. One context that is often overlooked is the context of the reader —the world from which the reader approaches the text. As readers of the Bible, we are not by nature neutral and objective. We bring a lot of preconceived notions and influences with us to the text when we read. Thus, we need to discuss and evaluate these "pretext" influences, lest they mislead us in our search for the meaning of the text.

#### *Pre-understanding*

One major influence that can skew our interpretive process and lead us away from the real meaning in the text is what we call *pre-understanding*. Pre-understanding refers to all of our preconceived notions and understandings that we bring to the text, which have been formulated, both consciously and subconsciously, *before* we actually study the text in detail. The pre-understanding problem is the broader issue that links with the cultural problems discussed in more detail below. Pre-understanding includes specific experiences and previous encounters with the text that tend to make us assume that we already understand it.

Pre-understanding is formed by both good and bad influences, some accurate and some inaccurate. It includes everything you have heard in Sunday school, at church, in Bible studies, and in your private reading of the Bible. However, pre-understandings of biblical texts are also formed by hymns and other Christian music, pop songs, jokes, art, and non-biblical literature, both Christian and secular. Likewise, culture constantly creeps in.

Another dangerous aspect of pre-understanding surfaces when we come to the text with a theological agenda already formulated. That is, we start into a text with a specific slant we are looking for, and we use the text merely to search for details that fit with our agenda. Anything that does not fit in with the meaning we are looking for we simply skip or ignore. That is, *we* as readers stand *over* the Word of God and determine what it means, rather than placing ourselves *under* that Word, seeking diligently to determine what *God* means in the text.

A related danger is that of familiarity. If we are thoroughly familiar with a passage, we tend to think that we know all there is to know about it and are prone to skip over it without studying it carefully. Hopefully you realized in sections 2 and 3 of Part II that most passages have a lot of depth to them, and we are unlikely to exhaust them or to grasp all there is to grasp in a few short visits to that text. Familiarity with a passage creates pre-understanding. As we revisit these familiar texts, we must resist the temptation of letting our familiarity dictate our conclusions before we even get started studying a text.

One of the most powerful, yet subtle, aspects of pre-understanding is that of culture. Our theology tells us to ask, *What would Jesus do?* Our culture, however, may subconsciously be telling us to ask, *What would Jason Bourne do?* Undoubtedly, our culture has a tremendous influence on how we read and interpret the Bible. For example, even though we believe that Jesus is our Lord and Savior, when he tells us to turn the other cheek, a voice in the back of our head objects. After all, turning the other cheek is not really the American way. It is not what Jason Bourne would do. Perhaps he might turn his cheek once and let his adversary strike him a second time just to demonstrate his patience and control, but undoubtedly after that second strike he would thrash the bad guy soundly (and we would all cheer). None of our action heroes turns the other cheek!

Thus, when we read of such a command from Jesus, we immediately try to interpret it in such a way that it does not conflict with cultural norms, especially those set by the culture's heroes. This culture-driven predisposition we call *cultural baggage*. Imagine that you are about to embark on a long hike in the mountains on a hot day. You wear good hiking boots and a hat. You bring sunglasses and a canteen. Should you bring three or four suitcases along? How ridiculous! Can you imagine hiking through the mountains with a suitcase under each arm?

If we are not careful, our culture will likewise weigh us down on the Interpretive Journey and hinder us from discovering God's message to us. Our culture tends to make us skew the text as we read it, twisting it to fit with our cultural world. Or, sometimes our culture works in us subconsciously to fill in all the gaps and missing details of the passage we are reading.

A good illustration of the subconscious influence of culture on our pre-understanding occurs when we read the book of Jonah and then try to visualize Jonah inside the great fish. Try to imagine this scene yourself. What do you see? Do you see Jonah squashed-up inside of the tight stomach of a whale, with no space between him and the stomach walls? Most people do not see that image. Many people, including ourselves, see Jonah inside a circular-shaped stomach, about six to eight feet in diameter, with a little bit of water at the bottom. Obviously this is not really what the inside of a whale (or fish) looks like.

So why do we see this? Where might this image come from? We suggest it comes from the movie (or book) *Pinocchio*. In this Walt Disney movie a whale swallows the main character, Pinocchio. The movie then presents us with a scene that portrays Pinocchio sitting inside the whale (a barrel-shaped room on its side, six to eight feet in diameter, etc.). This movie thus leaves us with a subconscious image of a person sitting inside a whale. When we read of Jonah's digestive misfortune, our minds begin an image search back through our memory banks, looking for a picture from which to visualize the event. As our mind searches through the files in its memory, it hits a match in the *Pinocchio* file, and a picture comes to mind without our conscious reckoning of where we obtained the image. Subconsciously we begin to fill in the descriptive gaps in the Jonah story with information that comes from a Hollywood movie! Thus, we find ourselves influenced in our reading of the Bible without even realizing what has happened. Cultural influence is huge!

What exactly do we mean by *culture*? Our culture is a combination of family and national heritage. You learn it from your Mom at breakfast, from the kids on the playground at school, and from television. It is a mix of language, customs, stories, movies, jokes, literature, and national habits. For Americans it is comprised of Big Macs, Barbie dolls, Tiger Woods, and Hollywood all mixed-in with George Washington, Babe Ruth, the Mississippi River, Wal-Mart, and the space shuttle.

Cultural influences can vary somewhat, however, even within the same city. If you grew up in an inner city, blue-collar, Catholic home with both parents, your culture differs in many respects from someone who grew up in a suburban, white-collar, single-parent, Protestant home, but you will still share many of the same cultural influences. However, even though they share some common cultural features, black, white, Asian, and Hispanic cultures differ significantly, even within North America. Once you move out of North America, you will encounter even more drastic differences in culture.

Your family background is a central element in your cultural world. You have inherited many, many values, ideas, and images (for good and for bad) from your family. For example, what are your views about money, work, the poor, or the unemployed? Your views have undoubtedly been shaped by your family's socioeconomic setting and its outlook.

Your family also provides you with your strongest frame of reference regarding relationships. If you were fortunate enough to grow up in a loving, caring family, it will be easy for you to transpose the imagery of this experience to the imagery of God's care for you. If you had a loving father, for example, then the biblical image of God as a loving Father will be easy for you to grasp. In this case, the cultural influence of your family background helps you to grasp the biblical truth about God.

Unfortunately, however, not everyone has had a loving father. Those who have grown up with negligent or even abusive fathers carry a lot of baggage into the biblical texts that describe God as a Father. This doesn't mean that these people cannot grasp this aspect of biblical truth, but it does mean that they will have to work harder to overcome some of the negative images from their childhood. Other images of God and his care may relate better to them. As we all seek to understand God's Word, it is important that we acknowledge and identify the cultural influences at work in our heads and hearts.

We recognize full well that Christians do not culturally misread the Bible intentionally. As noted above, all of us tend to be influenced by our culture subconsciously. It is a natural thing to do, and we do it without thinking about it. This subconscious interpretation, however, affects our understanding of the Bible in two ways:

- We tend to fill in all of the gaps and ambiguities in the biblical texts with explanations and background from our culture.
- More damaging to our interpretation is the fact that our cultural background preforms a parameter of limiting possibilities for a text even before we grapple with the intended meaning. In this situation, based on our culture we subconsciously create a world of

interpretive possibilities and a world of interpretive impossibilities. In other words, our cultural setting has driven us to decide possible and impossible meanings for the text even before we study them.

Let's examine again Jesus' command to turn the other cheek. Our subconscious agenda seeks to legitimize our cultural worldview, that is, the way things are in our culture. Thus, before we even start to explore what Jesus meant when he said this, we place parameters of possibility around the text and eliminate culturally conflicting possible meanings. It cannot possibly mean that if someone bad hits you, you are to let them hit you again. However, by doing this we are placing our culture above the Bible and reading the Bible through culture-colored lenses. In this way we miss one of the main points of the Bible, namely, that the biblical message is from God and is above culture. The challenge is to critique our culture with the Bible and not vice versa.

Pre-understanding, including culture, is not inherently bad, but it can often skew our understanding of the Bible, leading us down the trail of misinterpretation. We do not want to abandon our pre-understanding, throwing all of our previous encounters with the text into the trash. What we do want to do is to submit our pre-understanding to the text, placing it under the text and not over the text. We must be able to identify our pre-understanding and then be open to changing it in accordance with a truly serious study of the text. That is, after we have studied the text thoroughly, we then evaluate our pre-understanding and modify it appropriately in light of our current study.

### ***Biblical Presuppositions***

Our approach to pre-understanding, however, does not suggest that our objective is to read and interpret the Bible in a completely neutral manner, apart from any pre-suppositional viewpoint, such as faith. Total objectivity is impossible for any reader of any text. Neither is it our goal. Striving for objectivity in biblical interpretation does not mean abandoning faith or trying to adopt the methods of unbelievers. Trying to read the Bible apart from faith does not produce objectivity.

We define pre-understanding and biblical presupposition as two distinct entities that we deal with in two quite different ways. We must let our pre-understanding change each time we study a passage. We submit it to the text and then interact with it, evaluate it in light of our study, and, one would hope, improve it each time. Biblical presuppositions, by contrast, do not change with each reading. They are not related to particular passages but to our overall view of the Bible.

As Christians we serve the living Lord and have the Holy Spirit living within us. The relationship we have with God is a critical aspect of the communication we have with him through reading his Word. This relationship impacts us greatly as we interpret, and it is not something we want to renegotiate each time we read a text, as we do with pre-understanding aspects. Rather, it is something we want to use. It is important to note that we as evangelical Christians have several *presuppositions* about the Bible itself that develop out of our relationship with Christ that we will not set aside when we tackle a passage. For example:

1. The Bible is the Word of God. Although God worked through people to produce it, it is nonetheless inspired by the Holy Spirit and is God's Word to us.

2. The Bible is trustworthy and true.
3. God has entered into human history; thus the supernatural (miracles, etc.) does occur.
4. The Bible is not contradictory; it is unified, yet diverse. Nevertheless, God is bigger than we are, and he is not always easy to comprehend. Thus, the Bible also has tension and mystery to it.

We could perhaps add other presuppositions, but these are the central ones that need to be mentioned in this chapter. These presuppositions have to do with how we view the entire Bible and serve as foundations on which to build our method of study.

### **Conclusion – Can We Be Objective?**

Many writers have pointed out that total objectivity in interpretation is impossible, and we acknowledge this. However, total objectivity is not our goal. As Christians who have an intimate relationship with God through Jesus Christ, we are not striving for a neutral, objective viewpoint. We do not seek to be secular historians as we study the text (they are not objective either). We seek to hear what God has to say to us. Thus, we approach the text through faith and in the Spirit. So we want objectivity within the framework of evangelical presuppositions like those listed above. This type of objectivity has to do with preventing *our* pre-understanding, *our* culture, *our* familiarity, or *our* laziness from obscuring the meaning God intends for us in the text. This task also can be challenging; however, it is to this task that *Journey into God's Word* is devoted.

Every chapter in this book deals with some aspect of correcting our pre-understanding or neutralizing the negative cultural influences on our understanding. The observation tools we learned in chapters 2 and 3 will help us to be objective. The method of reading carefully that was presented in those chapters requires that we submit our pre-understanding to the text while we scrutinize it for details. Merely discovering the details of the text often corrects many of our pre-understandings and cultural misconstrues.

This chapter has merely delineated the problems we as readers bring to the text—the cultural baggage and pre-understandings that we must deal with as pre-text issues. The solution to the problem lies within the Interpretive Journey. We hope you are finding the trip rewarding. We certainly think it is worth all of the hard work and effort that you must exert as you travel through the following chapters!

### **Discussion Questions**

1. What is the difference between pre-understanding and presuppositions as defined in this chapter?
2. How do you think your own pre-understanding influences the way you read the Bible?
3. How should we deal with our pre-understanding as we go about the task of responsible interpretation?

## Section 2. Meaning and application

### *Who Controls the Meaning, the Reader or the Author?*

A favorite video for most children is an old movie entitled *The Wizard of Oz*. This movie is based on the book by L. Frank Baum. This delightful tale was about a young girl named Dorothy and her cute dog, Toto, who overcame the odds and defeated the powerful and scary "bad guys" (the wicked witches) with some help from Dorothy's nice new friends. To the young children the story had this simple meaning.

If we observe the story closely, however, and if we start to poke around into the historical background of the time Baum wrote the book, a different meaning surfaces. One of the hottest political debates going on in America when Baum wrote this story was over the issue of whether America should continue to use the gold standard as the basis for the U.S. dollar or whether it should switch to silver. This historical context suggests that the main line of the book ("Follow the yellow brick road!") may be a reference to the central political issue of the day. Remember that although the yellow brick road led to the great wizard of Oz, once Dorothy arrived there, she discovered he was a fraud. Dorothy's real hope lay in her shoes. In Baum's book the shoes are *silver*. Hollywood changed them to ruby so they would show up better in color for the movie. So, perhaps the book falls into the classification of political satire.

According to this line of interpretation, the characters in the story then probably represent different segments of American society. The Scarecrow represents the farmers (supposedly, no brains). Who would the Tin Woodsman represent? The factory workers (no heart). And the cowardly lion perhaps represents the political leadership of the country. We also meet the wicked witch of the east (the East Coast establishment?) and the wicked witch of the west (the West Coast establishment?). And who is the heroine? Middle America—Dorothy from Kansas."

So, who is right? Are Danny's kids *wrong* to interpret the story as a simple tale of good triumphing over evil? Did not the author intend it to be read as political satire? Are we wrong if we understand it otherwise? What *is* the meaning of the story? And *who* determines that meaning?

This question about meaning has prompted a lively and sometimes heated debate, not only in secular literary circles, but also among students and scholars of the Bible. Throughout the first half of the twentieth century, the traditional approach to interpreting any literature, biblical or secular, was to assume that the author determines the meaning and the reader's job is to find that meaning. Within the world of secular literary criticism, however, this approach came under attack throughout the latter half of the twentieth century, and many literary critics today argue that it is the *reader*, and not the *author*, who determines what a text *means*.

This view has drifted over from secular literary criticism into the field of biblical interpretation. Many biblical scholars began probing the question, *What is meaning?* Some concluded that the term *meaning* only applies as a reader interacts with a text—that it takes both reader and text to produce *meaning*. The author, they argue, is no longer involved.

Of course, there remain those who maintain that the original author still controls the meaning.

As an author writes, they argue, he or she intends to convey a certain meaning in the text. This intended meaning of the author's is the true meaning of the text.

The position that stresses the author in the determination of meaning is called *authorial intention*. The opposing view, which focuses on the reader as the main character in the determination of meaning, is called *reader response*. Both positions have strong arguments. Which approach should we take?

### ***Communication—the Central Issue***

Certainly the reader has the freedom to interpret a text any way he or she chooses. No one will force you to read *The Wonderful Wizard of Oz* as political satire. So the author has control of the meaning only so far as the reader allows him to. But suppose, for example, that you receive a mushy love poem written to you by your girlfriend or boyfriend. As you read each word and line of the poem, you will be searching for the meaning that your girlfriend or boyfriend intended. You will want to know what he or she is trying to say *to you*. In this situation you will be following the *authorial intention* approach because you are viewing the text as *communication* between the author and yourself. You know the author and you want to know what the author is saying to you. You will be asking the interpretive question, *What does the author mean?*

Let's assume, however, that one day as you walk through the woods, you find a piece of paper on the ground with a love poem written on it. The author is not even identified. The poem, however, is beautiful, and you enjoy it as you read. In this situation you may not care what the author intended or what the author meant. You do not even know who the author is. You have the freedom in this situation to read and interpret according to *reader response*. Your interpretive question will change to *What does this mean to me?* In the woods with an anonymous poem you are free to ignore the author and his or her meaning.

In many situations, however, it is extremely important that we search for the author's meaning because of serious negative consequences that will come if we misunderstand or intentionally ignore the meaning the author intended. For example, one of the most common literary texts in America is the big word STOP painted on the red octagonal signs at many street intersections across the country. If you choose to, you can follow a *reader response* approach and interpret the text to mean: *slow down just a bit, look for cars, and then speed on through the intersection*. Or perhaps it means Spin Tires On Pavement! The police, however, believe strongly in *authorial intent* for the determination of meaning, so they will respond to your interpretation with a traffic ticket and fine.

The issue of communication, therefore, lies at the heart of one's decision about how to interpret a text. If you, the reader, see the text as a communication between the author and yourself, you should search for the meaning that the *author intended*. If, however, you as the reader do not care to communicate with the author, then you are free to follow *reader response* and interpret the text without asking what the author meant.

In some cases, however, there may be negative consequences for such a reading.

Can you see how this discussion applies to reading and interpreting the Bible? This is an important issue—one that lies at the foundation of our approach to interpreting Scripture. If you read the Bible merely as great literature, merely for its aesthetic value, or merely for its suggestive moral guidance, not as communication from God, then you can interpret the text in any way you choose. Your main interpretive question will be: *What does this text mean to me?* If, however, you believe that the Bible is God's revelatory Word to you and that the Scriptures function as communication from God to you, you should interpret the Bible by looking for the meaning that God, the author, intended. Your interpretive question should be: *What is the meaning God intended in this text?*

We believe strongly that the Bible is a revelation from God to us. God's purpose is to *communicate* with us about himself and his will for us. We can choose to ignore his message and interpret biblical texts according to our feelings and desires, but if we do, we will suffer the consequences of disobedience. We will also miss out on knowing God in the way he desires. So it is essential that we follow the *authorial intent* approach to interpreting the Bible. In biblical interpretation, the reader does not control the meaning; the author controls the meaning. This conclusion leads us to one of the most basic principles of our interpretive approach: *We do not create the meaning. Rather, we seek to discover the meaning that has been placed there by the author.*

### ***Definitions***

At this juncture it is also important that we define the terms *meaning* and *application*. We will use the term *meaning* to refer to that which the author wishes to convey with his signs." Signs are simply the different conventions of written language — grammar, syntax, word meanings, and so on. Thus, in biblical interpretation meaning is not determined by the reader. Meaning is what the author intended to communicate when he wrote the text. What the reader does with the meaning is *application*. Once we identify the meaning in the text that God is trying to communicate to us, then we must respond to that meaning. We use the term *application* to refer to the response of the reader to the meaning of the text. Thus, it would be incorrect for us to ask in a Bible study, "What does this passage *mean* to you?" The correct question sequence is, "What does this passage *mean*? How should you *apply* this meaning to your life?"

### ***Applying the Meaning***

We cannot apply the Bible without knowing what it means, but we can know the Bible without applying it. We can investigate context, analyze words, and even memorize chapters, but unless we act on what we know, we do not truly understand that Word. Knowledge by itself is not enough; it should lead to action.

We began the Interpretive Journey by discovering the meaning of the text in *the town* of the biblical audience.

Then we measured the width of the river of differences and crossed the *principilizing* bridge.

Now it is time to ask, "How can we apply the meaning of the text in our town?"

Keep in mind that there is a vast difference between knowing how to apply a biblical text and actually applying that text in your life. Once you know how a text could be applied, it is up to you to submit to the Spirit of God and live out the application.

For example, in Ephesians 4:26 we are told not to let the sun go down while we are still angry. We find in this verse the *theological principle* of putting a fairly short time limit on dealing with anger. As a volatile emotion, if anger goes unchecked for long, it can do major damage. One *application* of this principle would be to make sure that when you get angry with your spouse or someone at work, you deal with the problem as soon as possible (e.g., before the end of the day). We will now show you how to determine valid applications for theological principles you have discovered in a biblical text. Since applications may vary from reader to reader, we need a reliable method of making sure that the applications are within the boundaries established by the author's meaning.

Our approach to applying biblical meaning follows the steps of the Interpretive Journey you are already familiar with (see Part I Section 1). We can expand Step 4 as we detail the application process into several sub-steps:

- Observe how the principles in the text address the original situation.
- Discover a parallel situation in a contemporary context.
- Make your application specific.

We will illustrate the application of process using Philippians 4:13, a popular text that is often misapplied: "I can do everything through him [Christ] who gives me strength." In each section, we will cite the step, discuss the process, and then apply it to our example.

*Step 1: Grasp the text in their town by summarizing the original situation (historical-cultural context) and the meaning of the text for the biblical audience.*

- Regarding Philippians 4:13, we should note that Paul is writing this letter while in prison awaiting trial (1:7, 13 —14, 17). His faithfulness to Christ in the ministry of the gospel has landed him in prison. In this friendship letter, he exhorts the Philippians to stand firm in the face of external opposition and warns them against internal fighting. He reports about his own situation and thanks them for their ministry to him. In Philippians 4:10-13, Paul acknowledges their monetary gift sent through their mutual friend, Epaphroditus. He also wants to make it clear that while he is most grateful for their gift, his ministry is ultimately dependent on Christ.

*Step 2: Measure the width of the river to cross.* What are the differences between the biblical situation and our situation?

- When we interpret New Testament letters, normally the river is not very wide or deep. There are exceptions, of course (e.g., dealing with the passage about meat offered to idols in 1 Corinthians), but usually this is the case.

Regarding the Philippians passage, there are a few differences. Paul is an apostle and we are not apostles. Paul is in prison and most of us have not been imprisoned for our faith (or for any other reason, we hope). Neither are we members of the Philippian church that have supported Paul's ministry financially. But there are also similarities. We are New Testament Christians under the same covenant. We are also members of Christ's body, the church. Moreover, many of us experience difficult situations as we seek to live out our faith. For the most part, the river of differences for Philippians 4:13 is not wide.

*Step 3: Cross the principlizing bridge.* List the theological principles communicated by the passage.

- As for Philippians 4:13, you could say, "Believers can learn to be content in a variety of circumstances through Christ, who gives them strength." Or you might prefer, "Christ will give believers strength to be content in a variety of trying circumstances that come as a result of following him faithfully."

*Step 4: Grasp the text in our town.* How should individual Christians today apply the theological principles in their lives? This step consists of several sub-steps.

- *Observe how the principles in the text address the original situation.* Look carefully at how the biblical principle addresses the historical-cultural situation. What you see in this intersection between the text and the situation is the heart and soul of the application process. There will be certain *key elements* present in the intersection of text and situation that will prove significant for the rest of the application process. As the principle in Philippians 4:13 intersects with the historical-cultural situation, several key elements emerge:
  - **Element 1:** A Christian (Paul)
  - **Element 2:** A Christian who is experiencing a variety of trying circumstances as a result of following Christ faithfully (Paul is in prison because of his service in the cause of Christ)
  - **Element 3:** Christ's promise to give the Christian strength to endure whatever the circumstances

With key elements in hand we are ready to connect to our world and make application to our lives.

- *Discover a parallel situation in a contemporary context.* In applying the Bible we have to be students not only of the biblical world but also of our own world. Search for a situation in your life (or your world) that parallels the biblical situation. When we speak of a *parallel* situation, we mean a situation that contains *all* of the key elements you identified in the previous step.

Below we provide two scenarios. The first is only an apparent parallel situation since it does not contain all the key elements; the second is a genuine parallel that does contain all the key elements.

- *Example I.* Philippians 4:13 has become a popular theme verse for Christian athletes in American society. The verse was even prominently displayed on the robe of a recent championship boxer. The phrase "I can do everything" no doubt motivated the boxer to

defeat his opponent or at least to do his best. Assuming that Paul and the boxer are both Christians (element 1 above) and that they both look to Christ for strength (element 3), we are still missing at least one key element of the intersection between the original situation and the text (element 2). Paul and the boxer have radically different understandings of the expression, "I can do everything." A close look at the literary context of Philippians 4:13 reveal that the word "everything" refers to a variety of trying circumstances. At this point in his life, Paul is experiencing a trial of need rather than a trial of plenty.

When Paul says he can "do everything," he is referring to being content or enduring rather than conquering. There is a big difference between the "trials" of athletic competition and the trial of being imprisoned for your faith.

We misapply the Bible when we grab a situation that is not a genuine parallel. There may be a superficial connection, but one or more of the key elements are missing. Ultimately when we misapply the Bible, we hurt people by pointing them toward false realities. People put their hope in something they think is true when it is not, and they suffer for it. In our example from Philippians, the principle of contentment in Christ whatever the circumstances is replaced by a proof text calling on God to help us win the game or the contest. How does this misapplication affect the faith of a losing boxer? Couldn't the boxer actually apply this verse more appropriately after a serious defeat? What do you suppose God should do if this boxer fought another Christian boxer who also claimed the promise of Philippians 4:13?

- *Example 2.* You are a single mother whose non-Christian husband recently deserted you because of your commitment to Christ. Your two small children suddenly find themselves without a father. The sense of personal failure weighs heavy. The social pressure of what people will say lingers. You face overwhelming financial burdens and worry about how you will survive on your part-time job. As life seems to crumble around you, God has given you an unshakable peace that Jesus Christ is with you, that he understands, and that he will see you through. In this last scenario all the key elements are present: (1) a Christian (2) who is experiencing tough circumstances because of his or her commitment to Christ (3) but who looks to Christ for strength to endure. As you identify contemporary situations that are parallel, you can have confidence that you are applying the meaning of the biblical text rather than an invented meaning. The next step is to be even more specific with your application.
- *Make your applications specific.* Once you have identified a parallel situation —a genuine parallel — you should give some thought to specific ways the biblical principle (s) might apply. What should the single mother think or do as she turns to Christ for strength?

(We say *think* or *do* because applications may touch on ways of thinking as well as ways of acting or behaving.) If we never make our applications specific, people may not know how to live out the message of the Bible in the down and dirty of real life.

Don't be afraid to make specific suggestions. People don't just need to know *what* to do; they also need to know *how* to do it.

Perhaps the best way to make your applications specific is by creating *real-world scenarios*. These scenarios function as illustrations or examples of how a person might put the biblical principles into practice. They help us move beyond abstract principles to capture the color and emotion of the biblical principle. We are quick to admit that these real-world scenarios are not on the same level as inspired Scripture; they are merely illustrations.

But we intend for them to be guided by the Holy Spirit and to be faithful to the biblical principles (i.e., consistent with the author's intended meaning). We also want the contemporary audience to know that God's Word is eternally relevant. Real-world scenarios should be both faithful to the meaning of the text and relevant to the contemporary audience. Let's give it a try. *Example.* A real-world scenario making specific applications for the single mother as introduced above.

As a single mother you could do several things—get counsel from a mature Christian, write down your thoughts, and pray honestly. You may also want to study other biblical passages that speak about husband–wife relations, divorce, remarriage, and so forth. God will give you wisdom as you search his Word. There may be business people in your church who could assist you in making financial plans having a plan to provide for your kids will ease many of the day-to-day worries.

What about your husband? Throughout this entire ordeal you have been a faithful wife. You have prayed constantly that your husband would allow the Lord to calm his restless spirit, but he made a decision to leave. He knew that your ultimate loyalty was to the Lord and that you would follow Christ above all, even him. While his leaving has been tougher than you ever imagined, you have come to know God's grace and peace in ways that are beyond explanation. While you are frightened about the prospects of going it alone, you are not really alone. Of this one thing you are now sure: Your Lord will never abandon you—never! He always keeps his promises. You can do all things through Christ.

Real-world scenarios furnish a wonderful way of making specific applications that are both faithful to the original meaning of the text and relevant to contemporary life. This approach works especially well when interpreting biblical stories since you don't have to create entirely new scenarios. Instead, you just retell the biblical story for the contemporary audience (an approach sometimes referred to as *contemporization*). To contemporize a biblical story you retell the story so that the effect on the contemporary audience is equivalent to the effect on the original audience. We translate the meaning of the story into our own context and reproduce its effects on the contemporary audience.

One word of caution is in order concerning real-world scenarios. You need to study the biblical passage carefully, especially the historical-cultural and literary contexts,

so that the real-world scenario you develop will accurately reflect the meaning of the biblical text. Otherwise you will be making a specific application for a biblical text that doesn't exist. It takes discipline, hard work, and creativity to come up with a scenario or to retell a story in a way that is both relevant to the contemporary audience and faithful to the original meaning. Please, please do your homework so that your scenario will reflect that meaning.

## **Conclusion**

Our approach to interpreting the Bible focuses on *authorial intent* rather than *reader response*. God has communicated with us through the Scriptures. He has worked through human authors to convey his meaning to us through the text. As readers we do not create the meaning; rather, we seek to find the meaning that has already been placed into the text by the author (both divine and human). This is why an understanding of careful reading, historical background, literary context, and translations is so important. These are the items we must grapple with if we are to determine the intended meaning of God, the author.

This also completes our approach to applying the meaning of the Bible. Because God's character and human nature do not change, his Word remains relevant! Our principlizing approach gives you a way to journey into God's Word that is relevant for every generation—not only for us, but also for our children, our grandchildren, our great grandchildren, and so on.

Some of you might be concerned that this method will restrict your freedom to apply the Scriptures. We remind you that as faithful readers our job is not to invent new meaning, but to apply the meaning that has been inscribed in the biblical text. Don't worry. You'll be able to find a number of parallel situations in your life or in your world that do contain all the key elements. And when you find a genuine parallel, you can be confident that you are applying the real meaning of the biblical text. Also, don't be afraid to make your applications specific by creating real-world scenarios or by contemporizing a biblical story. People need illustrations and examples of how the meaning might be lived out in real life. God wants his Word to sink deep into our hearts and minds and transform the way we live.

We need to remember the main reason we come to the Bible in the first place. We study Scripture not just to learn more *about God*, but to *know and love God more*. He gave us his Word not just to fill our brains with biblical facts, but to change our lives. The plain intention of the divine Author is that we would understand God's Word and then apply it. Or, as Jesus said in John 14:21: "Whoever has my commands and obeys them, he is the one who loves me."

## **Discussion Questions**

1. Why is the issue of who determines meaning (the author or the reader) such an important issue when it comes to studying the Bible?
2. Why is the issue of communication important to the discussion of authorial intent?
3. In the application process, why it is crucial to observe *all* the key elements that emerge from the intersection of the theological principle of the passage and the original situation?

# Basic Concepts for Teaching the Bible

## Part V

### The Supernatural Giftings of God

#### *1. The Fivefold Ministry Office of Teacher*

Now that we have studied the necessary components we must exercise let us consider the spiritual equipping Ministry Gift given by God to the Body of Christ. God has an anointed office that was given specifically for the teaching of His Word.

The office of the **Teacher** operates in the Body of Christ teaching, explaining and exhorting the Word of God through the divine impartations of revelation knowledge assigned to that particular fivefold ministry office from the Holy Spirit.

The basic Greek word for the **Leadership Gift of Teacher** is "**DIDASKALOS**" which means "**to instruct.**" **It also means: "to cause to understand," "to cause to shine."** **The Fivefold Ministry Leadership Gift of Teacher is vital to the edification of the Body of Christ in doctrine and training.** This involves teaching the true doctrine (God's will and purpose) as it is found in God's Word to the local church, other bodies of believers, and ministries, throughout the Body of Christ.

The Fivefold Ministry Gift office of Teacher is listed last in *Ephesians 4:11*:

- *And he gave some, apostles; and some, prophets; and some, evangelists; and some, pastors and TEACHERS.*

The Apostle Paul in stating the important ranking of the Ministry Leadership Gift of Teacher lists this office third:

- *And God hath set some in the church, first apostles, secondarily prophets, THIRDLY TEACHERS, after that miracles, then gifts of healings, helps, governments, diversities of tongues. Are all apostles? are all prophets? ARE ALL TEACHERS? [1 Corinthians 12:28-29]*

Some of the Ministry Leadership Gifts operated in the Ministry Leadership Gift anointing of Teachers before they were set in their proper Fivefold Ministry Leadership Gift office according to *Acts 11:22-26* and *Acts 13:1-2*:

- *Then tidings of these things came unto the ears of the church which was in Jerusalem: and they sent forth Barnabas, that he should go as far as Antioch.*
- *Who, when he came, and had seen the grace of God, was glad, and exhorted them all, that with purpose of heart they would cleave unto the Lord.*
- *For he was a good man, and full of the Holy Ghost and of faith: and much people was added*

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*unto the Lord.*

- *Then departed Barnabas to Tarsus, for to seek Saul:*
- *And when he had found him, he brought him unto Antioch. And it came to pass, that a whole year they assembled themselves with the church, and taught much people. And the disciples were called Christians first in Antioch.*
- *Now there were in the church that was at Antioch CERTAIN PROPHETS AND TEACHERS; as Barnabas, and Simeon that was called Niger, and Lucius of Gyrene, and Manaen, which had been brought up with Herod the Tetrarch, and Saul.*
- *As they ministered to the Lord, and fasted, the Holy Ghost said Separate me Barnabas and Saul for the work whereunto I have called them.*

The Fivefold Ministry Leadership Gift of Teacher is a divine calling ordained and equipped supernaturally by God. The Teacher must recognize the importance of this office. Many that have been called to this office will strive to be recognized as Pastors or Evangelists in order to be accepted as true chief leadership ministers of the gospel. They often become trapped in those offices and never impart the full edification the office of Teacher adds to the church and the Body of Christ.

- *Having then gifts differing according to the grace that is given to us, whether prophecy, let us prophecy according to the proportion of faith;*
- *Or ministry, LET US WAIT on our ministering: or HE THAT TEACHETH, ON TEACHING. [Romans 12:6-7]*

The basic function of the Leadership Gift of Teacher is watering what has already been planted:

- *I have planted, APOLLOS WATERED; but God gave the increase.*
- *So then neither is he that planteth anything, NEITHER HE THAT WATERETH; but God that giveth the increase.*
- *Now he that planteth AND HE THAT WATERETH are one: and every man shall receive his own reward according to his own labour.*
- *For we are labourers together with God: YE ARE GOD'S HUSBANDRY [garden].... [1Corinthians 3:6-9]*

Although many are exhorted to be apt to teach those doing so should never be confused with the ministry office of teacher. There is a distinct difference between those apt to teach and those ordained to teach. Elders are required to exercise their responsibilities in many areas including teaching:

- *This is a true saying, If a man desire the office of a bishop, he desireth a good work.*
- *A bishop then must be blameless, the husband of one wife, vigilant, sober, of good behavior, given to hospitality, **apt to teach**;*
- *Not given to wine, no striker, not greedy of filthy lucre; but patient, not a brawler, not covetous;*
- *One that ruleth well his own house, having his children in subjection with all gravity; (For if a man know not how to rule his own house, how shall he take care of the church*

of God?)

- Not a novice, lest being lifted up with pride he fall into the condemnation of the devil.
- Moreover he must have a good report of them which are without; lest he fall into reproach and the snare of the devil. [1Tm. 3:1-7]
- Flee also youthful lusts: but follow righteousness, faith, charity, peace, with them that call on the Lord out of a pure heart.
- But foolish and unlearned questions avoid, knowing that they do gender strifes.
- And the servant of the Lord must not strive; but be gentle unto all *men*, **apt to teach**, patient,
- In meekness instructing those that oppose themselves; if God peradventure will give them repentance to the acknowledging of the truth;
- And *that* they may recover themselves out of the snare of the devil, who are taken captive by him at his will.

There are several Spiritual Manifestation Gifts that are necessary to flow freely in the full Ministry Leadership Gift of Teacher. [*Word of Wisdom, Word of Knowledge, Prophecy, Tongues, and Interpretation of Tongues*]

***There are several signs that should be evident in the ministry office of the Teacher:***

*(a) You will teach the Word with simplicity.*

[Nehemiah 8:8, 12]

*So they read in the book in the law of God distinctly, and gave the sense, and caused them to understand the reading.*

*And all the people went their way to eat, and to drink, and to send portions, and to make great mirth, because they had understood the words that were declared unto them.*

[Isaiah 35:8]

*And an highway shall be there, and a way, and it shall be called The way of holiness; the unclean shall not pass over it; but it shall be for those: the wayfaring men, though fools, shall not err therein.*

[1Corinthians 1:20-29]

*For it is written, I will destroy the wisdom of the wise, and will bring to nothing the understanding of the prudent.*

*Where is the wise? where is the scribe? where is the disputer of this world? hath not God made foolish the wisdom of this world?*

*For after that in the wisdom of God the world by wisdom knew not God, it pleased God by the foolishness of preaching to save them that believe.*

*For the Jews require a sign, and the Greeks seek after wisdom:*

*But we preach Christ crucified, unto the Jews a stumblingblock, and unto the Greeks foolishness;*

*But unto them which are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God, and the wisdom of God.*

*For what man knoweth the things of a man, save the spirit of man which is in him? even so the things of God knoweth no man, but the Spirit of God.*

*Now we have received, not the spirit of the world, but the spirit which is of God; that we might know the things that are freely given to us of God.*

*Which things also we speak, not in the words which man's wisdom teacheth, but which the Holy Ghost teacheth; comparing spiritual things with spiritual.*

**(c) You will teach with authority just like Jesus:**

*And it came to pass, when Jesus had ended these sayings, the people were astonished at his doctrine:*

*For he taught them as one having authority, and not as the scribes. [Matthew 7:28-29]*

**(d) You will have a continuous flow of revelation, and stay abreast of PRESENT TRUTHS that express what the Spirit is currently saying to the Church:**

*That the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give unto you the spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of him:*

*The eyes of your understanding being enlightened; that ye may know what is the hope of his calling, and what the riches of the glory of his inheritance in the saints,*

*And what is the exceeding greatness of his power to us-ward who believe, according to the working of his mighty power, [Ephesians 1:17-19]*

*Unto whom it was revealed, that not unto themselves, but unto us they did minister the things, which are now reported unto you by them that have preached the gospel unto you with the Holy Ghost sent down from heaven; which things the angels desire to look into. [1Peter 1:12]*

**(e) You will impart life, not death:**

*It is the spirit that quickeneth; the flesh profiteth nothing: the words that I speak unto you, they are spirit, and they are life. [John 6:63]*

*For the word of God is quick, and powerful, and sharper than any twoedged sword, piercing even to the dividing asunder of soul and spirit, and of the joints and marrow, and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart.*

*Neither is there any creature that is not manifest in his sight: but all things are naked and opened unto the eyes of him with whom we have to do. [Hebrews 4:12-13]*

**(f) You will have a VISION of what God is going to do, and strive to instill in the people a desire to live in PURITY, that they might fulfill that vision:**

*For Ezra had prepared his heart to seek the law of the Lord, and to do it, and to TEACH in Israel statutes and judgments. [Ezra 7:10]*

*Where there is no vision, the people perish: but he that keepeth the law, happy is he. [Proverbs 29:18]*

*Wherefore lay apart all filthiness and superfluity of naughtiness, and receive with meekness the engrafted word, which is able to save your souls.*

*But be ye doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving your own selves.*

*For if any be a hearer of the word, and not a doer, he is like unto a man beholding his natural face in a glass:*

*For he beholdeth himself, and goeth his way, and straightway forgetteth what manner of man he was.*

*But whoso looketh into the perfect law of liberty, and continueth therein, he being not a forgetful hearer, but a doer of the work, this man shall be blessed in his deed. [James 1:21-25]*

**(g) You will have a burden not only to see the world evangelized, but also that the new converts be solidly established and matured:**

*Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost:*

*Teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you: and, lo, I am with you always, even unto the end of the world. Amen. [Matthew 28:19-20]*

*I thank my God always on your behalf, for the grace of God which is given you by Jesus Christ;*

*That in everything ye are enriched by him, in all utterance, and in all knowledge;*

*Even as the testimony of Christ was confirmed in you:*

*So that ye come behind in no gift; waiting for the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ:*

*Who shall also confirm you unto the end, that ye may be blameless in the day of our Lord Jesus Christ.*

*God is faithful, by whom ye were called unto the fellowship of his Son Jesus Christ our Lord. [1Corinthians 1:4-8]*

**(h) The teacher declares the *WHOLE COUNCIL* of God and produces a *BALANCE* in the people, with no fear of man:**

*For I have not shunned to declare unto you all the counsel of God. [Acts 20:27]*

*And my speech and my preaching was not with enticing words of man's wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power:*

*That your faith should not stand in the wisdom of men, but in the power of God.*

*[1Corinthians 2:4-5]*

*But as we were allowed of God to be put in trust with the gospel, even so we speak; not as pleasing men, but God, which trieth our hearts.*

*For neither at any time used we flattering words, as ye know, nor a cloak of covetousness; God is witness: [1Thessalonians 2:4-5]*

**(i) You will know how to organize truth into topical studies and practical disciplines:**

*Whom shall he teach knowledge? and whom shall he make to understand doctrine?*

*them that are weaned from the milk, and drawn from the breasts.*

*For precept must be upon precept, precept upon precept; line upon line, line upon line; here a little, and there a little:*

*For with stammering lips and another tongue will he speak to this people. [Isaiah 28:9-11]*

***(J) You will motivate others into a deeper study of the Word, striving to reproduce yourself in others as they develop a hunger for the study of the Word of God:***

*These were more noble than those in Thessalonica, in that they received the word with all readiness of mind, and searched the scriptures daily, whether those things were so.*

*Therefore many of them believed; also of honorable women which were Greeks, and of men, not a few. [Acts 17:11-12]*

***(k) You will help bring the unity of the faith, and the knowledge of Jesus, to the Body of Christ.***

*And he gave some, apostles; and some, prophets; and some, evangelists; and some, pastors and teachers:*

*For the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ:*

*Till we all come in the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, unto a perfect man, unto the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ:*

*That we henceforth be no more children, tossed to and fro, and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the sleight of men, and cunning craftiness, whereby they lie in wait to deceive;*

*But speaking the truth in love, may grow up into him in all things, which is the head, even Christ:*

*From whom the whole body fitly joined together and compacted by that which every joint supplieth, according to the effectual working in the measure of every part, maketh increase of the body unto the edifying of itself in love. [Ephesians 4:11-13]*

***(l) God will confirm the teaching of His Word with signs, through the ministry of the Teacher:***

*[John 3:2]*

*The same came to Jesus by night, and said unto him, Rabbi, we know that thou art a teacher come from God: for no man can do these miracles that thou doest, except God be with him.*

*[Mark 16:17-18]*

*And these signs shall follow them that believe; In my name shall they cast out devils; they shall speak with new tongues;*

*They shall take up serpents; and if they drink any deadly thing, it shall not hurt them; they shall lay hands on the sick, and they shall recover.*

*[Matthew 28:19-20]*

*Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost:*

*Teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you: and, lo, I am with you always, even unto the end of the world. Amen.*

The Ministry Leadership Gift of Teacher will never compromise the fundamental principles of Christ, but will walk in the wisdom of God to ensure unity and edification.

*Therefore leaving the principles of the doctrine of Christ, let us go on unto perfection; not laying again the foundation of repentance from dead works, and of faith toward God,*

*Of the doctrine of baptisms, and of laying on of hands, and of resurrection of the dead, and of eternal judgment.*

*And this will we do, if God permit. [Hebrews 6:1-3]*

*I therefore, the prisoner of the Lord, beseech you that ye walk worthy of the vocation wherewith ye are called,*

*With all lowliness and meekness, with longsuffering, forbearing one another in love; Endeavoring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.*

*There is one body, and one Spirit, even as ye are called in one hope of your calling; One Lord, one faith, one baptism,*

*One God and Father of all, who is above all, and through all, and in you all.*

*But unto every one of us is given grace according to the measure of the gift of Christ.*

[Ephesians 4:1-7]

The ministry leadership Gift office of Teacher is to maintain humbleness of spirit and of mind. They will strive to keep an open mind and always be ready to learn or be taught. They will strive to avoid the character flaw of a "know-it-all" understanding that the more you learn, the more you see, how little you truly know.

The *Fivefold Ministry Leadership Gift* of Teacher is necessary for the establishment of the Body of Christ. You may not have the glamour or shine of some of the other Ministry Leadership Gifts, but your capacity to edify reveals your necessity in the program and plan of God.

## ***2. The Gifts of Operation and Edification***

These spiritual gifts are manifestation "Gifts of *Operation and Edification*".

- *Now there are diversities of gifts, but the same Spirit.*
- *And there are differences of administrations, but the same Lord.*
- *And there are diversities of operations, but it is the same God which worketh all in all.*
- *But the manifestation of the Spirit is given to every man to profit withal.*

- ◆ *For to one is given by the Spirit the word of wisdom;*
- ◆ *to another the word of knowledge by the same Spirit;*
- ◆ *To another faith by the same Spirit;*
- ◆ *to another the gifts of healing by the same Spirit;*
- ◆ *To another the working of miracles;*

- ◆ *to another prophecy;*
- ◆ *to another discerning of spirits;*
- ◆ *to another divers kinds of tongues;*
- ◆ *to another the interpretation of tongues;*

- *But all these worketh that one and the selfsame Spirit, dividing to every man severally as he will.* [1Corinthians 12:4-11]

***There are nine gifts of Operation and Edification:***

- ***The Word of Knowledge:*** specific divine knowledge or information concerning situation, need or problem (diagnostic).
- ***The Word of Wisdom:*** supernatural wisdom, understanding and/or direction (prescription)
- ***Faith:*** supernatural unction to act upon God's word.
- ***The Gifts of Healing:*** supernatural manifestation of healing for sickness.
- ***The Working of Miracles:*** supernatural manifestations beyond natural limitations and abilities.
- ***Prophecy:*** to edify, exhort, and comfort the church.
- ***Discerning of Spirits:*** detect or perceive source of spiritual manifestation.
- ***Divers Kinds of Tongues:*** supernatural speaking in other languages
- ***Interpretation of Tongues:*** supernatural interpretation of unknown languages or messages.

The nine Gifts of the Spirit represent three basic categories of manifestation.

- Three Gifts of revelation,
- three Gifts of power, and
- three Gifts of utterance.

These gifts of edification are available to everyone in the Body of Christ, with or without a Leadership Ministry Calling:

- *But the manifestation of the Spirit is given to every man to profit withal.*

[1Corinthians 12:7]

These are manifestations (a shining forth) of the Holy Spirit upon the church for specific works of glory. The Holy Ghost determines the needs and quantity upon those individuals used. These gifts do not function as offices or ministerial callings, but as manifestations of endowments operated by the Holy Ghost through individuals in the church or Body of Christ. They are dispersed by the Holy Spirit according to requests, desires, and needs made by those wanting to be used as instruments of blessings to the Body of Christ.

- But all these worketh that one and the selfsame Spirit, dividing to every man severally as he will. [1Corinthians 12:13-16]

***The ultimate purpose of all spiritual gifts is spiritual maturity:***

Till we all come in the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, unto a perfect man, unto the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ:

That we henceforth be no more children, tossed to and fro, and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the sleight of men, and cunning craftiness, whereby they lie in wait to deceive;

But speaking the truth in love, may grow up into him in all things, which is the head, even Christ:

From whom the whole body fitly joined together and compacted by that which every joint supplieth, according to the effectual working in the measure of every part, maketh increase of the body unto the edifying of itself in love.

The Church must have balanced spiritual growth to arrive at her predestined perfection in Christ. Spiritual children are easily disturbed and swept about by false doctrines and teachings. The spiritual gifts Christ placed in the Church help us *grow up into His image*. We cannot reach that place without the function and operation of all of the spiritual gifts in the church. The church has been hindered in the past by only recognizing a few of the spiritual gifts. In these last days we need the fullness of all of the glorious manifestations of the Holy Ghost. This is the advent or age of the Holy Ghost.

The spiritual gifts are not for self-glory or to magnify the human nature in any way. They are only for the Body of Christ, the Church. It takes all of these spiritual gifts functioning, and operating as given by God to perfect (mature) and edify (build up) the Church.

Not realizing these results in the Church and the Ministry getting away from the supernatural and into the natural. When a person is born in the natural, God's divine purpose for that person is already hidden within him/her. When the new birth occurs, and one is filled with the Holy Ghost, the manifestation of certain spiritual gifts hidden within begin maturing that individual into God's divine will and purpose. You are equipped with certain specific spiritual gifts and talents.

Some will function as helps and governments Gifts, and some will fill the offices of ministry leadership Gifts called by God to operate wherever that person or persons are *set* in the Body of Christ. [Ephesians 3:14-21]

*For this cause I bow my knees unto the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ,  
Of whom the whole family in heaven and earth is named,  
That he would grant you, according to the riches of his glory, to be strengthened with might  
by his Spirit in the inner man;*

*That Christ may dwell in your hearts by faith; that ye, being rooted and grounded in love, May be able to comprehend with all saints what is the breadth, and length, and depth, and height;*

*And to know the love of Christ, which passeth knowledge, that ye might be filled with all the fullness of God.*

*Now unto him that is able to do exceeding abundantly above all that we ask or think, according to the power that worketh in us,*

*Unto him be glory in the church by Christ Jesus throughout all ages, world without end. Amen.*

I must emphasize again that there is a distinct difference in the chief leadership Gifts, the Gifts helps and government, and edification Gifts. The ministry leadership helps and government Gifts are men and women called (*set*), appointed, or assigned for the perfecting of the saints. They are given by Jesus to the church. These are *spiritual offices* not just spiritual *manifestations* or natural *operations*.

Now let us examine the Gifts of Operation and Edification. **There are nine Gifts of Operation and Edification (manifestations) of the Spirit.** These may be divided into three categories:

- **The GIFTS OF REVELATION** - The Word of Wisdom, the Word of Knowledge, the Discernment of Spirits.
- **The GIFTS OF UTTERANCE** — Prophecy, Tongues, Interpretation of Tongues.
- **The GIFTS OF POWER** - Faith, Healing, Working of Miracles.

**The word “manifestation” literally means “to shine forth.”** Picture a flashlight. The battery is the Holy Spirit; we are the flashlight. **When God touches us, there is a *Shining forth*’of His Presence to meet needs according to *1Corinthians 12:7*:**

- *But the manifestation of the Spirit is given to every man to profit withal.*

In “*1Corinthians 12:5-6*”, The Words “Administrations” and “Operations” are used in relations to the Gifts of the Spirit.

- *And there are differences of administrations, but the same Lord.*
- *And there are diversities of operations, but it is the same God which worketh all in all.*

The word “administration” literally means management. This refers to the individuals the Holy Spirit uses to manifest these Gifts of the Spirit through (*Fivefold Ministry Gifts and the Ministry Gifts of Helps and Governments*). The word “operations” literally means “energies” This refers to the different ways the Holy Spirit may choose to manifest Himself (*Nine Gifts of the Spirit*). For instance, there are *Gifts of Healing* (healing for the mind, spirit or body). The *Word of Knowledge* may OPERATE by a specific word concerning a person or by the minister feeling the infirmity of another and speaking the word of deliverance

They are given to the Church to continue Christ's ministry to the world. These are the manifestations of signs and wonders accompanying and confirming God's word and the believers:

*And he said unto them, Go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature. He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved; but he that believeth not shall be damned. And these signs shall follow them that believe; In my name shall they cast out devils; they shall speak with new tongues;*

*They shall take up serpents; and if they drink any deadly thing, it shall not hurt them; they shall lay hands on the sick, and they shall recover.*

*So then after the Lord had spoken unto them, he was received up into heaven, and sat on the right hand of God.*

*And they went forth, and preached everywhere, the Lord working with them, and confirming the word with signs following. Amen. [Mark 16:15-20]*

*Believest thou not that I am in the Father, and the Father in me? the words that I speak unto you I speak not of myself: but the Father that dwelleth in me, he doeth the works.*

*Believe me that I am in the Father, and the Father in me: or else believe me for the very works' sake.*

*Verily, verily, I say unto you, He that believeth on me, the works that I do shall he do also; and greater works than these shall he do; because I go unto my Father.*

*And whatsoever ye shall ask in my name, that will I do, that the Father may be glorified in the Son.*

*If ye shall ask any thing in my name, I will do it.*

*If ye love me, keep my commandments.*

*And I will pray the Father, and he shall give you another Comforter, that he may abide with you forever;*

*Even the Spirit of truth; whom the world cannot receive, because it seeth him not, neither knoweth him: but ye know him; for he dwelleth with you, and shall be in you. [John 14:10-17]*

*When they therefore were come together, they asked of him, saying, Lord, wilt thou at this time restore again the kingdom to Israel?*

*And he said unto them, It is not for you to know the times or the seasons, which the Father hath put in his own power.*

*But ye shall receive power, after that the Holy Ghost is come upon you: and ye shall be witnesses unto me both in Jerusalem, and in all Judaea, and in Samaria, and unto the uttermost part of the earth. [Acts 1:6-8]*

*And by the hands of the apostles were many signs and wonders wrought among the people; (and they were all with one accord in Solomon's porch.*

*And of the rest durst no man join himself to them: but the people magnified them.*

*And believers were the more added to the Lord, multitudes both of men and women.)  
Insomuch that they brought forth the sick into the streets, and laid them on beds and  
couches, that at the least the shadow of Peter passing by might overshadow some of them.*

*There came also a multitude out of the cities round about unto Jerusalem, bringing sick  
folks, and them which were vexed with unclean spirits: and they were healed every one. [Acts  
5:12-16]*

***They are given to the Church to assist in the edifying and building up of the members of the  
Body of Christ:***

*But the manifestation of the Spirit is given to every man to profit withal.*

*But all these worketh that one and the selfsame Spirit, dividing to every man severally as he  
will.*

*Even so ye, forasmuch as ye are zealous of spiritual gifts, seek that ye may excel to the  
edifying of the church.*

*But if all prophesy, and there come in one that believeth not, or one unlearned, he is  
convinced of all, he is judged of all:*

*And thus are the secrets of his heart made manifest; and so falling down on his face he will  
worship God, and report that God is in you of a truth.*

*How is it then, brethren? when ye come together, every one of you hath a psalm, hath a  
doctrine, hath a tongue, hath a revelation, hath an interpretation. Let all things be done unto  
edifying. [1Corinthians 12:7, 11; 14:12, 24-26]*

They are given to meet the spiritual, physical and emotional needs of the Body of Christ. The Gifts of Operation and Edification are administered and orchestrated by the Holy Spirit for everyone.

***We should EAGERLY DESIRE spiritual gifts.***

The word in the Greek is "ZELOUTE" which means "to desire eagerly" as in 1Corinthians 12:31:

o *But covet earnestly the best gifts: and yet show I unto you a more excellent way.*

You do not have to be mature saints to move in the *Gifts of the Spirit*. These gifts are given to those who are new in the Lord in order to assist in their edification and enable them to become good stewards of Christ's ministry

*As every man hath received the gift, even so minister the same one to another, as good  
stewards of the manifold grace of God.*

*If any man speak, let him speak as the oracles of God; if any man minister, let him do it as of  
the ability which God giveth: that God in all things may be glorified through Jesus Christ, to  
whom be praise and dominion for ever and ever. Amen.*

*[1Peter 4:10-11]*

The Holy Ghost also equips individual believers with the *spiritual gifts* necessary to assist them in the *specific office* He calls them to. Laymen can have spiritual gifts of edification operating through them. The Fivefold Ministry Gifts are equipped to minister regularly with certain *spiritual gifts of operation and edification* deemed by God as necessary for them to excel in the office they are called to. The same *spiritual gifts* operating through the Ministry Gifts will carry a greater anointing of persistency and order because there is a *double anointing* at work (several *Spiritual Operation and Edification Gifts* operating through *Fivefold Ministry Leadership Gifts*)

Education is good — but we need more than education. Ambition, if it is legitimate (seeking that for which Christ has apprehended) is good — but we need more than ambition. We need *churches and ministries equipped with supernatural gifts*. The Fivefold Ministry Gifts and The Ministry of Helps Gifts are supernatural in origin and power.

Labeling yourself a Ministry Gift does not make you that Gift. You can sit in a garage and call yourself a car, but that doesn't make you one. Calling yourself a Pastor, a Prophet, an Evangelist, Teacher, or an Apostle does not make you one. God does the calling, choosing, and ordaining:

*Ye have not chosen me, but I have chosen you, and ordained you, that ye should go and bring forth fruit, and that your fruit should remain:*

*that whatsoever ye shall ask of the Father in my name, he may give it you. [John 15:16]*

All the work of the ministry comes under the *lordship* of Jesus Christ. The New Testament views Christ Jesus as actively directing all operations from the throne of God through the person of the Holy Ghost:

*Nevertheless I tell you the truth; It is expedient for you that I go away: for if I go not away, the Comforter will not come unto you; but if I depart, I will send him unto you.*

*And when he is come, he will reprove the world of sin, and of righteousness, and of judgment:*

*Of sin, because they believe not on me;*

*Of righteousness, because I go to my Father, and ye see me no more;*

*Of judgment, because the prince of this world is judged.*

*I have yet many things to say unto you, but ye cannot bear them now.*

*Howbeit when he, the Spirit of truth, is come, he will guide you into all truth: for he shall not speak of himself; but whatsoever he shall hear, that shall he speak: and he will show you things to come.*

*He shall glorify me: for he shall receive of mine, and shall show it unto you.*

*All things that the Father hath are mine: therefore said I, that he shall take of mine, and shall show it unto you. [John 16:7-15]*

The early church went everywhere with the supernatural power of God working through them. The Lord was working with those early disciples. It was as their *Lord* and not merely as their *helper* that *He* worked with them. Though He is our *helper*, through the Holy Ghost, He is also our Lord.

*So then after the Lord had spoken unto them, he was received up into heaven, and sat on the right hand of God.*

*And they went forth, and preached everywhere, the Lord working with them, and confirming the word with signs following. Amen. [Mark 16:19-20]*

In concluding this final session of the Basic Concepts of Biblical Teaching you must understand that you have an awesome responsibility. Everything that God is has to be fully understood and practiced in order to have the complete manifestation of the church which represents the fullness of Christ:

- That the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give unto you the spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of him:
- The eyes of your understanding being enlightened; that ye may know what is the hope of his calling, and what the riches of the glory of his inheritance in the saints,
- And what *is* the exceeding greatness of his power to us-ward who believe, according to the working of his mighty power,
- Which he wrought in Christ, when he raised him from the dead, and set *him* at his own right hand in the heavenly *places*,
- Far above all principality, and power, and might, and dominion, and every name that is named, not only in this world, but also in that which is to come:
- And hath put all *things* under his feet, and gave him *to be* the head over all *things* to the church,
- Which is his body, the fullness of him that filleth all in all.

God has assigned us, the Body of Christ, the Church to fulfill His last glorious mandate of being the true sons of God filling all in all. The *Lord Jesus Christ* is the *Head* of the *Church*:

- **He is the One**, who gave,
- **He is the One**, who calls,
- **He is the One**, who equips,
- **Let Him do it.**